The Nerd and The Jock

by xX_Duke_of_Yaoi_Xx

Summary

The story (and side stories) of two teens growing up in a world where everything seems to be against them. This is a story of one Eren Yeager, and one Levi Ackerman.... They meet in the oddest of way, and yet a relationship forms on the school grounds. They both learn to love around Eren's ailments, and learn to accept that family isn't always defined by those what are connected by blood.

~Disclaimer~
I do not own Attack on Titan, or any of the characters from that wonderful series, all credit
for them goes to the creator.

PS: You don't really need to know anything about the characters for this fic! AND PLEASE COMMENT!!! I LOVE TO READ THEM AND WILL RESPOND WITHIN A DAY!

~Duke
A thing happened

So this thing happened, um, yeah....

Someone got into my co-author's account and deleted both the works we were working on, so I'm going to start uploading the chapters again.

I'm really, really, really sorry if anyone was really invested in this fan fiction.... but...

I won't be uploading for a bit, I'm still trying to get this all sorted out, I'm really sorry. The 57 chapters we have are split between 26 maybe 27 documents... I'm sorry but it might be a very long time until more comes out.... I hope you all understand.

Thank you

~Duke

Hey guys it's me again.... (3/31/17)

Hello, readers, this is Duke, I regret to inform you that I will be unable to continue writing this fan fiction.... that being said, someone has messaged me about continuing this on their own so please go check out TNATJ for the rest of their awesome chapters that they can think of! I hope you will forgive me for this... but it's been too much stress lately, and now I will get to read right along side you wonderful readers. Here's the link for the continuation from the posted chapters on....

TNATJ

EDIT: (10/1/18)

Everything above this is no longer true and this fanfiction is still being continued and edited by me

~Duke
Chapter One: The First Day

Chapter Summary

Well I'm gonna start re-uploading everything, please be patient

No wonder he was so popular, he could tell already.

Walking in between Jean and Erwin, Levi fit in perfectly. Though he was a bit on the short side, he acted the part of a jock, walked like one, and even talked like one. The faint smirk on his face was barely visible as he kept his head down in it's usual position. His steely eyes captured the gazes of every girl he passed, which wasn't a surprise. Meanwhile Jean, Levi's fellow athlete, slapped Mikasa--who was Levi's cousin--on the butt.

"I'd tap that," he joked as she turned around to scowl at him.

Who was watching all this, you ask? Can't you guess?

Eren Jaeger. He was well aware that he would never have a chance with Levi; he figured that out quickly, plus, Levi probably didn't even know Eren, with him transferring in today

Eren was a thin, weak, brainy nerd. His thick rimmed glasses hid his eyes, but it wasn't like he could take them off. Unlike stereotypical nerds, the glasses didn't have tape in the middle and he didn't possess any acne, but it was quite apparent that he was a dork. He didn't play any sports and often stammered out words when he was asked to answer something in class. He scored perfect on his tests, and most kids ostracized him for it. He hated being left alone at the lunch table, but he found it better than being shoved in a locker… that had happened a lot in middle school.

Maybe I should move on, he thought. In fact, I have to. God, is it bad to wish that someone is gay?

The bell rang above his locker, pulling him back from his thoughts. He dreaded first period, he liked the teacher, and the subject: chemistry, no doubt about that. What he hated about it was the people he sat next to, all of them. He was surrounded by jocks. Levi was to his right, Erwin was to his left, and Jean in front of him. The boys always talked about the upcoming pep rally for the football team, or how they aided to the huge lead they won by.

Before the teacher was able to enter the classroom, Jean harshly jabbed his fingers into Eren’s side. He flinched and looked over to the boy with slightly frightened eyes. “C-can I h-help you?” He asked and seemed to shrink as his voice squeaked out.

Jean simply snickered, “You coming to the Pep Rally later, Nerd?” Jean watched him with almost predatory gaze, like he would sink his fists into Eren without hesitation.

Eren took a few seconds to think about it, but knew that if he went he would be home past curfew, and for that his father would kill him. “No, I can’t go, I-” he was cut off with the teacher taking a textbook and dropping it onto his desk.

“Alright class, quiet down! Let’s get to learning shall we?” The eccentric teacher smiled. She was happy because today was a lab day and she simply loved experiments.
“Mrs. Hanji, are we going to have to pair up?” One student asked; her grin only seemed to get wider.

“Of course! So these will be the pairings …” Mrs. Hanji continued to call out the pairs. Eren’s heart sunk, as his name wasn’t called with any of the productive workers in the class. However, his worrying wouldn’t be in vain. He felt his heart skip a beat as he was called to be partners with Levi. Maybe this is a good way to get to talk to him? What should I say to him? OH MY GOD!!! Why am I even THINKING about this? He’s not even GAY! PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER, EREN!! His thought process was stopped when he faintly heard someone call his name. He snapped his head up and looked over to his partner with his vibrant green eyes.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Levi simply let out a “Tch”, leaning back in his seat more as he crossed his arms over. “Why do I have to get stuck with the Nerd?” he asked to no one in particular, his voice completely monotone with disinterest. He glanced over to see Eren seemed to shrink more once he heard those words. Why does he look so sad? I don’t want to be stuck with him! He’s going to try and get me to work too. Guess I’ll have to ask Mrs. Hanji-

“M-mrs. H-hanji?”

“Yes, Eren?”

“C-can I c-change my l-lab partner?” he stuttered out, looking very upset.

Oh good, he asked for me. Guess he doesn’t want to get stuck with me either. Well, I can’t really blame-

“No Eren, you and Levi will be lab partners ‘til the end of the year.” She paused for a second to raise her voice to get everyone’s attention, “That goes for everyone else too! You will be lab partners for the rest of this year! Better get acquainted with each other now!” She smiled devilishly as a majority of the class groaned.

Levi glanced over at his lab partner and noticed that the Nerd had simply paled and started to clam up. “What’s wrong with you, Nerd? Cat got your tongue?” he asked quietly, smirking a bit as he did so. He looks mortified; do I really scare him that much? I mean, I know it’s his first day as a freshman, but there was no need to be afraid of your upperclassmen. “Oi, say something, Brat!” Levi monotoned.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren looked down and then back up to his partner. “S-sorry, I-I’m just worried a-about the assignment,” he said honestly. They were going to be testing the colors of different substances as they were burned. That was Eren’s fear, FIRE. He swallowed hard; he didn’t want to tell Levi about why he was so afraid of it. Especially since they had only met a few minutes ago. He watched as Levi’s brows furrowed and he noticed the assignment as well.

“Do you have a problem with fire or something?”

Eren’s heart almost stopped and he paused for a moment, trying to rack his brain for something to say.

“Wait, nevermind, I do not want to know more about you than I already have to.”

Eren’s heart seemed to sink further. Alright, so his good looks is what makes up for his horrible
personality. Dammit all, why do I always fall for those that can only hurt me more?

Eren took a deep breath and somehow he made it through the experiment without freaking out too bad. He was mostly in charge of writing down detailed observations. He waited until they were done, hoping that Levi wouldn’t speak to him. He didn’t want to stutter anymore, but at the same time he wanted Levi to talk to him and show him a smile on his normally stoic face. He had noticed that during the hour, Levi had a perpetually disinterested face throughout the class. He was writing down a few more notes when Levi spoke up.

“Brat, what are you writing down? I want you to send that to me. I am not getting a bad grade in this class because of your lazy ass not sending me shit.” he hissed at Eren. Eren nodded and simply looked down at his papers and handed them to Levi.

“C-can you write y-your email, or your ph-phone number up h-here?” He stuttered out. He knew Levi wouldn’t notice, but he was doing better with the fluidity of his speech, even after just speaking with him for a little bit. He watched as Levi hurriedly wrote down both his number and his email as the bell for the end of class rang. He was disappointed that he couldn’t stay with Levi any longer than this.

“Don’t forget to send me the notes, Brat.” Levi said before turning and leaving the boy to go into the crowded hallway.

Eren watched as he left and he got through the rest of his classes. He wasn’t picked on as much, as they were freshman classes that he was required to take as a freshman, not his accelerated courses, like chemistry. He made it to lunch without seeing the short jock at all, which seemed to calm his nerves a bit. No one really tried to talk with him or make any friends with him, and though he was lonely, he was grateful no one was trying to pry into his life.

At lunch, Eren took one glance over the cafeteria, losing his appetite as soon as he laid eyes on Levi’s table. Girls of all grades were crowded around the football team; there were so many of them Eren could barely see the other side of the cafeteria, let alone even walk by them all.

*Shit! I can't get to the doors without walking past them.* Eren resolved the conflict in his head. He could do it if he just didn't look up. He had to. *I want to eat; I didn't eat dinner last night, or breakfast this morning… I need to eat!*

Walking faster than usual, he made his way past the crowd. He'd almost made it, but his bag got caught on Annie Leonhart's bag, nearly knocking her off the bench.

"The hell, dork?! You try'na start shit?" Jean was quick to react, towering over the small brown haired boy. Giving him only another nickname to allow others to call him by.

"U-uh, no! I-I was j-just walk-" Jean pulled Eren up by the collar, bringing him so close that Eren could smell the strong man's breath.

"I fucking dare you to do that again, Jaeger." So they did know his name, and only after one class together, amazing.

"Oi, Jean. Put the kid down." Eren never thought he'd hear the words, but Levi Ackerman had just stood up for him. At this point, he didn't care what happened. He felt like turning his head to thank Levi, but that would have been too much.

"No! He's try'na steal my bitch~!" Jean quickly slammed Eren against the wall. Where are the
teachers when you need them? In a matter of seconds, Jean had struck Eren across the nose, which was now bleeding and just refused to stop.

"The hell, Jean?" Other people from the football team were now crowding around the two, most of them taking neither boy's side and just watching it play out.

"The FUCK is wrong with you, Jean," Levi stood up confidently, crossing his arms and walking heavily toward Jean. "The Brat did nothing. He was just walking, and now you broke his nose."

Eren stood in shock, trying not to shake. He brought his sleeve carefully to his nose and touched it. It came away drenched in blood. Was it broken? No, he could feel it, it definitely was.

"You okay, Brat?" Levi put his hand on Eren's shoulder.

"FUCK. WHAT IS THIS. WHAT DO I DO. WHAT'S HE DOING. HE'S TOUCHING ME. HELP."

"U-uh, y-yeah," Eren answered and immediately regretting his stutter. Levi leaned in close to Eren's face, inspecting his nose. Eren blushed like mad, a bright sheet of pink decorating his cheeks. Why do you need to be this close to me! Stop! Seriously! I won't be able to take this!!!

"Why don't you come with me. That looks pretty bad," Levi offered.

"Um.." Eren stuttered, at a complete loss for words. Should he go? Or should he not go? He had no choice in the matter as Levi dragged Eren down the school hallway and into the bathroom. He shut the door behind them, made sure they were alone, and then turned to face Eren.

"Here," he handed the brown haired boy a paper towel to clean his nose off. Eren thanked him and took it, wincing at the pain when he touched his nose. Ya, it's definitely broken... Great, Dad's going to beat me.

He continued to think of excuses as to how he would explain this to his father on his first day of school. He thought of so many different excuses he could make up for the broken nose, but none sounded good enough for him to tell his father. Levi's stoic voice brought him out of his thoughts as soon as he started speaking to Eren again.

"So, what were you trying to accomplish back there, Brat?" Levi asked with his familiar smirk on his face. Eren stuttered as if he didn't know what Levi meant, and truthfully, he didn't. "Come on, when you caught Annie's bag? There had to be a reason. No one would dare to fuck with Jean, or his girl."

"N-no, I-I'm just really clumsy," Eren blushed and looked down at his fingers, hoping that Levi wouldn't notice the blush forming on his cheeks.

"You're shy, too," Levi blurted out, as if it were simply him stating facts, “You barely talked to me during Chemistry; I thought you were going to talk my ear off about being a Freshman in a Junior class.”

Eren couldn't believe it, Levi actually thought he would brag about himself? Sorry to ruin your party train, but I do not like people looking at me!

“And why is that, Brat?” Levi’s voice seemed to raise a bit as Eren realized his mistake. He had said everything out loud. Oh great, now he’s gonna beat me up too, and then I’ll really be begging Mrs. Hanji for a new lab partner.

“Oi, Brat! I’m waiting for a reply.” Levi’s voice made Eren look back up to see how his eyebrows were furrowed. Dammit, even when he looks angry he’s hot. Why does the world hate me and make me gay! God I hate this!
“Sorry, I-I..” Eren trailed off as he felt the warm tears start to pool at the corners of his eyes, “I-It’s because y-you’ll think I’m a f-freak.” Eren stuttered out, finally finding his words. He only saw Levi’s eyebrows furrow more, though this time he didn’t look angry, he looked confused.

“Why?” Eren couldn’t stop his own voice from saying what was on his mind.

" I-I’m gay, I-I think I’m in love with you.. and I’m terrified. "

Eren’s heart stopped again for the second time today. SHIT! I SAID IT! I ACTUALLY SAID IT! Why did I say that? It's not like he’s gonna actually do anything about it! This is gonna make my life miserable! He’s going to tell everyone in this school, and I’m going to get beat up by the entire football team. Ya, that’s probably what’s going to happen to me as soon as he walks out of this bathroom.

“Okay, sorry, but denying your offer, Brat. And stay away from me, I don’t need any of your homo-hormones rubbing off on me,” He spat back at the other and he left, but what he did do was keep Eren’s secret safe with himself.
Chapter Two : Grisha Yeager

Chapter Summary

Gore and violence, reader discretion advised

How the hell am I going to explain this to my father? Seriously! I can’t just tell him that a jock hit me for no reason…. He would never believe me. He groaned as he walked the 3 miles from school to the house he and his father just moved to from out of town. He couldn't say he didn’t like the town; it was beautiful in all aspects, even the houses that continued down the streets, it was just that everything is too far spread out for his liking. Why did he have to get a house that was this far from the high school! Does he think I'm fat? God, just another thing for him to be angry about.

Eren finally finished his long walk home, only to find that the house was completely empty. He heaved a sigh of relief, not knowing if he’d be able to face Grisha just yet. I wondered if he would even bother to ask if I had a good day at school. Or will he just start with the drunken beatings? Probably the latter.

The loud growl of his empty stomach was what brought him out of his trail of thoughts. That’s right, I didn’t get to eat lunch. Great. I should probably go and get something to eat… He tried to think of something that was most likely in the house for him to cook, but his mind drew a blank every time. Eren walked begrudgingly down the stairs, wondering if there even was any food he could make that wouldn’t be too hard to keep down if Grisha actually decided to beat down on him as soon as he saw Eren’s face.

He sighed again and just opted for pasta. That shouldn’t hurt my stomach too much, should it? Moving to get the pot, Eren winced as his wrists rubbed up against his long sleeved shirt.

I just opened them up again didn’t I?

He turned his sleeve over to see that he had in fact reopened the wounds he continued to give himself. He sighed again. Geez, I’ve been doing that a lot lately… Guess it’s just the thing that my poor little homosexual heart deems fit to do.

He lifted the pot up again, ignoring the burning sensation of the cotton shirt dragging against his now open wounds. He would just let them burn, he liked the pain, though he would never admit it to his father. That would be a death sentence. He liked the small dull ache there was on his wrists because it anchored himself to the horrible reality he found himself in all time. He absentmindedly
watched the water fill the pot, just noticing how the bubbles came rushing in with the water, only to
disappear milliseconds later. Eren then tried to take the now full pot from the sink to the stove and
found that it was near impossible, but somehow laden with the heavy pot he managed to make his
way to the stove.

*Note to self: Don’t fill the whole pot with water next time.*

He glanced at the clock on the stove as he reached to turn the stove top on. He turned it on as high
as it would go, hoping to get the water to boil quicker. He didn’t want to have to deal with Grisha
while he was eating… No. That had happened before, and he didn’t want to be throwing up all over
his father just to make him more furious. The clock read 5:57pm.

*Great. He’s going to be home soon--*

*Click*

*And now I realize why the world hates me.*

Eren turned his focus from the pot to the front door, he could almost feel the alcohol coming off of
his father in waves. It tempted to knock him down, but his father got to it before the stench could.
Eren didn’t have time to react as Grisha charged at him with the force of a bull, knocking his son
down to the floor immediately.

“Get up, you worthless piece of shit.” Grisha shouted at the boy he had just knocked down to the
ground. His eyes only darkened when Eren raised his head to look up to his father.

“What the fuck did you start a fight at school for!?” His mind immediately headed to the
possibilities where Eren was the sole purpose of his broken nose. It didn’t help that Grisha was a
doctor, and noticed right away. “ANSWER ME YOU LITTLE SHIT!!” He spat out and moved to
kick his face, further shattering the already broken nose that Eren had.

Eren groaned and was at a loss for words when he got up and put a hand to his face, only to find
that his hand was completely covered in warm, scarlet blood. He gasped when he saw it and looked
at his father again. He started, “D-dad, I-I can e-expl-” but he was cut off with a sharp kick to the
gut.

“DON’T call me your father! YOU ARE NOT MY SON! ” Grisha shouted at the top of his lungs,
getting another well placed kick between Eren’s arms and on his chest, feeling a satisfying crack as
he broke the weak boy’s ribs. “NEVER CALL ME YOUR FATHER EVER AGAIN.”

Eren nodded hurriedly and tried to back away already knowing not to talk back at his father. He was beyond drunk, and it would only get worse if he tried to fight back. He had already found out about that too. He gasped for air when he felt Grisha’s second kick land on his chest. He could feel the crack of his ribs, and couldn’t help but scream in pain. He coughed a bit and he noticed the specks of blood flicking out. *Fuck that hurt... Did I puncture something?* Eren could only question this for a few seconds before he felt a solid crack on his back. The pain was excruciating, though sadly, he was used the trademark sting of his father’s belt. He cried out in pain again as he tried to crawl away from his father hulking figure looming above him. “P-p-please...ahhh....s-s-stop...ahhh” Eren cried out in pain as he tried to reach for a chair so he could get up from his spot of the floor. His hand was covered in blood from his nose still, he wanted to desperately to get away from his father at that moment. His fight or flight response was kicking in and it was telling him to ‘get the hell out of dodge’. He struggled to reach for the chair again as he was pelted with the belt he so dearly hated. He could feel every welt across his back, he could count them if he wanted to, but to be honest, he didn’t want to count them right now in this situation. *There’s at least 20 now, maybe more....* A few more seconds went by and he could feel that blood was starting to pool from his back. *It’s definitely more than 30 by now, will I be able to get up?*

Eren didn’t want to think about the what if’s at the moment and finally reached for the chair, only to have his father stomped down on his raised arm with such force they could both hear the sickening crunch as Eren’s arm hit the floor under Grisha’s boot. The poor boy screamed out in pain and tried to pull his arm back, out from under his father’s boot. That was a task in itself, since Grisha was determined to keep the boy down on the cold floor. Grisha reached over to the pot of boiling hot water as he kept his foot on the writhing boy’s arm.

“This should help with your wounds.” He smirked as he began pouring the scalding hot water all over Eren’s back.

All Eren could do was brace himself for the horrible pain that was about to ensue, but he didn’t realize the pain would be this extreme. The water felt like lava all over his back, searing the opened and ripped flesh so much that some of the flaps of skin on his back almost looked to be cooked. Eren let out a gut-wrenching scream for a long time, as the water had pooled in his lower back where a majority of his wounds were. Grisha had him pinned where he was and so he couldn’t move. Eren was forced to wait until the boiling water finally cooled against his skin. It was a good 5 minutes before Eren’s screams had finally died down and he noticed just how much blood was pouring out of his mouth. He coughed again and even more blood came out to mix in with blood and water that drenched the kitchen floor. He knew his father would make him clean this up until his fingers were raw from scrubbing with bleach.

“WILL YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP!?” Grisha roared as Eren began sobbing loudly, unbearably obnoxious in Grisha’s mind.

Eren tried to quiet his cries and plead for him to stop this brutal attack. Though Grisha seemed less than pleased at the boy’s pleas, and simply lifted him. Eren cried out again as his tarnished body was suddenly jerked up by his father’s hand. He gasped and sobbed weakly as Grisha easily hung
his thin body in the air.

“I told you to SHUT UP!” He growled and dropped the boy to the floor and let him crumple into the wet mess. Sadly for Eren, he couldn’t hold in his cries, it simply hurt too much for him to quiet himself enough for Grisha to be pleased.

Eren gasped for air as he felt a large hand wrap around his bony neck and lift. He was desperate for air and trying to get away from his grasp. It hurt, he couldn’t breathe, his lungs felt like they were on fire. He tried to let out a plea for Grisha to stop but all that came out was a choked sob. He felt as Grisha’s fingers dug in close around his small neck. Is he trying to kill me? At this rate he will end up killing me... well, Levi will be pissed that he’s never gonna see those notes for Chemistry. Damn it, I won’t be able to stay awake for much longer--

And with that, Eren’s body fell limp in Grisha’s hand and was completely silent. “Good Boy” Grisha spat out, venom lacing his voice as he threw the broken boy at the floor. He could see that he was still breathing, he had just lost consciousness. Grisha took the opportunity to take a knife from the counter, searching for the sharpest one he could find. Once he located a paring knife, the pristine silver blade glinting, he began lacing Eren’s chest and arms with red lines upon red lines. He would have scars left over his already existing scars from previous encounters with Grisha. The mad man smiled at his handy work and then left to go and sleep upstairs.

Eren woke up hours later. He sputtered, and more blood flecked onto the floor. His whole body ached, like he had been hit by a speeding train. He tried to roll over and found it impossible. He finally managed to make his way to his backpack across the room on the floor. He slowly crawled over the tiles, an eternity to cross the ten feet he needed to. He fumbled his backpack open, getting blood everywhere, all over his notes and his phone. He tried to clean it as best he could, but found it to be in vain. He hesitantly drew a breath before he mustered the courage to dial Levi’s number. He tried to talk and noticed that it hurt more and he coughed out an even larger amount of blood. The phone rang until it hit voicemail. Eren hung up and tried again. Pick up the damn phone already short stack!

As if on command Levi picked it up.

“I Swear to God, Erwin! If this is you calling me to pick up your drunken ass, I will personally castrate you tomorrow before school!” Levi’s harsh tone hurt Eren’s ears as it was so loud. He let out a soft whimper and that seemed to have shut Levi up.

“Hello? Who the hell is this?” He hissed out into the phone. When he didn’t hear anything else, he continued in his rage. “I swear to god if you don’t answer me in-” he stopped as soon as he heard a
choked out sob.

“L-levi” Eren choked out, it was no louder than a whisper

“Brat? Is that you?” he asked quietly and his anger seemed to diminish before it spiked again. “Why the hell are you calling me at 3 in the fucking morning!?” He screeched out into the phone, that was until he heard Eren whimper again.

“L-levi... I-I...” he cried as he tried to wrangle his voice, but he couldn’t his vocal cords were crushed. “I-it hurts” he managed out in the ghost of a whisper. He tried to sob but ended up coughing up more blood and it wouldn’t stop.

Levi heard it all. “Oi, Brat, hang up, it’s obvious you can’t talk right now. Text me where you are. I’m going to come get you.” he sighed as he got up out of his bed and went to go get his car keys, but he wasn’t sure if he should hang up on the boy. He heard another choked out sob and tried to hear what he was saying.

“I…..can’t......it....Grisha.....angry......no.....come” he strained to try and process the information. He sighed and closed the door to his apartment as he went to his car.

“Brat, stop talking, and send me your fucking address already or I won’t come!” he growled but he didn’t realize the line cut out in the middle of his sentence. He had no idea where Eren lived, and he didn’t get a text from the kid. He decided it wasn’t worth his time to go after the boy anymore and went back to bed at around 3:45am. He tried to sleep but found that he couldn’t sleep at all, especially since he almost couldn’t make out a word the Brat had said. He sighed. *Brat, Are you okay?*

Sleep finally found Levi later, but it was not a good sleep, his mind surrounded with the what ifs concerning Eren. Was he okay? Did he really need help? Was he dead? *Wait... WHY THE HELL AM I THINKING ABOUT A STUPID BRAT!? I should be pissed off at him! He didn’t send me the notes for chemistry yet! Why should I be worried about his forgetful ass? He doesn’t deserve my attention! That damned brat is probably drunk off his mind and just called me to annoy the hell out of me. Hmmm...*

Levi expected to see the Brat in his seat already since he knew the freshman wouldn’t dare to be late to Mrs. Hanji’s class. Only,

He didn’t show up.
No, he wasn’t even late. He didn’t come to school at all.

*What the hell, Brat?*
Chapter 3 : Peanut Butter

Levi expected to see the Brat in his seat already since he knew the freshman wouldn’t dare to be late to Mrs. Hanji’s class. Only,

He didn’t show up.

No, he wasn’t even late. He didn’t come to school at all.

*What the hell, Brat? Why didn’t you come to Chemistry? Mrs. Hanji is going to be pissed!*  

“Mr. Ackerman,” Mrs. Hanji’s voice rang over the almost now silent classroom, “do you have any idea where Mr. Yeager is?” Hanji seemed incredibly calm, but Levi knew better than to make a wrong move now.

“No, Mrs. Hanji, I am not aware of where he is,” He told her, his voice a continuous monotone. *Damn Brat, now I have to actually take notes in this class! God damn it! He’s probably just skipping class… or is he actually hurt?* Levi shook his head as soon as the thought entered his mind. *No, why do I have to get worked up over some Brat? Nope. Nope. Nope. I refuse, that Brat means shit to me. I can get through this class by myse-

“Mr. Ackerman, take your phone out and call him, I want to hear what his excuse is for not being in my class.” Hanji’s voice had finally broke out into anger, “Go out into the hallway until you get him to answer his cell phone.” She smiled sweetly to try and hide her annoyance with Eren.

Levi swallowed hard, quickly nodding, “Yes, Mrs. Hanji.” he quickly got out of the room and went to the hallway with his cell phone. Once he made it outside the classroom and into the hallway, he pulled out his phone. He went through it and looked for the unknown number from 3:07am that morning. He clicked the number and called what he assumed was the Brat’s phone. He waited for someone to pick up, ring after ring, after ring. Levi was pissed off when it went to voicemail the first time, but nevertheless he left a quick message: “Pick up the damn phone, Brat” he growled into the phone. He hung up before trying to call again to get Eren to answer. Yet the boy didn’t pick up. He didn’t answer his phone, not for any of the 37 calls Levi had made to his phone trying to get him to pick up during first hour. He knew he couldn’t go back in the room without Eren on the phone to talk to Mrs. Hanji. The last kid that was in Levi’s position tried to cover for his lab partner being horribly hungover, and that didn’t end well for either of those stupid fucks.

He called Eren another 3 times, racking the total up to now 40 calls in the past hour. It was safe to
say that Levi was beyond pissed off at this point. **WHY IN THE EVER LIVING FUCK WON’T THIS FUCKTARD OF A BRAT PICK UP HIS FUCKING PHONE!?** Why can’t he pick up his damn phone? I’ve literally called him 40 times! The bell is about to fucking ring and I haven’t even heard today’s lesson. When I get my hands on that fucking Brat, I will personally wring the life out of his body through that small neck of his! Even Levi’s thoughts growled inside his head.

The bell rang for the classes to switch periods. **Where is that fucking Brat?** Levi couldn’t answer that question, not even after he went back in his class to retrieve his book bag. He didn’t want to look at Mrs. Hanji, almost expecting her to give him a detention for not getting a hold of Eren. Sure enough the older woman spoke up, once it was just the two of them in that room.

“So did you ever get a hold of Eren?” She asked quietly. She seemed concerned; Usually, after a few minutes the students returned with their lab partners on the phone. Levi hadn’t come back in at all.

Levi shook his head and looked down. “No, I couldn’t get ahold of the damned brat.” His cold tone barely hiding the anger that laced his words.

Hanji sighed before writing him a pass, both for his next class and for his phone. “Keep it on your desk, if he calls back you’re allowed to leave to come see me during any class. If any of the teachers give you shit about it, show them this note.” Mrs. Hanji’s words weren’t as hard as they had been at the beginning of class this morning. She seemed almost worried, though that quickly diminished once she opened her mouth again. “Make sure he stays on the line, I want to hear his explanation as to why he wasn’t in my class.” The devilish glint in her eyes sent a chill down Levi’s spine.

Whatever she’s got in store for the Brat, it is not in any case good. Levi rushed out of the room to get to his next class. He made it on time and kept his phone out on his desk at all times. He was getting increasingly pissed off as the periods were by and he didn’t call, or even text back. **Did the fucker break his phone? No, that’s not a possibility, it would’ve said the phone was unavailable right away, not ring for a fucking minute before going to voicemail.** Levi let out a heavy sigh as the bell rang again for his next class.

Will you just answer any of my goddamn texts you fucking brat?

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

*** 3:16 am, Yeager House ***
Eren laid on the floor, bleeding out, going in and out of consciousness, trying to force himself to stay awake. *I can’t sleep now. I NEED to stay awake.* The injured boy tried his best to regain his consciousness every time his blacked out. It felt like minutes went by, but it was hours. He heard a faint noise, almost like a ringing coming from the outside. Though he couldn’t tell if it was his ears or something else. His eyes finally cracked open, trying to figure out what annoying sound he was hearing. The ringing filled his ears and he winced as he fully woke up, quickly finding the sound unbearable. His phone continued to ring, but it was too far over to reach at the moment.

*Shit, who the fuck would be calling me right now? No one has my number except Grisha and….* Eren stopped his train of thought as he reached for his phone. He had to move, reopening nearly all of the wounds across his back. He looked at his phone and grabbed it with his hand, which was caked in now dried blood. He grimaced at the sight of his hand. *Just how much blood did I lose?* He asked himself before he looked at his phone, it had stopped ringing. *Finally, the annoying sound is fucking gone!* He praised for only a second before the notifications for missed calls, unread texts, and new voicemails… all of which came from one person- yeah you guessed it- they were all from Levi Ackerman himself. Eren groaned but soon found that it was hard to let out any noise out at all. He tried to speak but it just came out in as a air straining to pass by his vocal cords. *Well, now I know my vocal cords are crushed, no point in trying to talk…. So I’m not even going to try and call Levi back. What the hell time is it anyways?* It took Eren a bit to focus on the bright screen in front of him, which was his phone. When he was finally able to make out the time, he realized that it was around 9:27 am, give or take a few minutes, though he didn’t know if his phone was right or not. *FUCK! I missed first period! Levi’s gonna be pissed! I didn’t send him the Chemistry notes, that’s probably why he was calling.*

Eren hesitantly scrolled through his phone and opened up the 15 voicemails which Levi had so graciously left him. He tried to take in a deep breath, but found that it hurt way too much, even with the normal broken rib. *No, something else is wrong, it obviously isn’t just a broken rib, I’m coughing up blood for god’s sake.*

Eren finally clicked the first voice mail that Levi had left him and put it on speaker to listen to the little short stack furiously talk to him.

#1: *Eren I swear to God, if you do not pick up this phone in the next 10 minutes, so help me God I will murder you myself.*

#2: *Brat, pick up the damn phone already! Jesus Fucking Christ!*

*Well, now I know he’s really angry at me, shall we go through the rest?* Eren smiled at his own comment but continued to go through the rest of the other voice mails.

#3: *Eren, pick up the damn phone.*
Eren Fucking Yeager! Pick up the fucking phone **now** you asshole!!

Eren seriously, if you don’t pick up soon, the teacher is going to murder the both of us! I don’t know if you realized this or not, but I am **too fucking young** to die! **DAMN IT!**

Ahh, I see now, he’s just worried about missing practice due to a detention... well serves him right, he’s a cocky bastard. Eren tried to chuckle at his own comment, but it only ended up in his hurting a lot more than it should have. **Damn, I think he might have shattered a few of them, I can’t feel the bones out of place.** His thoughts trailed off as he felt the phone buzz in his hand again, the annoying ringing started up again. Eren knew he couldn’t talk though, so he let the phone continue to buzz. **I swear to god, if this annoying phone rings again I will chuck it across the room without a care in the world!** Eren sighed in relief as the ringing was silenced, and the annoying sound no longer hurting his already aching head more. He scrolled through his phone again and got to voicemail to listen to the others.

Eren, Mrs. Hanji’s pissed at you. I hope you know that!

Oi Brat, do you think it’s funny listening to all of these and not replying?

You better be on your deathbed right now, or I am going to put you on it tomorrow at school!

I hope you don’t think I’m kidding, you fucking Brat. I can’t wait to sink my fists into your stomach! **HA!**

Alright, enough with the games Brat, pick up the goddamn phone already!

I seriously mean it Brat, pick up the phone, call the school! Tell them where the fuck you are and to have Mrs. Hanji let me back in her class.

**Brat! First Hour is almost over! ANSWER YOUR **FUCKING PHONE**!

I swear to God Eren, you are going to die tomorrow you bastard!

Congratulations, Asshole! You made me miss all of First Hour! I’m going to fucking cut your balls off tomorrow!
#15: Brat, will you at least call back? Or text me back? Mrs. Hanji seemed like she was gonna let you off the hook if you called back. I don’t think you deserve it!

He’s probably right though, I gotta bandage myself up for school tomorrow… Eren’s train of thought derailed as soon as he heard his stomach growl. I haven’t eaten in the past two days…. That’s fucking terrific. He slowly managed to pull himself up with one arm, quickly realizing he couldn’t use his left arm at all. He gently reached over to his forearm and felt the bump from where the bones were snapped in half. Well, at least it’s not my writing hand. Gotta look on the bright side, I guess… Eren finally managed to stand up and look at his surroundings. His whole body ached as he looked down at the floor. Blood was everywhere. It looked like at least 3 people had been murdered here, and their blood drained onto the floor. Eren couldn’t stop himself from gagging at the thought that this was all of his blood, and no one else’s. How much blood did I lose? One look at his pale skin gave him an answer. Great, I can’t even cut myself, or else I risk completely bleeding out. Fucking perfect. Eren sighed and limped towards where his father kept all the bandages. He expertly wrapped his whole torso, along with his arms, they needed to be wrapped. He looked at his left arm again and knew he would need to re-break the extremity himself. He looked around for all the things he needed to set his arm, placing everything on the counter top in the kitchen. He grabbed a large towel and bit down on it hard as he took his left arm and smacked it down on the countertop, strong enough to re-break the bones. He would’ve let out a horrifying scream is he wasn’t biting down on the towel, which was now becoming drenched in bloody saliva. He took a few deep breaths- well, as deep as he could manage- before he calmed himself down and set the broken extremity before he wrapped it skillfully so that it couldn’t move. So that it could heal. Ha, like it’ll heal. Grisha will probably just keep breaking it until my body doesn’t respond and try and heal itself again, ever. Eren then looked to the rest of him, set his smashed nose correctly and put tape of the bridge of his nose to keep it in place. He attempted to take another breath as he moved to wrap his severely injured neck, but found it too difficult to really breathe correctly. He tried again, only to earn him a coughing fit, which ended up turning into a hurling fit, coughing and puking up blood, mucus, stomach acid, and a few other things Eren would try and erase from his memory, but mostly blood. It was bright red, fresh, which meant he was still bleeding on the inside. Wonderful. He finally wrapped his black, purple, blue, red, green and all the other colors he didn’t dare to list, neck, finally feeling more in control of his body. Eren limped off with a jar of peanut butter and a spoon, deciding to take his phone with him as he hobbled up the stairs to his room.

Eren finally made it up to his room after what felt like an eternity on the stairs. His exhausted body laid down on the bed and he got a spoonful of peanut butter, carefully raising it to his lips. The first lick of the spoon let him taste mostly blood. Is that all I’m going to fucking taste for the next week? Blood? He seemed to sigh in relief as he finally started to taste the nutty spread. He felt the hot tears stream down his face before he was even realizing he was crying.

At least I can taste the Peanut Butter.
Chapter Four: The Return

Eren had cleaned up the mess of dried blood and water known as his kitchen before his drunken father could come home and see it. Though, what surprised Eren the most was not that he had actually cleaned the kitchen completely without reopening his wounds, but that Grisha had not come home that night. *Does he feel bad that he hurt me this badly? No, probably not, he wouldn’t even bat an eye anymore... not after what I did.* He sighed in relief as he slowly made himself a sandwich. He ate quickly, savoring the fact that he could finally eat something after two whole days. He looked to his left arm, which was starting to hurt like hell again, even with the splint around it. He flexed his fingers gently. *Well, at least I can feel them. That’s good news.* Eren looked over his battered body, trying hard not to break down right then and there. This was definitely the worst Grisha had done to him, only topping every other instance because Grisha had cooked his flesh. Eren shook his head as soon as the thought of what his backside looked like crossed his mind; He was not going to think about that. *Nope, not gonna happen, I don’t want to know what the hell my back looks like.* For all I know it looks like fucking pulled chicken... before you put the barbeque sauce on it... Or would my blood technically count as barbeque sauce... *WHY AM I THINKING ABOUT THIS!??* Eren shook his head again, though he tried not to move his neck much. That would be like going to hell and back. He prayed to God that he would be able to talk in school at least a little bit. Sighing again for what felt like the millionth time today, the boy took his leave of the kitchen, making a stop at the closet to get the bandages and progressed to his room slowly. He was going to rewrap all his wounds before he passed out from exhaustion.

Eren had rewrapped all his wounds, nearly gagging when he saw how much blood had come off of his back. He was disgusted by the amount of blood he had lost overall. *Just how much did I lose?* He tried not to ponder the question too much as he stiffly got into his small bed. It only took a few seconds before he was passed out.

Eren woke up with a start, the alarm on his phone going off. He reached for the annoying device that was on his night stand. He carefully sat up, trying not to put too much pressure on his left arm or breathe too deeply for his chest. His phone was still going off, annoying Eren so much he was ready to throw the damn thing across the room...which is exactly what he did. The phone made a soft thud as it hit the wall, and then again as it hit the floor, though it didn’t shatter like Eren had hoped it would. No, the damn thing was still ringing. Eren tried to get up immediately and go after the blaring phone, only to find out that his legs almost refused to work. He got in a half step before he fell flat on his face, groaning at both the pain in his legs as well, now he realized it, the rest of his aching body. He felt like he had been hit by another train this morning, only to be allowed to walk among the living. He coughed as he struggled to get up, though his thin body allowed to it to be done easily. He got up, finally shutting his fucking phone off and then going to get changed. He wore black everything- even his *hoodie* was black- because he didn’t need people to see blood stains if anything were to open up. *Though, if anything does open up, I’ll probably die anyways.* *The hallways are gonna be fucking horrible.* Eren looked down at his feet and up his bruised legs, at the rest of his body and realized that there were more bruises showing today than there were yesterday. He gingerly reached up to touch his face, though almost instantly pulled his fingers back. He swallowed hard. Today was gonna be a rough day at school.
He had somehow made it to school with his backpack on his back, like a normal person, without opening anything up. He went hurriedly to first period, to hopefully get there before it got too crowded in the hallways. He went to Mrs. Hanji’s room and came in, going to sit down, hopefully without her realizing that he had just come in-

“Mr. Yeager! What a pleasure of you to finally come back to class,” Mrs. Hanji’s voice was dripping with sarcasm.

Eren jumped a bit from the harshness of her voice. He looked down before he put his bag down and got out his small white board and an expo marker. There was no way in hell that he was going to be able to talk today, and his hoodie was up to try and hide his face from the lights in the room. He came forward, putting the board on the desk by Mrs. Hanji. He started to write down his message in his beautiful script.

*Sorry, I can’t really talk right now, my throat is a little messed up.*

Eren kept his head down and erased the message after he knew that Mrs. Hanji had seen it.

*I’m sorry I wasn’t in class yesterday.*

Hanji took his apology and smiled softly. “It’s okay Eren, what’s wrong with your throat? Are you sick or something?” She asked softly and looked to him. “You also have to keep your hood down, it’s against the school rules.” Mrs. Hanji reached up and removed the hood from the top of Eren’s head. Eren looked down when he heard her gasp. “Oh my good science! Eren, what the hell happened to you?” She asked quietly, obviously more concerned, and all she saw was that his neck was bandaged.

Eren shook his head. *It’s nothing to worry about, really, he wrote down, It just hurt too much to speak at the moment. Is it okay if you don’t call on me in class?* Eren looked up and his face looked even more bruised; the tape on the broken nose was still there to keep it in place, yet his double black eyes were not given to him by Jean. Hanji came to that realization quickly. She nodded her head at his question that he had written.

“Yes, Eren, you don’t need to be called. I’ll give you and Levi both the notes that you guys missed yesterday, so don’t try and overwork yourself,” she said as she backed up to get the notes.

That was when Mrs. Hanji laid an eye on Eren’s broken arm in a sling. It was a hospital issued sling, but his arm was nowhere near as wrapped as it should’ve been. “Eren, do you need to seek medical treatment? I can write you a pass to go to the nurse first period…” The rest of her
suggestion died down as Eren furiously shook his head. He had multiple emotions showing on his face. Fear, resentment, a few others that no one could really understand unless they were in in his shoes, but above all the emotions his eyes so blatantly displayed, pain. Eren looked like he was about ready to cry from the amount of pain he was in. Mrs. Hanji knew better than to comply with her motherly urges to scoop Eren up into her arms and hold him close to allow him to cry, and she wouldn’t. No, she couldn’t do that here at her workplace; it would seem unprofessional. She decided it was best to keep his hoodie up. “I’ll write you a note for your hood then,” she said quietly and went to write his note. Eren sat down before the class filed in along with an angry Levi.

Eren swallowed hard as he saw Levi’s eyes instantly darken with the intent to murder. There was no doubt in his mind that he was capable of such a feat. Honestly, he wouldn’t be surprised if Levi had in fact killed a man before. He watched in fear as Levi came right for him and instantly grabbed his hoodie and ripped Eren out of his seat. The boy whimpered as Levi’s right arm rose up, and Eren’s eyes closed as he braced himself for the impact of Levi’s fists. But they never came.

“Mr. Ackerman, I don’t believe it would be proper to hit your lab partner the very same day that he returns back to school,” Mrs. Hanji’s voice was ice cold, her eyes throwing daggers at Levi who, likewise, turned his death glare to Mrs. Hanji. He then looked back at the pain in Eren’s viridian green eyes. He almost felt sorry for the poor brat and threw him back into his seat, only Eren ungracefully fell from his chair and found his way to the floor. Levi seemed to smirk until Eren’s hood fell from around his face, showing off both of his black eyes, a ton of scrapes and a few more bruises lining his face. Eren saw Levi’s eyes widen as he stared down at the boy on the ground. Eren quickly flicked his hood up to cover his face again.

“Was that really necessary, Mr. Ackerman?” Mrs. Hanji asked him quizzically. But the steely eyed teen couldn’t answer her question.

_What the hell happened to him? He didn’t look like that two days ago! Wait... when he called me he said something about being hurt. He couldn’t have been asking for help, could he? I mean, it’s just his face that’s like that right?_ Though Levi answered that himself when he saw the small amount of white medical wrap, that he was all too familiar with, wrapped around the Brat’s neck. _Seriously, what the fuck happened to this Brat?_ Levi shook his head when he saw the pain in the boy’s eyes as he shifted from the floor to his chair. Levi watched as he sat down on the cold, unforgiving chair. Eren was so tense that it made Levi wonder how much more of his body was wrapped up as well; maybe it was all of him? _No, he can’t be that hurt. If he was that hurt, they wouldn’t have let him out of the hospital...Wait, did he even go to the hospital?_ Levi shook his head and peeled his eyes off boy’s battered body. _Why the FUCK am I thinking about him like he matters so much to me??_

Levi returned to his seat beside the brat, Mrs. Hanji had given them a packet to do which contained the information they both missed yesterday, as well as homework from last night that neither of
them received. He grumbled his complaint about being behind the rest of the class but took the packet and did it right away. He looked over to Eren to see that the brat was doing the same. He was really glad that he hadn’t punched Eren in the face like he was originally going to, as the Brat looked injured enough. Wait… I should’ve punched him, he’s the reason why we’re behind in this class. I’ll make sure I give it to him later today. Levi went back to his packet and worked for the rest of class alongside the Brat. What he thought was strange though was that the Brat hadn’t spoken a single word, not even after he had tried to beat the crap out of him. What the hell? Is this brat actually giving me the silent treatment? Or can he not talk at all? Nope, not even gonna let that last thought through! He can definitely talk, and yet this fucker is giving me the silent treatment! This fucking brat! Who the hell does he think he is for ignoring me? Oh, I am SO gonna teach him a lesson when we are in the fucking hallway today! Levi held onto his pencil a little more forcefully as all his anger seemed to bubble up at those thoughts. He couldn’t wait to get his hand on him and beat the crap out of him. Oh yeah, I can’t wait! Levi seemed almost too excited at the prospect of beating the shit out of the Brat, yet some how his excitement went unnoticed.

The bell rang after first hour was over. A majority of the classmates got up and left to get to their next class as quickly as possible. Levi followed suit, and for the majority, he stayed outside the classroom waiting for Eren to exit. He waited for what seemed like forever as the hallways started to clear out. Levi watched as Eren came out and seemed a bit shocked to see the jock leaning against the lockers just outside of the classroom. He swallowed hard but coughed after. It almost sounds like he’s coughing something up. Damn, that’s gross, this sick Brat is fucking coughing up his damn mucus! That’s fucking disgusting! Levi’s scowl only grew more as he harshly grabbed Eren’s wrist, tugging him away from the classroom and towards a secluded place in the school. He felt the adrenaline already kicking in for what he was about to do to exact his revenge on the boy. His smirk that formed on his thin lips looked sinister, like he had the intent to kill.

Once they were in a spot Levi deemed safe from prying eyes, he slammed the already battered teen into the wall. Levi’s eyes were blazing in full blown rage. He looked down on the now shaking Brat like a hawk. Or maybe the correct term would be as a lion looks at it’s prey… Ya, that’s probably the right fucking one. Levi looked to the frightened brat and laughed. Which seemed to catch Eren off guard, it was a soft, dark laugh which almost resembled a loud chuckle.

“Do you know why I dragged you back here?” Levi asked sinisterly, almost as if he had a knife drawn to the other’s throat... But I don’t, DAMMIT! I could’ve really freaked him out! Then he would’ve done all of the chemistry work for me! How stupid can I be? He smirked as he watched the boy wearily shake his head. He looked rather pale, but Levi figured it was probably from the position he was in right now with the school’s resident badass. Yes, I just called myself a badass! I’m gonna live up to my own reputation! HAHA! FUCK YOU, EREN YEAGER! “Well, this better put some sense into your mind for not sending me the Chem notes from the other day,” he hissed at the other and pulled back his fist, he slammed his fist down onto Eren’s chest, but something was wrong. Why was there no crunch? I should’ve broken a few ribs at least! He stared down at his fist, which was still on Eren’s chest, with furrowed brows. He stood there, getting angrier by the second as he tried to figure out what went wrong there. Levi only had seconds to figure it out before he was confused yet again. There was blood on his fist. What the fuck? Levi looked up to see Eren’s look of pain slowly subside a way as he slumped down on the wall, his back leaving a bloodied mark on the wall as he slumped down. He was coughing up blood and a lot of it. Levi backed away from the other in shock before he swallowed hard. Memories flooding through his mind about his mother, dying in the same position as he saw Eren in now, a hole blown through her heart. NO! I refuse to let anyone die here! He shook his head before turning his head to try and
find a way to get someone’s attention. He finally decided that since they were in a nearly unvisited part of the school, the best thing to hit would be the fire alarm and shout for help, which was exactly what he did. The sprinkler system kicked in as soon as he hit the alarm and muffled screams filled the hallway as Levi started shouting. “Somebody get your ass out here and help me!! Call 911!!” He shouted at a few teachers which had come out of empty rooms to follow him.

Levi saw that they were running in his direction before he went and kneeled by Eren. His eyes betrayed him, showing a mix of concern for the boy, along with panic. He watched as Eren grabbed his wrist and smiled softly, or at least tried to smile, he was coughing up so much blood it was almost draining out of his mouth like a waterfall. His lips moved but nothing came out. No noise, nothing. Levi just sat there in shock of the boy sitting in front of him, understanding what he was trying to say in an instant. Levi was soon pulled away by the teachers and he seemed to zone out almost instantly then. His own face becoming pale, finally taking in full realization of what he had just done.

*Why thank me, you idiot?*
Chapter Five: What Have I Done?

Why thank me, you idiot?

Levi couldn’t get the thought out of his mind. Nothing could distract him long enough to prevent him from thinking about those full rosy, red lips mouthing their final—No! They were not the final thing that Brat said! Why do I keep thinking about that!? Dammit! He’s in surgery now! He’s going to be fine DAMN IT!

Levi leaned down and cradled his aching head. He was in the same hospital as Eren was, they had taken them both of them in the same ambulance. He was currently sitting in a pristine, shiny white room. At least this fucking room is clean. Why am I here again? I don’t have anything wrong with me! Levi looked down at his bloody hands. The blood wasn’t his and that was what repulsed him. He rushed over to the bathroom in the small room, leaning over the toilet as he expelled the contents of his stomach for the third time today. He felt the sting of the stomach acid ripping across his throat. Why the fuck am I throwing up again, you ask? Well, I’ve been trying not to remind myself what the fuck I just did to my lab partner! Levi threw up again as he pictured the broken teen limp against the wall, barely hanging onto his wrist before he was pulled away.

Levi tried to calm his churning stomach. I am not fucking doing that again! I refuse to throw up! Levi’s body betrayed him for the fifth time today. He didn’t hear the nurse come in, who located him in seconds after hearing his loud hurling sounds from the main part of the room.

“Mr. Ackerman?” She asked kindly as she sat down on the floor with him, seeming unaffected that the teen was throwing up still.

Levi gave her a death glare as she got closer to him, and if looks could kill, she would be dead at least two times over. “Can I help you?” he hissed and sat a bit farther back from the toilet, which he had just been clinging to desperately.

The nurse smiled softly before she handed him a bottle of water. “I want to talk, but I want to know if you’re going to be okay if we talk about the accident…” She trailed off as she watched Levi lean his body over towards the toilet, violently throwing up what small amount of stomach acid was still in his stomach. She hesitantly reached forward and rubbed his back, trying to soothe the other and get him to calm down. “Should I take that as a no then?” she asked kindly and was expecting him to nod.

Levi shook his head. “No, I need to talk about it, I need to know what happened to the fucking brat” he said quietly. He sat back on his heels, still close to the toilet, though not close enough that
he was hugging the toilet. No, he was trying to get his self-restraint back. “I…” He paused taking in a heavy breath, “I think I can handle it.” For Once Levi actually replied honestly, he did want to know more about what had happened to his chemistry partner. He took a few deep breaths and he calmed himself down.

“Do you want me to start asking questions? Or are you gonna tell me what happened?” The Nurse asked softly since no one really knew what happened to the boy at all. The police investigators were in the room in almost an instant. “Do you want to talk to me first? Or are you okay with them in the room?” She asked softly to the boy, knowing sometimes patients like trying to talk to someone who could comfort them through their distress.

The silver eyed boy looked at the police investigators, glaring at them before his gaze softened. “I’ll give you my side of the story, I wasn’t the one who hurt him before hand, you should know that… but I’ll only tell my complete side of the story if you’re completely honest with me about what’s happening to Eren.” He had the last bit of the sentence directed towards the Nurse. The nurse looked to him and she thought about it for awhile before nodding.

Levi took another deep breath before he nodded and looked to the nurse, then to the investigators, then back to the nurse again. He did not want to look at the investigators at the moment, no he couldn’t do that right now, he would throw up if he didn’t see any emotions, and he hoped the nurse would at least seem a bit concerned.

“The brat-.... I mean Eren,” The name felt weird, coming out of his mouth as he had only said it in pure moments of rage while on the phone trying to get a hold of him. “He was fine when I first met him on Wednesday, it was a lab day, so our teacher put us together for being lab partners” he paused to take in his breath and he looked up to the investigators who were hurriedly taking notes. Oh my god, I feel like I’m going to be sick again!

The nurse picked up on his distress almost instantly and helped him calm down, they did not need him going through another round of shock like he had before. She was really concerned for the teen as he recited the story back to them.

“I gave him my number, and my email so that he could send me the chemistry notes we took in class, he had written down all the data for the experiment….” Levi trailed off when he realized that he was rambling. “I didn’t see him again until we had lunch-” Levi stopped abruptly so that he could swallow hard as he thought about all the things that had happened. “Eren tripped over one of my friend’s girlfriend, so he picked the kid up and socked him in the nose. It was broken almost instantly, but that was all that he had when he left school on Wednesday.”

Levi looked up from his hands and locked eyes with the nurse who was gently holding his hand, encouraging him to continue with his account of what had happened. He calmed down even further when he felt her gently squeeze his hand. She was comforting, and he was thankful for that. I don’t
He closed his eyes as he thought about his conversation with the Brat over the phone.

“He didn’t send me any of the work at all, and I got really mad at him, but I couldn’t contact him because I didn’t have his number. So I went to sleep, thinking about how I would beat him up yesterday. He called me at around Three in the morning. I was angry still because I thought it was a friend calling for a ride from a party, but it wasn’t. All I heard were choked sobs, and whimpers. He sounded like he was in so much pain, but I didn’t know if it was physical or simply from drinking. I know a lot of people at our school get drunk off their asses and then get a friend to drag their ass home, but I didn’t think he would be the one to call me. I heard him tell me that “It hurt”, that the only thing I got out of him that I could really understand. I told him I would come pick him up, that he needed to hang up and text me where he was, but he didn’t. He had tried to tell me something else to, something like “don’t come, Grisha’s angry…” or something like that, I don’t remember the exact details at the moment. I got up to go and get my keys to pick the brat up from wherever he was, only he didn’t answer me. He hung up and then didn’t text me where he was. I waited a solid 45 minutes just in case he was having problems texting me, because I still figured he was drunk…. Levi didn’t know when he had started to cry, but he was a fucking waterfall now. He sobbed, his shoulders rising and falling harshly as his whole body shook. He knew that it wasn’t right, it hadn’t felt right to leave Eren and now he knew why.

“He wasn’t drunk, was he?” He sobbed out and cried harder as the nurse pulled him close to her chest and pulled him close into a hug.

“No, he wasn’t drunk on Thursday morning, do you know who Grisha is?” She asked him softly as he sobbed into her chest.

Levi again shook his head. He had no fucking clue who this Grisha was. Was he the man that had hurt the innocent boy? He felt absolutely horrible. Why didn’t I call him back? I could’ve got him to a hospital! I could’ve helped him before it got to this point! Levi sobbed harder when he thought about all the ‘what if’s that he could’ve done to help the boy. Yes he put up a front that he was an asshole at school, it was just the way everyone expected him to be, and honestly he was a little sadistic on the inside, but he would never wanted harm to befall upon Eren. He cried for what seemed like hours, but was only a few minutes before the nurse spoke up.

“Is there anything else? Like what happened today?” she asked quietly as she watched Levi pale, all the color draining from his face. The nurse pulled him into her lap, rubbing the teen’s back in small circles. She was trying to calm the sobbing teen down, she wondered if this was too much for him to handle, he did just come out of his state of shock. She had been worried about the shorter teen as he came in, not answering any questions. His eyes were glossed over, like he didn’t realize that there were people trying to talk to him. He had been like that for hours, and she continued to talk to him. The nurse rocked him back and forth, trying to console him more.

“I did this didn’t I?” He asked quietly after he had finally calmed down. “I’m the one who put him in this hospital.” He cried as he clung to the nurse’s now tear stained shirt. The nurse finally
calmed him down all the way after a few times. She asked him again what happened today as Levi moved out of her lap to get closer to the toilet again, fearing he wouldn’t be able hold what little acid was left in his stomach.

“I got into first period and I was really angry at him for not sending the notes, don’t get me wrong, I am known in school for throwing a few punches here and there, but I didn’t want to hurt the kid, maybe give him a black eye to teach him a lesson, but my teacher stopped me before I even got the chance to hit the poor kid. I saw the bruises and cuts all over his face, and they weren’t there before, he had two black eyes… Who does that?” he asked quietly and looked down trying not to think about what he did, but knew he would have to. He took in another deep breath to calm down his shaky nerves. “I took him towards one of the quiet places in the school after we got out of first hour. I slammed him against the wall, yelled at him to never forget my to send me the chem work again.” He paused and looked down at his hands as fresh tears found their way to his eyes. “I didn’t mean for this to happen, I just wanted to frighten him a little, so I punched him in the chest… but something was wrong-” he paused and moved to throw up again in the toilet. He tried to calm down his stomach but found that another thought about what happened, sent him through another hurling fest.

He threw up a few more times, his throat burning with the acid from his stomach, which was the only thing his stomach held at this point. He took a few deep breaths and allowed for the nurse to get close to him and touch him comfortingly. He needed it it, this whole thing was reminding him of his mother’s death more and more. He sat back down and tried to resume his speech as best he could without his voice cracking, or uncharacteristically bursting into tears.

“I… I punched him in the chest, where his ribs should’ve been, but it felt like he was vulnerable, like there was nothing there, I would’ve maybe left him with a fractured, or even bruised rib, but there was no resistance when I punched him, like there was no bone there at all. I was so confused… Eren started coughing up blood more and more, until it was just running out of his mouth-” He gasped as his eyes widened and he covered his mouth. “Oh my god, he was coughing up blood during first period and didn’t tell anyone, I thought he was just sick… oh my God, what have I done?” he asked and his tears started their waterfall for his eyes. His tears looked so out of place on his normally stoic face. His eyes seemed to be the only way to look into his emotions, the tears fell from them, and the look of pure guilt and concern was gut wrenching. He sobbed, trying to calm himself down and failing horribly.

“I pulled the fire alarm to get help, I was pulled back from him by the teachers… but before the teachers got there, Eren reached out and grabbed my wrist” he said and looked to the bloody stain on his long sleeved shirt. “He tried to thank me… but nothing came out of his mouth, it was just cascading blood, why was he trying to thank me?” He sobbed out.

The nurse instantly glared at the investigators to get the hell out of the room. They left after curtly nodding to the two on the floor in the bathroom. The nurse seemed to be relieved that they left. “Well, now that you were honest with us, I’ll be honest with you.” Her words seemed to take a bit for the young man in her arms to process, but he soon enough nodded. She took that as her cue to
continue her speech.

“Eren Yeager, 15 years of age, son of a wealthy doctor, Grisha Yeager, was brought in with you earlier today, from your school” She saw the young man instantly seeth at the mention of Eren’s father.

“You mean the brat’s own father was responsible for this!?” He growled, the rage clearly evident in his voice, along with his eyes. He watched the nurse with his steely eyes to get the answer out of her. However, she shook her head.

“We cannot make any assumptions as to how Eren acquired these injuries, but what I can tell you is that he’s lost a lot of blood, his back was severely injured, and it looks as though his ribs were shattered, and some splinters puncturing his lungs before you punched him. Though by the looks of how he had wrapped his own body, he seemed familiar with the injuries, which leads me to believe he was either hiding the injuries well to begin with, or he had received them on Wednesday after your school day. Though he did not seek any medical treatment, and we know this because his arm was broken, and not set with a proper cast. It seems as though Eren had set it himself, almost perfect without the use of pins and screws, that’s all I can tell you without going into detail and loosing my job.” Her voice was soft and watched at the teen took everything in that the nurse had told him.

“Thank you for telling me” he said quietly and he smiled that she was still holding him close. “He was pale, did he lose a lot of blood?” he asked quietly, looking up so that their eyes would meet and Levi would be able to tell if she was really being honest or not.

The nurse nodded and looked to Levi with concern. “Do you think you’ll be okay? You came with him in the same ambulance, but you don’t remember the ride, you probably don’t remember how you got to this room either, do you?” She asked quietly and he nodded to show that the nurse was very correct in her statements.

“I don’t remember much, I only remember being pulled away, and then thinking about my mother, and how he looked almost as lifeless as she did when she died like that…” he started before looking down. “The only difference was that she had a hole in her heart.” His tone had become dry and his tears stopped after that. “I feel much better now, thank you” he told her and tried to stand up, he was wobbly as she helped him up.

“Don’t be quick, take things slow, you just came out of shock, we looked in your files for a guardian, but we were unable to contact your legal guardian, do you have someone who can take care of the legal documents?” she asked softly and helped him to his bed so that he could calm down.
Levi shook his head. “No, that asshole Kenny hasn’t been around for years, he pays for all the shit I need, but he isn’t around” he said quietly. He sat down and watched as the nurse got up to leave. He quickly grabbed her arm again to get her to stop. He looked down and swallowed hard as she waited for him to speak.

“Can- um… can I see him, w-when he gets out of surgery?” he asked quietly, he looked really concerned as he met the nurse’s eyes.

“Of course you can,” she smiled and rubbed his hair. “Everything is going to be fine, he’s in the best hands.” She smiled, but it wasn’t as full as the Brat’s. No his smile, is wide, like he smiles from ear to ear. It’s so freaking white too. Her’s isn’t white at all! Does she brush them? I wonder how many whitening strips the damn brat uses…. Why am I thinking about this? She smiled at me, telling me everything will be okay, and the next thing I know I’m thinking about the damn brat? What the fuck is wrong with me!? I should be worried about the damn brats well being! Not his fucking smile! I can’t believe I did that! I should’ve known something was wrong with the brat! He comes in bruised and wrapped and I go and think he’s just sick… then I fucking put him in the hospital! What kind of a monster am I dammit! I mean I know I’ve broken a few bones before, but I’ve never put anyone in the hospital before have I?

His mind lingered on the disturbing thought before it drifted to the brat again. He should’ve known better, the brat looked so pale, he probably was bleeding when he slammed him on the wall. That’s why it was so fucking bloody when he slid down. I should’ve noticed that he was wearing all black! What the fuck is wrong with me! The brat wouldn’t be the one to wear all the fucking goth shit! Why did I pass it over like that? I should’ve noticed….

I should’ve fucking noticed… My head hurts so fucking bad… I wonder what he’s gonna feel like when he wakes up? I wonder if he’ll be able to feel anything, or if he’ll be too hyped up on the morphine to feel anything--- WAIT! Why the fuck am I still thinking about that brat? What the hell is wrong with me?

Levi shook his head so that he could try and dismiss the thoughts of Eren that surrounded his head. He wanted food, but he would wait for the nurse to return and ask her. He was not about to get lost in this shiny as building that they called Sina Central Hospital. He sat on his bed and looked around. At least the room’s fucking clean, I wouldn’t be able to stand it if it wasn’t.

Levi curled up on his bed, his thoughts swirling around Eren, no matter how much he tried to tell himself that he shouldn’t think about the brat. He found that the brat had consumed all of Levi’s other thoughts, and remained the center of Levi’s attention.

I am straight, right… but that brat’s fucking adorable. Wait, what?
Chapter Six : Explanations

Well, I’ve been suspended from school for three more weeks… that’s fuckin’ perfect.

Levi groaned as he got up from his hard bed. He stretched, looking at the clock on the nightstand. He sighed when he saw 3:07 AM. He couldn’t stop waking up at that time, not after the brat had called him that one night. Fucking insomnia… That’s the cause, not the fact that I’m worried about that damn Brat. Though Levi knew he was just trying to come up with an excuse, he knew the real reason. He was too afraid to have that happen to Eren again, and he would wake up and wait for a phone call, and wouldn’t be able to go back to sleep.

He got up anyways. These past 5 weeks were complete hell. Complete hell doesn’t even do it justice, it was like working under a dictator, in complete enslavement… yeah, that sounds better. Levi had been suspended from school for 2 months after what he had done to Eren, putting him into the hospital and all, yet he wasn’t the main reason for the Brat’s injuries so the administration had given him a break and didn’t expel him.

Levi got into the shower, and his mind was immediately filled with thoughts of the Brat, as it had been every day since he was suspended, there was a good reason for it too. He had been going to see Eren everyday. I wonder if he’ll be awake today? Awake. Levi wanted to see those beautiful viridian eyes again. He’d been wanting to see them for the past few weeks, though he would never tell anyone. No one will ever know, not even that damn Brat! I swear by it!

Levi had not fully accepted that he was gay yet, especially when the one he was slowly becoming attached to was in the hospital. Not only was Eren in the hospital, he was still unconscious from the surgery that had taken place over 4 weeks ago. Eren had needed multiple surgeries to correct his shredded back, shattered ribs and multiple other broken bones that they had found over the course of the first two weeks. Why won’t he wake up?

He shivered as the hot water ran out; He hadn’t realized just how long he was in the shower thinking about the damn Brat. He quickly reached for the soap and started to wash himself in the cold water. Levi came out a few minutes later, clean and dripping wet. He wrapped a towel around his built frame. No, he wasn’t one of those bodybuilders who had muscles-galore, but he was pretty well toned.

Levi walked down the hall to his room where he easily picked out some clothes that fit his form, yet he still chose to wear sweats over the shorts he wore. He was stopping at school - yes, he still went to school even though he was suspended - to get the things he needed for work, along with the work Eren needed to do from his teachers. It had become a habit over the past couple weeks. Wake up too damn early, take a long ass shower, eat a bland breakfast, go to school and grab the shit he needed to do, turn in the shit he already did, then drive over to the hospital to do his work in
Eren’s hospital room. Today won’t be any different, though I guess I’ll be a bit better. His face finally healed up completely. Why do I have to like this brat? Why is he so fucking adorable to me? Why can’t he fucking wake the hell up? ...Though he’ll probably hate me afterwards… but yet why did he thank me? Did he think I killed him? Was he thanking me for that? Because if he was, he’s going to be fucking pissed as all hell that he’s not dead… Then again, why would he want to be dead? Had his father done this before? Levi’s mind was filled with so many questions that he wanted that damned Brat to answer.

He left his room after he was dressed, countless questions still plaguing his mind. Levi made himself a quick breakfast: toast and a few eggs. He ate in complete silence. He didn’t mind it as some other people would; He enjoyed the quiet of his home, actually. He got up to get the keys from their designated spot. He wanted to make this quick, because he didn’t like the teachers that much, and it couldn’t be said they liked him that much either. He quickly made the two-block drive to the high school before getting out of his sleek black car and entering the old building.

He walked quietly along the barren hallways to get to the teachers’ rooms. He didn’t make much conversation with the old hags, maybe a few “Good mornings” here and there, but nothing much more than that. He liked to keep to himself, yet for some reason Eren was all he could think about as he got the work he needed to do and dropped off a few things to various teachers. Once his classes were out of the way he went along to Eren’s classrooms and picked up more work to add to the growing pile in the Brat’s hospital room. It took a little over half an hour to get all the papers in order for the both of them before he walked out of the building, both glad to get out of the building that brought too many bad thoughts to mind, and glad he could go see Eren now.

Alright- To see Sleeping Beauty, we go.

Eren’s chest was throbbing as he woke up. Actually, everywhere was throbbing, just more so his chest. He knew why as soon as he tried to take in a deep breath, only to let out a groan in pain. He looked around to try and see where he was, but came up blank. Why the fuck is everything in this room….white? Then it hit him like a ton of bricks. I’m in the fucking hospital? His thoughts were only confirmed by the steady beeps of machines next to him. He looked around his body and he saw that he had an IV in his right arm, and his left arm was properly wrapped and casted. He reached his hand up to his eyes to try and rub any of the tiredness he felt away. His body felt heavy, like he was still exhausted from a running around all day. Yet, Eren knew from the kink in his neck that he had in fact been asleep for a long time. But how long? How long have I been asleep for? His mind wandered until he saw a nurse come into his room, and the way her face lit up at the sight of him awake gave away her excitement.

“You’re awake!” She beamed and smiled happily down at the boy. She looked to the many screens displaying all his vitals before helping him sit up so she could change the bandages on his back.
“How long have I been asleep for?” he asked the nurse quietly, noticing his throat didn’t hurt anymore at all. Is my neck healed completely? In only a few days? He expected maybe 2 or 3 days to be the answer. He nearly flipped his shit when he heard the exact answer.

“You’ve been asleep for four and a half weeks, Eren.” She told him as she gently and carefully removed his old bandages and looked over the healing skin. His back was making excellent progress—probably because he hadn’t really used it in almost 5 weeks, but all that aside— he was doing well. She carefully wrapped him back up, letting her words sink in as she finished up.

“M-my father….” he trailed off and looked down. He half expected that Grisha would’ve come in and killed him by cutting off his oxygen supply or something like that. Yet he was still alive, 5 weeks after the initial attack.

“We haven’t heard from your father, Eren, all we know is that he has disclosed a blank check to the hospital for your medical bills along with a note.”

“What did the note say?” He asked quietly, he was quite curious, and he hoped the nurse would be completely honest with him. It probably says something about leaving me here, and maybe disowning me completely. He couldn’t have been more right.

“The letter says that he’s moved away, but he’ll continue to pay for all the bills… there wasn’t a return address on the letter, so we don’t know where he is,” the nurse was speaking to him softly. She didn’t know if he was mentally okay after what happened. She glanced over to the clock near the white board, which held her name - Petra Ral- and the times when breakfast, lunch, and dinner would be served. It also held the amount of medication to be administered at certain times. “Oh, it’s almost time for your friend to come. I’m sure he’ll be happy to see you’re awake--” Petra was cut short as Levi dropped the things he was holding, workbooks hitting the floor with a loud smack.

Eren looked up to where Levi stood in the doorway. He smiled cheekily, “So, you decided to come see me?” he asked quietly. Levi wasn’t sure if his eyes were fooling him, but Eren seemed to blush when he said that. He was surprised Eren didn’t stutter, but then again, he had no reason to think Eren would be nervous.

Eren shared the same silent surprise. He looked down at his hands, the seconds feeling like hours as he heard Levi come closer to him. He felt the bed shift, and looked up to see Levi’s steel eyes gazing intently back into his own ocean-colored eyes. It’s like he’s trying to see into my soul... not that I would mind, but doesn’t he not really like me? Why is he like this? Eren was the first to break their eye contact as he looked down.
“Why are you here?” he mumbled out, unable to look the other in the eyes as he asked.

“Why am I here?” He paused to take that question into consideration as Eren nodded. “I’m here, because I’ve been waiting for you to wake up for the past 5 weeks.” At this Eren looked up into his eyes, trying to read any emotions within that could tell him if Levi was lying. Yet, he found no such things. He found only honesty and concern.

“Well, I’m going to go and get Eren’s breakfast along with his medication, you boys can talk to each other and catch up.” Petra’s voice turned Eren’s attention from the raven-haired boy in front of him to the nice nurse. He nodded and couldn’t find the courage to look into Levi’s eyes again.

Once she left, and closed the door behind her, Eren found the courage to speak again. “So is that really the reason you’re here?” He asked, his voice small, almost like he was frightened, yet it sounded broken, like he didn’t want to ask.

Levi was silent for a minute. His own eyes drifted over the bedsheets, over Eren’s arm wrapped tightly and slung over his shoulder, over the bandages he could see wrapped around his torso, and over the wires strung between him and the heavy machines that stood guard to Eren’s right. He sighed in resignation. “More or less.”

Eren almost instantly gave Levi the ‘you-did-not-just-fucking-answer-me-like-that’ look. “So you just came to drop off the papers you so graciously spilled all over the floor?” He asked, giving Levi an incredulous stare. *Is that really the only fucking reason he’s been coming for the past four weeks? He probably wants me to think that I owe him something too…. Fucking perfect.*

*Fuck. He’s onto me. Quick, say something that doesn’t make you sound like a creep.* Levi was very thankful he could school his expression into complete indifference so easily. Years of practice had its perks. “I was expecting you to be a bit more grateful, Brat.”

Eren huffed as he crossed his arms over his chest, or at least tried to. *Called it.* “Why do I need to be grateful to someone who put me in this immaculate hell hole they call a hospital?” Why the *fuck am I questioning him further!? What the fuck is wrong with me? FUCK! I want him to actually like me, dammit! I should be glad! He put me here, and got me the fuck away from Grisha…*

Levi’s steely glare finally drifted back up to Eren’s face. Eren wasn’t too sure, but he thought he saw some softer emotion past the annoyance. His voice dropped, and he quietly spoke. “I thought you thanked me for it earlier, Brat.” His eyebrow quirked up, the hard lines of his cool facade smoothed somewhat with confusion. “...Why.”
“W-why what?” Eren started to stutter again, a clear sign to the raven-haired teen that he was nervous. Or hiding something. Probably both. But for now, Eren was feigning innocence from Levi’s question. He doesn’t want to fucking know, he’s already fucking told me that. He doesn’t need to know either.

He’s really going to play the oblivious card. He’s not going to do that and fucking get away with it. His voice stayed low, and dropped an octave. If you can’t beat ‘em, threaten the little shits. “I know that you know exactly what I mean.”

“And what is it that you know I know what you mean?” Eren asked, raising a quizzical eyebrow at the shorter man, who currently sat on the left side of his bed. He tried to lean back onto the raised bed, only to find out his pain medication had long run out. He hissed for a short second before leaning forward again, acting as if nothing was wrong with his back. Yes, nothing is wrong besides the fact that my back feels like I’m being repeatedly stabbed with fucking knifes!

Levi definitely noticed the pain laced into Eren’s features, but kept his face stoic. He’s awful at pretending he knows nothing. Let’s jog his memory… “When I punched you in the chest, you started gushing blood.” Levi swallowed, face still devoid of emotion. Please don’t notice how distressing this is. “You were on the floor, barely conscious, and in pain. You had to be carted away in an ambulance. And yet I saw you mouth the words ‘Thank you’ to me. I’m not fucking blind, and you don’t have amnesia. So tell me.” His eyes narrowed, and he leaned in minutely closer, patience wearing thin. “Why.”

Eren looked down at his hands, like they suddenly were the most interesting things in the world. He couldn’t force himself to meet the other’s eyes. Does he really want to know? He looks like he’s ready to cry. Did he think that he had killed me? Well, I guess that would’ve put anyone in a weird situation of what if’s. But I can’t tell him why, that would be going way too far into territory that no one knows about. Not even the friends I had at my other school know about it… HAHAHAHA. Friends. That word is fucking hilarious. I have none. Not even Levi can be considered one. Eren just blankly stared at the familiar hands in his lap. He hadn’t said a single word, just mulling it over in his head. Should I really tell him my whole past? Maybe I can tell him about some things but I can’t tell him every-

“Oi, Brat, are you even listening to me? Answer the fucking question.”

Eren jumped at the obvious hostility coming from the teen sitting beside him.

“And you know what? I have another question for you.”
“W-what?” Eren’s voice quivered in shock. His eyes showed the fear he was feeling from Levi’s overbearing tone.

“I know my own strength. My punch should have broken bones. But it didn’t. Someone or something did that for me. Care to explain that?”

Eren visibly swallowed and looked down at those oh so interesting hands again. “D-do you r-really want to know?” He asked. He felt hot tears start to line his eyes, but the other couldn’t see them because of his overly long hair shielding part of his face. Why do I need to open up to him? Why does it need to be him that interested in what the hell my story is? No one needs to know. No one cares.

Finally, we’re fucking getting somewhere. “You think I’d fucking waste my breath asking if I didn’t want to know?”

Well he has a pretty good fucking point. Ten point to fucking Gryffindor. “Y-you need to promise me something though.” Eren stuttered out the words and felt the first tear drop. HOLY SHIT! I’m actually going to fucking tell someone! I hope you feel special you fucking Deuterostome.

He’s crying shitshitshitshitshit! How do I make it stop, dammit! I really, really want to hug him right now but I can’t because his back is shredded but he’s fucking CRYING and I CAN’T HUG HIM AND HOW DO I MAKE IT STOP AND YOU’RE GOING TO VISIBLY FREAK OUT IF YOU KEEP INTERNALLY SCREAMING CHILL THE FUCK OUT! Levi was an internal train wreck. But Eren didn't need to know that. Let’s keep it that way. He tried to keep the malice out of his voice. “What am I promising, now?”

Eren didn’t meet Levi’s eyes. “Y-you need to promise me,” Eren paused to sniffl and rub what he thought were hidden tears away from his eyes, “that you’ll keep this to yourself. You can’t tell anyone about any of this, and I fucking mean it, Levi.” Eren tried to hide the shaking in his voice through anger, but he was failing miserably.

Pleasepleaseplease stop crying, anything to get you to stop crying… Levi was very quiet when he spoke, sounding gruff, but almost… comforting. “…Alright, Brat. I promise.” And with the exception of his mother,

Eren told him everything.
Chapter Seven : Detention

I’m finally back to fucking school. No more poring over textbooks and stalking Wikipedia to try and do my fucking homework. Levi felt the looks of some students as he walked the hallway to first period. He remained completely impassive to their stares. You’d think I had died and come back to life. Yes, be in fucking awe of my immortality. Sons of bitches.

He waltzed into Hanji’s class a minute before the bell rang. Unceremoniously dumping his bag on the floor and himself in his chair, he examined the still-empty chair next to him. How fucking long does it take to let someone leave the hospital? I'd've thought he'd be here by now. ...Whatever. He’s probably fine. His eyes wandered over to Hanji’s desk. She saw her looking at him just as the bell rang. A glint of disdain in her eyes, she looked straight at him, then pointedly at the empty chair next to him.

“Mr. Ackerman.”

If there was still any commotion in the classroom, her sharp voice silenced it. Levi stared back at her disinterestedly. The fuck does this bitch want now?

“Yes, Mrs. Hanji?”

A sickly sweet smile curled across her face. “Would you care to enlighten us as to the whereabouts of Mr. Yeager? Surely, given your, involvement with him,” her eyes narrowed at him, “you would know as much, would you not?”

Eren shuffled in as he heard the last of Mrs. Hanji’s cutting words, directed of course to Levi. “I- I’m sorry I’m late, Mrs. Hanji.” He stumbled over his words as he entered the room. He looked to be in far better condition that he did a mere eight weeks ago. His throat no longer wrapped, though his back was still healing, he could get through the day with medication. His arm was still in a cast however, and his chest was wrapped tightly underneath his clothing. He was wearing warmer colors, like he was happy to be out of the dreary hospital. His hair had been cut a bit shorter than it had been weeks ago, but he simply seemed to glow in front of everyone. Ignore the stares. Ignore the stares. Eren tried to remain bubbly in front of everyone as he went to go take his seat beside Levi. He handed an excuse note to Mrs. Hanji as he made his way over to the seat. He sat down carefully into the hard chair, and tried not to let his back touch the chair. That would hurt too fucking much. I wonder what the hell a busy hallway is gonna feel like?

With pursed lips, Mrs. Hanji stiffly took the note from Eren and followed him with icy eyes to his seat. “Very well. Good to have you back, Eren.” She tried not to make her irritation obvious. But
with Levi, it was obvious. He miraculously resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

Levi looked over to Eren carefully perched on his chair, analysing the front he obviously fabricated. *This kid’s pretending he’s totally fine. At least everyone else is too stupid to tell.* He nudged Eren’s shoe with his foot. The kid nearly jumped out of his skin before looking at him for the first time that morning.

“W-what?!” Eren stuttered, looking at Levi with wide eyes, giving Levi full view of his ocean-like eyes.

Levi gave him a small smirk, and spoke just quietly enough for Eren to hear him. “‘Sup, bitch.”

Eren’s eyes widened more, if that was even humanly possible. His heart fluttered at the sound of his low voice, as if it was trying to elicit a response from him. He opened his mouth, showing off beautiful white teeth before quickly covering his face with his hands. He turned his head away from the other to tried and calm himself down. The tips of his ears burned scarlet, which meant his whole face was flushed as well. *What the actual fuck is Levi trying to do?! Give me a fucking heart attack? Or is he just teasing me because I’ve basically cried on his shoulder for the past three weeks in the hospital?*

Levi’s eyes were alight with silent laughter, his heart jumping in his chest. *How the hell can he get even more adorable? That’s not even possible. It should be illegal to be that... cute.* He tilted his head, casually asking, “Something the matter?”

Eren spread his fingers to look at Hanji, only to find that she was talking to the class, her back towards them, as she wrote notes hurriedly on the chalkboard. He then gave a sideways glance towards Levi’s laid back form. He simply gawked at the other’s abs underneath that tight shirt he was wearing. *God, why in fucking hell - scratch that - Satan, why in your sweet hell is Levi this fucking gorgeous.* He slowly composed himself before letting the hand that covered his face down. “You’re an asshole I hope you know that.” Eren’s voice was soft and angelic, only Levi would be able to hear him. He then busied himself with his notes, trying not to pay attention to the sexy demon next to him. *God - Satan - I hope one day I would be able to know personally.*

Levi’s heart was doing backflips. *I’m going to go into cardiac arrest at this rate. Stop being so damn beautiful- wait no, please don't stop. “Funny, I get that a lot.”*

“I’m sure you do, you king of asshats.” Eren smiled widely, but covered his mouth with his tan hand. He tried to keep his eyes off of Levi for the rest of the class as he took notes. *Why Satan? Why do you hate me so? I can’t wait until I can get to my other classes and actually focus!* FUCK!
"Must he be so gorgeous? I don’t even know what Hanji’s fucking talking about anymore, god dammit… Well let’s continue to examine Levi’s sculpted body. Eren tore his eyes away from Levi as soon as Hanji slammed a book down on the desk.

“You two! Mr. Yeager, and Mr. Ackerman! What in Satan’s great Hell are you two doing looking at on each other? Did you pay attention to this lesson at all?” She asked, anger clear in her voice.

Eren swallowed hard but nodded. I’m going to regret this aren’t I?

“Well then Mr. Yeager, please tell me what the difference between Hydrogen Bonds and Covalent bonds is!” She shouted at him and the whole class fell deathly silent again as they watched the exchange between their crazy teacher and the two students who had finally come back to class.

“U-uh… A hydrogen bond i-is um….” Eren trailed off trying to look at his notes for the answer but couldn’t find it to be useful.

“I’m waiting Mr. Yeager.” Hanji’s hostile tone reverberated in the room as she tapped her foot on the floor, her arms crossed over her chest. She was pissed as all hell.

“I-it’s uh…uh… I’m sorry Mrs. Hanji I don’t know.” He looked down with his defeated voice lingering in the air.

“Mr. Ackerman?” The hostility was now focused on him.

“I don’t know either Mrs. Hanji.” He deadpanned.

“Well it will be a pleasure to meet both of you in detention after school today.” Mrs. Hanji smile was sickly terrifying and she turned back to the rest of the class. “Now, would anyone else like to admit they didn’t pay attention in class? You’d be joining those two in detention later today!” Hanji seemed to singsong the last statement giddily.

No one volunteered before the bell rang, letting them all off the hook for now.

“Mr. Ackerman, Mr. Yeager, report to the lab after classes. You’ll be helping me set up and clean
Eren looked to the door as he got his things together. He was really quiet, unable to look up at Levi. “Sorry” he whispered quietly and looked down. “I keep getting you into trouble...” he murmured and looked down. The mask had finally fallen, the happy glint in his eyes was gone, as if it wasn’t there to begin with. He started to make his way to the hallway, his shoulders slumped as he walked away from Levi.

“Oi, Brat.”

Eren looked over his shoulder at Levi. His eyes looked dull, “Yes?” He asked simply.

Worry was barely perceptible as it flickered past in Levi’s eyes. He raised an eyebrow at him, his mouth minutely pulled up at the corners. Why are you so hard on yourself all the time? Seriously, chill. “Don't worry about it; It's not the worst thing to ever happen.”

Eren only shrugged. “I’ll see you later,” the boy mumbled before turning and leaving, blending into the bustle of the hallways. He didn’t even cross Levi’s path until lunch, and even then he was across the cafeteria from Levi. Sitting completely alone as he scrawled into a small notepad.

Levi stared him down over his thermos of tea. Eren was completely oblivious to his surroundings and his spectator, of course, but that didn't stop Levi from willing him to Just fucking look over here before I have to uproot all my stuff and go over there, Brat. He set his thermos down with a bit more force than necessary, earning him some curious looks, particularly from the jocks around him.

“-evi. Levi.” Jean called for the fifth time in a row. “Are you back to reality yet?” He asked as he stared him down, then glanced at his white-knuckled grip on his thermos.

Levi snapped back to reality because of Jean’s annoying ass voice. The fuck does he want now? Levi glared at him, giving him the indication to continue.

Jean laughed it off and looked to Annie, who sat on his lap. “Annie did you hear the guy you tried to steal your bag that one time is back from the hospital?” He smirked a bit. “Apparently Levi put him there, I wonder how much of a wimp he is if one punch did him in for 8 weeks!” Jean laughed along with everyone else that had flocked towards their table. Anyone who wanted to appear cool naturally joined in.
Levi’s glare seemed to grow instantly darker. “Really, Jean? You think I got suspended for eight weeks for one single punch?” He asked, and seemed to smirk a bit. Though this smirk could instill fear into everyone at that table. “Mention it again and I’ll fucking castrate you, right here, right now you fucking asshole.” Levi’s voice dangerously levelled, the glare in his eyes turning ferocious.

Jean held his arms up in surrender. “Alright! Geez, I’m sorry man. Won’t mention it again!” He replied, wide-eyed at Levi’s obvious display of anger. “Who pissed in your cereal this morning?” He asked as a side comment, which caused Annie to snicker.

“Care to repeat that Jean?” Levi growled out, grabbing a few things, but mostly his lunch and his books. “If any of you dare follow me, you’ll be put into the back of an ambulance just like Yeager.” he snarled. He stalked off as most of the team tried to brush it off with nervous laughs. Levi definitely intimidated them all.

Eren hadn’t seen Levi stalk away from football table, though he looked up when a hush fell over the cafeteria. He didn’t see Levi anywhere and sighed. Why am I looking for Levi of all people. I mean I know I like him… Okay that’s an understatement, I fucking love the man. But, he doesn’t love me back. I wouldn’t be surprised if the hush was because he told the football team how he beat me to smithereens. ...I wish I didn’t tell him everything Grisha has done to me, thank god he didn’t question me about my mother’s role at all, or the lack thereof. Eren sighed heavily as he looked down at the book he was writing down in.

...Well, fuck. Levi shoved the metal doors to the outside open, storming across the courtyard to a picnic table in the shade. It was far enough from anyone else who decided to eat outside, but close enough for the fury he was radiating to be noticeable. Dumping his bag on the bench, he sat down and tried to resume eating his lunch. He studied the cafeteria through the windows, trying to look past the glare from the sun and spot Eren. He finally found him in the sea of students, still hunched over that notebook. He let his gaze drift back to the table he usually sat at, the jocks carrying on with whatever dumbass topics they thought were worthy of conversation. How the fuck is this going to work. While the adorable little shit is busy being lonely and depressing to look at, I have to feign indifference. And considering the fact that he tripped over Jean’s bitch’s bag, I’m expected to laugh at a major fucking mistake on my part like it’s the best thing since someone decided bread wasn't fucking easy enough to eat and had to cut it into pieces. Like fuck. This. His grey eyes settled back on Eren’s hunched figure. He’s damn fine...

And if anyone’s around, I have to pretend he's an asshole.
Eren finished up the rest of his classes, handing in a lot of work for most of his teachers. He continued on with a mask of happiness plastered on his face. His eyes were dull though, not gleaming as they should be if he was really happy. He grudgingly continued on to the ‘detention’ Hanji had spoke of. He sighed as his eyes laid on a very familiar figure down the hallway. God, he’s gotta hate me for this.

Levi leaned against the wall inside of the chemistry labs, bag slung on his arm and phone in hand. His foot made a quiet tapping sound on the hard floor. He looked up from his phone without moving his head much, raising an eyebrow at Eren’s slumped stature. He looks fucking miserable. We’re just setting up the lab, it’s nothing that awful...

Eren slowly got closer to Levi, the defeated look in his eyes prominent. He didn’t look towards Levi, and in fact tried to keep his gaze away from the handsomeness that he needed to work with. Don’t even look at him, he’ll probably just glare at you for this. Yeah, that sexy ass glare-- STOP! Do not think about his eyes simply undressing you, it’s probably his eyes trying to find all the places he can put a knife through my gut. He’s gotta fucking hate me at this point, he didn’t want to know anything, yet he knows almost everything.

“-at. Oi, Brat. You listening?” Damn, he’s miles away. What the hell’s he so caught up in?

Eren was completely oblivious to anything that was going on in the room. He didn’t even notice that Hanji had come in, given them instructions, and left. He was completely absorbed in his thoughts about Levi.

*Shatter!*

Levi hit the table with his fist in exasperation, his eyes holding no more patience as he seemed to look straight through Eren. “Okay, that’s it. There’s something hanging over you, and if it’s making you spread misery fucking everywhere and break beakers, I want to know what the fuck it is.”

Eren blankly stared down at the broken glass on the floor. Did I just break a fucking glass? Eren slowly shook his head, before he kneeled down to clean up the shattered glass, not caring if he cut
his fingers, which- of course- he did. “It’s nothing, Levi.” he said quietly.

“You and I both know that’s a fucking lie.” Levi strode around the table and stopped a foot away from him. “You’ve been in a shit mood all day. Why.”

Eren simply continued to clean up the broken glass. “I’m sorry, I was under the impression that you didn’t want to know anything about my life.” His voice sounded so hurt and broken. He never looked up to Levi, and focused on cleaning up the glass, his hands now heavy with scratches that didn’t seem to affect him in the least. You don’t want to fucking know, Levi, really you don’t. Please don’t ask.

...The fuck? And why is he letting himself get so cut up with the glass? Does he not feel that shit? Levi’s irritated expression became one of concern, his brow furrowing. He sounds so broken up... if he starts crying, and please don’t make him start fucking crying, I don’t think I know how to stop him. Levi slowly crouched down level with Eren. Well fuck. Here goes nothing. He carefully reached out and took his wrists in his hands, making him open them and drop the glass he was picking up. He somehow managed to keep his voice level; “Will you stop that? Your hands look fucking awful.” He tried to get Eren to stand up and to walk him over to where the first-aid kit hung on the wall, behind the front desk.

“Levi. Let . Go.” Eren growled out every word to the shorter boy in front of him. Eren hurriedly snatched away his hands, which now were only slightly bleeding. “Don’t. Fucking. Touch. Me.” The anger in his voice was so apparent, it was unnatural, even for Eren. He then bent back down and picked up the glass again, all of it, and put it in the bin specified for glass.

Levi nearly froze in shock. He had never heard Eren speak with such pure malice, and it was pretty terrifying. Fuckfuckfuck what’d I do Satan please spare me- With wide eyes, he just watched Eren pick back up every shard of glass and dump it. When he turned back to look at him, he tried to speak, his voice betraying more regret than he had hoped it would. “Eren-”

“No!” Eren shouted and walked briskly past him to see what they needed to set up. “I’m not going to listen to your fucking nonsense anymore. I’m done, damn it! I don’t want you acting like you’re actually concerned about me just because I told you every fucking detail about what Grisha did to me!” He shouted out every word at him as he moved across the lab, gathering everything they needed to set up all the experiments. “Not one more fucking word, or I am fucking leaving! And you can do this shit by your sorry ass self!” He shouted at Levi, thankful that the door was closed and no one came to see if everything was alright. “Go to your fucking practice! I know you don’t want to be stuck with the fucking Nerd.” he growled at the other. He was seething and he continued to set up for the experiments.
Levi didn't know what possessed him to do such a thing that could potentially end with graduated cylinders lodged in his skull. But his feet moved of their own accord, and then he was right next to Eren, carefully pointing to the tray of things needed to be set up, then to himself. He willed Eren to understand. *This is my own fucking fault. Let me finish this. You shouldn't have to be here, because I got us in trouble, and I'm sorry for that. Please.*

Eren just stared at him. Though he gave up after a bit. “Just go to fucking practice, asshole.” he growled at the other and continued to set up beside him. He didn’t look up to Levi after that. *Just go away, dammit. I wanna be alone, I want to cry from all the fucking stress. I wanna get this over with so I can go see mom.* Eren sighed heavily, seemingly calmer than just a few seconds ago, but his shoulders were still slumped, and his eyes glazed over in defeat.

...I’m sorry, *Brat.* Levi saw the battered resignation in Eren’s eyes, and sighed softly. He reached out and carefully took the Petri dish from Eren’s hands. He didn’t even seem to notice until he went to put it down and found it gone. He looked up again, and Levi willed him to understand one more time. *Let me take care of this mess I got you into. None of this is your fault. Let me do this. Please.*

Eren looked at him with emotionless eyes. He honestly wanted to scream at the other again. *It helps to yell at someone. I just wish it didn’t have to be him.* He moved away from the lab tables before grabbing his bag. He gently put it over his shoulder and walked off. Leaving without another word. *Why did I have to snap? Especially at him?*

Levi missed practice, setting everything up alone.
Eren strode out of the shithole they called a fucking school. Yes, Eren strode out of that fucking building. There were a few fucking reasons for that too. He was royally pissed off, and honestly if you could see emotions, you would be able to see the dragons of fury emanating from his lanky body. He was so angry with Levi, yet he knew he wasn’t really angry at him in the slightest. No, I snapped… I didn’t mean to, but I fucking did. Eren sighed as he crossed the street and started his long way across town to get home.

I can’t believe I just left him there? I mean I want him to like me and actually care, right?.... WAIT, HOLD THE FUCKING PHONE. I am not going to admit that I want someone by my side. I will not give in to his antics, and fall so helplessly for him only to have him wipe the floor with my pride. Eren looked down, mostly watching where he was stepping, but he was pretty much oblivious to anything that was happening around him. No, I’m not going to tell him that I like him. I bet he’s just trying to get me to fall in love with him, like all those girls that drool all over him.... I bet he thinks about me as just someone interesting that would be a quick fuck. At that point Eren covered his face with his hands. “Why do I always think about that?” he asked quietly. He didn’t remember that his hands were bleeding until he felt the warm liquid on his face. Great, it’s probably all over my face now too… thank the fucking Lord I wore black. Eren looked down towards the ground as he used his sleeves to wipe up the blood from his face, as well as pull his sleeves down to prevent his hands from bleeding any more than they had to. He swallowed hard as he heard the footsteps of another person behind him, casually walking, but he didn’t dare turn to see who it was. Nopenopenopenope, just keep walking dammit!

Eren sped down the long street as fast as he could to get to his ‘home’. He did everything short of running; His back still wouldn’t allow for that. Can’t be fucking late tomorrow morning either, I won’t have an excuse for Hanji’s class, dammit! Eren finally made it into his house, the small two story home almost empty. The silence was oppressive, Eren now left in complete and utter silence, save for the frequent ticking from the grandfather clock that never fucking stopped. Why is it so quiet? It’s never bothered me before... why now? Eren looked down at his bloodied hands and he just started to sob. All the stress life had thrown at him was finally getting to him. He slowly slid down the back of the front door, finally making it to the ground. He pulled his knees close to his chest and hugged them like his life depended on it. Why did it have to happen today of all fucking days?.... I want to go see her, I miss her... I miss Mommy. Eren started to brutally sob as he started to think of his deceased mother.

Why didn’t I listen to what she said? Why didn’t I listen? All the guilt that had been forced onto him by his father finally pulled the last straw and came tumbling over Eren’s shoulders. He knew this wouldn’t be good… It never ended well, generally with Grisha beating him, then patching him up so he wouldn’t die, so that he could live with the guilt for what he fucking did. He sobbed more, he felt his chest tightening. It hurt, but he did nothing to stop himself. He did nothing to stop himself, nothing at all. His mother told him “No.” Eren was upset, and started to cry. Why can’t I have mac n’ cheese, mommy? Eren was a quiet child, never really voicing his thoughts, but they were there all the same. He watched as his mom left the confines of their small kitchen. It wasn’t a spacious kitchen, but it wasn’t like it could only fit one person within it. Eren followed her as she
walked away to go upstairs, making sure that she was in fact gone.

Eren smirked as he went back into the pantry and grabbed the box of mac n’ cheese that he so desperately loved. He reached for it, standing on his tippy toes, and successfully grabbed the box of the coveted pasta. Eren smiled at his success, his whole face lighting up as he got up to put the hard macaroni in the pan, as he had watched his mother do so many times before, though he put the macaroni right into the pot, not adding water. *I can do it! I can show mom that I’m a big boy!* Eren smiled as he was able to hoist the heavy pot onto the gas stove. He tried to reach up into the pot, though soon found out he would need a chair from the table to get to the pot. The boy turned to get the chair, stopping only for a moment.

Eren felt more pain in his chest than he had ever felt before. His heart was beating at a hundred miles an hour, like it was trying to beat it’s way out of his chest. His eyes glazed over as he tried to claw at the uncomfortable feeling in his chest. He felt the fabric underneath his fingernails. He was gasping for air as his nails dug into the fabric, trying to make the tightness go away. Eren felt the warm trails down his hollow cheeks.

The boy grabbed the chair and dragged it silently to the stove top. He got up and perched himself on the chair, admiring the view of his mac n’ cheese. His small hands turned the knob on the stove in front of him. He smiled more as he heard the familiar repeated clicking noise until he heard the *fwoosh* of the gas igniting. He watched as the bright flames licked the bottom of the large pan. Eren let out a toothy grin as he hopped down from the chair, using the back of the chair and the counter to balance himself as he silently hopped down. His arm ended up knocking over the now empty box of mac n’ cheese, bringing it dangerously close to the open flames that licked the pot. He looked over as he heard another *fwoosh*. The box was burning.

At this point, Eren had fallen to the floor, crying and screaming. He was in so much pain, it felt like someone had reached in and crushed his lungs and was forcing the breath out of him. He was gasping for air, his chest burning just as much as it was tightening by the second. He tried to call out for help…. No one was there to answer him.

Eren stared at the burning cardboard box as it went up in flames. His eyes widened in interest as he picked it up, he was so curious of the fire that was slowly coming down the box, towards his delicate fingers. He made a small gasp, dropping the box when the bright orange flames licked his own fingers. He tried not to make a noise, *mom can’t know I’m making mac n’ cheese*. He hurriedly reached for the roll of paper towels which was on the countertop. He had to struggle on his tippy toes, reach over the counter and pull the towels from the roll. He pulled them down, sheet after sheet, still connected as he pulled it down to the floor, stringing it out. The boy’s eyes only widened at the next sight…. *Fwoosh.*

It took only seconds for the rest of the paper towels to be engulfed in flames. His eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, silently watching as the fire spread from old wooden cabinet to old
wooden cabinet. It took only seconds for the fire to successfully engulf the perimeter of the kitchen, and by this time, the smoke was billowing in the kitchen, and around the house out of control.

“EREN!” Eren shrunk as he heard his mother’s frantic voice. “Eren where are you??” Her voice more and more frantic as she coughed from the smoke she was breathing in. Eren opened his mouth to call out to her, but what if she found out? What if she found out I was making mac n’ cheese? No, that can’t happen. I wouldn’t be able to have it anymore. The young boy went to the now burning pot of pasta and tried to turn off the burner, he was successful in extinguishing the flames, but not the gas. Did he notice? No.

Eren was screaming so much he felt like his throat was raw. He was trying to scream for help, but it didn’t come out into coherent words. His fingers were spazzing out, locking up in uncomfortable positions as he rolled around in a frenzied panic. His head had hit the ground, and the table leg more than it should have, and he probably suffered a concussion, but his head already hurt too much to try and figure that out.

Eren started coughing as the smoke rolled lower into the kitchen. He sat down on the floor, only to see that the flames were starting to make quick work of the floorboards as well. He watched as the flames licked his feet. It hurts! It hurts a lot! Mommy help me!! I’m scared! Eren was starting to panic. He couldn’t help but let out a shrill screech at the pain which he was experiencing. He quickly silenced himself as he heard his mother come close to the kitchen. He sat on the floor, tears were now quickly running down his cheeks as he watched his mother come into the kitchen after him. Part of the ceiling caved in as soon as she did, the exit now blocked from the both of them. She kneeled down and picked up the now panicking boy. “M-mom-” Eren managed to croak out as he was lifted into her arms, we’re trapped mommy, was what he couldn’t say. They were both coughing horribly. “It’s-” His mother started coughing again, “It’s okay, Eren, mommy loves you.” She told him quietly. I love you too mommy! I’m so sorry. Eren only watched in complete shock as his mother screamed for Grisha to come to the kitchen. His eyes widened at the sight of them. Trapped. No way out. Both of them. “Carla… I’m going to get you out-” He started, but soon he started a coughing fit as well. The thick smoke was burning their lungs every time they tried to take a breath. “NO!” Carla roared and changed the way she held Eren in her arms. Mommy, what are you doing?? Eren was so confused as he cried in his mother’s arms. “Carla, you can’t be serious.” Grisha managed in between coughs. Eren was frantically looking between his two parents to see what the hell they were planning. Mommy? What’s happening? I’m scared. Eren watched as his mother got close to the burning piece of ceiling which blocked their escape. She carefully held him, kissing his forehead. Why does it feel like the last time? Eren could only watch as his mother lifted him with all the strength she had and threw him over he burning obstacle, and into his father’s waiting arms. Mommy? Eren’s eyes were still wide and he looked up to his father. He looked so distraught, he hugged the boy close to his larger chest, smothering Eren’s face into his chest so he wouldn’t breathe in the smoke anymore. Daddy? Why can’t mommy come? Eren was held securely until they got outside of the burning house, neighbors had evacuated the surrounding houses. Eren watched in horror as the house they had just come out of had burst into flames. Huge ones. It was so hot to stand anywhere near the fire. He looked up to his father and just watched him cry for the first time in his life. Why is daddy crying? Where is mommy?
“No…. Mommy” Eren continued to sob as his limbs spazzed out around him. His chest hurt so much, he didn’t know that making the mac n’ cheese would set the house ablaze. I’m worthless… I killed my own mother, my father hates me for it, he beats me often for ever being born and killing his precious wife. He’s disowned me as his son, he’s come close to castrating me, Levi knows I’m gay…. He knows I like him- no, he knows I love him. Eren was panicking as he curled up to himself. He had opened up quite a few cuts all over his body. Mom died today…. Eight years ago, today…. I couldn’t go see her grave… Grisha couldn’t beat me for it…. I’m useless. Eren started to finally black out from the lack of oxygen from his quick breathing.

Why do I feel warm? It feels almost… comforting. Eren thought he was hallucinating when he felt a pair of strong hands gently pick him up. It’s my own hallucinations…. No one cares about me, I’m going fucking crazy….

Eren drifted off into darkness, letting his body go limp in those strong hands.

This is all a bunch of fucking bullshit. Levi ran down the street to where he thought the Brat’s house was, scanning street signs for any clue as to where he was going. Eren only had a five minute lead on him; He was sure to catch up. Finishing the setup didn't take so long, thank God I actually focused on what the hell I was doing. His feet pounded along the cement walk, the noise not really registering. But nothing makes any. Fucking. SENSE. The Brat was totally fine this morning, and I would swear on my fucking life he was flirting back, but then I get us a one-way ticket to detention-great job doing that, by the way, someone get me a fucking medal - and then he goes to the other extreme of being a brooding little shit and practically using a dark, looming raincloud as a hat. Levi flew past plenty of busy streets, narrowly missing passers by, none of their names familiar in the slightest. Levi passed- well, pushed- some ditz of a blonde on the sidewalk out of his way. Fuckers need to move, dammit!

Cement gave way to nothing but open asphalt, the winding road walling him on his right with trees, the empty fields to his left letting wind push against him and try in vain to slow him from his dead sprint. The leaves on the trees around him rustling, dead leaves skittering alongside him on the street, drowning out any other sound. A small eddy of wind pushed brown, crisp leaves up in a small tornado, only to seemingly take aim and shoot at him, catching in his hair and poking his legs. Nature fucking hates me. And there hasn’t been a house for a damn mile. He kept running. Rose Wall Avenue sounds familiar… fuck it, GO. Levi had no real idea where he was going; He hadghosted over directions to his house only once on his phone, and he was in the middle of nowhere as far as he could tell. I could use my phone… eh, fuck it, that takes too much time. He took a sharp right, barely hesitating in his mad dash.

Did he not even fucking feel his hands when he was picking up all that glass? What he did to himself isn’t pretty, that’s for sure. He started skimming the edge of the trees for a driveway cut
into the line, setting his eyes on one a hundred yards up. There’s nothing wrong, my ass. I could understand not wanting to talk about it, but if he could at least admit something was bugging him to anyone, you’d think what with all he’s already told me... He stopped in front of the lone house, a dim brick facade staring him down. The three windows on the second floor, and the two on the first flanking the front door were dark. Old metal numbers hung rusting above the door frame. 104... That has to be it. His feet carried him up the cracking cement walk, eyes drifting over the shaggy, yellowing grass of the front lawn. A dying cherry tree hunched in front of the left windows, barren. The wooden front door was painted a dark red, the knob made of steel stained with the marks of hundreds of hands. He caught his breath for a moment and, poised to knock...

Wait, am I really expecting him to open the door after what just happened? Face, meet palm. Levi, you’re a goddamned moron. Pick a fucking window. Stealth mode activated, he crept up to the siding of the house, avoiding overgrown shrubbery as he went. None of the windows in front showed anything in the house, save inanimate furniture. But there was a sound…

The Brat’s... crying.

FUCK WHERE IS HE

Stealth be damned, Levi sprinted to the back of the house. He looked despairingly into each window, searching for anything, any sign of life and, from the window that sat opposite the front door,

Levi was given a clear line of sight past the kitchen, down the hall, and to the crumpled black mess Eren was, collapsed against the front door, shaking and clawing at his chest, looking to be in miserable hysterics.

... THAT’S FUCKING TERRIFYING. How am I supposed to get in there, dammit!?

Levi ditched his bag immediately and tried the back door, two steps to his left. Locked, of course. Wait... Levi jumped up, trying his best to feel at the top of the frame. He felt something, and soon heard something small and metal clang against the cement. Fucking duh.

He couldn’t scramble to get the key into the lock fast enough. He almost broke the knob off the door opening it, though bursting into the small hallway, he hesitated. Eren was on the floor, large tears spilling over his cheeks without interruption, shaking violently, breath ragged, bloody hands scrawling invisible script over his shirt. His eyes, glazed over and darting from spot to spot on the ground in front of him, could not see. Levi approached his form slowly, and though he was sure
Eren looked at him, or at least his legs, his gaze passed through him.

*Oh. My God. Eren.*

Levi rushed the last few feet and knelt next to Eren, trying to get a better look at his face. Brushing some hair from his eyes, his chest tightened at the utter brokenness he saw, how wholly shattered Eren was. *Eren, what… what happened?* His voice cracked as he spoke quietly, laced with a softness he wasn't used to hearing himself speak with. “Eren, hey Eren, shhh… it’s okay, you're fine. Everything’s okay…”

Levi didn't know what to do except take Eren into his arms, shifting his arms around him, lifting him up from the hard floor, Eren’s bag sliding off his arm with little resistance. *Damn, you're so light. The second I get my shit together we’re going out for cheeseburgers.* That thought stopped there; there was too much else to ponder. He cradled him close, watching for a moment with light fascination as his breathing slowed, his eyes slowly closing. He felt a heavy weight settle in his chest, a face marred with ugly dreams. Careful of his head he slowly turned, looking for the stairs. *We need to get you in bed, let you sleep…*

He took the first of many steps with caution, looking so he wouldn't trip. Thirteen steps brought him to the landing, and it was obvious which room was Eren’s.

He treaded lightly on the carpet, picking his way over discarded clothes and books, before gently setting Eren on the bed. With a thought, he moved to untie his laces and pull of his shoes, setting them with a soft thunk at the foot of the bed. He reached over him to grab the covers, pulling them up to his chin. Eren reached up to their edge, grabbing at them. Levi’s fingers brushed Eren’s, and soon found his wrist caught by his hands.

*Oh my God please stop making my heart melt with all this, you're so fucking adorable but you need sleep and I can't really stay too long but…*

Brow knitted, his fingers weakly pulled at Levi and, when he didn't move, he made a small sound.

*Warm… gimme…* Eren tugged at Levi’s wrist, not about to let go.

*Nooooo you're adorable and I want to but you don't even know I'm really here and this is gonna be hella awkward when you wake up and…* He had practically no choice. Eren wouldn't let go, and resisting much more would wake him up sooner than later. And Levi didn't want that. Fumbling in
his footwork to kick off his shoes, he lifted the covers and slid under without too much of a struggle.

Eren immediately made for the warm form that dipped his bed down, curling up close and bringing his arm over Levi’s stomach. Eren’s socked foot nudged at his, and nestled his cheek into his shoulder with a quiet hum. ...Warm. This is nice...

...What the actual hell is happening right now. Levi stiffened, so unsure of what to do with himself. But hearing Eren hum in content in his ear, he tilted his head to rest against Eren’s, curling his right arm up to hold Eren’s arm across him. He tentatively, softly kissed the top of Eren’s head, calmer about the way the day had gone, though he still worried about what was to happen. But I can’t worry about that now, I've got a Brat to look after.

Levi drifted for a few hours in a half-dreaming state, happy just to hold onto Eren for the time he has with him. With blurry vision, he gazed over to the electric alarm clock that glowed on top of Eren’s dresser. 7:54 PM. It had been four hours. That's when he felt the shift of heat. Shit, he’s waking up... This is gonna be awkward as fuck.

Eren’s eyes lazily cracked opened, confused at his surroundings. He looked around him, finding the new warmth at his side odd, yet comforting. He slowly blinked once, then twice… a third time, trying to rid himself of the heaviness of deep sleep. He moved a bit and felt a body next to him. His eyes widened immediately, his mouth releasing a sound of pure terror as his body moved away from Levi’s form, taking the blankets with him. What the fuck??
Chapter Nine : Food and Fluff

Fear. Fear is what he saw first. Confusion and shock, a flicker of anger, yes, but first and foremost, fear.

But it was the silent panic attack Eren was having that really hit him.

_Oh my God no not again please not again you've already broken down enough for one day calm down._

Eren looked at Levi with widened eyes. _What the fuck is Levi doing here? Why is he in my house… Why the FUCK is he in my room, in my bed!! And why in the ever present hell was I curled up to him? DAMMIT!!_ Eren felt his breathing become more and more sporadic as his chest started to tighten again. His eyes were full of terror as he tried to keep breathing, but was only managing wheezes. Eren looked over to Levi, pleading with him to do something… He was scared, and he didn’t want to black out again. He looked so scared, so helpless.

Levi knew what was happening. Concern crossed his eyes and he reached forward with care not to scare Eren even more. _Please don't freak out even more, cause if you do none of this is going to get any better._ He willed his voice to soften, “Oi, Eren, this is all a misunderstanding, don't panic please, I'll explain if you let me help you calm down.”

Eren looked to him, nodding with panicked eyes. He was tugging at his shirt. _It feels tight... It hurts._ Eren tried to take in a deep breath but soon found that his tightened chest wouldn’t allow for it. He started to cough, and it only freaked him out more, like he had breathed the smoke of that oh so horrible memory. His eyes bugged out a little more, he felt like he was choking… Yet it was all in his head. Levi needed to act quickly to calm him down, it wasn’t going to be an easy or fast process. “I-It hurts,” Eren finally managed to gasp out to the other as he tugged at his bloodied shirt, but you couldn’t tell- he was still wearing the black clothes from before. His clawing caused the wounds on his hands to open up a bit more and start to bleed again, adding to the mess on the poor kid’s chest.

Levi immediately shifted his weight forward, bringing Eren into his arms and getting him in his lap. _Levi, don't fuck it up now._ Leaning him back, he hugged him gently with his right arm, not caring about the blood that stained his sleeves as Eren hung onto him for dear life. His feet gently poked at Eren’s, and he tucked his head under his chin, mumbling softly. “It’s alright, nothing’s going to hurt you. It’s okay, I promise…” He rubbed his arm lightly with his thumb, tracing an invisible pattern up his sleeve.
The tension that once held Eren’s lanky body stiff, now drained from his whole being as he was gently cradled in Levi’s waiting arms. He started to cry once he was able to breathe a bit better, yet it was the pain from his chest that made him cry. He sobbed into the raven’s chest as he sputtered, trying to calm down. He was trying to get words out to him, but nothing but breathy sobs left his mouth. Eren clung to the other’s shirt, feeling Levi’s fingers gently trace up and down his overly thin arms. He tried to let out a whimper to voice his discomfort when Levi pressed a bit too hard on his sensitive skin, but nothing came out. It was like he was frozen in Levi’s arms; No matter how comfortable he was, he couldn’t move or say anything. He was starting to freak out all over again. I can’t move. I can’t move. I can’t move. I can’t move. All the sudden Eren was panicking and hyperventilating against Levi’s chest all over again. His eyes starting to glaze over again as they had when he laid on the floor by his front door. He was struggling to breath at this point, and his grip failing to maintain its strength. *Levi, help… Please.* Eren begged silently to the other in hopes he would be able to do something to help.

Something was not right. Quaking had become shaking had become quaking. Levi pulled back from Eren to look at his face, to see what was wrong. His eyes were shining, both from tears and loss of complete lucidity. *Shit.* “Eren, I'm so sorry, what’s wrong? Did I hurt you?” *Please don’t tell me I hurt you.* Levi shifted Eren carefully so he wasn't right up against him, so that he could see his face. He carefully held both of his hands, and decided talking to him was his best bet. *What the fuck do you say to someone whilst in pain and in panic mode? Just… start rambling. ANYTHING. …just, don't yell at him. Don't. Be nice.*  “Hey, I'm sorry if I hurt you, I'll be more careful.” *Okay, so good so far... “...um.” The kid feels like shit right now, most likely. I know it's hard, but try something humorous! ...know any jokes? Anything? “...did you know you live in the middle of fucking nowhere?”*

Woowooooooow. Fucking **brilliant** material. *I can already hear the talent agents knocking. Try again, dipshit.*

Eren looked up and his eyes seemed to soften and he smiled softly. He seemed to calm down a bit when he heard such an odd remark. Eren seemed to get back to reality a little more. “I…. I do?” he managed to ask the other quietly. He was still struggling to breath but having this conversation with Levi was starting to calm him down bit by bit.

Levi smirked just a bit. *Wow. Eren thinks your brand of humour doesn't actually suck! This could work... Keep going!* Levi lost the smirk. *Deadpan them. It makes them SO MUCH BETTER.* “So, these two guys walk into a bar. ...You’d think one of them would've ducked.”

Eren watched the other’s face don its usual emotionless expression. He was confused for only a second before a bright smile bared itself to Levi. He felt a little better, his chest didn’t hurt as much, and he could get a few deeper breaths in. *He’s trying to make me feel better… Maybe he doesn’t hate me after all?*
“Once, I heard this joke about amnesia, but I forgot how it goes…”

Eren looked at Levi and seemed to smile more. His chest was loosening up and his fingers were no longer locked into a tight grip against Levi’s clothes. He let out a weary chuckle, finding that he still had a sharp pain in his chest with deep breaths.

“Have you ever tried to eat a clock? It’s very time consuming.”

Eren chuckled a little more, not being able to really laugh at Levi’s idiocy like he wanted to. He ended up coughing again, horribly, as he tried to shake the pain from his chest. He coughed a little more, his eyes widening when his chest tightened right back up again. Two steps forward, six giant leaps back.

Oh my. Levi took one of his hands and brought it to rest on Eren’s upper arm, back to tracing feather-light patterns on the fabric, his other still carefully grasping his hands. Might want to tone down the jokes; the poor kid can’t laugh.

Eren watched as Levi moved, he seemed a bit fearful as his grip moved farther up Eren’s sensitive arm. His eyes almost instantly displayed fear. He was scared, Levi was hurting him, even with his grip so gentle. He honestly couldn’t feel Levi’s touch on his bleeding hand, but his thin frame gave way to very sensitive skin, easy to bruise… easy to harm.

Shit, that fear again… wait. It’s his arms. Levi snatched his hand back from Eren’s sleeve, looking with intense worry at him, at his arms. “What did I do? I’m so sorry, was that hurting you? Let me see, please…” Levi brushed his fingers over the cuff of his sweatshirt, asking.

Eren watched Levi hesitantly. He wasn’t sure if he could trust the other completely. Well, I mean he’s seen me in a panic attack, slept with me, and broke into my house… guess he can’t really tell anyone about this. Eren slowly moved his bloodied hands from Levi’s to the hem of his sweatshirt, moving it up again, meeting Levi’s eyes with his own weary ones. He swallowed hard before he pulled the hoodie over his head. Eren’s chest was littered with so many scars, a majority fresh, considering most still had their stitches in. He looked over to his severely thin arms, a bruise already starting to form in the shape of Levi’s hand. He looked to him with fear still, fearing he would do something else, so he shifted away slowly and carefully, but not completely leaving Levi’s warmth.

For the moment, seeing what damage he had done to Eren, and and what was already done to him, Levi shut down. …that handprint. Is mine. His eyes drifted over Eren’s chest. Those scars. So many of them. His gaze lingered on Eren’s hands. His scratched, bleeding hands… Eren.
Vision slightly blurred, he took hold of one of Eren’s hands. He turned it over to see the palm, the angry red of the pads of his fingers. *I let him… no, I made him hurt his hands.* He turned it back, carefully closing his own two hands over it, rubbing the knuckles back and forth with his thumb. His voice cracked, sound barely escaping his throat. “…I’m so sorry.” He carefully laced their fingers together, still tracing over his knuckles, the veins of his hands, the lines across his fingers.

Eren watched as Levi gently drew patterns across his thin skin. He watched in slight fear, though the fear in his eyes was quickly subsiding. His chest hurt still, but he was calming down again. His eyes seemed to dilate as he relaxed a bit more. He shook his head. “W-why?” His voice was shaky since his chest still hurt so much. He tried to read the other’s eyes to find out what he was really feeling, but he couldn’t read those steely grey lenses as much as he could hope.

Levi’s eyes looked to be made of glass. He was choking on his words. “I… that’s… that’s *my* hand on your arm.” His head bowed, bangs concealing part of his face. “I only helped to make your cuts worse. I punched you and got you in the hospital. And I didn't stop you, from picking up all that sharp glass. I let you get hurt.” A single, silent tear rolled down his cheek. “I’m… I’m sorry for that.”

Eren looked at Levi with concerned eyes. He tried to talk again but it immediately turned into a large coughing fit, immediately replacing his concerned eyes with fearful ones. “I-it h-hurts” he gasped out, clinging to the other’s shirt. His chest hurt a lot, he was trying to calm himself down before he freaked out. Eren’s eyes looked to meet Levi’s with his own pleading beg that was apparent.

“Don't try to talk, it’s fine. I'll get you a pen and paper in a minute. Just keep trying to relax. I've got you.” Holding his hand with reverence, he reached out and took his other, which had been resting on the bed next to him. Skimming his thumbs over the thin skin, he brought Eren’s left hand up, ghosting his lips over each of his knuckles. Bringing it back down, he let another tear stream down his cheek.

Eren watched in shocked stillness. He was simply staring at the spectacle before him. He would never imagine that Levi would actually like him back, care enough about him to come to put him in a warm bed, sleep with him, and try to get him to calm down from his panic attack. He swallowed hard and nodded quietly. He hoped the other would get that sheet of paper soon. He had so many questions that needed to be answered. After a few minutes of being in this position, with Levi holding him gently, his breathing was back to normal, and the tightness gone in his chest… *I don’t want to talk though, I’ll just start crying again. Find some fucking paper, short stack, and then come back to hold me….. WAIT, I want HIM to fucking hold me? What kind of fucking pansy have I become?*
Levi was… morose was the word. Following the outline of Eren’s hand with his eyes one last time, he remembered his promise. He slowly swung his legs over the edge of the bed, and as he let Eren’s hands go with reluctance, he spoke quietly. “I’ll get you some paper.” Hanging his head, he moved with deliberate steps over the things littering the floor of Eren’s room in his quest for paper. He stopped at the desk pushed against the wall, a notebook buried under a textbook and pens scattered about. He picked up a black pen and the book, turning to a clean sheet, and traipsed back to Eren, lowering himself back onto the bed and passing them both carefully into his hands.

Eren looked to the notebook wearily. He took a shaky breath before he grabbed both articles. He looked at the blank sheet of paper before he reached to start writing a few moments later. His handwriting was beautiful, perfect in every way, even with the slight quake that he had from his panic attack’s repercussions.

~ Why are you here?~

Levi looked at the paper, and was silent for a moment. He let out a sigh in defeat, and looked Eren in the eyes, his own filled with weariness and exasperation. “You were fine this morning, but after I got us detention- sorry about that, by the way,” he looked away and wrinkled his nose a bit, frowning, “you were so miserable, and when I tried asking you about it after school, you went off the handle. After you left, I… I finished setting up and ran after you, because I wanted to apologise and figure out what was eating at you.”

Eren’s eyes seemed too narrow a bit at the other’s explanation.

~ That doesn’t explain how the fuck you got in my house.~

Eren waited to see his reaction after he had written those harsh words. He was wondering how Levi had in fact gotten in when he knew that all the doors were locked, as he always tried to keep Grisha away, by at least a few seconds - if that.

Levi cringed at that. “When I got here, I... I realised I couldn't just expect you to open the door to me knocking. You would've pretended not to be home, you were so mad. I just…” He grimaced. “This is gonna sound really fucking creepy but the house was completely dark and I walked over to a window and I'm sorry I sound like a creeper but I heard you crying and I was really worried and I ran out back to see if I could spot you from there and I could see you up against the front door practically in a puddle of panic and anguish so I tried the back door and it was locked so I tried to see if you hid a key above the door and you did so I used that and you were in the middle of a panic attack and I didn't know what to do so I just picked you up and tried to calm you down and you started falling asleep and I brought you up here to your room and got you in bed and got rid of your shoes and when I pulled up the blanket you got ahold of my wrist and wouldn't let go and pulled me in with you and I don't know why I didn't just leave when I could have but you didn't let go so I just kinda ditched my shoes and you curled up to me and fell asleep and I just didn't want to leave you or make you wake up so I let you and then you woke up and started panicking and I…” Levi couldn't feel the tears running down his cheeks. “...I'm sorry. I was being creepy and weird and I broke into your house and you didn't even know I was here and I slept with you and I don't know why I didn't just leave and I hurt you and I let you hurt yourself and… I'm sorry, Eren.”
Eren watched as Levi started to cry silently. He timidly reached forward to Levi’s now damp cheeks. He gently cooed to him as he gently rubbed away the tears that trailed down his cheeks. He moved to curl up into the other’s lap, enjoying the warmth that Levi’s arms promised. He looked to the pad of paper and started writing again, though now situated on Levi’s lap.

~ It’s okay, it’s not really your fault. I don’t really mind, just try and wake me up next time... okay?~ Eren looked up to the other with concerned eyes as he waited for a response. Please don’t cry anymore, you need to be strong for me, for when I cry. Eren knew it was selfish, but the thought stayed all the same.

...Does this mean there’ll be a next time? Levi was stunned at Eren’s reaction to this whole mess. I expected him to throw me out... or smack me. Well...both. “Uh... o-okay.” His hands hovered awkwardly, unsure of where to go.

Eren watched him, trying to read what the other was thinking. He looked down at Levi’s hands; he seemed tense. Why is he so tense? Just hug me already. There’s a limit, you’ll be smart enough to know what it is, short stack. Eren sighed before he carefully took his hands, gently taking Levi’s hands into his own, then wrapping them around his bare torso to keep him warm again. His skin had become cool to the touch. He still couldn’t regulate his temperature well. He reached for the pad and pen once Levi’s arms were secure against him. ~Stay the night? Please? You’re warm, and it gets really cold... even with blankets~ Eren looked up to Levi to see his reaction to his words, he had such an innocent look to his face.

...He’s serious. He’s serious... Holy fuck, he’s serious! Levi’s eyes shone, a smirk settling into place. He nuzzled his nose behind Eren’s ear. “...Of course I will.” His gaze fell for a moment, and he mumbled into Eren’s hair, “I don’t want to hurt you any more though. I’ll try to be careful of course, but...” He tried to hide his face. Fuck. You're going to mess this up. I guarantee it.

Eren looked a bit confused at Levi’s words. He wanted to question him, but he knew that that would not go over well with his panic attacks and such. Why does he think he’ll hurt me? He can’t be that worried. I’m not a twig that’ll snap in half. Eren huffed and he started to scrawl out his thoughts to Levi, ticked off the other had worded his sentence that way. ~ We are doing nothing, Levi, I just want to fucking cuddle up to you so I can actually sleep tonight, asshole, get your mind out of the fucking gutter!~ Eren huffed again, crossing his arms. He obviously though Levi’s mind had strayed from the purer path in life. He almost growled in his throat at the mention of being hurt during the course of the night, especially during the sex.... Which they were NOT going to have.

Levi couldn't believe what he read. Damn I must've said that weird. Uh... “Nonononono I didn't mean anything like that Eren, I swear I didn't. I just meant I bruised you earlier without even thinking about it,” his fingers ghosted over the bruise from his hands on Eren’s arm, “and I just
don't want to be responsible for anything like that happening to you again.”

~You're afraid about giving me bruises?~ The question was short, but Eren’s face was what brought the emotion out of it. It was a mixture of anger that the other was afraid that he was fucking twig, but also a sense of happiness that the other as worried about him.

“I know it must sound pretty mean… look, I know you're not made of tissue paper, but… yeah. The short of it is yes, but the longer of it is I just don't want you getting hurt, is all, because I couldn't even tell the first time with how tight I was holding you and… ugh. I really just don't want to hurt you.” Is that a vaguely concealed insult? That's a vaguely concealed insult. Dammit. See? I totally called it. ... Fuck.

Eren watched Levi with unamused eyes. He turned to scrawl out his next, and apparently longer, statement. It took him a few minutes to write it down, and he kept the message concealed from Levi. ~ First, I'm not a fucking twig, I'm not gonna fucking snap if you hug me… Second, YES, I FUCKING GET BRUISES! So what’s the big deal? Yes, it’s a bit uncomfortable, but I can fucking live with bruises, Levi. It’s not as bad as not being able to fucking breathe because your ribs aren’t even there anymore. So stop your bitching about hurting me, yes, SHUT THE FUCK UP, and I fucking mean it! Get fucking dressed too.~

Eren pushed the other back down on the bed, and slowly crawled off the bed, he got out of his clothes to get into some dark pajamas. His hands were still bleeding, but he didn’t seem to mind. He moved to get another pair of pajamas out for Levi and threw them at him, timing it so that they would've landed on Levi’s head while he read the last of the message. Eren moved to hide away all the artwork left around the room. Once it was all away he moved to go down stairs. He was fucking starving, and his stomach was growling constantly.

...damn. Eren’s right. I'll stop bitching about it. He smirked as he pulled the pajamas off of his head, holding them close to investigate their pattern. An intricate crest was sewn over the heart, a golden lion rearing up with a roar. Gold and red thread spun thick laced the cuffs of the sleeves and of the legs. Huh... Fitting. And they're pretty cool. He pulled on quickly, setting the paper aside for only a moment before taking it with him and following Eren down the stairs. What's he up to now?

Eren was making a few noises in the kitchen as he was searching for some food, though the kitchen was practically barren. There was good reason for that too, but Eren wasn’t about to tell Levi he was broke and basically only ate at school, if he did eat there at all. He looked around the pantry, trying to find enough pasta of the same kind to make for the both of them. He tried to reach for one that was up higher, and soon got it firmly in his grasp before he moved to make their sad excuse of a dinner. Please do not question the absence of food in this house. Eren silently begged as he got a pot filled with water on the burner.

Levi scanned the bare pantry. ...Does he not eat? Like, ever? He is pretty skinny, but still. That's
He watched as Eren filled a pot with water and put it carefully on the stove, a sadness in his viridian eyes. He studied the small box of pasta next to the pot. Damn. I mean, who doesn't have food in the house? He couldn't stand to see that faraway look. ...No, this isn't right. I need to fix this. He quietly padded over to Eren, carefully wrapping one arm around his waist from behind and leaning his chin on his shoulder, reaching over to turn off the burner with the other, passing by the unopened box. “Sorry, I appreciate you trying to make us something, but do you mind if I order us something? My treat.”

Eren looked at him then down at the pot, then back to Levi, then back to the pot, then back to Levi yet again before he nodded. As he struggled to lift the heavy pot off the stove and to put it back into the sink, he looked down at his reflection in the water and he swallowed hard. He had changed so much in the past two months. I don’t even look like myself anymore. Eren looked at Levi; He honestly didn’t know what was around to order from, and he didn’t have any money in the house at all, so he hoped Levi had enough money to feed the both of them. Well mostly Levi, I probably won’t be able to eat much anyways.

Levi smirked, letting out a small sigh. “Alright. I’ve got quite a few numbers stashed in my phone, and plenty of cash, so don’t worry yourself.” He retreated a bit, giving Eren room to face him. “What’ll it be- Pizza? Chinese? There’s plenty of places that deliver.” Come on, kid. We need to get some real food in you.

Eren looked at him and opened his mouth to speak before he closed it again. He held up his hand, motioning for the paper Levi had set on the counter. He reached for it, soon scrawling onto the white sheet. ~Anything light, I can’t really stomach much~ He showed it to the other, not really caring about the food; he wasn’t a picky eater, but his stomach couldn’t handle rich foods anymore, nor could it handle a lot of food.

Levi studied his script for a moment, brow furrowed in thought. That Italian place has salads, and lots of the good garlic bread rolls, and maybe if I just get a small plain cheese pizza he'll nibble at it... “Alright. I'll be right back.” Turning on his heel, he went to retrieve his phone, making the call for delivery quickly, before Eren could get suspicious and come get him. He’s going to freak when he sees what arrives... oh, what the hell.

It wasn’t an hour before someone came knocking. Eren was stunned at the grocery bag’s worth of food, and the pizza box that accompanied it. Levi was prepared for the worst of his reaction. Leftovers. He’ll be fine for a little while.

Eren stared at all the food, not noticing the amount that Levi actually paid for this much food, not that it actually mattered. He went to go get his pad and pen, furiously writing on it to try and get a message across. ~ What the fuck is all this food? We’re not gonna be able to eat all that. I can barely finish a salad ~ The last part had been scratched out. No, Levi did not need to know about that. But Eren didn’t know that it was still pretty legible.
Levi, though he was worried at the last bit of his message, still had a shining light in his eye. He responded cheekily, “What- you have something against leftovers, Brat?”

_Back at it again with the insults I see._ Eren sighed and he scrawled out another message. _~ I’ll never be able to eat one fourth of that in a fucking week, short stack~_ Eren smirked at the other knowing Levi hated being called out on his shorter height. He had found out from teasing comments in the hallways that ended up causing bloodied noses.

...Well then. _We have a traitor to the cause._ I buy you food and you insult my inability to vertically grow. _What. Even._ His deadpan glare was punctuated by a raised eyebrow when Eren looked at him with an odd expression, a mix of confusion, incredulity and joy. “What?” He watched utterly confused as Eren doubled over in silent laughter. “What?” _Waitwaitwait. Did I say that shit out loud or something?_ Levi’s eyes widened in alarm. _Shit I did WHAT THE HELL BRAIN!?_

Eren couldn’t contain himself from his continued silent laughter. He barely got through a few words on his pad of paper, trying not to piss his pants from laughing so hard. He hadn’t laughed in awhile. _Well, I can’t really call this laughter, can I?_ ...Eh, it was close though. Eren smiled in mischief as he gave the other the pad of paper. _~Are you a teenage girl? Because apparently you can’t even~_ Eren couldn’t stop himself from actually laughing, the sound was joyous and pure as he made his way to the floor, trying to hold his bladder in.

Levi could only stand there, his face blooming scarlet behind his hands as he mentally berated himself and sputtered weakly in Eren’s direction. _You’re a fucking idiot yes I am thank you me you’re welcome me-

Eren’s laughter soon died down, he had started coughing again. He curled up into his chest, to try and shield himself from the pain within, even while knowing full well that it would do nothing for his pain. He coughed a bit more, not yet freaking out, but the pain was making him whimper a bit.

Levi stopped himself for a split second. _Remember how this works, Levi. He’s not a fucking twig. He’s in pain. But he’s gonna be okay. Just keep him from panicking. That’s what you need to do._ Levi moved the two steps over to him, kneeling down in one swift movement and reaching out to brush at his bangs with one hand, the other out for Eren to grasp. He petted him gently, trying to guide his head onto his lap, his legs unfurling from under him.

Eren looked to the other’s open hand, he timidly reached out, squeezing it tightly from the pain he was experiencing, as well as reopening the scabs on his hands yet again. He curled up to the other, soon calming down enough that it didn’t hurt to breath anymore. When they got to that point, Eren
sat up and wearily looked at the food before glancing back at Levi, then back at the food, as if to ask him what the hell he had actually gotten.

Levi seemed to understand his silent query, and perked up. Heaving himself off the floor and helping up Eren, he spoke. “Alright, dinner’s gonna be any mix of a Caesar salad, garlic rolls, and plain cheese pizza. I also may or may not have asked for a couple cookies.” He raised an eyebrow at Eren’s glare, raising his hands in surrender. “Oi, I got you food, didn't I? How about we enjoy it?” He smirked, a glint in his eyes.

Eren shrugged. *Not much I can do about it other than accept it I guess*. He nodded and went to get plates and silverware for them to use. He looked at all the food as Levi unpacked it all from the brown bag, and he seemed anxious to be near Levi while he would eat. *Eat, yeah, I should say try to.*

Levi caught his anxiety right away. Looking his way with concern, “You okay? It’s supposed to be a lot- that's kinda the point. I obviously don't expect us to do more than put a dent in it.” *Come on, please just eat something. Then, it’d’ve been worth it.*

Eren watched him carefully before he nodded and he reached for the salad to put a little bit on his plate. He knew he might not even be able to eat this much, depending on how thick the dressing was that he had never heard of. He made a very small plate before he turned to go and sit on the large couch. Eren picked slowly at his first piece of salad, though he quickly found out it was to his liking. That would pose a problem; He couldn’t eat too much, *Nope, that would risk throwing it all up in an hour, no thank you.*

Levi watched as Eren meandered dejectedly to the couch. *Man, he wasn't kidding.* He looked to his own plate, filled with pizza and a garlic roll. *Well this is awkward. Um... Fuck it.* Levi walked deliberately to the couch and sat carefully next to Eren. Balancing his silverware on the far side of his plate, he picked up his pizza and took a bite, watching Eren struggle with the salad. He put his slice down as he chewed, studying his plight. He picked up his roll, tearing off a quarter-sized piece, and timidly putting it at the edge of Eren’s plate. And then, he waited.

Eren looked to the small piece of roll and almost immediately shook his head. *I can't eat that Levi, I won't be able to stomach the rest of this goodness if I do.* He looked around for his pad and pen and soon found it with his eyes, back in the kitchen. He sighed, not wanting to get up and venture from his comfortable spot on the couch. He picked up the small piece of garlic bread and placed it back onto the other’s plate without another glance towards him.

Levi half-shrugged at Eren when he replaced the bread piece. *It was worth a shot. Maybe later in the week.* He nudged his foot with his own, letting him know everything was fine, before returning to his pizza.
Eren simply hummed softly in response. He managed to finish off the rest of his plate without feeling the need to throw up. He was able to hold it down, which was good. Eren got up to put his plate away before he came back to the couch to curl up to Levi, his head in the other’s lap yet again, feeling comfortable as all hell. *I could get used to this.* He yawned as he felt his eyelids become heavy. He was starting to fall asleep.

Levi lifted his unfinished plate above him as Eren forced it to vacate his lap. *Well then. This is now a thing.* Smirking, he reached far, trying not to uproot Eren, placing his plate carefully on the coffee table. He leaned back, his right hand dancing over to twine with Eren’s, his left hand playing with his hair. “Tired?”

Eren let out a soft hum of acknowledgement before he nodded slowly against Levi’s muscled thighs. He was tired from all the crying and panicking he had done today. His stomach was full, and it was nearing 11 pm, which meant that Eren would be knocked out for a good while before the nightmares would force him to stay awake for the rest of the night, *but of course, Levi doesn’t know… fuck it, maybe I’ll be able to sleep while I’m cuddled up with him.* Eren’s eyes closed completely as he finally passed out, his head resting on Levi’s lap still.

Levi let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding. He felt the tension drain out of Eren as he slipped into sleep, soft hair tangled around his fingers, hand braided into his own. He studied his peaceful face. *He’s fucking gorgeous. How the hell did someone with your looks even spare a second glance at me…* Feet outstretched, head comfortable against the couch, Levi drifted off. And for once,

Nightmares did not plague Eren’s sleep.
Eren’s eyes cracked open at the brightness flooding into the room. He groaned and moved his head, against something warm. Why aren’t my window shades drawn? And my head is warm, but my body is fucking freezing! Eren blinked a few more times to dispel his drowsiness, looking around and taking in the familiar sight of his living room. The memories of what had actually happened last night poured into his mind. He looked up to see Levi still sleeping, sitting up on the couch. Fuck, do the gods fucking hate me? He’s gorgeous… even without my fucking glasses I can tell! Eren scanned the room for them. Okay, where the fuck did I leave them? Eren slowly got up from his spot on the couch, quickly moving to hug his arms around his chest. FUCK! It’s freezing! What the actual hell? He stumbled a bit but soon found his glasses had at some point last night found their way onto the coffee table. Weird, don’t remember doing that last night. The boy shrugged before going to get changed into warmer clothes, cleaning his hands and hoping that they wouldn’t perpetually bleed like they did yesterday. And apparently last night too. Joy. Eren looked down to his grey pajamas, now caked with dried blood in various spots from his hands. The spots were large, and no longer held the shape of his hand. They had bled a lot. How am I not fucking dead from blood loss by now?

Eren shrugged the thought off as he quietly made his way up to his dark bedroom, his shades drawn to ward off the sun. He fumbled along the wall for the light switch, finding it after a short struggle and flicking it on. He’d only been actually living in the house for a few days, if even a week. He wasn’t completely used to it yet thanks to being in the hospital for so long. He looked to his wardrobe and the selection of clothes it held, which was sparse at best. He picked out a pair of dark jeans which hugged his ass nicely, making it a sight to behold - Well, women’s jeans do that to any ass, but he wasn’t complaining. Hmm, maybe Levi will like it. That was all it really took, that thought alone, before he was slipping the jeans on. He savored the perfect fit; They were his favorite jeans for a reason. Eren scrounged around the room for a shirt, finding a dark long-sleeve shirt, and pulled it over his head. No way would people be able to see if his wrists were bleeding. The scabs hadn’t opened in a while, but he was still wary of the fading slits lining both his wrists. I’m honestly surprised that Levi didn’t see them yesterday, or even comment on them. Maybe he was just too damn focused on that fucking bruise. He shivered in his own room as he changed his shirt. Today is a hoodie day, and no bitch shall fucking deny me the safety of my hoodie! Eren looked around for a dark hoodie as well, finally finding the dark navy, almost black, garment and slipped it over his head. His hair ruffled as his head popped through the top. Running a shaky hand through his mane in his only attempt to tame his unruly locks for the day, he grabbed a pair of socks from his drawer, and put them on quickly.

He walked around in his new outfit, looking for his phone. Alright, I’ve looked for it in five rooms. Where. The. Fuck. Is. IT! He was losing his patience. He finally found it in the kitchen. How the fuck did it get in here? And it’s on the fucking charger? Eren only had to look at the phone next to his, also charging, to figure out just who had put it there. Levi. Of course. That was actually pretty thoughtful.

Eren looked around only to find that all the food was gone, no longer on the counter where it had
all been last night. He furrowed his brow in confusion, finally looking to the fridge to find an
answer. He found that Levi had actually put all the food away into containers, which of course
would be easy to take for lunch. It was strange, seeing actual food in his fridge. Well, now Levi
knows that I don’t have any food in this house. Wonder how he’s gonna fucking take it out on me
when he wakes up... At that thought, nervousness swept over Eren. Is he gonna beat me like Grisha
does? Is he simply gonna stare and walk away from me? Mock me for not eating in front of the
whole school? God, is he just gonna insult me and then never come back? All these thoughts made
Eren’s stomach churn in unease. He stood there, gripping the countertop and trying not to freak out
as more and more thoughts raced around his head-

Levi’s warm form gently pressed against him from behind, one arm coiling around his waist, the
other giving him leverage against the counter, his chin resting on Eren’s shoulder. “G’ morning,
Brat. Sleep well?”

Eren practically jumped out of his shoes- well, he would, if he was wearing some. “Are you some
sort of ninja?” He asked with wide eyes as he turned his head slightly to see Levi. How the fuck can
he be this gorgeous at 6:30 in the morning? Geez… I need to step up my game.

Eren felt his face heat up almost instantly as he saw Levi’s face so close to his so early in the morning. He tried to
say something else but he stumbled over his words too much to get even one sentence out. His
stuttering had found a great time to come back up again. Fucking perfect. Eren hung his head in
slight defeat, his eyes resting on the strong arm around his waist. God how much I would give to
have him hold me all night…. Oh my god, did I really just think that? Stop, it’s not like he’s gonna
stay with me… He’s just worried about his Chemistry homework, yeah. That’s probably it. Eren
watched the arm quietly grow tighter around his vastly thin frame.

Levi watched Eren’s expression change from scared to flustered to defeated. He slowly rubbed his
stomach with his thumb, trying to reassure him. He’s so freaking adorable, and he doesn’t seem to
understand that. Levi, fix that. His voice was softened with a hit of concern. “...You doin’ okay,
handsome?” He watched in amusement as Eren flushed red again.


Eren let his head down, his whole face flushed, right up to the tips of his ears. Honestly he didn’t
know he could blush this much so early. He shuffled his feet, looking over to Levi for a split
second before down at his feet again. “W-What…” Fuck me and my fucking stutter! “W-what do
y-you want for breakfast?” He asked quietly and looked down. He knew how to make a lot, only
he didn’t have the ingredients for half of his ideas. Damn, I really need to find a job…. One where
people hopefully won’t come into physical contact with me…. Great... Nothing I can think of.
Perfect. Eren sighed and shook his head to clear himself of those thoughts before he gently pulled
away from Levi’s strong embrace, knowing full well those arms were not meant for him.

Levi quirked an eyebrow at him as he pulled away, inwardly protesting the loss of contact. “We
could always go out and get actual breakfast food if you’re not a pizza-for-breakfast kind of guy.”
The mischievous spark was back in Levi’s eye. Kid, just say yes so I can go spoil you rotten please.
Eren looked to Levi like he was some sort of alien. “Go out t-to breakfast… B-before s-school?” He stuttered and seemed completely bewildered at the thought of actually going out before school; that had never happened before in his life, not even with his mom around. He felt his chest start to tighten at that one singular thought… His mother. Levi still didn’t know, and he was surprised that Levi hadn’t pried for details yet. He thought about it, “I-I-I… It s-sounds o-okay.” He murmured and looked down at his feet again, unable to keep eye contact with Levi out of embarrassment. *Fuck my stupid stutter, go to fucking hell already!*

**YES HE SAID YES HE SAID YES!** “Alright, then it’s settled. I’ll go get changed and grab my stuff, and then we can go, cool?” Starting backwards, he turned and walked over to and up the stairs, grabbing his clothes from the floor and switching out of the pajamas, placing them neatly on Eren’s bed. Picking up his backpack from the foot of the bed, he stopped to think out of habit. *We didn’t have any homework, did we? Survey says… No. Thank GOD.* Levi hoisted the bag over his shoulder as usual and let his shoes clomp on the stairs on the way down, walking over to retrieve his phone from the charger. “So, do you care at all where we acquire food? Or not really?” He opened the refrigerator, picking a plastic container with salad and itty bits of garlic bread in it, handing it to Eren. “Lunch.”

Eren looked to Levi, looked at the food in his hands, seeing him in the clothes he had worn yesterday and shook his head. “I h-haven’t eaten breakfast i-in…. A l-long time” he stutter out, pausing to pack the food away before he told Levi something else. *Something he probably doesn’t want to know, I almost told him how long it has been since I ate breakfast… I almost fucking told him. I need to be more careful around him, or I’ll say something I don’t want him to know.* ...well fuck. *Switch tactics! There’s a diner not too far from the school that makes the best waffles. Want to try there?* *This shit is getting very concerning. I didn't think this all could get more concerning, but it did. He’s talking as if he wouldn't know what waffles are.*

“W-Waffles?” Eren asked, tilting his head to the side. “W-what are t-those?” He asked quietly and his eyes seemed to be filled with curiosity. He didn’t know what waffles were- he had never had them before, not at all. Would he be able to eat any? *I’m not really that hungry, I’m down to one meal a day really… If I can even handle that on any given day. So what in Satan’s glorious hell are waffles? Levi’s talking about them like they’re the best thing in the world.*

**HOLY FUCK.** Levi was silent for a moment, eyes widening minutely and considering this question for a moment. He watched as Eren shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, but paid it no mind. After a second, he simply said in perfect monotone: “You have not lived.” Snatching his phone and Eren’s bag, he ushered him out of the house and closed the door, locking it quickly with the key he snitched, all the while ranting “**How** have you never had waffles? They’re waffles. They’re the most perfect breakfast food to ever exist and you can put whatever you want on top of them and they’re sweet and made of fluffy goodness and **my God, man**- how have you never even
heard of them?”

Eren felt his stomach churn a bit… Sweets, he’d never done well with anything that was sweet before, not for the past 5 years, it had always seen daylight again almost an hour later. Eren swallowed hard and backed away from Levi a few steps. “I-I…” Eren trailed off not knowing how to answer, trying to give himself some space. His movement gave away the fact he was getting a bit scared from Levi’s passionate outburst. His father had always been one to beat after asking questions like that, and it was now ingrained in his body to get away, and to get away quickly.

Levi stopped ranting when he noticed Eren had backed away from him, a solid five feet down the walk, eyes fearful. ...Shit. Think. What the could the problem possibly be? “Hey, I'm sorry if I scared you. Is everything okay? Would you rather we do something else instead? Just get right to school? It's really up to you.” Why is this going downhill so quickly? Dammit.

Eren watched with wide and frightened eyes. He nodded at Levi’s last statement. School. That sounded better than the onslaught of sweetness that was apparently waffles. He felt his stomach tighten at the thought of them again. He wanted to get to school. He wanted to be able to actually pay attention in class, and today he had music with Mr. Dieter, so it wouldn’t be so bad, right? Eren still didn’t trust his voice enough to talk at the moment and hoped that Levi got the message to go to school.

Levi shrugged, nodding. “School it is. Let's go, then.” I fucking scared the kid… It was either the rant, or the concept of food. He started down the walk slowly, giving Eren a respectable amount of space. “I think I have some random snacks in my backpack if you get hungry at all, by the way.” He tried to make his voice as calm as possible. He refused garlic knots last night very… emphatically, for lack of a better word, and in general has been through some shouty, rough shit, so... probably both, actually. Try not to fuck this up even more. Take this time to think of more shitty puns. He seems to enjoy those.

Eren hurriedly shook his head. He didn't want to be hit. He almost instantly reached into his sleeves and started to scratch at the scabs on his wrist, and when he felt the warm liquid etch across his fingers he gave a small sighed of relief. It felt better, to be able to get over this with the small rush his open wounds brought. I can’t believe I am a fucking Masochist... But I can’t stop... It feels so much better to open them. Eren proceeded to scratch at his wrists until both of them were open and bleeding and he felt slightly better, hoping that Levi hadn’t gone through his backpack the night before and found his razors. He swallowed hard remembering the last time he had cut his wrists. He started to get a bit antsy as they walked along the side of the road, nearing the next house over. We walked a whole fucking mile already? And it’s been completely fucking silent... He must be ready to blow a fuse, I haven’t heard anything if he was trying to talk to me...

...maybe I've tried too many shitty puns. Levi nervously studied his shoes, Eren’s odd gait, his fidgeting hands. Or maybe they were overly shitty. But not the good kind of shitty, not the kind
that’s like ‘oh my god that’s so awful it’s great’ but the kind that’s like ‘why are you even trying, shut up.’ We’ve made it to the neighbor’s house and he hasn’t said anything. He hasn’t even grinned. …He’s probably off in LaLa Land or something, nearly stumbling off the road- probably his back, can’t be doing too well- fiddling with his sleeves… Why is he doing that, by the way? There’s no loose thread… at least, I can’t see one…

Eren didn’t see the two people exiting the nearby house.

“That’s the guy who knocked me over!” The small, almost girlish voice came from one of the two figures but Eren was too preoccupied with his wrists to look up to see the hulking figure rush past him and towards Levi. That’s when he looked up, to see none other than Erwin beat down on Levi, or at least begin to, in a blind rage.

A sickening crack split the air as a fist connected with Levi’s nose. He couldn't see who punched him right away, but knew they were in for it. Fuck. That was your FACE. If something busted … Stumbling back a few inches, he had no chance to retaliate before he was kicked in the gut, doubling over in pain before kicking into overdrive and full on tackling his attacker, not registering who he was before swinging his fist and nailing their jaw, bringing them both down.

Erwin looked down at the small body he was beating up only seconds ago. “Levi?” His smooth and rich voice spiked in question. He looked over to Armin. “Levi was the one who knocked you down?” He asked, rubbing his jaw with his left hand, getting his feet under him and picking up Levi without a second though with his right, raising the smaller teen at least a foot off the ground, turning the struggling mess towards Armin to allow him to confirm.

Armin confirmed with a small sound of assent, which came from right behind Eren. That of course scared the shit out of him and he jumped out of complete fear and landed wrong, falling to the floor without grace. His chest heaving and his pupils dilated in complete fear. When the FUCK did he get there?… Shit shit shit… I’m going to have another attack… Shitshitshitshit . Eren felt his chest tighten and he instantly grabbed for his hoodie, his breathing hitched and he tried not to choke on his lack of air. The signs were all there for Levi to see as he dangled in Erwin’s hand.

Levi watched as Eren collapsed on the ground, spinning into a panic attack. He’s having an attack. You need to get over there now and calm him down but not before you get this son of a bitch to put you back on the fucking ground. And trying to break his face isn’t going to help you do any of that. Your words, Levi. Use them. “Erwin.” So deathly calm, so stoic, it took Erwin, and Levi himself, by surprise. “I don't know why you decided to punch my nose, which I suspect is currently broken, but right now, that doesn't matter.” Levi let his murderous intent flash past his eyes, staring Erwin down. “Put me down, right the fuck now, and let me go help Eren, and your family might not find you dead in the gutter.” His eyes, dark with rage, spoke volumes: …Even I’m terrified of Levi. And I'm him! Listen to the guy!
Erwin watched the terrifying display without even flinching. He slowly lowered Levi to the ground, watching him, calculating Levi’s actions as he set him down. He looked over as Eren started to physically freak out. He was still on the ground, which had the hulking giant a bit concerned. He simply watched as Armin slowly stepped towards Eren in a submissive and calming manner, trying to get the kid to calm down a bit. Erwin also noticed that this boy was Levi’s lab partner. Why the fuck is Levi with his lab partner? Eh, I can ask him at practice later. He lowered Levi to the ground completely, letting go of his shirt as he did so.

Levi turned his full attention to Eren, switching from murderous to very worried in an instant, regarding the blonde trying to comfort Eren with immediate distrust. What the fuck does this mushroom think he’s trying to accomplish? Back. The fuck. Up. Levi tried to keep himself composed for Eren, trying to walk over with an even gait, kneeling down on the ground next to him and automatically wrapping his arms around him, gently rubbing his arm with his thumb. “Hey Eren, I'm sorry about that, we're all good now, you don't need to worry…” His voice was quiet. Please please please calm down I don't want you to panic it's alright I swear he’s got a shit ton of explaining to do but right now just be okay, okay?

Eren’s chest heaved as he watched Levi get put down and come close to him, brought to the warmth of Levi’s chest. He watched with wide and almost fearful eyes as he saw the innocent looking blonde come closer and kneel on the other side of him, though about two feet away which gave him space. Eren started to calm down as Levi held him, his breathing beginning to even out. It took a few minutes but soon he had calmed down completely and looked between the two of them kneeling beside him. He watched as the blonde spoke up first.

“You okay, Eren?” he asked quietly to the other and he seemed pretty innocent in Eren’s opinion. Wait… how does he know my name? Eren looked at him in complete confusion and leaned away from him a bit, and closer to Levi- if that was even physically possible- though Armin seemed to notice his confusion, his next words soft and caring. “Am I saying it right, Eren? I’m in all your classes, but I’ve only seen you physically in them for two days.” he explained, a small smile lighting his features. Eren seemed to visibly relax once he knew this small teen was in all of his classes. He nodded to answer the blonde’s first question.

“Wait, Armin, you’re telling me that you’re in all of the-kid-Levi-beat-up’s classes and you’re only telling me this now?” Erwin spoke up next. He still referred to Eren as the kid that Levi beat up, and it was certainly a shock to see him so protective of the Brat now, especially after what happened.

“He’s got a fucking name, Captain Eyebrows, and it’s Eren!” Levi had again taken less than a second to assume the position of a murderer. If looks could kill… You do not talk about him like that. He turned back to Eren, still tracing circles on his arm. “You doin’ okay? Can you stand up, or not yet?”
Eren looked between Levi and the ground and he nodded, using Levi for support to get to his own feet. He was wobbly at first, but soon found proper footing. He looked over to the blonde with curious eyes, and that seemed to get the mastermind’s attention.

“I'm Armin. I can understand you don't recognise me; I'm either on the opposite side of the room or behind you in all your classes. And I'm sorry for this whole mess…” He glanced at Erwin, at Levi’s crooked and bleeding nose, and at Eren’s shaky form. “…that got very out of hand very fast.” He sent a quick, sharp look to Erwin.

Erwin rose his hands in defeat and looked away. “I'll make it up to Levi at practice, we’re practicing hitting today anyways.” Erwin’s words practically meant he would let the smaller man tackle him for all he was worth as long as he fucking wanted to at practice.

Eren watched the two new members bicker as he moved to inspect Levi’s nose. He could tell it was broken from the awkward angle it was at. “I-I-I c-can set i-it for y-you…. B-but i-it’ll bleed i-if I d-do.” Eren’s stutter was far worse than normal and his face flushed from embarrassment as he gingerly touched the broken nose.

Levi snapped his eyes back to Eren, to the hand hovering near his busted nose. “Uh, that's probably best… But don't we need bandages or tissues or anything like that?” This is gonna hurt like a bitch, isn't it. Ah well... At least the nurse is cute.

Eren looked over to Armin who was already walking towards his house. He looked to the blonde curiously as he left, wondering if they should follow him to go inside. He watched as Captain Eyebrows followed him, so he assumed it was safe to follow the small blonde shroom. He clutched Levi’s wrist, fearful of being alone with the two ‘new’ people he had been introduced to just minutes ago. They soon made it inside and Armin put them in front of the large kitchen sink, before disappearing to find bandages. His large teal eyes turned to Levi’s steely grey ones. “A-are y-you r-ready?” He stuttered out his question, getting ready to set Levi’s nose. He hoped it would be easier since he had done it in a mirror countless times on himself. It seemed easier to do it on someone else in front of him. This is gonna hurt, I hope you’re fucking ready for it. Eren moved quickly, finishing in seconds and leaning back to appreciate his perfect set before the blood started to rain down like his nose was a fucking hurricane.

FUCK, THAT HURTS! Levi was braced for it, but the swift motions of settling the bone in place could not be over quickly enough. He resisted the urge to swat Eren’s hands away, to grab at his face, instead gripping the edge of the sink tightly, his knuckles going white. He felt warmth trickling down his face, and saw streams of crimson splatter in the sink below him. Surprisingly, he made little noise throughout the ordeal.
Eren watched and held Levi’s nose in place with gentle fingers. He took the bandages that Armin offered upon his return from wherever the hell he went in this house. Eren then wrapped LEvi’s nose expertly, and it wasn’t bulky, he pressed a wad of paper towels to Levi’s nose once the bleeding was starting to lessen, the pain shouldn’t feel that bad now, once the pressure of his fingers was gone. “B-better?” he asked quietly, watching him with wide, worried eyes.

Levi tried to even his breathing as the pain died down a bit, studying Eren’s expression. “Y-yeah, I’m doing as well as anyone could be in this situation.” That spark danced in his eye again. “Thanks, Brat.”

Eren watched the smirk form on Levi’s face. He wasn’t sure whether to regard the term ‘Brat’ as an insult or a pet name. It’s most likely an insult… fuck it all, he’s clearly enjoying insulting me. Eren’s eyes quickly looked away towards Armin. “We should p-probably h-head to s-school.” Eren stuttered yet again.

... there’s a pet name that could be easily mistaken for an insult if I ever heard one. “There’s still a lot of time until class starts. Would you mind if we talked for a moment?” Armin took a small step forward, resting his hand on Eren’s forearm. He gently pulled him away from the kitchen to the front room with little resistance, leaving Levi in the company of Erwin.

“So.” Levi’s expression was impassive, though… This is going to be a fun conversation. “What’s up with you and the shroom?”

Erwin watched Levi carefully for a few moments before he sat down on a stool which was found under one of the island counter spaces. He sat down before returning his gaze to Levi. “Armin’s my lab partner for chemistry,” his voice was cool and collected, “so sometimes I come over to do homework with him.” The burly blonde wasn’t lying but he wasn’t telling the complete truth either. So before Levi could question him he turned the topic around. “What’s up with you and the Nerd?” He asked and raised a questioning- manscaped- eyebrow.

Levi kept his expression neutral. “We're the same case, actually.” That... is pretty coincidental. Huh. But there wasn't even homework last night. But you can't mention that or you both lose your excuses... And he busted my nose because I knocked over his lab partner- which I don't even remember doing? ...Wait, he was that blonde on the sidewalk. Shit.

“Just a lab partner, huh? Did you come over to his house to harass him for your homework? Then become a ‘savior figure’ for him just so that he’ll continue to do it?” He asked quizzically, though his thoughts weren’t unlike what Levi’s reputation would lead anyone to believe. “He had hope in his eyes when he helped you, then you went off and opened your mouth.” Erwin was apparently way more observant that he let on. He had noticed the complete emotional exchange between the
two of them since they arrived at the front of the house.

“You and I both know I wouldn't do something like that.”...but he’s noticed something else. Damn his perceptive ability. But what could I have said that... Oh. Eren thinks I'm still insulting him when I say Brat. Mental note: fix that.

Erwin only watched Levi. “I wouldn’t put it past you, I mean, you did put the kid in the hospital.” Erwin knew he didn’t know the full story on that. Rumors floated around putting that situation way out of proportion. He wondered if taunting Levi about the incident would get him to spill some information. Erwin knew Levi was no killer, but the small raven still had a pretty bad temper and attitude to boot.

Levi’s eyes narrowed. Don't fucking remind me about it. “ You don't know shit about what happened.” He practically snarled at him. Don't go too fucking far with this.

“Care to explain it?” He asked calmly and collectedly. He could see the apparent anger flash in Levi’s eyes; he was good at reading him, and had been since they came to school. “I mean if I don’t know, I can only assume you put him in the hospital, breaking all his tiny ribs with one punch.” Erwin countered Levi’s obvious displeasure with an unapologetic snark.

That fucking does it. “I may have only punched him once, but I wasn't the one who hurt him as much as he already was in the first place! His ribs were already broken, his back already shredded, he’d already lost a lot of blood, and all it took was one punch to open a lot of wounds and make him lose consciousness and end up in the hospital. And it's not like I wanted that to happen. But you know what? It did, and I feel awful about it, and nobody will shut up about it. So you don't have to remind me how much I fucked up, thank you.” Don't ask for more details. It felt really good to get all that out but if I really start saying too much I'm gonna be in deep shit with the Brat so just accept what you just got.

Erwin let Levi rant without much of a thought. He watched the outburst, picking up on Levi’s words. “So he was already abused? By his own family? Or did he get into a bigger mess?” He didn’t ask about the wounds themselves- he asked about how the Nerd had acquired said injuries- but he decided to push it further and ask anyways. “How did his back get shredded and his ribs broken? All of them?” He inquired, his eyes glinting with curiosity for a second.

Hoping for him to not ask for more detail was too much. Instead of dropping, bait, pretend there is no bait- play dumb. “You expect me to know the answer to that? Like he'd ever tell the guy who sent him to the hospital all his woes.” Sarcasm dripped from his words.
Erwin simply raise an eyebrow. “You expect me to believe that? You just hugged the freshman like he was your boy-toy to get him to calm down. You don’t like to touch people, and you fucking hugged the damn kid.” he stated calmly, like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “So do you care to explain the details, or shall I ask the kid himself, and maybe those questions will be enough to push him over, hmm?” He posed the question for the seething teen to answer.

Fuck this. “Erwin. It's not my place to say anything, and trying to get Eren to tell you would be a huge mistake. Do yourself a favor and drop it.” His eyes said plainly what he thought: I will murder you if you try anything. I don't care if we're friends. I will end you.

Erwin simply raised his hands in defeat. “Alright, well... Armin will probably know everything about the kid after today. We should get going, it doesn’t look like he can walk straight yet.

Damn, he’s very observant to notice Eren’s unnatural gait. “If Eren decides to spill what happened, that’s up to him. And yeah, we don't want to be late for chemistry. Wasn't it supposed to be a lab day?” I have a feeling today is gonna fucking suck.

Erwin simply nodded before calling for Armin. The two teens approached and Eren had a bright smile on his face, as did Armin. They had hit it off pretty well, and really quickly, by the way that Eren was no longer afraid of Armin, allowing the blonde to pull him through the house by locked hands. Which was good; Eren had not the slightest clue where anything was in the house.

“...notes stockpiled from pretty much every class, and there’s a couple websites with good instructions on how to do stuff for math. Nothing too hard has really been taught yet, so you'll be fine.” Armin’s rant on getting Eren up to speed in class slowed, and the four of them stepped out the door to the front walk, Armin locking the door behind them. He should be fine with schoolwork, at least. He looks worn out, though... I guess that's what Levi’s for. He’s alright.

Levi went to walk besides Eren as they made their way to school, Armin and Erwin’s conversation ahead of them quiet to him; he wasn't paying attention. He studied Eren as Eren watched the animated way Armin spoke. ...Just say it in a way where you can still be cool and just get it over with. “Oi, Eren.” When his eyes met his own softer ones, he spoke quietly, one brow quirked up, smirking. “You know me calling you Brat isn't an insult, right?”

Eren looked at the other either confusion. “Eh?” The small sound of questioning left though beautiful pink lips.

Fuck. Now you need to explain more. Check for witnesses. Armin… is actually distracting Erwin beautifully. This could work. Be casual. He shrugged, an odd look in his eye. “I guess you could
call it a nickname.” ...that didn't suck... I'll take it.

Eren at first didn’t say anything. He looked down at his feet as they continued walking. “...a nickname, you say?” his voice held close to no emotion, and he didn’t look at Levi as he spoke. He just looked at the ground they were walking on. He was trying to decided whether he was okay with having Brat be his nickname, at least it's a nickname and not an insult... That's a good thing... Right? Eren’s mind was swirling with various thoughts and it seemed to put him back into Lala land. He was confused on what to think, was it good? Or should he be angry with Levi?

“...Eren? You alright?” Fuck. He doesn't like it. But it's fitting! But if he doesn't like it I'm going to feel bad every time I say it. What the hell has gotten into you?! I don't know!

Eren took a few seconds to acknowledge the other before nodding. “Y-yeah, i'm fine…. I-I guess that it’s okay” he murmured and he continued to watch his feet. His awkward gait was becoming more pronounced as they walked further. His back was starting to really hurt him, but he made no sound or movement of complaint. It fucking hurts, the pills don’t fucking help.... God fucking dammit! I don’t think I can fucking make it, I have to slow down to keep from hurting my back and ripping my wounds open. Eren slowed down and began walking slower than he was for the past couple minutes, his gait became even more awkward and it seemed very uncomfortable.

Wait. He doesn't just have an odd way of walking. That'd be his equivalent of limping. That explains a lot. Levi slowed to match Eren’s pace. “You're practically limping, Eren. Are you going to be alright making our way to school?”

Eren froze for a split second. How the fuck can he tell? ...Well, I mean, it's pretty obvious. “Y-yeah, I-I’ll be a-a-alright.” he stuttered out. He tried not to meet Levi's eyes because he knew that the Raven would be able to see the pain in his teal eyes. I should be alright for now, but the hallways are gonna be torture. Fuck my sorry existence.

...the kid both looks and sounds like he’s going through hell. And I can't really do a damn thing. I don't think I have aspirin in my bag or anything... Oh who am I kidding? The kid needs morphine or something with all the shit he’s been through. Just, uh... Levi brought his hand up to rest on his shoulder, moving his thumb, trying to be reassuring, ...that's all you can really do.

Eren tensed up and stopped for a second before he realized that it was Levi’s large hand on his shoulder. He looked over and calmed down a bit.

Armin noticed the hush behind him, looking back to see Levi and Eren moving slower than them, the former trying to comfort the latter. He caught a glimpse of Eren’s eyes. Oh. He doesn't have
odd footing; he’s in pain. Don’t I have something for that in my bag? He motioned for Erwin to fall back with him, speaking gently. “Hey Eren, you don’t look like you’re doing too well. Do you want some aspirin? I have plenty on me.” Just say yes, because we both know you need it.

Eren looked up to Armin, the pain evident in his eyes. “That would be great, Armin, thank you.” he murmured. He finally allowed for the three others to see his horrible limp. Why the fuck did I let them see it? It feels so much better to limp like this, actually fully limping, but it looks horrible. I hope Levi won’t hit me for it, I know my father fucking would. Eren limped to Armin to get the pills from his blonde savior.

Armin dug in his bag quickly to retrieve a small white bottle. Armin, two things. How did you not notice earlier, and thank god you carry this with you. Armin turned the bottle to read the back, muttering the text he skimmed over. “Okay, take two pills every six hours, six every twenty four… eh, fuck it.” He unscrewed the cap and took Eren’s hand carefully, shaking three pills into his palm. He returned to rifling through his bag after the cap was back on. “I may or may not have water in here, too… Aha!” He drew a mini water bottle from the depths of his bag, handing it as well to Eren. “There you go. You should feel better soon with that.”

Eren let out a beaming smile, and he didn’t hold back once it was out. He was very grateful for Armin’s bag of mystery which apparently held everything you could possibly need. He took the three pills and swallowed them down, and sipped at the water. “Thanks, Armin.” He must’ve been really relaxed to be able to not stutter around Armin. The blonde had gotten closer to Eren in fifteen minutes than Levi had gotten in more than four weeks.

...okay. I appreciate everything you’re doing for Eren. I really do. But if you could kindly step off just a bit because he’s mine that would be great. Levi let his arm drift over to drape completely over Eren’s shoulders, though he was still careful not to hurt him. Levi caught Armin’s eye. You’re perceptive. It’s been fifteen minutes and it’s painfully obvious he likes you, and that you can read people. So thanks, but remember… MINE.

Armin seemed to understand a lot more as soon as he saw Levi’s possessive gaze. He had so many things to blackmail both of them with to get his way. He smirked slightly then scampered off with Erwin ahead of them. He smirked devilishly once his face was away from them.

Eren seemed to have visibly relaxed once they made it to their chemistry class. They were in the lab today, so Eren sat next to Levi and Armin and Erwin sat across from them. My back still fucking hurts. Eren let out a strangled whimper when he sat down on the hard chair. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth to try to prevent himself from crying out in pain as he sat down. He looked around the room as he got a bit more comfortable. Where the fuck is Hanji? Shouldn’t she be here by now? She’s never late on a lab day.
The classroom was filled with the chatter of all the other students. Hanji’s desk up front was empty, totally cleared of every note and paper that usually cluttered its surface, even her shining gold nameplate.

They had been sitting for not a minute before a man walked in as the bell rang, signalling the beginning of class. He strode to the front desk of the classroom, a black messenger bag with a star insignia slung over his shoulder and a black pen twirling expertly in hand. The conversations of the class died down as he entered, dumping his bag unceremoniously in front of the desk and turning to face the students, leaning back against the desk casually and looking over the class, legs crossed at the ankles in front of him. His eyes stumbled over to Armin and, pointing to him dramatically with his pen, spoke. "You. Person."

Armin quirked an eyebrow as he was addressed, a grin cracking across his face. *We got literally the best kind of substitute teacher you could hope for.* "Yeah?"

His dark blue eyes were creased only minutely at the corners. He didn't let his arm drop just yet from directing all attention to him. "What's your name?"

"Armin Arlert." *This is gonna be good.*

"Well, Armin, you look very smart." The noirette declared this to him with no hesitation. "So tell me..." His voice dropped to a very grave tone, and his eyes narrowed. The entire class was at silent attention, unsure of what to make of this man. You've got 'em. Go for it! "...what class is this?" He said it more like a statement than a question. The class didn't have enough time to process this question to laugh before Armin replied.

"Chemistry."

"Okay." He spoke quietly and returned to a casual stance, twirling the pen expertly in hand once again, over the knuckles and behind the thumb, moving too fast to be possible. His gaze danced over the back walls of the silent classroom, then to the pen in his hand as he stopped its motions. With a shrug, he tossed it high over his shoulder. “Eh, won't be needing this.” He ignored it as it clattered to the floor, stepping forward to address the stunned room with a mischievous grin breaking across his face.

“**My name is Lathe Autonomous Quo, you can call me whatever the hell you want, and I am going to be your substitute chemistry teacher. If you need to leave for any reason whatsoever, be it you need to go to the bathroom or get water or anything really, you can just get up and leave. But I'll be very suspicious if you're gone for more than ten minutes. If you decide to have a conversation while I'm doing something or think that this class is a good time to flirt with each other, just don't be too loud about it, and we're cool. Now before we begin, you.”** He pointed to Erwin. “Your name. What be it.”

“Erwin Smith.” *Okay then, this is happening.*

“And yours?” He pointed to Eren.
“E-Eren Yeager.” Oh my God.

“And you,” He bust his nose? Looks pretty fresh if he did. “Mr. Thug Life?” The class collectively tried to stifle laughter at that, and at Levi’s very confused expression.

“...What.” ...What.

“Unless you want me to call you Mr. Thug Life for the duration of your time here at this school because of a busted nose, you'll enlighten me as to your name.”

“...Levi Ackerman.” Is this guy for real?

“Cool. And you are?” Lathe continued around the room, pointing to students and studying their faces.

“Alright! That everyone?” The class murmured in assent. “Just so you know, I'm probably not going to remember any of that.” He dropped his hand to his side. “But I thought you'd appreciate the sentiment.” Jk, I'm going to know your names and faces for at least fifteen years. I'm going to see you four lanes over at a grocery store checkout with a new haircut in another state and start talking to you as if we're besties. Fear me.

Eren watched shocked as the teacher went through everyone, then blatantly told them it was all for nothing. This guy is fucking awesome! What are we doing for a lab though? Nothing is set up for a lab… Like at all!

“So, Armin. What exactly is, or was, supposed to happen today?”

“We were learning how to balance chemical equations, and today we were going to write out the equations for various chemical reactions, and test them to make the connection between what is produced and what we wrote.”

“So, boring stuff.”
“Well-”

“There’s writing involved. That constitutes as boring. What’s in that big cabinet?” Lathe didn't wait for an answer before walking to the back of the room and opening the cabinet. He pulled out a random small box and read the back, an ecstatic grin splitting his face. “... I know what we're doing today.” He turned sharply. “Where are the watch glasses?”

All the students pointed to the drawers to his left. He opened the bottom one, taking out a dozen of them and placing them on the countertop above the drawers. He snatched an empty tray from inside the cabinet, placing the watch glasses inside. He returned to perusing the labels on the trays inside. “I don't know where the matches or the tongs are. Ah!” Add two boxes of matches, some tongs, a glass stirring tool and a beaker, and a pair of safety goggles and of course, a Bunsen burner and plate holder. He then drifted back up to the chemicals and compounds.

“Let’s see… I want…” His fingers ghosted over the many boxes and jars. “Ooh, this.” He grabbed a box of magnesium strips and plopped it in the tray.

“This looks interesting. That one is fun! I've never heard of this compound… oh well, we’ll learn! And this,” He regarded it a certain approval and respect. “is going to make it interesting.” He walked back with his tray to the front of the room, setting up quickly and efficiently, lining up watch glasses and bottles and hooking the Bunsen burner up to the gas in no time. The plate holder was lowered over the burner and, humming an odd tune, he donned his safety glasses. He looked down as the small creak of plastic was heard, picking up the pen he discarded minutes before. He skimmed the room with his eyes, locking onto something behind… “Erwin.”

“Yes?” Oh no please do not make me a Guinea pig in this...

“You might want to duck.”

Erwin slumped low in his chair, the side of his head against the table as Lathe’s pen whizzed overhead and hit the light switch dead on, bathing the windowless room in darkness. Murmurs of concern and flickers of fear floated around the room for only a second before they heard the scrape of a match and the soft whoosh of a Bunsen burner igniting, the glowing orange flame their only light. Lathe planted both hands on the desk in front of him, looming over the flame.

“What is about to happen, is I am going to stand up here and burn stuff. You don't have to take notes, and you don't have to really try and memorize anything. All you need to know is that lots of things burn. And they burn differently. Like this piece of paper.” He withdrew from his left front pocket a thick, folded up piece of paper. “I am first going to burn this sheet, given to me with
instructions on how to run this class. It says on here that you have homework. As of now, that’s a lie. I am burning this not only to remind you that paper burns with an orange flame, usually, but also because they won't stop giving me these and I don't know what to do with all of them. Rebellion is very okay. Down with the system!” And with that, the paper was on the netted metal plate, quickly being consumed by the flame. ...oh my god. Lathe started to chuckle, soon consumed by laughter, concerning the class that was beginning to think he was nuts.

He barely managed to speak through his laughing fit. “H-How h-have they not f-f-fired me yet?”

The class erupted into laughter. Eren watched in complete fear. This madman had access to fire. His eyes widened at the sight of the bright orange flames and he almost immediately started to panic. Those bright Orange flames were too close to his fear. His whole body started to shake in honest fear, he didn’t want it to happen again. Something’s gonna catch, we’re gonna get trapped, Mommy’s gonna die. Eren’s thoughts were leading him into a panicked state.

Armin and Levi noticed Eren shaking like a leaf at the same time. Levi glanced at Armin, who looked at him deliberately. Levi slowly reached over to Eren’s hands, tight in fists on his lap, and took hold of one, trying to calm him down. Don't worry Eren, I've got you. We’re all the way in the corner. Nothing’s going to happen.

Lathe, coming down from his laughing fit, looked over to their table, sensing... something. He saw a worried Armin and concerned Erwin, Eren about to panic, and Levi willing him to calm down. ...Huh. Maybe I do need to give the spiel. Okay, do it. Straightening himself, he announced to the class, “If it does please the court, may I state my qualifications for running this current freak show. Since entering the room I have noted all three fire extinguishers behind Eren, next to the entrance, and-” He reached down and heaved one onto the desk. “-the one underneath this desk. I know how to use them, and if it is acceptable to present company, I shall keep it in sight to my left.” He moved it to the end of the table, ready to use. “There is a medical kit next to the chemical storage over there, much more complete than the one behind me,” he pointed to the wall next to the board. “yet incomparable with the one that is my messenger bag in front of this desk. I know how to use that shock thingy in that metal box nailed to the wall by the door, and I know how to treat burns and provide emergency medical help of pretty much any kind that does not require lots of equipment. I know how to control the flames we produce here, and remember that as long as the source of the fire does not leave this table, because laws dictate practically everything in this room be fireproof, you're going to be fine. You're far away from anything going on. So.” He moved to take a watch glass, placing it three feet to his right and opening a bottle of clear liquid onto it. He reached for the matches, taking one and striking it. “I promise I'm not a pyromaniac.” He tossed it casually onto the disk, sending a burst of pink-tinted flame close to the ceiling. “I just like to burn stuff.”

Eren watched, his hand in Levi’s as Lathe continued to speak, and the man's words helped to significantly calm the starting spikes of Eren’s panic. The teen took a few deep breaths before he finally just held tight to Levi’s hand to keep him calm. He looked to see Armin very worried, Erwin concerned and Levi with an expression like he was trying to will something onto him. What
the fuck is he trying to do? Does it hurt for me to hold his hand? Eren looked down at his hand clutching Levi’s. He again thanked himself for wearing his black hoodie, his wrists were still bleeding- not that Levi could tell from his angle and the dark room. He swallowed hard and tried to calm down, hoping that Levi wouldn’t notice and beat him for it. Why do I keep thinking Levi will act like my father does? Maybe because he put you in the hospital? Well, yeah... but he didn’t mean to do that, at least I don’t think he did.... And he was there... Yeah, he was there because he had nothing better to do, he got suspended because of you. Eren’s own mind was a place of torment. He tried not to focus on the bright flames in the front of the room and only focused on keeping his eyes closed, and gripping Levi’s hand to keep his sanity at least for a little longer.

Levi tried just to focus on keeping Eren calm, switching the hand he already had to his other, going to clasp the other. It’s fine. You look like you’re about to flip, and I understand that, but please know you’re going to be fine. We all are. Our teacher might be slightly insane, but he’s no idiot. I’ve got you. I’ve got you. Levi carefully rubbed the back of his hands with his thumb, the fire in front, now a lingering green, forgotten.

Eren managed not to freak out during the class as Lathe continued to make horrible fire-related puns and small flaming explosions.

“You know, there’s a rule against bringing firearms onto school grounds. But we all know I like to break rules, so...” with a flick of his wrist, the flame on the match in his hand swirled around his arms insanely fast, clear across the back of his shoulders and off the back of his hand, dissipating into nothing. He winked. “...just don't tell anyone.”

With that, Lathe reached over to turn off the gas, leaving the room in darkness. “This drawer has a pencil in it. That’ll work. Erwin, hit the deck!” With a lighter thunk, the lights were back on, the pencil responsible skittering off under a table. With an impossibly wide grin, Lathe removed his goggles, setting them down before speaking. “And that is class. I hope that everybody learned something. Even if you just learned that fire is pretty. Or, something else.” He glanced at Eren and Levi. ...I ship it. “Now, two things. One, someone throw me that pen I had earlier.” It came spinning straight at him, and he caught it with ease. “Grazie. Two. Yeager, stay back, I’ve gotta speak with you. And everybody, real talk, if you're ever going to do something,” he smirked, “do it for the memes. Class dismissed!” The loud ring of the bell sounded through the room and the halls, and the class picked up their bags to head out; there was no real packing to do. Lathe moved to retrieve his bag from in front of the desk, and to clear a space on the front desk, moving the equipment he used to the left half quickly. He placed his bag on the table, and looked up expectantly to Eren as the rest of class filed out.

Eren watched as everyone scurried out of the room to get to their next class. Armin promised to wait in the hall for him. He swallowed visibly as he nervously neared the crazed teacher in front of him. “Y-yes?” he stuttered and looked up to him with wide eyes. His bag was in his hand, not across his back, since he couldn’t hold it there even if he wanted to. He looked up to Lathe with his unique viridian eyes, one that were so full of emotion, and in this case, fear, pain, and anxiety clouded those beautiful orbs.
Weathered grey stone lined the night sky, reflecting the craters of the moon. Moonsong eyes, what Lathe himself called them. They could read Eren like an open book. His entire demeanor switched, features softening and voice lowering in genuine concern. Elbows on the table, his shoulders came up nearer his neck. “I understand you weren't exactly comfortable with what we were doing today.” It was no accusation. It was just a statement.

“A-ah….u-um…..” Eren tried to think of a quick excuse before he hung his head in shame a bit for being found out so quickly. “N-no, S-sir…. I-I w-wasn’t.” Eren stuttered all his words in defeat. He looked down at his shoes, hugging his arms to himself, hiding away his open wrists.

...Eren, a few things. Do you think, as a person who declared their entire name to class and said to refer to them as whatever you want, that I care about titles? Please, call me Lathe. It’s alright.” His tone was calming, compassionate. “And it’s no crime to worry when someone’s setting fires like mad in front of you. I get that. I do.” His eyebrows turned up at the middle, a sadness of a sort making it’s way into his expression. “But if there’s something I think you need to know, it’s that doing what you've done to yourself has never helped anyone.” He pointedly glanced down to his arms. “I know what it looks like, blood on black fabric. With my profession, I'm no stranger to it. And you can see it in the way you're moving your arms, just holding yourself. In both senses.” He pushed himself off the edge of the table, standing without leaning, and reached into his bag for two rolls of bandages. He held out his hand gingerly. “Will you let me?”

Eren took a few weary steps back from the man as soon as he started to move. He watched as he had reached into the bag and pulled out bandages. He looked down at his sweatshirt and nodded. “Y-yeah” he murmured before he glanced at the closed door, making sure no one was coming before rolling up the blood-stained sleeves. So many opened wounds all over Eren’s wrists and hands, and so many scars that marred his otherwise perfectly tanned skin. He swallowed when he saw that he was still bleeding, quite heavily at that, and a few droplets of blood had managed to sneak their way onto the countertop. He looked down at the blood with dull eyes. He had scratched them open again this morning, and he had made them even deeper without realizing it, and not even Levi had smelled the blood coming from his sweatshirt. But it sure as hell was apparent when he rolled back the sleeves. Eren looked at Lathe with worried eyes. “P-promise?” he stuttered and then cleared his throat to speak again. “P-promise… n-n-not to t-tell?” he asked quietly. He was so afraid of anyone knowing and beating him up about it. His eyes reflected the pain he had endured at previous schools because of his wounds, his bruises, and the scars. He didn’t want it to happen again, not here. Not when I’m just starting to make friends… His eyes gave a silent plea for the teacher to comply, and hopefully he would.

...How many does that make? I think I stopped counting at twenty. ... It’s not easy for all of you, I know that. But this is... Lathe nodded slowly. “Wouldn't dream of it, kid. I think I have a better wrap for this…” He dug in his bag for wraps with thumb loops, carefully starting with his right hand around the palm, winding down to halfway to his elbow. He’s so bony... These bandages are way too long for his arms. That's not good. He found the scissors in his bag and had snipped three feet off the end before Eren could blink, cutting another two inches off the waste and leaving both on the table, putting the end hook in place. He quickly used the extra length to clean the drips off
the tabletop. You can clean that properly later. He found the wrap’s twin, doing the same for his left. But as he started on his palm, he spoke. “...though, I’d need you to do something for me. A favor, if you will.”

Eren gave Lathe a weary glance. “W-what?” He asked, his voice small and he seemed worried at Lathe would ask something ridiculous from him. His left hand was more scratched up on his fingers and the cut on his wrist deeper. An angry red voicing all the pain from those lanky fingers. He had watched the teacher wrap his arms with precision, and with practiced speed, bringing this wrap up between his fingers as well. There would be no worry of the bandages becoming loose at all. A majority of the bleeding had stopped on his right hand and he knew it was because of the wrap. He wondered what Lathe’s favor would be and waited in silence, anxious

“...Perhaps two, even.” He slid the hooks in place to finish Eren’s left arm. “I want you to try and stop. And I don’t mean just this,” he held Eren’s arm in his hands, weighing it, “but this, too.” He turned it over to the top, tracing with a finger the fact that you could see every ridge of his joints, his bones, his tendons. “...And the most important thing you need to understand,” Lathe looked Eren straight in the eye. “...is that you have friends here, and they all wish the best for you. I can tell you don't believe it. I can tell with some of them you believe the opposite of it. But they do. You have people here to talk to and to support you. I hope you'll let me be one of them.” He grinned. “We're here for you, Eren.” He crossed his thumb over his heart. “Swear it.”

Eren didn’t know when he had started to cry. He just felt the hot tears escape from his eyes unwillingly. He looked confused as he felt them fall down his face, he sniffled and reached up to wipe his tears away. “I-I’m s-sorry, L-Lathe” Eren quietly apologized to the teacher for crying in front of him. No one has ever said anything like that to me before- no one, not even the teachers who knew I was getting beaten before, not even the teachers who knew I killed my mom…. No one. I want to spill everything to him, just because of those words, but I fucking can’t. All I am is a fucking coward who goes crying to everyone they feel safe around, but is too scared to explain why the tears started in the first place. Eren tried to hide his now blotchy face because he couldn’t control his tears any longer.

Lathe reached for his back pocket, pulling out a red kerchief and pressing it gently into Eren’s hand. He closed Eren’s fingers around it. “You don't have to talk if you don't want to. But just know that wanting to cry, wanting to talk doesn't mean you're weak. I can tell that’s what you think it means. But it’s alright. ...Do you want to tell me?”

Eren looked between the red kerchief and Lathe. He wiped away his tears, letting out a strangled gasp for air as he tried to calm himself down. He kept his face covered as he tried to speak a few words to the kind teacher in front of him. “I-I-I…. I miss her” Eren finally managed before he broke out into sobs. Yesterday had been the 8th anniversary of his mother’s death, and he had had a panic attack and relived the very day he sentenced his mother to death. “And I’m the reason she’s gone.” Eren started to break down completely in front of Lathe. He hadn’t even told Levi as to what was really the problem yesterday. Well now someone knows, and I can only hope Lathe won’t
tell anyone. Eren’s stutter had disappeared for now, but his sobs were quickly wracking through his whole body, and it was almost starting to hurt to breathe in. His chest was starting to hurt again. But he couldn’t stop. It felt so good to finally cry and let everything out after so many years of keeping it inside himself.

Lathe was on the other side of the desk in a second, ushering Eren carefully over to one of the lab tables to sit down next to him, pulling his chair close and putting his arm around him, murmuring to him. He looked like his heart had snapped in half. ...To drag that kind of guilt along with you... “Eren… It’s alright. ...What happened?”

For some reason, Eren’s crying form had the balls to tell Lathe about what had happened that fateful day 8 years ago yesterday. He looked like a mess once he was done, and he was wincing every time he drew in a wheezed breath. He was trying to ignore the pain in his chest, but the pain was so clear in his eyes it was striking. His fear of fire, whether safe or not, was confirmed, and given a fair reason to fear it. The kid had such a rough life leading to this, moving from Germany after the incident, trying to learn English, trying to hide his accent for fear of bullying... Eren told him everything, which of course made him way late for his next class, which was PE, but he was in no condition to even think of participating at the moment. Eren just clung to Lathe’s shirt and sputtered out everything in between his painful breaths and his sobs. He tried to find as much comfort in Lathe as he could, but it wasn’t enough to get him to stop crying- no, the waterworks did not shut off at all during this whole time of telling Lathe all the things that had happened to him in the past 8 years. Eren even went as far as to mention what his father had done to him in retaliation, all of it: the rape, the stabbing, the whipping, the burning… everything. He couldn’t stop, it felt so good to finally get it off his chest.

Lathe held onto Eren through his entire story, trying to comfort him as best one could comfort someone pained from the guilt of their mother’s death, reinforced by years and years of abuse and emotional torture. ...there has to be something I can do to help this kid… I'll talk to Spades later. She’ll know what to do. But for now... Lathe just held onto Eren, letting him hold his shirt in a white-knuckled grip. He noticed the pain in his eyes- beyond the emotional, but in the tremors of his body, the desperate gasps for air. Painkillers and water. Bag. But you're holding Eren! Just for a second- he needs it. You're still going to be here. Go. “Eren, let me get you something to help your pain, okay? You're shaking so hard… and you need water, too, alright?” Lathe brought his hand to Eren’s, gently coaxing him to let go for just a moment. He slipped out of his chair and snatched a bottle of pills out of his bag and an unopened water bottle, away for less than ten seconds before he was back at Eren’s side, his shirt immediately reclaimed. He struggled to open the bottle with one hand, the other around Eren, succeeding and addressing Eren. “Hold out your hand, okay Eren?”

Eren did as he was told and he looked at Lathe with confused eyes as he sputtered to take in a shaky breath. His widened in fear as he started to cough, retracting his hand partway, his grip tightening on Lathe’s shirt even more. He tried to take in another strangled breath, but the coughing is what scared Eren the most, he couldn't get a breath in.
Remember. You need to stay calm for the both of you. “Eren, I know you're really scared, but you need to try and focus for me on getting these two little guys down the hatch.” He tipped the bottle onto the table, two small magenta pills clinking out. “All you need to do is get these two down, and have a sip of water, and you should feel worlds better. Just breathe, and focus. You’re alright.”

Eren tried breathing, and it didn't work out again. He reached for a pill and struggled to even swallow it, his chest hurt with the lack of air, and he knew he needed to down these before his breath ran out. I'm going to fucking pass out because of this. Eren was scared as he fumbled for the next pill and got it in his mouth, He struggled to swallow, a shaky hand reaching for the bottle and trying to latch on without much success before finally getting it and sipping at the cool liquid which helped the pills down. His grip was loosening from Lathe’s shirt, he was starting to lose his strength from the lack of oxygen. It took a few moments before Eren had relaxed enough to take in a deep ragged breath and he seemed to take a few, no matter how much it hurt, just to calm himself down, his grip tightening on Lathe’s shirt once again.

...I knew there was a reason Sue insisted I carry morphine on me. Thank god he can breathe again. “Good job, Eren, I'm so proud of you. You'll feel much better now, I promise.” He ran his thumb up and down his arm, drawing him close. “I've got you.”

Eren’s eyes dilated. His body was responding well to the morphine, and at this point it was the only thing that could help him get by with his extensive chest and back injuries. He took in a few more solid, deep breath before he calmed down completely. He curled into Lathe’s embrace and relaxed further. “Thank you, Lathe” he murmured. His stutter seemed to have hidden away, and a much more confident voice had appeared before the teacher, and it was filled with gratitude.

He’s responding well to the morphine. Good… Good. Lathe himself felt tension drain out of him, knowing Eren was okay for right now. “You sound much better. The medicine should help you through most of the day today. If ever you need more, talk to me, alright? I actually think I should write you a prescription for some, seeing as you need it… you know what I will. Here, let me up, alright? I'll just grab my whole bag and bring it over here.” He stood and grabbed his bag, sitting back down and plopping it on the table. Holding his pen with his right hand as he rummaged with his left, he withdrew a pad of paper, switching the pen to his left and quickly filling in the blank spaces, tearing the paper off the pad when he was done. And they thought I was ridiculous for practicing writing with both hands. Placing it on the table next to him, he rummaged for another notepad, pulling out the small stack of yellow and scratching out a pass. “This doesn't mean you have to leave, it just means I don't want your 2nd period teacher getting too mad at you. What class are you supposed to be in, anyway?”

Eren looked up to Lathe from where his gaze lay on his prescription Lathe had written for him. “I’m supposed to be in PE right now…. Mr. Siss will probably understand my tardiness, I mean I did just get out of the hospital two days ago” he murmured quietly and started to pull his stuff together to head off to the gym. “Also… um, what do I do if I can’t afford it? The prescription?” he asked quietly and looked to Lathe with innocent and curious eyes, not a hint of pain left in them anymore.
Lathe thought a moment, then picked up the prescription note again, making sure of an odd symbol he had already scratched into the corner, and put it back down again. “Just take this to the pharmacy on Trost St., two minutes from here, and hand it to the pharmacist with the purple-ish hair. No charge. And please, sit down for another minute, kid. As for PE, which you're not attending, haven't you been given a note by the hospital that says you can't perform physical activity of that kind for a while? Or do you need one of those, too?”

Eren sat back down, leaning again into Lathe. “No, I didn’t get one, they might have sent it to….” he paused for a brief second. Lathe already knew everything, why couldn’t he tell him his father’s name was Grisha? “They probably sent it to Grisha, but he hasn’t come back.” His words seemed a bit smaller at the mention of his own father’s name. Lathe should’ve been aware of the widely renowned doctor from Germany. Grisha Yeager was a big deal around here, and everyone seemed to be overlooking what he had done to his own child in a drunken rage.

...Grisha Yeager. Is the father. Of Eren Yeager. The one I have in my arms right now. ...What the fuck happened to ‘Do No Harm?’ Lathe was silent for a moment. I met him before, didn't I? I thought something was off about him… I never really did like the guy. I thought I was being paranoid. He carded his fingers through Eren’s hair, his left hand going to rummage for one last pad of paper. He sighed heavily as he scratched out one more note, excusing him from physical education classes for… Well, make it until further notice. I don't know truly how bad he is, how long he’ll need to heal. “...Alright. You're now free from gym. It’s a bit more than half an hour to your next class, you know. However you want to spend it is up to you.”

“Can I stay here?” Came Eren’s immediate reply. He didn’t want to let go, not yet. He couldn’t let go since he had found someone he could rely on. Someone he could trust, someone who could help him thoroughly. “Please…” Eren’s small voice sent out a thousand emotions. The boy was relieved, hurting, anxious, pleased, angry, content, and so many more emotions had flooded his brilliant viridian eyes. He looked better already, much better, without his eyes laced with the pain from his back, which was by no means properly wrapped anymore either. Should I ask him to wrap it? It hasn’t been wrapped in a long time, probably why it hurts so much. Eren was contemplating on asking for his back to be wrapped, but that would mean showing him everything, showing him, showing him the damage. It would no longer be words- Lathe would see everything if he did, all the cuts he had put on his sides himself, all the stab wounds from his father, the scars from surgery to repair his splintered ribs, everything. Even his back, which thankfully had healed over enough that his spine was no longer showing.

“...You've got a question to ask. I can see it. What's bugging you, kid?” Lathe just kept fiddling with Eren’s brunette hair, studying his expression.

Eren took in a deep breath to gather his courage and looked up to Lathe, his expression showed that he trusted Lathe, even after only meeting him a class period and a half ago. “Um… my back hasn’t been properly wrapped since I left the hospital… um, could you wrap it for me?” he asked quietly
to the older man as he sat up a bit to judge Lathe’s reaction. He trusted the other not to freak out at the sight of his hip bones and ribs showing clearly if he removed the oversized hoodie.

Lathe let his hand slip from his hair. ...everything he just told you is about to be put into proper context. Brace for that. Moonsong eyes softly smiled at him, recognizing the trust and courage asking that took. “Of course. Here, stand up and let me see if I have enough.” He let Eren uncurl his fingers from his shirt, standing and rummaging for all the bandages he had. A thought crossed his mind, and he looked to the doors, noting they were closed before returning his attention to his bag, removing three rolls. “This should be enough, but there are more in the other kits in the room in case we need more. So, Eren.” He nodded a bit, speaking quietly. “The hoodie has to go.”

Eren swallowed quietly before he started to lift the hem of his sweatshirt. Already Lathe could tell by Eren’s tiny waist that the sweatshirt was easily 5-8 sizes too big for the boy’s frame. Eren removed it, and the thin horror that his arms were, were nothing compared to the sickly thin and malnourished silhouette Eren currently stood in front of Lathe as. His shirt, which was much smaller that his hoodie, still hung loosely around Eren’s small figure. He slowly removed it from his body and almost instantly the outline of his hip bones were visible, poking at the bandages, his waist so slim, Lathe could probably put his hands around Eren and have his fingers touch. Lathe reached for the hooks holding the old wrappings in place, using scissors to cut them in various places and help them fall to the floor. The boy’s chest looked like the site of a massacre, scars and red, irritated lines, still held together by stitches from his last surgery, lacing across the brunette’s tan skin. It looked so out of place to see so many silvery scars imperfecting that beautiful caramel skin, yet Lathe hadn’t even seen the horrifying sight of the boy’s back. His ribs were jutting out as well, each and every one (that was there) could be counted. There were a few that could not be salvaged and were missing altogether from when they were pulverized. The boy looked like he should be dead, five times over, yet here he was, standing in front of his substitute teacher who he trusted the most at the moment.

...when I was holding onto his arm, how did the bones not snap in my hand? ...when he moves, I wonder if he can hear every joint creaking, so close to his skin, so without anything to protect them as they spin and swivel. ...when his heart beats, I can see his pulse, moving in fast waves to his fingertips, and I wonder if he ever noticed the veins in his hand move with his blood if he stays very still, or if he never did. ...when he walks, I wonder if he can feel every crack and pebble and abnormality in the cement. ...when he looks in the mirror, I wonder how long he spends just standing there, looking at himself with eyes trained to see only the ugliness of himself, focusing on one bit of skin that hangs looser than normal, while he drains his flesh away by ‘forgetting’ to eat and living the life of a skeleton with only threads of life left dangling, tied to rattling bones. My god. Let me fix you.

Eren watched at Lathe took in his whole being. He looked down a bit, feeling a bit ashamed of the way his body was, it honestly wasn’t his fault, more so his father’s than anything. He slowly turned around and his back gave off all sorts of shades of reds, pinks, and whites. His skin had not grown back onto the flesh which was still trying to heal from the horrible burning it sustained, and even a bit of the burns lingered after weeks of healing. The 3rd degree burns though, which covered the dip of his back, would remain as an ugly reminder. They had not healed at all, not even
a tad. They still looked fresh, like the pot had been dumped on him only seconds ago. Eren knew the healing skin was irritated and dried out, it was cracking and even a few places has started to bleed again, probably from trying to walk to school. He was limping so horribly this morning too. He needed more than just having his back wrapped, he needed to be cared for. It was obvious that Eren could not take care of himself through the pain he was experiencing, and it was obvious that his back would never heal if the skin continued to crack and bleed every day.

...Time. How much time do I have? Lathe looked to the clock on the wall. Twenty seven minutes. That'll do. “Eren. Give me one second.” Lathe snatched his pen, writing down another prescription for medicine as quickly as he could, scribbling that same symbol in the corner. He reached into his bag and pulled out another bottle, flicking open the cap and pouring two larger, chalky-looking pills into his hand, giving them to Eren with the water bottle. “Down the hatch. I'm kinda going into full-on doctor mode, so I'm sorry if I'm scaring you, but I have work to do. We need to patch you up.” He gave him a reassuring smile.

Eren simply nodded and followed Lathe’s instructions, downing the chalky pills in a moment. He then waited for more instructions from the man examining his back.

Vitamins. He's going to need plenty of those. Lathe studied the cracking, bleeding skin of his back. They're not too deep, but the skin is so dry ... I might as well just dump the bag on the desk. But he did not, opting instead to keep the mess contained and removing a jar of Vaseline, opening the jar and studying the contents. I wish I had something better to work with here… Placing the container down, he ran over to the sink and washed his hands quickly, drying them with paper towels and rushing back to Eren, picking up the container and carefully applying the petroleum jelly on the skin between the cuts. He grimaced as he heard Eren hiss from the pain, trying to keep his touches as light as possible.

If your skin could stretch just a little, you might not hurt as much when you move. He worked quickly, tracing between every line of his back. Thinkthinkthink what else. ... Alcohol swabs. Oh, that’s gonna hurt like a bitch. But at the same time, Lathe eyed the angry reds of some of the cuts. ...infection is not an option. Lathe closed the cap, running back to grab the paper towels and bring them up, wiping the gel off his hands. He grabbed one more morphine pill, handing it to Eren. “You’re gonna need this. It’ll all be over soon, though.” His thumb crossed his heart. “Swear it.”

Eren eyed the pill before he again took it and got it to go down with a sip of water. He reached over to his bag, grabbing a towel he would use to silence himself when he was cutting at school. If this is gonna fucking hurt as much as he says it will I'm gonna need this. Eren put the rag in his mouth and looked to Lathe when he was ready, gagged to prevent him from making too much of a racket.

...that’s horrible that he has that. Lathe shook his head to clear it. JOB. DO IT. Lathe opened a plastic container filled with alcohol wipes. He picked one up, unfolding it and holding it so that it covered his fingers, he looked to Eren, who nodded. He pressed the wipe to the first of many red cuts, turning it and turning it to cleaner sides of the wipe. He made it to the end of the first cut when he simply dropped it on the floor and picked up another one, just keeping going as quickly as
Eren would’ve screamed in pain if it weren’t for the rag muffling his pained cries. The pill took a bit to kick in and once it did Lathe was almost done with his entire back. Eren remained limp, bent over the chair as Lathe worked on his back. He had tears in his eyes, but they were subsiding. He would be okay, this was for the best.

It was killing Lathe to hear Eren in so much pain, but he knew it was a necessary evil. He could keep him from getting worse. He was especially careful to avoid the small of his back. ...that is what we’re really worrying about here. He dropped another alcohol wipe, closing the box and reaching for a small silver-coloured tube in the depths of the messenger bag, reading the label to make sure it was the right thing. “Eren, this is going to be the hardest part. I have burn cream with me. I’m going to use it. The morphine’s kicked in a bit more by now, I think, but it’s going to be the worst. You can do it, though. I know you can. It’s all easier after this, okay?”

Eren could only nod at Lathe’s words. He trusted the man to help, which was exactly what he was doing. He gripped the chair below him and gritted his teeth against the towel in his mouth, ready for the pain he would feel.

The cap snapped open, white cream pouring onto Lathe’s fingertips. With a deep breath, he reached out and smeared the cream over the small of his back, over every millimetre of skinless flesh. He cringed at Eren’s lurch, his sounds of extreme distress.

Eren’s whole body shook from the pain he felt as Lathe continued on his back, it was like he was touching his eyes with alcohol wipes, except like he had pulled the eyes out of the socket and filled the sockets with alcohol before putting his eyes back in. It burned, almost as bad as getting the burn to begin with. Eren’s eyes dilated further at the memory he had been trying to avoid, and Eren’s body began to shake for a new reason, his memories of the horrible incident and he was starting to cry and try to back away from the touch… From his father’s touch. Lathe could probably already tell that Eren had ventured off into his panicking stages. It was early; his panic could be stopped, but if not soon, it would result in a massive attack, that would probably lead him to lose his trust in Lathe.

...that’s it. That’s the whole thing. Lathe dropped the silver tube uncaring as he brought himself directly next to Eren, pulling him into his chest and running his hand not covered in medicine through his hair. “Hey hey hey, Eren, you did it- that’s over. It’s all so much easier from here. You’re very brave for letting me do all this. I really am so proud of you.” He rested his chin on top of his head, willing him to calm down.

Eren’s eyes flashed a feral look in them for a second before he realized it was Lathe who was
touching him, and that he was safe. He calmed down after a few moments and leaned into Lathe’s
touches, happy the morphine was working in full swing. He couldn’t feel anything but a dull ache
now.

Lathe allowed himself a breather. He looked to the clock. Seventeen minutes. Okay. This works. He
felt tension drain out of his shoulders, the worst over with. “Eren, I just want to make sure I have
enough time. I need to do your front. Your back already looks much better.” And it did- the cuts
had stopped bleeding, the skin slowly learning to stretch. Lathe untangled himself from Eren and
reclaimed the alcohol wipes. “Alright, this shouldn't take as long as your back. Sit on the table so I
can see better, okay?”

Eren nodded and tried to get up onto the table twice, and failed both times. He looked for help
from Lathe. He couldn’t lift his own body weight with his arms anymore. He looked a bit defeated
at the thought. How was he carrying a backpack then? It probably weight more than him…just
how did he manage?

...how do you manage? Lathe reached down to hold him up by his feet, Eren guiding himself onto
the table with his arms. He opened the container and took out one more of many. “Remember, this
is the easy part. These aren't as bad as the ones on your back. You'll be fine.” Lathe set to cleaning
his entire front and his sides, swiping over every cut, every scar, and every mark he saw, open or
not. He studied the stitches he was given. Why didn't they stitch the rest of the cut while they were
at it… Wouldn't have hurt… And my god, your ribs … you're missing so many of them… We need
to get some food in you. I'm talkin’ to the lunch ladies later. And what was that drug called… He
reached for the bandages when he finished, unrolling the first and fastening it over one shoulder
and under his arm. He slowly spiralled downward, adding in hooks where he needed one bandage
to connect to the next. ...Maybe I should just talk to that Ackerman kid. Have him check and make
sure he’s eating. But there are plenty of antidepressants that can also help with weight gain and
appetite too, god knows he’d need it... He left some extra space at the belly- not only for him to
have room to breathe, but to move and eat as well. He finished at Eren’s waist with one roll of
bandages only half-used, snipping off the extra and hooking it in place. “There we go. Done, with
nine minutes to spare. How are you feeling?”

Eren let out a sigh of relief at he didn't know he'd been holding in. He slumped down in the chair a
bit. He felt so much better now that his wounds and scratches had been cleaned and wrapped.
“Thank you, it feels much better” he said and he smiled softly, his bright teeth shining at Lathe.
Eren straightened himself and moved to put his shirt and hoodie on, covering himself to make it
look like he was actually filled out and not a living skeleton.

Lathe smiled softly. We're getting somewhere. “Now Eren, I just have a couple of questions for
you. Don't panic, some are yes or no questions, and some aren't, but they'll help me help you.
Alright? There's just a few of them.” Lathe moved to pick up the bandages scattered over the floor
and table, the drying wipes, and the discarded medicine. He placed all except the latter into a paper
bag, folding it closed and shoving it to the bottom of the trash. He turned his attention back to
Eren.
Eren watched as the man cleaned up the mess they had created in only about twenty minutes. *What questions is he going to ask? He said yes or no answers, but… What kind of questions? Do I have to answer them? …Well, probably.* Eren swallowed hard before he nodded at Lathe, signalling he was ready for the questions.

Lathe looked thoughtful for a moment. “…Do you have nightmares occurring about once a week or more?”

Eren nodded. “Yeah, I didn’t have one last night, while I was with Levi.” he murmured quietly, feeling like he could trust Lathe with his sexuality as well. *I hope he won’t tell anyone about this-if the school finds out I’m gay for Levi Ackerman, everything is gonna go to shit.*

Lathe saw his insecurity, and chuckled. “Don’t worry yourself. I never really cared about that sort of thing. It’s cute, honestly.” He smirked. “But they’re pretty common, then? Every night, really?” His tone switched to something more serious.

Eren nodded. “Yeah, every night, I sometimes… No. I can only ever sleep from 11-3 then I’ll be up the rest is the night.” Eren said and he looked up to Lathe again. If Lathe looked closely he would be able to see the large bags underneath each of his eyes. It wasn’t because of how thin he was, but the fact he could only sleep four hours every night then function the next day on only those four hours. It was close to insomnia levels. “Sometimes I can’t sleep more than an hour before I’m woken up by the nightmares” he murmured. He looked down at his wrapped hands, wanting to scratch at his wrists in a nervous tick, but he knew he couldn’t, not with them properly wrapped.

Lathe wandered over to the table again, picking up the pad of stationery and scribbling notes on it. *I can’t remember the name of the drug perfect for this sort of thing… eh, as long as Casper gets these notes he’ll be fine. Insomnia and nightmares. “Are the nightmares recurring? Is it the same thing happening every time?”*

Eren looked to Lathe and shook his head. “Sometimes it’s Grisha raping me, sometimes it’s him beating me, sometimes it’s the fire-and I’m the one who trapped, alone…. Sometimes it’s my father forcing me to drink whole bottles of alcohol… They’re not real nightmares, not a figment of my imagination, they’re just memories which I would rather forget.” He explained to Lathe with his head down.

*Recurring nightmares regarding abuse and pain, mainly involving Grisha. Some sleeping medicines make sleep relatively dreamless, but we need to stop the dreams altogether. If anything, this kid has PTSD.* Lathe scribbled something under the title of ‘Sleep’ before looking up to meet
Eren’s eyes. “You shouldn’t feel ashamed, Eren. Really. You’re going to be alright now.” Thinking for a moment, he spoke. “...Approximately how long has it been since you had three meals in one day?”

Eren seemed to laugh a little. “Three?” He asked quietly. “At least seven years.” he told the other and looked down. “An honest meal... the last one, I would say two.” he said honestly and looked down at his hands again.

Lathe stared at the floor over his pad of paper. *Prazosin for PTSD... Morphine for the pain... I need him to get the best vitamins we have around here because he’s not eating- or probably can’t eat... Yeah, I can’t do this alone. Lathe made a mental note to talk to Levi later. I’m gonna need to enlist a bunch of people for this. They won’t really know what’s up, though. I’m not cruel. I swore on it. He looked at Eren, continuing. “Is it that you can’t eat, or that you refuse to?” Please say can’t I can fix can’t

“I can’t.” he told the other honestly. “Levi tried to get me to eat yesterday, and I could barely finish a fourth of a Caesar salad. I can’t eat sweet things anymore either.” he told the other quietly, remembering Levi’s rant about waffles this morning.

...Casper’s smart. He’ll know what to do. Lathe scratched down ‘Best-working medicine you have to increase appetite or at least stimulate weight gain. Both would be wonderful.’ He made sure to add that same insignia to the corner. His eyes wandered over the floor. “Let me think... just on a general note, I’d start carrying water around with you. And you’re going to be taking a lot of pills for a while. I think that’s all I can write for you now, but it wouldn’t hurt-” he tore the sheet off the pad and handed it to Eren. “-to try some optimism. Hand everything I gave you to Casper at the pharmacy. He’s the purple-haired guy I mentioned. He should have it all on hand. I’ll call and make sure next time I have a few minutes. If he doesn’t-” He smiled brightly at Eren, stars whizzing about in his eyes. “-I'll track down what you need myself.”

Eren smiled. It was a genuine smile as well, one he hadn’t really showed in a long time. His teeth were perfect, surprisingly, especially with all the abuse he had gone through. He took the prescriptions and made a mental note to ask Armin to go with him. He thanked Lathe again and let him ruffle his hair before the next bell rang through the halls, and Eren got up to go to his next class.

“Have a good day, Eren!” Lathe called from his desk. He reached into his pocket, pulling out an old phone, and dialing a number without even looking at the keypad, holding it to his ear. It answered in two rings. “Hey, Casper! I need a favor from you...”
Eren made his way out of the room and into the filling hallway. He got shoved a bit by some of the jocks, though he tried to ignore them, since he wasn’t in pain anymore. *Morphine is fucking MAGIC!* He continued his way towards the music department. His class was with Mr. Dieter; He was a pretty laid-back kind of guy, as long as you did as he asked. Eren had only personally been in his class once, and it seemed like a pretty good atmosphere. He walked along, getting closer to the door before he turned his head, hearing a familiar voice call for him. He turned around and saw Armin waving at him, presumably coming from PE, since he wasn’t by the Chem lab door when Eren had left. Eren smiled softly upon seeing a familiar face, raising his arm to return the wave. He remembered that Armin had mentioned being in all his classes. A flash of scarlet caught his eye, and he looked at it in disbelief. ..*I just stole Lathe’s kerchief. How did I not fucking notice I still had it? More importantly, how am I going to get this back to him? He doesn’t have set classes. He’d just be wandering around, fuck knows if I’ll even see him again today! But this is Lathe we’re talking about… He shouldn’t be mad. I’ll keep it on me, return it when I see him next.* He folded the silk square neatly, tucking it safely into his pocket, waiting for Armin to catch up. “Hey Armin,” he greeted the shorter blonde once he had caught up with him. His voice sounded so pain free it was a complete flip from this morning.

“Hey Eren! You look and sound so much better than this morning. But how dare you leave me out in the hall for so long! I was almost late for PE! I hope your conversation with Lathe was reeeeeeally important.” Armin grinned, mock hurt dripping from his words. *Lathe, you are a godsend.*

Eren looked down a bit. “Yeah, it was important, sorry for making you late.” Eren apologized, and it seemed odd that he no longer had a stutter, and his voice sounded like it was from the heavens itself.

...*Did his voice actually change at some point or is it just the stutter being gone?* “Hey, it's cool. I wasn’t late, so no harm, right? At least we're on time for Dieter’s class.”

Eren nodded and he followed the short blonde in. He was surprised to see that people actually noticed him come in and sit down beside Armin. Eren looked up as a large binder was put in front of him already filled with sheets of paper.

“Welcome back, Eren,” Dieter’s voice was soft and kind. He was holding out everything they had gone over in the past 8 weeks without Eren around. “You think you can pick something out?” He asked him.

Eren looked a little shocked to see the teacher handing him the sheet music to over twenty songs. He stared at the index on the front page… “Um, pick… for the piano?” He asked; The first day he
“No, anything you feel comfortable with singing, I would prefer any from the top five.” Dieter said and waited for a response from Eren before he started class.

Eren took in a deep breath, feeling no pain whatsoever. *That’s good- maybe I’ll actually be able to sing, then.* Eren looked over the five options, only finding one to be at least in his range. *Yes, I know what my fucking range is, but does it have to be Halo? God!! WHY!?!?! It’s gonna make everyone think I’m a girl! Goddammit!* “I can do Halo, Mr. Dieter.” Eren replied after looking over all the songs.

“So, are you ready?”

“Yes, I’m ready.”

“Great, thanks Eren, you can go warm up in the sound booth over there,” pointing to said sound booth, “ I’ll come get you when we need you.”

Eren smiled softly and then got up to go and warm his voice up quickly. He spent a good few minutes in the booth, letting his voice out. He swallowed hard as there was a knock at the door. Dieter was there to get him out and bring him out to the large music room. He looked at all the other students at various instruments. He nodded to Mr. Dieter signaling he was ready, then everyone else did as well.

The sound started off soft in the beginning before a few more instruments joined the Grand Piano which some tall blonde was playing. Eren swallowed down the last bit of his remaining fear as he opened his mouth, letting his glorious voice let out the first couple lines.

“Remember those walls I built
Well Baby they’re tumbling down
And they didn’t even put up a fight
They didn’t even make a sound”

Dieter wasn’t the only one shocked by Eren’s obvious display of talent, in fact a few students had stopped their instruments altogether to hear this kid sing. He was like an angel, the way his voice drifted throughout the room. Eren opened his eyes again when he realized that no one had continued playing and all eyes were on him. He blushed immensely, not liking the burning sensation that the eyes caused him. He looked at the sheet… *Did I do something wrong? Did I start on the wrong note? It’s been a few months since I’ve seen sheet music. SHIT! What did I do? I don’t want them to stare-*

“Eren, where did you learn to sing? That was amazing!” Dieter’s happy voice sounded in the silence. A few other students voice their approvals as well.
“We didn’t know you could sing Eren!”

“Eren do it again!”

“Eren you are one lucky son of a bitch!”

That voice I know… that one is one of the… jocks. Eren turned around to see it belonged to the tall blonde situated at the grand piano.

“Thomas! Language!” Dieter’s tone had turned strict and unforgiving. “Sorry, Dieter!” Came a hasty reply before Dieter turned back to the rest of the class. “Alright from the top! You know he can sing now so let’s get this show on the road shall we?” He asked. The students gave a collective nod before they started it up again.

“I found a way to let you in
But I never really had a doubt
Standing in the light of your halo
I've got my angel now”

Someone screwed up and skipped over an entire line of music, so the second attempt was stopped in an instant by Dieter. “Come on! Work with me here! You guys can do it! Let’s go!” His encouraging words helped to raise all the students’ spirits. Third time's a charm . They got through the whole song without a hitch.

“It's like I've been awakened
Every rule I had you breaking
It's the risk that I'm taking
I ain't never gonna shut you out”

“Everywhere I'm looking now
I'm surrounded by your embrace
Baby I can see your halo
You know you're my saving grace”

“You're everything I need and more
It's written all over your face
Baby I can feel your halo
Pray it won't fade away”

“I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo
I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo”

“Hit me like a ray of sun
Burning through my darkest night
You're the only one that I want
'Think I'm addicted to your light”

“I swore I'd never fall again
But this don't even feel like falling
Gravity can't begin
To pull me back to the ground again”

“It's like I've been awakened
Every rule I had you breaking
The risk that I'm taking
I'm never gonna shut you out”

“Everywhere I'm looking now
I'm surrounded by your embrace
Baby I can see your halo
You know you're my saving grace”

“You're everything I need and more
It's written all over your face
Baby I can feel your halo
Pray it won't fade away”

“I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo
I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo”

“Everywhere I'm looking now
I'm surrounded by your embrace
Baby I can see your halo
You know you're my saving grace”

“You're everything I need and more
It's written all over your face
Baby I can feel your halo
Pray it won't fade away”

“I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo
I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo”

“I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo
I can feel your halo halo halo
I can see your halo halo halo”

...Could there be more perfect blackmail material? His voice is flawless! Armin stopped recording and clapped and cheered with the rest of the class, watched Eren fidget at the loud applause, his face red and hung in embarrassment. ...he doesn't think he deserves it, does he?

Eren looked around the room with wide eyes. They were applauding for…. For me? No one’s ever done that before.. then again, I’ve never sung in front of people before.

Eren stiffened when Dieter came up to him and smiled. “Eren that was amazing! Where did you learn how to sing?” Dieter asked with bright eyes. Eren didn’t know how to respond to the man’s overly happy demeanor. He blushed out of embarrassment, and it went all the way up to his ears. Fact- He looked really cute when his blush covered his whole face. Eren instantly covered his heating face. OMFG!!! I am blushing! What the hell do I do!? “I haven’t learned from anyone…” he murmured and felt a pang of guilt strike his chest. He had to lie, they couldn’t be asking about his mother, no not like this. He didn’t want to think about it. “I didn’t learn from anyone, Dieter.” He said a little more firmly.

Dieter only nodded. “Well you have an amazing voice, even without training. You can read the sheet music pretty well too if I’m not mistaken?” He asked.

Eren remained quiet and nodded, he wearily stepped back a bit, not liking all the questions, but he hid his discomfort on his face pretty well.

...You’re so lying.

“And how long have you known how to play music/sing for?” he asked and sat down in a swivel chair… which appeared out of nothing but air. When the fuck did he get that chair? Am i fucking
blind? How the fuck did I not see that? I want one of those spinny thingies! Eren looked around and soon located another chair and sat himself down, as did the rest of the class, interested to learn about the kid fresh out of the hospital.

“I’ve been able to play for years… Honestly I don’t know how long anymore.” He lied, no one but Armin knowing that he did. I know exactly how long... I started learning on my 5th birthday, and my mother taught me for the next 3 years…. only 3 and I’ve remembered every memory of it… Shit, I gotta stop thinking about it, I’m gonna start crying in class, and they’ll know something was up.

...that hit a nerve. Dieter, change of subject would be appreciated...

Dieter nodded taking it in. “So you signed up for piano too, can you play for us?” He asked quietly, he was hoping to see just how far this kid’s talent went.

Eren nodded and made his way to the grand piano, slowly to collect his thoughts and calm himself to brace for the rush of memories sitting in that damned stool would bring him. He sat down on the stiff black stool, looking at the magnificent ivory and ebony keys in front of him. He lifted a shaky hand to test out a few cords before he skimmed through a few pieces of sheet music. After a couple moments, Eren found a rather intricate piece of music. He took in a few deep breaths and then his shaky hands stilled. They flew over the keys with precision and fluidity. Eren didn’t skip a beat, not even when he had to turn the pages for the remainder of the song. He did the whole thing perfectly, without a single flaw. He knew he had let a tear fall as soon as he finished. It was mom’s favorite song, I know that by heart…. Eren quickly wiped his tear away before anyone could notice and was once again greeted by loud applause. Huh? Again? I’m not that good... Eren’s classmates didn’t seem to think that.

“That was amazing, Eren!” …you know it like the back of your hand. That was wonderful!

“How did you learn to sight-read that well?”

“That was absolutely beautiful! You play so well!”

Eren only shook his head. “No, no, no need for the applause, I’m really just a beginner.” he pleaded. He raised his arms in mock defense. “I’m really just a beginner at piano…” He trailed off and looked down. “I really don’t need the applause.” Eren was starting to show how uncomfortable he was with all the attention. Though of course, Dieter didn’t seem to notice.
“Nonsense Eren! You should be in the advanced classes! For either! Or private lessons! You could be going somewhere with that voice of yours.” Dieter said honestly.

**Distress detected. Deflect.** Armin kept his tone light. “Mr. Dieter, he just got back to school, don’t stress him out about taking fancy new classes already.”

Eren sent a look of thanks over to Armin when the blonde interrupted Dieter’s tangent. **Armin, you are a fucking life saver! Thank the fucking Lord you consider me worthy of your friendship!** Eren silently gave Armin a thousand thanks as the subject was lifted off of him and onto Dieter again. Soon enough the whole class was chattering about gossip around the school. Eren gravitated towards Armin to actually thank him for the distraction.

“Before you say anything,” Armin raised his hands in mock surrender, a victorious grin on his face. “... Know that I recorded your entire performance of Halo and that if you don't sit with me at lunch Levi gets to see the entire. Fudging. Thing.” **We already know I've won. Just go with it.**

Eren seemed to pale as soon as the words left Armin’s mouth. “You wouldn’t…..” Eren just trailed off knowing that Armin would gain nothing if he showed Levi the video. It would only be him at a loss… **so he would fucking do it.... “Am I currently being blackmailed to have my presence known at your lunch table?”** He asked quizzically and carefully, trying to read the situation at hand. **I do NOT want Levi to know that I can sing... nope, just another thing that he’d insult me with, that I sound like a girl when I sing.... Fuck it, I’ll sit with Armin at lunch, I guess... and that means I’ll have to eat, which means I’ll be throwing it all up again 7th period. Joy.** Eren tried to not look disheartened but he couldn’t get the picture out of his mind. He swallowed thickly. “I guess it’s okay” he muttered quietly.

...**Normally, when people talk or think about food, they don’t get that morose.** Armin quirked an eyebrow. “You alright, Eren? You look as if the thought of food disgusts you.”

Eren looked down at his hands. He shook his head. “It’s fine, I’m not going to be able to eat a whole lot though.” He told the other quietly. **Do not fucking ask another question Armin, I swear to god if I need to open myself up to another person besides Lathe today, I’m going to fucking lose it!**

**Touchy subject… Okay. I'll file that one for later. “That's cool. My friends won't mind.”**

Eren’s eyes widened a bit more. “Friends? Um... Who are these people?” He asked quietly, he was obviously nervous about being around other people.
“Connie Springer, Sasha Blouse, and Marco Bott. You'll meet Connie next period in German class. They're all really nice, don't worry.” Armin gave him a reassuring smile. We're all friendly people. Don't stress about it.

Eren nodded and looked at the clock. The bell rung almost instantly, making Eren jump a little in his seat. He got up along with Armin and followed the short blonde to their next class, where he would meet someone new.

Armin walked a bit faster than normal, throwing a glance over his shoulder to make sure he didn't lose Eren. “I just want us to get there a minute early so I can properly introduce you to Connie.” He's gonna like you, I can tell already.

Eren nodded and followed after quietly. He stood a few inches taller than Armin, mostly because he wasn’t slouched over… or limping because of his back pain. He headed inside the classroom with Armin as various people piled in. His eyes soon landed on the guy they were heading towards, a teen shorter than Armin. Or maybe they’re the same height? I can’t tell from here. Eren watched as Armin went up to the smaller, Yeah, at least an inch, man. He silently watched their exchange of a few words before Armin pointed him out to this ‘Connie’.

“Connie, this is Eren. Eren, this Connie. Connie’s on the football team, so he knows Levi.” Now do the thing where you become friends.

Eren watched Connie stretch out a hand towards him. He took it in his own larger, tanned hand. After that though, the teacher, Mr. Schultz, came in and greeted everyone. What should I do, they’re speaking my mother language…. What the fuck am I supposed to say that won’t tip it off? SHIT. Eren tried to stay quiet and let everyone else talk around the room. He didn’t know what to do so he just watched. This was basics to him, something easy, but he didn’t want anyone to really know he wasn’t from America, from a different country. Nope, they don’t need to know I’m different. I don’t need everyone to turn on me. <“Why does this have to be so hard?”> Eren muttered under his breath. He didn’t even realize he had let his fluent tongue get the better of him and speak in class. The teacher was on him in seconds.

<“Eren Yeager, you already know German?”>

That sentence alone had caused Eren to freeze up and swallow hard. How do I respond to that? I don’t want them to know… No, only Lathe knows… that’s too many people already. Eren opened his mouth to speak after a few moments. <“Yes, I know how to speak fluently.”> Maybe I can get by with just that?
<“That’s good to hear- a student who I can talk to in class, wonderful! I expect good grades from you, young man.”>

Did I just sign a contract to keep Mr. Schultz entertained during class?? Fuck me, that’s three fuck ups today and it’s only 4th period! Eren seemed to relax a bit though, no one really bothered with any prying questions. They understood that he was a fluent speaker, while the other students were learning basics. Mr. Schultz didn’t really bother him that much either, so Eren found the class relaxing for the most part. It went by pretty quickly, which led to the two of them saying their goodbyes to Connie and heading off to English.

“Hey Armin… What are we doing in English? I know we read Julius Caesar, but what are we actually doing besides reading?” He asked Armin quietly. English had never been one of Eren’s strong suits.

...um. “Eren, we finished Julius Caesar. We're doing theme discussion spanning pretty much the whole thing at this point.” He was quiet for a moment, before asking in a deadpan voice. “You didn't read it, did you.” It was more of a statement than a question.  

“Wait, what?” Eren asked in complete confusion. I don’t even understand what happened! First there was a lion in the street... and they didn’t kill it! Next there were some crazy dreams from a wise old man apparently.... Then I think a guy refused a crown.... But I think he wants it at the same time? And he had this party-guy who was by his side the whole time.... Didn’t like 100 different important people stab this wannabe guy? Then his party guy friend rants about it to the crowds... When the crowds gathered I have no fucking idea, they just kinda appeared. Then the city goes into chaos mode as party-guy summons up wannabe’s nephew to fight one of the hotshot stabbers. Yeah then people are like “On my honour...” and end up with a bunch of swords in their own guts.... Then I guess we parade them through the streets in some type of funeral thingy?? What the fuck was the point of this damn book again? Anyways... Short, abridged version... now Armin, I hope I understand enough to get through class. Which of course, he did infact know enough to at least understand some aspects of the class, though as the class continued he found himself more confused. Too many fucking names that sound too fucking similar! Eren let out a gasp in relief when they were let out of this confusing class.

“You looked like your brain was about to implode five minutes in. You doing alright?” Armin grinned at Eren’s very confused expression. That's what you get for not really reading the play. Or for not bothering with shmoop. ...Both.

Eren shook his head. “No, I read the book like three times, and I still don’t understand what the point is... I don’t understand the way it’s written either, it’s too confusing for me.” He said honestly to the other. They walked to the bustling cafeteria, Eren looking for the bald head which would indicate that Connie was sitting somewhere.
Armin pointed across the sea of students, waving. “He’s already got us a table. We sit kinda far away from the bigger tables. I don't see Sasha or Marco yet… scratch that, Sasha’s coming. Let’s get to our seats first before we try to say hi, alright? I'm going to head to the lunch line. Did you bring one, or are you coming with me?” Lunch is going to be... interesting, to say the least.

Eren nodded and followed Armin through the crowded section of the cafeteria. They passed Levi and Erwin’s table, thankfully not grabbing a lot of people’s attention. Eren sat down with his small container of salad. He was very quiet as he watched the other occupants with wide eyes, slightly fearful of the new people he was going to meet. Not fearful of them… No, fearful. I’m gonna fuck up again and everyone is gonna laugh and point fingers… Then I won’t be able to sit with Armin at lunch again.

“Hey, Connie! Eren’s gonna chill with us today, cool?” Armin smiled. This should all go rather well.

Connie nodded, grinning. “Of course! Go ahead Eren, sit wherever you like.” He motioned to the empty table.

Eren quietly nodded and he sat down two chairs from the left of Connie. He hoped that no one would sit next to him and that they would sit next to Connie. He put his small container of caesar salad down onto the table in front of them and he opened it carefully. Wait. I need a fork. Where's the table with all that sort of stuff? Eren looked around for what would be any semblance to a utensil station of sorts.

Connie noticed Eren looking all over the place. “What are you looking for?” He asked and wondered what he could be needing after Armin left. Though soon noticed, He doesn’t have a fork. “Forks and all the other things you’ll need are over there” Connie said pointing towards the end of the lunch line. He was waiting for Armin and Sasha to get back so Eren wouldn’t sit alone, so that he could go get his mountain of food.

I don’t want to leave this table until Armin comes back, but it would seem really weird if I don’t get up now to get a fork to eat….. Dammit. Eren nodded and thanked him quietly, going off to find the table, locating it where Connie said, at the end of the lunch line. He tried to make himself seem as invisible as possible, weaving through people carefully and quietly. He finally reached the small table and grabbed a plastic fork, turning to look for Connie’s table again. Shit… where is it? I don’t see Connie anymore. Fuck, where is it? My bag’s over there… FUCK, where is it? I knew I shouldn’t have left until Armin came back! FUCK IT!

He doesn’t remember where the table is, does he? Armin held tight to the tray in his right hand, patting Eren's elbow with his left to get his attention. “Eren, I've got my food. We can get back to the table. Connie got up, but we're over to the left, kinda near the back. I'll lead.” Armin led the
Eren watched Armin move and he followed after as close as he could. He fell behind a bit when they went through the crowd around Levi’s table. He stole a quick glance around, noticing that Levi was sitting beside Erwin chatting with him. Eren watched them for a few seconds before looking for Armin, soon finding the blonde and following after. He didn’t want to make too many people look at him. *Just follow Armin. Just follow Armin.* Eren followed the blonde and made it to the table a little bit after him. He sat down in front of his food, which happened to be next to Armin.

Connie left to go get his food since Eren was no longer alone at the table. “I’ll be back with food and Sasha.” he said robustly before he left to go to the lunch line.

Eren only watched before starting to pick at his already small salad.

“... that’s it? That’s a really small salad. If you're still hungry I have some extra fruit if you’d want it.” Armin gestured with his fork to Eren’s salad. *How are you not starving like the rest of the school population?*

Eren shook his head. “No, it’s really no big deal.” He tried to eat more than half of his salad, though soon found it close to impossible. “Thank you for the offer, but I’ll pass.” He tried to seem as calm as possible but he was panicking on the inside. *Shit, he fucking noticed.*

*You're panicking. Huh.* Armin nudged his elbow. “You look like you've just been caught committing a crime. It’s fine.” ...*still, though. I don't know what to make of this...* Armin spotted Marco from across the room, his light grey button-up as pristine as ever. Armin pointed him out to Eren. “That’s Marco in the grey shirt. He’s really nice. Quiet, though. You'll get along fine.” Armin tried to reassure Eren. *I have a feeling this’ll be alright.*

Eren only nodded and closed up his container and set it aside for now, he wouldn't be able to eat anything else, and he knew that. He watched as Marco came up to the table with his lunch in hand.

Marco slid into the seat across from Eren. “Hi, you must be Eren. It's a pleasure to meet you. I’m Marco. Marco Bott.” He smiled brightly at the both of them.

Eren smiled back, though it was a shy smile. “It’s nice to meet you too.” Eren said before he watched Connie and a girl return. *They have so much food, they each have three trays of food...*
How do they eat all of that? Eren stared at the two of them with wide eyes. Connie sat down next to Marco, in his original seat, and Sasha sat beside him on the other side. Eren watched with wide eyes as they started to dig into the huge amount of food they had.

“So, are you guys going to the football game this Friday?” Connie finally broke the silence at the table before shoving more food into his mouth. Sasha only nodded, but that was to be expected since the two of the eaters were a thing. But Eren didn’t know that. “There’s a pep rally after school in the gym before the game, if you can’t stay for the game.” Connie spoke after his mouth he was clear of food and he seemed insistent on Armin and Eren coming to either occasion.

Eren looked to Armin with wide eyes. The new people were a bit much to deal with, and very insistent… very insistent is an understatement, it’s like he’s pressuring us to go. Armin, help please! Eren silently begged to be helped out in a situation he had no idea what to do in.

Eren’s about to dissolve into panic if he doesn’t have an excuse. …Wait. That’s an excuse! “Hey Connie, Eren’s just getting back into the swing of things. I wouldn’t push it too much. He’d come if he wanted to and were up to it.” Armin tried to placate Connie. He can be overwhelming...

Connie nodded. “Alright, not this time, but we’ll drag him along sometime soon… Oh, I know! We can bring him next week to have him watch us kick some Sina ass!” Connie said excitedly.

Eren just watched as Connie and Sasha bickered about how their own team had in fact not beaten Sina’s football team in a number of matches against them. So Eren just remained quiet and watched. The two of them went back and forth for a long time. Sometimes Marco spoke up and brought a good point to the argument, and the two started off their bickering all over again. Eren didn’t really pay them much mind until Sasha looked over to his salad container. “Hey, Eren… Are you gonna eat that?” She asked and looked to his unfinished salad.

“Sasha! He’s new to the table! Don’t ask for his food yet!” Connie tried to reprimand his girlfriend. “Sorry, Eren, we were both cursed with bottomless pits as stomachs-” Connie stopped his sheepish rant when he saw Eren push his salad container towards Sasha.

“Ah! Thank you Eren! You’re awesome!” She said loudly, like there was no way to turn her volume down. She squeaked in joy as she got to eat the rest of Eren’s salad.

Eren took the contained back once it was empty and he didn’t speak again for the rest of the lunch period, which was pretty much done by that point. The bell to signal the next hour was coming sounded only a few minutes after that.
Armin stood, lifting his tray with one hand and bag with the other, pushing the chair back under the table with his foot. “To history! Mr. Hannes is teaching us about China. We're at the Han Dynasty. You should be fine.” Dumping his trash into a garbage can and leaving the tray, he led the way to class.

Eren nodded and stayed completely silent during class. Mr. Hannes didn’t even really notice the new addition to the class, he just started teaching once everyone was in a seat. He wrote notes on a whiteboard and answered questions, as hands were raised. Class was pretty quiet, and people took diligent notes, as expected from the honors class. Eren blended right in. He was silent, and he liked that he wasn’t noticed.

Before Armin knew it, the bell had rung, and they were already in math class. Geometry. Too many boring shapes. *I know how to do proofs, it’s not that hard.* He still took notes, though his mind wandered. *Eren really shut himself out of lunch today, I think… how does one ask about something like that? ...Dunno. Right now, more shapes. Joy.* The time passed too slowly for Armin’s liking. *Eren’s not even trying to raise his hand. But he finishes each question really quickly… Armin practically sighed in relief when the bell rang. I’m so done with this class.*

World religions and philosophy wasn’t exactly entertaining either, though Armin realized halfway through class that Eren had barely moved or done more than blink. *What is up with him? He’s miles away, that’s for sure. But why? He was fine until lunch. Armin blinked. Lunch. ...I’m not letting this go. We need to talk after class or something. He’s totally drawn into himself, and we’re not having that.*

The bell sounded, and everyone stood up to leave, ready to go home. Armin stood and picked up his bag, but Eren spoke before he could.

“Armin, could you come with me to the pharmacy on Trost? I don’t exactly know where it is.” His voice was as calm as ever. *Please say yes, I don’t want to go alone... Please say yes.*

Armin’s eyes widened a bit in surprise. “Of course. It's not that far from here. Let’s go.” *This is now happening.* Armin led him to a street to their left as they walked out the front door, walking down a street lined with small stores. *Just ask. Couldn’t hurt much.* “Eren, have you been doing okay? You seemed to clam up after lunch; You barely talked.”

Eren shook his head. “I’m not good with meeting new people... like, at all. I'm sorry if I worried you.” He hoped Armin would come into the pharmacy with him. They had gotten there pretty quickly. He looked at the door, swallowing hard, looking at the slips of paper in his hand. *There seems to be a lot of them... Fuck it, I can’t do this, I’m sorry Lathe.* Eren took a step back, like he was ready to turn around and bolt back home.
...That's a lot of paper. He needs that much stuff? Armin watched as Eren seemed ready to bail. Oh no no no no no, not happening. Armin gently put his hand on Eren’s shoulder, pushing open the door with the other and ushering Eren inside. “Well come on, we're not just standing outside and getting cold.” He made sure Eren got over the threshold, and crossed it himself, hearing the small chime of a bell over his head.

A man with short curly hair manned the counter, a coffee mug in one hand, typing on an ancient keyboard with another. He looked up as they entered, smiling brightly. “Hello! How can I help you?”

Armin brought Eren across the small store, pushing him in front of him. Do what you dragged me here for!

Eren tried to speak, find something to say. What do I tell him? Eren couldn’t think of anything to say, so instead opted for putting his stack of prescriptions on the counter for the man to see. He didn’t really know what to do or where to find the purple-haired male that Lathe had mentioned earlier in the day.

The blonde just stared at the small pile of papers. Isn't that handwriting… He noted the insignia in the corner. After a moment of silence, “Casper?” he called over his shoulder, past rows of boxes and jars.

A box hit the floor, followed by the man in question leaning out from behind one of the tall shelves. “Yeah?” He peered with dark eyes to the pile of papers on the counter, a light of recognition flitting past in them. “Right! One sec!” He quickly disappeared, soon bringing a brown bag with some things already in it to the counter, picking up the papers and shuffling through them. “I've got that, and that, that one’s on a shelf out front, I'll grab that in a second… oh, he mentioned one on the phone! I need that one too…” He turned on his heel to the shelf just behind him, skimming over the boxes and snatching one halfway down. Dropping it in the bag, the phone rang. The blonde picked up right away.

“Trost pharmaceuticals, how may I help you?” He listened for a moment. “He’s busy right now, helping someone with a pretty tall order.” The voice on the other end got a bit louder. “Okay, I'll get it then.” Another pause. “I won't let him, don't worry. I'll do it right now. Anything else while you think of it?” One more moment. “…that’s a very good idea, actually. Should I mark those as well? …Alright. Got it. And yes, we have the file, it’s open right in front of me. We did the math, adjusted the dosages, it’s all fine. Do you still need to talk to Casper, though?”

“Who needs to talk to me?” Casper took the phone out of his hand, holding it to his ear and
ignoring the following protests. The blonde soon just gave up, and went to the back shelves. “Hello? Oh hi! Yeah, I'm doing the thing.” He held the phone against his shoulder, flipping through the note papers. “Pretty sure I got everything you wrote down, and James is getting whatever you told him to get. It’s all marked, don't worry.” A pause. “Yes, in both cases. Yes, it’s big letters… I was about to give him the spiel.” He grinned. “It’s all taken care of.” He watched as James dropped two more things into the bag. “…good call, by the way. Is the date on that?” He inquired to James, who nodded. “Good. Now, is that everything you could possibly think of?” A second of silence. “Cool. I'll do the thing. …Uh, yeah, there is.” He eyed Armin. “…Uh.” He pulled the receiver from his mouth, addressing Armin. “What’s your name?”

Who’s he talking to? “Uh… Armin.”

“Armin.” He went right back to the person on the line, typing quickly in the computer. Lines of text filled the screen. “…yeah, he is. …You want me to do what now?” His eyebrows disappeared under his hair, and he looked at Armin. “…Alright.” He slowly took the phone, handing it to Armin over the counter. “…it’s for you.”

…who calls a pharmacy to try and talk to me. That’s not a thing… Armin took the phone, eyeing it with suspicion. He held it to his ear. “…Hello?”

“Hey Armin! It’s Lathe. I was your substitute teacher in chem this morning.”

…Why are you calling me. “…O-kay. What do you need?” This is already the weirdest phone call I’ve ever received.

“I know you're probably standing there next to Eren staring at a bag filled with all sorts of medicines and pills and stuff, pretty concerned. I’d just like you to know, now that you're in on this, that it’s all for his own good. Try not to bug him too much about it, alright?”

“Alright. I won't.” Much. “Anything else?”

“Yeah. Lemme talk to Eren.”

O-Kay. This is happening. Armin handed the phone to Eren, looking rather confused and amused. “It’s apparently for you.” Casper snickered behind the counter.
Eren took the phone from Armin, giving him another glance to try and decipher who the hell was on the other end. He swallowed hard. “H-Hello?” He asked quietly and his voice seemed timid thanks to the stutter reappearing.

“Hey kid! I’m glad I caught you! You doin’ okay? I know there’s a lot of stuff on the counter for you but don’t freak out, it’s really not that bad. Just make sure to listen to Casper and everything he tells you, alright?”

“A-alright… I can do that.” Eren’s voice seemed to have calmed down a bit already, with just a few words from Lathe. He swallowed hard. “D-do I need to take all of them, Lathe?” He asked quietly, like a child who didn’t want to take his medications because they tasted bad. There’s so many, I’m going to forget to take them… Or I’m going to overdose… shit, well an OD wouldn’t be that bad I guess…. I mean, it’s just me now….. Dad wouldn’t care at all….. Eren’s thoughts started to go more towards a suicidal way out of things before Lathe’s voice snapped him out.

“…Don't think like that, Eren. It's daunting, I know, but you have people who care about you and want you to get better. Most them you have to take daily, yes, but the nausea one’s for whenever you may need it and the burn cream’s for every other day. It is a lot. But we want you to get better.”

“B-but Lathe….” Eren trailed off knowing that Lathe was right and he couldn’t really argue against it. If Lathe was attempting to heal him, he would let the young man try and fix his broken and battered body… It’s the mental part that can’t be fixed…. But no one knows that. Eren just let out a small sigh and nodded, even though Lathe couldn’t see it. “Alright.” Eren mumbled the last word into the receiver.

“Good! I’m still going to need to check on you in the morning and make sure the medications don't conflict with each other, but because I never really know what I'm doing until I get to the school… yeah, I’ll just have to find your house and check on you before you leave for school. I’ll probably be knocking on your door at eight. Besides, you stole my kerchief. That’s a good enough reason as any to hunt you down.” His voice was filled with mischief. If we're going to start you on this path to getting better, we're going to do it right. “That a plan?”

Eren took a moment to take in Lathe’s words. “Yeah, that sounds good then…” Eren trailed off and looked to Armin and Casper. He hoped neither of them could hear their conversation. It would be so fucking embarrassing.

“Alright! I'll see you then. Now hand me back to Casper, please.”
“Okay.” Eren moved the phone from his ear and held it out to Casper before going to stand closer to Armin. *New people…. I don’t like them yet….*

“Now what? You’re so high-maintenance.” Casper joked. He listened, laughing. “That works. Alright. I’ll talk to you soon. Bye.” He put the phone back on the hook, addressing Eren and Armin. “One sec.” He walked through a door to his left onto the floor of the store, grabbing a jar of vitamins, some extra wraps and hooks, and a pill container with the different days of the week stamped onto their seven caps. He went back behind the counter, placing it on the counter below, where the two couldn’t see them. Taking a sharpie, he scribbled some numbers on the bottom of the bottle. “Alright. I have a speech to give. Eren, pay attention. This is important.”

“I hope you know what this is.” He held up the long plastic pill container, grinning as he nodded. “There are a lot of pills in this bag, so it’s easiest to use it and refill it at the beginning of the week. The only pill you will **not** put in here, and instead carry with you,” He held up one of the larger containers. “…are these, for nausea, to be taken whenever needed. Other than that, it’s pretty simple. One of each, including the vitamins, every day in the morning when you wake up, with a glass of water, or as much as you can manage. These,” He lifted a bottle with a magenta label. “…are morphine tablets. You can take a second one at lunch time if you feel you need it, so I’d have these on you as well. And these,” The second-largest bottle of the group was lifted, a sky-blue label on the front. “Will also help with your nightmares. Take one a half hour before you go to bed. This cream in the silver tube is for any burns, and you really only need to apply it every other day or so, when you change your wrappings. There’s stuff in here too for dry skin, and for cleaning cuts...And don’t worry about memorizing all this- the bottles have big labels with exactly what to do on them, and there’s a sheet in here with everything I just told you.

*Well, now Armin knows I’m in a lot of pain, I've got burns on my body, I have nightmares, and that I need nausea pills to eat... well, hopefully he won’t go around and tell everyone at school. When he doesn’t, I will be his best friend for longer than life.*

*...That’s a lot. **That’s how bad it is?** My god… Armin just brought his hand up to rest of Eren’s shoulder, seeing his distress. You can trust me to know this. I’m not going to go telling anyone all that.*

Casper quietly finished packing the bottles and things back up, folding the top over twice and stapling it shut. He slid it over to Eren, smiling softly. “Here you go, Eren. You’ll be alright.” There was a reassuring light in his eye. *Latre’s watching out for you. There’s no way you won’t be alright.*

Eren nodded his thanks to Casper. He took the large bag of pills and he looked over to Armin. “Ready to go home?” He asked quietly to the other. He was really quiet, and he seemed to be a little on edge as they stayed there longer.
“Yeah, of course. Let’s go. Thanks Casper, James!” Armin waved goodbye to the two of them, thankful for their friendliness.

The two of them walked home in silence, Armin deciding to follow Eren all the way home and walk the extra two miles to make sure that Eren did in fact make it inside his house. Eren put his bookbag near his desk, pulling out the little homework he had. He finished it rather quickly before going to sort out his pills.
Chapter Twelve: Introduction Arc Part 3: To Enlist an Army

Chapter Summary

This chapter got screwed up when recovered... sorry guys

Lathe was a real songbird.

Whistling a sweet old tune, he walked across the parking lot to the field, his visibly metal-toed boots clicking quietly on the asphalt. His bag, put back in order after this morning's ordeal, bounced lightly against his hip, his left arm holding the strap at the front end. He watched the few remaining leaves on the trees sway in the wind, many more fallen leaves haphazardly flying with the wind across the lot, swirling around him before dancing off elsewhere. One hand came up to tug at his collar.

I'm going to need to bring my scarf soon- especially with it getting windy.

He ran his fingers through his hair, looking more unruly than usual with the wind. He soon returned to skimming the faraway faces of the football players, just starting to pack up.

It isn't going to be easy to tell the kid... but I need to. He deserves to know what's wrong, and how we're aiming to fix all of it.

He thought of his conversation with Casper, and with Armin.

That's one person enlisted for the cause, and technically Armin's in on it now, since he was there for the whole speech, so I'm going to be optimistic and make it two. Well, counting me, technically three. The lunch ladies would then make eight, and Levi...

Lathe found his face in the group.

...will hopefully make nine.

Lathe ceased his whistling on a low note, getting close enough to be noticed as heading for the group, and not for a car. Lathe stepped onto the field, studying the group as some of the jocks glanced up, watching him approach.
I don't want to attract too much attention. Play it cool, and don't be suspicious. Out of character equals suspicious.

Lathe grinned cheekily as he got close, noting some of the players finished with packing lingering, unsure if he needed them.

"At ease. I'm just here for Ackerman."

Levi looked up at his name, surprise scripted in his eyes.

Why me?

He zipped his bag, his eyes soon filled with worry.

...is it Eren? He

was

kept after class, so...

Levi hoisted his bag over his shoulder, trying to remain calm.

It's probably nothing.

"Yes, Mr. Quo?"

"It's Lathe. I'm not big on titles."

Does

everyone

think I say 'call me whatever the hell you want' for funsies?

"...Lathe. What do you need me for?"

Is it Eren please don't be Eren
"Come on, let's walk. Do you have a ride to catch?" Lathe ushered Levi onward, walking off the field and apart from the others, letting his thumbs catch in his pockets, still holding onto the front strap of his bag.

"...No, I don't. I normally just walk back to my apartment from here. It's two minutes away." **Oh no.**

"Alright. My bike's parked up here, we'll just wander over." *Here goes nothing.* "Levi, this is regarding Eren. Don't panic please, he's alright." He smiled reassuringly at him. "I know you two are involved, so I thought you had a right to know why I kept him after class and what I know from a medical standpoint."

...Involved? *But, we're not... or are we?* Levi stuttered, looking for the right words. "I don't really think you could say we're... **involved,** I mean... It's not like I'm his..." Levi gulped nervously. "...I'm not his... his **boyfriend** or anything..." *...why am I telling you this?*

...**this whole thing is too cute.**"Levi, even if you're not official, I saw you holding hands with him under the table for practically the entirety of class."

Levi could feel himself start to blush, on the defensive. "He was going to have a panic attack!"

"And I am sorry about that. I didn't know he had a thing about fire. But even so," Lathe watched Levi's eyes. "I know you spent at **least** last night at his house." Lathe grinned as Levi flushed scarlet. *Gotta ch.*

Levi hid his burning face in his hands, muffling his voice. *Noooooooo... This is not* okay... no one should've known about that. "...How do you..."

Lathe chuckled. "Levi, it's alright. It's cute, honestly. But that's besides the point. The point **being,**" His tone softened. "Eren means a lot to you. And you mean a lot to him." Lathe took a deep breath. "Which is why I need your help."

...**what.**"What do you mean?" Levi brought his hands away from his face, looking at Lathe with worry. **What happened...**

Lathe sounded very serious. "I kept Eren after class because I could tell he was in distress... and I could tell at least his arms weren't exactly doing very well." He studied Levi's blank face, returning his gaze to the ground. "He ended up staying for the entirety of second period in the classroom for an impromptu medical evaluation. And the short of it is, he needs help. A lot of it. Not only do you deserve to know about it, but I hope you'll help wage the war for Eren's well being."

*The thing with a lot of teenagers these days is that they can be much more mature than they let on, so please, do me a favor and be one of them.*

They stopped in front of a gleaming red Harley, classic and eye-catching. But Levi was too worried to appreciate the bike. "...What **exactly** is wrong?"

Lathe took off his messenger bag, placing it on the seat of the bike next to a black helmet, and
turned back to him, leaning carefully on it. "A lot, and it won't do any good to dance around it all, so brace yourself. Eren has PTSD, is severely malnourished and an insomniac, mostly due to recurring nightmares as a result of said PTSD, which your presence last night staved off. He has depression, and countless physical injuries, which his depression... adds to." He looked at Levi's broken expression, knowing he understood. "I know he has some sort of knife in his backpack— one thing you should do is get rid of it. Or them. Any." Lathe shivered at the thought of Eren gagged. "But more importantly, he's going to be on a cocktail of drugs for a bit. Check and make sure he's taking them as he should, okay? The instructions should be rather clear on the bottles, and the pharmacist should have given him the spiel by now, but just make sure for me that they're not empty way before or after the date on the bottom of the bottles. Just shake them a bit and make sure something's left when you're around. And most importantly, food. He needs to start building up to eating three meals a day again. I don't care if it's breakfast time and he can't stomach more than one lettuce leaf. Make him eat the damn lettuce leaf. We need to train his body to recognize normal eating times again. Armin's kinda-sorta in on all this— well, all I really know that he knows is that Eren needs a lot of medications. He went with him to the pharmacy to get everything. I wouldn't worry about him spilling any of it. And the lunch ladies know to offer him light stuff, encourage him to eat something whenever he goes through the line. I'm going to be around for anything he needs— really. Anything. I just hope that everything works out. But you really do mean a lot to him, and he's being really hard on himself about all of this. Help him keep his head up. Can you do that?" Lathe ended his speech with a hopeful look.

...That is so much... Levi was silent for a moment, eyes skimming the ground, taking this all in. ...He needs to get better: “...Of course I can. I can do that.” He looked up from his shoes, looking Lathe in the eyes. If Eren trusted you enough and told you enough to determine all that, then I trust you.

Lathe gave him a toothy grin, relieved. This'll work. “Glad to hear that, Levi. And just in case, let me put my number in your phone. If something were to happen, I'm on call 24/7.”

That's a good idea. Levi reached into his pocket, pulling out his phone. Pressing a few buttons, he handed it to Lathe.

Lathe began tapping away. Okay, phone number... I'll just leave my name as Lathe in his contacts, it'll make things less confusing for times of emergency, God forbid there ever really is one... and... sent! Now I have his number in my phone. Handing the phone back to Levi, he smirked. “If it’s something dire, call me. If I hear it ringing, I'll drop everything and find you two. Text first for smaller stuff, alright? I'll let you go; You probably have homework to do.” He winked. “Good luck with the bf, by the way.” He snickered as Levi blushed again, turning to latch his bag in place near the rear wheel. He grabbed the helmet off the seat. “I dunno when I'll see you around again, because I never know where I'm going to be until I walk in. If you see me, make sure to say hi, cool?” He swung his leg over the bike, rifling in his pocket for the keys.
Levi took a step back, only now actually registering the fact his teacher rode a **Harley**. “S-sure, Lathe.” He gave him room to start the bike, getting one last smirk before the black helmet hid Lathe’s face, the kickstand going up. He waved as the bike moved from it’s space near the field, out toward the back exit. **That. Is a kickass bike.** His head still spinning with everything dumped on him, he headed to his apartment to ditch his stuff. **To visit Eren or not to visit Eren…**

**That is the question.**

Eren was quiet… Actually the whole house was quiet. He swallowed looking down at the mess of pills on his barren kitchen table. He had lined everything up, taking out his nausea pills separately. He put them aside, clear of the container he was filling up. Eren also separated his sleeping pills from everything as well. **Don’t want to take those in the morning.** He took the container and opened all the flaps for the container and started filling them with vitamins. He sighed once he was done, he looked at the morphine bottle. He slowly opened it. **I could end it here, surely these are strong enough to kill me, I probably wouldn’t even need to take the whole bottle. I could do it… No one would care… Armin could show Levi the video, Levi could go back to hanging around with the popular crowd and get a new Chemistry partner. He really wanted that, I bet he would be happy that he wouldn’t need to bother with me. I’m being selfish in wanting him to stay with me.** Eren watched with solemn eyes, all the brightness from before, leaving them. They were now a dull shade of teal. He watched as the pills rolled out of the bottle, he had way more than seven in his hand… He was filling it. **Morphine’s magic… It’ll make me disappear…** Eren’s shaky hand lifted the obscene amount of pills towards his mouth, only it never made it. He opened his closed eyes and looked up to see cold silver eyes staring down at him.

**Fuck when did Levi get in here?** Eren’s ears were ringing as he moved to snatch his hand from Levi’s grasp, effectively dumping the large amount of pills all over the clean floor. He looked down watching them. **Shit, why is he so quiet? Why’s Levi not saying anything? Why is he here? Why did he have to stop me? Why?** Eren swallowed thickly and got off the chair to start picking them up.

**Now wait just a goddamned second.** Levi stepped around the table and caught Eren in his arms before he could do anything more than stand up. He just pulled him into his chest, one arm around his waist, the other coming up to tangle in his hair, bowing his head and resting his forehead on Eren’s shoulder. **I need you to listen to me first.** “Eren.” His voice was very quiet. “... please.” It was all he could think of to say, but there was so much force behind it. Eren heard the force behind Levi’s words. “Levi, let me go” he said calmly. He was struggling weakly to get out of Levi’s grasp. “Levi, let go!” He struggled weakly. Levi was holding onto him tightly, and it made him feel cramped in a small space. His eyes had become fearful all over again. He knew Levi knew that he was trying to kill himself with the pills now. **“Levi… Let… Go”** his
voice cracked, he had started crying, he didn’t want Levi to be here. *How did he get in?*

...*I don't want to let go of you... I can’t... I just walked in on you... trying to...* Levi softly ran his fingers through Eren’s hair. *He... if I hadn't taken that key, he...* Levi let out a shaky breath, loosening his grip in the slightest, but not letting him go. “Eren, I...” His voice broke, and he willed himself not to break down. *No. You can't fall apart now. Stay with me here, Levi. He's okay now, you got here in time. For now, he's fine.*

Eren started to shake in his arms. “Let go, let go” he begged and struggled more. He moved a little too much and he felt the skin on his back tear in a new spot. He let out a shrill cry of pain and almost immediately slumped down in Levi’s arms. He started crying profusely; It hurt so much more with the pills starting to wear out. He could feel the blood starting to soak into his bandages. He cried out in more pain, finally becoming completely still in Levi’s arms. He was crying heavily, it hurt more without the morphine because he could now feel every single crack in his back, not just the new one.

*Shit.* Levi moved to catch Eren’s limp form, trying to pick him up and avoid his back at the same time. *The couch. I need to set him on the couch.* Levi tried to move Eren to the living room, giving up on trying to half-drag him after a moment and finally just picking him up bridal-style. *That’s gotta hurt, but I need to get you somewhere better than a kitchen floor.* Levi saw Eren’s tears, wishing he had a free hand to wipe them away from his face. He made large strides to the couch, setting him down very carefully, moving the few pillows there so he could get Eren to lay down on his front. *Now what now what now what uh... didn't Lathe say earlier he had pain meds? Levi picked his way back to the table, avoiding stepping on pills and seeing the sheet on the table. He skimmed it quickly. Morphine in the magenta bottle... wait. He looked at the floor. That’s what those are. He quickly read what was next to it. Take as needed... so, one? Maybe? Better too little than too much; He can always have another. He snatched one from the floor, dusting it off and and moving to find a glass in the cupboards, filling the first one he saw with water. He moved back to Eren’s side again. “Eren, you need to take this. It'll help.” He held out the small magenta pill. *Please, just this.*

Eren held out a shaky hand and he took the magenta pill. He took it, and drank some water with it to help it go down. He was crying harder as he moved, and the smell of blood started to surface in the room. He was still crying out in pain every time he moved.

*This is a lot worse than I think it is, isn't it. I need to know how bad it is.* Levi ghosted one hand near the hem of Eren’s sweatshirt, asking. “Eren, I need to see how bad it is. We need you out of this sweatshirt, okay?” *Remain calm. You need to be calm for the both of you right now.*

Eren could only nod. He knew that it would be really painful to have it removed, but he knew he had been bleeding through his bandages and in one of the worse spots it was bleeding through his shirt, soaking it thoroughly.
Okay. You can do this. You can do this. Levi started by pulling his sleeves straight, making sure the hooks in his arm wraps wouldn't catch. He started from his waist and shifted it slowly upward and over his head, pulling the bunches smooth every few inches. It was slow going, and Levi could see the few flecks of blood on the pads of his fingers before he was hit with the smell. Levi swallowed hard. Oh my god. Levi finished getting the dark fabric over Eren’s head, barely able to see the dark outlines of large blood spots all over his black shirt. There’s so much blood and the pain meds haven’t kicked in yet and I don’t know if Eren can keep moving to get rid of his shirt and…

Lathe. Call Lathe. You have his number. He’s know what to do. He has to know.

Levi hurriedly reached for his phone, fumbling with it before finding his contact and pressing the call button. He held it to his ear, silently panicking. It picked up in one ring.

“I'm coming, kid. Sit tight.”

The call ended at that. Levi just looked at his phone, looked to Eren, looked back to his phone.

Fuck, did he just call Lathe? No, he’s gonna be pissed at me… He’s gonna yell, he’s gonna hit me. Eren was starting to freak out for another reason. He didn’t want to have Lathe beat him… No, he can’t… he can’t come…. No please anything but that. “Please.” Eren begged Levi. “Don’t let him in…” He begged, reaching out for the other teen, but he cried out in more pain. One of the outlines got even bigger on the back of his shirt. He cried out; It was a gut-wrenching noise, one that made you want to stop whatever you were doing and help the poor kid. Eren was crying profusely, the wound on his back was much larger than any of them, stretching from one shoulder all the way down his back to the third degree burns and opening them up as well. The tears kept falling, and the pain pills weren’t kicking in yet.

Levi turned his head towards the front of the house, hearing the roar of a motorcycle engine get closer and closer. It stopped abruptly in front of the house, hearing footsteps run to the front door, Lathe punching it with the side of his fist once, hard, before opening it and scanning the front rooms.

He saw the magenta dots scattered all over the floor of the kitchen, the cold of the inside, the darkness that seemed to loom over him, and the barrenness of the house. He heard shifting to his left, and swung the door shut behind him without looking back to it, bag in hand and rushing to Eren’s side in an instant. He unwound his scarf from his neck and tossed it behind him quickly, dropping his bag and rolling up his sleeves, walking swiftly into the kitchen to wash his hands. His shoes clicked on the tile, a pill or two scattering as he kicked them. He was done in an instant, back to rifling through his bag. He assessed the situation, and removed a pair of scissors from his bag.
He turned to Levi. He spoke with a gentle tone. “Levi, how about you clean up those pills from the kitchen? I've got him.” Lathe turned to Eren, carding his fingers through his hair. “You're going to be fine, Eren. Don't worry. Either of you.”

Levi could only nod and turn to find a broom, stunned at this development. ...*He'll be... alright.* Levi just swept the floor of the kitchen slowly, staring miles away.

Lathe addressed Eren, voice apologetic. “I can't let you move any more than you absolutely have to, kid. I hope this wasn't your favorite shirt.” Before Eren could question that, Lathe cut the back of the shirt off, removing it completely so he could get to his entire back. He quickly moved from his position to the kitchen, dropping the soaked fabric in the sink. He returned to do the same with the bandages, cutting off strip after strip to reveal his whole back, using the parts still relatively untouched to clear some of the blood and let him see his wounds better. *That one long gash up his entire back is the real culprit here...* He pressed the lump of bandages against the wound to hopefully staunch some of the bleeding. ...*It's pretty deep, too...* It clicked. *He needs stitches.*

Eren let out a shrill screech when his back was touched again. He was close to having another panic attack because of the pain. He was freaking out; this was not about to go smoothly. Eren needed to be calmed down. Eren screamed, again, his whole body shaking and trying to get away from Lathe’s touches.

“Levi, we need you in here.” Lathe called to him in the kitchen, hearing the broom immediately clatter to the floor. He watched Levi immediately fall to his knees next to him, looking at Eren’s wounds in terror.

...*Holy fuck.* “Eren...” *Remember. Calm.* He turned back to Lathe, swallowing down his fear. “What do you need me to do?”

*You're quite the brave one. I admire that.* Lathe looked him dead in the eye. “I need to give Eren stitches. I'll give him some more morphine and use a bit of numbing cream, but it's not going to be enough, and I don't want to knock him out. It's not at all safe. It’s your job to keep him calm, and still enough that I can work.” Lathe had a stony expression.

*Morphine.* “I already gave him a morphine tablet... right before I called you.” *Please tell me that was okay*

Lathe nodded. “They really can be taken on a situational basis. If he needs them, he can take them. I know he had three about... ten hours ago. I've got fresh ones in my bag. One more should be okay, and they'll start kicking in soon enough. Is that his glass on the table?” Lathe dug in his bag
with his free hand, nodding to the empty glass sitting on the coffee table.

“Yeah. I'll get more water.” Levi stood, hurriedly going to fill it from the tap.

Lathe removed a small metal box, opening it and digging around, moving a spool of thread and a case with curved needles onto it’s lid. He reached into his bag for the fresh morphine pills, tossing it to Levi as he came back into the room. “One.” He looked to the small pile of blood-soaked bandages, moving his arm quickly off of it to thread a needle, tying a tight knot at the end. *This isn't going to be pretty. Where's my gauze...*

Levi knelt back down next to Eren, putting the glass on the floor before opening the bottle and taking out one of the pills inside. He coaxed Eren, trying to get him to swallow it, ready to help him drink the water.

Eren cried out and struggled to move away from Lathe’s hands. He was in fear. He was remembering all the times his father stitched him up, doing a horrible job so that the gashes got infected. Eren was so afraid, he looked to the pill and his mind thought of it as the anesthetic his father had used to knock him out to rape him. He started to cry even harder and struggled to move away, effectively opening his wounds further, letting a horrible sound rip from his throat in an attempt to stave off the pain.

*You just need to work and get this done with. Levi has his job, and it’s something only he can do.* Lathe reached for fresh gauze, taking the stained bandages and rising quickly to get rid of them in the sink. He returned, immediately putting gentle pressure back on his wound, rummaging for numbing cream. He found latex gloves in his bag, putting them on quickly and applying the cream around the wound with those on so that he could still sew, getting as close to the edge of the wound as he could. Everything besides Eren’s wound, he completely blocked out.

Levi looked to Lathe for help, finding none. *He's gone into full-on Doctor mode. A chandelier could fall to the floor a foot away from him and shatter, and he wouldn't notice.* He focused on Eren, seeing the panic in his eyes. *...Just do what you think is right. It doesn't matter that Lathe is right there. Just act.* Levi brought his left hand up hold Eren’s hand closest to him, his right running softly through his hair, petting behind his ear, cradling the back of his neck. *I've got you. You're alright. ...then tell him that because he's no psychic!* “Eren, I've got you. Look at me.” Levi moved to lock eyes with Eren, seeing so much pain and fear. He wiped his tears away with his thumb. “We've got you. Lathe is going to sew you back up, and it might not be painless, but you're going to be only better after this.” Levi leaned forward, pressing his lips to his forehead. He mumbled into his hair. “I've got you.” Levi glanced to his arm as something red was draped over his arm. *... A kerchief. Huh. We may need that.*
The kid had it in his pocket. He’s probably going to still need it for now. Lathe just put away the numbing cream, retrieving the curved needle and moving the topmost piece of gauze to reveal the beginning of the huge gash. This is not going to be pretty... but we need to. He nodded to Levi, and started the line of stitches, moving as fast as he could, pressing his arm down against the gauze to keep it pressurized as he went- and to try and keep Eren from moving.

Eren started to thrash as soon he understood what was happening. He started screaming. “No! Daddy! Stop! I promise I'll be a good boy! I promise!” He cried and he managed to get out of Lathe’s grasp, off the couch and scrambled across the room, leaving a trail of blood in his path, cut bandages falling from his stomach. His eyes had glazed over, his panic attack in full swing. “I'll be a good boy” he cried quietly and reached to hug himself in the corner of the room, so afraid of the two figures in front of him.

Lathe had somehow managed to catch the thread and the scissors as Eren passed him, snipping it In a flash of silver and catching the needle before it hit the floor. He couldn't let that complicate things even further. He put down his tools in the lid of the surgical box and spoke to Levi, his eyes not leaving Eren’s trembling form. “I really don't want to knock him out. He's lost too much blood for that, and at this point, he’d be so mentally scarred from that he’d scream in terror every time he sees me. Tying him down isn't an option either. But he needs to calm down. Do you have any ideas? I don't know much we can do with him cornered like that…” Lathe trailed off. Words aren't going to get through to him, I don't think. Then what…”

Levi just stared at Eren. “I… I don't think I have any.”

They just stood there for a moment, watching Eren fall apart.

That's when Lathe started to sing.

His voice was soft and deep, a gentle smile on his face, and he focused very intently on Eren’s expression, watching how it changed as the slow, foreign words left his tongue.

Der Mond ist aufgegangen,
Die goldnen Sternlein prangen
Am Himmel hell und klar;
Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget,
Und aus den Wiesen steigt
Der weiße Nebel wunderbar.
Wie ist die Welt so stille,
Und in der Dämmerung Hülle
So traulich und so hold!
Als eine stille Kammer,
Wo ihr des Tages Jammer
Verschlafen und vergessen sollt.

Eren listened to Lathe with shocked ears. He listened, to Lathe singing his mother’s favorite song. He slowly started to relax as he heard the words he thought he would never hear again. He felt the rush of warm tears roll down his cheeks. He started to crawl towards them, crying softly. But he continued to sing the rest of the words Lathe had sung just moments before.

Seht ihr den Mond dort stehen?
Er ist nur halb zu sehen,
Und ist doch rund und schön!
So sind wohl manche Sachen,
Die wir getrost belachen,
Weil unsere Augen sie nicht sehn.

Wir stolze Menschenkinder
Sind eitel arme Sünder
Und wissen gar nicht viel;
Wir spinnen Luftgespinste
Und suchen viele Künste
Und kommen weiter von dem Ziel.

Eren had finally made it to Lathe and clung to his shirt like a panicked child. He couldn’t feel anything on his back thanks to the morphine, and he was finally out of his panicked state. He whimpered though and held onto him like a child. He couldn’t feel a majority of his back, but the throbbing sensation was still there. He wanted them to make it go away. He was much calmer now, his mind replaced with thoughts of his gentle mother, and he wanted more.
Lathe had slowly lowered himself to sit on the floor, feeling for the red silk Levi had dropped, pulling Eren into him, careful of his back. *We need to finish this.* Wiping his tears away gently with the red fabric, he spoke. “Eren, I need to finish getting your back fixed up, okay? It’ll all be done before you know it.”

Eren nodded but still clung to him like a child. “Mommy?” He asked with hopeful eyes. He wanted his Mom, his mind was still in shambles, and with the return of his mother’s favorite song, he wanted to see his mother again, only he couldn’t. Though that information had to be kept under wraps for risk of him losing it again.

Levi just stared at Lathe, cradling Eren and mumbling to him in a language he didn't understand. **HOW THE FUCK DID HE DO THAT?! Eren goes from panicked and in shambles in the corner to a calm, crying mess in Lathe’s arms in two minutes! That song... What was it? It’s beautiful, and obviously not English... Where would he have learned that?**

*Do you have to keep breaking my heart, kid? Mum's... “Mommy will be home soon, Eren. But we need to get you stitched up. Will you let me?” It’s the blood loss. I don’t have much time, do I? He held out his hand for Eren to take, to pull them from the floor. I don't know what else I'm supposed to tell you...**

Eren nodded and released his grip from Lathe and turned his attention to Levi instead. He held onto him, expecting to be held back. He was completely unaware of how much blood he was in fact losing. His mind was still in complete disarray. Eren kept his grip on Levi’s shirt and sniffled as he curled up to him. “I want mommy...” He murmured and his tongue was slipping, showing off a thick accent of sorts.

Lathe motioned frantically to Levi. **COUCH. NOW.** Lathe moved with Levi to steer Eren back onto his stomach on the couch, letting him ramble on in either German or English so accented it wasn’t really English anymore. Lathe picked the needle back up and rethreaded it, stopping to tie off the loose ends he first left. He snipped the ends, and picked up the curved needle, sending Levi a pointed look before beginning once more, pressing gauze back down on to the gash with his arm and sewing as quickly as he could manage while still being accurate and neat. It was over in less than two minutes, the ends of the knot where the gash stopped and the burn began cut. **Burns, you don't stitch that. I put burn cream on it this morning... I just need to wrap that carefully with extra gauze padding and leave it. That's all I can do for that.** Lathe fished more gauze from his bag, placing it over the stitches before reaching for wraps. He needs to be off his stomach for this, but his back needs to be level... Hands and knees. **Come on... “Help me get him on his hands and knees so I can wrap him correctly.”** He moved to guide Eren’s waist up.

Levi just did as he was told, watching shocked as Eren quietly ranted, getting his chest off the
couch. Lathe moved impossibly fast, hooking the bandages together over his shoulder quickly and pinning the gauze in place. He barely needed three rolls to finish it.

Lathe let Eren collapse back onto the couch giggling, hiccuping and looking around the room in drunken mirth, his eyes soon glazing over. They fluttered shut, his smile fading as he drifted into sleep.

Levi fell back on his heels, exhausted. *It’s over.*

It was not. Lathe, though he stopped for a moment, now had wide eyes as he studied Eren, asleep. *Asleep. He’s* asleep. *Oh no no no no no…* He immediately dug for a larger metal case, looking around the room frantically. He spotted a floor lamp across the room with a twist switch just under it’s globe. *Perfect.* “Levi, I need that floor lamp over here, about where you're sitting. *Fast.*” He clicked the box open, a plastic IV of isotonic saline solution sitting inside. *He’s lost so much blood… He’s asleep, sure, but we need him to wake up too.* He waited for Levi to set down the unplugged light before rolling Eren onto his back with his help, dangling the IV from the switch of the light and inserting the needle in Eren’s arm, padding it with gauze and taping it down. Only then did he stop, running his hands through his hair and letting out a ragged breath, trying to explain. “Isotonic saline solution. For the blood he lost.” He tried to process what just happened. ... *Now. Answers.* “Levi, we need to talk about everything that just occurred.” He sounded tired, much older than he really was. *I need to sit down. Eh, it’s a nice carpet. …where it isn’t covered in blood.* He sat down across from Levi.

Levi just looked at him with dulled eyes. *I'm too tired… So much has happened…* “Lathe, I-” his voice cracked, but he shook his head, trying desperately to clear it. *This is important. You can handle this.* He looked up again, meeting Lathe’s gaze. “...Yeah?”

“Why was there morphine all over the kitchen floor?” He spoke quietly, evenly.

*The pills… so many of them…* “He-” Levi gulped, trying to breathe. *Just say it. Get it out.* “He tried to take it all at once. I stopped him.” Levi felt a tear streak down his cheek, hiding his face in his hands. He took in a shaking breath.

... *That was a lot of pills to give to one depressed, insecure teenager. Shit. I'll change around how many doses of what he has available to him later. But now…* Lathe shifted over to be next to Levi, putting an arm around his shoulders. He rubbed his arm gently. “He’s going to be okay now. You getting here in time was an absolute miracle. He’s not going back to school tomorrow though, I know that much; He lost so much blood. He needs to stay put for a little bit. But he’s going to get better. Much better.”
Levi rubbed at his eyes with his sleeve, letting himself lean against Lathe, his head on his shoulder, staring ahead of him at nothing in particular. ...that song was lovely… what was it? “Lathe?” His voice was small. “That song… what was it?”

Lathe’s eyes roamed the floor, saddened. “Der Mond ist aufgegangen. It's German. Eren’s mother…” He trailed off, pondering a moment. He should know at least something. He started again. “Eren’s originally from Germany, I don't know if you know that. His mother, she loved music. She loved to sing, play instruments like the piano… Eren got his love of music from her. I knew only one of the more popular German songs that was slower than your ordinary pop song. I guess…” He watched Eren’s chest rise and fall. “...He must have heard it before.”

Levi’s brow furrowed. “If he knew German, why doesn't he have an accent? You'd never be able to tell…”

Lathe sighed. “That was the point. Coming to America, learning English, he didn't want to be teased for talking oddly any more than he already was for not knowing a lick of English to begin with.”

Levi understood that. He looked off into space, remembering one more thing. “His mother… he's never talked about her before. Where is she?”

Lathe was quiet.

...Oh. “...she isn't coming home, is she?”

The silence lasted a minute more, Lathe’s voice, heavy with fatigue, finally breaking it. “...No.”

Lathe just started talking, about the Mac n’ Cheese, his mother's death, blaming himself for it and being blamed by his father. Lathe ghosted over the specifics, but he got the idea.

“So that’s why Grisha always beat Eren? Enough to put him in the hospital? Just because he blamed his own child for murdering his wife?” Levi finally felt like all the pieces fit into place regarding Eren’s mysterious past. Now he knew almost everything about the boy. “I wish I would’ve got to him that morning… Maybe it wouldn't have turned out this way.” Levi’s voice was cracking as he thought of the ‘what if’s. He struggled to keep himself calm, but he knew better than to break down. No, I can’t risk waking Eren up, not when he’s gotten to sleep after this
ordeal.

...more ‘what if’s. There are always so many of those. “What are you going on about, Levi?” Lathe quirked an eyebrow at his mumbling.

Levi looked over to Eren’s sleeping frame on the couch. “Well, he’s my lab partner for chem… So after class I gave him my number and threatened that if he didn’t give me the notes I would beat him up….” Levi paused closing his own eyes and running a pale hand through his dark hair. I sound like a complete douche… Well I guess I kinda was until I spent 5 weeks staring at his sleeping face. “I was pissed at first because he didn’t send me the notes we took for our lab- I didn’t get anything from him… I got a call at 3:07 in the morning that night…. I thought it was just Erwin looking for a ride home after getting drunk off his ass. I thought that because my phone didn’t recognize the number-” Levi’s voice cracked a little as the events of that night played over in his head. No, be strong… Lathe should know how much of an asshole you are… I mean, really. I don’t see how the Brat could trust me after what I did. “It wasn’t Erwin… It was Eren, and his voice sounded hurt… But I thought it might have been Eren who was drunk and looking for a ride. I didn’t realize that he needed to go to a hospital. And I yelled at him, because I was pissed at him for waking me up, I even offered to come pick him up from wherever the hell he was, but he hung up, and he didn’t text me again.” Levi ran another hand through his hair before he put it on the ground to straighten out his back a little. He noticed that Eren’s figure was shifting a bit. “Lathe, he’s gonna wake up soon.” He warned knowing Eren might panic as soon as he woke up. But Levi, that happened when you were in bed with him… He panicked be cause of that. Yeah, but it’s safer to prepare for it then be sorry later!

Lathe tucked his legs under him, shifting forward and placing a gentle hand over where the IV entered Eren’s arm. “We can’t have him freaking out and hurting himself with this; he needs to keep this in.” Lathe motioned to his right with his head. “Get on my other side, and hold his hand. If he starts freaking out as much as he first did with the stitches, pin his legs. I’ll get his arms and start singing again. Hopefully he won’t be delirious this time.” Lathe watched Eren’s face for shifting. “We all need to talk.”

Levi moved to his knees, getting to Lathe’s right and taking Eren’s hand. He ran his thumb over the knuckles lightly, waiting and ready to act.

Eren’s eyes started to flutter open a few minutes after he felt the pressure on his right arm. He felt someone holding his hand and he wondered what the hell was going on. He cracked open his eyes and felt like a ton of bricks had hit him. This is worse than the hangover from two bottles of vodka…. Fuck, what happened? Eren blinked a few times to get the hazy picture clearer. He first saw Levi and almost immediately began to relax, though when he looked over to Lathe holding his arm he shifted to move away from Lathe. He still wasn’t all that trusting of him after what he did. Don’t hit me. Don’t hit me. Don’t hit me.
Lathe immediately took his hands off his arm, holding them up in surrender and shuffling backwards a foot away from the couch. *Anything to keep that IV in.* “Sorry if I scared you, Eren. I'll stay over here for now. How are you feeling?” *You don't look crazed; That's a plus.*

Eren tried to shift his body over towards Levi, so he could curl up into his arms, though he soon found out that that was physically impossible, not even counting the tether attached to his arm. He looked to the IV with widened eyes. His head snapping between the bag, the needle in his arm, and Levi. He was ignoring Lathe’s question and giving Levi a confused look every time his teal eyes met Levi’s steely ones. He wasn’t completely back with them yet; His eyes were still dull, not carrying their usual vibrance.

*He doesn't look completely... There.* “It’s just for the blood you lost. Don't worry.” Levi saw him try to shift, understanding what he was trying to do. He moved a bit closer, to his left, letting his right hand hold Eren’s, his left going to cradle his neck, careful of the IV, to play with the hair at the base of his neck. *Lathe’s just going to have to deal.* “Everything went well. You're just going to need to take it easy for a while.”

Eren watched as Levi shifted. He felt more comfortable with Levi holding him, even if it was only around his neck, and not completely in his lap. He kept his eyes trained on Levi for a bit, but the vibrance never returned to his eyes. He slowly turned his head towards Lathe now that he felt more comfortable. “..... Happ.....en?” Eren tried to talk, but his throat felt so scratchy and dry. *It feels like I’ve been screaming for a long time... Shit, why can’t I remember?*

...he doesn’t remember that? *He did have a panic attack, and he wasn't himself at all in that... and he sounds pretty awful. He needs water. Lots of it.* “Let me get you some more water, Eren, and I'll tell you everything that happened, alright?” He slowly moved to take the glass from the table behind him, going to fill it from the tap. He was back in a moment, but for a moment, he hesitated. “Can you sit up more at all?” The glass was back on the table for then.

Levi moved to grab a pillow from near Eren’s feet, trying to gently prop Eren up. *This is going to take a while... he might as well get comfortable.* His hand left Eren’s to take the water, helping to hold it to his lips.

*I'll just stay back for right now. Lathe's got that part of this whole mess under control.* Lathe sat back down on the carpet, rubbing the back of his neck. He slowly tried to find the right words for everything. *Where to start...* “I got a call, about- I think, an hour ago. It came up as Levi in my phone, and I had just given him my number for emergencies, to call me without texting or anything else if something were to happen. I dropped everything, grabbed my stuff, and came over here. You were... On the couch, bleeding really badly. I had to cut you out of your shirt- sorry about that- and your bandages. You needed stitches, desperately. I think I gave you around, what, twenty at least? I did that, padded the cuts with gauze, and rewrapped you. That IV in your arm,” he nodded to it, “is what is called an isotonic saline solution. It’s intended really to replace the amount
of blood you lost. There are no drugs in it, so it isn't going to do much more than maybe make your head clearer, hydrate you a bit more at the very most. Oh, and by the way, you're not going to school tomorrow. You are going to be chilling at home for a while. You can't move too much with the damage to your back. It's too risky.” Lathe sighed, his head bowed. *This is too much...*

Eren blinked a few times. He took sips of water as Levi held the glass to his lips. He sometimes coughed at it when Levi tilted it too far back, but he never complained. He was listening to Lathe, but it didn’t seem right. *How the fuck do I not remember that? I would've panicked.... But Lathe isn't saying that I panicked or anything.... I feel like I did something that I haven't done in awhile.... But, shouldn't Lathe be angry with me? I wanted to end it all... How did Levi get in? I should probably ask.* Eren lifted his left hand to get Levi to pull the glass away from him. *Wait, did he just say I can't go to school? Well sorry Levi, you're not gonna have a lab partner to rely on. “-ho-w.....in?”* He finally managed, his voice still scratchy and dry. His eyes still latched onto Levi’s; Lathe forgotten for the moment, he wanted answers.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow. *This isn't working too well. English, anyone? Where's some paper...* Lathe tugged his bag closer to him, fishing out a pen and some blank stationery. He nudged Levi’s elbow with the pen, holding his free hand out for the glass. “Let him write it down. He shouldn't speak.”

Levi gave him the glass, taking the paper and pen without moving his left hand from Eren’s neck. He gave them to Eren, watching him write.

~ *How did you get in? I thought I locked the doors?*~ Eren eyes looked even duller, if that was even humanly possible. He hadn’t wanted Levi to come in, he wanted to be alone and do it. To get his sorry excuse for a life over with.

Levi slowly shook his head. “The key I used yesterday to get in, the one over the back door, I kinda put it in my pocket as I ran over to you. And I was actually the one who locked the front door this morning. I guess you were too distracted by my ranting about waffles to notice.” Levi’s eyes fell. *“I'm just really glad I had it.”*

~ *Why are you glad? I thought you wanted me gone* ~ Eren’s hand was shaking, a good sign to see that he was crying, and trying to hide it. Though of course he failed miserably and started to hiccup and sniffle. ~ *I thought you wanted a new lab partner.... I thought you wanted to hang out with the popular crowd again, not an outcast like me....*~ Eren dropped the pad of paper and let it fall onto the ground along with the pen. He then took his now free hands and he covered his face as he sobbed. He finally let all his insecurities surface. It showed how much he didn’t trust people, and how much a few words someone said could mess with his mind.
...Eren… did I make you think that this entire time? Levi moved his foot under him, letting him come up and kiss Eren’s forehead. He mumbled into his hair. “I don't want a new lab partner. I've already got one.” Please understand I don't hate you. Please understand I really like you. Please just understand…

Eren kept his face covered with his hands. He continued to sob quietly. He didn’t know how to respond to that. He had never thought he was wanted by anyone. No, Grisha made it quite clear, that I won’t be wanted by anyone…. No one would love me, not after what I did to mom. Eren swallowed hard, his hand reaching up to hold onto Levi’s. Hold me dammit. I want you to hold me… please Levi, even if it’s only this one time. His sobbing was starting to subside.

Levi heard him loud and clear. I think I can maneuver around the IV… “Move over.” Levi nudged Eren to his left, helping him shift before slowly, and careful of his arm, he laid down next to him, one arm over his stomach and the other under behind his neck, curling up to play with his hair. He leaned his head on his shoulder, letting out a shaky breath. You mean too much to me...

Eren shifted and let Levi lay beside him. He curled up to the other and he sniffled as he held onto the other’s shirt. He leaned his head against Levi’s. They looked worse for wear, the both of them. Eren’s face was blotchy, his eyes bloodshot from crying so hard. He looked pale, but color was slowly returning to his tan limbs. Eren hiccuped every now and then, and the motion quaked through his whole body. He started to tremble a little bit as he felt Levi play with his dampened locks. He knew he was hot because Levi’s skin felt cool under his neck. I feel so cold though, that’s odd.

He's so warm… Too warm. Levi felt Eren’s forehead with the back of his hand. He has a fever. Of course. Levi turned to Lathe, who was trying to be quiet as he put his bag back together from being strewn across the floor.

He felt Levi’s eyes on him, and spoke quietly before Levi could. “I'm not ditching you, kid, I'm just making sure I didn't lose a needle or anything.” He looked up, noticing his concern. “What's wrong?”

Levi kept the back of his hand on Eren’s forehead. “He’s burning up, Lathe.” He tried to pull Eren a little closer to his body. He feels so warm…. Is this why he was out of it when he had a panic attack? How did I not notice it before? Levi looked over Eren’s body and watched as Eren took in weak and steady breaths once he had calmed down again. I know he’s staring at me… I can feel the Brat’s eyes following my face every time I move. Levi looked back over to Lathe to see how he would handle this. I hope it’s not from something being infected… that could turn out really bad. Eren doesn’t need that, he doesn’t need to go to the hospital anymore.
...think. Lathe watched Eren shiver. He declared after a moment of silence. “...It's probably not infection. My guess is with so much blood lost, he's just much more prone to getting sick at the moment. His body is torn between healing wounds, and fighting off germs. He's going to be sick for much longer than normal. I'd say... eh, I'd give it a week at most. Where’s a blanket...” Lathe looked around the room, seeing nothing. “I'm going to find one upstairs. Don't try anything funny while I'm gone. I'll be right back.” He had a glint in his eye as he walked to the stairs, boots clomping on his way up.

Eren turned his attention to Levi once again. “S...school....w...wor...k” He finally got the words out to Levi with a few tries and he tiredly put his head against Levi’s head. My whole body feels like lead, and I want to sleep... but I don’t think I can... and they probably want to yell at me for what I did. Fuck it, I want to believe these arms won’t yell at me... but that’s not possible is it? Eren’s eyes seemed to have a little more life to them. Even with his fever he was starting to come back to reality the longer he stayed awake.

Stop worrying about school for right now... You have plenty else to think about. “I'll make sure you get your schoolwork, and every note there ever was for your classes. Don't stress about it. As for chem, I'll just work with Armin and Erwin. Hopefully they won't mind.” He smirked. You're starting to look a bit more like yourself. Good.

Lathe descended the steps a bit more quietly this time, holding a thick black comforter. “This was all I could find. Sorry, Eren, I stole it from your room. Levi, will you be okay with this much blanket on you, or should I fold it or something?” I can't have two overheating students. One I can handle. But two? Na.

Levi nodded and he helped to situate the comforter over Eren and himself. He didn’t mind the extra warmth. It helped with how cold the house was. It was dark too, almost as if the lights hadn’t been turned on in ages. There was barely any furniture, some of it was broken, and some broken pieces had blood over them, no doubt it was Eren’s with how abusive his father was. The kitchen looked worse. The tile flooring had numerous slits throughout it's entirety, and if one was curious, they would find that it was the same size around them all.... The same knife... The marks also made an appearance on the walls around the floor, almost like they had been thrown with the amount of force it would take to penetrate the floor or the wall itself. Eren’s kitchen was also practically barren of food. There was almost nothing of nutritional value there, besides one container of salad and a few slices of pizza that the kid would never eat in a million years. The pills had scattered themselves on the floor, forgotten where they were, and one box of pasta sat on one shelf in the pantry.

Lathe left Levi and Eren situated on the couch, scanning the living room before slowly walking into the kitchen. He picked up the broom from where it lay abandoned on the floor, sweeping the pills and dust and dirt into a small pile in the corner. I'll deal with that later. He leaned the broom against the wall, going to open the fridge. Nothing of real use. He closed it quietly, and went to open the pantry. One box of pasta. He closed the door. No wonder you're so painfully thin. It's not only that you can't eat because it'd come back up, it's a bit that you can't because you don't really
have any food. He turned back to look at the kitchen. The room was dark, grey. He moved to flick on more lights. One bulb above the stove flickered in yellow light, the rest in the room either burned out or missing. He shivered, really feeling the cold for the first time...This is too depressing. I need to fix this. Lathe walked back into the living room, stepping quietly over to the scarf he discarded, wrapping it back around his neck. He addressed Levi. “I won't be gone more than an hour. My bag's staying here in case you need anything from it, which you shouldn't, as long as Eren doesn't move much. My phone is always on for you two. Just stay calm, the both of you. Relax.” He ruffled their hair, sending the both of them a warm smile. “I'll be back soon. Stay out of trouble.” He walked to the front door, quietly shutting it behind him before striding over to his bike, picking up the old-fashioned riding goggles he’d dropped in his rush to get inside, donning them. They'll be fine. You've got shopping to do. Kicking up the stand, he started the engine and rode back to get his car.

Eren turned his head weakly towards Levi. “L….Le….vi” Eren managed with his scratchy throat. He moved to get his hand against Levi’s shirt to grab it again. He wanted to hold onto the other, even if he could only grab his shirt. He felt safe in Levi’s arms, and it was warm, he liked finally having something warm to hold onto after living in this cold house for only a week… but it was like this in all his previous homes, cold, unforgiving, dark…. So that if anyone looked in they wouldn’t see the blood when his father had beat him. Eren tried to nestle himself closer to Levi, but whined when he found that moving anything besides his arms and head was basically impossible.

Levi shifted a bit more to be on his side, allowing himself to be more fully pressed against Eren, kicking his shoes off the side of the couch and tangling their legs together. He pressed another kiss to Eren’s temple. I've got you. Don't worry. “Try not to speak too much, your throat doesn't sound up to it. Do you want the pen and paper back?”

Eren shook his head as he buried himself into Levi’s arms. His whole body was warm, alarmingly so. He was really quiet as he stayed curled up to Levi. You haven’t asked why yet... Are you waiting for Lathe to beat me? I know he’s going to.... Dad would do the same, patch me up, just to beat me again. Before he knew it, Eren was sobbing again.

“Eren, nobody’s going to hurt you anymore. We're not mad at you or anything like that. I promise. You're fine.”

“L......a......the.... M......ad?” He asked the other through his sobs. He sniffled and hiccupped. At least he couldn’t feel the pain in his chest because of the morphine.

“He’s not mad at you, he's just worried sick. If he was mad, he wouldn't have worked so hard to make you feel better.” Levi nuzzled his nose behind Eren’s ear.

He was right; Lathe wasn't mad. Somewhere, he was standing in a grocery store, metal-toed boots
tapping on stone tiles as he tried to find lightbulbs, thinking how ridiculously crazy everything had gotten in less than one day.

Eren only nodded. “No…… Mad?” He asked, his voice finally starting to come back to him. Please say you're not mad, please say you're not mad.

...How else am I supposed to prove to you we’re not mad? I could never be mad at you. “Eren, I-“ Words did not come. ...just do what feels right. So he did. Levi moved his head,

And kissed him.

Eren’s eyes widened a fraction. He felt Levi’s soft lips against his own. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He was too shocked to do anything about it. He didn't know if he should continue, or pull away. What the hell is he doing? He’s kissing me!! What the fuck do I do!?!? Eren didn’t know what to do, so he just kissed back.

He's kissing back. He’s kissing back! Levi let his hand drift up from Eren’s waist to his cheek, tilting his head for a better angle. His lips moved slowly against Eren’s, his eyes closed, just letting himself revel in the feeling of Eren’s mouth moving with his own.

Eren soon had to pull back to breathe, taking in air harshly. His eyes looked better, and had completely turned back to their beautiful viridian green. He slowly moved a hand up to his lips. Holy shit! He just kissed me! And I kissed back! Holy shit! What do I do now? I don’t know what to do. So Eren just laid there with wide eyes… His face flushed completely red. Would it be bad if I asked him to do it again? “...C-can… you…?”

Levi took in sharp breaths of air, awestruck. Eren fucking kissed me back. And YES! He let out a breathy laugh, lights dancing past his eyes, before pressing his lips against Eren’s again, the smallest bit more forceful.

Eren’s eyes widened slightly, before he let them slide shut. He let Levi kiss him, basking in the glory that was a kiss from the hottest guy in school. This is happening… HOLY FUCK! This is happening! He’s actually kissing me! Holy shit! Kiss me more, please! It feels so good! Eren turned his head a bit and met Levi’s forceful kiss. He was a bit timid in the kiss, not really understanding how he should go about it. Of course Levi knows how to kiss, he’s probably been with half the girls in the school. ...Stop it, he’s with you right now… Yeah, but for how long? Eren’s mind again returned to shambles but he allowed for Levi to continue.
Levi ran his thumb along Eren’s jaw, slowing down as he noted how timid Eren was in kissing back. *You feel so wonderful… How on Earth did I end up lucky enough to get to kiss you?*

Eren gave a soft whimper into Levi’s lips as his thumb grazed a sensitive part of his jaw. He blushed all the way to his ears as he pulled back to breathe. His lidded eyes slowly opened and revealed his gorgeous eyes, complete with golden flakes around the iris. He giggled a little as he stared at Levi, not really believing what had just happened.

Levi breathed heavily, blushing as he met Eren’s eyes. Those beautiful eyes. *I want to hear that again.* Levi dove back in, his movements slow and languid. He lightly brushed his tongue against Eren’s lips. *Please.*

Eren felt something else brush up against his lip. *Is that his tongue? What am I supposed to do? What is he even trying to do? I don’t understand.* Eren slowly parted his lips, giving access to Levi, but Eren wasn’t exactly sure what the hell was going on. He did what felt right, pressing their chests up together as much as possible, and even their hips. Eren really didn’t know why he was reacting to a kiss in such a way.

Levi shifted, practically on top of Eren, though he leaned on his left arm, careful not to crush him. *YES!* He slid his tongue past Eren’s lips, gently beginning to map out his mouth, finding Eren’s tongue. *You taste amazing, like cinnamon and vanilla…*

Eren shuddered as Levi pushed his tongue into his mouth. He gave a soft moan when their tongues collided in the small space. *This is fucking amazing… Holy shit, if he doesn’t stop I’m going to get hard, and I do not want to explain that! No no no! He’ll think I’ll be lusting after him…. No… He doesn’t know Dad’s raped me… He doesn’t know I’m a whore…* Eren tried to close off his mouth, so unsure of what he should be doing right now. He didn’t know, having never experienced love reciprocated… Only hate.

...*why are you…?* Levi pulled back in confusion with a gasp for air, seeing Eren’s eyes clouded with hesitance, and shame. “What’s wrong, Eren? Did I do something wrong?” Levi braced for the worst. *Oh god don’t tell me I suck at kissing.*

Eren looked up to him completely confused. “N-no…. But why?” He asked softly. He wanted to know why Levi was kissing him. He thought his love was one sided on his part, but he had no idea. *He’s kissing me like I’m the purest thing in the world… I’m not Levi… I’m nowhere near that.*

...*Words, do not fail me now.* “Because you’re handsome, and wonderful to be around, and because I want to.” Levi bowed his head and kissed him again, slipping his tongue back into Eren’s mouth.
Eren shuddered again. He parted his mouth for him once he started to lean down. His tongue raised to meet Levi’s as it entered his mouth. He finally was able to savor the taste of Levi’s own tongue. He tastes so clean... Like mouthwash... Hmmm... Did he stop home after practice, before he came here?.... He said he wanted to do this, too. Does that mean he likes me? Or does that mean he just wants an interesting fuck before he tosses me aside?...Fuck it, we’re going to believe in him for once and let him continue, broken heart be damned! Eren raised his untethered arm up around Levi’s strong shoulders. He could feel the strong muscles flex under his shirt as Levi leaned down a bit more. Their kiss becoming hotter, neither of them realized what was going on around them.

“A-hem.”

Shocked, Levi pulled away, turning quickly back onto his own half of the couch, blushing scarlet to his ears. Oh my God, the man’s a fucking ninja... not okay. Levi covered his face with his free hand, looking through his fingers at Lathe, carrying a large paper bag in his arm.

Eren looked over at Lathe as soon as Levi pulled away. He slumped back down into the couch, his breath hitched and ragged as he attempted to calm himself down. Lathe, you saved me from an embarrassing story, thank you... But please refrain from using stealth mode... You’re gonna give me a fucking heart attack! Eren’s whole face was flushed as he looked over to the man standing there. “L...athë,” he called. His voice sounded much better, and his eyes had returned to their natural brilliance.

Called it. “Sorry for interrupting.” Lathe quirked one eyebrow, noting their embarrassment, smirking at their reaction. He looked pointedly at Levi. “Just making sure you're not causing our patient too much... distress.” He grinned devilishly, wagging his eyebrow. “Dinner in an hour or less.” With that, he walked to the kitchen through the hall, setting down his bag and going to retrieve more from his car parked outside.

Oh my God Lathe nooooo.... stop it... Levi shook his head slowly, so embarrassed by Lathe’s antics. If anything, his face had gotten a more vibrant shade of red.

Eren looked back to Levi. He raised his free hand and gently touched Levi’s cheek. He had a small smile on his face, and he seemed to be content with life at the moment. “T-thanks” he murmured quietly. His voice no longer as hoarse as it once was, though it seemed that his body had heated up another degree due to their make out session.

Lathe hip-checked the car door shut, carrying the last of the bags inside, walking through the hall.
to the kitchen. He fished for a box of soft yellow bulbs, squinting to see if he’d picked the right
ones from the bag. *That’s it.* He scanned the ceiling quickly, looking for a free socket. He decided
to start above the kitchen table, leaning over it to unscrew an old bulb, tossing it in the trash can
under the sink before screwing in the new one. Light flooded the room, and Lathe looked around,
thankful he was able to see more than he-

A black leather belt, stained with blood, sat coiled in a far corner, tiny shreds of skin still visible on
the gleaming silver buckle.

*Oh my God.* Lathe covered his mouth with his hand in shock, thinking for a moment. *I can't touch
it. Spades would have my head.* He forced himself to turn away, to finish putting lights in around
the kitchen, so he could see what he was doing. He took a moment to enter the living room again,
to remove the globe from the floor lamp and put in a new bulb, replacing it and plugging it into an
outlet next to the couch. Soft yellow light illuminated the room, though it only made the
brokenness of the furniture, the drips of blood in the carpet more obvious. *I can try and clean all
this up later. First, keep them both from starving.* Lathe set celery and carrots on the counter, along
with a bag of wide spiral noodles and a jar of chicken bouillon. *Of course.* He went about boiling a
pot of water on the stove, adding the bouillon and chopping the vegetables into small pieces. He
found three bowls in the cupboard, waiting for the noodles to finish softening before spooning the
soup into them, carrying the first one with a little bit in it to Eren first, handing him a spoon. “You
don't have to finish it, but I would like you to try to.” Lathe retrieved the bowl for Levi, before
hesitating with his own. He decided to sit at the kitchen table and give the two of them some space,
pulling out his phone and typing furiously.

Eren looked down at the small amount of chicken noodle soup in his bowl. *That looks like way too
much… Levi, I’m not even the slightest bit hungry.* “L...Levi, I’m not hungry…” He said, looking
down with a defeated look. He didn’t even want to try to eat any of that soup, because he knew it
would just come right back up. *I don’t want to eat… Please don’t make me, I’ll just throw it right
up.* Eren shifted from where he was sitting up. Levi had sat him up when Lathe had mentioned
food, so now he rested with his back against the couch. He looked down at the bowl of soup in his
lap, and he felt disgusted just by looking at it. It made him feel nauseous right away with the rich
smell that was wafting off of the homemade soup. *Lathe, I can’t, even though you went to the
trouble of making this… I can’t….* Eren clutched at his stomach, starting to feel sick already, and
not wanting to throw up with nothing in his stomach. *No, that is much worse, pure stomach acid is
a bitch.*

Lathe looked up from his phone and his soup as he waited for a reply, studying the abandoned
setup that once was Eren sorting his pills. He looked at a container set aside, absentmindedly
reading the label. ...*Nausea pills. I forgot.* Lathe snatched the bottle from the table and walked back
to the couch, opening the cap and taking out a pill as he spoke. “I’m sorry Eren, I somehow
managed to forget you needed these to eat, take this and I'll get you a glass of water to sip from and
you should be able to eat some of that soup in a couple minutes.” He handed Eren the pill, going to
grab a glass of water. *You're an idiot, you know that?*
Eren looked at the pill and then down at his food. He swallowed the pill, he waited patiently for his water. *I hope I’ll be able to eat, this looks delicious.* Eren looked down at the warm bowl in his lap before looking over to see Levi eating beside him. *I wonder if it's good?*

Lathe returned with a clean glass, handing it to Eren and letting him drink before Eren handed it back. “Just give it a minute or so. Then, you should be able to eat.” Lathe smiled warmly, leaving them to their own devices. He sat back down at the counter, sorting the pills on the table into the pill calendar as he waited for text responses.

The teen nodded, sipping every so often from the glass in his hand. He was quiet and he watched Levi eat, before glancing towards the kitchen table where he saw Lathe moving pills into the container, before looking at his phone and typing quickly, his thumbs flying over the tiny keys. *I wonder what he’s texting so feverishly about?* He turned his gaze back to Levi. “Um… Can you tell Armin I won’t be at school tomorrow?” He asked quietly with his head down. “So, I won’t be able to sit at the lunch table with him….” Eren trailed off and looked down at his food, feeling the nausea subside a bit so he slowly sipped at the food, letting out a soft groan, his tastebuds were flooded with goodness. He hurriedly moved to get another spoonful of food. His mouth was watering at the taste of a home cooked meal. He felt tears fall onto his hands and didn’t realize he was crying. *It tastes incredible… I want more.* Eren continued to eat the whole bowl and looked towards Levi for more, knowing that he couldn’t get up.

Levi looked up, stunned that Eren had eaten so much so quickly. He saw the look in Eren’s eye. *Message received.* He leaned forward, putting his bowl on the table before taking Eren’s empty one to the pot, filling it as much as Lathe had for him. He looked to Lathe, who had noticed him get up.

Lathe pointed to Eren and mouthed, ‘For him?’

Levi nodded, and Lathe beamed, returning to his pill sorting. He carefully walked back and handed Eren the warm bowl.

Eren thanked him quietly and started eating from the bowl, but it wasn’t as rushed as before. He was still eating like he hadn’t eaten in forever. He was still crying, not really caring. *It's too good to fucking care if Levi and Lathe see. It's so good… I haven’t eaten something like this in years.*

*He's crying. And eating like a starved wolf. Which is great, since he's so thin… which I guess also explains the crying.* Levi nudged his foot with his own, smiling at Eren between spoonfuls of soup.

Eren finished up his bowl, and sat and watched it. He was starting to feel full for the first time in a
long time. It felt so good to actually be able to consume food. He looked up to Levi again. “C-can I have a little more?” He asked quietly.

...More? Wow. Those things Lathe gave him work. “Of course.” Levi took Eren’s bowl in his right hand, his own finished one in the other, and went back into the kitchen. About to put his bowl in the sink, he stopped at the sight of the bandages and fabric in the left half of it. ...right side of the sink it is. He placed down his bowl, putting one more spoonful into Eren’s and handing it back to him, reclaiming his spot next to him.

Lathe watched Eren eating from his place at the kitchen table, shocked. How is he eating that much? He’s so tiny, and if he hasn't eaten an actual meal in years, how can he manage it?

Eren thanked him and finished off the bowl, soon handing it back. “It feels good to eat” he murmured and smiled from ear to ear for the first time in a long time. He knew he wouldn’t be able to hold the food down if he ate much more, so he didn’t request another bowl. He struggled to move back to make himself comfortable on his ‘bed’, wincing when he tweaked his back. He didn’t know what the hell to do without Levi or Lathe helping to move him.

Levi saw Eren’s expression change as he shifted, putting the bowl down and helping guide Eren so he was laying down. He picked the bowl back up, placing it in the sink and looking over to Lathe.

Lathe’s phone was face-down on the table, and he just stared ahead, looking at nothing in particular. He noticed Levi looking at him, and smiled. He spoke quietly, moving from his chair. “I’ll clean up. The soup will make a nice leftover. He’ll have plenty for tomorrow.” Taking his own bowl to the sink, he thought. “Eren can't do much by himself. That includes moving around.” He put his bowl on top of the pile, looking pointedly at Levi. “You know you're going to school tomorrow, right? You're not getting out of classes.” He stepped back a bit, addressing Eren from the kitchen. “Eren, you're going to have to deal with me being around tomorrow, cool? Great!” He didn't even give him a chance to respond, let alone protest. He spoke to both of them. “I'm going to clean this all up, and then I'll leave you two to yourselves for the night. I'll be back at around eight tomorrow morning, alright?”

Levi nodded. Thank you so much! “Thank you, Lathe.” That’s exactly how you thank the man that saved your bf’s life. ...Wait. What.

Eren looked up from his couch. “You’re leaving, Lathe?” He asked quietly. He seemed to have a defeated look. He wanted to talk with him some more, because he knew he could tell him anything… like how he couldn't remember earlier.. And he should’ve freaked out.. I know that I should've had a panic attack, there’s something they’re not telling me.
Lathe looked back over to Eren and smiled. “I can stay awhile longer if you want me to. It’s barely nine. Just let me clean up before I do anything else, okay?” *We still have talking to do, I guess.*

“Okay.” He nodded, he would be okay with that. *We need to talk, because I know you're lying. I need you to be able to tell me the truth, even if it means telling me I had an attack and don’t remember.*

*Now, the bandages seem to have dried for the most part…* Lathe picked up an empty brown bag from the floor, quickly moving the bandages and fabric from the sink into it, popping his head into the living room to see if he got the others off the floor from earlier. He didn't; he swept those up with his hands, dumping those inside as well and folding the top over many times. He shoved it to the bottom of the trash bag. He turned the tap back on, reaching for the soap and scrubbing the bowls clean. The bowls dried and put away, he turned the stove off from it’s low heat to keep the soup warm, finding a large bowl in the cupboards below and filling it. He looked for plastic wrap, finally finding some and stowing the soup in the fridge. He walked over to where Eren and Levi were sitting, unsure of what to do with himself before just punching the coffee table back a bit and sitting on its edge across from them. “Alright. What’s up, Eren?” *This isn't going to be a fun conversation, is it?*

Eren took in a deep breath and got into a comfortable position against Levi. “Can we agree not to lie to each other?” He asked quietly and looked to Lathe. That pretty much gave away the fact that Eren knew they were hiding something from him. *Don't run away from this conversation.. Please Lathe... And you too, Levi. I want you to agree too.*

Lathe sighed, running a hand through his dark hair. His voice was grave. “…Alright. I'm sorry, Eren. I ghosted over the truth earlier.”

Levi returned Eren’s expectant look, nodding. *I guess he should know what really happened...*

Lathe leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, starting over. “I got a call from Levi a couple hours ago, around five thirty, and I knew since he didn't text first or anything it was an emergency. I rushed over, and you were face-down on the couch, bleeding heavily. I had to cut through your shirt and your bandages to see what had happened to your back. A huge gash had opened for your shoulder to above the small of your back. You were losing a lot of blood, and needed stitches, fast. That’s… when everything started to go wrong.” Lathe brought a hand to the back of his neck, studying the carpet. “…I threaded a surgical needle while also trying to staunch the bleeding and you started to freak out about everything happening, and Levi was trying his best to calm you down, but I barely got two stitches in when you had a full-on panic attack. You scrambled off the couch, and I don't know how but I cut the thread to keep you from bringing the needle with and you ran over to that corner of the room behind me, and you looked so scared. We
didn't know how to calm you down until I remembered everything you told me about…” Lathe swallowed. “…about your mother and Germany and music and I just started singing this one song I heard years ago and you just started crying and… you crawled back over to us and… and asked when your mum would come home…” Lathe glanced up to Eren’s face. “…and I said she’d be home soon because I didn’t know what else to tell you and if I told you that she wasn't coming home you’d go completely insane… but we managed to get you back on the couch and you started to get all giggly from the blood loss and I somehow finished stitching and wrapping you up before you passed out and I was so worried when you fell asleep because you had lost so much blood and I put an IV in your arm because we also needed you to wake up…” Lathe let out a heavy breath. “And that’s about when you should’ve started to remember things.” Don't you start crying, too… Today has been an absolute mess, my god...

I asked for my own mother…. I must’ve been completely crazy, for me to do that. “I’m sorry, I panicked when Levi grabbed me…” He trailed off and looked down. He knew that was the reason they were all here in this room. He panicked after Levi found him trying to take all the pills, he had struggled to get away, only to have his back rip open. Eren swallowed hard and looked up to Lathe with guilty eyes.

“...Why did you do it?” Lathe’s gaze was piercing. “Why’d you try to end it?”

Eren, if you aren't honest like you promised, he’ll never be kind to you again…. But I’ve already destroyed the trust we’ve built… So you’re going to lie to him again?.... No, I won’t do that, he deserves the truth... They both do. Eren looked up, he looked like he was ready to cry. “I didn’t want… No one wanted me… Why stay?... That’s what I thought when I tried to take them. I thought Levi would be happy that he could get a new chemistry partner, and that he could hang out with the cool kids once I was gone… And I thought that maybe it would be a way to please my father after so many years....” Eren stopped as he hiccuped from his tears. He sobbed for a few moments… “When you’re left alone for so long, when no one cares, it hurts… And with my past I thought no one would love me anymore… I’m broken beyond repair at this point… I’ll always be on pills, if I could even afford them… I can’t get a job, I don’t like new people, and I can’t do anything physically demanding… I can’t get enough money to feed myself properly… I’ll no longer be innocent in anyone’s eyes, not after what my father did to me… I was afraid… So afraid that everyone would leave me, and when you’ve been alone and beaten and outcasted… You never want that to happen. So I wanted to leave first, so that no one could try to pick up the pieces, only to find they can’t and throw me away to let the pieces shatter more for the next person… I have so many trust issues because of that, and so everyone’s words stick with me… Everything, no matter what, and they always haunt me to no end…” Eren sobbed out. He was going through so much, and he was finally letting it out to the both of them. His rant was all over the place, just saying whatever was on his mind, and it felt so good to actually tell someone and get it off his chest.

...Eren... Levi brought his arms around him, letting Eren rest his head against him. “Eren, nobody could ever hold what your dad did against you. And you need to have a little faith. You're going to get better, and you're going to become successful, and it's not like the friends you have now are planning to leave anytime soon. We all care about you. And we all want to help you. Trying to end it… that isn't worth it. It is never worth it, no matter how awful things might seem to be.” Levi
pressed a kiss to his temple. “You mean a lot to a lot of people, and to me. It's not worth it.”

Eren sniffled. He didn't know what to say… I can’t believe I have to tell him this. I have to…. I can’t trust them… No, not after what my father and so many others have done. “I… I can’t trust you though… I can’t… Not after what I’ve been through for the past 8 years… All the lies, the torment, the bullying, the backstabbing… I can’t believe your words. I’m sorry but I can’t, and I know it might seem rude to say this after what you two have done for me, but I can’t… I can’t trust someone to not leave… I tried that once, then I promised never again… I tried to trust that my dad wouldn’t do more than yell at me… And look where that got me… Underneath him, with him yelling at me to be a good whore and take it… I tried making friends before I really did, but I can’t do it… No, not after it got out that I was gay, and I was almost lynched at my last school… If others find out I’m gay, they’ll try to make my life a living hell… My only place of solitude is school… And if that becomes hell, life becomes unbearable…” Eren’s spiels were starting to really jump from topic to topic. His body starting to shake as he sobbed. His breathing started to worsen a bit but only a little bit, he was starting to lose it again.

Levi felt him shuddering in his arms. Another attack. He's about to have another attack. Levi looked to Lathe with panicked eyes. Sing. The last time you did it it calmed him down. He's in his right mind so he might not go insane so just try it, please.

Lathe looked from Levi to Eren, and drew in a shudders breath. Just focus. He began to sing, his low voice quiet at first, slowly, slowly becoming louder.

Eren listened to Lathe sing softly. He started to calm down. His body stopped shaking, and he watched Lathe with large eyes. He slowly moved to curl up to Levi, and hold onto his shirt. Soon he opened his mouth to start and sing along with the other. They were going back and forth. Lathe would sing a line, then Eren would sing the next. He seemed to calm down more as he got to sing in his own language. It had been such a long time since he had sung in his own language… the last time… It was with mom… Wasn’t it? Yeah, it was, I was singing this song with mom last… Before I wanted to make Mac n' cheese. Eren just continued to sing along with Lathe as he slowly curled up to Levi more. Calming down completely.

Levi gently pet Eren’s hair as he curled up to him, listening to the unfamiliar words, sweet though unknown to him in meaning. It’s a wonderful song… and Eren’s voice… he watched Eren’s lips move with the words. He sings so well...

Eren and Lathe soon finished the song, Eren looking like he was going to pass out soon. He needed to take his pills for his PTSD, to try and stave off the nightmares. Lathe knew what he had to take. He was in much need of a good night's sleep, especially after six years of sleeping only four hours a night.
Lathe got up from his perch on the table, going to the kitchen. “I'll get your medicine for tonight.” He moved silently, picking up the dark blue bottle from the table. I should probably get him a sleep aid, too... he’s not used to a normal sleep schedule, and he has to kick that ugly habit of getting to bed so late as fast as possible. Ten is better than eleven, I guess. He took the glass from earlier from the counter as he passed it, filling it. He fumbled with the locking cap on the pills, taking one out and offering it Eren with the glass, smiling lightly. “Last one for today. Down the hatch.”

Eren nodded and he took the pill along with the glass of water. He looked to his comforter laid out on the couch. “Are we sleeping here... Or upstairs?” He asked sleepily to Levi. He knew that Levi would most likely stay the night after what had happened today. He looked to him with lidded eyes. He was ready to fall asleep.

You can't move too much... “Here. It'll keep us from unnecessarily dragging you around.”

Eren nodded and he winced a bit as he tried to move to lay down. He wanted to be in Levi’s arms when they fell asleep.

“Hold still for a second, Eren.” Lathe rested his hand on Eren’s right arm, near his elbow. He scratched at the tape end, unraveling it a bit to remove the needle. He immediately replaced the tape and gauze. “The IV’s empty for now; You won't have to worry about that getting in the way as you sleep. I'll make sure you get a new one tomorrow.” He reached up to unhook it from the lamp switch, coiling it back up and placing it in its case in his bag.

Eren watched the dark haired man work. He didn’t move as Lathe requested and let him pull the IV out without a hassle. It felt good to get the stiff needle out. He looked to Levi with tired eyes, knowing he wouldn’t be able to stay awake much longer, but the house needed to be locked. I'm still afraid Grisha will come back... I want the doors locked...

Lathe retrieved his phone and scarf from the next room, looking to the mess of pills still on the table. Tomorrow, I'll clean all this up. Wrapping the thick red fabric around his neck, he spoke with a grin. “I'll get out of your hair.” Lathe picked up his bag from the floor, the odd star insignia shining up at him. “Levi, make sure you lock the door behind me. We don't need burglars throwing any more wrenches into our plans for today.” He stepped forward, ruffling Eren's hair. “Goodnight, kid. Remember Eren, I'll be here at eight. No later.” He looked to Levi as he stood, smiling and making his way to the door.

Levi followed him to the front door, his fingers digging in his pocket for the key. He's done so much... how am I expected to thank him? Levi watched him step over the threshold, sending him one last grin.
“Alright, goodnight Levi. Don’t cause too much mischief.” Light whizzed past his eyes. He turned to head to his car, when a hand on his elbow stopped him.

“...Thank you.” Don’t cry now. Don’t do it, Levi. No.

Lathe chuckled, sending him a warm look. “Of course. You’re very welcome.” He patted his shoulder. “I’ll see you both in the morning.”

“...A-alright. Goodnight.” Levi let his hand fall, watching Lathe step down from the front stoop, walking to his car. He shut to door softly, locking it behind him. He went to stow the key in his pocket again, before deciding against it and leaving it, and his phone, on the coffee table. Sleep would really be nice right around now.

Eren reached for the hem of Levi’s shirt. He whimpered a bit when it forced him to stretch out his body for the other. He tugged on the fabric gently, wanting to sleep curled up to Levi. He was still pretty feverish, so the more sleep he got the better. His pillows and comforter were already down there, so it would be easy for them to get comfortable on the large couch.

I’m coming, I’m coming... Levi helped Eren shift to lay down, slipping under the covers with him and automatically going to wrap his arms around his thin frame, resting his head on his shoulder, tangle their feet.

Eren whimpered a bit but managed to snuggle up to Levi and get into a comfortable position. He closed his eyes, and didn't opened them again... He was out cold, the events of today finally taking their toll on him.
Chapter Thirteen: Introduction Arc Part 4: Spades

Levi cracked open one eye, warm and content. He squinted against the light in the room. *Ugh, someone needs to close the shades... what’s on top of me?* Levi looked down, registering the weight on top of him, seeing a messy head of brunette hair. ...*oh yeah. That’s right...* Levi smirked, kissing the top of his head. He mumbled, trying to rub the sleep out of his eyes. “‘Morning. You awake yet?”

No response. Levi shifted, hoping to reach his phone and figure out what time it was. He caught it, glancing at the time. 7:46 AM. *Lathe will be here soon. And you have classes to attend.* Levi carefully tried to untangle himself from Eren, maneuvering oddly in an attempt to let him sleep. *It’s more than four hours. That’s great!* He finally made his way onto his feet, fixing the covers and padding to the kitchen. *Breakfast. Do I have time to...* Levi saw the unpacked bags at the feet of the table, a yellow cereal box visible in one. He pulled it out. *Cheerios.* He quickly opened the fridge, seeing a half-gallon of whole milk. *Lathe, you thought of literally everything.* Levi hunted for the bowls, eating quickly at the kitchen table, stealing glances to Eren as he slept. *Today should go well. Lathe will be around, so... it’s pretty much a given.* He rinsed his bowl in the sink, going to take back the house key from the table. He stepped back into his shoes, scattered on the floor.

A light pattern of knocks on the door shook him from his thoughts, walking over and looking through the front window to see Lathe’s car. He opened the door, greeted with the smiling teacher.

“Good Morning, Levi! Judging from the fact my phone was silent after I left, can I say all is well?” His blue and grey eyes were bright.

Levi chuckled a bit as he opened the door for their teacher. “Yes, you can rightly assume so, Lathe... Come on in.” He motioned for Lathe to come in as he held the door open for him. His voice was still quiet, as not to wake Eren up since the Brat was still out cold.

Lathe unwound his scarf from his neck, bowing his head a bit as he crossed the threshold, looking up to skim the living room for Eren. He saw him still curled up under the blankets, his eyes widening in surprise, matching Levi’s quiet voice. “Did he really sleep this entire time?”

Levi nodded, catching up to Lathe after closing the door. “Yeah. He didn’t even move last night; he was in the same position this morning until I slipped out from under him. I figured we should let him sleep, since he hasn’t been getting much.” Levi told Lathe, looking over Eren’s sleeping frame with a small smile on his face. The boy looked so much better than he did hours ago.

“Ten solid hours of sleep, assuming he conked out as soon as I left, about, is absolutely fabulous.
However, you have classes to attend, and I think,” Lathe nudged his elbow, smirking. “that he would appreciate being able to say goodbye to you.”

_**Lathe, you are a sly son of a bitch.**_ Levi’s face heated up a bit as a blush tinted his cheeks. He shook his head and looked towards Eren. “If me moving out from under him didn’t wake him, I don’t really know what will.” Levi really didn’t want to shake the poor kid, not when his wounds were only just starting to heal on his back.

“Well, us being quiet isn't going to help at all with it.” Lathe suddenly switched to talking at a normal volume. “Come on, stop being shy and get him up. I don't care what you have to do as long as it doesn't put him in pain and/or mortal danger. ... **Go on.**” Lathe pushed Levi forward. **Just do it, I don't want him to wake up and be upset that he didn't get to see you.**

Levi leaned forwards to get himself to balance out after the playful shove. He carefully walked over to where Eren’s head was and sat down by his sleeping figure. “Oi, Brat, it’s time to wake up… I gotta go to classes, ya know.” Levi spoke a bit louder as he carded his fingers through Eren’s long brown locks. “Come on, Eren, wake up, I gotta go soon.” His voice was soft and he gently shook Eren by the shoulders.

Eren finally stirred after a few minutes of prodding by Levi. He cracked his eyes open slowly. His back felt like it was on fire, and it introduced him to a world of pain. He let out a pain filled cry, his motions jerky and he whimpered. _Levi, you’re here…. _Despite his back, Eren smiled softly at the other.

_Shit._ Lathe dropped his bags, rushing into the kitchen to retrieve the pill calendar sorted out on the table. _Thank god I put this together last night…_ Grabbing a glass with water from the tap, he was at Eren’s side in a moment, kneeling next to the both of them and dumping the day’s worth of medicine into his hand. He handed him the magenta tablet first, trying to keep their moods light, as best as one could while someone was in extreme pain. “Good morning, Eren. ...I think. Here, this’ll help.” He helped him with the glass of water, handing him a few others after.

Eren watched from his spot on the couch as Lathe went into Doctor mode, studying the pills he had in hand. He looked to the small magenta purple tablet offered to him, taking that first and foremost with a swig of water. He then followed suit with the rest of the pills handed to him.

Levi gave a small smile as he watched Eren down the pills without a fuss. _That’s good, just take your pills like you’re supposed to. At least with Lathe here I don’t need to worry about you overdosing._ Levi ran his fingers through Eren’s hair as Lathe finished up with the pills. “Eren, I need to go, okay?” He asked and leaned over to kiss the boy’s forehead. _Remain stoic, do not show emotion, if he sees it he’ll want you to stay… and Lathe would not have that._
Eren looked up with a blush to see Levi’s lips twisted up into a small smirk. He nodded softly rubbing into that hand which was caressing his head. “Okay. Goodbye, Short Stack… Have a good day at school… Don’t forget to tell Armin, and bring me back my work” Eren mumbled in between yawns. He felt like he could sleep for eons. I still feel so tired… It’s like I can’t wake up… Do I have to? Can’t I just fall back asleep?

Levi chuckled and ruffled his hair a bit. “I won’t forget, Brat.” He sighed and got up. “Don’t sleep the whole day away,” he murmured and got up to grab his forgotten bag. “Bye, Lathe… I’ll see you guys after practice.” And with that Levi left the house and started making the 15 minute walk to school. Did I have homework? Survey says….. No, thank fucking Satan!

Eren watched him leave and whimpered as he struggled to get up, making sure Levi was gone before he even tried to move. He wanted to be able to do it himself, though he was finding it impossible very quickly, especially with his morphine not kicked in yet. He let out a pain-filled cry as he tried to push himself up. I need to do this myself; I need to, I need to, I don’t want to need to rely on someone to help me up in the morning… Shit, my arm is gonna snap if I try to do this any longer… Eren whimpered as he slumped down into the makeshift bed again. Looking over to Lathe with his mop of hair way out of order due to his bed head, he silently pleaded for help, along with a small whimper.

Lathe rested his hand on Eren’s arm, trying to still his movement. “You took a morphine pill a second ago, give it a chance. Then we’ll see if you can sit up. For right now, just stay put. It won’t be long.” He gave him a reassuring smile, standing and mumbling to himself. “I’m going to need my bags back…” He walked over to where they were on the floor, leaving his scarf on a hook next to the door, and letting his medical bag rest on the floor next to the couch. The other, black with a sharp blue and yellow spark symbol, he placed on the kitchen counter, starting to set up a laptop. He logged in, pulling up seemingly random files, and a long list with some groups of small icons on a purple screen filled the page. He grinned, turning and walking back to Eren. “Feel any better yet?”

Eren looked up to him and tried to push himself up. He whimpered a bit as he struggled. He could feel his elbows protesting against the movement. He let out a shrill sound as one of his elbows gave out, and he slumped back down. He put his head down in defeat. Fuck it, I can’t do that… Not even with the morphine can I push through it. Fuck, Lathe, help me dammit! Eren looked up to him with pleading eyes. His back felt much better, but he was too weak to actually do anything. He felt a wave of dizziness go through him as soon as he slumped down. Shit… Am I still sick? Fuck… I don’t think I can lift my head right now.

...how’s his fever doing? Lathe reached out to his forehead, feeling with the back of his hand. He might as well be on fire. “You’re really burning up, Eren. But we need to get you to sit up so you can eat. Here, I’ve got you.” Lathe gently took ahold of him, guiding him up and into a sitting position. “Do you have a preference at all for what you’d like me to make you?”
Eren let himself be moved by Lathe, and his head felt like it was ready to implode from the dizziness alone. He waited to even try and reply until he could put his head back on the couch. He waited for the dizziness to subside a bit. “No, I don’t… But I’ll need another pill” he murmured to the other and got comfortable in his spot.

*His head probably feels awful.* “Alright. One sec.” Lathe opened the bag at his foot, opening the top and handing Eren one more morphine pill. He took the half-empty glass from the table, handing that to him as well. “Your head should stop spinning soon. I’ll start on breakfast, okay? Do you want me to get you anything? A book or something?” *It’s going to be a pretty boring day, honestly. The only thing really happening is Spades coming over. And even then, that’s not for long. Or entertaining. But that’s to be discussed after breakfast.*

Eren thought about it for a few seconds. “Can you get my sketchbook…. And a few pencils? It’s on the desk in my room” he said quietly.

“Of course. I’ll be right back.” Lathe stood, going up the stairs and turning left to the room he remembered was Eren’s, where he found the comforter last night. He looked to the desk pushed against the wall. A thick sketchbook lay in the center, surrounded by various colored pencils, as well as some sketches. More drawings littered his room, with various subjects and mediums. *These are all really good drawings.* On closer inspection of his desk, there were various watercolor containers, some tins of paint…. A couple charcoal pencils and quite a few other random art supplies lying all over the surface. *Nice setup. Should I get him graphite or charcoal… Eh, I’ll give him charcoal. That’s always fun.* Carefully picking up the charcoal pencils and a small box of sticks, as well as a small sharpened and the sketch pad, he picked his way back over to the door, careful not to step on anything, and returned to hand the supplies over to Eren. “Is today a charcoal day?” His eyes were bright.

Eren gave him a small smile. “Charcoal will be good today” he murmured with a smile as he saw his small box of pencils. “Thank you” he said and smiled softly. He started out with one of his harder charcoal pencils, so it was a little softer than graphite, but it was good for sketching, which is what he started to do.

*You can enthuse about how wonderful drawing is later. Just make breakfast, and try not to burn it.* Lathe called from the fridge, perusing the new contents. “Eren, do you want tea or coffee to drink, or is milk okay?” He picked out some vegetables, and some ham and eggs. *Omelets, don’t fail me now!*  

*Oh… What does coffee taste like again?* “Um… What does coffee taste like?” He asked quietly back to the kitchen… It had been too long to know what any of that tasted like… “And tea… What does that taste like?” He asked quietly. He felt embarrassed for not knowing.
...You have not lived. “Here, you must have a coffee maker, and I know I saw a kettle in one of the cupboards. I'll make both and have you try some, and we'll see what you like. Sound good?” Lathe put the ingredients on the counter, going to dig for the small box of tea bags and the tin of coffee grounds. I'll just make sure I put plenty of cream and sugar in the coffee; He'll hate it otherwise.

“O-okay.” He agreed quietly and went back to sketching, he was almost done sketching already. “I think the coffee maker is in the pantry… But I'm not sure” he told Lathe quietly. If he’s making both which would I like? He must like both then? If he's making it and I don't like it...

“Okay. Hopefully it works. If not, I'll make it work.” Lathe walked over to the pantry, finding it shoved into a corner on the floor. He picked it up, carrying it over next to the sink. Plugging it in, he filled it with water and put in a new filter, filling it with the grounds. He pressed the switch, and was relieved when the red light came on. “It's ali-ve!” He jokingly called to Eren. He went to start the tea, setting the kettle on the back burner with water to boil.

It's alive? What the hell is he talking about? I don't understand… “What’s alive?” Eren asked into kitchen and he had stopped his sketching for now because he was so confused at the moment. Is he just crazy?? I don't understand… Like at all…

Lathe looked at him, one eyebrow raised. Frankenstein, anyone? “The coffee machine works. Have you never heard that quote from Frankenstein? Even if you haven't read the thing?”

Eren shook his head slowly. “No... What is Frankenstein?” Eren looked to Lathe with large beady eyes, expecting an explanation. “I don’t understand.” What the hell is Frankenstein???

...How to describe the really terrifying story of Frankenstein in two sentences or less... Lathe shifted to lean against the counter with one hand, thinking. “Frankenstein is this book by Mary Shelley about this crazy Doctor guy obsessed with the idea of immortality. He digs up a dead body and performs these experiments using electricity, eventually bringing the corpse back to life and naming it ‘Frankenstein.’ It all just goes downhill from there.”

“Oh… Were you talking about the coffee maker then?” Eren seemed to pick things up pretty quickly still, despite his fever. He soon returned back to his sketching, approving of the explanation he got.

“Indeed I was. I'm just glad I didn't have to re-wire the thing. Now I want coffee.” Lathe started chopping carrots and an onion quickly, cubing the ham. “You’re getting a ham omelet, by the way.
Where did I put the cheese…” He went back to hunting in the fridge, soon returning to scramble the eggs and add all sorts of things on top, waiting for it to cook before flipping it over. The kettle started whistling, so he turned off the burner, letting it sit while he plated the omelet. He went to get Eren a nausea tablet before handing him his plate. “I'll get you tea in a moment when it steeps. The coffee will be a few minutes. I'll get you a fork and knife.” He returned with the silverware in a moment.

Eren took his pill quietly and he waited for his food to cool while the pill kicked in. He only had to wait a few minutes before he didn’t feel nauseous while looking at the food. He slowly started to eat, smiling when he found it to his liking. He wasn’t eating nearly as fast as he was last night though; he was taking his time to eat.

Lathe watched the tea steep in a plain white mug, finding the small carton of cream in the fridge shelf where he put it, hunting for the mini bottle of honey in the paper bags at the table. He mixed a little of both into the cup, taking out the teabag and walking over, handing it carefully to Eren. “It's alright if you don't like anything I give you. They're both more or less acquired tastes.”

Eren nodded and carefully reached for the cup. He sniffed it and smiled softly. “It smells good.” Eren slowly raised the mug to his lips. He took a small sip of it, taking in the tea. He crinkled his nose a bit. “It’s really sweet.” I don’t like sweetness, it reminds me too much of when I used to eat something sweet and immediately see it come back up. “Is there anything less sweet?” As he asked he looked up to Lathe with his large viridian eyes.

You don't like sweet? Huh. I would've thought you'd hate it if I left it bitter. “Here- Let’s try that again.” He held out his hands for the mug. He went and dumped it down the sink, quickly rinsing it and refilling it with more hot water from the kettle. He put in another teabag. Give that a good minute to steep. Hearing the sputtering of the coffee maker, he grinned and turned to it, switching it off, fetching another mug and pouring some with room at the top, deciding to leave it black. If he wants cream or something, there's room for it. He brought him the dark tea first, handing him the mug. “Try this.” Personally, I'd probably spit it out that strong. But, whatever floats your boat.

Eren noticed the darker color of the tea. “Thank you.” He slowly rose the mug to take a sip. Ah, that’s better, I like this. Eren smiled and it was quite a big smile. “It tastes good” he said quietly. He smiled and rose the mug up to his lips again, taking another sip, his half-eaten omelet forgotten for now.

Lathe smiled, turning to pour himself some coffee, using plenty of cream and a pinch of cocoa powder from a small jar. How can he not like sweet? It's crazy. He studied the plain white mug. It could use some color. I'm all for white, but... Eh. Not important. He returned his attention to his laptop for a moment, scrolling through rows and rows of large icons and thumbnails. I'll let him finish his tea before giving him his coffee. It'll let it cool down in the meantime, anyway. He put down the mug, reaching over to start putting away the food left strewn about on the counter. I
should probably unpack all those bags, too… wait. Lathe looked to the pantry, the door still ajar, looking at the one box of pasta near the top. … Leave it for now. Spades could do something with that. He settled for washing the pan and the cutting board and knife, putting them away and glancing back to check on Eren every once in awhile. …Spades. Better tell him.

Eren had eaten a majority of his omelet, and was finishing up with his cup of tea when Lathe came back in. His sketchbook showed the beginning of an outline for a person. The charcoal gave for a really nice shading material, and damn did Eren know how to fucking use it.

“Eren, I have a mug of coffee for you if you want it, or you can have more tea if you really love it. But I also have something important to tell you.” Lathe flicked his left arm, moving his watch on his wrist so he could see the face. “In about ten minutes or so, I’m having my good friend Spades come over. She’s going to be working on the case against your father for everything he put you through.” He watched Eren’s eyes shift, quickly speaking to stop his fear. “She’s not going to ask for testimony or anything just yet. She just wants to map out the house, take pictures, collect anything incriminating. And since she has your medical file, it’s not like you’re going to be forced through a long proceeding. She’ll explain it more when she gets here at nine. But she’s very friendly, and she wants to help you get away from your father for good, so he can't hurt you any more.” Lathe rested a hand on his shoulder. “We're going to make this all as painless as possible. Don't worry yourself about it.” He smiled softly.

Eren watched Lathe… “But he ran…. He ran away… No one knows where he is anymore” he murmured and looked down at his nearly-empty tea mug. He tipped it back and finished off the last bit. He looked to his plate. “I can’t eat anymore than that, sorry.” He mumbled his words with his head down. “- and I’ll try some coffee.” He looked over to his sketchbook to pick it back up. He was grateful he hadn’t seen his father at all since he had returned from the hospital. I probably would’ve been dead already if he came back….

Lathe traded mugs with Eren, picking up the plate, balancing the silverware on it. “You're actually eating, which is good enough for me, as long as you like it. And your father can't run forever. Do you know what everyone in this world needs at some point?” He started walking back to the sink.

Eren watched him leave. “What?” He asked quietly. He returned his focus back to his sketchbook. He was still sketching something random.

“Money.” Lathe talked to Eren over his shoulder, scrubbing the plate. “Spades already had enough from your medical file to talk to a judge. She has tabs on all of Grisha’s bank accounts, watching for any withdrawals so they can catch him and drag him to court. He’ll be on the map soon enough.”

Eren swallowed hard. “They can’t catch him if he’s in Germany…. His passport is gone.” Eren
brought up the information quietly, his voice cracking again. He knew they wouldn’t be able to do anything once Grisha had left the country... It was too small of a case, nothing could more could be done. I don’t think they can do anything more... My father just sent a check to the hospital... He might’ve sent it from Germany.... Shit.

“Eren, there are charges pending against your father, and there’s always a paper trail. I'll make sure she checks recent purchases under his name, checks with airports nearby. International withdrawals will still come up with dates and times... Locations.” Lathe furrowed his brow. “I’m sure she knows someone at the American embassy in Germany. She knows a lot of people.” Lathe looked over to Eren. “A lot of people.”

Eren looked up to him and nodded. “Okay.” He continued to sketch until he heard soft raps against the front door after a few minutes. He looked over to watch Lathe move from the kitchen over to the front door. Is she here already?

“Lathe! It’s good to see you again. May I come in?” A sweet voice with an unplaceable accent sounded from the door.

“Hey Spades, thank you so much for coming. Of course. Eren’s over there, on the couch in the living room.” Lathe motioned to Eren, stepping back to let her enter.

She carefully walked over to Eren, surveying the room with sharp grey eyes. Her hair was the color of fire, pulled high into a ponytail, loose wavy locks tucked behind her ears, falling around her face. A large camera hung from around her neck, and she carried a heavy-looking case in one hand. She caught Eren’s gaze, and smiled sweetly, putting the case by the coffee table and offering her hand. “You must be Eren. You can call me Spades. I'm going to be helping with the case against your father.” Her eyes shone.

Eren watched her with wide eyes. Swallowing hard, he didn’t necessarily trust her yet, and to be honest, he was still trying to take in her bubbliness. He looked to her hand outstretched for his and he panicked a bit. What do I do? I’m so unsure.. “H-hi” Eren stuttered and moved away from her a bit, very wary of her.

She raised her arms in surrender, taking a small step back. She still had a small smile. “Fair enough. A total stranger, and a morning person. I'd be suspicious too.” She had a glint in her eye. I hope he doesn't mind my brand of humor. Eh, he's hanging out with Lathe. He should be used to it by now at least a little. “In all seriousness though,” she dropped her hands, her thumbs in her pockets. “I'm the person in charge of finding your father and dragging him into court. Me being here today is important, not because I need testimony- that’s a whole other ball game- but because I need to take pictures. Anything incriminating, I need to photograph, collect if I can, take DNA
and fingerprints from if I can, and file it all for analysis later. I just need you to let me know I can do that.” She looked Eren in the eye. “Eren, yes or no- will you trust me to lead the proceedings against your father?” You can trust me, kid. You really can.

Eren looked over to Lathe for a second before he nodded. “Y-yes.” He said quietly and he reached to his comforter to curl up under it. “What do you need to know?” He asked quietly. Does she need to know where to look? Does she need to know what he did? Does she need to know what knives he used? Eren started to shake just thinking about opening up to someone else.

_Oh my._ Lathe crossed over to Eren, sitting next to him and running a hand through his brown locks. “It’s alright, Eren.” He looked to Spades. “Am I allowed to talk on his behalf for some of this?”

Spades shifted her weight to one side, studying Eren’s shaking frame. “While I’m walking around, for the bigger picture, I think so. But if there’s something specific I should look into- a specific place or object or room- he needs to tell me that himself. It’s something only he would know.” Her eyes softened. “Can you do that, or should I just start my sweep?”

Eren swallowed hard. He curled up to Lathe’s touches and shuffled as close to him as possible. His shaking subsided a bit. “T-the basement… The kitchen floor…. And his bedroom at the end of the hall upstairs.” Eren whispered the words into Lathe’s ear before burying his head into his shoulder. He didn’t trust his own voice to go higher than a whisper. I don’t want to talk anymore… No more, please. He silently begged Lathe to understand as his shaking hand clung to the teacher’s shirt.

Spades tilted her head to one side, a lock of hair falling from next to her ear, a small earpiece visible. ‘What?’ She mouthed to Lathe, knowing better than to speak.

Lathe looked torn between speaking and just holding onto Eren, his right arm wrapped around him, his head tucked under his chin. His eyes focused on his raised left hand, slowly and with deliberation trying to spell out what Eren said. He dropped his arm as Spades nodded, taking her case with her up the stairs. He just held onto Eren, trying to get him to stop shaking. He murmured. “It’s alright. That’s all we need. I’ve got you.”

Eren sniffled quietly, nodding and curling up to Lathe’s chest. He was warm, and his hot forehead was rested against an open patch of Lathe’s skin between his neck and his collarbone. The boy made a soft noise and nuzzled his hot forehead into the relief his cool skin gave him. He was starting to stop his shaking, calm down a bit as his arms wrapped around him. I like being in someone’s arms… It’s so much nicer than a fist.

Spades slowly moved to the end of the hall, looking over her shoulder to Eren’s room. That’s his
room. It looks like any normal bedroom, nothing really important to the case there… She stopped in front of the closed door at the end of the hall, putting down her case and pulling on gloves. *I'll need these.* Holding her camera ready with one hand, she slowly turned the knob with one hand. ... *what? It's locked.* She dropped her camera, studying the knob, where the bolt slid in place against the frame. *It's an old house, so…* She fumbled to grab her wallet from her pocket, fishing an old ID card out and prodding at the metal. It immediately opened. *Of course.* Putting it away, she held onto her camera, pushing the door slowly open.

The stale stench of alcohol hit her first. Broken bottles littered the floor, all the dark glass from beer bottles, the clear, tall necks from cheap vodka, the thickest glass from scotch. She took pictures of the whole scene immediately, turning the flash on, and studying what showed up on the screen. The pictures showed what the darkness had hidden from her—just how much blood coated everything in sight. She retrieved yellow tags and right-angled rulers, snapping picture after picture of jagged bottles, their bottoms broken off or shattered entirely, dusting everything she could for fingerprints, swabbing the blood from their edges and anything from their mouthpieces, labeling them with extreme care. Picking the tags back up after photographing the entire scene with them one last time, she packed the multitude of samples she already had in a drawer of her heavy case, descending the steps carefully, not seeing much else on the top floor. She paused in the living room, seeing the blood spatter on the ground and in the corner, catching the maroon drops on the dark wood of some of the furniture. She looked to Lathe, still holding onto Eren as he drew.

Lathe felt her looking at him, meeting her gaze. He watched as she pointed to the drops in the corner. He read her lips. ‘*Last night?*’ He nodded, silent. He watched as she worked, taking photos of the broken furniture and the dark spots, swabbing the blood. He subconsciously held onto Eren just a little bit tighter. *She knows what she’s doing.*

Eren’s steady breathing sounded underneath Lathe’s chin. The boy had his eyes focused on the sketchbook in his lap, his back pressed against his chest. He enjoyed that Lathe kept his strong arms around his thin body. It was comforting to be in the man's lap as he drew. He had already finished his first sketch of a waterfall and started to work on a deer now. He was constantly switching the hardness he was using to get different colors in the fur. It already looked amazing.

Spades tried her best to be quiet as she worked her way down the room, the click of her camera the loudest noise she made. She stopped at the entrance to the kitchen, setting her things down and leaning down to closely study the tiles. *There are so many slits cut in the tile… Haphazard… Uniform. With purpose.* She placed down another ruler, taking photographs of how long each cut in the tile was, practically the same across the five or so she checked. *It was the same knife. So… but I don’t know if I want to ask him which. It’s thick enough to be a knife I’d find in the drawer with the rest you’d use for cooking.* She opened some of the drawers, finding one with sharper knives inside. A large butcher knife lay near the top, the front corner of the cutting edge especially scratched and nicked, slightly bent. *The money I’d put on that being it…* She snapped a photograph, carefully picking it up and taking special images, one of it held directly above a cut, a scratch line where it would stop cutting through the tiles visible on the blade, and one with it sunk into the tile, stopping exactly where it bent. *It’s a fit…* She removed it from the floor, dusting for any prints left. *Nothing. It’s been washed… wait.* She noted a small speck of blood, stuck in the
crack of where the metal was mounted onto the heavy plastic handle. That. Taking a swab, she then placed the knife in an evidence bag, careful not to have it cut through the thick paper. She looked over to the corner, seeing the bloody belt coiled up, the dark leather bloody, the metal behind the scraps of skin shining. Oh my god. She passed the pantry without a glance, placing a yellow tag next to it. This is awful... all of it. The grey dust stuck to fingerprints, many overlapping. There are good prints on this one. But that’s Eren’s skin... She picked it up carefully, placing it in a large evidence bag. She walked back to her kit, passing once more by the open pantry, finally seeing it. ...There is literally nothing in that pantry. She brought her camera up, disheartened by the lone box of pasta on the shelf. No wonder he’s so sickly... She stowed away the bags in her case, almost full with everything she collected. I’m going to need to stow this in the car soon... She picked it up, carrying it to the door in the hall, close to the kitchen. She thought a moment, and set it down. The basement. Let’s see what the damage is first... Taking a breath, she opened the door, reaching over to flick on the lights.

Cold white lights took a few seconds to flicker on, dim. The stairs creaked underfoot, the handrail ready to break off of the wall. It was much colder than the rest of the house, the grey cement floor full of cracks. A steel surgical table was drilled down into the floor, gleaming in the center of the room. Leather straps with steel buckles lay open, short ones for wrists and ankles, others for the chest, the legs, the head... Metal hooks stuck out from the ceiling above it, meant for equipment to hang... A metal cabinet drilled into the wall was ajar, showing jars labeled with spidered handwriting. Another next to it was closed, the key hanging from the lock. A file cabinet was in the corner, a few papers and old electronic equipment stacked on top of it. Wires connecting from the back of the biggest piece were nailed in place up the wall, strung to video cameras, their lights out, all pointing to the metal table in the center. The file cabinet labels were yellowing, their words barely legible:

The Effects of Organ Removal on Response to Various Illnesses and Their Combative Medicines

She had to stop reading after that.

Spades strode back over to the stairs, taking a shot of the basement as a whole before walking upstairs. Her face was blank as she picked up her case, walking out to her car and opening the passenger’s side door. She moved the two bags of evidence and the numerous DNA swabs for testing into a metal box on the floor, before leaning against the side of the car, taking off her gloves and putting her head in her hands. This is... After a moment, Spades dropped her hands, pushing herself off her car. Come on. You need to finish this. Picking up the heavy metal case up from the seat, she slammed the door shut, walking back through the door.

Lathe looked up from Eren’s drawing, concerned. She doesn’t look too good... is it really that bad? Lathe tensed, ready to get up and investigate for himself. I need to know.

Spades saw Lathe shift, and held up her hand in an imperative ‘Stop.’ She spoke quietly. ‘I’m fine.
You stay put.” She flashed him a quick smile. *I'm not letting you see this.*

Eren looked up when he heard her speak. He put his drawing stuff away for the moment and got up on wobbly feet, making his way towards the bathroom, sensing that Lathe wanted to get up and he needed to use the facilities himself. He used the wall to help him get around, and soon found himself in the bathroom.

Lathe stood, making sure Eren could walk without too much trouble before crossing the room quickly, putting his hand on Spades’ arm. His voice was low, urgent. “How bad is it?”

Spades looked to him with sympathy. “If you must know…” She pressed a button on her camera, showing him the last photograph she took.

The color drained out of Lathe’s face. *That’s sick... terrifying.* “What…” He swallowed hard, pointing to the cabinets.

“...I don't know yet. I haven't gotten that far. I only took this for now. Lathe…” Spades took the camera from her neck, giving Lathe a hug. “He’s fine now. He’s going to be even better soon. This is all behind him now.”

Lathe willed himself to stop shaking. *You can't. You won’t. Stop it.* “T-thanks…” He weakly returned her hug, pulling back after a moment. He swallowed. “H-how long do you think you need, still?”

Spades checked her watch. “It’s ten thirty now… I'd say noon. There’s an entire file cabinet down there that seems to be in relative order… I'm probably going to drag that back to the station. It'll take days to sort through, most likely.” She smiled softly. “You’ve done wonderfully, Lathe. I'll keep doing what I can. We can talk after I'm done. Right now…” she trailed off, watching Eren shambling back to the couch. “...you have a job to do.” She gave him a light nudge, a reassuring look in her eyes. *We’ll get through this. Somehow, we will.*

Eren shuffled to the couch and slowly made his way to a comfortable sitting position, wrapped up into a giant cocoon via his comforter. He seemed happy to be swaddled in warmth. He had gathered his sketches again, putting the finishing touches on the deer before he started to doodle on a clean sheet.

Lathe walked slowly back to the couch, his footsteps heavy. *The things he’s done to Eren...*
When he got to the couch, he hesitated, not sure what to do with himself. He shuffled his feet for a moment, not wanting to uproot Eren after he just got situated. Ugh. I suck at this.

Eren noticed Lathe shuffle on his feet. He reached over and pulled him down onto the couch before he curled up to Lathe again, laying his head on his shoulder as he situated himself in his lap. He’s comfortable…I like it. I wonder if Levi would be this comfortable…Hmm, I’ll have to see when he gets home. I’m also going to assume Lathe has seen the pictures from the basement, so he probably knows almost everything now…. Fun.

Lathe silently watched Eren doodle. It’s awful what happened to you. I just hope I’m doing an okay job trying to get you through this, out of your own personal Hell. He wrapped his arms back around Eren’s middle. We’ll get you out of this. Swear it.

Spades walked back to the basement door, letting out a breath, steeling herself. Her eyes hardened. You need to finish this. Stepping down the stairs, she placed her case on the bottom step, putting on a new set of gloves, removing rulers and tags, and getting to work.

The file cabinet was first. She took pictures of the equipment on top, studying the wiring. The cameras feed into this big piece, which I think burns it into CDs. …That’s fucked up. She dusted over the buttons for fingerprints, finding plenty and taking pictures of them before setting them on the ground, out of the way. She took pictures of the ancient labels on the drawers, dusting over the handles. More prints. She carefully took hold of the top handle, pushing the button and opening it.

Rows and rows of Manila folders stared back up at her, each dated and filled with papers, sticky notes, diagrams, descriptions… he was so systematic about it… It’ll take days and days to get through it all. I'm not going to be getting much sleep for a while, am I. But how could anyone do this, so many times, to their own son? She slid it back shut, letting it click back in place. Before anything else, you need to get it out of here. I should’ve brought the truck. Do I go get it now, or later… Later. Finish everything else. She moved over to the file cabinets, snapping images of the ajar doors, the key dangling in the lock. Prints. Prints. More prints. There’s no way he can get out of this. She opened the first cabinet slowly, and if she hadn't had her camera on a strap behind her neck, it’d’ve busted on the floor.

The top row of the cabinet, at her eye level, were jars filled with a dark liquid, masses of flesh still and floating inside them. Masking tape peeling at the ends labeled them, the pencil lines too smudged and faded to be legible. Spades swallowed hard, dusting them. They've been picked up so much-there isn't an untouched millimeter on them. She took pictures of their labels, faded though they be, and the labels on the rows of jars and boxes of medicine below them. The names were odd, ones she had never heard, and the few she did… these were all banned as anaesthetics. They… didn’t work. Twenty or more containers and labels, all with dates and notes underneath their names.
Twenty minutes after beginning the procedure, effects were apparent

Failed to completely render patient unconscious, allowed for continual movement of limbs.

No observable effects on patient, rendering them unconscious or otherwise.

Spades stopped seeing the labels as words. She refused to register what they said. She took the ones she knew were banned and illegal to possess, sealing them in paper envelopes. I'll need to ask Lathe about which other ones are illegal. He'd know. She looked to the jars again. ...I'm not touching those. They're a biohazard and I'm not equipped to deal with that right now. She cast her eyes to the right cabinet, sighing. ...One more cabinet. It's almost done. She turned the key, slowly opening the metal doors. Her eyes were greeted with the sight of various kinds of ropes. Ropes? She looked further down to a cardboard box, closed… It appeared as though it had been taped shut and opened many times, and it was just falling apart now. The outside was marked with that same wispy handwriting, only this time it was legible, done in a permanent marker: Personal. What could be in here? Spades reached forward and after snapping a few photos of the whole cabinet, she opened the box and almost immediately dropped her camera again. Leather whips, Nine-tail whips, gags, handcuffs… The list could go on, but Spades had to look away almost instantly. The smell from the box was putrid, a combination of blood and sex. She had to stand up and turn around to collect herself again. And to think it could get worse. Calm down, you need to finish this, this will just help drive the nail into getting him a lifetime sentence. She steeled her nerves, slowly returning to the box and opening it once again. She almost gagged at the smell that wafted from that box alone. Spades lifted up her camera, and took pictures before pulling each and every small piece of equipment out of it. She bit her lip as she picked up a majority of the objects. They were caked with a sickening combination of blood, lube, and semen. She went back to her bag to grab the yellow tabs and her rulers, taking careful pictures of all the… ‘instruments,’ before getting DNA samples from a majority of them, and placing them all in their own Manila envelopes. She then hurriedly put everything back in the box and put it back in the cabinet before hurriedly slamming it closed. I'll come back for that later. She let out a heavy sigh, her feet dragging on the floor as she walked back to her case, putting away her tags, swabs, gloves… She shut the top with more force than she needed to. When we find that man someone better hold me back before I kill him myself. How fucked up can you get?! She walked up the stairs, shutting off the lights and closing the door quietly behind her. She looked to her watch. Eleven forty-two… I should have everything back at the station by one or so. She peered in at Eren and Lathe, the latter holding the former protectively. He’s such a nice kid… It's awful how this had to happen to him.

Lathe glanced up to Spades, wishing to speak to her. He spoke quietly to Eren. “I need to get up for a sec, Eren, alright? I need to talk to Spades.”

Eren looked up to the man and nodded after a few seconds. He slowly and carefully got off of Lathe’s lap and curled up in the corner of the couch to doodle again. He didn’t mind the loss of warmth for now. He’ll come back… I know he will, he’s got to.
Spades didn’t set her case down. “Come with me.” She led him to the top of the staircase, opening the door again and flicking the light back on. She looked back at him, bringing him down the steps and slowly over to the file cabinets. She turned to him, a fearful look in her eyes. “There are some… jars in this cabinet, and I don’t know what they are. I need you to… identify them for me.” She set down her case and took up a pen and paper, nudging the cabinet open with the end of her pen.

Lathe’s eyes widened, his face as white as paper. Those are… “That’s… um, they’re all human organs… either whole, or in pieces… That first one is… A gall bladder.” He swallowed. “The second is probably sections of a liver. The third through the fifth are all pieces of a kidney… Only one. And the sixth and seventh…” He shivered. “…that’s a spleen. They can’t be anything else.” His eyes drifted down to the boxes of sedatives, his eyes widening. “Those… I don’t see one that isn’t illegal.” He skimmed over their labels, grimacing. “He used these…” He looked at one, his state miles away. “These were all banned because they either didn’t work at all, or all they would do is paralyze the body… and the patient could feel everything. They wouldn’t be able to tell you until you were done…” He ran a hand through his hair, shutting his eyes. Why. “Is that all you needed me for?” He turned his sad eyes to Spades. Please say yes so we can leave.

Her page was filled with numbers and notes. She nodded. “I need to collect all these boxes of medicine, and take them up with me. I have to collect the file cabinet and… Other things…” She tried not to shudder. “So I need to leave and come back with the truck. When I do, it shouldn’t be too hard to get that thing up the stairs and in it. And then, we can have a better discussion on this, if you’re up to it.” I don’t think I’d be able to talk too well about this at this point… But if you need to, we can.

Lathe studied his shoes, shook his head. “I- I can’t. Not right now.” I need to think more on this. It’s so much…

Spades offered him a small smile. “It’s fine. I’m not exactly doing too well with all this myself. I think you should go back up, stay with Eren. He’s probably worried about what happened to you being gone so long.” A small light flickered in her eye.

Lathe sighed in defeat. “Thanks. For everything.” The gratitude in his eyes was obvious, immense. He shuffled over to the stairs, listening to Spades put on gloves again and pick up the boxes. He felt exhausted, for it being only noon. You need to clear your head for awhile. You have a sick teen to attend to, and he’d probably appreciate it if you made lunch already. …I need to stop being so hard on myself. Chill. Lathe walked over to his laptop, scrolling through a long list of icons. He looked over to Eren. “I’m going to make us something to eat. Do you mind if I play some music? I won’t set it too loud.” Please be okay with it.
Eren looked up from his work to see Lathe. He nodded but his face gave away a look of discomfort before his body started to shudder as he coughed horribly. He coughed a few times before putting his sketching stuff away and curling up into a tighter ball. “You can play it” he told him, his voice sounded really hoarse after coughing.

Lathe winced at his hoarse voice. “Do you want a cough drop? I think I have some.” He walked to his bag after pressing a button, letting the first chords of a song play.

Eren nodded and moved to get up to follow Lathe to his bag. He was still wrapped in his large black comforter. He smiled at the song… It was Shooting Stars by Bag Raiders, so of course he started to sing along, taking the cough drop from Lathe.

“It’s late I’m awake,
Staring at the wall
Open up my window
Head floats out the door”

Lathe looked at Eren with surprise. *He knows this song? More importantly, he can sing? His voice is amazing!*

“No one else around
A shimmer takes my eye
I lift my head
Blinded by the sky”

Lathe shook himself from his stunned state of mind, grinning and standing back up, moving to start cooking. *I'm not the only music enthusiast around. That's great!* He dug in the bags for bread and tomatoes, fetching mozzarella cheese and fresh basil out of the fridge.

“Feel my weight in front
Following the sound
Moves away so fast
Fall to the ground”
Lathe nodded to the beat of the song, quietly adding his lower voice to Eren’s as he started cooking, shredding cheese and slicing tomatoes. He saw Spades come up from the basement, and at his inquiring look, she shook her head. ‘Thank you, though.’ Guess it’s just me and Eren for lunch, then.

“I know there's more to come
Jump back to my feet
Now I only see ahead of me
Chasing down the street”

Lathe assembled the soon-to-be-grilled cheese sandwiches in a hot pan, covering them and letting himself sing a little louder to match Eren’s volume. It's nice that it isn't just my voice singing along for once...

“Gave my love to a shooting star
But she moves so fast
That I can't keep up
I'm chasing”

Eren smiled as he sang. He came into the kitchen to look around for his nausea pills, he wanted to take them so he would be able to eat when the food was ready. The smell was making his mouth water already. Ah, found them! Eren lifted the bottle, so Lathe could see him take them before he put it back and got out a glass for water.

“I'm in love with a shooting star
But she moves so fast
When she falls then
I'll be waiting”

Lathe flipped the sandwiches and covered them one more time, waiting for them to finish browning. He kept a careful eye on Eren as he took his nausea pill. Just making sure... He took off the lid, avoiding the small cloud of steam and sliding them both onto their own plates, handing Eren one. “Here you go, Eren. Do you want something to drink? More tea? We have milk if you just want that.” You really liked the tea earlier. You didn't seem to be a huge coffee fan, though.

Eren looked to his plate and smiled softly. “I would like some tea, if there is some” he said quietly and he sat down carefully at the kitchen table, still wrapped in his blanket. His fever still high. I would love tea, it would probably help my throat.
“There’s still plenty. I’ll make sure to get more later.” He set the kettle on the back burner. “Do you want any honey in it? I know you’re not a big fan of sweet but it’ll help with your throat. I’ll make sure it’s still very strong.” *You really don’t sound good, and losing your voice sucks.*

Eren thought about it. *If it’s not too sweet it should be fine… “as long as it’s not too sweet you can put it in”* he told the other and carefully lifted his steaming sandwich to take a bite.

*...Have I not had napkins around at all? Ugh. He dug into one of the bags near Eren’s foot, opening a small package of them and placing a small stack in the center of the table. “I swear this isn’t some passive-aggressive message. Just if you need one.” He grinned, turning back to the singing kettle, finding another mug and letting the tea steep. He put his own plate across from Eren, handing him his tea before nudging some bags out of the way of his chair and sitting down, biting his own sandwich. *I hope he likes it. This is one of my favorite things to eat when I’m sick.*

Eren was already chowing down on the delicious sandwich when Lathe sat down across from him. *This is good, but I don’t think that I can eat much more… Eren took two more bites before setting half the sandwich down. He couldn’t eat it… *fuck… and it was good too.* Eren slowly reached to his tea and drank it slowly.

Lathe saw the guilt lacing Eren’s eyes, setting his sandwich down and swallowing before he spoke. “You don’t have to eat it all. You just started eating on a regular basis. You got through half. That’s wonderful progress.” His eyes glinted. “And they make good leftovers. It’s fine.” Lathe smiled, returning to his own food, studying the bags by his foot as he chewed. *I should probably put all that away when I’m done. It’s kinda getting in the way.*

Eren nodded in understanding. He liked that the tea was still strong even with the honey. He sighed from the relief the tea brought from his scratchy throat. *Feels better, I can probably sing better. My head is throbbing though, a lot more than before… *Fuck it hurts.* Eren reached up to rub his throbbing head, he gasped when he felt just how warm his forehead was compared to his cold hands. He whimpered a bit and tried to curl up to himself. He coughed again, and his throat became scratchy and dry in an instant. His whole body shook as he coughed, he looked even paler than before. *I feel like shit... God, I’ve never been so sick before... *Fuck... I feel dizzy again.*

*He’s getting worse. He needs to lie down.* Setting down his last remnant of sandwich, Lathe stood and swiftly stepped around the table, his arm across Eren’s shoulders, rubbing his arm lightly. “I think you should lie down, Eren. You sound worse than before. Here.” Lathe offered his hand, letting Eren lean on him as he stood up, dragging the blanket behind him on his way to the couch.

Eren stood up with Lathe’s help and immediately knew it was a bad idea. *Shit, I see fucking stars.*
Eren reacted sluggishly, trying to grab for Lathe’s arm as he started to keel forward. He missed though and gave a yelp as he crumpled on the floor. *Fuck, too dizzy to fucking stand… My body feels like lead… Goddammit.* Eren coughed again, curling into the fetal position to keep the pain at bay as his body shook violently with every cough.

Lathe dropped down next to Eren, brushing his hair out of his face and feeling his forehead again. *He’s burning up even worse than before. I need to get him off the floor.* Lathe carefully snaked his arms under Eren, slowly lifting him and the blanket up, stepping to the couch deliberately, trying not to trip on the blanket near his feet. *What do I do we need to break his fever and it sounds simple but I don’t want anything else I give him to react against the other stuff I already gave him*...

Lathe set him down on the couch, tugging the blanket to his chin before rummaging in his bag, finding an orange bottle and reading the back. *I know it’s for colds, fever, head congestion, dizziness and chills, blah blah blah, active ingredients… It should be okay. Two of them? That works. …may cause drowsiness.* Lathe looked to Eren’s curled form. *He could use the rest.* Lathe opened the top, shaking two of the tablets into his hand. He handed them to Eren. “One sec, I’ll grab your tea.” He walked quickly to retrieve it from the table, coming back to hand him the warm mug, helping him lean up to sip from it.

Eren swallowed the two pills. When he was lifted to sip at the tea he felt like his head was going to roll off his neck. It took a few moments for him to rid himself of the dizziness. He took a sip of the tea and was able to wash down the pills. Once he was put down he began to cough horribly, and it sounded almost that with each cough he could very well throw up whatever was in his stomach. *Fuck, it hurts, Lathe, help…. Please.* Eren whimpered and grabbed at his head when he finally stopped coughing.

*Oh thank god the coughing’s over, I thought for a minute he wasn’t going to keep lunch down.* Lathe pet Eren’s head lightly, murmuring softly. “It’s okay, your head will feel better soon. Just give it a moment and you’ll be alright.”

Eren whimpered a bit and reached out a shaking hand out. He weakly grabbed hold of Lathe’s pants and tugged on them. He wanted to curl up to something. He couldn’t sleep without a body beside him. *I don’t want to have a nightmare if someone’s not with me…. His eyes looked a bit fearful as he tugged onto his pant leg, fearful he would leave.*

*What is this thing that is now happening “Uh, what’s…?”* Lathe let Eren tug him onto the couch, helping him shift so his head was in his lap, tucking the blanket back in place. He tangled his fingers into Eren’s hair, softly petting him and playing absentmindedly with his locks. … *Alright.*

Eren had closed his eyes, his breathing evening out rather quickly. His small body curled up to as much warmth as he could. He slept soundly, though his coughs every now and then would jostle him a bit before he would fall back asleep again. He didn’t pull his head away when Lathe ran his fingers through his hair. *It feels nice. Don’t stop, Lathe….. Eren drifted off into deeper sleep.*
Lathe kept softly carding his fingers through Eren’s brunette hair, his gaze miles away. His mind wandered, though he made sure to check every once in awhile to see how his fever was doing. The pills I gave him have always acted fast. He’ll be much better soon. He looked up as a silver truck pulled up outside, Spades retrieving a trolley from the back. She quietly opened the door, fastening ropes hanging around the back of her neck, looking in at Lathe and Eren.

She smiled at him, mouthing ‘It’s cool; I can handle one file cabinet. I'll try to be quiet.’ She wheeled the trolley in, closing the door and lifting it down the basement stairs.

Lathe kept his attention on Eren, hoping he wouldn't stir. I hope she can handle that cabinet. It didn't exactly look light... Five minutes passed, and he heard shuffling by the basement door, which had been left wide open. A creak, and a quiet thunk. Another creak, another quiet thunk. Eleven more, and she was visible, carefully guiding the cabinet into the hall. She flashed Lathe a smile. She’s got this.

Eren’s whole body shivered. He let out a soft whimper because of it, and attempted to curl closer to the other and cocooning himself more into the blanket. The house was still pretty cold, and his fever showed no signs of breaking yet. But the boy went back to sleep as soon as he was comfortable again.

Waitwaitwaitwaitwait. Lathe picked up his hands, waving to make sure he had Spades’ attention. He wracked his brain for the right movements, spelling out the half of the words he didn't know. ‘It’s freezing in here. Did you see a furnace downstairs?’

Spades parked the trolley so it wouldn't move, signing back, mouthing the words. ‘I think it was on the other side of the stairs. I’ll go check and see if it’s working at all. I should probably call the gas company. It might just be shut off.’ She left the trolley, padding down the stairs. My money's on the latter. Looking at the furnace, it appeared to be in one piece. She went back upstairs, signing to Lathe. ‘Most likely, the gas was shut off. Let me take stuff to the truck, and I'll call around, get that going. Has there been any mail?’

Lathe shook his head. ‘There isn't even a mailbox here. There must be a PO Box that everything is going to. How else would they be getting billed?’

Spades nodded. 'I'll call the post offices in town. We’ll get all this sorted out.’ She hesitated, her fingers slowly feeling the air as she thought of the right words. She sighed, determined. ‘We can't forget that Eren is still a minor. I'm hoping I can find them as I go through the files, but we need to find Eren’s papers. His passport, his birth certificate… Lathe, we can't let him go through the system.’
Lathe’s eyes widened, his fingers twitching, before signing back rapidly, barely having to think about how the words moved. ‘No no no, I don’t think I’m the right kind of person to be responsible for Eren. I’d do an absolutely horrible job taking care of him all the time, and he’d probably get sick of me really fast and I don’t know if I’m up for something as important as that, it’s barely been a day and how could he ever trust me enough for that after one day?’

Eren’s body shook violently as he coughed again, his grip immediately going for Lathe’s shirt as he was startled from sleep. His body continued to shake even after his coughing fit. He was shivering; his fever had subsided only slightly, not even a whole degree yet… His eyes were wide in full blow fear as his body shook even more violently with a second, much longer coughing fit, he was struggling to get air in as his coughing continued. The sounds getting worse and worse as he continued, clinging onto Lathe.

Lathe’s attention immediately switched to Eren, dropping his arms to pet his hair and rub his shoulder, murmuring. You can’t panic now, that’ll make it worse. “It’s alright, Eren, you don’t have to panic, it’s just a coughing fit, it’ll be over soon…” Come on, this sickness has to give sometime. His fever’s barely gone down. It’s so slow going… But it’s going nonetheless.

Eren’s grip struggled to remain on Lathe’s shirt as a third longer fit ripped through Eren’s body. His shudders were violent for each cough, and he was a bit wheezy when if finally ended minutes later, his whole face was flushed red, and he was simply exhausted after going through that. He had still managed to keep his food down too, which was good. He exhaustedly slouched down into Lathe’s lap again and curled up to him. He was awake now, and too scared to go back to sleep at the moment. No, I don’t want to wake up not being able to breath like that again. Though, he was starting to calm down in Lathe’s arms with his soft murmurs.

Lathe sighed, relieved that it was over for then, smiling at Eren reassuringly. He looked up to Spades, leaning in the doorway, her arms crossed and one eyebrow raised. She mouthed silently to him. ‘you were saying...?’

Lathe blushed, turning his head away a bit and frantically spelling words with his left hand ‘Let me think about everything, okay? It’s a lot to take in all at once.’ Dammit Spades. Stop being... kinda maybe not wrong about everything.

Eren was completely oblivious to their conversation. He just started to mumble nonsense in German to calm himself down, his hands still firmly grasping Lathe’s shirt.

...That isn't English… Lathe listened to the odd words, bringing his hand back down to gently rub Eren’s shoulder. He considered his shoes as he saw them out of the edge of his sight, shrugging
and kicking them off. *I’m going to be here for awhile.* He crossed his feet on the coffee table, careful not to disturb Eren too much as he petted behind his ear, red still splashed across his cheeks. ...*I honestly can't tell how right she may or may not be... I've got the giving-you-this-when-you're-sick-to-make-you-better part of it down, but this part right now, I guess... Kinda? He hasn’t hated anything I've cooked so far... I dunno. Maybe. The decision’s on him, really. I'll have to bring it up sooner or later.* He barely noticed Spades continuing to move the cabinet out the door.

Eren’s murmuring soon died down and he rested his hot forehead against Lathe’s cool skin. “I’m cold” he mumbled quietly and weakly reached for his blanket, trying to pull it closer to his body; It wasn’t helping to keep the warmth around him much anymore. The boy was starting to shiver, his forehead so warm, showing off his fever, while his fingers and toes were icy cold.

*How else am I supposed to... Lathe, you know damn well what this situation calls for. Just fucking go with it.* “Watch out, kid, I’m coming in.” *What am I even doing?*! Lathe lifted his legs off the table, shifting so he was lying parallel to Eren, who was more or less on top of him. He pulled at the edge of the blanket, bringing it around the both of them. “That alright?” *I have no fucking clue what's going on*

Eren gave a soft giggle as Lathe moved them. He almost instantly curled up to Lathe’s warmth under the blanket, his cold fingers still gripping the man’s shirt weakly. He gave a soft hum of agreement as he curled closer, burying his head into Lathe’s chest. It was amazing how warm his body could be, yet how cold he felt... He felt like his extremities had passed the coldness to the rest of his body. *I’m fucking freezing, thank fuck for Lathe. If I was alone I don’t know what I would’ve done.* Eren burrowed into Lathe without a single complaint, grateful for the added warmth.

Lathe wrapped his arms around Eren under the blanket, rubbing his sides with his thumb. He was still in total panic mode. *Somebody help me please.* He heard a click from the front doorway, looking up sharply to see Spades with her camera pointed at them, grinning like a madman. *That's not what I meant by helping.* Spades quietly chuckled at his glare and went back to retrieving things from downstairs.

Eren felt Lathe’s warm arms around him and he mumbled something again in German, incoherent to Lathe because of the way Eren’s face was buried in the man’s chest. The boy soon fell fast asleep in Lathe’s arms again, feeling safe in them. *He’s warm... And I’m fucking exhausted.* Lathe, *I hope you’re comfortable, you’re gonna be here awhile....

*He’s out. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. Apparently.* Lathe smiled softly at Eren, letting his head fall back against the pillows. *How did I get myself into this?* Lathe felt the full force of the day's activities hit him, overwhelmed with exhaustion. *Well, while I'm here...* Lathe yawned, and let himself close his eyes, drifting in and out of sleep.
Chapter 14: Introduction Arc Part 5: Lathe's Humble Abode

Levi walked in the front door of Eren’s house, overnight bag slung over his shoulder, shouting out.
“I’m ho~me!” Why isn’t the door locked? I thought Lathe locked it behind me. And why isn’t anyone responding? It’s so quiet… Levi shut the door behind him, scanning the front rooms and down the hall. The bags still aren’t put away… Lathe had mentioned something about that earlier. Dumping his bag next to the door and kicking off his shoes, Levi looked to the couch, seeing Eren on top of Lathe, both of them peaceful in their sleep. ...I won’t wake them up. Levi walked over quietly, putting the back of his hand to Eren’s forehead. It’s way down from where it was earlier. It’s not gone, but almost. That’s good. He looked over to the kitchen, at the paper bags surrounding the table, at the plates from lunch still sitting on the table. I’ll get all this put away.

Levi spent the next twenty or so minutes storing boxes and jars in the pantry, the fridge, and on the counter. He stood back, admiring his work. The house actually looks lived in for once. He looked over to the table once more, the two dirty plates and uneaten sandwiches, the mugs and the pan on the stove. I’ll do the dishes. Carrying the plates over first and scraping them into the trash, going to turn on the water. It sputtered for a moment, and stopped.

...Huh. Placing the dishes on the mat in the sink, Levi walked to the bathroom, turning on the tap. More sputtering. That’s not good. Levi tried the faucet upstairs. Did they shut off the water? They shut off the water. The shower refused to work. The toilet wouldn’t flush. This is bad. Coming down the stairs, he turned to the couch, to where Eren and Lathe were sleeping. Lathe. Problem. Help. Levi walked straight up to him and did the first thing he thought of- he brought his hand up and smacked Lathe straight across the face. Wake up, dammit. He saw Lathe wince, still half-asleep, and smacked him again, his eyes barely starting to open. Come on wake the fuck up! Levi went to smack him one more time, but lathe caught his wrist in an iron grip an inch from his face. He was met with a stone-cold glare.

“What the fuck are you- oh, shit. Sorry- excuse the swearing.” Lathe let Levi go, registering the weight on his chest and glancing down at Eren, still asleep. He looked up to Levi, smirking.
“Jealous?”

Levi felt his cheeks start to turn red. Lathe you need to stop nooooo....

Lathe chuckled, his gaze softening, rubbing his sleep-heavy eyes, though they sharpened as he saw Levi’s concern. “What’s up, Levi?”

“They shut off the water. None of the taps work. They sputter at best, before they just run dry.” Levi shifted. “What should we do?”
Lathe studied Levi’s face for a moment, before looking down at Eren, still fast asleep on his chest. He ran his hand through Eren’s brown hair, scanning the grey living room, blood stained into the carpet and on the dark wood furniture, busted and old, the kitchen tiles slashed. *Fuck it. “Levi, help me get everything packed up. We’re going to my place.” I’m so done with this.* Lathe carefully shifted out from under Eren, trying to let him sleep. *He wouldn’t be able to pack much, and the kid’s going to be exhausted for the next week no matter how much or little he does.* With some odd footwork, Lathe was free, tucking the blanket back around Eren and putting a pillow under his head. He turned to the kitchen, noting the lack of paper bags. “You put everything away. Sorry you wasted your time, kid. We need everything back in the paper bags, wherever you put them. You do that- I’ll deal with packing the stuff in his room.” *I know how to deal with all the drawing supplies.*

“Cool.” Levi moved to retrieve the paper bags from the pantry, packing up everything from the shelves. *Fridge last.*

Lathe slipped on his boots, leaving them loose and unlaced as he walked to his car, getting a cardboard box out of the trunk. He took them off as soon as he walked inside again, padding up the stairs quietly and slowly entering Eren’s room, looking around and trying to decide where to start. *Sue first. Everyone could use some dinner after all this.* Setting down the box, he took out his phone, quickly tapping away at the keys. *Dinner for four. Enough to feed a small army. She can handle that.* Lathe put his phone back, awaiting a response. *I’d do the desk first- get heavier supplies packed up, then drawings and paintings and such, and then clothes if there’s room left. I can always just have a pile of them loose in the trunk if need be.* Lathe set the box down, organizing the desk first before starting to put away palettes, watercolors, dozens of acrylic bottles, oil pastels and pencils of many hardnesses, graphite or charcoal. Books and books of sketches and good drawing paper, into the box. *There are at least seven totally full… and a lot of it’s the good kind of paper. There are a couple empty ones, too. That’s so much… I approve.* Lathe picked up the drawings scattered around the room, running downstairs for napkins from the table to shield the ones in charcoal, in pastel. *I’m not letting these smudge. They’re too nice.* Sweeping the room with his eyes, Lathe nodded in satisfaction with his upheaval before turning to the wardrobe for Eren’s clothes, pulling it open.

There was barely anything inside- a few black shirts, nearly all of them with long sleeves, and dark hoodies. *He only ever wears black? Well, considering…* Lathe took one of the hoodie sleeves in his hand, tracing the faint outlines of blood stains with his eyes. Eren, the second you feel up to going out I’m dragging you to the mall. You need more than just this. Dropping the sleeve, he took ahold of all the hangers in one hand, lifting them with ease and walking down to slip his shoes back on, taking them to the car with them. He carefully laid them in the trunk, rolling the bottom half of the stack up and pushing it to the side. He returned for the box, noticing the bookshelf and the books he’d just kinda nudged out of the way. *He’s probably gonna want those.* Lathe packed those up, careful not to crush any of the drawings. *Percy Jackson, good choice… That’s a good Sherlock Holmes one… oh thank god it was Harry Potter, I don’t know how the hell I saw the cover and though it said Twilight…* Shouldering the box, he carefully walked down the stairs back to the car, placing it carefully inside. He returned to the kitchen, taking up some of the bags Levi had finished packing. Lathe returned for the last of the foodstuffs, addressing Levi. “You know, we’re almost
ready to go.” Lathe nudged Levi towards the couch. “I think out of us, whoever woke him up, Eren would be less likely to maim his boyfriend.” Lathe grinned at Levi’s scarlet face. This is too adorable. “I’m not about to stop, Levi. Now go.” He gently pushed him forward, taking the last bag to the car.

Why did Lathe have to be the shipping type? He’s going to be the death of me… Levi padded over to Eren, kneeling down and petting his hair. “Eren, we need to go. It’s time to wake up. We’re headed to Lathe’s place. We need you at least semi-conscious for the ride.” Come on… wake up, please.

Eren groaned softly before he shifted his head away from Levi’s touch. He then proceeded to snuggle up into his blankets further, his breathing evening quite quickly. This would be a challenge; it was almost like Eren was a bear in hibernation, and you do not want to wake one of them up…. Never. Never wake up a bear.

Levi sighed. Okay, you're being adorable as fuck, but we need you awake. “Come on Eren, I’m all for letting you sleep but we’re moving over to Lathe’s place for now. You can keep resting once we get there. Seriously. Up.” He gently shook Eren’s shoulder. Come on.

<“What the fuck are you doing trying to wake me up, you fucking bastard. I was having some decent sleep until you fucking woke me up asshole! You can suck a bag of dicks for all I fucking care! I don’t want to fucking get up! I am comfortable and warm! So fuck off you fuckwad!”> Eren’s angered voice came out piercing the air as soon as Levi touched his shoulder. He was speaking in fluent German, much more complicated than either of them would’ve been able to understand. <“Give me one good fucking reason not to tear your fingers off one by fucking one, or so help me Satan you will die if I need to get up from this fucking spot!”> Eren’s words came out laced in pain, The morphine fucking wore out, and I am NOT getting up from this couch until my back is numb and I can’t feel it, dammit!

“Damn, kid’s got a mouth on him.” Lathe had an amused look on his face, watching and listening from the doorway. That’s some very... colorful language. I don’t know half of what he said, but I know all the swear words. If he was in class he’d have detention. Lathe crossed the room to his bag, digging for morphine after noticing his pained tone, still smiling. ...but he looks like a puffed-up puppy, so it’s okay. “Here you go, Eren. Morphine for the pain.” He handed him a water bottle. “You’re going to be awake for a little while though. Sorry about that.” Lathe looked honestly apologetic. Sleep is beautiful, I get that. But you can’t keep staying here. There’s nothing really left to use- and my place is cool, so you’ll forgive me later.

Eren raised a shaky hand and took the water bottle, grumbling some German under his breath, low enough that the two of them couldn’t make out a word. He took his pills quietly and then laid back down, waiting for the burning sensation to leave his back. I’m not fucking moving, and you better not pick me up. I will hit you until you are black and blue like a fucking newspaper.
Lathe raised his hands in surrender, backing away. “Okay, okay. Five minutes. Five minutes and then we’ll get you in the car. That’ll be plenty of time for the pills to kick in.” Lathe kept one hand in the air, the other reaching into his pocket to check his phone. One new message. He opened it, grinning. “Let me pack my stuff, then I have some news to tell you.” Lathe moved and quickly took apart his laptop setup, packing it back in its spark case. He took his medical bag and brought both out to the car, soon returning. “Okay, so here’s the thing.” He addressed both Eren and Levi. “I’m currently boarding this one college-age woman from Tokyo who’s here studying abroad to work in the medical field. She has an internship at the hospital in the town nearby, but her term here’s up in about a month. Her name’s Sue Litagana, and she’s cool with just being called Sue. I just want you to not be surprised that someone else is home when we get there. She’s making fish for dinner, so we should be able to eat when we get there. Just letting you all know.” He smiled, looking to Eren. “You ready kid? The pills kick in yet?”

Eren’s eyes gave away everything that Lathe needed to know, basically giving away that his body was, in any sense of the word, ‘drunk’ off the morphine. Eren tried to roll over and push himself off the couch, only to realize that he in fact could not perform such a maneuver without help. He gave a soft groan as a plea for help and reached out for Levi’s arm, missing completely, and the arm falling limply towards the floor. Pick me up you fucker, you’re the fucking bastard who woke me up, so you get to fucking pick my sorry ass up!

Levi sighed, moving to wrap his arms under Eren, making sure he wouldn’t drop the blanket as well as he lifted him carefully from the couch, using the comforter as a protection against his back. “Alright, Levi’s got you, let’s make sure I don’t trip on this thing and get you in the car. Levi slipped his shoes by the door back on, carefully balancing on one foot for a moment, before walking to the passenger side of Lathe’s car, a 1955 Ford Thunderbird, black and sleek, in perfect condition.

Lathe watched amused, running over to open the door for them, Levi sitting down with Eren in his lap. “Sorry it’s only got two seats. I didn’t think I’d be chaperoning two kids around. At this rate, I’ll be shopping for a minivan next month.” Lathe cackled, watching Levi’s expression. This is great! He moved to pull the top over them, locking it in place and getting in, starting it with little trouble. “I promise I’ll drive like a responsible adult and less like a maniac than normal.” Lathe looked over his shoulder, carefully backing up into the road and shifting into drive, carefully accelerating. “We can’t risk getting pulled over with you carrying Eren like that.”

Levi braced his feet against the front of the floor space, holding Eren protectively. “That’s not very reassuring.”

“I know how to drive. Be nice and maybe I’ll let you borrow it sometime.”
“In that case, you drive like a fucking **God.**”

Lathe laughed, his eyes bright. “Thanks, kid.”

<“He better fucking drive like a god, I am forced to be in this asshole’s lap for the time being and I do not want to go through that fucking window.’”> Eren’s voice was soft as he spoke, but he still managed to sound pretty angry as he involuntarily snuggled up into Levi’s chest, looking for warmth. He was still freezing, and being forced outside had completely ruined what heat he had had in his blanket on the couch.

“...I caught the words god, for the time being, and multiple curses. You take German, Levi? Any clue what he’s saying?” Lathe had a smile on his face, smoothly turning a corner, passing Armin’s house.

“Yeah- I think he just doesn’t want to end up through the window. So, be careful is what he’s saying. I think.”

<“What he said, I’m not fucking repeating myself”> He grumbled and shivered again as he curled up more into Levi’s arms. **Hmmm.... Short Stack feels just as comfortable as Lathe does... good.**

“We’re almost there, no need to get so bent out of shape about it. Two minutes.” They turned down Maria Avenue, soon pulling into a driveway. Lathe shut off the car, opening his door. “Welcome to mine humble abode.” He grinned widely. “It’s been so **long** since I’ve been here.” Sarcasm dripped from his words.

<“You were just here this morning you fucking asshat… Get me inside, I am fucking freezing!”> Eren was not pleased with how the temperature had dropped outside in the recent days, and the strong wind tousling his long hair was not appreciated in the least.

“Fiiiiiiiiine. Yeesh.” Levi grabbed the door handle, opening it with his foot all the way and stepping carefully onto the stone driveway, the surface the slightest bit uneven, made of large, flat stones. He lifted Eren out, careful of his head before he hip-checked the door shut, following Lathe to the front door. He looked up the facade of the two-story house, ivy climbing up the red-brick front. An oak tree cast shade over the lawn, and the garden, lined with stones, flourished with red and white flowers, many of them roses. **It’s already a beautiful house... very nice.** He stepped carefully over the threshold, slipping his shoes off on the front mat, taking in the cozy atmosphere.
The first thing anyone saw coming into the house was a grand piano, polished and shining under lights in the further half of the living room. A couch was pushed against the wall opposite of it, two small dark end tables on either end, with plenty of small pillows. The floor was dark wood, the walls scarlet, and there was gold-colored inscription at the top of the walls in a hand Levi couldn’t read. A large open doorway into the kitchen was to the couch’s left, stone tiles visible, the accents on the dark cabinets a shining gold color. The stairs in front of him were covered in dark brown carpet, leading upstairs and out of sight. The room to the right had a large wood table in it’s closer half, sheet music in the process of being composed scattered all over it, pencils and erasers in various places. Words written in that same slanted hand, this time in black, covered the entire right wall, various insignias and scripts dotting the uniform look.

Levi slowly moved to lay Eren down, letting him sink into the dark cushions and moving to get a pillow under his head. He could smell the fish cooking in the next room. *It smells great- dinner should be good.*

Lathe likewise toed off his still-loose shoes, walking past Levi and into the kitchen. He smiled at the young woman at the stove. “Hey, Sue. Thanks for cooking for us tonight. It smells great. I’ve brought company, like I said.”

She looked at him with dark green eyes, grinning back at him. Her dark brown hair dusted her shoulders, nearly hiding her right eye as she grinned. “It’s nothin’ I can’t take care of, and thanks. The way you texted makes me think I’ll see a lot of these two while I’m here, yeah?”

Lathe nodded. “Yeah. Eren’s going to be living here, pretty much. And Levi- he might as well, with how much he’ll be around.”

Sue glanced to the doorway, a thoughtful look on her face. “Are they…”

“Yup.”

“Ah.” She smiled, turning her attention back to her cooking. “Just curious.”

“Well, don’t tease them too much about it. That’s my job.” Lathe beamed. “I have to get a bunch of groceries out of the car- can't have them rottting out there. How long until dinner?”

“Ten minutes, give or take.” *Dinner needs to hurry up and finish cooking. I’m hungry.*
“Cool.” Lathe left the kitchen, passing Levi and Eren on the couch. Eren had somehow wrangled Levi into laying down with him, his face buried in his shoulder. “Ten minutes. Don't fall asleep on me- I'll feel too bad to wake you up again and let you go without dinner.” Lathe put his boots back on, beginning to fetch bags and place them on the counter of the far wall. After the sixth was inside, he put everything away, rearranging the fridge and pantry for room.

Eren nodded as he found himself curled up to Levi again. He murmured something in German again softly before he stopped and just looked around at the room they were in. *The food smells good, really good. I hope that it’ll be as good as it smells.* Eren shifted a bit but waited patiently curled up to Levi silently.

Levi played with Eren’s hair, studying the inscription on the wall. He tried to make out the lettering. *I doubt it's English. ...or even an actual language. I can't tell.*

Lathe walked to the car one last time, retrieving Eren’s things, Levi’s bag in the crook of his arm and his laptop and medicines over his shoulder. He slipped off his shoes at the door. “I'm going to put your stuff upstairs, Eren. I'll show you where you’re staying after we all eat. I might as well put your stuff in there too, Levi.” He sent him a pointed look, smirking before disappearing up the stairs. He turned the corner and opened up the guest bedroom, setting the box at the foot of the full-size bed, hanging Eren’s clothes in the closet. He set Levi’s stuff next to the box. *Eren’s room.*

His face shifted, really looking hard at the room, one he barely entered regularly. He spoke quietly to himself. “This is Eren’s room now.” It was… odd to say. *I’m not going to be used to that for awhile...* He turned, leaving to go back downstairs and see if Sue had dinner ready, hanging his bags on the end of the banister of the staircase.

She turned to him as he entered. “You can call everyone in for dinner.” She turned off the burner, a kettle singing on the back burner, and started to set plates on the table, waiting on setting out glasses or mugs.

Lathe stuck his head into the piano room, meeting Levi’s eyes as he looked behind him. “Food.” He grinned, returning to help Sue.

Levi nodded and helped Eren get into a sitting position. His steely grey eyes following Eren’s wobbly movements as he tried to stand up in his slightly sedated state. *He still looks like he’s drunk out of his mind.* “Are you gonna be okay, Brat?” He asked quietly, his voice full of concern.

Eren nodded. “Yeah, I’ll be fine, just give me a minute.” He told him and pushed Levi’s hand away when he tried to offer help again. *I can do it myself, dammit!*
Levi watched as Eren swatted his hands away but he didn’t complain, only raising his arms in surrender before going to go find the food in the kitchen. It smells incredible… I want it. I’ll trust Eren that he can move himself around, he does seem to be standing well on his own. Levi gave one look back at Eren before entering into the kitchen alone.

Lathe looked up from the counter, smiling at Levi. He turned to Sue, ushering Levi over to her.
“Sue, this a student of mine at the high school, Levi. Levi, this is Sue, my boarder from Tokyo.”

Sue offered her hand, smiling brightly. “It’s wonderful to meet you, Levi.”

“Likewise.” Levi accepted her handshake. She seems nice.

Lathe noticed Eren hadn’t followed Levi in. He might be using the bathroom… I dunno. I’ll give him a minute.

Sue gestured for Levi to sit at the table. “Please, sit. Would you like something to drink? We have milk, tea, coffee, water, whichever you like!”

Levi sat down as directed, finding a seat closest to the far wall. He looked up at Sue after thinking for a moment. “If you have Earl Grey Tea, that would be great, if not water is fine.” He said, his stoic face reappearing, trying to prepare himself for Lathe’s banter.

“Of course! One moment.” She turned to open a cabinet, removing a small box of teabags and a mug with a conceptual sketch of a train on the side. She addressed Lathe as she went about making Levi’s tea. “Lathe, have you heard anything about Dr. Yeager’s disappearance? It’s still in all the local magazines and nobody seems to know anything.”

Lathe froze, setting his coffee mug on the counter from where he was pouring some, looking at Sue and slowly shaking his head, a dark look in his eye. If Eren hears anything about his father, he’s going to flip. “A-actually, Sue-”

“You too? You worked with him. Surely you must know something about why he would've left so suddenly.”

Lathe glanced worriedly to the other room. Where’s Eren. And she needs to stop talking about Grisha. He spoke hurriedly. “Sue, I met him once. A-” Lathe, over the singing of the kettle and
Sue’s movements, heard something from the scripting room. “Hold that thought.” He quickly padded past the piano, the staircase, to the wall covered in lettering.

Eren slowly walked away from the doorway that led to the kitchen… He heard Sue’s question, his father’s name. No, I…. I can’t go there….. No…. not dad….. Eren felt his chest tighten at the thought of his father. He slowly backed away from the kitchen… the sounds becoming more and more muffled as he was brought away from the source of the voice. His breathing was already starting to become erratic as he turned to run into the other room. His eyes were starting to glaze over as he was taken back into those awful memories. Nononononononononononono…… Please no more……I don’t want you to poke around inside me anymore..... Please it hurts..... Please stop, daddy please.... I’ll be a good boy..... PLEASE.... “…make it stop...” Eren’s voice was soft as he spoke to no one in the empty room. He had curled up into a small ball in the far corner of the room. The tears had already started falling as Eren pulled at his long brown locks, managing to tear out quite a bit of it. He was starting to claw all the bandages off his arms and wrists as well. Take it off… Daddy did something to it.... Take it off..... I need to take it off... I need to scratch it off.... I want him to stop... It hurts..... I’m gonna die.... He’s gonna kill me! He’s gonna kill me! He’s gonna kill me! Eren got his wraps off after much clawing, reopened a few of the slits on his wrists and he had managed to scratch at his arms until a few of the trails were bleeding. Nonononononono! I can’t have the wrap on! I can’t! I can’t! Daddy did something to it! I saw him drench it in something! Eren began to claw at the bandages under his shirt. He was starting to wheeze as his chest tightened up more and more. I’m gonna die… It need to come off.....I’m gonna die.... Daddy’s trying to kill me.... Daddy’s gonna kill me..... It’s gotta come off.... Eren was freaking out more and more, his shirt had made it off of him, and he started to scratch away at the wraps on his chest, covering them in bloody fingerprints from the small trails running off of his arms as he scratched those as well. Eren’s breathing so wrecked that he was starting to choke as he tried to breath.

Lathe stopped dead, seeing Eren in the corner, scratching like mad at his chest, his arms. Shit. He heard Sue. He sidestepped the table quickly and immediately knelt down next to Eren, taking both of his hands in his own and refusing to let go, looking him in the eye and humming Der Mond ist aufgegangen softly. Come on, Eren. Stay with me. We need you to be okay. It’s fine, I swear.

Eren’s eyes were wide, and glazed over. He wasn’t there with them anymore, he had left so long ago. He was crying horribly, his whole body shaking. He was still struggling to breathe. It hurts… It hurts… daddy’s gonna kill me.... He’s gonna kill me... I’m gonna die.... Eren continued to try and pull his hands away to scratch himself. I NEED TO GET IT OFF!!! Eren’s fists clenched and he struggled to pull away.

Lathe’s grip on Eren’s hands remained steady. He let his humming become singing, still quiet, yet loud enough for Levi and Sue to hear from the kitchen.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?” Sue started to follow Lathe, before Levi stopped her.
Levi’s eyes widened and he immediately grabbed her by the wrist. “No, stay here, Eren’s having a panic attack. If he sees you he might freak out more.” He explained, before rushing over towards where Lathe and Eren were on the floor in the corner of the room. His bandages were unraveled, surrounding him. At least he’s not bleeding as bad as last time, but I can tell this is worse…. Much worse…. The song’s not even getting to him anymore. Think Levi…. What do I do?…….. German….. Speak German to him! Levi sat down on the floor by them and he was gentle as he brushed a few of Eren’s locks out of the way of his eyes. <“Eren, can you speak?”> Levi’s voice was soft and gentle as he spoke the hard language. He knew he could only say certain things, but hopefully it would be enough.

Eren’s struggling became worse as soon as he heard those words. No! Dad! Get away from me! Please! Get away! I don’t want to talk! I don’t want to! No, you can’t make me! Eren had finally struggled to get one single fist away from Lathe’s grasp, his body taking over as his fist made contact with Lathe’s nose with adrenaline-filled strength.

Lathe turned his head with a grimace. Fuck. That’s definitely going to bruise. He kept Eren’s one fist in a death hold, trying to grab back Eren’s free hand.

Levi watched what happened and almost instantly knew that Eren was no longer in control with himself. He hurriedly made a reach for Eren’s free arm and with that Eren struggled even more. Eren, you’re not yourself anymore… What happened? What are you going through?

Eren struggled against the two of them, even trying to kick the two of them away from him, until he had to be pinned down to the ground by both of them, Levi on his right side, while Lathe was forced to handle his left. Though this only led into Eren starting to scream and cry harder. “NO! No more! Please! I don’t want it out! I don’t want it out! Daddy stop! Please! I’ll be a good boy! I’ll be a good boy I promise! I don’t want it out!” Eren was screaming, and it was a horrid sound as he struggled to breath and scream at the same time. His body was starting to still under the two of them. He was becoming unconscious from the lack of oxygen as well as from the exertion of having his panic attack. He was still struggling to get out from under them. Get out from the restraints… Get off the table… Be a good boy for Daddy…

Levi’s eyes widened. What the fuck is he talking about? He doesn’t want it out? He doesn’t want what out? This isn’t going well. Levi was able to pin Eren’s right half with relative ease thanks to his pure muscled body. Lathe, the more we pin him the more he’s struggling. What the fuck do we do?. Levi looked to Lathe, only to see the man focused on Eren’s eyes, he still hadn’t come back to them yet. “L-Lathe, what do we do? He’s still panicking…. And he’s struggling to breathe.” Calm down Levi, you don’t need to freak out, this has happened before, Lathe will know what to do. Levi tried to remain as calm as possible.

Lathe hadn’t had much trouble either in pinning Eren down, his foot on Eren’s ankle and hand on his wrist. He threw a look over his shoulder, to a bookcase filled with music books and binders. Do
I have it? I think I have it. I printed it out after I heard it, so… “You,” he spoke decisively, “are going to keep him from following and attacking me. Try not to let him maim you. I have an idea. On my mark, I'm going to let go. Ready?” Lathe looked Levi in the eyes, waiting.

Levi nodded, keeping his eyes locked on Lathe’s. I need to trust him, he knows what the fuck is going on with Eren. He can help, I need to trust him. I can do this.

An instant of silence. “Mark.” Lathe let go and immediately moved to the bookshelf, pulling out a white binder and flipping quickly through it, skimming the titles of piece after piece of sheet music. Where is it where is it where is it HERE! Snapping it open, he snatched the music before moving to the piano in the other room, sliding onto the bench and arranging the music on it’s stand and flipping the cover over the keys up. His hands stilled over the ivory, the ebony, and began to fly.

Levi was still struggling as Eren realized that Lathe had moved away from pinning him. He gave out a sharp cry and his left fist had connected with Levi’s jaw. FUCK. That’s gonna fucking bruise! He’s fucking strong when he needs to be, holy shit! Levi was struggling as Eren tried to force him off. It’s like someone lit a fire under his ass! Lathe hurry the fuck up and do someth- Levi watched as Eren slowly stopped struggling.

Eren was listening to the music, it was pulling him out of his horrible twisted memories of his father pinning him to the table and opening him up in so many sick ways. Music? Where is that coming from? Eren’s body began to relax as he heard the song continue. Mom? Is that you? Where are you? I want you mommy. “M-mom?” Eren’s voice was so much quieter now, not the screaming mess that he was before. He was starting to come back to them, his eyes showed it, and his breathing started to come easier for him.

Lathe continued to sway over the keys, remembering how the piece went, barely reading the music in front of him. He saw Sue watch him from the kitchen, though his eyes wandered back to the scripting room, noticing the screams had quieted. Good... good. Lathe let himself immerse in the sound, still attuned to the quiet tone of feet shifting next to the stairs.

Levi watched in relief as he could slowly release his grip from Eren’s wrists as the boy finally came back to them. That’s it Eren, come back to me... come back to us. We need you back. Levi watched as Eren took in a deep breath and his head moved around. “Eren.” Levi said his name with a breath of relief.

Eren’s eyes were wide, but he was finally back to the real world. “L-Levi?” He asked in a quiet voice, his body totally drained of energy. He reached out to Levi’s shirt, only his arm never made it and he passed out from exhaustion right then and there.
Fuck. Lathe should know he’s okay now. Levi slowly picked Eren up, bridal style. It was easy to pick him up because he was so light, despite his tall frame. He slowly walked with Eren towards where Lathe was. Don’t hit his head on something, Levi. Lathe will not forgive you for that. Levi was very careful with Eren and soon was beside the piano where Lathe played. Eren limp in his arms. “Lathe?”

Lathe snapped from his trance, seeing Eren unconscious and immediately ceased playing, his eyes going from faraway to sharp in a second. “Oh my god. Did he pass out while he was still crazed, or was he… back?” Lathe moved to stand, sliding from the bench.

Levi looked to Eren. “He was back…. Where’s his room? He needs to rest, he passed out pretty quickly.” Levi held Eren gently against his chest. He needs to sleep, that as his worst one yet.

“Top of the stairs, turn right, door’s on the right wall, two feet from the corner. I think it’s open. I need to talk to Sue.” He glanced to her in the kitchen. “You go. But remember, you need to eat. Come right back after you tuck him in, okay?” Lathe rested his hand on his shoulder, before letting him go, and walking to talk to Sue about what had happened.

Levi nodded and he went off carefully up the stairs. He was holding Eren gingerly as he followed Lathe’s instructions to go into the large spare room. He gently put Eren down on the bed, helping get him underneath the covers as Eren shivered.

Okay…. In bed, check….. Tucked in, check…. Fever, gone…. Thank fucking Satan. Levi removed the back of his hand from Eren’s head before going back downstairs. He was quiet as he came into the kitchen, sitting down in his spot before, without another word. He was seething from what had happened in only a few seconds after Sue had mentioned Eren’s father.

Lathe had stepped into the kitchen, resting a hand on her arm and looking at her intensely. “I’m sorry about what just happened, it's not at all your fault. You didn't know.” Lathe took a breath, speaking quickly. “Eren’s father is Dr. Grisha Yeager. It’s something we don't mention. I know it’s a huge topic in the local news, but speaking about him will really set him off like he did. A lot of awful, awful things happened. I’d ask you refrain from mentioning him. Alright?” He accepted her worried nod, sighing and running a hand through his hair, turning back to the counter to finish making himself coffee. That was the most stressful ten minutes of my life. He sat back down at the table, watching as Levi walked back in, radiating anger. Lathe glanced at him, worried, before carefully nudging Levi’s foot under the table. He hoped his look was enough.

Listen Levi- we’re all worried about Eren. But Sue didn't know, and now she does. He’ll be fine. Eren getting better is not the flick of a switch; It’s a slow gradient. But we’ll get there. Swear it.

Levi looked up to Lathe when he was nudged. He nodded, getting the unspoken message before starting to eat quietly. He wondered if Eren would want him to stay tonight. I wonder if he’s okay.
My jaw is starting to really hurt now. Fuck it. Levi reached up to rub his jaw to keep it from locking up.

Lathe understood. He tried to ignore the pain in his nose, running up to around his eye. Eren can really be strong if he wants to be, god damn.

Levi looked to Lathe. “Do you have pain medication… like an aspirin or something? An Ibuprofen would work too. Eren’s fist fucking hurts.” Levi let himself swear because he was in pain and he knew Lathe was pretty chill.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow. “Levi, you do know how to make a wonderful impression.” He tilted his head towards Sue. “And sure. I know I could use one too.” He set his silverware down, getting up from his spot to rifle through his bag at the stairs, touching his nose. It isn't broken, thank god. That'd be fun to deal with.

Sue watched Lathe leave, turning to Levi with a meek expression. “I apologise. I did not know I should not speak about Eren’s father. I will not mention him again. You have my word.”

“Good” Levi muttered looking down at his tea mug. He held it around the rim by his fingers, not caring for holding it by the handle. Levi looked up as Lathe entered the room again, this time carrying a small bottle of aspirin.

“Aspirin for days. Here.” Lathe opened the top, handing Levi two tablets. He took two himself, closing the bottle and stowing it in his pocket for the time being. He took his place back, sending Levi a deliberate look. I heard Sue apologise. I hope you can at least try to be nice.

Levi gave a small smile in thanks. He took the pills and swallowed them down with his tea. He was no longer radiating fury as he was a few minutes ago. Levi raised his fork to his mouth, taking in the wonderful taste. It’s really good Sue, thank you.” He said and smiled softly to her before returning to his stoic appearance and returning his attention to his food.

She gave him a small smile. She spoke quietly. “Thank you.” She turned to her food as well, the air between the two of them calm.

Lathe sighed into his mug, his messy hair hiding his weary eyes. Let’s see... Actual music is now required to calm Eren, who is now passed out of exertion after laying the smack down on myself and Levi, who almost ended up totally hating Sue, who didn't even know what she was talking
about would have such a twisted effect. All in ten minutes or less. ...I need to get out less. He chuck
tled to himself, neither of those in his company noticing. Who am I kidding?

=================================----------------------------------

Eren’s life had become a living hell for the next two weeks after that singular panic attack. His
nightmares had returned in full force, and whenever he had tried to go back to sleep he would wake
up more distressed than the first time and refuse to try again. He had also started having panic
attacks at school, in almost all his classes. Though his attacks were the talk of all the school kids
now, no matter how much Armin had tried to shield him from them for the past week, words were
always thrown at him in the hallways. Everything from fag to crybaby-bitch. Eren had tried to pull
through, that maybe it would get better, but it got even worse when he had a panic attack in the
middle of the lunchroom on the Friday of the second week. He was forced to spend the rest of the
day with the nurse, who did absolutely nothing for his condition. It was like no one cared. Levi
was getting concerned because Eren wasn’t talking to him or texting him, most of the time locking
everyone out of his room as soon as he got home until it was time to go to bed, when he would slip
in with Lathe to sleep for around 3 hours each night.

This Friday was like no other. He immediately came home, those horrible name following him for
a long time as he left the school premises. He was close to tears as he came home and took his bag
off and slumped down against the front door, his face in his hands as he cried. His whole body
shuddering. “I can’t fucking do this anymore,” Eren cried to himself. Little did he know that Lathe
had been home for half the day, and was on the phone with Spades for a majority of the day as
well.

“All of them?” Lathe had the beginnings of a grin cracking across his face.

“All of them!” Spade’s voice sounded from the earpiece of the phone. “It took me ages to go
through everything, tally up videos and procedures, but it’s all here! His passport, birth certificate,
Social Security information, everything! We just need to get you down to the courthouse and fill
everything out, and he’s home free! Of course, you've decided?”

“Well, yeah. I have. It's a yes. I think I can handle him. I certainly have the medical expertise to
take care of him, and as for the more personal side of it, I sure hope so. I think everything is really
going to be okay.”

“That’s great to hear! I'll bring everything down tomorrow. You know where to go, you've been
around the building before. I'll meet you in the lobby say, nine tomorrow morning?”
“You got it. I'll tell Eren when he gets home.” Home. “Thank you so much, Spades.”

“Of course! I'll let you go. Tell Sue I said hi!”


Lathe heard the door shut, grinning from the desk in his study, leaving piles of medical books and papers to descend the stairs. He stopped short, looking down at Eren’s slumped form, worry taking over his features as he quickly came down the stairs, kneeling next to Eren, pulling him into a hug. “Eren, what’s wrong? What happened?”

Eren pushed Lathe away as soon as the man tried to hug him. “I can’t fucking take it anymore!” Eren shouted at him, his voice drenched in anger and sadness. His fists were balled and he was seething as he stood up. “I CAN’T FUCKING DO IT!” He shouted and he grabbed at his head, tugging at his hair a little bit. “I’m not taking another one of those fucking pills Lathe! You can’t fucking make me do it!” He growled out and stormed off up the stairs and the slamming of his bedroom door sounded only seconds after. He locked himself in again as he went on an angry tangent. Throwing things across the room and screaming to release his pent up fury which was already overflowing.

Lathe rushed up the steps after him, turning the corner as the lock clicked, trying to turn the knob as he heard things start to crash against the walls. **FUCK.** Lathe felt his pockets, not finding what he needed. He stood and walked to the frame of his room, jumping to feel the top of the frame. He grabbed an odd-looking pin on a key ring, no bends in it. He went back to Eren’s door, fitting the pin into a small niche at the base of the knob handle, feeling it move the bolt aside belfry pushing open the door.

Eren’s room was a complete disaster. His artwork was thrown all over the room, some of his pictures torn apart. There was a singular pillow destroyed and remnants of fluff all over the room’s floor. Eren had picked up any pencils he had on hand and thrown them across the room, leaving marks on any of the walls they hit. He was curled up to himself by his nightstand, clutching onto a pillow as he cried heavily.

Lathe looked at the wreckage, and looked at Eren. **Maybe I’m not right for this... Stop thinking that. It's not you, it's got to be the PTSD pills he's taking.** “Eren, I don't think what you have now is enough.” Lathe slowly moved forward, sitting across from Eren on the floor, a respectable distance from him.

Eren watched him come closer, tears still streaming down his face. “I’m not taking any more pills,
Lathe. I refuse wholeheartedly.” He repeated and looked away from the other as he sniffled, holding the pillow closer to his chest as he tried to calm down.

Lathe’s eyes wandered the carpet between them. *You did something wrong in prescribing them, then. And you thought you had the expertise. It’s a case-by-case reaction to certain medicines sometimes!* There’s got to be one that’ll work right somewhere. “...That's not what I mean. I understand your PTSD pills haven't been working well at all; I admit, they're not the ones you need. I won't let you take those specific ones anymore, but you need something else for it. But I'm not talking about giving you more pills.” He looked him in the eye, his features soft. “I'm talking about getting you a service dog.”

That seemed to get Eren’s attention. “A service dog?” He asked quietly and he scooted closer towards Lathe, trusting him a little more right now, as soon as he said he could stop taking those fucking pills. “Will they let me come to school with it?” He asked quietly. He had no idea how one would work at all, and he was calming down more as he thought about a dog. *A dog can’t judge me… It can’t call me names either.*

*He's calming down. Good. Eh, it won't last long. God knows you'll do something to fuck it up. No I won't. We need to talk about this and I'm trying to be careful with it.* “They definitely will. A service dog can come with you pretty much anywhere you go. They’d make sure to keep you away from anything that can hurt you, and can tell right away when you're uncomfortable so they can calm you down. They can ground you during a panic attack if they have to. They can be trained to perform certain tasks, too. I think one would really help,” Lathe smiled gently.

“You’ll let me keep one here?” He asked quietly as he curled up to Lathe’s side, he was completely calm again after his little meltdown. He was talking about how this wasn’t really his house at all, that he didn’t really live here, would Lathe really be okay with him getting a dog?

Lathe, for an instant, looked incredulous. *How would I not? For you, “Eren, this is-” Home.* Lathe swallowed, starting again. “Eren, I've been on the phone with Spades all day. She found your papers- passport, birth certificate, everything. I have the opportunity to go to the courthouse tomorrow morning… and if I filled out some paperwork, I would be your legal guardian by this time tomorrow. This would be your home too, then. Not just mine.” He held onto Eren’s middle protectively, resting his chin on his head. “I want to know if you’d trust me enough to be your guardian.”

*Don't do it Eren. I'm no good at this…*

*Please* say yes, *I'll do my best to keep you safe and happy!*
It's a bad idea, I wouldn't listen to him.

Come on, I'm not that bad!

Yes, you are. For all we know you'd forget to feed him and let him starve.

Come on, I'm a great cook!

Riiiiiiight, so you wouldn't force him to eat burnt macaroni for the rest of his life. I totally believe you.

...That's just cruel.

So is boring him to death. You're not exactly an interesting person.

What? That's ridiculous! We can do any crafty or musical stuff or whatever he wants, you name it! And I'll help him take good care of his service dog.

You're lying.

I'm not!

Say no, Eren.

Eren, say YES!

Eren moved his head and stared at Lathe for what felt like hours. He was still trying to process everything Lathe had said. He’ll take me in? He’ll let me stay? I’d have a real home? He would let me get a dog? Eren was very quiet before he nodded slowly, putting his head back under Lathe’s chin to curl up to him again. “I trust you, Lathe” he spoke quietly with a small smile on his face as he leaned his head against Lathe’s chest. I get a home, with an awesome…. Would I call him ‘Dad’ now? Or would that freak me out?
Lathe felt as if he had shrugged a lead jacket off his shoulders. He sighed, relieved and ecstatic, resting his cheek on Eren’s head. Thank you. “That means a lot, Eren. Everything that I have, it’s yours, too.” Don’t fucking cry, you sap. Quit it. “That means I now expect plenty of piano music. And you’re going to have to deal with a lot of awful puns. I hope you’re prepared for all that.” Lathe grinned, allowing one tear to trail down his cheek, his eyes shining. Oh my God how did he say yes.

Eren smiled as he curled up to Lathe there, in their own moment. Perfectly content.
Eren had eaten dinner silently after their conversation. He was still thinking about everything Lathe had said. *He’ll let me have a dog? What happens when I have a dog? Do I need to walk it? When do I feed it?* Eren finished up his plate and looked over his phone. He had gotten a text from Levi saying that he wouldn’t be able to come sleep with him tonight. They were in Sina county for a late night game. *...I wonder if I can stay with Lathe tonight.* He slowly walked up to Lathe as the older man was cleaning the dishes. He slowly tugged on the man's shirt waiting for his attention, still so much like a small child.

Lathe turned to him, stopping the tap and reaching over for a towel to dry his hands, smiling warmly. “What’s up, Eren?”

“Umm…. Can I-” Eren’s face flushed red all the way to his ears. “Can I sleep with you tonight? Levi’s in Sina… For football.” He looked up to Lathe with innocent and hopeful eyes. By now Lathe must’ve known that he needed to sleep with someone to actually fall asleep.

_Eren… “Of course you can. It’s cool.” He gently ruffled Eren’s hair. “Let me finish with the dishes, and I'll come upstairs, alright? You get ready for bed. Tomorrow’s a big day, you know.” He had a glint in his eye. _There’s a lot going down tomorrow. Hope you're up for it all, Eren._

Eren didn’t release his grip yet. He shuffled his feet as he looked down at them.

…”that’s not all you had to ask me, is it?” “There something else eating at you, Eren? I've got answers.” Lathe let his hand rest on Eren’s shoulder. _You don't have to be afraid to ask me something._

Eren swallowed hard before he looked up to Lathe’s gaze again. “Do I need to take the pills tonight?” He asked quietly, his voice sounding very conflicted.

Lathe barely had to think about it before he shook his head. _Those were awful._ “Those weren't right specifically for you. We need to find you something better, but until we do, you don't have to take another one of them.” _Awful._

Eren gave out a sigh of relief before hugging Lathe hurriedly. “Thank you!” Eren let go soon after and then bounded off to go get into his black oversized pajamas that he always wore. He grabbed a pillow that he always slept with and headed towards Lathe’s room, leaving behind the black
comforter.

Lathe chuckled, finishing the dishes quickly and loading the dishwasher before heading upstairs. He grinned as he saw Eren sprawled across his bed, padding over to a dark wood dresser, fishing for sweatpants and a tank top. “Give me a sec, Eren. I'll be right back.” He walked to the bathroom, quickly changing and brushing his teeth before returning, dumping his clothes in a laundry bag.

Eren watched Lathe come back and his eyes locked on Lathe’s left arm. *He has tattoos? They look cool, I wonder when he got them?* Eren’s curious gaze followed his soon to be new father figure.

Lathe noticed Eren’s wide-eyed look, glancing to his arm. “Oh, the tattoos? Pretty cool, huh?” He grinned, inspecting them. “I dunno, I always wanted to get one when I was younger, and I just ended up getting a bunch of them.” *My only complaint is covering them with long sleeves in the summer. Damn you, professionalism!* He moved back the red quilt on his bed, hopping up and reaching over to turn off the light on the stand next to his bed.

Eren watched him climb in bed and he curled up to Lathe’s side as he got comfortable. “Thank you, Lathe.” Eren said and buried his head into Lathe’s chest, smiling.

Lathe smiled. “Of course, Eren.” He wrapped his arm around him, rubbing his arm with his thumb. *I got you.*

Eren smiled, quickly falling asleep. He slept the whole night for the first time in two weeks, though the only downside was that he woke up at around 5 am, still curled up to Lathe. He stayed still, not wanting to wake him up.

Lathe cracked open one eye about a half hour later, trying to make out the time on the clock on the wall opposite them, reading the hands. *I'm on school time, obviously. Eren’s probably still dead asleep.* He carefully shifted away from Eren and out of bed, padding over to the stairs. *Coffee first. Then maybe I can do something downstairs before I have to get ready for the courthouse.*

Eren watched Lathe get up and got up as well, though he was quiet as he stepped quietly to his room to get dressed in dark wash jeans, a black t-shirt, and a black hoodie as well. He put on some socks he found in his box of clothes before silently creeping downstairs and towards the kitchen. *He’s probably making coffee. I wonder if I can have some tea?*

“Want something to eat, Eren?” Lathe looked over his shoulder at him. *I have ears like a bat.*
Eren stretched as he walked into room, letting out a small squeak as he did so. “Breakfast would be great.”

...that’s the single most adorable sound I have ever heard. “Alright. Do you want tea? We have at least three kinds in here.” He opened the cabinet above him, showing a small collection of boxes.

“What’s the tea I had at my house?” He asked quietly and examined the different boxes. He just said it was tea, I didn’t know there were different kinds of tea…. So what did I have last time? That was really good.

Lathe tapped a light grey box. “This is what you had last time. There are a bunch of different kinds and brands, but this one is honestly my favourite. There are kinds like green tea, and they can come with different flavours, like mint… but you can always try others later if you just want to stick with what you like.” As he spoke, he set a kettle with water on the back burner.

Eren thought about it for a little bit before taking the light grey box and opening it carefully. He pulled out a tea bag from the box and looked at it carefully. “How do you get tea from this?” He asked and looked to Lathe with a curious gaze. He was quite the curious one.

Curious? Lathe grinned, picking the bag up by its tab. “What you do, is when you pour hot water into a mug, you put the bag in and leave this little tag on the outside. The tea leaves are in this little bag, and the water draws its color and flavour from the leaves, and the flavour gets stronger the longer you leave it in. It’s in the little bags so you don’t have bits of leaf floating in your tea.” He found a mug as the kettle started whistling. “Here, let me show you.” He filled the mug with hot water, placing it on the counter. He handed Eren back the small teabag. “Now, just dunk it it and let it sit for a minute. Don’t let the tab fall in, though.”

Eren nodded and put the tea bag in, not letting the small tab fall in, holding it tightly between his thumb and his forefinger. He watched as color slowly began to spread from the teabag into the surrounding water. Eren quickly became entranced and watched the tea steep curiously.

Lathe watched Eren out of the corner of his eye, smiling at his curiosity. He studied the fridge’s contents, looking for something he could make. He decided eggs and bacon would be fine. He placed them on the counter, noting the time on the clock. Sue would either just be getting up now, or… He listened intently for a moment, hearing small footsteps upstairs. Yep. There she is. He set two pans on the stove, one for eggs, and one for bacon, covering the latter with a lid so it wouldn't spit. “You can take out the teabag whenever you think it’s strong enough.”
Eren nodded and waited until the tea was as dark as he remembered it last time, so he pulled the tea bag out and looked around for a garbage, quickly finding it under the sink so he went for it and tossed the used bag out. He blew on the steaming liquid before raising it to his lips, letting out a soft sigh and going to sit in the same seat Levi had sat in for dinner the first night.

Lathe turned the bacon, letting everything finish cooking before sliding three eggs and two pieces of bacon onto their own plates. He set one in front of Eren, one in his place, and one where Sue normally sat, glancing up to the doorway as she quietly stepped in. “Good morning, Sue.”

She responded with a yawn, going to pour herself some tea as well. “Good morning Lathe, Eren.” She smiled sweetly at Eren. “Did you sleep well?”

Eren nodded as he stayed where he was. “G’mornin’” Eren slurred a bit as he sipped at his hot tea, more focused on it than any conversation really. Though Sue was probably used to it by now, Eren barely talked at home, and he was almost always sitting around the piano, either doing his homework on the floor or sitting on the stool and playing various songs that he knew like the back of his hand.

Sue sat down at her place at the table, thanking Lathe as he handed her silverware. She was relatively quiet as well.

Lathe broke the quiet. “Sue, when’s your shift at the hospital over?”

“It ends at around five, but I'm going to be out doing research at the library for awhile. I'll be home, say, nine?”

“Alright. Well Eren, you've got the place pretty much to yourself for the day. I'm going to be out at the courthouse for quite a while, so I won't be back until around four. I'm sure you can handle holding down the fort.” Lathe grinned at Eren, and then a thoughtful look overtook his features. ...He hasn't been downstairs at all, has he?

“C-can I call Levi over?” He asked quietly looking up to Lathe from his plate. He didn’t want to stay in this house alone… But if Levi can’t come over I can just play the piano until my fingers hurt… That always keeps me busy. Eren looked down at his food again and took another bite, he was getting better at eating his meals thanks to his pills, but he still couldn’t eat everything.

“‘Can I call Levi over’ he says. Of course you can. That’s not even a question at this point. He
practically lives here anyway.” Lathe took another drink of coffee, amused.

Eren nodded, finishing up what he could of his plate before taking his dish and starting to wash the dishes. He was a really good kid, cleaning up after himself and even the mess from the task of making breakfast.

Lathe finished soon after him, taking his plate to the sink and putting the ingredients away helping Eren dry the dishes. “Thanks for helping clean up, Eren.” Lathe set the last of the plates in the cupboard. “There’s a lot of time before I have to be anywhere. Do you want to see the workshop downstairs?”

“D-downstairs?” He asked, his eyes showing a bit of fear. He swallowed hard. He means the basement…. He’s talking about going to the basement…. “T-the b-basement?” His fear causing him to stutter as he slowly backed away from Lathe. But who could blame him after what had happened to him so many times before.

Lathe saw his fear, trying to placate him before he could panic. Think. It’s getting harder and harder to bring him back when he panics. “Eren, it’s nothing like what you might think. It’s an artists’ playground. There’s just a lot of crafty stuff to do. I’m not going to make you if you don’t want to go downstairs.” He raised his hands in surrender, staying put.

Eren watched Lathe and he stood his ground as well, he seemed to visibly relax once the word ‘crafts’ was mentioned. Does he mean like macaroni and little kid things? Or like paints all over and easels? “C-can y-you turn on a-all the lights, f-first?” He asked quietly. He really wanted to see it. I want to see what he considers crafts.

“Alright, I will. The door’s in the scripting room.” Lathe walked past Eren to the scripting room, opening the dark door and flicking on five light switches on a panel just at the top of the stairs. He turned to Eren, who had followed him and stopped at the staircase. “They're all on. I'll go down first, okay? You take as much time as you need.” Lathe slowly descended the wood steps, hand ghosting over the railing as he made his way to the bottom.

Eren took the stairs one step at a time, sometimes having to calm down his breathing between each step, finally reaching the bottom of the staircase before he peered in cautiously.

The far wall was entirely a chalkboard, covered in schematics and various sketches, some samples of different writing styles, and random insignias. A large table was centred in the closer half of the room, piles of variously-sized paper in the centre, a mix of stools and chairs pushed underneath to save space. A large shelf on the wall to Eren’s left held boxes and boxes of pencils, graphite and
charcoal, professional markers, and oil and chalk pastels, as well as smaller stacks of professional paper. The wall opposite it had a similar-looking shelf, this one with all colours of acrylic and oil paints, watercolour palettes, and many kinds of brushes. A few small boxes of baking clay and unopened models were among them, lined by tiny glass bottles of enamel paints. An easel was set up, a few blank canvases leaning against the wall. A simple quilting sewing machine was pushed in the corner, a box in front of it filled with scissors, pins, spools of thread and bobbins, measuring tapes and scraps of fabric ready to be sewn together. Various sketchbooks were left around the room at random, many of them nearly full.

Eren looked around the room with amazement flooding his wide viridian eyes. He checked out all of the boxes of pencils, all the markers in nearly every color imaginable. Eren was blown away by just how much was down there. He was careful with everything he touched, still unsure about using anything in this house, like Lathe told him he could. *Does he mean even all of this? I can come down here whenever I want?*

“You can pull out some of the boxes if you want, set up and work if you like. You don't have to be skittish about using what I’ve got down here. I meant it when I said what’s mine is yours. As of now, you have free reign down here.” Lathe’s eyes were bright, light flickering past. *Go ahead. I can tell you really want to.*

Eren gave him a look that simply asked, ‘Really??’ The boy maneuvered carefully through the room, collected a box of chalk pastels and some pieces of good paper before he set up at the table and started to make a mess of his hands and arms. So many colors clashed against each other as he enjoyed himself over his artwork. He looked happy, and he would probably be spending a lot of time down here too.

Lathe smiled as Eren began working so enthusiastically. He looked to the clock on the wall. 7:30. *Is that too early to call? Eh, probably not. Eren’s involved. Levi won’t mind.* “Eren, I’m going to run upstairs, call Levi and invite him over, alright? You're kinda…” He motioned to Eren’s already chalk-covered hands. “…occupied.”

Eren looked up at Lathe once he started speaking then down at his hands. “Yeah, you can call him for me.” His attention immediately going back to his art work. *This paper is such high quality! And he has almost all the colors for this brand!! Lathe you are the fucking best!*

Lathe walked up the stairs, going to the phone in the kitchen. *Now what was Levi’s number… eh, let's see if I remember.* Lathe pressed the buttons he thought were right, holding it to his ear. He grinned victoriously as he heard Levi’s sleepy voice.

“…Hello?” *Who the fuck are you and what the fuck could you possibly want.*
“Hey Levi! It’s Lathe- I'm calling from the house. Eren wants to know if you could come over for the day- I’m going to be gone for a while and he’d like your help holding down the fort.” We all know the real reason, but that works too.

Levi rubbed his eyes, swinging his legs over the edge of his bed. Yes! “Sure, that sounds good. I'd need a little while to eat something and get changed. Give me about half an hour, okay?”

“Sure! Try not to keep the bf waiting too long, though.” Lathe laughed at Levi’s exasperated sigh on the other end. “No, I'm not going to stop.”

“Laaaaaathe…”

“Never.” Lathe grinned, chuckling. “I'll see you soon.”

“Course. Bye.”

Lathe pressed the end button on the phone, placing it back on the hook. He walked back over to the scripting room, pausing as Sue passed him from the foot of the stairs, dressed for work. “I'll see you later, Sue. Oh, and Sue,” he caught her arm. “You don't have a problem with dogs, do you?”

She looked at him with confused eyes. “No, I don't. Why, may I ask?”

“Eren’s getting a service dog really soon, possibly today. I just had to make sure.”

“Oh, well I wouldn't have any problems with it.” She smiled brightly. “I’ll be home at nine.” She turned back to get to the garage. “Goodbye, Lathe!”

“Bye, Sue!” Thank god, no problems. It'd only be two weeks, but I'm just glad we won't have any immediate issues to deal with. He turned to run up the stairs and retrieve his phone, stowing it in his pocket before he went to walk back down the stairs to the basement, going over to the shelf and skimming over the many boxes. He picked a box of markers, selecting a medium-sized piece of paper and setting up adjacent to Eren.
Eren didn’t seem to either mind or notice really. He was too engrossed in his beautiful mountain scene. There were a lot of colors everywhere, and it made the picture all the more vibrant. He had a small smile on his face as he continued to draw and color.

Lathe had many maroon and copper and gold-coloured markers scattered around him, paying careful attention to his drawing of the mechanical insides of a watch. He looked up to Eren’s work, soon just opting to watch him work. *He’s so good… Damn.* Lathe looked up as he heard the doorbell ring. “I’ll get it.” He stood from his stool, quickly walking to let Levi in. He slid across the wood, unlocking the door and opening it for Levi, grinning. “‘Morning, Levi. Come on in.” He stepped back to let him in.

Levi toed off his shoes, a bag slung over his shoulder, his eyes catching Lathe’ arm. “Damn, nice tattoos.” He looked up at the piano, surprised Eren wasn't playing. *Huh.* “Where’s Eren? He’s always playing the piano.”

Lathe smiled, closing and locking the door behind him. “Thanks. And Eren’s downstairs in the workshop, going to town with chalk pastels. He’s crazy good.” *Like, seriously good. Like, god level good.*

_He has a workshop? And it’s in the basement? And Eren went down there voluntarily? “You have a workshop? That’s a thing?”_

“It is indeed a thing. He’s probably going to insist on chilling there for awhile. I hope you like art!” Lathe beamed, leading him to the stairs to the basement. He called to Eren as he clomped down the wood steps. “Eren, bae’s here!”

_Stoooop… “Hey Eren.” Levi walked up behind Eren, leaning over his shoulder. “What are you drawing?”_

Eren looked up and his smile grew a bit as he saw Levi. He smiled and showed off the beautifully detailed picture. The picture was so good, people would probably pay to have it framed in their home. “The mountains” He leaned back a little and poked Levi’s nose with a pastel-dusted hand, effectively leaving six colors all over Levi’s nose. *Ohh, I got six on him.* Eren couldn’t help himself from starting to laugh at the oddity of the color across Levi’s face.

..._there’s pastel all over my nose, isn’t there._ Levi blushed, trying to brush the stubborn dust off his nose, only managing to spread it around. _And now there’s dust on my hands._
Eren giggled more as he turned around and put both of his hands on Levi’s cheeks and just laughed at the multiple bright colors it left in the shape of his hands on Levi’s cheeks. The boy couldn’t stop laughing. *This is too good, Oh my god can I take a picture please?? Lathe! Help! Picture!! Get a picture of him!* 

Lathe answered his thoughts with a flash of movement and a click, catching Levi by complete surprise. He chuckled as he looked at his phone screen, seeing Levi’s image. “That is the best picture I have ever taken.” *Oh, yes.*

*Oh no.* “Lathe, give me that.” Levi held out his hand imperatively, taking a step toward Lathe.

Lathe stepped back, holding his phone protectively, wearing an impish grin. “Nope!”

“**Lathe.**” Demandng.

“**Levi.**” Defiant.

“Eren!” Eren called out his own name and basically attached himself to Levi. He had cleaned his hands off with wipes he found laying around, so now he was on Levi’s back his arms around Levi’s chest and his legs wrapped around his waist. He giggled and smiled at Lathe, tempting him to take another picture. *Take it! Take another picture!! DO IT NOW!!*

*This is too perfect!* Lathe quickly took at least five pictures, grinning like a madman.

Levi caught Eren’s legs, stepping to keep his balance. “Oh my god Eren! I liked this shirt.”

“I cleaned my hands, thank you very much!” Eren pouted when Levi accused him of having dust all over him. “It comes out too! You don’t need to worry” He pouted rested his head on Levi’s shoulder, making a whimpering noise. *That’s it Eren, entice him to apologize to you.*

*How can you be this fucking adorable so early? Alright, alright... “Fine.”* He spoke quietly. “Sorry.” He looked to his left, away from Eren’s pouting face. *Happy?*

Eren smiled again. He reached around Levi further, his wraps were only slightly covered in dust as
he pulled his arms around Levi’s chiseled chest. He nodded and then buried his face into the crook of Levi’s neck. Well at least he’s not mad. I wasn’t lying when I said that it comes out. Eren’s arm wraps would probably need to be changed after he was done as well. He smiled softly again as he felt Levi’s strong muscles under his shirt. I wanna draw it…. It would look heavenly…. That one would go in my bedroom. Yup, it’s decided, I’m fucking drawing him when Lathe leaves. You can’t say no either, Levi. HA!

Lathe tapped furiously on his phone, sending the pictures to his laptop. He glanced up to Eren, noting the glint in his eye. The kid’s got an idea- that could mean a lot of different things. He looked to the time on his phone. “I’ve got to start getting ready upstairs.” He moved to pack away the markers quickly, replacing the box and putting his unfinished drawing on an open shelf. “I’ll be out of your hair soon enough.” He walked up the stairs, heading for the bathroom to wash up.

Eren smirked evilly and looked at Levi. “You wanna help me with something?” His voice was innocent but his eyes were anything but. He almost had a full cheshire grin on his face as he looked at Levi. Please say yes… Please say yes!

Levi swallowed hard, looking at Eren. Fuck. “Uh… s-sure.” That’s not intimidating in any sense of the word at all. “What do you need me to do?”

Eren slowly slipped himself off of Levi and stepped back a bit to get a few boxes of charcoal pencils and a very large sheet of paper. “Take your shirt off.” Eren muttered to him as he tried to look around for a good lighting source for what he wanted to draw. This is gonna be awesome!

...Oh. “O-okay.” Levi hesitated for a moment before lifting his shirt over his head, showing off his toned muscles, his abs well defined. He tossed his shirt onto the table, rubbing the back of his neck.

Eren turned to look at Levi and he stood there in shock for a few seconds. I knew he was buff, but…. Holy SHIT! How does he not have a girlfriend right now?? I mean, really? He’s got to be the hottest guy in school. Oh well. “Come sit over here.” Eren motioned to the chair directly underneath a light fixture. He needed to position Levi the way he wanted to draw him. I’ve got him now.

“Um, okay.” I’m not sure about what’s happening. Levi sat down, waiting patiently for Eren’s next instruction.

Eren smiled softly and carefully positioned Levi so his arm was hanging over the back of the chair, his muscles nicely displayed. His other hand was positioned with his thumb hooked on the hem of
his pants, showing off his v-line before Eren stepped back and nodded. He scampered off towards his paper and charcoal pencils. “Don’t move.” Those were Eren’s only words before he started to draw Levi’s immaculate body.

This is quite the compromising position to be in whilst also not being allowed to move. Uh... Levi studied Eren as he worked, whose eyes moved over his chest before carefully picking different pencil after different pencil to outline and shade his form. I wish I could see how he was doing...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Spades, I'm beginning to think you've handed me the same form three times just to annoy me.”

“I have not. And be patient. There’s not that much left to do.”

Lathe grinned at her, twirling the black pen expertly. “You said that more than an hour ago.”

Spades rolled her eyes, a light smile on her face. “Well, I mean it this time. These last two aren't as long as some of the other forms.” She slid him the last two papers, leaning back in her chair. “This is a big thing you're doing.”

Lathe looked at her, giving a breathy laugh. “I'm just glad he won't have to worry about his father anymore.” The pen danced quickly over the page, the same information for what seemed to be the seventeenth time. “I just hope I know what I'm doing.”

“You'll be fine.” She cocked her head, studying him. “You were talkin’ earlier about something like his pills not workin’ right?”

Lathe sighed. “Yeah. His PTSD and nightmare pills were doing the opposite of what they were supposed to. He’s off them for the time being, until we can find him something that’ll actually do what it’s supposed to. I actually kinda wanted to ask you about that. You know lots of people.” He looked up to her. “Do you know anywhere we could find a good service dog? Specifically for PTSD, I mean. I really think Eren would benefit from having one.”

Spades tucked a fiery lock behind her ear, her blue plastic earpiece visible. “I do know a guy for that, actually. He’s paired a lot of service animals with the victims of cases I’ve dealt with before, a wonderful trainer. His name’s Moblit Berner. I'll text him, see if he has one.” She pulled out an
iPhone, tapping away.

Lathe continued writing as she waited for a response, finally moving on to the last page. *One more. One more and he’s home free.*

Spades beamed. “He’s got one.” Her smile fell a bit as she kept reading his messages. “They’ve tried to match him with someone three times already… There hasn’t been a good fit.” *That’s not exactly good. He’s more likely to not be a good match for Eren…*

*That’s not the best thing you could hear, but it’s a possibility. “We’ll just have to hope.”* Lathe had a determined look in his eyes. *Eren needs to get better. No matter what.*

Spades grinned. “That’s what I like to hear. He’s about an hour from here, pretty much in the middle of the city. That’s where they get most of their training done, around so many people. I’ll have him know you're interested. You going to go over today?”

Lathe thought a moment. *He’d definitely be up to it.* “Yeah, tell him we’ll come on down later today, no later than six, if that's alright.”

*It's about four now... cool.* “Fabulous. He’ll be expecting you.” Spades looked as Lathe signed the last page, sliding the papers from him and handing him the envelope with Eren’s papers in it- his passport, his birth certificate, everything. “That’s it. Congratulations, Lathe. You're now Eren’s legal guardian. Try not to kill him, will you?” She joked, her grin a mile wide. *You’re going to do great.*

Lathe dropped his arm, the pen in his hand hitting the table with a final-sounding clatter. “That’s it.” He laughed. “That is it, isn't it?” *I just did that.*

Spades pushed her chair back, standing. “Come on, you can skip to the excited stage of this any minute now.” She walked with Lathe out of the office they were in to the hall, the lobby, the parking lot. When she next looked over, Lathe was beaming, running both his hands through his hair in disbelief.

Lathe paused at the bottom of the steps, looking at her intensely. “Spades, thank you so much.” The gratitude in his eyes was powerful.
She chuckled. “Of course, Lathe. I’m just doing my job. But thank you, for doing something wonderful.” She patted his arm. “I’ve got to get going, and you’ve got things to do, right?”

“Right. I’ll see you later, Spades.”

“See you.” She turned, walking off to her car.

Lathe walked back to his car, only able to think about what he had just done.

Eren had not left the confines of the workshop downstairs. He was so engrossed in his art that Levi had to physically take his pencils away to get the boy to eat anything. Eren had created a beautiful picture of Levi’s built body; he didn’t include Levi’s head though. He had focused on the contours of his body and damn, did he do it justice. Eren was pleased when he had showed Levi the picture to get his shocked reaction out of it. He had been in a good mood all day, which of course Levi was curious about but he wasn’t about to ruin Eren’s mood asking him what was up. However, soon he was compelled to ask as it drew later in the evening and Eren had done nothing but draw.

“Oi, Brat, you’ve been in a good mood all day, and besides finding out that you can draw all day, what’s up?” He asked as he wrapped his arms around the bubbly brunette. What’s he drawing now? He’s gone through like seven sheets of paper in the last hour.

Eren lifted his head and looked up to Levi and saw his curious gaze. “Lathe went to the courthouse.”

The courthouse, what the fuck is he doing there? “What, he get a speeding ticket or something? That sounds like something he would do.” Levi snickered as he watched Eren return his focus to the colorful paper.

“He’s becoming my legal guardian.” Eren was completely calm as the words left his mouth.

“Really? When did you find that out?” Usually he would’ve told me something like that right away!

“I found out yesterday… but you were at football, so I didn’t get to tell you. Sorry.” Eren looked
back up at Levi for a few moments, his eyes full of guilt.

_Not the damn guilty eyes again! Damn this Brat! He’s too fucking adorable! I’ve lost control. You did this to yourself, brat!_ Levi shook his head as he moved to lean close to Eren’s face. “There’s nothing to apologize to me for.” Levi smirked as he watched Eren’s face flush from the how close they were to each other. He leaned in closer and kissed Eren gently at first, but he had already lost himself in his eyes, so in no time he was kissing Eren quite passionately.

Eren made a small gasp as Levi leaned in to kiss him. _Wasn’t expecting that, but I’m not complaining._ Eren’s eyes fluttered shut as he kissed Levi back, just like he had so many nights before. _I wonder how long he’ll be kissing me for? I wonder when he’ll get tired of me and go get a girlfriend…. Stop thinking like that, he’s with you right now, so fucking enjoy it!_ Levi had no intention of stopping anytime soon. He coiled his right arm around Eren’s waist, his left carefully pushing the paper and pencils back. He leaned over Eren, deepening the kiss, swiping his tongue over his lip. _Please._

Eren let him lick there for a moment or two before he opened his mouth to let Levi’s tongue enter. He wrapped his tongue around Levi’s, slowly coaxing it into his own mouth, tasting the mouthwash Levi had used after eating lunch. _Always so fresh and clean, I like it._

Levi quietly groaned into Eren’s mouth, his other arm coming up to tangle in Eren’s hair, pressing their chests and hips together. _You feel so wonderful…_ He continued mapping out Eren’s mouth, lost in the feeling of Eren’s lips moving with his.

Eren let out a soft moan every now and then as Levi either found a sensitive spot along his skin, or his tongue made him shiver. He was like a puddle, melting into Levi’s hands. _Oh, Levi…. Don’t stop, please._ Eren felt his knees finally give out, but when his back hit the table, he wasn’t concerned about it at all. He willingly let Levi align their bodies together, enjoying the feeling of Levi’s hips on his own thinner ones. _He’s strong, and I like it. Levi, you lose any of your muscles and you are dead to me._ Eren slowly brought a hand up to Levi’s head, carding through his hair before pulling him down to kiss him deeper.

Levi bent over Eren on the table, curling his tongue around his, letting his hands roam his chest, his waist, his hands seldom brushing the waistband of his jeans. He cupped Eren’s cheek, swiping his thumb over the spot he remembered made Eren shiver. _That sound… And you feel so good…_ Levi pressed himself as close to Eren as he could, without crushing his smaller frame.
Eren pressed himself up against Levi’s strong chest. He pulled back from the kiss to breathe. His eyes seemed to blaze with a fire, brightly shining. He was breathing harshly from kissing Levi so feverishly for so long. “L-Levi?” He stuttered out his name in embarrassment as he looked up to the shorter teen over him. Why did he kiss me like that again? And he’s touching me all over….

Eren let out a soft moan as Levi traced a sensitive spot along his side, causing the boy to shudder in pleasure under him. Fuck, he’s definitely experienced in this…. And it feels so good...

My god, if he keeps making sounds like that… Levi gazed back with hooded eyes, smirking. “Eren?” His voice was smooth and deep, like melted chocolate. He let his hands continue to wander over his chest, running up his sides.

Eren let out a high pitched moan as Levi grazed over his sensitive chest. He raised his hand to cover his mouth. Completely embarrassed by the noise he had just made. “Why… Levi?” Eren asked in between heavy breaths. He then tried to prop himself up with his elbows to look at the other straight in the eyes. He was smiling softly as he gazed intently into Levi’s steely eyes.

...I can't English! How do you put something like that into words? “Because you’re adorable, and talented, and you sound sexy as hell.” He pecked his lips before wandering over to his neck, nibbling at his earlobe. Crisis averted. Now. Let’s hear that again.

Eren let out a string of moans as Levi pinpointed every sensitive spot Eren had from the top of his ear down to his collarbone. Eleven, I counted eleven, god he must think I’m such a whore by now… Levi… Ah! Eren let out an even louder moan, writhing in bliss under Levi as his adam's apple became Levi’s target. He found the fucking motherload…. Shit, I’m gonna get hard soon… Then he’s surely gonna know I’m a fucking whore… Fuck, I need to stop this! Eren shifted, moving his hands to the sides of Levi’s head and brought his lips up off his neck and back to his own. Kiss me for all you’re fucking worth, Short Stack.

Message Received. Levi wasted no time in deepening the kiss, his tongue desperately going to coil around Eren’s, tasting him and exploring his mouth. So good…

“A-hem.”

Levi broke their kiss, jumping in surprise at their interruption. Fuck. His face blazing scarlet, he turned to Lathe, covering his face with his hand. This is so fucking embarrassing. A second time??

Eren’s eyes were wide as he turned his face to see Lathe standing at the end of the staircase, his arms crossed as he lounged against the wall. How long has he fucking been there? OMG did he
hear me moaning?? Oh god I hope not! That would be mortifying! Eren gently pushed Levi off of him so he could get up off the table, his face completely flushed all the way to his ears.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at them. “Apparently I need to knock to go anywhere in my own house.” He studied their flushed faces. I should probably get used to this happening. “Eren, we’re going to head out pretty soon. We’ve found you a doge out in the city. We’re expected.” He looked at Levi pointedly. “As long as that’s okay with present company.” Levi, you’re now going to have to deal with a protective parent. I hope you’re up for that.

Eren looked at him for a moment processing what he had just said. I’m really getting a dog??? And we’re going now!!? Eren looked down at himself, covered in various colors as well as charcoal, but of course that didn’t really show because of his black clothes. “U-um…. I’m gonna need my arms wrapped again if we head out.” He said and displayed his very colorful bandages for Lathe to see. Eren then turned to Levi to see if he was alright with them going.


“Oh… yeah, I was supposed to tell you that too, sorry…. I’m getting a service dog for my PTSD.” He said quietly and rubbed the back of his neck as his face heated up in embarrassment all over again. “You’re not mad are you?” He asked quietly and he stepped back a bit from Levi. He didn’t know how to react, it looked like Levi was really angry with him. Please don’t be angry… I need the dog…. I need it Levi I hope you’ll understand.

Why in the world… “Eren, I’m not mad, that’s great! I love dogs. And it’s good that you’re getting one to help you. I know it’s been rough for you lately. A service dog like that might be just what you need.” Levi wrapped one arm around him, rubbing his arm. I can't be mad at you. Stop assuming that.

Eren seemed to sigh in relief when he heard Levi’s words. His hand which had crept to his other wrist and started to scratch out of nervousness stopped and returned to his side. He felt much better already with Levi’s words.

Lathe noted Eren trying to scratch his wrists. That’s what the dog is for. “Good to hear. ‘Cause if you’re going to be seeing as much of Eren as I think, you’re going to be seeing just as much of his dog. FYI.” He looked to Eren. “As much as the color looks nice, I don’t think we want that dust getting everywhere. I’ll rewrap your arms, and we can get going, alright?”

Eren nodded and scampered off to go get changed into new clothes, wearing black jeans, and a
black t-shirt. He had removed his bandages, bringing them down for Lathe to dispose of since they had a bit of blood on them. He had also brought down one of his hoodies and waited for Lathe to come wrap his wrists again in the kitchen.

Lathe saw off Levi, before grabbing his bag from the banister and expertly rewrapping Eren’s hands. The bandages, instead of their usual flesh color, were a dark green. “We need some color on you.” He grinned, sliding the hooks in place. “Come on, let’s get in the car. You can have free reign of the radio. There’s an aux cord too, so anything on your phone is fair game.” He stood, leading Eren to his car, locking the door behind them.

Eren smiled and he already started to pull his phone out to create a playlist for the two of them. He walked to the passenger side of Lathe’s car and got in quickly since it was nippy out, even with a sweatshirt on. He quickly closed the door behind him and got comfortable in his place, his focus then turning to his phone again. What to play? What to play? What to play! OH I KNOW!! Eren began to hurriedly go through all his music and tap a few to add them to a playlist.

Playlist: Car Ride Jams

- Wake Me Up : 2Cellos
- Fix You : Coldplay
- Carry On : Fun.
- Halo : Beyoncé
- Grand Piano : Nicki Minaj
- Tennis Court : Lorde
- One Grain of Sand : Ron Pope
- Ride : Twenty One Pilots
- Riptide : Vance Joy
- Heathens : Twenty One Pilots
- Once Upon a Dream : Lana Del Ray
- Piano Man : Billy Joel
- American Pie : Don McLean
- How Far We’ve Come : MatchBox Twenty
- Sail : AWOLNATION
- I Bet My Life : Imagine Dragons
- Rap God : Eminem
- Primadonna : Marina and the Diamonds
- Mama’s Broken Heart : Miranda Lambert
- White Winter Hymnal : Pentatonix
- Home : Daughtry
- Don’t Let Me Down : The Chainsmokers
- Kanye : The Chainsmokers
- Everybody Talks : Neon Trees
- Flaws : Bastille
- My Songs Know What You Did In The Dark : Fall Out Boy
- Pumped up Kicks : Foster the People
- Stars : Fun.
- This Love : Maroon 5
- Young Volcanoes : Fall Out Boy
- Boulevard of Broken Dreams : Green Day
- Don’t You Remember : Adele
- Cake By The Ocean : DNCE
- It’s Time : Imagine Dragons
- Polaroid : Imagine Dragons
- Bleeding Out : Imagine Dragons
- Sunday Morning : Maroon 5
- Sledgehammer : Rihanna
- Chandelier : Sia
- Don’t You Dare Forget The Sun : Get Scared
Eren immediately put the playlist on shuffle, right away coming up with ‘Piano Man.’ Eren smiled and started to use his lap as the piano board and played along, waiting for the words to come to sing along.

Lathe nodded his head as it played, recognizing the first few chords. Nice. Carefully backing from the driveway, he put it in drive, beginning their hour journey into the city.

Eren was singing basically the whole entire car ride there, surprising Lathe with how well he could rap when ‘Rap God’ came on a few songs in. He just smiled and continued. I hope I’m on key, I haven’t sung for this long in years.

...Damn he can sing! He’s got rapping down to a science! And for this long, he’s keeping up really well! Lathe was beaming, careful in looking for the place. Parking isn’t going to be too easy, but eh. We’ll find somewhere. He pulled up outside a nice-looking building, thankful there was an open spot two doors down. He let the song finish before killing the engine. “Come on kid, let’s find you your doge!” Lathe smiled mischievously before opening his door, careful of other cars.

Eren smiled and unplugged his phone before he followed after Levi. He put his hands into his hoodie pouch. It was colder in the city, so he followed Lathe as quickly as he could. It’s fucking freezing here!! I want to go inside! MURRRRR!!!

Lathe stepped ahead of him, opening the door and ushering him inside. How could I forget to bring my scarf? It’s so cold. He followed Eren, grateful for the warmth of the inside.

Eren went immediately to hide behind Lathe as soon as he heard someone rushing down the stairs, a tall man came clomping down the steps at high speed. He was across the long hall in a second and coming towards them, his large steps making quick work of the space between them. “Hi, I’m Moblit Berner… You must be Lathe, Spades told me you would be coming… and are you Eren?” He asked leaning his head to the side to see Eren holding onto the back of Lathe’s coat peering out from behind him.

Eren slowly nodded behind Lathe, not courageous enough to come out from behind the safety of his foster parent.

Noting Eren’s fear, Lathe straightened himself to his full height, a head taller than the other man. “Yeah, that’s me… Spades said you have a dog?”
Moblit looked up at Lathe and nodded. “Yeah, Blake’s upstairs. I can bring him down, or we can go up to meet him, whichever you prefer.” His voice was gentle and kind as he noticed Eren’s distress and knew to back up a few feet.

Lathe looked to Eren, smiling gently. “Feel like going up some stairs, kid? That’s your call.”

Eren looked at Lathe and hurriedly shook his head and hid behind him fully. He didn’t want to wander. *Nope, I don’t like new people, I can hear people moving around upstairs… No, no way…*

Moblit nodded and led them to a door a few feet away down the hall towards the stairs. “You can wait in here while I go get him.” Moblit opened the door and motioned for them to enter the bright white room, flooded with natural light. It had a bunch of seats in it, lining the walls. “You can sit wherever, but you’ll probably want to keep the chairs against the wall. We’re going to make sure you guys can be paired, and that requires going on the floor… sorry, but it’s gotta be done.” Moblit apologized quietly before he went to go and get Blake from upstairs.

Eren went to go and sit down on the far side of the room. His right hand almost immediately reaching for his left wrist to scratch. He was really nervous and he couldn’t help himself.

Lathe caught his hand immediately, his grip gentle but firm. “Eren, don’t worry. I’m going to be here the entire time. This dog is trained to help you, not to hurt you. I’m sure in no time you’re going to be bff’s.” Lathe smiled.

“You think so?” Eren asked and put his hand by his side, his middle finger scratching gently against his dark jeans.

“I know so.” Lathe looked to the door. “I’ve got a good feeling about this.” He watched as Moblit entered, a dog in a vest at his heels.

Eren watched as the mahogany Belgian Malinois came into the room, stopped and stared at Eren for only a split second before he started to carefully and slowly come towards Eren. Eren watched him, his hands coming close to himself as he sat back further in his seat. He wanted to scratch, he was agitated… The dog could tell. He walked right up to Eren and put his paws onto Eren’s hands and moved to lick them. He moved to get his attention and licked Eren on his face. *What am I supposed to do with him? Am I supposed to pet him?* Eren shakily reached out to pet the dog half in his lap. The dog enjoyed the pets and Eren’s smile started to slowly come back as he started to visibly relax and pet the dog more confidently.
Moblit stood at the door and watched, he smiled, already knowing this would work out well. “He’s never responded to someone so keenly before, this is a good sign.” He said and closed the door behind himself, getting closer to them so Moblit could go over how Blake was trained so he wouldn’t freak out when the dog acted in response to Eren’s movements or demeanor.

They’re already bff’s. What’d I say? This is going to work out just fine.

Moblit came forward and told him all the commands he needed to keep Blake still during a class or such: “Sit”, “Stay”, “Down”, “Heel”, “Lay”, and “Follow”. Eren knew exactly what each of those words would do to Blake and was asked to walk around the room with him and repeat the motions so Eren would know how Blake would react. Next came the fun part: showing how Blake reacted to panic attacks and how he prevented them.

“Okay so I know this is a personal question, but I need to ask so Blake won’t freak you out. Do you have urges to do any self-harm… Cutting? Scratching? Anything?” He asked seeing the boy nod he got him to sit in a chair in the room and sat Blake beside him. Eren was asked to start scratching like he normally did and was told not to freak out, Blake would not harm him.

Eren nodded and started to scratch and he almost let out a scream as Blake moved in an instant and he had Eren’s right hand safely between his jaws. It was to stop Eren’s motions and the dog put no pressure on his fingers, just holding them there as the dog put a big paw on Eren’s left hand. Eren watched and he reached out to pet Blake with his left hand, which was when Blake released his grip on Eren’s right hand and reached up in the chair to lick Eren’s face, signalling a job well done to Eren.

Lathe had to keep himself from reaching out to intervene, though as he kept studying the dog’s behavior he himself relaxed and let the dog do their job. That’s a good thing for him to know- how to stop Eren from scratching. It’s a bad tic to have.

Moblit then ushered Blake away from Eren’s lap and sitting beside him again. “Okay now you know what he does when you try to scratch yourself. I need you to think of something that either makes you want to punch something or run away and hide… can you do that for me?”

Eren looked down at the dog then back at Lathe. Well, Lathe’s here if I really freak out. Eren nodded and then started to think about his father. His chest started to tighten almost immediately as a sense of dread washed over his whole body. He had to close his eyes. I don’t want to go that deep. No no, not that far! Eren felt Blake grab onto his hoodie and carefully drag him to the floor, so that he was sitting down in a curled up to ball. Blake instantly went to work and got Eren to uncurl after a minute or two and got him out of the ‘mini attack’ as Eren pet Blake back again, and
Blake can get him out of a small attack like that, before it really escalates. That’s good. I hope to god it never comes to that, but if it did… But what if one time it isn’t enough?

Moblit then looked to Lathe. “Lathe, are you prepared to work with an attack if he has one here and Blake can’t pull him out of it?” He asked quietly to the man sitting at the back wall.

Lathe looked him in the eye, responding without hesitation. “Yes, I am. I’ve had to do it before, and I’ll do it again. Every time he needs me to.” I just hope I don’t have to. It’s important that Blake can stop one before it happens, but there’s no way I’d just let Eren suffer in an attack...

Moblit nodded. “Okay, Eren I need you to stay on the ground, do you know what happens when you go into an attack? The actions you do?” Seeing the boy shake his head, Moblit turned to Lathe again. “Can you tell me what he does while he’s having a panic attack? Does he go somewhere specific in a room, is he in a certain position? Does he scratch or cut during his episode?” He asked, he needed to know so they could mimic an attack for Blake to show what he would do.

Lathe swallowed, remembering the two attacks he’d had to deal with. “Eren tends to run for a far corner of the room, away from people. He’d scratch at any bandages he had on, his arms especially. He’d curl in on himself, on the defensive. He’s turned violent, but that was only when we couldn’t get through to him…” It’s awful, what Eren goes through...

Moblit nodded and turned to Eren. “Do you think you can do that? Just the motions so you know how Blake with react and help you, so you don’t freak out more during an attack?” He asked Eren softly and pet Blake. This was the best he had done in about a year with anyone.

Eren nodded and he went off towards the corner and curled up in a ball, his back to the wall and he was faking scratching at himself. Blake followed right after and he grabbed Eren’s hoodie again and he moved Eren to lay out on the floor, away from any objects before he started to rub his body against Eren’s thin framing, finally getting a majority of his weight on Eren, effectively pinning the boy as he licked Eren’s chin and face to calm him down. Eren reached up to pet the dog like he would to calm himself down.

Moblit smiled at them. “He’ll only get up off of you if you tell him to “Rise”. Okay, Eren?” Moblit asked.
Eren nodded and pet Blake for a few more seconds. “Rise.” Eren watched as Blake slowly got up off of Eren, careful not to hurt him. And stayed by his side, gently pawing his hands and chest and licking his face. Blake’s tail was wagging side to side and sped up as Eren giggled. So that’s what he’ll do if I’m having an attack. I think I’ll be okay with that, he can’t pin my wrists and feet so it shouldn’t push me further in… I think I can do this. Eren looked over to Lathe with gleaming eyes as he sat up and allowed Blake in his lap to be pet.

That would work. I think this is it! “So, kid, what’s the verdict?” Lathe grinned, his shining eyes matching Eren’s.

“Can we keep him?” He asked as he moved to hug Blake and the dog didn’t seem to mind, licking Eren’s face vigorously. Please say yes, I wanna keep him...

“You got it.” He turned to Moblit, smiling. “We’ll take him. I’m assuming there’s plenty of paperwork to fill out?”

“There’s only three sheets, you’ll be fine! I’ll need you guys to follow me, we need to get Eren’s handler ID card done and Blake’s ID card is already in his vest, so that’s taken care of. Eren gets to pick the badges that’ll go on the rest of Blake’s vest so if you come to my office, we can get this all sorted out in 15 minutes.” He told them and motioned them to follow.

Lathe stood to follow, offering his hand to Eren, pulling him from the floor. He let Blake sniff his hand. He gently scratched him behind the ear. “Hey Blake. You’re going to be seeing plenty of me, too. It's nice to meet you.” He grinned, following Moblit. I like him. This is going to be alright. We'd better stop and get dog food on the way home. Can't forget that.

Eren smiled as the four of them walked to Moblit’s clean and orderly office to get his picture taken, his ID card printed and put into Blake’s vest. Eren then picked out all of the badges he needed. “Do Not Separate from Handler”, “Working Service Dog Do Not Distract”, “All Access Dog”, and “PTSD Service Dog” were the 4 patches which covered Blake’s camouflage vest. While all this was being done Lathe was busy filling out the three sheets of paperwork which were going to be filed. So Eren sat with Blake and pet him happily. He’s mine! He’s really mine!

“Before you go I should also tell you a few things about Blake. He’s a Belgian Malinois, so he’s gonna stick by Eren’s side 24/7. Eren’s going to need to walk him, a lot… And not just around the block every other day, I mean like go on a mile jog with him every day. He doesn’t really need a big back yard. He's also not friendly towards others that he doesn’t trust getting close to Eren. But as long as Eren introduces them to the dog, it’ll all go over fine. He’s very protective of his handler. Blake’s breed is known for their hypersensitivity as well, so if he jumps on you in class, don’t be alarmed, he’s trying to calm you down way before any panicking starts. And that’s about it. Oh, and he’ll sleep wherever you do… in case you have an attack at night, and if he can’t get you to
wake up he will leave your side to find someone he trusts to come and either wake you up or call for medical assistance in other cases.” Moblit explained to the two of them as Eren continued to run his hand through Blake’s soft fur.

Lathe simply nodded. Alright, so I'm guessing Blake’s just going to sleep on Eren’s bed, near his foot. Okay. And I'll make sure I leave my door open in case Blake needs to come get me... I dunno how well the exercise thing will go over. He’ll get used to it, I hope. Lathe signed the last page.

“That everything?”

“Ya, that’s everything, if you need to bring him back, call me first.” He said and gave them his card before he saw them off. He had given Eren a leash for Blake, so Blake walked at Eren’s side, the leash clipped to his collar.

Lathe watched the dog as they walked back to the car, smiling. “Alright, kid. He’s gonna have to sit in your lap while we drive. We’ll be stopping at the pet store on the way back too, picking up food and whatnot. Cool?” He glanced at his watch. We’ll be home... seven? Ish? Yeah, that sounds about right.

“Okay, that sounds good.” He went to the car and hopped in first, the dog hopping in after him. Eren put his phone on the aux cord, pressing play before settling into the seat. Blake found himself comfortably sprawled across Eren’s lap as Lathe drove.

Lathe stopped about fifteen minutes into the drive, pulling into the parking lot of a pet store. “We need food, and bowls, and all sorts of stuff. Ready?” He got out of the car, shutting the door. Dry run. Let’s see how Blake acts. He should be fine.

Eren looked around at all the cars, swallowing hard at the prospect of just how many people were in the store. Eren got out with Blake jumping out beside him. The dog stayed glued to Eren’s side; he didn’t really need the leash, but it was required in public. Eren followed Lathe into the pet store, which was crowded with adults, kids, and so many different kinds of animals. That being said, this was the only pet store for quite a few counties, so it was to be expected. Eren swallowed hard and started to reach for his wrist without even realizing it. A second later his hand was surrounded by Blake’s teeth. Was I gonna scratch? I didn’t even realize it... Blake let go once Eren had calmed down and pet him. He let go and walked beside them, keeping his ears perked towards all the different people around.

So far, so good. Lathe kept a careful eye on the two of them, slowing down when Blake acted in response to Eren’s nervous move to scratch. He waited for Eren to walk next to him, skimming the signs on the aisles and hanging from the ceiling, an empty basket in his hands. Dog stuff... Dog stuff... There! He turned a corner, facing a wall of different kinds of food. He started reading over the labels, looking for something that would be good for a dog of Blake’s size.
Eren walked further down the aisle to get some toys. *Balls. If I can get him to play fetch in the park, I can exercise him that way. That sounds easier than going for mile long jogs every day.* Eren moved and soon found a good sized ball bag and held it out for Blake to sniff at. Which of course he did and then pawed at it, almost like he was trying to get it out of the mesh it was in. *Does that mean he wants to play with it? Well I’ll get these ones then, he seems interested in it.* Eren came back to Lathe’s side and put the balls into the basket Lathe was holding. A few other dog owners had come in with their dogs, but upon seeing the vest on Blake, kept their dogs as far away as possible, as not to distract the service dog with their own dogs.

Lathe tapped a large bag of food. *This one should be good.* He moved the basket to the crook of his arm, picking up the bag with ease. “I think this should be enough for awhile. He needs bowls for food and water still. They’re further down, I think.” He let Eren walk ahead of him. *Go ahead. It's alright.*

Eren looked to Lathe before down at Blake and held onto his leash tightly. They walked down the aisle without incident and got to the bowls. Eren’s grip shifted on the leash again, gripping it tight enough to make his knuckles white. Blake whined and pawed at his hands and got him to release his grip, letting him pet him to relax. Eren smiled softly as he scratched behind Blake’s ear, calming down a lot. The people had moved away from this section of the aisle, so he felt more at ease again.

Lathe nodded his head at a set of metal bowls. “Pick something that’ll last a while. Those look alright? It’s your call, Eren.” *Pick whichever you want.*

Eren looked at the large bowl selection and picked out two large metal bowls, a bit bigger than the ones Lathe had pointed out. “Do you have paint that’ll stay on metal?” He asked quietly to Lathe, he was gonna paint on the bowls to customize them, that’s why he wanted the bigger ones, more space.

“I like the way you think. I’ve got lots of enamel paints. They’ll stay on well.” Lathe grinned. *Good idea.* “Can you think of anything else? We might need to get him a dog bed, unless you’re cool with him taking over the space near your foot or something like that.”

“I’m okay with him on my bed. It shouldn’t be a problem, it’s big enough.” Eren told him and smiled as he pet Blake more. The dog seemed really happy even with his ears swiveling around whenever someone either walked by, or even talked pretty close to them.

“Alright. Let’s get going, then.” Lathe walked ahead of them, shifting the bag in his arms. He made sure he could hear Blake’s paws behind him, making sure they didn't get separated. *So early on,*
Eren held onto Blake’s leash. The dog seemed relatively calm even with everyone around, as long as they didn’t come within a few feet of Eren he was completely calm. He only bared his teeth once at a dog who had gotten too close to Eren for his liking, but he didn’t growl. *Well, he didn’t growl… so that’s good I guess?* Eren smiled and softly pet Blake when the other dog had left.

After Lathe paid for the food and everything else they had gotten, they walked out to the car again, storing everything in the trunk. Lathe hopped back in the driver’s seat, a thought occurring to him. “Eren, you don’t have a driver’s license, do you?”

“A Driver’s license? I can get that?” He asked as he sat down in the passenger seat. Eren allowed for Blake to get on his lap. Eren closed the door and reconnected his phone to the aux cord. *I can get one of those?? Does that mean I can drive?*

“Well, you take a test that’s pretty much common-sense and get a permit first, and then you have to practice and take a road test, but yeah, you’re old enough to start working for one. If you want to, that is.” Lathe grinned. *How could you not want to be able to drive wherever and whenever you want?*

*Wouldn’t that require having a car? “But I don’t have a car Lathe…..”* Eren was confused. His father’s car was the only one he had seen, and even that wasn’t around anymore. *How would I even learn it?*

“Kid, would you kindly inform me what it is you are currently sitting in?” *Earth to Eren. Come in Eren.*

“Yeah, but it’s your car, I can’t drive your car!” Eren immediately protested the thought of driving this classic car. *Nope, can’t do it, I cannot drive this thing! What if I crash it? Or even put a scratch on it? Lathe would be pissed with me! Absolutely not!* Blake’s mouth clamped around Eren’s hands and he stared at him with his bright blue eyes. *Okay, so I was starting to freak out a bit there, thanks Blake.* Eren took in a few deep breaths before moving to pet the dog currently in his lap.

Lathe’s features softened. “It’s fine Eren, really. I’ve got insurance if you’re worried about anything happening, and that actually reminds me, I’ve got quite a few calls to make when we get home. But it’s something you should really think about getting. I’d be more than willing to help you learn and get ready for a road test. I think you should really consider it.” *Don’t worry. I can’t be too mad*
about anything happening to this car unless you were trying to wreck it.

Eren looked over to Lathe for a few seconds, completely silent as he tried to gauge Lathe’s features. Is he telling the truth? I know my father hated being in the same room as me for more than a few moments…. And he never had the patience to teach me any real life skills. I’ll think about it I guess. Eren nodded to him and turned his attention back to Blake who was hurriedly licking his face. Probably because he could sense the agitation of thinking about his father.

Lathe smiled again, starting the car and carefully starting again for home. Alright. I won’t bug him about for a little bit, let him mull it over. He’s got plenty of time to get one. He pulled into their driveway a little more than half an hour later. “Alright, let's get this stuff in the house, and then I'll start dinner.” Lathe hopped out, opening the trunk and picking up the bag of food.

Eren climbed out and unclipped Blake’s leash. The dog didn’t run off, instead staying right by Eren’s side as Eren went to the back to grab the bowls and balls and the few other things they had gotten for him. So he won’t run from me, that’s good… Do I need to keep the vest on him at home? “Lathe?” Eren called out as he came into the house behind him.

“Yeah?” Lathe was in the kitchen, fitting the bag of food in a large cupboard under the sink. “What’s up?”

“Does he have to wear the vest in the house?” He asked and looked down at Blake by his side. The dog was very curious of the room. His head looking all over the place, but he stayed by Eren’s side, without budging.

Lathe thought for a second before turning and shaking his head. “I don't think so. You're pretty much going to just be chilling here for the rest of today I think. He should really only need the vest when you're leaving the house.”

“Ohay,” Eren then went off to get the vest off of Blake and put it near the front door, along with leash. They then went around and inspected all the rooms that Eren was usually in: The Piano room, the Scripting Room, the Kitchen, his bedroom, the bathrooms, Lathe’s room and study, and the workshop downstairs. Eren smiled at his artwork that he had done earlier. He brought everything upstairs and took it to the kitchen. I want Lathe to see it… Even Levi’s torso too, that one’s my favorite. I wonder if he’ll be able to tell that it’s Levi? Even without Levi’s face in the picture? Eren set out all 12 pictures he had cranked out in so many different mediums that it was impressive. He then turned to Lathe to see if he could interrupt whatever he was doing to show him.
Lathe had been setting a pot of water to boil, some tomato sauce in another pan to heat up. A box of bowtie pasta sat on the counter. “It’s pasta tonight, alright Eren?” He looked over his shoulder, his face going slack at the drawings on the table. So that's what he's been doing all day? Lathe turned from the stove for a moment, studying the wonderful drawings, paintings. “These are all… Eren, they’re **great**! You really do have talent.” He took particular notice of the charcoal torso, tapping the bottom of the page with his nail. He looked at Eren out the corner of his eye. “Is this who I think it is, dare I ask?”

Eren smiled and blushed as he looked down at his feet. “Dare,” Eren simply responded. **Yup, he knows it’s Levi, but I don’t want to tell him, he can say it.** Eren looked over the largest picture with him, smiling down at his work, it looked really nice, and almost life-like, like it would pop off the page at any second. “Can I put it in my room?” He asked quietly and looked up to Lathe. His eyes were still full of innocence.

**Damn, is he smitten.** Lathe rolled his eyes in mock exasperation. “Well, if you **reeeeeally** want to, I might just tell you that the sticky squares you need to hang stuff on the walls are downstairs in the shelf in a box labeled ‘Poster Hanging,’ but of course I’d only tell you that if I was in a good mood. Maybe.”

Eren let out a high pitched squeal of joy before racing off downstairs, with Blake following closely behind as he rushed down the stairs in search for the box of supplies.

Lathe chuckled, turning back to the stove to make sure nothing was boiling over or burning. He stirred the sauce, dumping the pasta into the water. **The ship is sailing sooooo far!**

Eren came back with the small box of stickies and he went to carefully hand it up in his room. He found the perfect spot by the entrance of his closet. He smiled as he put it up. He gently touched it and smiled more. **Damn it, if only I could touch those wonderful abs right now... but that would classify me as a whore, so that’s a no go.** Eren admired the picture before coming back down to the kitchen, Blake at his heels. “What do you want to do with the other 11?” He asked quietly and curiously as he looked at them.

“Well, whatever you do with them is up to you. I think you should keep them all. There’s plenty of wall space in the workshop, but I may or may not have some space in my study if you’d let me have one…” **Eren, go nuts. I'd actually really like having one up there.** “Could you maybe pick one for me, hang it upstairs?”

Eren nodded and he took all the pictures back, disappearing upstairs to see what would fit in Lathe’s study. He walked into Lathe’s room and wandered towards the room adjoined to it. **It doesn’t have a door? Weird...** Eren walked in and looked at the massive amount of medical books
across different shelves. One was completely attributed to medical articles, and another to a bunch of different magazines collected over a few years. Another shelf was rather miscellaneous, with the top full of leather-bound law books, another shelf with boxes of wires and small tech devices, letters and cards and stamps in another box, articles regarding new technologies, from new additions to hospital care to video game advancements and coding scripts. *So many shelves… So many books too, has he had time to read them all? I wonder, there should be enough space in between a few of these shelves for a couple pictures.* The wood desk in the further half of the crowded room had his laptop set up and opened, a tablet plugged in in front of it. The blue-and-yellow spark insignia was alight. *Hmm. I’ve never seen that brand before… I wonder what it is?* The screen lit as Eren walked behind the desk, showing an odd login screen. *It’s not Windows, or a Mac. Huh. It went back to sleep after a few moments of no input. A desk lamp next to it was off.* Eren turned on the light, showing pages and pages of written text, some parts scratched out, things added, arrows redirecting the reader from one part to the next, all in practically unreadable script. *It’s the same as downstairs, I wonder what it says. Hmm. Well, let’s see what fits around the walls.* Eren went in between a majority of the large bookshelves and the shelves hanging around the room. He measured out a few places, and found that he could fit five of the landscapes around the room. *He’ll like this! I hope he’s not mad, but I’m gonna make more and invade his ceiling!! HAHAHA!* Eren smirked before going to hang to up his elephant picture in his room before taking the rest of his random animals downstairs to the workshop.

Lathe grinned as he heard Eren run downstairs, draining the pasta. *Dinner in about a minute.* He scooped out some in bowls for the two of them, drowning them in tomato sauce and placing them on the table. Taking a deep breath and cupping his hands around his mouth, he shouted in the general direction of the scripting room. *“Food!”*

At first there was no movement to be heard from that general direction before Blake’s hurried steps sounded on the staircase. He showed up first, Eren trailing a few steps behind him into the kitchen. His eyes had a very mischievous glint in them. *I know how many pictures I need to cover his ceiling now! Heh! He will be so surprised.*

Lathe went to fill Blake’s food dish. *“I know that look, kid, and it can't mean anything good. But I hope you’re not too busy being mischievous over there to fill Blake’s water dish.”*

Eren smiled before he grabbed the dish and then went to fill it in the tap. He waited until it was pretty full and put it down for Blake, who was already chowing down on his food. *He eats really quickly…. Is that normal? I hope it is… I don’t want him to get sick.*

*“Yeesh, he’s really hungry.”* Lathe scratched behind Blake’s ear, smirking. *He fits right in.* He stood, going to get them both forks. He handed one to Eren, before he turned back to the counter for a moment, filling a mug with hot water. *“Feel like trying something new?”* He tapped the rim of the mug, looking at Eren.
Eren took the fork to the sink, reaching for his nausea pills. He still needed them to eat his meals, and he was starting to finally pack on some of the pounds again. He downed them and looked to Lathe. “Sure, I’ll try a new one.” He walked off to go sit down at his usual spot on the table.

Hmm, which one… Lathe’s finger skimmed over the small assortment, picking a green tea. He might like this one. He dipped a teabag into the mug, waiting for it to steep as he retrieved his own mug for coffee. It’s never too late for coffee. Never! He handed Eren his mug as he sat down. “That’s a green tea. It might not be as strong as the other tea you’ve been drinking lately.”

It’s got a weird color to it. Eren stared at it for a second before he gingerly picked it up and took a sip. He wrinkled his nose at first before taking another sip to make sure and put it back down. Not strong enough, it doesn’t taste that great either…

Lathe watched his nose crinkle in distaste. “Nope?”

“Nope.” Eren repeated and got up to wash his mug out. He was gonna stick with ice water for today, so he reached up to grab a glass and filled it with ice from the freezer and water before he sat down. I’m not even in the mood for tea anymore… well, food then. And it looks amazing. Eren started to eat the bowtie noodles covered in sauce.

Lathe kept quiet for most of dinner, simply caught up in pondering who he had to call later, now that he was Eren’s guardian. He has to go on all the insurance, stuff like that. I’ve got plenty of emails to send, too. Lathe finished quickly, taking his bowl to the sink, filling the dishwasher.

Eren got up a bit after him. He had eaten a good majority of his bowl, but still couldn’t eat it all. Well, almost, I guess he can’t be too mad with that. Eren cleaned up the rest of the dishes for Lathe, trying to be as good as possible for him.

Lathe smiled at Eren as he helped with the dishes, ruffling his hair with a dry hand. “Thanks for helping clean up, Eren.” He looked down as Blake nudged his leg, petting him as well. “I didn't forget about you.” Blake likes me! He’s been doing wonders for Eren today.

Eren watched them and smiled happily as the two of them interacted. “Okay, Lathe, you’re not allowed in the workshop until I say so, okay?” He asked quietly. I need to make sure he doesn’t come downstairs, I don’t want him to see it too early.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at that, the look in his eyes jovial. “Got some super-secret project going
“Yup!” Eren giggled before he ran off to the basement again. He was in the middle of pushing things away to make a huge space for him to work. Moving things carefully, and making sure that he had all the supplies that he needed.

“Eren, I promise I'm not looking, but could you please hand me the gold paint from the box labeled ‘Wall Paint’ and a medium brush?”

He better not be looking at all. Eren looked around and soon found said box and found the gold paint. He picked up the paint and a brush and went back up to the top of the stairs to meet Lathe. “Are you painting the walls?” He asked quietly.

“Ma–ybe.” Lathe grinned, taking the paint and walking towards the piano room. One more line. I've finally got what I want written down.

Eren watched him leave and he retreated back down the stairs. He finished moving the furniture and took out the 48 sheets of paper he needed to cover Lathe’s study’s ceiling. Heh, this'll keep me busy! Mwahahahaha!

Lathe decided the phone calls and emails could wait. He fetched a chair from the kitchen, moving it and standing on top of it, the lid of the gold paint on the kitchen counter. He carefully moved along the wall, writing in that same, unreadable hand. When he learns how to read my writing, he can know what it says. For now… Lathe looked at the row of script, running the length of the longest wall, ending behind the piano. ...Me knowing is enough.

Eren carefully laid out the papers in a 6 x 8 fashion, leaving enough room in between so he could bend down and paint on the thick paper. Eren had found the glow-in-the-dark ‘essence’ that needed to be mixed into the paint so it would glow in brilliant colors at night. He smiled, knowing exactly what he would do with it. He picked up a bunch of blues, purples, reds, oranges, yellows and whites. I hope he’ll like this!

Lathe went to wash out the brush with soap, putting the lid on the tin of paint. Now I'll just leave this on the counter, since someone banned me from entering the workshop until further notice. He smiled, padding up the stairs with a fresh mug of coffee. Emails and such. Things must be sorted out. He walked into his study, his eyes shining as he saw the drawings on the walls. He really does have talent. He sat down at his computer, logging in and tapping away.
Eren set to work, pulling his hoodie off and setting it aside. *I'm going to get paint everywhere, good thing I put the crappy jeans on.* Eren started off with mixing various colors, adding different amounts of ‘glow’ to the paints. He smiled at his work and made sure it worked by going up, checking the room around to make sure Lathe wasn’t around before putting it in a corner to see that it was working just the way he wanted it to. Eren smiled and he continued paint, effectively getting paint all over his bandages, but he was in too much of a trance to really realize that. It was working quickly, he would probably be done way before Lathe fell asleep. *Maybe I can get Levi to help me get him in the kitchen and keep him there, or maybe even Sue? Hmmmm... Maybe I can get Blake to keep him in the kitchen. I need him out of his room and his study.* He looked around and started to examine how the blues meshed with each other, starting to add purples into the back drops. Eren began to mix it into the pain that was still wet making beautiful colors bloom forth. He looked down at his work and smiled happily. *Okay Purple’s done. Where’s the time? It’s already 10!?!?! The Fuck!!! I’ve been down here for 2 and a half fucking hours already??? And I still have to add in a majority of the top layers.... Fuck it, I’m pulling an all nighter!*

Lathe looked to the time stamp on the emails he was sending. *It’s nearly one. And since I’m supposed to act as an at least semi-functioning human being tomorrow, I should probably sleep.* Lathe logged off his computer, shutting it and standing, stretching his arms over his head and letting his spine pop. He padded back into his room, moving down the hall and glancing into Eren’s room. *He’s still downstairs? Well, when art calls... And he can sleep in as late as he wants tomorrow... well, today. It’s Sunday. He’ll either come upstairs when he reaches a point where he can stop or fall asleep working. Either.* Lathe walked back to his room, changing and washing up before falling asleep.

So Eren set about to layer it with his mixes of reds, and whites mostly, adding a tint of yellow in a few spots. Eren stood back and looked over his work. “This looks awesome!” Eren said excitedly to himself. Looking over to the clock again. *Now it’s 1 am.... Hmmm, I don’t remember hearing Lathe call for me. I was probably too engrossed into this to hear him and I still haven’t done the top layer of pure white yet. ...Fuck it, I’m finishing this beauty!*

It was close to sunrise when Eren finally finished with his pure white final layer. He sighed in relief and looked over to Blake sleeping in the corner. “I need a shower, it should be open since it’s 4:30.” Eren smiled and he left his work on the floor to finish up the drying process. Blake followed him up the stairs and then made his way to the bathroom upstairs, trying not to touch anything with his paint-stained hands. He washed his hands off as best he could before he turned the shower on and started to strip off his paint splattered clothes and lastly took his bandages off, which were completely caked in dried paint. Eren looked to the water, feeling just right on the back of his hand. *It’s not too hot, that’s good.* Eren stepped into the shower and he immediately falling from the shock. The pain was shooting up his back with every droplet that landed on his unwrapped back. Eren hissed out in pain, struggling to grab onto something that would hold him up. *Shit!* Eren’s body crumpled to the ground in complete pain, struggling to get his back away from the pain of the hot water. *Am I fucking showering in glass!? This hurts too much! Fuck, Lathe... I need Lathe...* Eren whimpered and put a hand out of the shower.

That grabbed Blake’s attention. The dog went up to Eren and licked his hand, looking over him and
trying to decide if he was having an attack. When he realized Eren wasn’t having an attack he whimpered, he didn’t know what was ailing his handler. He whined in frustration, pinning his ears back looking at Eren for instructions. “Help.” That’s all Blake needed to hear before he bolted out of the room and to Lathe’s room and instantly jumping on the bed. The dog was frantically pawing at Lathe’s chest and whimpering, growling even, so close to barking to wake this human up.

Lathe’s eyes shot open, taking a moment to register Blake’s frantic pawing, growling. Eren. Lathe quickly swung his legs over the bed, Blake jumping off of him and running to stand by the bathroom door. Lathe followed, hearing the shower running. Eren trying to take a shower with his back not entirely healed… not good. Lathe stepped in, keeping his eyes up and rushing to shut off the water, grabbing a towel from behind him and opening the shower door, covering him and carefully drying his back, running a hand through Eren’s hair, trying to comfort him. “Eren, I've got you, don't worry. Are you hurt? Did you hit anything when you fell?”

Eren shook his head. “It’s not…. bleeding….. again…. is it?…. It felt like…. Like glass….. was ripping through….through my back.” Eren sobbed, putting his head down against the floor of the tub. His back still felt like fire. “It… hurts.” He cried out and his tears continued to fall.

Lathe looked at the edge of the towel he was patting his back with, sparse red stains on the white cloth. “I don't think you are. The water may have loosened some from in the wounds, but nothing new, which is very good.” He laid the cloth over his back again. “I'm going to get you some morphine before I try and move you, alright? I'll only be gone a second.” He wiped his thumb over Eren’s cheek, brushing his tears away.

Eren sniffled and nodded, trying to stop from crying more. It hurts so fucking much, hurry, please. Eren’s eyes were full of pain all over again, and his tears made those Viridian eyes glisten more than they normally did. Blake came up to lick his face when Lathe went to get his morphine. He let Blake lick away his tears without much complaint.

Lathe moved down the stairs quickly, grabbing his bag rifling through it on the way up. Morphine. Two tablets. He poured them in his hand, dropping the bag and bottle on the ground as he came back into the bathroom, reaching for a cup next to the sink, filling it and kneeling next to Eren. He handed him the pills and the water, helping him drink.

Eren took the pills gratefully. He struggled to lift his head up enough to drink from the glass, even with Lathe helping him. He gave out a loud cry of pain when his head was lifted more than two inches from where he laid on his stomach on the tiled floor, his head turned to the side. The pain shot all the way down his spine. Fuck! It hurts. "Make it stop!" Eren cried out in pain and his hands starting to clench. Blake whined, he wanted to get close to Eren, but he knew better than to touch Eren’s back and lay on it. He whined louder when he knew Eren was going to start to panic. He tried to get as close to him as possible without hurting him.
Lathe snatched the other towel from the rack behind him, using it in part as a pillow for Eren, and using half of it to carefully dry his hair, trying to keep him from panicking. “Five minutes, Eren. Five minutes for the pills to kick in, and you’ll feel okay. The pain will be gone soon. Swear it.” He kept gently drying Eren’s arms, not caring about the paint that stained the cloth when he went over Eren’s fingers. He finished patting dry Eren’s back, the wounds, including the stitched gash, were an angry red, but they were not bleeding. His burn stills looks bad… better, but not healed. I’ll take care of that later. Lathe ran his hand through Eren’s damp hair again. “Has the morphine kicked in yet? Can you move?”

“I think you’ll need to pick me up.” He said quietly to the other. Eren eyes were still filled with pain, but he was calming down with Blake laying down by his head, licking his face. He never left and never stopped licking him. If he picks me up, he’s gonna see everything…. Not that I really care, a lot of people have seen it….. Especially the men my father… No, don’t think about that… Lathe’s different, he would never do that to you. You never need to be used as a slave ever again.

Oh my. “Alright.” Swallowing, Lathe took Eren’s hands and slowly brought him to sit, helping his arm over his shoulder and bringing him to his feet. He held onto Eren’s arm with one hand, keeping him balanced and his eyes elsewhere while he picked up the towel fallen on the floor, quickly wrapping it around his waist. …Awkward much? He let Eren lean on him as he walked him down the hall to his room, setting him on the edge of his bed. “I'm going to get more wraps for your back, alright?” He didn't wait for an answer before going to retrieve his bag, his face a vibrant red, concealed in the darkness of the upstairs. Nope nope nope nope nope not cool He took the bag and discarded bottle with him back to Eren, taking more flesh-colored wraps and quickly securing them over Eren’s shoulder, wrapping his entire torso before hooking it in place again near his waist. He picked out more dark green wraps for Eren’s arms, hooking the loops over his thumbs and spinning them to his elbows, sliding on the hooks. “Alright, you should be okay. I’d try staying out of the direct line of water. Maybe, showering with the torso wraps on? If your back itself isn't in the water it shouldn't hurt. Then you could always ditch the old wraps and have me re-wrap you. But you do need to shower sometime. Try tomorrow, after you sleep?”

Eren nodded. “Okay, I will….. And Lathe….you don’t need to be embarrassed about me being naked around you….. A lot of people have seen my body…. And I don’t mean Levi either…..” Eren trailed off and looked down. He swallowed hard and got up, hanging onto Lathe’s shirt to keep himself from falling over as he crossed the room. He got into his pajamas and then leaned heavily against Lathe to make it back into his bed. You don’t need to be embarrassed about it…. If I collapsed in the shower again, you’ll need to do it again…. And you’re not the only one who’s seen it… Hmm, if Levi knew….. He would think I’m a whore. Blake jumped up onto Eren’s lap and whined to calm him down.

Oh my god, Eren… Lathe shifted uncomfortably, letting Eren use him as a crutch. “Eren, even with everything you’ve gone through, none of it means that you should…” What’s the word…. “It shouldn't make you think that everything you have and are is any less personal and important. Our bodies aren't something we can throw around, no matter how much we might have before. I just hope you understand that.” Lathe let his eyes wander over the walls of his room, making out the
drawings from earlier in the dim light. “Your body is something you need to respect, is all I’m saying.”

Eren started to cry again, gripping onto Lathe’s shirt more. Respect my body? “How can I respect the defiled piece of shit that my father left behind?” he whimpered and cried as he curled up into Lathe’s arms. He cried hard, letting everything loose after so long. How can I, Lathe? You’re the first person to suggest it in 7 years….

Lathe held onto Eren, slipping onto the bed next to him. “Eren, the first thing you need to do, is to know that no matter what may have happened to you, you are always worthy of respect. Always. And that means you need to understand your body is not a ‘piece of shit.’ You need to know that, and you need to believe that. You deserve respect.”

“How do I deserve something like that? Lathe…. I’ve been raped by so many different men….. I’ve become a fucking prostitute in the last three years….” He cried and clung to Lathe as he cried more. He hadn’t told Lathe about that yet. “How can I be respected when I’m no better than a whore?” Eren asked, tears streaming down his face. “How can Levi love a body that’s been used? I’m too scared to tell him… I want him to like me…. But it’s only a matter of time before he finds out and leaves because I’m a whore…” Eren cried, the real reason for his tears finally surfacing. He was so afraid to be left alone.

...If I know anything about Levi... “Eren, I don't know how well you can tell, but Levi is so utterly smitten with you I can't even begin to describe it.” Lathe tucked Eren’s head under his chin. “And I know that if and when you two get to that point in your relationship and you feel it's time to give him that part of you, he won't run away knowing the truth. If he has any respect for you- and believe me, he does- he will understand, and still love you all the same.”

“Lathe… He can’t love me though…. Do you know how much of a living hell that would make his life? I don’t think he would want to be bullied at school all the time like I am….” He trailed off, realizing what he just said and buried his face into Lathe’s chest again.

...Like what now. ...Didn't he mention something like that Friday? It would explain his behavior... How infuriated and fed-up with everything he was. Lathe rubbed Eren’s arms, bringing up one hand to card through his hair. I'll address that in a moment. “Eren, love is a really weird thing that makes people want to do all sorts of things and brings out sides to people you may not know exist. I think with Levi, what happens at school because of you two being together is either trivial to him, or he’s going to make it trivial to the rest of the school.” Meaning, my money’s on him flaunting it at some point and daring the student body to tease a pissed-off jock who’s extremely protective. “And I think any teasing is going to die down regarding your panicking. You have Blake now, and he’ll help keep you calm.” Lathe smirked. “And he’ll chase away the haters for you.”
Eren was quiet for a moment… He wasn’t sure if he should tell Lathe how Levi and them had really seen each other for their second time…. *Fuck it, he needs to know.* “Lathe…. Levi told me that he was a homophobe when I confessed to him first…. And now he’s been kissing and touching me… I can’t help but think that the most popular kid in school is just gonna stab me in the back and laugh about ‘a good fuck.’” Eren sniffled as he told Lathe exactly what had happened when Levi helped him with his broken nose, before his father had beaten him for it. *I can’t help but fear that’s going to happen every time I get closer to him.*

Lathe was quiet for a moment, running his hand through Eren’s drying hair. “You two barely knew each other at that point. So much has happened between then and now. So much time has passed, time for you two to really know each other, work together in class and grow close. I don’t think, now that things have gotten to where they are, that he’s going to betray you like that. I can see it in his eye when he looks at you. He’s completely sold. He really loves you, Eren. I really do think so.”

Eren swallowed hard and sniffled against Lathe’s chest. “He still insults me when we work together in chemistry, even when it’s just the two of us working together.” Eren’s words were slow… He was starting to fall asleep against Lathe’s chest, in his arms. Blake had made himself comfortable at the end of the bed, watching them.

*What?* “Stay with me a little longer, Eren. How so?” *That doesn't sound right.*

“He calls me Brat with such a cold tone… Like there’s nothing but anger behind it… He’s joined in calling me a crybaby bitch and a fag…. He does it all the same….” Eren said and he yawned. He was exhausted, but struggling to stay up to please Lathe.

...*the next time I see Levi*… “I don’t think you’ll have to worry about that for much longer. I’ll talk to him, okay? See what I can find out is going on. But you shouldn’t worry. It'll all sort itself out.” Lathe smiled at Eren. “I'll let you sleep, okay? You really need it, and I wouldn't object to a couple more hours.” He slowly untangled himself from Eren, stepping onto the floor and pulling the covers up. “Goodnight, Eren.”

Eren made a soft noise before he curled up to Blake as the dog went to curl up to him once Lathe left. Eren’s arm wrapped around Blake and the two of them slept peacefully.
“Hey Levi, it’s Lathe. What’s your address?” Calling Levi at nine in the morning, Lathe tried to keep his anger contained for the moment. *He’s not going to give it to you if he knows you’re going over to kill him.*


*I know where that is. It’s two blocks away.* “I’ll be there in five minutes. Be decent.” Lathe didn't wait for a response before shoving the phone back on the hook, grabbing his keys off the counter and closing that door quietly behind him, locking it and passing by his car, opting instead to walk quickly down the street, seething. *We need to fix this.*

He found the apartment complex, walking in without being stopped. He stormed up the stairs, going to 104. He inspected the lock. *Basic. Could probably use the keycard trick if I needed to. But let's try the old-fashioned way for now.* He straightened to his full 6’2 height, knocking solidly on the door.

It only took a few moments for Levi to open the door up. He looked up at the impressively tall man standing in front of him. *Did this guy fucking grow since the last time I’ve seen him? Tell me your secrets!* “Hey Lathe, come on in, I can make some tea for you since it’s still early.” Levi ushered him in and into the studio apartment, the kitchen situated to Lathe’s right, and the dining room table to his left while the apartment extended out and to a balcony. In between the balcony and the kitchen was a nice living space. The TV was shut off and the couch across from it in was in pristine condition; actually, everything was in pristine condition, like it had all been recently cleaned. The walls were white as was most of the furniture, unless it was darkwood or greys. Levi had disappeared only for a second to close a door, which most likely led to his bedroom, and was starting on his way back towards Lathe. He had no idea what the man was even here for. “Did something happen to Eren?” He asked and sat down at the table, motioning for Lathe to do the same.

Lathe sat down begrudgingly, his eyes, normally warm, were very cold. “Sort of. I need to talk to you about your relationship with Eren.”

Levi’s eyebrow quirked. *What does he mean? As in like the thought of me over Eren? Or…* “Um...what?” Levi didn’t really know how to answer and the confusion spread across his face quickly.

Lathe leaned on the table, his arms on top in front of him. His eyes were dark as he spoke. “Levi, I
was talking with Eren last night, and he told me about how he’s getting pushed around at school because of his panic attacks. It’s the frustration from all of that that caused him to pretty much break down Friday when he came home. What’s worse, is he tells me you've been joining in with everyone in calling him a ‘crybaby-bitch’ and a fag. I can kind of understand the fact you have an image to keep as a jock, but it’s messing with Eren’s head to an extent where he’s afraid you’re going to stab him in the back, leave him and not turn back. He’s smitten, and he’s fucking terrified. And you need to cut the shit and sort this out.”

“But I would never do that to him. Lathe I’ve been trying to get that across to him for two weeks. I’m sorry that I have to go along with it and insult him during Chem class. We sit next to two fucking other football players… You expect me to call him anything but an insult and then the new rumor will be that Eren’s a seductress whore who’s banging the hottest guy in school… Yes, I am the hottest, and no that is not a self-proclaimed title, and quite frankly, I don’t give two shits about how the school sees me! I’m doing it for Eren so it’s only the name calling and the small shoves in the hallway, and not something more severe! If people knew he was a whore, do you know how many frustrated asshats I have in my class that would bang him just to get a load off? At least 20 and that’s not counting the girls…” Levi trailed off, his arms crossed in front of his chest, right hand grabbing onto his left bicep in an effort not to throw a punch at Lathe for accusing him of even thinking about stabbing Eren in the back. Fucking Lathe, know both sides of the fucking story first God Dammit.

Lathe kept his face stoic, his eyes flashing dangerously. ‘If people knew he was a whore?’ Check your fucking wording. Yet, he tried not to lose his head. Think. “If you’re not worried about how the school sees you, I actually have a suggestion on how to fix this.” Lathe smirked. “Show Eren off. Flaunt it. Shove it in their faces, and dare them to say shit. You're a jock. Play the part of a possessive, pissed-off boyfriend. Nobody will try anything, knowing they'd face your wrath.”

“Did the mentioning of the ‘asshats of my classmates’ go completely over your head? If I declared that I was dating Eren his chances of getting jumped in the hallway and raped increase tenfold. Especially when I’m not with him, which for your information is every period but two, and one of them’s fucking lunch! You expect me to believe showing Eren off will do any good? People will actually have a reason to call him a fag, the bullying will get worse if I do that… I can put up with it, I don’t think he can though.” Levi let out a shuddered sigh and leaned over his lap, putting his head in his hands. What the fuck do I do?

I think you can cut it out with the rage. Lathe sighed, his features softening. “Here, who’s in all his classes? Anyone he trusts?”

I’m going to assume that he trusts Armin enough since they eat lunch next to each other every day and I see them talk to each other in the halls. “Armin… He trusts Armin. But Armin goes through the same hell Eren does… They both get picked on for being in advanced classes.” Levi mentioned, looking up to Lathe to see how he would take the new information.
This is problematic. The politics of classes are tricky… I wonder what classes I'll be taking over tomorrow. Lathe looked thoughtful, speaking after a moment of quiet. “At least he'll have someone to lean on for the time being.”

“So you’re saying that I should go around flaunting Eren still?” He asked and looked up from where his head was in his hands. I can’t think of another way Eren would believe me, that I won’t stab him in the back and run away.

“Levi, there’s this thing called ‘popular opinion.’ It's the general consensus about something or someone. As far as I know, popular opinion on me, is that I'm pretty much the best teacher most of the students have had. That being said. I substitute a lot of classes, and see a lot of students every day. And not just the same ones. Everyone. If I hear shit going around about you or Eren, I know how to flip the switch from chill to do NOT fuck with me.” He grinned. “So yes. Flaunt it. Be prouder of it than an Olympic gold. And I'll bury anyone who stirs up shit for you.”

Levi heaved a sigh in relief. At least we’ll have one teacher on our side tomorrow, who knows how any of the other teachers will take it. Levi dropped his head back into his hands, still leaning over his knees on his chair. “Thank you Lathe… I didn’t know what Eren was so afraid about, but now I do, thank you, really.” Levi told him, but he didn't want Lathe to see his face at the moment, so he kept it hidden in his hands.

Lathe smiled. “I just want what's best for the both of you. Expect to see me in ‘protective parent mode’ quite a bit for a while. And Eren will have Blake, too. He'll be okay.”

Wait a minute… “Blake? Who the fuck is that?” Levi immediately got on the defensive of another man being around Eren that he’s never met before. His eyes were burning with passionate fury to eliminate all those who stood between him and his Brat.

The possessive boyfriend. He doesn't even have to act. Lathe studied the table, acting casual. “Oh, y’know, someone who’s going to be hanging around our house for awhile. Just moved in.” All technically not lies. Sweet. “You’d like him; He and Eren get along really well.”

“What?” Levi stood from his chair, his glare directly focused on Lathe. “Who the fuck does he think he is? Getting close to my Brat?” Levi growled. He looked like he was ready to rip someone apart limb from limb. And I feel like I’ll be ready to do it in about two seconds… Damn the charges for murder… Eren is my Brat and mine alone!
Lathe remained unfazed. “I dunno, I guess he thinks he’s Eren’s new PTSD service dog or somethin’, but that’s only my best guess. He doesn’t really say much other than ‘woof.’”

Levi’s fist clenched even more, his knuckles white, his anger now completely directed towards Lathe. “What the fuck!? You had me worried about a fucking dog? Are you trying to turn me into a motherfucking fool?” Levi growled, his eyes turning into slits again as he stared down Lathe. You could almost feel the rage radiating off of Levi as he stood there clenching his fists.

Lathe looked him in the eye, unaffected. He suddenly had this wondering look to him. “Have you told him yet?”

Levi stopped at stared at Lathe in confusion. “Told him what?” What was I supposed to tell him? I don’t understand? I don’t do this lovey-dovey shit… I don’t fucking know what to do.

“That you love him.”

Levi’s eyes widened and he stared at Lathe in shock. “How am I supposed to tell the Brat that? He barely understands the fact that I like him… I’m not the romantic type, I don’t know what to fucking do.” Levi sat back down in his seat. I’ve already managed to fuck it up somehow, haven’t I?

“With Eren, he’s not going to understand that you really do unless you tell it to him, straight to his face. I can't tell you how to say it, or when, but you need to say it at some point. Otherwise, he'll have to try and draw conclusions by himself, and we all know how that does.”

“But how do I tell him that I love him? I can’t just go out there and say it. He’d never believe something like that! I need to think it over Lathe… I can’t do it right now, I… I need time to think about how I’m gonna say it… God, it’s gonna be so awkward when we’re in the same room and I can’t look him in the eye because of this…” Levi ran his right hand through his hair, ruffling the inky locks. I don’t think that I can actually tell him something like that without defaulting to my straight face… He wouldn’t know what to think of that… I need to think of the right time to do it. When? And how? How the fuck am I supposed to tell him? He deserves to know… But he deserves to be told the right way.

Levi looked back into Lathe’s eyes. “Is that all? We’ve been talking for awhile.” Levi looked at the clock. Already, 2 hours had passed between them bickering about how Levi should tell him. But I can’t do it, I can’t do it yet… Nope, I can’t tell him I love him, not right now!
Eren had woken up around 9 a.m. when the front door was slammed shut. He groaned as his eyes opened to sunlight flooding into his room. He felt something warm and wet come across his cheek. *Well Blake’s up, I guess I should let him out and feed him.* Eren slowly propped himself up and looked at Blake, petting him gently before he swung his legs over the side of the bed. *Well, that was the first time I’ve actually got decent sleep without holding onto someone.* Eren stretched feeling the satisfying pop sound from his neck as it rolled. He sighed in relief before getting up and getting dressed, noticing how eerily quiet it was inside the normally sound-filled house. *Hmm. I wonder where Lathe is...* Eren ventured downstairs and found a note from Sue on the kitchen table. *Okay so Sue’s gone until further notice, got it... but where the hell is Lathe?* Eren shrugged before giving Blake his food and fresh water. He waited for a few minutes, the only sound the clinking of Blake’s collar against the metal bowl. He sighed quietly looking around for something to eat though finding that he couldn’t bring himself to actually eat anything. *I’m not hungry anyways... I’m going to check the Study to make sure he’s not up there... then I’ll put his new ceiling in.* Eren let Blake out to let him do his business before he ran upstairs to find Lathe’s room completely empty, along with the study. “Where is he?” Eren asked himself as he walked down the stairs. *He didn’t leave me did he? He’s going to come back right?* Eren swallowed hard, letting Blake back inside and heading down to grab the pieces he needed. *They dried beautifully! I really hope that he’ll like it.* With that Eren got to work balancing himself on a few chairs and had covered Lathe’s ceiling with the surreal galaxy picture. He was so proud of himself, so he opened the blinds so that the paint would get plenty of light. Eren then put the room back in order before he left the room to go down by the piano. He passed the clock and anxiety washed over him. *He’s been gone for 2 hours? Where is he? He didn’t text me... or leave a note... Did he leave me? Is he never coming back??* Eren had headed towards the corner of the room without a thought to it, and curled up in a ball. Blake instantly went to work and he pulled Eren into the middle of the open space by his shirt before he started to ground the other, putting his full weight onto Eren’s chest to calm him down as he licked his face. Eren was breathing hard as so many thoughts raced through his mind. “Eren!” Lathe ran to him from the front door, closing it without looking as he quickly knelt on the ground next to him, running his hand through Eren’s brunette locks and moving around Blake to hold onto his arm with the other, rubbing his thumb over his shoulder. “Eren, I’m here, it’s all alright. You don’t have to panic about anything.”

Eren’s labored breathing started to calm down. “L-Lathe?” Eren asked and looked up to Lathe with widened eyes. Blake continued to whimper and lick at Lathe’s face to keep him from going into a full panic. He did not remove his full bodyweight; no, he was trained not to, even with Lathe at Eren’s side again. “I’m here Eren, stay with me. You’re okay. I promise.” Lathe searched Eren’s eyes. *Is it his memories of his father? Or is it because I left without telling him? Probably because I left without telling him. Shit.*

Eren finally had tears in his eyes as he reached out to hold onto Lathe’s shirt with an iron grip. “Y-
you left…” Eren started crying as he held onto Lathe’s shirt. Blake leaned up a bit and reached for his tears and licked them away.

Lathe reached to help Eren sit up, pulling him close in a hug. “Eren, I’m sorry. I forgot to leave a note or anything, and I should’ve. I’ll make sure I do next time I need to go out.”

Eren calmed down when he was in his arms and so Blake eased up on his lap, sitting on his legs, his full weight still there to ground him until Eren told him to get off. Eren clung to Lathe’s shirt as he cried into the man’s shoulder. “Don’t leave me…. Please” he sobbed out and let his body shudder as he did so.

I fucked up. “I won't leave you Eren. I'm not going to leave. Swear it.” Lathe rested his cheek on Eren’s head, holding him tightly. He traced invisible patterns on Eren’s arm, trying to calm him. I'd never just walk out on you like that. I would hope you'd know that...

Eren just sobbed for a long time. He finally gave Blake the instructions to get off of him so the dog got off and sat beside him to lick his face. I was so scared…. You were just gone… I didn’t know when you’d be back. “I didn't….I didn't know…. When you'd...be back.” Eren hiccuped as he put his head against Lathe’s chest. “I was so scared you left…. And leave me all alone… Sue left a note that she wouldn’t be home until further notice… But you… You were just gone… I was so scared.” Eren tried to calm himself down.

“I'm so sorry Eren, I really should've left a note. I'll make sure I do from now on. I really didn't mean to scare you like that. I'm so sorry.” I should've left him something… Lathe kept his arms solidly around him.

Eren just stayed in Lathe's arms as long as he calmed down. Please don’t do that again. “You just slammed the door and left. I thought you’d be back in a few minutes but then that turned into an hour… And an hour turned into two and I started freaking out… I was so afraid.” he told him, still shaking.

“I'm sorry about that… I was mad, and I lost my head a bit. I wasn't thinking things through too well this morning. But you never need to be scared that I’m not going to come back when I leave for something. I'm always going to come back.” Lathe let out a shuddery sigh. This is all a mess.

“Where did you go?” Eren asked softly and gripped Lathe’s shirt a little more. He’s not mad at me right? Did he leave because he was mad at me and didn't want to be in the house with me? Eren’s mind started racing, his hands going to scratch, letting go of Lathe’s shirt. Blake instantly went and snatched his hands into his jaws.
Lathe sighed, swallowing. If you're anything other than honest, not only will I not forgive you, but I don't think he would either. “I went to talk with Levi. I was just really mad from when you said Levi joined in the name-calling at school. I needed to see if I could straighten some things out.”

Eren’s eyes widened immediately at the statement. “You what?” Eren’s eyes were overtaken by pure panic. He backed away from Lathe and removed himself from his lap. “You went to go talk to him?” He asked quietly again. “Why? Why did you go talk to him? I don’t want him to hate me any more than he already does…” Eren sat back stunned at what had just unfolded in front of him. “Lathe… What if he doesn’t talk to me again?” He asked and he looked so heartbroken at the mere thought. Blake instantly dragged Eren away into the center of the floor and he climbed up and sat in his lap. He was preparing to ground Eren; he could sense another attack coming on and was trying to get him to calm down now.

...Now that you mention it... **Fuck.** “Eren, trust me when I say that Levi doesn't hate you.” Lathe, though he did not go to hug Eren again, moved closer to lay his hand on top of Eren’s. “He isn't about to totally stop talking to you.” **He better fucking not, I don't want to have to deal with the guilt of knowing I fucked over their entire relationship**

Eren looked at him before he looked down again at Blake and pet him. “There’s no way you can know that….” Eren trailed off and burrowed his face into Blake’s fur to calm himself down. He hugged Blake and he tried not to cry as he thought of a world without Levi... *I wouldn’t be able to sleep with him anymore…. What if the nightmares come back?* Eren swallowed hard as Blake whimpered and whined to get Eren’s attention to calm him down and focus on the dog.

Lathe took his hand back, his head hung. He stared at the floor. *...did I ruin so much? I just... Wanted them to be happy. And everything at school was messing so much with Eren's head, I just... Maybe, we should have Levi over for Thanksgiving. It's in a few days, and I think Eren could do with seeing him then.* His voice was soft. “How about you give Levi a call, and invite him over for Thanksgiving? It’s in a few days, and I think we could do with some extra company.” Lathe offered him a small smile.

Eren thought about it for awhile. “Okay, I’ll call him with the house phone, and while I'm talking... You should go upstairs and check your study…” Eren trailed off as he got up and off the floor and started to head to the kitchen. *I hope he says yes, I really want to see him again. I didn’t even get to say goodbye to him yesterday.*

Lathe just let Eren walk to the kitchen, standing to go up the stairs. *...What did he do to...?* Lathe walked into his study, and looked up at the soft light of the ceiling. Stars shone down on him, and Lathe felt that sensation of weightlessness if for only a moment, the kind one would feel while adrift in a dream. *Space. He...* He painted all this. *It's beautiful.* Beaming, Lathe ran down the
stairs to the kitchen. “Eren, thank you so much…” He stopped in his tracks, his eyes suddenly full of concern and worry.

Eren stood looking at Lathe with pure heartbreak, his arm and hand holding the phone at his side, his other hand covering his red, tear-stained face.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

After Levi denied the invitation for Thanksgiving at our house…. My body decided that I couldn’t eat another thing. I couldn’t find the stomach to eat anything at all… Even after I had taken the nausea pill, I still had to throw everything up because the nausea was so bad. I’ve been feeling like shit since yesterday… and I can’t even bring myself to tell Lathe that he shouldn’t cook for me anymore… I know it’s not going to go down well. I know it won’t be staying down, even if the food goes down. Eren curled up into his bed and just laid there. Blake had been whining for him to get out from under the covers and actually move for the whole day, and it was almost time for dinner. I have no intention of moving. If Blake wants to eat, he can go down and eat like he normally does. I’m going to stay right here and stay in my own room.

He’s been in there the whole day… I know it hurts, I've been there too, but he needs to come out of there sometime… Lathe stood outside the door, quietly knocking on the doorframe. He didn't try to enter, his gaze downcast and searching the floor. His voice was soft. “Eren, there’s food downstairs for whenever you want it.” He stood there, listening to the silence. I can't help but think this is all my fault. If I hadn't gotten so overprotective, overbearing, letting myself lose my head like that… Maybe things would have been better and they would have solved this on their own. He stood there, hearing Blake’s whimpers. He's too worried about Eren to leave… Lathe left after a moment, coming back to place Blake’s food and water dishes quietly on the carpet inside, next to the door. He stood, looking up to Eren’s curled-up form. Poor kid… It would've meant a lot to him. Lathe struggled with himself, unsure if he should go over and console him. Thinking of himself, he decided against it, turning to leave for downstairs, quiet, his head hung. I hope Levi gets it together soon. For both their sakes.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

I ruined everything. I ruined absolutely everything. Two weeks, and they haven't spoken, haven't looked at each other, haven't said each other’s name. Eren isn't keeping anything down anymore. I can hear him pad to the bathroom, vomit, and go back to bed. It's the only sound left in the house since Sue left for home. I don't know how Levi is doing. I can only imagine what he must be thinking, somewhere, maybe at home, about how everything went all wrong somewhere. Probably with me, and the way I talk. Too much. Me? Heh. I've been alright. I can handle the guilt of knowing you wrecked a wonderful relationship. I’ve just been sitting here, staring at the piano keys. I think it’s time for breakfast. I don't know. Time passes oddly when you're sitting at the keys, even if their sound isn’t making you sway. I don’t have a watch on me. I have no real way to tell,
whether the six on the clock is am or pm. I closed the blinds. Maybe I should move. I don’t want to, though. Don’t want to disturb the missus. I have to take care of him. Myself. And Blake. Of course. I stand, and my phone is still on the counter from yesterday. Was it yesterday? Before is fine. It’s… Saturday. Six in the morning. I’m not hungry. Maybe Eren will be, after so long. A plastic cup of food, a plastic cup of water for Blake. That first, up the stairs. Eren’s plate is clean. I know he pitched it last night. Blake’s following me to the kitchen again. He’s at the glass door to the backyard. It’s cold out, but he’ll be okay. Let him run around. Let someone maybe be happy. Scrambled eggs are easy. Two minutes. They’re on his dresser if he wants them. I think he has a new pill calendar for the week.

I’m sorry, I was called away. I have nothing else to do today, miss, besides watch ghost hands fly over your keys. I’m watching them play ragtime, the blues, something that doesn’t exist yet, perhaps. No, miss, I never said that. Never. It’s as if music is reinvented every time it is played. It could never… What is it, one would say, ‘jump the shark?’ I could not stomach the thought. I could forever move over your ivory, hearing what is yet to be in shatterable silence, simply being and creating without movement, hearing without being and creating without movement, living without hearing without being and creating without movement. The papers? They, they are from my tilt. I haven’t played them yet. But they sound absolutely wonderful, I assure you, Madame. I’ve worn down so many pencils writing them for you. I apologize for the drops on them, the tear marks… I have not been myself. I did something… awful. I have taken from two people what it is easiest for millions to sing about, either not knowing what their words written by others mean or speaking in tongues, their souls singing for them. I must sound so odd… Is not the right word. A romantic sap. Is perhaps accurate. I must sleep soon, miss. I have a puppet to tote come Monday.

Blake is back in the house, he’s trying to tell me something. I do not need you, Eren does. Go to him. He has a heart to mend. More important than fighting the burden of Atlas. Go- I will hold this Boulder. You are as lovely as ever, miss. I do not know what to play. I have written for you, and I have sung in my head for you, but to play… I cannot. I do not know what to do with such an honor. I am willing myself for you not to wilt, it is all I have to give you, my presence. I have left the mail to wait, you have asked my attention. I forget myself… And I need to remember, for the sake of many.

Blake is pawing at my leg. It is night. I must remember, soon, intention.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

It’s the only way to get him back… I need to do this. Eren stood behind the backstage curtain on their last day of school before Christmas. He’d entered the talent show. Everyone at school would be at this talent show, and it was mostly just some wise cracks making jokes… I guess they’re supposed to be funny? I don’t know anymore. Eren waited for his turn to get on stage; He still had to wait for three more people to ‘perform’ before him. I don’t know if you can call it a performance, no one has actually sung or danced at all. Eren clenched Blake’s leash as the line in front of him dwindled down to two. He was nervous, of course. Who could blame him… He was trying to win back Levi’s favor. Win it back… More like try and get him to acknowledge me.
again… If he would talk to me… even at school, I would feel so much better. Even if it’s just as a friend… I can bear with it… I want to be by his side again. I want him to be worried about me… I don’t want him to ignore me anymore… I don’t want to have this empty gnawing feeling in my stomach anymore… I want to be able to actually enjoy the things Lathe makes me to eat… I want to not have to feel acid burn my throat every time I try to eat. Eren pet Blake to calm himself down and to steady his thoughts before he got on the stage. The line had vanished in front of him and he watched as two buff Stage Crew guys pulled out the Grand Piano. It was attached to a mount with wheels so that it would be moved by two people easily. Eren took in a few deep breaths as the microphone was positioned for him to sit at the stool. Not even Lathe knows I’m doing this… Fuck, what will Lathe think? I’ve been wanting to practice… But he’s been hogging the piano lately, whenever I come down to see him… I don’t think he’s noticed me come to see him at all these past two weeks. I’ve been wanting to talk to someone other than Blake… Someone I could really talk to, but Lathe wasn’t there when I called out for him. He was physically sitting in front of the piano… But he just wasn’t… There. Eren took slow steps across the stage with Blake, giving him small commands to lay down and stay. He dropped the leash beside the dog, knowing he wouldn’t run off. His head turning briefly to look out into the crowd. Everyone was staring, surprisingly quiet, but then again, no one would’ve expected the most bullied kid to stand up and show himself off in front of the whole student body. Eren swallowed, or at least tried to. Levi’s in the center section, 10 rows from the stage, and sitting on the end. His face looks as blank as ever… Lathe’s in the back with the rest of the teachers. He looks a bit surprised. Probably didn’t expect me to give one more shot at this… One last arrow in the quiver before this hunter starves in the winter. Eren slowly took his seat, sliding down the long bench in front of the piano itself. He looked over the keys and then at the microphone in front of him. He didn’t bother to introduce himself, everyone knew who the fuck he was. He tried to clear his throat as he spoke into the microphone for the first time. The sound of his own voice echoing in the silent auditorium. “Well, I’m doing this for the two people I hold dear to me. For the first, I just want you to come back to me… I really want you back, and the second… Won’t you let me in again? I can’t deal with this loneliness anymore….” Eren trailed off his ‘intro’ and let the crowd of teens murmur about who they thought he was talking about. The people were only able to murmur for a few seconds before Eren’s fingers flew expertly over the keys in front of him. He closed his eyes as his glorious voice left his lips… Leaving a majority of the student body in shock.

“Am I just a fool?
Blind and stupid for loving you
Am I just a silly girl?”

…He’s talking about me. Does he really want me back after… after everything I did to him? I’m a coward who can’t say the most important thing I need to and… he still wants me?

“So young and naïve to think you were the one who came to take claim of this heart
Cold-hearted, shame you’ll remain just a frame in the dark”

He’s still trying for him. He’s got a spectacular voice, and he’s giving everything he’s got. If anything would get through to Levi that he loves you so get over it and say it…
“The people are talking, the people are saying
That you have been playing my heart like a grand piano
The people are talking, the people are saying
That you have been playing my heart like a grand piano.”

...I'm sorry, Eren. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to keep you from getting hurt even more by staying away from you, not giving anyone more reason to hurt you and... I forgot about the most important thing. How you felt about this... Us, I should say...

“So play on, play on, play on
Play on, play on, play on
Play on, play on, play on
Play on, play on”

“Am I queen of fools?
Wrapped up in lies and foolish jewels
What do I see in you?
Maybe I'm addicted to all the things you do”

...I need to say it. I need to get all of this out of my head. I need to tell you. I love you and you should know that.

“Cause I keep thinking you were the one who came to take claim of this heart
Cold-hearted, shame you'll remain just a frame in the dark”

I'm going to do it. The second he's done singing on that stage, I'm going to get up there and fucking tell him. And I am going to make him believe it.

“The people are talking, the people are saying
That you have been playing my heart like a grand piano
The people are talking, the people are saying
That you have been playing my heart like a grand piano”

I really fucking love you, you Brat. Any moment.
“So play on, play on, play on
Play on, play on, play on
Play on, play on, play on
Play on, play on”

*Here goes everything.*

Levi was out of his seat in a moment, before the last chords had faded from the piano, before anyone had raised their hands to clap or to boo him off the stage. He was running down the aisle, leaping onto the stage, and at Eren’s side in a second. He knelt his left leg on the piano stool, pushing the microphone out of the way. He took Eren’s face in his hands. “Eren, I’m *really* sorry, and I *love you.*” And he smashed their lips together, willing him to understand and to *believe.*

Eren leaned into the kiss immediately. His arms wrapping around Levi’s broad shoulders as he kissed Levi back. Tears were streaming down his cheeks as he kissed Levi. *I missed this so much, I don’t care what people think anymore, I just want him back!* Eren didn’t even take into mind that a majority of the student body was in fact applauding at their display of genuine affection. *Levi, thank you so much.*

Levi, albeit reluctantly, pulled away after a moment. He leaned his forehead against Eren’s, breathing heavily. “Eren, I was such a fucking idiot this entire time. I didn’t want you getting hurt any more than you were for your panic attacks so I tried to keep up my image of not being involved with you but I totally disregarded how it was messing with your head and I just couldn’t get over myself and tell you that I *loved* you and I was so scared to say it so I pushed you away and… I’m so, so sorry for being an asshole and an idiot. I really, *really* hope you can forgive me for that.”

Levi pulled from him, reaching for the cordless mic and yanking it from it’s stand. He stood, addressing the crowd. “I, Levi Ackerman, hereby declare that this Brat, Eren Yeager, is my boyfriend from this moment forward… Anyone who so much as says a fucking *word* about it to him, you’ll have me, and the rest of the fucking *football team* to deal with! Are we *clear*?” Levi growled out into the microphone, almost expecting an objection just so they could shut him down. “Because *Surprise,* Motherfuckers, I’m Gay and *Taken.*”

...a pissed-off, possessive boyfriend, flaunting it like an Olympic *gold. And he doesn’t have to act.*
Chapter 17: IT FINALLY FUCKING HAPPENED!!!!

Eren smiled as he looked into his locker. *No one’s calling me any names… It’s great! ...Where’s Levi? He said he would take me home to Lathe’s after school. I want him to kiss me again. I want to show him Lathe’s study too!* Eren grabbed all the things he needed, not noticing that Blake was currently sniffing at Levi… He’d almost barked at Levi when he had first met him, jumping on the stage to get close to his handler. Only now he was curious.

Levi slung an arm over Eren’s shoulders. “Hey Brat. Is this Blake?” Levi kept trying in vain to pet him. *Just let me pet you. I know your vest says I’m not supposed to, but I’m an exception here. Come on. ...Please?*

“Oh, hold on, he won’t trust you yet…,” Eren bent down and took Levi’s hand and put his own hand under it, then offering Blake to sniff at the outstretched hands. Blake instantly went to sniff at the hand that was attached to his person’s. His ears perked, moving all about as people walked by and lockers slammed shut. Blake scrunched his nose up a bit before going up to him and sniffing all over Levi to make sure that he got all of Levi’s scent. The dog soon sat and wagged his tail as he stared at Levi, now expecting to be pet. Eren chuckled and let Levi’s hand go. “He trusts you now.” Eren smiled at that and he looked so happy, for the first time in a long time.

*Wait, what?* “So first you refuse to let me pet you, and now you’re demanding I do it? I’m not sure that’s how this works.” Levi told Blake sarcastically, still going to pet him, scratching behind his ears.

“Levi, I’ve only displayed you to him and, like, one other person. He knows that I trust you with my life… And will look for you if he can’t find the other I’ve entrusted it with. You and Lathe are the only two he trusts completely.” Eren smiled and stood up, grabbing Blake’s leash and motioning Levi to get up as well. Blake got up as soon as Eren did so; he was very attuned to Eren’s body language and how he reacted to certain things.

...you trust me with your life? Levi shook himself out of a daze after a second and quickly followed Eren. “...you really trust me with your life?”

“Well… You’ve already saved it twice.” Eren blushed and looked at his feet for a moment. *He’s got me wrapped around his finger and he doesn’t even fucking know it. Face, meet palm. He needs to know that I still trust him… And I want it to stay that way. I want to be able to live again.*

...stopping him from overdosing… And sending him off in an ambulance. Levi walked to get alongside Eren, reaching out to twine their fingers together. “...that means a lot.” *I’m still no good
Eren smiled and he leaned over and put a quick peck on Levi’s cheek. He waited until they were far enough away from the school to take Blake’s leash off of him and put it in the pack attached to his vest. He only took his hand away from Levi for a moment before returning it to the pale skin he so desperately loved. *I hope we can get along, all three of us…* Eren smiled as Blake seemed unfazed by the removed leash, and stuck to Eren’s side like glue. The rest of the walk home was short and peaceful. Eren climbed up the stairs first, jiggling the key into the lock until the door swung open. Eren ushered them both inside, Blake waiting patiently to get his vest removed as per usual. So Eren did just that and let Blake go get his water. *So how do I get you to kiss me again? Hmm…* Eren pondered as he shut the door and led Levi down to the workshop, which was still in the same order he had left it in 2 weeks ago.

...back here, are we? I didn't exactly have art in mind... “There something specific you were… thinking of doing, Eren?” Levi smirked, his eyes running Eren up and down.

Eren blushed a bit and got out some large paper and the charcoal pencils again. “Your back, I want to see how your shoulders meet your neck, so strip your shirt off.” He told him and was busy preparing for a day of drawing.

...yeah, see- we’re not going to have that, exactly. “Alright…” Levi slowly pulled his shirt over his head, tossing it onto the table. He sat down on a stool directly next to where Eren was setting up. He tugged lightly at his sleeve for a moment. “I can understand you wanting the shirt off…” He reached over, pulling Eren facing him into his lap. “…but I had other things in mind.” He rested his hands on Eren’s waist, looking at him with shaded eyes.

Eren let out a soft gasp of surprise as he was pulled close to Levi, his eyes instantly taking in the glorious sight of his wondrous abs. *Fuck… He’s too fucking hot!* Eren just stared at them, unable to pull his face away from them to actually look Levi in the eye again. His hand timidly reached out to touch Levi’s cool skin and feel how solid he actually was.

Levi tilted his head, leaning into Eren’s touch, their lips only a few inches apart. He hovered there for a moment, before pressing his lips against Eren’s, their kiss starting slow. He pulled Eren a bit closer, letting one hand wander slowly up Eren’s side. *It’s okay to touch- I’m certainly not complaining.*

...back here, are we? I didn't exactly have art in mind... “There something specific you were… thinking of doing, Eren?” Levi smirked, his eyes running Eren up and down.

Eren smiled as Levi was gentle with him. He slowly reached out his fingers gently touching Levi’s warm skin. *Huh… It’s not cool like the rest of them? I can feel the muscles moving under his skin.* Eren slowly put his whole hand on Eren’s abs, letting the palm of his hand touch the warm skin. He shivered as Levi’s hands had found a sensitive spot along his sides and he let a small moan escape his lips, pulling away from the ginger kiss for a second, to look into Levi’s eyes. His own
eyes were full of happiness, and a hint of lust if Levi could detect it.

Is that… Levi quirked an eyebrow, a small smile on his face. His own eyes mirrored Eren’s, and he let his other hand begin to wander as well. His eyes traced Eren’s outline. *You feel… thinner. And you were thin to begin with…* “Eren, were you eating while I was gone?” His voice was weighted with worry.

Eren kept his hand on Levi’s lower abs, a few inches from the hem of his jeans. He looked down at his feet for a second before he nodded. “I was eating…… But I couldn’t keep anything down.” He told the Levi the truth; There was no point in hiding it from him. *No point in hiding it, then he’ll know why I’m still throwing everything up if it comes to that…* Eren slowly raised his other hand, feeling Levi’s warm skin under all his fingers now. *Hmm… I wonder how far this’ll go?*

Oh my. We need to fix that. But we can deal with that later. Right now… He cupped Eren’s cheek with his hand, kissing him again with more force, his tongue swiping over his lip after a moment. …I’m a bit occupied.

Eren felt Levi’s lips against his own. He moved slightly, pulling away from the kiss for only a second, but there was a mischievous glint in his eyes. He started to clear room on the table beside the two of them, after a moment clearing it from all the clutter so he could lay down on it, with Levi over him again. Eren jumped up onto the strong table and he motioned with one finger for Levi to come to him. He had almost a seductive air to him as his legs were a spread apart as the hung over the edge of the table. *I hope he likes this, I want our last kiss to happen again, I don’t care if I get hard from it anymore. Levi won’t leave me because I get hard from it… I wouldn’t be surprised if he’ll be trying for it.*

*What are you…?* Levi watched Eren climb from his lap and onto the table, seeing him beckon him on top. Levi swallowed hard. *Fuck.* Levi stood, starting with one knee on the edge of the sturdy table and lifting himself on top of Eren, careful still not to crush him. His eyes dark, he dove in again, taking advantage of Eren’s surprised gasp to enter his mouth, immediately tangling their tongues together. *So good…*

Eren felt Levi’s tongue dance around his own after the shock of Levi kissing him so quickly subsided. His own tongue danced around Levi’s, taking in the warmth of the muscle within his own mouth. Eren slowly wrapped his hands around Levi’s broad shoulders, moving his fingers across his chiseled back. *Goddammit Levi, touch me already… Don’t make me wait.* Eren became a little more forceful in the kiss, trying to get his message across as his fingers gently dug into his shoulder blades.

Levi seemed to hear him, shifting carefully to lean on one arm, the other cupping his cheek, thumb brushing his jaw, before letting it slide lower, over his shoulders, splaying across his chest and
Eren let strings of moans out as Levi’s hands wandered over multiple sensitive spots. *At least they’re somewhat muffled by our kiss. God I wonder if he’ll find out my inner thighs will almost immediately get me hard, and I know that one… He’s finding ones I’ve never had touched before.* Eren pulled back and let out an extremely loud moan as Levi’s fingers grazed his hips.

Levi, his eyes dark, let his mouth wander again to Eren’s neck, nibbling and licking and suckling, remembering the sensitive spots from before. *I want to hear you sing.* His hands trailed along his sides and to the hem of his jeans and up again, wishing to go further, but he knew to wait until he knew he could.

Eren moaned out even more as both of his hands were now at his waist. *Fuck Levi, this feels amazing…. I want more… But the doors still open upstairs.* “Hmmm… Go close the door upstairs… Then you can” Eren moaned out as Levi’s fingers grazed more spots. *Lathe would be home soon, but hopefully he can get the door closed means at least knock, or think before you enter… Hmm, he’ll be cool about it.*

...*Right. Door.*** Levi, with one last butterfly kiss to his neck, lifted himself off of Eren and touched down on the floor, hurrying himself up the stairs to close the door. *No more interruptions, please.* As he reached out to grab the doorknob and close it, his eyes glanced to the base of the stairs, where he saw *Lathe. Fuck.* Levi stood there a moment, unsure of what to do or say, when Lathe just quickly gave him a thumbs-up and disappeared up the stairs. …*how are you an adult.* He closed the door, descending quickly and crossing back over in two steps to Eren, vaulting back onto the table. He gazed into Eren’s viridian eyes with his own hooded steel ones, kissing him fervently. *Now, where were we?* He carefully lowered his hips against Eren’s, gauging his reaction.

Eren gave a soft groan into their kiss. *Levi, if you continue... I hope you are prepared to deal with my hardon.* Eren pushed his hips up against Levi’s, giving a slow motion to grind his own hips into Levi’s. *Damn, this actually feels great when it’s not some random guy… Fuck, Levi…* Eren could feel his length starting to harden in his jeans.

Levi felt Eren’s length against his hips, grinding down against him, groaning into his mouth at the friction. His hands traced along the denim hem, wishing to go further. He brought his hand to toy with the button of his jeans, pulling back from the kiss for a moment, his eyes asking for permission. *Let me… help you with that.*

Eren leaned his head back a bit, looking at Levi with lustfilled eyes. *Oh don’t stop Levi.* Eren spread his legs wider for Levi and let him undo the button of his jeans. *Hmm, I wonder if he’ll know what to do? Well, if he doesn’t I can always direct him on how I want it.* Eren gave a slight nod as well, in case opening his legs weren’t enough for his approval.
Levi undid the button, gently kissing him as he unzipped his jeans and tugged them down his hips, fingers ghosting over the waistband of his boxers before tugging them down, letting his erect length spring free, hand hovering unsure for a moment, before gently taking him in hand close to the base, pumping in a slow rhythm.

Eren let out a loud moan and his head shot up as soon as Levi began his slow rhythm. “L...Levi.” Eren moaned out his name, moving to grip onto the other’s shoulders. I haven’t felt this good…. Since I don’t know when… Fuck, please don’t stop Levi.

My god, you sound so fucking sexy… Levi sped up his movements, going to suckle again on Eren’s neck, running his thumb over the slit of Eren’s head.

Eren’s whole body shuddered from the intense pleasure. Beads of precum started to seep from his head. Eren’s whole face was flushed. “Fuck… Levi…. G-good.” He moaned out as Levi kissed his neck. Is he gonna leave marks on me? I wonder if he will… I kinda want him to.

Levi twisted his hand as he pumped Eren quickly, biting Eren’s soft flesh. Mine. He held Eren’s length with more pressure, his movements becoming more erratic.

Eren gave out a sharp cry of pleasure as he felt the pressure increase on his length. Shit… Levi…. He felt the warmth start to coil in his stomach. He moved his head to the side, giving Levi more room on his neck. “L-Levi… I’m… Close.” Eren’s breathing hitched more, his length leaking precum, effectively lubricating Levi’s hand on his dick.

Levi pulled away from Eren’s neck, noting with pride that he would surely have plenty of hickeys to show off. He leaned up next to Eren’s ear, his voice smooth in quiet command. “...Then cum for me.”

Eren felt the coil that had been tightening in his stomach snap. He cried out in pleasure as he felt his whole body shudder and felt rope after rope of come leave from him. The pearly white covering Levi’s hands and his stomach. Eren was still moaning underneath Levi as he was milked for every last drop of his come. He was still panting hard, his chest heaving litany of Levi’s name rolling off of his tongue. Fuck.... I want him to do that again. “Levi....” Eren finally opened his eyes again and he looked at Levi with hooded eyes.

I will never get tired of hearing that. “Eren…” Levi gazed at him with dark eyes, a red streak across his cheeks. He shifted a bit, his hand reaching blindly for the box of wipes he knew were
somewhere on the table to clean himself, feeling his own length still straining against his jeans.

Eren shifted a bit under him. “Levi….. Let me…” Eren moved out from under Levi and he grabbed the box, handing it to Levi before slipping off the table. He put himself together quickly before he looked at Levi’s jeans… “C-can I help you?” He asked quietly, his hand grazing over Levi’s length in his jeans. It’s so big…. Holy shit...

Levi, having cleaned himself, shivered at Eren’s touch. ...Fuck. He tossed the box on the table behind Eren, letting out a shuddery breath. “... please.” His hands hovered unsure, before cupping Eren’s cheeks and pressing a quick, forceful kiss to his lips.

Eren kissed him back. His slim fingers making quick work of Levi’s jeans and pulling them down, his fingers gently tracing the outline of Levi’s monstrous length. He pulled back to breath, putting his forehead against Levi’s. “Well, now I know why someone’s popular.” Eren smiled and palmed his length. “It’s so big.” Eren moved down to kiss the outline in Levi’s boxers, teasing him. I wonder how long he can take this for?

...Tease. Levi forced down a moan, his fingers going to tangle in Eren’s hair. “Eren, please. ” I’ve lasted this long, but don't make me wait too much more...

Eren smirked for a second before he grabbed hold of his boxers with his teeth, pulling them down all the way to his knees. He smiled more as he saw Levi’s length spring free. “It’s really big…” Eren trailed off as he slowly trailed a finger from the base all the way to the head, going over his slit. Oh, he is so getting teased… I don’t care, he’ll thank me later.

Levi let out a low moan, his fingers threaded through Eren’s hair tightening their grip. Eren. Please.

Eren gave a soft moan as his hair was pulled. He smiled softly, gently bringing his lips to kiss the head of his length. “Big and thick.” His lips opened and Eren slowly started to engulf his length into his mouth. Thank god I’ve done this before, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to do this. Eren took his whole length in all the way to the hilt, mindful not to hit his teeth against him. I wonder if he’ll pull my hair again… He’ll be in for a surprise if he does. Eren began to suck on Levi’s whole length, and looked up to see what his face looked like. Wonder if anyone else was able to take his whole length in and suck it?

Levi groaned loudly in bliss, his face completely flushed, eyes hooded, trying to keep his hips from thrusting forward. Oh my god, Eren… It’s never felt this good… He fought to keep his knees from
buckling, giving out. He tugged on Eren’s locks again, lost in pleasure.

Eren moaned as Levi tugged on his hair again, sending vibrations down Levi’s length. Eren looked for his reaction, wondering if Levi would come from that stimulation alone. Eren moved his hand up to fondle Levi’s balls as well, gently massaging them in his hands.

Levi felt his coil tightening, shuddering at the vibrations around his length. He let out a long moan. *I can't hold on for much longer… “E-Eren… I… I can't…”* His breath hitched, looking down at Eren with lust-filled eyes, overwhelmed.

Eren slowly moved back, sucking on Levi’s sensitive head, his tongue darting around the tip, before nudging his slit with it. *Cum then, Levi.* Eren brought his other hand up to start to pump the base of Levi’s length. *Cum for me, I want to taste you.* Eren was eager to have Levi come in his mouth, and he was doing everything he could to prolong Levi’s climax, but knew it would happen soon, even with his grip on the base of his length.

Meeting Eren’s eyes, taking in the sight of him, Levi felt his coil snap, unraveling as he came in Eren’s mouth with a loud moan, Eren’s name rolling off his tongue, a mantra, his knees threatening to give out from under him. *Eren…*

Eren swallowed every drop of Levi’s cum, not letting a single one get away. *It’s salty, almost sweet…. I like it, it’s not terrible.* He continued to rub him to milk every last pearl of cum from Levi’s length, before he rose his head again, his mouth coming off of Levi with a seductive ‘pop’. Eren looked up to Levi and moved to kiss him again, the salty flavor still on his tongue, but Eren had swallowed everything down.

*…He swallowed… Damn.* Levi kissed Eren fervently, not caring that he could taste himself, pulling himself together before pulling Eren close and tangling their tongues. *I really fucking love you.* He wrapped his arm around his waist, his other hand cupping his cheek. He pulled back to whisper, “I love you.” before diving in again, a streak of red across his face.

Eren didn’t care that Levi had pulled him up onto the table with him. It made it easier for their bodies to press against each other with Eren on top, so of course he did, pressing their hips and chests together, Eren’s nipples still perking up through the bandages wrapped around him. He continued the kiss, tilting his head to deepen it more. *This is fucking amazing… I don't want to stop…*

Levi kissed Eren lazily, his hands running slowly up his sides, over his back. *This is so wonderful… I don't want to have to stop…* Levi pulled away after a few moments, looking to
Eren’s neck and smirking in victory at the small bruises blooming there. Mine. Contented, Levi just held onto Eren, nose buried in his hair, feeling his breath on his shoulder.

Eren smiled as he laid there contently. “You were pretty good at the handjob… I would’ve thought that you would’ve been bad… didn’t you have girlfriends like, all the time to do that for you?” Eren asked and giggled as he moved his head to set his gaze on Levi’s eyes. He was trying to poke at Levi to see just how experienced he really was with this. “I also know why all the girls would be so interested in you.” Eren playfully palmed at Levi’s crotch, a smile forming on his face.

Levi blushed furiously at Eren’s movements, his insinuation, shoving down another groan and swatting at Eren’s hand. He quirked an eyebrow at him, opening his mouth and trying to find the words. There were none. “…shut up.” Dammit Eren. Levi pecked Eren again on the lips, a spark of amusement dancing in his eye.

Eren smiled and let Levi peck him on the lips. He giggled and put his hands on Levi’s chest as he pulled himself up. “I think you would need to make me shut up… So when we go farther… Do you know what you’re doing?” Eren asked as he slid his hands down Levi’s bare chest towards his hips, where Eren’s bubbly ass was currently resting.

Levi swallowed. “Uh… y-yeah, I do.” He watched Eren’s hands move down his torso, propping himself up on his elbows.

“You don’t sound too sure… I’m going to assume you’ve never been in a gay relationship, since you so proudly announced that you were gay today at the talent show…” Eren smiled more as he traced the pronounced v-line on Levi’s abdomen. “…so I’m going to assume I’m going to need to teach you what to do.” Eren leaned down and kissed Levi’s chest. God, he’s so beautiful. Eren started to bite at the white skin under his tan hands. He was starting to leave marks of his own.

Levi let his head fall back, groaning at the feeling of Eren’s mouth all over his chest. “W-well… I guess so…” Levi shuddered, his heels digging into the table, trying to keep still. Oh my god...

Eren smiled. “Oh, so you’ll let me teach you then?” He asked quietly as the smile escaped from behind his plump lips. He leaned down again and marked Levi’s chest again on his right pec.

The thought finally registered, a dominant look flashing in his eyes. “Actually…” He purred, one hand going to trail up Eren’s inner thigh. “…I think I know what to do…”
“Fuck!” Eren let out a high-pitched wail as Levi touched his inner thigh. His jeans instantly got tighter. Shit… And I just came not too long ago too… Fuck… It feels too good. “Levi, are you sure?” He asked his voice filled with lust, trying to cover himself from Levi’s eyes, only to force his ass onto Levi’s crotch more, as his hands went to immediately cover himself and Eren’s whole face flushed completely.

Levi’s features softened, his hand leaving Eren’s thigh to bring his face closer to his, kissing him softly, drawing out some of the heat. He pulled back for a moment, speaking quietly. “We don’t have to now if you don’t want to.” He rested his forehead against Eren’s, meeting his eyes. I can wait.

“I don’t want to… but that’s fucking embarrassing” He whimpered to Levi as he buried his face into Levi’s neck. I can’t believe I got hard again... am I some kind of insatiable demon? “I’m sorry, I should probably go take care of this.” He murmured quietly and moved to pull away.

Levi stilled his movements, holding onto him. He murmured into his ear. “Let me.” He carefully switched their places, Eren underneath him as he undid his jeans, pulling them and his boxers down once again, kissing Eren slowly. Let me take care of you. He slowly pumped his length, twisting his hand and running his thumb over the slit of the head.

Eren became vocal all over again. His back arching off the table from the pleasure. “Fuck… Levi…” Eren squirmed a bit under his grasp. Fuck it feels good... Do it more. Eren could already feel the coil starting to tighten in his gut, but that was probably because he was still sensitive from the first orgasm he had only a little while ago.

Levi tangled their tongues together, speeding up his strokes. He moaned into Eren’s mouth. You’re so vocal… And I love it.

Eren moaned into their kiss. His back arching even more as only a few moments went by before he felt the coil snapped yet again, releasing a wave of pleasure. Fuck... that was good. Eren was close to passing out from the pleasure he had just experienced. Levi, if I fall asleep, you better fucking carry me upstairs. Eren curled up into Levi’s arms before he passed out and became limp in his arms.

Levi reached over to the box of wipes, cleaning them up and discarding the used wipe. He carefully maneuvered onto the floor, donning his shirt before picking Eren up bridal-style and walking him up the stairs, watching that his head didn't hit anything. He opened the door, keeping his hold on Eren solid, stepping up and immediately being met by Blake, who has been lying patiently under the scripting table. He stood and trotted over to him, sniffing at his leg. Levi kept walking over and up the stairs. He glanced over to Lathe’s door, seeing the man in question leaning against the frame
with an odd smirk. He wagged his eyebrow at him, laughing at Levi’s flushed face before descending the steps. Levi went to tuck Eren in on his bed, climbing in next to him and pulling him close, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

Blake jumped up and stared at Levi laying with him for a second before he went to curl up at the foot of the bed. Eren curled up to Levi to get a few hours of sleep, safely in Levi’s arms again.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Levi woke up to a hand smacking clear across his face. **FUCK.** Still in a sleepy daze, he could not avoid a second smack, now fully alert. **What the hell?** Levi looked up, arm shielding his face, to see Lathe looming over them, his hand still raised. Levi sputtered. “What the fuck was that for?!”

“That.” Lathe dropped his hand. “Is payback.” He grinned. “Dinner’s ready. Come downstairs while it’s still hot.” He sauntered out the door, back down the stairs. **Still too fucking adorable.**

Levi looked to Eren, miraculously still asleep. He smiled a little at his peaceful face, and gently shook his shoulder. “Eren, there’s food downstairs. Come on, I'm hungry.” **I require sustenance!**

Eren’s eyes cracked open. “I'm not hungry.” Eren whined and tried to roll over to go back to sleep. Blake as already up and sitting at the end of the bed, watching the two of them. **I don’t want to throw up again… I really don’t want to, I don’t want to eat and have it happen again.** Eren pouted as he snuggled under the covers. “You can go eat, I’m staying here.”

“Oh no, none of that. Come on- you're going to eat something whether you like it or not. I promise we'll do everything we can to help you keep it down. Don't worry about that.” Levi moved so that he was half-standing on the floor, hooking his arms underneath Eren and lifting him from the bed. **You're obviously not going to walk down there willingly, sooo...**

Eren didn’t complain much as he was lifted off the bed. **I wonder if he’s noticed I like him to carry me yet?** Eren whined a little and held onto the sheets but once he let go he was easy to handle. He watched as Blake followed them down the stairs. Though he sighed when they got to the kitchen. “Levi, I’m really not hungry…” He trailed off and put his head against Levi’s chest again.

“You're skinnier than the last time I held you, and you were too skinny then! We're getting some food in you.” He carefully set Eren down, pulling out a chair for him at the table and sitting down
“I don’t want to eat though…” Eren complained until he saw that Lathe had made the chicken soup that he so dearly loved. He swallowed hard knowing he wouldn’t be able to resist the temptation of chicken noodle soup. He took his nausea pill and waited for it to kick in. *This is bad, I’m gonna eat too much, then really be throwing it up.*

Lathe was beginning to act much more like himself, getting out bowls and placing one full of soup in front of Eren. He rested his hand on his shoulder for a moment. “I think you'll find you'll feel much better eating.” He went to hand Levi his bowl, setting down with his own. *The problem wasn't you in throwing it all up, per se... I think what caused all that is mended.*

Eren looked down at the soup in front of him for a long time. *Fuck... Lathe always does things like this... I wanna cry again... I’m so happy he thought about this.* Eren slowly picked up a spoonful and lifted it to his mouth. He smiled softly as he savored the taste. *Dammit, I'm starving... And so after a few minutes, Lathe was filling his bowl again, with a smile on his face.*

*Good to know everything's working out. Eren can eat, and this one got his shit together.* Lathe beamed, handing Eren his bowl back. He pretended not to notice Eren and Levi playing footsie under the table.

Eren ended up eating the whole bowl before he called it quits on the food. He didn’t want to over eat and throw up because of that. Eren gave up after Levi won a majority of the footsie challenges the two shared. He looked down at his empty bowl and smiled softly. *Maybe it’s for the better... that I can eat again.* Eren looked to Lathe, “I can shower with the wraps on my back right?” He asked quietly. He’d never tried to take another shower by himself again after that experience, he would always just fill a bucket with water and dump it over himself to wash.

“You can. It would be best if you took them off to clean, but you’d have to stay out of the direct stream of water, and we don't know how well you’d do then. You'd need help with that.” Lathe tried not to look at Levi. *Don't give them more ideas. ...I already did, though. Shit.*

“Levi, can you help me shower?” Eren asked innocently as he looked to Levi, across from him.

Lathe just put his reddening face in his hand, focusing on his soup and trying to ignore their conversation. *Eren, why would you ask that when I'm right here?*

Eren followed along, though the sudden jostle didn’t bode well for his stomach. Eren gripped Levi’s wrist to make him stop moving, if only just for a second. Fuck I feel like i’m gonna throw up again.

Levi immediately stopped moving, moving to hug Eren and still him, seeing his face twist with nausea. Fuck, I forgot. He held onto Eren, hoping it would pass.

Eren stood stock still, the nausea swelling in his stomach. No… Stay down, food. Stay down… I want to shower with Levi… Stay down… Please. It took a few minutes but finally the nausea passed to where Eren could move around without worry.

Thank fuck. “Sorry about that…” Levi started them moving to the shower upstairs slowly, letting Eren take as much time as he needed. Maybe he needs stronger nausea pills… Lathe must’ve picked up on that. He saw the whole damn thing. I’ll mention it later.

Eren took about 5 minutes to get up the stairs. He looked around for new clothes and found that Lathe had put a bunch of clothes in a basket, folded by his door. Lathe did laundry while we were asleep? Eren shrugged and grabbed underwear and sweatpants knowing he really shouldn’t grab a shirt until his arms, back and chest were wrapped. He took Levi to the bathroom, closing and locking the door. “I’ll have to show you Lathe’s study after this… I snuck in and kept the blinds open all day, so that we’ll be able to see the stars.” Eren smiled and struggled to get his shirt off for a few seconds before finally getting it off.

…Does he want help with those bandages? I can see some of the hooks are on his back. Levi put them on even ground, taking his shirt off and placing it on the counter. “Do you want me to help you with your wraps? There are hooks on the back.”

Eren looked to Levi for a moment, thinking about it. “Yeah, that would help, thanks.” Eren turned around and displayed his back for Levi. His hair has gotten much longer since they had first met, it needed to be cut again.

“Your hair’s really long…” Levi noted absentmindedly, unpinning and sliding hooks out of place and carefully peeling them away from his healing back. He looks so much better than the last time I saw his back… That was when he first got the stitches, wasn’t it? They should be taken out soon, it looks like. “Your back looks much better, Eren.”
“Does it? It still feels like something’s ripping through it every now and then.” Eren told him. “My chest is almost completely healed though, which is good, only scars left.” He smiled softly and turned so that Levi could see his chest scarring over in so many different places. You could still tell where he was missing a rib.

Levi dropped the wraps out of the way, kicking off his shoes. He looked at Eren’s chest, tracing every scar with his eyes. He did so much… No. You shouldn’t think about that now. Just focus on helping Eren get clean. He pulled Eren close to him, giving him a gentle peck on the lips before he nudged him, a soft smile on his lips. “Come on, let's get you clean.” He continued to undress, stepping out of his jeans and placing them on top of his shirt, ditching his socks and boxers.

Eren ditched all his clothes and turned the shower on, but didn’t step in. He didn’t know if he should let Levi in first. His ass was currently facing Levi, but Eren didn’t seem to mind. He can control himself.

“Should I go in first?”

Eren looked to him and nodded quickly.

Levi slowly moved past him and into the hot spray, adjusting quickly to the temperature. He held out one hand to Eren, smirking. “Come on in, the water’s fine.” I'll catch you if anything happens. Don't worry.

Eren took his hand and looked at his glorious body. God, I knew he was hot, but this is ridiculous. Eren blushed as he stepped in and he felt the heat of the water starting to steam the room. “It’s warm” he said and smiled. Some of the water was coming off of Levi’s shoulders and splashing only his chest gently.

Levi reached to his right for a washcloth, holding it into the stream of water for a moment and rubbing soap onto it, turning Eren around and beginning to wash his back, taking extreme care not to harm him. He went over the healing wounds with a ghost of a touch, and he entirely avoided the long gash and the burned skin underneath it. “Tell me if I start doing something that hurts.”

“Okay.” Eren was quiet until Levi pressed a little too hard and he hissed in pain. “That hurt.” He tried to calm down, moving away from the pressure. He looked back at Levi to see if he understood.
“Sorry, I’ll be more gentle.” Levi rested a hand on Eren’s arm, holding him still as he finished with his back, moving on to his sides, coming up to his shoulders, his arms. He turned Eren around to face him, starting on his chest. He swiped over his neck, smiling a bit at the marks there.

Eren moaned when Levi brushed over his neck. He snapped his eyes open and looked at him with hooded eyes. “How many did you leave?” He asked and eyed Levi up and down. He had only left 5 large marks over Levi’s flawless chest.

Levi counted. “…Seven.” He allowed his eyes to skim over Eren’s naked frame. Beautiful. His redirected his attention to his eyes after a moment, then again to Eren’s chest as he washed him.

“So I get two more then? I get to mark you two more times?” He asked, almost eager to do it again to Levi, just to see his reaction. Eren looked down slightly to meet Levi’s eyes. He’s not that much shorter than me… Maybe a few inches.

So that's the game we’re playing, is it? Levi moved the washcloth to the small shelf next to him. “If you want to be fair about it…” He smirked, eyes shaded, his head slightly tilted and neck further bared in invitation.

Eren’s eyes lit up like a fucking Christmas tree. He smiled before coming closer to him, bending his head down to get at the perfect skin of the other’s neck. He kissed it gently at first before he bit the supple flesh under his teeth. He made one large possessive mark that had almost broken skin, but was strong enough to leave a huge bruise there. He gently moved to Levi’s other side and he bit down on the other side of his neck. Mine. He's mine, bitches. No one else’s. Eren smiled and was pleased with his possessive work.

Levi groaned as Eren marked his neck. “Damn, you don't have to bite that hard, Brat.” That actually kinda hurt. He went with it anyway, eager to let Eren mark him. And I should get to mark him again later, too… definitely. Mine. Levi took his face in both of his hands when he pulled away, kissing him fervently for a moment before pulling away, reaching for the washcloth and putting more soap on it. Shower. Clean. Right. He carefully worked down Eren’s torso, making sure not to miss any spots.

Eren just giggled. “Yeah, but now if anyone sees you now, they know you’re taken.” Eren smiled and reached up to kiss him, reaching for the cloth. “Shall I wash you?” He asked seductively.

Levi felt red streak across his face, swallowing. “…please.” He smirked, handing Eren the cloth.
Damn, that voice.

Eren looked at him and smirked. He slowly washed Levi’s solid form with the washcloth. “Levi, where are you dirty?” He asked again in that seductive voice, his hands already starting to wash around Levi’s neck.

Fuck… um. Levi quirked an eyebrow. “Everywhere.” That’s a valid answer. …right?

Eren smirked and leaned down to peck his cheek. “Even your nether regions?” He asked and his seductive voice could bring even the most honest-minded men to their knees. Oh the ways that I can get you to blush… Talking dirty is definitely one of my favorites. “I’m not sure, you’ll have to tell me.” Eren was currently washing his arms and smiling as he did so, touching an asscheek to Levi’s hips as he got close to him.

God… Levi searched for his voice. “Uh.. S-sure.” He’s such a fucking tease, dammit.

Eren smirked and washed everything on Levi’s front, taking special care around his crotch. Eren bent down to give Levi a show at his ass when he washed his legs. He felt around Levi’s strong legs. So much muscle… Fuck it’s so hot.. I wonder how he’s finding my ass… God I love teasing him.

Levi couldn’t help but stare. His ass is damn fine. Levi smirked, enjoying the show.

Eren soon moved and turned Levi around, his hands going down his muscled back. Holy shit, it just gets better.

Levi shifted his shoulders, the muscles rippling across his back with the movement. He sighed as Eren washed his back, leaning into the touch. This feels really nice, actually.

Eren smiled and washed the rest of him before handing it back. “Can you wash it out? I can do your hair if you can do mine?” He asked quietly his arms wrapping around Levi’s broad shoulders. He smiled and kissed Levi’s left ear happily.

“Of course.” Levi rinsed out the washcloth, putting it back on the small shelf and reaching for a black bottle of shampoo. He poured some into his palm, setting it back down and beginning to massage it into Eren’s hair.
Eren let out a soft sigh of pleasure. “That feels good, Levi.” Eren’s voice was soft and his seductive tone forgotten for right now.

Levi gave him a small smile, moving his fingers in small circles from the nape of his neck to the crown of his head, careful to brush any bubbles away from his eyes.

Eren leaned into his soft touches, his back flush against Levi’s chest. He left out a bunch of soft whimpers when Levi found a sensitive spot. He was in complete bliss with Levi’s hands running through his hair.

Levi was content to stay in the warm water, fingers threading through Eren’s brunette locks, his face peaceful. After a few minutes, however, he moved to carefully rinse Eren’s hair out, brushing away the bubbles before taking the white bottle of conditioner from the shelf and resuming his motions with that, before Eren could protest. When he was sure he had gotten it everywhere, he kissed Eren’s shoulder blade, speaking softly. “We’ll leave that for a moment, alright?”

“Leave it? Don’t we need to wash it out?” He asked quietly to the other. *Don’t we need to get it out?*

“*We do, but if you leave it to sit for a few minutes, it makes your hair even softer. We’ll rinse it out in a few minutes, then. I won't forget.*” He pressed another butterfly kiss to his shoulder. *Don’t worry about it.* He handed Eren the black bottle. “Will you do mine?”

Eren smiled and he nodded. “Okay.” Soon he had his hands lathered in the shampoo, working their way through the Levi’s inky locks. “Your hair's getting long… Your undercut isn’t shaved all the way anymore.” He was really gentle with Levi’s hair.

Levi hummed, leaning into Eren’s touch. “That makes two of us. We’ll get Lathe to drag us out of the house and get haircuts.” Levi let his eyes close, enjoying the feeling of Eren’s fingers threading through his hair.

Eren smiled and he rubbed it in a little more. “You can probably wash it out, then I can do your conditioner.” Eren told him and brought his hands back. He was starting to get cold from the lack of warmth. His fingers were pruning and his lips starting to turn a purplish color because he was getting so cold.
Levi looked over his shoulder at him, his eyes flashing with worry, seeing his purple lips. He immediately set the bottle he was holding down. “Eren, you don't look very good. Are you alright?”

“I’m cold,” he murmured and he curled up to Levi’s skin for warmth. He couldn't get directly into the water, so he was freezing the whole time. *So fucking cold… Can he rinse my hair out now?*

Levi wrapped one arm around him, the other going to turn up the water as high as it would go, adjusting to the temperature and rinsing his hair quickly. *I hope the steam warms him up.* He reached for the washcloth again, soaking it and carefully running it over his shoulders, his arms, trying to warm him. He moved to rinse out Eren’s hair, carding his hands through his locks. “Any better?”

Eren nodded a little bit. “I’m still really cold though.” Eren looked at him and his lips were almost a shade of blue. “Can I get out?” He asked and started to shiver.

*Oh my, Eren.* “Of course.” Levi quickly shut off the water, opening the door and stepping over the small frame, snatching a clean white towel from the rack. He held it open for Eren, wrapping it around him and carefully drying him off. He pulled him into a hug. *You’re freezing…* He rubbed most of the water out of Eren’s hair, patting his back dry without incident. He grabbed a towel for himself, drying his hair and wrapping it around his waist. He led Eren by the arm back to his room so he could change, leaving him for a moment to retrieve and don his own clothes.

Eren slipped on clean boxers and he got out a new pair of sweatpants. He was still shivering. “Levi, can you get Lathe? He needs to do my bandages.” Eren moved to grab a blanket to wrap around himself as he shivered.

Levi, though his first thought was to wrap himself around Eren and keep him warm, was trumped by Eren’s need of wraps for his back. He nodded, descending the stairs fully dressed, finding Lathe in the scripting room, studying a huge shuffled mess of sheet music, all in pencil and in varying states of completion. Many were wrinkled or torn. He looked up as Levi entered. “Eren needs new wraps.”

Lathe nodded, straightening himself and moving to the bag on the banister, removing three new rolls. He led Levi back up the stairs, finding Eren in his room, his brow instantly furrowing with concern, noting his purple lips. “You okay? Are you cold?” He immediately set to work, having Eren stand and turn so he could see his back.

Eren nodded. “I’m really cold…” He told Lathe and shivered as he turned and showed him his
back. His back looked better after the dried blood had been washed off. *Hurry, I’m fucking freezing!! Lathe please hurry I wanna curl up to Levi.* “Oh… C-can I s-show Levi the stars?” He shivered, his teeth chattering.

Lathe wrapped him in record time. *The stitches can come out in a couple of weeks. It won't take too long. Good.* Lathe smiled. “Let me see your arms first.” He took his forearm, scrutinizing the thin scars that remained. “You don’t really need the arm wraps anymore. Unless you want me to do them anyway, if you're afraid of scratching, still. Or if you just want to look tough. Both are valid reasons.” He grinned.

Eren shook his head. “I don’t want them wrapped. I can take him then?” He asked, still shivering, but now swaddled in his large blanket.

“Of course. Go right ahead.”

Eren smiled at him and reached out to grab a bunch of pillows and blankets happily. “Levi, we’re going star gazing!” He called happily from the room, he went and made a nest of sorts in Lathe’s study, he brought a bunch of blankets and pillows into the room, almost intent on watching the stars until they fell asleep. *He’s gonna love this!* Eren smiled, it was getting dark outside so the paint would really glow tonight.

Levi let out a breathy laugh, following Eren into Lathe’s study, looking curiously around the cluttered room, down to the nest Eren had constructed on the floor. He quirked an eyebrow, but nestled in nonetheless, looking up to the ceiling after a moment, his eyes going wide, his jaw slack. *Oh my god.* “Did.. Did you do that?” *It looks so real...*

Eren smiled and got close to Levi and snuggled up to him, wrapping them in all the blankets. “Yeah, I did, and wait until the sun goes all the way down… It’ll look really cool!” He said excitedly and started to finally get warm next to Levi.

Levi wrapped himself around Eren, tangling their legs together. “It already looks so real… you did an amazing job.”

Eren smiled and when the sun went down completely, the painting lit up the whole room. “Do you like it?” He asked as he turned to see his opinion. *I hope he does.*

Levi looked to the ceiling in awe, feeling like he was staring at the sky. “It’s absolutely wonderful.
It’s realistic and bright. Amazing.” Levi kissed Eren’s temple. *You have real talent.*

Eren giggled and snuggled into his chest. “I could stare at it forever…” Eren trailed off and smiled as Blake came in and laid down by them. “Thank you for today, too. I really mean it… Thank you for… For telling me…” Eren said, a red tint across his cheeks.

Levi pulled Eren closer, burying his face into the crook of his neck. “I’m sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I was… I was scared that things would get worse and not better.” He pressed a soft kiss to his cheek. “I'm so glad I told you. I… I really do love you, Eren.”

Eren smiled, propping himself up. He looked over to Levi, swallowing hard. “L-Levi?” He asked quietly. His stuttering giving away that he was nervous. Blake was instantly by his side and grabbing his hands to get him not to scratch at the scabs that were there, but almost gone. *Fuck, he knows I’m nervous now…*

Levi’s eyes widened a bit, at Blake’s intervention, and at Eren’s nerves. “Yeah, Eren?” *It’s okay, you don’t have to be so scared to tell me anything.*

“Um… Well… I… I … I…” Eren freed his hands only to have them snatched again in Blake's jaws. The dog growled at him… Wanting him to calm down before he even tried to take his hand again. “B-Blake?” Eren’s attention immediately pulled to the growling dog. *Blake’s never growled at me before?*

Levi carefully reached out, tentatively petting Blake behind the ears and talking to him softly. “Blake, it’s fine, don’t worry about him, let me.” Levi talked Blake into letting him hold onto Eren’s hands, sitting upright. He twined their fingers together, trying to calm Eren, his voice smooth and low. “Now, what did you want to tell me?”

“I… I… <I love you Levi>” Eren looked down at his hands in Levi’s. *I couldn’t tell him… I couldn’t tell him in English… I couldn’t tell him…. Fuckfuckfuckfuck… Nononononononononononononononononononononono….*

<“I love you too, Eren.”> All *those German classes, for the best reason there is.*

<“You… They taught you that in school?”> he asked quietly. His eyes wide, his face flushed completely. *Stop panicking… Stop panicking… Stop panicking… You’re fine! You told him… And he fucking understood… You’re Fine Dammit!* Eren let Blake grab his shirt and lay him down on
the ground and whine constantly. Blake was so worried about him, and getting ready to ground Eren before he really freaked out.

Levi moved down with Eren, thinking about his words and doing his best to translate, unused to speaking it. He leaned over Eren, his voice quiet. <“Yes, they did.”> He pressed his lips lightly against Eren’s. It’s alright. You said it, and I understood you, and you’re alright. Everything is alright.

Eren watched Blake get on his chest and start to lick at his face trying to calm him down. Eren’s heart was beating a mile a minute. He was trying to calm himself. Levi told me he loves me… And I told him back… Holy Shit… I didn’t want to tell it to him in German… And for fuck’s sake he fucking understood it. He probably thinks i’m a fucking coward for not being able to tell him in English. Fuck… Blake whined and kept his full weight on Eren to calm him down.

Levi kissed him sweetly, his hand coming up to cup his cheek. He told me he loves me! He loves me! I wouldn’t have cared if you’d written it down, signed it, or said it in a language I would never understand. I know you’re panicking about that. I couldn’t say it at all at first. You actually said it. That’s what matters. You’re fine, Eren. It’s all fine. Levi shifted his grip on Eren’s hands, running his thumb over his knuckles.

Eren looked to him and his eyes were starting to show fear. I can’t calm down.. I can’t calm down… Levi help me please! Eren’s fingers moved to grip Levi’s hand in a vice-like grip. He was afraid of panicking again, and he didn’t want to. Blake was already grounding him and he wasn’t calming down.

He’s going to panic…. You keep forgetting he isn't telepathic. Maybe if you told him all that… “Eren, I promise you're going to be okay. I know you're beating yourself up for switching to German, and you shouldn't. You could have said it in English or written it down on a piece of paper and handed it to me and it would have meant just as much. There’s no reason to be so scared, so frustrated with yourself. You said it, and that’s what’s important.” …that works. Maybe. Levi gazed into Eren’s panicking eyes with his own calm ones. “Believe me.”

< “You don’t think I’m coward?” > Eren asked quietly. He started to calm down little by little, Levi’s deep voice calming him down.

Levi thought for a moment, the words registering. He likes to speak German. Do that, still. He pondered his response, finding the words. <“I do not think that. I was a coward… I did not think about how you felt, and refused to tell you at all for too long. I think you are brave. Braver than I was.”>
< “You really think so?” > his voice was showing how much he was calming down. Blake started to wag his tail knowing he was starting to calm down.

A quiet voice spoke from the doorway. “Are you two doin’ okay? I heard Blake whining from downstairs.’ Lathe was mostly a dark silhouette, the lights behind him off. The stars above them showed his face, concern over the features not hidden by shaggy black hair.

Eren looked up to Lathe and nodded. < “we’ll be okay… I’m calming down… Levi’s calming me down.”> Eren looked back to Levi and took a few deep breaths to calm himself down more. Blake’s tail continued to wag.

Lathe, though he did not know much German, understood by looking at the three of them that all was well, or soon to be. This is all too sweet. He smiled and nodded. “I’ll leave you be, then.” He quietly slipped back downstairs, still keeping an ear out for them.

Levi sighed in relief as Eren calmed fully, still running his thumb over his hands. He kissed his cheek, pulling Eren close.

Eren smiled. <“Thank you.”> Eren called Blake off and leaned over to kiss Levi fully. I want you to fucking kiss me for that!

Levi kissed back fervently, pulling Eren close, letting their tongues tangle together. I love you. He let his hands lazily wander his chest, his sides, finally settling on running through his hair.

Eren let them kiss passionately, though soon asked for entry into Levi’s own mouth. I want to feel you too. He timidly licked at Levi’s lips.

Levi’s tongue retreated, allowing him in.

Eren slowly slid his tongue into the other’s mouth, his tongue going around to every point, mapping out the inside of Levi’s mouth gracefully. His hands roamed over Levi’s chest.

Levi quietly moaned into Eren’s mouth, tilting his head further to deepen their kiss, one hand going to rest on his waist. You taste wonderful...
Eren moaned back as well. His tongue slowly sliding over all of Levi’s teeth, counting each one as
he did so. *Always so clean and fresh… Levi, you feel so damn good.* Eren didn’t mind Levi’s hands
on his waist, he moved his leg bit, so that his body could move closer to Levi, his chest coming up
to press against Levi’s. *This feels so right, Levi…* Eren pulled back for a few seconds to breathe,
giggling when he gazed into Levi’s eyes with his own happy ones.

*Damn, he’s gorgeous.* Levi gave him a small smile, joy flitting past in his eyes. *This feels… Right.*
Levi leaned their foreheads together, the both of them falling back on the pillows, Levi tucking
Eren’s head under his chin. He looked up to the ceiling.

Eren smiled and he curled up to his chest. He laid flush on Levi’s chest, their legs tangling
together. “Levi… If I go to sleep…” Eren yawned, it had been a long day and he was falling asleep
already.

Levi ran his hand through Eren’s hair, his own eyes becoming heavy with sleep. “Yeah?”

Eren nuzzled his head into the crook of Levi’s neck, under his chin. <“Stay with me.”> Eren’s
voice was soft barely audible as he drifted off to sleep. Blake went off and padded downstairs
probably to be let outside. Eren’s breathing had evened out as well, with Levi’s hand running
through his hair.

Levi instantly recognized the words, smiling. <“Of course.”> Levi let his eyes shut, and he too
surrendered to the calm of sleep under the stars.
Chapter 18: Christmas Woes

Lathe was back with them by Christmas. He went shopping, restocked the fridge, doted on Eren and Levi, poked fun at their couple-y antics, tried to deal with his nerves from pondering Christmas and everything that had happened by painting scene after scene of metal and gears, but the only thing that brought him back was sorting through the sheet music on the table, fixing and finishing it all, transferring it all in clean dark ink to fresh sheets, playing them on the piano until his fingers hurt, singing their odd lyrics that weren't always English and putting it all away on a shelf under the binder label ‘Tilt.’ He got back into the swing of cooking, that mischievous glint returning to his moonsong eyes, his voice going from quiet whispers to it’s loud tenor. Another golden line of script crawled over the wall behind the piano. He remembered to sleep and eat. He beamed. He was himself.

Eren had progressed nicely over the past week and a half. He slept snuggled up to Levi every night, actually slept. He no longer woke up to nightmares and could actually sleep longer than four hours every night, catching up on some much needed rest. Eren’s eating habits had started to return to normal once again. He was no longer throwing up everything he ate, and was actually keeping it all down. He had gained a few pounds since Lathe started cooking again for them all. He was back to three meals a day, and the meals were small, but hey… it’s progress. Eren had found that his nausea pills did little to help him open up his stomach, so Lathe gave him stronger ones, which did the trick beautifully. He was able to eat larger portions of the delicious food Lathe made again. Lathe had also allowed Eren and Levi to go out and get a Christmas tree along with ornaments and some other random decorations for around the house, but due to his past experiences with Christmas, Eren insisted upon getting almost every decoration available and decorating THE WHOLE HOUSE… Even going as far as painting some Christmas scenes and hanging them around the house. He was overly bubbly when it started to snow outside 3 days before christmas, leaving a white sheet out on the grass in front of the house. Eren had stayed out for way too long since he was so excited to see snow on the ground again. That had ended with Eren needing to drink many mugs of tea, sitting in front of the fireplace wrapped in blankets and surrounded by Levi’s arms. Though Eren didn’t really mind; He got to kiss Levi as much as he wanted as they laughed in front of the fireplace. Eren didn’t leave the house when Levi left to go back to his apartment every few days, he trusted that he would come back as soon as possible. Eren wondered why he didn’t just stay here with them, but was given the spiel about how his Uncle paid for the apartment and wouldn’t reply to any of the mail Levi had sent him about renting with his own money, so Eren just let him go. He had finally gotten Levi to let him draw his whole body, almost completely naked, but he allowed him to wear his boxers for that picture, which was immediately hung in his room. Eren was much happier after that week and a half, and he was eagerly waiting to open the presents that started to accumulate under their tree.

It was relatively quiet for those one and a half weeks. Most of the time I would be curled up with Eren, keeping him warm, or supervising his decorating the house, or acting as his model when he wanted to draw. I have no real room to complain- I get to hold Eren, have as many hugs and kisses as I want. Lathe’s been stress-cooking to ease his nerves, apparently. At least, that’s what I think it is. But can cook really well, so… nothing to complain about. It was odd, seeing him so quiet. I’m just glad that joyful look in his eye is back. And Eren’s filling out nicely- he can keep food down. I have to check on the apartment from time to time of course- make sure nobody’s broken in, and at this point quite a bit of the food in the fridge is either gone bad or becoming suspicious- though it’s
easy to forget I have to. I practically live here at this point. It’s wonderful to not have to sleep alone. Lathe… he takes good care of us both. Christmas is coming so soon… so is… I don’t want to make a big deal out of it. It’s a day for everyone, not just me. I’ve been studying German a lot more lately, because Eren seems to switch to it often, and likes to use it. I’m not too sure what to get him for Christmas. I have ideas, but… I dunno. I’ve never been a good gift-giver. I need to fix that. Blake’s really been enjoying the snow! He’s been running circles in the backyard, confused and excited but mostly excited. He likes sitting in front of the fireplace especially. It’s nice… not having to spend the holidays alone.

Eren cracked his eyes open earlier than he had planned. It’s fucking 6:30… The fuck… I won’t be able to fall back asleep… But I don’t want to wake Levi up. Eren looked up a bit, shifting his head to confirm that Levi was, in fact, still asleep. He looked at his peaceful face as he slept. I really really really want to go downstairs and open presents… But he’s so fucking gorgeous sleeping, and I don’t want him to be grouchy if I wake him up to early… Eren decided just to lay there for the next hour and a half until he couldn’t take it anymore. He got up slowly, moving to straddle Levi’s waist before bending down to bite at the fading bites he had left on Levi’s neck a week and a half ago. Wake up… I wanna open presents, and I want you to open the present I painted for you… Come on… Please wake up. Eren bit down a bit harder on the sensitive skin to get him to wake up.

Levi groaned, cracking his eyes open at the unexpected biting. “Ngh… Eren… What are you…?” Levi rubbed the heel of one hand against his eye, his other gently pushing up on Eren’s shoulder. As much as I enjoy it… “Come on Eren, I’m up.”

“No… You made me wait….” Eren leaned down and bit at his neck again, leaving a fresh mark. His eyes were full of mischief. “You made me wait so you get bit.” He said and leaned down and bit his neck again. You are really gonna have to push me off to get me to stop… Eren rested his hands on Levi’s bare chest and smiled. He was happy that Levi never slept with a shirt on.

“E-Eren… Come on…” Levi gasped. I just woke up and part of me doesn’t want you to stop but it’s Christmas and I want to go downstairs…presents. “…Eren… Downstairs… Presents.”

Eren’s head instantly shot up. “PRESENTS!!!” Eren was off of Levi in a second and racing downstairs without Levi, Blake following quickly at his heels. You could hear the squeals of joy coming from downstairs everywhere in the house. If Lathe was still asleep, he was certainly up now. There’s so many presents!! Yay!!!

“Hey Brat, wait for me!” Levi reached over and tossed on a shirt before running down the stairs after him. “Don’t start opening presents without us!” Don’t do it, Eren! Control yourself!
Lathe lifted his head as feet thundered down the stairs. *What the hell...* His eyes widened, beaming as he got up to follow them. *It's Christmas!*

Eren was already by the presents. He was putting them into four separate piles one for each of them and a pile for Blake as well. *So many presents... So many!!!*

Levi quirked an eyebrow at the pile being made for him. *Is all that...* "Is that all mine?" *It can't all be for me... Is it?* He knelt down, looking at the tags. *They all have my name on them...* "That's all mine." He looked over to Blake’s pile, grinning. *Even Blake gets lots of presents.*

“Yup, those are all yours! And look- Lathe’s got just as much as us!” Eren beamed, his voice was so loud as he finished sorting out the presents.

“I do?” Lathe’s eyes widened in surprise as he descended the last few steps. “...I-do.” *I didn't think I was going to get so many... that's so much...* He crossed over to them, petting Blake and ruffling Eren and Levi’s hair on his way to sit next to his pile at the Christmas tree. He beamed at them. “Now, although I think we all know the answer...” He eyed a very excited Eren with amusement. “...who wants to go first?”

Eren opened his mouth before he closed it for a second. His excitement seemed to die down a bit. “C-can I?” He asked quietly, still pretty unused to having presents to even open. *Can I? Is that a thing? I am the youngest here... When mom was around I used to always open presents first. But she's not here.*

“Youngest first? Wait...” Lathe counted in his head. He looked over to Blake with a grin. “Blake in human years is actually the youngest, but if you go by dog years, he’s 35. He’s technically the oldest one here.” His gaze returned to Eren. “But yeah. You can go first.”

Eren’s smile brightened and he started to go through his presents. He mostly got some more hoodies from Blake, in literally every color he could ever ask for. *Yes! I have more hoodies!!! Yes!!!* Eren still had quite a few more presents from Levi and even one from Lathe. Eren opened one of his small boxes from Lathe and he looked at the small dark green calligraphy pen. *What is this?* Eren looked up to Lathe with confusion at first as he lifted the pen carefully from the case it was in. He looked at the top of the case, now looking for clues as to what this was, seeing countless small bottles of all the colors of the rainbow and everything in-between... *is this a pen? A fountain pen?* “Is this a pen?” He asked Lathe quietly and looked at it with curiosity and happiness.
“It is indeed a pen. A dip pen, specifically for calligraphy- Fancy writing. There’s a row of other tips for it in that box, so you can make lines of all widths. Or they all just look really cool. Both. The book in there shows you how to do fanciful lettering, including cursive, which you should know how to do anyway.” *You’d better let me borrow that on occasion.*

“Cursive? What’s that?” He asked quietly as he looked down at the case and saw the different tips Lathe had mentioned. *There’s so many...*

“Cursive is that writing old people do where you write all the letters of words together with one line. It’s faster and generally nicer-looking than printing once you get the hang of it.”

“Oh cool, can you teach me? I don’t learn that well from books… More from experience.” Eren carefully put the pen back before closing the case and looking up to see his answer.

“Of course I'll teach you! As long as you're willing to occasionally share.” Lathe grinned. *I shall teach you the ways of script.*

Eren smiled. “Okay, that's fine with me.” Eren’s smile got wider as he started to open his present from Levi. He opened a small box and his eyes widened at what was before him. “Are you serious??” Eren looked up to Levi, almost expecting him to say that they were fake. They had two tickets to go see Nate Ruess at a venue downtown. *Is he serious?? Nate Ruess?? Like the real thing? Really I get to go see him in concert?? OH my fucking God YESSSS!!!!*

“I'm very serious. Those are two tickets to see Nate Ruess perform live at the Town Ballroom.” Levi smirked. “Is that alright?”

Eren instantly tackled Levi in a huge hug. He was squealing the whole time. “Oh my god! I am so excited!!!!” Eren was so happy. *I get to go see a concert with him!!*

Levi caught Eren, trying not to let them topple over, laughing. “I'm glad you like it!” *Yes! That is going to be an amazing concert, I know it!*

“Wait will I be able to bring Blake?” He asked and almost instantly started to worry.

Levi thought for a moment, unsure. He looked to Lathe over his shoulder.
Lathe also looked uncertain. “It's going to be really loud, very crowded, you're going to feel the
beats of the songs in your chest, there's probably going to be smoke or something… I would
honestly say it’s not the best place for Blake. I'll email Moblit a little later, get his opinion, but I
think you'll have to leave him home.”

Eren swallowed hard.  *I need to leave Blake here? What if I panic? What happens then?* Eren's
face gave away his fears and worries.

Levi held onto Eren a bit tighter, kissing his temple. “I'll be there with you. I'll make sure we don't
get separated, and if you do start to panic or feel too uncomfortable, we can bail whenever you
need to. I'll make sure you're fine. Sound okay?” *I won't let anything bad happen.*

“Okay.” He said quietly he rested his head into Levi’s chest. “It’s your turn now…” He crawled
out of his lap but stayed right next to him, holding onto his shirt with one hand and petting Blake
with the other.

“Alright.” Levi reached forward, taking up a large, flat, thin package. He carefully tore the paper
off.

Eren smiled when Levi was greeted with a painting of the picture of Eren clinging onto Levi when
he had pastels all over his hands. Levi looked completely surprised and Eren had a toothy grin
plastered on his face. *I hope he likes it, it took me five tries to get everything right.*

“Eren… It’s amazing! You painted it so well!” Levi smirked at the memory, looking to Eren with
happy eyes. “Thank you so much.” He leaned over and pecked his cheek. *I love it!*

Eren smiled and blushed. “I’m glad you like it.” He was blushing a lot. *I really hoped you would
like it. And I’m glad you did, you seemed so opposed to the picture...*

Levi carefully set it down, looking at the two boxes addressed to him in Lathe’s script. *Why is one
wrapped in birthday wrapping paper? He couldn't have found out...* He reached for it, only for
Lathe to stop him.

“Open the other one first.” *You can see what’s in that one after.* He grinned impishly.
Well that’s suspicious. Levi took the other small box in hand, carefully tearing open the bronze paper and opening the lid, seeing a row of small brown bottles. What are they? They smell weird. “Lathe, what are these?” Levi sent him a confused look.

Those are bottles of henna. The good kind, too, and plenty of them.” He grinned. “What you do, is you take one of them, and you draw on your skin with the paste, and you leave it to dry and crack off. It dyes your skin, and the tattoo lasts for up to two weeks if you take good care of it.”

“So I can give Levi tattoos??” Eren asked and looked over the bottles. “Really? I can give his whole chest and back tattoos?” He asked and his eyes gleamed with mischief.

I knew that was the perfect idea. Lathe grinned, recognizing that spark in Eren’s eye. I'm rubbing off on you. I'm not sure how good of a thing that is. He replied before Levi could. “Yup. And you can do it as many times as you like.”

Eren’s eyes glinted more. “I’ll do your back today… And I’ll do your arms before the concert.” Eren’s smile widened from ear to ear. Oh you are so getting tatted

There is no way out of this. You’re Eren’s new canvas. Accept it. “I better look so badass, you can’t even imagine.” He smirked, setting the lid back on the box and putting it aside. “Now…” He reached for the birthday-paper-wrapped box, looking at Lathe suspiciously. He tore at the paper, opening the lid of the box, which had a note taped to it. ‘Levi- you are now 18. I’m not telling you how I know that. But happy birthday all the same! Take good care of Eren~’ What? Levi moved aside the tissue paper hiding the contents of the box, blushing furiously at it’s contents, putting the lid back on the box and glaring daggers at Lathe, who was trying very hard not to laugh. ...Really? Condoms and lube? REALLY? What kind of adult are you?? “Lathe…”

Lathe gave up and laughed, quickly taking a picture of his furious and embarrassed expression. That is the greatest reaction ever! “There a- problem, Levi? You look kinda mad.” Lathe grinned like a madman.

“What’s in the box, Levi?” Eren asked and moved to reach for the box and open it, getting his hand on the lid. What’s in here that Lathe gave Levi to make Levi give him a death glare?

Levi smacked Eren’s hand away lightly, holding the box out of his reach. He fixed Lathe with a death stare as he spoke, deadpan. “You don’t want to know.”
“Why can’t I look, Levi?” Eren whined and reached for the box again. “It can’t be that bad if Lathe’s laughing.” Eren got his hand on the lid again.

**NOPENOPE** “Eren, if Lathe is laughing, it’s possibly something awful that he orchestrated. And this is one of those times.” Levi scooted away from Eren, trying to keep it out of his reach. “Lathe, you are **horrible.**”

“But why?? I’m so confused!” Eren threw his hands up in exasperation. **What the fuck did Lathe even get him??**

*When in doubt, encourage the mayhem!* “I dunno Levi, if he really wants to know what I got you, why don’t you show him? He has a right to know.” **It does involve him.**

“Stop encouraging this!” **WHY?** Levi facepalmed. **I’m so done with you.**

Eren took this moment to grab the box and pull it into his lap. He slowly opened the lid, his face paled when he saw what was inside. **Oh my god Lathe… That is fucking terrible… We’re not even having sex! Did you need to go ahead and do that??** Eren put his head down, his long locks hiding his eyes as he gave Levi the box back. **Does he think we already did it? Does he really think I’m that loose??** Eren shifted to move away from Levi now… Completely embarrassed now. **How can he do that?**

Lathe sobered from his mirth when he saw Eren’s reaction. His expression shifted. “I’m sorry Eren. It was just supposed to embarrass Levi. I didn’t mean to upset you.” **Dammit, Lathe. Learn to tone it down.**

Eren swallowed and looked down at his wrists. He was trying desperately not to scratch. Blake picked up on it and took his hands into his mouth. He whined a little but waited for Eren to calm down. **Lathe… I do not forgive you… Not yet… You’ll need to earn it… “Don’t do it again.”** Eren failed to keep his voice steady as it began to quiver a bit. **You better not fucking do it again, Lathe.**

**Goddammit.** “I won’t. Swear it.” Lathe had a sheepish look on his face.

Levi handed him a small wrapped box. “Come on. The sooner we eat, I think we’ll all feel better.” **You better like that.**
Lathe took the small box from him, opening it and lifting out a small bronze gyroscope compass on a stand. He tilted it, watching it swivel. “...How…”

“All you’ve been doing for the past week and a half is paint scene after scene of metal and gears. I thought you’d like it.”

Lathe beamed. *That’s really cool.* “I do. It’s wonderful. I know exactly where it’s going on my desk.”

Eren moved and gave Lathe another small box. “Here, this is for you too.” Eren said and smiled softly, though he still couldn’t look Lathe directly in the eye.

Lathe took the box from him gingerly, taking off the lid, carefully removing a shining bronze watch, the numbering around the face in Roman Numerals. *Oh my god.* “Eren, this is beautiful!”

He turned it, the metal glinting in the light. “I love it! Thank you so much!”

Eren smiled softly and looked down at Blake, petting him to calm himself down. He looked back at Blake… “So who got him all the oddly shaped presents?” Eren asked. He had gotten Blake a huge rawhide bone, with a bow on it, but there were many more wrapped things. *They look like bones… Hmm, I wonder how many he’s gonna get…*

Lathe rubbed the back of his neck. “I got him a couple… but not as many as there are there.”

“I got him… I dunno… five? Ish?” Levi was kind of impressed with Blake’s pile. *He got so much stuff. I’m kind of jealous.*

“Alright well, we’ll give him this one first.” Eren picked up the largest one, which he had gotten him. He took the bow and ribbon off of it before he gave it to Blake who got up and struggled to put his jaws around the whole thing. It was huge. *Heh. It barely fits, that’s actually kinda funny.*

Levi smirked, watching Blake attempting to bite around the bone.

Lathe chuckled, taking a picture of Blake struggling with the huge bone. *That’s really funny!* He eyed the pile. *I think we all know who really won this Christmas. ...Lucky.* Lathe shifted to his feet, leaving his presents under the tree for the moment. “I’m going to go make breakfast, alright?” He ambled to the kitchen, getting out ingredients for quiche, deciding after a moment to make
Levi tugged Eren into his lap, wrapping his arms around him and studying the Christmas tree with bright eyes, resting his chin on his shoulder. “You really went all-out. You did a great job on the tree especially.”

Eren smiled softly and snuggled into Levi’s chest. “Yeah, I guess I did.” Eren smiled and he reached for the box with the tickets in them. “So the concert…it’s on New Years?” He asked quietly and looked up to him. “January 1st?” He asked making sure he was reading the date on the ticket right.

“That’s right. I thought it would be neat to spend New Years out and about. We can make a day of it if you want.” It’d be fun!

“But we wouldn’t be able to take Blake with us.” He was curled into a small ball on his lap and looked up to his silvery eyes. What am I gonna do without Blake there with us?

“I’ll be there the whole time. I don’t think that because Blake isn’t there, we can’t go and have a good time. I won’t let anything happen to you. But if you don’t want to, say the word, or we can figure something else out. Maybe take Blake around until the concert and have Lathe come get him or something.” Whatever we decide, it’ll work out fine.

Eren nodded and curled up into his chest. “You’re getting a tiger on your back by the way.” Eren told him finally deciding what he was going to do first.

“Am I now?” Levi smirked playfully, kissing Eren’s temple. That’d be really cool. “You’re practically going to cover me in tattoos, aren’t you?”

“Is that even a question?” Eren snickered and reached up to kiss Levi’s neck, where he had bitten him this morning.

“You’re right. Why did I even ask?” Levi gave a small smile, holding onto Eren tighter as he kissed his neck.

“Hmm. You’re not getting anything after the stunt Lathe pulled…” He trialed off as he moved to bite at Levi’s neck again since Lathe couldn’t see them. “If he honestly thinks I’m that loose he is
sorely mistaken.” Eren’s words were laced in venom as he muttered them; he bit Levi’s neck a little harder as he did so.

Levi stifled a groan, pulling his head back to bare more of his neck. He struggled to speak normally. “I do admit, that was… crossing the line, a bit.” Dammit, Lathe.

“So you need to be a good boy before your lips are allowed to touch mine.” Eren growled a bit as he moved to bite down on Levi’s collarbone.

Waitwaitwait “Am I… n-not allowed to… to kiss you?” Levi sounded surprised. Is that what he said? No no no no not happening

“Nope. You’re not allowed to, you can thank Lathe for that.” Hmmm, I wonder how long he’ll be able to take it? He’s been kissing me non-stop basically for the past week and a half.

...God fucking dammit, Lathe. If I wasn’t occupied right now you’d be dead meat. “Y-you can’t… be serious…” Levi gasped, trying to control himself as Eren trailed little bites over his neck, his shoulders.

“Oh, I’m completely serious.” Eren’s tone told Levi that there was basically no room for discussion. “Nope, I’m not even gonna give you your birthday present anymore. I had it planned, too. Shame.” Eren bit hard enough to leave a good bruise forming on the top of Levi’s shoulder.

How did you know it was my… what? “W-what… did you h-have in… in mind?”

“How did you know it was my… what? “W-what… did you h-have in… in mind?”

“Hmmmm… let’s see, I made sure to pull the air mattress down to the workshop yesterday too… guess we don’t need it there anymore.” Eren bit down again, leaving another good mark. Hmm, I wonder what he thinks I had planned. I did take the air mattress downstairs for a reason, but I wonder if he knows that reason…. Or is his mind in the gutter? Well we’ll just have to see.

He doesn’t mean… does he? Or does he mean for art or something… I can’t just fucking sit here much longer. “E-Eren… p-please… let me…” Levi could barely talk coherently.

“Let you what?” Eren asked, pulling back from Levi’s shoulder and looked to him with a quirked eyebrow. His eyes basically telling Levi he had no room to argue in this so what the fuck do you want now? So his mind is in the gutter now?
Levi was breathing more heavily than normal. “Let me kiss you please.” I don’t want to be punished for Lathe’s dumbass antics. Please. “You shouldn’t do this to me because of what Lathe did.”

“Nope, you don’t get to kiss me. I’m going to go put my stuff up in my room.” Eren crawled out of Levi’s arms and then went to go take all his hoodies and such upstairs into his room, leaving Levi alone downstairs. I wonder if he’ll be bickering with Lathe when I get back?

Levi sat there for a moment, stunned. … what. Furious, Levi got to his feet and stormed to the kitchen, trying to keep himself from shouting. “Lathe.”

Lathe jumped, dropping the knife on the counter and spinning around, his arms raised in defense. “Don’t come closer- I know Judo. And I didn’t think it would get that sort of reaction out of Eren! He wasn’t even supposed to see what I had gotten you!” Lathe looked worried that Levi would explode at him.

“Well he was obviously going to want to know what you had given me! What else was I supposed to do? He would’ve been mad if I didn’t let him see.”

“You could’ve… I dunno, lied? Okay, not one of my better ideas.”

“Really? You really think so? It’s occurred to you that maybe it wasn’t the best gift to give after it makes Eren refuse to let me even kiss him?”

“What now?” Lathe dropped his arms, apologetic. “I’m really sorry, Levi. I’ll try and make it up to you. I’ve already got cinnamon rolls in the oven; I’m going to try and win him back over with food.”

“Apology only kind-of accepted. And how the fuck did you know it was my birthday, anyway? How did Eren know, too?”

“Armin knows literally everything about everyone. I just kinda asked him at one point if he knew when your birthdays were. I need to know these things.”
“How did Armin know that?”…wait. “Fucking Erwin told him.”

“How’s he on the football team, right?”

“Yeah. And don’t try changing the subject! …Actually, when’s Eren’s?”

“March 30th. Three months. His is real close to mine.”

“Really?”

“The Ides of March. I can never get tired of saying it.”

“…we literally just read the fucking play and I can’t even remember what the hell that means.”

“The middle of March, Levi. The fifteenth.”

“Oh, right… how the hell did we start talking about that? I’m supposed to be mad at you! If Eren doesn’t cut out the ‘no kissing’ thing quick, you’re dead meat.”

“I’m sorry!! I don’t know what to tell you… besides not listen to him and just do it anyway. He’d probably give up trying to stop you after ten seconds.”

“He’ll be castrated if he even attempts it.” Eren’s voice sounded as he came into the room to get a mug out and pour water in the kettle. “Wouldn’t want that to happen, now would we?” Eren’s tone still deathly serious.

Lathe spoke up first. “Eren, I admit, what I did wasn’t exactly a great idea. But do you really have to take it out on Levi? Just ban me from the basement! Steal my laptop! I’ll deal with it.”

“You’re already banned from the basement for the next week. Have you forgotten that already?” Eren asked. He did ask Lathe if he could have the basement a week and a half ago and Lathe of course had said yes. So he doesn’t remember doing that at all?
“I meant **extend** that. Like, a month. I don’t know! But I didn’t forget about it. I know I already have to keep away. You can still steal my laptop if you want!” *This is reaching dangerous levels of ‘not cool.’*

“Hmm, maybe I’ll consider it, but Levi’s still banned from kissing me, he’s also not getting his present either, and you are banned from the basement for the next two week.” Eren said and waited until the kettle was singing to fill his mug and start to steep his tea.

*I feel like a fucking hostage negotiator. Shit. “Eren, I’ll give you the password for my laptop, and Steam remembers all my credit card information. I’ll stay out of the basement for as long as you want me to, but I think you should at least let Levi have his present.”* Lathe gave his words a moment to sink in. “It also has Netflix on it.” *Since when did Eren get put in charge?*

“Hmmm…. Netflix… I’ll consider it, but everything stays the same for right now.” Eren said sitting down in his seat as he sipped at his strong tea. “That’s literally the only thing in that offer that entices me, Lathe. You should know I don’t play video games.” He murmured and sipped at his tea more. “Levi, there’s more water in there if you want a cup too.” Eren told him, knowing he would probably want some tea.

“It has more songs on it than 200 CDs could store.” Lathe turned back to chopping vegetables. “Pandora and Bandcamp, Synthesia… you can have the drawing tablet too, if you want to use Photoshop… just sayin’.”

Eren looked curiously at Lathe. “Hmm, this revelation entices me… Okay. Levi can have his birthday present if you are both good for the rest of the day. No fighting, either of you. Lathe you are banned from the basement and Levi you’re still banned from kissing me.” Eren told them and looked to Lathe. “I’m taking the computer downstairs then…” Eren’s voice was again firm, there was no more negotiating going to happen at all.

*I’m going to do absolutely nothing to upset this careful balance. Good thing I have all those magazines stockpiled. “Go right ahead. The drawing tablet should be with it. I’ll write all the passwords down in a moment, after I get breakfast in the oven.”* *I get the notion I’m a prisoner in my own house.*

*But I still can’t kiss you… I’ll deal for now. This is an… odd situation we’re all in. I won’t mess with it.*  Levi nodded, going to make himself tea. He glanced at Lathe, who just shrugged.
Eren smiled when he smelled the cinnamon. “hmmmm….Cinnamon Rolls.” He sighed in pleasure as he put his head down on the table. *Ten points for Lathe towards forgiveness.* Blake came up behind Levi and pawed at the back of his legs. He whined, wanting to go outside, chase the snow around.

Levi moved over to the sliding glass door, opening it and letting Blake rush past him outside. He closed the door and picked his mug of tea back up, sitting at the table as Lathe opened the oven and removed the cinnamon rolls, drizzling them in icing and putting one in front of them.

“One to start. There’s always more.” He grinned, returning to fuss over the quiche. He put it in the oven, setting a timer and turning to them. “I'm going to run upstairs and gather up all the cords on the desk, write down passwords and such. You're going to need a couple notes on the operating system; it’s nothing like Windows or whatever you're used to. Don't let the house burn down while I'm gone.” He smiled and left, going to do just that.

Eren nodded and he reached for his first large cinnamon roll. He loved the ones Lathe made. He took his first bite, his eyes rolling back from the explosion of flavor in his mouth. *Lathe, I expect you to make them more often now.*

Levi watched Lathe leave, turning to his cinnamon roll. He took a bite of it. *It tastes even better than it smells! Where the hell did he get these?!* Levi finished his quickly, bringing his plate over to the tray to get another. He turned to Eren. “Do you want another one?” *Play nice.*

Eren had set his cinnamon roll down on his plate half uneaten… *Fuck, I forgot my pill, I’m gonna fucking throw up… don’t move, don’t fucking move.* Eren’s other hand was resting on his stomach and his face was pale. *SHIT… Levi get me my fucking pill… I want to eat the deliciousness and not have to see it in a few seconds. Read the fucking situation Levi.*

*He’s about to freak out. Why…*food.* Nausea pill. Where.* Levi set his plate down, reaching for the bottle they kept on the counter. He opened it and handed Eren one of the pills. “There, that should help.”

Eren nodded slowly, taking it, sipping from his tea. “Thanks.” He was able to say a few words after a few moments. It took quite a few minutes to kick in before he picked his cinnamon roll up again. “Thank you, really.” He said quietly. *I can fucking eat again.*

“Of course. It'd be cruel not to let you enjoy cinnamon rolls.” Levi smiled, taking his place back at the table, sipping his tea. *They really are good. I'm just glad you're not going to be sick.*
Eren nodded and he ate the rest before getting up to grab another big one.

Lathe padded back into the kitchen, looking over to Blake outside running in circles and chuckling. He checked the quiche, deciding it was ready and bringing it onto the stovetop. He cut a piece for each of them, setting one and a fork at their places before sitting down himself with more coffee.

Eren looked at the quiche with curiosity. “Lathe… it looks great… what the hell is it?” He asked and looked over to the man sitting to his right.

“It’s called a quiche, a fancy word for breakfast-food pie. There’s a bunch of cheese in it, and ham, and onion, and fabulousness. I think you’ll like it.” He took a bite, the cheese still hot and melting.

Eren looked at it for a second before his fork stabbed into it. He lifted it to his mouth, eating the single piece before proceeding to scarf down the rest of this glorious breakfast pie. Eren then turned to his roll to eat that as well.

*It's good I haven't made anything they don't like yet. They love whatever I give them!* Lathe smiled and kept eating, turning to check if Blake wanted to come back in. He let him in again, white from the snow coming down heavily outside. *It's a good thing I put this towel here for this exact reason.* He quickly rubbed Blake dry, hanging the towel on the handle of the oven for the moment. He filled Blake’s metal bowls, reclaiming his place at the table.

Eren heard Blake’s tags clink against the metal bowl, smiling as he took his last bite of cinnamon roll. He took his plate to the sink and started to do the dishes again out of habit. *Hmm… should I give Levi his present before or after I do his back?* “Levi?” Eren asked quietly for his attention, without turning his head, mostly focused on the dishes he was doing and loading in the dishwasher.

“Yeah?” Levi looked up from his quiche, turning in his chair. “What’s up?”

“Do you want your present before or after I do your back?” he asked quietly. He was still doing the dishes, not paying much mind for anything else besides Levi’s voice.

Lathe nudged Levi’s arm. “You're not going to be able to move for a while after your back is done, giving the henna time to dry and crack off. It'll take an hour at least after he’s finished. I'd say before.”
Levi nodded, turning back to Eren. “Before.”

“Alright. Meet me downstairs when you’re ready then, and close the door behind you.” Eren then left with his mug of tea, grabbed the box of henna bottles and retreated downstairs. Blake stayed in the kitchen after he had eaten, still struggling to eat the rawhide bone.

Lathe stood after a moment, taking the rest of the dishes to the sink. He was quiet for a moment. “I really do want to make it up to you. Anything you need, tell me, alright?”

Levi slowly nodded. “Okay. At least you know how to bargain with him. Thanks for breakfast. It was great.” He handed Lathe his plate, walking to the scripting room. He looked to the boxes under the tree. ...The henna is gone, but so is the box with the condoms and stuff in it... Did Lathe move it or something? He quirked an eyebrow, but did not stop walking to the stairs, closing the door behind him and descending the steps.

Eren was in the middle of lighting a bunch of candles around the room, all the lights were off otherwise. Both missing boxes were on the table to the side, which still hadn’t been moved back in the past month. There was a large queen sized bed which had a bunch of pillows and blankets on it. Eren finally finished up with all the candles and he looked around to see Levi at the end of the stairs. He motioned him to come forward as he crawled onto the air mattress himself. He was wearing his sweatpants as well as a white tank top he had gotten today. The only thing white he actually owned. So he sat cross-legged in the middle of the bed, waiting for Levi to join him.

Levi was speechless, stunned at what Eren had put together. He swallowed hard, crossing the room and climbing onto the bed next to him, watching Eren with unsure eyes. ...What is all this...?

Eren moved and soon had Levi in the middle of the bed. He reached for the hem of his shirt and pulled the loose cloth over Levi’s head and threw it away, not caring in the least where it landed. Eren crawled onto Levi, straddling his waist, his ass cheeks on Levi’s crotch. He swallowed hard and ran his hands down Levi’s chest. Closing his eyes as he took in a deep breath. “You ready?” He asked quietly… but Eren didn’t look happy, he looked almost remorseful.

He looks as if this is the last thing he wants to do... “Eren… are you sure? You don't look too sure yourself.” Levi spoke softly, propped up on an elbow, brushing a lock of hair out of Eren’s eyes.

Eren looked down. “I… I’m scared. But I need to do this... I need to tell you.” Eren said and he moved his face into Levi’s hand as his face was shown again to Levi. I need to tell him, I want to
tell him... I want to know he won’t leave me before we go any further with this.

Levi gave him a soft smile in reassurance. “What do you need to tell me?” You don't have to be afraid to talk to me.

Eren kept his head against Levi’s hand, not wanting to move it. “I’m not pure Levi… I’m a whore…” Eren let the first few tears drop quietly. He was putting all his trust in Levi not to leave after knowing how broken on the inside he was.

Levi’s face twisted in confusion, concern. His thumb brushed Eren’s cheek, wiping away his tears. “Eren, don’t cry, please. What in the world makes you say that?” How could you call yourself that?

“Levi... I’ve had sex with so many men, I lost count after 50... I even let my dad have sex with me... I’m a filthy incestuous whore...” Eren cried more, but tried to keep his voice as steady as possible, finding comfort in Levi’s hands. Well now he knows... that I’m a whore, a slut, a bitch, a prostitute, a toy for someone to play with... And now he’s gonna leave because I’m not anything like he thought I was. Eren reached out to his wrist and started to scratch at it, close to opening his small scabs up again, but he wasn’t there yet.

Levi brought up his other hand to catch Eren from scratching, his mind running in overdrive. His own father... That must have been part of what the basement was all about. Wasn't it. No no no, that wasn't any of his fault! “Eren, don't call yourself that.” Levi looked into Eren’s viridian eyes, hoping he understood. “None of what your father, or anyone, forced upon you is your fault. You don't have to be so hard on yourself for it. If you're worried about me being mad, I'm not. It doesn't change the fact that you're wonderful, and that I love you.” How did I ever find that hard to say? “Please, don't think of yourself as a whore, because you're not one.”

Eren sniffled and looked down to his hands in Levi’s hands. “So... you’re.... You’re not gonna leave me?” He asked quietly through tears. He was so afraid to be left alone after he had finally found someone to latch himself to. He had been brave enough to tell Levi what had happened, telling him was supposed to be his present, but Eren was tempted to allow him to go a little further if Levi would stay. Please say you'll stay... Please don't leave me.


Eren sighed in relief and just laid down on top of Levi and let himself get over his fit of sobs as he held onto Levi, wrapping his arms all the way around his chest. “Thank you, Levi...” He trialed off and nuzzled into his bare chest, loving the feeling of his warm chest on his cheeks. Don’t let me go
Levi.

Levi instantly wrapped his arms solidly around him, one arm snaking up to tangle in his hair, slowly carding his fingers through his Brunette locks. He quietly mumbled to Eren. “Of course I'm going to stay Eren, I love you, I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. It’s all alright.”

Eren smiled and moved up a bit. “I’ll let you have a little brief from your ban.” Eren’s moves would’ve left Levi very little time to comprehend his words before he crashed his lips against Levi’s, his arms coming out from around Levi’s chest and wandering down his bare chest.

Levi kissed back fervently, one hand going down Eren’s side, the other cupping his cheek. He tilted his head to deepen the kiss, soon swiping his tongue across Eren’s lip in a request for entrance. *Please.*

Eren opened his mouth instantly, arching his back and grinding his hips down on Levi’s crotch a little bit. He was still a bit timid to do so, but he feverishly kissed Levi, meeting his passion. *Dammit Levi... Kiss me, I've already had enough without you.*

Levi groaned into his mouth, his hips coming up to meet Eren’s, tangling their tongues together instantly. *He still tastes like cinnamon... I love it.* He swiped his thumb over Eren’s jaw. *I hope you don't reinstate the ban after this... Barely an hour with it in place, and I've already missed you more than anything.*

Eren moaned into the kiss as Levi’s thumb ran over a sensitive part of his jaw. His hips grinding against Levi’s, moving in a slow circle. Eren’s hands getting closer to the hem of Levi’s pants. *Remind me, never ban Levi from kissing me again.*

Levi pulled back for an instant to take a deep breath before immediately diving back in, his lips moving forcefully against Eren’s. His fingers toyed with the hem of Eren’s tank top.

Eren moved his hands to help Levi take his tank top off, pulling away from the kiss only to take it off. “Hmm… Levi.” Eren moaned and looked sexy as all hell where he was, straddling Levi and grinding down a bit harder as his length started to get erect. *Fuck Levi, touch me please. Maybe if you’re lucky I’ll be calm enough to actually do it with you.*

Levi smirked, his hand going to run over the bulge in his sweatpants. “Yes, Eren?” His voice was low and smooth, his steel eyes hooded.
Fuck. Eren let out a loud moan as his hand grazed over his hardening length. “Fuck, Levi… more” Eren ground his ass into Levi’s crotch and his own crotch against Levi’s hand as he was palmed, his eyes full of need. *Fuck, I never want to miss this… He’s not allowed to fucking leave me. Ever.*

Levi leaned up to kiss at Eren’s neck, nibbling at the soft flesh as he palmed Eren’s length, one hand running along the waistband of his sweatpants. *Too much fabric.* Levi pulled at the fabric, moving them down from Eren’s hips, running his hand over his length through his boxers.

Eren gave out a string of moans. “Fuck, Levi… Ahhh… More… please…” He moaned out and tried to get as much friction from Levi’s hand as possible. He was still holding back on how much noise was making; He was still really shy, but allowed Levi to do more. *It feels good. It feels really good.*

Levi moved to switch their positions, suckling at the flesh of Eren’s neck, leaving small bites and kisses. He played with the hem of Eren’s boxers before pulling them down and helping Eren kick them off, taking his length in his hand and slowly pumping. *Damn, his voice… Fuck.*

Eren’s back arched off the bed as Levi took his length into his hands. “No… I’m… supposed… to please… you…” Eren tried to get out his words in between moans. He wasn’t wrong, either. *It’s his birthday, I’m supposed to do this to him… not have him do it to me.*

Levi pulled back from Eren’s neck, speaking lowly into his ear. “Eren, I want to make you feel good. Let me.” *You deserve it.*

Eren shuddered as Levi’s rich voice flooded his ears. He let out a louder moan as Levi squeezed his cock a little tighter. *Fuck… Levi… So good.* Eren moved a bit and wrapped his arms around Levi’s shoulders. His fingers digging into his shoulder blades. “But… Levi…” Eren knew that he should let him do something else today, not just get a blow job. “Not all the way… ahh… you can do… haaa… whatever you… agh… want besides… haaa… that…” Eren moaned out as he bucked up into Levi’s hand wrapped around him. *Fuck, he can do whatever he wants… just not all the way yet.*

Levi nibbled down Eren’s neck to his collarbone, intent on leaving many small marks. *Mine.* He twisted his hand as he pumped Eren’s length, his other hand moving to gently fondle Eren’s balls.

Eren let out a high pitched wail of pleasure. “Levi!” Eren gasped out feeling pleasure consume his whole body, his nipples beginning to perk under the bandages around his chest. His eyes were
lidded. “I… I can’t… Much longer….” Eren moaned out to him, stringing along his name within
the moans. He could feel his coil beginning to tighten very quickly.

...Not yet. Levi tightened his grip around the base of Eren’s length, slowing his ministrations and
kissing his collarbone lightly, waiting for Eren’s shuddering to stop.

Eren whined when he wasn’t allowed to cum. “Leee~viiiii.” Eren whined, wanting release.

Levi leaned up to Eren’s ear, his voice soft. “Not yet… I want all of you Eren.” Levi moved in a
blur of motion, flipping Eren over so he was resting naked under him. He drank in his lithe body
under him, sitting back on his knees and reaching to gently trace his hands down Eren’s sides,
noting where Eren moaned and writhed under him. Fucking perfect. Levi smirked as his hands
finally came to rest on Eren’s bubbly asscheeks. Holy fuck. They’re so soft… and bubbly… no ass
can match this one! HOLY FUCK! I want it… I want it bad. Levi noticed how his pants almost
instantly got tighter as he saw Eren’s ass, his mind imagining just how good it would be to fuck
him right then and there. No. I can’t do that until he says I can… He’s trusting me right now.
That’s enough of a birthday present. Levi slowly started to massage Eren’s perfect asscheeks,
gentle and rhythmic.

Eren moaned out and moved to present his ass more to Levi, moaning more as Levi pulled his ass
cheeks apart. I can almost feel him staring at my hole… damn, does it look that fucking good. Eren
gave a small gasp as he felt something poke at his puckered hole.

Levi smirked as he let a finger trace the twitching pucker. Fuck, I want this… Eren seems to enjoy
the touching too, fuck, look at his eyes. Levi watched as Eren turned his head to look back at him.
Hmm, I wonder if he’d let me…

“No.” Came Eren’s instant reply.

“But-”

“No. I told you we cannot go all the way, I am not ready for that yet. No fingering either.” Eren’s
voice was firm but he didn’t move his ass away from Levi’s grip. He slowly turned his head back
to rest it down on the bed, trying to focus on the pleasure.

Well, if I can’t finger him, I got something better. Levi moved a bit so that he could more easily
access Eren’s ass before he bent down, his head going immediately to Eren’s puckered hole. His
hands were stretching his cheeks as far apart as possible, his tongue darted out to lick at the hole. *Fuck he even tastes good too, he tastes like the rest of his sweet skin...* *Fuck, I want more.*

Eren gave out a high pitched sound as he felt Levi’s wet hot tongue against his asshole. “Fuck... Levi...” Eren moaned out even more as Levi continued to vigorously lick away at the hole, slowly trying to get his tongue further. Eren let out loud moan after loud moan, his whole body shivering from pure delight. His length dripping precum already, a line dripping down to the sheets below them. *Fuck, Levi, I won't be able to do this any longer.* “L-Levi.. I.. I can’t- hyahh!” Eren moaned out before letting a loud gasp out. His throwing his head back as his orgasm finally struck him and he shot rope after pearly rope down to the sheets below them.

*Well, I found a new spot for Eren. That felt great, his ass clenched around my tongue almost instantly...* *Fuck, he’s gonna feel so good, when we get there.* He held Eren up letting him get off his post orgasmic high, setting him to lay down by the pillows as he stripped the bed of the soiled sheets. *Nope not getting dirty.* Levi got off the bed and pull his own pants and briefs off, letting his own length spring free of its restraints before he climbed back onto the bed with Eren.

Eren smiled as he came in and went to curl up to him. “Can I help you out now?” He asked his voice seductive, playful as well. *Fuck, that felt great. Shit, I didn't think getting rimmed would've felt so good.*

Levi smirked, settling next to him, pecking at his lips, moving down his jawline to his ear. “Hmm, I guess you can.” Levi smirked softly and he watched Eren shift to move so that he was in between Levi’s legs. *Fuck his ass looks perfect...*  

Eren went to Levi’s length, slowly running a finger from base to tip, watching the beads of precum seep from the slit on the head. Eren leaned his head down, licking the beads away from the slit, and rolling his tongue around Levi’s head, listening to him groan in bliss. He slowly but surely let his throat relax on Levi’s length, taking in his whole length at once.

*Fuck, I forgot he can deepthroat me... Shit, I am not going to last long at all.* Levi’s hand grabbed at Eren’s long hair, pulling on it roughly. *Eren, fuck, I can’t take this!* Levi felt the vibrations run up his whole body as Eren moaned from the tugging.

Eren began to bob his head up and down, letting Levi pull at his locks every now and then. It took only a few minutes of his movements until Levi was really starting to crumble underneath him. *Only a few more seconds.* Eren lifted his head up to the tip and increased the pressure tenfold.

“**FUCK!**” Levi shouted out as his orgasm hit. His body jolted, hunching over Eren’s head from the
sitting position he was originally in. Levi let out more moans than he cared to. *Fuck, I didn’t want him to hear me moan like that!*

Eren smirked, his mouth coming off of his length with a seductive pop before he pushed Levi down and crawled up into his chest. “Can we sleep for a bit?” he asked quietly. Stretching his whole body before snuggling up to Levi, he shivered a bit, but didn’t make a move to collect his clothing from the floor.

Levi smirked, pressing a kiss to his temple. *You’re shivering… And I ditched the sheets, so… “Let me up for a moment, get your clothes. You’re shivering.”* Levi, albeit reluctantly, slipped out from under Eren, picked up Eren’s clothes from where he discarded them and handed them to him, finding his own and putting them on. He climbed back onto the bed, pulling Eren into him, running a hand through his hair, murmuring. “Better?”

Eren nodded curling up to him to sleep, getting warmer wearing of his previously discarded hoodie. “I wanna sleep for a few hours, then I’ll do your back after we wake up, okay?” Eren asked as he gave out a loud yawn and climbed onto Levi’s chest again, wanting to be in his arms and warm.


-----------------------------------------------------------------

Levi opened his eyes to solid knocking on the door at the top of the stairs, Lathe calling down through the wood to them.

“I’m not allowed to come downstairs, but I made lunch and am obligated to tell you to wake up and get the hell up here to eat, dammit!”

Eren shifted on top of Levi, groaning as he did so. “So loud…” Eren whined and buried his head further into Levi’s chest, not willing to get up quite yet.

Levi called out in Lathe’s general direction, “Give us a few minutes, and we’ll be up!”

Eren whined more. “Too loud…” He moved and rolled off of Levi, surrounding himself in the mound of pillows a few feet from Levi. He closed his eyes to go back to sleep. *They’re so fucking loud… My head hurts… I don’t wanna move…. Fuck it I’m going back to bed.*
Levi stretched his arms over his head, smirking at Eren’s adorable bedhead. *He’s too fucking cute.* Levi moved to catch Eren around his waist, pulling him closer to him. He spoke quietly. “Sorry for yelling… but you can’t fall back asleep. It’s the middle of the day and I want food.”

Eren swatted lazily at Levi’s arms. “Murr… Go then… I’m tired and my head fucking hurts.” Eren proceeded to grab a pillow and pull it to his chest to curl around.

Levi let his arm drift to Eren’s waist, pressing a kiss to his temple. “Do you want me to get you some aspirin or something then? It would be nice if you did come upstairs to eat with us.” *You require sustenance; admit it.*

Eren gave a soft whine. “I’m staying here… I want another blanket though, it’s cold down here…” Eren clutched the pillow more, turning away from Levi’s arms a little bit. *I wanna sleep, I can eat later….*

Levi pressed another kiss to his temple, shifting to get up from the bed. *Fiiiiiiine.* “I’ll go get you blankets, then. But you really should come up and eat.” Levi padded over to their stairs, careful to pick his way up in the darkness. He left the door slightly ajar, going up to Lathe’s study where the nest of blankets and pillows remained from more than a week ago. Draped in the blankets and carrying a multitude of pillows, *Where Eren got all these I do not know…* he stepped down the stairs, careful not to trip over anything dragging on the ground. He returned to Eren, dumping the pillows on the bed and tugging the blankets in a semi-neat fashion over him. “I really think you should come upstairs…”

Eren grumbled something from under the covers, moving around to get comfortable before closing his eyes and going back to sleep. *I want to sleep. Leave me be… sleep is not my best friend at the moment… I want to make it happen though… Fuck… my head hurts…. Murr.*

Levi sighed, leaving him to sleep. *The Brat’s more stubborn than I am!* He went upstairs and snagged the aspirin bottle from Lathe’s bag, ignoring lunch and Lathe’s inquiring look as he got a glass from the cupboard and filled it with water, returning to Eren and gently nudging his shoulder. “I have aspirin for you if you want it…”

Eren slowly moved out from under his hoard of blankets. He took the aspirin and chugged down the glass of water. “Thank you.” He mumbled before retreating underneath his mound of blankets. *Go away, I wanna sleep.*
Levi ran a hand through his hair before returning upstairs, taking a seat at the table and finally looking up to Lathe’s odd stare. “...What?”

Lathe smirked, setting down a plate of grilled cheese in front of him. “Eren doin’ alright?” He nodded his head to the aspirin bottle still in his grasp.

Levi quirked an eyebrow, placing the bottle on the table in front of him. “...Yeah, he just had a headache.”

“...Really?” Lathe looked unimpressed, setting a mug of strong tea in front of him as well. “Alright.” He picked up the bottle, moving to put it back where it belonged. *That really all?*

...*What are you insinuating.* “Lathe, don't. You don't exactly know what’s between Eren and I.” His voice was cold as he talked over his shoulder.

*I probably should lay off a bit.* Lathe winced. “Sorry. I'll lay off for a while.” Lathe moved back to the table and sat down next to Levi, quietly starting to eat his grilled cheese. *Dammit.*

Levi sighed. *Just...* “Just don’t joke about that, please.” *That’s territory you're not allowed into. Also you're kind of like our dad and that just makes it weird.*

“...Okay.” Lathe was silent for the rest of lunch, getting up to do the dishes and taking Levi’s plate and mug without comment.

Levi stood, about to turn back to the scripting room, but he stopped and walked next to Lathe at the sink, silently drying the dishes and putting them away. An understanding passed between the two of them as Levi took a grilled cheese on a plate and a mug of tea, balancing the bottle of nausea pills next to the sandwich and leaving to rejoin Eren downstairs. He descended the stairs, closing the door quietly and turning on the lights of the stairwell and the front quarter of the room. He set the food on the table, moving to Eren’s sleeping form and gently shaking him awake, speaking softly. “Wake up, Brat. Food.” *You need to eat!*

Eren groaned. Slowly coming out from his nest of blankets. “Do I have to?” He asked quietly, looking at Levi with almost a death glare. *I want to sleep... Why’d you fucking wake me up?*

“Yes,” Levi leaned down and gave him a peck on the lips. “-you do. Lunch today is very good, so
please try and eat.” He retrieved the nausea pills, handing him one and his mug of tea as he sat up. *Come on, we need to make you eat!*

Eren took the pills and took a sip of his tea, sighing as he felt the warm liquid run down his throat. “Why… I’m not really that hungry…” Eren was still giving Levi his own death glare, though it started to soften as he saw the grilled cheese sandwich. *Ten more points to Lathe and his apology.*

“Our might not know how hungry you are, and because you should.” Levi placed the plate in Eren’s lap. “Just try, and if you find you really can't I'll take it back and stop bugging you about it.” *Please at least try.*

“Fine.” Eren reached for the food after a few minutes of intense staring. *My head hurts too fucking much to stare at him for too long. Fuck.* Eren picked up the grilled cheese from the plate, taking a bite before taking a few more.

Levi internally sighed in relief as their staring contest of sorts ended. *Thank God he looked away, I wouldn't be able to hold it for much longer. ...He has a headache, though… Shit, he could probably hold it for much longer.* Levi watched Eren nibble at the sandwich. *Good. He's eating.*

Eren ate the rest of the sandwich and downed the tea before he set it down and slithered back into his cocoon of blankets. *I'm going back to fucking sleep.*

Levi swiftly placed the dishes on the table before crawling back onto the bed and under the blankets, turning Eren onto his back and straddling him, brushing a lock of hair out of his face. “You don't think I'm just going to let you go back to sleep, do you?” *Of course not.*

Eren curled closer in on himself. “Go away, I have a headache. I wanna sleep.” Eren growled at him and tried to grab at the covers.

Levi leaned down and gently nipped at the bruises littering his neck. “Well, while we're waiting for the aspirin to kick in…”

Eren let out a loud moan, his face flushing in complete embarrassment. *What the fuck is he doing? Is he trying to get me hard?* Eren moved and swatted at Levi, pushing him away. “No, Levi, don't do that.” Eren whined and moved away from his grasp.
Levi shifted and followed Eren’s motions, suckling harder at his neck. *You’re not getting away that easily.* He ran his hand down Eren’s chest, tracing over his sides.

Eren moaned out again. “Levi! No, I have a headache!” Eren let out a huge moan as Levi sucked on a very sensitive spot along his neck. “Levi, stop…. I’ll get horny again!” Eren whined as he squirmed under Levi’s hold as his sides were touched.

“That’s the plan, Brat.” Levi kept Eren in place as he kissed and licked at Eren’s adam’s apple, one hand drifting south and ghosting over the front of Eren’s sweatpants.

Eren moaned out more. *Fuck, if Levi does this again… I don’t know how long I’ll last.* Eren struggled to move away from Levi, but found it next to useless as he felt Levi’s hand already starting to tease him through his sweatpants. Eren’s breath hitched immediately, his back beginning to arch up off the air mattress.

Levi brought his head up to meet Eren in a heated kiss, tongue prodding at Eren’s lips for entrance, his hand palming Eren’s length with more pressure. *My God, your voice… you sound so damn sexy…*

Eren let out another loud moan only to have his mouth sealed off by Levi’s lips. *Levi… Fuck…* Eren ground his hips up into Levi’s hand, wanting more of the friction as his length slowly got harder.

Levi moaned into Eren’s mouth, his hand moving against Eren’s clothed length before drifting to the hem of his sweatpants and pulling them down over his hips, palming Eren through his boxers. Levi pushed his tongue past Eren’s lips, tangling with his. *Just let me.*

Eren soon gave into Levi’s touches, his head pounding from both pleasure and the damned headache. Eren’s hips moved more vigorously as he was palmed through his boxers to full erection. *Fuck.*

Levi’s tongue danced with Eren’s, his hand for a moment playing with the hem of Eren’s boxers before pulling them over his hips and helping Eren kick them off. He gently took his length in hand, stroking him slowly.

*Fuck… Levi, you bastard, rub me harder*. Eren bucked his hips up, groaning as Levi’s hand slid down to the base and then back to the tip. Eren’s hands gripped the blankets under him, his
knuckles white. *Fuck, don’t tease me.* “Please Levi… Faster, don’t tease me…” Eren begged, letting his seductive voice take over of his vocal cords.

**Fuck, that voice.** Levi obliged him and sped up his strokes, gripping him more firmly and twisting his hand.

Eren moaned out more, throwing his head back in bliss as Levi did as he asked. His moans were incredibly loud; he wasn’t trying to suppress his voice anymore. “L-Levi!” Eren gasped out feeling that sensation start to coil in his stomach. He growled and continued to buck his hips up in time with Levi’s motions, trying to get as satisfied as possible.

Levi gasped for air, going to attack Eren’s neck, sucking and biting hard as he pumped Eren’s length quickly. He groaned, his own length throbbing as he heard Eren moan loudly.

Eren reached down for Levi’s hand, getting him to stop. “Hold on, together… Please…” Eren begged him and a hand moved to pull Levi’s sweatpants down. *I wanna feel you too.* Eren pulled Levi’s sweatpants and boxers down in one pull, reaching out to grab Levi’s length and move him closer.

Levi stopped, moaning as Eren took his length into his hand. *Fuck.* Levi lowered his hips, letting their lengths brush against each other. “E-Eren…” Levi gasped, leaning to kiss him hungrily.

Eren kissed him roughly, biting at Levi’s lips teasingly. He soon had his own length in his hand, rubbing both his and Levi’s together. “Fuck!” Eren cried out as he felt both the warmth of Levi’s length against his own and the pressure of their hands running over them. “Levi… Levi… More… I want more” he moaned out and his whole body began to quiver under Levi.

Levi shuddered, feeling his own coil tightening, ready to snap. *I can’t hold on for much longer…* Levi leaned up to Eren’s ear, willing his voice to be smooth and low. “Eren… cum for me.”

Eren’s eyes widened as he cried out loudly in bliss. He almost clamped down on their two lengths with a vice like grip, only to stop himself when he felt the coil snap, his pearly cum shooting out, messing the sweatshirt that he wore. He was in complete bliss in his after-orgasm high, slowly jerking the both of them trying to get as much cum as possible out. His eyes hooded as his head rolled to the side, staring into Levi’s silvery orbs with his own green eyes, darkened with lust.

Levi groaned as his own cum decorate Eren’s chest, his steel eyes shaded as he leaned down to kiss
him, the fire in his chest burned down to a glow. Fuck, that felt amazing… He shifted, pulling back to help Eren remove the soiled sweatshirt, dropping it on the floor to be washed later. He laid down next to Eren, straightening himself out and content to lazily kiss Eren, pulling them flush together.

Eren kissed him lazily back… It took a few minutes for him to get out of his daze. “Did we just cum on my new hoodie?” He asked, moving to reach for his boxers and sweatpants. He didn’t seem too pissed off about it right now. “And twice? In one day Levi? Twice in only a few hours… Fuck my head is pounding.” Eren sat up and put his head in his hands, rubbing his head. Fuck the pills better kick in soon. I feel kinda dizzy… I need water. “Levi… Get me some water… please, my head hurts.”

Levi’s brows furrowed in concern, pecking Eren on the forehead and immediately slipping from the bed to take their dishes upstairs. “Alright. I’ll be back with water in a minute.” He quickly walked upstairs to the kitchen, the smell of Lathe’s cooking hitting him as soon as he stepped into the scripting room. Damn, it smells good up here… He walked to the kitchen, seeing Lathe fussing over three pans and a cutting board all at once, in full-on chef mode. He put his dishes in the left side of the sink, grabbing and filling a water glass and studying the stove. “You've got a lot going on, and it all smells great.”

Lathe beamed, chopping onions. “Thanks! There’s going to be a feast tonight, given it’s Christmas. I'm planning on having plenty of leftovers, which is always a good thing.” He scraped the contents of the board into a pan, going for the carrots. “Feel free to snitch anything. I don't mind if you want to steal a cookie or two.”

“Nah, thanks. I'll let you have the kitchen to yourself.” You seem really into it, I don't want to get in the way. Levi smirked, turning and going back downstairs, taking the bottle of aspirin with him. Just in case what Eren took wasn’t enough. He closed the door behind him, walking down to Eren and handing him the full glass. “Here you go, Brat.” Hope this helps.

Eren made a soft noise of acknowledgement before reaching for the glass. He took slow sips before he was chugging the whole thing. Shit my throat is dry… “Can you carry me upstairs? I don’t think I’d be able to fucking stand, I want to drink a fucking gallon of water too. Upstairs. “Of course.” Levi pocketed the bottle of aspirin, reaching under the blankets and curving his arms under his legs and back, lifting him in one smooth movement from the bed. He traipsed over to and up the stairs, careful of his head. He opened the door and nudged it wide with his foot, following the scent to the living room and setting Eren down on the couch, arranging a pillow under his head. He didn’t drag anything up with him, and he was freezing earlier… “Do you want me to grab you a blanket from downstairs?” He held out his hand for the water glass.
“Yeah, please. Levi… Um… I’m sorry… About earlier… your present… I didn’t explain it properly…” Eren said and looked down at his fingers, twiddling with him. I can explain it later… If you want me too, so you can understand it… But I can’t keep my fucking head up right now. Eren gave him the empty glass and hoped he would fill it and come back with a full one.

Levi’s expression changed to one of worry, going to fill his glass again before he asked anything, avoiding an in-the-zone Lathe as he did so. He handed him the glass full of cold water before asking, “What did you need to explain about it?” I don't understand… What do you have to explain?

Eren drank the full glass in a few seconds… “What it meant was that I’m giving you complete trust… So I told you about my past… That was your birthday present… My complete trust in you… Even though I was so worried you would leave me.” He told him and held out his glass out to be filled again. I hope you understand… Please do.

Levi looked at the glass in Eren’s hand for a moment, reaching out to take it and twining their fingers together with the other, bending down to kiss him passionately, though soon pulling away. “I’m really glad that you trusted me to know all that. You don't have to worry about me leaving anytime soon.” He winked, smirking as he went to refill his glass again. He was back in a second, handing him back the glass. “I’ll go grab you a blanket.” Levi left for the basement, sifting through the many blankets on the bed before picking out a thick red and gold quilt, folding it so it wouldn't drag on the ground and returning to drape it over Eren, sliding under it next to him.

Eren smiled as Levi came to lay down with him, curling up to his side. He had already downed the water, and was intent on keeping himself flush against Levi’s sculpted chest. “Thank you, Levi.” Eren said and smiled happily. “I’m really happy.” Eren’s eyes closed again, his aspirin kicking in a little, as he closed his eyes to sleep.

Levi pried the glass from his hand, placing it and the aspirin bottle on the floor next to him. He brought his arm around Eren, leaning his cheek on the top of his head, looking over and noticing Blake asleep under the piano. That’s adorable. He closed his eyes, rubbing invisible patterns on Eren’s arm. But not as adorable as Eren.

Eren was dead to the world until Lathe announced that dinner was about ready, and to start waking up. He groaned, his head still pounding as he woke up in Levi’s arms. Fuck… my head fucking hurts… My back is starting to hurt too… The fucking morphine’s wearing out… Shit. Lathe, I need another pill.

Levi noted his discomfort, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “Eren, do you need more aspirin?
“Morphine… ran out.” He whimpered, even though his back was healing, if he didn’t have morphine, he could still feel all the stitches and the large burn on his lower back. *Hurts like a fucking bitch!*

“Got it.” Levi slid out from under the blanket, bending down to grab the aspirin and glass, switching the pills for the magenta bottle. He filled the glass with cold water, handing it back to Eren along with one morphine pill, as well as a nausea pill. “Here. This should make you feel better.”

Eren thanked him, taking the pills and downing the glass. He sat up, feeling his head spin a little less than it had before. Eren moved to shift his leg over the side of the couch, getting up to slowly pad to the bathroom to relieve himself from the numerous glasses of water.

Levi sauntered into the kitchen and sat down at the table, looking back at the counter lined with a multitude of dishes of food. *Leftovers for days.*

Lathe looked over his shoulder at him, smiling. “We’re going about this buffet-style, Levi. You can grab a plate at the end unless you want to wait for Eren.”

“I’ll wait. He’ll only be a minute. He’s been drinking water like crazy today, so…” *That is kinda weird.*

Lathe’s expression shifted. “That explains the million times you’ve come to get water from the tap. Is he doin’ alright?” *That’s not exactly a good thing to hear, considering he isn’t out running a marathon…*

“He had a pretty bad headache all this afternoon, still does.”

Lathe’s brow furrowed. *That doesn't sound too great.* “I’ll check up on that when he gets back. Speak of the devil…” Lathe set down the pan in his hands on a potholder, pulling off his oven mitts. He walked over to Eren, around the table. “How you feeling, Eren? I'm hearing not too great.”

Eren shook his head immediately regretting it and putting it down on the table to stop the dizziness
swirled in his head. “No…. My throat’s dry… and my head fucking hurts.” He whined and he reached up to rub his temples. “I’m hungry… and thirsty.” He mumbled, making things even odder, he never admitted to being hungry.

Lathe’s eyes widened in surprise. “From a medical standpoint, this is the first case in which I’m concerned someone’s hungry.” He felt his forehead. “You’re just a bit warm, if anything. I’d say you’re just dehydrated. We’ll make sure you eat and drink plenty, and you should be fine in no time. Sound alright?” Lathe smiled. “It’s serve-yourself for dinner. I’ve got a whole feast laid out for us. Take as much as you like. I’ll get you some tea, if you like. There’s hot cocoa too, if you feel like something sweet for a change.”

Eren shook his head slowly. “Tea, please.” He said before getting up and loading his plate, at least doubling what he was normally served… and he never finished what he was normally served. I’m cold. “Levi, can you get the blanket from the couch?” He asked quietly as he took his plate to sit down in his normal spot.

Levi set down his plate, not believing the amount of food Eren had taken. There’s got to be something wrong. “Uh, sure.” Levi swiftly walked to the couch, picking up the quilt and helping to drape it around Eren before reclaiming his spot.

Lathe set down Eren’s tea, his eyes widening at the sight of all the food Eren took. That’s more than I took- and I’m starving! “I guess we should be glad you’re eating!” Lathe joked, setting down and sipping at his cocoa before starting on his plate.

Eren wrapped up in his blanket finally started to eat. What was incredible was that he had finished the whole plate, and actually went up for seconds to get another decent sized plate. Eren’s skin looked a bit pale, but other than that he seemed fine. Eren finished his glass of tea, getting up to get more, leaving his food at the table for the others to stare at. My head still fucking hurts. And I’m fucking cold to top it off.

Lathe studied Eren’s plate, thinking hard. What the hell? He normally has the appetite of a fucking ant. ...If something were really wrong, he’d still be out of sorts tomorrow. We’ll wait and see. He returned to eating his mashed potatoes.

Levi was thinking along those same lines. He eyed his boyfriend- he would never get tired of thinking that, his boyfriend- with a mix of worry and curiosity. It’ll probably blow over, whatever’s gotten to him.

Eren sat back down and finished up his second plate and his tea before he got up to start the dishes.
like he normally did. *Fuck… I feel dizzy again.* Eren gripped onto the small ledge to keep himself standing up. *Shit… Dizziness, kindly go fuck off.*

Lathe was on his feet in a second, his hand on Eren’s arm to steady him. “You okay? You need me to walk you to the couch?” *Dizziness getting up. Dehydration. Sudden increase of appetite. Add blurry vision and you’d get… Is it that?*

Eren turned his head, feeling his head ripping with a new pain. *Fuck… I can’t see anything. What the fuck?* Eren felt so disoriented as he fell forward a little bit, everything in front of him a blurred grey. “Y-Yeah.” Eren’s voice sounded both pained and confused, like he didn’t know where Lathe was anymore. *Fuck… go away… my head fucking hurts.*

Lathe caught Eren as he lurched, half-dragging him to the couch, speaking so Eren could tell where he was. “I’ve got you Eren, I’m getting you to the couch, you're going to be just fine. I know what’s wrong now.” He carefully set Eren on the couch, letting him lie down, exposing his right arm from his quilt cocoon. “I never put that other saline IV in nearly a month ago; It slipped my mind completely. You didn’t show too many negative signs of all that blood loss, until now. You haven’t been eating too much, the low blood pressure and not enough salts- yeah, it all lines up. I’m going to put that IV in now, alright? I’ll find a stand for it upstairs and we can get that going; you’ll feel much better after it.” Lathe went up the stairs to retrieve a metal stand, hooking an IV from his bag onto it and inserting it into Eren’s arm, taking it down. “It’ll be less than an hour, but I’ll probably get you a second one. I'll go find one.” He left, disappearing upstairs.

Levi watched this unfold with worried eyes, setting his silverware across his finished late before coming to kneel next to Eren. He brushed his bangs from his eyes. *It’s worse than I thought, huh. But you’ll be okay soon.* Levi didn't know what to say, instead just pressing a kiss to Eren’s cheek. *Feel better.*

Eren moved to take his hand. “Can you stay?” He asked quietly, his vision had finally returned back to normal. His head still felt like it was splitting. “Please?” *And just talk to me… about anything, please, I don’t want to be reminded about what’s in my fucking arm.*

Levi gave him a small smile, standing and slipping next to him, careful of the IV. He slung his arm across Eren’s shoulders, chattering about things happening in his classes and on the football team, noticing Eren’s uncomfortable looks to his arm. *Be distracting. That’s easy enough.* Neither of them noticed when Lathe walked past and changed the bag hanging from the thin stand.

Lathe started on the many many pots, pans, and dishes that had piled up, stashing the many leftover plates in the fridge. *I'm not going to have to cook for awhile- sweet!* He looked down when he felt Blake nudge his leg, smiling and setting food and water in his bowls. *He’s finally woken up. He’s got the life.*
Eren smiled and chuckled every now and then. His color was starting to return, and his headache starting to subside a little bit. “Levi, you’re so cold to everyone else except me, it sounds like.” He murmured and smiled curling up to him as best as he could. He was shivering against him, he needed another blanket, but he didn’t want Levi to leave him alone on the couch. *Don’t leave me, I don’t care if I’m cold.*

*You’re still shivering...* “Do you want me to get you another blanket? You're still cold, I can tell.” Levi tensed to get up.

“I'll get one for the two of you.” Lathe approached them, a dish towel over his shoulder. “Eren, let me take that IV out, okay?” He took his arm gingerly and removed the needle, leaving the tape and gauze in place. He disposed of the empty bag and tubing. He disappeared upstairs and returned with another quilt, twin to the one already thrown over them. He spread it over them, returning to the dishes. *Let them be as they are.*

Eren curled up into Levi’s arms. “I wanna sleep downstairs tonight.” He told Levi before he closed his eyes against the man’s chest. Eren slept peacefully as his headache faded to oblivion.

Levi kissed the top of his head, letting his eyes close, already heavy with sleep. “Of course. ‘Night Eren.”’ He mumbled, fading into unconsciousness, content.
Chapter 19: Nate Ruess

Eren’s health had improved after a few good nights of rest, plenty of food and drinks as well as some much needed movement. With his dizziness and headaches gone, Eren dragged Levi to his ‘nest’ downstairs, opening the box of henna bottles. He took over 5 hours to complete Levi’s intricate back and he was very proud of his work. Even the shading looking excellent! It took Eren a few more days to convince Levi to get his arms done, finally resorting to a staring competition, which Levi had no hopes in winning now that Eren’s headache was gone. His arms took another 5 hours, each containing intricate detail. Eren had practically moved into the larger basement, sleeping on the larger air mattress with Levi almost every night now. He was fiddling with Lathe’s odd computer whenever he wasn’t either playing the piano or painting. Eren still hadn’t completely understood how the damn thing worked even with the notes Lathe gave him, so he found himself more occupied with painting and playing piano than singing, though as the week wore on Eren was becoming obsessed with learning every song he could from Nate Ruess. Eren had been singing his songs non stop- that was, until Levi had practically gone mad from Eren singing all day; and apparently his voice was a good way to get Levi horny. Eren, being the tease he is, didn’t allow for a single touch other than a kiss that day. Lathe had spent a great deal of time with Eren at the kitchen table, attempting to teach him the ins and outs of cursive handwriting. The lessons had been going well, but Lathe had decided Eren was not prepared for his calligraphy pen yet, so they were practicing with normal pens. Eren and Levi stayed inside the warm house for the most part, which left Lathe to go outside and play with Blake to get his pent-up energy out. The crazy dog would run laps around the large yard, waiting for Lathe to finish building a snowman before running at it full speed and knocking it over completely, effectively turning Blake white while he was still outside. Lathe seemed to enjoy his time outside with the dog a lot, seeing as he was constantly singing songs from Frozen, which was also driving Levi up the wall. Eren watched most of the time recording the whole scene on his phone, smiling as he sent it to Armin. The two of them had become regular texting buddies over the course of the past week, and if he wasn’t laughing because of something Levi said, it was definitely about something Armin had texted him about. It was nice seeing that Eren was actually happy now, his real personality coming out. Eren had become stubborn, both Levi and Lathe agreed, yet they could do nothing to stop Eren from challenging them to staring competitions they couldn’t dream of winning. It was their fault for agreeing to something they had no hope of winning. The time flew by on their winter break, the week passing by quickly, along with their New Year’s celebration. Eren had become a happy camper about the idea that they would stay up to watch the ball drop on livestream only when Lathe told him he would make fresh cinnamon rolls the next morning.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

So there they were, sitting down eating cinnamon rolls at noon on a friday afternoon. Eren had already eaten 4 cinnamon rolls and was getting up to get another. They are too fucking good to give up. I feel like I’ve gained ten pounds in the last week from Lathe’s cooking. Well, ten pounds would probably do me some good. I wonder if I have been gaining weight. I wonder if Levi can tell? I’ll have to ask him.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at Eren, smiling as he sipped at a mug of hot chocolate, his features still
with a reddish tint from so much time spent outside. *He’s still eating like a starved wolf. Getting some meat on his bones will surely do him good, given how thin he was at first. I need to get him on a scale soon, see how he’s doing weight-wise.*

Levi was thinking similarly, his eyes tracing Eren’s outline. *I don’t have a clue as to how he could flip the switch from ‘never hungry’ to ‘constantly dying of starvation’ in a day. Well, he’s filling out nicely. Levi smirked, biting into his second cinnamon roll. Very nicely.*

Eren sat back down at his seat, digging into his beloved roll before he spoke up. “So, where is the concert again? And what do I have to wear?” He asked quietly and he took another bite from his cinnamon roll.

“It’s at the Town Ballroom, in the city. You’d probably want to wear jeans and a hoodie over a long-sleeve shirt if that’ll keep you warm enough. Two if you think you'll need it, I dunno. I'm not sure what footwear you have that will work…”

Lathe spoke up, putting his mug down. “Eren, I know you don't have a winter coat or boots or anything like that of your own right now, so until we get you some, you can borrow some of my stuff. You'll fit anything in my closet, really. My metal-toe boots have good treads for the snow and ice, and I have a couple jackets you could pick from.”

Eren looked up to him with wide-open eyes. *I get to wear those awesome boots? I REALLY GET TO WEAR THEM?? YES!!! Eren’s eyes shone with even more excitement than before. “Thanks, Dad.” Eren didn’t even realize he let the word slip.*

Lathe froze, his eyes wide, looking intensely at Eren, before a smile overcame his face. *Did he really… He rested his chin in his palm, his head dropping down to look at the table, trying not to cry. He did. He tried to keep his voice even. “Of course.”*

Eren smiled. He finished off his fifth cinnamon roll before taking his dishes up to the sink, starting to wash them. “Levi, help me take a shower after you’re done eating.” Eren’s voice was stubborn, meaning no room for argument. Eren also didn’t care Lathe was there; Lathe knew they’d showered together before, so he didn’t really care anymore.

Levi smirked, finishing his tea. *Is that an order? “Alright.” He stood, bringing his dishes to the sink as well, drying the plates Eren handed him and putting them away.*
Eren and Levi finished up the dishes pretty quickly, Eren heading off upstairs first, towards his room. I should pull out what I want to wear… Hmmm… Long sleeves, I’ve only got black so I guess i’m wearing that, my dark green hoodie, the jeans that Levi likes… He says they “make a perfect ass look more perfect”… Which I don’t care about, but I guess if they make my ass look nice for him… So that’s good I guess, right?

Levi walked into Eren’s room shortly after, eyeing Eren’s choice of jeans with a smirk. Nice choice. Levi sifted through the selection he added to Eren’s closet, pulling out a Nate Ruess wife beater, a dark jacket, and dark jeans. Going with the black, aren’t we? At least we’ll sorta match.

Eren picked up some towels before scampering off to go get in the bathroom. He turned the water on and stepped back to strip a bit, waiting for Levi to help with his wraps. I wonder how it looks under the wraps now.

Levi was in the bathroom a moment later, stripping off his shirt and jeans, kicking off his socks and stepping out of his boxers. He turned Eren around and slid the hooks out of his bandages, letting them unravel onto the floor. His eyes swept over Eren’s back, the cuts across Eren’s back almost totally healed, the burn in the small of his back looking much better than at first. The long gash down Eren’s back, held together still with a neat row of stitches was healing well. Those can come out really soon. After our shower, Lathe should have a look and see when they can come out.

Eren stripped the rest of the way down. He waited for Levi to step in first, and reached to give him the cloth so that he could wash his back. He waited patiently and quietly, happy that he was going out on an actual date with Levi for the first time today. I wonder if we’ll go out to eat…. Hmmm...

Levi stepped into the warm stream of water, adjusting the nozzle above his head so it was a gentler spray, like a mist. Maybe he can actually get under the water now. He reached for the cloth, taking Eren’s hand gently. “I think you can get under the water and not have it hurt. I also don't want you to be freezing again. Give it a try?” I don't want you to scare me with being so cold- your lips were fucking blue! Not good.

Eren thought about it for a few moments before he shook his head, thinking back to the time when he had tried to shower alone. Eren shook his head more and backed away out of fear, moving his hand from Levi’s hold and backing away until his back reached the cold tile wall behind him and he jumped out of surprise. No… I don’t want that to fucking happen again… No, absolutely not. Eren was too afraid to step under the direct stream of water still, and probably would be for awhile.

Levi sighed, smiling. Soon enough he won't be freezing to death every time he wants to take a shower. He held out his hand for Eren’s again. “Alright, then at least come over here so I can wash your back.”
Eren slowly got closer to Levi, slowly turning to him and allowed for his back to be washed. He was still pretty on edge. *Don’t you dare take the head off and put it on my back. I swear you will be kicked in the balls, and Lathe will take me to the concert if you do!*

Levi washed his back, still being very careful of the scars and especially of the huge gash running up from his burn, which he avoided completely. *He’s seriously tensed from my suggesting he stand under the water... I just don't want you freezing.* Levi moved to wash his sides and arms, turning him and starting over his chest. He made sure he held the cloth under the water every minute or so as he washed him all over, trying to keep Eren warm. *We’re not having a repeat of last time. No.*

Eren noticed and stood closer to Levi, letting himself press against his warm skin. *He’s warm... Which is good, I don’t want to be cold again.* Eren let himself be washed, giving a small gasp as Levi grabbed his ass, quickly smacking his hands away with a glare and let him return to washing him.

Levi let out a breathy laugh, bending over to wash Eren’s legs and feet. *Enjoying the view up there?* He glanced up for a moment... *yup, he definitely is.* He stood to his full height, drenching the cloth and handing it to Eren, smirking. “Your turn.”

Eren smiled softly. “Okay.” He said quietly. He got the cloth and started with Levi’s chiseled chest, admiring the feeling of the stone hard muscles under his hands as he washed him. *God, I fucking love his body... Is that a bad thing?*

Levi leaned into his touch, his eyes wandering over the fading bruises on Eren’s neck. He smirked. *They suit him. But they're fading... I need to fix that.* He looked up and met Eren’s eyes, a possessive glint in his eye. *I wonder how mad he’ll be if start fixing it now...*

Eren met Levi’s eyes, noticing the possessiveness in his look. *Levi? What the hell are you thinking?* Eren quirked an eyebrow as he got closer. “What’s your problem, Levi? Think I’ll find a guy hotter than you?” Eren asked teasingly as he poked his chest with a smirk forming on his lips.

A spark of mischief danced past in Levi’s eye, and he took a small step forward, closing the space between them, their chests flush. He muttered against his neck. “No... Just making sure everyone else knows you're already taken.” He started sucking hard at the skin near the joint of his neck, kissing and nibbling across to his adam’s apple. *Mine.*

Eren gave a moan, pressing his hand against Levi’s chest, trying in vain to push him away. “Levi!”
He gasped, trying to push him away. *Fuck, I'm gonna get hard! I don't want to! “Levi! No! Stop! Not there! Anywhere but there!”* Eren called moving his head away from Levi head to get himself out of the sticky situation which was going to ensue if this continued. *If you continue I will kick you in the balls, and not give a damn.* Eren’s eyes were hard, but he was giving Levi permission to mark him on his neck anywhere but there.

*Alright. Not there. “...Alright then.”* Levi moved back to the joint of his neck, suckling and biting the skin, leaving a ring of bruises around the base of his neck. He trailed up to nibble on his earlobe.

Eren let out strings of moans but he knew he’d be able to keep his arousal down. “Levi… Fuck, so many, I get to do it later…” He told him and clawed at his skin as Levi bit particularly hard.

Levi pulled back for a moment, satisfied with his work. *That'll let everyone know he’s mine. “Of course.”* He leaned in to kiss him fervently, soon pulling away.

Eren let Levi kiss him, pulling back with him. “Hair, then can I get out? I'm starting to get cold.” He told Levi honestly and pressed his back to Levi’s chest to stay as warm as possible.

“Okay.” *I'll try to keep it quick enough- no blue lips.* Levi reached for the black bottle of shampoo, massaging some into Eren’s brown locks. He helped him rinse it out, still staying out of the direct stream of water before running conditioner through his hair and rinsing it out right after. *That should be fine.*

Eren got out once he was done and wrapped himself in the warmth of towels. He went back to his room, putting on new boxers and his nice jeans before going to get his back and chest wrapped by Lathe again. His back was doing extremely well now that he was actually eating things.

Lathe grinned as he wrapped Eren’s back, studying the stitches. “I’d say you have no more than a week left to keep in those stitches. And the rest of your back and that burn and doing very well.” Lathe thought a moment, sliding the last hook in place. “Is it alright if we weigh you? See where you're at? There's a scale in the bathroom under the sink.”

“Okay, the upstairs bathroom? Or is there one down here?” He asked quietly, knowing Levi was still in the shower. *I wonder how much I’ve actually put on in the past week… Actually, when was the last time I was weighed?*
“There’s one down here. Come on.” Lathe led the way to the bathroom, rifling in the cupboard for the scale and pulling it out, giving Eren room to step on it, looking at the number. He grinned. “You’re at 98 lbs, up from your original 80. That’s still really light for someone your height, but it’s great progress for two months. Keep that appetite of yours and you’ll be where you should be in no time.” Lathe joked, stowing the scale back in the cupboard.

Eren smiled and nodded. “Thank you Lathe, for everything.” Eren went right up to him and hugged him tightly, probably surprising Lathe from the amount of strength his body was able to produce.

‘Dad.’ The word still rang in his head. Lathe hugged Eren back just as tightly, his cheek resting on Eren’s head. He let out a shuddery sigh, trying to keep his voice even. “...Dad.” You can call me that if you want...

Eren’s eyes widened, his head craning back to look up to Lathe’s eyes. “Really? I can call you Dad?” Eren’s voice was quiet, yet full of excitement, just as his eyes were. “Can I really call you Dad?” He asked just to be sure, and seemed to hug Lathe even tighter.

Lathe smiled, his eyes hopeful. “If you want to.” He swallowed, trying to push down the lump in his throat. Dammit, don’t cry, you sap. Quit it.

Eren’s eyes brimmed with happy tears almost instantly. His shoulders shuddered as he started to cry against Lathe’s chest, grabbing onto his shirt. “I finally have a Dad again.” Eren said, crying happily in his arms. I can finally say that again... I have a Dad... I have a much better Dad. I have one that won’t leave me, one that won’t hurt me. One that that wants me. I’m so happy. Blake sat at the door watching them with perked ears.

Lathe pulled Eren close, rubbing his arm and resting his chin on Eren’s head, tears trailing down his cheeks. It makes me so happy to know you trust me like this... There’s no way I’ll ever let anything happen to you. Swear it.

Levi stumbled down the stairs, hearing sobs from upstairs, turning to the bathroom with worry etched across his face. Eren’s crying. Why. What’s wrong? “Eren, are you-” Levi stopped short, his worry gone as he saw Eren latched onto Lathe’s shirt, both of them crying in happiness. It’s been two minutes. What did I miss? Levi stepped back awkwardly, walking back to the stairs to go up to finish changing. ... They need a minute.

Eren held onto Lathe for a few more minutes, crying happily until the tears subsided, giggles now breaking free. “Thank you.” Eren giggled. Thank you so much, you have no idea how much I appreciate being away from that home.
Lathe let out an airy laugh, rubbing at his eye with his sleeve. “Of course, Eren.” Lathe beamed. *You really do mean too much to me.*

Eren smiled and laughed for a good bit before he pulled back, reaching up on his tippy toes to kiss Lathe’s cheek before giggling and dashing off to go glomp on Levi upstairs, tackling the two of them to his bed. Eren was still laughing and giggling; he was so happy, and it showed in his whole demeanor. “Guess what! Guess what! Guess what!” Eren was talking really fast, his smile from ear to ear.

*Something big must have happened.* “Whatwhatwhat?” Levi’s quick speech matched Eren’s, a small smile on his face as they fell onto the bed.

“Lathe said I can call him ‘Dad’!” Eren said excitedly. He looked like a happy puppy, and if he had a tail it would be wagging back and forth. “I finally have a Dad again!” Eren said happily and giggled as he curled up onto Levi’s chest. He shivered a bit, realizing he was just in his jeans and his wraps. *I have a Dad again!*

Levi’s eyes widened, his arms wrapping around Eren’s shivering form. *That… For Eren to have someone like Lathe, someone like him to call Dad after the first ‘Dad’ he was given… It’s amazing. “Eren, that’s wonderful. You’re really lucky, you know… Having someone like Lathe as your father. I’m really happy for you.”* Levi kissed the top of his head.

Eren smiled, happy. “When are we gonna go?” He asked quietly, shivering in Levi’s arms. “I’m really excited!” Eren said, his smile wide. *I’m so happy, and I’m really excited to know what we’re doing… Levi said we had reservations downstairs.*

Levi looked to the clock on the wall. “It’s around four-thirty now… So we should probably leave in about a half hour, no later. We have reservations at six, so we should probably finish getting dressed.” *Probably.*

Eren nodded and moved to get his longsleeve on, slipping it onto his slender frame. He looked really hot in the all black attire, shoulders wider than his waist and he was tall. He looked almost like a girl with how long his hair was. The bite marks were still clearly visible even after Eren had donned his dark green hoodie. He looked to Levi, looking for his approval in his clothing choice. *Hmm, do you like what I’m wearing?*

*Damn.* Levi looked Eren up and down, nodding in approval. “You look damn fine.” He smirked at
Eren’s blush. *Hey, I'm being honest here.*

Eren’s blushed flushed his whole face, all the way to his ears. “Okay, I wanna look to see if Dad’s boots and jacket fit, come with me.” Eren pulled on his hand and pulled him downstairs to the closet the coats and shoes were in. *I wanna wear the steel toed ones!!*

Levi let Eren drag him downstairs, smiling just a bit at the happiness in Eren’s eyes as he spoke. *He really is pretty fucking lucky.* Levi stopped with him in front of the closet, helping him look for a jacket that’d go well with his outfit.

Eren picked out a nice heavy black jacket. The jacket had strips of teal green, which matched Eren’s eyes, bringing them out nicely. The strips were where all the seams should’ve been and covered them, fitting him nicely and Eren smiled as he put it on. Eren dug into the back of the closet, finding a smaller pair of Lathe’s steel toed boots. *Probably an old pair.* Eren slipped them on finding that they fit him perfectly, his smile running from ear to ear. *Perfect fit.* “How do I look?” Eren asked Levi in an almost seductive purr as he showed off his outfit.

Levi smirked, studying Eren’s form. “...**Perfect.**” *Damn does he look good.* “Let’s get going, cool? We’re taking Lathe’s Thunderbird.” He nodded to the door. “I’ll grab the keys.”

Eren nodded and carefully went outside, the snow had even gotten onto the porch, forming a good layer of ice on the steps. He carefully took his first few steps down the icy driveway, getting closer to the car, looking up for a moment to look at the darkening grey sky, seeing the snow fall. *It’s pretty.*

Levi looked over his shoulder as Lathe tapped him on the arm, pressing the keys into his hand.

“Have fun, Levi. But be careful driving- you have my son in the car.” Lathe looked to him with a proud grin, turning and walking back upstairs. *They'll be fine.*

Levi quirked an eyebrow, smirking. “I will be, don’t worry.” He walked out the door, closing and locking it behind him, unlocking the car for the both of them. He started it, carefully backing out of the driveway before heading for the city, Eren fiddling with the music on his phone, plugged into the stereo. With their singing along to every song, time flew, and in no time they pulled up to the curb two doors down from Between the Walls. *Good parking space. That’s luck right there.* Levi killed the engine, pointing and announcing to Eren, “We’re here!”
“What’s this place?” He asked as they got out. Eren was still unfamiliar with the downtown area, having only been there once to pick up Blake. Well, it certainly looks crowded and popular… I guess that’s a good thing then?

“This is the restaurant Erwin insisted we have our football party at last season, and I thought it was pretty nice. I think you'll like it.” I hope so.

“Okay, sounds good.” Eren said, taking Levi’s hand and twining their fingers together. The tips of his fingers were already cold from being outside for only a few moments. They were the only thing not covered. His nose got a bit red as well, and it made him look even cuter. It’s cold, I wanna go inside. Eren noticed that they could see the wispy steam from their own breaths in the cold air.

Levi smirked, pulling him to the doors of the restaurant and holding it opening for them, immediately greeted by the loud chatter of people and a neatly-dressed hostess. “Reservation for Ackerman?” They were led to a table in the back corner of the restaurant, away from most of the noise and handed menus.

“Your server will be right with you. Can I get you two any drinks to start?” She pulled a pen and paper out of her apron.

“I’d l-like a hot tea please, Earl Grey if you have it.” Eren said and shed his jacket, rubbing his hands together to warm them up, breathing on them to try and see if that helped. They don’t feel any warmer.

“The same.” Levi looked to Eren, noting how cold he was after just a moment outside.

“Alright, I'll bring those right over.” She scribbled their drinks onto her pad and walked off, disappearing into the fray.

Levi looked over to Eren’s red nose, then to his hands. Without another thought he reached over the table and held them, rubbing them to try and warm them. You’re freezing already. How does that even work?

Eren smiled softly and thanked him, letting Levi warm his hands up before the hostess came back with their teas. Eren took his tea in his hands, warming them the rest of the way up. “Okay, now I haven’t been to a restaurant in a while… so… I don’t know what anything tastes like.” Eren reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out his nausea pill, taking it and sipping his tea to help
wash it down. *How does this thing work? I mean I know they serve you, but what do I do?*

_Hmmm…_ Levi quickly skimmed the menu. *90% of this or more, Eren isn't familiar with.* “Well, first I'll just give you a rundown of how this all works. The waiter or waitress, whichever, will come over, introduce themselves, ask if we need more time to decide what we want, and we’ll probably say yes. They'll come back again after a few more minutes, and whenever we’ve decided what we want, we just tell them, they take the menus, and it’s all a waiting game from then on. As for what the different foods taste like… I can't exactly describe all that for you. I think you just have to pick one and hope for the best, though I think anything you can choose will be good.” *Yeah, I dunno how to tell you what to get.*

“_Hmmm… can you just get me whatever you think I’d like? I’m not really that picky of an eater… just nothing too sweet._” He told the other and smiled behind his mug, sipping at it quietly. *There’s too many things to read, and I don’t exactly know what everything is in the descriptions either… It's better just to let him decide. I have no idea what the fuck we're doing.*

*Or that works._ “Okay…” Levi trailed off, reading over everything and skipping around. *There’s plenty to pick from… But of all the things to get, on your first real date, steak never fails._ “Got it.” He set it down, picking up his tea and drinking, skimming the crowd for a moment. *I forgot how many people come here.*

Eren looked around with him and almost seemed uneasy, seeing such a big crowd around them. He watched as someone came forward, a tall man had dark hair which was slicked back. He looked really buff, and smiled as he came up to them, almost instantly undressing Eren with his eyes as he came up to them.

“Hello, my name’s Gustav, I’ll be your server for this evening. Have you decided on what you would like to order? Or should I give you a few minutes?” The man’s voice was smooth and his smile close to intoxicating.

Eren swallowed hard and looked away from the man who was clearly trying to hit on him. He was really uncomfortable with the man undressing him with his eyes, looking up to Levi for help, he had no idea what to do. *Levi, help! Please! Get him to leave!*

Levi had the man fixed with his coldest glare. “Yeah, my **boyfriend** and I would both like the steak, medium rare with a baked potato, butter only.” Levi rattled off their order quickly and thrust their menus at him, trying to get this over with so the man could leave.

“Of course sir,” Gustav took the menus after writing down the quick order. “Could I interest you in
an appetiser to start with?” He asked, his eyes flickering over to Eren’s lithe body every few seconds.

“No, thank you.” Just leave so you can stop making Eren uncomfortable.

“Alright, I’ll put this in for you guys, would you like waters with your teas?” He looked at Eren completely when he asked. He was ignoring Levi completely, trying to get Eren’s attention.

“Umm… yes please.” Eren said, looking down at his hands, trying not to scratch at his wrist with this man staring at him.

Gustav left after that, but he was certain to return. Eren looked up to Levi, putting his hands across the table and looked to him with pleading eyes to get him to hold them firmly so he wouldn’t scratch at his arms. Blake’s not here, I need you to fucking hold them, so do it dammit!

Levi immediately took his hands, holding them firmly and giving them a quick squeeze in reassurance. “I’m sorry, that guy’s being really creepy.” We’re on a fucking date and he’s just going to creep all over this. Ugh.

“It’s okay… there’s a lot of people.” Eren said, trying to keep his eyes locked onto Levi’s as the creep came back with waters for them. Eren completely ignored the man, his hands shaking in Levi’s hold. Fuck, calm down, Levi will beat him to a pulp if you freak out. Don’t freak out, calm down.

Levi’s hands didn't leave Eren’s, thumbs running over his knuckles as he looked to the man setting down their water, obviously staring him down. I hope you’ve decided to fucking quit it.

“Is there anything else I can get for you?” Gustav asked with his persistent smile plastered to his face. He was trying not to back away from Levi’s stare, struggling to hold his ground.

“No, thank you.” Levi answered for the both of them, unblinking. Give up.

Gustav visibly swallowed hard before leaving. Eren seemed to calm down once the man left. I hope he doesn’t come back. I don’t want to see him again.
Levi kept his hold on Eren’s hands, hoping the same thing. *I wonder how long it’ll take for him to pass us off to another server. Or become mute. Or stop looking at Eren like a fucking pervert. Any would work.* “You know, it’s going to be crowded at the concert, more so than this. And you look uneasy… are you going to be alright, do you think?”

Eren thought about it and nodded. “Yeah, I just want you to be next to me, I don’t want another person trying to force themselves on me.” He murmured quietly to the other. *I’ll be okay. I’ll be okay.* Eren calmed down after a few more moments and was able to pull his hands away from Levi and sip at his tea.

Levi mirrored his actions, watching Gustav come out from the kitchens, tensing. *What’s he up to.* Levi followed him across the the room, stopping a waiter with sandy hair on their way to the kitchen, speaking to them quickly and quietly. They looked over to them, and the blonde nodded. They both carried on with their duties. Levi smirked triumphantly.

Levi: 1. Fuckwad: 0. He returned to his tea.

Eren smiled down at his tea. “So, how close are we to the stage?” Eren looked up to Levi with curious eyes, still not knowing much about the whole ‘concert’ thing.

“We’re in the pit, meaning we’re in the area directly in front of the stage. So, really really close. But the pit is very crowded and loud. And there aren't any seats to be had.” *Is that okay? I thought it'd be okay.*

Eren watched him, his eyes filling with more and more excitement if that was even possible. “Really? That’s cool, do you think we’ll be close to him? Oh my god that would be so cool!” Eren said and smiled more as he squealed quietly in excitement.

*Thank god.* Levi smirked. “We’ll be pretty close, most likely. I'd say no further than… Thirty feet at most? Like, no further than that wall over there.” He pointed to the other side of the narrow restaurant. *So, pretty damn close.*

Wow, we’ll be so close, I wonder what it’ll be like? Levi’ll be able to see from between people… Right? Oh well, we’ll figure it out. I wonder what it will be like? He said it was gonna be loud, how loud? And how crowded? Eren nodded, he watched as a new server came up to them with their perfectly done steaks. He smiled kindly after setting them down in front of each of them.

“Is there anything I can get you? Refills for your teas?” He asked softly and sweetly.

Eren shook his head. “No, thank you.” Eren’s response was quiet, the mostly because he was
distracted by the food that had been placed in front of them. **What is this? How does one even attempt to eat this?** “Uh… How does… Umm… How do you eat this?” Eren asked and looked up to Levi with a curious glare. **What even is this? Is it meat? I’m assuming it’s edible…**

Levi quirked an eyebrow, a surprised look in his eyes. *He doesn’t know how to eat a steak? Um… how the fuck do you explain how to eat a fucking steak?* “Uh, here. Watch me.” Levi picked up his fork in his left hand, his knife in his right, starting to cut off a piece slowly enough for Eren to follow. He stabbed the small enough piece with his fork, showing Eren. “You just kinda cut it into small enough pieces to chew, like this.” He popped it into his mouth. “And then you can eat it.”

“Huh?” Eren stared at the odd knife and for a few more seconds, “Wait, what? Why are you holding your fork in the wrong hand?” Eren asked. He was overly confused about this. **Why are you holding the knife in your right hand? That’s where the fork goes…** Eren put the knife down and tried to cut the large piece of meat with the side of his fork, quickly getting frustrated when the action did nothing to break apart the steak.

*That’s not exactly effective.* “No, look, pretend you’re holding a pencil instead of a piece of cutlery. So do that for the knife and the fork, and you hold the steak in place with the fork while you move the knife back and forth to cut the steak.” He showed him his grip on the knife. “Look how I’m holding it, and give it a go.”

Eren picked up the utensils as directed. *How is this supposed to be any better?* Eren had picked up the knife in his left hand, effectively holding the steak down with the fork in his right hand. He struggled to cut it, trying in vain to maneuver the knife over the meat. *He makes it look so easy… What the fuck!*

Levi watched his plight for a few moments. *Have you never used one of these things in your life? It’s so fucking easy. …Fuck it.* He leaned over the table, tapping the spot on his plate next to the steak with his knife. “Here, let me.” He quickly started cutting up Eren’s steak for him, careful not to elbow their tea or water.

Eren watched Levi cut his steak. *It only took him a few seconds to do the whole steak…. Well then… So I must look like a complete idiot in front of him then… that’s wonderful.* Eren stared at his plate with a sullen look, his eyes no longer seeming to glitter as he slowly took his fork and stabbed a piece, raising it to his mouth. His eyes brightened back up again and he smiled happily. *This is fucking delicious!*

Levi returned to his own steak, not missing the sad look Eren had before eating the steak. *Huh.* “I’ll teach you how to use a knife later. It’s kinda important to know. We’ll fix that.” He smirked. **This steak is great!**
Eren nodded, his focus now completely shifted to the steak in front of him. He managed to clear his plate in a good amount of time, sipping at his tea occasionally. He finally finished and shifted his gaze to look up at Levi with his bright viridian eyes. He had a big smile on his face too. “That was delicious!” Eren said and smiled happily, taking another sip of his tea.

Levi looked up from his near-clear plate, smirking at Eren’s bright expression, staring into his eyes for a moment. He looks so happy! His eyes are shining. You know, they're really pretty… It was a great idea to bring him here. “I’m really glad you liked it, Eren.” He blinked, leaning back and sipping at his tea. “I'm full. As soon as I spot the waiter I'll wave him down…” Levi trailed off and looked over the restaurant, seeing their waiter a few tables over. He caught his eye, nodding. He came over to their table.

“Is there anything I can get you?”

“The check, please.” He watched him leave with a nod, checking his watch. 6:43. Plenty of time. Levi studied Eren’s happy expression over his mug, inwardly ecstatic. This was a wonderful way to start off the night. How is this our first date? You think we’d’ve done something before this. Dunno. This is an unconventional relationship. I’m not going to question it.

Eren smiled down at his tea. “Thank you… I really mean it, this is fun.” Eren said and blushed looking at the bottom of the mug. I wonder what the rest of the night is going to be like? I hope there won’t be any other guys hitting on me… god that guy was a creep.

He’s too fucking cute when he blushes. Levi nudged his foot under the table. “Of course. I’m glad you're enjoying it.”

Eren smiled more and watched the blonde waiter come back with the check. I hope it’s not too expensive.

Levi picked up the check, opening it and trying to figure out the tip. Fuck, I’m absolute shit at math. That Gustav douche better not be getting any of this. But that other guy is cool. What was his name, anyway? He never really told us, I don’t think. How the fuck do you figure fifteen percent? Meh. That looks about right. Levi scratched down a number to leave the total at an even number, fishing out his wallet and setting down three twenties, shutting it and placing it back on the table. He pushed out his chair a few inches. “You ready to go?”

Eren reached for his jacket and nodded, shrugging it back on, zippering it up and waiting for Levi
to lead him out of the crowded restaurant. “Ready.” Eren’s voice was soft, and he was already
shoving his hands into his coat pockets to attempt to keep them warm. I don’t want to be cold… but
I’m gonna be fucking freezing as soon as we step outside... fuck.

“Alright.” Levi rose, pushing his chair back in with his foot and stepping to lead them from the
restaurant. “Do you want to walk to the Ballroom? It’s not too far and I don’t know if I’ll find a
parking space if we try and drive down.”

Eren thought about it. “We can walk, if we’re not too far.” Eren said and zipped his jacket all the
way up as they neared the entrance and could feel the cold air coming in as the door was opened.
Fuck did it get colder outside? I mean the sun went down... but it feels like it took twenty degrees
with it!

Levi led their way, turning right as they exited. “It’s at absolute most a ten-minute walk. And we
already have tickets so we won't be stuck waiting in some long line.” I hope. It’s fucking freezing.
Levi stopped them at their car, opening the passenger door quickly. “Hold on a sec.” He reached in
the space between the seat and the trunk, pulling out a green scarf and tossing it to Eren. He took a
grey one for himself. And I thought Lathe was fucking crazy for bringing backup scarves
everywhere. He wrapped his around his neck, slamming the door shut and locking it, continuing on
their way.

Eren’s thank-you was soft, mostly muffled from the scarf he hurriedly wrapped around his face.
He looked at his hands, already red from the cold air. Fuck... they’re already so cold.... I won’t be
able to feel them soon... fuck! Eren hurriedly buried them into his pockets, trying to get them to
warm back up again. He followed Levi, only two steps behind.

Levi looked over his shoulder, quirking an eyebrow. What’re you doin’ all the way back there? He
reached back and tugged at Eren’s left sleeve, pulling his hand out of his pocket and twining their
hands together, slowing to walk alongside him. Fuck, your hand is cold. It’s been all of a minute!
He held on to his hand tightly, hoping his grasp brought him some warmth.

Eren shivered slightly as his hand was taken. He let Levi’s warm hand hold his own. He’s so
warm.... It feels nice. I wish I could stay warm like that.... I don’t know if I’ll be able to feel my
hands after this.... Eren stayed mostly quiet during their walk to the Town Ballroom, his hands still
icy cold as they entered the venue. Fuck, I can’t feel my fingers... Shit, don’t let Levi know...
shitshitshitshitshit.

Levi let go of Eren’s hand once they got into the lobby, looking around at the people waiting
around. He nodded over to the coat check, taking the tickets out of his pocket and making sure his
jean pockets still had his phone and wallet before handing his over, the scarf in a sleeve.
Eren followed Levi around like a lost puppy. He could hear one of the opening bands already playing through one of the open doors at the end of the large hall they were in. Eren tucked his scarf into a pocket before he took it off and handed his jacket over as well. He looked adorable in his hoodie, and his bruises around his neck were still quite visible. *So why are we giving them our coats? And is that the room we’re going into? With the loud music? Eren’s eyes wandered around the room looking at the many doors around the hall, adorned with musical paraphernalia.*

Levi smirked at Eren’s collar of bruises, making sure to keep an eye on him as they stepped around swarms of people to the door. He handed the man guarding the door their tickets, taking the ripped stubs and holding his hand out to be stamped. He turned and waited for Eren, making sure he got his stamp before walking any further in.

Eren followed after quickly, seeing the room that they were entering, brightly lit worth various colors, the sound was immense, flooding his whole body, not just his eardrums. *It's so loud... This is a concert? Eren made sure his grip was locked onto Levi’s wife beater, which nicely showed his badass tattoos. Well, they do make him look like a badass... Eren smiled softly and followed him through the thrum of people towards the front. So many people, and apparently I’m an eye catcher...* Eren looked around as they entered, seeing various guys with their eyes all on him, his grip tightening on Levi’s shirt in an instant.

Levi looked around as they headed for the pit, sending cold glares to anyone he caught ogling his boyfriend. *We don’t need repeats of what was going on at dinner. Keep away; He’s obviously taken.* Levi guided Eren towards the pit, enjoying feeling the thrum of bass in his chest.

Eren felt the vibrations pound through his chest. *It feels weird... But like in a good kind of way.* Eren let Levi guide him, only to have his other hand tugged on, bringing them to a screeching halt. Eren’s head snapped back to see the owner of the hand currently wrapped around his wrist- a tall brunette man who seemed way too old to be looking at Eren was staring at him with a heavy look of lust.

“Are you from Tennessee? ‘Cause you're the only 10 I see. The name’s Nile. Nile Dok.”

Eren paled a bit at the man’s cringe-worthy attempt at flirting and struggled to pull his arm back from the man’s grasp. *Levi, help, he’s got my wrist, it hurts! He’s grabbing it too hard...*

Levi turned to see why they stopped, barely able to keep from cringing at the godawful pickup line. *Who the fuck does this bitch think he is? He fixed him with a deathly look, staring him down. Hey. Dipshit. He’s taken. You can let him go now.” I don’t want to have to wreck you. I'd get kicked out for that.*
The message didn’t seem to get across. Nile was still trying to hopelessly flirt with Eren. “Do you have a map? I just keep getting lost in your eyes.” Nile attempted to pull Eren closer, feeling the small wrist in his hand and wanting to get him away from the smaller man. He looked at the hickeys with distaste but it didn’t deter him.

That was so unbelievably shitty... Just stop. “Stop fucking hitting on my boyfriend. And let him go. He obviously doesn’t want your fucking hands on his wrist. Back the fuck up.” If I have to I obviously will. But I also don't want to get blood on this shirt. Getting the stains out is a bitch.

Eren’s eyes widened in pain when Nile’s hand closed even tighter around his wrist, he whimpered, his eyes fearful. He tried to get the attention of one of the security guards, finally getting one, and the burly man started to walk over.

Nile held his wrist tighter. “Which is easier? You getting into those tight pants or getting you out of them?”

Eren’s eyes hardened almost instantly, his other hand coming up and connecting with Nile’s nose with a sickening crunch, knocking the man down with the solid blow. Eren then fearfully retreated behind Levi as the security guard came to assess the situation. Fuck, what if Levi’s angry I punched him? Are they gonna make us leave? I think my wrist is bruised… I don’t think it’s broken, but only time will tell for that one.

Levi was caught between anger and complete confusion. He’s gonna fucking die. But he’s unconscious on the floor. But... Did Eren fucking break his nose?! Levi watched as blood started streaming from Nile’s nose, stepping between Eren and his unconscious attacker, not even noticing the security guard until he spoke.

“Okay, calm down, what happened? I saw you punch this guy… But I don’t think I really need to escort you out, do I?” He asked and looked at Nile as the man was slowly coming back to reality.

Levi looked to Eren behind him, turning to address the guard. “This guy had my boyfriend by the wrist, and was making him seriously uncomfortable. He wouldn’t let go or stop harassing him no matter how much we both asked him to step off.” ...the fucking asshole. People need to stop making passes at Eren. It’s getting really fucking irritating.

“Ah alright, so this guy’s at fault.” The guard easily picked Nile’s stunned form from the floor, throwing him over his shoulder and dumping him outside of the venue.
Eren watched the guard leave with him and sighed quietly, his attention back to his wrist. *It’s already starting to bruise... Fuck, I hope it’s not broken.* Eren’s finger slowly ghosted over the forming bruise, hissing from pain when he pressed too hard.

Levi gingerly took his wrist, inspecting it. “I don't think he broke it. It’s just a bad bruise. You gonna be okay?” *I’m gonna need to really fucking watch for this sort of thing. I’m not letting you wander off.*

Eren nodded slowly. “Yeah, I’ll be okay.” Eren leaned down a bit and kissed Levi chastely on the lips. “Thank you.” Eren’s eyes were happy as he leaned forward to kiss Levi again, hopefully to get the other prying eyes to look away. *Hmm, hopefully this will get them to look elsewhere.*

...*Fuck it at this point.* Levi kissed him back feverishly for just a moment, deciding that everything was already odd enough to warrant it. *Maybe everyone will get the message and step off.* He still broke their kiss early, turning their attentions back to the stage and getting as close as they could.

Eren followed Levi closely until they got right to the front of the crowd, keeping his backend pressed against Levi so he wouldn’t be grabbed. *We’re literally right in front of the stage! He’s gonna be right in front of us!! Holy crap!* 

*We’re right in front! I'm surprised everyone let us pass them.* He shifted, feeling Eren’s ass pressed against his hips. *If that's what it takes to keep him from being groped, go right the hell ahead.* Levi smirked, his hands drifting to hold Eren’s hips possessively, waiting for the opening bands to finish their set.

*The opening bands were pretty good.* Eren smiled as he saw the stage crew starting to put up the set for Nate Ruess. “Levi how long do you think it’ll be?” He asked turning his head to look at him.

Levi thought for a moment. “...five minutes? Ten at most.” *It won’t be too long. I wonder what song he’ll open with...*

Eren waited patiently, excited once he started to hear the Introduction of Grand Romantic He hummed along, tapping his foot. *He’s coming out!! He’s coming out!!* Eren jumped up and down excitedly as Nate Ruess stepped out from behind the curtain singing ‘AhHa’, so of course Eren had to sing along with him.

Levi jumped with the beat, the energy Nate had instantly infectious. He moved against Eren,
feeling the bass in his chest and singing right along with the words, not even able to hear his own voice with the sound so loud. He’s right fucking there! He’s not even ten feet from us!!

Eren was having the best time of his life, he wasn’t panicking at all. This is so cool! Eren was so happy that he actually got to reach out and touch Nate’s hand as he kneeled down to touch a few people’s hands. He was so happy, singing song after song after song.

Nate ended ‘Slide,’ swaying as he took another drink from a red solo cup, going to the mic and holding onto it tightly, the audience quieting in an instant. “So, I never originally wanted to do a duet with Pink. She had written a wonderful song and I kinda liked it, but I didn’t think I was the right voice for it. She wouldn’t stop asking me to at least give it a shot, and I had walked into the recording studio singing something I just came up with in the car on the way there, because I had been listening to the radio and ‘We are Young’ had come on and I was so fucking sick of it at that point that I turned it off and just started thinking of random shit to sing so I was singing something and her expression let me know she was not going to let me get out of singing. We recorded it and it went alright, but the thing is, it’s a duet. I want to know if anyone wants to come up here and sing with me.” He grinned, licking his lips and scanning the now screaming crowd in the pits, more rushing into the back. He looked as near dead center a noirette was waving the arm of the smiling, embarrassed brunette in front of him. He looks thin enough to lift up here. “Come on up here, kid.” He knelt to the edge of the stage, helping him up onto the stage and leading him back to where another microphone had been placed next to his on the stage. He looked over to him, beaming. “What’s your name?”

Eren’s face was completely flushed, his whole body shaking in excitement. “E-Eren.” His voice stuttering from his adrenaline running through the roof. Holy shit, you’re gonna sing with him, calm the fuck down! Eren’s gaze landed back on Levi, seeing him smirk and his phone already out and recording the whole thing. Well I guess Lathe is gonna see this in the morning, wonderful.

“And how old are you, Eren?” Hope you don’t stutter like that too much. You gotta sing!

“I’m sixteen.” Eren smiled as he was able to calm his voice. He looked really hot standing there too, a feast for all eyes, and the girls were screaming for him too.

“You having fun, I hope?”

“Yeah, this is awesome, I’m having a lot of fun!” Eren seemed to brighten more as Nate continued to talk to him. His voice sounded throughout the whole venue, sounding like an angel’s.

I get the feeling you’re gonna do just fine. An easy look came over Nate’s face. “Well Eren, I think
you’re about to have even more fun. Would you do me the honor of singing the part of Pink in ‘Just Give Me a Reason?’”

Eren’s eyes widened. “Really? I get to sing it with you?” Eren asked and he looked absolutely adorable as he asked that question even though he was already onstage. *Oh my god is this really happening?*

“Hell yeah! You ready?” He nodded to the pianist behind them, the room immediately going silent as the first few chords thrummed through the speakers.

“**Right from the start**

You were a thief

You stole my heart

And I your willing victim

I let you see the parts of me

That weren't all that pretty

And with every touch you fixed them”

Nate turned from the mic, shouting to the backstage crews, still audible to the crowd. “**Someone get this kid a record deal!**” *He’s fucking amazing! I should be listening to you on stage!*

Eren blushed as he heard Nate’s words, but continued to sing the rest of Pink’s part beautifully, the crowd going completely wild.

“**Now you've been talking in your sleep, oh, oh**

Things you never say to me, oh, oh

Tell me that you've had enough

Of our love, our love…”

_Fuck waiting, I wanna sing with him._ Nate joined Eren in the refrain, smiling wide.
“Just give me a reason
Just a little bit’s enough
Just a second we’re not broken just bent
And we can learn to love again
It’s in the stars
It’s been written in the scars on our hearts
We’re not broken just bent
And we can learn to love again”

“I’m sorry I don’t understand
Where all of this is coming from
I thought that we were fine
Oh, we had everything
Your head is running wild again
My dear we still have everythin’
And it’s all in your mind
Yeah, but this is happenin’”

“You’ve been havin’ real bad dreams, oh, oh
You used to lie so close to me, oh, oh
There’s nothing more than empty sheets
Between our love, our love
Oh, our love, our love”

“Just give me a reason
Just a little bit’s enough
Just a second we’re not broken just bent
And we can learn to love again
I never stopped

You're still written in the scars on my heart

You're not broken just bent

And we can learn to love again”

“Oh, tear ducts and rust

I'll fix it for us

We're collecting dust

But our love's enough

You're holding it in

You're pouring a drink

No nothing is as bad as it seems

We'll come clean”

How the fuck did he hit that note?! I can’t hit that note! HOW?!

“Just give me a reason

Just a little bit's enough

Just a second we're not broken just bent

And we can learn to love again

It's in the stars

It's been written in the scars on our hearts

That we're not broken just bent

And we can learn to love again”

“Just give me a reason

Just a little bit's enough

Just a second we're not broken just bent
And we can learn to love again

It's in the stars

It's been written in the scars on our hearts

That we're not broken just bent

And we can learn to love again”

“Oh, we can learn to love again

Oh, we can learn to love again

Oh, oh, that we're not broken just bent

And we can learn to love again”

Eren took in a deep breath as they both finished the song without incident. *Holy shit, I just did that!* Eren looked over at Levi, who had an actual smile on his face as he recorded the whole thing.

Nate just looked at Eren as the audience exploded with applause. *Holy fuck.* He took a step closer to Eren so he could hear him. “After the show, do you think you could come backstage? I want to talk to you.” He grinned as Eren nodded. “Cool. You with anyone? I'll get you passes.”

“Yeah, with the guy who was raising my hand before, he’ll be standing with me.” He said and smiled, his whole face completely flushed. “Did I do okay?” He asked after and he seemed genuinely concerned that he would’ve sang horribly. *I hope that was okay, I really don’t want to tarnish his image in the least.*

*Are you serious?* “Eren, I'm pretty sure you did better than me.” He shouted over to the crews again. “Can we have two backstage passes please? Do we have those?” He watched his guitarist take them from a stagehand and bring them over, taking them and giving them to Eren. “That voice of yours is going to get you places, Eren. Thank you so much.” He beamed.

Eren smiled even more. “Thank you, Mr. Ruess.” Eren said bashfully, clutching the back stage passes as he headed towards the edge of the stage to slide back down to Levi’s side, his eyes filled with happiness. “Levi, that really just happened, OMG!” Eren slipped down and hugged Levi close. *Holy crap, that really just happened!*

Levi grinned, returning Eren’s tight hug. *That was fucking amazing!* “Eren, you were great! You
sang beautifully! You're so lucky! And he gave you passes backstage! I can't believe it!” I can't fucking wait to tell Lathe all of this!

“He said he wanted to talk to me after the concert…. Is that okay?” He asked, reclaiming his place against Levi as Nate began to sing again.

Levi pulled Eren close to him possessively, a small smile still on his face, his eyes bright. “Who the hell would I think I am to tell you no? Of fucking course! It’s Nate Ruess! It can only be good!” You are so fucking lucky.

Eren blushed and smiled happily as Levi wrapped his arms around him. The concert lasted a long time; some people had started to shuffle out around 11pm. Eren waited excitedly for them to go back stage. I wanna see what he wants to say to me… I'm really curious…. What could it be?

Levi watched as Nate finished his second round of encores, disappearing off the stage for good. I wonder what he wanted to talk to Eren about. We'll just have to see. He kept one arm wrapped around Eren’s waist after Nate walked off, nudging him gently in the direction of a door to the right of the stage, guarded by two members of security. “Come on, let’s go say hi to Nate. Get out the passes so they let us through.” Levi smirked. That really was the greatest thing that could have possibly happened.

Eren took out the passes, his hands shaking in nervousness as he did so. Shit, I need to calm down, I need to calm down… Levi help, I need to calm down dammit!

Levi took the passes from Eren’s shaking hands, tossing one of the two lanyards over Eren’s head, then bringing one around his own neck. He’s shaking with nerves… Levi rubbed Eren’s side with his thumb, sending him a reassuring look. “You don't have to freak out. I can only think that whatever Nate wanted to tell you is something good. Who knows what he has to tell you? But you did fabulously on stage, you know. Maybe it’s something about that. We’ll have to find out.” He lifted the tag on his lanyard to show to the guards, recognition crossing their faces as they saw Eren, moving to let them pass. He slowly guided Eren into the busy, dim halls of backstage, people running around with headsets and drapes of wires and binders of papers.

Eren held onto Levi with a shaking hand. One of the people running around spotted them and took them back towards a smaller room, where Nate was waiting for them. It’s okay Eren, don’t freak out, Levi’s here… Yeah but this is Nate Ruess we’re talking about- that is freak-out worthy!

Nate grinned when he saw Eren, getting up off a stool and moving to greet them. “Hey, Eren! I'm glad you could come back. I need to tell you something very real. Your voice,” Nate Ruess
sounded absolutely sure of his words. “...is going to get you places. I know it. You sang your half of the duet better than I did. If it’s cool, I’m going to talk to my producer, see if I can get you a contract if you're interested. He’d need a video of you singing though, so… I'll just give you my number.” He patted his pockets for nonexistent paper, then just reached out his hand. “Can I borrow your phone for a sec?”

Eren nodded hurriedly. He fished his phone out of his pockets, fumbling with the passcode a few times before handing him the phone with a blank contact space. Is this really happening? Like really? Levi I swear to god if this is a dream I don't know what I'm gonna do.

“Thanks.” Nate turned it sideways and tapped quickly, putting in his name and number. He handed it back to him. “Cool. If you could at some point send me a video of you singing- preferably with the best microphone you have on hand- I'll pass it on and see if I can get you a contract with someone. Alright?” He grinned easily. He'd definitely interest someone.

Eren could only stare. He's serious... I can’t believe it... He thinks I can sing that well? Eren looked down at his phone in disbelief, still unable to really process just what Nate was saying. Earth to Eren, he's talking to you! Eren swallowed hard, opening his mouth, but finding himself at a loss for words. He nodded and looked over to Levi with wide eyes, as if asking him if this was really happening.

This is really happening. Levi’s arm tightened around Eren’s waist, practically beaming. His grey eyes were bright as they met Eren’s viridian ones. Holy fuck this is happening! I don't know how today went from creepy waiters to this, but it's all real!

Eren watched his reaction for a few seconds, quietly shifting his gaze in between the two of them. So does this mean I can trust him? Can I really trust him to do everything he says? Eren’s trust issues were quickly resurfacing as he pressed against Levi’s side.

He doesn’t look like he believes this is all happening. Or trusts me to do it. Either. “I'm serious, Eren. You've got talent and I don't want it to go to waste. I'll do what I can to get you started.” Nate shifted his gaze to Levi, addressing him. “I'm sorry, I never got your name?”

“Levi.”

“Well Levi, do me a favor and make sure Eren gets around to sending me a video, cool?” His eyes were amused, looking between the two. When they both nodded, he beamed. “Alright. I'll talk to you guys later, maybe? There's still a ton of stuff we all have to do to clean up.”
Eren nodded and his shaking hand still had not left Levi’s shirt at all, he stared down at the phone with Nate’s contact information on it, his cellphone and email… did this really just happen? Or am I dreaming? “O-Okay.” Eren stuttered and his face flushed all the way to his ears.

“Thank you so much! Really, it’s a great thing, what you’ve just promised to do for Eren.” Levi spoke softly, his voice heavy with gratefulness. He rubbed Eren’s side, reassuring him. This just happened.

Eren’s eyes still held disbelief. Can I really trust him? Levi must think I can… But I don’t understand. I can’t sing that well… do I? Grisha always said I had a horrible voice. What will Dad think? I don’t have any recording equipment or anything to even attempt to try this. Eren looked down at his hands, hiding his face, swallowing hard as he tried not to scratch at his wrists again. He was so nervous about this. And Nate probably fucking knows that I’m a freak…. Gaeh, I want to scratch, Levi, I don’t know what to do.

“It’s all up to you whether or not you go through with this. I think you could get a contract. Easily. But if it freaks you out, you don’t have to send me anything by tomorrow, say. That’s not how this works. Whenever you want, send me something. Or not.” He raised his hands in surrender. “Either way, it’s your call. But I’d give it a shot.” He smiled. “I’ll talk to you later, alright? I shouldn’t keep you any longer. It’s late as fuck.”

Eren looked up to him. “I… I don’t have a microphone or any recording equipment at home.” His voice was quiet, his hand still clutching onto Levi’s shirt.

Levi spoke before Nate could. “I’m pretty sure Lathe could either dig something out of that office of his, or get you something new. With that voice, you were bound to want or need one at some point anyway.” He smiled. I know Lathe would have no problems spoiling you with the best recording equipment you wanted.

Eren thought about it and nodded. “Okay, that sounds good.” Eren nodded and leaned against Levi’s side. It's really late, and I'm exhausted. I hope Levi’s okay to drive. It's probably freezing outside too… Great.

“Alright, we’ll get going. Thank you again, so much.” Levi gently tugged Eren to the door. You’re exhausted. Let’s get home. They walked back through the halls, past the stage and to the coat check, Levi paying the man and helping a very sleepy Eren put his coat on and wrap his scarf around his neck. He put on his own before they walked outside, the air cold as ice. Fuck it’s cold. He kept one arm securely wrapped around Eren’s waist, opening the car door for him after their ten-minute walk and hopping into the driver’s seat, immediately starting up the heater.
Eren looked at his hands. *They’re frozen again.* “Levi, I can’t feel my fingers…” He trailed off as he flexed them, touching his own fingers and feeling nothing but numbness. *That can’t be good.*

Levi, about to pull from the curb, put the car back in park in an instant. He reached over for Eren’s hands, rubbing them to try and warm them up. *Your hands literally feel like they’re frozen.* He waited until they didn’t feel like ice, running his thumbs over the knuckles and kissing the top before letting them go, returning to pulling from the curb, setting off in the direction of home. He grew more and more curious about the silence of the car, accustomed to Eren’s usual singing or chitchat. *He’s probably just thinking about everything that’s happened. A lot has gone down in not too much time.* He pulled into the driveway a half hour later, looking over to Eren. … *Aaaand he’s out. He’s not gonna wake up, is he. I need to carry him.* Ugh. Levi opened the door and closed it as quietly as he could, going around to unbuckle Eren and lift him from the seat. He hip-checked the door shut, keys in hand as he approached the front door, about to try and open it when Lathe opened it for them, smiling fondly at Eren asleep in Levi’s arms.

“I take it everything went well?” Lathe stepped aside to let them enter, closing the door behind him and leading them to the door to the basement. He kept his voice down, wanting to let Eren sleep. *That’s the most adorable thing I’ve ever seen.*

“I’ll tell you about it later. Right now I’m tired, and Eren is getting heavy.” Levi stepped down the first step, turning to look at Lathe over his shoulder. “I need to talk to you in the morning, cool? A lot of stuff went down. And thanks for letting me borrow the car.” He gave him a small smile, turning to watch his feet as he picked his way down the basement stairs.

“Of course. G’night.” Lathe shut the door behind them, padding upstairs to his own room, stretching his arms over his head with a yawn. *It’s half past midnight. I need sleep.*

Levi walked over to the bed, setting Eren gently down. He went to unlace his boots, placing them on the floor at the foot of the bed. He slid him out of his jacket and unwound the scarf from his neck, pulling his hoodie over his head and unbuttoning and pulling off his jeans, leaving him in his shirt and boxers. He didn’t even stir. *He’s out cold.* Levi himself stripped to his shirt and boxers, sliding under the covers next to him, wrapping around him.

Eren curled up to the warmth, his body was still oddly cold, especially his hands. The boy hadn’t moved besides getting closer to Levi, and he slept like that the whole night, not moving at all. He didn’t even wake up first, and didn’t even move when Levi slid out from under him in the morning.

Levi untangled himself from Eren, trying not to wake him. He stood and looked at Eren for a moment, smiling gently. *I’ll let him sleep.* He walked over to his side of the bed, pressing a kiss to
his forehead and walking to the stairs. He closed the door quietly behind him, padding to the kitchen where Lathe was skimming through a book, coffee of course in hand.

Lathe looked up, placing his chocolate coffee on the table and closing his book, turning to Levi. “You wanted to talk to me?”

Levi nodded going to fill the kettle with water to get tea ready. “Yeah…. We need to get Eren some good recording software, along with a really good microphone.” Levi sat down at the table to wait for the water to heat up.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him. “What are you getting on about? Why the sudden interest?”

“Well, after getting hit on by two creepy ass guys, and I’m pretty sure Eren broke the second guy’s nose… ‘Cause he was on the floor before I could touch him… we got pretty close to the stage and Nate Ruess ended up singing that duet he did with Pink… And long story short, Eren was pretty much picked up and he got to sing it with him… So now Nate wants Eren to send him a good video of him singing so that he can talk to his producer about it.” Levi got up when the kettle whistles and began to pour it into his mug quickly.

Lathe was deathly silent, his eyes wide. He looked at Levi, then over the floor. What. The. Fuck. “...are you serious?”

“Completely.” Levi said and sat back down with his mug filled with tea. “You wanna see?” Levi was already fishing for his phone in his pocket. He’ll probably wanna see this. I don’t know if he knew Eren could hit that high note.

Lathe watched the video with wide eyes, his gaze impossibly intense. That’s… that’s Eren on stage. And he sounds amazing! He can hit a note that high?! He watched as he was handed backstage passes, the crowd absolutely wild. “You two got to go backstage and meet Nate Ruess??” Lathe looked ecstatic. That’s the greatest thing ever!

Levi nodded. “Yeah, so Eren’s gotta get recording things to send to Nate, he gave him his number, so he can send it to him. He said to use the best mic he had available to him.” So I take it Lathe’s on board with this already?

Lathe looked up at him, then off in thought. “Well, the only mics I have are attached to headphones I bought years ago… It’s a good thing amazon exists!” He grinned. He’s getting whatever he
needs. Or wants. Both. We haven’t really been using Sue’s old room anyway...

“Hmm, you’re going to spoil him rotten again aren’t you?” He asks quietly before sipping at his drink. Wonder how much he’s gonna get him this time.

“Oh yeah.” Lathe grinned, picking up his mug. “Can I go stalk the internet for microphones and stuff now?”

“Am I allowed to join you? Also you should probably make cinnamon rolls, it’ll get you back in the basement quicker, I’ve learned.” Levi smirked as he set his cup down.

Lathe put down his mug, standing. “That’s a great idea! Cinnamon rolls! And then we can go on the internets!” Lathe rifled through the fridge for cinnamon rolls, and in less than half an hour they were eating rolls over Lathe’s laptop at the kitchen table, scrolling through amazon and reading description after description of microphone specs.

Eren had woken up alone on the air mattress downstairs. He groaned, looking around for his clothes. Did Levi bring me down here? I remember... falling asleep in the car? I don’t remember getting home. Eren found his pants and shimmied them on after he heard footsteps upstairs and smelled cinnamon rolls. “Ten points to Lathe.” So Eren wrapped himself in a blanket and came upstairs, rubbing his eyes at the bright light pouring into the house. Fuck it’s bright. I want cinnamon rolls though. Eren yawned as he walked to sink to get his nausea pill. “Mornin’” Eren yawned, taking the rest of the hot water to make his own tea.

“Good morning!” Lathe grinned, eyeing Eren’s bed head with amusement.

Levi smiled, getting up and wrapping his arms around Eren’s waist from behind, leaning his chin on his shoulder. “Good morning Eren.” I’m smiling more than I ever really have. Huh.

“What the hell, why are you guys so happy… It’s too fucking early… Levi, you’re smiling, you never fucking smile what the hell is up with you two?” He asked as he picked up a large roll, smiling as he took a first bite.

Levi stood on his toes, pressing a kiss to his cheek. “I just had a lot of fun yesterday. Last night was really nice. And you sang wonderfully and we met Nate Ruess… and you could really go somewhere with your voice. It was great!” So much has happened, and it was all wonderful. How can I not be happy?
“Levi, it wasn’t that good, and I don’t have any equipment to even make a video. I wouldn’t even know what song to pick!” Eren said pushing Levi away playfully with both his hands only to pull back his left wrist immediately. “Shit.” He whispered quietly, cradling his bruised wrist. Eren looked down at his wrist. I think it actually might be broken… Shit…

Lathe glanced over as Eren swore, noticing the way he gingerly held his wrist. Uh oh. He turned from the laptop to better face Eren, holding out his hand. “Eren, your wrist hurt? Can I see it?”

“Ah… Yeah.” Eren slowly and carefully held out his horribly colored wrist, he hadn’t noticed how much his wrist had swelled up, giving it an odd look around his thin limbs.

Lathe looked stunned and immensely worried, cradling Eren’s wrist and looking at it for barely a second before he stated, “It’s busted. To bruise and swell that badly, it’s not going to be an easily set break, either. Let me run and get changed. We’re going to get you to a doctor who can set that for you. You’ll be fine dressed the way you are, but have Levi help you with shoes and a hoodie. I’ll be two seconds.” Lathe let go of his wrist and got up to rush upstairs, changing quickly and grabbing for the car keys from the dresser… which were not there. Lathe froze, thinking. Oh. Right. Levi had them. He scampered down the stairs, looking for Levi.

Levi and Eren were in the front room, getting Eren into his boots, and he was now wearing a hoodie, though the boy didn’t look happy. “Is this really necessary?” He asked, quickly getting irritated, which led Blake to hop up onto the couch and calm him down. “It doesn’t really hurt that bad!” Eren persisted.

“Eren, it looks horrible. We need to get you to someone who can help.” Levi tied the laces tightly, moving to sit next to him on the couch, wrapping an arm around him. “I don’t know how you didn’t even notice it.” Seriously. How did you not notice? It looks ridiculously painful.

“Levi, it doesn’t hurt, really, I don’t want to go to the hospital to get it checked out, it doesn’t really bother me! Please! I don’t want to go!” Eren pouted, petting Blake with his right hand. I don’t want to go to get it set, because it’s probably too broken to set… I don’t want it to have another surgery… God no.

Lathe sat down on Eren’s left, looking at his wrist with extreme worry. “Eren, your wrist is busted very badly, probably dislocated, and I’m not about to let you go without at least a cast. Whether or not you feel it doesn’t matter. We need to get you to a doctor, now. Please. Let’s go.” He patted Eren’s knee, standing. “Levi, you have the keys?”
Levi reached into his pocket with his right hand, tossing him the keys. “Here.” He gently leaned over and gave Eren a peck on the lips, pulling him to his feet. “We just want you to be okay. It’ll be fine. We’ll bring Blake with us.” He let his arm slide from Eren’s waist, going to the kitchen to retrieve Blake’s vest, securing it in place. He took Blake’s leash in his right hand, immediately pulling Eren back against him with his left, feeling protective of him. “Come on, let’s go, okay?”

Let us make sure you’re okay.

Eren sighed, “Alright, fine, let’s get this over with.” Eren let them all pile into the car. Eren found himself in Levi’s lap, shivering from the outside cold air. Blake sat between Levi and Lathe, and the car ride was fairly quick to an Orthopedics Building about 15 minutes from their house. Which of course, when they entered, Lathe just had to know the lady at the front desk.

“Hey ‘Desce! That’s my son Eren and his boyfriend Levi. Eren busted his wrist and someone needs to check it out.”

She stared at Lathe with wide brown eyes, a dark brown lock of hair with the ends dyed purple falling into her face. She was deathly silent for a few seconds, her face neutral until she exclaimed “What?” ...You have a SON? Since when?!

“WHAT!? ” Eren’s eyes were wider than dinner plates. Did he just call me his son?! Is that really what he just fucking said!?

Lathe looked back to Eren, smiling mischievously. “What? You two are obviously together. I wouldn’t think it’d be a problem to say it.” He turned back to Iridesce. “I adopted Eren a few weeks ago. I thought I’d told you?”

She quirked an eyebrow, still shocked. “...You most certainly did not mention it in your Christmas card. I haven’t heard it from anyone. But that’s great!” She beamed, tucking her long hair behind her ear. “So Eren’s wrist is broken?”

Lathe’s smile dimmed, his mouth a serious line. “Shattered would probably be a better word for it. Most likely dislocated too. It needs at least to be set, or more if that’s not enough.” He leaned on the front counter, watching as Desce tapped quickly on her computer keyboard.

“Alright. I know you know what you’re talking about. I’ll see how soon we can get an x-ray done… I think we have a place in… less than an hour? Someone cancelled an appointment, and if everyone else was at least sort of on time, you’ll get in without too much of a wait.” She smiled. “You can have a seat over there. There’s a bunch of magazines everywhere, so you should be pretty occupied for a bit. If anything earlier comes up I’ll call you up first.”
“Thank you so much. Don’t I need to fill something out? I mean, Eren hasn’t been here before yet or anything.”

“Yeah, let me print out the forms you need.” She tapped on her keyboard, clicking away and handing him forms on a clipboard in no time. “Do you need a pen? Or do you still carry ten around with you?”

“I’ve got it.” He grinned, reaching into his coat pocket and ushering Eren and Levi into the waiting area. “Let’s sit down. It might be a while.”

Eren nodded and looked to Lathe as they sat down. “So why were you guys all happy go lucky this morning?” He asked, shifting his gaze over to Levi before reaching out to pet Blake and turning his focus to the dog. I couldn’t have sung that well… I don’t understand why Nate would even offer me something like that. I can’t even record anything. All I would be able to do would be a phone recording.

“Levi showed me the video of you singing with Nate Ruess onstage last night.” Lathe beamed at him. “You were so fabulous up there I can’t even tell you. It was seriously impressive. I heard that he’s going to try and get you a contract. That’s huge!” He split his attention between the papers in his lap and Eren. That… I can’t even begin to believe it!

“Lathe, I can’t really sing that well…. I can’t really…. I don’t know why he said that…” Eren trailed off, keeping his attention on Blake as he pet him. He looked around and he saw two young women sitting across the room from them, whispering and point at him. When the women noticed he was looking, they blushed and giggled. Why are they giggling and blushing? I don’t get it.... Eren watched as one of them came over to see him.

“You aren’t by any chance Eren? The guy who went and sang with Nate Ruess last night?” She asked quietly, her eyes full of hope.

“Uhh…. Yeah, I am…. Can I help you?” Eren asked, confusion clearly written across his face, his confusion furthering when the woman squealed and waved the other woman over.

“Could we get a picture with you? And maybe an autograph?”
Wait, what? Eren was at a loss at how to respond as the other woman came up to them. “Oh My Gosh! It’s really you! I can’t believe it!” The woman was so excited to even see him. Wait, are they serious right now? Eren looked over at Levi. What do I do?

Levi just nodded, his eyes bright. He’s famous already. That’s really cool. He nudged him, standing. “Go ahead- I’ll ask Desce for paper.” She should have enough to fork some over. He walked to the front desk.

Eren stood up and he got in between the two young ladies, who preceded to take pictures with him, mostly selfies, though they did ask Lathe to take a few pictures of them together. Blake was in those pictures, with his leash in Eren’s good hand. The women were smiling and excited the whole time, already voicing their plans to post the pictures of facebook. Facebook? What is that?

Levi came back from the desk and handed them two sheets of paper, Lathe letting Eren use the clipboard to sign his name.

Eren signed his name neatly on both sheets of paper and the ladies giggled happily giving him one last hug before they were called back for their appointment. Eren just watched from where he stood, completely stunned. “Um… what’s a facebook?” Eren asked innocently as he stood there. And what just happened? Do they think I’m a celebrity or something? If they do, they are sorely mistaken.

Lathe took back his clipboard, but had to consciously make an effort not to drop it at that question. ...HOW? “How… Facebook is this website where people put up photos of themselves and little snippets about their daily lives, and pretty much anyone can see what you put up on your profile, or ‘Wall,’ as it’s called.” I need to get you a PC you can actually use, dammit.

“So… they’re going to post those pictures of themselves with me…. And other people will be able to see it?” Eren asked and sat down as he tried to process everything that was currently happening. “But why would they want to post about me? And why did they ask for my signature?” He asked. Eren knew close to nothing on social norms or even what fangirls were… but he obviously had two already.

Levi looked at Eren incredulously. “You got up on stage last night and sang a kickass duet with Nate Ruess. They wanted your signature and a photo to post because they obviously attended the concert and loved your singing. That was a big thing that went down yesterday. You already have fans!” I just hope I don’t have to fight off too many fangirls in the times to come.

“Okay… but… is it already on this facebook? Did people post videos or pictures of me already?”
He asked quietly, Facebook was his only concern for right now… but what he really needed to worry about was Youtube and Twitter. Especially Nate Ruess’s twitter.

Levi already had his phone out, checking YouTube. Lathe got his out to check twitter. His eyes widened. “I typed in your first name and there are hundreds of results coming up. Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr… everything.” Holy Shit.

Levi looked up from his phone. “Someone from Nate’s crew got the whole thing on video and put it up… it’s got 2 million views and climbing.” Levi just stared at Eren in complete disbelief. …oh my god.

“Wait… WHAT? 2 million people have seen it!?!” Eren’s eyes were widened in shock. “And what is a twitter? And a youtube? You said a couple more, but what the hell are they?” Eren asked his eyes switching between the two of them to get answers from either of them.

Lathe started to rattle them off, counting on his fingers. “YouTube is a website where people post videos of all sorts of stuff, like music, home videos, anything, really. Instagram is this app where you post pictures of stuff from your day with captions explaining what’s going on. Tumblr… the pictures you post can be drawn or taken and pertain more to fandoms and followings of people. A fandom is the term for the fanbase of a specific thing, like a show or person. There are a few more, but those are the big ones. And you’re an absolute hit! The internet has officially gone cray.”

Ummm…. What? People are actually talking about me? Eren seemed at a loss for words… one of the technicians came to get him for an x-ray, pretty early, but things were going quickly, so the room was free. Eren stood quietly, Blake at his side.

“I’m sorry hun, but your dog needs to stay out here. If you need to bring someone with you, you can, but the dog can’t go in the x-ray room.” The old woman watched as Eren gave Lathe Blake’s leash and brought Levi back with him.

Eren followed quietly behind the woman, answering questions about the pain he was feeling so Eren told her honestly. “It’s just annoying when I put weight on it or pressure behind it, but besides that I didn’t even notice it.” I don’t think Lathe was right when he said it was shattered.

The old woman nodded and got his wrist ready for the x-rays, after putting the lead aprons on them. She wasn’t prepared for what she saw on the first picture. Eren’s wrist was dislocated, completely separated from the point it should’ve snugly fit into… and his wrist really was shattered. She sighed, going to reposition his wrist to get a few more pictures so she could get an accurate picture of all the pieces of shattered bones above the dislocation. The lady took the
pictures and moved them to his file, telling them to go back out to the waiting room. “You’re wrist is horribly dislocated, and the bones above your wrist are completely shattered, hun. You’re most likely gonna need surgery, and probably some pins.” She told them as she led them out of the room.

Lathe had finished the paperwork by the time they came back out to the waiting room, and was showing Desce the video of Eren singing on his phone. He looked up, immediately addressing them. “How bad is it?”

Eren looked down, his face was still pale as he cradled his shattered wrist, still distraught about the outcome.

“Well, you were right. It is shattered, and his wrist is completely dislocated… I don’t know how you can’t feel it Eren.” Levi shook his head as they reclaimed their seats.

Lathe winced, taking his phone back and stowing it in his pocket. “Desce, work your magic for me. Can you get us an appointment to fix up Eren’s wrist?”

“I’m already on it. There’s an opening later today. I’ll put this in as a procedure to be done as soon as possible.” She clicked twice, a grin cracking across her face. “Oh, you’re going to like this. Guess who’s open today?”

*Now what? “...who?”*

“Dr. Scott Octavian.”

“You’re joking.” Lathe’s eyebrows disappeared behind his black hair.

“I am not. He’s got nothin’ going on at around two this afternoon. I’ll put you in. That alright?”

“Oh, of course! I heard he decided to become a doctor, but I didn’t know what the specifics were.”

“He’s a surgeon.” Desce booked the appointment and looked up to Lathe’s worried face. “It’s a shattered wrist. I’d be shocked if they put a cast on it and left it. He’s at the hospital a couple miles
down the road, further south. You know the one?”

“Yeah.” Lathe pushed himself off the desk. “Thanks Desce. And someone needs to tell me these things. I thought that was what the whole Christmas card exchange was for.” Apparently that sort of stuff isn’t note-worthy. Apparently.

“...Just like how you didn’t mention you have a son now?”

Lathe blushed, glaring at her. ...Roasted. “It had been a month, Desce. It was a weird, intense, I-don’t-even-know month. But I probably should have mentioned that.”

A few hours later, the four of them had piled back into the car to head to the hospital where Eren’s appointment was. They were called into Dr. Octavian’s office a half hour before Eren was scheduled for surgery so he could talk with them about how the surgery would go.

Eren was nervous, gripping onto Blake’s leash as they walked through the white hallways. Why did I need to have surgery? Why? I don’t want to have them open my skin... It’ll bleed.... What if I bleed out? What happens if they can’t be fixed? Millions of thoughts were running through his head as they got closer to the doctor’s office. What happens if I can’t use it again? What happens if I can’t play the piano. Eren stopped in his tracks as the thought crossed his mind. No! That can’t happen! I need to be able to play piano! I can’t do this! I can’t! Eren was starting to freak out until Blake got hold of his good hand to bring him back to reality. I can’t do this Blake, I’m too scared! Eren took a few steps back from the direction they were heading, and Blake whined as he held Eren’s hand in his mouth still. No, I can’t do this Blake... Lathe I can’t do this... I don’t want to go into surgery.

Lathe turned as he heard Blake whine, taking in the panic on Eren’s face, flitting past his eyes. This isn’t going to go over easily. Lathe walked back to them, putting his hand on Eren’s shoulder and gently pulling him along, speaking softly. “You don’t have to worry, Eren. Scotty’s a great doctor and you’re going to come out of surgery as good as new. Swear it. Let’s just go to talk to him right now, and we’ll know exactly what’s going to happen and if there isn’t anything we can do to make this go smoothly, okay?”

Eren swallowed hard but nodded. He was quiet, sticking mostly to Lathe’s side since he knew that Lathe knew about what Grisha did to him in the basement. He knows... He can help... Lathe can help, he knows the doctor... Eren was struggling to calm himself as they entered the room and
Blake was still whining about it as they sat down.

They hadn’t been sitting for more than a minute waiting when a wiry man with light brown hair walked in, skimming over a paper on a clipboard and consciously avoiding the top of the doorframe. He looked up to them and grinned, beaming when he spotted Lathe. “Hello!” He put the papers on the counter, coming over to shake their hands, giving Lathe a fistbump. “I’m Doctor Scott Octavian, and you two must be Eren and Levi? Desce told me a bit about you two. It’s nice to meet you.” He looked to Lathe with a mock accusing look. “How dare you not tell me you had a son?”

“I’m sorry! Yeesh, it’s been a cray month, but yeah. That’s a thing. And you need to stop being taller than me.”

“Can’t do much about that, Lathe. Sorry.” I’m not really sorry. He smiled good-naturedly, returning to business. “Alright, so I was told Eren’s wrist was shattered. Could you tell me how that happened?” His looks softened as he addressed Eren.

“Ah, we were at a concert last night… And there was this guy… He grabbed my wrist and tried to get me away from Levi, and his grip kept getting tighter and I felt it snap, but I didn’t think it was shattered, ‘cause it didn’t hurt that much…. But I knocked him out and gave him a bloody nose for it.” Eren had to pet Blake to keep himself calm as he told Scott, and it was the first time Lathe knew what exactly happened too. Hmm, he deserved the bloody nose, he didn’t even have good pick up lines.

Levi reached his arm over Eren’s shoulders, trying to keep him calm. Please don’t freak out. Please don’t. We need to go through with all this and get you better.

Scott picked up on Eren’s discomfort and studied Blake for a moment, understanding. Ah. This isn’t going to be easy for anyone here, is it? “That would definitely do it, with a strong enough grip. I can’t really explain how you didn’t feel the pain from the bone breaking, though. I hope I can alleviate some concern; this is a very run-of-the-mill procedure you’re asking me to do. Plates and pins are definitely necessary, but there’s very little risk of complication. Recovery will be a breeze as long as you don’t rush it. You’d be in a cast for about six weeks, then after two more you would be 100% good to go. Do you have anything specific you want to ask me about how everything will go?”

“Do I need to be knocked out?” He asked and held onto Blake tightly as the dog jumped up into the chair to calm him down. If he does… I won’t be able to do this… I’ll have an attack… I can’t…. I don’t want to have another one.
“You do. We need to keep you from moving during the procedure and from feeling any discomfort or pain.” He looked to Lathe, who had a very worried look on his face. There’s something I don’t know… It’s not my business, though. Not in it’s entirety. “I’m sorry, but it’s necessary. And I can’t let you bring your dog into the room during surgery. It could compromise our ability to perform appropriately and the sterile environment.”

Eren’s grip tightened around Blake. The dog knew that Eren was gonna have an attack if this persisted so he was already clambering off of Eren’s lap and pulling the boy to the floor and getting ready to ground him. Nononononono…. I don’t want it out! I don’t want it out! Eren’s mind was in a complete wreck at the thought of being put under again. Blake had already started to ground Eren, a sure sign that this was not going well with Eren, and already starting to bring up painful memories. I don’t want it out!

Lathe leaned forward, about to go down with Eren and help him, but Levi was already there, cradling him and muttering in his ear. What could we do? His eyes widened as a thought crossed his mind. “What if I was there with him?” Lathe looked at Scott intensely, who had backed up to give Eren room. “I could be of use. And I could help keep him calm. He needs to have this done.”

Scott looked to Eren, to Levi, and back to Lathe. “It’d be a crime not to try and fix his arm. And we could use an extra set of hands. Alright. I’ll show you where you need to go and get properly dressed later. Right now, um…” He looked to Eren again. I don’t know how to properly deal with this… Um… I’ll just let Levi and their dog handle it, I guess…

Eren calmed down after a few minutes of Blake and Levi by his side. He seemed a little lethargic after his attack, but that was to be expected. I’ll be okay if Lathe’s with me… I won’t freak out if he’s there. Eren was soon taken by nurses to get dressed for his operation and was helped onto a stretcher, waiting to be called into the operating room.

Eren, though he was still out of it from his earlier attack, felt overcome with worry when a surgical team came to wheel him into the operating room. What are they doing? Where are we going? I don’t see Lathe and I want him to be here and he said he’d be here for me where is he… Eren felt one of the team tap his shoulder, looking up behind him to his left to see Lathe, grinning from behind a blue mask, wearing scrubs.

I didn’t bail, don’t worry. I’ve got you. Lathe kept pace with the rest of the team, acting as the Operating Room Nurse. When they entered the dark room and positioned Eren under spotlights, he saw fear bloom across Eren’s face again. He rested his hand on Eren’s arm. “You don’t have to worry about a thing, Eren. We’ll take good care of you.” He helped drape Eren and sterilize his arm. He watched as Scott spoke to the anesthesiologist, giving them permission to put in the IV. Lathe stepped to Eren’s other side for a moment, holding onto his hand. You’ll be fine. Out like a light before you can count to ten.
Eren barely felt the IV being inserted into his arm. His gaze was focused on Lathe for all but three seconds before his eyes started to close. *This stuff works quick*…. Eren was knocked out without incident for the whole 1 hour procedure.

Everything went off without a hitch. Lathe handed Scott everything he needed and called for, putting in metal plates and pins, reassembling Eren’s bones and stitching the wound back up. Eren was taken to a room where they waited for the anesthesia to wear off, Lathe getting out of his scrubs and sitting by his bed with Levi on the other side with Blake. They were both on their phones looking up recording stuff and debating their findings when Eren started waking up.

Eren’s eyes cracked open slowly. *Shit… What happened? My body feels like lead.* Eren looked up to the white ceiling and almost instantly started to freak out because he didn’t know where the hell he was, struggling to sit up. Blake jumped up on the bed and licked at his face to calm him down.

Lathe immediately put down his phone, taking hold of Eren’s right hand. “Eren don’t you worry, it’s Lathe, and you’re in the hospital. You just woke up, and the operation was a complete success. You don’t have to panic.” He rested his other hand on his shoulder, prepared to hold him down if needed. *You can’t move too much. The medicine is still working it’s way through your system and we can’t have you overdoing anything.*

Eren looked up at Lathe and around the room silently. He opened his mouth to try and speak, but his mouth was too dry to even get a few words out, so he opted to nod. He laid back down on the hospital bed and let Blake come and lay right up with him. *So my wrist is okay then?* Eren lifted his left arm to find it wrapped in a white cast. *Huh…. I would’ve picked green but oh well. I’m making him get me a pack of Sharpies then.*

*He could use water.* Lathe reached over to the bottle of water and the glass on the table next to them, filling it and handing it to him. “I didn’t know what color you’d want your cast, so I got you white. Easier to doodle on.” He gave him a mischievous grin.

Eren sipped at the glass and nodded. “Sharpies.” Eren croaked out before sipping more at the water. *I need sharpies to be able to do that Lathe… What will people think at school?* Eren looked over to Levi to see what he was doing, finding him engrossed in his phone. *What’s he doing?*

“I’ll get you plenty of Sharpies. As long as you let me help you decorate it.” He followed Eren’s gaze. *Riiight. We haven’t done much talking about recording stuffs.* “Earth to Levi, the bf’s awake.”
Levi put down his phone, giving him a small smile. “Sorry ‘bout that. We were both looking up microphones and such for you while you were still out. How’re you feeling?” *Hopefully not like shit.*

“ Weird.” Eren said quietly as he sipped at his water. “Why… Microphones?” He asked quietly. He had no idea what the two of them were doing. *Microphones? Why are they looking for microphones?*

“Remember meeting Nate Ruess last night?” Levi smirked. “Anything about sending him a recording sound familiar?”


Levi pulled out Eren’s phone from a bag next to him with Eren’s clothes in it, pulling up his contact and showing him. “Pretty sure.”

“That’s…. He gave me his phone number?” He asked in disbelief and he had a huge smile on his face. *That actually happened!! OMFG!*

*How do you not remember this? “Yeah, he did! He asked you to send him a sample of you singing and he’d try and get you a contract, get his producer interested.” Okay, he did seem pretty out of it and it is hard to believe. But it happened!*

Eren looked up to Lathe to see if Levi was actually telling the truth, because he couldn’t believe it. “I can’t sing that well though…” Eren said, his confusion clearly etched across his face. “And I don’t have any recording equipment…” Eren trailed off looking back at Levi. *Oh, that’s why he’s looking for microphones.*

“Yet.” Lathe grinned, picking his phone back up and handing it to Eren, the video of him singing onstage. “And you sang so unbelievably well last night! I think you could really do something with it. The recording stuff and your voice. You could make it into a career if you tried hard enough, I think. But do you hear yourself? You were better than Nate!"

“I was?” Eren asked and looked down at the phone and at the YouTube video that was from Nate’s channel. The video already had two and a half million views. “Is this really me?” He asked quietly and he pushed play and he was surprised by himself. *That’s me singing?*
Lathe watched Eren’s expression shift. “That’s really you.” *How can you not remember something like that?*

“How can you not remember something like that? Everyone was going absolutely wild! Nobody could believe their ears when you hit every single high note there was. It was really impressive!” Levi tapped on his phone, showing it to Lathe. “What about these specs?”

“Nice. Put it on the watch list.” *We’ll sort through the rest of our options with that later.* “So, since you’re awake, I think we can leave after we fill out paperwork. I’ll go see what I can find out about that, alright?” He stood, pushing the curtain aside and looking for a nurse.

Eren nodded looking over to Levi. “What kind of camera have you found?” He asked quietly. *I really want to try this. What song should I do?*

“There’s this camera called a Canon EOS Rebel T4i that has really good quality for taking still photos as well as video, which is good, and we’re probably going to need a couple extra memory cards, maybe, I dunno. But the microphone… there’s an Audio Technica AT2020 which looks pretty good, regarding the specs and reviews of it. And obviously as for headphones, you need a pair of Beats. And don’t try and say no to any of this.” He looked to Eren and stopped him before he could protest. “At least with the headphones, you love music so damn much you were bound to end up getting a pair eventually. The Studio ones are wireless… and this pattern with the white pixels on it looks so cool! Yep, it’s settled. You’re getting these. But the real thing we have to worry about is the computer. You hate Lathe’s laptop, so we need to get something with an operating system you can use.” He scrolled down, looking at the list of options.

Lathe came back, sighing and running a hand through his hair. “Ugh, I don’t like having to argue as to the mistakes on the damn bill. Half the time there’s so much wrong on it. Levi, remember we can always add more hard drive space and memory. If it has a damn good processor, it’s being considered.” He grinned, plopping back down next to Eren, smiling gently at him. “Whenever you’re ready to get up, you can change and we can get going.”

“I’m thinking a Cyberpower, or an Alienware. They’re both really really good.” He read further. “This Cyberpower has a better graphics card.”

“That one, then. I have a feeling you’ll want to use it for drawing and photography, too.” He looked back to Levi. “See if there’s a good printer on there, actually. I don’t have one. One with a big scanner.”
“HP Printers. Got it.” He typed quickly, handing it to him. “That good?”

“We don’t need the industrial one.” He tapped one next to it. “Better.” Well, I know what we’re doing with Sue’s old room now.

“Cool. We can finish checking stuff out later. But we should probably get going.” Levi stowed his phone in his pocket, reaching to the bag of Eren’s clothes. “Do you need help?” You still seem kinda loopy.

Eren nodded. Oh yeah, I don’t think I can do this myself. Eren was able to swing his legs over and the side of the hospital bed. “Yeah, please.” He said quietly, reaching for Levi’s shirt so he had something to grab when he stepped onto the cold floor. His legs shaking already. Holy shit, the anesthetic is… Holy shit! I can’t feel my legs… Eren was holding onto Levi trying not to let his knees buckle out from under him.

Levi caught Eren right away, lifting him back up to sit on the edge of the bed. “Oh my. Let’s just focus on getting your shirt back on for right now. He helped Eren shift and get the light blue cloak off, leaving him in just his boxers. He handed him his shirt.

Lathe smacked his forehead. “We’re in fucking hospital. Of course. Do you want me to wrap your back again, Eren?” Ugh, and I was about to let him go without them because I thought I didn’t have any to wrap him with. Well, he doesn’t need them as much as he used to, but still.

Eren looked down at his torso, now finally noticing that the wraps weren’t there. “Yeah…. When did they come off?” Eren asked. When did they….? I don’t remember taking them off either… What?

“The nurses who helped you get into that gown probably took them off for you. You were really out of it from your attack, and with the anesthesia, I’m not surprised your memory’s fuzzy. I'll see if I can't get you some. Hopefully they won’t tell me I'd need to pay a hundred bucks for it.” He muttered under his breath and walked behind the curtain again, looking for anyone who could get him some.

Levi reached into the bag and retrieved Eren’s jeans. “Let’s give this another shot.” Levi helped Eren put his feet through the legs of the jeans, reaching to hold him up so he could step down and finish getting them on.
Eren carefully stepped down, holding onto Levi as he knees buckled out from under him. “I still can’t feel my legs.” Eren’s voice was still a bit groggy, his arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders. But at least the jeans are back on… Are these my ass-hugging jeans? They feel tight...

Levi heaved Eren back onto the bed. 100 pounds of dead weight. Lovely. He reached back into the bag and knelt down to help Eren with his socks and the metal cap-toed boots, lacing them up tightly. He looked up as Lathe came back with three rolls of bandages.

“Look what I found. I passed Scott in the hall and he nicked me these. Two seconds and we should be good.” He worked quickly, going over some places with the wraps twice before hooking it off. “I don’t have scissors so we’re just going to go with it. You can put your shirt on now. I’ll take those stitches out next week, I’m thinking.”

Eren nodded and he was able to get the shirt over his head without any trouble. “So I can go now?” He asked quietly. He left the hospital band across his right wrist, not really minding that it was there. “I would like to go… But I still can’t feel my legs…” Eren told them and looked up to Lathe.

Lathe looked pointedly at Levi.

Levi sighed in mock exasperation. “Okay, here we go.” He carefully snaked his arms behind Eren’s back and under his knees, lifting him up and holding him close. He smirked at Eren’s reddening face. Dammit stop being cute.

“Cool.” Lathe stepped around them to grab Blake’s leash and the bag next to Levi’s chair, moving to hold the curtain open for the two of them.

Eren buried his red face into Levi’s neck, hanging onto Levi with his arms around his shoulders. “Thank you.” Eren whispered quietly to him and held on as they left the building and started to shiver as they stepped outside into the cold air. “It’s cold outside.” He whimpered and tried to press himself closer to Levi for warmth.

Lathe led them to the car, unlocking it and opening the passenger door for them. “Hop in and I’ll turn on the heater. It’s too cold for this…” He let Blake hop in and situate himself on the seat in the middle, going around to get behind the wheel and start it.

Eren shivered, his teeth chattering as he clung to Levi. I'm fucking freezing again. I need to get warm. “I’m cold..” Eren shivered and trembled in his arms. Levi I’m really cold, seriously, hurry
Levi quickly situated himself in the passenger seat, buckling the seatbelt and turning the heat on high the second the keys were in the ignition. He held Eren on his lap, his back pressed to his chest, tangling their legs and holding his hands, trying to rub some warmth into them. They feel like fucking icicles already. You really were not made for the cold in any way shape or form. Not good.

Eren pressed himself against Levi. So fucking cold. He shivered for a majority of the ride. Eren sighed as he felt the warmth against his chest. The warmth feels good.

Lathe pulled into a craft store a few minutes later, shutting off the car. “I’m just going to grab a bunch of Sharpies. I’ll only be a few minutes.” He left the keys in the ignition so the heater would keep running and walked in, scanning the signs above the aisles for Sharpies. He stopped dead as he looked down one aisle to his right, seeing the wall. He walked quickly over and saw a five foot stretch of wall covered entirely with cups and cups of individual sharpies in all colors. He picked one up, inspecting it. They’re the double-ended kind, with the ultra-fine tip... I want all of them. He looked around for a basket of some sort, walking down two aisles and picking out a plastic bin, filling it with three of each Sharpie from the wall. Everyone’s gonna think I’m insane. But whatevs. He walked to the front of the store and set the bin down on the counter, smiling at the very surprised cashier. “I’d like all these, please.” It took nearly ten minutes to scan everything before he could pay and traipse back to the car, putting the bag in the trunk and reclaiming his place in the driver’s seat, trying to close the door quietly when he saw Eren completely passed out in Levi’s arms, smiling. He resumed their trip back home, pulling into the driveway in a few minutes and shutting the car off. “I’ll get your door.” He hopped out, Blake’s leash in hand and opened their door.

Levi carefully shifted Eren in his arms, careful of his head as he lifted him out of the car. He followed Lathe as he opened the door to the house for them, toeing off his shoes on the mat. He spoke quietly. “I’m gonna take him downstairs again. Can you get the door?”

Lathe closed the door behind them, unclipping Blake’s leash and moving to the scripting room. “Of course.” He opened the door and turned on the stairwell light, letting them pass. He checked his bronze watch. “It’s about two right now. I’ll make us a late lunch if you’re hungry.”

“Sure, that’d work. Then we can figure out exactly what we’re getting him and where we’re going to put it in the house.” Levi disappeared down the stairs before reappearing with Eren’s boots and his pants. He set the boots by the door before going to get his sweatpants upstairs, disappearing downstairs again to put them on Eren, tucking him in the nest. Where he found all these pillows and blankets, I still have yet to know. Once he knew that Eren was comfortable, he came upstairs, pulling his phone out as he sat at the kitchen table going through the Amazon watch list.
Lathe’s laptop was still set up on the kitchen table, and he was scrolling through all the options they had added to the Amazon watch list. “We’re probably going to put all this stuff in Sue’s old room, which has pretty much just been there for a month. There’s a desk, of course. I'll need to see if I have another power strip for all the things we’d need to plug in. There’s a wireless set of headphones here which I like. The wired ones would just end up tangled in something.” He skimmed through the specs for the computer. “It has four USB things, which is good. He could use a hard drive, too, now that I think of it. I need paper or something to write this down. Eh, I'll just pick one from on here while I think of it.” Typing, and four more clicks. “That’s a good camera, that Canon one you have picked out. A tripod would be a good thing to have…” Two more clicks. “Cool mic.” He skimmed through the specs. “This is the most important bit. It looks pretty good. The only problem… Is that you picked the grey one when the chrome one looks way cooler.” He grinned. Another click. He leaned back and looked to Levi. “Did you find anything else you’d want to take into consideration? Or is that okay? You can keep looking on here while I cook if you want to.”

Levi nodded, skimming through more on Amazon. “Hmm… Should we get him some recording software? There seems to be some really good stuff to make good YouTube videos.”

“Is any of it from Adobe?”

“There’s two… But most of it’s not.”

“Adobe has really good stuff, and it’s all easy to learn. I'll sign in and look into it when my hands aren’t full.” Lathe was in the middle of making hot sandwiches, frying beef and onions.

“Alright, what we having?” *Smells good whatever it is.*

“I found some shaved beef in the fridge, and I'm frying that with onions and we can put it on bread for hot sandwiches. There’s mozzarella cheese too, if you want.”

“Sure, that works….. What kind of drawing tablet should we get him? You know he’s gonna want one sooner or later.”

“...oh what the hell was it called… It had a hella long name… I think it was a Wacom Cintiq… 22HD Drawing Tablet thingy… about 19” by 11” or something like that? See anything like that? I saw it not too long ago. I was pondering whether or not to get it.” Lathe sprinkled mozzarella on top of the meat and set a lid on it, waiting for it to melt.
"I got it… It says that it’s compatible with Microsoft processors, so I guess we’re going with that then?" Levi asked as he pulled up the expensive tablet and put it on the watch list.

"…that’s the question, actually. I think we’ll have it run Windows. I don’t think Eren’d want to mess with Linux or anything like that. But really any processor would work."

“That probably would be best.” Levi went through to make sure he was getting the best of the best. “This one is really expensive Lathe… Are you sure about it?” He looked at the price tag which doubled the price of the entire watch list.

“Go for it. Money's no object.” A flicker of sadness passed his eye, but Levi didn't catch it. “As long as he lets me borrow it sometime, we’re good.” He grinned.

“Alright. Then on the watch list it goes.” Levi said and he looked around Amazon a bit more. “Does he play anything besides the piano?” He asked quietly, looking back over to Lathe.

“Y’know, I don't know. I don't think so- he’s never mentioned any other instruments.” Lathe slid half the contents of the pan onto one slice of bread, the rest on another. I wonder if he’d want to learn another one. He handed Levi one of the sandwiches, sitting adjacent to him. I still have it downstairs… I wonder if he’d want me to teach him how to play it? It would be kinda neat… I think. At least, I think it would be neat…

Levi thanked him as he took his first bite. “So, since we’re remodeling Sue’s room, where are we gonna put the bed? He’s gonna want it out of that room, so it’s just free space… I mean he moved the table out of the center downstairs… So there’s a lotta space to move around.” Levi thought about how they would go about redoing the room. “Think he’s gonna wanna paint the walls?” He took another bite. Maybe Eren’ll want a YouTube to post all his music videos… And maybe he can do time lapses of him drawing… The camera can handle that.

“If he doesn't paint the walls, I will.” Lathe beamed. “He’s definitely gonna want to. And I’m not sure where the bed will go. We might just end up donating it.”

“You could probably throw it in his room, since we’ve been sleeping in his nest downstairs for the past three weeks.” Levi took another large bite of sandwich. “We might need to set up a YouTube and Twitter for him, maybe even a Facebook while we’re at it.” Levi rattled off the things Eren would need to get himself out there in the world.
Lathe was content to just listen, though he barely touched his sandwich. “He’s definitely going to need social media accounts with all this attention he’s getting. While he’s still a big topic we should get him up and out there.” The sooner the better, with everyone talking about him.

“I can do that once we have his computer… So when he wakes up should we make sure he likes everything?” He took another bite of his sandwich. Why isn’t he eating?

“Yeah, we should make sure he likes the colors, the styles, etcetera. Until then, just leave them on the watch list.” Lathe’s eyes wandered over the table. He should like what he’s getting.

So… How do get a recording from the camera to the computer? Eren asked Lathe again as they set up the camera, just to make sure he was going to do this right. I have all the paint I need to this right? Eren looked over at the various different cans of paint colors and brushes.

Lathe smiled, pointing to the cord connecting to the computer. “The camera is connected to the computer here with USB. When you hit record, this program,” He pointed to the program running up on the screen. “Will understand that you want to record and save it under the title ‘Wall Painting Time Lapse’ which you can always rename later, too. When you're done you can just hit the red button again, and the entire thing will come up here, ready to edit. Easy.”

“Okay that’s easy enough… Thanks for going to get the paint earlier, I’m gonna start it soon, so I’ll be down for dinner when I’m done.” Eren smiled and started to open quite a few cans of dark green paint.

Alright. Don't make me drag you down for dinner, even if you're still not done. Have fun.” Lathe beamed, walking over and closing the door behind him. I wonder what he’s gonna do with all that free space on the walls… I'll see soon enough.

Eren smiled and started to record on the camera. He took 7 hours to paint a beautiful scene of a small stream running over rocks in a colorful forest. He had also used glow paint in the flowers so that they would flow in the nights, and the detail was incredible as he smiled back at the camera and finished the recording. Well I finished before dinner, I better wash my hands before I touch anything else. Eren then scampered off to go and wash his hands. “It’s Finished!” Eren yelled down the stairs on his way to the bathroom.
Lathe looked over his shoulder, setting down his potholders and noting the time left on the oven. *Two minutes. I want to see it! It's done!* He scurried over to and up the stairs, coming into the room, careful not to touch the walls. His jaw dropped. *Oh. My God.* He walked up close to the far long wall, studying the detail of a flower. *He got so much detail in... it took him seven full hours to do all this.*

Levi had been at the kitchen table, following Lathe up the stairs with curiosity. His eyes went impossibly wide at the beautiful scene that ran the length of three walls. *...it’s amazing. It looks so pretty, and there’s so much detail...* Levi slowly walked the length of the painting. *Oh my God.* 

Eren, you have some **serious** talent.

Eren came back into the room seeing them look around the three walls. “So what do you think?” Eren asked them and smiled. “What other rooms am I gonna do after this?” He asked in a sarcastic tone thinking this would be the only room he was actually do this to. *Surely Lathe won’t let me paint anywhere else, but that would be cool, I could do something different in other rooms, put you in another part of the world.*

*“Y’know, I was thinking the hall could use some sprucing up. Or if you wanted to you could try doing metal and gears on the ceiling in my room.”* Lathe had his hand on his chin as he studied the wall, seriously considering it. “I wonder if the staircase would look good like a desert or a sandstormy thing...”

Eren looked at him with wide eyes. “Are you serious?” Eren asked him quietly, his eyes gave away his disbelief. *I didn't think he would consider it.*

“Now I really want a sandstorm somewhere.” He looked over to Eren. “Oh, I'm dead serious. That’d actually be the neatest thing if you wanted to paint the house different things like this. Desert scenes, fields, rain, I don't know. Anything! But if you want to and they turn out half as good as this,” He spread his arms wide, beaming at the impressive mural. “Go right ahead.” *You really did do an amazing job. I love it!* 

“O-okay.” Eren blushed and raced out of the room when the oven chimed signalling dinner was ready. “FOOD!!” Eren screamed as he ran down the stairs, going to take his nausea pill.

*Oh my.* Lathe went after him, going to reclaim his oven mitts and take the pot roast out of the oven, setting it on the stove next to a pot of mashed potatoes. He had the table set in a minute, handing Eren and Levi a plate and a mug of tea, sitting down with his own. *I wonder if I can actually get him to do the ceiling. That would be the greatest thing in the history of ever.*
Eren loaded his plate, happy with the food Lathe had made. “Pot Roast!” Eren’s voice was full of excitement. He sat down at his spot and he looked like the happiest teen in the world. He had paint smeared all over his forehead too.

...did he not notice in the mirror? Lathe tried to suppress a chuckle as he watched Eren dig into his food, having been taught over the past week how to use a knife.

Levi smiled at Eren’s enthusiasm, quirking an eyebrow at the paint on his face. He nudged his feet under the table, amused. Stop being so cute. ...Wait, actually, please don’t.

Eren dug into his food and smiled happily. “I think I figured out what song I want to send to Nate.” Eren announced and looked up to see if the two of them would show any emotions on their faces. I wonder what they’re thinking.

...this is gonna be good. “Which one?” Lathe looked to him with interest, curious. Levi’s expression mirrored his.

“Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen.”

Lathe had to make a conscious effort not to drop his fork in surprise, his eyes wide. “That’s a really difficult song. Your voice is going to go all over the place; recording it right, you’d have to do it four times over to get the individual pitches in. Though, I think you could do it. And it’d sound amazing if you did it right. If you're up to it, that’s a great choice.” It’d sound fabulous- every executive out there would be fighting to snatch you up hearing it.

Eren nodded. “Would you be able to help me get the pitches recorded smoothly on top of each other?” He picked up another fork full of food, smiling wide.

“Of course! It’ll be easy enough to do from a technical standpoint, putting the recordings on top of each other, which I’ll make sure you know how to do too, for later. And I’ll help you figure out how high or low you need to sing specific parts of the song, if that’s what you mean.” That’s a thing that needs doing. It'll be simple, most likely. Hopefully.

Eren smiled, finishing off his plate, and started to do the dishes.
It took four days to get the video of Eren singing perfectly aligned so it sounded perfect. His voice was close to rivaling Freddy Mercury’s by the end of editing the video and he didn’t use anything to mess with his voice at all. So there Eren sat, in front of his computer about to upload the video onto YouTube. “Lathe… Does it really sound okay? We don’t need to edit it anymore?” He asked worriedly. *I don’t want it to be horrible and then Nate will think I’m complete trash.*

“We’re done editing it and Eren, it sounds too perfect. It can’t get any better. Really.” He beamed, running a hand through his black hair.

“O-okay.” Eren stuttered for a second before he started to upload the file and titled it: Eren Yeager: Bohemian Rhapsody Cover. “How long is it gonna take to upload?” Eren asked curiously since he hadn’t uploaded a video onto his YouTube account yet since Lathe had not finished recording all his piano music yet for the time lapse.

“I heard it takes a couple hours. This is a good computer, sooo… Four? Ish? It'll be awhile for rendering the video.” They had recorded video of Eren singing the individual parts, the screen split in four so you could see him as he sang in the four individual pitches. *It turned out great! This is going to drive the Internet crazy, I think. Everyone's still waiting to see him.*

Three and a half hours later the video was posted onto his account. Eren was nervously staring at his phone.

~Hi Mr. Ruess, it's Eren

-It’s Nate, Eren. And hi!

~ So… I kinda made a YouTube account and posted the video on there, is that okay?

-Does it have the video of you actually singing?

~ Yeah, that’s all it is...

-Okay I didn't know if you'd just have a random clip art or what but that's great! What’s the link? Or actually, what's your username?

~ Eren_Yeager

- Cool I'll look it up gimme a minute

-YOU DID BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY!?!?!?!??!

-YOU /NAILED/ IT OH MY GOD
~ That’s good… Right?

-Everyone I know is going to be tripping over themselves trying to get a contract to you first that’s how good it is

~ Do you need another one? Or… Is that one okay for right now?

-I’d say you're good for right this moment as for me and what I'm doing for you over here but you should probably think about other songs to cover and put up

-Start up and keep up a good YouTube profile

~ Okay, I will, umm… Should I text you again when I post something? Or are you just going to follow me on YouTube… Or whatever you do on that site.

-I'm officially your third subscriber. But I'm gonna text you every time I see you put something up probably and just gush about how great it is FYI

~ You really don't have to push yourself for that…. And I have 3? Already? I just uploaded that video like 5 minutes ago...

-I need to tweet about this hold on

~ I got a Twitter too

-YAS is it the same username or what

~ No underscore

-Cool I just tagged you

~ What’s a tag?

-It means when I wrote my tweet I specifically mentioned your profile, and people could click on your name and go to your profile

-I also put in the link to the video so you're about to get a lot of views

~Wait… You can do that? Sorry, i’m new to the tech scene… I have no idea what the hell I’m doing.

-That's totally okay and yeah, you can do that! Seriously, I’d give this ten minutes to really start to explode

-People still will not shut up about how fabulous you were at the concert and I understand their enthusiasm

~ it was weird… I had two women come up to me and ask for pictures and an autograph at the Orthopedic center.

-Already being swarmed by fans. And what you doin’ at an Orthopedic place?

~ Ah… Yeah… There was this guy at your concert… And he wouldn’t let go of my wrist.
~ He ended up shattering a part of my arm, and dislocated my wrist…

~ I knocked him out though, and gave him a bloody nose.

~ *sends picture of decked out cast*

-Please tell me you broke his nose that’s fucking terrible I'm really sorry

~ I think I did… I felt something move under my fist… And he was bleeding pretty badly before the security guy came and dragged him out.

~ And it’s not like you did anything wrong… My bones are just easy to break I guess.

-Did all this shit occur before you came onstage or am I blind

-By the way that is the coolest looking cast I've ever seen

~ No it was before, and thank you for pulling me up by my good hand.

~Thanks! Me and my Dad did it!

-An artist /and/ a singer! Next thing you tell me is you have a book on the bestseller list

~ Oh no, I’m not a big writer but you see the forestry thing behind me in the videos?

-Yeah you get a green screen or something? It's really cool

~ I painted that.

-...You've got to be fucking kidding you painted that?!

~ yeah, my Dad isn’t finished recording the piano music that we’re going to put in the video, but I’m putting up a time lapse of it.

~The video will be at least an hour long.

-How long did all that take? Must've been ages and ages. And your Dad plays the piano? Does he write stuff or just do covers

~ Seven hours… I did it a few days ago, looks pretty cool huh? I’ll need to send you a picture of my Dad’s Study’s ceiling.

~ He does both, let me get a picture hold on.

~ *Sends picture of Galaxy ceiling*

-That is the coolest thing ever. And seven hours is a really long time

~ Nah, it’s not that long… It takes longer to do a ceiling… I’m working on my Dad’s bedroom ceiling, but it’s just outlines right now, since I was recording the past few days.

-So you're just taking over the entire house with paintings

~ Yup, and I got actual drawings hanging up too. Mostly in my room too… Mostly Levi. :P
-I completely approve. Just take over the entire house with paintings and drawings

~ Oh! You wanna see my favorite?

-Yes you need to show me

~ *sends picture of Levi’s shirtless abs, from the beginning of Christmas Break*

-It looks like you took an actual picture and didn't even draw it that is amazing

~Thank you! Oh and I meant to ask you… Do you mind if I tinker with a few of your songs?

-Like the ones from fun. Or just my stuff from Grand Romantic

~ Both

-the songs from fun. I'd need to talk to the whole crew about, so I dunno but you can go right ahead with messing with Grand Romantic songs

-But like what would you do with them mess with the lyrics mostly or the music

~ No the pitch and the pace mostly… I want to slow a few down and play them on piano and put them in a higher pitch.

-That's what YouTube is for! As long as you're not trying to sell them or anything you're good

~ No… I would never! That would be like blasphemy to me!

-Lol good no blaspheming here! But yeah it'd be cool to see you cover my songs you'd do a wonderful job of it

~Awesome! Could you see what the video’s at now? I’m not in the computer room, and I’m tired as all hell, so I don’t want to climb two flights of stairs.

-Let’s see, at the fifteen minute mark, ten thousand views and climbing by the hundreds.

-Wait like an hour and check it'll have at least a million guaranteed

~You really think so? People don’t really know that I’m the guy who sang with you though….

-That's why I tweeted it I literally said ‘We found the guy who sang at my concert! He sings like a pro and he just got a YouTube! Check him out as Eren_Yeager @ErenYeager!’

~ Oh… Thank you, also can you thank the guy in your crew who posted the video? Of me on stage with you?

-Eren he got raises for days so he’s good, and I'll pass that along

~ Oh cool. I’d love to sing with you again :D It was REALLY cool

-The next time I don't have twenty things happening in one day I'm taking you up on that
because that was legit the most fun I've ever had performing

~ Alright, I gotta go, Levi’s pulling me to go to sleep… So Good Night Nate!

-‘Night Eren! Say hi to Levi for me

Eren smiled as he turned his phone off for the night, curling up to Levi’s side. “Nate says ‘Hi.’
And he thinks that I’ll have a million views in an hour…” Eren murmured sleepily against Levi’s
chest. That's awesome… He thinks it sounds great.

Levi wrapped his arms around Eren, one hand carding through his hair. He hummed in assent.
“You'll probably have twice that many in the morning at least.” Levi yawned, finding it hard to
stay awake.

Eren nodded, though soon his breathing evened out, signalling that he was deep asleep, his internet
popularity climbing through the roof.
Over the past two months, a lot of things happened. Eren had posted the finished timelapse of painting his recording room. That video alone boosted his subscribers from 350,000 that came with the cover of Queen to well over half a million. Eren was still getting the hang of Twitter and Facebook, and with Levi’s help was able to link all of his accounts together, even getting Twitter verified pretty quickly. Eren decided to lift Lathe’s ban from the basement after about a month, given the condition that his ‘nest’ of blankets and pillows on the air mattress would not be touched. So of course, Lathe agreed to that and was allowed downstairs again. Eren had also done nothing sexual with Levi since getting the cast on his left arm. Nothing, but he figured Levi would be able to hold out. Eren continued to post more videos of mostly him singing different songs and maybe playing the piano along with it, and the internet was going crazy for him. Producers from all over the country had started to call the house and leave messages on the house phone, one after another after another. It seemed like for the past month the phone hadn’t stopped ringing. Everyone was getting sick of it, Eren especially since a majority of the callers were producers he’d never even heard of hoping to make it big. Eren also couldn’t go anywhere in town without people recognizing him and wanting pictures or autographs, especially school. The girls went crazy about him, especially whenever he posted a new video, and the same ones would ask for autographs to send to their cousins... or other relatives who apparently wanted his autograph. Eren had also moved with the rest of his table to join with Levi’s table, so he mostly sat either next to Levi at lunch, or completely on his lap. He enjoyed sitting on his lap more. After a few days of that arrangement Jean had come around and apologized for breaking Eren’s nose on the first day of school, and that was what began the bickering. The two of them always ended up fighting about something, most of the time it was about something small, and not worry of being fought over, and most of the time it just led to the two of them duking it out to see who could come up with the best insults.... Eren always won, ‘cause he’d start roasting Jean in German, and just making everything sound like a horse insult to everyone else. As it got closer to Lathe’s birthday, Eren finished up his ceiling, even making a timelapse out of it. He closed the door and put a bow on it and smiled as he went to go and get Lathe to see his early birthday present. Eren was happy when Lathe almost hugged him to death for it.

Levi chucked his book across the room as the phone rang for the third time in an hour. *They never. Fucking. Stop. It’s great that Eren’s getting so popular, and if we were getting called by bigger producers, that’d be a whole other thing. But these are people who have no idea what they’re doing, really. We don’t want that. The attention he’s been getting at school is pretty cool, though. So many girls keep coming up to him for autographs, giggling like maniacs. He finally moved to our lunch table, and he brought Armin and the rest of his friends with, the former part of which I think Erwin appreciates. He keeps getting into roast battles with Jean, which is actually pretty impressive, given how much he wins. His German insults are actually better than his English ones most of the time. It's kinda cool, kinda scary. But it seems like all he’s been doing lately is art and music and singing. It’s pretty neat, a lot of the artsy stuff that he’s been doing, and his voice still sounds fucking amazing and sexy as all hell... But he’s been fucking ignoring me in certain departments. I get a kiss sometimes. That’s really been it. He hasn’t needed much help in the shower anymore since Lathe took the stitches out of his back... His cast came off, too. That’s good... I mean it’s good that he’s healing up and able to shower by himself again and not have to worry about pain or freezing to death, but really... I miss being able to hug him and kiss him whenever I want. He’s locked away in his recording room or some other room he’s painting half the time, or we’re bid to be silent while he’s playing the piano. I’m trying not to practically jump him at this point, but if he keeps me waiting for much longer, I just might. We need to fix that.*
Spades came to visit on Lathe’s birthday.

It had been a relatively quiet morning, a school day, but Lathe took the day off. He was still up way too early, sipping chocolate coffee at six in the morning, greeting a very sleepy pair of teens who wished him a Happy Birthday, Eren demanding a hug. Levi handed him a small present, and Lathe opened the lid of the box to a Swiss Army Knife, with small saw blades and scissors and screwdrivers. He beamed. *That's really cool!*

Spades had come over at around eleven that morning, holding a rectangular package wrapped in plain brown paper, the masking tape yellowing and no longer sticking together. Lathe invited her inside, and she was ushered into the kitchen, where she set the package on the table. She insisted it was a present of sorts, something found buried in the attic of an old high school. Lathe paled, and pulled back the aging paper, revealing an ancient wooden box, an unfolding chess set with the carved pieces and a set of aging cards inside. A stack of papers laid on top, outline-style notes in messy handwriting with that familiar spark insignia drawn and redrawn in the margin, the official one colored and circled. A picture of a dozen high school students, a club with a black-haired teen in the center, a redhead on his left and a platinum blonde on his right, was paper-clipped to a note in the box, signed ‘Mom.’

He cried.

Levi and Eren had come home to Spades and Lathe playing chess, a mass of cards on the table besides them. They were talking about everything and nothing, and both of their eyes were red.

Eren worriedly put his bag down by the door. “What’s wrong?” Eren asked and hurriedly took Blake’s vest off, leaving it where it was, rushing over to Lathe. *I’ve never seen his eyes this red before. What happened? Why is Spades crying too? It’s his birthday! He’s not supposed to cry.*

Lathe gave him a sad smile. “Spades here found my old chess set, buried in the attic of my old high school. There’s just... a lot of important things with it.” His eyes wandered back over to the picture, studying the girl on his right.

Eren followed his gaze to the picture and picked it up. “Is this you in high school?” Eren was gentle with the picture, as if it would tear easily. “You look the same still... Is this you, Spades?” Eren asked and pointed to her beside Lathe in the old picture.
Lathe pointed out the people in the picture. “That’s me, and that’s Spades on my left. Scotty’s all the way on my left, he was a freshman so he’s still shorter than me, and Desce is right next to him, but she hadn’t dyed her hair yet. She was thinking about it. I don’t think you’ve met anyone else, but the sandy-haired one is Ryan…”

“Wait… I’ve seen that guy before….” Eren pointed at Ryan and tried to think about it. “Hey Levi… Where have we seen this guy before?” He asked him as he came back from letting Blake outside into the backyard. I remember him from somewhere… But where?

Levi looked at the photo, thinking hard. “Wasn’t that… He was our second server before the Nate Ruess concert, when we went to Between the Walls. The first guy passed us over to him.” Levi moved to fish through his backpack.

“Oh yeah! That guy was really nice.” Eren said and made himself comfortable next to Lathe. I wonder who everyone else is?

Lathe beamed. “I heard Ryan was still around, I just didn’t know where he worked. But that sounds like him, alright. Total sweetheart.” He moved over the line. “That’s Marc, he has his own tattoo parlor in the city. He did some of my sleeve, actually.” He moved to the other end of the photo. “That’s Phoebe. She’s… is she in Washington State now?” He looked up to Spades, who shrugged. “She’s somewhere in the west coast states, doing coding, I think. Damien… I think he’s a bounty hunter or something like that. And that’s Brooklyn, who actually married Marc a couple years ago. She does tattoos with him. They’re both really good. But… yeah, that’s everyone. Everyone from the club.”

“But who’s that girl?” Eren asked pointing to the girl standing next to him in the picture. “You didn’t mention her.” Eren said quietly. Why’s that?

Lathe was silent for a moment, and swallowed hard. “That’s… that’s Viola. She… she used to be my girlfriend.” Lathe rubbed at his eye. “…we were together for quite a while after we graduated. About five years. I actually…” Lathe wiped tears away from his eyes. “I had actually gone out and… I had been ready to propose to her after college. I… I had a ring picked out and everything, and I knew where I wanted to take her to ask… to ask her to marry me… but…” Lathe buried his face in his hands, his voice shuddering. “She… s-she died in a car crash before I could ask.” Lathe laid his head in his arms on the table, sobbing. I miss you...

Eren immediately regretted asking the question. “Lathe… I… I’m sorry, I didn’t…. I didn’t know.” Eren looked down at his feet. Shit… I shouldn’t have asked, I should’ve figured he didn’t mention her for a reason…. Shit. Eren’s hand immediately went to his wrist, scratching at the pale skin,
which had been hidden under the cast for so long. *I shouldn't have asked... I'm sorry.* The guilt flooded into Eren’s eyes, and Blake was outside, not there to stop his scratching. “I’m sorry... I... I didn’t mean...” Eren stepped back a few feet away from him, feeling absolutely horrible.

Lathe looked up, wiping at his eyes. “It’s...” His eyes widened as he watched Eren scratch, leaning forward to catch his arms. “It’s okay Eren, you didn't know. It’s not your fault.” He sniffled, trying to smile. “Don't feel guilty. You... You didn't do anything wrong.” *It’s okay, you wouldn't have known. I never mentioned her...*

“I'm so... I'm so sorry, Lathe... I didn't know... I'm so sorry.” Eren began to cry as Lathe held his hands. He felt too ashamed to call him his Dad at the moment. “I’m sorry.” Eren sobbed, still moving to scratch at his left wrist, the red lines already starting to form from his nails, Eren’s face littered with tears.

No you shouldn't cry... “Eren...” Lathe pulled him into a hug, leaning his cheek on his head, rubbing circles into his back. “You couldn't have known. I never said anything about her. You don't have to cry...” Lathe let out a shuddery breath.

Eren continued to cry in Lathe’s lap, where he was pulled into his arms. “I’m sorry.” Eren said quietly and shakily wrapped his arms around Lathe’s torso. *I feel horrible... I made him cry... I'm a horrible son... Shit...*

Lathe brought one hand up to card through Eren’s hair, holding onto him tightly. “It's fine, Eren... Really, it is.” *You don't have to cry, please, don't...*

Levi stopped in the doorway of the kitchen, watching Eren and Lathe cry with wide eyes. He looked to Spades. *Why are they crying? What’s wrong?* Spades just had her face in her hands, not even noticing Levi next to her. He looked to Eren’s arms, seeing the ends of small streaks of red. *He’s been scratching.* Levi slowly padded to the two of them, unsure of what to do. *Lathe never cries... what happened?*

Eren just continued to cry. “I’m so sorry, Lathe, I’m sorry...” Eren continued to apologize like a broken record. “I'm so sorry.” Eren's whole body shuddered as he cried into Lathe's chest.

Lathe hadn’t even noticed Levi next to them. He kissed the top of Eren’s head. “Eren, please... it’s Dad. An you don't have to cry... Please, don't cry... It’s okay, I promise.” *You shouldn't cry you should be happy so please don't cry...*

“I’m sorry.” Eren said quietly as he sniffled against Lathe’s chest, hiding his blotchy face from
everyone else. “I didn’t mean to, I’m sorry.” Eren’s grip on Lathe’s shirt tightened. “I’m sorry, Dad, I didn’t want to make you cry more on your birthday.” Eren said quietly and curled up to Lathe in his arms more.

Lathe let out a breathy laugh, his eyes glassy. “It’s okay, Eren. You were bound to either find out or ask soon enough. I really miss her… but it’s okay. I’m okay. And I don’t want you to feel guilty about asking. I’m just happy I have my chess set back… The card, the notes…” He swallowed, smiling. “It’s all alright.” *It really is. Don’t worry yourself.*

Eren nodded slowly but kept his head buried in Lathe’s chest still, feeling safe in his arms. *I feel bad… I hope he won’t cry anymore, I don’t want to see him cry any more.*

Lathe just held onto Eren, rubbing absentminded patterns into his back. He opened his eyes and looked to Levi, who he hadn't noticed. *Oh… Right.* Lathe’s tears subsided, and he did his best to send Levi a smile. *I'm okay. Eren’s okay. Don't you go worrying about us.* Lathe looked to Spades as she rose, sending him a reassuring smile, her eyes red.

She spoke quietly. “I think I'll get going, okay Lathe?” She nodded to Eren. *You're a bit preoccupied...* She picked up her bag from the floor, leaning over the table to rest a hand on his shoulder. “Take care of yourself. I'll see you soon.” She turned to leave, closing the front door quietly behind her.

Eren sniffled still. “I’m sorry.” He said quietly, finally brave enough to raise his face to look at Lathe.

Lathe smiled softly. “Eren, you sound like a broken record. It’s okay. I haven't ever really let myself cry about it… I think I needed that.” He pressed a kiss to Eren’s temple. “Come on. I’m not gonna let us stay sad. How about the two of us make dinner?”

Eren moved to wipe his tears away from his eyes as he nodded. “Okay, that sounds good.” Eren sniffled and shuffled over to get onto his own feet. Levi looked to the glass door as he heard Blake paw at it, looking up to him with a ball in his mouth.

Levi looked down and smirked. “Okay, okay… I’ll go play with you outside.” He walked over to the sliding glass door, opening it and letting Blake run ahead of him. *So much energy… Yeesh.* He followed Blake into the yard, shutting the door behind him.
Lathe stood from his chair, stretching his arms over his head. “O-kay. I should probably move all this to the scripting room… let me do that and we can start.” He nudged the chair into the table with his foot, moving the pieces off the board and flipping it over, gently placing everything inside and closing the latch. He carried it to the scripting room and set it down, rolling his sleeves up as he walked back to the kitchen. He quirked an eyebrow at Eren, smiling. “You haven't done too much cooking with me… Have you?”

“No.” Eren answered as he was looking through the fully stocked fridge. “What are we going to make?” He looked up to meet Lathe’s eyes as the tall man walked into the room.

“Hmmm… how many eggs do we have?” Lathe went to the cupboard, looking for flour.

Eren reached for the carton of eggs, opening it. “We have 8.” Eren responded. “How many do we need?”

“Four.” Lathe brought out the bag of flour and set it on the wood kitchen table. “We’re working over here- we need the space.” This is gonna be fun.

Eren nodded and careful pulled out four large eggs. He gently set them down on the kitchen table, making sure they didn’t roll off. “What are we….” Eren trailed off as he saw the massive amount of flour that was now on the table.

Lathe grinned, grabbing a measuring cup from the cupboard. “We are making pasta.” He set it on the table. “...But we can't do anything until we wash our hands.” He nodded to the sink. “I'll get aprons- this can get messy.”

Eren giggled as he moved over to the sink. He washed his hands, noticing just how red the scratches on his wrist were now. I didn’t think I could do that much damage in just a few seconds… He washed the soap off of his hands before he dried them off, waiting patiently for his apron.

Lathe handed him a dark green apron with a blue and white pattern on the pocket, tying an autumn-patterned one behind his back. “You need me to tie it? Or do you have it?”

“Can you tie it?” Eren asked him, a blush forming across his cheeks when he couldn’t tie it himself.
Lathe grinned. “‘Course.” He turned Eren around, tying a knot in the back. “Now I'll just wash my hands and we can start.” He did so, drying his hands and holding part of the towel under the water for a moment, moving to clean the table a bit before drying it and tossing the towel on the counter. “So. Pasta. You really only need eggs and flour to make it, so here’s the flour and a measuring cup.” He slid them in front of Eren. “Could you put one cup of flour in a little pile in front of you, and one for me?”

Eren nodded, measuring out the cups. “Just put them on the table?” Eren asked with a questioning glance towards Lathe.

“Yep. On the table.” You'll understand soon enough where this is going.

Eren just shrugged and he did as he was told, putting the two cups of flour in front of them.

Lathe grinned, moving the flour on the counter behind them, out of the way. “Okay, now just take your hand and make a hole in the middle of the pile.” He moved to carve out a space in the middle of the flour.

Eren carefully mirrored Lathe’s motions and did as he was told. “Like this?” He asked quietly, showing his work to Lathe.

“Yep! So once we’ve done that, take two of the eggs,” He picked one up from the middle of the table. “And crack them into the middle of the flour, into the space you just made.”

Eren took the eggs and did as he was told. He was good at following the simple instructions. “So how does this make pasta?” Eren stared down at his volcano-type structure filled with egg instead of lava.

“We’re getting there. Now we're just going to use our hand and whisk up the eggs, taking some of the flour from the walls with it and mixing that into it until we start getting a ball of dough.” I haven't done this in forever- it's great to make it again!

Eren nodded, silently following the instructions. After a few minutes Eren started to get a ball of dough and looked up to Lathe to see if he was doing it right.

Aaaaandaand.. Lathe flicked a small bit of flour at Eren’s nose, grinning at his surprised expression.
“I think you're getting it!” Success!

Eren’s jaw dropped. “Traitor!” Eren called, picking up flour in his hand and throwing the small handful at Lathe’s face.

Lathe shook out his hair, flour dusting his shoulders. “Oh it is on.” Lathe took some from the bag on the counter and threw it at Eren, getting him in the shoulder. That escalated quickly.

Eren soon grabbed another handful of flour and made sure that he got a direct hit to Lathe’s chest. “Bring it!” Eren shouted, already reaching for more flour.

The bag tipped over, and Lathe hit Eren with a handful on his forehead, effectively getting it all in his hair. He grinned like a madman. This is war.

Eren gasped from the shock, shaking out his long locks of hair; he still hadn’t gotten it cut yet. His shoulders were covered from the flour, and he reached to get another fist full, chucking it to effectively cover Lathe’s black hair and turn it white. Eren couldn’t stop laughing. “You… You look like an old man!” Eren continued to laugh and point at Lathe, happiness completely filling his eyes again, making them shine bright.

Lathe beamed, speaking in mock indignation. “Since when does being thirty-five count as old?” He took another handful and hit Eren square in the chest, his eyes shining.

“You are soooo old!” Eren mocked him. “You're more than double my age!” He called and he ran around the kitchen table, avoiding the fistfuls of flour Lathe was chucking at him. The kitchen was quickly becoming filled with flour, everywhere.

Lathe stopped for a moment in mid-throw, thoughtful surprise taking over his face. “Wow, I am getting old.” He grinned and resumed throwing. “At least I still have my hair.” He joked. Stop moving already!

“Wait! Are you saying that I don’t have any!?” Eren screeched, throwing another fistful at Lathe, hitting him square in the crotch before he ducked out of the way of another handful from Lathe. Neither of them noticed Levi come in with a very muddy Blake, holding him in place with a towel, trying to get the most of it off of his fur.
“Maybe I didn't say that exactly…” He grinned, teasing Eren. He didn't notice the surprised looks they were getting.

Levi just surveyed the scene, taking in the flour-coated everything in the kitchen, Eren yelling about hair and Lathe egging him on... *yep. Totally normal.* Levi tried to just towel Blake off and scurry out of the war zone, not wanting to get involved. *Nope nope nope not my problem*

Eren saw Levi trying to sneak out of the kitchen. “I have longer hair than the both of you!” Eren shouted throwing more and nailing Levi right across the face, getting a bunch of it in his hair, and then nailing Lathe across the face again.

Levi put his hands up in surrender. “I said nothing.”

Lathe put the bag down, putting his hands on his head, stating with a look of mock guilt, “I have the right to remain silent, anything I say can and will be used against me in a court of law…” He tried to keep from grinning.

Eren just shook his head. “Alright, fun’s over. Dad… Pick up the mess, and make us food… Levi… Come with me.” Eren said and managed to untie his apron setting it down on a chair, and motioning Levi to follow him towards the stairs.

Lathe just smiled, looking for the broom. “This is gonna take a while.” *Totally worth it though.*

...*Huh. Okay.* “Sure.” Levi trailed after him up the stairs.

Eren pulled him into the bathroom, along with their towels, closing and locking the door behind them. “Did you do what I said… Not get a present for me… Right?” He asked quietly. *Just want to make sure.* Eren started to strip off his clothes, hoping Levi would get the idea that they would be showering together.

Levi raised his eyebrows. *This is a nice change.* “Uh, yeah. Right.” He started to take off his own clothes, stepping out of his muddy jeans. *I still don't know why you don't want me to get you anything…*

Eren noticed the mud. “Well, at least he’ll be tired out for later on then. Ready?” Eren asked, checking the water. *It feels like a good temperature… Hmm, all my hickeys and bites are gone on*
him, I gotta fix that… Eren stepped into the shower first, relishing in the warm feeling of the water on his body.

Levi finished removing his clothes and took a moment to appreciate the view. Damn… I haven’t seen that ass in forever. He smirked, stepping behind Eren and closing the glass door behind him, enjoying the warm steam. He turned Eren around, his eyes traveling over his neck. All the bruises are gone… I need to do something about that. Levi wasted no time in pulling Eren close to him, leaning up to kiss him hungrily. I’ve missed you. I’ve missed this.

Eren wrapped his arms around Levi’s shoulders, moving so his chest was flush against Levi’s. He tilted his head, deepening the kiss, giving him access to his mouth. God, we haven’t done this in forever… I wonder if he can wait until spring break?

Levi’s tongue moved against Eren’s, his hands drifting from his waist to hold onto his ass. You still feel amazing, you still taste sweet… why haven’t we done this in so long?

Eren moaned into their kiss as he felt Levi’s strong hands grab his ass cheeks. He pulled back to gasp for air. “Levi…” Eren moaned out his name, ducking his head down to the crook of his neck and moving to bite the skin between his shoulder and his neck. God, your hands feel like magic on my ass, fuck, don’t stop Levi.

Levi groaned loudly as Eren bit the skin on his neck, leaning his head back and giving Eren more room. He massaged Eren’s ass in his hands, relishing in being able to feel him. Please. “E-Eren…”

Eren pulled back, giving Levi a hooded glare for a few seconds before moving his head to the side and opening his neck for Levi to attack. Fuck yes. Bite me.

Levi traced his neck with shaded eyes, smirking possessively before moving to press Eren against the wall of the shower, attacking his neck, licking and sucking hard on the skin at the joint of his neck. Mine.

Eren gasped as he felt Levi lick at his neck. “Ahh… Levi… More…” Eren moaned out Levi’s name with every bite mark he left. Fuck, it feels so good after so long without it.

I’ve missed hearing that damn sexy voice… Levi left a ring of bite marks around his neck, moving to suck on the skin next to his adam’s apple. Please, I want to hear you sing.
Eren let out a high pitched wail as Levi attacked the extremely sensitive area. He let out a string of moans along with Levi’s name, his nails digging into the back of Levi’s shoulders from the pleasure he was in. “Fuck Levi, I’m gonna get hard, Levi…” He groaned as he felt his erection start to rise.

Levi nibbled at his neck, one hand drifting from his ass to his length, running from the base to the tip, gently taking hold of the base and slowly pumping. *That’s the idea.*

Eren moaned out louder from the extra sensations. “Levi… You too.” He moaned and moved a hand to give Levi’s length some attention as well. *Fuck we haven’t done this in forever… I wonder how pent up he is.*

Levi moaned loudly, a red streak across his face as he moved to bite the spot under Eren’s ear. *It feels so good after so long… God fucking damn it, I’ve missed you…*

Eren let out a litany of Levi’s name as he was bit. “Fuck Levi… I can’t… I can’t much longer…” Eren cried out as Levi moved to put both of their lengths together and rub them in unison. *Fuck it…*

Levi felt his own coil tightening, moaning loudly. “I… Eren… Fuck, I can’t…” He sped up his movements, biting down hard under Eren’s ear.

Eren’s coil snapped instantly. “Levi!” He cried out in bliss, clinging to his shoulders as he came all over himself. His whole face was flushed red, and his chest heaving a litany of Levi’s name.

Levi came as he heard Eren cry his name, his own chest covered with white droplets. He moved to kiss Eren, tangling their tongues together. *I love you I love you I love you*

Eren let Levi kiss him as they came down from their highs. “Levi, we gotta wash ourselves. No more.” Eren told him, gently pushing him away, the water starting to wash their cum away.

Levi reluctantly pulled back, reaching for the soap and a washcloth. He washed their chests before turning Eren around, to wash his back, still careful of the long scar that ran down his back. *It’s been so long but I still don’t want to hurt you…* He pecked his shoulder blade before attending to his arms and his legs, turning him back around to hand him the cloth. He smirked. “Your turn.”
Eren smiled softly as he took the cloth, putting a bit more soap on it. He went over Levi’s entire chest, taking in every curve and contour. “So handsome…” Eren leaned forward and kissed his neck gently before he moved to go and did Levi’s back. *He’s so hot… I can’t wait for my birthday. Dad knows he’s banned from the basement from my birthday through to the end of Spring Break.*

Levi smiled, sighing happily as Eren kissed his neck, enjoying the feeling of Eren’s hands tracing all over his back. *We need to do this more.*

Eren soon finished up and stood under the water with him. “Shampoo.” Eren reached for the bottle, handing it off to Levi.

Levi turned and poured some shampoo into his hand, reaching up to massage it into Eren’s hair. “Your hair is so long… I think we all need to go get haircuts.” *My undercut isn’t exactly shaved anymore. We need to actually go and fix that.*

“You don’t like the long hair?” Eren sunk into Levi’s hands as he was massaged, closing his eyes and enjoying the feeling.

“I didn't say that… It’s kinda nice. But the ends should get cleaned up, at least. If you like the long hair, I certainly don't have a problem with it.” He smirked. *It does look good on you.*

“Hmm, I might just get it trimmed… Also are we gonna need to give Blake a bath? I didn’t see how muddy he was.” Eren said, still leaning into his touch. *It's getting to the muddy season.*

“Yeah, we are. He got really muddy, but I cleaned up his paws so he doesn't track up the house.” Levi rubbed at the nape of Eren’s neck. *Oh yeah, that’s a thing that needs doing. “At least he doesn't give us hell when he needs a bath.”*

“Yeah, I’ll give him a bath. Can you help Lathe clean up the kitchen… He probably won’t be done.” Eren moved to get shampoo in his own hands to start on Levi.

Levi nodded, guiding Eren under the stream of water to rinse out the soap. “You two really did a number on the kitchen.” He leaned into Eren’s touch, retrieving the bottle of conditioner. *Everything was so white… You two really got into it.*

Eren nodded. “Yeah, we got into a little bit of a war… It went well though, we laughed it out.”
Eren reached to get Levi’s hair shampooed, tangling his fingers in the long inky black hair.

*All in the name of good fun.* Levi sighed happily, rubbing conditioner into Eren’s brown hair. “That’s good to hear.”

Eren smiled and was happy while they both massaged each other’s head, getting clean. *Well we can do this now, and not have to worry about me freezing my ass off.*

After a few minutes, Levi steered Eren back under the water, rinsing the conditioner from his hair. He stood on tiptoe and pecked Eren’s lips. “Alright, you’re all done.” He gave him a small smile, moving so he could get everything out of his hair before shutting off the water. He stepped out of the shower first, taking a towel from the rack and holding it open for Eren.

Eren smiled and he wrapped himself up in the towel he was given. “Thank you. I’m gonna get dressed then get Blake and wash him.” *Thank you, for showering with me again.*

Levi pulled Eren close and kissed him sweetly for a moment before letting him go. “Okay, I’ll get dressed and help Lathe clean up that disaster zone we call a kitchen.” *Thank you for letting us do this again.*

Eren smiled softly. He went and got dressed before going to get Blake from where he was sitting by the front door like a good boy. *There he is, time for your bath.* Eren picked up the dog. *It’s getting easier to pick him up.* Eren took him upstairs and put him in the shower and waited for the water to get to a good temperature to start with his bath.

Levi quickly dressed in clean clothes, dumping his muddy ones in the laundry hamper before heading for the kitchen, careful where he stepped on the wet floor. *There’s still flour nearly everywhere, though at least it’s not on the floor…*

Lathe looked up from where he was trying to get the last of a small pile of flour off the floor. He sighed in relief. “Backup’s finally arrived. I’m just going to finish getting this off the floor. Can you clean up the counter and the stovetop and stuff? Anything except the kitchen table. That’s where dinner is being made.” *Help! There’s so much flour…*

Eren gave Blake a long bath, and the dog seemed to like it. After about half an hour Blake came downstairs and he looked and smelled better than before.
Levi was wiping down the counters as Lathe resumed making the pasta noodles, lumping everything together and using a rolling pin to spread the dough thin with practiced movements. In no time he had a pile of noodles growing on the table next to him. He glanced over his shoulder, setting down the knife he was using to cut the noodles and getting out a pot to boil the water, another to heat a thin pasta sauce. He piled the noodles on a plate, waiting for the water to boil. He got out three bowls, placing them on the now-clean counter. He added salt to the water and glanced at the clock, dumping in the noodles at the top of the minute. They barely took two minutes to cook before he put them into the three bowls evenly, pouring sauce over them. He beamed, looking over to Levi as he quickly cleared the table of the mess, setting them down at their proper places, petting Blake as he trotted in and nudged his leg. He untied his apron and hung it from a peg on the wall, next to Eren’s green one.

Eren came down a few moments later. “Well he’s clean now.” Eren said and groaned at the smell of the food.

Levi smirked. “He certainly looks better when he’s not covered in mud.” He scratched Blake behind his ears when he came over to sniff at his leg.

Lathe chuckled, setting down silverware and mugs of tea. “I really hope you like the pasta- It’s my favourite.” He grinned, going to fill Blake’s food and water bowls before taking his place at the table. I really hope you two like it.

Eren nodded, going to take his nausea pill by the counter. I wonder how much longer I’ll be needing to take these.

Levi went to sit at the table, twirling a noodle around his fork. It looks really good. He lifted the fork to his mouth, his eyes wide as he looked at the pasta still in his bowl. “That’s literally the best pasta I’ve ever had.” Teach me your ways.

Lathe grinned. Thank god at least one of you likes it! “Thanks- I’m probably going to make it more often.”

Eren took a large forkful. “Yes, please do.” Eren smiled and he started eating his whole bowl.

That makes two. Yes! He chuckled. “I will, but maybe with a little less war involved.” Flour literally got everywhere. It’s not the easiest stuff to clean up. Lathe was quiet for most of dinner, getting up to wash his dishes, cleaning the pots on the stove and putting them away.” Is it alright if
I have the piano, Eren?” *You've been using it so much, I feel like I've got to ask!*

“Yeah. That's fine, I’m pretty tired, so I’m gonna try and sleep…” Eren said quietly rubbing his head, thinking about the school work he needed to do before he goes to sleep. “Well I got work to do… So I’m going upstairs to do it.” Eren set his dishes in the sink before going upstairs to do his homework.

Levi got up a few minutes after Eren left, handing Lathe his dishes and helping to dry them. “Lathe… Eren asked me not to get him a present for his birthday. Do you have any idea why?”

Lathe was silent, his brow furrowed in thought. “…all I know, is that I'm not allowed in the basement between Eren’s birthday and the end of spring break.”

Levi quirked an eyebrow, though a certain thought made him blush furiously. He ducked his head, putting the last bowl away. “I have to go do… something.” He walked from the kitchen, running a hand through his hair. *

does that mean..?

Eren was having the worst day at school. Chemistry had him screaming… The lab basically exploded in his face. Gym saw him slipping on the concrete and busting his lip open. Third period… was study hall, but no one seemed to acknowledge him, Armin nowhere to be seen. Fourth period was no better, neither was fifth… And Eren had lost the gleam in his eyes by lunch time. Eren put his bag down by his usual spot at the lunch table and he took Blake up to the lunch line to get his tray of food. His eyes looked downcast. *Today sucks…*

“Happy Birthday, Eren! Why’re you looking so glum?”

Eren just shook his head. “Thanks.” He murmured quietly, not even looking up to meet Lathe’s gaze, just taking the tray from him, reaching for a few other things to add to it.

Lathe looked a bit worried, his eyebrows going up as he caught a glimpse of Eren’s lip. “You busted your lip? Ouch. Rough day, huh.” *It’s your birthday, dammit.* He switched places with the other ladies on the line, following Eren, determined to cheer him up. *Think. How to get him to smile… food puns. Of course!* “Hey Eren, what do you call a fake noodle?”
“An impasta.” Eren’s voice was so monotonous, it rivaled Levi’s. *I really don’t want to deal with this, Lathe.*

Lathe’s smile faltered a bit, but he kept following Eren. “Why don’t eggs make good comedians?”

“They always crack up at their own yolks.”

“...where do pancakes live?”

“In a flat.”

“What’s it called when someone steals your coffee?”

“A mugging. Are you done?” Eren’s glare was ice cold.

Lathe’s hopeful smile was completely gone, a hurt look in his eyes. “...yeah, I'll stop. I'm sorry.” He walked back to his proper place in the line. ...*I'll let him be. He must be having a really horrible day...* 

Eren paid for his lunch, sluggishly going to his spot at the table and he set his tray down. He didn’t look anyone in the eye and didn’t say anything before he put his headphones on, ignoring everyone. He didn’t even yell at Jean for commenting about his busted lip.

Levi walked in a minute after Eren, going through the lunch line, not missing the small sad look Lathe gave him, nodding over to Eren. He looked over, and could practically see the dark cloud hanging over him. *Well, shit.* He nodded, paying for lunch and going to sit next to Eren, putting down his bag and nudging him. “Hey, Eren. Happy Birthday.”

Eren didn’t even make a move to acknowledge Levi or the four words he said. He just kept his headphones on, his eyes looking like stormy waters, his focus on the food he was barely eating. *I just want to be left alone right now... I want to get my homework done.* Eren soon just pulled out his homework and pushed his unfinished tray over towards Sasha and Connie who gladly accepted it. Eren got to work on his homework, finishing a good portion of it.

...what? “Eren, come on. Anything?” *You're not even fighting with Jean. The universe is practically ready to implode.* Levi watched Eren just start on his homework. ...*Nothing.* Levi,
bracing for the worst, carefully plucked the earbuds out of Eren’s ears. “I’m sorry, but are you
doing okay?” He gave him a worried look. Today has apparently been awful… You can rant if you
want. Or punch me for taking away your music, which I would probably deserve at this point.

Eren looked up to Levi with sullen eyes. “Yeah… I’m fine, just a shitty morning.” Eren said quietly
returning his gaze to his work.

“You could say that again Fagger!” Jean called from across the table.

“Shut the fuck up, Secretariat! No one fucking asked for the horse’s opinion!” Eren shot right back,
his gaze hardening as he stared Jean down into his seat. I am angry, and I swear to god, I will
fucking kill you if another word comes out of your fucking mouth! Eren heard Blake growling,
taking his hands into his mouth instantly… Only to see the shocked expressions surface on
everyone’s faces. I said that out loud… Didn’t I? Eren just sighed and sat back down from his
angered outburst and went right back to his work.

...Well fuck. Levi’s eyes widened in shock, handing him back his earbuds. Don't poke the bear…
“Here, if you still want them…”

Eren just shook his head, taking them back but not putting them on. “Only a few more fucking
hours before break… Just drop it.” Eren returned his attention to his work, finishing it up about
halfway through lunch, so he just put his head down on the table and watched the conversation
continue around the table. He learned that Armin was out sick, and probably would be out
tomorrow as well. Well, no help for me during Shadis’s class.

Levi kept glancing to Eren as they talked, trying to think of how to make him feel better. He did
say to just drop it, but I want him to feel better… But I might just end up making him more mad.
Levi just nudged his foot, hoping he understood he wanted to help him, but didn't know how.

Eren just looked over at Levi, soon shifting to sit in Levi’s lap and resting his head against his
shoulder. “You better be fucking ready for tonight.” Eren whispered in his ear before curling up
into him. Closing his eyes to rest for the few minutes left in lunch.

Levi quirked an eyebrow at this, holding Eren around his waist and trying to listen to the
conversation, though he was soon lost in thought. ...what’s tonight?

Eren was asleep against his chest for the rest of the lunch before he woke with the bell. Him and
Blake went through the rest of the day, Eren getting angrier and angrier as the day went on. He waited by his locker for Levi to come get him, he sat down with his back against the lockers, trying to calm himself down by petting Blake.

Levi walked to Eren’s locker, smirking and pressing a kiss to his cheek. “Hey Eren. You ready to go home?”

Eren smiled softly as his cheek was kissed, seeing as the hallway was barren. Eren stood back up and they walked home next to silent. “Sorry for my outburst at lunch.” Eren sighed quietly, intertwining their fingers. It's still fucking chilly outside.

Levi squeezed his hand reassuringly. “You weren’t exactly having the best day, and Jean was being an asshole. It was warranted.” No harm done.

“Yeah… You think Dad’s home? I need to apologize…. I was kinda a dick to him at lunch.” Eren sighed, leaning his head against Levi’s shoulder.

Oh. That’s why he didn’t look so happy… “I think so… but you know he’ll forgive you. Things got off to a bad start today, and just went downhill. It'll be alright.” He’ll understand. He’s probably already forgiven you.

Eren nodded. “Okay… Is that Spades’ car?” Eren looked confused as he saw the other car in the driveway. “That’s definitely not Dad’s car.”

Levi quirked an eyebrow at the car, recognising it. “That’s Spades’ car, alright…” What’s she doing here? “I wonder what she’s doing over…” They walked up the driveway, Levi opening the unlocked door.

Eren was thinking the same thing as they walked in. “DAD!” Eren yelled out hoping to get a response from Lathe to see where he was in the house. I gotta apologize to him. Eren took Blake’s vest off and let him outside, walking quickly through the piano room and through the kitchen to the back yard.

Levi just stared at the object set in the middle of the piano room, Eren walking past it without even noticing. “Um, Eren…” You kinda missed something...

Eren turned around after letting Blake out. “Levi do you see…” Eren stopped in his tracks as soon as he saw the cello sitting in the middle of the piano room with a huge bow on it. …. How did I
“Is that for me?” Eren smiled as he kneeled down beside it to admire the cello. “It’s beautiful!” Eren’s full smile back on his face as he carefully touched the cello, as if it would break at the slightest touch.

Lathe popped his head from around the corner of the scripting room wall, Spades not far behind him. “Happy Birthday!” They both beamed at him, Lathe walking over to give Eren a hug. “I thought you might want to learn an instrument besides the piano, and I used to play the cello so I can teach you how.” Yes he likes it!

“I haven’t seen a cello since mom died.” Eren said softly and smiled more before getting up and rushing Lathe, giving him a huge hug. “Thank you.” Eren smiled as he hugged him tighter. “I’m sorry about earlier too, I didn’t mean to snap at you.”

Lathe caught Eren, letting out a breathy laugh. “It’s fine, you were having a bad day and my trying to cheer you up wasn't what you needed. It’s all good.” He pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

Spades tentatively stepped forward, an envelope in her hands. “I have something for you, Eren. I was talking to the folks at the American embassy in Germany, and they told me… Your old home had collapsed from disrepair. It didn't have much in it, and the basement was the only thing left, but I asked them to send me anything left to give to you, and they gave me this. I didn't know what it could be used for, so… I had it made into a pendant. I hope that’s alright…” She held out the Manila envelope to him.

Eren slowly reached out and he took the envelope from her. He opened it and saw a familiar bronze key turned into a necklace, thanks to a thick leather string. Is this… It is, it has to be… Eren couldn’t hold back the tears that started to overflow from his eyes. “How…?” Eren looked up to Spades as the tears fell from his eyes. How did you get this? How did they get this?

She shifted to her other foot, not knowing how to respond entirely to Eren’s crying. “..The ceiling of the basement caved in, and a troupe of people had to go in and salvage what they could of the estate. That was the only thing they found that wasn't rubble, in a smaller room of the cellar that hadn't fallen in on itself.” You'd think I'd know how to comfort him but I don't, oh crap I suck at this...

Levi walked up behind Eren and hugged him, resting his chin on his shoulder. He rubbed Eren’s side gently. It’s okay...

Eren started crying as he heard that. “None of the instruments survived?” Eren started sobbing as he put it down. This is all that’s left of home? This is it?
Spades’ brow furrowed. *Instruments? None of the reports mentioned...* “...there were supposed to be instruments in the house? There wasn’t anything like that in the reports I read, or the pictures I saw...” She thought. “They could have been moved beforehand by another member of your family... but they weren’t destroyed. I would know about it.” *They could be anywhere... but they’re most likely still in one piece.*

“No... This key... It’s to the room with mom’s instruments... I always used to hide in there... Playing everything she taught me until my fingers bled... I haven’t seen a cello... For a long time...” Eren said and started to cry all over again. “Mom taught me to play almost all of them in the room... I haven’t played them in years.” Eren slowly looked at the key by his chest and smiled sadly, his head resting against Levi’s chest. “Thank you Spades.” Eren said and wiped away the tears on his face.

*To hide away and be able to play music, which would probably be loud enough to hear from the basement, at least... I can't help but feel I'm missing something.* “Eren, I hate to keep pressing... But, how did you get into the room with the instruments?”

“You had to move the rug in the basement... And you had to use the key to unlock the trapdoor and climb down the ladder to the extra room... Did that cave in too?” Eren sniffled, calming down completely again, the tears completely forgotten.

“...They didn't even know it was there.” Spades’ eyes were wide, locking onto the key. “...I may need to send that back.” *Or take it with me and do their job for them. ...Fuck it, this one thing I'm going to make sure they do right.* “Eren, now that I'm thinking of it, I should probably head over and see what I can do about getting into that room. It hasn't caved in or they would've seen it as a huge hole in the floor... Don't get your hopes up too much, but you might be getting all those instruments back.” *I swear to fucking god if they're not there I'll murder somebody*

Eren looked down at the key. “You're going to Germany?” His fingers graced over the bronze key, noting every single scratch on it. *She can get mom’s instruments back? I would be able to play her violin again? And her guitar?*

“I don't think I trust a well-trained team of people who missed an entire room of stuff to try and get into it and mail everything overseas.” *Yeah, that has sketchy written all over it. No.* She grinned. “I’ve been looking for something interesting to do, anyhow.”

Eren ran up to her, his arms wrapping around her torso. “Thank you, Spades.” Eren hugged her tightly. *I'll have more memories of mom then... I can give the key up for now.* “Can you bring the key back, please?” Eren asked as he reached to take it off of his neck again.
She hugged him back, surprised. “O-of course I will. I’ll make sure you get everything.” She gently took the key back, placing it back in the envelope for safekeeping. She smiled brightly. *I'll make damn well sure this goes over smoothly. It’s the least you deserve.*

Lathe beamed, patting Eren’s arm. *That’s wonderful news! He could get so much back that’s really important… “In the mood for cake, Eren?”*

“What kind of cake?” Eren asked curiously. *What kind of cake would I like? He knows I don’t like sweet things.*

“Black Forest Cake.”

Eren froze, eyes slowly meeting Lathe's. “No... Are you serious?” Eren asked in complete disbelief. “Did you make it?” Eren was bouncing already. *I haven’t had that cake since my 7th birthday… That was 10 years ago...*

Lathe smiled brightly, slowly leading them to the kitchen. “Y-yeah, I did. I tried to find something that wasn’t too sweet and I tried making that…” *Though judging by your giddiness I made a good decision.*

Eren followed eagerly and he saw the huge cake Lathe had made him. “Dad this is awesome!! Does it have the cherries in it and everything?” Eren asked quietly, his head moving between Lathe and the cake. *I wanna eat it! I’m so excited!! I can’t wait!!!*

“Now what’s a Black Forest cake without cherries? It has plenty in it, don’t worry.” Lathe laughed, going to retrieve plates and a knife to cut it.

Eren happily bounded to the kitchen table, planting himself in Levi’s lap even with the four chairs. *He’s gonna deal with it. “You’re gonna have to give me a refresher on the cello… I haven’t played it in 9 years.” Eren said quietly, waiting for his slice of cake.*

“I'll dig mine out from the basement- hopefully the termites didn't get it- but yeah I'll gladly help you with it.” He smiled to Eren, catching the odd look Spades sent him. “...we don't actually have termites, Spades. I can see you thinking about reporting me for neglect.” He handed Eren the first piece of cake, listening to their laughter.
Eren looked from Levi back to his cake, digging in and groaning in bliss at the taste. *It tastes just like at home. God I love this.* Eren savored each forkful, though found himself getting up from Levi’s comfortable lap to get another piece. “It tastes great Dad.” Eren quickly got a second slice.

Lathe beamed, still working through his first piece. “Thanks- I'm really glad you like it, Eren.” *All that fretting over it was worth it.*

Eren smiled wide, sitting back in Levi’s lap. “Spades are you going to stay for dinner? Or do you need to go?” Eren asked out of curiosity. He had no idea what Lathe had planned for him.

Spades smiled sheepishly. “I have a couple things to attend to… I'm sorry, but I can't stay.” *There's also not much room- well, there is, but…*

Lathe looked to Spades. “It’s alright, I actually have something planned for Eren, given he’s cool with it.” He looked to Eren pointedly, putting his fork down. “Eren, what's your opinion on tattoos?”

“They’re fucking awesome… But I can’t get any yet, I'm not 18.”

“That’s for getting them by yourself. But if, say, you had permission from a guardian of some sort…” He grinned.

“You’ll let me get a sleeve?” Eren asked immediately.

“I’ll let you start a sleeve if you want. You couldn't get an entire sleeve done in one day, it’d take forever and they kinda hurt for a little while.” He beamed.

“Dad… I shattered my wrist and it didn’t bother me… I think I’ll be okay.” Eren said and looked to his left arm. “Think they’ll be able to cover the scars?” He asked quietly and looked down to his arms.

“Definitely, as long as there’s plenty of color.” He glanced over to Spads to see her reaction to this, her face in her hand.
“Lathe, sometimes I forget you're not still a juvenile delinquent.”...why do you encourage this? Tattoos look really cool, that's a given, but he better be damn sure of what he wants.

“Hey, I'll make sure he chooses something really good.” He looked back to Eren. “They’re kinda permanent, so you’d better be in love with whatever you want to get. We don't have to go today if you don't know what you'd want to get, but I'm letting you know you now have tattoo privileges.”

Eren squealed in joy, running out of the kitchen, and to the basement. He came back up a few minutes later with a sketchbook in hand. “I’ve been sketching this for a few weeks… I started coloring it in, but I don’t know if I want just cool colors, or just hot colors, or a combination of both.” Eren laid the sketchbook down, smiling as he watched for their reactions. “Does it look good?” Eren asked quietly.

Lathe’s eyes widened, studying the picture. He tapped at certain places in it. “…I’d say the flowers should be hot colours, the area right around them warm and the other sections should be cool colors. The linework should stay black.”

“That's what I was thinking, so I can get it?” Please say yes, please say yes, please say yes!

“...It does look hella cool, and you've obviously worked really hard on it. Sure! You might want to start picking colors, though.”

Eren thought about it for a second before racing off and grabbing a bunch of different color Sharpies. He dumped them on the kitchen table and went to town on his sketch. He finished it as everyone else was cleaning up from eating their cake. “I like it like this.” Eren showed off a finished sketch with vibrant greens, blues purples, reds, and oranges, the picture looked wonderful. I hope he likes it, cause I do.

Lathe looked back as he finished washing their plates. “That looks really good, Eren. That’ll work wonderfully!” Since you've filled out to a normal weight, it won't likely stretch out. He dried his hands, placing the towel on the counter. “Levi, do you think you’d want to come with, maybe get something?” I dunno if you've thought about this as much as Eren obviously has.

“I'll come with, but I don't know what I'd want, so I'll hold off on that. Another time, though, after I've really thought about it.” Like he said, they're permanent.
“Cool. I should probably change my shirt, something where Brooklyn can get at my arm.” He grinned. I've been thinking...

“Wait, you’re gonna get a tattoo today Dad?” Eren asked with surprised eyes. Lathe’s getting one? Eren looked to his own long sleeves… “Do I need to put a different shirt on?”

“Well, we can't let you have all the fun.” Lathe joked. “And yeah, I've been thinking about what else to put for my own sleeve. And a tank top would be best, make it easy to get at your arm. The less of a struggle in getting at it, the better.”

Spades smiled, standing. “I should get going, let you all get ready to go. I'll probably be heading out within a week for Germany. I'll make sure everyone’s extremely careful with whatever is found. And don't go too crazy with the tattoos, Lathe.” She jokingly warned him. Nothing too cray.

Lathe chuckled. “Don't worry, Spades. And thank you.” He beamed, moving to walk her to the door.

Eren went off to go and get a tank top on, quickly realizing he didn’t have any clean, so he grabbed one of Levi’s tank tops and then moved to slip on a coat on top to keep himself warm. He watched as Spades drove out of the drive way from his bedroom window, talking to Lathe as he walked up the stairs. “Where will we keep them all?” Eren asked Lathe. “If they’re all there?”

“We’ll put hooks in the walls. Move around tables. We’ll make room for them.” He smiled. “We obviously have to keep everything she finds.”

“Even Mom’s piano?”

“Especially the piano.”

Eren smiled and went to get Blake to put his vest on him. “I can bring Blake right?” Eren asked quietly, looking back to Lathe as he walked towards Levi and Blake in the kitchen.

“Oh yeah, Blake’s coming with.” Lathe grinned as he followed Eren down the stairs, riffling through the downstairs closet for a jacket, finding a dark leather one. Might as well.
Eren smiled and fit Blake with his vest, getting his leash. Eren hadn’t zipped up his jacket so Levi’s Nate Ruess tank top showed through. *Wonder if he’ll say anything.*

Levi noticed Eren’s tank top choice, smirking. *It suits him. Then again, he looks good in anything he wears… but especially when what he wears is mine.* “Nice shirt.”

“Thanks, ready to go?” Eren leaned down to kiss Levi on the cheek and pulling him off the kitchen chair. *I wanna get it started.* Eren reached over for a second, grabbing his sketchbook and leading Levi to the front door. Eren put on the smaller pair of metal-toed shoes, and he was ecstatic as he zipped up his coat the rest of the way.

“As ready as I'll ever be.” Levi followed Eren to the door, watching him lace up the boots. *He really loves those boots- he wears them practically everywhere now.*

“Alright, Eren has his sketchbook, that’s kinda important; we’ve got Blake; we’re wearing tank tops; I’d say we're all ready. Let’s go!” Lathe opened the door for them, locking it behind them as they walked to the car. “I *really* need to look into getting a car where driving you both around isn’t illegal.” *Oh my God, if I got pulled over and ticketed Spades would have my head…*

“Well, don’t drive like a maniac and we won’t get pulled over.” Eren said slipping in and situating himself on Levi’s lap. *I wonder if he’s caught on to what tonight is? Well if he hasn’t he’ll be willing anyways.* Eren made sure that Blake was comfortable between them and Lathe.

Lathe spoke sarcastically. “No promises.” He started the car and carefully backed out, driving with an extra air of caution into the city, luckily getting a parking spot right in front of their destination. “We be here!”

Eren chuckled before he slipped out and waited for Blake to follow Levi out of the car. He held onto the leash in his right hand, the sketchbook tucked under his left arm as he looked up at the parlor’s neon sign.

Lathe locked the car, holding the front door open. He grinned at the man at the front desk, walking up after them. “‘Sup, Marc.”

Marc smiled widely as he saw Lathe come in behind the two teens. “Hey, Lathe! What’s up?
Brooklyn’s finishing up with her last appointment today, then she can take a look at whatever the hell you’ve drawn up for your arm... but first. My name’s Marc, what can I do for you guys?” Marc stood up and shook their hands, smiling. He was shorter than Eren, yet taller than Levi, which put him at roughly the same height as Armin.

“Um… I wanted to get a sleeve started.” Eren started out and pulled his driver’s permit out from his pocket.

Marc took the permit to inspect Eren’s date of birth. “This says you’re 17 today, so Happy Birthday, but I can’t let you get started without your parent in attendance, sorry Eren.” Marc shrugged and handed him back his permit.

“Uhh… That’s what Lathe’s for… he’s my legal guardian.”

Marc’s eyes instantly flew to Lathe. “You are not fit to be an adult! How did you end up being this kid’s legal guardian? And when the hell did that happen? You didn’t say anything about it in your Christmas card! Or did it happen after that?” Marc’s interest was piqued as he moved out from behind the desk to stand with Lathe and give him a solid punch in the arm. “You’re so forgetful sometimes you know that? I’m surprised the kid hasn’t starved yet!” Marc turned back to Eren seeing Blake sitting down by his feet. “Oh…. What’s his name?” Marc asked, instantly distracted by the dog in the room. Marc was completely over the place, but he was a good guy, and god did he end up loving Blake the moment Eren let Blake be pet.

“It totally slipped my mind to mention it, it was a month and a half before Christmas and things were cray when I ended up adopting him and yeah… I’m sorry I didn’t mention it, but yeah, it’s a thing.” Lathe beamed, rubbing his arm where Marc punched him. Good to see you, too.

Eren looked at Marc, watching Blake enjoy the petting session. “So, um... am I allowed to get started?” Eren shuffled his feet, feeling his face heat up from his blush.

Marc looked over to Lathe. “You approve? And are you gonna sit there with him? Or get a tattoo? Technically he needs someone 18 or older with him to get it…” Marc waited for a response.

Lathe looked over to Levi. “Levi, you’re gonna have to chill with Eren as he gets his tattoo.” He looked to Marc. “He’s 18, don’t worry. And as soon as Brooklyn’s free, I’d like to show her what I'd want done.”
“I just finished up.” A tall brunette with her hair in a high ponytail walked from a room further back, taking off a pair of latex gloves. “I'm just gonna grab paperwork and send this last guy on his way, so…” She looked up, stopping dead in her tracks as she spotted Eren. Holy fuck that's him. “Oh my god. You're Eren Yeager.” She quickly dropped the gloves into a trash bin, grabbing a pad of paper and a pen. “Can I have your autograph please? A photo maybe? I saw you at the concert and the videos you've put up, you're absolutely amazing!”

Eren was shocked to see her reaction, so of course, he turned a darker shade of red, all the way to his ears. “Y-Yeah… We can do that.” Eren said and took the pad of paper and pen from her, putting it down on the desk to sign the first blank sheet he found. He didn’t know how she wanted to take a picture, so he just kinda stood there awkwardly. This literally happens wherever I go…

Marc just watched the exchange with fascinated eyes. “Oooohhh, you’re the kid Brook never stops talking about… got it.” Marc nodded his head in understanding. “You got a pretty good voice, kid.”

Brook handed Marc her phone, turning to Eren. “I'm sorry, this probably happens literally every time you leave the house, but I had to ask.” She stood next to Eren as Marc held up her phone, smiling. She took it back after he took the picture. “Is it okay if we put this on the parlor’s Facebook?”

Eren thought about it for a moment. “Yeah, that’s completely fine. I don’t have a problem with it.” Eren was still holding his sketchbook wondering when Marc was going to lead them back.

“Alright! So if that’s done I’ll take you two back and Eren you can show me what you got for me to work with!” Marc had an excited air around him as he almost skipped down the hall towards his studio room, which had a huge chair in the center of it, along with a bunch of stools, which of course had wheels and could spin.

Brooklyn put her phone away. “I need to give my last guy paperwork and then I'll come fetch you, cool?” She snatched a small stack of papers and disappeared into the back, a man following her out a few minutes later. She escorted Lathe into the same room, setting him down and situating herself on a stool. “Now what in the world do you want this time?” She joked.

Eren opened his sketchbook to show Marc the designs and coloration he wanted on his left arm. “Just a fair warning… I have scars that run all the way up my arms… Don’t be too alarmed, I don’t do it anymore.” Eren told him before shedding his coat and showing off his scarred arms.

Marc only nodded before he looked at the left, which was obviously worse than the right, with the
number of scars it had. “So the left arm, yeah? We looking to cover these up?” Marc looked over
the arm, turning it around and seeing that his arms were quite thin, but a small bit of muscle was
starting to form under the skin.

Eren nodded looking at his picture. “You think you could do it?” Eren asked him, carefully
fingering over one of the designs.

“Our course I can do it. We’ll start with some of the outlining today, and we’ll see how long Lathe
takes and how much pain you can take today.” Marc said and started to get everything ready,
getting out a pen and paper to transfer the design over, pulling a light box close.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

A few hours later saw Eren’s upper arm completely outlined and filled. Marc worked fast and was
surprised that Eren was actually able to hold a conversation without the slightest hint of pain in his
voice. *Is he one of those guys who’s nerve endings are gone and they can’t feel anything? Or does
he have an extremely high pain tolerance? I can’t tell…* He was **laughing** in my chair… I’ve never
had anyone laugh… I’ve had people cry, and even pass out, but never laugh… *Is this kid okay
mentally? Hmmm…. well, something’s wrong somewhere, he’s Lathe’s kid…* Marc didn’t want to
do any more on Eren’s arm, knowing that he would probably hurt for a long time, and that he
would show him how to properly take care of it, and he would wrap it up for the first day.

Lathe popped his head around the corner, his arm dressed and carrying his jacket. He raised his
eyebrows at the immense progress on Eren’s arm. “You got **plenty** done for one day. I didn't think
you’d get so much so quickly.” **Well, Marc does work fast. Go figure.**

Eren giggled. “Yeah, it tickled a lot.” Eren got himself up off the chair after Marc had thoroughly
wrapped his arm.

“Yes, he was laughing in my chair…. That’s certainly a first I will not forget.” Marc got up to lead
them to the door. “So we gonna see you guys in 4 to 5 weeks?” Marc asked pulling out his
appointment book.

“Yes. Definitely. A Saturday, preferably.” Lathe looked over the calendar, pointing to a spot.

“May 8th? I got a spot in the afternoon I can fit Eren in for the rest of the outlining. Brook’s got a
space at the same time too if you want to come in. Larry will be in too, if you want to have a go the
same time as the other two nut jobs you came in with.” Marc said and filled in for Eren and Lathe’s appointments.

“Sure, put me in. I'll think about what I'd like.”

Marc nodded putting Levi in for an appointment at the same time as well. “Alright, anything else we can do for you guys?” Marc asked as Brook came back to the front to see them off.

Lathe reached into his back pocket for his checkbook. “Just tell me what the damage is, and I'll sign your forms.”

Marc got out the paperwork for the both of them, and gave him the total for the day. He made sure to keep everything organized as the papers were handed back to him and he let them leave after he made sure Eren knew how to take care of his tattoo. “You guys are all set then, have a Happy Birthday Eren!” Marc called.

Eren thanked him quietly and led Blake outside towards the car, his jacket loosely hanging over his shoulders to keep him somewhat warm outside.

Lathe unlocked the car, hopping in and turning up the heat immediately, tossing his jacket behind the seat.

Levi opened their door and let Blake in before him, sliding in and pulling Eren onto his lap, careful of his arm. “You are going to look so badass when that’s done.” He kissed Eren’s cheek. *I’m seriously impressed.*

Eren smiled widely. “Thank you Levi… but it won’t look as good as the tiger I put on your back with Henna.” He said quietly, snuggling up into Levi’s chest. “What time is it? Are we gonna actually eat something for dinner? Or another helping of cake… I could go for either.” Eren stated as he made himself comfortable.

Lathe looked over. “We could stop at this place nearby that has really good chicken wings, or we could head home. It’s about nine thirty right now, so it wouldn't be busy, but it’s up to you.”

“Home. There’s leftovers in the fridge too.”
Lathe nodded, smiling. “Aye-aye, Cap’n.” He pulled away from the curb, starting their trip home.

Eren sang along to the radio the whole ride home, keeping his ass pressed against Levi’s crotch. He knew he was being a tease, but at this point he couldn’t care less. *For all the times you’ve been trying to grope me in the past two weeks, here is your punishment.*

Levi swallowed hard as Eren sang, trying not to practically attack Eren with Lathe in the car and driving. *Nope not now chill be cool.* It was only barely working, Levi allowing himself only to wrap his arms tightly around Eren’s middle.

Lathe pulled into their driveway a half hour later, hopping out. “Home!” _And it’s ten at night and I want sleep. Or food. Both._

Eren clambered out of the car first, Blake following suit, climbing out over Levi, and going directly for the door, scampering after Lathe inside. Eren went right to the fridge and started to heat up a lot of chicken noodle soup, knowing everyone would probably want it and Lathe had made a ton earlier.

Levi shut the door behind him, kicking off his shoes and plopping down at the kitchen table, his eyes tracing over Eren’s outline, resting on the wrapped tattoo. He smirked. *That is going to do the impossible and make him look even more sexy. What the hell._

Lathe took a bowl of soup from Eren graciously, sitting down at his place at the table with a sleepy look. “It's been a really long day… After dinner I'm just going to head up to bed, cool?”

“Cool, just remember that you're banned for the next two weeks from downstairs.” Eren told him as he handed Levi a bowl of soup, turning to go and dish his own bowl. _Levi, you are going to thank me later..._

“Just so you know. I might have to go down once just to get my cello, because you don’t know how to get into the storage behind the chalkboard if you want me to teach you something over break…”

“That’s fine, you know the rules about my ‘nest’, they still apply.” Eren told him, sitting down and digging in, finding that he didn’t need the nausea pill to eat, which was progress.
Lathe was too tired to notice. “No touching any blankets or pillows unless I want to get shanked, yadda yadda yadda. Promise I won’t.”

Eren nodded, feeling full after one bowl of soup so he got up to start the dishes and put them in the dishwasher, too lazy to actually wash them at the moment. *Nope, it’s time for Levi to give me my birthday present.*

Lathe handed him his bowl, giving him a hug before yawning, padding his way to the stairs. “‘Night, you two.” He was gone in a moment.

Levi got up from the table as he finished his bowl, putting it in the dishwasher and closing it. He turned to Eren. “So, we’re downstairs tonight?” *And what was that whole deal about birthday presents and me not getting you one…. And what is tonight, exactly?*

Eren nodded. “And for the next two weeks, the basement shall become our little bunny den.” Eren’s seductive voice came out as he got closer to Levi, moving to kiss Levi’s neck gingerly, just doing enough to arouse him, but nothing more.

Levi swallowed hard, sighing as he felt Eren’s lips on his neck. *I like where this is going… But does that mean…* He blushed furiously. *He doesn’t… Does he?*

Eren pulled on Levi’s arm, leading him downstairs to his nest. The only thing difference was that he had put the box of condoms and lube in the middle of the bed. *Well, if you weren’t sure yet, you’ll know what we’re doing now.*

Levi’s eyes widened as he recognised the box on the bed, letting himself be pulled along. “E-Eren, are you sure…?” *This is really important… I hope you’ve really thought about it, because I’ve been waiting but if you aren’t sure I can keep waiting if I have to.*

“I’ve been waiting long enough, I want my birthday present.” Eren said and laid down seductively on their bed, pulling out a bottle of lube from the box, as well as some condoms, moving the rest of the box to the floor. “You ready, Levi?” Eren asked. *God please say yes, I’ve been waiting all day for this.*

Levi barely hesitated before he grinned, a predatory look taking over in his eyes. He climbed onto the bed, looming over Eren. “*Yes.*” He leaned down to kiss Eren fervently, his hands immediately tracing over his lithe body.
Eren groaned into the kiss, opening his mouth, coaxing Levi’s tongue in. His own hands ran over Levi’s chest, forgetting about the bottle of lube for the moment.

Levi tangled their tongues together, reaching down and toying with the hem on Eren’s shirt. *Too much clothing.* He broke their kiss for just a moment, taking off his own shirt and helping Eren with his, quickly coming back down to start kissing at his neck, suckling at the soft skin there.

Eren moaned out, not caring how loud he was since he knew Lathe was completely asleep. *Fuck, I don’t care if I sound like a wanton whore, I want him.* Eren’s hands reached down, tugging on the hem of Levi’s pants. *Too much, I want them off. I want them off now.*

Levi got the message, unbuttoning his jeans and kicking them off, his mouth not leaving Eren’s neck as he unzipped Eren’s jeans, sliding them over his hips and letting him kick them off the bed. He nipped and bit at the skin nearing his adam’s apple, remembering something he had done once before, tracing one hand gently up his inner thigh.

Eren gave a loud moan as Levi’s hand pressed against his inner thigh, and when his fingers dragged across his leg, he let out a shrill cry of pleasure, his whole body writhing under him, his cock instantly hardening. “Levi… Fuck…” Eren moaned and pushed on his chest to get him to look him in the eye with his own lustful ones.

Levi groaned against Eren’s neck, hearing him cry in pleasure. *That voice…* He pulled my away from Eren as he pushed on his chest, smirking at the lust in Eren’s eyes. “Something… the matter?” He purred, one hand ghosting over the front of his boxers.

“Levi… Touch… Me… Please” Eren moaned out his sentence, hoping to get Levi to pull down his boxers and reveal just how hard he really was. “Fuck… Please… Levi.” Eren begged, bucking his hips up into Levi’s hand as he was ghosted over. *More… I want more… Touch me more Levi.*

Levi’s eyes glinted. “Because you asked so nicely…” His voice was low and smooth, his hand sliding off Eren’s boxers in one movement, tossing them off the side of the bed, uncaring where they went. He watched as Eren’s cock sprang up against his stomach, painfully hard. He took him in hand, stroking him gently, moving to kiss down his chest, leaving a trail of bite marks as he went.

Eren was a moaning mess under him. His whole face was flushed with a dark shade of red, and his hands were clutching the first layer of blankets underneath him. “Levi… Ahh… Levi.” Eren was
completely vocal, bucking his hips up into Levi’s hands to get more out of it.

Levi refused to move any faster, leaning up next to Eren’s ear, his voice even. “Yes, Eren? If you want something… You need to tell me.” He gave particular pressure on Eren’s length as he spoke.

Eren gave out a soft groan. “Levi… Touch me, please…” He gave a soft gasp as the pressure was increased. “Touch me, touch my ass, please.” Eren begged for Levi to switch his focus already. But his begging body looked stunning as it writhed under Levi. Dammit Levi, I’m supposed to be the tease not you!

Levi refused to completely accept that answer, his unoccupied hand moving to squeeze Eren’s ass. “Is that really all? Don’t you want… Anything else?”

Eren let out a few short pants, his breathing hitched. He moved a bit under Levi, giving him better access to his ass. He spread his legs seductively, reaching down to touch himself. “Touch me Levi… Finger me…” His whole body was screaming for attention, which he was crazing for.

Levi grinned, his eyes raking over Eren’s lewd pose. My god. He moved his hand from Eren’s cock to his mouth, looking Eren in the eyes, commanding him. “Suck.”

Eren’s eyes lit up instantly. He lifted his head up, taking the three fingers into his mouth instantly. He was able to suck on them pretty hard before he swirled his tongue around them, coating them with his own saliva. He let his eyes lock onto Levi’s as he continued to suck and lick on his fingers. Oh my god, I love this.

Levi suppressed a shudder at the look in Eren’s eyes, watching him suck on his fingers. Fuck. He pulled them away from his mouth after a moment, a thin string of saliva connecting them to his lips for a moment before he moved his hand to Eren’s entrance, tracing it with his finger before he pushed one digit in past the tight ring of muscle up to the first knuckle, feeling Eren move under him, his ass closing immediately at the intrusion, clamping down on it. Tight. “Oi, Eren, you gotta relax.”

Fuck… It hurts… It actually hurts again… well shit. Eren hissed slightly at the intrusion, almost closing his legs, but keeping them open for him. He took a few deep breaths, feeling Levi slowly insert more of the single finger into him. “Fuck.. Levi…” Eren moaned out quietly at first onto his got used to it, starting to relax and let Levi move his finger freely. Doesn’t hurt… Feels good.
Well, he’s relaxed, time for the next one. Levi slowly thrusted in the second, feeling Eren tighten right back up around him. Relax Eren... I'll make sure you’re only feeling pleasure by the end of tonight. He slowly thrusted them in and out, until he felt Eren relax again on them. Fuck, it’s like he’s sucking me right in... He feels so soft.... Levi started to scissor his fingers, trying to get him to open up. He heard the litany of curses come from Eren’s mouth as he scissored the pucker itself, added his third finger.

Eren cried out, shaking underneath Levi as he felt his third finger come in. He was moaning out Levi’s name as he clung to the sheets below him. Fuck... Levi... Fuck that feels.... Good. Eren quickly got used to the full feeling of having three fingers in him. Fuck he hasn’t found my pros-- Eren let out a pleasure filled scream as Levi curled his fingers up, hitting the bundle of nerves right on.

Ah, there it is. Levi watched as Eren arched his back off the mattress in pure pleasure, the precum leaking out of his cock in heavy streams. The corner of his lips slowly hooked up, giving a smirk as Eren moaned on his fingers, fucking himself to get off. Nope, can’t have that now, can we? He slowly drew his fingers out, hearing Eren whimper from the loss.

“Levi…” Eren whined, begged, and moaned out his name in the span of a second. “Levi… Please…” Eren shifted, turning so he was on all fours, and his ass in the air, easy to grab onto, easy to fuck from behind.

Damn. Levi shifted to kiss up Eren’s spine to his neck, one hand cupping his ass as the other reached for a condom abandoned on the blankets next to them, tearing the packet open with his teeth and rolling it on, dropping the wrapper. He nibbled up Eren’s back as he felt for the small black tube of lube, the cap snapping open as he poured a generous amount into his hand, tossing the tube aside as he slicked himself up, making his way up to the nape of Eren’s neck as he positioned himself at Eren’s entrance. He leaned up to Eren’s ear, his voice low. “Eren… tell me… what do you want me to do?”

Eren gasped feeling Levi’s tip at his entrance, ready to come in, but not pushing. He reached his arm around, tangling his fingers in inky hair, moaning out as he pushed his hips back. “Levi… Fuck me…. Please.” Eren begged him, moving back to start to get Levi’s tip pushing against his entrance. Fuck, he's big... I want him.

Levi smirked. As you wish. He slowly pushed forward, the tip of his cock pushing past the tight ring of muscle, groaning at the pressure. You’re so fucking tight, my god... He dropped his forehead against Eren’s shoulder, waiting for Eren to tell him he could continue.

Fuck. Eren took a few moments to get used to Levi’s massive size. “You’re so big… Levi… Go further.” He moaned and cried out more as he did so. Holy shit he’s fucking huge!
Levi slowly pressed forward, inch by inch, trying not to move too fast. *Oh my god, Eren…* He stopped as he was buried to the hilt, pressing kisses and nibbling at Eren’s neck. *Whenever you say...*

Eren stayed still for quite a few moments before his grip on the sheets below them loosened. His voice started to come back out. “Levi…” Eren moaned out his name, pushing back on him, giving the go ahead to move. *God, this feels amazing.*

Levi pulled back until the tip was the only thing still inside Eren and thrust forward, building a slow rhythm. He groaned against Eren’s shoulder, biting down on the soft skin. *Fuck, you feel perfect...*

Eren let out a loud moan, moving back in time with Levi’s thrusts. *Holy shit…. It feels great.* Eren continued to moan out Levi’s name, moving his head to the side a little and giving him space to bite his neck. “Levi, fuck me…. Faster…” Eren moaned out as he felt the coil beginning to form from the pleasure he was feeling.

**Gladly.** Levi moved faster, thrusting deeply into Eren, biting hard at the base of his neck, moaning loudly. *Holy fuck, you feel so good...*

Eren continued to let out string of moans, moving slightly under Levi to get a better angle, crying out in pure bliss when Levi thrusted directly onto that coveted bundle of nerves. “Fuck! Levi… Fuck… Right there, haaa- harder.” Eren begged him and his moaning filled the whole basement.

**There it is.** Levi aimed for that same spot, his hard thrusts becoming more erratic as he felt his coil tighten from the pressure. He moaned into Eren’s neck, biting hard.

Eren came right then and there. “Levi!” His cry came as he clamped down around Levi’s cock. *Fuck, fuck, Levi… Fuck...* Eren’s arms were shaking a little from his high that he was getting over. “So good, Levi.” He moaned out and tried to relax so Levi could finish.

Levi moaned loudly as the pressure increased tenfold, Eren’s cry music to his ears. Levi groaned as his coil snapped, his movements slowing as his high set in, giving Eren’s neck one last kiss as he slid out of Eren, dropping the used condom in a wastebasket next to the bed before flipping Eren over, kissing him passionately, cupping his jaw with his hands. *Oh my god, Eren...*
Eren moaned into the kiss, pressing up to Levi, his own hands moving up to go through Levi’s inky locks. *Fuck, that felt amazing.* Eren’s whole body shook a bit from the aftershocks of pleasure coursing through him, pulling back to breath. “So good… Levi.” Eren panted to him, trying to form coherent sentences but failing horribly. *Fuck it… “Levi.”* Eren moved to pepper Levi’s neck with gentle kisses, not leaving any marks, just content with kissing the pale skin, the pearly white cum forgotten on his chest for now.

Levi sighed happily, shifting to lay down next to Eren, wrapping his arms around his waist and pulling him close. “Eren… I- I love you.” _I really really do_

Eren smiled, leaning up to peck Levi’s lips. “I love you, too.” Eren then leaned in to kiss him deeply, his arms wrapping around Levi’s neck, pulling himself closer.

Levi pulled Eren on top of him, their chests flush, kissing him lazily and letting their tongues tangle. _I don't think I'll ever get tired of hearing you say that._

Eren continued to kiss him lazily for a while, pulling back to rest his head on Levi’s shoulder. His voice was soft in his ear, and he was close to sleep. “That felt great… We have the basement the whole break.” He told him and kissed his ear gently, resting his head back down to close his eyes to sleep.

_So that's why Lathe was banned from down here again._ Levi smiled softly, tugging a blanket over them. ..._the whole break._ Levi leaned his head back, his own eyes heavy with sleep. “You felt so amazing… and the whole break…” _No complaints here._

“I said that this would be our bunny den.” Eren yawned, snuggling into his side, feeling warm from the blanket. “Wanna shower together tomorrow?” He asked softly, his eyes closing quickly. He was gonna be asleep soon.

“Is that even a question?” Levi smiled, letting sleep wash over him.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren woke up first. He slowly peeled himself up off the bed. *My back’s sore… But it could be worse so I’m not complaining.* He looked around at the articles of clothing thrown all over the room, picking them up, searching for his boxers first. *Where the hell are they?? Ah, found them!* Eren swiftly put them on before he moved to pounce of Levi. “Good morning, Sexy Demon.” _Eren_
leaned down to kiss Levi awake.

Levi cracked his eyes open, smiling into the kiss, pulling Eren flush against him. *That’s a nice way to wake up. I can get used to that...* “G’morning.”

Eren smiled back, shifting when he felt Levi’s morning wood poke his clothed asscheeks. “Mm... Shower, I wanna get clean.” He told him and he pulled back to kiss Levi’s cheeks. *I would love to fall asleep like that all the time.* “That was probably the best sleep I’ve had in my life.” Eren’s voice was soft as he pressed ghost-like kisses on his jawline, trailing to his ear and down his neck.

Levi sighed contentedly, smirking. “You took the words right out of my mouth.” He gently pulled Eren back up to peck his lips, sitting up to swing his legs over the side of the bed. “Let me find my clothes and we can head upstairs, okay?” His eyes skimmed over the room. *Now where the hell did half of my clothes end up?*

“Okay.” Eren threw his clothes at him from the pile he had collected. He was already slipping into his sweatpants and Levi’s tank top he had worn last night. “I’m gonna go and get clothes out for us upstairs. We should go get our hair cut after breakfast!” Eren suggested, scampering off the steps. He looked much happier than he did yesterday, almost as if he was glowing. He saw Lathe in the kitchen and went and kissed his cheek. “‘Morning, can you make some breakfast pie while we go shower? Thanks!” Eren scampered off before Lathe could argue with him, running quickly up the stairs.

Lathe watched Eren scamper off with surprised eyes. *...what the hell? Okay.* Lathe just grinned, chuckling and setting down his coffee, going to start breakfast. *Someone’s in a good mood.*

Eren had gotten out another of Levi’s tank tops for himself, and some nice jeans as well. He had set out similar clothes for Levi, though he got a t-shirt. *He’ll think I’ll look good in his clothes. They fit me better now that I’ve filled out a bit more.* Eren went off and started the shower right away, waiting for it to get up to temperature, and waiting for Levi to get upstairs.

Levi ascended the steps a moment later, walking into the bathroom and shutting the door behind him. He started to strip, running a hand through his messy hair. *Haircuts... That’s a good idea.*

Eren got into the shower, going to stand under the water, letting it run down his whole body and sighing as he felt the warm water relax his whole body. *Fuck, I could get used to morning showers.*
Levi stepped in after him, closing the glass door behind him, enjoying the warmth of the water and the steam. He smirked as he traced over Eren’s front, counting the many bruises and bites that peppered his skin. *...A couple more wouldn't hurt...* With a glint in his eye, Levi closed the distance between them, nibbling at an unmarked patch of skin near his collar.

Eren gasped as he felt Levi’s teeth against his skin. “Levi… Isn’t there enough?” He asked, but didn’t really protest or push him away. *I don’t mind, I just like teasing him…* Hmm, I wonder how far this’ll go. *Not that I really care…* Levi’s already ready to jump me. Eren looked down to see Levi was still sporting his morning wood.

Levi bit at the base of his neck, wandering slowly to his adam’s apple. “Nope… You could always use more…” Levi smirked, licking and kissing his soft skin. *Just making sure everyone knows what’s mine.*

Eren let out a soft moan. “Levi.. We just… We just… last night…” Eren wasn’t really complaining about him and even lifted his head to let him go crazy on his adam’s apple, already starting to get aroused by Levi’s actions.

Levi looked up to meet Eren’s eyes, his hands going to cup his ass. “...Are you saying you want me to stop?” *I’d much rather continue...*

Eren gave out another quiet moan. “Levi… There aren’t any condoms up here. I don’t mind, but I thought you would.” His voice quiet, yet seductive as he moved his head to the side to kiss Levi’s ear, nibbling on it softly. *No, I would much rather have you continue, but if you don’t want to because we don’t have a condom that’s fine...* Though I know I’m clean… Grisha always made sure of that.

*Why would I...* Oh. “I don't mind at all.” Levi moved to press Eren against the wall of the shower, one hand coming up to wander over his chest.

Eren nodded and let Levi push him against the wall, groaning as Levi ran his hand over a nipple. His cheeks flushed immediately. *I’m still fucking sensitive there...* Great. He knows, and he’s gonna leave so many bites on my chest now. Eren moaned, pressing his hardening cock against Levi’s hips, trying to get friction to get him even harder.

Levi leaned forward to kiss Eren hungrily, tangling their tongues together, groaning as Eren’s length rubbed against his own. *Fuck.* He reached on hand down, trailing a finger from Eren’s base to tip, running over the slit.
Eren let out a loud moan, gasping before raising a hand to his mouth to silence himself. We can’t let Lathe hear us.

Oh that won’t do… Levi reached up to move Eren’s hand, kissing him hard before pulling away, looking at him with hooded eyes. “I’d much rather hear you.” He moved to attack his neck, beginning to loosely pump his shaft. Go ahead.

Eren let out a loud moan. Shit, this isn’t good, I’m still weak from last night… Eren reached up to cling to Levi as he felt his knees start to go weak. God, Levi, please don’t stop. Eren moaned out his name, hanging onto him tightly.

Levi wrapped his arm around Eren’s waist, holding him up as his other hand reached blindly for the shelf, glancing over for a second to see he picked up the white bottle. That’ll do. He flicked the top open, tipping some conditioner into his hand before setting it back down, covering his fingers. He kissed and licked his way over Eren’s collarbone, his hand going to prod at Eren’s entrance, slipping his first finger in to the knuckle.

Eren let out a loud gasp, moaning into Levi's neck as he felt Levi’s first finger. “Levi… Haa, more… More, please.” Eren begged him as he tried to move his hips down to get more of his finger in. Fuck it feels good. I’m still really sensitive from last night. Eren cried out in bliss as he licked over a sensitive spot. Levi… You fucking tease, you know my nips are sensitive!

Levi smirked, holding Eren up as he pressed in a second finger, his head ducking down to suckle at the small buds on his chest, switching between the two. Damn, I will never get tired of hearing that voice...

Eren moaned out in a higher pitch. “Levi… Ha… Please, I can’t… Don’t tease me…” Eren begged and writhed in his hold. Levi, fuck, I want you, hurry please… I want you. His fingers feel amazing but his cock feels so much better, I want it!

I can’t wait any more. Levi drew his fingers from Eren’s hole, reaching back over to the shelf and pouring more conditioner into his hand, coating his length. He took hold of Eren’s shaking legs and pulled them over his hips, holding Eren above his shaft. He slowly lowered Eren onto his cock, pressing past the ring of muscle, groaning into his shoulder. So tight...

Eren gasped as he was lifted up, his arms immediately tightening their grip around Levi’s shoulders, bringing his chest right to Levi’s face. Holy shit, I feel so full. He feels so big. Eren
moaned out, his head close to Levi’s ear as he did so. His whole body was still shaking, his back pressed against the wall to help keep him up in the air in Levi’s arms.

Levi moaned into Eren’s shoulder, slowly lifting Eren up and letting him fall back down on his length, his thrusts deep. *Oh my God, you feel so good...*

“Levi... you’re so deep...” Eren shifted only a little, crying out in pleasure as Levi hit that wonderful bundle of nerves. “Fuck, Levi... There...” He moaned out, his cock twitching against their stomachs.

Levi sped up his motions and aimed for that same spot, hitting it over and over, one hand coming up to pump Eren’s neglected length in time with his thrusts.

Eren was a writhing mess in Levi’s arms as pleasure coursed through him. “Ha... Levi... I can’t... Much... Longer...” Eren moaned out his hands coming up to run through Levi’s long hair. “Fuck me.” Eren’s seductive voice sounded softly before he moaned out again, loudly, honestly not caring if Lathe would hear them or not. *Fuck me... Fuck me good Levi.*

Levi tried to hold on, thrusting hard into Eren, his hand tightly jerking Eren’s length. He sucked on the skin at his adam’s apple, moaning. *Message received, holy fuck...*

Eren moaned, his legs wrapping tighter around Levi’s waist. “Levi!” Eren cried as he came to Levi’s motions. He was shaking, his ass tightening around Levi, feeling him hit his prostate repeatedly, prolonging his orgasm. *Oh fuck! Levi... Shit... So good, I’m gonna be weak for a while... Holy shit that was great!* Eren was panting from the intensity of their activities.

Levi’s coil snapped as Eren clamped down on his length, his movements slowing after a moment. He slowly lifted Eren off of his length, still keeping a firm hold on his waist as he set him on shaky legs, kissing him deeply. *You felt so wonderful...*

Eren groaned as he was set down, his knees shaking. “Hmm... You filled me up pretty good.” Eren said quietly, resting his head against Levi’s shoulder as he tried to catch his breath back. *It feels warm... I feel full. I need to clean that out though.* Eren reached around to finger himself, trying to get it all out.

*What do you think you're doing.* Levi gently swatted Eren’s hand away from his entrance, pressing three fingers into his still-slick hole, kissing down his jaw. *Let me.*
Eren gave out a loud gasp. “Levi… fuck…” Eren moaned louder as Levi found his prostate right away. *Are you serious? You found it that quickly? Fuck… You better get it all out!* Eren’s knees felt weak as his cock was starting to harden right back up. “Levi…” Eren moaned out his name again.

Levi’s fingers brushed over Eren’s prostate, coaxing out drips of white. He felt Eren’s length hardening against his hips, though he didn’t let go of his waist. *We can’t let you fall.* He pushed down his own arousal, pressing soft kisses down his neck.

Eren cried out in bliss, feeling Levi’s soft touches all over him. “Levi… I can’t… you better… have everything out….” Eren gasped, feeling the coil start to tighten quickly. *I’m so fucking sensitive, it’s incredible.*

Levi smiled against his neck, his lips ghosting over his collarbone as his fingers worked out the last few drips of white, curling and pressing against his prostate. *Don’t worry about that.*

Eren cried out Levi’s name as he came again, his own cum landing all over Levi’s chest. Eren’s legs trembled as he clung to him, panting quickly. “No more, please… I want to be able to stand.” Eren slowly regained the use of his jello legs before the two of them washed themselves off and washed their hair thoroughly, Levi being careful of Eren’s tattoo, Eren getting out of the shower first and going to get dressed, walking to his room with just a towel around his waist. His chest was lined with fresh hickey and bites. *Well, Levi found his new favorite spot.* Eren took a deep breath in the hallway. *Breakfast smells fucking amazing!*

Levi followed him soon after with a victorious smirk, quirking an eyebrow at Eren’s choice of clothing for him. *Nice.* He quickly dressed, giving Eren one last peck on the cheek before they headed downstairs to the kitchen. *I’m starving… and breakfast smells good.*

Eren quickly got dressed using the towel to dry his hair out completely. Eren took the towel downstairs as he continued to dry it. He walked into the kitchen with a smile on his face. “Breakfast smells amazing Dad!” Eren seemed to glow even more as he sat down at the table waiting patiently for his food.

Lathe looked over his shoulder from the stove as he cut the quiche, smiling, a barely noticeable red streak across his face. *Don’t do it, Lathe. Don’t you fucking dare. I don’t care that they were so loud that you could hear them, if you so much as say one word about it I don’t care that I’m you. I will murder you.* Lathe handed Eren and Levi each a plate and a mug of tea, sitting down with his own piece and sipping at his coffee. “Either of you have any plans for today?”
“We’re gonna go for haircuts after we eat, we need them.” Eren said, digging into his meal without needing the nausea pill. Eren sipped at his tea between his bites. *I hope he didn’t hear us, god that would be so embarrassing, but he hasn’t said anything... so maybe he didn’t? Anyways... I think I’m gonna cut my hair short again.*

Lathe studied Eren’s plate, his gaze flicking to the counter where the small bottle of pills sat untouched. “...since when did you not need the nausea pills to eat?” *Well this is a new development.*

Eren looked up to Lathe with a smile. “Well, I tried a few times, but I was finally able to hold it down yesterday, so I’m gonna try and stay off of them.” Eren said finishing off his plate and his mug and going for refills for both. *Maybe it’ll stay that way.*

Lathe beamed. *Progress!* “That’s great to hear! Hopefully you won’t have to take them anymore.”

Levi gave Eren a small smile. *That’s good. He can hold food down for right now.*

Eren beamed as well, taking another piece of the quiche and filling his mug up with more tea. He took a few more minutes to finish off the extra food he took and he sat back to wait for Levi so they could go. Levi still needed to drive them everywhere in the Thunderbird. He got up, putting his dishes in the sink before letting Blake out to make sure he didn’t need to go when they were out. *Haircut, that gives Lathe time to calm down if he heard us... it’s also a mini-date! Which is great!*

Levi had finished a few minutes before Eren, and had gone downstairs to retrieve his coat, padding back to the kitchen with Eren’s coat and boots in hand, placing the latter near the door, handing Eren his jacket.

Lathe turned in his chair, pulling his wallet from his pocket and handing Levi a credit card. “Just because I’m giving you this does not mean you can go cray with it. Just for haircuts. Unless I end up texting you two a grocery list or something, alright?” He grinned.

Levi smirked, tucking the black card into his wallet, his voice deadpan. “No promises.”

Lathe chuckled, turning to Eren. “Is it alright if I dig out my old cello from the basement? I won’t touch anything else.” *Yeesh, I haven’t gone behind the chalkboard in forever...*
Eren thought about it for a second. “Yeah, that’s fine, the blankets might be all over the place, but just leave them where they are or put them back on the bed.” Eren told him, letting Blake back in and putting his vest on him, clipping his leash to him as well.

“Cool. Have fun, and try to resist dying your hair green!” Lathe called jokingly as they walked out the front door, the lock clicking behind them. He stood after a moment, reaching again for his wallet, drawing out a steel card with a few holes punched in the end. He traipsed down the stairs, turning on all the lights and padding past the bed. He picked up a blanket that had fallen on the floor, tossing it on the bed, hearing something clatter to the floor. He looked down, seeing a small black tube of lube. He blushed furiously, face in his hand, deliberately stepping over it and continuing to the chalkboard wall, looking for the seam in the wall between two of the panels. He slid the card through part of the seam near the top, hearing the click of a lock and pushing it in, sliding it a bit to the right. He felt for the light switch, stepping into the small storage room. A hard black case leaned against the far wall, and he picked it up, carrying it upstairs first before returning for the small amp and the pedals that went with it, switching the light off and closing the panel behind him. He avoided the small tube on the floor and walked quickly back up the stairs, shutting off the lights. ...Well, it's official.

It was only a few minutes after Eren and Levi left that there was a knock on the door.

Lathe looked up from where he was setting up his cello. Who the hell is that? Levi and Eren should be at the salon by now… He stood, placing the electric instrument in it’s stand before walking to the front door, cautiously opening it.

“Hello, is this Eren Yeager’s residence?”

Lathe studied the young man in front of him, seeing an older man walking up the driveway. I know your face. “…Aren't you Nate Ruess?” Lathe blinked, grinning sheepishly. “Oh, uh, yeah, it is. He’s not here right now, though.” He offered Nate his hand. “I’m Lathe, Eren’s father.” He looked to the man behind Nate. “And you are?”

“Ah, sorry, I’m Nate’s Producer, Jeff Bhasker. It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Jeff held his hand out for Lathe as well. “I was hoping that I could talk to Eren, I’m willing to wait, since we’re in the area anyways.” The man smiled softly, seeming like a kind man as it was.

Lathe stepped back a bit, opening the door wider. “Then won't you come in? I can get you some coffee or tea if you like, and we can talk until he gets back. He and Levi are just out getting haircuts; it won't be long.” Eren is going to freak out when he hears Nate’s here!
Nate gave him an easy smile, stepping over the threshold and kicking off his shoes. “Thank you, though is it alright if I just have water?” He looked around their living room, fascinated by the dark wood cello and the piano, the gold script on the wall. *Wow. Classy.*

“I’ll take a coffee if you would be kind enough.” Jeff slipped off his boots, setting them next to Nate’s Converse and stepping in, out of the way of the door. He looked around, eyes immediately drawn to the Grand Piano and Cellos. “Very nice set up… Is this where he records?” Jeff asked, looking to both Nate and Lathe. *Nate probably knows the answer; he’s been ranting about the kid the whole drive here.*

Lathe nodded, moving to the kitchen. “Yeah, Eren records his piano pieces down here, but most of the vocal stuff he records upstairs.” Lathe handed them both their drinks.

“I see, thank you, Lathe was it?” Jeff asked, taking the mug, sipping from it cautiously. *Want to make sure I’m saying it right. This coffee’s really good, I need to find out what brand it is.*

Lathe smiled and nodded, retrieving his own mug from the table.

Nate studied the piano, fascinated, lost in thought for a moment before looking to Lathe. “Eren said something once about you writing your own music. I have to ask, did you write the piano music in the videos he put up of him painting?” *I'd certainly never heard anything like it.*

Lathe smiled. “Uh, yeah. I did. I tend to just compose stuff randomly… I have a binder full of stuff, if you want to see it.”

Nate grinned. “It was really interesting music. I'd like to see it, if you'd let me.”

Lathe beamed, walking to the scripting room and pulling the binder from the shelf. He set it on the closed top of the piano, opening it to the clean sheets of music.

Nate skimmed over the notes, remembering the music from the video, reading over the words, his brow furrowed. He tapped the cursive lyrics. “...how would these work? Like, how low or high do you sing them?”
Jeff glanced over his shoulder and looked over the music, and the lyrics quiet to hear Lathe’s answer. I wonder if he can sing… Did he teach his son to sing this way?

Don’t be a pansy, Lathe. Do it. Nate Ruess is right fucking there. Do it! “I think it would be easiest if I sang it.” He went and put his coffee down on the kitchen table, taking the music out from the binder, spreding it over the stand. He was still for an instant before he began to play, singing his best.

Jeff closed his eyes listening to the sweet melody, smiling as Lathe continued to sing. Ah, I see… so he fluctuates between high and low, no wonder he wanted to sing than try to explain it to us. He sounds great, I like it. I hope his kid is just as good if not better.

Nate’s eyes followed Lathe’s fingers over the piano keys, his eyes bright. He must have taught Eren how to sing. He has such a good range- he makes it look easy to move that quickly up and down the scale.

Lathe had a small hopeful smile on his face as he played the last few chords, looking to the two of them. “…Was that any good?” Dammit if that sucked I might as well get hit by lightning right now.

“Your range is really good; I’m impressed. I hope you taught Eren the same thing. It was done beautifully, and I can see how it was easier to show us, your voice fluctuates a lot to keep the lyrics flowing nicely. It was very well done.” Jeff was short and too the point as he sipped at his mug still.

“I really like where you used vibrato- it really added this emotion that you could feel really strongly. And yeah, you can go from the really low notes to high ones like it’s nothing. You’re Eren’s father, alright.” He grinned.

Lathe laughed oddly, not knowing what to say to that last comment. Um. How does one respond to this… “…um, that’s really kind of you, but you should know that Eren’s not mine. I adopted him about five months ago.” He rubbed the back of his neck. At least I know I didn’t suck. That’s good.

Jeff’s eyes widened. “Really? Did you teach him how to play the piano? Or anything? I can see that there’s two cellos up here… are you teaching him that?” Jeff asked and shuffled over towards the cellos. “Who taught him how to sing like that, if it wasn’t you?” Jeff asked curiously. This is a very interesting development.
Lathe’s gaze traced the outline of the instrument. “...his mother did, a long time ago. She taught him everything he knows about music, about playing the piano and singing. I'm just kind of letting him and helping him with it a little, I guess. I got him the cello for his birthday, I thought I'd teach him that...”

Nate paused in his perusing of the binder full of music for a moment, looking up to the silent electric cello. *It looks a bit dusty...* “You play the cello much?”

Lathe smiled, moving over to it. “Not as much as I used it. I just brought it up from the basement.” He plugged in the amp, turning the volume down so it wasn't overwhelmingly loud. He sat on the black stool he brought up with it, drawing it up to him, thinking. *What to play, what to play...* He smiled. I know. He thought about the notes before drawing the bow smoothly across the strings, playing the familiar chords of Secrets.

Jeff picked up the notes after a bit. *OneRepublic, nice choice Lathe, it sounds great on the Amp.* Jeff sat down on the nearby couch, appreciating the notes flying through the air, though his head snapped towards the kitchen as he heard a blaring ringtone.

Lathe nearly dropped the bow in surprise. “That’s Levi. I need to see what’s up.” He put the cello in the stand and quickly moved to the kitchen, picking up his phone from the table, skimming over the texts.

=Yo, we’re almost done with our haircuts, about to head home

=Need anything from the store or what?

Lathe glanced up to Nate and Jeff, typing quickly.

)Yeah, we're going to need plenty of food. I'll send you a pic of the grocery list

*sends picture of said list*

)Btw we have company over

)Guess who it is

=...John Cena.

)No

)Good guess tho
Is it those people from the tattoo place yesterday

Just tell me who the hell’s in our house

Nate Ruess and his producer guy Jeff what’s-his-face

You're serious.

Levi, trust me. I'm being super cereal right now.

Just stop

But that’s great!! Nate Ruess is in our fucking house!!

Yeah he’s staying for lunch and stuffs and he wants to do some musical stuffs with Eren

So don't keep him waiting too long okay?

Roger. I'll make sure we don't take forever in the store.

Oh, and pick up a bunch of chicken for dinner.

Enough for five people

I'll think of something fancy to do with it

Alright. Talk to you later

Same

Lathe set down his phone, turning the tone volume down before coming back to the living room. “Levi and Eren are going to get some groceries so I can make lunch for all of us, is that alright?”

Jeff nodded. “That would be great, we figured we’d be here awhile since Nate wanted to record with him so badly.” Jeff finished off his mug before following Lathe’s lead, ushered into the kitchen.

Nate smiled. “Thank you so much, that sounds great.” He picked up the binder of music, following Jeff and Lathe to sit at the kitchen table with them, skimming over the dozens and dozens of pieces and asking about their titles, their words.

Lathe looked up as the front door’s lock rattled, Levi pushing it open with his foot and kicking off his shoes, taking note of the new shoes and boots on the mat. Nice Converse. He walked into the kitchen to set the bags on the counter, greeting Nate and Jeff, moving to put the groceries away, Blake at his heels. He turned around as he noticed Blake’s defensive stance in the doorway, trying to stare Nate and Jeff down. “Oh yeah, that’s Blake. He’s just really protective of Eren, it’s kinda his job. Here.” He went to take off Blake’s vest.
Nate saw the patches sewn onto the vest. *He's a service dog. PTSD, maybe? He isn't deaf, or blind...* He read the red lettering on one of the patches. *...PTSD. He *was* really nervous and jumpy when he came backstage, practically clinging to Levi for dear life...* Nate stood, maintaining a calm, neutral demeanour as he moved around the table, stopping a few feet from Blake. He noticed Jeff rise behind him, doing the same.

Levi put the vest next to the couch, retrieving a bag of dog treats from on top of the fridge. He handed a couple to Nate and Jeff. “Here, if you give him these he’ll know you’re not any danger to Eren or anyone else around here.” He put them back, watching over his shoulder as he put the groceries away.

Nate took a small step forward, holding out his hand with one of the treats, watching as Blake slowly moved forward, sniffing at his hand before licking it up from his palm. He grinned, giving him the other two, scratching him behind the ears. *He’s nice. I like him.*

Jeff slowly came up to Blake, coming down low and having his hand out with a treat like Nate did. Blake slowly came up to him, sniffing him, slowly taking the first treat and hastily accepting the two that followed. He lay down in between the two of them, wagging his tail lazily as he was pet. *He’s pretty chill. So Eren’s got PTSD... I wonder why? What happened to the kid with the golden voice?* Jeff picked his head up as he heard a few chords coming from a cello in the other room.

“I REMEMBER!!!”

Eren shouted from the other room, which prompted Blake to get up and hurriedly rush to Eren’s side in the piano room, only to find that he was okay and playing the cello like he had been born to do so. Blake came back soon after and sat down by Nate, expecting to be pet. The music steadily getting more difficult as Eren continued to play the cello.

Nate leaned over to pet Blake, quickly giving up and sitting down next to him. Nate smiled to himself, his thoughts joking. *So demanding of attention.* He had no problem with giving Blake attention.

Late quirked an eyebrow at Eren’s shout, listening to the music growing more and more complex. He looked over to Levi. “What’s up with Eren?”

“He started thinking about how he hasn’t played the damn thing in almost a decade and became determined to remember how to play his mother’s favorite....” Levi let out an exasperated sigh as
he closed the now fully stocked fridge. I just had to ask... And he went on a fucking rant... A huge-ass fuck-mothering rant.

You sound so done with him. “I get the idea whatever he said was extremely long-winded.”

“You have no idea... He went on a rant of instruments that his mom taught him how to play... thirteen... Thirteen instruments he knows how to play. ...I don’t think we’ll be able to fit them all here if Spades can get them all. We’d be trying to get another Grand Piano in the piano room. But anyways, just let him get it out of his system for right now. Once he’s played it until he’s satisfied he played it just like his mother taught him, he’ll be over. I didn’t tell him Nate was over here, figured it was a surprise.” Levi was short and to the point as he acquired a cup of tea and sat back down at the table in Eren’s usual spot. God, that was such a long car ride...

“We’ll figure something out in getting everything over here...” He froze as what he said clicked. “...did you say thirteen instruments?”

“Technically twelve because we can’t necessarily take the organ from the church he grew up near.” Levi said and took a long swig of his tea. At least his music sounds wonderful. Levi watched as Jeff returned to his seat at the kitchen table since Blake was preoccupied with making sure Nate was giving him a belly rub.

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up, and he turned to start on lunch for all of them, pondering how Eren could have learned thirteen instruments and where the hell they would put all of them. We could donate the piano I have right now to my old high school. They didn't have one last I checked- then again, that was years ago. I'm sure there's a school around here that would love to have it. And we could put hooks up in the walls, or something... We'll make room for everything.

The music in the other room had finally stopped and Eren was coming closer to the entrance. “Hey, Dad, are we having Marc and Brook over for dinner-” Eren froze when he saw Nate sitting on the floor with Blake. His eyes lit up like a fucking Christmas tree as he squealed in joy, running over and dropping onto his knees to give him a hug. “Oh my god! Nate you’re here!” Eren’s excitement was clearly evident in his voice, a bit higher because of it.

Jeff chuckled quietly as he saw Eren race to tackle Nate all the way to the floor in a huge hug.

Nate laughed as Eren glomped him, falling back onto the floor with a huge grin, ruffling Eren’s hair. “Good to see you again too, Eren. Nice to see your cast is finally off-” He gasped as he saw Eren’s tattoos, careful of them. They look really new, as in I-just-got-them new. “You got tattoos?!” They look so dope what even!
Eren smiled, pulling himself off of Nate so they could both sit up again. He seemed much more comfortable to be around him in his own home. He looked at his tattoo and nodded. “Yeah, this is only the start of the sleeve, I gotta get the rest outlined and then colored in… I got it yesterday, looks cool, huh?” Eren smiled even brighter as he showed Nate the whole upper arm. *I wonder if he likes it? I hope he does… I’ve been doodling it for quite a long time.*

“That. Is so cool! Did you design it, or did someone else?” *Given you painted the upstairs room, my money’s on you.*

“I did… That reminds me. Dad you got a tattoo yesterday too, I haven’t seen it yet!” Eren said and looked over to Lathe by the counter, he hadn’t even really noticed Jeff quietly watching them. *What did Lathe get?*

Lathe looked over his shoulder, chuckling. He stopped to pull his loose sleeve up to the top of his left shoulder. “I already had the hand of cards on it, and the roses… But I had Brook put in the gears at the top left corner yesterday, and the chessboard.” He motioned to the checkered pattern underneath the red roses. *I thought she did an amazing job of it.*

Eren’s eyes widened. “They look awesome! What are you making for lunch?” Eren turned his head to Nate. “How long are you staying for?” Eren asked quickly, wanting to know how long he got to spend with Nate and see if they could do any recordings together. *Please say you’re staying at least a little bit after lunch! Please please please! I wanna sing with you again!*

“We’re having pasta and some Caesar salad for lunch.”

“And I was hoping I could stay for a while, record some music with you.” Nate beamed at Eren’s excitement.

“You’ll sing with me again? You really will?” Eren asked, Blake moving to take hold of his hand to get him to calm down. *Too excited? Well, Blake picked up on that pretty quick.*

Nate watched as Blake took Eren’s hands into his mouth, pushing down concern. *He’s trained to do that, remember. Let him do his job. But I should probably help him chill out a bit.* He rested a hand on Eren’s arm, an easy smile on his face. “Course. It’ll be fun! And we can sing whatever you want.” *That really would be cool!* Nate suddenly looked up to Jeff, remembering his quiet presence. “Oh my God, how could I possibly forget? I’m sorry, Jeff. Eren, this is my producer Jeff Bhasker. Jeff, this is Eren Yeager, the kid who sang at my concert that I refuse to shut up about.”
Eren turned to look at Jeff, his eyes growing to the size of dinner plates in pure surprise. *Holy shit! That’s really him! That’s really Mr. Bhasker!* Eren didn’t know what to do, or say since nothing came out of his mouth when he opened it to speak. Eren felt Blake climb into his lap and lick his face to bring him back out of his thoughts and to reality. *Alright calm down... He’s only here because Nate’s here... That’s gotta be the reason right?*

“Hi, Eren, I wanted to stick around and hear you sing with Nate to see if you're as good as he says you are before I make a contract with you.” He said and smiled easily, sitting back in his chair watching as Eren was slowly petting Blake in his lap, trying to process everything.

Nate nudged Eren’s arm, his tone light. “Now don't you go and get all nervous on us here.” He looked up as Lathe started to set the table, moving the binder of sheet music to the counter. “Come on, I get the feeling lunch is ready.” He smiled, standing and offering Eren his hand.

Eren looked up to Nate’s hand for a second, still trying to process exactly what was happening. He ushered Blake off of his lap, giving Nate his good hand to pull him up. *Probably harder to do than when he picked me up from the crowd to get onstage. I have gained 40ish pounds since then.* Eren got up quickly and thanked him quietly, noticing that there were five spots at the table being set and four chairs. “Hey Dad? Where’s an extra chair?” Eren asked, turning to Lathe for an answer. *I mean, I would just make Levi’s lap my chair, but this is Jeff Bhasker we’re talking about... I don’t know if he would think I’m weird for being gay.... I wonder if Nate told him?.... Oh shit.... All the hickeys and bites.... They can see them!! Shit!* Eren felt Blake’s mouth on his hands again to stop him from freaking out more at the new revelation.

Lathe’s brow furrowed as he saw Blake catch Eren’s hands. *What’s wrong?* He reached for the punch card in his wallet again. “Basement. I'll be right back.” He sent Eren a reassuring smile before he walked to the scripting room, quickly reappearing with another chair, setting it next to Levi. He stepped around the table and handed everyone a plate with salad, plenty more in the large salad bowl he set in the middle of the table, and a bowl of pasta, sitting across from his usual place where Nate now sat.

Eren sat down across from Jeff, who was where he usually sat with Levi to his left and Nate to his right. He swallowed hard looking to the food. *I don’t think I can eat without a pill....* Eren slowly got up and went to the counter to take his nausea pill before coming back to sip at his water and wait. Blake had reclaimed his hands as soon as he sat down and he whined a little, forcing Eren to focus on him and not anyone else. *Shitshitshtishriftshrift.*

Lathe sent him a sympathetic look as he took his pill. *Nerves do that to you... but he’ll be okay.*
Levi nudged his foot with his own. You don’t have to be worried about anything, Eren. It’s alright.

Jeff noticed that Blake had pushed Eren back, away from the table a bit and was almost practically standing in the chair to try and calm him down. What’s got him like this? God… Is it me? He doesn’t need to be worried about me.

Nate looked at him worriedly, leaning to rest a hand on his shoulder, giving him a small smile. “You don’t have to be worried about anything, Eren. We’re not gonna attack you or anything. It’s fine, promise.” He’s probably worried about Jeff… but Jeff’s really nice. You don’t have to worry about him.

Eren looked down and the hand that wasn’t petting Blake went up to cover a large number of hiccups on his neck. He couldn’t bring himself to look anyone in the eye, not even Levi. Shit… There’s so many… I can’t cover them all up. Though Blake seemed to pick up on it. The dog leaned his head against the other side of Eren’s neck, hiding the rest of the hiccups. Shit… I need something to cover them up… A hoodie? Yeah but those are upstairs…. Shit

Lathe suddenly rose, understanding. “I’ll be right back.” He quickly excused himself upstairs, digging a dark green hoodie from their closet. I’d probably be that embarrassed if I were Eren… He traipsed back down the stairs and tapped Eren’s shoulder lightly, handing it to him. That should make you feel less self-conscious.

Eren sighed in relief and moved to put it on, quickly covering all the hiccups and bites that littered his body. Thank you Lathe. Eren calmed down a lot after that and Blake laid down by his feet at the table, waiting for food to drop to eat. Eren slowly started to eat again, finishing up his salad first before moving to the pasta. Well it certainly is good… But then again Lathe hasn’t made anything I don’t like yet… And it’s been almost five months too...

Jeff seemed to be relieve when Eren calmed down with his hoodie. Wonder if it’s a special hoodie for him?

Nate relaxed, returning to his food when he saw Eren mellow out, a knowing look in his eye....oh. That makes sense.

...These are important people. I’ll let it slide. Levi smirked, though he kept nudging Eren’s foot under the table.
Eren sent Levi a huge glare before he looked back to his food. He finished off his plate and worked on finishing up a second one. *You are in so much trouble... Well it’s not your fault they showed up... But God, you are getting a punishment dammit! It almost looks like I got strangled with how many there are!*

Nate finished eating first, addressing Eren as he ate his last few bites of salad. “So, Eren, is it cool if we record some stuff? We can sing whatever you like, or we could play the piano. It’s your call.” He grinned. *They're both really fun to do.*

“All the recording stuff is upstairs, so singing would be better. I don’t want to have to drag it down here...too much work.” Eren stood up taking the dishes from everyone that was finished and put them in the sink, motioning Nate to follow him. Blake came as well, stretching as he appeared from under the table.

Nate followed Eren up the stairs, glancing to the left and seeing the ceiling of Lathe’s room, recognising the bronze and gold cogs and gears. *That is really cool.* He saw the numerous drawings on Eren’s walls as they passed his room, finally stepping into the recording room. He slowly walked the length of it, taking in the amazing detail of the jungle-esque scene. “You really went all-out on this. It’s amazing.” He turned to Eren as he set up the camera, grinning. “What were you thinkin’ we should sing?” *Anything you have us singing will turn out fabulous, honestly.*

“Well, I’ve been thinking about doing another duet with you…. If that would be okay?” Eren asked as he moved to set up his computer, which was already loaded with a multitude of Recordings, pictures, and videos. “It’ll take me a minute to sort through everything… Do you have any ideas?” Eren asked looking over as Nate inspected his room. *I wonder if he likes the room?* “If you like this, we should ask Dad if I can show you his study, that’s probably the best one I did so far.” Eren returned his focus back to his computer and it started up with a picture he had been working on taking up the whole screen. He quickly closed out of it before he started up the software for recording and made sure everything was connected where they should be. “Would you be interested in doing country by any chance?” Eren looked up to Nate as he asked. *I wonder if we have a guitar around.*

*You did Lathe’s study too? Lucky.* “Country music would be cool. And yeah, we have to do a duet.” *Jeff brought his guitar.* “Do you happen to know how to play the guitar?” *If you do, we’re going all out with this.* Nate walked over to Eren, inspecting his setup. *Nice computer.*

“Yeah I do, but I don’t have one…. Did you guys bring one?” Eren asked moving to make sure he was signed into his YouTube account. *Hmm... I’ve never tried to live stream yet... That could be interesting.* “Have you done a livestream before?” Eren sat down and clicked a few things and already had a live stream set up and ready to go.
“Yeah, Jeff did. I'll go get it. And… I think so? I mean, I know what they are obviously, but I only did one once. It was really cool actually, getting to see people comment and ask questions in real time. We could do one for our jamming, if you want.” That would be really neat, seeing people talk and comment. It’s also not as much of a pain to edit if you post them!

“Alright, then I’ll start it up and get it tweeted out… You wanna go get the guitar?” Eren asked and got his phone out to tweet about a live stream. Hmm, should I say Nate’s with me? Or keep that a surprise until they click? Well I might as well start the live stream then link it.

“Same. I’ll go grab it.” Nate disappeared down the stairs, pulling out his phone to tweet about the livestream. He popped into the kitchen. “Hey Jeff, can I borrow the keys to the car for a sec? I need to grab something.”

Jeff looked up with a raised eyebrow. “Uhh, yeah… I guess.” Jeff dug the keys out of his pocket and handed them over to Nate. “What are you grabbing? I thought you didn’t want anything from your luggage?” He questioned turning away from the two at the table with him. And Lathe was just getting to the point of where he found out Eren could sing too…

“Something.” Nate grinned and left for the car, opening the trunk and grabbing the guitar case, slamming it back shut and locking it. Going back inside, he tossed Jeff the keys, and ran back up the stairs before he could protest, tapping away on his phone. “Thanks!”

“What does he need my guitar for?” Jeff asked to himself as he watched Nate run up the stairs. “Does he know how to play?” Jeff asked either of them.

Levi nodded. “Yup, that would be one of the thirteen he can play.” So many… And he told me about all of them.

Nate walked back into the room and closed it with his foot, placing the case on the ground and opening it, taking the guitar out and handing it to Eren. “Here ya go. It’s Jeff’s, so don't break it or anything.” He grinned. You're not gonna break it and we both know that.

Eren smiled as he took it. “You wanna tweet it out and see what we’re playing first while I get used to the sound and tune it to the song?” Eren asked as he slipped the strap over his shoulders, adjusting it so it fit nicely in his lap as he sat on the stools he brought out in front of the camera. “It’s recording and we’re live just so you know.” Don’t swear… Don’t want to be responsible for that.
“Oh, we're live?” Nate looked into the camera, beaming. “Oh, we're live. Hi! And yeah, I'll finish tweeting this out now.” He plopped down onto a stool next to Eren, typing quickly on his phone. “Alright, I'd give it five minutes to explode.” And I'll try my best not to swear like a sailor. He pulled up the comment section next to the screen of their stream, skimming over the many greetings and excited keyboard smashings, reading over the fan suggestions of songs to sing. His brow furrowed in thought. What should we sing first? “What to sing, what to sing...” He kept reading as multitudes of people suddenly latched onto the same idea. “Hey, how about we do ‘Just Give Me a Reason’ again? Everyone wants to hear it, and it sounded amazing the first time.”

Eren looked up to see Nate by his computer. “Sure, let me tune the guitar, give me a couple seconds.” That would sound really nice with the guitar behind it. Eren smiled as he finished up after about two minutes of screwing with the notes before he played a few cords of the song. “I’m ready when you are... oh I’ll move the mic out so they can see us both.” Eren got up and moved the microphone and stools back so that they could be seen by the camera at full body length. There that should be good. Blake seems interested in being in the shot too, apparently. Eren watched as Blake sat down in between the two stools, looking up to Eren as he leaned down to pet Blake behind the ears. “Hey Blake... you’re on camera... wanna say ‘Hi?” Eren giggled as Blake growled a little bit looking straight at the camera before right back at him.

Nate smiled, petting Blake’s head, seeing the comments rush with greetings to Blake. “Everyone’s saying hi to Blake.” He is adorable. It’s understandable. He noticed some people commenting about his collar, asking who’s service dog it was. Oh yeah, the lettering on his collar. “Uh, a lot of people are asking who’s he is, they can see the lettering on his collar.” He looked to Eren.

Eren looked up from the guitar and down to Blake’s collar. “I completely forgot his collar said that... oh well.” Eren turned to look at the camera. “Blake’s my doge... He’s a PTSD service dog, so don’t be alarmed if he bites, that’s his job.” Eren smiled and turned over to Nate. “You ready?” He asked quickly. Change the subject, I don’t want people asking why I need a service dog.

It’s cool to skim over it. It shouldn’t be so important that Eren needs him as people might make it out to be. “Ready when you are.” Nate gave him an easy grin, listening as Eren started the familiar first few chords.

Eren played the first few chords of the song with a happy smile on his face. Eren opened his mouth first, singing beautifully. The comments section continued going wild. At least they like it... now focus on the song. Eren sang beautifully, even going so far as to hit the high note perfectly. Hmm, will I be hitting high notes like that again today? I mean I can go higher... but Nate doesn’t know that.

Nate sang his best, again joining in at the first refrain. He sounds so much better than I do. And I still don’t understand how he can go that high! It’s seriously impressive. He laughed as Eren strummed the last few notes. “You somehow sound even better than at the concert, and you were
singing perfectly then!"

Eren smiled sheepishly. “Nah… My voice was wavering a lot when I was on stage with you… It probably sounds better because I’m not as nervous to do that again… So have you guys decided what we’re doing next? We’re doing duets!” Eren called to the camera before going to look at the comment section as it blew up. Their twitters were just as bad, their phones continuously vibrating from all the tweets. Well I can have Nate pick the first one.

I call BS on that- you were going all out with it on stage and it was great! He scrolled through the comments, finding a suggestion he recognised. “Do you know ‘Need You Now’ by Lady Antebellum?”

“Do I know…. Of course I know… I’ve been looking at country songs for the past three days… But I need to retune the guitar if we wanna do that one… The question is do you know it? Or you gotta study the lyrics?” Eren giggled a little as he made a jab at Nate. Would you know it? I don’t think there’s a seriously high note… but we’ll see.

Nate put his hand over his heart in mock hurt. “Well, I never!” He grinned, lightly smacking Eren’s arm. “Of course I know it.”

Eren could only laugh as he was playfully smacked. “So… did you know I could go even higher… I can basically sing like a girl if I really wanted to.” Eren told him and he proceeded to turn the guitar in his lap. Wonder if I’ll be going that high today… I know I can, it’s not that hard to hit it, but it’s a lot of strain on the throat.

Nate quirked an eyebrow. “We can sing whatever is comfortable for your voice. But, like, what’s the highest note you can hit? Do you know?”

“I can hit a C8.” Eren replied without even needing to think about it. Yes, I can hit the highest note in the world… I know… but I can’t go that low though, I wish I could, but I can’t.

Holy fuck. “Are you serious? That’s the highest note anyone can hit. And now I really want to hear you hit it, if you want to.” He laughed sheepishly. Please please please I need to see this! Well, hear this. Please!

“I’d need to sing ‘Say Something’ at least two pitches higher than normal to even attempt getting that high, songs aren’t made to get that high.” Eren said and finished messing with the guitar.
“We’ll do that one later, let my voice warm up some.” Eren said and he texted Levi to bring them up a couple of bottles of water so that they could have something to drink. *Hmm… I kinda want to show you off… You’re kissing me when you get up here.*

“‘Course, I don't want to be responsible for killing your voice. That’s not cool.” He quirked an eyebrow at Eren’s phone. “More tweets?”

“Nah, I texted Levi to bring us up some water bottles for in between songs.” Eren said and put his phone down as he heard the door creak open and he waved Levi over.

Levi walked over, setting a couple bottles of water on the desk, handing one to each of them. He walked in the view of the camera, still wearing his tank top that showed off his muscular arms. “I just brought you a bunch, there’s like four for each of you if you want it…”

Eren smiled and took his hand, pulling him close and pecking his cheek. “Thanks Levi.” Eren moved and kissed him chastely on the lips before he turned back to his water bottle, opening it to take a long sip of it. *And there goes the comment section.* “Levi you’re popular… Hmmm, sorry but no, he’s mine.” Eren announced to the internet which just caused both of their phones to go off with more tweets and comments, and the boy could only giggle.

Levi turned to the camera, his cheeks tinted red as he spotted the red light on. He looked at the screen with wide eyes. “Wait, you’re livestreaming this?” *Well that’s a thing apparently.*

“Yup, but don’t worry. It’s gonna get posted as a regular video too, and there’s only…” Eren squinted to look to see how many people were viewing the stream at that moment. “Only a little over a million and a half people watching.” Eren smiled back at Levi’s flustered face. *Well, punishment given.*

Levi felt himself flush red to his ears, hiding his face in his hands. “You know… You could have warned me.” He gave a breathy laugh, turning to hit him lightly on the shoulder. “I’ll be downstairs if either of you need anything, okay?” He didn't wait for an answer before he left, closing the door behind him. *Yeah I’m out*

Eren burst out into laughter as Levi left the room. “God, that reaction was great! He didn’t even notice me take pictures! HAHA, oh well, back to the music. You ready?” Eren asked putting his water bottle down to pick up the guitar again and get ready to play Lady Antebellum. *Well, Nate, now you know I don’t care anymore… Wonder how many of the tweets are hate for being homosexual? Oh well, I’ll think about that later.*
Nate beamed. *Well, he obviously doesn't mind showing Levi off. Hopefully there's not too much hate about that.* “Ready!”

Eren smiled and he started to strum the first few cords of the song, opening his mouth first, taking over the Lady’s voice. Eren’s voice was a little lower and fuller; he was definitely into this song a lot, putting his whole being into it, and it showed in the comments how much the audience loved it. *He sounds good with me... It’s funny how this song is mostly us singing together... We sound pretty good together.*

*He’s really getting into this. And our voices do sound really good together. We need to do this more often, seriously!*

Eren continued to play the guitar, singing beautifully, not messing up in either department, even though he had no sheet music in front of him. *This song went over well, in my opinion at least.*

Nate took a large swig of water from the bottle in his hands, looking through the comments for suggestions and good instrumentals, insisting that Eren go solo in singing Heroes by Alesso. The Sweet Escape by Gwen Stefani, Love the Way You Lie by Eminem… *He’s doing absolutely fabulous. And he can rap! Damn! For a really long time, too.* The comments were flooded with exclamations and praise for Eren’s skillz. He sang No Air by Jordin Sparks with him, beaming the whole time. *Because of course we need another love song in there.* Nate suggested What Hurts the Most by Rascal Flatts, watching as Eren picked the guitar right back up. *He doesn't have any sheet music to go off of and he’s nailing it!* Nate and Eren got really into Worth It by Fifth Harmony, moving on their stools to the beat. They sang Say Something by A Great Big World beautifully, Nate beaming with an astounded look as Eren finally hit the C8 note. *Oh my God HE CAN HIT THAT!* Nate found himself on the receiving end of Eren’s puppy-eyes, giving in as Eren picked the guitar up one last time to play Boulevard of Broken Dreams by Green Day. *It’s so obvious this is one of his favourite songs ever. And he’s playing it really well!* Nate suggested that they lastly sing another song by Queen, everyone watching the stream typing Somebody to Love over and over, finding an instrumental and singing their best. *Yes! That’s a great way to end a singing session.*

Nate glanced at the time on the lower corner of the screen. *We've been singing for 45 minutes... We could do something else for the stream, maybe a Q&A?* “Eren, question. We’ve only been streaming for about 45 minutes, and I was thinking we could have people tweet at us using some random hashtag to ask questions and we answer some of them. Lots of people do that in videos and streams, if you want to do that.”

Eren thought about it for a minute. *That sounds like a great idea, the only problem is I don’t know how hashtags work yet.* “That sounds cool… You’ll have to do it though, I’m still very unfamiliar with Twitter.” Eren got up, crossing the room to put the guitar in it’s case safely. *Well, I didn’t break it, or damage it... That’s good.*
“It’s really easy, you just kinda make something up. So, people watching this stream, go on Twitter using #askYeager and just start asking all the random questions you have floating around in your heads.” He turned to Eren. “Literally you can just make up a random hashtag like that and then look it up and everything tagged with it will pop up. So…” He looked to his phone, searching for it. “I announced that about twenty seconds ago, and there are already dozens of questions coming in, though a bunch are either repetitive or… not actually questions.” He quirked an eyebrow. *To be expected. Which ones are any good… Hmmn…*

Eren pulled out his phone, typing in the hashtag… *There’s so many! Which one should I pick first?* “What’s your favorite home cooked meal?” Eren made a small noise of thinking before he looked up from his phone. “I would have to say my Father’s Pot Roast would be my absolute favorite for dinner, and lunch would be his homemade chicken noodle soup. What about you Nate?” Eren asked turning to him. *What’s your favorite?*

“Oh, God, um…” Nate laughed. *Do I even have a favourite? Most of the time I just eat out…* “Ugh, I just end up eating out so much, I don't really have a favourite food that you would make at home… Sorry, I have to pass. Not applicable for me.” He skimmed further down the list. “Have a favourite city?”

“Hmm… I would have to say Munich. And for anyone who doesn’t know where that is, it’s in Germany.” Eren scrolled through his phone. *What to ask? What to ask? What to ask? Oh here’s a good one!* “Have you ever gone traveling somewhere?” Eren had a raised eyebrow in question.

“Is that even a question? I've been on tour all across the states! I've been to Europe a few times, too. But yeah, of course. I travel a bunch. It gets really annoying when you keep forgetting time differences or what state you're in, which tends to happen. ...Where are you originally from?”

“I’m from a very small town in the German countryside.” Eren answered and smiled, rubbing the back of his neck, embarrassed by the fact that he wasn’t American. *He’s gonna ask about my non-existent accent isn’t he? Or ask if I’m fluent?*

“Oh that’s really cool! Can you still speak German fluently, or not really?” *He doesn't have an accent… I never would have guessed!*

“Yeah, I can still speak fluently, our high school actually requires us to take a German class, so I end up speaking it most of the week in class. But that was my first language, so I won’t forget it soon.” Eren’s blush had spread to a light dusting across his cheeks. *God, this is embarrassing. Where are you from?”*
“Iowa City, Iowa. I’m American born and raised in the states.” He kept reading. “What’s your lifestyle like? So, like, what’s a normal day for you, I guess?”

“Well, let’s see, I get up between five and six in the morning, come upstairs from where I sleep in the basement and wait for my Dad to make breakfast, go to school, come back home, do my homework with Levi, and then I’ll either take over the basement, which is our all our artsy things are, or I’ll record stuff on the piano, or I’ll record stuff up here, or I’ll draw on my computer… It really depends how many videos I’ve already recorded, or what mood I’m in.” Eren swiped through his phone. “What do you guys think about each other's singing careers?” Eren looked up, thinking for a bit. “Well, I really liked when you were singing with Fun. That was probably the best music I heard, but then when you guys split up, and you started singing on your own I really started to like everything you did. I think it’s really impressive how well you’ve done over the past couple years, and you were successful enough to go on tour, which I loved being a part of by the way.” Eren laughed a little as he mentioned himself in Nate’s tour. That’s my favorite part.

Nate ran a hand through his hair, a wide grin and a faint blush on his face. “-I just think it’s absolutely insane how I just kinda got you up on the stage and everything just snowballed from that. You have an amazing voice and I honestly felt so inadequate when you were singing at the concert with me, and you’ve just been kinda shoved into the spotlight and rolling with it from there. The song covers you've been doing are absolutely fantastic for the difficulty of the pieces you keep choosing and I can't believe all that just kinda happened because I picked you to come up because you looked like I could pick you up easily enough to get you onstage.” That is the weirdest thing I've ever been responsible for.

Eren chuckled. “That’s certainly very kind of you… So you picked me because you thought you could pick me up?” Eren asked, giggling. “That’s really funny, you probably can’t lift me up as easily anymore.” Eren couldn’t stop giggling as he sat in his stool.

“Is that a challenge?” Nate joked, slowly rising from his stool.

Eren’s grin went from ear to ear. “Oh yeah! Try it! I dare you!” Eren laughed as he stood up as well. Come on! I wanna see if you can lift me like Levi can!

“Fine! I will!” Nate took hold of Eren and tried to lift him, unable to budge him. What the hell? “What? Come on! You sure you don't have bricks in your pockets this time?”

Eren nodded, laughing so hard he was practically crying. “I…. hahahaha… I told you …… hahahaha… I told you, you couldn’t do it!” Eren was dying as Nate continued to struggle to lift him. This is fucking hilarious!
“This is so unfair, you need to stop growing.” He joked, giving up, throwing up his hands in defeat. “I give up.” I don't know what that Dad of yours is feeding you...

“Oh I haven’t grown at all! I’ve only filled out… that’s really all I’ve done, gain a couple pounds.” Eren got back onto his stool. “Anyways, I told ya so!” Eren laughed and had a shit-eating grin on his face. I told ya so!

Nate sat back down, beaming. “I don't know what it is you've been eating, but now I look inadequate and that’s not cool.” He joked, going back to skimming through his phone. Oh. Can I ask that? “There’s a person here asking about your mom, cause you keep mentioning your Dad but not really your mom…”

Eren looked down a bit. “Ah… yeah… I don’t have one anymore.” Eren’s demeanor became quite somber before skimming through the phone. That one’s harmless… “Can we see Blake again? Yes, I’ll call him upstairs.” Eren raised his right hand to his mouth whistling loudly for a few seconds before they heard Blake bolting up the stairs. Blake came in between them and was wagging his tail as he sat down. “Good boy Blake, can you say ‘Hi’ to the internet again?” Eren smiled as Blake growled a little before sitting to get pet by the both of them. Twitter adores him… I should post more pictures of him then.

Nate scratched Blake behind the ear, looking to Eren with sympathy. It can't be easy… He looked to his phone again. “Am I going to sing with Eren more often?” He looked up, smiling, “I really really want to. We need to drag you and everyone out to LA sometime to record a bunch of stuff, both stuff just for you and us both. That would be really neat.”

“That would be awesome, I’ve never been to LA before.” Eren said and smiled, a blush forming across his face again. “Do either of you have any siblings?... Well I don’t, I’m an only child.” Eren looked up from his phone and back over to Nate.

“Yeah, I have an older sister. Her name’s Libby. What’s your favourite flavour of jelly beans?”

Eren gave an awkward smile. “I don’t like sweets… so I’ve never tried jelly beans… I know it’s weird… but I’m weird to begin with. Are you ticklish?” Eren said and posed to tickle him. If he says yes, I am sooo going for it!

Nate raised his arms defensively, leaning away from him and wincing. I'm going to regret this. “I'm so ticklish it’s not even funny but if you so much as move-"
Eren pounced on him immediately. “TICKLE WAR!” Eren got to his side and started to tickle him, laughing a lot. If he tickles me, oh my god, that’ll be hilarious! Eren finally got Nate on his sides and laughed almost manically. 

Nate tried to tickle him back, laughing loudly, trying to get away from him. “No! N-not my sides, please!” He finally reached for Eren’s sides in a last-ditch effort, beaming as Eren let out an adorable yelp and started giggle, stopping and vulnerable to attack. Yes! Nate took his opportunity and immediately went for Eren’s sides, laughing. 

Eren giggle struggling to push his hands away and failing completely. “Nate! No! Stop! PLEASE!” Eren begged him, a blush forming across his face, all the way to his ears. NOO!!! I’m gonna pee! STAHP! 

Nate stopped, beaming as he retook his seat on his stool. “I totally won.” He let Eren manage his gigging fit before he asked him another question. “Who is your best friend and how did you meet?” 

“Ah, my best friend. Well I met him when I was walking to school, I used to live like three miles away, took forever to walk there, and it turns out Armin was my neighbor… A good mile down the road, so we walked to school together, found out we were in all the same classes, so he helped catch me up in all the classes I needed to be caught up in. But yeah, Armin is my bestie, and he’s awesome. Now let’s see… Next question… Ah! The artsy one! Do you prefer pens or pencils?” Eren asked putting his phone down and looking at him with curiosity sparking in his eyes. I wanna do a picture of him for his birthday… In which ever he says he prefers. 

“Hmmm… probably pencils. My handwriting can get really scratchy and I tend to misspell things. Like a lot.” He laughed. “It’s best for me to be able to erase stuff and try again. Now… This one’s kinda artsy, I guess. Do you like your handwriting?” We kinda already know my answer. You can barely read it sometimes! 

Eren smiled. “Yeah I really like my handwriting… Armin and I exchange notes a lot, and he always says mine are easy to read… Compared to his own handwriting. I guess I like that aspect of it, that it’s clean and everyone can read it.” We’re running out of good questions… “When was the last time you visited a zoo? I don’t think I’ve ever been to one.” Eren put his phone back down, waiting for an answer. Is that a bad thing? I’ve never seen one before. 

“...It was a couple years ago, in the fall. Yeah, I think it’s been three years. And how have you never gone to a zoo? If you don't go soon, I will personally drag you to one.” He grinned. “sweet treats or salty treats? I have such a sweet tooth, it’s crazy.”
“I would rather have salty, I love pretzels!” Eren looked back down to his phone. “Oh this is a good one! Have you ever sung in the shower? I know I have!” Eren giggled happily.

“How can anyone not sing in the shower? Like, it’s weird not to. Which family member do you most closely resemble?”

“Ah that would be my mother… I have her eyes, I was always told that.” Eren said with a small smile. “What color clothing do you like to wear?” Eren asked. Change the subject quickly...

“I don't have a huge preference like that, but I typically wear really dark clothes and then there’s a bright splash of color somewhere. Like, dark jeans and a black jacket, but I’ll have a shirt with a bright design on it and light shoes. Which family member are you most like?” So many family questions, and I get that he doesn’t like to talk about his mum… I dunno...

“Ah… That would be my Dad right now… He adopted me about five months ago. So he’s the only family I got now. But we’re so alike it’s incredible. He likes to paint, draw, sing and play the piano. He’s an awesome dad and I am picking up way too many of his quirks and habits… Like his old boots, I practically live in those now. So yeah, I would say I’m most like Dad… And I call him that because he is my Dad and I see him as family… So I don’t call him by his first name anymore.” Eren explained quietly before he looked at the time. We’ve been talking for almost half an hour... Yeesh.

Nate smiled. He’s really lucky. “Do you want to end the stream there? That a good place to stop? We've been online for a while.”

Yeah this'll do. “So then I guess this is it guys! I’ll be posting this later in the week! So once it’s up you can show it to your friends who missed it!” Eren said with a smile before turning to Nate to see if he had anything he wanted to say. You wanna close us off or…?

“Alright, so we’ll see you guys later! Bye!” Nate beamed at the camera, leaning forward to stop the recording and the stream. “That was epic.” He leaned back to look at Eren, grinning like a madman. “Oh, and I was dead serious. This is going to happen more, and I don't care if I have to drag you out to LA. This is too much fun.”

“Really?” Eren asked and his eyes brightened up even more. He was being serious? Eren watched as Blake took his hands, glancing down at his dog, letting out a nervous laugh. “Sorry, I’m still really nervous whenever I’m with you..” Eren was honest and he sat down on the floor and Blake sat beside him, licking his face to calm him down. Calm the fuck down Eren!
“Eren. We had a tickle war ten minutes ago. You don’t have to be nervous around me!” Nate got off his stool, feeling too tall and going to sit down next to Eren, petting Blake.

Eren could only give by a nervous chuckle… “There’s a reason I have a PTSD service dog… I’m really bad at trusting people… I’m surprised I can even trust Lathe… And he’s my Dad now… It’s just a thing I have… Major trust issues…” Eren took deep breaths to calm himself down. Eren this is good, ‘cause Nate needs to know I don’t trust people… I don’t trust people to follow through with their words. Eren was brought out of his thoughts when Blake started whining horribly and climbed onto his lap, nosing him to the floor. Am I freaking out that much?

_What- He’s trained to do his thing. Let him if he needs to._ Nate brought his hand back from Blake’s head, sending Eren a reassuring smile. “It’s okay, it really is. I understand. Thank you for telling me.” He watched with worry as Blake brought Eren to the floor. _Should I do something…? What though? _ “Uh, I’ll be right back.” Nate stood from the floor and quickly walked downstairs, hearing movement in the room to his left. He poked his head around the corner, catching Lathe’s eye. “Uh, Blake just did this thing where he gets Eren on the floor and sits on his chest and I’m kinda worried but I don’t know what to do…” _Well then, what a help I am._

Levi stopped Lathe with his hand for a moment before moving around the table. “I’ll go.” He looked to Nate, leading them back up the stairs. “He’s either panicking or overexcited. He’ll be okay…” Levi walked into the recording room, pushing the ajar door open and kneeling next to Eren. He rested a hand on his shoulder, his voice soft. “You okay? You with me, Eren?” _He doesn’t look like he’s having a full-on attack, which is good…_

Eren looked at Levi with scared eyes. <“I can’t trust him Levi. I can’t… I can’t…. Why can’t I?”> Eren started to cry a little, Blake quickly licking the tears away from his face. He wasn't anywhere near a full attack; Blake had kept him from that. _Why can’t I? Why can’t I trust that he’ll follow through with his words? Why can’t I Levi? Why can’t I say it out loud in English? Why can’t I?_

Levi looked to him with worry, his other hand cupping his cheek, softly rubbing his jaw, trying to translate what he wanted to say. _How am I supposed to answer that? _<“…Eren, it’s okay. So many bad things have happened to you, and I understand that you are… wary of the people you meet. We all can understand that. It’s okay to not put your complete trust in everyone right away. It isn’t something you should be upset about, that you don’t completely trust people immediately. It isn’t smart to. It’s okay. Don’t cry, please. It’s alright.”> _I don’t know how I’m able to remember all those words, but thank God I can. It’s never a good idea to trust everyone wholeheartedly right away. We all understand. We do._

Eren took a few deep breaths, nodding. He calmed down quickly. <“Thank You.”> Eren was soon calm enough for Blake to get off of him and go to Nate and paw at his legs. He whined a little bit
to get his attention. Eren sat up and leaned his head against Levi’s shoulder, taking a few more deep breaths to calm down completely.

Nate hovered near the door, unsure of what to do with himself and listening confusedly to the two of them speaking. ... The hell are they saying? He sighed in relief as Eren sat up, Blake coming over to him and demanding attention. He reached down to pet his head. Good job Blake. I have a feeling it could have been a lot worse than it was.

Levi wrapped his arms around Eren, kissing the top of his head. Don’t worry. I’ve got you and we all understand. I think you’ve been up here and away from everyone else maybe for a bit too long. He pulled back to look at Eren’s face. “Want to head downstairs? Jeff and Lathe are picking through music for the cellos.” Maybe that’ll cheer him up.

“Really? I haven’t seen sheet music for a cello in a decade… Pretty sure.” Eren said quietly and he got up stumbling for a second before finding proper footing. Okay, I think I can play the cello for a bit. Eren looked over to the guitar case. “Can either of you carry that? My arms feel like jello right now.” Eren looked down to his shaking hands. They really do… And it feels weird...

Nate nodded, moving to pick up the case, following the two of them down the stairs. How is he going to play the cello if his hands are shaking that hard? He set the case down in the Scripting room, leaning it against the wall near the door.

Lathe looked up as they entered, picking up a small stack of papers and moving around the table to Eren, resting a hand on his shoulder. “You doin’ alright?” He gave him a small smile. “We can play some music on the cellos if you want.”

Eren looked over at the cellos in their stands. “That sounds good…” Eren glanced down to his horribly shaking hands. “Can I see the sheet music first?” He asked, his voice soft as he glanced at the small stack Lathe had brought over. Hopefully my hands will stop shaking after that.

Eren looked at the first song, recognising the notes on the sheet music. “Is this Beethoven’s 5th Sympathy? I can play this without the sheet music.” He said quietly and put the 3 pages back on the table in front of the couch. Wake Me Up by Avicii? What does that sound like again? Eren felt himself tapping away the first few chords on the paper to try and get the rhythm down. Oh it’s that
one. These two work. He studied the music before putting it down. First two memorized. Onto the next. Eren shuffled through the 12 pages for the next 3 songs, memorizing all the sheet music. “Okay I can play them.” Eren told him, picking up the sheets he had put down and gave them back to Lathe. *I don’t need them anymore.*

Lathe blinked, stunned. “D-don't you need the music on the stands?” *There’s no way you could know them already. I don’t need them because I've practiced too much, but…*

Eren shook his head. “No, I memorized them. I don’t need them anymore.” Eren’s hand no longer shook as he still held the papers out. *I don’t need them. Is that strange? Mom always taught me to memorize it in one go… So…*

Lathe took the papers, placing them on the table. *I need to see this.* “…Alright. How about we sit down to play? Do you want to record this, or just jam and go for it?”

“Would we be able to take them upstairs? Everything is still connected for recording, so it’d be easier to record up there.” Eren moved over towards his cello sitting there on the stand with the bow by it’s side. *Hmm, I might need to tune it though, I’ll definitely need to screw with the bow for a bit.* “I’ll need to adjust the cello for the songs but yeah, I can do that while we set up for recording. There should be enough chairs up there for everyone.”

“Alright, that works.” Lathe walked over to his cello, unplugging it from the amp and coiling the wires, holding the amp with one hand and his cello and bow with the other. He looked to Nate for a moment. “Can you carry up the stand for me, please? My hands are kinda full.” He smiled a bit sheepishly, following Eren up the stairs. *This is going to be interesting.* “Did you catch the words while you were reading over the music? Or no?” *You took next to no time at all looking it over.*

Eren looked back over to Lathe. “Huh? Oh... yeah I did… why is that weird?” Eren asked and seemed to shrink back on himself a little as he moved some of the chairs around, so he got chairs he and Lathe could sit in. The stools left for Nate, Levi and Jeff. *Is it weird that I did that?*

Lathe talked as he plugged in the amp. “Eren, have you ever heard of sight-reading competitions? They’re these big events where people, particularly who play piano, come together and see who can best play their instrument using sheet music they’ve never seen before and are not allowed to practice until they do the actual judging. If you can play as well as you feel and as well as you tell me, you’d probably win first place in every competition you entered. It’s not exactly easy for most people.” Lathe sat down, pulling his cello close, leaning forward to take hold of the mouse. “Oh, you were livestreaming earlier? That explains why you were trending on Twitter a bit ago.”
“Wanna livestream? I can put it out on twitter?” Eren moved to take his phone out again, ready to start the stream. “I can just post it later, and while we’re waiting for all the viewers to come back on I can tune this cello to what it needs to be.” Eren suggested and looked to Nate. *He looks excited just to see me play… Jeff seems to want to know if I can really play without the sheet music. I wonder what Levi would think about it?*

*If the Brat can pull this off I’m going to be seriously impressed. And maybe a bit concerned. Both. Levi studied Eren as he tweeted out to his followers, Lathe clicking to start the stream. This is gonna be good.*

Lathe looked to the camera to make sure the red light was on, hearing Eren pluck at the strings of his cello, tuning it. He turned on his amp, nudging a small board of buttons near his foot. *Just if I need them. I think I will for Thunderstruck.*

“So which song are we doing first? I want to make sure I’m tuning this right.” Eren fiddled with his cello a little more before moving on to his bow, tightening the strings a bit more, and making sure the hairs were in good condition. *They’re absolutely perfect. He must’ve gotten me a new one.*

*Is that how you start a live stream these days?* “What, you're not going to introduce me? You're just going to let all these people out here see Eren Yeager and this other guy? Is that how this is?” Lathe joked, a hand over his heart in mock hurt.

Eren started to laugh right away. “I was gonna wait a few minutes to let the view count get to a million or so, then I was going to introduce you… Chill fam!” Eren laughed a bit, looking to the comment section blow up. “WELL, Now they want to know who ‘the other guy’ is... But now you get to wait! HAHAHAHA!” Eren laughed and it only took two minutes for the live stream to reach well over twice the number of viewers as before. “Nate, you’ve been overtaken by ‘the other guy’.” Eren joked and smiled turning towards him to see his reaction. *Don’t worry Dad, I’ll introduce you, chill.*

Lathe rolled his eyes, beaming as he glanced to Nate, who just quirked an eyebrow back at him. *Sorry not sorry Nate.* He looked back to Eren, checking his watch. “Anytime this millennia, Eren.” That familiar mischievous glint had returned to his eyes. *I love messing with you. And the fans are waiting…*

“Oh my good god! Will you chill out? Okay anyways! Hello internet! Welcome to another live stream. I know what you're probably thinking… Another one? Already? Well yeah! Nate and I got to sing, but since you guys are soooo interested in my family affairs… I want you guys all to meet Lathe, this is my adoptive father for anyone who happened to watch earlier’s livestream, but we can just call him ‘the other guy’. So since Nate and I sang already, ‘the other guy’ and I are gonna play some good music on our cellos! Okay now that introductions are over… What song are we
“doing first?” Eren turned to Lathe with a replica of Lathe’s mischievous glint in his own eyes. *I like messing with you just as much as you like prodding at me.*

*So that’s how it’s gonna be, huh. What to do, what to do… His last name translates… Yes!* Lathe inspected his bow with purposeful indifference. “Well, little hunter, I was thinking “Wake Me Up” by Avicii would be a good one to begin with.” *Two can play at this game.*

*Oh… So we’re crossing those lines… Oh fun, that’s wonderful. I could swear at him in German, but I don’t want to be responsible for that.* “Okay Mr. Quo…. Have you checked your Status ’cause I think it’s being ruined.” Eren threw back at him, finishing up tuning his cello.

*…that one was actually pretty good, even if it made no sense. Dammit! “Is that so, peasant? The people in the comments seem to adore me with their caps-lock keyboard smashings.” He grinned. The comments are going pretty nuts.*

*So he’s insulting my birthplace now? In the middle of nowhere in Germany. “Hey, I at least had a house to begin with, your mom had to pick you up from the industrial block.” Hahaha, got you!* Eren played a few chords on his cello to make sure his bow was tightened the way he wanted it to be.

*Hey, I like my name, dammit! “Well, for a blockhead, at least you have some idea how to tune that thing.”*

*Did he just call me a blockhead? “I am the smartest person in my class right now, you should know that by now Dad… And at least to a foreigner my name isn’t two ways on how to say ‘the’.” Thank you Middle School Mandatory Spanish classes!*

*…Roasted.* Lathe sputtered, trying to think of a good comeback before dropping his head in defeat. *It’s no use. My name is such good roasting material.* He put up his hands in surrender. “Fiiine, you win. *This* time.”

Eren gave a cheerful “Woot-Woot!” as he did a little fist pump in the air. “Good thing I practice roasting Jean every day!” Eren said almost a little too excitedly. “And I always win those, right Levi?” Eren asked looking off camera to see Levi perched on a stool. *He’s so hot… Mental note: Levi must be drawn on a stool.*

Levi had a hand over his mouth, trying very hard not to bust out laughing.*Oh my god, Eren just*
totally roasted Lathe… That was great! Levi nodded quickly, not trusting himself to speak without laughing too hard, though looking at Eren he lost it and burst out laughing, doubled over on his stool. “Oh my God that was perfect! Where- where do you even get this stuff from?” Teach me your ways.

Eren could only laugh along with him. “Well, I’ve learned from the best!” Eren’s hand came to smack Lathe on his back. Eren had a huge Cheshire grin across his face as he turned back to Lathe. “Okay, Dad, you ready?” Eren asked and got his bow ready to play the music.

Lathe’s grin matched his, his eyes bright as he shifted his feet, for the moment holding the bow in his teeth, his foot hovering over a button on the panel. He nodded, clicking it and strumming the strings at the neck of the instrument. With another click he had his bow in hand, ready to join in for the chorus.

Eren started to play the few chords perfectly before he opened his mouth to sing. He had changed it up a bit, so now it was a pitch higher, and more suited towards his voice, but it sounded great all the same. He was able to sing beautifully, even while playing the rather difficult half of the song.

“Feeling my way through the darkness
Guided by a beating heart
I can't tell where the journey will end
But I know where to start”

Jeff couldn’t believe his eyes. He can really do it? And he’d never seen this song before? This is amazing! I’m sure as hell convinced!

“They tell me I'm too young to understand
They say I'm caught up in a dream
Well life will pass me by if I don't open up my eyes
Well that's fine by me”

Lathe softly began to add his deeper tenor voice, drawing back his bow and playing his part of the chorus. He really was able to memorise all that. It’s amazing how he did it, but the real question is whether he can do it for all of them...

“So wake me up when it's all over
When I'm wiser and I'm older
All this time I was finding myself
And I didn't know I was lost”

…it’s so odd to think of the things that led to this exact moment. If Nate hadn't picked you up onto
that stage, I wouldn't be playing this song with you. Lathe grinned as they began to play the instrumental part of the chorus, closing his eyes and letting his fingers fly over the neck of the cello, his head nodding to the beat, his hair sweeping over his eyes.

“I tried carrying the weight of the world
But I only have two hands
Hope I get the chance to travel the world
But I don't have any plans”

“Wish that I could stay forever this young
Not afraid to close my eyes
Life's a game made for everyone
And love is the prize”

Eren smiled taking a breath, his eyes landing on Levi as he sang the last words. *Yes love is the prize, so love me Levi!*

“So wake me up when it's all over
When I'm wiser and I'm older
All this time I was finding myself
And I didn't know I was lost”

Eren was even able to hit the high notes at the end of this song, without missing a single beat on his cello. His fingers were flying and his bow moving rapidly to keep up with the quick pace of the song.

“Didn't know I was lost
I didn't know I was lost
I didn't know I was lost
I didn't know (didn't know, didn't know)”

Jeff sat amazed for a few moments before he raised his hands to clap, Nate and Levi soon joining him in his actions. *That was amazing! And Eren memorized that just now? And shifted the scale to fit his voice? That incredible... Where? Where and how did he learn to do that?

*That’s really cool and really concerning at the same time. He looked at the sheet music for two fucking seconds! I'm not exactly a music expert but I know that playing something doesn't work like that.*

*How could he possibly remember how to play it after looking at the music for barely a minute?*
And for not playing the cello in so long, he sure plays it well! It’s really impressive.

Eren moved a bit to open a water bottle to soothe his dry throat. “So what are we playing next, Old Man?” Eren showed off a Cheshire grin as he put the water bottle back down. Which one will I be singing?

Lathe clicked a button at the end of the panel, his game face on. This is war. “If it’s not too difficult for a rookie such as yourself, Thunderstruck sounds good right about now.” And I’m not old!

“That sounds fine, have you gotten all the termites out of your cello though? Don’t want it to break in your hands.” Eren countered thinking of the obscenely long time it had been since Lathe had probably touched the thing. That amp is older than I am.

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry about me if I was you. After all, last I checked, termites don't eat metal.” It’s an electric cello, dur. I was joking earlier.

“Thanks for the info Captain Obvious, but what about your bow? That’s wooden.” Eren pointed out a huge grin on his face as he reached to tune his cello a tad to get what he needed. Not everything on your cello is metal… As much as you may think it is.

“Don’t go giving any termites any ideas. Eating a thin stick of wood that’s been polished too many times? They'd have to be trying to get poisoned.” Not tasty. Ew. Lathe reached for his own water bottle, taking a small sip.

“Well you better watch for the carpet bugs, eating away at the hairs, you look like you’re missing a few… And maybe in a few other places.” Eren couldn’t help the growing smirk on his lips. That’ll set him off, talk about his hair. Just a few more seconds and I’ll be done tuning and ready to go.

Lathe turned to look at Eren, stretching his neck to the side with a small yet sharp crack. “You really about to insult the hair of a guy that knows Judo?” You’re not going there. Naw.

“Naw… I wouldn’t do that! I’m insulting a guy that’ll definitely lose some hair because of me in the next few years.” Eren gave him a shit-eating smile, raising his bow to signal that he was ready whenever Lathe was. You think I’m afraid of you? Grisha beat the shit out of me… Daily. I’m not afraid to get hit, you’ll just lose my trust for forever, I hope you know that. Eren’s smile disappeared a bit, Blake coming over to sit next to him, sensing he was starting to get a bit agitated.
No Blake, I’m fine, don’t worry.

Lathe just dropped his head and sighed in defeat again, raising his bow, muttering with a small smile. “…ugh, I’ve created a monster.” At this rate I’ll be going gray twenty years sooner. He drew his bow back, slowly beginning to build up the pace of the piece, his foot poised over the buttons of the panel.

Eren let him start up, knowing he wouldn’t be needed until the bass of the song was acquired. Eren finally started to join in, bringing into the song a higher pitch, and a higher difficulty of notes on the cello. It was only a few more moments before Eren began to sing, nailing the whole song easily, without missing a beat. Shit, I need nail clippers, I broke a hair. Eren looked around the room for some clippers before he sighed. “Levi, can you get me some nail clippers? I snapped a hair.” Eren said resting his cello against himself as he examined his bow. That song requires you to play hard, and geez, I haven’t snapped a string since my mom yelled at me when I was six… That was eleven years ago…. Oh wow… Has it been that long already? Eren’s eyes looked a little downcast as he remembered his mother yelling at him as if it was only yesterday.

Lathe watched as Levi left to find nail clippers, turning to Eren with another comment of his tongue, though he stopped for a second as he saw Eren’s eyes downcast. What’s he thinking about? …should I keep roasting him, or… I don’t know what even anymore. “I guess you’re one to talk, on about me taking care of my bow while you go and break one of the hairs on yours.” He joked, a small smile on his face, his eyebrow quirked. Please tell me that didn’t make things worse, cause you don’t look too happy.

Eren’s lip twitched up into a smirk for a few seconds. “Yeah… I guess you’re right.” He took the nail clippers from Levi, carefully removing the damaged hair from the rest of them. I can’t believe I did that…. God, he must think I’m such an amateur. <“ I’ll be more careful Mom, I promise.”> Eren’s voice was soft as he spoke the phrase, turning to Lathe and putting on a smile for the camera, though it didn’t follow in his eyes. “What we playing now?” Eren asked quietly, reaching down to pet Blake as he got closer to Eren’s knee.

Lathe’s eyes widened as he picked up one word from his sentence. Mom? …oh. And what? You’re going to give up that easily? Lathe leaned toward him a bit, a look of disbelief on his face, trying to hold back a grin. “…what? That’s it? You’re not going to keep insulting my weird name? My hair? Anything?”

“Nope, you’ll know why after the next song, Hypocrite. So what we playin’?” Eren gave him a small smirk. His bow is too tight, he’ll snap a few seconds into this next song…

Lathe searched his face, suspicious. …what do you know that I don’t. “They Don't Care About Us. MJ.”
Eren nodded, shifting to tune the cello a tad bit, only taking a couple seconds. “Ready.” Eren replied, bow at the ready. He’s gonna snap it, isn’t he? And he says I can’t take care of my instrument! You can’t even notice how tight your strings are!

Lathe brought up his bow, suspicious as he began to play the first few chords, a small frown on his face after a few seconds. Something’s not… He nearly jumped out of his skin as the bow snapped in his hand, dropping it with a shocked yelp. Fuck! He stilled, staring with wide eyes at the broken mess of wood and hair. Oh my God. Did I really not notice it was going to bust? ...Eren could fucking tell. Couldn’t he.

“Told ya so, ya Hypocrite.” Eren shook his head before he picked up his bow to play out the whole song, singing well as he did so. Once he finished he turned to Lathe. “Never insult me on taking care of my instruments. You couldn’t even tell your bow was going to snap!” Eren’s eyes blazed with anger for a few moments before it died down. <“Mom always said to take care of them, otherwise you won’t be able to play again.”>

Fear flickered in Lathe’s wide eyes, quickly putting his cello in it’s stand and getting up, wanting to get away from Eren if just for a moment. ...He’s never been so angry. And he’s angry at me.

“Ohm, spare bow. I’ll be right back.” He quickly headed out the door for the basement, his face in his hand. ...sorry. Fuck, I need to pay better fucking attention. He brushed at his eyes as he retrieved a spare bow from the room behind the chalkboard, coming back up, torn between taking his time to let Eren cool and hurrying for their audience. He took his seat back next to Eren, afraid to look at him as he inspected his bow and re-tuned his cello, his voice quiet as he finally spoke.

“...I’m sorry.”

Nate glanced to his phone, texting Levi, Jeff reading over his shoulder.

NR: What’s Eren saying? It’s not English and I know you know it
LA: You’re right, it’s German. Eren apologized to his mother for breaking a hair on his bow.

LA: Then he said his Mom said something about taking care of the instruments or you don’t get to play them.

<“Lathe, you don’t need to apologize, I should be the one apologizing. I could tell they were too tight from the beginning, and I didn’t tell you. I’m sorry. You don’t need to apologize to me, you’re not at fault”> Eren’s tone was cold, still avoiding eye contact with Lathe, focusing on Blake as the dog rested his head on Eren’s knee. It’s okay, I calmed down… I’m sorry Blake, I let my anger get the best of me. Eren pet Blake, taking in a few deep breaths meant to calm himself down.
Lathe forced his face to remain stoic, his hair covering his eyes as he studied the bow in his hands. *Whatever it was he said… it certainly didn't sound nice.* He tried to keep his voice even. “...You can pick what song we do next.”

Eren nodded and quickly came to a decision. “Hmm, the 5th sounds like a good one to go by.” Eren smiled softly, his voice no longer cold. *Then I can rest my voice a little bit.*

Lathe raised his bow to the cello strings, his gaze switching between his fingers and his feet. “...Ready when you are.”

“Alright!” Eren beamed a bit as he started to play. *I can make Mom proud… Playing her favorite.*

Lathe drew his bow against the strings, his thoughts of the piece near constantly being interrupted and his attention pulled back to the flash of anger Eren’s eyes directed to him. He fingers slipped, he played the wrong notes, and he even skipped nearly an entire line of music, his focus drowned in guilt, his eyes red. *He was so mad at me, and now he’s probably furious I can't even play this one fucking song right.*

Eren soon put his bow down, looking over to Lathe. He put his cello in it’s stand, grabbing Lathe’s wrist to get him to stop. When he looked up to see Lathe’s red eyes, he felt a pang of guilt strike across his chest. Oh… Mom was mad at me… I did something wrong. “I’m sorry, Dad, I didn’t mean to yell at you before, I just let my anger get to my head, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it.” Eren’s voice was quiet as he spoke, but he had soft eyes as he looked over Lathe’s new bow. “Please don’t be worried, I’m not mad at you, I just get angry sometimes, and I don’t really mean what I say, so please don’t take it personally.” Eren bent down a little to kiss Lathe’s knuckles gently, his back facing the camera, which hid the action, making it seem as though he were inspecting the new bow. *Please don’t be sad…. I don’t want to make you feel bad.* Eren gasped in shock a little as Blake growled, grabbing his hand, only then did he realize he had started to scratch at his pants…. And his hands were shaking as well.

Lathe’s eyes widened, watching Eren’s hands shake, his free hand moving his cello to it’s stand, putting the bow down and pulling Eren into a hug, letting out a small sigh. *I worry too much sometimes… Now don't you go worrying about making me feel bad. We're not going full circle on this.* He pulled back and grinned. “It’s okay. I'll just have to think of better roasting material.” He thought for a second. *Eh, screw it.* He suddenly moved while Eren wasn’t expecting it, tickling his sides with a huge grin.

Eren gave out a squeal of surprise before he turned to try and get out of Lathe’s hands, but to no avail. *Dammit! His arms are too fucking long!* “Let go of me! You giant!” Eren growled playfully
and twisted to try and avoid another attack on his sides. His laughter was beautiful as it rang through the room. The comment section apparently loves Tickle wars... Or us roasting each other... I can’t tell.

Lathe finally decided to have mercy, releasing Eren from his grasp, his mischievous grin back in place. Better. “So, are we going to try and play that symphony again in the hopes that I don’t slaughter it, or the last on our list?”

“The last on the list is fine.” Eren reclaiming his seat and setting up his cello. He glanced over at Levi and the other two sitting behind the camera, all three of them looking really worried. Well shit, I probably have some explaining to do after this. “Nate, tweet out to the people to see what songs we’re playing after this!” He called out to the man beside Levi.

Lathe reclaimed his cello, leaving his bow in the stand. “Not gonna need that for this.” He tuned it slightly, his fingers hovering over the neck. “Ready?”

Eren nodded letting Lathe take over the first few chords of I Will Wait by Mumford & Sons before he started play, his cello started as his voice did. Hope Lathe’ll sing with me, I can’t go that low, I hope he knows that! Eren just continued to sing the lyrics with his higher pitch.

Lathe near immediately joined him with his deeper voice, singing low. He strummed the strings loudly, the movements familiar, a smile on his face. I always really liked this song. But you need a lower voice in there somewhere to sing it.

Eren’s playing sped up and slowed as the notes called for it, never missing a beat for the entire song. God, we sound fucking incredible! Mental note: Record with Dad more often.

Jeff listened in fascination. Their voices compliment each other so well, you would truly think that they are really a father and son pair with the way they can harmonize like they’ve been practicing for years.

Nate watched Lathe’s hands fly over the neck of the cello, listening intently, his brow furrowed. ...They sound so good together. And I don’t know what weird dynamic it is they have going on, but they obviously work together very well.

Levi watched the both of them, studying them with concern written across his face, turning into confusion before he turned stoic all over again. What the fuck was that? Eren was scratching
again... He hasn't done that since... Since Lathe cried... Was Lathe crying again? They seem to be back to normal whatever it was... But what the fuck happened?

Lathe steadily finished strumming out the last few notes of the song, wringing out his hand after, beaming. That was great! He inspected his fingers before reaching over to pick up his bow. “That was a fun one! Any good requests?” He glanced up to Nate.

Nate looked up from his phone, Twitter going nuts. “Royals by Lorde is a popular request.”

“What’s that song?” Came Eren’s immediate reply. “I’ve never heard of it.” Who’s Lorde?

Lathe gasped dramatically, a hand over his heart in shock. “You have not lived.” He immediately leaned forward and typed on the computer, pulling up a copy of the sheet music. “Now do the thing where you become an more of an expert in this song than Lorde, who wrote it, in under a minute.” He joked, leaning back.

Eren rolled his eyes. “I don’t become an expert on it, I just memorize the whole thing.” Eren took the sheets once they were printed, he only took about ten seconds to look at each sheet before he had memorized the whole thing. “Sounds like a good song.” Eren put the papers down where he couldn’t see them before tuning his cello again.

Memorize it and play it flawlessly the first time. That and being an expert on it are practically the same thing. Lathe plucked at the strings, finding they were in tune for the song and raised his bow, ready to set the beat. “Alright. On your mark.”

“Mark.” Eren called and he waited only a second before opening his mouth to start to sing. This is like the lowest I can go, thank Lorde this is the lowest in the song. Eren picked up his bow as well and started to play beautifully. Hmm, I wonder why Levi looks so worried? Is it that weird that I can do this? Eren continued and he was happy that a few of the lines were a bit higher in pitch.

…. Where did he learn to do that? Has he always been able to do that? Levi watched in amazement as Eren continued the song word for word without messing up on the cello at all. It’s amazing that he can even sing while playing... I wonder what Jeff thinks of all this, he seems so interested in Eren now. Levi watched as both Nate and Jeff watched Eren with wide eyes. Hopefully he’ll be able to get a contract... Eren would be set for a long time then.

Nate watched Eren’s seamless movements, not understanding. ...There’s no way he can play all
that without having heard it once… could he? Is he? I think he is…

He must have heard all these songs before, there’s no way that he can do that! No way at all. Jeff watched with a look of complete disbelief. What is this kid trying to pull? Jeff watched as Eren finished off the song and drank a lot of water, rubbing at his throat a little. He has been singing a lot, a sore throat is reasonable.

Levi noticed Eren’s actions as well. “How about we call it a day? Give you a break Eren. We don’t want you to lose your voice.” Levi suggested getting up to go to the computer to turn the livestream out, waiting for Eren to sign off.

“Okay then this’ll be a wrap guys! I’ll post the two live streams later on this week! Bye!” Eren waved as he finished, watching as the red light on the camera switched off signaling they were no longer recording. Thank god… It’s over.

Jeff stood first. “Eren, how can you do that? You played the song and sang it perfectly without looking at the sheet music for more than a few seconds. What gives?” Is this kid trying to pull a fast one on me? That’s not cool, bro.

Eren looked down at the cello. “My Mom taught me to memorize everything right away… Cause if Grisha ever found the sheet music… He tore it up. He never liked that I was a ‘music rat’ as he referred to me as.” Eren’s fingers twitched as he mentioned his father… Blake growled at him almost instantly grabbing for his hand. Eren was thinking about how his father had hit him for reading the sheet music. He was five at the time, and Eren was mortified as his father ripped up the sheet music his mother had given to him for his birthday. You memorize it right away so Grisha can’t do anything to it. His focus wasn’t turning to Blake no matter how much Blake whined and pawed at him. Finally the dog got him out of the chair and got him to sit on the ground. Being moved around is what snapped Eren out of his thoughts. Tears quickly welled in his eyes and he reached out to hold Blake close to him. “Sorry… I just remembered something.” Shit… I almost didn’t come back for that one.

Lathe knelt on the floor next to him, pulling him close, rubbing his arm. It’s okay. He’s not here. Don’t you worry. “I think a little bit of a break is exactly what we all need. Here.” He stood, holding out his hand for Eren to take.

Eren let Blake off of his lap, reaching out a horribly shaking hand to Lathe. His eyes filled with fear when he saw how badly shaking he was. Shit… Am I really shaking that bad? Will I even be able to stand? Eren swallowed hard and looked up to Lathe with scared eyes.
Lathe took hold of his hand, though he bent down to pick Eren up around his middle and set him on his feet, making sure he could stand. *You’re shaking terribly… Are you okay?* “You alright? Can you stand?”

Eren tried to step away but soon regretted it as he almost crumpled to the floor. He shook his head, fear clouding his eyes. *No I’m not okay… Not at all. I can’t even stand without falling down.* Eren’s shaking hand struggled to hold onto the side of Lathe’s shirt.

Levi rushed over when he saw Eren’s fearful eyes. *“Hey, it’s okay, it’s alright, you’re okay, Eren… You’re fine, you’ll be okay. I promise, it’s okay, you don’t need to be scared.”* Levi helped keep Eren on his feet, talking to him softly to calm him down.

Eren’s hands were grabbed… Blake had growled at him, he had tried to scratch again. *“What if he comes back… What if he finds out about me… Levi… He’ll kill me for this.”* Eren freaked out a little bit more as thoughts of his father took over his mind. His eyes were blown wide with fear.

*Kill.* The only word Lathe understood. He kept his hold around Eren’s middle, holding him up and close, his cheek resting on his head. *Oh no, no no no… That’s not going to happen.* “Eren, nobody’s going to hurt you. We’re not going to let anything bad happen to you. You're safe here, I promise. I swear it.” *You're okay.*

Levi moved away a bit and looked to Jeff and Nate. “Can you two go downstairs… Please?” Levi asked and he looked back to Eren. “We might be here awhile.” He told them, watching as the two of them left the room and closed the door behind them. They went down the stairs quietly, and waited in the kitchen.

*“No… He’s gonna come back! Grisha’s gonna come back… And he’s gonna kill me!”* Eren’s whole body was shaking in Lathe’s grasp. He was starting to panic, not there completely, but getting there.

Levi looked to Lathe. “Sit down with him, it’ll help with his body shaking that much.” *He hasn’t really started to panic yet, we need to calm him down… Blake can help with that, but I don’t think Lathe will let go of him.* Levi cleared a space for them just in case Eren did end up panicking.

Lathe eased them down onto the ground, holding Eren in his lap, carding his hand through his hair. *I'm not letting go of you. I'm not. And I'm not sorry.* He murmured in Eren’s ear. “Eren, Grisha isn’t going to hurt you. He’s gone. He’s gone, and there’s nothing here that I'm going to let hurt you. You don't have to go through that pain anymore. Please Eren, stay with me. Don't panic. You don't have to.”
Eren cried in Lathe’s arms. “I don’t want it to happen again…. I don’t want him to rip up the sheet music…. I don’t want him to kill me.” Eren cried as he was held close to Lathe. *I don’t want it to happen again…. I don’t wanna die. He’s gonna kill me because I’m a useless music rat.* “I don’t want to… I’m a useless music rat.” Eren cried to Lathe. He had switched over to English once he knew Jeff and Nate were gone. He hadn’t noticed that Levi had left as well, to probably talk to them about what was happening.

“Eren, you’re not useless. The music that you play is absolutely wonderful. And please believe me when I say nobody’s going to rip up your sheet music anymore. And nobody’s going to hurt you.” They’d have to go through me first. “You're safe, Eren. You really are.” He pressed a kiss to Eren’s temple, holding him tightly, rubbing circles into his back.

Eren sobbed into his chest for awhile. “No… One?” Eren looked up to Lathe with teary eyes, calmer after he cried. “No one… Will?” Eren asked again, tears still falling from his eyes.

Levi came down the stairs looking around for Nate and Jeff. He found the two of them in the kitchen, in complete silence. *Geez, it’s like they think Eren’s dead or something.* “Don’t worry, he’ll be fine.” Levi moved to put on the kettle to make some tea, and turned the coffee maker on for Jeff. *Lathe’ll drink it if Jeff doesn’t want anything.*

Nate followed Levi with his eyes, worried. *I’m almost afraid to ask…* “Uh… Levi? I-if it’s okay for me to ask… why did Eren start shaking so badly? And… who’s Grisha?” He gulped, quickly correcting himself. “I-if it’s too personal you don’t have to tell me. I'm just worried.”

Levi took in a deep breath, letting it out after a moment. “No, It’s okay, you guys should probably know.” Levi waited for the water to heat up making tea for himself before he started this. “So, Eren’s from Germany originally… You know that right?” Levi asked as he poured the hot water in his mug. *Does he? Cause we should probably start from the beginning.*

“Yes, he mentioned it during the stream we did earlier.” *He didn’t seem to like talking about it…*

“Well, let’s just say his Mom taught him a shit ton of instruments between the ages of 3 and 8 ½… His mother loved music, taught him everything she knew. Their house burned down that year, he was almost 9, his mother died to save Eren’s life… Grisha never forgave him for that.” Levi took a big swig of his tea. “Grisha is his actual father, his biological father…” Levi trailed off waiting for Nate and Jeff to motion that the understood so far.
Nate’s eyes were wide, tracing over the table. He glanced up to Levi, giving him a small nod. *I don't like where this is going...*

“Eren started the fire… Trying to make himself some Mac n’ Cheese, his mom had come back into the kitchen to get him out because he was screaming from the burns he was getting. She yelled for Grisha to get down to the kitchen. The ceiling had caved in so she threw Eren over the fire… And Grisha and Eren got out… His mom never made it.” Levi took another swig of his tea, steeling himself as he retold the story.

Nate leaned his head into his hand, his eyes still wandering over the table, though they didn’t really see it’s top. *...that’s horrible...* He again slowly nodded.

“Grisha moved over to the States… Got his license to practice here… I think it was a few states over, but he never forgave Eren for his mother’s death. He started getting violent, hitting him mostly, sometimes he would take away his dinner, and just beat him more.” Levi got up to get more tea after finishing his mug. *They should know, especially if they’re going to stay.* “Grisha didn’t respect him as a son, and because of the difference in education from moving, and because Eren didn’t know a lick of English, he was put into kindergarten when he arrived in the states, which is why he’s a freshman and 17 right now. But… Grisha was a horrible father… No you probably couldn’t even use father to describe him.” Levi turned back to them, leaning against the counter as he glanced over to Jeff. *He’s been silent this whole time... It is a lot to take in, but I’m honestly surprised Grisha didn’t kill him before high school.*

Nate had his head in his hands, trying to process everything Levi was telling them. *That’s terrible... Eren didn’t deserve any of that...*

“Grisha started to find that Eren wasn’t begging for him to stop his beatings after he got used to it… So Grisha moved to worse punishments. He started to use his belt as a whip against Eren, and when Eren got used to that, he began to rape him. He broke Eren… Repeatedly, even being sick enough to invite other men to come and rape Eren as well.” Levi paused knowing that one paragraph was a lot to take in alone. *I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. Not even my worst enemy.*

Nate was deathly silent, slowly shaking his head. *No no no no no... That... oh my god...*

Jeff swallowed hard. *Levi looks like he has more to say... How could this get any worse?* Jeff had his head against the table, trying not to think about how this man had affected Eren enough to leave him a panicking mess.

Levi took a deep breath before he started yet again. “But once Eren wasn't screaming anymore...
He got even more sinister…. He put in an operating table with restraints in the basement of their home, he gave Eren pills that were banned anesthetics. They were banned because they didn't work, they didn’t stop people from feeling pain as they were operated on or they would work for only a few minutes. He operated on Eren, taking out various organs as he was on the operating table. The sick bastard recorded each and every procedure… He kept a record of everything, as if Eren was his test subject.”

Jeff’s eyes widened. “Please tell me this guy’s in prison now! How could he do that to his own son?” How? How could he do that?

Nate swallowed hard. Please please please tell me he’s locked up and gone forever.

Levi shook his head, seeing their shocked expressions. “No one knew… Eren never said a word about it, the bastard had threatened to kill him if he did. So Eren put up with it. And he had almost been lynched at his old school… They found out he was gay… Eren tried to get over the pain of everyone calling him names, he started to cut himself… And Grisha encouraged it until it got really bad. His arms are covered in scars.” It gets worse, I hope you're prepared.

Nate’s expression was stony, though worry and sympathy flashed past his eyes. He brought his hands back onto the table, still nodding his head. Your own son… Why.

Jeff’s eyes widened. “Is he dead? Please say he’s dead… He can’t still be out there… Is he?”

“He is, he left as soon as Eren got put in the hospital… He had transferred to our high school a few days in, and we were paired for chemistry. One of the guys broke his nose for tripping over his girlfriend’s bag… So when Eren got home, Grisha beat him, he shattered 4 of his ribs beyond repair, and broke every single other one. He whipped his back, with his belt, until his back looked like it was shredded meat. He dumped hot water over his back, giving him horrible burns, and broke his left arm. Eren missed the next day of school, only to come back the day after on Friday… I was pissed at him because he never called me back. I punched him in the chest, but there was no give, no crack, nothing. I punched his organs, protected only by his skin. His back opened up, and he was coughing up blood. He was rushed to the hospital, and I was suspended for 8 weeks, he was in the hospital in a coma for 5 of them… And I brought him his work and spent every day with him. His father hadn’t come to the hospital to work since he had beaten Eren… His passport’s gone, and his bank accounts emptied, and everyone just turned a blind eye to what he had done to Eren. He’s probably back in Germany.” Levi told them and took a long sip of his drink.

Nate studied his hands for a moment before he spoke quietly, his voice even. “…do you think he’s going to come back?” He better not. He better stay the fuck away from Eren, that's for damn sure.

“We can’t be sure…” Levi sipped his tea. “Eren’s freaking out that he’ll come find him now… But
he hasn't made any appearances and he’s been the hot topic of the Internet for awhile… And he hasn’t showed. I don’t think he’ll come back, he must know by now that he would be put in prison for life. That’s basically what happened to him, and so when he remembers either of his parents, it starts to set him off… He was really close to panicking before… It was probably a lot for him… He’s got a lot of trust issues because of everything that happened to him.”

“So that’s why he needs Blake around?” Jeff asked quietly, seeing Levi nod.

“Yeah, we haven’t found any PTSD pills that help him, they all just make it worse. He needs to sleep with either me or Lathe to actually fall asleep. It’s gotten better with Blake around.” Levi’s voice was still even. *I need to stay calm, cause of what they’ll ask. So they ask me and not Eren. Don’t be alarmed but he’s gonna be really out of it, if not asleep when they come down.* He turned to the fridge and brought the chicken out. *We should get started on dinner.*

Nate looked over to the staircase as he heard quiet footsteps, watching Lathe carefully descend while carrying Eren, the two of them talking quietly and smiling.

Lathe walked over to the table, nudging Eren’s chair out with his foot. “He’s just got jello legs.” He explained, setting Eren carefully down in his seat, moving to don his apron and start cooking.

Eren thanked him as he was set down. “Sorry about that.” He apologize to Jeff and Nate.

“It’s okay Eren, we understand.” Jeff told him instantly, shaking his head. “You don’t need to apologize, really.” *Don’t apologize, it was my fault for bringing it up.*

Nate gave him a small smile. “It’s alright. You don’t really need to apologise.” *It’s understandable.*

Eren could only nod. “Still though… It was probably a shock to see.” He put his head down and looked at Blake between his legs, petting him with a soft smile.

“Eren, really it’s fine, but after all that, I got a few questions for you… Would you be willing to sign a contract with me for the next few albums you make?” He asked with a wide smile as he saw Eren’s smile grow.

“Really?” Eren asked. *Is he being serious? That’d be awesome!!*
Levi gave a small smile seeing Eren’s happy face. *That’s better you should be happy, not always in fear of your father.* Levi sat next to him, slipping an arm around his waist and pulling him close. “Do you want some tea Eren?” He asked quietly. *Don’t get too excited, Blake will worry.* He watched as Eren nodded to his question before returning his attention to Jeff. Levi quickly got up and got his mug, filling it with tea, trying to stay out of Lathe’s way as he started with dinner. He sat back down beside Eren, pulling him close still, letting him sip at the tea. *He’s arms are still shaking. But that’s to be expected, he’s probably exhausted.*

Lathe looked over his shoulder and beamed at Eren. *That’s great! You need to let me write some songs for you. That’d be really cool!*

Nate grinned at Eren’s elated expression. *I knew Jeff would be sold the second he heard you sing.*

Jeff nodded. “I’m completely serious, but I want you to think about it, this is an important decision, and I’m assuming Nate’s already said he’s hauling you over to LA? So you can see the recording studio. Have you Nate?” Jeff asked turning to see him.

“Now what kind of friend would I be if I don't drag him out there?” He looked over to Jeff with a raised eyebrow. He laughed a bit, looking over to Eren. “But yeah, don't rush yourself into a decision. We’ll bring you around LA, have you see the recording studio and all that good stuffs.” *And do all the important kinda boring stuff, talk numbers, talk about who should write your songs if you don't write them...* He glanced over to Lathe. *...though I think I already know the answer to that.*

Jeff nodded. “Yeah, Nate you know that song we’ve been working on? ‘Pieces?’” *I want to see if Eren can really do that.. Though what we have is on the piano... But Eren can play that.*

Nate nodded, looking at him suspiciously. “Yeah, what about it?” *We haven't finished writing it, so...* *Oh.*

“I wanna see if he can do it.” Jeff said and smiled. “Cause then I know he’s not lying when he says he hasn’t see it.” Jeff turned to Eren. “Will you be willing to play the piano after dinner for me?”

Eren nodded. “Yeah, I can do that.” He told him quietly.
Nate grinned. It’ll be really cool to see if he can really do it. Not to say I think he’s been pulling us along, but it’ll be neat to hear him sing it.

Lathe shut the oven turning to them. “It’ll be a little bit before we can eat.” He suddenly looked over to his binder, producing a pen out of seemingly nowhere and walking over, flipping to the back and scribbling words down on a blank page. While I think of it I need to write it down. He closed it after a second, taking off his apron and smiling sheepishly. Eh.

Eren looked to them. “I can do it now… But someone will have to carry me, I can’t really move my leg-” Eren didn’t get to finish before he was scooped up by Levi. He was careful as he held him, an arm snaked under his knees and the other around his lower back. Eren watched as Nate and Jeff got up, following Levi to the Piano room.

Nate motioned for the keys from Jeff, running out to the car to grab the sheet music. He brought it back, handing the sheets to Eren. “Here you go. Now do the thing.” This is gonna be interesting.

Eren took the sheets and looked over them carefully. He gave them back a minute later before starting to play the beautiful melody on the piano. Gotta bump the pitch a bit higher so that I can sing it.

“Look at you
Confused and Misunderstood
One day you’ll see
It just wasn’t meant to be
You will remember that day
Life goes on
As they always say
The pain won't last very long”

“Pick up the pieces
That he tore apart
Pick up the pieces
From your broken Heart
If there was anything
That I could change
I would help you
Make him feel the same”

“Questions unanswered
Lies have been mastered
Unsure what holds truth
Looking for the proof
That it's all a sick joke
All in your head
It's all a big hoax
That you're better off dead”

“Pick up the pieces
That he tore apart
Pick up the pieces
From your broken Heart
If there was anything
That I could change
I would help you
Make him feel the same”

“One day he will see
What he truly missed
One day he will see
How you are truly happy
Without him around
Without hearing his sound”
“Pick up the pieces
That he tore apart
Pick up the pieces
From your broken Heart
If there was anything
That I could change
I would help you
Make him feel the same”

Eren’s brow furrowed as he finished it. “... This isn’t the end of the song is it? I feel like it should keep going...” Eren looked back over his shoulder to see four shocked faces. “What? Did I play something wrong?” Eren asked worriedly, reaching to see the sheet music again. What did I screw up? I thought I did it fine...

“Holy fuck.” Nate just stared at him with wide eyes, running both his hands through his hair, completely stunned. ...How. HOW.

Jeff just stared. “You weren’t kidding then? You can really play anything you see... That was perfect Eren, higher than Nate, but that’s to be expected with your range... That was perfect!” Jeff had wide eyes, still staring at him in disbelief.

Lathe looked from the sheet music to Eren, back to the sheet music, and back to Eren. He blinked. He was dead serious. “Oh my god.”

“What? Did I play it wrong?” Eren asked quietly, his eyes showed that he was really worried. Did I do something wrong?

Levi shook his head wrapping his arms around Eren and kissing his temple quickly. “No, that was amazing Eren, but they’re just surprised you can do that and remember.” Levi hugged him close to his chest. That was amazing... And your mother taught you to do it.

“You totally nailed it.” A grin began to crack across Lathe’s face. “You sang it perfectly. You didn't miss a word or skip a single note.” He beamed, his eyes flickering happily. “That was
Eren smiled softly. “Umm… Can I show them the study?” He asked quietly, looking up to Lathe with hopeful eyes, he smiled as Levi held him close to his chest. He’s warm… It feels nice. “I never got to video it… And Nate’s curious.” Eren said quietly, nuzzling back into Levi’s arms.

“Now how could I possibly say no?” Lathe grinned. “You worked really hard on it, and it’s beautifully done.”

Eren smiled and turned to Jeff and Nate. “You wanna go see it?” Levi’ll carry me upstairs. I like when he carries me.

“Hell yeah!” Nate replied immediately, a large smile on his face. This is going to be really cool!

“Wait, what’s the study?” Jeff asked confusion crossing his face. Nate hadn’t told him that Eren was an artist as well. He figured they had hired a professional to paint the recording room.

“Oh, Eren painted the ceiling in what’s pretty much my old office upstairs. He did an amazing job on it. He also did the ceiling in my bedroom and his walls are literally covered in drawing. In the most literal sense. There is no space left on his walls. He did the recording room too, if you didn’t know.” Didn’t Nate tell you?

Jeff’s jaw dropped, his head snapping to Nate. “You didn’t tell me he was a freaking artist! OMG! I thought you guys had a professional muralist come in and paint it! That room is amazing!” Jeff quickly rattled off and hit Nate playfully on the shoulder. “Can’t believe you let that one slip your mind!”

Eren blushed at the compliments coming off of Jeff’s tongue. He gasped a little when Levi picked him up and blushed fully. “Well then let’s go.” He said and smiled.

Levi nodded talking him up the stairs. So if he think’s that room was cool he obviously has not seen the other rooms. “Lathe is your room clean enough to show off?” Levi asked in playful banter.

“Don’t worry, I keep my room clean. Unlike some people.” He joked. Go for it!
“Hey, just ‘cause Eren likes to load the bed with hundreds of pillows and blankets does **not** make the basement a messy place!” Levi called back before Eren could and led them all into Lathe’s room, looking up to see the ceiling bring them into a piece of machinery. There were so many gears, so many details, and if one stared long enough it looked as if the gears moved.

Nate just stared up at it, his head craned back, unblinking as he followed the illusion of the moving bronze and gold gears. **That. Is. So.** “...Cool.” He just looked up in awe, tracing over the complex mechanics of the ceiling.

...**Are they...** “Are they moving?” Jeff asked in disbelief looking around the room. **This is amazing.**

Eren giggled and moved to wrap his arms around Levi’s shoulders. “They’re not moving, but it does look like it, I made sure of it.” Eren giggled happily.

Lathe grinned as he looked back up at the shining cogs. “It really is the coolest thing. Best birthday present ever.” **Seriously.**

“Should we move on to the next room?” Levi asked, watching Eren nod. So the group moved to the open door at the side of Lathe’s room. “Did you put more pictures on the walls in here?” Levi’s voice sounded from the room and Eren could only giggle more.

Lathe followed them in, looking over to his left, his eyes widening as he noticed the entire left wall had suddenly transformed into an African Safari, animals standing tall in the landscape. **What...** “...When did you... How did you do this without me noticing?” His smile widened. **Oh my god!**

“I... May or may not have woken up in the middle of the night last night, snuck into your room and put it up.... Whilst you were sleeping like a rock.” Eren told him and smiled happily.

Jeff’s eyes were wide. “That looks so real! Like we’re in the Safari right now...” Jeff trailed off, not even noticing the ceiling yet.

Nate beamed, his eyes wandering up from the African landscape to the ceiling. “Hey Jeff... Look up,”

Jeff looked up after a few seconds. “Holy Shit!” His eyes as wide as his mouth was. **This is like you're in fucking space! It looks so real!**
“Dad, shut the lights off, it looks cool on both of them.” Eren knew the stars would glow, but he also added glow paint to all the animal’s eyes that were looking directly at the group as well as stars across the sky. Eren had even made a moon out of the glowing paint, and figured out how to make it translucent so nothing could be seen with the lights on.

Lathe reached not to him and flicked the switch on the wall, his eyes immediately drawn to the eerie glow of the animal’s eyes, staring at them in the dark. The moon shone, it’s small craters visible. ...Whoa.

Nate looked up, immersed in the stars sprawling above them. That is absolutely amazing.

Eren smiled but a thought soon came to mind. “Oh, Dad, we’re out of glow paint too.” He said and watched as Jeff turned to look at the Safari scene and almost jumping out of his skin when he saw the eyes. Does it scare people that much?

That’s fucking terrifying! Jeff backed away from the picture a little bit. “The eyes are glowing…” Jeff just stated the obvious, trying to get over his nerves.

Nate grinned, poking Jeff’s arm in jest. “What, you scared?” Oh my god he totally is!

“That’s so unnerving though! It looks like they’re intent on coming out of the wall to eat your face off!” Jeff punched Nate in the arm. You say anything about this to anyone I will personally murder you!

Nate just laughed, his eyes shining. “Whatever you say, Jeff.” Oh I’m so telling everyone about this.

Lathe decided to have mercy, switching the lights back on. “Want to show them your room, Eren?” You’ve got so many drawings to show off.

“Well Levi’s the majority of what’s hung up so as long as he’s cool with it…” Eren looked up to Levi who only smirked.

“I’m fine with it Brat, otherwise I wouldn’t have been your model.” He picked Eren back up from
his feet and took him to his room, setting him gently down on the bed. Pictures filled the room, and he was right, a majority of the drawings were Levi.

_They look like pictures... Are they really drawings?_ Jeff looked around the room in awe. “You're so good Eren, and Levi have you ever thought about modeling?” Jeff asked with a chuckle as he saw the picture Eren had drawn of Levi’s abs during Christmas break.

_You’d seriously think Eren had gotten into photography. ...He has a camera. He should try it sometime._ Nate smirked at Jeff’s comment. _If these drawings are the real thing, it’s not too bad of a suggestion._

Levi’s cheeks had a rosy tint to them as he shook his head. “Nope, I don’t work well with people for long periods of time.” Levi ran a hand through his hair. Watching as they looked around to all the pictures of himself on the wall. _God, maybe I should’ve said no… This is embarrassing!_

_Lathe grinned mischievously as Levi shifted from one foot to the other, giving his elbow a nudge. “Something the matter? You’re not embarrassed or anything, are you?” He tried to keep from laughing at Levi’s expression. Oh my god that look on his face is priceless!_

_“Lathe. Stop.”_ Levi growled and pushed him playfully away since he had put Eren down. “how long until dinner’s ready anyways?” Levi asked looking down to see the time on his phone. _That went by quick... It’s already 5, damn._

_Lathe glanced at the time on his phone over his shoulder, his eyes widening a fraction. “Three minutes ago.” _Nope I don’t want anything to burn._ “Let’s head downstairs, shall we?”

Jeff followed Nate and Lathe downstairs to the kitchen and sat in the seats they were in for lunch. Levi followed after, a little slower because Eren was leaning on him to walk, but they made it down when Lathe was setting plates at the table.

_“It smells amazing.”_ Eren watched Levi get everyone a glass of water, then get him his pill bottle. “Thanks.” He took his pill giving him the bottle to put back in it’s place on the counter.

_Levi came and sat back down besides Eren. “This looks amazing Lathe, what is it?”_

_Jeff nodded. It smells and looks like a 5 star meal._
Lathe smiled sheepishly, a barely noticeable red dusting across his cheeks. “Roast chicken with onions, potatoes, carrots and celery. There’s plenty left if anyone wants seconds.” He took his place opposite Nate, smiling. *I hope they like it.*

Eren took the first bite and smiled. “You need to make this more!” Eren announced, taking another bite. *Now you’ll know how I gained so much so quickly, Nate.*

Levi chuckled before digging in as well. “I second his statement.” Levi continued to eat silently, not really focusing on anything except for the food in front of him.

“I’d third that statement, but it wouldn't do much because I don't live here.” Nate grinned, taking another bite and watching Lathe laugh. *This is awesome!*

“Well, I’ll fourth the statement, even though we don’t live here, and we’ll call ahead next time and request this!” Jeff laughed and continued to eat. *I haven’t had food this good in forever!*

Lathe chuckled, sipping at his water. “I'm really glad you all like it.” He glanced over to Levi and Eren. “I'm surprised I haven't made anything either of you don't like yet.” *That’s seriously got to be some sort of miracle that I didn't get stuck with picky eaters.*

“Well as long as it’s not sweet I’ll pretty much eat anything…” Eren trailed off and just looked down. *Shit... I need to keep my mouth shut... I haven’t been desperate to eat for 5 months...* He swallowed hard, not picking up his head to look at anyone, not finding the courage to do so, but he still ate, quietly, not sure what to do. *They don’t want to know what I went through... It’s bad enough that Lathe, Spades, and Levi know everything... I don’t want people to pity me... I don’t want them to think about what my father did to me every time they see me...* Eren reached down to pet Blake behind the ears, under the table.

Levi nudged Eren’s foot, patting his knee under the table. He sent him a reassuring look. *I don’t know what it is that’s you’ve got going on up there, but you don’t have to worry about anything now. Just eat and be happy. Enjoy this.*

Eren looked over to Levi, smiling a bit before he started to eat normally again. Whatever he had been thinking about had seemingly vanished for now.
Levi took a deep breath as he walked out of the counselor’s office. The hallways were barren except for a dog and his brown-haired owner, whom of course Levi walked towards, slowly and quietly, coming up to Eren to wrap his arms around him, leaning up a bit to kiss the back of Eren’s neck. “Sorry about that, but I have permission to bring you as my date to prom.” He told him and smiled. But that wasn’t the only reason I was in there. That can wait until later though. Levi took Eren’s hand on their quiet walk home, stepping over the threshold and going through the usual routine of letting Blake outside, throwing their bags at the end of the stairs, not caring because none of the teachers were assigning homework anymore. They were all in the dreaded ‘Review Mode’. It was just another day of studying… It’s getting soooo boring. It wasn’t long until Eren had reclaimed his seat at the piano. I swear he gets better each time he sits in front of the damn piano.

Lathe leaned on the banister of the stairs, looking over to Eren with a purposefully indifferent look. “Before you get into the piano, I thought I should tell you that you got something in the mail today.” Oh he’s gonna love this.

Eren’s hands stopped from their graceful dance over the piano keys. “I did?” His voice sounded hesitant. I don’t get mail though… what could I have possibly gotten? I’m too young to be getting college stuff, Levi’s been getting a lot of that lately… but he just keeps throwing it out…

Lathe showed him a decent-sized and suspiciously-shaped package, reading the label with apparent disinterest. “Yeah, dunno why. You might have a fan or something from a town in Germany that just so happens to have your old address, but then again it could just be cleverly disguised junk mail. You know, I guess I might as well throw it out for you if it’s nothing special which it surely isn’t.” Lathe moved as if to really go pitch it in the kitchen, holding back a grin.

“WAIT!!” Eren instantly got to his feet and quickly snatched the box from Lathe’s hands. He went and sat down in one of the beanbags which he had convinced Lathe to get him. He opened the cardboard first-class box carefully to reveal an old black case. Eren cried almost instantly. It’s the violin… It’s actually here… Oh my god, thank you Spades. Eren cried happily as he pulled the case out from the box and hurriedly opened it, his fingers going over each and every curve of the polished wood within. God, I haven’t played this thing in years. “Spades sent this?” He asked and looked up to Lathe with tear filled eyes, but there was a smile on his face as he cried.

Lathe just nodded, picking up the sturdy cardboard box from where Eren had dropped it on the floor, picking up foam peanuts. “Yeah, she did.” He looked to an inside flap of the box, turning it and squinting. “She wrote something here.” His smile grew. “‘One of many, many more. Eleven more in pristine condition getting ready to go!’” YES!
Eren cried even harder, holding the case in his lap. “Oh my god.” Eren didn’t know what else to say, and he just cried happily. *I get to have Mom back...*

Levi looked up from his place next to Eren’s beanbag, shifting to get next to him and coil his arms around his waist, smiling. *That’s amazing! You get all of them back!*

Eren turned from a crying mess to a ball of laughter in a matter of seconds. He curled up into Levi’s arms and smiled happily, closing his eyes as he was held. *God... I don’t want this to end.*

Levi watched Lathe disappear with the box, leaving them for the moment. He turned to look at Eren, pressing a gentle kiss to his lips. “Want to try and play something? I’d love to hear it.”

Eren nodded wiping away the tears on his face with his sleeve. He smiled and brought out the violin from its case. “I can’t believe I get to play this again.” Eren smiled as he held it under his chin in his left hand. He picked up the bow and began to play a wonderful melody, a happy smile plastered on his face the whole time. *I missed this violin so much...*

Levi had shifted Eren so he wouldn’t get poked with the bow, watching Eren’s fingers glide over the strings, listening intently. *He plays like he never stopped- and it’s been so long...*

Lathe reappeared from the basement, the box stashed away, stopping in the doorway of the scripting room, listening to Eren play. *He’s got such amazing talent...* Lathe smiled and shook his head, walking quietly to the kitchen to start on dinner, half his attention kept by the wonderful music that floated in from the piano room.

Eren took his bow away from the instrument once he was finished with the melody. “It’s still tuned to me playing it years ago.” Eren smiled softly, leaning back so that he was against Levi, the violin situated in his lap as he relaxed. “I miss her.” He murmured quietly, his voice uneven as he spoke.

Levi held onto Eren just a bit tighter, pressing gentle kisses against the back of his neck. *I know you do. You know...* Levi spoke quietly, his voice nearly a whisper. “She’d be proud of you.”

“You think so?” Eren asked as he put the violin back into it’s case, putting it beside the bean bag before curling up into Levi’s chest, nuzzling his head into the crook of Levi’s neck. “Do you really think so?” His voice a whisper. *Do you really think she would be proud of me?*
Levi pressed a kiss to the top of his head, resting his cheek on his head and closing his eyes. “I do.” I know she would be.

Eren smiled, his whole body relaxing in Levi’s arms. His breathing evened out pretty quickly, and his 156 pounds of muscle - thanks to finally getting back into the weight room for gym class - lay on Levi’s chest as dead weight. Eren was exhausted after the week of review they had, and was studying out of his mind to make sure he knew all the answers to everything, so he’d barely gotten any sleep at all in the past few days.

Levi smiled softly as he felt Eren relax, letting himself drift in and out of sleep, burned out from the intensive studying of the past few days.

Lathe quietly padded into the piano room a bit more than an hour later, smiling at the sight of the two of them asleep on the beanbag. That’s so adorable… He quietly took out his phone and snapped a picture, sending it to his computer before gently shaking them awake. “Hey, dinner’s ready. It’s time to wake up.”

Eren let out a soft groan and simply swatted at Lathe before nuzzling back into Levi’s chest. I’m too tired to eat… Sooo tired…. I wanna sleep for days...

Levi cracked open his eyes, yawning and stretching out his legs, waking up fully as he smelled dinner. …is that lasagna. He looked down to Eren as he tried to go back to sleep, his arms shifting under him. Yeah, no. “Eren, it’s lasagna. I’m getting up, and that means you have to get up too.”

“But I’m tired!” Eren whined and tried to put as much of his body as possible on Levi. He can lift me up, who is he kidding? He’s been working out like crazy, I’m surprised he hasn’t asked to use me as a weight yet.

Levi rolled his eyes, one arm now under his legs, the other keeping its hold on his waist as he shifted their weights forward, standing to carry him to the table. “Well, stop being tired so we can eat.” He pecked Eren’s lips in apology, setting him down carefully at his usual place at the table. His eyes lit up as he saw the dish on the stove. Yes!

Eren groaned a bit and rubbed at his eyes with a huge yawn that ended in an adorable little squeak. He put his head down on the table. “Do I need to wake up early tomorrow?” Eren’s voice sounded exhausted, just as exhausted as he felt. I wanna sleep till noon, and I’m probably going to bed at 6 tonight.
“Judging by the fact that you're falling back asleep at the table…” Lathe set down a plate of lasagna and a water glass next to his arms. “I’m guessing you waking up before eleven tomorrow isn't likely.” He set a large piece in front of Levi. *He seems rather enthusiastic about lasagna.* He sat down with his own, studying Eren amusedly.

Eren nodded. “You're damn right it’s not likely.” He slowly lifted his head, picking up his fork and not hesitating to dig in. *I love food a little more than sleep though, so I’ll eat and then sleep.*

Levi ate quietly, thinking. *Is it a good idea to bring it up while Eren’s so sleepy? I don't know how well he’s going to react... He seems like he’s in a good mood though, so... You need to sometime, Levi. Do it.* “So, uh… I think I figured out where I'm going to college.” He studied Eren’s expression, trying to gauge his every reaction. *This isn't going to be easy, is it.*

Lathe looked up from his plate, smiling. *That’s great! What’d you have in mind?” I've never heard you talk about it yet.*

*Now or never Levi. Do it.* “Marine Corps. University. They have a good program for me to go through ranks while I’m in college, as well as help me become an EMT after college, so I’ll be trained as a medic for the field as well.” Levi watched as Eren slowly put his fork down, suddenly disinterested in his food. *He doesn’t like the sound of that does he?*

“Where is it?” Eren asked with worried eyes. *I don’t want him to leave me.*

*He hates this doesn’t he?* “It’s in Quantico, Virginia. About 10-12 hours from here, four hours by plane.” Levi told him and watched Eren’s eyes flicker with so many different emotions.

*He wants to be a marine... He’s gonna be gone for four years for college... And then even longer after that when he gets sent overseas... What if he never comes back? What if he comes back to me in a box?* Eren looked down at his wrists; he hadn’t realized he had already started to scratch, and he didn’t even feel Blake biting his hands to get him to stop. *Blake... He’s going to come back to me in a box.* Eren stayed silent during the rest of the conversation between Lathe and Levi. He simply listened, never looking up, or touching his food again, just petting Blake under the table to keep himself calm.

*Lathe’s eyes lit up instantly. “You want to be an EMT? Oh that’s great! You’d be doing a lot of good out in the field. You’re welcome to look through any of the medical stuff I have up in my study if you want to.” That’s a great career to look into!*
Levi smiled. “Thanks Lathe… But I gotta do a tour in Afghanistan before I can come back… I’ve been going back and forth with the counsellors at the university, and they’ve helped me decide. They work with a community college in the area which trains the EMTs… And I’ll be getting my field medic training there, along with getting a few ranks under my belt before I get deployed.” I wonder if Eren’s pissed off at me for not mentioning what I wanted to do sooner? I gotta tell him I need to go for basic trainings throughout Senior year too… That’s part of our application of sorts.

A small flicker of worry passed Lathe’s eyes, though his smile barely wavered. “I’m sure you'll be fine. If you're dead set on it, and it sounds like you are, believe me, I understand what it’s like to want to help people who need it.” You can take care of yourself. And God knows they need all the help they can get.

Levi smiled. “Yeah, I need to go to basic training sessions though… They start on the last week of August, and run for the whole year, the last week of every month.” He told Lathe and smiled softly. “They need your body to build up endurance and all that jazzy stuff.” Levi said and picked up another fork full of food. Neither of them had noticed that Eren had left the room, his food untouched from when he had set his fork down.

Lathe smiled, patting his arm. “You'll do well. Just make sure someone collects the classwork you miss for you.” He quirked his eyebrow and went to resume eating, only to stop as he noticed Eren had left, nearly dropping his fork, putting it down, his brow furrowed in worry. How did I miss that? “Where’d Eren go?” His ears strained to hear footsteps upstairs or in the basement, hearing something downstairs.

Levi looked over to Eren’s seat. “I’ll go find him…” Levi got up, putting his fork down and moving to go look for him upstairs. He probably locked himself in his recording room.

Lathe called to him before he could disappear up the steps. “He’s downstairs, in the basement. I can hear him… He doesn't exactly sound happy.” He sounds like he’s crying...

“What do I tell him? I really want to do this, and I’ve been thinking about it for awhile now, how do I get it across to him that I want to do this? That I’ll be fine?” Levi looked to Lathe as they both stood in front of the basement door, hearing Eren sobbing and Blake whining to calm him down.

Lathe ran one hand through his hair, a look of worry on his face, his other hand resting on Levi’s shoulder. “...I think you’ve just got to tell him that. And if I were you, I'd make the most out of what time left you two are guaranteed before you leave.” He sighed. “It’s a lot to take in for him… but hopefully he’ll be willing to wait for you. I can't imagine him not.” Lathe let his hand slide from Levi’s shoulder, sending him a reassuring smile. “Good luck.” He padded to the kitchen to start dishes, leaving him alone.
Levi took a deep breath, beginning his descent into the basement, closing the door behind him and moving to the bed, the lights dim. He saw Eren curled up and shaking in his nest on the bed, Blake pawing at him and nudging him, trying to stop his ragged sobs. Levi walked the side of the bed, climbing up and shifting to pull Eren into his lap, holding onto him tightly. I'm sorry, Eren. It's not easy to tell you, but I really want to do this.

So I have no choice? I can't make him stay... Lathe agrees with him. He think's what Levi wants to do is great. I'm the only one who doesn't want him to leave... Eren sobbed as guilt raked across his chest. "Do you... Do you really... Really want... To do that?" Eren sobbed as he clung to Levi's shirt, burying his face into his chest.

Levi's hand traced over Eren's arm, and he slowly nodded. "Eren... I know it's not easy to hear, and it's not easy to tell you either... It's going to be a long time that I'm gone, and, I really really feel like it's what I need to do... I-I hope... That you'll... That you'll wait for me..." Levi searched for the right words, pressing kisses to Eren's forehead and temple, wiping away his tears. Please don't cry...

I have no choice... I have to let him go... I can't tell him to give up on what he wants for me... I can deal with the pain... Eren sniffled, struggling to keep himself from crying, taking a few deep breaths as he nodded. "O-okay." He said with a shaky voice, sniffling as he reached up to wipe away the tears with his shirt sleeve.

Levi gave him a small smile, his hand cupping Eren's cheek as he kissed him chastely, his voice a small whisper. "...Thank you." I love you.

Eren let Levi kiss him, struggling to force himself to smile for him. "Promise me... Promise me you'll come back for breaks?" Eren asked quietly and looked up to him with hopeful eyes.

Levi leaned their foreheads together, his expression soft. "Of course I will. Promise." He pressed feather-light kisses on his lips, holding Eren snugly against his chest. I'm really gonna miss you, believe me...

Eren nuzzled his head under Levi's chin, calming down slowly but surely. He let silent tears fall, taking a long time for his whole body to relax against Levi. He had cried himself to sleep in Levi's arms.

Levi sighed, shifting so he could comfortably lay down with Eren on top of him, wrapping
protectively around his form. *We are going to make the most out of the time we know we have together.*

---

Lathe quietly padded down the basement stairs at three in the afternoon the next day, stepping over to the bed and gently shaking Eren’s shoulder. “Come on, Eren. It’s real late to be sleeping still. You gotta wake up.” *We have things to do today!*

Eren cracked open his dull eyes, looking as if he had no will to do anything at all. “I just wanna sleep…” He mumbled, turning over to the other side of the bed, completely forgetting that they had to go get tattoos today.

Lathe moved to the other side of the bed, still trying to get Eren up. “Have you forgotten what we had planned for today?”

Eren grumbled, trying to bury himself under a multitude of blankets. “What… I thought I could sleep today.” He curled up into a tighter ball to make it harder to pull the blankets away from him. *I wanna sleep.*

Lathe grinned. “It’s three in the afternoon. You’ve slept. Now don’t make me tickle you to get you up; I want us to be on time for our appointment with Marc and Brook.” *I refuse to be late. And we still need to get food into you and stuff.*

Eren slowly crawled out from his blanket fort. “Shit… I forgot about that.” Eren yawned as he sat up to rub his eyes. *I need to get up then… Fuck.*

Lathe smiled. “Yeah, that’s a thing that’s happening. If I can trust you to actually get up and get dressed, I'll go fix you something to eat. Alright?”

“I’m not hungry.” Eren replied instantly and got up slowly, stretching for a few seconds. He slowly padded towards the stairs to go upstairs to get dressed. It was so unusual, normally Eren was always hungry, and always snitching since he could eat without the pill and had been doing so for a number of weeks. *I don't think I'll be able to eat even with the pills.*

Lathe quirked an eyebrow, following him up the stairs. “You sure? There are strawberries all cut
up in the fridge.” Come on. Something? Anything? You skipped both breakfast and lunch. You didn't finish dinner last night either. “You need to eat something. At least try?”

“I’m not hungry, Dad.” Eren quickly disappeared upstairs, going to change into his tank top.

Lathe sighed in defeat, a flicker of worry in his eyes as he crossed back into the kitchen, hovering again over the sketch he and Levi had worked on for the past few hours: White and navy blue wings crossed. He smirked. It does look really cool. He went over to the coffeemaker, talking over his shoulder to Levi. “No more changes? That okay?”

“Yeah. I really like it. The linework is really all I’m going to be getting done today, yeah?” Levi’s eyes wandered over the outline of the feathers.

“Yep, probably. Depends how quickly this Larry guy works, and how much pain you can take. You are getting it on your back, and if you want it as big as you say it’ll take a while, and it won't exactly feel too nice.” Nope.

Levi nodded, looking up as Eren came back down the stairs, a small smile on his face. He held out the sketch. “Lathe and I sketched out what I want to get tattooed. What do you think, Eren?”

Eren looked over to the picture. Wings… They look cool. “They look good…. Where are you getting them?” Eren said and went to get one of the travel mugs that he’d gotten for his tea. He filled the kettle up and put it on the stove, waiting patiently, he still couldn’t look either of them in the eye.

“My back; they're going to be pretty big.” Levi quirked an eyebrow at Eren. He seems a bit off...

Eren nodded. “That’ll look really cool when it’s done.” Eren turned back to the kettle, waiting for it to heat up before he went over and put two tea packs in it. I need this to be strong as all hell… Otherwise I don’t think I’ll get through today.

Lathe picked up his own sketchbook up from the table, placing his soon empty mug in the sink, not missing the two tea tags that dangled from the side of it. “Whenever you're ready, Eren.”

“Let me get my sketchbook, then we can go.” Eren put his large travel mug down, letting it steep with the two tea bags. That should get it strong enough… I wonder if Lathe noticed? Eren shook
his head a bit as he walked down to the basement, grabbing his sketchbook and coming back upstairs to see how strong his tea was. Eren cautiously took a sip. *That’s really strong…. Good.* He took them both out before closing the cap on the travel mug again. “Ready.” He murmured, going to put his boots on, as well as his loose jacket.

Lathe watched Levi stand to slide his own shoes on and head out to the car, moving to lace up his own boots. He looked to Eren’s face, trying to gauge his expression. “Are you okay, Eren? You know you can talk to me if something’s bugging you.” *If you need to talk about Levi going away, that’s why I’m here.*

Eren shook his head. “I’m fine, really Dad, I’m just exhausted from school this past week.” *Well, I’m not entirely lying… But that’s not the whole reason.* Eren led Blake to the car and let him hop in before getting in and sitting on Levi’s lap. He took another sip of his tea, looking a little more lively now.

Lathe accepted that answer for then, locking the door behind them and sliding into the driver’s seat, starting the careful drive into the city, turning on the radio. “So if you really do decide to accept the record deal, does this mean I’ll hear you on the radio?” He grinned. *That would be really fucking cool.*

Eren thought about it. “I guess so…” He rested his head back onto Levi’s shoulder. <*>“How long have you wanted to do this? To move away for college?”*> Eren took another careful sip of his hot drink. *You never said a word to me… But you’ve been going to the counselor a lot more lately.*

Levi thought a moment, sighing and resting his cheek on Eren’s head, speaking quietly. <*>“I’ve thought about it for a few years. I decided on the Marines last month, and everything was… Finalised yesterday.”*> Eren nodded after a few moments, taking everything in. <*>“I’ll let you go on one condition…”*> *I hope you don’t… I want to keep you here.* Eren smiled softly as he felt Levi wrap his arms around his midsection, pulling him flush against Levi’s chest.

Levi held onto Eren tightly, his nose buried in Eren’s hair. “Mhm?”

Eren took in a deep breath, tracing Levi’s muscles on his arms. <*>“You need to be completely fluent by the time you leave… Completely, and you can’t forget a damn word while you’re gone.”*> *I don’t want you to forget about me.* Eren was struggling to keep his voice even, taking a big swig of his tea after he told Levi the condition that he wanted him so desperately to fail at.
Levi nodded. <“I'll do my best…”> It's the forgetting part I'd have to worry about...

<“I mean it, Levi. You can't forget a fucking word… Not at all, I’m going to call you, and talk to you in German… And if you forget something… I want to be able to talk to you over the phone… I don’t want to have you worry about your bunk mates knowing that you’re talking with your boyfriend.”> Eren turned in his grasp, moving his arm to hold onto his shirt. I know you don’t like to talk about certain things with people around… I can’t believe I’m stooping so low, as to make up excuses to try and keep you here...

That’s a good reason. Levi pressed a kiss to his forehead. <“Good idea. I'll make sure I know every word. All of them.”> He smiled. All of them.

Shit... Eren felt his heart break a little. I didn’t.... No! I don’t want you to learn every word! You can’t stay if you do! Eren’s eyes darkened a bit, he somehow kept his breathing even and didn’t burst into tears, which he wanted to do so much. He reached over to pet Blake and plastered a smile on his face. Levi can’t know I want him to stay… Fuck… I screwed myself over.

Worry flitted past Lathe’s eyes, as if he could hear Eren’s heart cracking. He glanced over for a moment, though he knew he needed to keep his focus on the road. ...nothing about this is going to be easy… Is it. They pulled up outside the tattoo parlour half an hour later, Lathe smiling and trying to keep the mood light. “We’re here! Let’s go.”

Eren hopped out of the car, quickly followed by Levi and Blake. He took Blake’s leash and led the dog inside the parlour, taking a large gulp from his ridiculously strong tea, trying to wake up a little more. Eren rubbed at his eyes to make it seem believable that he was extremely tired. Make it believable… Marc’ll probably talk your ear off while he’s working.

Marc looked up from the front desk as the door chimed from being opened. “Hey guys! Welcome back!” Marc got up and went to go and greet everyone again, he even had a large rawhide bone for Blake this time. Eren smiled and hugged him and Blake wagged his tail as he was given the bone. Marc then went to give Lathe and Levi a hug. “I’m in the hugging mood, so go along with it.” Marc’s smile was wide as he squeezed the both of them in one go, letting go and turning towards the hallways. “Brook! Lar! Your appointments are here!” He yelled back and went over to Eren. “Ready?” He asked. I can’t wait to do the rest of his outlining, his design was awesome!

“Oh no, I haven't had my aspirin yet.” Brook spoke sarcastically as she approached them from the back room, grinning and addressing all of them. “It’s good to see you all again. Been doin’ alright?”
Eren shrugged and nodded, going off to follow Marc into the room he was in last. “See you guys later.” His eyes were still dark, but he tried not to look anyone in the eye, or they would notice.

Larry poked his head out of his room. “Is this the crazy guy you were talking about Brook?” He asked finally stepping out of the room. The man was pretty tall, but not as tall as Lathe. He was a bit on the heavier side, but not by much, and his hair was a good mix of blonde and ginger. He was wearing jeans and a plain dark shirt, which happened to be splattered in paint. “Hi, I’m the new guy, Larry.” He gave both of them his hand to shake, a large smile on his face.

Lathe subconsciously straightened up, shaking his hand, grinning. “That kinda sounds like me. I'm Lathe. It’s nice to meet you.”

Larry chuckled a bit. “At least he admits to it.” He smiled as he gave Levi his hand to shake as well. “I take it you’re with me? Since Brook’s been complaining about working with Lathe- AKA the crazy guy- since this morning?” Larry joked, a cheeky smile crossing his features.

Levi shook his hand and nodded, his face stoic as he studied him. *He seems alright.* “Yeah. I'm Levi.”

Larry smiled and motioned him to follow. “Do you got a design in mind? Or we gonna draw something up?” They passed Marc working on Eren, Blake laying down in Eren’s lap as Eren pet him with his right hand, a small smile on his face. Larry led him to the next room down the hall. “Welcome to mine humble working space.”

Levi quirked an eyebrow at his words, scanning the room that was very similar to Marc’s, though much cleaner. “I drew something up at home, and I know where I want it.” He handed Larry the drawing.

“Awesome! Then Let’s get started shall we?” He flicked the switch to turn on the light box, smiling as he quickly transferred the picture over.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe reached forward to catch Eren’s shoulder, one hand carefully prying the fork from his hand, sighing in worry and defeat. *That’s the third time he’s fallen asleep at the table this week.* He pushed his chair back with his foot, moving to scoop Eren up from his chair, carrying him upstairs,
turning left into his own bedroom and setting him down on the bed, pulling the red quilt over him. He’s burning himself out, studying for exams. If he isn't reviewing for math or whatever it is he has an exam on next he’s passed out in the beanbag chair in the piano room… Or nodding off over food at the kitchen table. Lathe moved to put away the leftovers downstairs, quickly filling the dishwasher and returning to get ready for bed, Blake following at his heels. He reached down to scratch behind his ears. He can’t fall asleep if he’s trying to, though… Levi’s been at his apartment studying in the silence, and Eren’s so used to having Levi next to him… He had a nightmare the night Levi wasn’t here with him. He’s been sleeping in my bed with me since then. Lathe dumped his clothes in the hamper, sliding under the covers next to Eren, who curled right up to him. He wrapped his arms around his middle, staring up at the seemingly shifting gears, worry in his features. I really hope he’ll be okay soon… He’s driving himself into the ground.

Eren woke up at around 4:30 in the morning, carefully getting out of Lathe’s arms, and letting him fall back asleep as he went downstairs to study for Geometry a little more. Last exam… Then I can sleep next to Levi again… Eren made himself some toast and ate quietly as he went over his notes at the kitchen table. The bags under his eyes were visible, but he didn’t care ‘cause he had aced all his other exams and now only Math was left.

Lathe stumbled tiredly down the stairs at seven, yawning. I'm supposed to proctor an exam today… I think. Eh. He ruffled Eren’s hair as he passed him on the way to make coffee, giving him a smile. “G’morning. Already studying hard, and it’s so early. What is it today you're taking?”

“Math… And I’ve already been up for three hours.” Eren told him quietly, moving to make himself some tea. He had progressed from two bags in his cups to three and sometimes four. “Last exam today.” Eren told him as he yawned, waiting for the water to heat up.

Lathe looked over to him with wide eyes, wide awake though he hadn't even taken a sip yet. He put down his mug and turned to Eren, not missing the fact he had three teabags in his hand. Now wait just a damn second. “Eren, are you sure you're not stressing out too much over these exams? I know you want to get a good grade and everything, but your sleep schedule is all out of whack and we’ve been going through so much tea it’s like you're afraid they're gonna stop making it.” He nodded to his hand. “I get the feeling your exam studying has a lot to do with all the stress you've put yourself under, but I also get the feeling it's more than that. If you're not going to do anything else, if you don't want to talk or anything, can you at least promise me that after this exam is over you'll try and at least start with getting some actual sleep at night? I'm really worried.”

Eren nodded. “Yeah, I’m probably gonna fall asleep as soon as I get home. I promise I’ll try and get back on track… We need to go get a tux still… Prom’s in two weeks.” He reminded Lathe as he rubbed his eyes, waiting for his tea to steep.

“We’ll get you fitted for one after you're not in danger of passing out on the spot. And we need to get you back to just using one teabag. Seriously, that’s crazy strong tea you've been drinking
“Yeah, I had some toast around 5:30…”

It wasn’t two and a half hours later that a loud bang sounded in Eren’s exam room. His head had smacked against the desk as he passed out, his exam finished and put in a neat pile at the top corner of the desk. The loud sound startled the other students in the silent room who all gasped as they saw Eren passed out in his seat.

A loud, quick clicking filled the room as Lathe strode to Eren’s desk, gently shaking his shoulder. Come on… Wake up. He gave up after a moment, knowing Eren wasn’t about to wake up anytime soon. He sighed, picking up Eren’s packet and flicking through it, checking to see if he completed everything. Scantron’s entirely filled out and the free responses, all in ink… Good… He signed the ‘I-didn’t-cheat’ thing… Yep, he’s done. He looked up to the front desk of teachers, a woman walking up to them. He handed her the exam, his voice quiet. “He’s done, but he won’t wake up… Should I just…?” There’s no protocol for this...

She took the exam from him and shrugged. “There’s only a half hour left, we’ve got plenty of proctors, and since he’s done… You and he can get going. It’s fine.” She sent him a warm smile.

Lathe smiled gratefully, picking up the pencils and sharpeners from his desk, quickly walking to the front of the room to grab Eren’s backpack, dropping them in the front pouch and slinging it over his shoulder. He walked back to Eren, carefully bending down to wrap his arms around him, lifting him from the chair without too much trouble. He glanced around, noting with an indifferent face that all of the students were watching, stunned. Yeah, they’ll get over it. He walked to the door, thanking the woman as she held it open for him, walking through the silent halls to get to the car, get Eren home. Of course… At least it’s over. He sighed, Blake at his heels as he manoeuvred the door open, Eren leaning against his arm as he drove them home. For now, it’s over.

Eren woke up at around 8am the next day, head throbbing. He groaned as he got up, looking around to see what room he was in. I’m in Lathe’s room? Where’s Lathe?…. Wait, what happened?… Fuck my head hurts. Eren swung his legs over the edge of the bed, looking at the clock on the wall, the small hand pointing to the eight in Roman Numerals. “…I slept for 11 hours?” Eren then noticed the light filtering in through the window. “…Nope… I slept for the whole day… Holy Shit.” Eren slowly got up on shaking legs before he went to go down the hall to shower. He came out after about 15 minutes, looking much better than he had in a long time. I feel so refreshed… I can’t believe I slept that long… Eren walked into his room and donned a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie before making his way downstairs. He was greeted first by Blake at the end of the stairs. He sat down to pet him a little before he heard his stomach growling, getting up to walk to the kitchen. “Dad… What’s for breakfast?” Eren asked as he walked into the kitchen,
going to put the kettle on the stove. *I think I’ll only need two to wake me up…*

Lathe turned from the stove and sighed in relief, giving Eren a hug. “You look so much better, you slept **forever…** Good morning. I’m making omelettes. I didn’t know what you’d want in yours, so I just made what I usually do for mine.” He slid one from a pan onto a plate, handing it to Eren. *You don’t look like the undead now… Much better.* He glanced to his mug. **Two tags. Progress.**

“I feel better, thanks… As long as it’s got cheese in it, we’re Gucci.” Eren took the plate and went to go sit at his spot on the table. “Levi’s finishing his exams up today…” He trailed off and ate a forkful of the omelette, sighing in relief. *My head still fucking hurts.* “Please tell me I finished my exam yesterday.” Eren’s eyes were wide with fear at the thought of an unfinished exam. *Shit, I don’t remember if I did or not!*

Lathe sighed as he remembered carrying Eren out of the exam room. “Yeah, you did. I don’t know how you hit your head on the desk **that hard** and could still sleep like the dead. I had to carry you out of there. Literally all of the students looked at me like I grew horns or something. Fun.

“Is that why my head’s killing me now?” Eren groaned as he reached up to rub his temple where his head had smacked against the desk, a decent sized bruise forming. *At least I finished it.*

“That’d do it. I’ll get you some aspirin.” Lathe set down his own plate, going to his bag and returning with two white tablets. “Here.” He sat down adjacent to him, lost in thought for a second. “I was talking with Casper earlier. I need to go over and help him look over some of the research he’s been doing later. We think we’ve found some PTSD medication that won’t make you worse.” *It’s a good thing, too.*

Eren thanked him quietly for the pills, taking them and nodding after. “How long do you think you’ll be? I’m gonna have Levi over once his exam is finished.” He told him, taking another bite of his omelette. *Will he be out long enough to do something? Or just an intense make out session…? God I haven’t seen him in forever.*

Lathe took a bite, eyeing Eren’s expression. “It’s gonna be a while, most likely. As in you’ll most likely be on your own for lunch. I’ll text you and let you know if I’m going to be much later than that.” *If what Casper’s found doesn’t check out, I have a few compounds we can look through…*

Eren nodded. “Okay.” He finished off his plate before going to go downstairs and pull out some drawing supplies. *Levi gets out at 10… And he’s coming over after that… And Lathe won’t be home until after Lunch… That would give us enough time.* Eren blushed as he looked over to the box they had tucked away in a shelf near the mattress. *I gotta wait for him though.*
Lathe watched Eren leave with a raised eyebrow, finishing up breakfast and doing the dishes before heading out, opting to take his bike. They better not get in too much trouble.

Levi practically kicked in the door two hours later, dumping his bag on the front mat and kicking off his shoes, scanning the front rooms. Where are you… He closed the door behind him and listened, deciding to try the basement first, walking quickly to the scripting room and down the stairs, looking over to see Eren sitting on the mattress, doodling. Perfect. He crossed the distance quickly, climbing onto the bed and carefully moving the pad of paper and the pencil from his hands to the floor, leaning up to kiss him fervently, pulling him close. I missed you…

Eren gasped in surprise at first before he wrapped his arms around Levi’s shoulders, kissing him back just as feverishly. God, I miss this… Don’t leave me… Please… Eren moved his head to the side, deepening the kiss as he opened his mouth to allow Levi access.

Levi immediately took the invitation, his tongue moving to coil around Eren’s. You still taste so sweet… He shifted until he was practically laying on top of Eren, their chests flush, his hands wandering familiarly over Eren’s sides.

Eren moaned into the kiss as he felt Levi’s hands all over him. He pulled back from their kiss to breathe, his eyes filled with yearning and lust. “Lathe won’t be home until after lunch.” Eren purred into Levi’s ear, moving his hands to the edge of Levi’s shirt. We haven’t fucked in a while… And I’ll probably be able to sleep for a bit more after.

Good. Levi smirked, getting the message and pulling his shirt quickly over his head, showing off his chiselled abs before attacking, biting and suckling at the skin of his neck.

Eren groaned in bliss as he felt Levi’s lips on his neck. Fuck it feels good. Eren moaned, feeling his arousal already starting to form, his hands running down Levi’s chest, making their way to his pants, making quick work of the button and zipper and tugging them down.

Levi kissed up Eren’s jaw, kicking off his jeans and and letting his hands slide down to tug at Eren’s sweatpants, quickly realising he wasn’t wearing boxers. He’s not wearing anything under these… Damn. He grinned, pulling the sweatpants over his hips and tossing them off the bed, letting his fingers run down the inside of his thighs as he did so.

Eren moaned as Levi touched his inner thighs, his cock twitching at the stimulus. “Fuck, Levi… Don’t tease me… Please, it’s been long enough.” Eren whined as he spread his legs for Levi,
reaching down for his sweatshirt and pulling it off, revealing his filled out form. *Fuck he’s hot... I want him... I want him now.*

Levi pulled away from Eren’s neck for a moment, his eyes raking down his lithe form before he quickly reached for the nearby shoebox, taking out a small black tube and a condom, dropping the latter onto the bed as he went to kiss down Eren’s chest, leaving small bites and bruises. *I won’t make you wait too long.* He poured some lube into his hand, setting the tube aside and coating his fingers. His hand drifted to his entrance, slowly pushing one finger past the tight ring of muscle up to the knuckle.

Eren moaned out loud, not hiding his voice at all as he spread his legs a little further. *... It feels... So good.* Eren was moaning out Levi’s name left and right, moving his hips to try and accept more of his finger.

Levi soon added a second finger, gently scissoring him to get him to loosen up. *You're so tight...*

Eren groaned in bliss. His face completely flushed out as he felt Levi’s fingers loosen him up. *His fingers... God they’re like fucking magic!*

Levi quickly tugged off his boxers, letting his length spring free as he added a third finger, curling his digits and searching for his prostate, nibbling across his collarbone.

It took a while for Levi to find the bundle of nerves, but once he did, Eren’s back arched high up off the mattress and his cries of pleasure filled the whole basement, his cock leaking precum in streams onto his chest. “Fuck... Levi!” *Don’t tease me, please... God it feels good.*

Levi withdrew his hand, moaning into Eren’s shoulder as he heard Eren cry out, reaching for the condom and tearing the wrapper with his teeth, rolling it on and flipping their position, kissing Eren deeply. He reached for the small black tube again, pouring a generous amount into his hand and slicking himself up, his hands going to hold onto Eren’s hips, positioning him over his length. *I want to try something...*

Eren was confused when Levi suddenly changed their positions. *What is he..?* Eren watched him slick up and knew instantly what he wanted, his blush darkening and going all the way to his ears. “L-Levi?” Eren’s voice stuttered in embarrassment. *We’ve never done this position before... It’s really embarrassing... God, and can I look any more like a whore?* Eren looked down to his dripping cock as more precum escaped from his slit. *God, to have him stare at me like this... It’s embarrassing, but exciting all at the same time... Shit...* Eren slowly lowered himself down onto Levi, inch by inch before he had Levi in to the hilt. *Fuck he’s huge.* Eren moaned out a string of
Levi’s name and praises to his great body.

Levi groaned as he watched Eren with hooded eyes, blushing scarlet as he took in his pleasures expression, listening to his litanies of his name. Holy fuck... he’s gorgeous. He moaned, his hands tightening their grip on Eren’s waist.

Eren sat there, panting with Levi’s length fully embedded in him. “You're so fucking big… Levi.” Eren groaned as he timidly rolled his hips, gasping out when he found his own prostate in that fluid motion. Holy shit... That felt amazing. Eren then rolled his hips again feeling the brush of pleasure against Levi and groaning in bliss. “Feels good.” Eren moaned out, leaning over Levi a little, his hands pressed against Levi’s chest for support as he slowly raised his hips until Levi’s tip was the only thing before thrusting himself back down with a cry of pleasure as he did so. Holy fuck, this is great!

Levi groaned loudly, his heels digging into the mattress, his hands cupping Eren’s ass. Oh my God, you feel so good… Levi gasped, feeling pressure slowly building in the pit of his stomach. “E-Eren…” He let his head fall back, losing himself in the pleasure. Please.

Eren groaned in bliss as he found a steady rhythm which had him both fucking himself on Levi and rolling his hips with every thrust. God, I can make him hit my prostate every time.. Holy fuck, it feels so good. Eren had felt the warmth building in his stomach as his pace quickened. “Levi, more, please… Fuck me…” Eren knew he couldn’t get a quicker pace than this going, but he wanted Levi to pound his ass into orgasm. Please Levi.

Levi rolled them over, looming over Eren as he went to attack his adam’s apple, his hands wandering to Eren’s length as he quickened the pace, pounding deeply into Eren. So good… I want to hear you.

Eren cried out in bliss as Levi pounded into him. He shifted a little, giving Levi an easier angle. “HOLY SHIT! ” Eren cried out, back arching off the bed as Levi pounded into his prostate. Holy shit… I’m not gonna last… Fuck… “..Fuck me.” Eren whined as his hands went up to Levi’s shoulders, his nails digging into the skin. He let out a louder moan, his toes curling as he wrapped his legs around Levi, forcing him to stop deep inside of him, right on his prostate. Eren came hard, his whole body shuddering in bliss as he called out Levi’s name in ecstasy as stream after pearly stream of cum landed on his chest. Holy fuck…. That was the best one yet… Fuck!

Levi moaned loudly into Eren’s neck, his coil snapping as Eren’s legs wrapped around his waist, his voice loud in his ear. Oh my God, Eren… You felt so amazing… Levi leaned up to kiss Eren passionately, slowly pulling back and shifting to lay next to him, his arms around his waist. He pulled back after a moment, out of breath, leaning their foreheads together, speaking quietly. “I
Eren smiled, pecking Levi back. “I should probably clean up before this dries.” Eren moved to get up, his body shuddering as he did so. *Fuck I can still feel him... God, that was awesome...* Eren looked over to Levi laying there, his eyes running over his whole body. *I should clean him up too.* Eren got up and retrieved the box of wipes from the shelf next to them. He cleaned his chest and ass until he didn’t feel sticky anymore. He put the wipes in the trash before going over to Levi. He took his condom off, tying it and throwing it away before getting between Levi’s legs. His hand grabbing Levi’s length by the base and slowly leaned his head down to suck off the cum that was left on it from the condom.

Levi’s eyes widened in surprise before he moaned loudly, trying not to buck up his hips. *It’s been all of two minutes and I’m already gonna get hard again... “Eren... Hah...”*

Eren looked up to him with hooded eyes. He pulled his head up with a lewd ‘pop’. “Should I stop?” Eren’s seductive voice coming into play as he slowly ran his hand up and down Levi’s length, toying with his slit. *Do you really want me to? You haven’t gotten blown in forever.*

Levi gasped, shaking his head quickly, pleading with him. “N-no, Eren, please ... don’t stop...” *Please... don’t stop.*

Eren smirked. “Good boy.” He lowered his head and began to suck away at Levi’s large length and sucked the whole entire time, all the way down to his base, able to deepthroat him. *I wonder how long he’ll last? He’s gotta be sensitive after cumming that hard... The whole condom was full.*

Levi moaned, his voice filling the entire basement, feeling his coil quickly tightening, his toes curling. *I'm not usually so vocal... But it’s been two minutes and I'm still so sensitive...“E-Eren... I can't... Ha... much longer...”* He soon felt his coil snap, groaning as he felt Eren sucking him dry. *My God...*

Eren made sure he had gotten each and every drop before he came off of him with another ‘pop’. He slowly crawled up to lay on his chest. “Feel better?” Eren asked with a cheeky smile across his face, the bruise completely visible now that the hair was out of his face.

Levi’s smirk and cheeky remark disappeared and eyes widened, one hand coming up to brush his hair away from his forehead, hovering over the bruise. “Eren, what happened?” *That looks like it’s gotta hurt...*
Eren looked down at Levi’s chest a small smile on his face. “Well you know… I’ve been studying like a madman for exams…” Eren trailed off and kissed his chest a few times before continuing his story. “I haven’t had the greatest sleep schedule in the world… But after my Math exam yesterday… I kinda passed out and my forehead smacked against the desk really hard apparently…. I didn’t wake up until this morning… And it was the morning exam yesterday too… So I slept the whole day yesterday according to Dad.” Eren told him in between peppering Levi’s collarbone with kisses.

Levi sighed, though he suddenly spoke quietly in shock. “That was you? I heard someone mention what had happened this morning before the exam, but I didn't catch a name. Lathe had to carry you out of the exam room.” That explains it.

“Yeah… Then I guess he tried to wake me up a few times to get me to eat, but I was out… Like out out… I was so hungry this morn-” Eren was interrupted by his stomach growling. Looks like I’m still hungry.

Levi smirked, leaning up to peck his lips. “And I guess you still are. Come on, lunch sounds good right about now.” He shifted out from under Eren, looking around for where his clothes went, picking them up from the floor and dressing.

Okay.” Eren pulled his sweatpants on and his hoodie, slowly making his way upstairs. “I think that was probably the best sex we’ve ever had.” Eren told him honestly as he walked up the stairs slowly, waiting for Levi to follow him.

Levi blushed red to his ears, smirking as he followed him up the steps. “Took the words right out of my mouth.” He winked, trailing behind him to the kitchen, immediately going to put the kettle on the stove.

Eren sat down before he got up again. “I’m gonna go put some boxers on… It feels weird now.” Eren scampered off to race upstairs quickly followed by Blake. He came back a minute later without a hoodie and just a tank top, one of Levi’s of course, and boxers on under his sweat pants. “I’m still waiting for you to fuck me hard enough that I’ll be limping for the next day.” Eren purred as he wrapped his arms around Levi’s waist, hugging him from behind.

Levi blushed even harder, looking over his shoulder with a quirked eyebrow. What the hell? ...That’s probably the sex talking. He needs to sit down. Levi smirked and went along with it, turning to face him, one arm snakeing around his waist and pulling him to the table, gently kissing his cheek and letting him sit down. He let him go, turning to the fridge, scrutinising its contents. Hmmm... What to make that isn't a sandwich... Ah. He carefully lifted out a large bowl of soup, setting it on the counter and fishing in the cabinet for smaller bowls, placing two in the microwave. He turned to the kettle as it whistled, setting two mugs to steep with tea. He soon handed Eren his
mug, soup and spoon, sitting across from him and nudging his feet, a small smile on his face. *I really missed this.*

Eren had a huge smile on his face as he ate the whole bowl of soup and drank the whole mug of tea, his head finding the table as he yawned. “I’m tired..” Eren stretched a bit in his seat, struggling to keep his eyes open.

Levi sighed, leaving the dishes at the table as he stood, walking around the table to scoop Eren up, carrying him into the piano room, his eyes landing on the couch. He walked over, carefully laying down and shifting so Eren was on top of him, pulling the quilt on the back of the couch over them, his nose buried in his hair, arms loose around his middle. He hummed contentedly. *I could use some sleep...* His eyes drifted closed, surrendering to peace after the weeks of exam stress.

Lathe opened the door a few hours later, untying his boots and catching himself from loudly announcing his presence as he saw Levi and Eren asleep on the couch, smiling fondly. *Back to normal.* He quietly took a picture of them, glancing at the clock. *It’s about three now... I’ll organise my notes and start dinner.* He went to grab a mug of coffee, doing the dishes before disappearing upstairs, starting dinner an hour later. He padded back to the couch, gently shaking the two of them awake. “It’s time for dinner, you two.” *Hopefully they’ll stop being nocturnal soon... But then again this is too adorable so I’m personally not complaining.*

Eren groaned a bit opened his eyes, his mouth opening wide as he yawned ending with a squeak. He rubbed at his eyes and pushed himself up off of Levi and moved to get up, stumbling a bit before he woke up fully. “Fo~od.” Eren called and headed straight for the kitchen, Blake following at his heels. *I’m starving.*

Levi rubbed at his eyes, trailing after Eren and sitting down at the table, thanking Lathe as he handed him a plate of meatloaf and a mug. He smirked as he watched Eren immediately scarf down his food like a wolf. *Yeesh, you'd think he hadn't seen food in years.*

Lathe sat down with his own plate, smiling. *Thank God Eren’s eating. It's better than the completely random snacking he's been doing for weeks.* “Eren, I was thinking that after dinner you and I go get you fitted for a tux.” *That still needs doing. And the place I've in mind will be open late anyway.*

Eren nodded and smiled. He finished off his plate, going up to the counter for seconds and beginning to scarf those down as well. “Sure, Levi can hold the fort down for a bit.” He sipped from his mug every now and then. *I can sleep with him from now on.*
Levi quirked an eyebrow at him, smirking. Alright. “Yeah, I'll fight off all the burglars for you.” He looked to Lathe, watching him chuckle.

“Good to know the house’ll be safe.” Lathe stood, moving to wash dishes. “If you want to get changed before we leave, Eren, you can, and we can go whenever.” He kicked the dishwasher shut, scratching Blake behind the ears as he nudged his leg.

“Um… What should I wear?” Eren asked him quietly, looking down at his feet as he shuffled towards the doorway to go upstairs when he had an answer. I’ve never been fitted before…

“Hmmm… Well, something that’s comfy and form-fitting at the same time. You'll have something, I'm sure. Don't worry about it too much, though. Just nothing real baggy. So lose the sweatpants and you should be good.”

Eren nodded going off, coming back with his ass-hugging jeans, as well as a t-shirt that fit him nicely now that he had filled out to a normal weight. “Okay, ready.” Eren said with a smile on his face, he had his metal-toed boots on and a jacket on his arm. He had Blake’s vest, which Eren put on him as soon as the dog saw it.

Levi’s eyes ran him up and down, getting up from the table to give him a hug and a peck on the cheek before they left. “I'll see you later.”

Eren giggled and leaned up to kiss him properly before pulling back. “We’ll be back soon.” Eren smiled as they left and he slid into the passenger seat of Lathe’s car, Blake hopping in and sitting in between them. He knows his place… That’s good.

Lathe smiled, driving them about a half hour into the city, killing the engine outside of a smaller shop. “We’re here.” He got out, looking through the window to see if he recognised the person behind the counter. Yes! Jack’s here tonight. He locked the car, opening the front door and holding it open for Eren.

The man at the front desk looked up, his emerald eyes shining behind black-rimmed glasses. He spoke happily, his words accented. “Hello! And hello, Lathe. Can I help you two find anything?”

Lathe ushered Eren forward a bit, nodding. “Hey Jack! This is Eren. He needs to get fitted for a tux for prom.”
Jack smiled brightly, stepping around the desk and holding out his hand for Eren. “It’s nice to meet you, Eren. I’m Jack, as Lathe said.”

Eren watched him hold his hand out. He swallowed hard before reaching a shaking hand out as well. Blake whined and pawed at Eren’s legs, succeeding in diverting Eren’s attention from Jack back to his dog.

Jack’s features softened, letting Eren go and gesturing for them to walk with him further into the store. “The fitting rooms are further in the back, if you’d follow me.”

Eren nodded and followed slowly. He reached down to pet Blake to calm his nerves as they got to the fitting rooms in the back of the store. What is he gonna do? Wait… Does he need to touch me? Does he need to see me without clothes on?... shit...

Jack led them into a side room, guiding Eren to stand in the centre. He walked over to a small desk and picked up a clipboard and pencil in one hand, a measuring tape in the other. He wrote down Eren’s name at the top, then walked over to Eren with the tape. “You don’t have to take anything off, Eren, and this won’t take too long.” He watched Eren shift, wary of him. He glanced over to Lathe. I know he knows how this goes… “If you want, I could have Lathe do it if it would make you feel better.”

Eren swallowed hard, his gaze focusing back on Blake, as he tried to calm himself down. He nodded at his statement. “P-please.” Eren stuttered and he had a hint of fear in his eyes as he looked over to Lathe. Please don’t be mad at me...

Lathe nodded and took the measuring tape from Jack, giving Eren a smile. “It’s fine, don’t worry yourself.” He looked to Jack. “What first?”

It wasn’t even ten minutes before the small chart on Jack’s clipboard was filled out, him going out on the floor to see if there was something in Eren’s size, leaving Lathe and Eren to debate what color tie and pocket square would look best with a dark green dress shirt.

Eren looked over the ties and pocket squares… “What about the light blue?” Eren asked quietly as he looked up to Lathe, Blake sitting down in between them. I kinda like that… Blue and green… those are my favorite colors.

Lathe tapped a darker shade with his nail. “If it’s too light it won’t look as nice, but I like the idea
of a blue. What about this one?”

Eren looked at the sapphire blue Lathe was pointing too. *That would look good with an emerald green shirt.*… “Is emerald green considered dark?” Eren asked quietly as he looked at the satin tie.

“I would say so. It would certainly go with a tie this color. We’ll see what they have that’s closest to emerald. Would you want your pocket square blue too, or would you want it to match your shirt?”

“Blue… I like this blue,” Eren said as he carefully picked up the nice tie. *It would look really nice with black…oh… I don’t have any shoes either.. Shit.* Eren glanced around to see that this store did infact sell dress shoes in a multitude of different colors and styles.

Lathe followed Eren’s line of sight. “We'll get you shoes too, don't worry.” He stepped to their right, picking up a pocket square the same shade of blue. He glanced up as Jack approached them.

“I have a suit waiting in the back for whenever you're ready to try it on, Eren. But take your time.” He smiled warmly.

Eren looked up and over to Lathe. *Should I go put it on? Or…?*

Lathe gently nudged Eren’s elbow, handing him the handkerchief. “Come on, let’s see how it looks.” *This is going to look amazing!*

Eren nodded, taking the sapphire cloth from him. He felt awkward as he stepped out of the changing room a few minutes later. He had a heavy blush on his face. “Umm…. Dad? I-I don’t know how to… To tie a tie.”

Lathe gave him a soft smile, chuckling. “I should’ve figured. Here.” Lathe stepped forward, taking the tie from him and throwing it around his neck, being careful not to tie it too tightly. “That okay?”

Eren watched him tie it with fascination. “Um… Y-yeah… I think so?” Eren was confused on how everything should go and had put the pocket square in oddly. *This is so embarrassing… I’ve never worn anything like this at all...*
Lathe rolled his eyes good-naturedly, clarifying. “I mean, it isn't choking you or anything, is it? It shouldn't be too tight.” He reached for the pocket square, tugging it out and folding it neatly, tucking it back into his jacket. *There.*

“No, it’s not tight.” Eren told him, not really knowing where to put his hands, so he let them stay at his sides. *What do I do with this? Where do my hands go?*

“I really do like this color blue with the green shirt.” Lathe looked to Eren’s hands, picking up his wrist and tapping it, thinking. “Right. Cuff links. You need a pair of those. Something silver-coloured would go well.”

Jack quietly approached, seeing Eren had come out of the changing room. “Does everything fit alright? Nothing too tight or too loose? Anything you want to change, as in color or anything?”

Eren shook his head. “At least… I think everything fits… I’m not really sure….” Eren looked down, feeling ashamed that he didn't even know how clothes were supposed to really fit him anymore. *I really don’t know...*

*Hey now, none of that.* “Here, first try just walking in a circle around this room a few times, and stop if anything pinches.” Lathe let his arm go, letting Eren walk.

Jack followed Eren’s movements, looking down to his socked feet. His brow furrowed. “The pants are an inch or two too long. You’d end up tripping after a while.”

Eren walked a bit more before he stopped. “Umm… Should I stop now? Or should I keep walking?” He reached a hand to rub the back of his neck, still completely embarrassed about this.

“You can stop. Be completely honest, does anything feel weird? Can you not bend your knees comfortably or without meeting resistance, is your shirt too loose anywhere…?”

“It feels weird where I have my shirt tucked in… ‘Cause I feel like I need to tuck a lot of it in.” Eren unbuttoned the jacket to show just how skinny his hips were compared to his broad shoulders. *God, I’m still a fucking twig.* His eyes darkened a bit at the thought. *Even after gaining a lot...*
Jack simply nodded in understanding, scrutinising the excess fabric. “It’s too wide at the waist; an easy fix. If that’s the only thing you’re having trouble with, you can change out of it, I’ll make the alterations, and we’ll try it one more time, okay?”

Eren nodded, feeling Blake grab his hands as it started to shake. He bent down easily and pet Blake between the ears. *I need to calm down... Blake’s worrying.*

Lathe went to untie Eren’s tie, resting a hand on his arm and gently pushing him back to the changing room. When Eren had finished changing back he handed the shirt and pants to Jack, the jacket and tie draped over his arm as they looked at cuff links, Eren deciding on a circular silver-coloured pair, one with an E etched into it, the other etched with a Y. They walked back to the change rooms where Jack waited with the altered garments, sending Eren back off to change again, Lathe not really needing to retie his tie.

Eren came out of the room a minute later with the altered clothing looking much better on him. “Does... Does this look better?” Eren stuttered as he saw the two waiting for him to exit the room. Blake whined a little and went to sit next to him.

Lathe smiled brightly. “You look great, Eren!” He looked to his feet. “But I don't think they’d let you go to prom with just socks on.” *Pretty sure that’s against some dress code.*

Eren looked down at his feet. “...uh... Yeah... I need shoes.” Eren said sheepishly and looked down to hide his flushed face at his statement.

Jack smiled at Lathe’s remark, his voice warm. “Don’t worry, we’ll get you shoes. You can leave the suit on for this, just follow me.”

Eren swallowed hard and followed Jack, Blake following closely at his heels. *Is he gonna question my feet? I’ve been hiding them in Lathe’s boots for so long.*

Jack led Eren to a small stool, having him sit and place his foot on a measuring plate. “Alright, these are the kind of socks you’d wear with dress shoes, which is good. You’re around a five and a half. Is there a specific style you’d want to look for, or would you let me see if I can find you something you’d like?”

Eren thought about it for a second. “Um...do you have any... That are a metal cap-toe...?” Eren asked and looked up to meet Jack’s gaze with hopeful eyes.
Jack grinned. “Of course. Silver-coloured, I'm guessing?” He watched as Eren nodded, leaving for a moment and returning with a pair of shining black shoes, helping him fit them on and lace them up. “Stand up, walk around a bit. Tell me if they feel too loose or tight, or odd at all.”

Eren got up and he walked around raising on of his feet in pain. “That hurt.” Eren said and furrowed his brow before walking back over to take them off. “They hurt a lot.” His eyes clouded with disappointment as he sat down to relieve himself of the pain.

Lathe stopped Jack after he took them off, about to take them away. “Can I see that?” He inspected the inside, a thought coming to mind. He tapped the inside bridge. “The shoes he normally wears have arches in them, and these are rather flat. Do you either have something that already has arches in them or inserts he could use?”

Jack nodded, disappearing for a moment before reappearing with a small package, slipping supports into the shoes before re-lacing them on Eren’s feet. “Now try that.”

Eren stood back up and smiled. They feel much better. He took a few more steps and was happy when he didn’t feel anymore pain in his feet as he walked. “They feel a lot better, thank you.” Eren said, a smile on his face, but it didn’t follow to his eyes. But Jack wouldn’t be able to tell the difference.

Lathe noticed, sending him a reassuring smile, placing a hand on his shoulder as he sat back down to take them off. It’s alright. We’re almost done.

“Okay, if that’s everything you're looking for, I'll take these shoes up to the front, Eren, you can change out of the suit and I'll have it and everything else ready for you soon, okay?”

Eren nodded and he took the shoes off, giving them to Jack before going off with Blake to go get changed.

Jack looked to Lathe with a raised eyebrow, grinning. “I didn't know you had a son. You’ve never mentioned him before.” He calls you Dad all the time. How could you never talk about him at least once?

Lathe rubbed the back of his neck and shrugged, following Jack up to the front desk. “Well, I adopted him in November, and I haven't been in for a while, so…”
Jack beamed at him, writing out a receipt on his clipboard, passing it and a pen to Lathe to sign. “That’s wonderful! I wish you’d have come around and told me sooner. But that’s great! I’ll go grab his things.” Jack walked off to the back, Eren returning with Blake and Jack in tow, who carried the suit in a zippered garment sleeve, handing it to Lathe and taking a cheque from him in return. “Thank you so much.” He turned to Eren. “I hope you enjoy prom, Eren.”

Eren smiled. “Thank you very much.” Eren followed Lathe out of the store and towards the car. “So… Why did my feet hurt the first time I tried the shoes?” Eren asked him, not having heard their conversation before.

Lathe held the shoebox under his left arm, fishing for his keys, speaking. “My old boots which you have claimed as your own have arches built into them for support. When you tried on the shoes the first time, they had next to no arch. Jack put in supports, which you need, and voila! Nicely-fitting shoes. And the first pair, too. That’s luck right there.” Metal cap-toe, too. I'm rubbing off on you too much. Lathe found the keys in his pocket, his wallet hitting the sidewalk with a dull thunk, a receipt fluttering out from it in the breeze. Dammit. “Eren, catch that paper, can you?” Lathe unlocked the car, bending down to pick up the leather wallet.

Eren went after the fluttering piece of paper, finally catching it after a few moments, his eyes scanning over it. His eyes widened as he saw the huge figure at the bottom of the sheet. “D-Dad…? D-did you… J-just pay $2,000 f-for my tux?” Eren asked with wide eyes. Shit! That’s so expensive, Lathe! What the hell! I didn’t need you to break the bank for this! I would’ve been fine with something much cheaper and simpler than this! This is too much! Eren looked down at the paper with worried eyes. “That’s too much Dad…” Eren trailed off with a saddened look in his eyes. “... You didn’t need to spend that much!”

Lathe sighed, opening the trunk and carefully draping the suit in the back, setting inside the shoes and shutting it. I knew he’d end up asking sooner or later. He turned to Eren, holding out his hand for the paper, a soft look in his eyes. “Here, let me have that. Get in the car, I’ve got a thing to explain.”

Eren looked down and gave him the paper before getting into the car silently with Blake. You didn’t need to do that Dad… “I don’t deserve something that expensive Dad…” Eren thought about how much the purchase would put Lathe under, and he felt his chest tighten up a bit at the thought, Blake instantly reacting to try and calm him down. I don’t deserve that...

Lathe slid into the driver’s seat, shutting the door and leaning back, a thoughtful look on his face. He was silent for a moment. “I don’t know what it was. I really don’t. But my mother was absolutely terrified that one day she would run out of money. I know how lots of people have that kind of concern, it’s something you’re supposed to worry about and keep in mind, but this was an
extreme fear. She ended up scaring my dad into the same mentality as hers. Literally, if it didn't do anything to keep us alive, we didn't get it. I had... what, three outfits during grade school? Four maybe? There was absolutely nothing superfluous in the house. No TV in the tiny apartment we had. Very simple meals. No decorations. And both of my parents had full-time jobs too! They hoarded every penny they could.” His eyes flickered with sadness. *Sometimes I wonder if mom ever saw me as something other than another unnecessary expense.* “It finally clicked when I was about ten that if I wanted anything, I would have to get it myself. I wasn't going to go to the high school I wanted unless I got a full scholarship, so I did everything I could to. And I did, somehow. I filled all my free time with books from the library, because reading was the only thing to do where I lived that was free.” Lathe’s face fell. “When I was about sixteen, my dad went to sleep one night and didn't wake up. None of the doctors knew why. He wasn't seriously old or anything... But it was the stress. The stress my mum put on him. I know it. ...when I was eighteen, I had a full scholarship to a state university, thank god, and barely a week after I told mum I was thinking about becoming a doctor she had a heart attack. Probably thinking about the cost of medical school.” Lathe’s face darkened. “No family was left other than me, so I got everything. I was barely a teenager, and Eren, with the money they had stashed away I could have done absolutely nothing for the rest of my life and had plenty to spare. I don't know what the hell she was scared of. But I didn't know what to do with it. I just… I just went ahead with medical school, became a general surgeon, decided teaching was better, got a house… and just left most of the money alone. I guess…” Lathe sighed, dropping his head. “I guess I'm trying to make sure you don't go through what I did. I had nothing, really... and I guess I just want you to have everything. I... I just want you to be happy and have nice things.” *Like I didn't...*

Eren let a single tear fall down as he listened to Lathe’s story. “I-I’m Sorry…” He fell silent after that, not facing the other as he tried to comprehend his words, his shaking hand slowly petting Blake. *He had it worse than me... Dad at least got me things to get me out of his hair...*

Lathe looked over to him and smiled, his eyes glassy. “Thanks… it’s alright.” He rested his hand on his arm. “I guess I just feel I need to spoil you with stuff. But you don't have to worry about me, or money, really. I'm not that reckless.” He grinned, starting the car. “It’s been a long day. Let’s get home, alright?”

Eren nodded. He was quiet the whole trip, which was unusual for him, he didn’t look up at all either. He kept his focus on Blake, and his shaking hands petting him too to try and relax before Lathe noticed how much he was freaking out internally. *I don’t deserve something that expensive though... At all...*

Lathe glanced over, sensing Eren’s internal turmoil. He sighed, smiling softly. “Come on, aren't I allowed to spoil my own son?” *Chill, Eren. I wanted to.*

“But... But...” Eren shot his head up hearing Lathe’s words before looking back down and speaking so softly, Lathe almost didn’t hear him. “I don’t deserve something like that.” His hands were still shaking as he pet Blake, who had moved into his lap to calm him down.
Naw. “Like hell you don’t. Eren, if anything, it isn't enough. You’re immensely kind and talented and brilliant, and I couldn't have asked for anyone better to call my son. Just enjoy it.” Just go with it.

Eren nodded, waiting for them to get home, in relative silence until one of his favorite songs came on and he was softly singing along, seemingly back to normal; however, his hands never did stop shaking.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~


Eren smiled and blushed a bit. “Really? Does my hair look okay?” Eren asked trying to flatten the brown locks which never seemed to comply. Come on, work with me hair... Oh, who am I kidding? I’m just glad I don’t have anything sticking straight up today... God that's always embarrassing.

Lathe rolled his eyes, chuckling. “Your hair looks fabulous, now quit it or you'll mess it up.” He gently swatted at Eren’s hands. “You have your phone in your pocket, your wallet if you need it… Unless you want a watch I'd say you're good.” Your phone could function as a clock though so it's a trivial matter.

Eren thought about a watch for a second, looking to Lathe and he was instantly reminded of the straps Grisha used on his wrists. His eyes flashed with fear for a split second before he backed away, hurriedly shaking his head and holding his wrist, rubbing at it as if he had just gotten free of something too tight on his wrists.

Lathe’s eyes widened a fraction, holding up his hands in surrender, staying put. “Okay, you don't need to have one, just thought I'd offer.” He grinned as the doorbell rang. “I think that’s for you.” Be glad I didn't sign up to chaperone this year.

Eren nodded, his focus moving towards the door. “Okay… Umm… Well, I’m going to let him in… Don’t somehow pull out a shotgun between now and then. Please.” Eren scampered off to open the door. I think he was joking about that... But I’m not completely sure.
Levi stood tall in the front door, dressed in a black suit with a white dress shirt, a silver tie and pocket square faintly reflecting the light from inside. He looked up to Eren, a red rose affixed to his lapel and another in his hand, trying not to let his jaw hit the floor. *Holy fuck is he handsome.* He smiled, taking a small step forward. “Eren, you look… *Amazing.*” *Hot damn.*

Eren’s eyes widened as they landed on Levi. *Holy shit… He’s fucking hot… God, can I take his clothes off right now? Please?* “You don’t look too bad yourself.” Eren purred with a smile on his face as he stepped forward to kiss Levi’s cheek, a blush on his face as he pulled back and pulled Levi inside the house.

Levi blushed, following Eren into the house, intent on claiming his lips when a flash of silver stopped him dead in his tracks.

“Now I don’t think I have to go through the *entire* speech as is traditionally given, but I will let you know that as long as he’s home by one, you're fine, and if he comes back alone and crying I *will* kill you.”

“DAD! Are you *serious* right now? I thought I told you *no* shotgun spiel!?” Eren said with exasperation, finding his head in his hand quickly, the other hand on his hip. *I can’t believe I put up with his antics.*

Lathe quirked his eyebrow, holding out the wide-bladed, hooked sword for him to see. “What? You said I couldn't use a gun, so I got out the sword instead!” *Technically I did nothing wrong.*

“Was it *necessary* to threaten him?” Eren asked with a twitching eyebrow, quickly getting irritated by Lathe’s banter. *I am so done with you.* He sighed looking back over to Levi. “He doesn’t mean it, don't worry.” He stepped closer and gave him a soft kiss on lips.

Levi gently kissed him back, pulling back after a moment, surprisingly unfazed by Lathe’s antics. “It’s Lathe. I kinda expected something like that.” *Could see that coming a mile away.* He held out the small box in his hand, a red boutonnière resting inside. “I have something for you.”

Eren blushed as he looked at the box. “I swear to God if this is a ring, I will murder you myself.” Eren joked before he opened it and gasped softly when he saw the beautiful rose within. *This is beautiful.*

Levi smiled, carefully picking it up and handing Eren the box so he could affix it to his suit jacket,
pinning it in place. “Now we match.” *I like that.*

Eren smiled and turned to Lathe once it was securely fastened to his jacket. “Alright, you can take all the pictures you want, so are we going to be on the stairs? Here? Outside?” Eren asked, a hand snaking down to intertwine with Levi’s. *I promised him he could take a bunch.*

Lathe grinned, leaning the sword against the wall and producing a camera out of nowhere. “Those are all good ideas, but let’s get my one really good idea out of the way and have you two at the piano.” *That’d be adorable.*

After an absurd number of pictures, Levi found himself in the driver’s seat of the Thunderbird, and in the midst of prom. *The music is really fucking loud. But it’s okay to dance to, and Eren’s been practically grinding against me this entire time, so I really can’t complain. It’s a good thing Blake stayed home, he’d be going nuts with everybody here… Well, going nuts. I kinda wish they did something more with the food… Lathe could have done a better job running the catering. But then again, Eren is gorgeous as fuck and grinding against me for the seventh song in a row, so again. Can’t complain.* Levi looked up as a slow song began to play, people filtering off of the dance floor and leaving the couples to dance. He watched as Eren turned to face him, holding out his hand, the ghost of a smile on his lips. “May I have this dance?”

Eren blushed furiously. Slowly reaching out to take his hand, Eren stepped closer. “I hope you know how to do a proper Waltz.” Eren moved to put his other hand at Levi’s shoulder just as Levi moved a hand to his waist. *So, waltzing… Hmmm, can he do it? I’ll let him lead.*

Levi nodded, stepping forward and to the side, slightly surprised as Eren smoothly stepped back with him. *He knows how this goes, not being the lead? Hm.* Levi slowly moved them around the floor, pulling Eren closely against him. His voice was quiet, only Eren able to hear him. “You’re really handsome, you know that?”

Eren’s face flushed a deep shade of red, all the way to his ears. “Really?” He asked softly as the two of them swayed in time with each other. *I like dancing with him, it’s comfortable.*

“How the hell did I get so lucky?” Levi smirked, pulling their chests flush, studying Eren’s viridian eyes.

Eren smiled wide, happy they were dancing together for the rest of the song. “So we have to stay for the after party?” Eren asked with a seductive purr as he wrapped his arms around Levi’s neck. Everyone had started to pour onto the dance floor after the slow song ended.
Levi suppressed a shiver, his arm tightening around Eren’s waist. “I wouldn't say that…”

_Something tells me I don't want to._

“So then we could go after?” Eren asked, his lips brushing over Levi’s ear gently as he slowly ground against Levi. The music had returned to its blaringly loud volume and the body mass of grinding had formed again. _I want to get you out of those clothes._

Levi moved against Eren, smirking, a glint in his eye. _I do like that suit on you… but it might look even better on the floor._ His voice dropped an octave. “I think I like that idea.”

Eren smirked. “Good boy.” Eren praised as he kissed his cheek and proceeded to focus on grinding against Levi even more, no one caring that Eren’s ass was against Levi’s crotch. _Hmmm, only a little longer, then we can go._

The rest of the night passed in a flurry of loud pop songs and explicit dance moves, and before Levi knew it he and Eren were stumbling out of the gymnasium and towards the parking lot, struggling to keep their hands to themselves as Levi drove them quickly home, opening the front door and pinning Eren against it the second they were inside, claiming his lips and demanding entry, pressing against him. _I want you I've wanted you all night … I need you now._

Eren opened his mouth instantly, groaning as his tongue slipped against Levi’s. _Fuck… It’s so warm…_ Eren was already seductively picking up his left leg to wrap around Levi’s torso. _I’m going to make him go wild tonight._ His hands traced over Levi’s chiseled chest. _So much clothing… We should go downstairs… but we’ll need clothes for tomorrow morning… Shit._ Eren pulled back, panting to catch his breath. “Levi… We need clothes for tomorrow… But we can’t wake Lathe up…” Eren leaned his head down a bit to nip at Levi’s left ear. _How we gonna work that out?_

Levi thought for a moment, placing his hands on Eren’s shoulders, reluctant to break away from him, if just for a minute. His voice was quiet. “Give me a second. I’ll grab us both something and try to be quiet about it.” He gave Eren one last kiss before pulling back and initiating stealth mode, sneaking up the stairs, close to the walls, keeping an ear out if Lathe shifted, ducking into their room and snatching up sweatpants, boxers and tank tops for the both of them before descending the steps, sighing in relief as he hit the bottom step. He crossed the scripting room quickly, seeing Eren had already gone downstairs, turning the corner and dropping their clothes on the table, kicking off his shoes and pulling Eren into a heated kiss, backing him up to the bed. _Now…_

Eren let himself be led to the bed and fell back on it with Levi on top of him. He had kicked off his shoes and socks, unbuttoning a few buttons as well as loosening his tie to make himself even more seductive. His tongue tangled with Levi’s as his arms wrapped around his broad shoulders.
Levi’s hands moved over Eren’s chest, immediately working to undo the buttons of his jacket and unhook his cuff links, pulling it from his shoulders and tossing it with a bit of care off the bed, immediately going back to attack his neck, sucking hard at the skin of his neck he could reach, fumbling to undo his tie. *I don’t want to tear any of this but I want it all off* now.

Eren noticed his fumbling and reached to get it loose enough for them to pull the tie off over his head and discard it along with his jacket. *You’re so hot.* Eren’s eyes were hooded as he slowly lifted himself up off the mattress to kiss the corner of Levi’s mouth again before moving to stake his own claim on Levi’s lips. *So fucking hot.*

Levi moaned into the kiss, shrugging off his jacket and tossing it aside, unbuttoning Eren’s shirt and throwing that over the edge of the bed as well, his tongue coiling around Eren’s. *Why the hell are there so many clothes they need to get the fuck out.*

Eren smirked at Levi’s persistence in getting his clothes off. He groaned into the kiss as Levi’s hands grazed one of his nipples. *Fuck I’m sensitive.* Eren reached up, making quick work of Levi’s tie, and moving onto his shirt, fumbling with a few of the buttons as Levi trailed over sensitive spots all over him. *Fuck… He knows where it feels good.*

Levi slid quickly out of his dress shirt, throwing it behind him and attacking Eren’s chest with his mouth, his hands running over his sides, one drifting to toy with the button of his dress pants, unbuttoning it and pulling down the zipper teasingly slowly.

Eren whined impatiently as his body was played with. “Levi… Please, I want you.” Eren told him, reaching down to palm Levi’s growing erection before making quick work of Levi’s button and zipper.

Levi moaned against his chest, tugging Eren’s pants and boxers over his hips, letting him kick them off, one hand dragging a strip from the base of his throbbing length to the tip, thinking for a moment. *…should I?* He decided, kissing his way down Eren’s neck, his stomach, shoving down every unsure thought as he licked a stripe up Eren’s length, his tongue playing with the slit. *It’s time I return the favor.*

Eren head shot back into the mattress. “Ahh… Levi… You… You don’t… Haa… Have to…” Eren moaned out to him, his breath starting to hitch as his both hands let their fingers tangle in his inky locks… *It feels good… But I should be the one… “I… Haa… Should… Be… Fuck… The one… Who… Does that…”* Eren moaned out, digging his heels into the mattress as he spread his legs to give Levi more access. *Fuck… He’s just toying with me… And it feels fucking amazing…*
Levi looked up to him with hooded eyes, smirking, his voice deep and smooth. “Do you want me to stop?” His tongue circled his tip teasingly. *I want to.*

Eren let out a string of moans, hands rifling through Levi’s hair. “N-no… D-don’t stop.” Eren finally managed to moan out. *Fuck it feels good… I’ve never been on the receiving end for one of these...* Eren continued to let out strings of moans whenever Levi’s tongue found an especially sensitive spot. *Holy fuck… It feels so fucking good.*

Levi suckled on his tip before beginning to slowly bob his head, taking in more of his length and pumping the base with his hand. *I can’t get as much as he can, I’d choke...* He flattened his tongue against the bottom of his length, careful not to let his teeth scrape against him.

Eren was a moaning mess. “Levi... Haa... Fuck... Feels... Good...” Eren moaned out more and more, his body jerking when Levi sucked hard enough to get a good reaction out of him, his left hand had moved down from Levi’s hair and to the sheets below them in a white-knuckle grip. *Shit.... Levi’s pretty good at this...*

Levi sucked hard on his length, twisting his hand and letting his tongue swirl around his tip, teasing his slit. He bobbed his head faster, his hand putting more pressure near the base of his length. His other hand held Eren’s hips in place, keeping him from bucking up. He moaned as Eren tugged at his dark hair.

“Holy Fuck… Levi... Haa... Levi... Please... Can I?” Eren asked quietly. *I’m gonna cum... I don’t want you to choke.*

Levi looked up to him with shaded eyes, suckling on his tip harder in answer.

Eren felt his coil snap as Levi sucked even harder. His body curled up around Levi’s head as he cried out in bliss. *Holy fuck! That was fucking amazing!* Eren continued to fill Levi’s mouth with his cum. “Fuck... Levi...” Eren cried out as Levi sucked him dry.

Levi quickly swallowed Eren’s load, not letting any escape. *Salty... It doesn’t taste too weird... I kinda like it.* Levi pulled up from Eren’s length with a seductive ‘pop’ and leaned up to kiss Eren heatedly, kicking off his pants and boxers, his cock straining against the front. His hands wandered up Eren’s chest, pushing him gently onto his back. He broke away for an instant to fish in the shoebox on the nearby shelf, immediately coming back to attack Eren’s adam’s apple, leaving small bites up and down his neck. *Mine.*
Eren moaned in bliss, his own length starting to harden all over again. “Levi… Haa… Don’t tease me… Please…” He begged to him, shuffling a little under him and moaning louder when their lengths brushed against each other. “Levi… You’re so big…” He moved a hand to ruffle through Levi’s dark locks, his eyes hooded as he watched Levi move over him. *Fuck, I can’t believe he just did that...*

Levi smirked, slowing to press butterfly kisses over his collarbone as he snapped open a small tube of lube, coating his fingers and setting it aside. His hand drifted down to Eren’s entrance and a finger pressed past the ring of muscle.

Eren cried out in pure bliss as he was stretched open. One hand tugging gently as his noir locks. “Levi… More… I want more…” He moved his head so that he was kissing Levi’s jawline and nipping at it gently, playfully. *I want your everything... I want you... I want you now.... But what if I lose you?*

Levi pressed in a second finger, gently scissoring him and searching for his prostate. He quietly moaned, nibbling at the skin under Eren’s ear. *Don't worry, you'll get more.*

Eren moaned, his hips moving against Levi’s fingers in want. *Shit... They feel good.* “Levi… Mhm… I need more.” Eren begged and tugged at his hair a little harder. *Fuck… I don’t know what I’m going to do with him gone.* Eren took in a deep ragged breath, trying desperately not to cry at this point in time.

Levi withdrew his fingers, reaching again for the small black tube, pouring some into his hand and tossing it aside, slicking himself up as he kissed over to Eren’s lips, his touches feather-light. He moved to align himself with Eren, kissing him deeply as he slowly pushed forward, burying himself to the hilt inside of Eren, groaning into his mouth. *So tight... you feel so wonderful...*

Eren gasped as he felt Levi enter him, pulling back a bit from Levi’s kiss. *No condom?.... God he feels so warm.* “L-Levi!” Eren moaned as he thrusted into him all the way to the hilt. “Levi… huh… You feel…. So… so warm…” Eren’s breathy moans took over the room as he slowly wrapped his legs around Levi’s waist, pushing him in further.

Levi moved to suckle on Eren’s adam’s apple, building a deep, steady rhythm, one hand running over Eren’s chest, the other tangling in his hair.

Eren groaned as Levi started to thrust in him. “Levi… Ha… Harder… Give me everything!” Eren
begged as he writhed under his touch. *Everything feels so good.* His length jolted as Levi sucked a bit too hard at his adam’s apple, already starting to leave a bruise, and his suckling just furthered it. Eren’s wanton cries of pleasure rang throughout the whole room. *I can’t believe we’ve never woken Lathe up...*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe’s eyes cracked open with a loud sound from downstairs, immediately shutting them and flushing a bright scarlet as he noted the time. *It’s the middle of the fucking night. After prom. And Eren doesn’t exactly sound like he’s in pain.* Lathe covered his face with his hands, knowing no amount of listening to loud music with earbuds would drown out the sound, resigned to a night without sleep. *At least he didn’t come home alone and crying.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren’s voice rang in Levi’s ears, and Levi pounded hard into Eren, leaving bitemark after bruise around his neck, feeling his coil tightening in the pit of his stomach. *You feel so damn perfect, my God...*

Eren moved his hands to rest on Levi’s chest, pushing him back a little. “Not yet...” Eren moved Levi back, pushing him up so he was sitting back on his heels, moving to his side and stretching a leg over Levi’s chest, happy that he got the message when he felt strong hands grab onto his thigh and felt Levi ram into him… Straight into his prostate. Eren let out a scream of pleasure in response to his actions, his body on display for Levi as he shook from the pleasure. *Holy fuck.... This is amazing!* “Oh my god! **Levi!** Right.... Uhh... There!” Eren cried out in bliss as Levi went to town on him.

Levi let his eyes rake over Eren as he pounded into him, his face flushed as he watched Eren writhe under him with hooded eyes. He moaned as he felt that same pressure building inside of him. “E- Eren... I... Hnn, can’t...” *Holy shit, Eren...*

Eren cried out Levi’s name as his coil quickly snapped and he found himself spasming under Levi as he was pounded continuously. “**FUCK!**” Eren shouted loudly, his voice traveling throughout the room and the rest of the house. *Shit, so good! Levi don’t stop!* Eren moaned louder, his body tightening against Levi as his thrusts became quicker, harder and more erratic. “Cum inside me… Levi... **Fill me up!** ” He cried out, reaching an hand to touch his pecs. *So hot... I love it!*

Levi felt his own coil instantly snap, moaning loudly as he felt Eren milking him dry. *Oh my god,*
that voice… Damn… Levi pulled out of Eren, lowering his leg and diving down to kiss him fervently, his hands running over every curve and line of his body. You feel so amazing and you sound wonderful and you're mine.

Eren panted for a few seconds before his lips were smashed against Levi’s. Holy shit… I think I could go another fucking round… My hardon’s not going down! Eren moaned and shifted to cup Levi’s face with both hands as he opened his mouth to let him in. Indulge me please . Eren moved to raise his hips against Levi’s showing off his painful erection. Fix it… Please.

Again? Levi smirked into the kiss, coiling his tongue around Eren’s. Not that I'm complaining. Levi shifted, bringing Eren with him close to the edge of the bed, suddenly moving to step down onto the floor, breaking their heated kiss and flipping Eren over to stand between his legs, kissing up his spine to nibble at the back of his neck, his hands running over his sides. He suckled on the skin of his shoulder blade as he lined himself up with Eren’s entrance, suddenly thrusting forward to the hilt.

Eren gave a sharp cry in complete bliss. HOLY SHIT! “Fuck! Levi… Hnn… There… Give me everything… I want it… Hard… Fast… Deep.” Eren’s seductive voice floated around the room, intertwined with moans. His hooded eyes looking over his shoulder to see Levi’s response. Please… I want you to fuck me...

Levi groaned at his words, biting into his neck, his grip tight on Eren’s waist as his pace picking up as he rammed deeply into Eren, looking up to meet his hooded eyes with his own, full of lust. Mine.

Eren's body pressed back against Levi, strings of cries, moans, and even the occasional scream left Eren’s swollen lips. “Fuck! Levi! Fuck… Fuck me… Please.” Eren begged, his right arm reaching around to pull Levi’s head to his neck, moving his own to the side giving him unrestricted access. Fuck me please! I can’t take it much longer! Eren could already feel his coil beginning to tighten in the depths of his abdomen.

Levi took advantage of the skin offered to him, suckling hard on the soft flesh, his thrusts becoming erratic as he aimed for Eren’s prostate, groaning loudly as Eren moaned in his ear. He felt the pressure build in the pit of his stomach, but he refused to let himself go just yet. His mouth wandered up to Eren’s ear, his voice deep and even. “Eren… cum for me.”

Eren’s eyes widened in an instant as he let out a loud scream of bliss, his voice ranging through three octaves in one go, his ass tightening around Levi with no remorse as his whole body shook, his cum shooting to cover his stomach with pearly white. Eren’s body almost crumpled from the state of his blissful high after his orgasm. Holy shit… Best sex… ever. Eren was too weak to keep
himself up, so he sunk down into the mattress, thankful Levi’s grip on him was strong as his knees gave out.

Lathe winced in embarrassment as he heard Eren scream, but in the moments after, hearing nothing else, he sighed in relief, his hands falling from his red face. Thank God, they’re finally done! Maybe I can finally get some sleep. Hoping those sounds don’t haunt me. Lathe shifted to his side, only to throw his pillow across the room as he heard another cry. Are you serious?!

Levi felt his own coil snap, moaning into Eren’s shoulder as he spilled into him. My god, so good… He pulled out of Eren, leaning up to kiss him before pressing butterfly kisses down his neck, his shoulders, his back, kneeling between his legs and pulling Eren’s asscheeks apart, leaning forward and letting his tongue dart out, tracing the red entrance and pushing past the muscle.

Eren let out a sharp cry in bliss. “Levi…” Eren whined as Levi’s tongue entered him. “Levi, no more…” Eren begged quietly. I’m so tired… That felt great… But I can’t get hard again...

I know you can't handle much more... but I won't be too long. Levi pressed on, his tongue able to go further into Eren as he was already so loose, not caring that he could taste himself as he licked up his soft walls.

Eren let out a series of soft whimpers as he gripped the sheets below him. His whole body shaking all over again with the repercussions of his multiple orgasms. “Levi…” Eren still whined his name and he struggled to reach a hand to his ass, to shoo Levi away from it. No more… Levi...

Levi decided to have mercy, pulling himself away from Eren’s hole and kissing lightly up his back again, turning him over and shifting them both back fully onto the bed, cupping his cheeks and kissing him passionately. He moved to lay down next to Eren, their legs tangled together. I love you.

Eren sighed contentedly as he snuggled up to him, his body still shaking every now and then from the aftershocks of his massive orgasm. Fuck, I can still feel it. He slowly reached for multiple blankets to cover their naked bodies, his fingers already starting to get cold without warmth surrounding him in the basement. Hmm, thank Satan you’re warm. It wasn’t long until Eren was
deep asleep curled up next to Levi.

Levi wrapped his arms protectively around Eren, pulling him close and tucking his head under his chin, relaxing as he felt Eren’s breath even out. He let his eyes flutter shut, surrendering to sleep. I really do.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

So summer’s been going pretty well so far. Dad got Levi and I the books we needed to read for summer… Yeah, I’ve had them done for three weeks already and Levi’s just finishing up the last one. But I guess that’s to be expected since he’s completely packed for our two week… Vacation? I think that’s the right word… I’ve never been on one, I don’t know what it will be like, but we’re going to LA. Which means we need to get there by plane. Eren sighed at the thought of being dragged onto a plane for the second time in his life. I’ll be completely honest… I am not looking forward to that. I hate airplanes. They remind me about the incident… I didn’t like that we had to move… And I did not like being forced onto that metal death trap! Dad’s been trying to calm me down for days saying that it’s not that bad… But we can’t drive there, we don’t have a big enough car for the four of us to safely drive there. Yes… I’m counting Blake because apparently he gets a seat as well on the plane. Eren folded up another tank top, a few shorts and some t-shirts. New clothes… Yeah that was a fun time. As soon as Nate had called saying he had the last two weeks in July to show us around, get a flight, Dad went nuts. He took us out shoe shopping, clothes shopping, and we even went out and got my violin bow re-haired….That reminds me, I gotta ask Dad how the packing process for that goes. Eren looked down at his suitcase filled with shorts, his usual ass-hugging jeans, a bunch of tank tops and t-shirts, boxers and his socks. Oh yeah, twelve pairs of socks for the win! No one will deny me the pleasure of my socks! He made sure that he had enough clothes for a two weeks, and a little more as per Lathe’s instructions. I’m really excited to go… But I have no idea what to expect… Like at all. What are the people gonna be like? Is Nate gonna take us to the zoo? Are people gonna recognize me? Oh god, I hope not… That would be so embarrassing, especially if I’m having a panic attack on the fucking plane… Shit. I don’t want to go, but I really want to go see Nate again! Fuck it! I’ll be fine tomorrow, I’ll be able to sit next to Blake without a problem… Hopefully.

Lathe went over a checklist of things to do in his head, rifling through the fridge for anything that would spoil while they were gone. I don’t want to come home to the smell of rotten eggs. Two weeks in LA… That’s great! How the whole ‘flying in on a plane’ thing will go down is really the only thing I’m worried about… Well, not the only thing. But I just need to make sure Eren doesn’t totally freak out on the plane. I called the airline and asked about Blake, and since we’re boarding before everyone else with the people who need special assistance, we’re going to sit together near the front. That’s guaranteed. I’ll make sure we have aspirin, and the flight’s not long enough to give him anything to have him sleep… I never understood how people could sleep on airplanes… besides the point. I guess we’ll just make sure he has lots of music or a pen and paper if he wants to try and draw or compose something… I dunno. And… I’m just kinda worried about wasting our welcome with Nate. He’s offered to just let us crash at his place, which is really nice of him, but two weeks is a long time. I just don’t want us to be a burden. …They better be finished packing their stuff. I took them out a little bit ago and they both got a bunch of new clothes and shoes for the trip.
Eren still hasn't stopped living in my old boots though... Like he doesn't even bother really taking them off in the house sometimes. He really likes them. But he's got a bunch of other shoes now too, which he kinda needed, so I'm hoping he wears the others at least once. But yeah those two better be packed. We leave at three in the morning and I'm forcing everyone to get to bed early. And that means after dinner no drawing, no internet, no... Lathe blushed. ...other things. My noise-cancelling headphones should be coming in the post any minute now. I'm so done with them. Every damn night? Ugh. They're all the way in the fucking basement and I can still hear them! Lathe moved to pitch a carton of eggs. I'm so done.

Levi sat at the table in the basement, trying to finish reading his summer reading book, continually glancing up at his suitcase packed and shoved in the corner by the staircase. Two weeks in LA. It's going to be a really cool vacation. I can't believe Nate's gonna show us around... I wonder where we're going? What we're gonna do? I just hope we get there okay. I'm really worried about Eren... He's already freaked out about being on a plane. And Blake gets the seat next to Eren, so, I can't sit with him and be there for him if he starts to panic. I mean, I'll be there, but I'll be behind him. I just don't want him to freak out on the plane or in the terminal. Or at all! I just want this to go over okay. We get to get up way too fucking early tomorrow so we can drive places and catch our plane. Fun. Lathe took us out to get a bunch of clothes and stuff for the trip a few days ago. So we'll be at least somewhat fashionable walking around LA. He glanced to the staircase. I still just want us to get there okay.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren swallowed hard as Lathe packed his car in the Long term parking Area of the Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport. This is the airport? Eren had a strong grip on Blake's leash as Lathe and Levi got out to unpack their suitcases from the back of the car. I need to get on a plane?

Lathe placed his suitcase covered in sharpie doodles behind him, easily pulling out Eren's suitcase and offering it to him, pulling up the handle. He gave him a warm smile. "Here you go, Eren." He lifted out Levi's, similarly placing it next to him and shutting the trunk, locking the car. "Alright. Let's drag our stuff in there and see how this all goes down." They shouldn't give us too much trouble at customs... Well, except for me, maybe. He shifted around the large messenger bag on his shoulder. I'm pretty much bringing a modified medical kit... the only real difference is thanks to technicalities, my laptop's in here too. ...Dammit, I'm a doctor, not a drug dealer. Hopefully it won't take them more than ten minutes of rifling to know the difference. He grinned, pocketing his keys and leading them through the dark parking lot to the lobby, heading to the Southwest Airlines desk, waiting in a nearly nonexistent line. He spoke sarcastically as he looked pointedly around the very quiet lobby with a smirk, trying to keep Eren's mood up. "Huh. I wonder why it's so quiet." It's five in the fucking morning. That's why.

Eren swallowed hard as they came through the front doors, with his luggage in tow, and his backpack slung across his shoulders. This place is smaller than the other ones I've been in... He followed Lathe warily, his eyes darting towards every sound in the barren facility. Blake whined at him when they finally got to the desk and a nice old man greeted them.
“Mornin’ Sonny, what flight we got you fella’s takin’ out?” His voice was a little rough as he started clicking a few things on his computer. His dark blue shirt held his nametag, which told Lathe this old man’s name was William. “Three checked bags? One for the each of ya’?” He asked in clarification as Levi set the suitcases on the scale, one by one as Lathe handed him their passports.

“7AM flight out to LAS. And yes.” Lathe leaned easily on the counter, watching him type and swipe their passports. He smiled and thanked him as he handed them their flight tickets. He handed Eren and Levi their tickets and passports back, tucking his own in his bag.

Eren looked down at his ticket, Blake pawing at his shaking hands. Well, they’re not shaking too bad… That’s always good. Eren pet Blake behind the ears before following Lathe through the airport. Where are we going now? Eren’s eyes still darted everywhere and he jumped a foot in the air when a loud bang sounded through the hall when one of the doors closed. Everything… Sounds so loud….

Eren turned his head back to see where they were headed, down a large hallway loaded with TSA people, machines, roped in lines, and people waiting to get through security. Eren froze almost immediately, staring at it with wide eyes. No… I don’t wanna go through it….

Levi immediately picked up on Eren’s panic, putting his arm around his waist and gently pulling him to the line, murmuring to him. “Don't worry Eren, nothing bad’s gonna happen. We'll make sure you're okay. The TSA people are nice, and they just want to make sure everybody on the plane is safe.” He followed Lathe to a line separate from the rest, for people with disabilities, watching as he glanced over his shoulder every few seconds. Levi took off his backpack from his shoulder, placing it on the belt behind Lathe’s bag, taking Eren’s bag from him as well, his hand not leaving Eren’s waist.

“I have to declare that there’s a lot of different medicines in here, so yeah.” You're going to search this. And I had it all organized, too. Dammit. Lathe took his laptop from the bag and similarly took off his watch, emptying his pockets into a bin. He took off his boots, setting them in one as well. There’s metal on them. That’s a thing. He sent Eren a smile. “It’s easy. You don't need to worry.”

He stepped into the large machine, his hands over his head as it scanned him, grinning as nothing came up abnormal and went to talk to the agent rifling through his bag. They all assume I’m a fucking drug dealer. Chill.

A lady in a dark blue shirt looked at them, her shirt adorned with the TSA badge. “Alright guys, I need to see all your IDs, I need to see the Dog’s ID, the Handler ID, everything…” She trailed off as she saw Eren visibly shake against Levi, it was then that she noticed the PTSD badges on Blake’s vest. “Do either of you have any metal on you?” She asked curiously. He’s not gonna wanna go through the machine… Is he?
Eren just backed a few steps away, so unsure of what was happening now. *No… I don’t want to… I don’t want to go…* Eren’s eyes were wide with fear as Blake pulled at his hoodie sleeve to get him to the floor. He didn’t even notice until he stepped in front of him, breaking his gaze frozen on the lady at her podium. Eren was already breathing hard. *I don’t wanna go on the plane with him… I don’t I don’t I don’t!*

Levi knelt down next to Eren, wrapping his arms around him. **Fuck what do I say?** He ignored the woman at the podium, set on getting Eren calm and back to his feet, picking up on what her question implied. “Eren, it’s okay. You're not going to go through the machine. The nice lady just wants to know that Blake is yours, and that you don't have anything you're not supposed to. It’s fine, I swear. Lathe and I won’t let anything happen. I promise.” **Please. The sooner we get you through here the better.**

Lathe looked over from the desk, his eyes wide and full of worry. **Fuck it.** He left the counter and walked straight back through the machine, kneeling on Eren’s other side, his hand on his shoulder and voice quiet. “Eren, you don't have to worry. Levi and I are going to be right here the entire time.” **Hmmm. Maybe bargaining will work to some extent.** “I know you're scared, but after all this is over we’ll be in LA! I’ll make chicken noodle soup and we’ll let you relax. It’s going to be a lot of fun. What do you say?” **The sooner this is over with, the better.**

Eren swallowed hard, looking to Blake, reaching a shaking hand over to Blake’s vest and removing the two ID cards it held. His breathing seemed to show how he slowly calmed down, going from hurried pants to slow breaths after a few minutes. His whole body shook as he tried to stand up, using Levi to help him stand up. He held the ID cards out for Levi, reaching towards his backpack for his passport. **Chicken noodle soup… That sounds good.** “P-Pasta?” Eren asked quietly, looking over to Lathe to see if he would make his pasta. **I want the homemade stuff.**

Lathe nodded quickly, smiling warmly. “Pasta. Of course.” He kept his arm on Eren’s shoulder, looking to the woman again as Levi handed her the ID cards. “Now what was that question? I didn't catch it.”

“**You have any metal on you guys? You don’t have to go through the machine, you can put what’s in your pockets in the machine… And then my colleague will wand you.”** She said and pointed towards the guy holding the wand-like metal detector.

Eren looked up to Lathe. **What the hell is in my wrist?** Eren slowly put his backpack on the line, along with his phone, wallet and he slowly took his shoes off and put them as well. *I don’t want to go through that thing.*

“**Eren had metal plates and pins in his wrist from when it was broken. But that should be it.” I don't think Levi’s busted anything… And I certainly haven't.**
The lady nodded and pointed them over to the man who was motioning them over to him. He started off with Levi to make sure Eren knew what he was doing first before he ran the wand over Eren’s whole body. When they came up clean he checked Blake’s vest for anything before swiping it, everything coming up as normal. Their bags were waiting for them by the counter and the man pointed towards them. “Your bags are ready, have a nice trip.” He smiled before focusing on the next group that came in.

Levi walked next to Eren to the counter, shouldering his bag and pocketing his phone, retying his shoes. He stood, waiting patiently for Eren to lace his boots before moving his arm around his waist again, following Lathe as they moved to find their terminal. Now that that train wreck is over… we have half an hour before our flight departs, ish. He glanced at an overhead screen. Yep. We’ll just chill and kill time, I guess. He kept a close eye on Eren’s expression, guiding him through the sparse, albeit loud, groups of people. You'd think that at six in the fucking morning people would be quieter. But apparently not.

Lathe stopped them at their terminal, scanning the seats for three open spaces. He led them to seats facing away from the window, sitting down on one end and putting his bag in his lap. “For right now it’s just a waiting game. We won't board for about ten minutes at least, given the flight isn't too delayed.” A thought occurred to him, and he moved as if to stand again. “If either of you want to grab a snack from somewhere in here or something, we can, now that we know where our terminal is.” That’s probably a good idea, actually.

Eren hurriedly shook his head and he sunk down from the seat to sit at the floor, his bag at his side, and Blake coming up to sit in his lap. His arms wrapped around his dog instantly as he buried his face into Blake’s soft fur. “I don’t wanna.” Eren whined as he clung to Blake. I don’t want to walk around... I don’t want to see any more planes!

Levi sat on the floor next to him, dropping his bag and wrapping his arms around his middle, holding him protectively. “You don't have to walk around anymore, then. It’s okay. Do you want me to maybe go get you something? I can see if any of the places around here have tea.” That might calm you down. Make you feel better.

Eren looked to him, an eye peeking out from Blake’s fur. “O-okay.” Eren said quietly and his arms stayed wrapped around Blake. Tea... That sounds good. I want tea.

Lathe stood, slinging his bag back over his shoulder in an instant, his voice soft. “I'll go; your hands are kinda full.” He nodded to Levi. “You want tea as well, I'm assuming?” He grinned as Levi nodded once. “Alright. I'll be back really soon.” He walked off, skimming the names of the businesses lining the walls. He was back in a few minutes, handing Levi a hot cup of tea, careful in passing one to Eren’s shaking hands. “Be careful, the cup and the tea are both reeeeally hot.” I
almost burned my hands holding them before they gave me a drink tray. ...I feel too tall standing here. Lathe sat down on the floor next to them, leaving them with some space as he sipped carefully from a cup of hot chocolate. He glanced up to the screens overhead, noting their flight was still on time. Alright. Soon enough we'll be boarding.

“Good morning, Folks, the plane’s already in for this morning’s 7am flight to LAS McCarran Airport, we will be boarding all those who are in need of assistance as well as families with small children first, then we will proceed with the A, B, and C seating numbers. This is flight 7893, destination LAS McCarran, leaving from Gate 10, now boarding all those in need of special assistance.”

Eren looked up from his cup of tea to Lathe. Is that us? Am I considered needing special assistance? Eren noticed that they had sat down in the handicap area, away from the rest of the people who would be boarding. Shit… I need to get on it now? Eren started to instantly shake as he saw a man walk towards them, noticing the dog. “We’re all ready for you guys to board.” He said kindly and reached out with a treat to offer Blake. Blake perked his ears but didn’t dare to move from Eren’s arms.

Lathe shifted to his knees, his hand resting on Eren’s shoulder. “Come on, Eren. That’s us.” He didn’t stand yet, waiting for Eren to move. I’m right here. Don’t worry. We're both here with you.

Levi put his bag on his shoulder, his arm moving back around Eren, gently beginning to guide him to stand. “It’s okay, Eren. Don’t worry. I’m right here.” He shifted one foot under him, moving as Eren moved. Easy does it... Please don't worry, don't panic... You don't have to panic. Really. I promise.

Eren slowly got up from his sitting position, Blake staying by his side, curiously looking at the treat from the man before taking it. Eren’s shaking hands gripped onto Levi on his left side, his right elbow, his hand trying not to crush his tea, feeling Lathe on his right. “Can.. Can I close my eyes?” Eren asked when they got near the long hallway leading down to the plane. I don’t wanna look... I don’t wanna look...

Lathe moved his arm over his shoulders, nodding. “That’s okay. We’ll guide you.” He and Levi carefully nudged him along the hallway, telling him of any uneven spots in the floor. He sent a look to the crew that greeted them, hoping they understood. “We’re almost there, Eren. There’s a little step, and then you're in the plane.”

Eren nodded, eyes still tightly shut as he was led into the small plane and sat down in the first aisle seat to the right. Blake entered there as well, hopping right up into the chair comfortably, taking the window seat. Eren was seated before he opened his eyes and his clutch lessened on Levi so he could get to his own seat. “Thank you.” Eren said with a small smile, looking to his tea as he took
another sip. *That was much easier...*

Lathe moved to shut the shade on the window, beaming. “We got you on here in one piece. That’s good.” He glanced to Levi. “I’ll let you have the aisle seat.” *I’m not about to go anywhere, really. Also if anything happens you’re more or less better at calming him down than I am.* He settled into his seat, shutting the shade and leaning up to pet Blake over the headrest. *You keep him happy up there, you hear me?*

Levi dropped into the aisle seat, sipping his tea and patting Eren’s arm, smirking. *There. Should be smooth sailing from here. Hopefully. ...someone get me some wood to knock on.*

It didn’t take long for the 30 other people to come into the airplane and take their seats. Blake had his head in Eren’s lap and sprawled out over the seat he was assigned. The plane was taxied over to the runway and took off quickly as they were the first flight out for that morning. Eren surprisingly didn’t freak out at all, he had fallen asleep from the lack of it last night, as well as from his mini-attack he had at security. Blake bared his teeth at anyone who got too close to him and it was a short three hour flight, Eren jolting awake when they landed a little roughly on the runway in LAS.

Levi had long since pried the empty paper cup of tea from his hands, leaning over to look at Eren. “We’re here. Have a nice nap?” He teased lightly, petting Blake as he looked at him from Eren’s lap. *No incidents to speak of. That’s great!*

Eren looked to Blake, who still laid in his lap. “We’re here?” He asked, his voice groggy, showing just how tired he actually was. “How long was I...” Eren gave a soft squeak as he yawned, “...was I asleep?” *I feel exhausted.*

“How about three hours. The whole flight, really. You were out like a light. It’s actually kind of impressive.” *Sleeping on a plane is impossible. How?*

“It really is. I had to take a twelve-hour flight a couple times and I don’t even try anymore. It never works.” Lathe looked over the top of the seat. *How the hell does the person terrified of planes have the insane skill of being able to fucking sleep on them? Unfair.* He grinned as he felt the plane slowing. “We’re about to get off. Our layover is about an hour, so we have time to kill. It’s 9AM now... so we can either go get something random to eat if anyone’s hungry or we can see if Eren also possesses terminal-sleeping abilities.” *I dunno. I can just keep derping around on my laptop.*

“I’m tired…. But I’m fucking starving… I want food!” Eren whined as he rubbed at his eyes, trying to wake up. *My body feels like lead… I fucking hate having a panic attack... Even a small
Levi fought back a grin. *He’s too fucking adorable.* “Alright, food it is.” He looked up as the pilot came back over the intercom, standing from his seat with Lathe right behind him. “Are you okay going down to the terminal?” *If we need to do the guiding thing again that’s okay.*

Eren thought about it, nodding as he picked up his bag, putting it on his back as he took Blake’s leash, the three of them allowed to get off the plane first, Eren still gripping onto the both of them as they walked up the long hallway to the loud and busy terminal, where Eren freaked out a little from the noise, along with just how many people were around. *Holy shit… This place is busy…. Fuck.*

Lathe stood tall as they walked to find their terminal while looking for some place to eat on the way, deciding looking intimidating was a good way to keep a small circle open around them, not wanting anyone to jostle them. *Eren’s on edge enough as it is. So- sorry, but don’t.* He looked up at a familiar sign, grinning. *Starbucks. Thank God, something I recognise.* “Starbucks okay?”

Eren nodded, still clinging to Levi as they followed Lathe through the busy terminal and towards the counter for the coffee shop. *Do they have any food that’s not sweet?* Eren looked around to see what they had in the case. *Banana Nut Bread…. Yum… I want that, and tea…*

Lathe smiled at the woman at the counter, ordering coffee and a croissant for himself and letting Levi and Eren ahead of him to order. He frowned a bit as he watched Eren yawn again, speaking to the woman after Eren spoke. “Can you just make sure everything’s full strength? No decaf.” *Eren’s falling asleep on his feet here.* He swiped his card and moved them down the counter, taking hold of everything as it was finished for them and leading them to their terminal.

*You’re about to collapse. Dammit, stop getting heavier.* Levi practically held Eren up as they walked to their terminal, sighing in relief when they claimed a full row of empty seats without armrests, sitting next to Eren and taking his food from Lathe. “Once you eat, you can go back to sleep if you want. I think I’d make an okay pillow.”

Eren nodded, picking up his Banana Nut Bread and starting to chow down on it. It didn’t last long, and neither did his tea before Eren was laid out on the bench, his head in Levi’s lap, completely passed out yet again. Blake hopped up at the end of the bench and sat there as a guard, baring his teeth when people got too close to the bench, but he didn’t move other than that.

Lathe glanced up from his notebook, smiling at Eren asleep in Levi’s lap. *They win the cutest-couple olympics.* His gaze moved to a small flash of light, noting one of many slot machines
scattered throughout the airport, dozens of which they had already passed. He quirked his eyebrow, watching the roulette animation. ...I do have some spare change I'd like to get rid of... “Levi, I'm going to go get rid of some loose change on that machine over there. I'll be like two seconds. Guard my stuff.” He stood, walking over to the machine, grinning as he heard Levi jokingly warn him not to gamble away the house. He sat down at the stool, tapping at the screen and rifling through his wallet, dropping coins into the slot. His hand hovered over the display for a second. Eh... 13 as a lucky number is a thing, right? He placed his entire bet on 13 black, not really paying the pot any attention as he watched the animation play out, the small ball swiftly circling the roulette wheel, slowing and finally landing... On thirteen black. The machine made a loud sound and Lathe nearly jumped in surprise at the noise, looking over to the attendant in a red uniform approaching him, smiling.

“Congratulations! You just won on a Progressive Pot!” Her voice was cheery as she pressed a few buttons to get the machine to print out a ticket. “We’ll have to run through some paperwork, stay here, pull out your license, and I will get all the paperwork and your check.” She took the ticket and disappeared for only a few minutes before reappearing with a large check in hand and a few sheets of paper for paperwork.

Lathe handed her his license, taking the papers and a pen from her and filling them out quickly. He handed them back to her after a few moments, a slightly puzzled look on his face. ...how did that just happen.

She smiled and returned his license once she confirmed with her own signature that Lathe was in fact the winner and above the legal age for gambling, and began to fill out the check for him. “Congratulations Mr. Quo, here’s your check, have a nice day in Vegas.” She handed him his check along with his license, before she was whisked away by another man having difficulty printing off the ticket for his winnings.

Lathe thanked her, an eyebrow quirked as he put his license away, looking to the large check in his hands, his eyes going wide at the sum. How the fuck did I win thirteen grand with pocket change?! He stared at the paper for a moment before just shaking his head in disbelief, folding it and placing it in the inside pocket of his jacket, walking back over to sit next to Levi, still with an odd expression. ...huh.

Levi studied his expression, a surprised look in his eye. Can I ask? “They seemed to make a big deal out of you winning.” His fingers absentmindedly ran through Eren’s hair.

Lathe glanced over to him, speaking quietly. “Thirteen thousand six hundred and fifty-seven dollars.” On lucky number thirteen. Thanks to quarters I wanted to get rid of.

Levi’s eyebrows shot up. “You were over there for ten seconds before you won! How the hell did
you win that much on your first try?"

“I don't know. But I do know trying to do better than that is a horrible idea.” His voice quieted as he looked back to Eren, stirring in Levi’s lap. “And I also know that speaking that loudly in shock is a good way to wake up sleeping people.”

Eren groaned quietly as his eyes cracked open. Why the fuck did he wake me up? Eren brought a hand up to his face to try and rub the tiredness away, that was until they saw people flooding out of their Gate. “Is the… Is the plane early?” He asked, watching as people walked by them, Blake baring his teeth to everyone, which gave them a bit of a bubble. Fuck... I don’t wanna get on another one... I wanna sleep.

“Only kinda. They still need time to clean up the plane before we can board, so we've got a couple minutes still.” His eyes wandered out the window for a moment, landing on a familiar building past the runways. He grinned. “Hey, it’s that casino I'm banned from.” ... That was fun.

“Why?” Eren asked, sitting up as he rubbed his eyes more. “Why were you banned from a casino?”

Eren’s hands moved away to show his tired eyes, along with a spark of curiosity.

“Okay, story. So you know that picture that came with my chessboard? That was a picture of this club thing I led in high school, and it was just the most random-ass club ever. We at one point were all learning how to play lots of different card games, including the ones they play in casinos. It kinda became habit after a while to count cards, and we were all really good after a few months. A couple years ago the entire group got together here in Vegas and we were in that casino, and we kinda fanned out and ended up dominating the card tables. We all got caught counting cards, which was pretty impossible for us not to do, and so we’re all banned from going there ever again. The look on the dealer’s face though as we practically wiped the floor with everyone was totally worth it, though.” He beamed. That was priceless!

Levi smirked, trying to sound serious. “It’s nice to know that the club you founded was teaching impressionable teenagers such important life skills.” Good going. You’d think you’d also spend a couple minutes in your club meetings talking about how you need to hide the fact you’re counting cards.

Eren nodded. “Remind me never to play a card game with you, no matter how good I think I may be.” Eren said and he looked to Blake as he bared his teeth at the attendant coming towards them. “You guys can get on now if you would like, before everyone else.” The man smiled softly before returning to the podium to announce that their gate was getting ready for boarding.
Lathe chuckled, standing. “Fair enough.” His voice softened as Eren shifted from Levi’s lap. “Do you need us to guide you up to the plane again?”

Eren nodded quickly. *Yes, there is no way I will be going in that fucking thing without you two hanging onto me.* Eren picked up Blake’s leash and allowed him to go farther in front as his right hand gripped Lathe’s arm and his left gripped Levi’s. Eren closed his eyes as soon as they got to the tunnel, shutting them tightly just as he had before. Eren was slowly guided onto the larger plane, the staff clearing the way for them as soon as they saw Blake. Eren was seated in the middle of the first row of seats. Blake taking the aisle seat as Eren pulled Levi to the window seat before he opened his eyes again. He looked at the large amount of space in front of him, surprised. *So much room.* Eren watched as Lathe took the aisle seat behind them, slowly starting to get even more panicky as more and more people got onto the plane, his grip getting tighter on Levi’s shirt to a point where his knuckles were white. Blake got up and started to whine and paw at Eren’s other hand, making sure he didn’t scratch at his pants. A few people throwing looks at the three of them, sometimes even stopping and staring before being pushed along. *No… So many people…. He’s gonna be here…. No…*

Levi took hold of Eren’s hand with his left, prying his fingers from his shirt so he could hold onto his hand, his arm snaking behind his waist, speaking to him quietly. *It’s the people.* “Don’t worry Eren, I know it’s a lot of people but they’re not going to hurt you or anything. You're safe. Lathe and Blake and I are watching out for you, and we're not going to let anything happen to you. You don't have to worry. We’ve got you.” *You don't have to panic. I've got you.*

Eren’s white-knuckled grip started on Levi’s hand. “Too… Many…” Eren whispered as he buried his face into Levi’s chest. *He’s gonna be here… No… He’ll kill me… “Levi…. I can’t…. I can’t do… This…”* Eren’s eyes were full blown with fear, widening more as he saw one of the crew close the door and lock it. *There’s no way out… We’re all gonna die…* Blake got up from his seat and moved Eren away from Levi and sat down in his lap, pressing against Eren’s chest and into the seat. His whines grew louder as Eren’s mind got further and further away from them. *No… We’re gonna die! I’m gonna die!* His whole body started to shake, his grip lessening from around Levi’s fingers.

Levi turned in his seat feeling Eren’s grip slacken, watching Eren’s eyes. *He’s not entirely there, is he. Shit.* “Eren. Eren, you there? Can you hear me?” He studied Eren’s expression with worry, squeezing his hand tightly and moving his hand to his shoulder. “Eren, come on, stay with me. It’s alright, nothing’s gonna happen to you. Really. You're safe. It’s okay.” He glanced up to Lathe, watching them with concerned eyes, ready to get up and help.

“Sir, do you need us to call a doctor for him? We can hold the plane for a few minutes, the line for take off is long right now…” One of the attendants was at the aisle, watching as Blake struggled to pull Eren back.
That’s it. “A doctor isn’t going to help him. Excuse me.” Lathe stood and moved around the attendant, shifting to sit next to Eren in Blake’s vacated seat, holding onto Eren’s right hand tightly and speaking to him quietly, gauging his expression. How far gone are you? “Hey, Eren, it’s me, Lathe. You don’t have to worry about anything, really. Levi and Blake and I are right here for you, and nothing bad is going to happen. We’re just going to take off in a little while, have a smooth short flight, and we’ll be in LA. Nothing’s going to go wrong, alright? We’ll make absolutely sure you’re safe. I swear it.”

Eren’s breathing hitched a little. His eyes looking right past them as his whole body shook. <“He’s not here? He’s not here, right?”> Eren’s voice was laced with panic. I don’t want to be trapped with him… I don’t I don’t I don’t!

Levi immediately shook his head, his voice reassuring. <“No no no, he’s not here. He’s nowhere near us right now. You don’t have to worry about him, Eren. He’s not going to hurt you anymore.”> Levi ran his thumb up and down Eren’s arm, trying to comfort him. He’s gone. He’s not going to come back anytime soon.

I really need to brush up on my German. I can barely understand him, and that’s simple. Shit. “Eren, you don’t have to worry about him anymore. He’s not on the plane, and we’re not going to let him hurt you anymore. He’s gone. Don’t worry, please.” Lathe pleaded with him, his eyes wide with worry. Wherever he is, I don't think he’s about to come back. Please don't panic.

It took a few moments before Eren’s eyes were finally looking at the two of them. He had calmed down enough that his breathing had returned to normal, but his whole body was shaking. Tears formed in his eyes and spilled over before Eren could stop him. “I’m sorry…” He mumbled to the two of them, Blake never left his lap, and kept him pinned to the chair, knowing full well he could still freak out completely. I almost didn’t come back… I was so close...

“Sir… Can we ask you to return to your seat, we’re being taxied to the runway. We need you to get back to your seat.” Her voice sounded apologetic as she got out of the way for Lathe to return to his seat.

Lathe nodded and released his tight grip on Eren’s hand, sending him a small smile as he pressed his red handkerchief into his hand, reluctantly moving back to his seat and buckling his seatbelt, still keeping an eye on them as the plane started to move. I hope he doesn’t freak out again... You’ve got to keep him with us, Levi.

Levi held onto Eren as he rubbed at his eyes, pulling him close to lean on his shoulder. Sleeping. That could help… You won’t have to worry if you’re not awake. “It’s okay, Eren. You don’t have to apologise for anything. It’s not your fault. Do you want to sleep, maybe? Or something else?” I’ll
Eren nodded. *My head feels like lead…* His head slowly found Levi’s shoulder, passing out before they even left the ground. *I have a headache.* Eren woke up when they landed, Blake still very much in his lap, making sure he wouldn’t freak out when they landed. *Where the fuck am I?!!* Eren’s grip tightened on Levi’s hands as his eyes shot around the plane. *“Where the fuck am I?”* Eren freaked out until he saw Levi was sitting next to him and he calmed down.

Lathe looked up to him, concern crossing his features. *He’s still talking in German? Not good. He’s still on edge.* Lathe leaned forward, deciding against tapping his arm and possibly scaring him. “We’re here! I hope you slept well. Nate should be waiting for us at the baggage claim when we get off.” He noticed Eren wincing and rubbing his head, his brow furrowing. “You want some aspirin, when we get off?” *I don’t have a water bottle and there are always water fountains everywhere, so…*

Eren nodded rubbing at his head. It didn’t take much longer for them to get off of their plane once it had finally stopped moving, the attendants helping to get the three of them off the plane and give them time to get away. *My head fucking hurts.* Eren was fine as they walked up the long tunnel, leading to the terminals. *“So many people… What if he’s here?”* Eren’s voice was quivering as Levi pulled him along and towards the throng of people.

Lathe handed Eren some aspirin, pulling them over to a water fountain for a second, the crowd a bit thinner at the sides of the large halls. His eyes wandered over the halls, studying the multitudes of people. *There are way too many people in here for comfort.* He quirked his eyebrow as the crowd parted for a cart carrying older people towards the baggage claim, watching it slowly approach. *Bingo.* He tugged on Levi’s sleeve, nodding to the cart as he walked out closer to the centre of the hall, waving to get the driver’s attention. “Excuse me!” He grinned as the driver slowed the cart, speaking to him and looking over his shoulder for Eren and Levi. *Our ride’s here!*

Levi got the message, gently pulling Eren from the water fountain after he was done drinking and back into the waves of people, leading them to where Lathe had stopped the cart. *Lathe, you’re a fucking genius.* He helped Eren climb into the back of the cart, Blake hopping into Eren’s lap, taking a seat next to him and watching them start to move, heading for the baggage claim. *It’s better than wading through tons and tons of people.* He looked to Eren and smirked, his voice soft. “You doin’ okay?”

Eren shook his head. *“No, what if he’s here… He’ll find me Levi… He’s gonna kill me…”* Eren’s voice was shaking as he held onto Levi. He closed his eyes and buried his head into Blake’s fur. *I don’t want to be here…. I don’t want him to be here… I want to go home…* Eren was still clinging to Lathe’s red handkerchief, holding it firmly, not wanting to let go of it… He didn’t want to open his eyes either. *No… No more people… Please!*
Kill. Lathe rested his hand on Eren’s arm, his voice quiet. “Eren, he’s not here. He’s gone. He’s most certainly not about to hurt you. There are a lot of people here, and none of them want to or will hurt you. Really. It’s alright.” At this point if anyone so much as looks at you the wrong way I might have a hard time not castrating them, you’re so on edge.

Eren only nodded. He was silent until they were dropped off at their baggage claim, waiting for their luggage to come around the carousel. <“I wanna go home.”> Eren’s voice was quiet as he sat down on the ground to pet Blake. He tried not to cry, his face already clearing up from his tears before.

“Oh my God! It’s Eren Yeager!” A voice cried out from one of the other baggage carousels.

Eren barely had time to whip his head around before a bunch of screaming girls came over towards them, Blake quickly getting on the defensive and standing up, baring his teeth, getting ready to lunge at the girls if they got too close and freaked him out. What? Blake no. Eren pulled him back on his leash, but he just sat there wide eyed as the girls came running up to him, taking countless photos and the crowd kept getting larger and larger. What the fuck is happening? Eren just looked up to Levi. <“What the fuck is happening? What the fuck are they doing? Why are they taking pictures of me?”> Eren’s voice was full of confusion.

“Can we get a picture with you?”
“Can I have your autograph?”
“Oh my gosh!”
“It’s really him!”
“I can’t believe I’m meeting a YouTube icon!”
“Eren will you marry me!?”
“Eren smile for the camera!”
“Eren Yeager! He’s really here!”

Ah. Fangirls. Should’ve expected that. Lathe looked to Levi as he shifted next to Eren protectively, noting the murderous look in Blake’s eyes. An oppressive group of fans isn’t good when Eren’s still so nervous. Get them to step off now. Lathe projected his voice, trying not to sound mad. “Alright, a little room, okay? You're making Blake nervous.” He looks ready to kill someone. He glanced down to Levi, speaking to him. “I’ll try and keep up some space. Can you grab our suitcases?” We need to get Eren away from all these people. The sooner, the better.
Levi nodded, standing from his place next to Eren and walking quickly to the carousel, walking it’s length in search of their bags, picking up two and setting them next to Lathe, still warding off a crowd. **Damn, he really does have a shitload of fans.** He quirked his eyebrow as someone asked him to marry them, glaring at them. **Oi. He’s kinda taken. Bitch.** He walked back to the carousel one more time to retrieve Eren’s suitcase, rolling it behind him and stopping next to Eren. “Alright. Where’s Nate supposed to be?” He spoke to Lathe, standing on tiptoe and trying to scan the crowd. **Where are you…**

“I’m right here…”

Levi quickly turned around at the familiar voice and watched Nate raise his eyebrow at him, waving from directly behind him. **People need to stop engaging stealth mode.**

Eren looked up to see Nate and a smile showed on his face, the crowd went wild, trying to get around Lathe to get to Eren to get better photos. <“um… Can we go now… I wanna go… There’s too many people here…”> Eren backed up as a man with a camera started to come towards him to take pictures. “Levi!” Eren called for Levi in shock as the man got closer, his eyes so unused to the bright flash from the professional camera. **Shit… My head hurts…** Blake growled at the man, tugging at his leash, hard enough for Eren to let go and the dog bolted a few feet to quickly chase the man with the camera away, and managing to scare the crowd away after a few seconds. He returned to Eren’s side afterwards, his leash in his jaws, Eren scooping down to get it. **I wanna leave…. I’m tired as all hell, and I want chicken noodle soup.**

Nate raised his eyebrows, impressed at Blake’s effectiveness in fending off the photographers. **Handy.** “Hey Eren! Glad to see you all got here in one piece!” Nate pulled him into a one-armed hug, leading them out of the baggage claim. “Jeff’s got the car waiting outside.”

Eren nodded. **Good, get me out of this fucking place.** His whole body was still shaking, especially when Nate pulled him close, he would be able to feel it. <“No more metal death traps… Please.”> Eren’s voice was quiet.

Levi watched the two of them walk out, Blake following at Eren’s heels. **Well… That went… Well? Would you consider that going well?** Levi took his suitcase along with Eren’s, looking over to Lathe. “He doesn’t like planes… Or airports.”

Lathe just gave him a deadpan look. **“Really, Sherlock? What in the world gave you that idea?”** **Was it the multiple mini-attacks? The not-so-mini attack? Seriously… Eren and anything to do with airports and planes should not mix. It’s too bad it’d take a solid twenty hours non-stop to drive out here.** Lathe pulled his suitcase behind him, following Eren and Nate, sending pointed
looks to any photographer he thought stepped a foot too close. *That’s right. Keep your distance.*

Nate led them out of the baggage claim to a small covered drive, a black Mercedes waiting at the curb. Nate waved to Jeff, grinning and moving to open the back door for Eren, letting him step in and Blake hop up. He left the door open as he opened the back gate, taking the suitcases from Levi and Lathe and easily fitting them in back, climbing in next to Jeff in the passenger’s seat. “Alright, well, welcome to LA! Was your flight okay?” Nate turned in his seat to look at them, an easy smile on his face. *Kinda worried about Eren… He hasn't said anything in English yet.*

<“No, I’m not going in another one of those fucking flying death traps!”> Eren was seated in the back seat, his body leaning onto Levi’s as his vision started to get cloudy. *Fuck… My head hurts…* Eren passed out as soon as the car started to move, going limp.

Levi sighed quietly. “Well, we’re gonna have fun getting him back into the airport in two weeks.” His left hand reached up to tangle in Eren’s locks after he situated him laying across the back seat and his head in his lap. *He needs to sleep. He barely got any last night from freaking out so much.*

Jeff watched the whole ordeal take place. “I-is he okay?” He turned his attention back to the road getting on the highway, directing the car out of the city and towards the suburbs.

Lathe sighed, running a hand through his dark hair. “Well, the short of it is that Eren and airports do not get along well. He had a couple mini panic attacks, almost not coming back from one… And he’s just been exhausted all morning because we got up at like three in the morning our time and because of said attacks… I kinda had to bribe him through security with food. That being said, is it cool if we stop at a grocery store on the way?” Lathe grinned sheepishly. *It got him through security without a complete breakdown, so it’s worth it.*

Nate just raised his hands in mock surrender, smiling. “Hey man, if you want us to stop and get stuff so you can cook, don't expect me to stop you. As long as there’s enough for everyone.” He added with a grin. ... *and by everyone I mean me. Go right the hell ahead!* “You heard the man, Jeff. To the grocery store!” Nate whisper-shouted, trying not to wake Eren up.

“Yeah yeah, I get it, but let’s get to Pasadena first shall we?” Jeff made quick time on the highway, getting off in a very nice suburb. “Lathe do you have a preference on where we get the food from? Like there a specific grocery store you like?” He asked as they headed towards the shopping areas.

“…is a Whole Foods nearby? That's the only place I can think of that you'd have out here.” Lathe looked out the window with a raised eyebrow, not recognising a number of the stores.
“Whole Foods? Yeah, give me four minutes.” Jeff turned a few corners, using only three to make it to the store. “I’ll go with you, Nate stay with the two of them.” Jeff offered, parking the car pretty close to the door since it was so early on a Monday, stepping out but leaving the car running for them since it was hot and humid outside. “We’ll leave the air conditioning on for them. What you making for Lunch?” Jeff asked as he swung around the back of his car to meet Lathe on the other side.

“Well, I offered Eren chicken noodle soup and then he had to up the ante and ask for homemade noodles in it so that’s what’s for lunch, apparently.” Lathe stepped down the from the car, turning as Nate addressed him.

“Y’know, feel free to grab as many things as you want to make food. There’s plenty of room in the fridge for stuff if you plan on cooking a bit while you're here… just sayin’.” I expect you to cook in return for a place to sleep.

Lathe chuckled, his hand on the door. “Alright, I get it. I’m gonna be put in charge of food for a bit, aren't I?” He rolled his eyes good-naturedly as Nate shrugged and nodded. “Fiiine. I'll grab a bunch of stuff. Promise we won't take forever.” He shut the door, walking with Jeff up to the store. “Is it cool if you drive the cart so I can move around easier? Get to the displays?”

“Yeah man, that’s cool.” Jeff went off and grabbed a large cart, quickly returning. “Gotta warn you though, Nate’s got literally nothing in his house foodwise…”

Lathe shook his head, sighing. “Are you serious?” At least one of everything it is, then! ...it’s gonna be a long two weeks. He walked slowly down the rows of produce, inspecting all the vegetables before setting anything in the cart, which started to quickly fill up. “We’re about to fix that.”

“Good; Nate’s been raving about your cooking since we left… God, it’s almost as bad as the time he talked my ear off about Eren… That was a nightmare… But he still does it! He doesn’t know when to shut up… But his girlfriend’s away for a month in France… He’s probably lonely in that huge-ass house all by himself.” Jeff chuckled. “Eren’s latest music video was a great cover of Grand Piano… Has he sung it before?” His voice was quiet as he watched the cart quickly fill.

Lathe stopped for a moment, turning over a tomato in his hands, a small smile on his face. “Yeah, he has.” And it was probably the best decision he ever made, singing it. He set the tomato and a few others in a bag in the cart, moving on to potatoes. “It’s been seven months since I heard him sing it last. He did an amazing job of it then.” It was enough to get Levi on that stage and kiss him like his life fucking depended on it.
“Was he playing the piano with it? Or the violin? I saw him doing both in the video; it looks really good, and his videos are getting better now that he knows how to put them together.” Jeff complimented Eren, continuing to watch Lathe.

“Piano. His violin… He didn’t have it with him at the time.” It was kinda in Germany. Which we also kinda didn’t know. Lathe wandered over to fruits, careful as he picked out three containers of strawberries. Eren fucking loves these. And so do I. And most likely everyone else because strawberries for the win. …they're not gonna last long.

“Strawberries… Good choice.” Jeff smiled as he watched the 3 five pound containers enter the cart. “Those aren’t gonna last… Are they?” Jeff chuckled, looking around to see if he saw anything else. “Oh yeah… You can probably pick a lot of fruit at Nate’s house too. He’s got oranges, lemons, limes…. And I think… Yeah they didn’t get rid of the avocado tree yet… So everything is ready to get picked about now.” Jeff told him. Just so we know we have room in the cart instead of filling it with produce which he can grab off the back porch.

Lathe looked at him like Christmas had come early. Seriously?? That’s awesome! “That’s great!” He glanced over to a table of melons, one eyebrow raised. “Don’t tell me I could get one of those from the porch, too.” If you could I’m going to be even more jealous and that’s nearly impossible at this point.

“Nah, you should probably grab two if either of the teens like it… Nate could eat a whole one by himself. Trust me… I’ve seen him try and succeed.” Jeff said, his hand finding his forehead, though a smile was on his face. That was the stupidest bet he ever won.

Of course. Lathe grinned widely, weighing two in his hands before moving things in the cart to set them down, careful not to crush anything. He also picked up a watermelon, making sure it was seedless. “You make Nate sound like he stopped growing up after sixteen.”

“Try ten and you describe the little shit perfectly.” Jeff looked around. “On to the deli? Or going right for the whole meats?” Jeff asked him, guiding the cart after him. I’m learning a lot from this guy, he’s pretty chill.

“That depends. Do you happen, on some odd chance, to have a panini press?” If so that changes literally everything.

“I’ll text Nate… Knowing his girlfriend he probably does… But we’ll never know.” Jeff pulled his
phone out sending a quick text out to the car and getting a reply in a few seconds. Jeff immediately started to laugh. “He thinks it’s still in the box… But they have one.” Jeff continued to laugh for a good while. “God, his girlfriend gets the randomest things sometimes.”

Lathe chuckled, leading them to the whole meats. “In that case, we don’t need the deli. And that’s about to change very quickly.” Lathe mentally critiqued the packages of chicken, putting plenty of packages in the cart and moving on to beef, looking at the labels carefully and picking out some of the heavier packages. I need to make steak at some point... ooooh, Pot Roast! Yes! Lathe moved on to pork, selecting a few before looking for the shelves for cheeses. “Another question. Does Nate have any soup crocks lying around?”

Jeff shrugged and sent out a text message to the car, again receiving a reply quickly. “He wants to know if they’re big ceramic things that take up way too much room in his shelves?” Jeff looked up to Lathe for an answer. “He says they look like giant bowls.” Is that what he’s talking about?

Lathe laughed, perusing the shelves for mozzarella and Swiss. “Yeah, that’s it. How many, dare I ask if he remembers?”

Jeff went back to his phone, “He says at least 8… And that they take up too much room. Which I think is hilarious because I haven’t seen him use them at all.” Jeff chuckled, putting his phone in his pocket.

“Then I’m breaking them in for him. Metaphorically speaking. Those things wouldn’t break if you tried. I don’t even have to see them to know that.” Lathe picked up a small wedge of cheese and picked up a loaf of French bread, carefully setting it on top in the cart. “Okay, so I’m assuming he doesn't even have milk or eggs or butter or whatever.” Those are all things that need acquiring. “At this rate, I’m going to need another cart.” Lathe added two cartons of eggs to the cart, pulling down the small metal seat and setting milk and juice inside it. “And then, the most important things…” He set down multiple small grey boxes, a large tin, and a small jar. “Coffee and tea stuff.”

“Do we need another cart? I can go run and get one.” Jeff said, straightening himself from behind the cart. I just hope you won’t magically disappear on me.

“...That’s probably a good idea. I’ll be in the baking aisle.” Lathe grinned, taking the heavy cart and steering it to look over the bags of sugar and flour.

Jeff went off, coming back with the new cart within a minute or two, quickly finding Lathe. “It wouldn’t hurt… He probably doesn’t have anything in his fridge besides drinks… Knowing him. Also… Make sure he doesn’t drink himself to sleep. He doesn’t hold his alcohol well… And he
tends to get into really bad betting habits while drunk… Don’t be offended if he dares you to do something you don’t want to do… He’ll forget by the morning.” Better tell him now before Nate even tries another drinking Olympics.

Lathe easily shrugged off his worries, smiling. “That’s alright. I’ll make sure if and apparently when he gets drunk that he doesn’t get into too much trouble.” He lifted various bags of baking supplies into the new cart. I’m not too much of a drinker, so I’m used to being the ‘designated-driver’ type friend in those kinds of happenings. Lathe tugged along the still near-empty cart, taking a few bottles of olive oil from the shelves and grabbing small jars of bouillon and sauces with near-unpronounceable names. “Worcestershire. Say that three times fast.” Lathe grinned.

“that will be the kind of thing Nate will be trying to get you to do once he’s drunk… And he will be, especially if you’re home tonight… Which I’m guessing with Eren still speaking German you will be?” Jeff asked, following along, pushing the fully loaded cart. “I must say though, that man has never once had a fucking hangover… He can’t hold his liquor for shit, but he never once had a problem the next morning.”

Lathe rubbed the back of his neck, picking up small cans from time to time. “Nate actually offered to let us crash at his place for the entire time we’re here. And apparently I’m paying him back in food.” He raised an eyebrow at the very full cart and the slowly filling one he pulled along. “And at least I won’t have to deal with a hungover Nate while we’re here.” Having to deal with people dealing with hangovers sucks. Lathe looked to the cart, thinking hard if he’d forgotten anything, tapping his boot in thought. “As long as he doesn't challenge me at cards, we’re good…” Don't want to practically rob the guy...

“I’ll hide the deck when we get home.” Jeff told him. “Got enough stuff to feed them for at least a few days?” Jeff looked to the massive amount of food. It looks like you have enough to feed a large army.

Lathe looked to him and shrugged. “I'm feeding two teenagers at heart, two actual teenagers, I don't know how often you're going to be around to eat, and…” Lathe snapped his fingers. “Dog food. Right. They have that here?” He looked to the signs overhead, seeing the pet aisle a few rows over. “Cool.” He led the way to the aisle, skimming over the labels on the bags. “Just curious, how often do you think you'll be around?” Need to know to make enough!

“I think I’ll stay for lunch… But then I gotta go back to work, and I believe if Nate keeps to his schedule you guys will be over at the studio on Friday… So I’ll come home with you guys probably then… But I got work, so I won’t be around often, maybe a lunch here or there, possibly dinner every now and then, but I’ll make sure Nate tells you beforehand.” Always tell the cook before you come so there’s enough and not any surprises.
Lathe nodded, smiling. “Alright, sounds good.” He heaved a smaller-sized bag of food on the cart under the basket, thinking for a moment before nodding. “I think we have maybe just enough to pull through.” He joked, his eyes bright. “We’ll have to be careful though, ration it carefully. We might even have to come back.”

“I dunno, Nate’s got you guys going on a bunch of trips around town, I don’t see you guys being around for lunch a lot… But hey, you never know… Especially with him.” I believe Nate said something about going to a bunch of parks.

“I foresee myself lugging a picnic basket around at some point. Picnics notwithstanding, and I’m not even sure if I used that word right, I think we can check out now. God, the cashiers are about to hate us.” He led them to the front of the store, stopping dead in his tracks as he glanced to the shelf to the right of him, studying the label on the small red boxes. He thought for a second before grabbing five boxes and carrying on, smirking. Pockeys. And they’re the bigger boxes, too. Here’s to hoping one of the two of them know what they are. He picked a lane at the front, making sure the cashier’s tag did not say ‘trainee.’” That would be a nightmare for everyone involved. He set down the divider and started unloading things, asking for paper in plastic. It took quite a while for everything to scan, even with the cashier moving quickly. Lathe swiped his black card, barely glancing at the total before signing and accepting his receipt from the cashier, thanking her. He walked with Jeff back to the car, stopping at the back. “Now how the hell are we gonna fit all this food in that car?”

“You’d be surprised how much space is actually in front of the seat next to you… And the seat folds up too… So we can just load the car up. We’ll be home in five minutes, we’re only really around the block.” Jeff walked around opening the car door and widening as he saw Eren’s body practically convulsing in Levi’s arms. “Shit…” Jeff just motioned for Lathe to come, shooting a look to Nate and he seemed just as shocked as Jeff was. What the fuck happened?

Eren’s eyes were blown wide, his whole body shaking, his head thrown back, and shoulders arched. He was crying, tears streaming down his face, his mouth open almost like he was screaming, but nothing was coming out. Eren wasn’t there, his eyes glassy and unfocused.

Lathe abandoned the cart immediately, clambering up into the car and quickly assessing the situation. That's not a panic attack. “He’s having a seizure.” He moved to carefully shift Eren onto his side, looking up to Levi as he moved out of the way, deathly calm. “How long has it been?”

“Thirty seconds… Not even… His eyes just snapped open and his body started to shake… I didn’t-I didn’t know what to do… It just happened all of the sudden.” Levi was struggling to keep his composure as he saw Eren’s spasming beginning to lessen.

Lathe just nodded. “Good, it hasn't been too long, then. It must have been all the stress…” Lathe
tugged at Eren’s sweatshirt in places, making sure it wasn’t too tight around his neck where he lay on the backseat, brushing the hair out of his face and picking up the red kerchief from where it was dropped on the seat, wiping away his tears. “He should be fine, just give him a few minutes to get his bearings back.” Lathe studied Eren’s face as he relaxed and slumped into the seat. *At least we don’t have to get you to a hospital...*

Jeff watched, slowly taking the seat next to where a lathe had sat before and folding it down to make room on the floor. “Will he be okay?” Jeff asked, his voice filled with as much worry and concern as his eyes were. *I hope this doesn’t happen to him too much... He should be able to enjoy himself.*

Eren’s eyes slowly closed, his breathing evening out and his body becoming slack in the seat.

“Can I move him? So his head’s in my lap? Or will that start another one?” Levi looked up to Lathe. *I don’t want to start another one, that was fucking terrifying. Don’t ever scare me like that again, Brat.*

“You can move him so his head is in your lap, just be gentle. But you're not going to start another one. He’s been so stressed out by flying in, and that stress caused his seizure. He’s just going to need to relax for a little while, sleep a bit, and hopefully getting some food in him will make him feel better.” Lathe folded up his kerchief, leaning forward from where he knelt on the car floor to peck Eren’s forehead before moving, letting Levi have his seat back. “He’ll be right as rain in no time, though. I can assure you all of that.”

Levi gently moved Eren’s head into his lap, his hands softly carding through his hair. *Scared the shit out of me, you Brat.*

Jeff loaded up the car in record time before he got in his seat to go home, making sure everyone was safely buckled, Levi reaching over to buckle around Eren’s waist. Once that was over they drove to Nate’s house down the long driveway and parking near the huge ass porch.

Nate opened his door, looking back with a weary smile. “We’re here. Let’s get everything inside.” *It’s too early for all this to have already happened...* He stepped out of the car, moving bags out of the way for Lathe and Levi, carrying Eren, to step down. He slung quite a few bags over his arm, carrying them to the back door and unlocking it, stepping inside. “Welcome to my house! Make yourselves at home, I guess.” He looked to Levi, an unsure look on his face. “The living room... If you go through that hall there, to the dining room, go past the stairs and there’s the living room, okay?” *Eren needs to rest... And you're probably- definitely- going to want to stick around him and make sure he’s okay.*
Levi nodded, toeing off his shoes on the mat and carrying Eren carefully through the house, looking around. It’s fucking huge… And really nice. He looked up at the chandelier that hung over the dining table for a moment, turning left and passing the stairs before looking over the living room, making a beeline for the couch. Levi sat down gently with Eren still in his arms, shifting so he was laying on top of him with his head on his chest, moving pillows around underneath his head and pulling a blanket draped over the back of the couch over them. He wrapped his arms around him protectively, listening to the sounds coming from the kitchen. I hope you’re alright, you really fucking scared me. Maybe rest and food will do you good.

Lathe helped Jeff and Nate make multiple trips to the car, getting all the bags and scattering them around the kitchen on the floor and the counters. “Alright. I'm going to put stuff away, and then I'll start on lunch. Where’s the pantry?”

“The cabinet to the right of the fridge.” Nate said and pointed towards the large cabinet. The only thing it had in it was various canned goods and boxes and bags of snacks.

Lathe studied the contents for a moment before turning to the fridge. He pulled open the door, looking over the shelves. Gatorade, soda, ugh, beer, and water. Do you never eat at home? Lathe moved and began to organise what drinks there were in the fridge, succeeding in moving them all to one shelf near the middle. You've got your work cut out for you. “Alright. You just need to show me where everything is, I’m gonna need an apron, and find that panini maker.”

Nate nodded, moving around opening cabinets and drawers showing him everything he needed. He pulled out the panini press, still in the box, setting it on the island, going off towards the mudroom and pulling out a maroon apron. “This good?” He held it out for him.

Lathe took it, tying it behind his back. “Yeah, of course. Now unless either of you want to be pressed into service, someone needs to keep Levi company.” He moved to start unboxing the panini press and set the box aside, lifting bags up onto the island.

“Alright! Let's go see how much space Levi and Eren took up on the couch!” Nate ran off to go to the large living room.

Jeff chuckled, “I’ll leave you alone in the kitchen.” Jeff went off to go chill in the living room as well.

Lathe sighed, watching as the pantry and fridge slowly filled, lost in his own thoughts.
Nate sat down at the far end of the couch. “So… How long will he be asleep you think?” Nate's voice was soft.

Jeff nodded, sitting down at the other end.

Levi ran his thumb over Eren’s side, thinking. “I’d guess he’d sleep for a couple hours if we didn't wake him up. With all the stress and… And him having a seizure, he’s got to be exhausted. But we should definitely wake him up for lunch.” I hope Lathe was right about you being alright.

Jeff nodded. “How you think the airport going home is gonna go?” Eren looks really pale.

“Not well. It was a nightmare for him, getting here… A more direct flight home would be best at this point, where you only have to be on one plane. We would have driven, because we knew it wasn't going to be easy the second Lathe first mentioned a plane and Eren had a mini-attack, but we don't have a car to fit all of us properly for a trip that long… and it'd be twenty solid hours without stopping. It just had to be done.” Maybe Lathe has something to give you to keep you calm... I hate the idea, but I don't want to see you stressed out enough to have a fucking seizure because of it again.

Jeff nodded. “So he’s got a bad memory with planes?”

Levi nodded. “The first time he was on a plane, his father- Grisha, forced him to. He didn't want to leave Germany, leave his home, and come to America… He was scared and didn't know too well what was happening, and Grisha didn't exactly help comfort him. Grisha threatened him if he hesitated, and he was terrified. ...Eren and planes just do not mix.” His hold around Eren’s middle tightened just a little.

Eren shifted in Levi’s arms, twisting so that he was laying on his stomach… His mouth wide, open, drooling onto his chest. He whimpered a bit, curling up close to him.

Levi quirked an eyebrow at Eren, his eyes softening. Since when do you drool? But you're cute enough that I don't mind. Levi tangled their legs together, holding Eren close, rubbing circles into his back.

Jeff watched as Eren’s body shuddered in Levi’s grasp. “Is he okay?”
Levi’s brow furrowed in worry. “He doesn’t… I don’t know.” *Should I wake him up? He could be having a nightmare… Or it could be something else… Oh God, please don't tell me the seizure did anything terrible to his head.*

Jeff got up and ran to the kitchen. “Lathe… It's Eren…”

Lathe set down his knife, abandoning the noodles on the table and wiping off his hands as he followed Jeff back to the living room, kneeling next to Levi. “He’s shaking, I can see that. What else isn't normal? Was he muttering?”

“No, but he’s drooling, and he’s never done that in his sleep before…” Levi ran his hand through Eren’s brown locks. “Should we wake him up?” *I don't think this is too good…*

Lathe nodded, his eyes fixed on Eren’s expression. *You have to gauge whether or not this could be a temporary thing. Be careful.* Lathe gently shook Eren’s shoulder, his voice quiet. “Hey Eren, it’s Lathe. You should wake up.” *We want you to be okay.*

Eren barely moved, his mouth still drooling a large amount. His body was still shuddering, and Lathe’s quiet voice causing him to whimper. *What’s happening? It’s so loud.*

Lathe reached into his back pocket, pulling out his red kerchief, his voice still quiet. *Are you scared of me? He could just be disoriented.* “Eren, are you okay?” He wiped away Eren’s drool, careful not to startle him.

Eren jumped back from the touch, his eyes barely cracked open as he whimpered. *So loud… Why is he so loud?* Eren’s body was still shaking as he moved away.

Lathe kept his eyes sharply trained on Eren as he brought up his hand, telling Jeff and Nate silently not to move. *You're about to get up. No.* He drew back his hands, looking Eren in the eye as he brought up his hand and tapped his ear in questioning, mouthing ‘Am I too loud?’

Eren watched him, slowly nodded, still moving away from Lathe. *He’s screaming at me… I don’t want him to scream at me…* Eren’s eyes showed a hint of fear. *I don’t want him to be mad at me. Please don’t be mad at me.* Eren whimpered as he backed away, his back going flush against the back of the couch and he almost jumped from the contact.
His ears are seriously sensitive… He must think I'm screaming my head off at him. I doubt he knows sign language… And I don't have paper. Mime this out. Lathe shook his head, raising his hands in surrender, though he didn't move from his spot. He mouthed his words slowly so Eren could read his lips. ‘I'm not mad.’ He held out his hands a small distance in front of him, his expression apologetic. ‘Hug?’ You look really scared, but it's okay.

Eren watched him, slowly moving off the couch and towards the floor, he sunk down to his knees cautiously crawling towards him, slowly coming up into his arms. I'm scared, what's happening? Why is everything so loud? Why are my ears ringing?

Lathe gently wrapped his arms around Eren, not wanting to spook him. One hand resting on Eren’s back counted his heartbeats, and he listened as his breathing calmed. He’s calming down. Good, so he definitely recognises me, but his ears are a bit worrisome. He looked pointedly at Nate, miming writing with one hand and mouthing to him. ‘Pen. Paper.’ He watched him slowly get up, returning after a very short while. He pulled away from Eren gently, taking the pen and paper and printing neatly, handing it to Eren. ‘Your ears are hypersensitive right now. I was whispering a moment ago, not shouting or anything. It should pass.’

Eren watched him, his ears hurting as he heard the pen scratch the paper. He jerkily reached out, knocking the pen away and out of Lathe’s hands, quickly moving to cover his ears and started to cry. It hurts… It's too loud.

Lathe watched, stunned for half a second before a thought occurred to him. He slowly stood, raising one finger and walking to the kitchen, digging into his bag. He pulled out his noise-cancelling earbuds, leaving the iPod behind and returning next to Eren, handing them to him, showing him they were unplugged. He tapped his ears. That should help.

Eren looked to the earpieces, slowly putting them on, crying in relief when he didn't hear anything besides the ringing in his ears. It still hurts… It still hurts… Blake whined, following Eren and grabbing for his hand, sensing he was agitated, only the action made him scream and back away in fear. Quickly finding himself running away throughout the house, being chased by a confused dog… Screaming the whole time. Why’s it chasing me!? It wants to fucking bite me!! Eren ran in circles around the first floor, shooting past the group as he ran through the living room in a panicked frenzy.

Jeff just watched Eren screaming and running through the house being chased by Blake, who obviously didn’t know he was the reason Eren was freaking out more… he’s so loud… And he sounds like someone’s chasing him with a gun… Intending to kill him. “Blake… It’s Blake… Levi… Get the dog.” Jeff watched as Eren ran full speed through the house, knocking into walls and he tried turning corners, slipping a few times only to scream even more as Blake got close.
“MAKE IT STOP!!!” Eren’s voice laced in panic as he tried to get away from Blake. Blake didn’t understand and tried to get close to him, wanting to get him to the floor and ground him. Whining and barking for him to stop running, but of course Eren didn’t hear anything… Not even his own screaming… He only heard ringing, and that scared him even more.

Levi stood from the couch and waited for them to run past again, lunging for Blake’s collar and moving with him to catch him and keep him from choking on his collar. “Blake, he’s confused and scared of you. Heel!” Levi tried to keep him from pursuing Eren and scaring him even more.

Eren ran straight into Lathe’s arms, a crying and screaming mess. <“Make it stop! Please!”>

Blake whined pulling against Levi until he was told to ‘Heel’. He stopped and sat down in front of Levi with his ears perked, whining still when he heard Eren’s cries from the kitchen.

Let’s get him away from everyone. Lathe picked up the pen and paper quickly before leading Eren into the kitchen, his arms wrapped around him, trying to comfort him. He sat Eren down at the counter, pulling over a stool so he could sit and see him. He kept his arm around him, rubbing his back as he finished writing and let Eren see the notepad, adding ‘Blake was just really worried about you, he didn't know he was scaring you. Don't worry; you can stay here with me if you like.’


...are you fucking serious. This is bad. Really really bad. Lathe wrote quickly, his left hand flying across the paper. ‘Blake's your PTSD service dog. Don't you remember him? You didn't recognise him?’ I don't know if this is short term or long term… It's kinda looking like the latter… Fuck. Please let me be wrong.

Eren shook his head. No… Why do I have a dog? Where the hell am I? Eren’s eyes darted around the room. < “Where are we Dad?”> Eren’s voice was still full of fear as he spoke.

Keep calm, Lathe. Think. Nate’s house is a new environment, so that could possibly be chalked up to short-term memory loss post-seizure, which is normal. Same with the general confusion, and the hypersensitivity of his ears is normal. He remembers me, and he didn't freak out when he woke up on top of Levi, so he remembers him too, but Blake… That’s not good. That’s not good at all. ‘We’re at Nate Ruess’ house, in Pasadena.’
“Where the fuck is that!?" Eren backed away from Lathe a little bit. “Why are we here?”

Lathe scratched down his response quickly, keeping his hand on Eren’s arm, showing him the notepad. ‘We’re in the state of California, a little outside of Los Angeles. We’re here because you and Nate are friends, and he wants to show you around and sing with you.’ Has he forgotten all these recent developments? Next thing he’ll be telling me he doesn’t know he’s famous. I think he needs to sleep or do nothing too mentally straining, give his mind a chance to mend. If this is his first seizure this would make more sense. ‘Please don't be scared, Eren. You can trust him, and his producer Jeff too. They’re all really nice.’

Eren nodded, accepting that explanation. “Um… Can… Can I draw?” Eren asked softly, his hands starting to scratch at his wrists. I wanna draw… I wanna forget about it… I wanna calm down.

Lathe caught his wrists gently, nodding. He let go of his hands after a moment, holding up one finger and retrieving Eren’s discarded bag from the mud room, placing it on the kitchen table and setting out some of his drawing things where he could keep an eye on his from the counter and stove easily. He gave Eren another war, hug and kissed the top of his head before letting him draw, moving to finish cutting up the pasta.

Eren sat where he was on the chair and pulled his feet up to come in a cross legged position under him, his pencil starting to move over the paper.

Jeff looked down the hall and saw Eren and Lathe in the kitchen. “Did you catch any of what he said? He was pretty loud… Probably from the headphones…” Jeff’s voice was quiet as he looked over to Levi. That was terrifying, I can’t believe that all just happened.

Levi looked down to Blake, petting him. “When he was running, he said he wanted us to make it stop, make Blake stop chasing him. And… In the kitchen…” Levi swallowed hard. “He… He didn't know who Blake was. And he didn’t know… Where he was, or why we’re here.” That’s… That’s not… No… Levi walked back over to the couch and dropped down onto it, rubbing at his eye and trying to keep himself together. Maybe it’s just a temporary thing. We can hope.

Nate held his head in his hands, his elbows on his knees and eyes full of worry. That’s not good, that's not good at all, who am I kidding that’s fucking terrible … terrifying. “…maybe it’ll pass. Maybe it’s not permanent. I think… I think Lathe would have told us by now if he thought it was so abnormal that it couldn’t be reversed.”
Lathe’s hands moved deftly as he made lunch, studying Eren out of the corner of his eye. He stopped for a moment, fishing again in his back pocket for his kerchief, coming over to Eren and handing it to him. He pointed to Eren, then to his mouth. ‘You’re drooling.’ That shouldn’t be permanent.

Eren watched him, staring at the handkerchief in his hand for a few moments before slowly and with jerky motions raising the cloth to his mouth. He wiped around his mouth, pulling it back to see that he had drooled a lot. But… I don’t drool… Eren swallowed hard, his grip tightening on the red cloth, looking up to Lathe with scared eyes. Eren’s confused response was loud enough for Levi to hear in the other room.

Blake whined as he heard the agitation in Eren’s voice so he got up to go and get to him, only to be pulled back by Levi’s firm hold. He whined, looking back at Levi and trying to tug away from him.

Lathe reached for the paper and pen again, his other hand on Eren’s shoulder, giving him a reassuring smile. ‘It’s nothing to worry about. It’ll pass soon enough.’ His head slightly turned as he heard Blake’s whining, his thoughts consumed by Eren’s lack of recognition of him. Think. Is there any particular reason Eren wouldn’t recognize him? Does he look the same? …did he? He wasn’t wearing his vest… maybe that’s it.

Lathe held up one finger, moving to the mudroom and picking up Blake’s vest, walking to the hall and calling to the living room, still where Eren could see him. “Levi? Come here for a sec. And bring Blake with you.” He stopped Levi as he rounded the dining table, tossing the vest to him. “Put this on Blake again. I have an idea.” I hope this works.

Levi caught the vest easily, raising an eyebrow at him and kneeling down to put it on Blake, standing after a moment. “Do you want me to lead him into the kitchen, then? See if Eren recognizes Blake now?” I can kinda see where you’re coming from with this...

“Yeah, follow me. But don’t go too fast, I don’t want to spook Eren.” Lathe turned and walked over to Eren, wrapping an arm around his shoulders, writing quickly. ‘Someone wants to say hi to you. They’re nice, don’t worry.’ He smiled softly and pointed to the doorway where Levi walked in slowly, Blake in tow.

Eren watched as Levi walked in with Blake. He couldn’t hear his whining, but he could see that Blake was straining against Levi’s grip. Eren moved down, out of his chair and sat down on the floor across from them, watching him with wide eyes. He’s so big...

Blake noticed Eren’s agitation rise, so he laid down, slowly creeping forward, his whining quite loud when he came near Eren across the room, still on the ground. He waited there, waiting for Eren to allow him to come closer.
Eren’s face slowly changed and he slowly started to reach out towards Blake, his hand shaking and timid before he pet him and his face seemed to instantly change, into a softer expression. “Blake.” Eren called his name and watched as the dog came up to him and lick his face, Eren giggling in response, a large smile on his face. My Blake.

Lathe let out a huge sigh in relief, his head in his hands. Thank the fucking Lord, Eren recognizes him. He looked up to Levi, whose expression mirrored his own. “So that fixes that. Everything else that’s been going on will pass, without a doubt, now that we know that his memory loss is temporary and can be jogged. But he’s not going out at all today. And that’s not a suggestion, it’s an order.” Enough shit has gone down for today. “We all just need to relax.” He leaned down and ruffled Eren’s hair gently, smiling. “I’ll finish making food, and then we’ll just all hang out for today.” He walked back to the stove, stirring a large pot and fixing up cheese sandwiches for the press.

Levi sat down on the floor next to Eren, petting Blake with him and sorting through his thoughts. If this is how he reacts to planes, I don’t think I’d drag him into an airport ever again. How else could we get you back across the country that isn’t driving, and isn’t a plane? His eyes widened, a thought occurring to him. “Hey Lathe, what if we took a train back to Kansas?”

Lathe stopped, thinking hard, slowly beginning to nod his head. A grin began to crack across his face. That’s fucking genius. How didn’t we think of that sooner?! “That’s it. That fixes everything.” He beamed at Levi. “I’ll cancel our flight back to Kansas, and look up trains heading back to Wichita later. Good thinking!” This could work! Yes!

Jeff stood in the doorway watching as Eren giggled happily, seeming as though nothing had happened to him before. He glanced over at Nate, standing on the other side of the doorway. Lunch smells great… And Eren looks to be back to normal. I really hope he is, and that nothing major is wrong with him.

Nate stepped into the kitchen timidly, still wary of Eren. I don’t want to set him off, but he does look somewhat okay right now. “You really did a number on the table, Lathe.” He quirked an eyebrow at the island, flour dusted over quite a large part of it. “Are we anywhere close to eating? You’re killing us over here, with food smelling that good.” He grinned.

Lathe looked over his shoulder at the two of them, chuckling. “Yeah, lunch is pretty much ready.” He turned the burner on low, fishing a stack of bowls out of a cupboard, filling one and turning to Levi. “Food, Levi. Make sure Eren knows… and Nate, wait there for a second.”

Levi tapped Eren gently on the arm, catching onto Lathe’s train of thought. He pointed over to the
doorway, at Nate and Jeff, turning back to Eren and giving him a thumbs up. *Hopefully you recognize them... they're nice.*

Eren looked up at the two of them, his face contorting in confusion for a few moments before everything clicked. Eren was up off of the floor in only a few seconds and his arms wrapped around Nate’s middle. “Nate!” Eren’s voice was happy and excited, but he still couldn’t hear anything aside from the ringing in his ears due to the headphones. *Nate’s here... Wait... Didn’t Dad say we’re at Nate’s house? Are we staying here?*

Nate smiled easily, returning Eren’s hug, rubbing his arm. *Thank god, I’m not a stranger. He seems surprised to see me, though.* Nate spoke quietly, even though he knew Eren couldn’t hear him. “Glad you’re okay, Eren.” He pulled back after a moment, looking over to Jeff with a smile. He nodded over to him, directing Eren’s attention. *Need to make sure you remember him, too.*

Eren looked over to Jeff, whom he stared at blankly before he slowly got closer. “J-Jeff?” Eren was a bit hesitant around him, not trusting of him yet. He slowly reached out to Jeff’s hand and poked at it. *Does he hit? I don’t want to be hit.*

“What’s he doing?” Jeff looked around to Lathe, feeling Eren poking at his closed fist again. He slowly brought it closer to Eren to see him inspect it, only to have him hurriedly shuffle back and almost hide behind Nate. *Wait am I scaring him?*

Nate looked quickly between the two of them, recognition flashing past his eyes. “Oh no, no, Eren, Jeff’s nice. He’s not going to hurt you.” Nate reached around to slowly bring Eren closer to Jeff. “He’s not going to hit you, I promise.” Nate moved to stand next to Jeff, resting his elbow of Jeff’s shoulder. “See? He’s cool.”

Eren watched Nate move closer to Jeff, but he shook his head, his eyes still glancing down at Jeff’s hands at his slightest movements. <“Fist... Hurt me...”> Eren timidly pointed at Jeff’s closed fist still.

Jeff's brow furrowed in confusion. “What’s he saying? Does he want me to do something?” Jeff was so confused. *What the hell is he thinking? Does he still think I’ll hurt him?*

Levi stood from his spot on the floor, approaching them slowly. “Your hand is in a fist; he’s afraid you’re about to hit him.”
Jeff looked down to his hand, slowly unclenching his fists and saw Eren relax visibly. “He thought I was going to hurt him?” Jeff slowly reached out a palm towards Eren. *Will this freak him out more?*

Eren watched him and timidly reached a hand towards the outstretched palm and brushed his fingertips down the length of his palm twice before pulling his hand back, moving to return to Levi’s side, looking at Lathe to see his wide eyes. *Did I do something wrong?*

*...That means forgiveness.* Lathe was stunned for a moment, and looked to his own hands, lifting them and beginning to slowly sign to Eren. *Start with something simple.* {You know sign language?}

Eren watched the words… Moving up to Lathe and reaching for his hand, spreading out his palm before he moved his own hand on top of it. He pinched his pointer and thumb together, placing it slowly on Lathe’s open palm. {A little bit.}

*He’s talking through my hands. It’s probably how he learned it.* Lathe moved his hands, Eren’s following his motions. {I didn’t know. It’s time for lunch. I’ll get you some, okay?}

Eren watched his hands move, feeling them under his fingers. His brow furrowing for a few moments before he nodded, his fingers light on Lathe’s palm as he signed the letter ‘T’. Eren looked up to him with hopeful eyes. *Can I have tea?*

Lathe studied the letter for a moment in confusion before it clicked. *Right. Lunch. Tea.* {Okay. One minute.} He drew his hands away from Eren, going to set a kettle full of water onto the stove. He picked up one of the bowls and filled it with soup, placing a spoon in it and handing it and a plate with a cheese panini on it to Eren. He made sure he had a grip on both before signing. {Sit at the table, and I’ll bring you T.} He made sure to use the letter T, gesturing to the kitchen table where Eren had been drawing.

Eren stood there for a few seconds, looking behind him to the table Lathe gestured to and went to set his food down amidst all his coloring supplies. He came back though, and waited to take Lathe’s hands back. *I want two tea bags… He doesn’t know that though.* Eren took his hands when Lathe returned his attention to him. {2 T.} Eren stood there, hoping Lathe would get the message. He hadn’t realized he had started to speak in English as well… Actually asking for two tea bags out loud… But of course he couldn’t hear himself and thought he was only moving his lips for Lathe to better understand him.

Lathe immediately nodded, smiling. *Aaaaand back to English!* He turned as the kettle soon started
to sing, grabbing a mug from the cupboard and filling it, dunking in two teabags and placing it on the counter next to Eren. {You decide when it’s ready.} He turned back to fill more bowls with soup, handing them and plates one by one to the rest of them.

Eren watched the mug Lathe had out on the counter. He waited for a few minutes, letting the tea steep for a long time. Strong… Good. Eren took the two tea bags out and looked around in confusion. Where’s the garbage? I don’t know… Eren stood there awkwardly.

Jeff looked up to see Eren looking around in confusion with the two used tea bags, he slowly approached Eren with open hands, and gently took them from him and showed him where the garbage was. He returned to his seat after Eren sat back down and began eating. He still picked up his pencil to work on his sketch of a lion.

Levi moved with his own bowl and plate to sit adjacent to Eren, watching him draw as he ate. He nudged his foot with his own, smirking at him. We’re back to English. Good.

Nate sat down across from Eren, speaking after a few minutes as they contentedly ate. “So, the thing is, tomorrow it’s supposed to rain. And not just rain, it’s supposed to pour. So, I’m thinking we go to the Zoo tomorrow, when nobody’ll be around, and the animals will be out because it’ll be cool out. If he’s up for it.” Nate looked to Lathe. Do the sign language thing… Eren can’t hear me.

Lathe nodded. “Sounds good to me.” Lathe looked up as Levi mirrored his actions, and tapped Eren’s arm, spelling some of the words. {Zoo tomorrow? It’ll rain, but not many people will be there.}

Eren watched the words Lathe signed to him, picking up his sketchbook and tapping at the picture of a lion showing it to him. Zoo? Lions? Eren tried to think about his next word. Camera… Did we bring one? {C-A-M?} Eren made the motion of taking a picture and tilted his head. He still asked if they had it, but he was unaware as he tried to get the sign language across. Does he understand?

{Yes, and we have the c-a-m-e-r-a. We’ll bring it with us.} I made sure we had it with us. It’s still in your bag. That’s not the kind of thing you check in your suitcase.

Eren’s smile went from ear to ear as he nodded, but then his face darkened a bit. He pointed down to Blake, asking if he could come softly. Can he come? Or do we need to leave him here?
Lathe looked to Blake, thinking for a moment. {I don't think he can come with. He might stress the animals.}

Eren gave a small pout and a soft noise of disapproval. {No people?} He spoke softly in hope that there wouldn’t be a lot of people. *I don’t want to be surrounded again.*

Lathe shook his head. {No people.} *People tend not to go outside during pouring rain.*

Eren nodded. {Okay.} Eren returned to eating, mumbling softly every now and then, sometimes is was curses when he broke a pencil tip, or if he made a stray mark. Eren had eaten his whole bowl, three times over, and had managed a second sandwich… Not realizing that Jeff had left after he had finished eating… So the other three were just staring as he swore every now and then.

Lathe stared in surprise as Eren ate so much, tapping his elbow, amusedly signing. {Had enough to eat yet? And watch your language, Eren.} *You're swearing all over the place.*

Eren nodded before his brow furrowed. {What? Why language?} Eren was really confused as he stared at Lathe. *Why is he asking to watch my language.*

{You’re talking. You keep s-w-e-a-r-i-n-g.}

Eren’s face went completely flushed and he covered his mouth, his eyes wide. *Fuck!* Eren looked down, slowly holding a flat palm out. *Will you forgive me?*

Lathe recognised the gesture, running his fingers down his palm twice. *I forgive you. It’s not like you could hear yourself talking.* Lathe picked up his dishes, walking them and the other empty plates and bowls from the table to the sink, starting to clean up.

“He swears more than Cartman!” Nate joked, eyeing Eren amusedly. *Pretty colourful vocabulary you've got there.*

Levi turned to him, raising an eyebrow, smirking. “Are you kidding? Just wait until he’s back to speaking German, and make it Kenny.” *It’s really bad when he’s talking in German, you would not believe.*
Levi nodded, standing up from the table. “Sounds good. Let me grab a mug of tea first.” He sent a small smile to Eren before grabbing a mug, soon disappearing with Nate back into the living room.

Lathe washed the counter of the flour and egg, sitting back down next to Eren as he finished his drawing, his pencil hovering unsure over a clean page. {Want to go sit outside on the p-o-r-c-h? We can work on your sign language a bit.} You need to learn a bit on how to do it by yourself, not on someone else’s hands all the time. Especially since you switch from English as much as you do.

Eren watched his hands, moving in his seat to point to the door at the end of the mudroom leading to the back porch. Out there?

Lathe nodded. {Yes. That okay? You can keep d-r-a-w-i-n-g if you want.} Whatever you want.

Eren nodded, putting the pencil down, taking his hand and leading him outside to the porch. {How...I… Sign… Myself?} Eren took time between each word to make sure he was doing it right on Lathe’s hands.

Lathe moved them over to a table in the shade of an orange tree, sitting opposite Eren. {Yes. You can sign on my hands, but you should learn to sign by yourself. We can start with the a-l-p-h-a-b-e-t.}

The afternoon went by quickly after that. Eren made wonderful progress with signing by himself; he got the alphabet down, the most important thing he could learn for sign language, and he’s getting lots of words down, if he takes his time with it. He started speaking normally after a few hours, and we took out the earbuds without any problems. We had to go back inside after a while to make dinner, and Eren wanted to help me make pasta. We somehow kept from having another full-on flour war, which I’m actually kinda thankful for, because Nate’s kitchen is huge, and I don’t know if I’d be up to cleaning up that mess. Eren started humming when we were rolling out the dough, and I just had to start singing, and soon enough we’re just going through song after song together, just whatever came to mind. I hadn’t gotten any pasta sauce while we were out earlier, so we tried making it from scratch, which actually wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be. We’d end up hearing Levi and Nate roaring with laughter every once in awhile from across the house, which was pretty amusing. It was kinda difficult to get them to come and eat when dinner was actually ready, but they forgot about TV as soon as they sat down at the table. Which was good, because knowing them, or at least Nate, they’d take their food into the living room and drop the bowl laughing, and tomato sauce stains. But Eren was himself. I’m really relieved... I was so worried that the memory loss was permanent. It’s definitely not, though. Nate actually had the gall to hide
an ice cream cake from us. Who does that? I understand not wanting other people to steal your sweets, but seriously! “Were you ever going to tell us you had that, Nate?” Lathe grinned impishly.

“I wanted to make sure there was still some left for dessert, yeesh. You’d probably inhale it all if you got the chance.” I'm surprised you didn't check the freezer, honestly. Nate went to get them all clean plates, handing each of them a slice and a clean fork.

Eren looked at the foreign food with curiosity. “What is this?” Seriously... What is it? It looks so weird... Eren took a timid fork full before instantly shaking his head and pushing the plate towards Levi. “No thank you…” He murmured and grimaced at the sugary taste the creamy food left in his mouth. That's gross... It was so sweet.

Right. “He’s not a fan of sweet stuff, I don't think it ever came up…” Lathe grinned as he remembered something, standing and grabbing a box from on top of the fridge, tossing it gently to Eren. “Here; you might like these instead.” He sent a pointed look to Levi, wagging his eyebrow. You better know what those are.

Levi tried not to choke, a blush spreading across his face. Pockeys. At least that’s not the worst idea you've ever had. Levi looked back at his plate, less interested in his cake than he was before. He looked back to Eren. I'd much rather share some of those with you...

“What are these?” Eren looked at the package with curiosity, slowly opening it and taking a bite of the first stick, finding that he liked them. “They’re good.” Eren said and picked up another to eat. “Can I have the rest?” Eren asked Lathe, his voice full of innocence.

Lathe grinned mischievously, glancing over to Levi. So he does know what they are. “Yep. And there’s four more boxes of them, too. ...Just remember to share.” His grin widened as Levi blushed furiously. Oh, get over it. We all know how much I ship you two.

Levi swallowed hard, abandoning his cake and standing, tugging on Eren’s sleeve. “H-how about we grab our stuff from the mudroom and head upstairs, okay?”

Eren nodded and followed Levi to grab their things and head upstairs. “Did Nate show you upstairs already?” He asked quietly.

“Yeah, he did.” Levi led Eren along, turning left at the top of the stairs and opening the door
directly in front of them to a large guest bedroom, an armoire next to the queen-sized bed. He
locked the door behind them quietly and rolled his suitcase against the wall, holding his hand out
for the small red box as Eren did the same. “Can I see those for a second? I promise I won't steal
them all.” He smirked, a glint in his eye. *This is gonna be fun.*

“Uhh… Yeah?” Eren seemed unsure of himself as he handed Levi the large box.

Nate watched them leave. *Well, he needs a drink just as much as I do so…* “While it’s just us a-
dults…” Nate slipped out of the room, coming back with a large bottle of Jack Daniels and two
heavy glasses. “I think we need some liquor after what we went through today.” Nate set the bottle
and the glasses down, going into the freezer to grab his large ice cube tray. Picking out two, he set
them in his glass looking over Lathe. “On the rocks? Or straight?” *If you’re cool with it being
room temperature, that’s cool man.*

Lathe eyed the bottle warily before letting out a sigh, running one hand through his hair. *I could do
with a drink for once.* “On the rocks.” *It has been a hell of a day.* “Thanks.” He took the glass from
Nate, feeling the slight burn of the alcohol as he sipped from the glass, swirling it around in his
hand, his fingers around its rim. *One drink isn't about to kill me.*

“You okay? Like, you’re not gonna break down on me after what happened to Eren today?” Nate
deadpanned, raising his glass to finish it off, lifting the large bottle and filling his glass again. *God,
I definitely needed this, and Lathe probably does too.*

Lathe laughed under his breath, sliding his now-empty glass over a bit, letting Nate refill it. “I'm
honestly surprised I haven't yet.” His face fell a bit, studying the ice in his glass. “He worries me to
death sometimes. He’s got so much plaguing him… it’s not always a walk in the park to deal with.”
*But.* “But I'm going to be there for him with all of it. I mean… I'm his Dad.”

Nate sipped at his drink, motioning for him to move down to the table instead of standing around
the island. “Do you wanna talk about it? You seem like you could use someone to vent to.” He
said and sat down at the table. *This burn feels good, if he needs to rant, I’ll let him… I know what
it's like to keep it pent up...*

Lathe sat down next to him, leaning his elbows on the table. He let out a heavy sigh after a
moment, dropping his head. “…I really could. Thank you.” He took another sip from his glass,
leaning his head on his hand.

“Well, I’m here… So you get to spill, the liquor isn’t gonna run out anytime soon, so if you need
more, by all means…” Nate motioned to the bottle, sipping at his drink, leaning back. *Spill... I
Lathe finished off his glass, setting it down and letting Nate refill it, not caring that the ice was nearly gone. He let out a shuddery breath. “I…” His voice cracked, and he swallowed hard, his voice shaking a bit as he spoke. “I just… Eren’s been through hell and back. He really has. And as much as I want to protect him from anything that could hurt him… I can’t protect him from his own memories. He… You don’t know what could send him into an attack. He could see one thing, whether it be a gesture or an object, or say something specific, and all of a sudden he’s… He’s terrified of everything and can’t remember English, crying maybe, on the floor scratching… Sometimes, he—” Lathe swallowed hard, taking a long drink from his glass, a tear running down his cheek. “—he won’t even recognise me, and… and I can’t do anything about that. I just…” Tears started to fall in streams, rubbing at his eyes with his sleeves, sniffling. “Sometimes I have to con-convince him that I’m not going to hurt him and just h-hold onto him, and I’m a stranger to him trying to c-comfort him… I…” Lathe let the tears fall, finishing his glass and sliding it over to ask for another. “I never feel like I’m doing a good job… I really just want him to be happy, and… and I don’t t-think I’m good enough…” He dropped his head into his arms, sobbing, his empty glass still in his tight grasp.

Nate filled his glass again not as full, rubbing at his shoulders in comfort. “Lathe… How can you say that? You’ve given him so many opportunities he would’ve never had without you. Lathe, have you seen how happy he is with you? He’s smiling practically whenever he’s around you, Lathe. He wouldn’t’ve survived without you… You’ve done so much for him… You’re more of a father than his actual one ever was… your doing great Lathe! You need to believe in yourself a little more.” Nate finished off his glass, pouring another for himself. “Do you really think he’s not happy? He found another piece of his mom again in his sign language with you…” He seemed so happy to have another part of her in his life at dinner.

Lathe lifted his head, tears still tracking down his cheeks as he downed the whiskey in one gulp, setting it down in silent demand for more. “I c-can’t give him e-everything, though… I c-can’t always b-bring him out of an attack. S-sometimes L-Levi has to h-help, and it still barely g-gets him back to us… And what i-if I’m not around and… And something h-happens? What if I’m at the store a-and he has an attack? What if I’m not t-there a-and… And G-Grisha comes back?” Lathe downed another glass, feeling it burn down his throat. “I—I’m n-not going to be there w-when he re-really needs me, and… w-what good is my s-sign language then w-when he… When he’s…” Dead. Lathe shook, burying his face in his hands, his expression contorted with misery.

Nate sighed quietly, filling the glass just halfway again. I know you needed the fucking drink, but you are way too insecure… Like, you are worse than Eren at this point. “Lathe, you’ll always be around for him… You need to be, especially with Levi going away… He needs someone to be there for him when Levi’s at college. You’re the only one who can do it…. Grisha’s not gonna be able to come back, people would know if something happens to Eren, he’s starting to get a regular schedule down… Nothing is going to happen to him without people noticing… Don’t worry Lathe, you’re doing great with him. He’s so happy with you, and I wish you could see that.” Nate moved his glass to fill it again. He’s so happy with you and Levi by his side. “He trusts you, Lathe… Blake trusts you… You are the best person for the job of raising him out of that hellhole he was in,
and giving him everything he wants. **You**, Lathe. You’re the **only one** who can do it.” *Believe in yourself will you?*

“B-but I… I’m not always going to be r-right next to h-him… I c-can't drag h-him everywhere, and if something h-happens and he c-can't come to get me, I… I w-won't always be able to h-help, and I w- **want** to always be there to h-help…” He dropped his hands, picking his glass up again. “E-even if he i- **is** happy… I can't h-help but think I could be b-better… I'm t-trying, I r-really am, but I c-can only do… s-so m- **much**…” Lathe looked up to Nate, his eyes glassy. “D-do you r-really think I'm d-doing okay?”

“Lathe how could you even ask that? You’re doing better than anyone else could! I know if I tried I would never be able to do this! You're doing fabulously.” Nate filled his glass, picking it up and finishing it in one swig, a heavy blush forming on his cheeks. *That one burned… But it’s a good burn.*

Lathe’s face was red from the tears and the whiskey, sipping at his glass, staring into the amber liquid. “I h-hope so…” He finished his glass setting it down, covering the top with his hand as Nate moved to refill it. “N-no thanks… I've h-had enough.” He leaned his head in his hands, trying to even out his breathing, his tears finally stopping. “T-thank you, N-Nate… It m-means a lot…” *I never have anyone to listen...*

Nate smiled putting the large bottle away, his steps a bit swayed. “You okay to wake up early tomorrow?” Nate asked slouched against the doorway. “I can take you up to your room if you want. We’ve all had a long day.” Nate hadn’t noticed Blake come downstairs and begin to paw at Lathe’s knee, wanting to be let out.

Lathe sighed heavily, standing on unsteady legs, holding onto the table. He slowly made his way to the back door, opening it for Blake. He turned back to Nate, trying not to let his legs give out from under him. “Y-yeah… Please.” *I can’t fucking stand, what the hell.*

Nate nodded. They waited for Blake to come back in before they all went upstairs. Nate led Lathe past the first guest bedroom to the second, opening it to show him the Queen bed. “Here’s your room. They boys are next door… Yeah, and the bathroom is over there.” He pointed across the hall from the first guest bedroom. Then pointed to his own room, directly across from Lathe’s. “That’s my room… I’ll see you guys tomorrow morning.” Nate sauntered off to his room and closed the door behind him. The first guest bedroom was completely silent, the door locked, but as soon as Blake whined, it was opened and he was allowed in and the door closed and locked right away.

Lathe let out a quiet laugh, stumbling into his room and shutting the door behind him. He didn't bother undressing at all and climbed into bed right away, instantly falling into a dreamless sleep.
Chapter 22: Summer Continues

Eren woke up at five the next morning, looking over and seeing Levi and Blake still very much asleep. He smiled, getting up and silently getting dressed before slipping out of the room and going down the stairs. *This house is so big... Does Nate live here alone?* Eren made his way to the kitchen, smiling as he saw his drawing stuff all over the kitchen table, but he moved out to the porch, breathing in the fresh morning air. *It’s beautiful outside.* Eren looked around at the trees lining the area, adorned with fruits up in the high branches. *Oooohhh... Those look really good.* He had his sights set on the large blood orange tree in far corner of the back yard, before one would pass beyond the garage. He looked around for anything to try and grab the beautiful fruits from the tree. *How do I get up there?* Eren’s eyes lit up like a Christmas tree and he moved to start clambering up the trunk.... *This looks cool from up here.* Eren reached up, grabbing quite a few of the large blood oranges and tucking them into his shirt. After he got enough to satisfy himself he had a good aerial view of the area, his eyes drifting towards the space behind the large gate.

What’s that blue thing? Eren slowly and carefully clambered down from the tree, only a few small scrapes on his hands and bare feet from the bark, but he didn’t seem to notice as he got closer to the gate, going on his tiptoes to try and see over it. What’s that blue thingy? It looks really cool...

What is it? Eren figured out how to open the large white gate after a few frustrated attempts at opening it. He watched the gate close, but made sure it didn’t close completely. *I wanna be able to get out of here...* Once he knew that the gate wasn’t going to close on him he warily padded towards the large rectangular blue object which took up most of the space behind the garage. What is it? Eren’s curiosity was completely piqued, leading him to slowly reach down to touch the glassy surface. It’s water! What the fuck? Why does Nate have so much water in his backyard? Does he know? Is it clean? Eren raised his hand up to his face. It smells weird... And it tastes weird... Eren contemplated the reason this amount of water existed in the ground in Nate’s backyard. He put his hand back down into the water realizing it was quite warm, he shifted positions and soon had his feet down in the water, sitting at the edge of the deep end of the pool without realizing it. He reached into his tied off shirt and pulled out an orange, starting to expertly peel the orange and bite into the juicy fruit.

Levi grumbled in his sleep after a few minutes, his arms searching for Eren at the loss of warmth. Finding nothing but empty sheets, Levi cracked his eyes open, suddenly awake as the house was silent, Eren nowhere to be seen. *Don't freak out, he's probably just downstairs. Yeah, for breakfast or something.* He sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed, pausing as he saw Blake still asleep at the foot of the bed. That's not good. Levi left their room, padding down the stairs, quietly calling for him and looking over the rooms. “Eren?” Levi walked to the kitchen, his eyes wide with worry. “Eren!?” His voice started to fill with panic. Where is he?! He ran upstairs, pounding on Lathe’s door loudly. “I can't fucking find Eren!” *Fuck.*

Lathe’s eyes shot open, ignoring his pounding headache. He lifted his head to the door, scrambling to get up and straighten out his shirt before quickly opening it and taking in Levi’s scared expression. *Shit.* “What’s wrong, Levi?” He placed his hands on his shoulders, giving him his full attention.

“I-I don't know where Eren is! He was asleep with me last night, but when I woke up he wasn't in
bed and I looked downstairs and he’s not there and Blake was still asleep…” He looked down at Blake who had woken up, pawing at his leg and whining.

“Blake.” Lathe looked at Blake, thinking. “Here, how about we use Blake to find Eren? He should be able to track him down. Come on, Blake.” Lathe crouched down, looking Blake in the eye. “Find Eren.” I hope you know what the word find means. Lathe followed Blake as the dog immediately left to go downstairs, Levi jogging behind him as Blake sniffed at the floor and walked them directly to the back door, pawing at it. I was sure I locked that… Lathe opened the door, following as Blake trotted over to a far corner of the yard, sniffing at the base of a tree. Lathe looked up. Blood oranges… Eren does like oranges. “Eren? Are you up there?” Lathe circled the tree, trying to get a good look past the branches. I don’t think he is, but… “One sec. I need a better view.” Lathe looked for a good handhold and quickly scaled the tree, pushing a branch aside and looking out over the backyard. Where are you… His eyes fell on a sparkling blue pool on the other side of a gate, barely ajar, small ripples across its surface. Lathe felt his stomach drop as he blinked and saw Eren floating upside down in the centre, his face going white as a sheet, his grip slackening. Oh my God. He nearly fell out of the tree, the near fall jerking him back to reality. He looked up in terror, letting out an immense sigh of relief as he blinked again, the image gone.

Eren’s not dead. He’s not drowning. Relax. He studied the water for a second, his eyes wide as the ripples kicked up a bit. But he still might. Lathe clambered down from the tree in an instant, passing Blake and Levi as he hurried to the gate, opening it and stepping onto the concrete, a hand over his heart as he saw Eren perfectly fine near the deep end, still eating his oranges, peels in a neat little pile next to him. “Eren.” Lathe walked over to him, his voice shaky. Don’t scare us like that. “Eren, please be careful. The water’s really deep there.” Lathe tried to hold back a worried sob, his mind still the smallest bit hazy from the night before. “Don’t scare us like that. We were so worried something had happened to you…” Lathe sat down next to Eren, pulling him into a tight hug, burying his face in his shoulder. I don’t know what I would do if you had fallen in, and...

Eren looked up when his name was called, giving a cheeky smile to his father, kicking at the water with his feet. “It’s not deep… It doesn’t look like it is…. Why were you worried? I didn’t want to wake you guys up so early….” Eren trailed off but picked his legs up out of the water and leaned back into Lathe’s arms. What did I do? I’m confused… And how deep is the water? It only looks like it’s a foot and a half feet deep. “Daddy? What’s wrong? Why are you crying?” Eren asked, his voice full of concern as he turned to see Lathe better.

The same image of Eren floating in the water flashed in Lathe’s mind, causing him to shudder. His voice was choked, trying to calm himself down. “T-the depth’s p-painted on the ground… It’s t-twenty feet deep… I-if you f-fell in a-and we didn't get h-here in time…” No no no no no please no Lathe held onto Eren even tighter, trying desperately to pull himself together. He’s okay, you’re here. Calm the fuck down.

Oh… That’s what I did… It’s cause I can’t swim… Eren turned away from the pool, leaving his unfinished orange on the cement beside him. He shifted so that he was hugging Lathe back. “I’m sorry Dad, I didn't mean to scare you…. It was so early… And I was really hungry… I’m sorry…”
Eren wrapped his arms around Lathe still and held on.

Levi knelt down next to the two of them, resting his hand on Eren’s shoulder. “How early is early? It’s barely 6:30 now…” You can’t get much earlier than this...

“F-five…” Eren told them and looked down. “I had trouble sleeping last night…. I couldn't stay asleep.” Eren moved so he rested his cheek on Lathe’s shoulder and moved a hand to hold onto his shirt. I don’t want Dad to worry, I’m okay. That’s a really long time… But he’s fine! You’re holding him in your arms right now. He’s okay. But what if he had fallen in? He’d have drowned and you would’ve just slept on like nothing fucking happened. You’re holding onto him right fucking now. He’s fine. You’re fine. And now he knows to be careful. You can teach him to swim sometime. Lathe nodded in understanding, carding his hand through his hair, resting his cheek on his head. For now, he’s fine.

Levi gave him a small smile. “It’s fine, Eren. It’s been an odd twenty-four hours, to say the least. I just got concerned when I couldn't find you straight away. But we understand.” Just don’t make a habit out of scaring us, Brat.

Eren smiled as he felt Lathe’s fingers card through his hair, his head tilting into the gentle hand. I didn’t think this through did I? Eren smiled at a thought, moving back from Lathe a little and reaching into his shirt he pulled out two more oranges. “Oranges anyone?” He had a large smile on his face, his hands were scraped up a bit, but nothing major. Lathe probably had the same damage on his own. I wonder if this’ll make Dad laugh? I want him to be happy too! We’re going to the zoo today! Eren gasped in shock as he felt the first large raindrop across his skin. What the hell? Eren looked up as the clouds broke loose, rain starting to come down, not as hard yet, since it was only the beginning, but the clouds were so dark it almost looked like night this early in the morning.

Lathe let out a breathy laugh, looking up to the sky as it started to rain. Oh yeah, I forgot about that. “The forecast called for rain. Here, let’s pick up your orange peels and get back inside, okay?” Lathe pressed a kiss to his temple before letting him go, picking up the pile of peels next to him and standing.

Levi helped Eren stand, making sure he didn't fall in before wrapping his arms around his waist and giving him a quick kiss, pulling him along with them to the house. I was really fucking worried… But you’re okay. That’s what matters.

Eren let Levi pull him inside the house, shaking his head and the water coming out of his hair like a wet dog. Blake did almost the same action of shaking off in the mudroom, but it went through his
whole body and not just his head. Eren smiled as he saw Lathe come in, his eyes widening when the rain really started to come down. *It's pouring out… Are we gonna be able to go?* Eren looked towards the kitchen as he heard footsteps coming in.

Nate came down and smiled at all of them. “Mornin’!” Nate seemed pretty cheery, not knowing in the least what had just gone down between the three of them. “Did you guys get caught in the rain?” *They’re soaked at their shoulders.*

Eren smiled widely back at him. Reaching into his shirt and pulling out another two oranges. *So that’s four that I haven’t eaten yet… “Dad?… Can you make cinnamon rolls? I’m still hungry.”*

“I guess you could say that.” Lathe looked to the mountain of peels in his hands, then to Eren. “You’ve eaten nearly all the oranges from Nate’s tree back there and you’re still hungry?” He grinned. “Yeah, I’ll make cinnamon rolls.” He brushed off the peels from his hands in the garage can, going to peruse the fridge. “It’s a good thing I bought a couple of these.” He had a tray of cinnamon rolls in the oven in no time, leaning on the island and watching it really start to pour. “I made sure to bring all of our rain stuff, luckily, so we’re still set for the zoo today.”

“I didn’t get to eat all the ones I picked…” Eren trailed off as he sat down at the table with Levi and started to play footsie as they waited. Blake just laid down on the floor by Eren’s chair, watching as Nate made coffee in the coffee maker.

“Lathe, you want a cup of joe? Or are you a tea fanatic like the two crazies you brought here?” Nate turned to him after he filled his own mug but had gotten three more out incase all of them wanted tea or coffee. *Please tell me I am not the only coffee drinker here.*

“Coffee sounds amazing right now. Thanks.” Lathe gratefully took the mug from him, adding cream and a bit of cocoa from the small jar on the counter. He walked over to where his bag hung in the mudroom, fishing for the bottle of aspirin as his headache came back full-force. *This is why we don’t drink six glasses of whiskey in one night. “You need any aspirin, Nate?” Jeff said you never get hangovers, but I find that hard to believe…*

Nate shook his head. “Nope I’m good, you drank more than me last night anyways.” *No he didn’t, but we’ll see if he remembers that… Surely Jeff told him I don’t have hangovers… Can’t hold my liquor… But I don’t have hangovers. “You guys are up awful early too… I thought I’d be waking you guys up at seven-ish.”*

Levi quirked an eyebrow at Lathe. *Didn’t take him as the drinking type.* He looked back to Nate. “Eren was up at five this morning, and Lathe and I got up at six-ish. But in Kansas time it’s about
nine or ten right now.” Jet lag and a hell of a day will do that to you. ...kind of explains the drinking thing, actually.

Nate’s eyes widened a bit. *Five? Well, taking into consideration that Kansas is two hours ahead of LA does mean that he was really up at seven then... I guess?* “Okay, so Eren was up first, and I see he raided the blood orange tree.” Nate chuckled and got out the box of tea bags for Lathe since he was near the kettle as it started to whistle. *I don’t know how many they’re gonna want.*

Eren gave a cheeky smile. “Yeah, they’re really juicy and **really** good.” Eren said with a smile on his face, putting the four uneaten oranges in a bowl in the center of the island. *Well if anyone else wants to eat them they're there.*

Lathe chuckled, dropping two teabags in a mug for both of them, waiting a few minutes for the tea to really strengthen before throwing the bags out and handing them to Eren and Levi. “*In that case…*” He picked one up from the bowl, peeling it expertly. “I think I'll have one.” He peeled off a wedge, biting it and smiling. “*Those are really good.* *Maybe we should see if any fruit trees could live in our backyard. That’d be really cool.* He set down the orange as he looked to the oven, opening it and snatching an oven mitt, lifting the cinnamon rolls onto the stove. He took plates from the cupboard above him, icing the rolls and setting one in front of the two at the table.

Eren let out a soft squeal of happiness as the cinnamon rolls were put in front of them. *Cinnamon rolls!!* Eren happily dug into his food, sipping from his tea every now and then. “*When are we leaving?*” Eren got up to get more rolls. *I'm happy I don't need to use pills to eat anymore.*

Nate smiled, eating his own rolls standing at the island. “Well it opens at 10… And it only takes 15 minutes to get there, but it's raining, so I’m not gonna drive as fast on the highway. But really it's up to you guys... We could spend all day there if we wanted to, I just hope you brought enough space for your camera...” Nate lifted up his mug, finishing off his coffee before moving to fill it again. *I’m cool with whatever...*

“*Oh don’t worry, we have plenty of space on the camera.* *There’s a 64-GB chip in the camera right now, and there’s four more where that came from.* Lathe looked over to Eren and Levi. “It’s really up to you two when you want to leave. I’m fine with anything, really, whenever you two want.” He sipped from his mug, wincing. *Fuck I hate hangovers… this headache sucks. Hopefully the aspirin kicks in soon.*

Eren nodded, thinking about it. *If we went early then maybe we can see all the animals awake from sleeping... “Right away, I wanna go right away… How many animals do they have there?” Please tell me they have lions! PLEASE!*
Nate grinned. “Too many. There’s really anything you could think of. Seriously, name something.”

“Lions?”

“Yes.”

“Giraffes?”

“Yes.”

“Giant Anteater?”

“Yes.”

“Chimpanzees?”

“Yes.”

“African Painted Dog?”

“Yes.”

“Tigers?”

“Yes.”

“Asian Elephants?”
“Yes.”

“Speke’s Gazelle?”

“Yes.”

“Gorillas?”

“Yes.”

“Hippos?”

“Yes.”

“Jaguars?”

“Yes.”

“So, we’re going on a Safari.” Lathe joked, grinning at Eren. *All those animals are there? That’s gonna be really cool.*

“YES!” Eren through his arms up in the air like an excited five year old. *I get to see all my favorite animals to draw! Ohh!! I can get pictures for more drawing!!*

Levi gave him a small smile, sipping on his tea. “Well, we have plenty of time before the place even opens. We should leave right around ten so when we get there we have plenty of time to walk around. Judging by your enthusiasm, we’re going to be there for a while.” *This is going to be really cool, seeing all those animals.*

Nate chuckled. “Alright that sounds good, so we got two hours to kill… I would take you outside to see the pool, but it’s raining pretty hard out right now… Sooo… Yeah.” Nate had no idea the three
of them had already seen the huge pool behind the large garage. *Wonder what they'll come up with.*

“What’s a pool?” Eren looked up at the mention of something he had no idea about. *What the fuck is that?*

Lathe suppressed a shudder, still a bit on edge. “That big pit full of water you were chilling near this morning. That’s a pool. You can swim in it for fun.”

“S-swimming?” Eren stuttered and looked down at his hands a little. “You’re supposed to swim in those? “But… I-I-I don’t know how to…” Eren looked up and he looked scared that he would see their angry faces for mentioning that he couldn’t do something.

“We should teach you. It’s something you should know how to do.” Lathe gave him a reassuring smile.

“Yeah, not knowing how to swim isn’t good. But it’s never too late to learn. It’ll be fun.” Levi sipped his tea, patting his arm as he recognised Eren’s fear. “Don’t worry yourself about it. We’ll make sure you know how to swim soon enough.” *Maybe by the time summer ends we could go out once and help you at least learn to tread water. We can't have you drowning.*

Eren looked down to his hands and nodded. *I… I don’t know how…. Because Grisha never taught me… He just threw me in…* Eren reached down to pet Blake to calm him down. “Okay…” Eren smiled softly. *But Dad and Levi will help me swim, they won't throw me in the lake. They won't yell at me to die…* Blake whined loud enough to snap Eren back to reality. “Sorry…” Eren swallowed hard. *I wonder if I would freak out… If I went in the water with them?*

Nate gave him a small smile. “It’s cool, Eren. Well, we have two hours until we can leave, so we should probably go over exactly what I’m dragging you to while you’re here. It’s gonna sound like a lot, but for the most part we can do two to four in one day.” He started counting off on his fingers, thinking. *Probably should’ve written this down. Eh, if I forget anything I'll eventually remember over the next week ish.* “The LA Zoo of course, Universal Studios in Hollywood, the Hollywood walk of Fame, TCL Chinese Theatre, Griffith Observatory, Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Hollywood Sign, Los Angeles Museum of Art, Santa Monica Pier, Olvera Street, The Grove, Sunset Boulevard, Farmers Market, Little Tokyo, LA Live, Dodger Stadium, Universal City Walk, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, Runyon Canyon Park, Los Angeles Convention Center, a bunch of random beaches, Recording Center, and finally, the YouTube Space LA, where some people you know may or may not be.” He finished, grinning. *Oh you're going to love the last one, especially.*
“What’s the YouTube Space… Thingy?” Eren asked with confusion. *It sounds like we're gonna be doing a lot in this trip.* Eren looked up from Blake and looked at any of them for an explanation. *What is it? Is it for YouTubers?*

“It’s this space where YouTubers with more than 10,000 subscribers can go and record videos and use any of the things or sets they have there. It’s really cool, I've been there a few times. And because it’s open to any YouTuber who wants to use it, you might run into someone you recognise.” *It's really really cool.*

“I have over 10,000 subscribers?” Eren asked quietly. *The last time I checked… Was when Nate told me he subscribed… And that was 3… How many do I have? I don’t even know how to check it!*

Lathe stopped Nate before he could pull out his phone, his own already in hand. “I got this. You have…” His eyes went wide, grinning widely. “...5,947,306 subscribers.” *That’s a ton of people.* “Yeah, you're kinda a big deal, Eren. I'm surprised you haven't checked the count in that long.” *You didn't even know you had ten thousand? Try 594 times that.*

“I do? I don’t know how to check it… The last time I knew… Was 3 people.” Eren blushed a lot at the thought of that amount of people actually watching his videos. “Do they all watch the videos?” Eren asked curiously. *I don’t know how to check that either.*

“Eren, your last video, the Grand Piano one, was viewed 13 million times already. It’s been four days.” Lathe deadpanned. *Four. Fucking. Days.* “You've got a huge following! People who are subscribed to you receive notifications every time you post a video. So yeah, they most likely see at least a majority of your videos. ...We really need to go through this whole social media thing again.” *You're not really a tech person, I get the feeling. But you're so popular right now you need to at least pay it some attention!*

“Wait… It works like Twitter does?” Eren asked seeming to blush an even darker shade of red. *I don’t get this at all! “How can I have more views than followers?” Doesn’t it go away after the first time you see it?*

Lathe sighed, reaching for a clean piece of paper and a hard pencil. “I'm borrowing this paper. Look. Explanation time.” He sat down next to Eren, the pencil moving across the paper, drawing out little boxes and insignias and arrows. “You put videos up on YouTube for the whole world to see. When you put up a video, anyone who is subscribed to you receives a notification on their phone or computer that you put it up. They can go to it, and watch it as many times as they like. You also have a Twitter, where you can post pictures and little notes about your day, and announcements. People who follow you on Twitter will receive notifications whenever you put
something up on there. Now, stay with me here. Your YouTube…” He drew an arrow across the page. “...is connected with your Twitter, which means that whenever you post a video, Twitter knows that you put it up, and sends out an announcement message to all your followers, so that they can go and see it. You can have more views than subscribers because you don't have to be subscribed to someone to watch their videos. Make sense?” *Do I have to explain Instagram now? Is that where we're heading with this?*

“Wait… Doesn’t the video disappear after you watch it?” Eren’s brow furrowed in confusion. “How many followers do I have on Twitter?” *The last time I asked... I was at 400…*

Lathe tapped at his phone. “About 14 million, a little over. And you're thinking of Snapchat. With Snapchat…” He drew the ghost icon. “You can take photos and send them to people, like text messages. Those go away after a while so they can't save them for later if you're sending something you don't want a bunch of people to accidentally see. You could also put photos up on your ‘story,’ which is pretty much just a collection of stuff you want others to see as much as they want. Like a mini slideshow of what you do with your time, kinda. Instagram is pretty much one big Snapchat story, but you can put videos on there too. I think. Yeah. Pretty sure. They all start to sound similar after a while, honestly. But each of these are meant to do practically the same thing: connect you with other people, whether privately between you and one other person, or between you and the whole world. People who are subscribed to you or follow you, they're people who are specifically interested in the stuff *you* do, and say. Did I miss anything?” *Facebook is just kinda there at this point, so I don't think I have to go over it much.*

“Ummm… Yeah… I think? So I should be more active on those apps on my phone then?” Eren asked as he pulled out his own showing off that all the apps were in a small cluster with thousands upon thousands of notices for each of them. *What are those numbers over the apps?*

“You haven't even opened half of them in weeks, I see. And yeah, you probably should. It’s important to talk to your fans.” He grinned, no malice in his words. “Here, pick one to start with. Twitter might work best, since you have the most followers on there. And all those numbers in the red ovals? That’s how many notifications you haven't responded to. They could be any number of things: how many people messaged you, if people you followed did anything while you were gone…” *This is going to be an uphill battle, getting you into this, isn't it?*

“The one with the 2 million is Twitter right?” He asked pointing to the icon of the small blue bird. “I get so confused on which one's which.” *God this is so complicated. “Can you post pictures on Twitter?”* Eren asked. *I think you can…? Can I post a picture of Blake? Everyone loves Blake.*

“The blue bird’s Twitter, and the names are under all of them in white for you to read if you forget. And yes, you can. Tap it.” *...now I really want us to embrace our inner white girls and take a selfie all together and post that.* “The pen thing up at the top right corner? Tap that, and then tap the camera.” He watched as the camera app opened. “Now, what do you want to take a picture of? You
can take more than one, if you want to post a couple.”

“You can post more than one? Can we take a picture of Blake… And then all of us together? Ooh! Can we take a picture at the Zoo too?” Eren asked his eyes sparkled with endless ideas dancing in his head.

“Yes, yes, and definitely yes. Twitter is good for the occasional picture. But if you want to put up a bunch of them, Instagram is best, because that’s all pictures. Here.” Lathe went back to the home page, showing him the Instagram icon and opening it, tapping the camera and the same app opening. “You can put up as many as you want. Twitter is more for random comments about life or things or people. But go ahead, go nuts!”

Eren’s smile brightened and he took a shit ton of pictures of Blake, posting them happily, all in one post but in a template he found. “Like this?” Eren asked as he put the caption: ‘Pics of Blake!’

“This gets posted?” Eren asked quietly looking up to Lathe. His pictures were a great quality and highlighted Blake’s features, some were even filtered, giving Blake a glowing appearance. He looks cute.

Lathe beamed. Well, you caught on quick. “Yep. Hit the post button, and sit back and watch the people fawn over how adorable Blake is.” He took out his phone as Eren posted it, the first to like it and deciding to comment on it because he could. ‘Omg he looks so cute! ^u^’ He looked up to Eren as he hit the post button.

Eren watched the number of likes explode and his eyes were wide. He smiled as he read the first comment. “I completely agree with this person.” Eren said and read the comment about him being cute, having not the slightest clue who it was. “Can we take a picture together? Can we? Can we? Can we?” Eren jumped up and down out of his seat as he thought about it. The likes and comments continued to climb, all of his followers really did love Blake. So many likes…

Lathe chuckled, his eyes bright. “Of course we can. Get over here, Nate. You're not getting out of this.” Lathe tapped the icon to turn the camera around. “Here, I have long arms. Let me, okay?” He carefully took the phone from Eren, holding it up high.

Levi moved over to get in the photo, his arms wrapping around Eren’s waist, giving the camera a faint smirk. Sorry, Fangirls. Mine.

Nate laughed, speaking in mock exasperation. “Fiiiine, if I have to.” He rolled his eyes good-naturedly, moving in on the other side of Eren and Levi, beaming at the camera.
Lathe grinned as Blake looked up to see what he was doing, snapping the picture and looking it over, posting it with the caption ‘Look who we’re hanging out with! @NateRuess’. “Alright, it’s up! And I tagged you, Nate.” Lathe looked to Eren’s confused expression. “Tagging someone means you referenced them in your post in some way, and you put a sort of link to them in your post so people can go and see their stuff, too. You put the at symbol, and then whatever their username is.” Lathe handed his phone back to him. “You can take more if you want. As many as you feel like, really. You're free to go completely overboard with this.” Everyone's going to love whatever you post.

Eren looked at his phone with a mischievous grin. He raced off into the house with Blake, everyone’s phones going off as Eren took professional-grade photos of random things around the house, making Nate’s house look amazing. This is so cool!

Levi quirked his eyebrow at the seventh picture of Nate’s stuff in two minutes. “He’s just finding random stuff and making it look really good.” It's actually pretty impressive, making a stack of DVDs look artistic. “Just wait until he gets his hands on the good camera.”

Lathe shook his head slowly, laughing at Eren’s enthusiasm. “I've created a monster.” He tapped away, posting little comments of his thoughts on every picture he put up. He didn't recognise my username. Huh. I thought he would.

Eren finally finished after he took a really flattering picture of Levi, leaned forward with his elbows against the island as the others made small talk. Eren posted the picture with a smile the caption reading: ‘The Best Boyfriend Ever’. He looks so fucking hot… Holy crap.

Lathe tapped at his phone, thinking of what to comment. Just don't be creepy. ‘He looks great; all your pictures do!’ He smiled as people liked it, keeping his comment near the top of the listings. He’ll be sure to see that one.

Eren smiled at all the comments coming in. “That’s weird… This person’s comments are all at the top of my posts.” Eren scrolled through the many he posted and the comment was always at the top. “It’s at the top of all of them? People like this person’s comments that much?” Eren showed Levi the comments and how this one person was always at the top. “Are they someone popular I have no idea about?” Levi would know… He’s more of a social media guru than me.

Levi looked over the name. coffeegodsAutonomous? Isn't that… He struggled to keep a straight face, glancing over Eren’s shoulder at Nate and Lathe, both barely keeping it together. I can either mess with Eren, or roast Lathe. Hmmm… payback time. Levi sent Lathe’s a pointed look, near
imperceptibly nodding to his phone as he responded, feigning confusion. “I dunno who that is… I haven’t heard of them before. They must have a lot of followers.” Give him a cue, Levi. Think. “I wonder what their favorite kind of coffee is, if they must love it so much.” Levi held back a grin as a sub-comment popped up. “Huh. Strong, with cocoa, cream, and sugar.”

Eren smirked. Just like Dad. “Hey Dad! Look! This person has the same quirky tastes as you! They put chocolate in their coffee too!” Eren smiled as he showed Lathe the sub-comment. I wonder which chocolate is his favorite. Eren types out a response to the comment, asking yet another question. He waited for a response, going back over to Levi’s side across the island.

‘Vahlrona Bittersweet cocoa powder in a 9 oz jar purchased from Whole Foods yesterday and expiring in August of 20XX.’

Eren’s brow furrowed at the comment. “Hey Dad? Don’t you like Vahlrona Bittersweet Chocolate mix?” Eren asked quizzically. “Are you sure you don’t have a twin brother?” This person’s tastes are so much like Dad’s…. That’s kinda weird…. No one I know other than Dad likes Chocolate in their coffee...

‘I’m pretty sure I was an only child, Eren.’

What the hell? “That’s weird… They say they were an only child.” That’s pretty cool though. ‘Ah, that’s cool, I’m an only child too! It’s so weird… You have tastes just like my Dad. :P’ Eren waited for a response again. It’s kinda scary how close he is to Lathe.

This is too perfect. ‘I know! We even have the same taste in boots! Metal-capped toes all the way ^u^’ He quietly and quickly reached over and snapped a picture of the mudroom, zooming in a little on the boots and sending it.

Wait…. How would they know that? Those look like my boots... What. The. Fuck. Eren turned around to see Lathe moving back into his original spot and then everything clicked…. Finally. ‘Oh… Thanks for posting a pic of our shoes Dad.’ I am sooo done with you. Eren looked down at his phone. “You could’ve just told me! I actually thought there was someone else out there as weird as you! Do you know how scary that is?” Eren asked and he turned back to look at his own pictures and their comments. That’s scary… Because you’re basically a lunatic. That’s terrifying… What if there was actually someone out there like that? Would that mean that Dad had a stalker? What if it was….Grisha? Eren didn’t feel Blake bite his hand until he was trying to pull him to the floor. Reality came flooding back in and Eren kneeled down by Blake to pet him and calm himself down. No… He’s gone…. He’s not going to come back...
Levi knelt down next to Eren, pulling him into a hug from behind, his chin on his shoulder. He gave him a small smile, his eyes apologetic. “Sorry we scared you, Eren. We were just trying to have a little fun, not make you freak out.” Levi pecked his cheek, standing up with him.

Lathe smiled sheepishly at Eren. “Sorry. We were just messing with you, Eren. Though how did you not catch on that it was me earlier? I have my middle name in my username! ‘We’ like coffee the exact same way- with an exact expiration date! I was hoping you'd actually check the jar to see when it expired. I've thought you'd be much more suspicious sooner.” He grinned. “But this was too perfect, so I'm not complaining. But,” He walked over to where their backpacks hung in the mudroom, rifling through Eren’s. “If you're going to be posting so many pictures on the ’gram, you might want to use this.” He pulled out the camera they used to record Eren’s videos, showing it to Eren. “Do you know how to use this?”

Isn't that what I use for recording? “Umm… You plug it into the computer… And hit the record button on the computer?” Eren said and looked at the multiple other buttons on the sides of the camera. “But we don't have my computer….” Eren trailed off as he looked over the strange buttons. What do those do?

Lathe grinned, moving so they could both look at the display. He tapped a small slot at the side. “Well, yes, you can do that. And no, we don't have your computer, but you don't need your computer to use this. This camera has a small chip in it, which lets you take 64GB worth of photos and video, and you can upload all of that to your computer later. The most important buttons on here you should know… This button,” He pressed a button, which showed a black screen. “Will show you the last photo you took. But we haven't taken any pictures yet, so it doesn't have anything to show us. You can keep pressing this button to go further and further back with the photos you've taken, and the one right next to it to move forward through all of them again. This one just gets you out of whatever special menu you're in and sets you back up to take more pictures. This button turns the flash on and off, so if it’s dark you turn it on, and a light will flash when you take the picture so if it’s dark you can see it. And this, the very most important button, is right by your finger here. You press that, and it takes the picture. All these other buttons aren’t too important right now. Get it?” He handed Eren the camera. “There’s a strap to hang it around your neck, which I'll get out in a little bit so you don't have to hold it the entire time we’re at the zoo today. But go ahead, try it out! Don't mess with too many settings, though. I'm not a total expert on how that works.”

Eren held the light camera in his hands. What the hell do I do with it? Eren looked around for things to take pictures of. What do I take a picture of? He soon walked out of the kitchen and around the house looking for things, soon finding that a close up picture of the patterned pillows looked really fascinating, which led to him taking pictures at multiple angles. Is this what I do with it? Eren came back to the kitchen a few moments later. “Umm… how do I look at them again?” Eren asked and held the camera back out to Lathe. I can’t remember this for the life of me.

“This one under the screen, the one on the left goes back, and the one on the right goes forward.” Lathe pressed the back button once, nodding at the picture. “Nice angle on that one.” He pressed
the button again, looking at the different angles Eren took the pictures from. “You're already finding really good angles. Once we find you a better subject matter you’ll be doing wonderfully. I’d suggest the backyard if you want, we’d need to get into our rain gear soon anyway and the camera’s waterproof. It’d be interesting, if you knew where to look.”

“Okay, that sounds good... um... can I wear my boots today?” Eren looked down as he shuffled his feet. *I know he got me a bunch of shoes to wear... but...* He gently put the camera down on the island, his eyes still not directly meeting Lathe’s, but they never did when he asked questions like these. *I don’t want him to be mad at me.*

*He knows he can ask questions and not be terrified, right?* Lathe rested his hand on his shoulder, smiling warmly. “Of course you can. They're fine for in the rain, they should keep your feet dry. Just because you have a lot more shoes now doesn't mean you have to stop wearing the ones you already like. Whichever you want.” *Come on, I practically live in my boots. I can’t not understand.*

Eren smiled and nodded. “Okay... and um... what am I supposed to wear?” Eren asked and looked up to meet his eyes for a split second before looking down at his shuffling feet. An improvement of sorts, but he was still healing mentally. *That’s a really stupid question... but I have no clue.*

“Well, let’s see. It’s a bit warm out, even though it’s raining, so, not a sweater.” Lathe joked, his eyes bright. *Progress.* “You have a light raincoat in your suitcase. It’s thin, dark green, and feels like plastic. You’ll know it when you see it. Thick socks, a thin long-sleeve, and pick a pair of shorts, because long pants would get soaked with the amount of puddles you're going to end up stomping in.” *He’d better bring dry backup everythings, knowing him.* “I dunno when we’d be home next, so bring down a dry change of clothes, for if and when you’re completely drenched, okay? And I have umbrellas, so I've got that covered. That pretty much goes for you too, Levi, word for word, except your rain jacket is a steel grey color. You have waterproof boots in your suitcase, we made sure of that, so wear those. Questions?” He looked between the two of them, smiling as they shook their heads. He ruffled Eren’s hair. “Good. Let’s all go get ready, then.” He looked over to Nate, who shrugged.

Nate grinned. “Alright, I'm coming, I'm coming.” He followed Lathe and Levi and a very excited Eren up the stairs, changing quickly and rifling through his closet for a rain jacket, finding a dark brown one. He poked his head out of his room as Eren scampered back down the stairs, an amused expression on his face. *You’d think he’s never seen rain before.*

Eren was giggling the whole way down the stairs, racing off to the mudroom to lace up his shoes. He looked really cute as he put on the oversized rain coat and picked up his camera. *Picture time!* Eren then went outside, flipping his hood up as he raced off to take more pictures. *So Dad said he has a strap for this? That’s cool!* Eren took over twenty pictures of the various fruits in the different trees, figuring out how to change the zoom on the camera pretty quickly. *This is so cool!*
Levi picked up his own change of clothes after tugging on his rain jacket, picking up Eren’s pile of clothes from where he forgot them on the end of the bed. He went down the stairs with his boots also in hand, placing the clothes on the island where Lathe would see them, pulling on his boots and going outside to supervise Eren. You’d think he had a triple espresso this morning, yeesh! Levi hovered underneath him as Eren clambered partway up a tree, ready to catch him if he fell. “Oi, Eren, be careful up there.”

Lathe walked over to them, wearing a long maroon raincoat and toting a green umbrella, a camera strap in his hand. “Hey Eren, I have that strap for the camera-” He stopped as he followed Levi’s gaze up into the orange tree, seeing Eren snapping a picture, not holding onto the branches. He swallowed hard. “Eren, I don’t think climbing up there while it’s so wet is such a good idea. You should really be hanging on…” He moved next to Levi, worried that he’d slip.

Eren took quite a few more pictures. “I’m fine Dad, I used to climb trees all the time in Germany.” Eren told him and he shifted a little more to get a better picture, changing the focus. A bright flash, quickly followed by a loud crack of thunder made Eren jump out of fear, knocking him off balance from the branch he was laying against, his eyes widened as he tried to wrap his free hand back around the branch. Shit! Eren felt the tree bark scrape against his arm as he slipped off the branch, the water not helping him stay attached to the rough surface.

Lathe immediately dropped what he was holding, moving as Levi brought up his arms, both of them catching Eren easily, one on either side. Lathe was white as a sheet, his eyes wide. “I think that’s enough tree climbing in the rain for you.” He and Levi set Eren down, pulling him into a tight hug before going to retrieve his umbrella, handing him the strap. “Here, so you can have both your hands free when you’re not using it.” His eyes were still heavy with worry. He could've gotten really hurt, he could've broken his leg or his arm, hit his head and gotten a concussion...

Eren nodded, his eyes still wide from the shock of actually falling out of the tree. That… That just happened. Eren jumped again, grabbing onto Lathe’s coat immediately as another clap of thunder sounded, he let out a high pitched screech in fright as he grabbed for Lathe. It’s so loud… Holy fuck. Eren’s hands were shaking from the shock… His whole body was. That was scary.

Lathe wrapped his arms tightly around him, holding him close and slowly starting them for the house. “It’s okay Eren, you’re alright. Let’s just chill inside for a little bit, you’re a bit shaken up from falling like that. It’s okay, let’s just get in the house.” I could use a minute, too. He let out a small sigh of relief as they entered the dry kitchen, closing his umbrella, taking the camera from Eren’s shaking hands and putting the strap on it. He hung up his coat and kicked off his boots, grabbing his bag and moving towards the island. “I’m just… gonna put our dry stuff in my bag. I’ll put my computer and stuff upstairs. Can’t chance that getting wet.” He padded over to the stairs, passing Nate on the steps. “I’ll be back down in a minute, but we’re gonna stay inside until we leave, okay? Eren scared us to death for the second time in two hours and fell out of a tree. He’s okay, we caught him… But yeah.”
Nate nodded, his expression one of understanding. “It’s cool. Wait, the second time? What was the first?” What happened to compete with falling out of a tree? Another question—why was he in a tree while it’s raining?

Lathe ran a hand through his hair, letting out a heavy sigh. “This morning, before any of us woke up, he went outside and was eating oranges by the pool, sitting at the edge of the deep end. Twenty feet deep, and he can’t swim… Scared the hell out of me when I saw him over there. If he fell in…” Lathe’s face was stony, ignoring the image that flashed past his mind. “It’s been two hours max and Levi and I are already worried sick.” He tried to keep his tone light, but it didn’t follow too brightly to his eyes.

Nate gave him a sympathetic look, patting his shoulder. “Well, he’s okay right now. That’s what matters. You go and do what you need to, and I’ll make sure to keep an eye on the both of them.”

He smiled faintly, going down the stairs to the kitchen. That’s too much stress for everyone already, and it’s not even noon… He stopped short in the doorway of the kitchen, his eyes wide as he watched Blake pressing on Eren’s chest as he laid down on the floor, whining loudly. Levi, though he speaking to him and trying to get his attention, wasn’t getting anywhere with him. Fuck. “Lathe!” Nate called over his shoulder loudly, moving forward and kneeling next to Eren, his hand on his arm. Think, what do I say? He looks far away...

“Eren, can you hear me?” I don’t think he can… I can’t tell. “Eren, everything’s alright. Please, be okay.” I don’t know what I’m doing… “Eren, you’re fine. If this is about falling from the tree… Lathe and Levi caught you, and you’re okay. They’re not going to let anything happen to you. We all won’t let anything hurt you. Come on, please don’t panic. It’s okay.”

Levi was on the floor, his arm wrapped under Eren’s head and rubbing his left arm. “Come on Eren, talk to me please… Tell me what’s wrong.” Shit… He just slid right down to the floor as soon as Lathe left. Levi watched as Eren made no move to talk, his eyes still wide from the shock. He’s not there anymore… Fuck. “LATHE!” Levi picked his head up and screamed for him. “Come on Eren, fight it… Don’t panic please… You’re okay, you’re in my arms now… Talk to me, please!” Levi’s eyes were wide as he saw Eren’s body tense up from a loud crack of thunder which shook the house. He can hear us… He can hear the thunder… He’s still scared of it...

Lathe’s head shot up as he heard Levi shout from downstairs, abandoning his bag as he ran down the stairs, his socked feet sliding across the tile in the kitchen, his eyes wide as he took in Eren’s prone form. He’s in shock. He immediately moved to kneel next to him, looking him in the eyes and brushing hair away from his face, one hand on his arm, the other holding his cheek. Fuck. He’s barely there. “Eren, it’s me, Lathe. It’s all alright, I’ve got you. You don’t have to worry about anything, I swear. You're fine.” He felt Eren tense as another rumble of thunder sounded…oh. “Eren, you don’t have to be scared of the thunder. I know it sounds really scary, but it’s nothing to be worried about. It’s just a sound. Don’t worry, please. You're okay.” Please be okay.

“......fall....” Eren’s lips barely moved as he spoke. Blake was whining still but he noticed Eren’s
Eren's body started to calm down and his large blue eyes looked up to Lathe. Eren’s body started to shake again at another loud rumble.

Fall? Is he scared because it made him fall? “This isn’t an attack is it?” Levi asked Lathe, his hand still gently rubbing Eren’s arm to get him to calm down. *His heart rate isn’t as rapid now… The thunder’s getting quieter….* “It’s the thunder….” Levi whispered and moved his hand down to lace his fingers with Eren’s.

Lathe shook his head in response to the first question, his voice quiet. “He’s in shock, and yeah.” He spoke up, giving Eren a faint smile. “No no no, Eren, the thunder isn’t going to make you fall anymore. It just surprised you the first time. You did fall, but we caught you. It’s not going to do anything like that again, put you in danger. It’s a loud noise, and it just caught you off guard the first time. It’s all okay now. We’ve both got you. Don’t worry, please.” He pressed a kiss to his forehead, pleading with him. *He’s calming down the littlest bit… That’s good...*

Eren blinked a few times, his pupils dilating to the amount of light in the room. His eyes moved to start focusing on Lathe. “.....D-Dad…?” Eren’s voice was quiet, and Blake stopped whining completely, knowing that Eren had come back to them. *What happened….* His whole body shook as he heard another crack of thunder, his eyes instantly clouding with fear as he looked up to Lathe, but he couldn’t tear his gaze away from those moonsong eyes.

Lathe nodded quickly, his voice even and reassuring, relief in his eyes. *Thank God. Now keep him out of shock.* “I’m here, Eren. I’ve got you. The thunder isn’t anything to be afraid of, I promise. Come on, don’t focus on it. It can’t hurt you. I’ve got you. You’re okay.” *Don’t leave us again, Eren. Don’t run yourself into the ground with fear.*

Eren kept his gaze locked onto Lathe’s eyes, his hand wrapping around Levi’s hand. His other reached up to grab onto Blake’s fur. *Blake’s on my chest… He’s grounding me… “....Zoo….?”* Eren asked quietly, the fear fading from his eyes as he put his trust in Lathe’s words. *He’s got me… It won’t hurt me.*

Lathe slowly nodded, relaxing a bit as the fear left Eren’s eyes. He gave him a weary smile. “Yeah, the zoo. You’ll be okay? We’re going to be outside for the most part… If you don't think so we can always go some other time this week.” *I don’t want you to be terrified the entire time… You won't enjoy it, and I don’t want you scared at all...*

Eren slowly shook his head, his eyes still locked onto Lathe’s. “No… I wanna see the lions.” Eren told him and pouted a little bit. *I wanna go… I don’t want to be scared...*
Levi chuckled a little, keeping his fingers intertwined with Eren's. “Of course you do, Brat.” Levi smiled softly. At least he’s back to himself again. He wasn’t there…. For a long time.

Lathe chuckled quietly. How am I supposed to argue? “Okay, if you're sure, we can still go. Of course.” Lathe moved to sit back on his heels, helping Eren sit up. “I still need to go and finish packing up my bag upstairs, but then we can go, okay? Make sure you're all ready. I'll be back in two minutes.” Lathe stood, pulling Eren, and subsequently Levi, up with him, letting him go and moving back to the stairs. That makes it three...

Eren nodded and he stayed glued to Levi’s side as he waited for Lathe to come back. He seemed better, still like a six year old with how much he was talking their ears off about the pictures of the fruits. “They look really cool!” Eren said and showed them off to Levi multiple times. I wanna take a bunch of pictures. He looked a lot better after his shock left him, and he wasn’t freaking out, the thunder had passed.

Lathe reappeared after a moment, his bag slung over his shoulder. He went to put on his rain jacket again, lacing his boots back up. “Alright, we can go whenever you're ready.” He listened to the rain for a moment. The thunder’s over with for now… Good.

Eren nodded and moved to show Lathe the various pictures. “Dad look! Look at the oranges! They look so pretty!” Eren smiled, his camera securely attached to him thanks to the strap. They look so cool! Even after falling…. It was worth it. They look so good.

Lathe looked at the pictures with a warm smile. They do look really good. I dunno if it was worth the worry though… “They’re really good, Eren. But I don't think you should climb any more trees while it’s so wet and rainy. There’ll be a lot of good photographic material where we're going, too, so don't hesitate to take pictures of anything. Including things that aren't the animals.” You dunno when you'll see something and want a picture; lots of odd things make for great photos.

Eren nodded and he turned the camera off as he got his phone off the charger. “Okay, I’m ready!” Eren said happily, a huge grin on his face. I wanna see the lions!!

Nate smiled, fishing the car keys out of the pocket of his rain jacket. “Alright, let's get going then!” He grabbed an umbrella as he walked to the door past the hooks on the wall, unlocking the car and hopping into the driver’s seat. It was a short drive, and Nate pulled into the empty parking lot, turning off the car right near the front. “We’re here, and apparently no one else is. We must be the only people around here crazy enough to do this.” Nate grinned, slamming his door shut behind him and sauntering up to the ticket window, his umbrella keeping him mostly dry. “Hello! Four adult admissions please.” He turned to Lathe and Eren before they could interject. “I know what you're about to say, and no, they're not going to give you a kid’s admission because you're internally six years old.”
Lathe beamed, a glint in his eye. You know me too well already. “You sure? Maybe if we asked nicely.”

Levi just shook his head sighing. “Lathe… Just give up, you know it’s not gonna happ—”

“But Leeeeviiii!” Eren jumped onto Levi’s back, catching him by surprise as he did so. Eren was giggling the whole time. This is so much fun already! Eren’s smile was huge as Levi held him up.

Levi looked up to Eren, rolling his eyes. “Nevermind… I guess you can ask for the brat.” He made sure to keep a hand on his umbrella as well as Eren to make sure he didn’t fall. He’s starting to get heavy… Fuck.

Lathe nudged Nate over the littlest bit so he could talk to the woman at the desk, smiling and polite. “Excuse me Miss, I hope it’s not too much trouble, but my son and I both happen to be six-year-olds at heart. Could we both have a child’s admission, please?” Just be nice about it. You never know.

The woman at the desk quirked an eyebrow at him, trying to stifle her laughter. Did he really just…? “That just made my day. You know what, alright.” She tapped at her keyboard, printing four tickets and handing them to him. “Here you are. Have a nice day, and enjoy your visit!”

Lathe beamed and thanked her, handing out the tickets as they walked past the window. He looked to Levi. “Y’know, all I had to do was ask.” A little humour and manners can get you a long way. It gets you a kid’s admission at the zoo. That’s a plus!

Levi just watched with a furrowed expression. “I can’t believe that actually worked.” He made sure Eren was aware he was going to put him down before he did so. I can’t believe he just did that… And got away with it.

Eren raced in through the gates and looked around as various employees walked around in different directions towards different exhibits. Where are they going? He kept his eyes trained on the woman walking to the right-most walkway. “What’s that?” Eren asked, walking towards the kid section of the zoo, following the lady with long brown hair.

Nate studied Lathe with an incredulous look. “I don’t know how you just got away with that, but
okay.” He kept an eye on Eren as he scampered away into the kid’s section of the zoo, following him and making sure not to lose sight of him. You’ve gotten into enough trouble for one day. We’re not letting you get lost, too.

Eren followed the lady with the long hair as she walked through the kid’s section towards the back to the Ranch exhibit.

She turned and smiled as she saw Eren. “Hi there! You wanna come and pet some of the goats?” She asked kindly with a wide smile, her hand motioning to come towards the gate. They’re the first ones here… and I need to feed the goats, maybe he’ll want to feed one?

Eren frozen, unsure if he should follow this strange woman. What do I do? Eren looked back towards the three following him, his eyes showed a slight trace of fear. What do I do? She wants me to pet the goats? Is that okay? Can I do that?

Lathe walked up to Eren and nodded, nudging his elbow. “Go ahead if you want. We’re right behind you.” You’re fine, don’t worry.

Eren slowly crept towards the gate, which the kind lady was holding open for him. He was instantly greeted by five goats, coming right up to him and sniffing him. Eren froze in a second, unable to move as he was slowly surrounded by the goats. What are they? Their eyes look so weird. Eren reached up to grab his camera, turning it on and starting to take pictures as more and more goats surrounded him as the lady looked for food.

“I know, I know, I’m getting your food! Don’t worry.” The lady responded to the constant bleats of the goats that followed her towards the food. Must they be so noisy so early?

Levi just chuckled as Eren picked up the camera. “You’ve certainly made a monster.” He followed Eren into the pen, the goats surrounding him as well before the lady put out the food, all of them running away towards the filled containers. “Enjoying taking pictures, Brat?”

Eren nodded, moving with the goats to take more pictures of them.

Lathe grinned as he followed them into the pen. I certainly have. Good thing it has an insane amount of space on it. He walked closer to the goats, petting one on the head as it looked up from it’s food at him. “You’re allowed to pet them, Eren.” Go ahead! They’re nice.
Eren looked up from his camera, slowly reaching out towards one of the goats, jumping back in surprise as it quickly lifted it’s head and licked his fingers. What the hell!? Eren watched the goat, moving a hand to pet it’s head, giggling as the goat leaned into the pets. “It’s cute… Why’d it lick me?”

Lathe chuckled as more goats started to sniff at his legs. “That means he likes you.” His eyes were bright. They’re all too cute...

Levi watched Eren pet the goats that came up to him. “Pet them all you want, but you are washing your hands as soon as we leave this pen, Brat.” Levi crossed his arms as he looked to Eren’s hands, blackened from petting them. He looked to see Lathe and Nate petting the goats as well. “Correction, you are all washing your hands.” Levi kept his arms crossed even as the goats bleated, trying to get him to pet them. They won’t shut up either… Good god, but I can put up with it, Eren’s giggles are worth it.

Eren watched the goats try to get Levi to pet them. “Levi, be nice and pet them… They’re asking kindly!” Eren pouted and squatted down to pet two more goats that bounded up to him, giggling as one of the smaller ones fell over. Oh my god, that was adorable. “Come on Levi!” Eren whined as he gave Levi a pointed glare.

Levi only sighed, reaching down to pet the persistent goat. There. You happy now? You’re lucky, the only reason I’m petting you is cause I can’t refuse that pout, or that angelic voice… Fuck, I am way too into him.

Eren picked his head up as a sharp whinny sounded through the ranch. Eren watched as the lady let out a miniature horse. “What is that?” He asked as he picked up his camera again to take more pictures, completely interested in the new animal. It’s so small… It looks so cute!

Lathe looked up at the sound, smiling. “That’s a miniature horse. Regular horses would be about as tall as you if not taller, and people ride them. Usually littler kids ride on miniatures, though.” His expression shifted. ...something tells me he’s going to ask...

Eren’s eyes lit up in fascination. “Can I ride one?” Eren asked, his eyes shining with curiosity and happiness. I wanna ride a big one!

Called it. Lathe smiled, nodding to the woman. “It’s okay with me, but you should ask the woman nicely.” I dunno if he’s able to, if he’s too big or what...
The woman chuckled shaking her head. “No, no one’s allowed to ride the miniatures. I’m sorry, maybe if you convince your Dad you can ride a bigger horse when you go home.” The lady smiled kindly and let Eren take a bunch of pictures of the small horse in front of him.

Levi sighed. “You do realize he’s going to ask to ride one as soon as we step foot in our own house… Right?” Levi asked Lathe as he went to stand by them, letting Eren have his photo op with the horse and the goats. **We should take him away to see the rest of the zoo… So he doesn’t run out of space for things he really wants to see.**

Lathe ran a hand through his dark hair, smiling and shaking his head. “I know. I’m never going to hear the end of this until I get him on a horse, am I?”

“Nope.” Levi responded before he turned to Eren taking even more pictures. “Eren, don’t you wanna go see the lions?” He smirked as Eren’s head shot up. **That got his attention.**

“Lions?” Eren asked, getting up and abandoning the goats and miniature horse to go by Levi. “I wanna see the lions!” Eren said excitedly, jumping up and down. **I wanna go see them!**

“It makes sense now, why he got the kid ticket.” *He’s jumping around like he ate pure sugar for breakfast.* Nate laughed, leading them out of the pen. “I think the lions are in this direction.” He walked them down a little ways, stopping to watch the meerkats. He noticed a shuttle nearby, the driver just chillin’ behind the wheel. “One sec.” He nodded to Lathe, moving to talk to the driver. “Excuse me, sir? Is it alright if you drive us to a few exhibits?”

The man looked up from his iphone. “Of course, where you looking to go Mr. Ruess?” The man gave a kind smile, looking over towards the direction Nate came from. “If I may ask… Is that Eren Yeager?” He asked as he saw a hood come down, revealing brown shaggy hair.

Nate looked back at them, giving the man an easy smile. “Yeah, it is. And we were thinking of heading to see the lions.” *I didn’t take you as the type to recognise either of us.* “I’ll grab them, one sec.” Nate walked back over to the group. “Our ride’s here!” He nodded to the shuttle, leading them onto it.

The man turned to face them in his seat a map in hand. “Alrighty, I know we’re going to see the lions, but what else do we wanna see? I can make a good route for us.” The man smiled more as Eren came up to point out a bunch more exhibits for the man to circle and make a route for them. “Alright, so then to the aviary first!” The man waited for them all to sit down and he started the shuttle to go through the empty no wet pathways. The man noticed that it was fairly quiet in the back. **That’s not right, you’re at the zoo! You’re supposed to be excited!** “So Mr. Yeager, how long
are you guys going to be in LA?” He looked over his shoulder for a split second before turning back to the pathway in front of him.

Eren looked up as he heard the man refer to him as if he were his father. “Umm… just Eren is fine, please… and um we just got in LA so we’ll be here awhile.” Eren smiled softly, leaning his head into Levi’s shoulder, gripping his hand. *I don’t want to think about my father right now.*

Levi noticed Eren’s shift and knew exactly what had caused it. “It’s okay Eren, I’m right here. Nothing is going to happen to you.” His voice was a soft whisper, ending with a kiss on Eren’s temple. *We don’t need you to panic here. No, that won’t do.*

Eren nodded, waiting only a few moments before they stopped in front of a large glass building, which looked almost like it housed an entire rainforest inside.

The kind man turned off the engine after parking the shuttle. He picked up his walkie-talkie “Hey Martha?” “Yeah?” “What count are we at for guests?” “Four, Two adults and two adults with six year old mentalities.” “Ah, okay, great, thanks. Call me if we get any more.” The man smiled and hopped off the vehicle to join their group. “I hope you don’t mind me joining, but no one’s here, so I can walk around with you guys. My name’s Andy by the way.” He held his hand out for them to shake.

Lathe shook his hand, grinning. “I’m Lathe. And it’s fine, you can join us. Doesn't sound like there’s much else going on to do.” ... *This place is completely empty. I thought it would be sparse at best, but not like this!*

Nate similarly shook his hand. “Call me Nate, please. And yeah, I didn't think it’d be this empty. I’d expected a smattering of people at most, but not just us.” *Getting the whole zoo to ourselves is really neat, though.*

“Yeah, well it was thundering pretty bad earlier-” Andy was cut off as the rain decided to downpour even more on them. “Well, let’s get inside, shall we?” He asked and opened the door for everyone. *Grace would so flip about me meeting these guys.*

Eren smiled and scampered into the building. *It just started to downpour… what the actual hell?* Eren looked at the glass that separated them from the hundreds of birds that flew around and adorned countless tree branches. *They’re so cool!* He instantly stepped forward and started to snap photo after photo.
Levi chuckled a bit. *He does realize that we can go walk around in there right?* He moved in towards Andy, holding his own hand out. “Levi, it’s nice to meet you. I’m Eren’s-” Levi was cut off before he could finish.

“Boyfriend, I know. My daughter, Grace, doesn’t stop talking about how adorable you guys are. She makes me watch every video he posts, he’s got quite the voice.” Andy’s smile was kind, and he watched Eren snap photos through the glass wall, completely ignoring the wall. *I wonder if I can take a picture with him? Grace would flip.*

Lathe eyed Eren with amusement, stepping over to him. “Eren…” He pointed to the door a little ways to their right. “Would you like to go inside?” *That’s a thing we can do, ya know.*

Eren looked up to see the door. “YES!” His reply was immediate and he was inside the door in second and already taking a bunch of photos of different birds at different angles. *They’re so pretty.* He smiled widely as a red macaw landed near him and stared right into the camera. *AWESOME!!!* Eren’s camera constantly clicking as he took more and more pictures.

Levi followed them inside, keeping pace with Andy, a barely perceptible blush on his face. *Oh no, I never thought about the fact that people probably ship us now. One is plenty…* He glanced to Lathe and then to Eren, smirking at his enthusiasm. “That’s very nice of you to say. It’s odd to think sometimes that Eren has as many fans as he does.” *I wonder if Eren’d give him an autograph for his daughter? She sounds like she’d love one.*

“Well Grace has been a fan since he put up his first video, she followed Nate, she loved his concert that she went to about a week ago in LA. We had a good time… do you think they would take a picture with me? Grace would never believe me unless I gave her proof…” Andy trailed off as he rubbed the back of his neck, watching as a large bird flew down to land on Levi’s shoulder.

Eren instantly turned his camera to take a bunch of pictures of the colorful bird on Levi’s shoulder. “Don’t you dare move.” Eren told him, snapping a shit ton of pictures, from various angles. *It’s so pretty… and it looks cool on Levi’s shoulder.*

Levi stood deathly still, warily eyeing the bird on his shoulder. He flinched when it turned it’s head to look at him, shutting his eyes. *Eyes are shiny, don’t peck at my eyes or anything, thank you very much.* He opened his eyes again after a moment, trying to relax and giving Eren a small smile. *...Okay, it is a pretty bird, I give it that. “...it’s kinda heavy.”*

Nate chuckled. “Yeah, I think a bird as big as your head would weigh a little more than nothin’.” *That is really cool. Where’s my shoulder bird?*
Lathe looked over from a quiet conversation with the parakeet perched on top of his head, grinning widely. *I wonder if he’d do a pirate impression if I asked him to. Or I could photoshop those pictures later. ...both. “Hey Levi, say something pirate-ey!”*

*Are you serious. “...arg?” What the hell do you want from me?*

Eren pressed a few buttons on the camera. *“Do it again!”* He called excitedly and zoomed the video onto Levi with the large Red-lored Amazon on his shoulder. He smiled as the bird spread its wings out, flapping them a few times before settling again on Levi. It gave a quiet squawk as Eren came a bit closer. *I got that on Video! That’s so cool!*

*I’m on video now, aren’t I? ...Better make it count. Think, what’s something pirate-ey to say? Levi gave the camera a tough look, his voice deep and menacing. “Arrrrrgh. Trying to steal me booty, ar ye?”*

*“Aaargh, tryin’ to steal me booty, are ye?”*

Levi practically jumped out of his skin, nearly tripping over his own feet as the bird jumped off from his shoulder, away from his stumbling form. *Oh my god it can talk. “Did it… Did it just… Really?”* Levi had a hand over his heart, trying to calm down. *Nearly gave me a fucking heart attack.*

Eren’s laughter filled the whole place as he kept the camera trained on Levi’s face, looking at his reaction. *“Oh my god… That was priceless!”* Eren stopped the video before doubling over in laughter.

Andy lost his composure when he saw Eren start to roll around on the floor from laughing so hard. *So Eren’s one of the six year olds? “That was pretty good, and yeah, it did just talk.”* He wiped a single tear from his eye as his own hearty laughter died down.

Lathe laughed loudly, nearly joining Eren on the floor, the parakeet flying from his head as he doubled over. *“Oh my god, Levi, the look on your face… That was too perfect!” That was the greatest!*

Nate laughed, following the bird’s flight back up to the trees. *“That was too good! You looked*
absolutely terrified!” He composed himself after a second, looking over as a bird flew past his face. “Whoa!” He stepped back a bit, following the small blue bird as it landed next to Eren’s head, looking at him with curiosity, as if to say ‘Why are you on the floor?’

Eren’s laughter stopped almost immediately as he slowly moved his camera to take a picture of the small bird, his eyes full of amazement. *Holy shit, it’s so close.* Eren set the camera on the ground, reaching his right hand to get a picture of the bird on the floor.

The small bird leaned in to inspect the lens quizzically, hopping over and jumping up on top of the camera, inspecting it. It looked to his finger frozen on the button, slowly walking onto his finger.

Eren’s eyes were wide as he watched the bird. “Ummm… D-Dad?” Eren watched the bird with wide eyes. *It’s touching me… What do I do?! Do I keep it on my finger? Or do I get it off? Wait… How am I supposed to get it off?*

Lathe slowly approached, so as not to startle the bird. He knelt down on the floor, sliding the camera from his grasp and positioning himself, adjusting the zoom. “Smile, Eren.” He took multiple pictures of the bird on his finger, Eren smiling in the background with his eyes still set on the bird, full of wonder. *These are so going online.* He made sure he had at least one of the bird looking at camera as well before he spoke again quietly. “Here, let's stand you up. Easy now, don't want to scare him.” He helped Eren get to his feet, smiling at the bird. *That is really cool.* “You okay with him there, or do you want to let him go?” *You need that hand for pictures.* “We could always see if he'd move to your shoulder.”

Eren watched as Andy came up to him, sticking a finger out for the bird to grab onto, which it did and he moved his finger slowly to Eren’s shoulder. The bird hopped off onto his shoulder, moving closer towards Eren’s neck, snuggling into the fabric of Eren’s hood. “Ummm…. Okay then.” He shivered as he felt the light feathers against his neck. *It feels weird, but the bird seems comfortable… I think?* “Can I have my camera?”

Lathe handed it back to him, slowly moving the strap back around his neck, trying not to disturb the bird. “Careful with the strap; don't yank it off while your little friend’s still there.”

Levi studied the bird on his shoulder, his face expressionless. “He really likes you.” He watched as it nuzzled into Eren’s jacket, his hair. *...Lucky.*

Andy nodded. “Yeah, those little guys are social birds… They like to stick around other birds, but they also find ways to land on people and make themselves comfortable.” *Well I guess being a tour guide for them isn’t really that bad I guess.*
Nate nodded. *Explains why one was making a nest out of Lathe’s hair a minute ago.* He looked to Levi, catching the odd look in his eye. He nudged his arm, his voice quiet, one eyebrow quirked. “Is that jealousy I see, Levi?”

Levi blushed furiously, stuttering a bit as he quickly responded, his voice hushed. “W-what? Why the hell would I be jealous of a damn bird? Yeesh.” He glared at Nate. *Not cool, man. And it’s a bird. It’s not exactly like it counts as competition.*

Lathe looked up, a mischievous grin on his face. He had heard their exchange, watching Levi’s embarrassed expression. “What’s wrong, Levi? Afraid you’ve got some competition?”

Eren picked his head up looking over to Lathe. “Dad… Do you really need to tease him?” Eren asked before turning back to walk a little farther in, another small blue bird coming towards him and landing on the other side of his head, nuzzling up to his neck. *Their feathers are so soft… It feels so weird against my neck.* Eren spent the next half an hour snapping photos and videos of the birds, coming back to the group, wanting to go see the next exhibit. The only problem was he now had five blue birds on him, one on his head and two on either shoulder. “How do I get them off?” Eren asked and looked at his shoulders.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow, moving his hand and letting one step onto his fingers. “I don't think scaring them off is a good idea. Maybe if…” He brought his hand down and carefully lifted it straight up quickly, effectively helping the bird take off for the trees. “That works.” He grinned at the one on Eren’s head, reluctant to leave for Lathe’s hand. “Come on, I know his hair has serious nesting potential, but he kinda needs it.” He helped the rest of the birds take off, smiling and brushing off his hands. “Alright, where to next?” *This is great!*

Andy pulled the map out of his pocket. “To the big cats, ready?” He asked and they all made it outside without the birds chasing them out of the doors. He pulled his hood up as he stepped outside to get the shuttle started up again.

Eren’s hurried nod as he jumped into the shuttle made just about everyone chuckle from his childlike excitement. *I wanna see the big cats! I wanna take more pictures! All the pictures!!* Eren couldn’t keep himself still, always shifting in his seat, even though it was a quick ride to see two of the four big cats in the park. The snow leopard and the tiger enclosures were basically right next to each other, so they stopped at the former first. Eren didn’t even wait for the shuttle to stop, he hopped off while it was still moving, seeing the white fur of the leopard from where he was. *It’s outside!! Yay!*

Levi smirked, waiting for the shuttle to stop before going after Eren. “Oi, be careful, Brat.” He
gave him a small smile, going right up to the edge of the enclosure, watching as it started to walk towards them. *Huh. I kinda figured it’d ignore us.* It seemed to look directly at Eren, tilting it’s head.

Lathe sauntered over, looking over and studying the uniforms of the people working there. *Green, green, and more green.* “Y’know, I didn’t really notice it before… But all the animals seem to love Eren. It’s probably the green coat, actually. They recognize the color from all the other workers here.” *That’d help get him some reeeeeally good photos.*

Nate grinned, watching the snow leopard’s movements. “That’s great! Now they won’t just ignore us and come up to say hi.” He nudged Eren’s elbow. *That’s really cool!*

Andy chuckled. “Well, that’s certainly a safe assumption, Charlie probably wants his food, he’s getting fed soon, so he’s probably asking for it.” He watched as Eren crouched down to take more pictures of Charlie just as the leopard moved with him, wondering what the black box was and if it contained food for him or not. *Yup, he’s always got food on his mind.*

Eren giggled as Charlie rolled over and Eren got some really good pictures of him. “He’s so pretty… And he’s really big… He’s bigger than a house cat!” Eren said in complete amazement. *He’s staring right at the camera too! His eyes are gorgeous!*

*...okay, I admit, that is pretty cute.* Levi quirked an eyebrow at him. “You know there are cats way bigger than this too, right? He’s downright *tiny* compared to some of the others they have.” *You think he’s really big? Just wait.*

Eren paused, his head slowly turning his head to Andy. “You have *bigger* ones?” *Like… Much bigger? Or only slightly bigger?*

Andy smiled and nodded. “Yes, Zeus is at least three times bigger than Charlie.” *So he doesn’t know how big a lion is… Well this’ll be fun, Zeus likes to come right up to the glass when we’re around. He’s a big show off.*

Eren’s eyes widened with curiosity. “Really?” His eyes lit up like a fucking Christmas tree for the third time today. *I wanna see it!* “Can we go see Zeus?” He asked and started to get up, ready to run back to the shuttle again, completely missing that Charlie was being fed by a keeper.

Lathe reached out for Eren’s shoulder, his eyes bright. “Slow down a sec, Eren. We’ve got time.
We’ve got nothing but time. We’ve got time to kill!” He grinned wider. *There was a reason they gave me a child ticket.* “Let’s stick around and watch the keepers feed Charlie a bit, okay? I want to see this.” *We don’t know the next time we’ll be back- which we probably will be at some point, given how much we’re going to be in LA now.*

Levi rolled his eyes, still smirking. “Really Lathe?” *Well, him being internally six years old as well isn’t exactly wrong…* He shook his head, watching the keepers feeding Charlie. *That is really cool.*

Eren watched as Charlie was given a large piece of meat and he grabbed it in his mouth, scampering away from the keeper and running up one of the tall ‘trees’ and lounging on it as he ate. *That’s so cool!* Eren touched a few buttons on the camera before he started to take a multitude of pictures. He was so engrossed in taking pictures he didn’t even realize that Nate and Levi both pulled their phones out to take pictures of him. *Charlie’s so pretty. His coat looks cool even though he’s soaked.*

Levi tapped at his phone, adding a caption to the picture he just took. *‘That moment when a snow leopard is bigger than a housecat *GASP*’* He smirked as he added it to the growing collage. *Tumblr is going to love this: An excited Eren looking so damn adorable it shouldn’t be legal.* He smirked, walking up next to him and nudging him after Charlie had eaten and decided to simply lounge on the tree. “If you want, we can go see Zeus now.” *Charlie’s just chilling, and you have a hundred pictures of him.*

Andy chuckled. “We’ll get to see Zeus soon, we’re closer to Zelda. Let’s go see her first, let’s get back to the shuttle.” I wonder what he’ll think of Zelda? Knowing her… She’s gonna run up to the glass when she sees me.

“Who’s Zelda?” Eren’s curiosity was instantly spiked as he hopped off to follow Andy, stomping in all the puddles on his way. *Good call on the shorts Lathe! I get to stomp in all of them!!* 

Nate smiled, trying to avoid the splashes. “Zelda’s a tiger, and she’s expecting Cubs soon. She really likes people, so you’ll get a good look at her.”

Andy nodded in agreement firing up the shuttle as Eren excitedly hopped in. “Come on, Levi! I wanna go see Zelda!” Eren bouncing up and down in a seat. *I wanna see how big she is!*

Levi rolled his eyes with a small smile as Lathe practically skipped over to follow Eren onto the shuttle. *You two are such children.* “Alright, I’m comin’.” He stepped onto the shuttle and took the seat next to Eren, his eyes brightening as he took in his excited expression. *...seriously, though.*
Andy drove them around a short bend and around another large enclosure, getting close to another glass viewing area that was sheltered. “Alright, well, gonna warn you, she can’t break the glass, but she gets excited around people.” *Hope she doesn’t scare the shit out of any of them.*


Lathe walked up to the glass next to him, peering around the enclosure. “Huh. I don't see her.” *She’s gotta be around here somewhere...*

Levi walked up on Eren’s other side, looking around, noticing that Nate had hung back just a bit, an expectant look on his face. *What...*

Andy stayed back where Nate was. *She’s gonna scare the shit out of them... Isn’t she? She loves doing that.* He watched as Eren turned his head back for only a split second missing where she had come out of hiding from, turning it back to the enclosure, seeing the large tiger burling towards them at full speed and jumping up onto her hind legs, her front two paws situated on the glass near Lathe’s head, her whole body stretched out right in front of Eren.

*Holy... Shit...* Eren pretty much fell back, his whole body shaking at the sight of the large tiger staring him down through the glass. *It’s so big... It’s so fast...* Eren could only watch with wide and frightened eyes as Zelda whipped her tail around inspecting the five men who had come to visit her. *I can’t get up... My legs feel like jello.*

Levi jumped, bringing his arms up defensively as he looked up to the huge tiger staring at them. *Holy Fuck!* His head turned as he heard Eren fall to the ground, immediately moving to help him up. *Smooth catch, Levi. Smoooooooth. Get him the fuck up.* “You okay, Eren?” He knelt next to him, taking his hands and tugging him gently to his feet.

Eren had to regain his bearings before he turned his head back over to Levi and nodded, he slowly got up, watching as Zelda slowly came down on all fours, this time looking up at them, not down. She came right up to the glass brushing her large side and head against it. “She’s pretty...” It took only another second for Eren to get his hold on the camera and start to take striking pictures of her posture. *She’s beautiful!..... But terrifying... Why did she do that?*
Lathe could only stare at her with wide eyes, perfectly still as her large paws hit the glass near his head, studying her face as a grin slowly cracked across his face. ...Cooool. He turned as he saw Levi move to help Eren up, concerned as Eren stumbled for a second on his feet before he was back to taking pictures. ...aaaaand we’re back to normal. Zelda really is something, isn’t she? Lathe’s eyes traced the curve of her stomach. Yep, she’s definitely got quite a few tiny tigers in there. Any day now, huh?

Nate had his phone at the ready as Eren and Levi jumped in shock, snapping the picture quickly and typing away. ‘Scaredy Cats’ He chuckled, posting it and putting his phone back before approaching the glass, a wide grin on his face, joking with her through the glass. “Now was that really necessary, Zelda? This is why I can never bring anyone with, you always scare them off. Even if it is hilarious.” That was great!

Andy started to chuckle at his comment. “She loves to see the shocked faces… It’s quite common.” He went up to the glass and put his hands on the glass near her. She sat down, balancing on her back haunches and putting her large paws right on top of Andy’s hands. “Well she’s still a playful tiger at heart.” As she was when she was bottle fed, always jumping all over the place.

Eren moved closer towards them, snapping countless photos of her as she ‘played’ through the glass with Andy, a smile across the man's face as she played along. She’s really cute. He spent a good amount of time getting her at just the right angle to give her large sides the spotlight, especially when she laid down in front of the glass on her side, stretching out fully on the ground her tail whipping around as Eren took even more pictures.

Levi could only watch as Eren constantly moved around, either giggling or in complete concentration as he was taking photos. “You do realize that card is going to be full in like.. An hour… If not sooner right?” His arms were folded across his chest as he sent an incredulous look towards Lathe. He’s taking like a thousand pictures of everything!

Lathe watched Eren for a moment, both his eyebrows raised as he heard the rapid click of the camera. “I brought four of those cards for the entire two weeks, and apparently that much space isn't enough. Somehow- someway- you're managing to fill them up really quickly. Eh, I can always back stuff up onto my computer and then wipe the chips, if need be. At this rate, I'm going to need to get you a better lens for that.” He chuckled, shaking his head as Eren barely seemed to hear him. He’s too busy taking pictures of the beautiful tiger. Understandable.

Levi just shook his head, finally managing to convince Eren to move along as Zelda laid down for a nap five minutes later. Andy continued to drive them around the large bend, stopping to allow Eren to take pictures of the momma and baby hippo for literally a solid twenty minutes. Well at least he can’t fall in with them. He whipped out his phone as he saw Eren leaning over the rail to take more photos. ‘Don’t fall in!’ He smirked as he posted the beautiful captioned photo to Tumblr, which of course was loving every bit of Eren as he took picture. God… He’s got to at least
be breaking some sort of law for being that adorable. Levi kept a watchful eye as they continued
to proceed throughout the rest of the zoo, spending around three more hours in the rain as Eren
took thousands of pictures of everything. Eren had a practical field day with Zeus laying right in
front of the glass. He’s gotta be so happy seeing the lions, he’s been standing there, waiting for
Zeus to turn his head just enough to get just the right angle. They had successfully gone through
the Safari section of the zoo getting great pictures of the Chimpanzees, Okapis, Giraffes, Gorillas,
Orangutans, the Elephants and lastly the Zebras. I swear to god, Eren has found his spirit animal.
They were running around their entire enclosure… Eren was running back and forth with them,
snapping pictures the entire time, and of course Lathe just had to join in with him. I thought those
two were going to break their necks… Do you know how slippery it was around the exhibit? Levi
had finally gotten Eren away from the animals and they started towards the exit, Andy driving
them and was pretty happy since he got a picture of all of us together, even selfies with us, which of
course Eren was all into. Of course he was. They were just about to get off the shuttle when
Andy’s walkie-talkie went off. What? Is he needed back? Have people finally joined us in the
rain? Levi wasn’t really paying any attention to the conversation until they turned in the opposite
direction from the exit and back towards the big cat enclosures, stopping in front of Zelda’s
enclosure, and Eren bolting off of the shuttle and towards the crowd of green jackets standing at
the glass of the enclosure. … What? Levi was the last to follow everyone from the shuttle as they
all went to join the mass of green. What the hell? I don’t get it…oh… Oh!

Eren was on his knees taking pictures of five small fluff balls. OH MY FUCKING GOD THEY
ARE SO FUCKING ADORABLE!!! His eyes were wide in fascination as he took picture after
picture of the small fur balls. “Dad… Why are they so small?” Eren eyes didn’t leave the small
bodies that were curled up to Zelda’s side. They’re so cute… Why are they so small? They weren’t
here earlier… Were they?

Lathe knelt down next to him, his eyes sparkling as he looked at the tiny cubs. … Oh my god
they’re so CUTE!!! Lathe quirked an eyebrow at the question, thinking for a second. … how do you
explain that with words? “They’ve just been born, Eren. They’re so teeny because they’re pretty
much as young as you can get, and because if they were much bigger it’d be a lot harder for Zelda
to give birth to them safely.” They’re so tiny and fluffy and adorable and EEEEEEE! They’re too
cute! Lathe beamed at the tiny cubs, watching as they sniffed around at each other and shifted next
to their mother.

Eren was silent for a few moments. So … “Was Zelda that small?” Eren asked, continuing to take
countless pictures. So tiny… But their mom is so big … How the hell does that work? “How long do
they stay small?” Eren finally pried his curious gaze from the tiny cubs to look up to Lathe, his
eyes shining, which would’ve led him to believe Eren was the happiest he had ever been before,
and seemingly unafraid of anything, even to look Lathe in the eye.

Lathe’s eyes were bright as they met Eren’s. … He looks the happiest he’s ever been! He nodded.
“Zelda was once that tiny, yeah. All of us were once tiny, and we grew up to be big and tall. It’s the
same with tigers and lions and elephants and all animals. The cubs won’t stay that small for very
long, because they would need to be big enough to hunt soon and then have cubs of their own.
After a couple years, maybe five ish, they'd be pretty close to how big Zelda is now, or even bigger for the male cubs. But they'll be small for a few months, but they'll be as big or bigger than a housecat after two months at most.” Tigers in the wild have to grow up fast, become independent and mature quickly. They don't have as long a lifespan as we do as humans.

Eren nodded, taking countless pictures, though soon he backed his head away from the camera a bit and stared at it with a furrowed brow. Why won’t it take anymore? Eren clicked a few buttons, trying to figure out why the camera wouldn’t take anymore. Eren looked up to Lathe with a confused look.

Levi sighed, shaking his head. “Did you fill the card in four and a half hours, brat?” Levi let a small smirk spread across his lips.

“You managed what?” Lathe gently took the camera from Eren, conscious of the strap still around his neck as he looked at the display, pressing a few buttons, his eyes wide, speaking under his breath. “Well shit.” He looked up to Eren, handing it back to him with a joking tone. “Congratamalations, Eren. You managed to take 45 thousand pictures over the course of four and a half hours.” I'm gonna need to buy terabyte hard drives while we’re out here to back up all those pictures, aren't I?

“Is that really how many he’s taken?” Nate looked over Eren’s shoulder, his eyebrows shooting up as he saw the ‘memory card full’ message across the screen. That’s… actually kind of impressive that you could manage that many pictures. “I knew you were taking a lot of pictures, but you took that many? Wow.” He looked up to Lathe, smirking. “You’re probably going to need to get more of those things to last him for the entire vacation.” He’s still going to find reason to take nonstop pictures of literally everything.

Lathe sighed and nodded his head, grinning as he slowly shook his head in defeat, his tone sarcastic. “I wonder what made me think 180,000 pictures was more than enough for a two-week vacation.” ...I wonder.

Eren looked up to him and shrugged. I’m hungry… We haven’t had lunch…. “Can we go home?” Eren asked softly, his eyes barely meeting Lathe's for more than a second.

Lathe tilted his head a bit, wearing a confused expression. Huh? “Mind if I ask why you suddenly want to leave? I was just joking you know, it’s totally fine. I’d’ve thought you’d want to spend more time around here, maybe look at something we missed or keep adoring the cubs.” He grinned for a moment. What’s with the sudden mood switch?
Eren was quiet as he looked down. “.... I'm hungry.” I'm really hungry ... It's 2:30~ish... And we ate at like 8 this morning... Fuck I'm really hungry.

Lathe was quiet for an instant before he shrugged, smiling warmly. “Oh, alright. We can go get something to eat. Do you want to go home and eat there, or we could always see what places to eat at around here look good if you like?” Food does sound good right about now. We can go out, but I certainly don't mind making lunch for everyone.

Eren nodded. “I want food.” He was on his feet in a second going to cling to Levi. “I want food Levi!” He whined, which just got him an eye roll. I want food! How can you not be hungry?

Levi sighed, moving to hold him a little better. “Brat, be careful.” His voice was only slightly cold, but his expression soft all the same. Don't randomly jump on people.

Lathe watched him cling to Levi with an odd expression for an instant, chuckling as he stood. “Eren, don't worry, we'll get you food. The question still stands: Eat at home or out in a restaurant?” You gotta pick something.

Levi sighed as he felt Eren’s body go slack against his back. He didn’t just..... He fucking did. “Home... He’s out... Like a fucking light.” How you managed to fall asleep in two seconds I will never know. He shifted so that he wouldn’t drop Eren’s limp form.

Nate looked at Lathe, then back to Eren, his eyes wide. “...is he really?” He looked to Eren’s face, his eyes shut and breathing even. “...oh my god, he is.” How do you do that? He was quiet for a moment. “Is that a thing for him that happens, or...?” ... Or should we be concerned?

Lathe just shrugged, dumbfounded. “...He’s had a very exciting morning, and he’s been hyper for pretty much all of it. I kinda figured he’d at least fall asleep in the car at some point. But right now? ” Falling asleep at the drop of a hat? ...that's actually kinda impressive. “Eh, home it is. You got him, Levi?” Can't have you dropping him.

Levi nodded, his hands reaching around to hold Eren’s ass, to keep him on his back. Yup... Can’t complain, even though he’s getting heavier. Levi managed to hold him fine all the way to the car, and gently put Eren down on the seat, noticing as he sat him back. He’s still drooling... How long will that take to go away? “Hey, Lathe? Can you come look at Eren?” His voice held a hint of worry as he buckled Eren into his seat.
Lathe stepped back to look at Eren, looking concerned to Levi as he reached for his kerchief, wiping away his drool. “The drool? Is that what you’re worried about?” He shrugged as Levi nodded. “It’ll take a little bit for that to go away. A couple days, tops. Then it’ll stop. But it’s a matter of days and not hours, because his seizure was as short as it was. But he’s fine.” Thirty seconds was far from a bad seizure, as far as seizures go... So yeah, a few days max.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Well... This has definitely been a fun two weeks, if Eren’s excited face is anything to go by... And how can it not be? I mean look at it! It’s incredible! Goddammit how can he look so damn sexy yet so fucking innocent at the same time? We’ve basically gone everywhere Nate told us he was going to take us. Eren didn’t care much for the ocean, but that was to be expected since he can’t swim and he refused to go into Nate’s pool the entire time, even though he can stand in the shallow end.... Correction, I can stand in the shallow end. But as we paraded around LA, Eren got even more accustomed to actually sending tweets out, posting pictures on Instagram, and Lathe of course made sure tumblr knew exactly what we were doing... So guess what all that equals... Guess yet? It means fangirls... a lot of fangirls. You have no idea how popular this kid is! I swear we almost couldn’t go anywhere without Eren being stopped and asked to take a picture with him, but I’m pretty sure Nate Ruess and the service dog are a dead give away for Eren.... I can’t really complain though, he didn’t panic and actually enjoyed taking pictures with girls... And some of the guys... Okay, that part I will complain about. Lay off! He’s taken, asshats. Eren also had the camera around his neck the entire time we were out, unless of course he was going on a ride or something, then he would seldom take it off. That being said, you can only imagine how many pictures he had taken...no? Well, let’s see, Lathe had to go shopping for a terabyte worth of storage for his computer, and he comply maxed it out... He filled all four of the 64GB cards... Thrice. In two fucking weeks.... I can’t really complain though, Eren’s having the time of his life, and he seems to feel more comfortable asking questions around all of us which is good, he usually isn’t able to look us in the eye for more than a second, but now it’s more than a few seconds. It’s progress. Nate. Oh god, where do I begin? Nate Ruess: The fucking legend. Yeah, that sounds about right. Damn, he has been the absolute best fucking tour guide ever, like literally ever. He answers all of Eren’s questions, which I feel has been a big help in Eren maintaining eye contact a little longer, but the best is when he brought us to the recording studio, and he took Eren into one of the rooms and showed him how everything worked. We were there for hours, especially after Eren pulled out his violin. I swear he recorded at least 10 violin solos... And they were masterpieces, you have no idea how much I had to hold back that night last week. Eren went right to bed, leaving me hanging, not even a single kiss goodnight. Lathe’s also been messing with his computer and trying to book us some train tickets to get to Wichita... the closest so far he can get us is Topeka... Which isn’t that far of a drive, but then again, our car is in Wichita. He also freaked out for absolutely no reason whatsoever and changed some of our planned day trips around, so instead of staying home and relaxing on the last day of our vacation... We went to the YouTube Space LA. Yeah, Eren’s been pretty excited about this for awhile, but he has no idea what it would be like. We got here, and the place is fucking massive. But... Why the fuck is it so empty?

Eren’s eyes darted around the large open space as they were let in the doors by the receptionist.
“Hello, can I have your Account name please?” She asked kindly to the four of them as they walked in.

Blake following Eren at his side, his eyes also wandering around, sniffed at the floor a few times before seeming to give it his seal of approval. “Ummm… Mine?” Eren asked, rubbing the back of his neck. *Why do they need it?*

Lathe nudged his elbow. “The maker spaces are for the Youtubers who have at least 10,000 subscribers. She’s just checking if you can be in here.” He looked up. “With so many of us, do you need ours, too?” *I know Nate and I both have enough… But mine are really just from instrumentals and the fact Eren’s my son, so…*

Nate shook his head. “I gotta go run a few errands, stay as long as you guys want, I’ll be back when you call me. Don’t call for a taxi, I’ll come get you.” Nate smiled softly, disappearing back behind the glass doors towards the parking lot.

Eren watched him leave. *Oh… He did say he needed to do a few things today… Oh well. “Um… It’s Eren_Yeager…”*

The woman’s eyes widened as she looked up at him. “Are you really him?” She asked almost in disbelief. *Is it really him!?*

Eren nodded, wide-eyed, unsure how to respond, and slightly moving to hide behind Lathe as the woman came around from the desk to greet them. *What do I do?*

Lathe looked to Eren, sending him a warm smile, his voice quiet. “Eren, it’s okay, don’t worry. You’ve been swarmed with fans pretty much these whole two weeks, and I’d thought you were cool with all the attention.” *If not, you’d certainly fooled me. She seems nice, I wouldn’t worry.*

Eren nodded and he came out a little to greet her, slowly reaching out to take her hand and shake it as she introduced herself to him as Margaret. He stayed mostly to Lathe’s side as she walked them through to show them where all the rooms were, and it was basically dead silent, no one really in the building walking around “Why’s it so quiet?” Eren asked as the woman opened the door to the biggest editing room in the Space… Markiplier and Jacksepticeye both looking up as the door was opened.

Lathe froze as he saw them, trying not to completely freak out….*oh my god that's them. What do*
Mark stared at them for a few moments before he recognized Eren. “Oh my god! Are you Eren!?”
Mark instantly got up and bounded over to Eren and gave him a huge hug, the red tips of his hair moving around with every step he took.

Jack stood to follow him, grinning as he moved to them. “Calm down, Mark, you’ll give ‘em a heart attack.” He looked to Eren and beamed, running one hand through his green hair. “You’re Eren Yeager? It’s really nice to meet you! Is it cool if I have a hug?” He held up his arms, though he waited for an answer. Unlike some people I don't want to terrify everyone I meet with over enthusiasm. But at the same time he’s Eren Yeager!!

Eren carefully pried himself from Mark’s arms, moving over to Jack to give him a hug with a smile on his face. Blake stared at Mark, sniffing over him with hard eyes, almost as if he had picked up his glare from Levi himself, who currently had his eyes trained on Eren hugging Jack.

Blake. The perfect excuse. Lathe stepped over to Mark, scratching Blake behind the ears as he spoke, keeping his voice from straying an octave too high. “Sorry ‘bout that, he’s always wary of new people. I'm Lathe, Eren’s dad. Um… Can I have a hug please?” He held out his arms timidly, a hopeful look in his eyes. Please please please!

“Hugs for Days!” Mark said so loudly you would almost consider him shouting as he glomped onto Lathe’s waist. I will always give hugs… They’re awesome.

Eren slowly moved out of Jack’s arms. “Hi… Um… Jack?...or…umm… Sean?” Eren asked, his hands shaking a little as he kept his gaze trained on the floor. I can’t meet him in the eye… I don’t know what to call him… What the hell do I call him? Blake came up to Eren and pawed for attention, getting Eren’s shaking hands to pet him.

Jack gave him a soft smile, understanding. Blake’s for his PTSD. Just be chill. “You can call me whatever you like, Eren. Jack and Sean are both fine, whichever you prefer.” They're both my name, really. Either works just fine.

Eren nodded and glanced over to Lathe and Mark squealing like school girls as they hugged each other. Umm… dad? Are you okay?

Levi just shook his head, watching Mark and Lathe. Lathe’s such a two year old… Or he's just a
huge fanboy. It would explain why literally every liked video on his YouTube channel is related to video games, many of which are let's-plays. Isn't he the guy nearly half of them are from? He deadpanned to them. “I get the feeling you two just became best friends in the past two seconds.” That’s legitimately what it looks like.

Mark slowly pulled away from the hug. “But hugs are awesome!” Mark practically yelled again, moving quickly over to Levi and hugging him around his midsection. I don't feel so short against this guy.

What the hell? ...He’s Lathe all over again. Levi froze, his hands hovering for a second before he lightly returned the hug, just going with it. Just roll with it... I guess.

Eren looked up from his hug with Jack. “Um... What are you guys doing here?” His voice was quiet, keeping his eyes trained on Blake, his hands shaking. They're major YouTube stars.... Like... I'm pretty sure we're in the ..times more’ subscribers section with these two.

Mark’s head swiveled around back to Eren. “Well, I’m showing Jack around LA, and one of the stops was to bring him to the YouTube Space, because he’s never been to one before.” He removed his arms from around Levi, walking back to where they were working originally and shutting down the computer. “What are you guys doing here?” Same thing I would imagine?

Lathe shrugged a bit. “Well, this is our first time in LA, and Nate was showing us around for the past two weeks. This was our last stop before we head back home tonight. Nate just dropped us off really, had some stuffs to do, but we thought we’d check out what was here since Eren and the rest of us are definitely going to be seeing more of LA in the near future, see what’s available for use and such, see if we ran into anyone we recognized...” Lathe rubbed the back of his neck, shifting. They're both literally right the fuck there. Chill. Just don't make it obvious that you pretty much stalk their social media. That could be off-putting. Pretend you're normal. “It’s really cool to actually meet you guys! I just didn't expect this place to be so empty, though. It sounds like it’s just you two around, judging by the fact I can hear the clock ticking two rooms over.” He quirked his eyebrow at the far doors, scanning the room for a second. Seriously, it’s so quiet!

Jack smiled, looking to Eren, his voice warm. “Oh yeah, I heard Nate was showing you around. It’s literally everything Twitter talks about these days, I've seen so many random pictures of you guys floating around. I take it it’s been fun going around? What’ve you been doing all?” ...and yeah, why the hell is it practically abandoned up here?

Eren’s eyes met Jack’s for only a second or two before snapping back to Blake as he whined. I know, I know, I need to calm down. “Well we went to the Zoo, we went to the astronomy place… A bunch of museums, we got to see the Hollywood sign… Um... We went to a...um… A theme
park?...” Eren’s voice was quiet as he spoke, slowly making his way to sit on the floor and pet Blake to calm himself down. *I think they were theme parks.... I don’t know though...

Jack watched as Eren sat on the floor, shifting. *I feel too tall now... I don’t like standing while he’s down there... “That all sounds really cool! Do you remember which park you went to? Universal Studios or Disneyland, maybe?” He’s really nervous, but that’s okay. Let’s just try and see if we can get you to open up a bit.* Jack gave him a small smile.

Eren continued to pet Blake as the dog sat in his lap. “Ummm.... Both... We went to both.” Eren looked up to Jack for a few more seconds, feeling only slightly more comfortable with him. *Will he sit down with me too? He keeps asking questions... What if I can’t answer?*

...*Yeah, me standing while he’s sitting isn’t gonna work.* Jack decided to move to the floor as well, still giving him his space as he sat across from him. “You got to go to both? That’s awesome! Did you go to the Harry Potter portion of Universal Studios? We haven't gotten around to seeing it yet.” *Lucky!*

Eren looked over to him as he got down on the floor. “Y-yeah.” His voice was still quiet and his eyes met with Jack’s for a few more moments before he focused on Blake again. “It was cool... I-I got a cape and a wand and a lot of candy.” Eren’s smile was slowly starting to creep on his face as he remembered walking through it. *It was really cool.*

Lathe looked to Levi, and they both shrugged, moving to sit on the floor next to them, making a small circle with an opening for Mark.

Mark followed suit, sitting between Lathe and Levi, watching as Eren seemed to calm down more with everyone around him at his level and not standing above him. *Well, that’s good, he seems more calm with the rest of us sitting down with him instead of standing up.*

Jack grinned, his eyes shining. *Cooooool. ...now I want a cape.* He looked to Mark, his tone leaving no room for argument. “Mark, we’re going to Universal and checking out all the Harry Potter stuff. I want a cape.” *This is now happening.*

Mark’s grin widened to his ears. “Of course we’re going to Universal! We just didn’t get there yet!” His peppy voice carried through the large room, almost as if he were shouting but not quite. *We’ll get there eventually, don’t worry! I wanna go again too!*
Eren watched them with wide eyes. *They all followed me to the floor... They didn’t need to, oh god are they doing it just because I’m on the floor.... Fuck.* Eren kept his eyes locked on Blake’s vest, not meeting anyone in the eye, not even Lathe.

Jack beamed. “Good, because I would have dragged you there anyway.” He looked to Eren again, his voice and features softening as he noticed Eren’s unease. “What else have you been doing around LA? I remember seeing a lot of pictures of you at the Zoo floating around tumblr.” *I saw a couple of the photos you took of the little tiger cubs- they were so adorable!* “Those pictures you took of the little tiger cubs were really good, the cubs were too adorable!”

Eren slowly turned his head to meet Jack’s gaze. “T-thanks.” He stuttered at first before he opened his mouth again, a smile forming across his lips. “They were really small, and really cute.” *I wonder if we’ll be able to see them when they’re bigger?*

*There it is! He’s smiling.* “What other animals did you see while you were there? What were your favorites?” The conversation carried on for a few more minutes, Jack asking Eren about his time in LA, Eren slowly opening up more and smiling more as time went on.

As the conversation lulled, Lathe spoke up. “How about we go around, see the rest of what’s in the space? I want to know what kinds of sets and recording setups they have around.” *They better have some electronic instruments around... At least a keyboard or two around. I'm probably going to be spending just as much time here as Eren is.*

“Yeah! Come on! Let’s go! I’ll show you guys around!” Mark was to his feet in an instant, waiting for everyone else to follow. *This is gonna be awesome!*

Lathe stood to follow him, Jack shaking his head with a grin on his face as Levi took Eren by the hand to pull him up, walking behind him as he gave them a tour of the space. *These are really nice computers. There are a lot of really nice sets around... Really good cameras and rigs in some of them...* They walked through a room entirely covered with a green screen, and he looked up the the lights and the camera hanging from the rigging above. *Sweet.* He glanced into some of the smaller rooms as they passed, computers and microphones set up inside. *Those are good for individual recording... Yes!* He grinned as they entered a smaller room with various electronic instruments set up, a keyboard set up next to a desk with a computer, already online and running a recording program. They lingered for a moment as Mark talked a bit about the instruments, moving to inspect the buttons over the board and sitting at the stool. *This is a nice keyboard...* He switched it on, glancing up as a small dialogue box recognized the keyboard was on. *And it's already hooked up.* He studied the screen as Mark fell quiet, the ticking of the clock suddenly deafening in his ears. His head tilted to the side. *That’s it.* He suddenly reached out, his hand flying over the keyboard and starting an audio recording, the room deathly silent behind him as he stillled, the microphone picking up the ticking behind him. After a bit, he held up his watch to the mic, tapping the screen and looping the soft sound. He suddenly brought his wrist against the desk, the metal making a
harsh sound against the hard desk, a loud rhythm. He looped it and started tapping his nails softly against the desk, moving left and right, further and closer to the microphone. He tapped at the screen one more time, the sound not unlike that of working, moving gears. He leaned on the desk, humming soft and low next to the mic, tapping his throat with a finger, letting it loop after eight beats. He sat back, letting it play as his hands hovered over the keys for a moment, waiting for a good place to begin. His hands came down softly over the keys, the notes staying towards the left of the board, his right hand quickly drifting to glance over the highest keys before immediately returning to the lower notes. He moved over the keys, his eyes hidden behind his dark hair as he began to softly sing.

“If you ever see me

Not as myself

Do this world a favor

And take what I've wasted away

I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you let this bronze

Touch the floor again, in frustration

The only thing in this life that I regret

‘Let me bend, never break.’

If you can, I'd surely love

If you took just a moment

To piece all this rose-tinted glass

Back together

For these metal bones will not melt, pinned together

Lasting, rusting away at my joints

And I, in quiet deprivation

Have no will to move them

But they'll come, maybe see me,

But they hear, and they sway

And I can do no more than watch
As they pitch from the peak to the bottom

They stand at the platform, the steam all around
And they sway, sway, sway on their toes
They let themselves fall, in the darkness no more
Wrapped in gold where nobody here knows
They sway, sway, sway on their feet
And they hope they will land where the bronze and gold meet
And they sway, sway, sway and they'll fall
Released from what nobody knows at all.”

Lathe looked up from the keyboard, a hand slowly moving to stop the recording, suddenly hyper aware of the silence behind him. ...where the hell did any of that come from? Really! What the hell?!

Eren moved up to him, tugging on his shirt sleeve to get his attention. <“Are you okay?”> His voice was full of worry and his eyes full of concern as he looked up to Lathe. You look like you’re going to break down or something…. Please please tell me you’re okay.

Lathe looked to Eren, the weariness that had taken over his features immediately dissipating, giving Eren a sheepish smile and taking gentle hold of his hand. “Yeah, I'm fine, just got kinda carried away I guess. I've been able to hear nothing but the clocks ticking in the background, it’s so quiet, and my head just got away from me. But hey, when music calls…” He gave him a reassuring smile. “It’s all good. Don't worry.” ...seriously though, where did any of that come from? Any ideas, anyone? He let Eren go for a moment, reaching over to title the piece and email it to himself quickly. That’s good… That gets posted later. I like it. He soon turned back to the rest of the room, noting their looks and smiling sheepishly again, rubbing the back of his neck. Musical outbursts. That’s a thing… apparently.

Oh my gosh. “That…. That was awesome!” Mark’s enthusiastic voice barreled through the room as he went up to Lathe. “How did you do that?” Mark asked curiously, his eyes looking over the keyboard. I didn’t know that’s what you used that for....

Lathe just shrugged, looking over the screen at the many layers he had created in the audio file. “I just… I heard the ticking of the clocks, and got inspired. I've been obsessed with gears and mech lately, and I just kinda started layering sounds. Next thing I knew there was a rhythm going, and I
thought it needed something smooth to go with it and I was humming, then the piano was a good touch and… I don't even remember the half of what I said. I just started singing… Sometimes, for me, music just **happens**. It’s a random event, and you just gotta roll with it. But whatever just happened was really cool, and that’s going home with me to edit and mess with, and post. That was fun!” He grinned. …**that’s always really cool when it happens. It should be interesting, knowing what the hell I just said.**

Jack stood behind Mark, studying the computer screen and looking to Lathe, a look of awe on his face. **How the hell did you just do that?!** His voice was quiet, growing louder to its normal volume as a grin cracked across his face. “…**what even just happened. That was so cool! I can't understand how you could come up with all that on the spot!** That was really good!” …**just… Wow.**

Levi moved from his place leaning against the wall listening to use Lathe’s shoulder as an armrest, wrapping his other arm around Eren’s middle. He looked at the microphone, to where Lathe was sitting. “…**I don’t know what the hell just went down, but that was pretty fucking awesome.**” **You just... sat down and did the thing. That's seriously fucking impressive.**

“C-can I do one?” Eren asked, his voice a little shy. **My violin is in my bag… I wanna play. It’s too quiet, I don’t like it, it reminds me of that horrible house.** He shrugged off his bag, pulling out the violin case and brandishing it for the group to see.

Lathe nodded immediately, moving the microphone and standing to let Eren have the stool, leaning on the desk next to the keyboard. He pulled up a new file for recording, clicking the record button. “**Whenever you're ready, Eren.**” He and the rest of them fell silent, taking the case and his bag from him. **What’re you going to play?**

Eren nodded, his focus on his violin as he tuned it for the song. He made a small noise to show he was about to start, and started to quickly start on the first few chords of Secrets. **I know Dad likes this song, I wonder if he’ll sing?**

… **this song.** Lathe beamed, his eyes following the bow as it moved over the strings, his look beginning to go further and further away. He counted the measures in his head, his voice low and full of emotion as he began to sing, his head moving from one side to the other as the song went on. He barely noticed Levi, Mark and Jack joined him for the chorus, his gaze miles away. For him, it ended too soon, Eren drawing out the last notes and letting silence fall before snapping out of it, clicking to stop the recording. He had a small smile on his face, and beamed as he looked up to Eren. **I love that one.**

Eren’s smile was wide, as if he was feeding off of Lathe’s smile, he looked really happy and relaxed. “You guys sounded great!” Eren’s cheeky smile returned again as he shuffled from foot to
foot. I wonder if Mark or Jack will want me to play something?

Oh my god. Jack stood silently for a moment, quickly moving to glomp Eren, careful not to hurt the violin in his hands. “That was amazing! Oh my gosh I loved that! You play so well!” That was great!!

Eren giggled as Jack hugged him. “I didn’t do anything, you guys were the ones who were singing.” Eren countered but couldn’t stop from giggling. Jack’s hugging me again!

“Are you kidding me? You played the violin like a boss. That was really good! Seriously, I loved it!” How can you say you didn’t do anything?

Eren blushed at the compliment. He thinks I did good? Eren’s smile was genuine as he watched Mark come over to hug him as well.

“Do it again! I wanna hear another song!” Mark was basically jumping up and down around Eren and Jack, hugging him when ever he had two feet planted on the ground, the rest was a fangirling mess. It was totally awesome!

That was really good! Levi flashed Eren a small smile, an amused look in his eyes as he followed Mark’s movements. ...he must drink espresso like everyone else drinks water.

Lathe chuckled as Mark hopped around, his eyes sparkling. “You up for another song, Eren? Got another one on your mind?” Hmmm... What would he pick? I dunno...

Eren nodded, thinking about which song to pick. ... No can’t do that one, no one besides Lathe would know it.... Can’t do that one, only I would be able to sing it... Um... Oh! I know! P’nk! Eren looked around the room, his eyes finally landing on what he was looking for. “I got an idea.” His eyes held a mischievous glint as he put his violin in the open case and went to get the electric guitar from the wall, along with an amp. No let's see how this baby sounds. I haven’t played an electric guitar since middle school... eh, can’t be that bad...

Lathe quirked an eyebrow as he watched Eren retrieve the guitar from the wall, slightly suspicious, his expression mirroring Levi’s. ...the hell is he doing? He hasn’t used one of those before... Pretty sure. What’s he up to...
Eren turned the amp on very low to make sure the guitar was tuned to where he wanted, his smile quickly going ear to ear. Oh yeah. “Ready?” Eren asked his eyes gleaming with happiness. All hail the queen, P!nk. His hand flew over the neck of the guitar, the start to P!nk’s ‘So What.’ His voice accompanying the guitar confidently.

Mark’s eyes widened immediately, struggling to hold in an excited squeal. YES!!! Within only a few moments Mark was going right along with him and singing just as confidently with him, surprised Eren didn’t miss a single beat.

Lathe, Levi and Jack all nodded along to the song, singing with them for the chorus. Lathe and Jack beamed, a small smile on Levi’s face as the song went on, jamming in their spots as Eren strummed expertly at the electric guitar.

Eren really put everything he had into the song, and he ended off the song with a loud laugh, a smile still etched across his face. “That was awesome!” He breathed out, returning to melodious laughter as he turned the amp off.

It was Lathe’s turn to beam and glomp onto Eren, careful of the heavy instrument he held. “That was great! I didn't know you played the electric guitar before! You did amazing!” He laughed, ruffling Eren’s hair a bit. You did a great job of playing that! That was really cool!

Levi chuckled quietly as Lathe glomped Eren, a small smile on his face as he moved as well to wrap his arms around Eren, giving him a quick peck on the cheek. “That was really good, Eren! You played really well!” This has all just snowballed into a huge jam session, hasn’t it?

Eren looked up to Lathe, his eyes bright as they met Lathe’s excited eyes. “I did? I haven’t played it in a long time.” Eren told him honestly. It’s been 4 years already....

Lathe laughed, his eyes bright. “You played as if you never stopped! That’s really cool, how you can remember how to play any instrument you ever learn for so long! It’s an amazing talent to have!” That’s really cool!

Eren smiled as he leaned into Lathe’s arms. “It wasn’t as long... It’s only been four years since I last played this.” Eren told him, looking down to the guitar in his hands. That was really cool. Mark was so into it!
A huge jam session was underway at that point. They played and sang at least five more songs before we wandered back into the computer room, and Lathe brought one out of sleep mode and started to freak out as he saw a heart icon or something on the screen. Next thing I knew Marc Jack and Lathe had Eren sitting down to play some video game... Under-something, I dunno. They were going to be there all day, and the dialogue was really funny, but I had to call Nate after two hours of really bad puns to get out of there and over to the train station. It wasn't easy dragging them out of there, but I managed. Somehow. Not before Lathe asked for more hugs and a picture, of course. Eren was really cool on the train, he didn't freak out the slightest bit. He just thought it was really cool, if anything. It took a while to get us back over to Kansas, nonstop. We slept on the way back, and Lathe had managed to get us a private room on such short notice somehow. He had to call Marc, ask him to drive us up to Wichita from Topeka so he could get his car back from the airport. Eren had nearly flipped when he saw the airport, even when we explained we just had to retrieve Lathe's car. He was okay when we left, though. It's been only two days that we've been home, and of course, Eren didn't shut up about the miniature horse from the Zoo until Lathe took him horseback riding. ...my God, I'm really struggling not to just jump his bones every time I see him... It's been two weeks since we had sex and I'm dying... Seriously, something needs to happen soon, before I go away in a week...

Eren was sitting in his recording room, doodling on his computer. He was already starting to draw some of the characters from Undertale. I wanna play it again... I wonder if Lathe will let me? It seemed so cool. Eren was pretty much silent as he continued on his tablet screen. They're starting to look alright... I guess? I dunno, Lathe would have to be the judge on that.

Lathe knocked on the doorframe of the recording room, poking his head in. “Eren, for the third time, dinner’s ready. You doin’ alright up here?” You're drawing... You must be really into whatever you've got going on. He walked up next to him, looking at the screen with a huge grin. “Oh. My god. Yes!” Lathe’s eyes shone. Now I know the kind of games you’d like! Thank god you like Undertale! ‘I love it! Oh my gosh, you're drawing all of them too perfectly!’ Lathe was practically bouncing on his toes. Yes!

Eren looked up to Lathe, putting the stylus down for a moment. “You think so? They’re not too animated or anything?” I really hope they look okay... Cause I’ve been letting the software record the screen... So that I can post a video of it. It took a moment for Lathe’s words to finally catch on to him. “What’s for dinner?” He was on his feet, making sure everything was saved, pausing the recording and exiting out to go downstairs. I didn’t even hear him call me for dinner... I was so engrossed in drawing.

“French toast. And Eren you took them from being 2D and gave them so much dimension and personality and I LOVE IT!” Lathe laughed, his hands covering his mouth as he looked over the image with wide eyes. I LOVE IT!!!!!!!!
Eren’s eyes widened in a fraction of a second before he was bolting down the stairs at a very high rate of speed. “FRENCH TOAST!!!! ” Eren screamed as he slid across the floor in the kitchen, almost knocking into the table. “French… Toast… Lathe, I fucking love you so fucking much right now!” Eren called as he moved to load his plate with food. I’m sooooo hungry, I skipped lunch… well damn.

Lathe laughed, his eyes sparkling as he scampered after him, trying not to slip on the hardwood of the piano room. “Love you too kid, now watch your yap and try not to crash into anything!” Yeah, we don't want you breaking your other wrist or hitting your head on anything. The floor in the kitchen’s stone! He followed Eren in filling a plate, grabbing a bottle of maple syrup and sitting at the table, picking up the butter cup as well. Breakfast for dinner!

Levi poked his head out of Eren’s room, heading down the stairs after them. “WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TWO YELLING ABOUT?” He slid across the floor, stopping next to the table and leaning on it in one smooth motion. “I’m all for sliding to the kitchen and being cool about it, but I don't think pursuing a career as a crash test dummy is something you want to do, Brat.” He smirked, winking at Eren as he moved to grab a plate. No crashing into things and hitting your head on the edge of the table, please.

Eren wolfed down the first slice after buttering each and every single one. Oh my god… I love this so much! His eyes followed Levi as he slid into the room, following him as he walked to the counter for food. “Hey…. I didn’t crash into the table, and neither did you, so sliding is perfectly okay!” Eren retorted stubbornly, filling his mouth with another slice of toast.

Levi quirked an eyebrow, pouring maple syrup over his French toast and offering it to Eren after a moment. “I said I'm all for sliding, but as long as you don't come as close as you did to crashing.” He nudged Eren’s foot under the table. Just as long as we're good.

Eren gave a glare of disgust at the syrup offered to him. “You and I both know, I hate syrup, stop trying to offer it to me already!” Eren growled for only a moment before he was nudging Levi’s leg just as playfully. We’ve gone over this soooo many times already.

Levi raised his hands in mock surrender as Lathe nearly dropped his fork in shock. “Well excuse me, I just thought it was impossible to eat French toast without maple syrup. But apparently not.” He smirked, his feet nudging Eren back. I'm just joking, don't think I'm being mean.

Lathe looked to Eren in surprise. ...how are you eating French toast without maple syrup?! It's practically not even French toast without syrup! ...oh wait, yeah, you can't stand sweet stuff... We
still need to fix that. He shrugged, returning to his toast and keeping his feet clear of their playing footsie.

Eren continued to play footsie with Levi as he was finishing off his fourth and final plate of french toast. Yeah... there are no left overs.... That was what the fourth plate was.... The rest of the french toast no one else was going to eat. He got up to put his plate in the sink and start the dishes. “What time is it?” Eren asked the other two as he moved to take their plates. I honestly have no idea anymore.

Lathe stretched his arms over his head, seeming to droop. “Ugh, time for me to get to bed. I think it’s like eight or something, and I'm fucking exhausted.”

“You hypocrite! You just fucking swore, don’t yell at me not to when you just fucking did it!” Eren laughed as he turned his head to look Lathe over his shoulder. Don’t yell at me for doing something you just did.

Lathe just looked at him, confused. ...wha? He looked to Levi, his hair falling in his eyes as he spoke, a slight stutter to his words. “D-did I really just…?” Did I actually swear?

Levi nodded, an amused look in his eye. “Yeah, you kinda did.” Can you not even tell?

Lathe looked at him for a moment, then to the floor, thinking hard. He shrugged after a moment. “Eh, it’s too fucking late for this. I'm going to sleep.” He shambled over to the staircase, ready to collapse into bed. Sleep... Sleep sounds fucking wonderful right about now.

Eren watched him for only a few seconds before he returned to his dishes quietly humming. Hmmm…. Lathe’s been getting to sleep a lot earlier lately… I wonder if LA wiped him out?

Levi walked next to Eren, drying the plates he was handed and stowing them in the cupboards above them, wrapping his arms around Eren’s waist from behind after he was handed the last one. He purred into Eren’s ear. “Is it alright if we head downstairs?” I don't know what the fuck I'd do if God forbid you said no... Murder, actually, is probably what would happen. Just say yes so I can fuck you already!

Eren shivered as Levi spoke in his ear. His voice is so deep, God that was hot. Eren’s head slowly turned, his hooded eyes meeting Levi’s, his head giving a barely discernible nod before he leaned in to kiss him, softly at first. Yeah, we haven’t done this in a while, have we?
Yes! Levi turned Eren around so he could press their chests together, tilting his head to deepen their kiss, pressing Eren against the counter for a moment before pulling him to the scripting room, his arms still tightly wound around him. *Downstairs. Just make it downstairs, and he’s all yours.*

Eren followed him, a large smile creeping across his features. *This is gonna be fun, we haven’t done it in a long time.* Eren let himself be led down the flight of stairs before he broke free of Levi’s grasp and moved to get what they needed from the shoebox hidden in the shelves. *I should take out some more condoms, just in case we do more than round one…. Which we’ve been doing a lot lately.*

Levi let Eren rifle through the shoebox for a moment, immediately pulling him back to kiss him, pulling him to the bed and gently pushing him onto it, looming over him as his tongue pushed past his lips, coiling around Eren’s. His hands wandered over Eren’s chest, brushing the waistband of his jeans. *My God, it’s been too. Fucking Long.*

Eren’s warm hands ran up Levi’s chest, his thumbs rubbing teasingly across Levi’s exposed collarbones. He let his hands slowly drag down his chest, taking in every contour under his fingers, finally tugging at the hem of Levi’s shirt. *I want it off. I want it off now.*

Levi broke their kiss for an instant, quickly lifting the shirt over his head, the defined muscles of his chest rippling as he moved before he threw it to the side, moving to attack Eren’s neck, leaving small bitemarks and bruises in his wake. He suckled at the soft skin, his hands drifting to the hem of Eren’s tank top, tugging at it after a moment. *Off. Now.*

Eren lifted his arms up to let Levi pull the article off easier. *I missed this… I missed this so much.* Eren’s arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders, pulling himself up off the bed to latch himself against Levi’s warm body, his lips locking onto Levi’s, kissing him hungrily, more passionate than before.

Levi’s hands ghosted over his exposed chest, exploring every curve and line, slowly finding their way to the hem of his jeans, teasing playing with the button for a moment before undoing it, unzipping them and tugging them over his hips, letting his fingers run lightly down the inside of his thighs as he did so. His lips moved to kiss at his adam’s apple, sucking on the soft flesh. *I want to hear you.*

Eren let out a soft gasp, his breath beginning to hitch. “Levi...” His name rolled off Eren’s tongue with a breathy moan, a hand slowly carding through Levi’s inky locks, and tugging a bit. *God, don’t stop please.* Eren’s erection strained against his boxers as he wiggled his hips to help Levi
get him out of his jeans. His other hand reached down to tease at Levi’s pants, slowly working through the button and zipper before tugging to get it just over his hips to be able to see his growing bulge. *Fuck, he’s already hard... I can’t complain though.* His hand found the bulge, palming it as he let out a series of breathy moans.

Levi groaned against his neck, his hand lightly running up over Eren’s growing erection through his boxers before finding the hem, tugging them down and over his hips and letting Eren kick them off. His hand teasingly ran from the underside of the base to the tip, running over the slit before loosely grasping his length, slowly pumping his shaft. His other hand reached over blindly on the sheets, searching for the small black tube before finally grasping it after a moment.

Eren let his moans get louder, arching his back off the mattress as he moved his head against Levi’s, his mouth by the shell of his ear as he moaned and hissed in pleasure. His body was all the more open for him as he shuddered underneath him. *Fuck, it feels so good.* “Levi… More, please.” He begged, the hand in Levi’s hair pulling him to his neck, and offering it to him to mark the tan skin as much as he wanted. *Mark me... Make people know I'm yours.*

Levi smirked possessively, biting and sucking harder on the skin of his neck, leaving a ring of bruises blooming around his collar, his hand quietly flicking open the cap of the small tube, coating his fingers and setting the tube aside. His other hand still slowly ran up and down his shaft, teasing the head with his thumb as his fingers drifted to his hole, tracing it before pressing one finger past the tight ring of muscle to the knuckle. *...you sound so damn sexy and you're mine and I need you... I need you now...*

Eren let out a high pitched cry, his body relaxing instantly at the familiar intrusion. “Fuck, Levi… Hurry, don’t make me wait.” *I want you... I want you so bad.* Eren’s teeth gently rubbed at the tip of his ear as his seductive voice wafted through the room. *I don’t wanna wait.*

Levi pressed another finger inside him, scissoring him and searching for his prostate, feeling the soft walls as he nibbled at the other side of Eren’s neck, wandering over his collarbone. *I don't want to wait much longer either... I can't. I need you now.* Levi drew his fingers out of Eren, his other hand snatching a condom from the sheets, tearing it open with his teeth and rolling it on. He grabbed the small tube and slicked himself up, tossing it back aside as he aligned himself with Eren, his hands tracing over his sides as he kissed the spot below his ear, slowly pressing into Eren until he was buried to the hilt. *...oh my God, I've missed you... I've missed this... I've missed everything about you...*

Eren’s hands reached around Levi’s broad shoulders as he felt him come all the way in to the hilt. *So fucking big... “Levi… You’re so big, it feels so good.”* Eren whispered into his ear, kissing it gently, moving to suckle at his jaw, leaving a few visible marks before trailing back up to his ear, his left hand moving to mess with his hair again. *It feels so good, and you haven’t even fucking moved yet.*
Levi groaned against his soft skin, beginning a slow deep rhythm as he purred into Eren’s ear, his voice low. “Eren, you’re so tight… You feel so amazing … I love all the sounds you make, they’re sexy as hell …” His grip tightened on Eren’s hips, speeding up a bit. ...so good…

Eren’s moans grew louder as Levi sped up his rhythm. “...ugh, Levi...” Eren’s moans took over the basement, his body pressing against Levi’s, his breaths coming out in pants against Levi’s neck. So good... So fucking good. His eyes held a mischievous glint in them as he thought of something, slowly squeezing his insides, adding pressure to Levi’s entire length that was embedded in him, sending a shiver down his spine. Holy fuck.... That felt fucking great.

Levi groaned loudly against his neck, his thrusts becoming more erratic as he felt Eren’s walls clamp down on his length, the coil in his stomach tightening quickly. I’m not going to last too much longer... Levi’s hand drifted down to tease at Eren’s length as he dropped his head onto his shoulder, moaning loudly after a minute as his coil snapped, biting down on his collarbone. ...holy fuck you feel so good...

Eren gasped loudly, his whole body shuddering, and his coil snapping from the sudden bite to his collarbone. Holy fuck... I came, I came hard... Eren thought he saw stars as string after string of pearly white littered his chest and abdomen. Fuck. Eren tilted his head away, his eyes focusing on the strip of cloth at the edge of the bed. Well... It’s certainly worth a try...

Levi moved to kiss Eren hotly, his tongue still mapping out his mouth as he drew out of him, removing the condom and dropping it into the wastebasket next to the bed. He stood for a moment to retrieve the box of wipes from the table, cleaning both of their chests and discarding the wipe before climbing back on top of him, kissing him passionately, his hand cupping his cheeks. Now... We can take our time, go slow...

Eren kissed him back, his tongue licking against Levi’s bottom lip, asking for entrance as he moved to switch their positions, managing with some effort to flip Levi over. My turn now... He used Levi’s surprised gasp to let his tongue slip inside, gliding over his teeth and swiveling around his tongue. His hand reached out to the black cloth and pulled at it, looking at it for only a second before returning his attention to Levi’s mouth. A long-sleeve’ll work for this... I just need to get him tied down first.

Levi gasped in surprise, his eyes fluttering open for a split second as Eren flipped him onto his back, catching a glimpse of black fabric out of the corner of his eye. What are you...? His eyes opened as he felt Eren grasp his hands, widening as he moved them above his head and tied them with the shirt. Wait what. Levi broke their kiss, his voice breathy. “E-Eren, what...?” What are you doing?
Eren’s eyes held a seductive flare in them, a fire burning so brightly, one Levi had never seen before. His body dipped down as he craned his neck to nip at Levi’s ear, gently tugging before releasing it. “It’s my turn…. I promise I’ll be nice.” His voice was an octave deeper than it usually was, a seductive purr as he rolled his body back into a sitting position, giving him an erotic air. *My turn, I’m gonna make you go crazy…*

Levi swallowed hard, his member twitching as Eren tightly tied his hands together, tucking them behind his head. His eyes raked up Eren’s form looming over him. *…holy fuck he’s hot… My god…* He looked up as Eren reached to draw the fabric over his eyes, panicking for a split second that he couldn't see. …*He just blindfolded me. What the hell do I do? I don't know what to do about this… Shit, what’s happening?* He felt the bed dip as Eren moved to stand, hearing the familiar sound of the crinkling of condom wrappers in the shoebox on the shelf. …*he plans on doing what. Oh my. This is happening. Shit I don't know what to do…* He listened as Eren padded back to the bed, feeling Eren take his place again in front of him, feeling very exposed at his position, unable to see and so completely open. He shivered a bit in his nervousness, and in anticipation.

Eren leaned down, setting aside the lube and condom for now. *You are so fucking hot, and you’re on display for me.* He slowly leaned down, his tongue starting at the top of Levi’s coarse pubic hair and trailing up his stomach and over his chest in one large strip. *Oh god, he tastes great too. Fuck me … Well no, I’m going to be fucking you this time.* He lifted his tongue off the skin for only a moment. “Tell me where it feels good Levi, I wanna know, everything.” His seductive purr was right near his ear before he latched onto one of Levi’s nipples, sucking hard at the pink flesh and teasingly biting the small nub. *Moan for me.*

Levi moaned loudly, his face blushing crimson under the dark fabric as his back arched, his heels digging into the mattress. [Eren, right there, please…] Levi’s moans became louder as Eren’s hands wandered his chest, his face red to the tips of his ears, French rolling familiarly off his tongue. …*Oh my God…* … *What the hell is he saying? It sounds so weird. Eh, whatever, it’s probably jibberish .* Eren sucked even harder on the pert nipple, biting on it, and pulling a little roughly before releasing it and moving to the next, letting his slender fingers abuse the one he had just released. *I want you moaning for me. <“Does it feel good Levi? Does it feel good to be played with?”>* Eren let his rough German tongue take over as he grinded gently against Levi’s thigh, still completely entertained with Levi’s perky nips.

Levi’s moans filled the basement, whimpering as Eren moved to suckle on his other nipple. *That damn voice…* [My God, Eren, yes, don’t stop, please don’t stop. Holy fuck, I love you, please…] His member throbbed as Eren purred into his ear, his hips grinding back against Eren’s, searching for friction.
Eren smirked, moving away from him, only a few inches but enough that Levi wouldn’t be able to rub against him. *You’re definitely answering me… But what are you saying?* He stopped his sucking, choosing to bite his nipple and pull just as he had done with the other, his tongue slowly tracing down his body, coming to the coarse hair above his crotch, but avoiding his length at all costs. <“No no, you’re not allowed to cum yet, I need you to wait.”> He purred, a cheek against the inside of Levi’s thigh as he backed up onto his heels, raising the leg over his shoulder. *He’s so fucking hot, holy shit… Why did I not do this sooner?* He kept the kisses gentle, but soon progressed to bites and bruises, moving down towards his crotch but not too close before switching to the other leg. *I’m gonna tease you until you’re ready to come with just me kissing you.* <“You need to tell me what you want Levi, or I won’t be able to please you.”>

Levi writhed under him, whimpering as Eren touched him everywhere except the place he wanted him to the most. [E-Eren… Please…. Touch me, finger me, God, touch me please…] *I’m going to go insane if you don’t touch me… I need you, I need you badly… I need you now.*

Eren watched the words tumble from Levi’s mouth with ease. … *The. Fuck . Is . He. Saying?* He gently set Levi’s leg down before reaching for the small bottle of lube, silently uncapping it and covering two digits with a generous amount of lube. He moved closer to Levi, grabbing his hips and pulling Levi up closer and onto his own knees, sitting back on his heels and letting his own length tease Levi’s twitching hole before he swirled a cool finger around it, gently pushing in to his knuckle, looking up to gauge his response. <“Levi, moan for me, I want to hear you moan my name.”> Slowly Eren had his whole finger inside of Levi, feeling his inside twitch with every slight movement. *He’s so sensitive, and he doesn’t even fucking know it… Shit .*

Levi felt Eren pull him onto his knees, his lower back off of the bed as his legs found their way over Eren’s shoulders, shivering in anticipation as he felt Eren’s finger trace his hole, hissing a bit at the intrusion, trying to relax as his finger felt up his walls. He moaned loudly as Eren purred, no longer caring about how loud he was. [Eren, my God… Please , don’t stop, I need… I need you, I want you so bad… My God…]

<“Patience Levi, I’ll give it to you soon, I need to make sure you’ll feel nothing but pleasure.”> His voice rolled off of his tongue as he gently inserted another finger into Levi’s quivering hole, leaning his head down to kiss Levi’s inner thighs again. *Fuck, I wonder if this feels as good for him as it does for me?*

Levi shifted at the intrusion, hissing quietly as Eren stretched him out, whimpering a bit in pain. *Fuck, it hurts… Shit .* He groaned as he felt Eren’s lips ghosting down his thighs, his member painfully hard against his stomach. He forced himself to relax, sighing after the fingers inside of him became less painful and he could feel the pleasure growing. [Eren… Please, more… I need you…]
Eren nipped gently at his thigh, tracing his tongue down the side as far as his body would allow him, his fingers curling up and moving around gently. *Come on... Where is it? I want to know where it is first...I don’t want to put the third in without having found your prostate.* Eren’s fingers were gentle as he added a bit more lube to make sure Levi felt as little pain as possible.

Levi suddenly let out a breathy gasp as he felt Eren’s fingers ghost over his prostate, his back arching further off of the bed. He let out a strangled yelp as Eren’s fingers pressed against the bundle of nerves, writhing under him. [**Fuck,** right there, Eren, **please**, right there... **I need** you...]* Oh my God, don’t stop, please don’t stop...*

Eren inserted his third finger into Levi as he felt him writhe under him. <“Fuck that’s hot.”> His free hand coming to gently caress Levi’s thigh until he got to his crotch, slowly taking hold of his member and holding his base, making sure that Levi wouldn’t be able to cum just yet. *No... Not yet.* His fingers abused Levi’s prostate as he stretched him out the rest of the way.

Levi groaned as Eren pushed a third finger into him, moaning loudly as Eren’s fingers pressed at and teased his prostate, whimpering as Eren took hold of his length at the base, shifting and hoping for friction. [E-Eren, **please**, I-let me... I need you now, **please**... I can't take it, make me cum, **please**...] *I need you so bad...*

Eren gently took his fingers out of his twitching entrance. *God he looks so lewd. It’s wonderful.* <“Tell me what you want me to do Levi.”> Eren kept his grip tightly around the base of his cock, making sure he didn’t cum and getting him down from his high. *I need you to last as long as I do. So you can’t come yet.*

Levi whined as Eren withdrew his fingers, bucking up his hips as he spoke, slightly stuttering. [E-Eren... I want... I want you to fuck me, please... I need you in me, I need you **now**... My God, Eren, **please.**] *Keep me waiting any longer and I don't know what I'd do... I need you, I want you so bad...*

Eren smirked, slowly positioning himself at Levi’s entrance and teasing it with the tip of his cock, leaning over Levi’s body and taking in one of his nipples to suck at. <“Good Boy.”> Eren praised as he pushed into Levi slowly to allow him to get accustomed to his length quicker. *You sound so fucking hot, I wonder what the fuck it is you’re saying... It’s probably something sexy as all hell...*

Levi shivered at the praise, whimpering as Eren’s length stretched him out, his head back as he arched up off of the mattress, his heels pressing against Eren’s back. ...*It feels so good , but it hurts so much all at the same time... I don't think I'll ever get tired of hearing that damn voice of*
Eren stayed as still as possible, his mouth continuing to bite and suck at the smooth white flesh across Levi’s chest. <“Tell me when I can move, I’ll wait until you’re ready, Levi.”> Eren continued to litter his chest with bite mark after bite mark, waiting for Levi to adjust to the intrusion. *I want to fuck you into oblivion...*

Levi took in a ragged breath, relaxing as he felt the pain fading, feeling strangely filled with Eren’s length inside him. He nodded, shifting his hips and trying to press back against Eren’s hips slowly to get him to move. [Y-You can move… S-Slow, please...] *We don’t have to rush anything, and you feel so good already… Take all the time you want, please...*

Eren slowly pulled out until the only thing left was his tip before gently easing himself back in. He kept his slow pace, feeling Levi’s tightness start to fade a bit. *That’s good, he’s relaxing, I’ll wait to get faster or harder until he’s begging for it.* Eren kept his teasingly slow pace for a long time, sometimes going as far as to lightly brush against his prostate but never hit it head on.

Levi moaned under him, curling up a bit and nudging forward with his head, finding Eren to kiss him, his tongue languidly moving into his mouth and wrapping around his own. He broke the kiss for only a second, breathing a word against his lips before reclaiming them, nibbling his lip. [...Harder, please.] He pushed his hips against Eren’s, meeting his thrusts as he kissed him heatedly. *You can go faster... I’m going to lose it if you don’t.*

Eren’s hands moved from his nipples down to Levi’s hips, his grip tightening as he picked up his pace and thrusted even deeper into Levi’s warmth. Pulling his lips away from Levi’s for only a moment <“Tell me what you want Levi… You need to tell me.”> His grip still strong on Levi’s hips as he thrusted into him, still teasing him with close thrusts towards his prostate but never hitting it directly. *Oh no, that’s for later, I want you begging for it, I want you to beg for me to let you cum.*

Levi panted, moaning loudly as Eren quickened the pace, thrusting deeper into him, his breathing ragged against his lips. [E-Eren… Please… Fuck me, let me cum, please... L-let me cum, you’re driving me insane, stop teasing me and let me have everything, please... ] *Let me cum, please.*

Eren smirked, moving a hand to remove the blindfold from Levi as he pushed him down to the bed, his grip on his hips increasing tenfold as he went to town on him, thrusting quickly, deeply and directly on his prostate. <“Cum for me… Cum for me, Levi.”> Eren’s eyes were hooded as he stared into Levi’s silvery orbs. *Fuck he is so fucking hot.*
His hands still bound behind his head, Levi let out a strangled scream in bliss as he looked Eren in the eye, Eren’s voice all he could hear and his back arching off the mattress as he came hard, clamping down on Eren’s length as streams of pearly cum decorated his chest, moaning and panting, going limp against Eren. [Oh my God, Eren...] ...Holy fuck, that felt amazing...!

Eren watched as Levi’s face gave away his pleasure. Holy shit... He’s so fucking hot... His coil snapped as he heard Levi let out a strangled scream, and in an instant he climaxed. So fucking tight, I wonder if I felt this tight for him? Eren slowly pulled out, his breath ragged from exertion. He tied off the filled condom, and threw it away, moving to grab the wipes and clean the both of them off, his eyes full of contentment. “Levi...” Eren’s voice had once again returned to his usual soft voice, hoping to get his attention. I wanna know what it was you were saying...

Levi struggled to untie his hands, tugging at the knot with his teeth and pulling free, letting the shirt fall onto the floor, uncaring as he tugged Eren on top of him after he had cleaned them up, holding him gently, one arm around his waist, the other buried in his hair, softly murmuring into his brunette locks. “Hm? What’s up, Eren?”

Eren slowly reached down to pull the covers up over them, his hand coming up to gently finger over the many marks he left on Levi’s chest. “What were you saying?... It sounded like you were answering me... But I have no idea what it was you said.” His smile was just as soft as his eyes as he traced every mark.

Levi’s eyes widened. If I was speaking something, and it wasn't English or German... Shitshitshitshitshit not good... I fucking let it slip... He sighed, a defeated look to him for a moment. “I- I was talking in French, I guess. I said a lot of things- you made me beg for it, among other things; I’ll let you piece together the rest.” He smirked. “But yeah, French... I know it from a really long time ago...”

Eren nodded, curling up to him to hide his growing blush. “I-I didn’t hurt you... Did I?” Eren asked timidly as he looked up to Levi’s eyes. I’ve never necessarily topped before...

Levi dipped his head down, pressing their foreheads together, looking Eren in the eyes, his voice quiet and warm. “No, you didn't. You were amazing.” He pressed a chaste kiss to Eren’s lips, before pulling back and giving him a small smile, his eyes bright. “I love you, Eren.” I really do.

Eren smiled, happily curling up to him, his lips finding Levi’s neck to press a few feathery kisses to the pale skin. “You’ll be sore tomorrow, I hope you know that.” He murmured quietly, his eyes already starting to close as Levi pulled him towards his body. I’m tired... That’s exhausting.... How do you manage?
Levi sighed as Eren kissed his neck, settling into the mattress. His voice was sleepy, his head resting on top of Eren’s. “Mm. I'll just make you carry me around if I can't stand up.” ...I seriously might.

Eren didn’t respond, his soft and even breathing letting Levi know he had fallen asleep. His head was tucked into Levi’s shoulder, his arm draped across his chest, and his breath warm against Levi’s neck.

Levi chuckled softly, his thumb rubbing lightly against his side, his eyes sliding shut as sleep overcame him.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe padded over to the scripting room from the kitchen. It’s ten in the morning and they’re still asleep? They never sleep this late. He opened the door to the basement, going halfway down the steps so he could lean over the banister. Hey, since I'm technically not banned from the basement… Yet… “Breakfast!” He chuckled as they started to shift on the bed. Yeah, time to wake the hell up already! I can't eat all those pancakes by myself!

Eren was the first to sit up, his bed head going every which way as he stretched. He had what almost looked like a collar of hickeys and bitemarks around his neck. His chest was littered with similar marks, especially his collarbone. The fuck? I'm still tired. Eren rubbed his eyes as he yawned, trying to wake himself up. “It’s too early…” He whined, not wanting to get up out of the comfort of the bed, the sheets thankfully hiding his naked lower half.

Lathe shook his head, his gaze moving over to the clock on the wall. “It’s ten in the morning. You two never sleep in this late. And I’m not about to let you start. Come on, pancakes are waiting. And could you shake Levi awake for me? He’s not moving.” You two need to get the hell up and eat something. I didn't just make breakfast for what would normally feed six for nothing!

Levi grumbled, reaching blindly next to him and trying to tug Eren back down next to him, his arm curling around his waist and refusing to let go. “M’ tired. M’ going back to sleep…”

Eren lazily lifted Levi’s arm off of him. “Come on… It’s Pancakes… I want food.” Eren groaned at him, still in a tired haze as he shook Levi until he was awake enough to sit up. “I wanna eat.” He pestered, his voice sounding like a child’s. I'm gonna eat your share if you don't wake up, and you know I will.
Lathe looked between the two of them as Levi begrudgingly sat up, quirking an eyebrow as he saw handmarks on Levi’s hips. Huh. Usually it’s Eren with those marks… Eh. He pushed off the banister. “Okay, now that you’re awake, I’ll get going back upstairs. Get dressed and come right up, alright?” He padded back up the stairs, closing the door lightly behind him.

Levi rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, looking at Eren. “Do I really have to get up? I know it's pancakes, but…” He sighed as Eren immediately cued the puppy eyes. Dammit. “Okay, okay, breakfast.” He smirked, pecking Eren on the cheek before swinging his legs off the side of the bed, hunting for his clothes and dressing as he found them.

Eren had a little more difficulty locating his clothes, but soon found sweatpants and stole Levi’s shirt before he found it and scampered upstairs with it hanging loosely around his frame. No shirt for you, ha!

Levi watched helplessly as Eren scampered up the stairs with his shirt, looking around and knowing he wasn’t able to do the same with Eren’s shirt. He’s too small for me to do that. Maybe I'll just retrieve one from upstairs… Or is that too much work… He looked down at his torso, the many bruises littering his chest. I’d rather try and avoid as many teasingly judgemental looks from Lathe as I can. Shirt from upstairs it is. He donned his sweatpants and padded upstairs after him, disappearing up to their bedroom for only a moment before padding into the kitchen wearing a grey tank top. He thanked Lathe as he was handed a plate of pancakes and a mug of tea, sitting down at his usual place at the table.

Eren was already in the middle of scarfing down his first plate, his eyes brightened as he thought of what happened last night. “Oh yeah! Dad guess what? Levi can talk in French! He was talking-” Eren tried to continue the rest of his sentence, too muffled by Levi’s hand to get any actual words out. What?… Oh… Yeah, right….don’t tell Lathe about sex… Forgot about that… Oopsie!

Lathe looked up in shock as Levi moved so quickly to cut Eren off, before the thought registered. Wait… You speak French? A grin cracked across his face. [I didn't know you could speak French. Everyone from the club still speaks French too, you know, Spades and everyone in the photo I showed you a while ago. That’s really neat! When did you learn it?] …this could probably be useful at some point in time, speaking with Eren not knowing what the hell we’re saying. …kinda evens out the field, Eren and I knowing sign language.

Levi’s eyes widened in surprise, his hand dropping from Eren’s mouth. What? [You know French? And I… I learned it from when I lived in Canada.] He said the last half of the sentence coldly, sending Lathe a quick glare. Don't ask.
Message received. ...well, one joke. [Canada, eh? And yeah, in the club that I led everyone took French, and we all studied like mad trying to become fluent. We all remember everything pretty well, mainly because our group chat’s in French. Can’t have peeps reading out phones over our shoulders.] He grinned, sipping from his mug of coffee. It is a pretty good way to keep people from reading it, and for keeping on top of new words.

Eren watched their exchange. The fuck are they saying? {You guys are horrible…. The fuck are you saying?} Eren’s glare was directed at the two of them as he signed, knowing only Lathe would be able to tell, but he didn’t care at the moment. I am soooo fucking lost, and you better not fucking say to watch my language.

Lathe laughed, raising his right hand to spell out one word. {Stuff.} This is great! He beamed as Eren glared at him, setting down his mug and signing. {Just a bit about how everyone in the squad knows French from high school. Nothing too big.} We’re not doing too much hardcore gossiping, don’t worry, you’re not being left out of much. And I would tell you to watch your mouth… But you look done enough with my antics already.

Eren gave a soft huff, getting up to fill his plate yet again with more pancakes. You guys suck. He flipped them the bird, as he glared at the both of them, before turning to his food again, a smile gracing his face at the delicious food. Go ahead, speak all you fucking want. Both of you suck.

Levi chuckled, pecking his cheek in apology before sitting back at his place across from him, nudging his foot with his toes as Eren sat back down. He picked up his mug of tea, sipping it before returning to his syrup-covered pancakes.

Lathe spoke again after a moment, a spark in his eye. “If it makes you feel any better Eren, since we all know sign language too we can keep Levi from knowing what we’re talking about. Evens the score.” You’ve been getting random anger flares. We’re getting kinda used to it, but that doesn’t mean we don’t notice. Eh.

The glint in Eren’s eyes matched Lathe's as he picked up his head. {Oh that sounds much better.} Yes, let him feel as out of the loop as me. He put another forkful of pancake in his mouth. {Let him suffer!}

Lathe laughed, signing back. {Oh my gosh, you're going to make me sign to you all day now just to annoy Levi, aren't you?} Pretty sure that’s what's gonna happen all day today. Apparent payback, even if I'm the one enabling this.
{Yup, that’s exactly what is happening, it’s pay back for me not being able to understand him last night.} Eren’s face instantly flushed. Shit….

Lathe covered his face with his hand, spelling quickly with his left hand as his cheeks tinted red. {Oh my God Eren, too much information.} Stahp, you’re not supposed to tell me that kind of shit… Nooooo……

Levi looked between the two of them, confused. “What the hell did you say? Eren, what did you say?” Why the hell do you both look so flustered all of a sudden? Was it… Dammit, did you slip up and say something embarrassing? He did, didn’t he. That’s exactly what happened. Levi buried his face in his hands, sighing loudly, his voice teasing as he shook his head, a small grin on his face. “Eren, I’m so done with you.” Did you really?

Eren looked down almost shamefully, slowly lifting his hand palm up to Lathe. I didn’t mean to say that… Fuck… I fucked up. His eyes lost their glint when he heard Levi’s words, however teasing they were, they still struck a chord for him. …Is…is that why you’re leaving me? I fucked up…didn’t I? But…you’re done with me?

Levi looked up, the grin falling from his face in an instant as he saw the shame in Eren’s eyes, reaching over to take hold of his hand, lacing their fingers together and tangling their feet under the table. He took his other hand after he saw Lathe quickly run his fingers down his palm, his voice quiet and warm. <“Eren, I’m sorry, I didn't mean it like that. I was just trying to be playful, I didn't want you to get upset. I didn't think about what I said. It’s okay.”> He gently pressed a kiss to the back of his hand, trying to get Eren to look him in the eyes. It’s okay, I said that wrong… please don’t be upset.

Eren slowly pulled his hands away from Levi, trying to take another bite of the food left on his plate but quickly finding that he couldn’t. He slowly got up, his eyes still downcast as he put his plate in the sink. {I’m sorry, I’ll be upstairs.} Eren signed towards the table, not really seeing if Lathe was watching as he went to go lock himself into his recording room.

Lathe looked to Levi, his voice quiet. [He’s going upstairs. Are you…?] He nodded as Levi stood, a worried look on his face as Levi went after Eren. ...Damnit.

Levi went up the stairs after Eren, knocking lightly on the recording room door a moment after it shut. “Eren, can I come in?” He tried the doorknob. …aaaaaand it’s locked. Damnit. I don’t want to have to get the key… “Eren, please unlock the door, I want to talk to you.” We need to sort through some things…
Eren was quiet, moving to put his headphones on his head as he sat down at his computer, pulling up the picture he had been working on last night as well as the video as he continued with it, letting the music blare in his ears to drown everything out. …. He’s done with me?

Levi could hear the music from the other side of the door, sighing in defeat. Yep. Key. He turned to Lathe’s door, jumping up and running his hand across the top of the frame, letting the thin metal hit the ground before picking it up, moving back to the door and feeling with the end of the thin rod at the base of the doorknob, feeling it push the tumbler aside and pushing open the door. He closed the door behind him and set the key on the table, moving to wrap his arms around Eren, gently taking the stylus from his hand and turning him to face him, turning off the music. “Eren, talk to me, please.” He hooked another chair on wheels with his foot, pulling it close so he could sit next to him, twining their fingers together. “I said that wrong, I didn't... Please tell me what’s wrong. I'm really sorry…”

Eren didn’t look up to him, his eyes trained at his feet. {No, I’m not going to tell you because you’re not going to stay... No matter what I say.} Eren was struggling not to cry. You're just waiting to leave...

Levi shifted, his hands resting on Eren’s arms, gently trying to guide him closer to him. I can barely catch some of those words... I think one of them was ‘stay’... I need to hold onto you... But you don’t want me to touch you... And it’s not like I'm leaving because I don't love you... < “Eren, come here, please. And I'm not leaving because I don't love you. I love you so much, but I really feel that this is something I have to do. I'm not leaving for long this time, it’s just a week, but of course I'm going to be back for you. I'm really going to miss you, but I need to do this.”> I really really love you, but... it’s just, this is something I can't pass up.

Eren listened to him, looking up to meet his eyes, his own welling with unshed tears. I don’t want you to leave… I know it’s just a week... But… I don’t want you to leave.... Eren could only nod, leaning forward to rest his forehead against Levi’s shoulder.

Levi gently pulled him into his lap, carding a hand through his hair and his other wrapped around his waist, resting his cheek on his head. <“Eren, I know it’s not going to be easy… It’s not easy for me either, believe me… But it’s something I have to do. I really do love you, and I’m not trying to get away from you, that’s not it at all… I want you to be happy… And I just hope that for while I'm gone, and it’s... longer than just a week, you’ll wait for me.”> He pressed a gentle kiss to his temple, his eyes glassy.

Eren only nodded, holding onto him. I’ll wait for you... But will you be there to come back? What if something happens?
Levi sighed, holding onto him tightly, his fingers running through his dark brown hair. For now… We’re alright.

Eren’s been really distant all week. He’s a lot quieter than he normally is, when he’s not singing love songs upstairs or at the piano or under his breath when he’s just lost in thought… I asked him how he was holding up earlier, and he smiled and tried to tell me he was doing okay, but it didn't follow to his eyes. He’s really broken up about Levi leaving… I don't know how he’s going to react, seeing Levi leave for the first time today. It’s only for a week this time, but it’s going to be hard on him. It’s going to be weird, not having him around for a solid week… But he’s just going to train this time around, so he’ll be okay, come home in one piece. Eren… I swear, sometimes I catch him with this look in his eye like he’s a minute away from breaking down. I’d hate to see how he is when Levi’s gone for months and months at a time… Lathe looked to the clock on the wall, reading the Roman numerals. Erwin’s going to be here soon to get Levi… He walked downstairs to the piano room, where Eren and Levi sat on the couch, Eren’s head on Levi’s shoulder. His voice was quiet. “You sure you have everything, Levi?”

Levi nodded, his arms wrapped around Eren, gently rubbing his side. He was wearing the digital camouflage the academy had sent him. He looked up as he heard the low hum of a car pulling into the driveway, looking to Eren curled into his side. ...Eren... His voice was gentle and low. “Come on Eren, let’s stand up, okay?” He gently guided Eren up with him, his arms not leaving him as they stood to their full height. He pulled Levi close to him, one hand coming up to cup his cheek, pressing a soft kiss to his lips. Don't you worry about me or anything. “I love you, Eren. I'll be home before you know it.” He sent him a small smile. I'm gonna miss you… But I'll be home soon.

Eren kissed him back just as softly. He nodded and leaned his head into Levi’s hand. “Okay…. I’ll be waiting.” His voice was very quiet, jumping when he heard Erwin’s hard knock at the door. He’s really leaving….

Levi’s head turned as he heard the harsh knock, looking back to Eren and pressing one last kiss to his lips before letting his arms slide from him, picking up his pack from the floor next to the couch. “I'll be home soon. I promise.” He gave Lathe a quick hug before opening the door to Erwin, looking back and giving a small wave as he shut the door behind him, following him to his car.

Eren watched him leave, going towards the window, walking right past Lathe, as if he weren’t there, and standing at the window. .....No.... Don’t go.... Don’t leave me, I don’t want you to leave me.... Eren could only watch as his heart shattered, the car pulling out of the driveway and down the street towards the highway. I don’t want you to leave. Eren just stood there, staring at the road, as if they would turn around and come back, and he stood there, Blake whining at him to do something other than stare blankly at the road. … Come back....
Oh my... Lathe slowly padded behind him and rested a hand on his arm, rubbing his shoulder with his thumb, his voice quiet. “It’s okay, Eren. He’ll be home soon. ...do you want to come upstairs and write with me?” We need to get you to do something other than stare out the window... “Eren, you can’t just stand here… let’s do something, please.” ...something to distract your mind... Otherwise, I don't think you'd be able to do anything except break down inside...

Eren barely heard him, he could only watch the road, bringing his hands up to scratch at his wrists, which of course warranted Blake jumping up to grab his hands in his jaws. Eren didn’t even flinch, he just kept his eyes trained on the road, his head leaning forward to press against the glass. ... Don’t leave me... I don’t want you to die...

Lathe sighed wearily, taking hold of Eren’s hands and guiding him over to the couch gently, sitting down and holding onto him tightly. His voice was quiet in his ear. “It’s okay Eren, he’ll be home really soon. He’s gonna be okay, I promise. Don't worry. You can talk to me if you want… You can cry if you need to.” ...you look like you’re about to....

Eren was quiet for only a few second before his grip tightened on Lathe’s shirt and he started to sob. “I don’t… I don’t want him to leave…” Eren sobbed and curled up into his arms.

Lathe rubbed soothing circles into Eren’s back, moving to wipe away at Eren’s tears with his kerchief. “Eren... It’s something he just has to do. I know it doesn't feel like it’s fair, that he has to leave like this, but he’s going to come back for you. He’ll be okay, it’s just training he’s going through right now. He’ll come home in one piece, and he’s going to come home every time he has to leave because he loves you. He’ll be home again soon. It won't be too long… And it’ll get easier, as time goes on…” This isn't the only time you have to say goodbye to him...

Eren continued to sob as he gripped onto Lathe’s shirt. “I don't want him to leave!” Eren shouted loudly, the loudest he had been in a week. His fists gently beating against Lathe’s chest, not really hurting him but beating against him in his anger. “I never wanted him to leave!” Eren screamed as he cried in his lap. I don’t want him to go!

Lathe looked lost, not knowing what to do as Eren shouted, sobbing into his shoulder. He shifted so Eren was in his lap, trying weakly for a moment to stop hitting him before just letting him. ...it’s not like he’s hurting me... Just let him let it out, I guess... I don't know what to say for any of this, what to do... What else can I tell him? ...nothing, really. He tried to keep his arm out of the way of his fists, wiping the tears from his eyes with the soft red fabric as he held Eren against him, murmuring into his ear, trying to calm him. It’s okay... Just... that’s all you need to know. That it’s all gonna be okay.
Eren shook his head, his fists getting harder on his chest until he practically punched him in the chest, moving away from him. “No! It’s not alright! Levi’s leaving me! He doesn’t want to stay with me anymore!” Eren shouted at him, getting up and staring at him as he cried. “Levi’s leaving me! This is just the beginning!” His voice rose high enough that he didn’t even notice the door opening.

Well shit. Spades looked quickly between a defeated Lathe and a furious Eren, unsure of how to intervene. He looks like he’s about to punch his face in. Fuck. “Eren, hon, calm down, please.” She walked to him, trying not to startle him as she rested a hand on his shoulder. Her expression softened. Levi must’ve just left… I was hoping to catch him before he left. He looks so… Broken. “Eren, it’s okay, please. He’s going to come home soon.” You don’t have to shout… You look so furious ...

Eren just shook his head, beginning to sob and break down. “But he left… And he’s gonna leave me again.” He sunk down to the floor, curling up to himself, letting Blake fret over him as he cried harder, his angry facade crumbling right before them to show just how broken he was. I want him back already…. I don’t want him to ever leave.

Spades knelt down next to him, Lathe on Eren’s other side as she gently rubbed his arm, her voice quiet. “Eren, I know you don’t like it, but Levi’s leaving because he feels that he has to. It’s something he feels called to do. But I know that every time, he’s always going to come back. He might leave, but it’s only ever temporary. He’ll be back for you soon. He really will be. He’ll come home in one piece, and just because he was gone for a while doesn’t mean he ever stopped loving you.” …I know it’s hard, but you have to learn to handle it… For right now, though, it’s okay to feel sad, and angry, and broken all at once… I understand… But you can’t be like this every time he has to go...

Eren just sobbed, his head buried in his hands, as Blake tried to lick away his tears. “Why didn’t he ask? Why does he want to go so m-much? I d-don’t want him to go! I-I …n-never wanted him to g-go!” Eren cried, looking up to them, shaking his head. “I don’t…. I don’t want him to leave like… Like mom did…” Eren cried, letting Blake push him down into the ground. I don’t want him to leave like Mom did… I didn’t get to say good bye!

Lathe murmured quietly, wiping at his tear-stained face. “Eren… Levi felt that there was no way he couldn’t do what he’s training to do. It’s not as if he would be okay with knowing he could have been a Marine and not going through with it. It’s just… What he’s going to be training to do, is to help others and try to save lives. I felt the exact same thing when I was looking for a profession… It’s not as much of a choice as it is a calling. And Eren, he’s just going for training right now. He’s not in any real danger right now. And even when it does come time for that, I know that he’s going to do everything he can to come home to you. He really will.” He has to.
Eren struggled to stop his sobs. He let Blake force him to the ground, laying down on his back and the dog quickly laying down on his chest to keep Eren from freaking out anymore than he already was. His eyes looked so broken. What if he likes it so much he wants to stay? What if he finds someone else to love?... And he’s really done with me?

Lathe ran his hand through Eren’s hair, trying to get him to calm down. “Eren, Levi loves you too much to spend any more time than he has to away from you. He’s going to come home soon, and I promise you that if anything, he’s going to love you even more than when he left. He adores you, and he’s not going to stop at anything to get himself home to you. I swear it.” He’ll be home in a week. It’s just a week. ...wait. Spades is back from Germany. Lathe’s eyes suddenly snapped up to Spades in recognition, though his attention soon returned to Eren. We can all talk when Eren is calmer...

Spades was silent as Eren cried and started to quiet down, gently rubbing his arm. Her voice was soft as Eren’s sobs finally stopped. “Eren, there’s something I want you to see. It’s outside right now… I think it’ll make you feel a bit better.” It took forever to get it overseas... And then getting a truck to drive it here was unnecessarily a nightmare… But it’s here. Finally, it’s all here!

What’s outside? Eren slowly calmed down with Blake resting on top of him, grounding him until he knew that he wasn’t going to panic anymore, or freak out anymore. His voice was still pretty shaky, even with how much he was trying to keep calm. “W-What’s… out-outside?” Eren looked over to her, letting Blake stay on his chest, reaching up to pet him to try and calm himself more. I didn’t want him to leave....

Spades smiled warmly. “I want you to see for yourself. There’s a if truck out in the driveway, but it’s what’s in the truck that you should see. Come on, can you get up for me?” She brought her feet under her, slowly guiding Eren to his feet. Oh you're going to love this. She kept one hand on Eren’s arm as she guided him to the door, letting him slip on his boots untied and opening the door, walking him to the back of a large truck, one you would see movers use. She reached into her pocket for the keys to the back, unlocking a large padlock and stepping back. “The doors swing open, so watch out.” She took hold of one of them, holding it open and Lathe pulling the other open, letting Eren get a clear look inside.

Eren’s eyes widened at the sight, his mother’s grand piano situated in the far back corner of the truck, securely tied down, and padded to prevent any nicks. He felt new tears start to fall from his eyes and stain his cheeks all over again. <“Mom.”> His voice was a hoarse whisper as he quickly jumped up into the back of the large truck and inspected all the cases that surrounded the piano. <“They’re all here…”> His voice was soft as he spotted the double bass case. I have my mom back…. I can play the music she liked… Eren let his tears fall as he sunk down to his knees, and hugged the case and sobbed with a small smile on his face, memories flooding into his head. I miss you so much.... Can you come back Mom?
Lathe looked with wide eyes over the cases of instruments, his gaze landing on the piano. “Hey Spades? Did you call the old school yet or do I need to call?” We don't have enough room to keep both of them. And we obviously know which one has to stay.

Spades nodded. “Oh they know, they've got people there ready for it anytime today. The office is still open during the summer. They've got maintenance at the ready. I know you have the rolling stand thing in the basement, and dismantling the back sliding door won't be too hard.” Switching the two out won't be a problem. She looked to Eren with a soft smile. “He has more of his mother back.” ...this is why I do this.

Lathe nodded, smiling. “Spades, thank you. You've done too much.” He hooked the door in place so it wouldn't swing shut on him, hopping up and picking over to where Eren was, gently patting his shoulder. “You can take them all inside, Eren. They're yours. Put them where you like, but keep them clear of the kitchen or the piano room. Spades and I need to move stuff around a bit.” This shouldn't be too hard.

Eren nodded, sniffling as he slowly stood up, picking up the large case with relative ease, like he’d always been carrying it. He had a huge smile on his face as he carefully hopped down to the ground and went off in the house to bring the case upstairs and to the recording room. I wanna play this one later.... Eren smiled softly, scampering between the truck and the recording room and managing to neatly put them all in the far corner, and he moved to finally open the double bass case. You first...

Spades and Lathe set to work, Lathe and Spades heading to the basement to retrieve a toolbox and the rolling stand for the piano, taking the back sliding doors out of their frame and leaning them against the house. The kitchen table and the chairs were next, and between the two of them they managed to lift the grand piano onto the stand, rolling it out the back and around the house to the driveway, switching it to the piano in the back of the truck. It’s a damn good thing I made sure there was a ramp on this thing. If not we’d have a problem. They were carefully positioning the ornate piano inside when they heard music coming from upstairs. “He’s already playing… And it’s like he never stopped.” Spades beamed. He’s got so much raw talent...

Lathe smiled as they carefully lifted it to the floor. “Hopefully it’ll keep him occupied for the week...” I just hope it helps him cope... He carried the stand back to the front after they moved the kitchen table back and replaced the glass doors, helping roll the piano up and locking the wheels, helping Spades secure and pad it. He closed the doors to the back with her, watching as she locked it again. “Spades-” He swallowed as she smiled at him, so grateful to her for bringing back everything Eren had left of his mother. He pulled her into a tight hug, his head dropping onto her shoulder. “ Thank you.” You’ve done so much ...

Spades looked surprised, returning his hug. “Of course, Lathe. Of course.” She pulled back after a moment, patting his arm. “I'll get this to the school. Oh!” A light of recognition flashed in her eye,
reaching into the inside pocket of her jacket, showing Lathe a Manila envelope. “Can’t forget to give him this! Come on.” She led Lathe back into the house, walking upstairs and slowly pushing open the door of the recording room, greeted by very complex classical music. ...wow. She held up the small envelope where he could see. I've got something for you.

Eren looked up to them as they opened the door, slowly bringing his bow down from the neck of his instrument and putting it in it’s stand, getting up off the stool to see what Spades had for him. What is that? It looks familiar…. The key! Eren’s eyes had a hopeful look to them as he came up to her to look at the envelope. <“Mom’s key?”> His voice was soft and his eyes full of hope, the pain he felt earlier only a small trace now.

Spades opened the envelope, taking the small key out by the leather string. <“Your mother’s key. It’s all yours.”> She set down the envelope, clipping it around his neck. ...Better.

Eren let her clip the leather strap around his neck and looked at the metal key in his grasp. <“Thank you…. Thank you so much, Spades!”> Eren’s arms instantly went around her waist as he buried his head into the crook of her neck and cried happily. I have everything I could ever want from her back… But I can’t bring her back… I never can, and it’s my fault...

Spades smiled, returning his hug, gently rubbing his back. <“Of course, Eren.”> She held onto him tightly, letting them gently sway as he cried into her shoulder. ...You have everything you could have back. ...I think she’d be really proud of you, of everything you’ve done.

Eren just sobbed at that and held onto her tighter. <“I miss her….I miss Mom so much.”> Eren just broke down again, clinging to her. I want her back… but I can’t have her back… not after what I did… I can’t… I can’t have her back… I didn’t want her to leave me...

Spades held him tightly, one hand coming up to card through his hair, resting her cheek on his head. She let out a shaky breath, keeping her voice even and low. <“...You know, Eren, I think she’d be really proud of you, seeing all the things you've accomplished.”> I don't know how anyone couldn't be more proud.

Eren just cried more, his grip loosening from her shirt a little. <“You think so? I’m not a useless music rat?... She’d be proud of me? Even after what I did to her?”> Eren let the guilt he still held surface. I want her back, but I can’t have her back.

<“Eren, I know that your mother, wherever she is, doesn’t hold what happened against you. I don't know how she couldn't be so proud of you, the talent you have, the skills you've developed and the friends you've made… You're not useless. Nobody could ever think that. I know that right now,
wherever she is, she still loves you more than anything.”> She loves you, Eren. I know she does.

Eren sniffled as he buried his head into her neck. Lathe…. He’s not married… I don’t think I’ll ever have a Mom again… <“I still regret everything that I did… I killed her…. I killed my own mother… everyone hated me for that.”> I’m going to have to live with that fact… that I’ll never have a mom again, because of what I did.

<“Eren, nobody in their right mind could hold what happened against you. You were so young, you couldn't have known that what you would do would cause everything it did to happen. It’s okay to regret it, but you don't have to hold it against yourself. It was a tragic accident, and it was unfair that she was taken away from you, but it was not your fault. Nobody in their right mind could hate you for what happened.”> Spades forced her voice to stay even, her eyes a bit glassy. *It’s terrible, what happened… But by no means was it your fault. It was unfair, and horrible, but an accident, and not your fault.*

Lathe hovered in the doorway a step behind them, not sure how to help calm Eren down. *Spades is keeping up so well with the German, half of which I still barely understand… It’s his mother… I… She has him. If I need to help, I’m right here, but I think he’ll be okay with Spades. But I’m not moving. He stayed put, watching as Spades spoke quietly to him. He’ll be okay, Spades has him.*

Eren just sobbed against her neck. <“Why…. Why did I have to do it… Why did I have to make the Mac n’ cheese? Why didn’t I listen to her… She wouldn’t be dead! Grisha wouldn’t have beat me… None of this would’ve happened! She wouldn’t’ve died… Why couldn’t it have been me? I’d just be the one that’s dead… not Mom… I wish I had killed myself…”> None of this would be happening… I wouldn’t have fucked with Lathe’s chance at getting married… having a family of his own. I wouldn’t have fallen in love, and Levi could’ve had a normal family…. And maybe he could do what he actually wanted to and be a Marine for life… I’ve ruined so many dreams… I wish I would’ve died…. It would’ve been so much better for everyone.

Spades pulled back from Eren for just a moment, brushing the hair away from his eyes, trying to stay composed. *You can't break down too.* <“Eren, please don’t ever say that. Never wish that you were dead. I know it’s absolutely horrible what happened, and everything that followed it wasn’t the best, but things are the way they are. It’s unfair…”> She sniffed, trying to keep tears from falling. <“And I know you regret every bit of it. But wishing that it had been you instead of your mother… Eren, please don't think that things would have been better if it was you and not her. All we know is that with you still around, you’ve made a lot of people happy. You, with the songs you sing and the pictures you paint and the things you say and do, you've made so many people, so many that you don't even know, happy. Please, don't think like that. There are so many people now that would be devastated if you left their lives…”> She looked to Lathe for a moment. <“Eren, you have a boyfriend and a father who love you more than anything in the world. Please, don't forget that. Don't think that you being gone would have let them live a happier life. I don't think they could even imagine being happier now. They love you so much. And your mother loves you, too.”> Please. Don’t forget that.
Eren only shook his head. &lt;‘I’ve ruined their chances for so much…Dad can’t have a family…He won’t be able to get married with me here, and Levi… We can’t have a family either… I’ve ruined his chances of having kids.’&gt;

Spades looked up as Lathe stepped forward, letting Eren go for an instant before he was enveloped in Lathe’s arms, her hand still on his arm.

...I’m terrible with speaking German… English for me will have to do… “Eren, you haven’t ruined anything. As for me, all I know for sure is that I couldn’t ask for a better family- I have you as my son, and that means so much to me. You've brought me so much happiness, and I can’t even begin to tell you how much I love you…” He sniffled, trying to keep his voice even. “And as for Levi… I don't know if it’s too much for you to think about right now, but it is possible for you two to have children of your own. Or you two could adopt… The point is that you being with Levi doesn’t take away his chance at having a family of his own. You haven't ruined anything, Eren. You've made things so much better.” Lathe pulled Eren close, running a hand through his hair as he tucked Eren’s head under his chin, a tear trailing down his cheek. ... How can you say half of that? ...I don’t know how you could believe it...

Eren could only nod and snuffle, moving his arms from around Spades to around Lathe and clinging to him. “.... But I can’t bring back mom….” Eren cried and clung to him. ... And I feel horrible about that. “And I’ve ruined my chances of ever having one again… I'm sorry Dad.” Eren told him and he sniffled. I’m so sorry, I really am.

Lathe swallowed hard, his voice a bit shaky. “Eren, you don't have to apologise for anything. Whether or not I would have married… You wouldn't be responsible for it, either way. You being around has done nothing except make me the happiest man on Earth…” He let out a heavy sigh. “...I know you can't bring back your mother, and you can't undo what happened, as much as you want to… But having you as my son has neither helped or hurt any chance I have at finding someone I’d want to marry. Eren, you don't have to apologise for anything. It’s okay, really.” Tears kept trailing down his cheeks, trying to keep himself composed. ...you being around, being my son, hasn’t done anything to keep me from finding someone I would want to marry... you have nothing to apologise for.

Eren nodded, his cries starting to wane as he held onto Lathe. “Dad… Can… Can I…?” Eren trailed off, his grip still tight on Lathe’s shirt. I don’t want to be alone tonight...

Lathe’s brow furrowed, rubbing small circles into his back, his voice quiet. “What is it, Eren? You know you can ask me anything.” Whatever it is, I've got answers. Go ahead.
“Can… Can you stay with me today?... The whole day? And… And can… Can I sleep with you tonight?” Eren asked, his voice shaky as he held onto Lathe. *I know Spades needs to go soon…. But I don’t want you to leave me too…*

Lathe glanced up to Spades for a split second before he pressed a kiss to Eren’s temple, his voice warm. “Of course I will. I’m not going anywhere. Don’t you worry.” *Spades said the maintenance people were on standby… She’ll have all the help she needs. The piano’s already in the truck, so…*

Spades spelled with her free hand quickly to him where he could see. {I'll be fine taking care of the piano. You have your own things to do.} She murmured quietly to Eren, her hand still gently rubbing his shoulder. “Eren, I'll get going, is that okay? We’ve both still got the day ahead of us.” *And I can't leave the maintenance people at the school forever…*

Eren nodded, gently reaching out to her to cup her face gently, a small smile on his face. “T-that’s okay.” He leaned his head back against Lathe’s chest and sniffled as his tears finally stopped. *You can leave… I just want Lathe to stay with me… I don’t want him to leave me soon.*

Spades smiled, reaching up to brush the hair away from his face. “Alright. I'll see you two later then.” As Eren’s hand fell away from her face she sent a smile to Lathe and moved for the door, disappearing downstairs and closing the front door silently behind her. *He’ll be okay. I hope.*

Lathe looked back to Eren, pressing a kiss to his forehead. “It’s getting to be around noon… Want to help me make lunch?” *I think you'll feel better after we get some food in you.*

“Grilled cheese?” Eren’s voice was hopeful as he braved a glance to meet Lathe’s soft eyes. *He’s not angry… Right?*

Lathe smiled warmly. “Grilled cheese.” He gently pulled Eren over to the stairs, keeping an arm around him as they made their way to the kitchen, in no hurry. After they made and ate lunch, never more than a few feet apart, Eren brought him back up to the recording room, and Lathe got a good look at just how many instruments there were. *There are so many of them… He can play all of them?* He sat down on a stool as Eren brought out the instruments from their cases, one by one, playing every song he could remember. *He plays like he never stopped… He’s got such amazing talent.*

Eren looked over to Lathe’s cello. “Can we play together?” He asked quietly, though still not looking into his eyes. *I wanna play with you, we haven’t done that.*
Lathe smiled. “Of course we can.” He stood to move the cello and amp closer, turning it on and inspecting the bow for a moment. *Can’t have this breaking. After the last one, I haven’t got any more backups.* “Anything in particular you want to play?” *I have some random sheet music if you don’t know what you’d want to play.*

“U-um…. I don’t know… But um… What should I play with you?” Eren asked and looked over to the many cases in the corner… *If he’s doing his cello, I should stick with strings, so I have the other cello, the double bass, the violin, and the viola… Or I have guitars….*

“Hmm… Something with a higher range than a cello… Violin, if you want, or whichever you think would sound the best. And I have some sheet music on here…” He placed his cello back in it’s stand, typing quickly on the computer, soon logging into an odd-looking file-sharing website and pulling up a long list of sheet music. He skimmed the long list, picking one with the name ‘Garden.’ *That’s a good one, one I haven’t played in a while.* “I think you’ll like this one. It’s fast, and complex, and it sounds amazing.” He printed it off, handing the many sheets to Eren. “*It is pretty long, though. You’ll still probably manage memorising all of it in minutes anyway though.*” He grinned. “The higher bit starts with the first line, and then every other.”

Eren took the sheets, going to sit down on his high stool, perching himself as he skimmed through the sheet music. *It has a wonderful rhythm to it.* He was gently fiddling his fingers against his thighs as he went through all the sheets, his eyes widened as he reread one of the lines. … *Is this? It is!* “Is this from Undertale?” Eren asked quietly, a glint in his eyes as he finished reading through the music.

Lathe grinned. “Yeah, it is. It’s from the Flowey boss battle. I hope I don’t mess it up too much. It gets insanely difficult very fast, and there are too many beat changes to count…” He brought his cello back from it’s stand, his bow at the ready. “*I start… Whenever you’re ready, Eren.* The violin is perfect to hit the notes I can’t.

Eren nodded, picking up his bow. “I’m ready.” *So ready…. Wait we should record this.* “Wait!” He got up and went to set the computer up for recording it. *We need to record this.*

Lathe grinned widely as he saw the red light start to flash on the camera, the recording program pulled up. He waved to the camera. “Hello! We’re doing a thing!” He chuckled as Eren sent him an odd look. “Okay, the song from Undertale we’re playing isn't actually called ‘Garden,’ it’s called ‘Your Best Nightmare’ and the Finale’s written into it.” He shrugged, a glint in his eye. “Close enough.” He picked his bow back up. “*On your mark, Eren.*”

Eren smiled and started out the first few cords expertly. He stayed perched on his stool, a small smile on his face. *I like this song.*
Lathe’s hands flew over the neck of the cello, the movements familiar as he drew his bow quickly over the strings, mostly playing the lowest notes his instrument allowed him to. He grinned, Eren keeping in perfect time with him. It took forever to arrange this piece so it was playable... And you’ve got it down to a science in two minutes flat. That’s great! It was a long song, his grip on the bow beginning to loosen as they let the last melody fade, his smile wide. That. Was amazing!

“Eren, I don't know how you pick up the melodies so fast... That was great!” You played it perfectly!

Eren smiled and put his bow down. “That was a rather long song… But, you know I just memorize everything right away.” I really like the Undertale songs… We should do more of them. He moved to finish the recording.

Lathe tapped his arm after he hit the stop button. “Y’know, I have a ton of Undertale songs arranged, and a bunch more from games you might like to play sometime, if you want to make an event out of it.” He shrugged. “It’s your call, though.” We could do a stream if you wanted. But, I dunno if you're up for it or not.

“Hmm… Well, today is my recording day… But...” Eren trailed off as he looked at his violin. If I record everything today... I won’t be able to distract myself... Eren’s eyes became dull as he thought about Levi. He’s gone... I don’t know what to do without him...

Lathe tapped his arm again, his eyes soft. “Here, how about you just listen, okay? You can turn on the camera if you want so you have something other than Garden to post, but I just want you to just listen, okay? You don't have to play.” ... We need to get you out of the house. But for right now, we need to just have you relax.

Eren nodded, moving to go set up the recording stuff for Lathe and moved away his stool, and went to sit in the corner of the room. What’s he gonna play? He made sure everything was recording.

Lathe looked up to the camera and waved. “Hi! It’s Lathe. I know you may or may not be wondering where Eren is, but you're just going to have to deal with me.” He grinned. “I've got no real plans for what is about to happen, all I know is I have a list of different songs I've memorised from video games on the computer screen next to me for inspiration, and nowhere to be. So, enjoy this, whatever this may end up being.” He shifted a bit, pulling the pad of pedals closer to his foot and clicking the first one, drawing his bow slowly over the strings. He started with slower songs, glancing up every now and again to the list, thinking what to play next as he switched from melody to melody for nearly a half hour, jumping from calm to eerie, to intense and to sweet, and back again. He smiled as he played, his hands moving of their own accord. I need to play this thing more often... I certainly don't do it enough, even with such a setup here... Yep, it's official. I need
to do this. The melody faded, slowly returning to the one he had begun with, ending on a long, low note. He was silent for a moment, looking up to the camera and grinning. “Thanks” was all he said before he leaned over and stopped the recording, looking over to Eren as he set the cello back in it’s stand, his features soft. “How was that?” His smile faded a bit as he took in Eren’s distant look, staring at him from his corner of the room. He stood, pulling his stool behind him as he sat next to Eren, wrapping an arm around him. “You doing okay?” You look so sad…

Eren snapped out of his daze and looked up from where he had trained his gaze, simply nodding before getting up. “Yeah, I’m fine.” His voice as dull as his eyes. I'm fine… I need to get through this.

Lathe stood up with him, his hand on his arm. “Hey, how about we get you out of the house? We can go do something. Stalk the mall, go anywhere you like, how about? Anything you want!” He tried to keep the tone light, his smile bright. Hmm… what's good to distract you with… Ah! “There’s a bookstore not too far from here if you want to go have a look around.” You do have a thing with books, you have a lot of them.

Eren picked his head up, giving Lathe full view of his dull eyes, nodding silently. Books... I’ll be able to read everything away... maybe I’ll even be able to escape the loneliness inside... Ha! Yeah... right, because that will actually happen... I need to put on a smile, to get Lathe to think nothing’s wrong... yeah, that should work out. Eren ran a hand through his shaggy hair, plastering a soft smile on his face, but it barely reached his gaze as he went towards the door. “Bookstore… that sounds like a good idea.” Eren tried to keep his voice light. Act normal... you need to act normal. They can’t know you're hurting inside... Hide it. Hide the pain. You’re good at hiding it... Keep it up.

Lathe sighed, seeing clear through his facade. ...after so long, you think I can't tell when you're upset? He followed Eren down the stairs, lacing his boots with him, his voice quiet as he saw Eren fight to keep a smile on his face. I don't know how the hell to say this... I'm not trying to tell you to be sad, but forcing yourself to look happy when you're so obviously not... I can't stand it. It makes you look even more miserable. “...Eren, you don’t have to force yourself to look happy. It’s okay to just... emote, and not force yourself to look otherwise.” ...I'm not sure whether or not that was a roundabout way of telling him to be sad... I really hope it wasn’t. Shit.

Eren stopped for a second as he stared at his laces. ...I feel like I can’t hide anything from him... fuck... well, I guess I’ll have to try a bit harder... tone the smile down a bit, and just let it seem natural. Eren let the smile he held fall from his face, the corner of his mouth turning up a bit as he finished tying his boots to his feet. “Got it.” Was all he said before moving to grab his bag, along with Blake’s vest as the dog stood at his heels.

Lathe sighed wearily, standing and picking up his keys. Okay, A, by admitting that you were faking in the first place and still smiling after the breakdowns of today, it’s obvious you’re still faking it.
And B, just… Emote! It’s not a crime to look sad, it’s not your job to look happy all the time if it’s just for my ‘benefit.’ If you feel sad, that’s okay! It’s justified! Just… You look even more miserable when you’re trying so hard to hide it… His eyes widened. …wait. I just said that, didn’t I? Shit. He looked up to Eren, standing.

Eren looked down, his eyes not meeting Lathe’s as he walked with Blake towards the car. I look even more miserable when I’m trying to hide it, huh? Well… I guess we’re going for the depressed out of my fucking mind look today, I hope you’re happy. He waited patiently for Lathe to unlock the car, letting Blake in first and sitting down beside him, not looking over to Lathe as he got in the driver’s side.

Lathe shut the door behind him, fiddling with the keys for a moment before he held out his right palm to Eren, his head bowed, mumbling quietly. “I’m sorry, Eren, I was thinking out loud, and that was really mean… I’m really sorry…” He swallowed hard, his glassy eyes tracing over the floor of the car. You really did it, Lathe. Good fucking job.

Eren glanced over, a twitch in his lips as he raised his hand, gently tracing his fingers down the length of Lathe’s hand twice. “It’s okay, you did nothing wrong.” Eren’s voice was quiet, yet oddly emotionless. You didn’t really, you just told me I gotta spend more time remembering what my facial features feel like when I’m around Levi… when he comes back… if he… no! When, it needs to be when. He barely noticed as Blake shuffled to paw at Lathe’s lap once they started driving.

Lathe glanced to Blake as he drove, a flicker of guilt still in his eye as he looked to him quickly, keeping his eyes on the road, his voice soft. What’s up, Blake? “What’cha tryin’ to tell me, Blake?” Eren’s not freaking out or anything right now… He focused for an instant, trying to gauge Eren’s demeanour. …he still looks pretty depressed… No changes there, sadly… At least he’s somewhat calm. He’s a bit tense, though. Again, understandable. He sighed. …Today has already been too long of a day. He pulled into the lot of a two-story bookstore, shutting off the engine. This’ll be a good distraction for a bit. “Eren, we’re here.” He sent him a small smile, getting out of the car and locking it behind him.

Eren snapped out of his daze when Lathe spoke, looking around to see that their surroundings had infact changed, and they were indeed at the bookstore. Fuck… He stepped out of the car, clipping the leash on Blake and letting him sniff around the car. What are you trying to do? His eyes were still pretty downcast as Blake led him to Lathe’s side and continually pawed at him, but he wasn’t whining, it was almost like he wanted attention, but he’d never done this when his vest was on him before. He had always waited for his vest to be removed before he was an attention hog. Why are you acting so weird today? “Come on, Blake. Leave Lathe alone.” His voice was still emotionless as he gave a gentle tug on the leash, pulling Blake away from Lathe and back to his side.

Lathe looked confused at Blake’s actions. Huh. He always sticks to business when he’s got the vest on. He’s never done that when he’s working… What’s with that? He shrugged, keeping a careful
eye on Blake as they walked to the large bookstore, Lathe holding the door open for them. You’re not speaking with any emotion either... Hmm. He followed them in, letting Eren guide them around the store, looking at the tables they passed. He picked up a hardcover with a gold insignia on the front, looking up, his eyes widening. ...aaaaand he’s gone. Well then. He looked to the back of the book. XX year anniversary? Then they’ve got to have the box set for this somewhere... He took the book with him, moving to grab a basket from the front of the store again, picking titles off the shelves as he walked. The Invention of Hugo Cabret is a good one, Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe he should like... A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Life as We Knew It, Eragon, Hush Hush... He laughed as he picked one up. The Girl With the Lower Back Tattoo... My god, that was a riot... Coraline... I should find the movie for that, that was a good stop motion animation... Come to think of it, Eragon was a good movie too. Where are they... He wandered over to the far right wall, covered in DVDs and box sets. Jackpot. Coraline, Eragon... True Grit, of course... Jumanji was great... The Great Gatsby, obviously. Frankenstein, because he didn't even get the most classic of all references. Casper was a really good one... Here... He picked up a heavy box set. ...Is that Star Trek set. Oh my God, it’s literally everything!! He beamed, setting it in his basket. He looked over to another set. Oh. My God. Monty Python. GIMME! He chuckled, moving over to the animated section. O-Kay, we need an anime in here somewhere, see if he likes anything like that, which he probably will... He stopped, looking over a pink case dotted with red roses. ...Ouran High School Host Club. I was obsessed with this!! He snatched it up, looking around to the shelves behind him. Oh, but I'm making him read the manga before he gets to watch it. There’s more in the manga than the show, anyway. And if he doesn’t read it... He grinned, picking the entire series from a high shelf. ...I will. He suddenly looked around, worried. How the hell could I forget the time? It’s been a while, and Eren’s just been wandering around... And Blake was acting so strangely... He walked quickly up an aisle that ran the whole length of the store, looking down each aisle for him. Where are you... Upstairs? He walked over to the escalator, taking a moment to survey the first floor from his vantage point. Nope, he ain’t down there. And he couldn’t have left, obviously. Pretty sure he wouldn’t. He walked down an aisle, passing a table of comics and finding him in the nonfiction section. “There you are Eren, I’m sorry we got separated-” He stopped as he saw the huge stack of books in his arm, reading the title of the book he was pulling out from a shelf. ...When Bad Things Happen to Good People? ... NAH. He looked down the spines of the books in his arm. Thirteen Reasons Why, The Perks of Being a Wallflower, A Monster Calls, My Sister’s Keeper, Men We Reaped, Me Before You, The Absolutist, Eleanor & Park, Of Mice & Men, The Fault in Our Stars, The Outsiders, Wonder, ... The Time Traveler’s Wife. Like hell I’m letting you walk out of here with nothing but tearjerkers. “Eren, put it back.” Lathe shook his head, his shoulders drooping a bit.

Eren was about to turn and walk to look for his next book to pick when Lathe spoke up. Wait... What? “Huh? Why do I have to put it back? I wanna read it...” Eren protested, and his eyes still seemed distant. Blake had come up to Lathe again and pawed at his pant leg until Eren pulled him back to his side, the dog looking up to keep eye contact with Lathe. Why is he acting so weird? I don’t understand!

Lathe looked to Blake, just beginning to understand. I know, he’s depressed and there’s not much we can do about it besides try and distract him. It sucks. Lathe looked back up to Eren, setting his heavy basket on the ground and moving over to him, pointing from one book to another. “Let’s see, depressing, depressing, and very depressing. Half these books made me want to cry when I read them, Eren. The Time Traveler’s Wife? Really? That could make literally anyone on the planet
burst into tears. The point in coming here was to get you something to make you feel better, not pile more sadness on top of you. So, you are going to give me these,” He took the pile from Eren’s hands, setting it on a nearby shelf. “...Sorry bookstore employees, and look, I did my best to pick out things I thought you’d really enjoy, so we can keep going around and you can try and pick out something that’s not going to make you cry, or we can give what I’ve got a shot. Do you want to keep wandering, or no?” I’m not letting you get any of that. ...even if they all were really good, they’re nowhere near the kind of thing you need to be reading right now.

Eren looked down, his eyebrow furrowing for a split second before defeat crossed his features. “N-No… I’m done looking.” His voice was soft as he stuttered, and Blake just kept his eyes either latched onto Lathe’s, or staring at Eren. ...So I’m not allowed to get those books?... Well I don’t see any point in staying any longer,... I just wanted something to… to… I don’t even know anymore... why did he need to leave?

Lathe pulled Eren into a hug. “Eren, they're just not the kind of thing you need to be reading right now. I'm not trying to be mean, I just want you feeling better. Let’s head home, okay then?” He gave Eren a soft smile, his face falling a bit as he took in Eren’s expression, bowing his head and offering his palm. I'm sorry, I'm just worried about you.

Eren just shook his head. “There’s nothing to apologize for… It’s fine Dad.” Eren murmured quietly as he started to walk back down the aisle towards the escalators, expecting Lathe to follow him, Blake whining and biting at his hands as he tried to bury them into his pockets. He only sighed and let Blake take his hand. Fuck it... you’re being so weird today.

Lathe was stunned as Eren simply ghosted past him. ...I thought it’s always gone without saying, even if you don't think someone needs forgiveness, you’d give it to them. What the hell? Lathe was perplexed as Eren walked to the escalators, swallowing hard and unable to suppress a small wave of guilt. ...I can't help but feel guilty... I said he could get books and stuff, and then I come along after he’s been picking them out for a long time and just nix the whole lot of it. He picked up the basket, settling it in the crook of his arm as he followed Eren, his eyes a shade darker than normal, his shoulders slumped. Dammit, and he doesn't forgive you for it, either... His eyes widened as Blake suddenly bit Eren’s hand. ...but he hasn't done anything yet, and Eren doesn't even care... You’re acting really off today, Blake. Or... Well, Eren’s acting really off, and then again Levi did just leave... So you’re just reacting to that, then. Makes sense. He studied Blake. But then again it doesn't entirely explain your pawing at me. ...What do you know that I don’t? He moved behind Eren to the line for checkout, near totally silent as the woman at the register rung up his things and handed him a receipt with a mumbled “Thanks.” He carried the bags to the car, unlocking it and setting the things in the trunk, sliding into the driver’s seat and shutting the door. He turned to Eren again, holding his palm up again in a silent plea for forgiveness. Please, I feel like I was being way too mean about it when I didn’t let you get those books... I was a complete asshat. Just... Please?

Eren looked over to his outstretched palm, sighing as he reached over to stroke his fingers across
his palm twice. “I already told you, there’s nothing to apologize for, it’s fine Dad, really, you don’t need to make a big deal out of it.” … I’m already over it…. He turned his gaze back out the window, missing the fact that Blake moved to latch his mouth around Lathe’s outstretched palm, and giving him a complete stare down.

Lathe’s eyes were wide as he stared straight back at Blake, trying not to panic. **What the actual hell are you doing? What am I doing? Do I really look like I’m about to hurt myself or something? What is it?** He brought his other hand up to pet Blake gently behind the ears, glad that after a moment he had his hand back. **What’s wrong? It’s something about Eren, obviously. He’s probably confused that Eren’s so depressed, and keeps trying to get me to help Eren because he doesn’t know what the hell else to do.** He scratched gently at his ears. **Don’t worry Blake, I’m on it.** He gave the dog a small smile as he licked his hand, moving to start the car and drive home. **...hmmm, straight home?** He glanced over to a plaza as they approached it, seeing a small coffee shop. A memory tugged at his mind, and he grinned. **Nope.** He pulled into the parking lot, killing the engine in front of the small shop. “Alright, Eren, let’s go.” He hopped out of the car, a mischievous grin on his face. **This always worked for us- hell, why not for him?**

Eren looked around seeing they were in a plaza parked in front of the local coffee shop, which was pretty dead considering it was two in the afternoon on a monday. He brought Blake out and following Lathe inside, only to groan as a familiar stuck-up voice sounded through the almost empty cafe.

“Well, well, well, look what the cat dragged in. How’s your summer been, Fagger?” Jean called from behind the counter, the smirk on his face faltering a bit as he noticed how dark Eren’s eyes were.

“I’m not in the fucking mood Secretariat, now shut your hay chute and do your fucking job.” Eren growled as they got closer to the cash register.

“Ooohhh… No need to be sassy, suicidal bastard, I was just asking how your summer was, chill the fuck out…. What can I get you?” Jean looked at Eren, watching as he shrugged. “Then don’t waste my fucking time, I’m doing important shit.”

“Yeah, prancing around all day in an empty field like a retarded horse… yup, that’s sooo important.” Eren’s voice dripping in obvious sarcasm as he looked through the glass display case to look over the treats.

“Hey! At least I was trying to be nice, fuckwad. You’re the one who had to lose the apeshit.” Jean spat right back. “So did you finally break up with Levi? This your new boy toy-” Jean visibly swallowed as he looked up to Lathe’s hulking figure standing a solid 6 inches above him and
staring him down. *Nope... Not a new boyfriend... Shit. “M-Mr. Quo.”*

Lathe stood tall, his expression dark, staring at him, his eyes flashing dangerously. *...you did not just say all that. “You happen to have anything else to say to my son, Mr. Kirstein?” You're lucky I haven't hit you for that. What the *fuck* makes you think you can say that shit?*

Jean’s eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, and he cowered under Lathe’s glare. *Fuck.... He’s pissed ... wait, did he say son? Eren is Lathe’s son? “N-No Sir, um... I didn’t know that Eren was your son... I didn’t think the rumors were true...”* Jean stared at Lathe like he had grown an extra head in the span of a second, not even realizing Blake was here as well, and had pawed at Lathe during the entire banter Eren and him held.

Lathe ignored Blake for the moment, quirking an eyebrow, his glare still icy. “Well, now you know. And are you *sure* you don't have anything else to say? An *apology*, perhaps?” *That was some awful shit you said.*

Jean just gaped at Lathe, unable to break from the glare he was currently cowering from. He didn’t see Eren snap a picture of his frightened form.

“Eh, this is enough of an apology, look at his face, he looks ready to pee himself! I *could* just send it to the football team...” Eren’s glare was just as dark as Lathe’s when Jean finally snapped his eyes away from Lathe’s and to his own.

“You wouldn’t...”

“Oh you know I fucking will, Seabiscuit.” Eren countered just as quickly.

“Eren, no please, not the football team... I’m sor-”

“Done.” Eren chirped with a smile on his face as he showed Jean the group chat, which held the picture with an excellent caption: ‘Looks like the majestic stallion finally figured out what being castrated feels like’. “I fucking did it, apology accepted horseface.” He only smirked as Jean’s phone and his own buzzed off the hook with comments from the whole team. *Payback.*

*There it is.* Lathe grinned as Eren’s face lit with a smile, nodding. “I approve. Now.” He looked to Jean, setting his face stony again. “Are you going to do your job and take my order, or are you just
Jean hurriedly went back to the counter. “Y-yeah… what can I get you, Mr. Quo?” Jean asked, his voice lacking all sarcasm.

Lathe looked up to the menu board above him, his tone unamused, intentionally garbling a few words and making one up. “I’d like a medium grarblefla with two droblefluh and a vriska, please.” His voice was still cold, reaching into his back pocket for his wallet. He was internally smirking. ...wonder how much those are going for these days.

... What? “I-I’m sorry, Mr. Quo, but could you… could you repeat that to me again?” I don’t think a word you said is on our menu… unless I completely heard you wrong… which I could have.

... Well, I’m getting the camera out now... Eren just started recording as non-suspiciously as possible. This is gonna be fucking great and I can already tell.

Lathe glared at him, sighing loudly. “I said, I’d like a miniature coffee with extra puppy, two shots of riboflavin, Glory to Arstotzka.” He fished in his wallet for his credit card, looking up as Jean made no movement, his unamused facade never faltering. “Well?”

... Did I hear him right? Jean started to punch in for a medium coffee. “I’m sorry… D-Did you say extra puppy?” Jean asked, his eyes concerned. What is in his sick and twisted mind to want puppy in his coffee? A, we don’t do that shit, and B, we still don’t do that shit.

Lathe brought a hand up to pinch at the bridge of his nose, his eyes shut in frustration. “Are you deaf?” He shook his head, muttering. “Cant get a simple order right….” His tone was angry as he dropped his hand, leaning on the counter and fixing Jean with a cold glare. “Now you listen and you listen well, okay? I’m not repeating myself again.”

“O-Okay…”

“For the last. Time. I’d like a double triple bossy deluxe, on a raft, four-by-four animal-style, extra shingles with a shimmy, and a squeeze, light axle grease, make it cry, burn it, and let it swim.” He managed to keep a perfectly straight face, waiting for when Jean recognized the order. Any minute now...
It took only a moment until Jean was glaring at Lathe with a perfectly straight face. “Well, Mr. Quo, glad to know you keep up with SpongeBob, but I regret to inform you that this is not the Krusty Krab and I cannot fulfill such a tall order.” *I am so done with you, and you’ve only been here for five minutes, not even. You’ve been messing with me this whole time haven’t you?*

“Well, if that isn’t a *shame*, Squidward. I was hoping you'd serve food here. But I guess we could just order off the menu.” His tone was still cold as he glared at Jean. “Medium coffee, double-double. What do you want, Eren?” He turned to Eren, his entire demeanor instantly shifting as he looked to him.

Eren held his smile for another moment before shaking his head. “I’m good, I don’t want anything.” He told him quietly, his smile already starting to fade as Jean got serious and started to get Lathe’s coffee together, pouring in half the coffee before he added two creams and two sugars and topped it off, using a stir stick to make sure everything was evenly distributed. He watched as he put a lid on the cup as well and a sleeve around it, sliding it to Lathe.

“Anything else I can get you?” He asked, his voice clearly showing his disdain for Lathe at the current moment.

Lathe handed him his black credit card, picking up the coffee. “Just a receipt, and an explanation.” He sipped from the cup. “Where did you get the idea you could say that kind of shit to Eren? I’m curious.” *Furious is a much better word, but that'll do.*

Jean took the credit card, silent as he did his job, handing it back with a receipt. “I’m sorry Sir… I-I…” Jean couldn’t find the words to describe the situation.

“Dad… Can we not do this here?” Eren asked, his voice breaking only a little as he rubbed his forehead. *His fucking presence annoys the shit out of me… I just wanna leave.*

Lathe looked to Eren and nodded, his features softening for an instant before he walked them to the door, speaking to Jean over his shoulder. “I'll see you in class, Mr. Kirstein.” He turned his attention back to Eren as they left, his voice quiet as they walked into the parking lot. “You okay?”

“I’m fine, Dad. It’s not like he hasn’t said any of that before.” *But it still…* Eren had a sad smile on his face as he let Blake in and sat down in the passenger seat. *It’s nothing I should be worried about… But he was right…*
Lathe studied Eren’s expression, setting his cup in the holder and placing a hand on Eren’s arm. “Eren, it’s not fine. What he said was absolutely terrible. Don’t listen to him. I’ll see if I can do something about it, okay?” He hasn’t heard the end of this. He started the car, beginning the drive home. ... awful.

Eren shook his head. “It’s fine, really, it’s not like he’s never said it before…. He says that every day. We always fight with each other at lunch.” He told him, what sliver of a good mood he had thoroughly obliterated. I’m not that worried about it. “I’m just surprised he hasn’t come up with any new material… He’s had all summer, and the best he’s got is combining faggot and Yeager together… At least I have a ton horse insults for him.” Eren’s voice was cold, and almost a little heartless. It shouldn’t bother me.... But he’s fucking right ....

Lathe sighed, worry written into his expression. ...The first thing I do when classes are back in session is hunt him down ... “Just because he says it all the time doesn’t mean it isn’t still awful. I guess for the meantime, you have my permission to thoroughly roast him. But I’ll see what I can do. I really don't like that, the things he said… But let’s not focus on that. Just be prepared that the second we get home we’re watching Jumanji.” He smirked, though his mouth soon returned to a neutral line, thinking. It wasn't long before they pulled back into their driveway, Lathe killing the engine and opening the door. “We be home! I'll grab our stuff. Here, so you can unlock the door.” Lathe handed him the key ring, moving to the trunk to gather up the bags. This is gonna be an... Interesting week. He slammed the trunk shut and looked up, surprised. He opened the passenger door, Eren still sitting inside, staring at the keys in his hand. He shifted so the bag handles hung in the crook of his arm, gently shaking Eren’s shoulder. “Come on, Eren, let’s get you inside, okay?” He pulled gently on Eren’s shoulder. Do I have to carry you inside? You look so completely out of it...

Eren jumped a bit in his seat, looking around, his eyes darting every which way. He took in a deep breath, following Lathe out of the car and towards the door, realizing that he had the keys after a few moments and stepped up to unlock the door. Why can’t I focus on anything? This is so unlike me.... Fuck.... I need to act normal dammit... Dad won’t have to worry then… He slipped inside, taking a bag from Lathe and going to set it down in the scripting room, on the coffee table in front of the large TV. What even did he get me? I’m gonna be forced to read them aren’t I? He let his shoulders slump a bit. Well, just smile I guess? Say that you like the books? Even if you can’t focus long enough to actually read them?.... We’ll get there when we get there... But I need to show Lathe some gratitude, he did buy me books... Not the ones I wanted... But he did buy me some...

Lathe took the keys from where Eren had left them in the lock, shutting and locking the door behind him and toeing off his boots. He followed Eren after setting the keys on a hook by the door, setting the bag on the coffee table in the further half of the scripting room, starting to unpack its contents. “I tried my best to pick out the things I thought you would like. They're all great stories, and a great deal of them have really good humor. There’s plenty here to make you laugh, I assure you.” He tapped the Ouran High School Host Club disc set. “You're not allowed to watch this until you've read the manga, which you've already found in the bag you have. There are a couple movies here, including the entirety of Star Trek: which I assure you, you will love. But Jumanji is first. But here, let’s see… it’s 3 o’Clock now, so, how about we make popcorn and grab something to
drink, watch this, and then make dinner, okay?” He gently patted Eren’s shoulder after everything was scattered over the table, nudging him to the kitchen.

Eren barely looked up to Lathe, but moved in the direction he was prodded towards. Is it sweet? I don’t think I’ve had it before… Eren waited, his head tilted enough to have his eyes hidden from view thanks to his shaggy bangs. You need to hide it… Hide it...

Lathe moved to the cabinets, rifling to the back for a small bag of unpopped kernels. He dumped a decent amount into a saucepan on the stove, adding butter and salt and setting a glass lid on top, turning on the heat. “Eren, watch this.” Lathe turned, his small smile gone in an instant as he saw Eren curled up on his beanbag in the piano room. He quickly walked over, kneeling next to him and carding a hand through his hair, his voice soft. He’s got the thousand-yard stare… He’s so out of it… “Eren…” Lathe struggled to find words, after a moment deciding there were none. He simply shifted to wrap his arms around him, leaning his head on his shoulder and rubbing his arm. I just want you to be okay… He looked over as the kernels started popping, reluctantly letting Eren go to attend to the popcorn, soon moving a large bowl to the scripting room and retrieving a mug of tea and one of hot chocolate for himself, setting them on the coffee table before moving back to Eren, kneeling next to him. “We’re all set up, Eren.” He studied his blank face, offering his arms after a moment. “Want me to carry you?” You look so far gone and I can’t stand it...

Eren’s eyes finally snapped out of their stare and looked over to Lathe’s outstretched arms…..Levi would be the one to carry me… But he’s not here… Eren silently shook his head, getting up on his own and walking over towards the Scripting room with Lathe, Blake following at his heels. What are we doing again? And what did you make?... It smells good.

Lathe dimmed the lights as they passed the switches, the DVD already in the player. He picked up the remote. “The mug on the far side is your tea. And popcorn… Well, a movie’s not a movie without a good snack.” He grinned, sitting down and hitting play, holding onto the bowl so they both could easily reach it. “I think you’ll like it. The movie and the popcorn.” He popped a few kernels into his mouth, kicking his feet up onto the table. You should. ...I hope.

Eren watched him, taking a few sips of his tea before he timidly sunk down to the couch. Slowly creeping over, he curled up to Lathe’s side and stuck to it like glue. He watched the movie with mild interest, his eyes not immediately going to a long away stare. It took a few minutes, but Eren finally tried the popcorn, and after the first few pieces he was eating it by the handful. It is good.

Lathe set the popcorn in his lap, holding it with his left hand and letting his right arm rest over Eren’s shoulders, rubbing his arm lightly as his focus flickered between the movie and Eren. Well, he definitely doesn’t hate the popcorn, that’s a plus. He’s still got his appetite… He’s at least kinda okay. I sort of expected him to lose any appetite he had. He doesn’t look like he’s staring off into space, bored… That’s good.
Eren watched the movie silently, curled up to Lathe. *It's weird…. Why the hell is that kid turning into a monkey? Why are there animals in the streets? I still don’t understand this movie.* He reached for another handful of popcorn, only to come up empty.

Lathe looked to the bowl of popcorn, surprised as he saw it empty, a few unpopped kernels the only things left. ...*wow. That was a lot of popcorn, too. And we've still got a ways to go!*“Want me to go make more?” He looked to Eren, his voice warm and expression soft. *I already know how it goes; I don't mind making more if you want.*

Eren nodded, silently, his eyes still latched onto the TV screen, as if he couldn’t pull away. *What the actual hell is this movie? How much longer is this madness?* Eren stayed curled up to his side, not really knowing that Lathe needed to get up and leave him.

Lathe brought his feet down from the coffee table, bringing up his arm from around Eren’s shoulders. His brow furrowed as Eren’s hands were still latched onto his shirt. “Eren, I have to get up if I’m going to make more… You’d have to let go of me.” ...*did you hear and understand what I said, or no? It’s a legitimate question...*

Eren looked up to Lathe when he spoke and then down to his hands, everything finally clicking, that he had to let go. He swallowed hard, his hands slowly letting go of the fabric under his fingers. *I need to let go... I need to act normal.* He let go, turning his attention back to the movie after he curled up into a ball on the couch.

Lathe pressed a kiss to Eren’s forehead before he stood with the bowl, ruffling his hair lightly at Eren’s melancholy and walking swiftly to the kitchen, immediately setting more popcorn into the saucepan, trying to will it to cook faster. *Come on, I don’t like leaving Eren alone when he’s that depressed...* The few minutes it took for the popcorn to cook seemed agonizingly long, and he sighed in relief when the kernels finished popping, dumping the popcorn into the bowl and shutting off the stove, moving the saucepan off the burner and returning to the scripting room, sitting down next to Eren again and wrapping an arm around him immediately, pulling him close as he kicked his feet back up. He gently rubbed Eren’s arm, trying to get him to unfurl from his tiny ball, deciding to shift and pull him into his lap, both his arms around his middle and letting Eren hold onto the metal bowl of popcorn, resting his chin on his shoulder. He gently rubbed Eren’s side with his thumb, not able to pay too well attention to the movie. *I'm really worried about you...*

Eren let Lathe move him around, not really putting up a fight. His face was blank enough to make someone think he was a life size doll. *Why’d he put me in his lap?* He looked down at the bowl in his lap, slowly reaching in and starting to eat the popcorn again, leaning back against Lathe’s chest. *He must be really worried…. Fuck... I'm the one making him worry so much.*
Lathe was soon lost to his thoughts, suddenly realizing the movie had ended as the credits began to roll. He reached to the arm of the couch for the remote, hitting the stop button and looking up to Eren, a small smile on his face. “So, how’d you like it?” He gently took the bowl from Eren’s hands as he began to shift them apart. *I hope he didn't think it sucked.*

Eren shrugged, his focus going towards the floor, that thousand yard stare coming back. He was still silent, trying to stay curled into Lathe’s chest as much as he could, wanting to stay in his arms. *I don’t want him to let me go… Not like Levi let me go… He didn't let me go! Yes he did and you know it!*

Lathe realized Eren wasn’t about to let go of him, leaning forward to place the bowl on the table amidst the books and disc cases and wrapping his arms back around him, tucking Eren’s head under his chin. *…I don't know what else I can tell you… You've been so distant and miserable… And if I ask if you want to talk about it, I'm afraid you'll either become furious or… Or we’ll just go in circles… I don't know what to do.* He sighed quietly, letting himself just hold onto Eren for a moment, trying to get him to relax. He spoke after a few silent minutes, quiet. “Do you want to help me make dinner, Eren?” *…or we could do something that doesn't require too much thinking, and just order takeout and watch something else… “We could order out instead, if you want.”… or. Lathe suddenly grinned widely. *I know what we can do.* “Actually… feel like going out to eat, Eren? I know somewhere great we could go.” *They shouldn't be too busy, it’s Monday night.*

Eren looked up to meet Lathe’s eyes with his own broken ones. “…o…okay.” Eren spoke quietly, turning his head over towards the books on the table in front of them. *What are those?* He was staring at the large boxes amidst the piles of books.

Lathe smiled as he followed Eren’s line of sight, leaning forward and tapping the largest box on the table, a gold insignia gleaming back at them. “That, is the entirety of Star Trek, if you happened to be wondering. That’s Ouran High School Host Club next to it, an anime. Those are really the only box sets I got, everything else is pretty much stand-alone. Here, let’s get up, okay? We’ll take our dishes to the kitchen, and then we can go.” He gently nudged Eren to stand, picking up the bowl and his untouched mug of hot chocolate, which had gone cold. He padded to the kitchen with Eren following him dazedly, carrying his mug of tea, dumping out the bowl of the unpopped kernels into the trash and rinsing their mugs in the sink, placing them in the dishwasher. “If you don't need to go to the bathroom or anything, we can just get our shoes on. It's not too terribly far a drive.” *It’s only twenty-ish minutes away. …and you're going to love it.*

Eren nodded, disappearing down the hall and towards the bathroom, shutting the door behind him, locking it out of habit. Blake followed him to the door, sitting down and pawing at it, sensing Eren’s high level of distress. He whined before going to get Lathe and sat down in front of him and pawed at him, whining, as if he were trying to tell him something.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at Blake, gently scratching behind his ears, sympathizing with Blake’s
worry, speaking quietly. “Yeah, I know, he’s really upset that Levi left. It’s not going to last
forever, though. He’ll be okay soon, and he’ll hopefully learn to cope. It’s not stopping either of us
from worrying ourselves to death though, is it?” He chuckled a bit, petting Blake for a few
minutes, waiting for Eren to reappear.

Eren turned the sink on, he cleaned off the bloodied blade expertly and made sure the room was
spotless. He gently slipped the razor back into where he had hidden it from Lathe two weeks ago.
*He can’t know… He’d be really mad at me…* Eren looked over his thigh, two more fresh streaks
lining his inner thigh. *Well, they’re done bleeding…* He wrapped it up, though he knew they
wouldn’t bleed anymore, and fixed his appearance a bit in the mirror. Eren walked out, Blake
instantly going to his side and whining. *It’s funny how you pick up on it after awhile…* A smile
formed on his face, and for once it followed to his eyes, for all the wrong reasons.

Lathe smiled at him, seeing a small flicker of light in his eyes. *For once, your eyes have something
in them besides sadness, thank god.* “You ready, then?” He walked them over to the front door,
tyling on his boots and opening the door for him. *A nice dinner out should help.*

Eren nodded, slipping into his boots and putting Blake’s vest on him, the two of them walking out.
Eren seemed less dazed than he was earlier and Blake even more stressed. *I know… I’m sorry
Blake, but it makes me feel better.*

Lathe unlocked the car, sliding into the driver’s seat and shutting the door behind him, looking
over as Blake hopped in through the passenger-side door and pawed at his leg a bit harder than
before, still sitting obediently between him and Eren. *…what? Did something happen that I didn’t
catch?* Lathe just petted Blake for a second before he started the car, trying to keep his attention on
the road ahead of them as Blake nudged at him. *What is up with you? I know, Eren’s not the
happiest camper since Levi left. I know! Believe me, I understand that. …I’m not sure, though, if
you’re trying to say I’ve missed something…* Lathe shrugged off the eerie thought, the radio filling
the quiet between him and Eren until they pulled up in front of a restaurant, shutting off the car and
turning to Eren, a small mischievous spark in his eye. “We’re here.” *This is gonna be cool.*

Eren looked at the large ornate building with a gleam of fascination. *It looks cool… What is it?*
Eren got out of the car without much prodding, Blake right at his heels as they stared at the large
building.

Lathe locked the car, moving to nudge Eren along to the front door, holding it open for him before
leading them up to the hostess station, where they were greeted by an older man.

“Hello! Two? Would you like a regular table or a hibachi table?”
Lathe nodded, grinning. “Hibachi table, please.” He glanced over to Eren, chuckling at his perplexed look. Just trust me on this. He followed the man to the right side of the restaurant, sitting in a stool at the counter lining a flat stainless steel grill, a large vent above it. He thanked the man and accepted a menu from him, skimming over it as Eren sat next to him, staring confusedly at the grill, and at the selections. ...yeah, this is a thing that's happening.

Eren’s brow furrowed. What the hell is all of this? Why does it only list meats and nothing else? “Is… Is it just this?” Eren asked quietly, his voice timid as the other stools around them were filled. What if he’s here? What if he sees me with Lathe? What if he tries to hurt Dad? Blake whined, standing up and taking Eren’s hand before he could think of scratching.

Lathe shook his head. “You're going to get rice and vegetables and some other stuff with it, too. But they just need to know what meat you want, which is really the only thing that changes. So, pick anything you want.” He looked down as Blake took Eren’s hand, gently patting Eren’s shoulder. “You don't have to be nervous about anything, it’s all okay. I’m right here, don't you worry.” He gave him a reassuring smile, looking over his menu. Hmmm… Steak and Scallop sounds good...

Eren nodded, petting Blake as watched a waitress come up to take their orders. He was timid as he told her but he finally had a small smile on his face. Blake still had his hand in his jaw, and seemed unwilling to let go, no matter how much Eren pet him. Well, I guess I deserve this, I mean you finally picked up on everything...

Lathe handed her his menu after he ordered, looking to Eren and seeing Blake still attached to his hand, worried. He hasn’t let go yet, and Eren’s been petting him… What the actual hell are you going on about? I’m starting to get suspicious. Lathe scratched behind Blake’s ear, trying to get him to let go of Eren’s hand, finally seeming to convince him to let him go. He looked up as he saw the chef approach with a cart, grinning widely. Here we go.

Eren watched the man greet them all and turn on the large fan above the flat grill, turning on the grill as well. Why does he need a fan? He watched in mild fascination as he spread around a clear liquid on the grill, leaving the large mess be for the moment while he picked up his two utensils and he started to do a bunch of tricks. What…? How is he doing all that? It looks so cool! He swallowed hard as he watched the man pick up a lighter from the cart behind him, his hand going to Lathe’s shirt sleeve and gripping onto it. What is he doing with a lighter? Why does he have a lighter? His eyes widened as the chef added more of the same clear liquid to the grill and ignited it, almost letting out a scream of terror as the liquid caught aflame and burned bright and tall for a period of two seconds. What. The. Actual. Fuck. His eyes held a trace of fear as his grip moved from Lathe’s shirt sleeve to his wrist, and latching onto it.

Lathe moved to hold onto his hand tightly, rubbing his knuckles with his thumb. ...shit. I forgot about that. Eren’s scared to death of fire. ...he might be okay for the rest of this, more or less. He
Eren nodded, his eyes still wide with fear, but it quickly died down as the chef showed off more of his skills. He brought out three eggs, spinning them on the hot surface, picking one up with his flat spatula, and bouncing it until it got to a good height that he turned the spatula, letting the egg crack over it and onto the hot grill. He did the same with the other two eggs, turning back to dump the large pile of rice on the grill and start to add various spices and sauces, finally adding the eggs once they were done. He made a show out of putting a large portion on everyone’s plate, to which Eren just stared at his plate unsure how he should go about eating it, or if he should even start, as the man started with the vegetables, setting aside some pieces of broccoli. *What the heck is he doing?* Eren’s grip was still on Lathe’s hand as the chef cut up some of the florets. *What is he trying to do?* Eren watched as he used his flat spatula again to pick up a small piece of broccoli and flung it at one of the people surrounding the table in an arc. *Why is he throwing food at them? The fuck?* Eren stared at the sight with complete confusion.

As it came closer to their turn, he looked over took note of Eren’s confusion. He leaned over and spoke quietly. “Eren, what he’s trying to do is throw the broccoli at your mouth and you have to try and catch it in your mouth. It’s fun!” He smiled, looking up as the chef turned to him, watching him flick a small piece of broccoli at him and easily catching it in his mouth, chewing with a bright light in his eyes. *This is always fun!* He sent Eren a reassuring look as the chef turned to him.

Eren opened his mouth, watching as the chef arced the floret at him. He moved his head to just the right angle to have it bounce off his nose. His face was priceless, completely bewildered and a flush of embarrassment crossing his cheeks. Blake was able to catch the piece of broccoli that fell. *I didn’t catch it...*

Lathe chuckled as he saw Eren’s expression, squeezing his hand lightly. “Hey, it’s cool. Blake gets a snack, and you can try again, you know.” He nodded to the chef, grinning. *Come on, you got this.*

Eren opened his mouth once more, watching the broccoli come close to him, smack him on the forehead, and bouncing off to be caught by Blake. *What the hell? Why can’t I catch it!?* He furrowed his brow, and the chef tossed him another piece only for him to fail miserably, and Blake get another snack. He looked over to Lathe, a pout on his face and defeat clearly written across his face. *I wanted to catch it...*

Lathe shrugged and sighed as Eren pouted, squeezing his hand tightly. He smirked and spoke to him quietly as the chef moved on to the next person, trying to cheer him up. “‘Twas a valiant effort, though it was in vain...Hey, it’s okay.” He nudged his foot with his boot, looking down to
Blake as he wagged his tail. “At least Blake got something to munch on.”

Eren smiled softly, and nodded, watching as the chef finished off his rounds of throwing food. He soon had a steaming heap of various veggies on his plate and everyone’s food was cooked. This is a lot of food… It looks really good too.

Lathe beamed, letting his hand go and picking up his chopsticks, beginning to eat. Eren’s actually showing some emotion, other than looking distant and blank or miserable. …He looks the littlest bit happy. That’s great! He watched with an amused look as Eren fumbled with the chopsticks for a moment, deciding to have mercy and tapping his arm. “Here, look at this. Just hold this one chopstick in the joint of your thumb. It’s not going to move from there. Now just hold this chopstick like you would a pencil, and move that around to pick up the food. Like this.” He showed Eren how he held his chopsticks, showing him how to pick up a vegetable, and scoop up a decent bit of rice. “Give it a go, see how that works.”

Eren watched him, picking up on how to use the chopsticks properly with ease. “Thank you… Dad.” Eren was quiet as he mostly focused on his food. He had managed to eat the whole plate, but he didn’t feel full at all. No… It’s like nothing will fill me up… Why?

Lathe looked over as Eren quickly finished his plate, quirking an eyebrow. …You seem to be even more of a bottomless pit than usual. “If you want, you can steal some of my rice. I still have a ton left.” He nodded to the huge mound still on his plate. There’s no way I can finish all this.

Eren showed another soft smile, picking up his chopsticks again and helping Lathe finish up his massive mound of rice. I still don’t feel full at all… what the hell is wrong with me? He distracted himself by petting Blake as they waited for the waitress to come back around with everyone’s checks.

Lathe finished his plate, setting down his chopsticks and looking up as the waitress came by, taking his check from her and fishing for his wallet, leaving it with the amount due and a decent tip in cash on the counter. He smiled to Eren, stepping down from the stool. “You ready to go, Eren?” He nodded towards the door.

Eren nodded, hopping down from the stool and sticking to his side like glue, Blake following quickly at his heels. I don’t want you to leave too… Please don’t… Eren was patient as they got out to the car and started to drive back, humming along with the radio, petting Blake since all Blake wanted was to be pet, as he literally laid across Eren’s lap, hoping to get his attention. He’s still wearing his vest… Why is he doing this?
Lathe furrowed his brow at Blake’s actions, though he kept his attention on the road. ...something bigger’s going on here, and I need to figure out what it is. He pulled into the driveway, shutting off the car and unbuckling. “We’re home! Let’s get you inside. You look kinda tired. ” Understandable, given the way today’s gone...

Eren nodded, stretching as he got out of the car and stepped over the threshold, shedding his boots and taking Blake’s vest off. .... Dad’s right though, I’m fucking exhausted... He moved upstairs to go and get changed, removing the makeshift bandages he had made before as the cuts had already scabbed over. They’ll heal in a few days... So I won’t do it again... Probably...

Lathe kicked off his boots, padding upstairs to his bedroom and shutting the door behind him, quickly changing into a tank top and sweatpants. He stretched his arms above his head and yawned, opening the door and waiting for Eren to vacate the bathroom.

Eren opened the door from the bathroom, his eyes starting to close.... I’m tired... Fuck I can’t stay awake... Eren tried to take a step forward, but his knee buckled out from under him. My whole body feels like lead...

Lathe was immediately at his side, catching him as his legs gave out from under him. “Yeesh, I didn't think you were that tired.” He shifted his hold on Eren, sweeping him up bridal-style. “Let’s get you in bed.” He walked him back to his bedroom, laying him down in the bed and sliding in next to him, pulling the quilt up over the both of them and shutting off the light, wrapping his arms protectively around Eren and holding him close. ...you’ll be okay. ...at least, I hope so.

Eren curled into Lathe’s warm embrace, his head finding itself happily nuzzled into Lathe’s shoulder, and his hands holding onto the fabric of Lathe’s tank top. He had a small smile on his face, for all the wrong reasons.
Lathe slammed the car door behind him, his bags lightly bouncing off his hip as he walked up to the school building two weeks after classes had begun. *First time anyone’s needed a substitute- to be expected, it’s the start of the school year. Eren hasn't said much about how classes were going, though. I asked him about it and he just kinda brushed me off... I have no idea why. Dunno. It’s probably nothing.* He pushed open the door, walking down the halls towards the main office, noticing the hall immediately quieting considerably. He kept his poker face, quirking an eyebrow at some of the looks the kids were giving him. *...the hell? Why’s a majority of the kids here staring at me? You’d think I got a tattoo on my forehead.* He glanced up as he heard hushed whispers from an adjoining hall, the crowd in front of him parting slowly enough that he could hear the better part of it. His full attention turned to the conversation as he heard Eren’s name, trying to look as if he wasn't listening. He watched as a very short blonde out of the corner of his eye talked, her words sharp.

“I really don't think it’s a good idea for you two to be hanging out with that Yeager kid.”

“Why do we need to stay away from Eren? He’s so adorable, and he gives us his extra food.”
Sasha’s tone started as worried, but turned into excitement as she mentioned food.

“Because, haven’t you heard? He’s a seductress, a whore, the damn Quo Hoe even got himself a spot in Mr. Quo’s Registry. He’s sick and perverted… why would you wanna hang around a perverted hooker like that?” Jean immediately replied. *Maybe I can get him worse than the picture he sent to the football team… I just need to switch everyone’s focus from me to him.*

Lathe’s face darkened instantly, his face stony and expression cold. He strode directly over behind Jean and Annie, his boots clicking menacingly on the floor, his tone that of ice. *“Mr. Kirstein. Ms. Leonhart. I need you two to come with me.” This is why Eren wasn't talking about school.*

Jean’s eyes widened, his head snapping up to see Lathe’s face. *He looks ready to murder someone...* fuck . He slowly got up from his seat, completely afraid of being hit. “Y-yes Sir?” He asked, his eyes showing a hint of fear for only a moment. *No, don’t act scared, you can get away with it.*

*Don't even try playing dumb.* “Don't act surprised I’m asking for you. I heard every word. You and Annie. Follow me.” He turned on his heel, walking for the main office, keeping an eye on the both of them that they were right behind him.
Annie stood from the bench, her face clear of any emotion. *What the hell now? What’s he even going to do? This is just a waste of time, we all know nothing’s gonna happen.*

Lathe led them into the main office, bringing them straight to the principal’s office, rapping on the wood door. He looked up as a blond man his height opened the door, looking at him silently before leaning forward to sniff him. Lathe seemed completely unfazed, his stony expression unwavering. “Hello, Mr. Zacharius. There’s a problem regarding these two students I think we need to address.” He looked to Jean and Annie. *He looks only slightly terrified, and she just looks bored. ...well then.*

Mike glanced over the students motioning to the seats in front of his large desk. He remained mostly quiet aside from a soft grunt which would signal for Lathe to continue. Mike sat down in his own seat and watched the students with cold eyes. **What did Jean do now? Was he being... indecent with Annie in the locker room? It wouldn’t be the first time for that to happen.**

Lathe stood next to the desk, his glare moving between the two of them, trying to keep his voice level. “There’s apparently been a gross misunderstanding, regarding my adopting Eren Yeager, which you are aware of. I happened to overhear these two speaking to Eren’s friends in the halls, using rather choice words to describe him. They called him, and pardon the language, a seductress, a whore, and a perverted hooker. I don’t think convincing a student’s friends and the school body that another student is such is going to be tolerated.” *Fuck. That.*

Mike sighed quietly, a hand coming up to hide his raging eyes. “Has Eren voiced any complaints?” He turned his gaze, a bit softer towards Lathe. *I would need a complaint from him to do anything, but having already dealt with him, I don’t think he’ll want to open up and complain about it.*

Lathe shook his head. “He hasn’t, but it rather does explain his unwillingness to discuss anything related to school with me.” *...It explains a lot.*

Mike nodded, getting up to make an announcement for Eren to report to the principal’s office before he sent the two out of the room to wait in the chairs outside the office, making sure that they were marked absent from their classes. He looked to Lathe after the two of them left. “There’s really not much I could do without Eren voicing a complaint… and through past experiences… I don’t believe he will voice one.” Mike told him, sitting down in his chair and motioning for Lathe to sit down in one of the two in front of his desk.

Lathe moved to sit, nodding silently. *...I know. I just hope that maybe this will be an exception, see if he’ll actually decide to say something about how terrible Jean’s been to him. I can't stand the thought of him being called all that to his face...* He looked back as someone lightly knocked on the door, Eren slowly entering. “Hey, Eren. Sit down, okay? You’re not in any trouble.” *Far from*
Eren looked to Lathe and instantly stopped where he was. *Fuck... it's about them... isn't it?* “Can you…. Can you leave, Dad?” Eren asked, looking down and rubbing the back of his neck. Blake whining and pawing at him to calm down. *Fuck... Dad knows everything... Shit, I didn’t want him to know...*

Lathe looked surprised, standing and moving to the door, letting Eren enter. He patted his arm for a moment, sending him a reassuring smile. “I’ll be right outside if you need me.” He left into the hall, shutting the door quietly behind him and standing guard, trying not to eavesdrop and failing miserably.

“Eren, do you have anything you want to tell me about Jean and Annie?” His voice was soft, along with his eyes as he stood and went to sniff Eren’s head after he sat, then looping around the desk and sitting back down. *He smells agitated.*

Eren looked down at his hands, the tears starting to well in his eyes. “How did Dad find out? I didn’t want him to find out.” Eren said, his voice remaining surprisingly steady as he let a few tears fall. Blake took his hand so he didn’t scratch at himself. *I didn’t want him to know.*

“He overheard them in the halls, talking to your friends. Why wouldn't you want your father to know?” His brow furrowed a bit, thinking. *Why not?*

Eren felt his chest start to tighten. *He’ll leave me.... If he thinks I’m a whore... He’ll hit me... just like Grisha did.... He’ll do those things to me.* Eren’s eyes were wide as he felt his chest tightening more, spiraling quickly into a panic attack. Blake starting to whine louder and try to drag him out of the seat, but Eren was firmly placed, so Blake started to really freak out when he realized he couldn’t pull Eren down to the floor. He whined loudly, trying to get Eren’s attention, but when that wasn’t enough he moved to the door, jumping up on his hind legs, scratching at the door handle until he was able to turn it down and push it forward like he was trained to do. His ears were perked, looking around finding Lathe on the other side of the door and jumping up and barking at him, hoping Lathe would get the message. Eren was far gone, Mike trying to keep his head upright, and his airway clear as he struggled to breathe.

Lathe was stunned as the door suddenly opened, Blake suddenly jumping up on him and barking. *...Fuck. He never barks.* Lathe immediately moved to the office, seeing Eren in the midst of a panic attack and Mike trying in vain to help him breathe. *Fuck.* He strode to Eren’s chair, Mike moving out of his way as he walked in front of Eren, trying to get his attention and gently pry him from the chair, moving him to the floor and pushing the chair back with a foot to give them room. *He’s not there. ...first, we need space.* Lathe sat down on the floor with him, looking into his eyes,
thinking hard. What do I do... Think, you've done this before... Sing? Yes? Eh, Zacharius will just have to deal.

Der Mond ist aufgegangen,
Die goldnen Sternlein prangen
Am Himmel hell und klar;
Der Wald steht schwarz und schweigt,
Und aus den Wiesen steiget
Der weiße Nebel wunderbar.

Wie ist die Welt so stille,
Und in der Dämmerung Hülle
So traulich und so hold!
Als eine stille Kammer,
Wo ihr des Tages Jammer
Verschlafen und vergessen sollt.

This isn't doing shit. Lathe hadn't noticed much shift in Eren’s expression, worry written into the lines of his face. ...Here, just think about it. Use your words, and try to be at least semi-articulate. If you have to, you can switch to English. ...which you'll probably have to. Go! <“Eren, can you hear me? Talk to me, please. I want to know if you're okay.”> You're so far gone... I can't stand it! <“Come back to us, Eren, please. Say something. Anything. It’s okay.”> ...I don't think he can hear me at all... Lathe sighed as he didn't respond, once again beginning to sing.

Seht ihr den Mond dort stehen?
Er ist nur halb zu sehen,
Und ist doch rund und schön!
So sind wohl manche Sachen,
Die wir getrost belachen,
Weil unsere Augen sie nicht sehen.

Wir stolze Menschenkinder
Sind eitel arme Sünder
Und wissen gar nicht viel;
Wir spinnen Luftgespinste
Und suchen viele Künste
Und kommen weiter von dem Ziel.

“.... Und kommen weiter von dem Ziel…” Eren’s lips barely moved as he spoke the last line with Lathe. He still had that thousand yard stare, but he could hear them. *I don’t want you to know*....

<“Eren? Can you hear me? Talk to me, please. It’s okay.”*> Thank god he said something. *He can hear me at least a little. Just talk. Stay with us now that you're here.*

<“....Yes…. It’s not….”> Eren spoke quietly, his eyes still wide and his pupils dilated. He felt Blake move to rest on his chest and ground him, tears quickly running down his face. *I don’t want it to happen to me again. <“... Not again….”>*

Lathe held onto his hand, squeezing it tightly and trying to catch his eyes. <“Eren, we’re not going to let what happened happen again. Talk to us. Tell us everything. Just let it out. I’m right here, and you don't have to panic about anything. It’s over. Just tell us. Take all the time you need.”*> As long as it takes, let’s hear it. <“Can you switch to English?”*> Mike kinda has no fucking clue what's going on.

Eren tried to take in a deep breath, he struggled, and it almost sounded like his lungs had constricted, and that’s exactly what it felt like. <“... No…. No more…. I don’t want you…. To know…. No more….“> Eren cried, though his eyes started to reach to the light which was flooding in through the window, he was slowly starting to come back to them. *It hurts, my chest hurts…. Why can’t I breathe?*

Lathe reached for his kerchief, gently wiping Eren’s tears and keeping his tight grip on his hand, rubbing his knuckles with his thumb. <“Okay, that’s okay, just calm down for now. Don't try too hard to take a deep breath, just relax. It’s okay.”*> Lathe followed his line of sight, noticing where his gaze had landed. *The light. He’s getting there, he’s calming down a bit… He just needs time.* <“Give it time, Eren. Don't rush. Give it time.”>*

<“... No, you can’t know… You’ll think it’s true… You can’t know what they said…”> Eren’s voice was slowly getting louder, and his arms moving to try and get whatever was suppressing him off, he was only seconds away from getting violent. His hand already starting to turn into fists,
I'm not articulate enough to say this in German. Lathe leaned back a bit, raising his hands in surrender, though he didn't move from his spot next to Eren. “Eren, listen to me. I heard what they said, but I don't think anything could be further from the truth. I could never believe something that horrible. It’s all lies, and I know that. I would never think something terrible like that were true, really. Please believe me.” They're wrong. It's all a bunch of bullshit lies. They don't know anything.

Eren blinked a few times, his eyes finally adjusting to the light coming into the room. His head move around, taking in his surroundings, fully coming out of his panic attack. Where the fuck am I? He took in the unfamiliar surroundings, finally recognizing he was in Mr. Zacharius's office after a few moments. He looked down to his chest, feeling Blake grounding him, making sure he couldn’t get up. Was it that bad?... Dad was singing... Eren moved his head over to Lathe and just started to sob all over again. I don’t want you to believe them.

Lathe shifted forward and helped Eren to sit up, wrapping his arms around him as Eren cried. “Shhh…. It’s okay, Eren. I've got you. I know that everything they said was just a bunch of terrible lies. What they said was absolutely horrible, and I don't believe a word of it. Right now, you're okay. And if you can tell us about it, in English, then we can stop it from happening again. You just have to tell us that you didn't like it, and want it to stop, and we can take action, okay?” Lathe gently rubbed circles into his back, his voice and features soft. I've got you. We're going to stop this crap in it's tracks.

Eren hiccuped as he tried to stop his sobbing. Blake getting off of his chest and allowing him to curl up to Lathe’s side and cling to him. “Jean… he-he... he said that… that I was a Quo Hoe.... He called me a perverted freak for…. For… for seducing you…. He told me that I was a whore... and that I would do anything... for... for good grades.... I didn’t want you to know... I didn’t want you to know that they were teasing me.... I didn’t want you to know... because I was afraid you... you would get mad... for me ruining your name....” Eren sobbed into Lathe’s shirt and curled up to him, Blake moving to lick away his tears.

Lathe held onto him tightly, his voice quiet. “Eren, why would I be mad at you for something you didn't do? It’s not your fault those awful rumors got started. You didn't do anything wrong, and I'm certainly not mad at you. I could never be.” He looked up to Mike. “Is that enough for us to take action?”

Mike grunted softly. “I’ll deal with the proper punishments, you can take him home, I'll get teachers to fill in, don’t worry. Let him calm down, I take it that it was particularly bad if you had to sing to him in German and he was speaking back to you in his native tongue for such a long time. I understand, let him relax.” Mike said softly and walked out of the room to give them time. You could just barely hear the furious tone of Mike's voice from beyond the wall directed at the
two students sitting outside.

Lathe nodded, his hold around Eren’s middle firm and protective as he helped Eren to calm down to completely, murmuring in his ear and rubbing his side. It’s okay. Mike’s taking care of this. You’ll be fine, and this won’t happen again. After a few solid minutes, Lathe spoke quietly. “Can you stand up? We can get home, let you relax. If you still need a minute that’s okay too.” There shouldn’t be too many students out in the halls, considering classes already started.

Eren shook his head, gripping onto Lathe’s shirt. “No… I can’t feel them.” Eren murmured and cried, not realizing just how much his body was shaking. I feel numb… I’m exhausted…. I wanna go home. “I wanna go home.” Eren murmured quietly, sniffling, and letting Blake lick his face clean.

Lathe nodded, his eyes widening as he saw him shuddering. “Eren, you're shaking like a leaf. Let me get that.” He reached out and grabbed Eren’s discarded backpack, slinging it over his shoulder and wrapping his wrist around Blake’s leash, shifting his feet under him and scooping Eren up, making his way to the door and carefully opening it. He kicked it closed after Blake exited, walking down the hall of the offices past Jean and Annie, Mike barely batting an eye at them. Thank god he understands. His boots clicked in the otherwise silent halls, walking to the parking lot. He wove his way to his car and carefully set Eren inside, moving to the driver’s side and starting the short drive home. You just need a chill day, and you’ll be better for tomorrow.

Eren stood at his locker, a blank stare on his face. Well, this week’s been better… but Levi and Erwin left this morning… I don’t know what to do anymore, I don’t like that he left. Eren picked up his head and skimmed through his locker, picking up the book he was currently working on, which was Eragon, a bookmark halfway through the large novel. Just this... for this weekend... No homework... and I've already recorded for this week. Fuck. Eren slammed his locker closed, the sound echoing through the barren hallway, leaning forward and resting his forehead against the cool metal. What the fuck am I supposed to do?

Armin was quiet as he walked down the hall, a bit of sadness in his eyes. ...right. Levi’s not here to come get you, walk you home… Armin leaned against the locker next to Eren, his voice quiet. “You want me to walk you home?” You look like you could use some company. ...I kinda could too, honestly.

Eren looked over to Armin as he spoke up, his eyes a little more hopeful as Armin finished, a smile crossing his face. “Yeah, that would be great.” I think that would be great, you're probably just as lonely as I am.
Armin sighed, giving him a weak smile and pushing off of the locker, walking with him down the hall to the doors, starting the short walk back to Eren’s house. They were quiet the whole way there, simply enjoying the other’s company as they ambled down the sidewalk, Armin stopping as they reached his driveway, his front door, hesitating. *I kinda want to stay, but I can't just invite myself in… ugh. I can't words for this...*

“Come on in, it’s just me and Lathe.” Eren told him, noticing his small hesitation. *I don’t want to be alone, it’s too quiet with just the two of us in the house.* Eren stepped up to the house, opening the door and calling out to the silence in the house. “We’re home!”

After a moment of hearing footsteps upstairs, Lathe poked his head out from next to the stairs on the second floor, his eyebrow quirked. “What’s this ‘we’ of which you speak? Oh hi Armin! I take it you're gonna be chillin’ here for a while?” He moved to pad down the stairs, his smile warm. “Y’know, if you're still here, you're more than welcome to stay for dinner.” *You and Eren both could use each other’s company… You can sympathize with each other. And God knows Eren could use it.*

Eren nodded. “Hey Dad, can Armin stay over night? I can go drive him to pick up some stuff.” Eren almost begged him. *Please, I don’t want to sleep alone…*

“Of course he can, if that’s alright with his Grandfather. But you just got your license last week…” He looked to Armin. “I guess if it’s okay yyou, and if you promise not to distract him, he can drive you both to get stuff.” *You two need to stay in one piece. Otherwise, I'd have two marines after my blood...*

Armin smiled, relief obvious in his eyes. “Thank you so much. And I won't distract him from his driving, I promise.” *...it’s so weird, when I wake up and someone’s not next to me...*

Eren smiled and he dropped his bookbag by the stairs, and turned to Armin. “You wanna leave your backpack here? Or take it home? I know we don’t have any homework so…” Eren kept a smile on his face as he plucked the car keys from one of the hooks by the door. *Dad’s letting me drive the car!* Blake stood there, his head going between Lathe and Eren, unsure if he should whine for his vest to be removed or if Eren was going somewhere.

“I guess take it home, I don't have anything really important in it and I'd like to grab some stuff if I'm staying overnight, pj’s and whatnot.” Armin shrugged, looking to Blake as he looked around at them. *New developments- Eren no longer requires Lathe to operate a car.*
Lathe grinned at Blake’s questioning look, petting him. “Eren’s doing the thing and driving Armin around. It’s just gonna be you three.” He pulled Eren into a hug. “Now please be careful driving, we want you two to come back in one piece, okay? I mean it.” He let Eren go, a faint flicker of worry in his otherwise bright eyes. You'll probably be okay- I mean really, it’s Armin - but nevertheless be careful.

Eren nodded and ushered them all outside and into Lathe’s car, Blake situated between Armin and himself. Blake moved to paw at Armin, he knew what was going to happen now that Levi was gone and he was trying to warn him. Eren made sure everyone was buckled before he started to back out of the driveway expertly. This is a lot easier than when Lathe was first teaching me.

Armin looked to Blake a bit confused, petting him. He probably just wants some attention. But he’s on duty, so… Something else? What’s up, Blake? What’re you trying to tell me? He watched as Eren drove to his house, his turns smooth and paying careful attention to all traffic and signs. He grinned as he soon pulled into his driveway, unbuckling as Eren shut the car off. “Even if you just got your license last week, you’re a pretty good driver. I’m impressed. Now,” He pushed the door open. “...I’ve got stuffs to retrieve. You can come on up.” He let Blake hop out behind him, watching as he immediately moved back to Eren’s side. He walked up to the front door, pulling a key from his pocket and unlocking it, calling out to the quiet house. “Grandpa! I’m home! I brought a friend!” Armin beckoned Eren inside, closing the door behind him and kicking off his shoes. He padded into the living room, Eren in tow, greeting his Grandfather with a bright smile. “Grandpa, this is Eren, he’s a good friend of mine from school. Eren, this is my Grandfather.”

Mr. Arlert smiled as he slowly got up from his chair. “Ah, you’re the boy Armin talks about, it’s a pleasure to meet you.” His smile was soft, and stretched his arm out to Eren, shaking his hand, and seeing Blake, who stared at him questioningly. “Well, you must be Blake, it’s a pleasure to meet you too.” He smiled brightly, bending over to outstretch a hand to him and watched Blake sniff his hand and wag his tail before sitting beside Eren’s legs. Finally he stood straight again and turned to Armin. “Of course you can go, Erwin’s not here, so I’d feel better if you were with Eren and not alone this time around.” He smiled softly.

Eren’s smiled widened happily. YES! He can stay! I can sleep with someone besides Lathe again! Eren was happy that Armin could stay. “Thank you very much, Mr. Arlert.” He was being completely honest.

Armin smiled widely. “Thanks, Grandpa. I’m going to get some things from upstairs, then. I need pajamas and that kind of stuff.” He walked back to the staircase with Eren in tow, ambling into his room, shedding his backpack and retrieving an empty spare one from his closet. He walked to the dresser and grabbed a pair of pajamas, thinking for a moment. ...I kinda get the feeling I'm going to be spending more than just the one night. He shrugged and grabbed a few extra changes of clothes, grabbing his phone charger from near his desk and his toothbrush and a hairbrush from the bathroom. Is that it? I think that’s it. “Alright, that’s everything.” He walked back downstairs, going to give his Grandfather a hug goodbye. “I'll call and let you know when I'm going to be home or if anything changes, okay?”
“Okay, sounds good, have a good time.” His voice was soft from the other room.

Eren stayed near the door, waiting for Armin to come back with him. Blake whined and pawed at his leg, not wanting Eren to do what he was going to do once he was home. Eren squatted down and gently pet him behind the ear. “What are you so persistent about?” Even though I know what you’re worried about… how can you tell that I’m doing it?

Armin returned after a moment, noticing Blake’s pawing at Eren’s leg, his insistence on getting his attention. …what is it? There’s something you know that I haven’t picked up on. What is it. Armin slid on his shoes. “Let’s get going, okay?”

Eren nodded and stood back up, opening the door and leading them out. Blake followed closely at his heels but waited for Armin at the passenger side of the car to get in. Eren got in the driver’s side and started the car up, waiting for Armin to get in. I wanna go home… I need to cut again… I need too, it’s been too long.

Armin slid into the passenger’s seat after Blake, buckling up, quiet as Eren drove them to his house, sensing… Something. He looked down as Blake again pawed at his leg, trying to get his attention. …seriously. What the heck are you trying to tell me?

“Don’t mind him, he gets weird once Levi leaves… it’s just from me being a bit depressed about it… Just pet him and he’ll be fine soon.” Eren told him taking care to take them home, parking in the driveway as if he had been doing it for years. “So… if you would like to comment on my oh so reckless driving you can tell Lathe.” Eren smirked, cutting the engine and getting out, Blake following Armin out the passenger side.

Armin laughed, hopping out with Blake close behind him. He had his bag slung over his shoulder as they entered the house, speaking to Lathe as he spotted him in the kitchen, cooking. “Eren’s seriously an amazing driver. I’m very impressed.” He slid off his shoes, looking down as Blake nudged his leg. …so he only acts out when Levi’s gone and you’re depressed, huh.

Lathe looked behind him and grinned. “Good to know you two got out of it unscathed. Just make sure you put the keys back on the hook, Eren. And judging from your bag, I take it it’s alright for you to sleep over?”

“Alright!” Eren shouted by the door, putting Blake’s vest by the door and heading upstairs. “I’ll be down in a minute! I’m getting changed!” He called and Blake’s ears perked and he whined even
louder, going over to Lathe to paw at his legs, whining consistently, like he had the first time Levi had left.

Lathe’s brow furrowed. Huh. Again? You get to acting all antsy when Levi’s gone. He petted Blake behind his ears, thinking. What is it. Eren’s rather depressed every time Levi leaves, so… That’s probably it. I shouldn’t worry too much, I don’t think. …Maybe I should get that guy Moblit’s number from Spades. I need to stop putting that off.

Armin looked worried as Blake pawed at Lathe as well. …even with the vest off, that’s concerning. What is it… He looked up the staircase worriedly for a moment before moving to the kitchen.

Eren locked himself in the bathroom, pulling out one of his hidden razor blades, and set it on the counter. He shuffled out of his clothes and put them in the hamper before picking up his razor again and drawing five thin lines on the inside of his thigh, making sure it was in a new spot. Can’t have anything scar… Levi might be tipped off from that… but that should be okay there. Eren wrapped his thigh tightly, slipping into his sweatpants and a sweatshirt. He took in a deep breath, a smile forming on his face. God, that feels so much better now. He unlocked the bathroom and raced down the stairs and walked into the kitchen, sitting down on the ground and letting Blake come up to him and basically attack him with licks and whines, his tail wagging happy that he was back in the room with everyone. God… you make it so obvious that I’m cutting…. I need you to calm down.

So now he’s happy he’s down here again with us? So, Blake was trying to warn us about something you just did upstairs? What could he have done? If Blake’s so worried about him while he’s so depressed, by himself… Is he…? No, why would he start? And I haven’t seen anything on his wrists. Probably nothing. My mind’s getting away from me. Armin smiled, shifting his weight to his other foot, feeling too tall standing next to Eren sitting on the ground. “So, what’cha want to do?” I have no idea what you people here do for entertainment. …music stuff? But I’m no musician...

“We could watch a movie, what ones did we not watch yet Lathe?” Eren asked, petting Blake until he calmed down enough that he was chill having Eren with people.

“Coraline’s the next one, I think. It’s really nice, you’d like it, Armin.” Lathe grinned, keeping his attention on his chopping vegetables on the knife in his hand. No knife mishaps, please. “Want me to make you popcorn and something to drink?”

“Popcorn!” Eren said excitedly, his eyes widened in excitement. “Can you make popcorn? Please??” Eren asked, giving Lathe the puppy dog eyes. I want popcorn! It’s so good!
Lathe rolled his eyes, setting down the knife and wiping his hands on his apron. “You don’t need to break out the big guns and go all puppy-eyed on me, I offered to make it. Mercy!” Lathe laughed, grabbing the skillet and setting popcorn to pop, setting a kettle on the back burner. “Armin, question. Do you like tea, coffee, or hot chocolate? Or something else?”

“Hot chocolate, please.” Armin looked to Eren, shrugging and sitting down next to him on the floor, petting Blake with him. Why not?

Very polite. Lathe retrieved two mugs and went about fixing their drinks, the popcorn popping under the glass lid. Soon enough, a large metal bowl was filled with hot popcorn and Eren and Armin had mugs in their hands. “Alright, now shoo and enjoy your movie. Dinner should be ready or close to it when it’s over.” He grinned, a mischievous glint in his eye as he nudged them to the scripting room.

Eren smiled scampering to the scripting room and giggling as he put the movie in. “Armin, sit down on the couch.” Eren told him, and waited for the movie to get set up. I wonder what this one is like?

Armin took a seat, his eyes wandering over the assortment of books and movies all over the coffee table. ...Star Trek, Casper, ...anime? “You’ve got quite an assortment of stuff here.” It wasn’t as much of a question as much as an observation. ...lots of seemingly random stuff... Huh.

“Oh yeah, Lathe takes me to the bookstore and we get a lot of stuff… I’ve been reading a lot, so a lot of stuff is scattered all over the place.” He explained with a large smile on his face. I’m getting better at hiding it… Well, Armin’s here… So I guess it helps.

Armin read the titles of the disc cases. “Just curious, who’s idea was the anime and the piles of manga?” He glanced down to a rather tall stack next to the leg of the coffee table. ...that’s a lot.

“Dad’s. I haven’t finished the manga and I’m apparently not allowed to watch the anime without finishing the it first, so I need to read 8 more volumes.” He said quietly, getting up to join Armin on the couch.

... kinda figured. Eh, at least it’s not Star Wars he has everywhere. “Well, reading the manga first only makes sense.” Armin shrugged and sipped his hot chocolate, careful not to burn his mouth as Eren sat down next to him, situating the bowl of popcorn between them. His attention was turned to the title screen of the movie, immediately recognizing the style. It’s stop-motion? Cool. He listened intently as the opening scene played out, an eerie, sublime feeling to the entire scene, completely enraptured. ...I can tell right now this is gonna be cool.
Eren watched, eating the popcorn diligently, and he paid attention to the whole movie. *Wait.... What? What the fuck just happened? I'm so confused.... What the actual hell?* Eren looked over to Armin. “Um... Armin.. Can I ask you something weird?” Eren asked quietly. *I don't want to sleep alone.*

Armin looked over to him, noting Eren’s uncertainty. His brow furrowed minutely, gauging his expression. “Uh, sure, go ahead. Ask away.”

“Um... I know this might sound weird... But... Will you... Will you sleep with me tonight?” Eren asked him quietly, his eyes giving away his depression for a few moments.

...I don't think I'd want to wake up alone, either. Armin’s features softened, sending him a weary smile. “Sure. It’s fine, Eren.” He patted his arm lightly for a moment. ...I miss Erwin, and you miss Levi... We’re in the same boat here.

Eren smiled and leaned over to hug him. “Thank you.” He whispered quietly and curled up to Armin. *I don't want to sleep alone... I wonder how Lathe will take it...*

Armin gave him a soft smile, letting his right arm draped over Eren’s shoulders after a moment, lightly rubbing Eren’s shoulder as he returned his attention to the movie. ...Would Mr. Quo be okay with that? He’d probably be suspicious... I dunno, he seems like he’d understand... Armin kept his arm around him until the movie ended, letting Eren go when he shifted to grab the remote. “Should we go see if dinner’s ready?”

Eren nodded, standing up and moving, causing Blake to get up and follow him. He shut the DVD player off and then turned towards the kitchen. “Alright, come on.” Eren said softly. *I want food.*

Lathe looked up as the two of them ambled into the kitchen, smiling. “Perfect timing. The stew’s done, so I'll get you two bowls. Let me guess- more tea, and more hot chocolate?” He took the long-since empty mugs from them, setting a kettle back on the burner and handing Eren and then Armin a bowl of stew.

“Thank you, Mr. Quo.” Armin took the bowl from him and sat down opposite Eren at the table, looking for silverware. ...hmmm. *I need a fork or something.* He looked up as Lathe handed them both silverware.
Lathe shot Armin a grin. “Armin, do you remember what I said the first time you were in any of my classes?” He turned as the kettle on the stove started to sing, setting Eren’s tea to steep and finishing a mug of cocoa for Armin.

Armin’s brow furrowed as he thought, taking the warm mug gratefully from him. “Um… That I looked very smart?”

“Well yes, I did say that. What else?” He turned to serve himself a bowl of stew, sitting at the head of the table. “Something about my entire name being Lathe Autonomous Quo, and to and I quote, ‘call me whatever the hell you want?’” He smiled warmly to Armin. “Please Armin, call me Lathe.”

Armin nodded, giving him a small smile. “Alright… Lathe.” Armin set down the mug, picking up his fork and taking a small bite of stew, his eyes bright. “This is really good, Mr.- Lathe, sorry, Lathe.” Armin rubbed the back of his neck. Well, it’s not the worst habit to have.

Lathe chuckled. “Thank you, Armin. I’m glad you like it.” He was rather quiet though most of dinner, his mind sorting through many miscellaneous thoughts.

Eren ate his large bowl of stew, going up for seconds and finishing that off too. Why do I still feel so empty inside? You know perfectly well dumbass! But… No Buts. You know why, and it’s because Levi left you! He hasn’t left me yet! No, but he’s going to be leaving you soon! Ha! Just think of what your pathetic little existence will do without him…. No I can’t…. You’re right, you can’t. Eren's mind was in inner turmoil as he sipped from his tea mug, his eyes showing off more depression than they had in the last few days. I don’t want him to leave me alone. He wiped away the tears forming in the corners of his eyes before they fell. No no no, I can’t have them worry. Eren looked up from his mug towards Armin to see how he was faring. I wanna go to bed, I’m tired, I feel like I could cry myself to sleep though.

Lathe looked to Eren with worry, noticing how he was trying not to cry….what’s wrong? Lathe glanced to Armin for an instant, gently patting Eren on the shoulder and giving him a small smile. I can’t very well ask while Armin’s right there and you're trying to hide it… I just hope you'll be okay.

You look miserable, and exhausted. Armin set down his fork, finished with his bowl and speaking quietly. “Want to head upstairs to bed, Eren? You look really tired.” He glanced to Lathe, looking for any reaction. ...Huh. Nothing?

Eren nodded, standing up and taking their dishes away to the sink to wash them. I wanna sleep.
Eren wiped at his eyes again as he struggled not to cry… *No, I gotta be strong, like nothing's bothering me…* He motioned for Armin to follow him out of the kitchen and towards the staircase.

Armin followed him, picking up his bag from where he had left it by the front door as they passed it, looking around and catching sight of the metal works painted on Lathe’s ceiling. *...cool.* He watched as Eren ambled into his own room, looking a bit further down the hall and spotting a bathroom. “Eren, I’m just going to change and stuff in the bathroom, okay?” He walked over and shut the door behind him, locking it out of habit as he quickly changed and brushed his teeth. He returned to Eren’s room, waiting outside the door for Eren to finish changing.

Eren soon opened the door, he was wearing baggy sweatpants and a tank top, showing off his tattooed arm, almost completed but not quite. He sniffled, wiping at his eyes as he stepped out of the way to come into his room, his walls lined with pictures and drawings of Levi.

Armin set down his bag at the foot of the bed, looking up to some of the drawings. “These are all really good drawings, Eren. Very realistic.” *They almost look like pictures…*

“Thanks… I just wish the real thing were here.” He mumbled, sitting down on the edge of the bed and burying his face in his hands, hunching over his knees to rest his elbows on them as he struggled not to cry. *No, don’t do it now, don’t lose your composure. Lose it? You've already lost it, a long time ago. What? No I didn’t… Yes you did, the moment he said he was going to be a marine you’ve been thinking about it! No I haven’t! Yes you have, just fucking admit it you fucking dumbass.*

Armin sighed, sitting next to him and leaning his head in his hands, letting out a shuddery breath. “M-me too… I really miss Erwin…” He tried to force down tears, though a few began to escape, trailing down his cheeks. *I know it’s something you have to do… And I know that right now you're not gone for long… But that doesn't change the fact that I really fucking miss you.*

Eren nodded, moving to curl up to him. *I don’t want to be alone.* He barely heard Lathe walk upstairs and shut his door. He let out a soft sob, burying his face into Armin’s side once he laid down. *I don’t want him to leave me…*

Lathe padded silently up the stairs, hearing the quiet sound of crying from in Eren’s room, his face falling. *...they really miss them…* Lathe decided to leave them be, closing his door quietly behind him. *They need their space…*

Armin shifted to lay back on Eren’s bed, pulling Eren close and tangling their legs together, tears silently streaming down his cheeks, his cheek resting on Eren’s head. *...I really really don’t want to*
wake up by myself… But you feel nothing like Erwin… I still feel so alone...

Eren wrapped his arms around Armin’s waist. He feels different… It’s nothing like Levi… He’s not sturdy enough. Eren let his tears fall freely, not afraid to hide them anymore. Even though we’re trying to help each other… It’s not working is it? Eren sat up after a bit, tugging on Armin’s wrist to pull him up, his eyes shaded from his shaggy bangs.

Armin looked up to him confused, sniffling quietly. “W-what is it? Where are we going?” Armin let Eren tug him along, tears still falling as he followed him down the hall, resisting just a bit as they approached Lathe’s room. What are you doing? “E-Eren, what…?” Armin followed him in as Eren silently opened the door, his eyes worried as they approached Lathe on the bed, completely knocked out. What are you doing?

Eren pulled him into the bed and crawled over to curl up to Lathe’s other side. I don’t want you to sleep alone… And we can all fit. Eren curled up to him instantly and started to break down and really cry, sobbing so profusely that his shoulders shuddered with every breath.

Lathe blinked awake, confused for an instant as he felt Eren curl up to him and cry, immediately moving his arm to pull him close. He looked to his other side, Armin hesitantly shifting closer to him. He didn't miss the tears streaking down his cheeks, his shaking shoulders. He gently brought his other arm around him, letting him curl up to him and cry into his shoulder, feeling his small arms wrap around his torso. It’s okay… I understand.

The second he felt Lathe’s arm wrap around his shoulders, he clung to his shirt, sobbing heavily into his shoulder, his legs tangling with his and Eren’s. …you feel like Erwin does… He buried his face into Lathe’s shoulder, not trying to hide his sobs. I miss him so much ...

Eren cried himself to sleep after around 15 minutes of solid crying. His body stilled, his head heavy on Lathe’s chest as it had been the last time Levi left. His face was stony, but his expression changed every so often as he went through various different nightmares. I don’t want him to die.

Lathe sighed as he felt Eren and Armin still in his arms after a while, looking up to the ever-moving gears on the ceiling. …they really miss them… It took an hour, lost in his thoughts, before Lathe finally let his eyes slide shut, overcome with sleep.
Armin’s been staying over this whole weekend, and Lathe let me extend his visit until Erwin and Levi get back. He knows I don’t want to sleep alone, and we did better after Friday night, and we were able to sleep by ourselves in my room since then. It’s Tuesday…. 9th period…. Ugh, I don’t like having English last period… I hate it, but at least Armin is with me. They’re not coming home for a few more days, and Mr. Arlert has let Armin sleep over the whole time, which is nice… I don’t have such an urge to cut with him here, and Blake’s noticed, and calmed down… I really hope Dad doesn’t notice, I don’t want him to be mad at me for cutting. Eren was jostled from his thoughts as the bell for last period rang. Time to go home. “Ready Armin?” He asked quietly, his voice was soft, and his eyes a bit brighter than they had been on Friday.

Armin looked up from packing up his bag and grinned, slinging it over his shoulder. “Yeah. Let’s go.” Armin led them out of the classroom, walking down to their lockers and switching out some of his books quickly, waiting patiently for Eren to do the same before they headed out, walking to Eren’s house in companionable silence.

Eren smiled softly, reaching out to hold his hand as they walked along, getting close to his house. I wonder… I haven’t really done it with Levi in a while…. It’s been awhile, shit… I shouldn’t be thinking about this… He’s my best friend, I don’t want to lose him over this!

Armin looked down to their hands, a small flicker of uncertainty in his eyes. ...I don’t know what to make of this… Is he…? I think he is… But I’ve got Erwin, and you’ve got Levi… I know it sucks that they’ve got to leave so much, but… I promised him I’d wait. Armin however didn’t pull his hand away, lightly squeezing his hand as Eren brought him up the driveway, letting him go to unlock the door.

Eren let go to unlock his door, throwing it open and dragging Armin in by the wrist. “Dad! We’re home!” He called, bending over to remove Blake’s vest and put it down by the door. I’m hungry…. God, I feel like I can never be full, and now I feel like I can’t even be fucking satisfied with what Levi did with me…. Fuck….

Lathe looked up from his writing at the scripting room table, grinning at them. “Hey you two. Just let me finish scratching down this thought and I’ll be out of your hair.” He joked, writing quickly before shuffling papers together, walking around the table. “How did school go today?”

“It was alright, boring… No homework, as usual.” He told him, throwing his bag down by the staircase and going towards the larger pile of movies. “Armin, what you wanna watch today?” He called as he crossed the room to said pile. Well, there was homework, but we got it done during Lunch, sooo…. Damnit, why can’t I stop thinking about it? You shouldn’t ask him…. You promised Levi you would wait.

Armin skimmed over the titles on the coffee table. “What about Eragon? I know you finished the
books by now.” That looks pretty cool.

“Awesome, it’s decided! Hey Dad?” Eren threw him the puppy dog eyes as soon as Lathe looked to him. I want popcorn again.

Lathe looked up, immediately sighing in defeat, smiling. “I know, kid. Popcorn, tea and cocoa coming right up.” He left the papers on the table and walked to the kitchen, soon returning with mugs, and a moment later with a familiar metal bowl. “Here you go, I’ll be upstairs for a bit if you need me, but I’ll be down in an hour to make dinner.” He took his papers on his way upstairs, disappearing up the steps.

He got the TV and DVD player set up to play the movie, coming back with the remote. Eren smiled and pulled Armin into his lap. “Can I ask you something?” He asked softly.

Armin had only a second to settle in Eren’s lap before his soft voice next to his ear made a barely perceptible shiver run up his spine, a faint red dusting over his cheeks. ... He’s so obviously flirting with me… “W-what?” Do I want to know what you're going to ask?

Eren swallowed hard, leaning his chin down on Armin’s shoulder. “I’m… I don’t feel satisfied…. Waiting for Levi…. I don’t know who to ask…. I’m sorry, but if you don’t want to do anything I completely understand… I just don’t know how to take care of it really…” Eren’s whole face was flushed. I’ve never had to take care of it... Levi’s been taking care of me enough to keep me satisfied.... But… fuck… I don’t know how to say this...

Armin flushed scarlet to his ears, his eyes widening a fraction. ...How do I even respond to a request like that? I know it’s really hard, without Erwin here for me or Levi for you… and even if I could use someone else’s touch… I’m supposed to wait for him. I told him I would, and... wouldn’t that count as cheating? Armin kept his eyes glued to the floor as he tried to formulate a response, feeling Eren’s hands gently holding onto his waist. ...I don’t know... I guess it wouldn't, technically? I’d just be... Teaching him how to deal with it? I... I guess...? “U-Uhm… I-I’ll show you… If t-that’s okay…” I don’t know what the hell I just agreed to.

Eren nodded, hugging Armin’s waist tightly, as he had so many times before in the halls. “Thank you, really… You’re a life saver.” Eren sighed in relief and reached to bring the popcorn bowl close and letting be Armin go so he could get out of his lap if he wanted. I just... I don't know how to deal with it... And it fucking hurts without Levi around...

Armin watched Eren let go of his waist with a small frown. ...I kinda don't want to get off of your lap... is that selfish or...? Armin took the popcorn bowl from Eren’s hands, placing it in his lap
and carefully leaning back against his chest, glancing up and gauging his reaction. *If it looks like you're not okay with me sitting here I'll get off.*

Eren smiled, wrapping an arm around Armin and pulling him close, using his other arm to eat popcorn. He returned his focus to the TV and watched with wide eyes as the large blue egg started to crack. *It's so big, holy crap...*

Armin rested his head against Eren’s shoulder, following the movements of the knee-high blue dragon with fascination, watching as it grew bigger and bigger quickly through the movie. *She’s getting very big very fast... And she looks so cool.* He sipped from his warm mug, completely enraptured.

Eren smiled, sipping from his mug as he was entranced by the whole movie, completely missing when Lathe had come in to see how they were doing, and to start on dinner. *This is pretty accurate to the book... I'm surprised.*

Lathe peered around the corner over to them, quirking an eyebrow at Armin situated in Eren’s lap. *...the hell?* He shrugged after a second. *Eh, they're best friends. They have the right.* He glanced down the bowl in Armin’s lap. *Yep, still set on popcorn.* He smiled faintly, moving silently to the kitchen to start dinner. He returned soon, leaning against the doorframe, smiling softly. “Dinner’s ready, you two.” He left as they both nodded, moving to set the table.

A soft frown crossed Armin’s face for a moment as Eren’s hands slipped from around his middle, standing up with the nearly empty bowl in one hand, his mug in the other.

Eren stood up after, Blake quickly at his heels as he led them to the kitchen. The wonderful smell had already wafted to the Piano room, which once Eren took a deep breath of he smiled widely. “TACOS!” He cheered and moved quicker to slide into the kitchen, just barely missing the table. *Tacos!! We haven't had Tacos in a long time!!!*

Armin laughed, close behind him. His eyes were bright as he spoke. “Yeesh, be careful. Can't have you slipping.” He set the bowl on the counter, rinsing his mug in the sink before Lathe took it. “Thank you. It really does smell good, Lathe.” *It stills feels kinda weird saying your first name- I'm not used to doing that with adults.*

Lathe grinned. “Thanks.” He turned to Eren for a moment. “You heard him- again with the sliding, chill! Even if you arrived a few seconds later, there’d still be plenty left, I assure you.” He joked, handing Armin a full mug and taking Eren’s empty one. He soon handed Eren back a fresh mug of tea, setting a taco in front of Eren. “Armin, I don’t know what you’d want on yours. Lettuce,
tomato, sour cream, cheese? All of the above?"

“No tomatoes, please.” Armin sipped from his mug, taking his place at the table. “Everything else is fine though, thank you.”

...finally, someone who’s picky. Literally everyone else I’ve cooked for in this house just inhales whatever I put in front of them. Lathe nodded, quickly fixing a taco for him and handing him the plate, sitting down with his own and beginning to eat quietly. I’ve got another song pretty much completely written out. I just need to tweak the actual music to it when I have a chance at the piano, and it’ll be done.

Eren practically inhaled his first taco, moving to fill his plate again and came to sit back down with two large tacos on his plate. Those two didn’t last much longer. I’m hungry…. I don’t want to be hungry, it scares me… But why can’t I feel full?

Lathe looked to Eren’s clean plate, surprised. It’s like he won’t stop eating… Huh…. Maybe it’s the stress of Levi being gone. Probably. Or a growth spurt, or something like that. Yep. That’s likely it. Lathe chuckled, standing with his empty plate and mug, going to wash his dishes before returning for Eren and Armin’s. “Alright, I’m going to clean up. You two can do… Something. Whatever it is you kids do these days.” He joked, looking over his shoulder to them. “But just letting you know, I'm going to be using the piano. I won't be playing obnoxiously loud, but you might not want to try and put on another movie. And if my playing sounds weird, that’s because it’s a work in progress, so deal.” He moved to put the clean dishes away, smiling.

Eren nodded, tugging at Armin’s wrist, a pleading look in his eyes. Can you show me? “We’ll be upstairs in my room then.” He told Lathe, his voice even. Good, he won’t be able to hear us…. I think… we should be okay if we keep the door closed… I really don’t know how to deal with this though.

Armin followed him, letting his blonde hair fall into his face and hide his crimson face from Lathe. ...oh no, he means now, and I don't know what I'm supposed to do… My god, this is embarrassing… He shut the door behind them, Eren reaching to lock it, swallowing hard. “Uhm...” Armin shifted from one foot to the other, hearing Lathe faintly playing the piano downstairs. He at least won’t be able to hear us… My God, if he hears us… No, he won’t… He won’t. Armin let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, leading Eren over to the bed and gently pushing him to sit on it, sitting next to him, unsure of where to start. ...I don’t know if I can do this...

“Um… I know this sounds really weird… but… I don’t know what to do… How do I get off without Levi? I’ve never done it myself b-before… is that strange?” Eren asked softly, a large
A flash of relief passed Armin’s eyes. *Oh my god, he had me thinking he wanted sex... Thank god it's not that... This is still seriously embarrassing, but... I can do that, I guess. Show him...* Armin furrowed his brow a bit. “I guess kinda, since you’re seventeen and never felt like you had to.”

Armin swallowed hard, trying not to lose the shred of confidence he had. “But I can show you. It’s easier with lube, if you have any up here...” *Which you probably do, given you and Levi have had sex...*

Eren nodded, getting up off of the bed and going to the drawer towards the top of his dresser, rummaging through a few things before pulling out a good sized black bottle of lube. “Why do you need this? I don’t really want to have sex Armin... I just... I don’t know why it hurts so much... I promised Levi I would wait for him to come home...” Eren’s words were soft and his eyes trained on his feet as he held the bottle in his hands. *We usually only use this for sex... so it would be really weird to do this with Armin... I just... how do I get it to stop hurting in the morning?*

Armin shook his head quickly, immediately speaking. “No Eren, I didn't mean for sex, I was worried that that was what you meant but it’s not. It’s just easier with it. Here, it’s... It’s okay. Come back over here.” Armin held out a hand to him, trying to catch his attention from the bottle. *We’re not going that far. That’s not happening.* Armin took the bottle as Eren handed it to him, getting him to sit next to him, trying to find the right words. *How the actual hell do I say this... ‘Um, you can take it out...” ...I guess that counts...*

Eren stared at Armin where he sat at the edge of his bed for a few moments. *Take it out? Take what out? ..... Oh, Oh, Oh.* Eren nodded his hands moving down to where the zipper was on his jeans. He unzipped his pants, trying to shimmy them down past his hips, finally getting free of them for at least a little bit, then pulling down his boxers as well. *Okay... what the hell happens now?* Eren looked over to Armin with curious eyes. “O-okay... now what?” He asked quietly, looking down at his half-harden. *It fucking hurts.... Shit.*

Armin snapped the cap of the lube open, taking Eren’s right hand and pouring a small amount into his hand. He closed it and put it aside. *...He’s given me all the initiative in this... Just go with it.* Armin moved so his right rested on the back of Eren’s hand, his fingers lined up with Eren’s, guiding his movements. He moved his hand to spread the lube over Eren’s hand, his fingers. He tentatively guided Eren’s hand to his length, closing their hands around and it and slowly pumping. *...I can’t believe I’m doing this...*

Eren let out a soft gasp as he touched his erection with the cool lube on his fingers, which warmed quickly. He looked up towards Armin, a look of lust in his eyes. “Okay... What- what else... ahng...” Eren let out a shuddery moan as his thumb grazed over his sensitive head. *...It.... It feels good.*
Armin shuddered slightly as he met Eren’s eyes, his face scarlet as he felt his own length twitch in his boxers. Dammit… He started to quicken the pace, his thumb guiding Eren’s to run over the slit in his head, gently twisting their hands, unable to break from Eren’s gaze.

Eren let out a much louder moan, his body shaking a bit. “Ar-Armin… haa… It…. It feels…. Good.” He gasped in between moans. *It feels really, really good. Why haven’t I figured this out before?*

Armin felt his blood rush south from Eren’s moans and his movements, the lust in his eyes. Armin shuddered, feeling his length straining against the front of his pants. *Shit, I'm hard… what do I do?*

Eren looked down towards Armin’s pants, seeing the tent pitched in his pants. *Armin’s hard… well… I should probably do something, since he’s helping me out.* Eren shuddered and arched his back a bit as he tightened his grip on his own length. He reached over with his left hand to Armin’s pants, gently cupping his erection. “C-can I… help you too?” Eren asked, letting out another moan as he hit a particularly sensitive spot down his shaft. *I don’t want to be the only one that gets help… you should be able to let it out too… I know how hard it is.*

Armin’s eyes immediately widened as he felt Eren palm his erection through his pants, trying to suppress a moan. ...*it’s been too long …* He tightened his hand on Eren’s length, his fingers by now coated with lube, replacing Eren’s hand as he nodded, his left hand moving to unbutton and unzip his jeans, pulling them down along with his boxers, gasping as his throbbing length met the cool air of the room.

Eren grabbed the bottle, adding a little more lube to his right hand before gently grabbing Armin’s length, just as he was shown earlier. *Fuck… his hand feels really good.* Eren moaned, gently rubbing Armin’s erection. He kept his eyes looking into Armin’s eyes, his own full of lust and wanting as they rubbed each other. *It feels really good.*

Armin moaned loudly as Eren’s hand started to pump his length, his free hand immediately coming up to cover his mouth, biting onto his sleeve. *My god, I can’t be so loud … but it feels too good …* Armin softly whimpered as Eren started to speed his strokes, his pupils blown wide with lust, looking from Eren’s eyes to his lips and back again. ...*damn.* His thumb played with Eren’s slit, his hand tight around him as he pumped him faster.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Lathe ceased his scratching at the sheet music with a pencil as he heard an odd sound from upstairs. He sat completely still on the piano bench, listening intently, his eyes widening. That… Are they… Is Eren cheating on Levi?! Lathe blushed as he heard a soft sound, his eyes wide and showing confusion and panic. He can't be cheating on Levi. He can't be. Even if Levi and Erwin aren't around to… satisfy them, and even if they are really good friends, comfortable with sitting on each other’s laps… Even if the sounds they're making up there… No, Eren swore… he can't… He wouldn't. He wouldn't do it by himself. …what if Armin made him do it. I could’ve misjudged him completely, even if he always seemed so kind and polite. I could have been all wrong. I can't help but think that Armin talked him into it. He seemed so much more consistently composed than Eren through all of this, and Eren’s so vulnerable… He can't. Lathe held his head in his hands, covering his ears and trying to block out the faint sounds, letting the words swimming in his head drown out the quiet noise. …He can’t.

Eren’s body shook as he let out a strangled moan. “A-Armin… haa… I can’t…. I can’t much longer…” I’m gonna cum soon… Fuck, it feels so good. Eren moved forward, his eyes still locked onto Armin’s lust filled ones. Fuck it, I need to do this. Eren leaned forward, pressing his lips to Armin’s, still wary and unsure how Armin would take it.

Armin’s eyes widened in shock. It feels like him… Armin let his eyes slide shut, kissing Eren back and twisting his hand around Eren’s length hard, shuddering as Eren’s grip on him tightened. …it feels too good …

Eren groaned into their kiss, soon pulling back to pant, his whole body shuddering. “Armin… fuck!” Eren cried out in bliss as he came into Armin’s hand, his body shaking in bliss with each spurt of cum. … Fuck…. That felt great. Eren leaned forward to reclaim Armin’s lips, twisting his hand around Armin’s length and toying with his slit. You need to cum too.

Armin moaned loudly into Eren’s mouth, shuddering as he released in Eren’s hand. …oh my God… That felt amazing… His hand slowly pumped Eren dry, his hands coming up, his dirty hand slung over Eren’s shoulder, the other holding the back of his neck as he kissed him. That felt so good… He began to feel tired, caught in the post-orgasm glow. He hummed into Eren’s mouth.

Eren moved back, pressing a quick kiss to Armin’s forehead. “Thanks, Armin.” He murmured happily, moving to get off the bed, going to the wipes he had around and cleaned their hands up before putting the both of them back together. “You wanna put your pjs on? I don’t mind if you stay in here with me… I’m going to change into mine.” Eren told him, turning to return the bottle of lube to the drawer and then fish out his pjs and change himself.
Armin nodded, standing from his spot at the edge of the bed. He reached for his backpack still at the foot of Eren’s bed, deciding changing in Eren’s presence wasn’t a big deal considering what had just happened. He changed quickly, soon tugging Eren to the bed and shifting to pull the blanket up over them, holding onto him tightly. He sighed contentedly, his entire body relaxing.

Eren pulled Armin close, holding onto him tightly, his arms wrapped around his waist, his chest flush against Armin’s. He has a soft smile on his face as he fell asleep rather quickly with Armin in his arms. .... Good night, Armin.

Lathe couldn’t sleep. It had been deathly silent in the house since ten, and Lathe could do nothing except lay awake staring at the ceiling, drowning in a sea of tormenting thoughts before he gave up. It’s four in the fucking morning. I’m not getting any sleep at all, am I. Fuck it. Lathe tossed off the sheets, getting up and padding downstairs, picking up a clean sheet of music and starting to write, the weight in his mind, if anything, getting heavier. He decided at six thirty to start making breakfast, dark circles under his eyes as he set about making pancakes, something that required his focus. He tried not to think about Eren and Armin… Cheating on their boyfriends… Doing… He snapped out of his thoughts, shaking his head to clear it and flipping the pancakes before they burned. He placed the finished ones on a nearby plate, covering them with a skillet lid as he made more, finishing off the batter. He nearly jumped out of his skin as he suddenly heard Eren’s voice, immediately looking over to him, trying not to drop his mug. Fuck. He forced a smile onto his face, hoping his tiredness didn’t show. “Mornin’, Eren.” His smile faded a bit as Armin trailed after him, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. You. “Good morning, Armin.” Lathe’s words had a sharp edge, though he tried to act as if he wasn’t furious as he sent a quick glare to Armin, redirecting his attention to the pancakes, fixing plates for the three of them. He set the table quickly, sitting down rigidly, slowly beginning to eat and stopping after barely three mouthfuls. I'm not hungry. He stared into his mug, his eyes hidden by his shaggy noir locks.

Armin looked confused as Lathe spoke with an icy tone, surprised as he glared at him. What? What'd I do? Was it… His eyes widened, trying to force down a blush. Don't fucking tell me he heard us. No no no please don't let it be that, he’d have the completely wrong idea, because it’s not cheating... Technically...

Eren barely noticed their exchange, as he was enraptured by his stack of pancakes, starting to inhale them. Maybe I’ll be able to actually get full now? Eren had a hopeful look in his eyes as he continued to eat the rest of his plate.

Lathe glared into his coffee, trying to contain his sadness, his disappointment, his confusion, his anger. ...I can't stand to sit next to you right now. Lathe stood from the table, bringing his coffee with him, his tone leaving no room for argument, terse. “If you'll ex cuse me.” He immediately left for upstairs, his door shutting loudly behind him, trying to distract himself getting dressed for
work. I can't do this.

Armin watched his barely contained rage in shock, hearing him slam his door upstairs. ...whatever it is, it's bad. ...He heard us. He must have.

Eren watched him leave, looking over towards his plate which he left almost untouched. “I wonder if he spilled something on his music last night?” He’s usually not like this... But I know how his music is spur of the moment a lot of times... so if it got ruined, I wouldn’t be surprised if he was pissed and couldn’t remember how to write it again.

Armin shrugged a shoulder, his worried eyes tracing over his plate. “Maybe…” He heard. Suddenly, he didn't feel so hungry anymore.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe stormed through the halls silently, students moving quickly out of his way as he walked to his next class. Well, today is turning out to be shit. I broke a watch glass and a beaker during chemistry, I nearly shouted at three students, and everyone’s looking at me as if I want their blood. I'm so fucking tired I can't believe I'm still standing. The class immediately fell silent as Lathe walked into the room, dumping his bag in front of the desk and turning to lean on it, rubbing his temple with his hand, the other bracing against the edge of the wood desk. Eren and... He are in this class. He closed his eyes, waiting for the bell to ring before speaking loudly enough for everyone to hear. “Okay, so here’s the thing. I'm pretty sure I've had all of you, so I don't think I need to introduce myself again. First, I'd just like to say sorry right now, I'm not in the best of moods and the language part of my brain is refusing to function in an eloquent manner.” He glanced up, glaring at Armin for a moment. “But that’s what happens when you don't get any sleep.” He looked at the desk, only a stack of textbooks on it to the right and a globe near his left hand. He picked up the globe and started to unscrew the top of it, practically scowling at it. “So what exactly are you supposed to be learning? This is American History, yes?” He looked around to a sea of nodding heads. “Okay, so that means I have to rant about America. Easy enough. The thing is though, that right now I can't properly words. So.” He removed the sphere from its stand, leaving the stand on the floor to the side of the desk and hopping up onto the desk, slinging his legs over the textbooks and laying back, spinning the globe on his finger absentmindedly. “What time period are we talking about? Give me two years to work between and I'll just start ranting.” He watched the globe spin, listening to the stunned silence. He kept the globe spinning on his finger as he propped himself up on one elbow, turning to face the class. “Look, it’s been a long day. If someone doesn't tell me what time period you're learning about, I'm going to either make one up or assume you want to know about everything.” Silence. They're still fucking terrified of me. Joy.

“Alright. We’re going to talk about Richard Nixon, because why not.” Lathe kept sending Armin pointed looks as he spoke. “So, Richard Nixon was a member of the Republican Party, the 37th President of the United States, and should not under any circumstances have been trusted to run a nation. A bunch of stuff went down while he was in office, and I'm just going to start listing stuff. This thing happened called the My Lai Massacre, a slaughtering of the women and children in the
village of My Lai in March of 1968, located in the northern part of South Vietnam. Troops were on a search-and-destroy mission to root out members of the Viet Cong. They ended up decimating the people of the village, all unarmed, their bodies mutilated and some women gang-raped before they were killed. It was just a huge mess, and the public didn't hear about it until November of 1969, and the press attention caused public opinion to sway more in opposition of the war. ...You know what?" Lathe stopped the globe, jumping down from the desk and picking the globe stand back up, screwing it back together. "I'm sorry, I really am, to all present company minus one. But I can't do this." He set the globe back on the desk, slinging his bag back over his shoulder. "There's a half hour left in this class. If you all could do me a favor, just read from your textbooks or just goof off, I don't even care anymore. Just don't leave or cause trouble. I'm done." Lathe walked out of the classroom, slamming the door shut behind him and striding to the main office to sign out, a dark storm cloud trailing behind him.

What is up with Lathe? I don’t understand... why did he glare at Armin whenever he saw him... Why? I don’t get it? What did Armin do that was wrong? I just... Why? And why couldn’t he sleep last night? We even went to bed early last night! I don’t get it... Is he mad at me? Is he trying not to freak me out by taking it out on Armin? Oh god... what if he’s angry at me? No... I can’t have him be angry at me... What if he doesn’t let me bring Armin home again? But... I liked sleeping with Armin, he’s closer to Levi’s size than Lathe is... and he’s fun to watch movies with, he’ll let me hold him, and I like that... I don’t want to be stuck hugging a pillow while I watch a movie by myself... Will Lathe watch movies with me? I don’t want him to stop... I don’t want him to leave me too, what if it’s because he’s mad at me? He didn’t even talk to me at all today... Why? What did I do? I’m so confused... Why did you walk away from me in the hallway? Why are you avoiding me? Do you hate me? Do you hate Armin and because I’m friends with him instantly hate me too? What did we do? I don’t understand... We didn’t do anything wrong! Eren’s mind was flooded with so many thoughts, Blake whining as his eyes got darker. He slipped a few binders into his locker, staring at the dull backing, barely noticing that he started scratching. His nails dug into his skin, allowing for large red streaks to cross his wrists, Blake whined, trying to get his attention but failed. He whimpered as he saw Armin coming closer to him.

Armin gently put a hand on his shoulder. “Hey, Eren... are you okay?” He asked quietly, his eyes running down his arms seeing Eren scratching. That’s not good, that’s what Blake is worried about. He reached to grab his wrists, finally snapping Eren out of his trance with a slight gasp.

Eren jerked his head back a bit, his eyes searching the area, trying to figure out where the hell he was, he calmed down when he instantly recognized Armin’s blonde bowl cut. He let out a sigh he didn’t know he was holding in, leaning forward and resting his temple on Armin’s head. “...When are they coming back?” I keep asking... but the answer won’t change will it?

Armin sighed, letting go of his wrists, knowing he wouldn’t scratch again. “Eren, I’ve told you five times already. They’re not gonna be home until Friday... Eren, you need to calm down, I’m gonna go home today and make sure that my Grandpa is alright... okay?” He asked, pulling Eren into a
hug. I don’t believe that going home with you is a wise decision… Lathe has only glared at me all day… I think he heard us. No, I know he heard us yesterday. I wonder if he’s going to have a talk with Eren about that… Otherwise he’s gonna think something completely different. God dammit… That means I have to figure out sleeping alone for the next two days.

Eren’s eyes widened a fraction at the new information. He’s not coming home with me? Well… I guess that’s okay… but… Are you leaving me too? Levi’s leaving me…. Lathe hates the both of us… and now you’re leaving me too? Eren tried not to cry as he pulled away, hiding his face as he closed the door to his locker with a slight slam, his eyes dark and downcast, completely ignoring Blake’s whines as they walked towards the door. What the hell? Why the fuck is there so many people standing around outside today? What the actual hell? Eren sighed in frustration as he moved to the doors, holding them open for Armin, not really looking to see why people were crowding outside the doors in the front of the school.

Armin was curious as they got to the doors, seeing the massive body of students outside. What the hell? It’s not a Pep Rally, right? We should’ve left from the side not the front… Wait…. Is that?… Oh my god! It is! Armin dropped his bag where it was and raced to Erwin, standing there in his digital camo, holding his arms out for him. He didn’t care that he was crying as he launched himself into Erwin’s arms, wrapping his own around his shoulders, his legs finding away around Erwin’s middle. “You’re… You’re back… Oh my god, You’re back!” Armin smiled as he tried not to cry.

“Oi, Brat!” Levi called over to Eren, trying to get him to look up. Stop looking so sad and get the hell over here! I want my hug!

Eren’s eyes widened a fraction, frozen for a second before he looked up slowly. L-Levi? Eren stood there, staring at him for moments, time seeming to freeze as he took in the sight of Levi wearing his digital camo, standing there, waiting for him to come running up to him… But Eren stood there, so unsure of what to do, the tears quickly starting to fall…. Please tell me this is real… Please… Eren covered his face as he started to sob, letting go of Blake’s leash and allowing the dog to go and race to Levi and paw at his legs uncontrollably, like he was trying to get his attention. Eren took the first few shaky steps towards him before moving his arms from his face and his steps getting quicker until he was wrapping his arms around Levi and sobbing. … It’s real, thank god… he’s actually here. He came back to me.

Levi held onto Eren tightly, gently rubbing circles into his back, his voice quiet near his ear. “Hey Eren, I really missed you. I’m here, don’t cry. It’s okay.” He buried his face in his shoulder, a small smile on his face. It’s good to be home.

Lathe watched through one of the windows of the main office, seeing Armin and Eren run up to Erwin and Levi without much hesitation. Levi’s home already… and the way Armin and Eren are going up to them, it’s like nothing between them happened at all. How could you cheat on your
boyfriend like that and look like there’s nothing weighing down your conscience? Surely they must feel something… Lathe looked down to his hands, having accidentally crumpled the papers he was holding in his tight grip. ...should I go out there? I have no reason to chill in here, and it’s Levi. But… I’d say something. Lathe looked to the sheets in his hands, pitching them in the recycling bin and walking out the side door, moving to his bike and driving off away from the house and the school, needing a bit to clear his head before he could even try to go home.

Erwin held Armin with ease, a happy smile across his face. “Did you miss me Armie?” He asked quietly, a deep chuckle leaving his throat. *I certainly missed you.*

Armin buried his face into his neck, smiling widely. “Too much. I’m really glad you're home.” Armin leaned up and pecked his cheek, grinning broadly. *You're home! You're really home!*  

Erwin smiled and kissed his cheek in return. “You wanna head home? My car’s in the lot.” He murmured quietly into Armin’s ear, kissing the shell of his ear gently. *I missed you so much.*

Armin nodded quickly, smiling as he unwrapped his legs from around Erwin, stepping onto the ground and grabbing his hand, twining their fingers together and pulling him to the parking lot, a spark in his eye. *I think we could do with being alone for a little bit.*

Erwin nodded, looking over to Eren still clutching onto Levi like his life depended on it. “Do you guys want a ride home? There’s enough room in the truck and you’re two blocks away.” Erwin offered the ride, rubbing a thumb over Armin's hand. *I saw that spark, Armie, you can’t hide that glint from me, but I’m a proper gentleman so you always offer the car ride.*

Levi shook his head. “No thanks, we’ll walk. Like you said, it’s two blocks.” He glanced to Armin for a split second. *Besides, I kinda have the feeling Armin wants you all to himself as soon as possible.*

Erwin nodded, leading Armin out towards the parking lot and to his large black truck.

Eren looked up to Levi, his hand coming up to rest on his cheek. “Can we… Can we go home?” Eren asked quietly, shooing Blake away from Levi’s legs as he continued to paw at them, just as he had done to Lathe and Armin the first day they left.

Levi nodded, his head leaning into his touch for just a moment before one arm slid from around his middle, still keeping an arm around his waist as he guided them home, walking next to him quietly,
comfortably.

Eren had his head leaned over against Levi’s shoulder, his right hand holding onto Levi’s shirt tightly. “I missed you… You know, it’s getting better when you leave… But, it’s still really hard.” He mumbled quietly, his eyes still a bit downcast, but not as much as before. Blake was walking in front of them, happy to be off the leash but he stayed within five feet of them.

Levi kept his left arm tightly around his middle, pressing a kiss to the top of his head. “It’s good to know that it’s getting easier… thank you for being so willing to stick around for me through this.” His eyes wandered up the street, Eren’s house already visible. Home. After it being that for so long it still sounds really nice. He let Eren push open the front door, letting him close it before turning him around and pressing him gently against it, one hand coming up to cup his cheek, kissing him deeply. I really really missed you...

Eren shed his backpack, tossing it towards the staircase before wrapping his arms around Levi’s broad shoulders…. Fuck I missed you so much. Eren tilted his head to the side slightly, trying to get even deeper with his kissing.

Levi broke their kiss, smirking and looking into Eren’s eyes as he practically dragged him into the basement, a possessive glint in his eye. ...Mine.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

It was late. Lathe knew that much. He didn't expect Eren and Levi to get up until the morning, and he knew he wasn't going to be working the next day, yet he still waited until nearly midnight to dig into the highest-up cupboards, way in the back for a new bottle of whiskey, picking a heavy glass and shutting the cabinet. He dropped some ice into his glass and sat down at the kitchen table, breaking the seal of the bottle and leaving it on the table, pouring himself a glass and trying to mute the endless thoughts of Eren cheated on Levi, and Armin made him. He poured himself a second glass, a third, a fourth, a fifth until tears were streaming down his face, resigned to the loud voices shouting in his head. I can't believe Eren would do that… But I can't tell Levi… It'd fuck everything up. He rested his head in his hand, letting out a shuddery breath. He barely even noticed someone walk into the kitchen, looking up and instantly speaking, his voice cracking, his eyes full of misery. “L-Levi.”

Levi walked past him quietly, quirking an eyebrow at him. “Yeah?” He asked, stretching out as he yawned, more hickey and love bites lining his collarbone. How much have you drank… Levi looked back as he pulled out a glass for himself, looking to get water. Wait… Is that the seal? He’s drank half a bottle of Crown Royal right there? Is he out of his damn mind?
Lathe thought hard for a second, suddenly shaking his head. “N-nevermind… I shouldn't tell you… I don't want to mess anything up…” Lathe hid his face in his hand, his eyes screwed shut. *I'm going to make it worse if I open my mouth about it…* Lathe took another sip from his glass, which was nearly empty.

Levi sighed, bringing his glass of water over to the table to sit down with him. “Lathe, you know you won’t mess anything up, you’re clearly distraught about something, just spill.” Levi insisted raising his own glass. *I really hope you don’t have to work tomorrow.*

Lathe sighed heavily, his eyes tracing over the table. *Maybe I should believe you… Just tell you… It’s… So Armin was here most of the time you and Erwin were gone, okay? He and Eren just kinda kept each other company, watched movies, just chilled… But last night… I know I heard them both up in Eren’s room, moaning… I think Eren was cheating on you, but I didn't want to think that because he promised to wait for you and I can't help but think maybe Armin forced him into it maybe… I didn’t want to mess anything up and tell you, but I guess you deserved to know.” Lathe sobbed into his hand, tears flowing freely down his cheeks. *I didn't want it to be like that… I wanted the two of you to be perfectly okay as a couple, for Eren to be able to cope without you, without… Without that…*

Levi swallowed hard as he took in Lathe’s words. *That… That doesn’t sound like Armin… But if what he heard… And Lathe’s got ears like a bat… Well fuck.* He drained his glass before reaching for the bottle of alcohol, filling his glass, offering to fill Lathe’s as well. *I need a drink after that.*

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him, though he nodded and slid his glass over. “Since when do you drink?” *Last I checked you were 18, not 21.*

Levi sighed, just shaking his head, filling up Lathe’s glass and setting the bottle down with ease. “I started when I was nine, and no, you’re not getting the whole story, I refuse to tell anyone.” His tone was cold as he picked up his glass and drained it with practiced ease. *That burned… I haven't had a drink in over two years…*

Lathe raised both of his eyebrows looking at him, his attention soon returning to his glass. “I won’t ask… And at this rate, I’ll probably forget, too.” Lathe just shrugged, his eyes dull as he sipped from his glass, soon emptying it and setting it down, resting his head on his arms on the table, trying to calm himself down from sobbing.

Levi nodded. “You should probably head upstairs before you forget to do that too.” His tone was soft as he filled his glass again, taking a sip from it. *This won’t be enough to give me a hangover, I’ll be fine…*
Lathe let out a shuddery sigh, bringing his head up and and standing, taking his glass to the sink and throwing the broken seal from the bottle away. He capped the bottle and shoved it back into the highest cupboard, turning to Levi for a moment. “You didn't see where I put that.” He rested a hand on his shoulder lightly for a moment, sadness in his eyes before he let it slip away, walking to the stairs with a bit of sway in his step, leaning on the railing as he walked up to his room to collapse on his bed, the door shut and locked behind him.

Levi followed suit closely after, finishing his glass, returning it to the sink and walking past the stairs and to the scripting room and to the basement. So…. Eren was cheating on me? I don’t think he’s honestly capable… Not Armin… Well we’ll have to see. He slipped downstairs and slipped back into bed with Eren, feeling him curl up to him immediately, closing his eyes and sighing as he fell asleep.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren woke up a little later than he expected, stretching in the bed, reaching his arm over to nudge Levi awake, only he was met with an empty bed. Huh? Eren quickly started to freak out. Oh my god, did I have a dream about that? Levi’s not actually home, is he? He reached over to feel the empty bed, feeling the warmth that a body left behind and sighed in relief. No… He just woke up before me. He’s really here. Eren smiled at the thought, slipping out of bed and scrounging around for his clothes and slipping them over his body. Well, Levi didn’t notice the cuts on my thighs, so we should be okay. I hope. He slowly sauntered up the stairs, ruffling his hair with a hand running through it. Why the hell didn’t he wake me up? He opened the door at the top of the stairs, closing it behind him as he walked around the empty house to find both Lathe and Levi sitting at the table. Lathe was drinking coffee, and a bottle of aspirin near his mug and Levi drinking tea with two tea bags instead of one. What? Why are they like this? Wait…. What did I do? Eren’s face was full of concern as he stepped in and looked over them. “D-Dad?” He asked quietly, his voice a little hoarse from last night.

Lathe looked up, his face weary and eyes set. I need to figure out what the hell is going on between you and Armin. Lathe stood, leaving the bottle of aspirin and his mug behind. “Eren, we need to talk. Now. Please, follow me.” His voice was lower than normal, rough, his head still a bit foggy from last night. We’re getting this straightened out now. Lathe walked over to him, gently pulling him along by his arm to the basement, shutting the door behind him and walking down the stairs. He pulled two stools out from under the table and sat, guiding Eren into the other next to him. His tone was grave as he spoke, looking up to Eren with tired eyes. “Eren, we need to clear up what happened with Armin two nights ago. I heard you two upstairs, doing… Questionable things. It’s been hanging over me that you could've been cheating on Levi, and whether I'm wrong or right, you need to explain it to me. What happened with Armin Tuesday night?” Lathe just let the words tumble out, rubbing his temple and trying to will away his pounding headache. ... drinking that much was not that great an idea...

Eren eyes were wide as he was more or less dragged down. Wait… What’s happening? Why do we need to talk? Eren sat down beside Lathe his eyes wide and showing a hint of fear. ... He heard us?
He thinks I'm cheating on Levi? Why?... I would **never** do that! Does he think I'm a whore? Oh my god... He does... But I... I didn't want to ask him how to take care of it, it's embarrassing, and even Armin said it was weird that I didn’t know. Eren looked down, his hair covering his face, hiding his darkened eyes, not speaking to him, only shaking his head. No... I wasn’t cheating. Eren felt the tears well into his eyes. **He thinks I’m a whore... He thinks I’m cheating on Levi with Armin.... Oh my god... He heard us. Oh god no, please don’t make me say this... It's embarrassing, we didn't do anything! He was teaching me dammit!**

Lathe let out a shuddery sigh, his eyes glassy as he stared at the floor, holding his head in his right hand. “Eren, **please.** You can tell me. I just want to know if you... I just want to know if what you did with Armin was cheating. I just want to tell me if I'm wrong, tell me if I'm right... And let me know what you two were up to. ...I’ll try to understand.” **Please, just tell me I’m wrong. Tell me you didn’t cheat on Levi, that nothing like that happened, that it was a huge misunderstanding. I wouldn't care that you worried me sick for nothing, I'd be fucking relieved! Just tell me.**

Eren just shook his head, starting to stand up off of the stool. **No... I don’t want to tell you... You think I’m a whore... You think I was cheating.... You don't trust me!** Eren let a few tears fall. Are you gonna make the rumors true? The rumors that I’m a seductress and a whore? Are you gonna rape me like Grisha did? No... I don’t want to tell you, I regret even trying it now! I just needed help and I was too embarrassed to ask!

Lathe’s hand suddenly hit the table loudly, nowhere near Eren, his fingers threaded through his hair and tears streaming down his face. After a tense moment of silence, he spoke, his voice cracking and quiet as he gently reached out a hand to Eren’s shoulder, lifting his head a bit, his bangs shifting from in front of his broken eyes. “Eren, at least tell me he didn't force you to.” **I swore I'd never let that happen to you, my God please don’t tell me it happened again while I was right there.**

Eren’s eyes widened and he snatched his shoulder out of Lathe’s reach, stepping back a few feet. “No!” Eren snapped at him. “Armin didn’t force me to do anything! He’s my best friend! He would never do that! **Dammit !**” Eren’s fists were clenched as the tears streamed down his face. “Why would you think that?” Eren asked, tears falling freely down his face. **Why would you think that? Armin is nothing but nice... Why? Is it because you don’t trust me around anyone else other than Levi?**

Lathe let his hand fall, looking forlornly down to the floor. **...so does he mean they did...?** “Eren… But did you two...?” He glanced up through his dark hair, swallowing hard. **...did you...?**

Eren’s eyes filled with momentary rage. “NO! Why would you think that I was cheating on Levi?” Eren almost screamed at him. He lifted a hand to rub away his tears. “No... I asked Armin to help me.... God this is too fucking embarrassing... But do you not fucking trust me enough to be alone
with my best friend?” Eren asked, the anger faded from his voice leaving just pain.

...oh... what?... whatever that means, I fucked up. His voice wavered as he spoke, rubbing at his red eyes, trying to stop the tears. “Eren, all I knew was I was playing the piano and I suddenly heard you two and I could do nothing but assume the worst... I just... I didn't know how the hell to say anything to you then and when you two seemed totally fine the next day, I was wondering if it was because nothing happened or... A lack of remorse.” He sniffed. “I was just so worried that something like that had happened and believe me, I was hoping against hope that it wasn't like that... I... and then I didn't know how to deal with that weight hanging over me, knowing that something could've happened and that I probably shouldn't tell Levi that you... What was it that you were doing, exactly?” ...please, just let me be wrong. Tell me I'm wrong.

I'm gonna have to tell him... Aren't I? Eren heaved a sigh, moving to sit back down on the stool. "I... I... This is embarrassing... Even Armin said it was weird that I didn't know." Eren couldn't find it in himself to look up to Lathe.

...what. You're not making sense. "What do you mean...? What didn't you know?” Lathe looked to him with confusion.

How could that make any sense?

Eren's face flushed completely. "I... I didn't know how to take care of it... It was starting to hurt... Levi and I hadn't done it in a long time..." Eren told him, bringing a hand up to cover his face. This is so embarrassing! "I was too embarrassed to ask you... So I asked if Armin could show me... Cause I didn't know what to do with it." Eren moved to keep his face covered. Will you still think I'm a whore? Are you mad at me for making you worry? You probably are... fuck ... What do I do? I didn't know what to ask, or who to ask... Dad... Did I do something wrong? Am I... Am I a whore? Eren swallowed hard at the thought, his eyes holding nothing but shame. ... He must've told Levi... Fuck... I don't think I can explain it to him without Armin's help.

Lathe flushed scarlet, holding his head in his hands. Even if that does kinda make sense...... that's not something you normally ask your best friend, is it? Lathe spoke quietly, trying to sort through his thoughts with his muddled mind. "...Eren, two things. First, there's the internet for that. And second... I'm sorry. I was an idiot to immediately assume the worst, and doubt your commitment to Levi... but you need to tell him, because... I told him, last night." He immediately held up his hands in defense. "Not a great move, and I'm really sorry, but I wasn't thinking straight." I was too drunk to keep my mouth shut. Lathe sighed heavily. "Eren... you need to tell Levi. And Armin needs to tell Erwin, too. Together, if you have to. But... come clean about it. Levi already knows something was up between you two. Just... get it over with after school or something." Lathe tried to send him a reassuring look. ...if you two come clean, they might not be as mad as if you kept secrets from them.

... So he did tell Levi?... Come clean, tell them that I didn't know what to fucking do? Yeah, that sounds like a great idea. Eren only nodded looking down at the floor, unable to turn to Lathe. "Um... Can you... Can you call the four of us in sick? I think we need to talk together... and the sooner the better, I don't want Levi to tell Erwin anything and screw up their relationship too...” Eren's eyes held so much remorse for his actions it was unbelievable. Only, Lathe couldn't see it,
he never found the courage to look Lathe in the eye, or even up enough to let his eyes see anything but floor. I fucked this up major... Shit... I should've known... I should've known he doesn't trust me... I should've... but I put my trust in him... Why did I do that? I was too embarrassed to ask him about why it hurt so much when Levi and I didn't do it for a long time... He automatically thought I was a whore? That I would drop my pants for my best friend? Does he think I'll drop my pants for him too? Eren felt the need to scratch, so he began to, his nails digging into his skin, leaving long red streaks in their wake. ... Fuck... I can't trust him... he doesn't even trust me... He think's I'm a whore... Eren continued to scratch, enough that he had opened his skin up in a few places where the larger red marks crossed paths. He just started to break down, letting his tears fall freely down his cheeks, trying not to shudder with every sob, trying to contain it but failing miserably. Eren stood up from the stool, slowly heading towards the staircase. ... I don't want to be a whore... He was still scratching his wrists when he got to the end of the steps, waiting for his response as so many voices flew through his head, calling him names and bringing forth his worst fears. I regret everything.

Lathe stood, crossing the room in two steps and gently catching Eren's hands to stop his scratching. He pulled him into a gentle hug, softly rubbing circles into his back, his voice quiet. "Alright, I will. Eren, please don't cry... I'm not mad or anything, if that's what you think." I won't let you scratch over this... and you don't have to cry. It's okay, you plan on coming clean about it... that's not going to be easy for any of you, but it's necessary."...Eren, it was a huge misunderstanding on my part, and I'm so sorry for overreacting like I did." Lathe pulled back from him, one hand still around his middle, his head bowed and holding up his palm to him. I hope I didn't cause any more harm than can be repaired...

Eren looked at his outstretched palm. ....I should be the one apologizing. Not you.... He gently raised his hand to place on top of Lathe’s, asking for forgiveness as well. You don't need forgiveness.... I do.... Eren let out another shuddery sob as he saw the scratch marks had left nasty red lines across his tan skin. I look ugly.... I wanna cut.... But I can’t. Eren sobbing continued, even though Lathe had told him not to cry. .... This is all my fault... I couldn't wait until Levi got home... I'm a motherfucking whore and Lathe agrees... He thinks I am too.

Lathe moved his hand under Eren's, closing it. "Eren, you don't have to apologize to me for anything. It was my fault for assuming the worst, not trusting you wouldn't cheat, and telling Levi. I'm the one at fault." He reached to his back pocket, wiping away Eren's tears with his kerchief. "Please, don't think I'm mad at you. You don't need to scratch, or apologize. I understand. It's okay." He pulled Eren close, tucking his head under his chin. "It's okay."

Eren tried to swallow down his sobs, nodding. He gently pushed away from Lathe. "I need to go..." He turned without looking at Lathe again and ran up the stairs. Blake going nuts as soon as the door was opened. He lifted his arm to wipe away the tears that continued to fall down his cheeks. He ran from the top of the stairs towards his room, and the sound of the door slamming shut rang through the house. ... He still thinks I'm a whore... He's trying to hide it, but he still thinks I'm a whore... Eren drowned out the sound of Blake's whines, which quickly turned into frantic barks in front of the locked door. He fumbled around for his phone, finally locating it on the foot of his bed and calling Armin, continuing to scratch with each dial tone.

Lathe ran up the stairs after him, at Blake's heels as Eren slammed the door shut, jumping a bit in
surprise as Blake barked after him. *He never barks.* Lathe turned, reaching for the key on the
doorframe to his room, sliding the pin into the base of the knob and pushing it open, holding Blake
back by his collar so he wouldn't rush Eren. He walked over to Eren on the bed, silent as he took
hold of Eren's free hand to stop his scratching as he talked on the phone, letting Blake jump onto
the bed and lick Eren's face. *Just not the scratching.*

Eren talked quietly with Armin as he sobbed. "Dad found out... We... We need to tell them... Cause
Levi knows... And... And..." He paused as Armin spoke softly to him. He nodded after a few tense
moments. "Okay..." Eren hug up, struggling to scratch at his wrists, he was close to opening them.
"They're coming to get us... We're not going to school." Eren sniffled, leaning back into Lathe's
arms.

Lathe sat down on the edge of the bed, pulling Eren into his lap, keeping his hands away from his
arms. "That's okay, I'll call in, tell the principal. I'll get you four excused from class. I'm not going
to be able to do that every time though, you know." He carded a hand through Eren's hair. "Eren... I
really don't want you scratching, and you're so close to opening them up... let me wrap them up for
you. Please? Then I'll let you get dressed to go over." *I don't want you opening your arms while
you're there..." You and Levi need to be back before dark at absolute latest, though. Is all that
okay?"

Eren nodded, still never looking up to his eyes. "I know... Just this once please..." Eren's voice
cracked for the lasts part of the sentence. *He thinks I'm a whore, doesn't he?* Eren's sobs starting to
fade. Blake was trying to get his hands into his jaws, whining the whole time. "Can you get him
outside... Please?" Eren asked, looking away from Blake and pulling his hands away from him. *No,
Blake will tell him I want to cut... That's why he was barking at the door, he knew..."

Lathe nodded, shifting out from under Eren, taking Blake by the collar and walking him
downstairs. He grabbed his medical bag, turning as he let go of Blake who started going right back
up the stairs. "Blake. Heel." Lathe pet him as he sat down, leaving him downstairs and listening to
him whimper as he walked back upstairs quickly, shutting and locking the door behind him so
Blake wouldn't come back inside. He took fresh dark green wraps out of his bag, sitting down next
to Eren and carefully putting the loop over his thumb, winding the wrap down his arm and pinning
it in place, doing the same to his other arm with practiced ease before he pulled Eren back into his
arms, pressing a kiss to his forehead, his temple. "It's going to be okay. I'll let you get dressed,
okay? I'll tell Levi he needs to change." He stood, striding to the armoire and grabbing some of
Levi's clothes, shutting the door behind him as he marched downstairs to inform Levi of their
schedule.

Eren nodded, sniffling until his tears stopped. *He's probably mad at me... I did the worst thing... I
fuck everything up... Levi's gonna leave me for this... He knows... He thinks I cheated...* He got
dressed in a daze, not really looking anyone in the eye. He went downstairs, Blake instantly
running up to him as he stood near the door, in a complete daze of thoughts.
Levi approached him after a minute, his pajamas in his hands, having changed in the downstairs bathroom. His expression was stoic, his voice even. Too even. "Eren, what's this thing about Erwin and Armin coming over to get us?" ... is this about you two cheating? Are you two going to apologize and explain why you two decided to cheat when you both swore to wait for us? I don't know how you two could run up to us yesterday and not feel anything... not look guilty in the slightest.

Eren barely acknowledged him, his eyes trained on the floor. Levi thinks I'm a whore... Everyone thinks I'm a whore... Everyone's gonna leave me... His shoulders slumped, as fresh tears sprouted and he struggled not to scratch, Blake going as far as to get his mouth around one of Eren's hands. He just stood there, crying quietly as they waited for the low hum of the truck coming into the driveway, and a few quick knocks on the door signaling that Armin had arrived to get them from the truck. Eren reached for the door and pried Blake off his hand. "Heel, Blake, be a good boy Blake." He sniffled, looking up finally to Armin with broken eyes, and completely breaking down in his arms. I fucked up... They're all gonna leave me.

Armin held onto Eren tightly, rubbing his back lightly, worry and sadness in his own eyes. Lathe's glares make sense now... He looked up to Levi over Eren's shoulder, at the hardness in his eyes. He looks really mad... shit. Armin looked away from him, gently pulling Eren along to the truck, opening the back door and helping him up, letting Eren curl up to him and wrapping his arms around him, finally letting out a ragged sob... please, don't let this ruin everything.

Levi walked out behind them and shut the door, hearing Lathe lock it behind him as he crossed over to the passenger's side door, sliding in next to Erwin. He stared ahead, his eyes cold as he thought. you cheated.

Erwin watched them clamber into the back, his eyebrow raised. What? His attention was stolen by Levi almost slamming the door as he got in the passenger seat. What the hell is Levi angry for? He's not even looking at Eren, much less acknowledging that he's crying. I need to know more about this. "Levi... Why?" Erwin looked over to him for a split second as he turned to back out of the driveway and to the street.

Eren was clinging to Armin as he curled up to him. His words were whispers into Armin's neck as he sobbed. I'm so sorry... I fucked everything up... I'm so sorry Armin. He sounded like a broken record as he cried.

You better not swerve and get us in a fucking wreck if I tell you right now. "They cheated." Levi's eyes stared straight ahead, though he watched out of the corner of his eye if Erwin reacted at all to it, in case he had to snatch the wheel. They fucking cheated. He ignored the sobs from the back of the truck.
Armin's grip on Eren tightened, sobbing into his shoulder. ...maybe they'll understand if we explain...? At this point... He looked up as they soon pulled into the driveway, swallowing hard as it really hit him what they had to do. I don't know if they will.

Erwin only nodded, silent as he held the wheel, driving them to his house, thanking his parents for getting early jobs. ... Well Armin wasn't kidding when he said we needed to talk... They got home only a little later and he parked the car in his driveway. "Alright, let's head inside." He killed the engine and led them all inside the large house.

Levi nodded, stepping down from the truck and trying not to slam the door too hard, not looking back as Armin and Eren clung to each other and trailed behind them trying to control their sobs. You two have a lot to answer for. He followed Erwin, kicking off his shoes before marching to his bedroom with him, sitting at one end of the bed with Erwin next to him, finally letting his eyes land on Armin and Eren. "Alright. Start talking." You better have a damn good explanation for this shit.

Eren eye's looked so broken as he looked up to meet Levi's glare for a few seconds. "It.... It's my fault... Don't blame Armin..." He tried to stand up straighter, as if he was trying to shield Armin. This isn't your fault... You don't need to bare the brunt of this.

Erwin quirked an eyebrow from where he sat. ... So Eren's taking the blame for whatever they did? What was it that they did? Cheating.... But.... Armin promised to wait for me, didn't Eren do the same? I think he did....

Armin hung onto Eren still, trying to force back tears, though his hand kept a white-knuckled grip on his shirt. "I-it's my fault, too... I can't let Eren take all the blame." I was involved... I agreed when I could have said no...

Levi looked between the two of them. They're both trying to take the blame for… what, exactly? "What did you two do?" I thought you both swore to wait for us. What happened to that, huh?

Eren shook his head. "Armin... No, I asked... I'm to blame. You were just helping me..." He told him and stood in front of him, shielding him from everything. "I asked Armin if he could help me... Levi, we hadn't done it in awhile... It was starting to hurt, and I didn't know why and I didn't know how to take care of it... And and... And... Armin taught me how to take care of myself... That's it... That's all we did." Eren told them, his whole body shaking as he sobbed. Well now they know... "I'm sorry, but... But... It was starting to hurt a lot... And I didn't know what to fucking do to make it stop " Eren brought a hand up to cover his face, still shielding Armin.
Levi was silent, a barely perceptible brush of pink over his cheeks as an image of Eren and Armin jerking each other's lengths flashed past his mind of it's own accord, suddenly speaking frankly after a moment. "That's pretty hot." ...damn. First off, I didn't know you didn't know how to take care of yourself, and that actually is a pretty good reason, even if it's not something best friends normally do, and second... damn.

Erwin listened, his pants tightening a bit at the thought of Armin jerking Eren off, nodding at Levi's statement. That would be fucking hot... Holy shit, but at least they didn't cheat. Where did Levi get the idea that they cheated on us? It seems what they did was purely educational... So it was harmless? Well... Now that this is cleared up and we're off for the whole day... I have an idea. "Alright, well since Eren so clearly announced what actually happened, Armin... Would you show us how exactly you taught Eren to take care of himself?" He smirked as he saw Eren's face instantly flushed, and his sobs stop from surprise.

Levi smirked, a predatory look in his eye as he studied Eren's expression, feeling his jeans tighten. I definitely wouldn't mind watching the show.

Armin sputtered for a second, his face flushing red to his ears. You're serious. Memory flashed in his mind without his consent, remembering the lust in Eren's eyes, the curve of his lips, his hands on his length... He felt his length twitch in his jeans, letting his hand slide around Eren's waist, pulling him closer and letting his other hand toy with the hem of his pants, looking him in the eye, his own shaded. If you're sure you'd like to watch... He grinned, purring in Eren's ear. "Want to give them a show, Eren?" I certainly don't mind.

Eren's eyes widened, his body shivering as he heard Armin's words near his ear. "Are... Are you sure?" He asked quietly, dipping his head down, giving Armin full view of his sultry gaze. I wouldn't mind... I kinda owe Levi at least that much. He swallowed hard, his hand moving to reach for Armin's crotch, feeling his bulge already there, his own length twitchin from the sensation. Holy shit... It's gonna be so hot with them watching us... Damn..

Armin let out a quiet moan as he felt Eren palm him through his jeans, tugging Eren to the end of the bed, opposite Levi and Erwin, though turning him and pushing him down, straddling him and unbuttoning the denim, giving Erwin and Levi a good view of his actions. He locked eyes with him, unable to tear away from those lust-filled orbs. His voice was low, his eyes only flitting away from Eren's for a split second to trace over his lips, soon caught again in his gaze. "I'm sure." He tugged Eren's jeans over his hips, palming his erection through his boxers.

Eren watched Armin's actions, letting himself be pushed down onto the mattress. He kept his gaze locked with Armin as he let out a soft moan from his actions. "Armin... You too." His hands reaching up, sliding down his body, coming to the hem of his shirt and slipping his hands under him to feel his warm skin. He let out a soft hiss as Armin traced a finger over his sensitive head, as the fabric rubbed on him. Fuck, this is hotter than last time... His lanky fingers made quick work
Armin's jeans, rubbing his erection through his boxers as well. He was letting out soft moans every now and then, his gaze not even moving from Armin's as Levi and Erwin moved to get a better view of the two of them.

Armin groaned softly, his eyes never leaving Eren's as he finally trailed up to the hem of Eren's boxers, pulling them over his hips, letting his fingers splay across the tan skin and trace down to his length before letting one finger run up the underside of his already fully hard length, teasing him and rubbing over the slit before taking him in hand loosely, slowly beginning to pump him. He whimpered quietly as Eren's hands teased his length through the fabric of his boxers. *My God, this is even better than when we first did it...*

Eren let out a soft mewl of pleasure as his breath hitched. "Haaa... Armin..." Eren moaned out his name, his eyes darkening with even more lust as he moved his fingers to the hem of his boxers and moved them off of Armin's hips, teasingly slow, letting his length spring free of his cage. His hands moved to his asscheeks, moving to grab them gently at first, kneading them together, pressing down on his skin roughly as his fingers trailed to his hips, pulling him closer, so he was flush against his own thighs. *You're skin's so soft Armin...* He let out another loud moan as Armin toyed with his length, his thumb grazing over a certain spot. His right hand traced down from Armin's hip to his length, gently palming his length and fiddling with his balls. *I didn't touch your balls last time... I wonder...* Eren reached above his head to grab a few pillows to help prop himself up, so he could get a better angle to watch Armin work.

Erwin watched both of their actions. He reached down to relieve some of the pressure built up in his pants, so he unzipped his pants and pulled them down a bit so his own length wasn't restrained. ...*Well this is certainly a good show.* His eyes flickered over to Levi who sat beside him adjusting himself as well. *And Levi's still really hard... Well, we could all get off like this.* His hand reached to Palm himself slowly, waiting to turn his full attention to their boyfriends.

Armin moaned, his legs spreading a bit wider as he loomed over Eren, his free hand wandering under the hem of Eren's shirt, feeling the warm tan skin as he twisted his hand around Eren's length, his thumb playing with the slit of the head. *It feels too good...* He glanced up for barely a second, his eyes glazed over as he saw Erwin and Levi both palming themselves, watching their display hungrily. His eyes held a spark of pride as he returned his attention to Eren, blocking out their audience again as his free hand wandered further south, gently massaging Eren's balls, letting a finger brush over Eren's entrance, carefully gauging his reaction. *...would you let me...?*

Eren whimpered from the teasing treatment, his eyes hooded, only to widened as he felt Armin poke at his sensitive entrance. "Armin... I... I want more." He moaned out, biting his lip after he did so, his hand loosely surrounding Armin's length and beginning to pump slowly down his length, varying the pressure every so often. *Do it Armin... Tease me... It'll feel really good...* fuck I want you to kiss me... Eren's left hand snaked up Armin's shirt, feeling around, and finally locating one of his perked nipples. He pinched and twisted the bud, his eyes glued to his face to watch his reaction. *...if you'll let me, the shirt is coming off.*
Armin whimpered as Eren teased his nipple, feeling him roll the bud between his fingers. He watched Eren's silent plea for a kiss, moaning unabashed as Eren started to pump his shaft. I can't take it. Armin's hands left Eren for a split second, quickly lifting the shirt over his head and revealing his pale, soft, unmarked skin before he leaned down to kiss Eren greedily, his tongue swiping over his lips. His left hand returned to pumping Eren's shaft, breaking the kiss after a long minute and holding three fingers of his other hand up to Eren's mouth, looking him in the eyes as he quietly, lowly demanded "Suck." I want to make you feel good.

Eren looked a little breathless as Armin pulled back from the kiss. His hooded gaze moved for only a moment to Armin's fingers in front of his face, which flushed all the way to his ears a dark scarlet red in a matter of seconds. He leaned forward with an open mouth, taking in his three fingers with ease, suckling on them, his tongue rolling over them. His hand never stopped its motion around his length, squeezing and twisting, a finger glossing over the slit. His other hand occupied with abusing his nipples, flicking, pinching, and pulling at them to get Armin to moan. His body shuddered as his hand returned to his waiting length. Holy shit... It feels so good.

Levi watched with hooded eyes as Eren moaned under Armin, his own length painfully hard in his boxers. Holy fuck, that's hot. Levi forced down a moan as he palmed his length, soon deciding that wasn't enough and shifting to push his boxers over his hips, letting his shaft spring free and taking it loosely into his hand, pumping slowly and playing with the slit, his eyes glued to the erotic display in front of them. Oh my god...

Armin quietly groaned as he watched Eren suckle on his fingers, moaning in pleasure as he felt Eren's hands all over him, soon drawing his fingers back from Eren's mouth, coated with saliva. He shifted to kiss Eren fervently, his tongue again prodding at his lips asking for entrance as his hand drifted to Eren's entrance and traced the pucker with one finger, slowly pressing past the ring of muscle, feeling up the soft walls. You're so warm and soft, so tight... Damn.

Eren let out a gasp, his lips parting, and allowing Armin's tongue to enter his mouth. He whimpered as he felt his finger enter him and run around his walls, moving his hips down to get more of his finger in. His moans were silenced by Armin's lips over his own. Eren still abused his nipples but soon moved the hand to let them go and he started to focus completely on Armin's erection. A hand on his shaft, pumping slow, but steady, and his other on the head, teasing and poking at the slit. ...You should feel just as good as me.

Armin groaned into his mouth as his tongue mapped out the cool cavern, tangling their tongues together as he felt both of Eren's hands on his length, shuddering at the stimulation. So good... He pushed his finger in to the knuckle, waiting a moment before adding his second finger, thrusting slowly in and out of him, stretching him out and searching his walls for that bundle of nerves.
Eren moved his hips against every thrust of Armin's fingers, his body giving off an erotic look as it rolled to take in more. ... It's right... "There."
Eren pulled back from the kiss as he arched his back off the bed. Armin's fingers pressing directly onto the bundle of nerves, sending a jolt of pleasure through his entire being. "Haa... Armin... Don't tease... Me..."
Eren moaned out, his hands continuously pleasuring his length, feeling the precum start to drip between his fingers. It must feel good for him... That's fucking hot. Eren leaned his head forward, his temple resting on Armin's as he let out loud moans, a shril cry of ecstasy here and there as Armin teased his prostate. ... Fuck Armin... He could already feel his coil starting to tighten. I want my shirt off... I want it off now... He pulled his hands back from Armin for only a few seconds as he removed his shirt, showing off his hickey-ridden chest, tossing the shirt away before his hands returned to Armin's length.
"Armin... I won't be able too... For much longer." He warned with a cry as he was traded again.
And he's only got two fingers in... It feels really good...

Armin groaned, Eren's voice loud and arousing in his ear as his eyes raked down Eren's chest, noting the many, many hickies scattered over his chest. All Levi's... that won't do. Armin ducked his head down to suckle at the skin at the joint of his neck, a patch of unmarked skin turning red under his lips and teeth as he slowly added his third finger, thrusting deeply into Eren and aiming for that bundle of nerves, pressing at it and brushing over it relentlessly. His hand around Eren's length tightened, twisting his hand and toying with the slit. Then cum. I want to hear you.

Eren moaned a little more as his coil tightened, finally snapping as Eren almost screamed from the pleasure. His body convulsing from the pleasure of being touched. Eren's body went almost slack under Armin as he was marked more. He panted as he looked to Armin with lust filled eyes, his hands moving to his shoulders to push him down to the bed. Moving so that his face was only inches from Armin's length, and his breath warm against it. His hand continued to pump him, picking up the pace. "You too, Armin." His voice was seductive as he purred against his thigh.

Armin shuddered as Eren screamed in his ear in bliss, some of Eren's cum painting his chest and going lax under him as Eren flipped their positions, a shiver running up his spine as he felt Eren's breath against his shaft, moaning loudly as Eren's hand moved faster up and down his length. "E- Eren.... please ." Armin pleaded with him.

Eren's eyes held a hint of mischief to them, as he leaned his head down, giving a few teasing licks to Armin's length as his hand continued at a fast pace. "Cum for me Armin, cum for me..." He trailed off as he licked over his slit, his eyes begging for his release. I wanna see your face when you cum.

Armin let out a strangled cry in pleasure, his eyes not able to leave Eren's as his coil finally snapped, releasing over Eren's face. Oh my god ... Armin panted heavily, sitting up and gently pulling Eren's face up to his by his chin, his voice quiet. "Let me help you with that." He lapped up his seed from Eren's face, taking care to get every drop and not caring that it was himself he was tasting, before pulling Eren into another heated kiss, languid as he wrapped his arms around his neck, only remembering their audience as they broke away for air, looking over to the two of them.
"Enjoying the show?" He quirked an eyebrow at them. *You two look rather flustered there, jerking off to our little display... so, I'd say yes, you are indeed.*

At the sight of Armin climaxing, and his cry of pleasure, Eren's length twitched back to full hardness. He let Armin lick his face clean, kissing him back just as heatedly. Once they pulled apart he looked over to Levi and Erwin as they sat in some bean bag chairs in the middle of the room, watching the two of them on the bed. Eren moved away from Armin's touches, sinking down to the floor and crawling between Levi's legs, biting gently at his inner thighs before moving to take his whole length in one swift movement. *...Do you understand now? That I didn't cheat on you? That I'm not a whore?* Eren sucked vigorously, even going as far as to deepthroat him.

Erwin watched Eren crawl off the bed, crawling over to Levi. He moved quickly, getting out of his jeans and getting on the bed with Armin. Moving to hurriedly kiss him passionately, his hard length poking against Armin's lower thigh because of the height difference. *That was so fucking hot... Holy shit!* ...

*...that was the hottest damn thing I have ever seen.* Levi's eyes widened a fraction as he watched Eren crawl over to him, groaning loudly as the heat of Eren's mouth enveloped his length, forcing his coil not to snap then and there. He brought his hands up to fist in Eren's hair, gently tugging and moaning as Eren's tongue flattened against the bottom of his length, as he suckled at the tip. *

Armin wrapped his arms immediately around Erwin's shoulders, feeling the muscles flex under his hands. and kissing him back with equal passion, grinding up against him, slowly getting hard again. "E-Erwin... Haa... P- please. J-Just take me already." *Please... I want you. I need you bad and I want you more than anything right now...*

Eren moaned onto his length as his hair was pulled. *Levi... Fuck, we haven't done this in forever.* He sucked as hard as he could, bobbing his head up and down as he did, going all the way to the tip, swirling his tongue around it before deep-throating him yet again and his nose touching Levi's abdomen. His body shuddered, his picked clenching from the loss of fingers, wanting to be filled again. *... Levi will you still...love me?* Eren looked up to him with lust filled eyes, his erection twitching at the sound of Armin's moans. *We're all gonna fuck right here aren't we?*

Erwin nodded, reaching into the nightstand and pulling out their bottle of lube and pouring a decent amount on his fingers as he prepped Armin with practiced ease. "I can't wait any more Armin... So I hope your ready." Erwin's voice was deep beside his ear as he slowly leaned forward, pinning his arms above his head and thrusting his whole length into Armin's twitching hole in one fluid motion. *He's fucking tight... Must be from all the excitement, God, his eyes look amazing ...* He risked a glance over to the two at the bean bag chairs. *They won't mind, they'll probably be fucking soon anyways...*
Armin threw his head back, his eyes locking onto Erwin's as he pushed back onto his length, moaning loudly as Erwin thrust deeply into him, his toes curling. "E-Erwin... haa... h-harder, please..." *I missed this so much...* He tilted his head, better exposing the pale skin of his neck in silent invitation. *Mark me. Make me yours.*

Levi moaned softly, his fingers still threaded in Eren's brunette locks. *If he keeps this up, I'm not going to last...* Levi tugged Eren off of his length and flipped him onto his back on the beanbag chair, quickly reaching back onto the bed where Erwin had discarded the bottle of lube, pouring some into his hand and dropping the bottle. He leaned up next to Eren's ear, purring. "Do you know how hot the two of you looked?" He slipped himself up, lining himself up with Eren's entrance and suddenly thrusting deeply into him, starting a relentless pace. He sucked more bruises up the side of his neck, groaning lowly in pleasure, a possessive and absolutely predatory look in his eyes. *I don't mind too much sharing you with Armin... but doing this...* Levi thrust deeply, aiming for his prostate....*this is mine.*

Erwin watched Armin writhe under him with darkened eyes. Lowering his head to the crook of his neck, he licked the pale skin, gently before taking a good amount in and sucking on him, letting go after a minute, leaving a large mark on his neck. He hummed gently against his neck as he followed Armin's pleas, thrusting harder than he had and keeping up a brutal pace. "You're... Beautiful Armin" His deep, rich voice was a whisper against Armin's ear, his teeth gently grazing the shell and kissing it gently. *So beautiful for me.*

Eren let out a small shriek as Levi entered him forcefully. "Haaa... Levi... So good... Ha.... You're... You're not... Mad?" He moaned out his shaking legs moving to wrap around Levi's waist. ...*I don't want you to leave me because of this...* His hands coming up to to wrap around his shoulders scratching at them every time he cried out in bliss, his prostate being brutally nailed. *Please don't be mad at me... I love you. "L-Levi!"* Eren cried out at a particularly hard thrust to his prostate. ...*Fuck...I can't tell if It was pure pleasure or if it hurt enough for it to feel good... Holy fuck. *

Armin arched his back, moving his hips to meet every thrust, moaning as he felt Erwin mark his neck. His thrusts were hard, and with his touches light and his voice quiet, it was driving Armin insane. "E-Erwin... I can't... haa... much longer... s-so good... " Armin felt his coil tightening in the pit of his stomach, his length leaking precum in streams onto his chest.

Levi nibbled on the lobe of Eren's ear, his voice low and rough as he spoke. "No I'm not... that was the sexiest damn thing I've ever seen." His hands wandered over Eren's chest, his fingers splayed over his skin and trailing low, running over the insides of both his thighs. His head ducked down to suck hard at his adam's apple, feeling his coil tightening. *My god... "So good..."*
Erwin smirked and picked up his pace a bit, feeling the heat start to pool in his stomach. "Armin, I love you... You're so beautiful..." He praised, his fingers playing with one of his nipples, as he continued to kiss and suckle on the skin, leaving small marks, trailing down his collarbone. *Beautiful... And Mine...*

Eren screamed as rope after rope of cum landed on his chest. "Levi!" Eren's cry of bliss was followed by a soft moan, he tightened around Levi's length, his body growing limp under him in his post-orgasm bliss. ... *Fuck... I don't think I'll be able to walk straight.* Eren's hooded eyes locked onto Levi's steely ones. ... *You're not mad... That's good.*

"Erwin!" Armin cried out in bliss, Eren's cry and Erwin's praise and touches that left fire in their wake driving him to release, pearly cum decorating his chest. He fell limp under Erwin, letting him use his body, his walls tightening even further around his length. *My god...*

Levi groaned loudly into Eren's neck, shuddering as Eren cried out in his ear, thrusting deeply and releasing, his movements jerky as he dropped his head against Eren's shoulder, his hands coming up to cup his cheeks as he pulled out of Eren, lifting his head and bringing his lips close. "I love you." He breathed over his lips before kissing him passionately, his tongue snaking into his mouth and tangling with Eren's, his eyes sliding shut. *I really fucking love you.*

Erwin gave a few more frenzied thrusts, before biting down on his collarbone gently and cumming inside of Armin, filling him to the brink. He let out a loud moan as his body shuddered, panting once he was finished. He raised his head to gently peck Armin's cheeks, slowly trailing to his lips and claiming them. *You feel perfect.* He didn't pull out of him yet, happy to stay in Armin's warm and full hole. *I filled you to the brink.*

Eren's lips parted to let his tongue in, his own dancing along with Levi's. He groaned as he felt Levi fill him. *That's a lot, and it's so warm...* He whimpered a bit into Levi's kiss, wiggling his hips a bit, trying to get his attention. *My body is so fucking sore. I need a break Levi or else I'm gonna pass out.*

Armin's fingers gently threaded into his hair, whimpering into the kiss and relaxing in his arms, his eyes fluttering shut as they kissed lazily. *You feel so warm... I feel so sore, and so full... I love it.*

Levi pulled back from their kiss, his eyes shining as he looked into Eren's. He shifted to sit on the beanbag, pulling Eren gently into his lap, his arms wrapped around him protectively. Levi buried his nose into Eren's hair, content just to breathe in his scent, murmuring quietly. "I really love you." *I really do.* He looked up at the sound of Armin and Erwin kissing, remembering suddenly their company. ...*now what?*
Erwin pulled back a bit from their kids to breath, moving to sit up, pulling Armin with him so he was situated in his lap, his length still buried deep inside of him. He glanced over to Levi looking over to them. "Well, that was certainly interesting." He commented flatly, reaching up to tease Armin's nipples again. *I could go for round two... But let's see what you think first...* His eyes running over his facial expression, gauging his reaction.

Eren's body was stiff as he was pulled into Levi's lap, his length pushing a little further in and he let out a soft whimper as Levi moved under him. *If either of us move... He'll rub up against my prostate... Shit... I'm still sore...* Eren's hands moved to splay over Levi's chest, his head leaning against his shoulder. *I'm tired too...*

Armin shifted, his face scrunching a bit in discomfort as he pushed Erwin back a bit, weakly swatting his hand away. "N-no more... I can't..." He lifted himself off of Erwin's length, turning to look between Levi and Erwin with a devious smirk. *Eren looks really worn out too...* "Eren and I gave you two a show..." He stepped down from the bed, keeping his gait even as he moved to sit in the beanbag next to Eren and Levi's. "I think it's time the two of you return the favor." *I want to watch.*

Levi blushed lightly at the thought, looking up to Erwin, his eyes tracing over his defined muscles, his strong jaw... *That could work.* He smirked at Erwin, lifting Eren gently off his length and setting him in the beanbag chair, standing and striding over to the bed, lifting himself onto it and straddling Erwin's hips, purring into his ear, his hands lightly tracing down his chest. "What do you say, Erwin? Shall we?" He nipped at the spot under his ear lightly, beginning to nibble and suckle down his neck. *Objections?* He felt Erwin shiver under his touch. *None?*

Eren laid limply where he was placed, slowly starting to curl up to himself and whimper from losing what had filled him. He watched from where he was on the beanbag, trying to keep his hole shut so he didn't leak Levi's cum everywhere. *I'm really tired, but this is already hot... Fuck. Eren couldn't turn his eyes away.*

Erwin smirked, his large rough hands coming up to land on Levi's hips. "I think we could give them a show." He murmured, his deep voice soft near Levi's ear, his large hands moving to grab at Levi's ass as he was marked. *Hmm... We just gonna rub each other, or is someone's ass gonna see fingers?*

Levi's eyes sparked, leaving purpling bruises down Erwin's neck as one hand trailed further south, the other pushing him down onto his back. He let one finger teasingly trail up Erwin's length before loosely taking him into his hand, beginning to pump him agonizingly slowly. He let his other hand drift down to massage his balls, moving to kiss and lick and suckle on the other side of his neck, his collarbone. *How's this going to go? I have a feeling you're going to fight my being on
Erwin hissed a bit at the soft touches Levi left on his length. *Oh.. We're going for that game are we?* He gripped Levi's asscheeks, spreading them wide apart, his finger teasing the pucker. "Levi." Erwin's deep voice rang as he called to get his full attention. *I gotta get you under me…* With his grip on Levi's ass he moved quickly to have Levi pinned under his body weight. "Should I?" He purred on Levi's collar bone, his teeth sinking in to an unmarked area, as his finger continued to poke at his twitching hole.

Levi shivered as he felt Erwin's finger trace his hole, his deep voice in his ear, his eyes widening as Erwin flipped him onto his back. *I knew it…* Levi stifled a moan as Erwin massaged his ass, his length hardening against his stomach as he moved back against Erwin's finger. His voice was quiet. "P-please." Levi leaned his head back, giving him all the room he could want to mark him. *Go ahead.*

Erwin smirked, his hand reaching for the lube and lubing up his fingers teasing his hole before thrusting a finger in, all the way in. *Let's see how you take that.* His other hand closed around Levi's length, shifting so he had better access to the two objects of his attention. *So... Are you as vocal as Eren is? I think he trumps all of us…*

Levi gasped, his hand tightening around Erwin's length as he felt his finger plunge inside of him, not easily able to focus on anything besides the feeling of his hand on his length and his finger up his soft walls. He let out a loud moan, blushing bright scarlet as he heard how loud he had suddenly become, trying to keep in his moans as he pushed back against Erwin's hand. "M-more, please... " He groaned as Erwin's thumb brushed over the slit of his head. *My God…*

Erwin was quick to comply, slowly thrusting in a second digit. "You like that Levi?" He asked, his Husky voice looking over him. *You certainly look like you're enjoying it…* He smirked as Levi clamped a hand around his length, letting out a loud moan, moving his hips to encourage Levi's hand to move.

Levi's eyes were clouded over with lust, his toes curling as Erwin pushed in a second finger,his hips moving down to meet his thrusts. He pumped Erwin's shaft, his pace speeding up and his hand twisting. He let his head fall back as his free hand reached up behind Erwin's neck and pulled him closer to him, a silent desperate plea for him to either attack his neck or *Fucking kiss me already.* "Nngh, Erwin, yes, please… my God, so good… " Levi let go, letting himself moan unabashed, his hooded eyes locked onto Erwin's. *Fuck, it feels amazing…*

Erwin let out a loud moan as he felt Levi's hand start to ravage his length. *Holy fuck.* He leaned his head down locking his lips over Levi's and swallowing his moans, his tongue forcing itself past
Levi's lips into his mouth to explore his cavern. He worked in a third finger, curling them up against his inner walls and looking for his prostate. *Come on, it can't be that hard to find...* He continued to thrust his hips against Levi's hands to get even more of his actions. His own hands occupied pleasing Levi.

Levi curled their tongues together, moaning loudly into their kiss as he felt Erwin add a third finger, his hand roughly jerking Erwin's length. His eyes suddenly went wide and he broke their kiss, his back arching and letting out a strangled yelp as Erwin found his prostate, gasping for air. "T- there, right there, my god Erwin, please... " Levi pleaded with him, crashing their lips back together and taking advantage of his surprised gasp to force his own tongue into his mouth, tasting him greedily and mapping out his mouth.

Erwin let their tongues tangle with each other, his fingers continuing to abuse that coveted bundle of nerves. *That's it Levi, cum, you know you want to... You can feel it.* Erwin felt the heat start to pool in his stomach, Levi's hand working magic on his length. He glanced over at their boyfriends, who watched with wide eyes as they went at each other. A smirk formed on his lips as he pulled back to breath adding to the many marks on Levi's collarbone. *So I guess Eren is into marking just as much as Levi is?*

Levi broke their kiss, letting out a strangled scream of bliss as Erwin milked him dry, cum painting his chest as he panted, a thought suddenly occurring to him. He quickly squeezed the base of Erwin's shaft, preventing him from releasing as he flipped them over. *I have an idea...* He let his lips drift down Erwin's chest, breathing over the head of his impressive shaft. His hand was firm around the base, his other hand holding his hips down to the bed, preventing him from moving. He teasingly licked the slit at the head of his length, his eyes locking onto Erwin's. *Let me make you feel good.*

Erwin gave a soft chuckle as Levi flipped him over, his hand reaching down to tug at Levi's noir locks. *Holding me so I can't cum... You cheeky little bastard.* He moaned as he felt the heat on his length from his breath, and he let out a warbled cry as Levi teased his slit. *Fuck... I won't last...*

Levi suckled on his tip, taking in as much of his length as he could, flattening his tongue against the underside. *He's not going to last long... I'll have mercy.* He hummed, sending the vibrations down his length and pulling up, still teasingly licking his slit as his hand firmly and quickly pumped him, his eyes shaded as he looked to Erwin. *Cum, then. I want to watch you fall apart.*

Erwin's face contorted to one of bliss. His body arching, and his length pulsing as he fell apart. A loud moan escaping his lips as he covered Levi's hand and face with a rather large load. *Fuck that was hot... I wonder where he learned to hum... That felt amazing.* He leaned up to help clean Levi's face off, his eyes dark as he licked him clean just as Armin had done to Eren before.
Damn, you're so fucking hot... holy shit. Levi shifted forward and let him clean his face, soon lacing his fingers behind his neck and pulling him into one last kiss, tangling their tongues together before breaking away from him, panting and sitting back on his haunches, looking over to their audience. "Enjoy the show?" He smirked at their expressions, an all-over ache setting in. My god, that was great... and I feel so sore now... but it's a good ache, at least.

The day was a pretty good lazy day, we had curled up together on the large couch and went through a bunch of movies, Armin and I eventually venturing off to make some food before returning to it. I don’t really remember what time we got home, but Levi and I were home before sundown, like Lathe had asked, in much better spirits than we had been before. It felt like only seconds went by, but it was another three weeks... Levi and Erwin left again, Lathe had let Armin stay over again, but he only stayed one night before going back home to take care of his grandfather. We got to celebrate Halloween, which of course Lathe helped me with making a Undertale costume, Lathe dressed up as Sans while I was Asgore. We ended up stealing the show in our high school, which wasn’t surprising, we had spent hours on them to get my mind off a Levi being gone. He came back for another three weeks following that, only to leave again. Armin didn’t stay over, but him and his grandfather came over for Thanksgiving. It was lonely without Levi and Erwin there, but when there was a knock at the door, I was surprised to see that Nate had come with his girlfriend, Charlotte, along with Jeff, Spades arriving soon after. I was happy that there were a lot of people around to distract me from Levi’s absence, and believe me they tried their best.... But nothing ever really felt right... I was depressed. Blake knew, but he had calmed down since I was able to sleep by myself now, and I hadn’t had the need to cut at all for the past two months so he was pretty chill. Festivities were over before I realized it and people were leaving all over again, so I slept downstairs and cried myself to sleep that night, trying to convince myself that Levi would be home soon, but I knew that was hopeless. Two more weeks of school ensued, nothing really amazing happened, I got all my work done the first day of break, even when Lathe insisted I take a break... I couldn’t, I knew I couldn’t…. If I did I wouldn’t be able to hold my depression down. I wanted to spend every minute I could with Levi before he left. Levi’s last day home was Christmas... I was happy that we got to spend his birthday together, and let’s be real here, it ended up with me under him in the basement and I believe at least a blindfold and some fuzzy handcuffs... Anyways, Lathe got me a car! My own car! And it’s big enough that we can all legally fit inside of it! WOO! I was happy for only a few hours before I realized what I would be using it for when Levi left.... Absolutely nothing. And that hurt. He wasn’t around a lot, and it was starting to really get to me again, I kept eating, Lathe said I was eating him out of his house, which only made me feel worse… I was getting fat again, I shouldn’t be eating anymore… but I can’t stop, I always feel like I’m starving… It’s… I can’t feel full anymore… Levi returned after new year’s and we were thrust right back into school, only together for lunch... and that didn’t help much either. We were in that dreaded review mode all over again, so I would raid the fridge whenever I was studying, cause Levi always went to his own apartment to study for tests... What made it worse, was that I couldn’t sleep with him after... Our last exam... It was today... And Erwin and Levi left right after... I feel so useless, like he can just throw me away and not feel a fucking thing. I let him in... and he’s leaving me... I can’t help but think that everything that he’s told me has been a fucking lie this whole time. If he loved me why is he leaving me? It’s because I’m getting fat right? Levi pointed that out at the kitchen table before our review mode kicked in, and I felt horrible. I hate how I look, the fat goes right to my thighs and my stomach, I’ve become ugly... I fucked it all up didn’t I? So here I am... Crying in the upstairs bathroom, relapsing...
horribly after my last midterm… Cutting across both of my thighs, multiple times over… I don’t care anymore… Maybe it will help me look better? I’m a scarred piece of shit anyways… and when I’m fat… it only makes everyone want to leave anyways. I can hear Blake whining on the other side of the door… but I’m not about to open it, nope I can’t… I’m useless, even Blake should know that… well It looks like he does, he left too.

Eren let out a shaky breath as he added red line after red line to both of his thighs, the blood dripping down his legs to the tile underneath him, already starting pool under his feet, yet he didn’t seem to notice.

Blake had been scratching at the door for minutes, leaving visible marks as he whined at the door. He paused to sniff around the door, trying to paw the locked door open, to no avail. His whines got louder as he smelled the faint trace of blood. His ears flattened as he raced downstairs to find Lathe in the kitchen, going up to him and jumping on him to get his attention.

Lathe looked down in surprise as Blake jumped onto him, setting down his mug. *Shit.* "Where is he?" Lathe stood, setting down his coffee mug and running after Blake as he went up the stairs to the bathroom door. His eyes widened at the obvious, long scratch marks at the door, a small pile of wood shavings scattered on the carpet…. *Fuck it.* Lathe turned and reached for the spare key above his door, using it to shove the tumbler aside in the knob and pushing open the door, dropping it on the ground with a clatter in shock. He froze, looking over the long, heavily bleeding cuts on the insides of Eren's thighs. …*that's what Blake's been trying to tell me this entire time. Eren's been cutting.* He reached forward and took hold of Eren's wrist, prying the razor from his hand. "Eren, what are you *doing?* I need to get you bandages. Stay *put.*" Lathe let go of Eren, motioning with his hand for Blake to sit at attention at the door as a guard, running downstairs to find Lathe in the kitchen, going up to him and jumping on him to get his attention.

Blake started barking at Eren as he grabbed for another razor he had hidden in the bathroom, starting to slash at his thighs again, not even really paying attention as Blake tried to get his hand in his jaws, but he just pushed Blake away. His eyes were emotionless as he started to cross the lines, the blood flowing freely down his legs, the pool getting larger from those actions alone. Blake barked without reserve, trying to tell Lathe to hurry the hell up, cause he had gotten another razor. …*I'm worthless... I'm something to throw away, I'm broken...*

Lathe snatched his bag from the bottom of the stairs, stopping to grab red towels from the closet and racing back into the bathroom, carefully snatching the second razor out of his hands and throwing that one away as well, moving the trash can out of Eren's reach. "How many of those do you have? Eren, please stop, it's not worth it. It doesn't do anything, *please.* " Lathe set down his bag and went to run two towels under hot water, ringing them out and putting one under his feet to soak up the pooling blood, using the other to wipe up the red streaks running up his legs, carefully cleaning the cuts and holding one of Eren's wrists with his free hand, Blake holding onto the other as he worked. He reached into his bag for gauze, pressing it carefully against the cuts to staunch the bleeding, letting go of Eren's wrist to grab a roll of bandages. He lifted Eren's now-clean foot to
rest on his leg as he knelt in front of him, so he could slide the bandages under his leg and begin to quickly wrap his right leg, soon doing the same for his left. ...Why? It doesn't do you any good... All it does is cause you more pain... He slid plenty of pins into place, leaning up to pull Eren into a tight hug, burying his head into his shoulder, trying not to sob. You need to stop... I know it hurts for Levi to be gone but you can't cope by doing that...

Eren put his hands on Lathe's chest pushing him away, his state still blank. "Why.... He's just gonna leave me... He doesn't care... He's throwing me away... He's not here anymore.... Why... Why does he have to throw me away? Am I useless? Have I really gained that much in the past two months... Am I a nuisance?" Eren's eyes still emotionless and his tone cold as he ranted about everything that set him over the edge. Why can't I cut? It helps clear my head... It's so foggy... He pulled his hand away from Blake and started to scratch his own wrists again, opening up the lines he had made only a few minutes before he had started on his thighs... Why can't I? He's leaving me... He's throwing me away....

Lathe immediately grabbed his hands, trying to catch his eyes. "Eren, I don't know how else to say it without sounding like a broken record, the same explanation. Levi loves you so damn much and it's the most adorable thing I've ever seen, and you can tell in the way he looks at you, in the way he kisses you and hugs you all the time just because he can and in the way he holds onto you right before he leaves because he's going to miss you so much and in that instant after he shuts the door he already knows he will. Him leaving does not, by any means, mean that he thinks you're just something to play with and throw away. He has something he feels called to do, but the fact that he comes back home every time and that the first thing he does is find you means that he still cares so much about you. Cutting yourself is just going to bring you more pain... it doesn't bring Levi back, and it doesn't make the heartache go away. You need to stop. I..." Lathe swallowed hard, tears welling in his eyes. "I just want you to believe that, and... and be okay." His voice cracked, looking away and busying himself with cleaning and wrapping Eren's arms to his elbows, sliding more pins in place and pulling Eren close once again, switching places with him to pull him into his lap, nestling his head into his shoulder and trying to control his sobs. ...you can't do this to yourself... you can't.

Eren just sat there, his eyes still emotionless. "Lathe.... I'm sorry..." He murmured, his voice cold, and almost heartless as he leaned back into his arms with a blank stare. ...I just can't help but think that's what really is going on... I can't... Not after what he did to me... Eren just started to break down, tears starting to finally fall from his face as he grabbed onto Lathe's sleeve, holding it in a white-knuckled grasp. "...I don't know what to do... I can't... I... I don't feel full anymore... And I... It's been harder to enjoy anything anymore... Even when Levi's here..." He told him honestly. His head nestled under Lathe's chin as he curled up to him.

Lathe held onto Eren tightly, trying to get his emotions back under control and think. .....it's stress eating, and he can't enjoy anything, and he's cutting... depression. I think I can get you something for that... Lathe carded a hand through Eren's hair, pressing a kiss to his temple and speaking slowly, quietly. "Here, I think I know what might help. I think I know what's wrong." He reached over with his foot and hooked the strap of his bag, pulling it up without letting go of Eren and
fishing through the many many small bottles, finally pulling one out with an orange label. He skinned the back. *It's still really early in the day... yeah, we can start him now, see if anything happens.* He opened it and poured one into his hand, capping the tiny bottle and pressing the pill into Eren's hand, reaching over to fill a glass on the counter with water from the tap. "Come on Eren, down the hatch. It'll make you feel better after a little while." *It should.*

Eren looked to the small pill with broken eyes, lifting his hand to his mouth and swallowing it. *He's trying to fix it... Maybe he can... But. You're too afraid ask you little shit? Why didn't you just cut your wrist and be done with it?... I... I can't do that... Yes you can! Why haven't you!?* Eren could almost see the little devil version of himself talk on his left shoulder. *Why do I have to listen to you?... Because I'm always right, and you fucking know it.* Eren just hung his head in utter brokenness.

Lathe handed him the glass, helping him lift it to drink before setting it back on the counter once it was empty. *I have to find all those razors and get rid of them.* He pressed a gentle kiss to the top of his head, resting his cheek on his hair. *But I need Blake for that to help me, and I don't want you out of my sight.* Lathe kept one hand firmly wrapped around his waist as his other fished in his pocket for his phone, pressing one of the keys to speed-dial Spades, holding the phone to his ear as she picked up one ring later. [Spades, we have a very serious situation.] The french flowed easily from his tongue, not wanting Eren to know what he was saying to whom. [I caught Eren cutting, and I need to sweep the house with Blake and find any razors he has around the house, because I know they're hidden around. Could you... come keep an eye on him for me? I don't want to let him out of my sight but if you're busy I totally get it...] A pause, and Lathe sighed in relief. [Oh my god, thank you so much... alright, see you soon them. Bye.] Lathe ended the call, stowing his phone away and returning his arm to hold Eren's middle. "Eren, Spades will be here in a little bit to say hi... I just want to let you know before she gets here. She'll make sure you're occupied... she'll help take care of you. She adores you... and she wants you to be okay.

Eren swallowed as he held onto Lathe nodding slowly. His eyes were dull, sitting in Lathe's lap in completely silence, picking his head up as he heard the front door swing open, and close loudly right after. *Levi?* Eren's eyes widened and he rushed out of Lathe's hands and started for the stairs, racing down them stopping by the door, only to see Spades... The smile on his face fading as his shoulders slumped. His eyes returned to their dull color, and his eyes trained down to the ground as he tried not to cry. *Why would you expect him to come home? You honestly think he loves you? Nope, that's a lie.* The voice in Eren's head rang loudly. He stumbled a bit, his body feeling numb as he walked into the piano room and curled up on the large bean bag. *Because you're a fat, worthless, seductive piece of shit.*

Spades immediately set down the bag she was holding, quickly crossing the room towards Eren and kneeling down next to him, pulling him into her arms. *...He thought I was Levi, didn't he. He misses him so much, it's all he wants... for him to come home.* Her voice was soft as she spoke. "Eren, hon, it's okay. Come on, look at me. It's all alright. I've got you." *Please don't be so miserable... being miserable never did anyone any good..."
Lathe let Eren go, standing and leaning over the banister to look as Spades went to comfort him. She'll take care of him. He looked over to the bag she brought with, recognizing a movie case inside of it. I knew there was a reason you came to mind first. He took hold of Blake's collar, bringing him back upstairs with him, cleaning the bathroom and holding up a razor for Blake to see, tapping it. "Find these." He started his sweep, searching everywhere Blake led him to and throwing out every razor he showed him. There's so many... He tried not to break down as the number of razors in the wastebasket he took with grew, though tears still fell when he found the blades that had dried blood on them.

Eren just laid there, letting her hold him, not really refusing her as he was moved around. He didn't protest at all. I thought it was him... How could I be so stupid...

Blake whined once they got to Eren's room, he started pawing at five different drawers... And finally at his closet he clawed at the wooden door, wanting Lathe to open it...

Spades shifted to pick Eren up, carrying him into the scripting room, stopping on the way to also pick up her bag, laying Eren on the couch and brushing the hair from his eyes. She picked up one of the movies from her bag, setting it in the DVD player and picking up the remote, moving back to the couch. "If you need me to get you anything you tell me, okay?" She sat down and shifted so Eren's head rested in her lap on a thin pillow, pulling a blanket over them and starting the movie, running her fingers through his hair gently. I just want you to feel better...

Lathe pulled out each of the five drawers before he forgot which ones they were, turning his attention to the closet as Blake scratched at it, opening it and going to rifle through the bag that Blake pawed at, taking out a small metal kit full of razors and a towel for stifling any sounds of pain... has he been taking this thing to school? That's horrible... Lathe pitched the entire thing, closing the closet and going through the drawers for every last sharp blade he found. He followed Blake down the stairs, hearing the sounds of Harry Potter playing in the scripting room. That'll keep him occupied for a while... He followed Blake into the bathroom, finding too many blades hidden in too many niches, some in spots he didn't even know they could fit. He trailed after Blake lastly to the basement, quietly walking to the door with him and sparing a look to the couch. Eren was half-asleep, and Spades had since shifted until he was practically laying on top of her, herself looking sleepy as she still threaded her fingers through his hair, the movie quiet background noise. He smiled weakly to her, gratefulness apparent in his eyes. He watched as she sent him a tired smile, soon returning her attention to Eren, petting the spot behind his ear and murmuring soothingly into his ear. She's got him. He turned to the basement door, opening it and flicking on the lights, closing it quietly behind him and padding down the steps, waiting for Blake's lead.

Blake went up a few of the stairs and started to paw at the corner of the rug, looking back to Lathe, his ears perked, waiting for him to come and grab the ones under the rug on the stairs. He whined, smelling the blood that was dried onto the blades hidden away. There were at least ten there under the rug.
Lathe quirked an eyebrow, walking up the stairs and lifting the end of the carpeting, swallowing hard as he picked up the blood-stained razors laying flat on the wood. ...and to think I've walked down these stairs a thousand times… He looked up to Blake as he took the last one, following him around the basement and retrieving the many blades scattered around, despair growing in his eyes as he saw the number in the bottom of the wastebasket grow. He watched as Blake led him to one of the art shelves, pawing at a box in the back with no label. I don't remember having a box like that back there… Lathe moved the boxes in front aside and removed the box, opening it. The package for the razors was inside, only three left. ...It says there were a hundred in this thing... damn. Lathe moved the box to the table, counting every last razor from the wastebasket…. five of them are missing . Shit. Where would they be? Blake's done leading me around... where would he have them? School, maybe? Or he could have thrown them out... I dunno. But we have to find them. Lathe went to one of the shelves and retrieved a large piece of very heavy paper, placing all the razors on it and folding it over, duct-taping it all over and heading back upstairs with it, petting Blake. He slowly opened the door, seeing Eren asleep on top of Spades, his expression troubled as she gently ran her fingers through his hair. He went outside to throw the package away in the dumpster, returning the wastebasket to it's place upstairs and coming back down, standing at the foot of the stairs with suddenly no idea of what to do with himself. He sat on the bottom stair, burying his face in his hands and letting Blake lick at his hands, trying to get his attention. He simply sat there and pet Blake, his head on his hand as he thought.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe hasn’t let me out of his sight… He thinks I’ll try to do it again, and he’s completely right… but what he doesn’t know is that I still have five…. I brought one home with me in February… He found it right away after Blake barked at him, and he’s taken the door off of my room and the recording room so I can’t hide anymore. He’s also jammed the lock on the bathroom door so I can’t hide. Levi came back… I couldn’t look at him for a week, and Lathe didn’t want me to leave his sight still, so I slept in his room, just as I had been for a long time. February went by quickly, and it seemed in the blink of an eye he was leaving yet again… What do you say when the one you love is gone for long periods of time, only to come back later, then to leave again? I don’t understand how Lathe can say goodbye without batting an eye. But when it was my turn… he had to pry me off with Erwin’s help, I don’t think I cried so much in one day before. I didn’t want to see him leave. Lathe tried everything to keep me happy, and when his hopes looked like they were crushed, he changed my pills, they don’t do a damn thing, but I’ve become a good enough actor for Lathe not to notice that my smiles a completely fake one. Levi bought it just as quickly when he came home. It’s March now… Lathe’s birthday passed, we had a fun time at the park and then went out to a good dinner. I feel like the days don’t last long enough.... I mean, he already left again… My birthday was today, and I couldn’t even bring myself to step away from the window at all. How could he miss my birthday? Well, he doesn’t love you that’s why! ...There it is. That little monster that continues to fester inside of me, and it just continues to grow. I can’t stop it… I’ve tried… but I find out everything he says is right… It hurts. It really fucking hurts, and I’ve made the mistake of bringing home three more razors, which of course Lathe found. So now I’m down to one, and I can’t fucking get to it, I left it at school today. I figured Levi might surprise me for my birthday, but I was wrong… and he was right yet again.

Eren slowly slipped out of Lathe’s grasp, making sure not to wake him up as he tip-toed down the stairs, arriving in the kitchen in a matter of a few silent seconds. He looked up to the clock. ...It’s
four in the morning... I should be able to drink it all... Eren silently moved the chair and boosted himself up to the tallest cabinet, opening it silently and digging into the back, pulling out the bottle of Crown Royal. He closed the door to the cabinet and silently put the chair back, taking the whole bottle with him. It's a little less than half... I should be okay, it's not straight up vodka... and it's not the whole bottle. Eren padded without a sound to his beanbag chair, unscrewing the cap and taking a long swig straight from the bottle. It burns... But it's a good burn. He curled up in the plush chair, drowning out the monster inside without a second thought.

Lathe stirred two hours later, feeling the now-familiar warmth next to him gone. He squinted at the clock across the room. It's too damn early for him to be getting up for school. His eyes widened. ...given that school isn't till Monday. He kicked off the quilt, quickly descending the steps downstairs and turning to the piano room. His eyes widened as he saw Eren on the beanbag, curled around the empty bottle of whiskey. ...for once in my damn life I'm glad Levi and I... well, mostly me... drank more than half of that. He'd have drunk the whole damn thing! ...There's no way he's going to be coherent. Lathe slowly approached him, acting in a submissive manner. I have no clue how he acts when he's drunk. Hopefully he doesn't get violent. His voice was quiet, slowly kneeling next to Eren. "Hey Eren, what are you doing up so early?" Don't provoke him. Just play it cool.

Eren's head turned over towards Lathe, his eyes dilated, showing just how drunk he actually was. But the amazing thing was that he was completely coherent, and his voice even as he spoke. "I couldn't fall asleep." He mumbled moving the bottle and lifting it again to try and get the last drop, even though it was already empty and had been for quite some time. My body feels numb... good. Eren still hugged the empty glass bottle to his chest, refusing to let go of it.

He's coherent... that's surprising. But that doesn't change the fact that half a bottle of 80-proof whiskey will get you incredibly drunk. Lathe slowly reached forward an open hand for the bottle. "Eren, there's nothing left in that bottle. Give it to me, won't you?" Lathe's fingers had barely touched the neck of the bottle as he spoke. "Eren, there's nothing left in that bottle. Give it to me, won't you?" Lathe's fingers had barely touched the neck of the bottle as he spoke.

Eren growled at him and pulled it away. "No!... Mine!" He tried to move away, rolling off the beanbag with a soft thump to the floor. He whimpered, struggling to coordinate his body enough to flip over to push himself up. "It's mine!" Eren's voice was childish but the anger was clearly present. It's mine, you can't take it!

Lathe recoiled a bit, not knowing how to deal with Eren's anger. Shit. "Eren, it's empty, it's not doing you any good. If you really want to hold onto it, okay... Here, let me help you." Lathe bent down next to him, taking careful hold of Eren, trying to help and lift him onto his feet.

Eren hissed at him, his free hand moving to try and pry his arms off of him. "No! Let... Me... Go! I can do it myself..." Eren whined, his arm trying to weakly push Lathe away but he couldn't do much with the way he was struggling to even balance himself. Don't touch me! I can do it myself! I
can fucking do it! Don't baby me! That's all you fucking do! Eren didn't realize that he had actually said all those things out loud, his hands starting to ball into fists.

Lathe let Eren go, taking a small step back, trying to steel himself and taking a deep breath. ...He's drunk... He's not thinking straight... Or is he? He's coherent... do I really baby him? ...maybe I do... Stop thinking that, he's drunk! Take it with a grain or ten of salt. Lathe eyed his fists warily, raising his hands in surrender, ready to catch Eren as he swayed on his feet. But look at me, ready to catch him the instant he stumbles... am I really that overbearing and protective? "Eren, come on, please sit down..."

Eren shook his head, immediately regretting the decision as it sent him stumbling to the floor, the bottle surprisingly not breaking when it hit the floor, forgotten for now. He growled harshly, swatting away Lathe's hands as he got up. “Why do you need to be so overprotective of me! I don’t want you to be over my shoulder every fucking second of every fucking day! Why can’t you just let me be!? I want to be alone dammit! You took my fucking door off of my room! I can’t do anything anymore without you knowing! This house is too fuckin quiet for me to even try to think about anything…. I HATE IT!” Eren shouted, stumbling forward, pushing Lathe away as he came close to him. His whole body swayed dangerously from side to side as he stumbled towards the bathroom, slamming the door shut and beginning to riffle through all the spots he had hidden his razors. ...Goddammit! Did he fucking take all of them? Eren flung the door open and stormed back into the piano room, anger pouring off of him. “LATHE! You fucking took all of my razors! I can’t fucking cut until Monday! What the fuck is wrong with you!? You just had to take the only thing I had as a fucking security anymore and throw it away? Do you even realize how overbearing you are? You keep taking things away from me! I can’t do anything on my own anymore! You don’t fucking trust me anymore!” Eren’s words were laced with anger. “You won’t even let me lift a fucking finger around here! You literally do everything! Is it that you don’t trust me enough to do anything to your standards?? Is that what you think? Cause that’s what it fucking feels like. I don’t want to be babied and have everything handed to me! No! I don’t want to pity me! But you obviously can’t even fucking realize how much I hate it! You can’t even notice that the new pills you gave me haven’t done jack shit! You don’t understand me at all, Lathe! Yet you pretend that you can and do everything in your power to try and belittle me! The music you write… Do you write it to try and keep my range as small as possible? You know I have a fucking massive range! I hate that you write it like that! I can’t take it anymore! You don’t understand ANYTHING!” Eren roared at him, getting closer and closer to him with every point he made until he was only a foot away from Lathe, looking like he could murder anyone in a second.

Lathe swallowed hard, his eyes glassy with unshed tears as he raised his hand, one palm up asking for forgiveness. His voice was small and shaky as he spoke after a moment, careful not to speak over him and make him even more furious. "E-Eren... I-I'm really sorry... p-please don't be mad..." "He hates me. Doesn't he. He's completely right.... I'm so overbearing and overprotective and I baby him so much... but... I don't want to believe that... but... you look like you're ready to kill me... I... Lathe let out a shuddery breath, his voice breaking. "E-Eren, I..." "I'm sorry I misread you... I don't deserve to be your father......"
Eren’s eyes turned murderous as he watched him cry. "You can't fucking apologize for that!" He shouted, smacking his hand away, grabbing at Lathe's shirt with his left hand while his right came up... It found it's place... Lathe's nose broke with a sickening crack and the force only an adrenaline-filled punch could contain. Eren pushed him down to the ground and backed away. "I hate you!" He screamed moving surprisingly fast towards the door, managing to slip his boots on, grab his keys and remember his coat before slamming the door shut behind him as he walked out, the hum of his Kia Sorento fading as he drove away, in which direction Lathe had no way of knowing. *I need to get away from him...*

Lathe crumpled to the floor in misery and shock, his face contorted in pain as he heard the car drive away. *...the two minute rule, Lathe. You can't break down yet... Eren's furious, and drunk, and driving*. Lathe brought a hand up, tenderly prodding at his nose. *...it's busted. First things first*. Lathe heaved himself to his feet, taking his medical bag from the banister and moving to the bathroom, getting out bandages and setting them aside, resting his fingers on his nose and mentally bracing for the pain. He deftly set his nose, swearing loudly as it set in place and streams of blood dripped to his chin, stuffing it with gauze and bandaging it in place. He stumbled upstairs for his phone, leaving the mess behind as he walked to his room, mistyping Spades' number three times before holding it to his ear, his misery obvious in his voice. His voice was tiny when she picked up. "S-Spades?"

Spades picked up as soon as she read the caller. *... It's 6:15 in the morning, I gotta get to work...* She paused, taking a deep breath, noticing the absolute misery in his tone, her eyes widened and she stopped in her tracks. "Lathe? Lathe, what's wrong?" *Why do you sound so... Eren.... Don't tell me he relapsed...*

Lathe swallowed hard, trying. to keep his voice even. "E-Eren found the w-whiskey I had hi-hidden... he got really m-mad at me and s-stormed out, and he's driving on h-half a bottle of it. I d-don't want him getting h-hurt or h-hurting someone else..." *...mad is the understatement of the century... he broke my nose, and if everything he said is...... I deserved it......*

"He what!?" Spades was put the door in a second and moving to get into her car, thankful she had it outfitted with sirens and lights. *Did I hear him right? Eren drank half a bottle of whiskey... And is trying to drive?? "Hold on Lathe. I'll be right there okay, you need to stay calm, alright??* She hung up, throwing the phone in the passenger seat as she got in and peeled out of her driveway taking off at a high rate of speed towards Lathe's house.

Lathe held the phone to his ear until it beeped at him loudly, finally tapping to end the call with his thumb and dropping it, not caring as he stumbled back down the stairs, staring at the glass bottle on the ground. He picked it up, moving as if on autopilot to the kitchen, the letters of the label blurry... ......*I deserved it*. He crumpled to the floor, clinging to the bottle as he broke down, tears streaming down his face as he curled into himself, not hearing the pounding on the front door, or it opening.
Levi finally got the door open, his eyes full of worry. Did I miss him? I wanted to wake him up. He stopped in his tracks when he heard sobs coming from the kitchen. He walked through the piano room, coming into the kitchen and seeing Lathe in the corner clutching an empty bottle of whiskey. "Lathe? What's wrong? Where's Eren?" He asked his voice growing worried as he stepped up to kneel by Lathe, hearing him mumbling something, but not understanding any of it. What the hell is he talking about? His eyes widened when he heard the blaring sirens come closer to the house. What happened? Where the hell is Eren? His questions were unanswered as he heard someone pull into the driveway and the sirens immediately stopping, Spades running into the house not a moment later.

Spades rushed towards the sounds of sobbing, stopping for a second when she saw Levi in his digital camo gear kneeling by Lathe. "Levi... You're back?" She questioned knowing he wasn't supposed to be back for more than a few days considering it was break. She turned her head towards Lathe as he rambled on, curling up closer to himself. She kneeled in front of him, finally getting a good look at the damage Eren had done. "Lathe... I'm here, Levi's here, you need to tell us what happened... How did Eren find the bottle?" She asked softly, reaching to grab his free hand. I need you to calm down for me, I need to know everything, we need to find him, and find him soon.

Lathe's eyes locked onto her as she grabbed his hand, not noticing Levi or completely registering what she had said as he struggled to breathe evenly, trying to speak clearly, his words heavily accented to the point that they were nearly impossible to understand. "H-he was h-hiding razors around the h-house in the places you'd n-never l-look... h-he must've found it like t-that." His knuckles were white as he gripped her hand, suddenly looking over to Levi as he really recognized his presence for the first time. ......I was absolute shit to your boyfriend... you're gonna want to kill me too... Lathe scrambled back from Levi, clutching the bottle tightly and letting go of Spades, fear obvious in his voice and eyes as he struggled to speak clearly. "I-I'm sorry Levi, don't be mad at me, I d-didn't know I was doing such a b-bad j-job... I-I'll do b-better, I swear! Don't hurt me!" Tears fell down his face as he backed into the corner of the kitchen, sounding like a broken record as he apologized over and over.

Spades watched him move away from Levi in fear. Well, this is gonna be fun... Okay, Levi, Sorry, but you gotta leave... I need someone who can actually understand what the hell it is he's saying... Spades reached into his pocket pulling out his phone and grabbing Levi before he could get closer to him. "Call Casper, tell him we need him here now, it's vital." She practically pushed him out of the room. "He's afraid of you, I'm gonna try and calm him down, but stay out of the room unless absolutely necessary... Eren ran... He's driving drunk I believe but I need to be sure. Work with me." Her voice was low so Lathe wouldn't be able to hear her. She slowly approached Lathe to seem as nonthreatening as possible. "Lathe... It's okay, take a deep breath, I need you to calm down." She held her arms out, as if she were waiting for a hug. Come on, you need to calm the fuck down now.

Levi nodded, heading towards the door as he found Casper in Spades' contacts. He pushed it and waited for Casper to pick up. "Casper?" His voice a bit broken as he spoke. Eren ran away? What happened? Why would he run?
Lathe shook as he pressed against the wall, sobbing as he watched Levi leave the room. His attention snapped back to Spades, and he watched as she lifted her arms to him. He stared at them, slowly shifting forward and setting down the glass bottle, wrapping his arms around her and burying his face into her neck, his hold on her tight as he fell apart. "I'm a terrible father... I couldn't even figure out what Eren wanted, even when everything I did he hated... I've been breathing down his neck this entire time and I never thought that maybe he needed space... I deserved to have my nose broken... I've done such a shitty job of taking care of him..."

Spades pulled him close, rubbing reassuring circles into his back, cooing to him softly in reassurance. "Lathe, it's gonna be alright... You don't need to cry we'll find him." She told him softly. Trying to rock him slightly from the awkward position they acquired on the floor of the kitchen floor. I can't understand a word you're saying, and I need to... How the fuck did you break your nose? Don't tell me Eren did it while he was drunk? Oh no.... I don't know how you'd take that.... What else did Eren say that's making you break down like this?

Casper was still in bed when his phone rang, and he planned to ignore it until he recognized the ringtone. He reached blindly for it on the end table and finally pressed answer. He froze in rubbing the sleep out of his eyes as he recognized the broken voice on the other end, any sarcastic remark about waking him up dying on his tongue. What? You're definitely not Lathe... "Um, who is this and why are you calling from Lathe's phone?"

"Casper it's Levi, I'm Eren's boyfriend, I need you to come- we need you to come to Lathe's house, now. We can't understand a word he's saying and Spades is trying to calm him down now. We need to find Eren before he gets into an accident, we need all the information we can get, please, get over here." Levi's voice pleaded from the other end.

"Casper, come on! We need to hurry up! Eren is drunk and driving!"

So you're Levi... Fuck, if he's talking in korean it must be bad. Casper kicked off the covers, fully alert. Spades is there too? My god, what happened? "Hang tight, Levi, I'll be there as soon as I possibly can. Seven minutes. I'll see what I can do then." Casper ended the call to change and grab his backpack, snatching his keys and trying not to drive like a maniac with worry, parking next to Spades and hopping out, running to the door and knocking once before coming in, dropping his bag and kicking off his shoes as he walked to the kitchen, dropping to his knees next to Lathe, who had moved to Spades' lap, quietly sobbing and muttering in korean. =Hey Lathe, it's okay. Spades and I are here, and we're gonna make sure Eren's safe and everything turns out okay.= ...why would Eren get in an accident driving? How are you so sure? He glanced over, seeing the empty whiskey bottle abandoned on the floor. ...that's how.

Lathe looked up as he brushed the hair from his face, tears streaming down his face. He stuttered as he spoke, his arms still tightly wound around Spades. =B-but you don't know where he is, a-and he’s driving drunk and he’s gonna get hit and… =Killed. =I-I just want him t-to be okay so… H-he can come home a-and we can fix everything he was m-mad about a-and I can t-tell him…= Lathe
dropped his head, his shoulders shaking violently. =...I don't w-want the l-last thing he told m-me to be that he… That he h- **hates** me… = I need you to come home so I can tell you I love you…

Spades was distracted by her phone going off, immediately recognizing the ring tone. “Lathe, I’m gonna get up it’s Dave.” She slowly got Lathe to let go of her and stood picking up the phone call from her partner. “What you got for me?” She asked, trying to steel herself for the worst possible outcome.

“There was a fatal car crash 15 miles from where you are right now”

**Eren.** “Are you at the crash scene now?”

“Yes, car heading southbound crossed the double yellow line and crashed head on with a semi… The driver side of the car was partially ripped from the rest of the it and flattened, the driver didn’t survive.”

… No, that can’t be Eren…. Spades leaned against the counter, putting the phone on speaker, as she set it down and swallowing hard. Both her hands moved to clutch the counter’s edge, tears trying not to fall from her face. “Dave… What’s the make and model?”

“It’s a black Kia Sorento… Last year’s model…”

…That’s Eren’s car. She put her head in her hands and took in a shuddery breath.No… **He can’t be dead…** **He can’t be…** Spades looked over to Lathe where he was clinging to Casper and sobbing uncontrollably.

Lathe was inconsolable, his entire body shaking as he clung to Casper, sobbing into his shoulder. He tried to speak, overcome with grief and misery. =H-he c-an't be... H-he can't... T-that can't be h-him... H-he... He was supposed to... He can't b-be d-d- **dead** ...= For an instant, Lathe's expression became one of rage, shouting, his voice furious and broken. =**HE CAN'T BE DEAD!*= Lathe shuddered violently, his eyes screwed shut as he cried into Casper’s shoulder. **He can’t be dead... He was supposed to graduate... He was supposed to write songs and be happy and maybe...** He swallowed hard. **But he can’t... He was supposed to live and instead... He's gone and the last thing he ever said to me is that he hates me and... I didn't even say anything when he left... if I knew he would have left and this would have happened I... I'd have at least said goodbye... told him how much I love him... and I can't.**
Spades shook her head, picking the phone back up, turning speaker off. "Where are you, Dave? I'm coming." She waited for only a moment before she hung up again. "Lathe, I'll call you when I find out more okay?" She asked quietly, leaning down to kiss his mop of hair before she picked up her keys, going out to the door. "Levi, I'll call you too once I know something... I'm- I'm sorry." She spoke quietly before going to the door and leaving in her car, the sirens blaring into silence. *He can't be dead. No, I can't let that happen to Lathe twice....* She sped off towards the scene of the horrible accident.

Levi's eyes were downcast, walking across the room to sit down against the wall beside Lathe and Casper. "I'm sorry, Lathe, I didn't get home in time...." Levi's eyes were like a dull storm, and his face completely blank, not knowing what to think. *Eren's dead? He's gone? Why... Why couldn't I have gotten here earlier.... I wish I was earlier, maybe we wouldn't be in this mess...* He was supposed to graduate, he was supposed to be with me after.... No... he *can't* be....

Lathe sniffled, slowly shaking his head as he let go of Casper, sitting back against the wall. His eyes were faraway as he spoke quietly, his voice rough as he forced himself back to English. "...no, Levi, it's not your fault. Please, don't think that. Never think that." Lathe reached for his hand, rubbing his thumb over his knuckles as he tried to speak. "L-Levi, I.." His voice broke, staring hard at their hands, not knowing what to say. *He's... He's really... I couldn't keep him safe... I swore I'd keep him safe and he went to drive away drunk and I fucking let him... He... He was...* Lathe looked up to Levi, swallowing hard. *He was supposed to... to...*

Levi only nodded, understanding in the silence between them. "...I didn't get here in time." His voice emotionless as he leaned over his head in Lathe's shoulder staring blankly at the floor.
Chapter 24: All the Wrong Things That Form The Perfect Relationships: Part 2

It was an hour before Lathe's phone started to ring. Spades on the other end, tapping anxiously on her steering wheel as she waited for Lathe to answer, a small smile on her face.

Lathe heard his phone ringing upstairs, none of them having moved for the past hour, silent. He squeezed Levi's hand, his voice quiet. "That's Spades. I have to get that." He let go of Levi, heaving himself off the floor and mechanically walking to his room, picking his phone up from the floor and pressing answer, slowly walking back downstairs. "S-Spades... Please, don't tell me..." Lathe's hand shook, setting the phone on speaker as he sat back down against the wall of the kitchen, setting down his phone and gripping Levi's hand tightly, staring at his phone as if to will Spades to tell him it wasn't Eren, he wasn't dead, he was alive... Somewhere, alive...

"It wasn't Eren, this isn't his car, it took a bit to piece together the registration with only half of a license plate... sorry, but we still haven't found him, there are a bunch of road blocks around the county and the surrounding counties on the main roads. We'll find him Lathe, I promise." She told him, feeling a heavy weight lift off of her chest as she spoke. He's not dead... He's alive, he has to be, this wasn't his car.

Lathe buried his face in his hand as a few tears fell down his face, shaking as he sighed in relief. ...he's not dead. "...oh my god... thank you, Spades." Thank you for doing so much to find him... For getting to us so soon... He's still okay... But we're not out of the clear yet... "Are y-you coming back, or are you n-needed out there?" I want Eren found so I can tell him everything... but at the same time, you have a job... but I really need you here too...

"Yeah, I'm gonna keep looking for him and checking up on a bunch of other things. Okay, I gotta go, but I just wanted you to know that it wasn't him... He's still alive, that we know of right now." She smiled softly, hanging up and setting her phone down before starting to drive to the station and call a bunch of districts to see if they had pulled anything up from their road blocks. Where are you, Eren? Please tell me you're not in a ditch somewhere in the middle of farmland... I need to find you, you need to be alive.

Levi let out a shuddered sigh of relief, a soft smile forming on his face. "Thank god... He's alive..." Levi finally let the tear fall, sobbing quietly, trying to pull himself together. "He's alive... but... he's still driving isn't he?" He asked quietly after the line cut out. He's still in danger... He could still get into a crash.

Eren kept his eyes on the road in front of him. I... I need to get away from him... He's gonna be mad
at me... I yelled at him, and I didn't mean to. It all just came out. He kept his grip on the wheel, driving a bit slower than he normally would out of precaution, his head surprisingly clear to an extent. He was getting away, far away, already three counties away from Lathe's home, the road blocks starting to become less frequent as he learned to take the side streets. I can't let them find me... Lathe would be pissed if I got caught driving as drunk as I am... Eren turned down a road, regretting the decision immediately as he saw more cop cars. Fuck... just act normal, they're not ready yet. Eren was almost to make it past the roadblock before it had been formed, and continued towards the open fields. Well, traffic certainly isn't a problem out here. He picked up the speed a bit to get farther away, hating that he had to waste that much gas going in circles in side streets to avoid the cops. His head grew a bit fuzzy as a loud noise sounded within the car, wincing from the high pitch it had. Fuck... What the hell was that? I'm out of fucking gas!? Wait... I thought I filled it last night?.... shit no I didn't people came over, and I couldn't. He looked around, nothing but fields for miles on end, the road barren, not a car in sight. Well, looks like I'm stuck here for a bit.... I can clear my head a bit more I guess. Eren sighed quietly, slowing the car down as it ran out of the last bits of gasoline. He ended up on the side of the road, far far away from any help at all. He slowly got out of the car, sitting down against the front wheel, curling up to himself to cry. I shouldn't have yelled at him... It all came out without me thinking about it.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe could do little more than pace around the house with his head in his hands, jumping every time Spades' phone rang and nearly becoming consumed with worry only for it to be a false alarm every time. Casper eventually steered him to the piano to occupy his mind, rifling through all the sheet music he had and handing him stacks to play, though he played many of them too fast or too slow, missing a few notes and skipping whole lines, his fingers stumbling over the keys until Casper stopped him, letting him go back to pacing as much as he wanted, his hands tangled in his dark locks. It's been more than five hours and they haven't found him yet... He's still alive... He must be, he can't not be... He... He can't... He nearly jumped out of his skin as Spades' phone rang, watching with fear flickering in his eyes as she picked up the phone, answering it.  

Spades reached into her pocket, her brow furrowing from the caller ID on her phone. Why the hell is Deerhead calling me? That stations two hours away.... Don't tell me Eren actually drove all the way out there? She answered the phone. "Hello, this is Commissioner Spade, to whom am I speaking too?" She kept her voice strictly professional during the call. Unless there's been problem with the highway again?

"This is Greg Dunham, the Sheriff in Deerhead. I'm calling concerning the call you've sent out earlier today."

"Eren? But Deerhead is more than 2 hours away from here, and he's severely intoxicated...."

"I wouldn't say intoxicated, he's irritable, and won't let anyone come near him. He was found half
an hour ago, by a farmer, his car's out of gas, and in need of a tow, but he hasn't moved from beside his car."

"Are you sure it's him?" Her voice sounding even more hopeful as she moved to the kitchen to grab her car keys.

"Yes, one of my troopers ran his plates, and he fits the image associated with the owner's license. It's a Black Kia Sorento... Last Years model I believe? License plate number: TITAN104."

It's HIM! " Was he in any accidents? Is he injured? Is the car damaged?" Her voice was frantic trying to get as much information as possible. I need to know that he's not hurt!

"No, the car doesn't appear to have any damage, and the teen is fairly aware of his surroundings, and he's coherent, no signs of pain... One of my troopers is staying with him right now, making sure he's alright and to keep him from running."

"Don't let him leave, I'm coming to get him now!" She told the man on the other end, quickly going towards the door. "Lathe, I'm going to go get him, he's okay but we won't be back for awhile, maybe around 5, distract yourself... please, make some dinner for him, he's probably starving..." She went up to hug him, a happy smile on her face.

Lathe was stunned for an instant as she hugged him, recognition flitting past his eyes. He's okay. Lathe pulses her into a crushing hug, his head dropping against her shoulder, thanking her over and over, tears of relief falling down his face. He's okay!! Lathe pulled back from her, smiling widely, his eyes shining with gratitude as he nodded. "Okay, I will." He let her go, allowing her to run to the door, hearing the sirens fade into the distance after a moment. He looked to the kitchen after a moment, his brow furrowed.

It's too early to make food now... I'll make pasta in a bit. His face suddenly fell, losing himself to his thoughts. Is he still going to be that mad at me? If he was clear-minded enough to drive that far and not get killed... Was he clear-minded when he was yelling at me earlier? ...does that mean he still hates me? Lathe buried his face in his hands, trying to force down a sob, his mind violently rejecting the thought. He... he hates me... he hates me...... He hates me. Lathe's shoulders shook, unable to keep his emotions under control as his mind spun in circles.

Levi came right up to him and hugged him around his waist, crying right along with him, but for a completely different reason. "He's coming home Lathe! He's coming home! He's okay! " Levi cried happily at his statements, Spades closing the door behind her as she left. "What should we make for dinner? Should we make some pasta, I'll be happy to help...." He trailed off, realizing Lathe didn't have a happy expression on his face. No... why are you crying and not happy? Why can't you be happy? It's Eren! He's coming back home... "Lathe? Do you want to talk about it?" He asked softly, his arms still tightly wrapped around Lathe's waist.
Lathe struggled to speak clearly, his voice trembling. "I-if Eren w-was clear-m-minded enough to get that far without getting h-hurt... He must've been clear-m-minded enough t-to know what he w-was saying earlier... that he h-hated m-me... that I'm too overbearing and overprotective and that I refuse to let him do anything around here and he hates all of that and maybe he's right... M-maybe he really m-meant it... H-he h-hates m-me..." Lathe's knees threatened to give out under him, tears streaming anew down his face. *He's coming home... And he's still going to hate me... I... He can't ...*

Levi's eyes darkened a bit. *No... Eren would never say that intentionally. "Lathe, Eren doesn't hate you... He can't, it's impossible for him to, he loves you, a lot, he calls you his Dad doesn't he? He could never hate you.... He drank almost 25 ounces of Crown, there's no way in hell that he was clear minded.... I doubt he'll be angry at you when he comes home, and you have to believe me on that, he doesn't hate you, I think the liquor was talking for him, not himself."* Levi told him, feeling more of Lathe's weight on his body and starting to slowly guide him to the couch. *Nope, you're not gonna be on the floor again, I need to you sit down and be calm, you need to be okay for Eren... cause Eren's probably gonna come back crying into your arms.*

~~~~~~~~~~

Eren was curled up to himself, his back still against the front wheel, a man in a uniform sitting beside him. *At least this one isn't as talkative as the last one... I don't want to talk to anyone... I wanna go home... I wanna apologize to Dad, I shouldn't've said any of that.* Eren keeps his head on his knees, staring at the gravel surrounding him, his black jacket wrapped tightly around him. *I'm surprised this guy hasn't tried to offer me food... The last guy wouldn't stop... He kept telling me I need to eat something, but I can't do that... I can't! What I did was horrible! I should've never left... Dad'll probably be really angry at me for doing everything... I think I might've broken his nose, shit... I don't want him to hit me...*

Spades drove with the sirens on all the way out to Deerhead County upon checking in with the station, hearing Eren wasn't about to move from his spot next to the car. *It's a damn good thing he's okay... If Lathe lost you, I swear he might have never smiled again...* She turned off the sirens as she saw the number of police cars ahead, parking the cruiser and getting out, walking up past rows of policemen and weaving her way to the Sorento. She nodded to the officer next to Eren, cuing him to leave and slowly approaching him, a small smile on her face. "Eren?" She knelt down next to him, resting a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Eren, it's me, Spades. I'm here to get you home." *Lathe's worried sick... and the first thing you're doing when you get home besides get glomped by Lathe and Levi is eat.*

Eren looked up to her, his eyes shaded with regret and misery, slowly nodding, his gaze returning back to the gravel beside him. His lips slowly moving. "Is he..." He coughed, shivering from the end of March chill. "Is Dad mad?" He asked, looking back up to Spades, his eyes completely broken. *Please say he isn't... I don't want him to be mad at me... I didn't mean what I said! Eren sniffled, trying to hold back his tears from the mere thought of Lathe hating him. Lifting a frozen hand out of his pocket to wipe away the tear. He sat back a bit, uncurling a little bit from himself, and shivering as he did so. I've been sitting out here... Since 9 I think.... And it's 2:30... I think? He
swallowed, his eyes puffy from sobbing for a majority of the five hours he sat outside in the cold.

Spades shook her head, giving him a small smile. "He's not mad, Eren. He's been worried to death that something might have happened to you while you were driving. ...speaking of which, wait here." She stood and returned to her cruiser quickly to retrieve a breathalyser, bringing it back and holding the mouthpiece close to Eren. "Eren, can you just blow into this for me?" She read the small screen as he did, giving it time to calculate BAC, and her eyes went wide. You're completely sober. But it's not like Lathe would lie about how much you drank... How the hell... "...well, technically since you're completely sober right now, I can't do anything about you driving under the influence..." She brushed some of the hair from Eren's face, suddenly realising how cold he was. "Eren, hon, you're freezing! Here, let's get you in the cruiser and heated up. I'll call a tow truck to get your car, and then I'll take you home, okay? You have a worried boyfriend and a very worried father waiting for you." For Lathe, grief-stricken is more like it. Let's not keep them waiting much longer. You and Lathe need to talk...

He's worried?... He's not mad at me? Eren let out a small sigh of relief, finally standing up, stumbling on his feet for a bit, trying to regain his balance from sitting in the cold for so long. His whole body felt like it was frozen, and his shoulders shuddered violently as he coughed. I feel like shit... He reached out with a frozen hand, touching her cheek, in silent greeting before leaning into her, almost his full weight as he shivered and coughed from the cold. He smiled softly as he leaned into her body, happy for her warmth. You're warm... It feels good...

He hadn't really looked to see just how many troopers had come to stay here and watched their exchange, some of them with their jaws agape. None of them had even gotten a single word out of Eren, let alone actually got him to get up and abandon his car. The poor kid had refused all jackets and food too, and he had to be freezing sitting in the cold air for more than five hours.

Spades shifted his weight around to pick him up, cradling him close as she carried him to her cruiser, his cold forehead resting against the warm skin of her neck. She strode past the rows of stunned officers, one of them opening the door to her cruiser for her as she set Eren inside gently, quickly grabbing a blanket from the trunk and tucking it around him, shutting the door. She turned and dismissed the multitudes of officers, moving to the driver's seat of be cruiser and immediately turning on the heat. She first called for towtruck, looking over to Eren as she hung up. She reached over to card a hand through his hair, speaking quietly. "We're not going home right away Eren, I need to bring you to the station first, okay? Then we can go home." That breathalyser's got to be broken. She drew back as he nodded, silent for a moment before her tone became angry. "... why did you drink so much? And then even think to try driving? We thought you'd get yourself killed! " Her features immediately softened, leaning over to hug him, rubbing his arm with her thumb. "...but you're okay now, and that's what matters. You had us scared half to death..." She heaved a heavy sigh, letting him go. "But you're okay. Right now... You're okay. But, really... Why?" She started to drive them home after the truck appeared, keeping her eyes on the road.

Eren slowly looked over, curling up in the blanket, coughing horribly for a few moments, his eyes widened a bit when Spades yelled at him for those slim three seconds, his eyes downcast as he tried to swallow the lump in his throat. "I... Levi wasn't home.... And he promised me he would be...." Eren's voice was hoarse, struggling to say more than a few words before a coughing fit ensued. Levi promised... And he's not home. His eyes stayed glued to the floor, simply broken. I want him to be home... But he won't be... He sniffled, trying not to cry, but more than a few tears escaping, his numb hands finally starting to warm up.
Spades sighed, glancing over to him. "Didn't you hear me earlier Eren? Levi came home minutes after you left. He and Lathe are home and worried sick right now about you. He kept his promise." He's waiting for you.

He's home?...He kept his promise?... Eren's eyes closed slowly, as he curled in on himself, starting to sob. I can't believe I did that.... Why did I react like that right away? I did it without thinking...They probably thought I died... I fucked up. Eren sobbed quietly, curled up in the passenger seat, swaddled in a large blanket, finally getting some warmth around him.

Spades reached over to pet his arm, though she soon just had to keep her hands on the wheel, albeit reluctantly. When his sobs started to wane, she spoke. Alright, I hope you're up for questions. "Eren, the breathalyser came up completely clean, and I've had that thing for years and it's never acted up. How much did you drink?"

Eren let out a shuddery breath. "Umm.... Half a bottle.... Of Crown..." Eren told her, his voice quiet, a coughing fit ensuing after his sentence. I drank the rest of it.... It worked only for a little bit...

Spades was quiet, thinking. That's what Lathe told me... Then either my breathalyzer is busted or you're stone-cold sober, and I don't know whether or not you are. "...Eren, why did you get into Lathe's whiskey like that? Half a bottle is too much... For anyone."

"It hurt... And I... I couldn't. I couldn't cut, Dad took away my razors... And I didn't know what I... I didn't know what to do anymore.... I just... I wanted to feel numb again," Eren told her softly, trying not to sob anymore. I wanted to get away from it. It was yelling at me, I wanted it to go away.

Spades looked over to him, her voice soft. "I know you must have heard this so many times, but I'll say it again... Cutting and drinking to feel numb doesn't make the pain go away. It just hurts your body, and then the pain feels so much worse when it's been gone and comes back again. It's all in your head... and you can't outrun it. I would have done the same thing Lathe did. I wouldn't be able to stand seeing you mutilate your body. You're supposed to respect yourself... I'd have thought Lathe would have told you that. I can't tell you exactly how to cope... But if it's about Levi being gone so much... I think it would help to know that he's going to be fighting tooth and nail the entire time to come home to you. He really loves you... And he's not going to leave you without a plan to come home." He loves you so much... And I can tell he wants nothing more than to be there for you, and to make you happy...

Respect... That's what Dad always says...

You can't listen to him, he tells lies. He's leaving you.

No! He...H-he can't!

You're damn right he's leaving you.

I don't want him to leave me though!

But he is, that's what people do, they leave.

No, he can't leave me!
But he does, and he is!

No!

Yes!

"No! I don't want to listen to you anymore!" Eren shouted, covering his ears, and started sobbing all over again. *I don't want to listen to him!*

... *Ha! You can't get rid of me!*

"Get out of my head!" His fingers grabbing at his hair. "Get out of my head... I don't want to listen to you anymore!" Eren sobbed.

You don't want to listen to me? *Well news flash! I'm you! Dumbass!*

"No! You're not me!"

*Yes I am!*

"No, you always say Levi's leaving me!"

*He is!*

"He's not and you fucking know it!"

*What are you talking about?*

"I have nothing to worry about!"

Y-yes... *Yes you do...*

"NO! I *don't!*"

Eren cried softly, curling up to himself, sighing quietly as silence ensued thereafter. He just continued to sob, happy that the voice had finally shut up.

Spades was silent as he struggled with his thoughts. *...he and his internal monologue don't sound like they're friends. ...but he's getting there, if he's as sure about Levi coming back as he sounds. Spades sent him a worried look, relaxing as she spotted a tiny smile of his face. He'll figure out how to cope. I'll get him and Lathe to talk if they don't open up on their own, which I doubt I'll have to. Maybe a small change of pace at home is what he needs. Spades looked over as she heard him start to sniffle, seeing his nose was still red and his cheeks held a pink tint. "You okay, Eren? There are tissues in the glove box if you need them." He looks like he's coming down with something... "You feeling under the weather at all?"

Eren nodded, a shaking hand reaching out to the glove box and pulling out all the tissues, starting to go through bunch of them. "Yeah... I feel like shit... I'm sorry, Mom." Eren murmured quietly, picking up another tissue and trying to blow his running nose. *My whole body hurts....* He curled up tighter as a coughing fit started, lasting for a whole minute, his body shuddering. *I feel horrible.... mentally and physically.*
...did he just... Spades looked over to him, smiling warmly. She spoke quietly, her voice light. "It's okay, Eren. Sitting outside in the cold that long would do that to you." She looked back to the road, her mind wandering a bit. If he called me Mom, and Lathe is his Dad...... huh. Y'know... Memories she had of Lathe started to flit by in her head, his humor and kindness, optimism and compassion, his honesty and natural charm... Eyes to get lost in and a warm, real smile every time he saw her... Spades lazily grinned. ...that's not too bad an idea, actually... I wonder if he'd be interested...?

Spades was quiet for the rest of the drive to the station, music faintly playing in the background as Eren lightly dozed in the passenger seat, her thoughts rather consumed by a certain noirette. ...how the hell has it not occurred to me before? She parked in front and shut off the car, gently reaching over to wake Eren. "We're at the station, hon. We just need to double-check your BAC, it's just a quick blood test. Nothing to worry about, okay?" She gave him a soft, reassuring smile. "In and out, and then we'll be home in ten minutes."

Eren jolted awake, his body becoming rigid after a moment. Shit, I feel like complete Shit .... He nodded, slowly starting to untangle from his blanket, shivering as he stepped out into the cold air. Fuck, it's freezing . Eren tried to take in a deep breath, a coughing fit was the result. He curled up over himself, trying not to throw up with every cough. Fuck.... my head's starting to hurt too... Eren swayed to lean on the car, trying to regain himself after coughing horribly yet again. "Mom... It hurts." He whimpered to her as he looked over to Spades, on the other side of the car. He looked like an over sized 5 year old, whining while he was stuck in bed with the flu. My chest hurts.... everything hurts.... I'm starving....

Spades was on the other side of the car in an instant, retrieving the blanket from the passenger seat and wrapping it around Eren's shoulders, carefully manoeuvring to scoop him off his feet. She held him close, her voice soothing. "I know it hurts right now, but we need to get this over with and then you'll be home, and we'll get some dinner in you and Lathe will help with whatever it is you caught and fix you up good as new. Just stay calm for me, just breathe. It'll be done in no more than five minutes, I swear it." She murmured to him, carrying him to the front doors of the station where officers in the lobby held open the doors. She went down one of the halls after nodding to them and the people at the front desk, entering a smaller room and gently setting Eren down in a chair, retrieving a small needle and vial. She took gentle hold of Eren's arm, cleaning the area at his elbow with an alcohol wipe. "Just one small vial. It's okay. It's not much." Spades picked up the needle and had a small vial drawn before Eren had realised it, labelling it and handing it to a passing lab tech in the hall. She came right back to Eren, brushing the hair from his face. "Home sound good?" She lifted him from the chair as he nodded, bringing him back to the cruiser and setting him inside. She turned the heat on again as she slid in, starting the short drive home. It was barely ten minutes before Spades shut off the car in Lathe's driveway, looking over to Eren. "You ready, Eren?" You're going to get glomped the instant you set foot in there.

I hope he's not mad.... I really hope he isn't. He swallowed hard, nodding as he got out, still wrapped up in the blanket tightly. He followed Spades to the door, watching with wide eyes as she opened the door, and stepped in with her, the house smelling of homemade pasta. ... Dad made Pasta... I'm hungry. Eren slowly took his shoes off, Blake instantly coming up to him and whimpering and whining, as if yelling at Eren for leaving without him.

Lathe turned from his place at the stove next to Levi, his attention shifting from the pot of thin sauce to the door, his gaze locking onto Eren's. He swallowed hard as they all went absolutely silent, setting down the spoon he was holding and slowly stepping around the table, his eyes worried and relieved with a tiny flicker of fear passing by them, and he stopped a few feet from Eren, tentatively holding his arms out to Eren. His voice was tiny as he spoke, breaking after a moment as tears welled in his eyes. "E-Eren, I..." I was worried you wouldn't come home...
Eren ran right up to Lathe, his cold limbs latching onto him, his body starting to shake as he sobbed violently. "I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry, Dad." Eren cried and clung onto his shirt as he cried, burying his face into Lathe's chest. Even though he had been in the warmth of a car for a long time he was still freezing. "I'm so sorry, Dad.... I didn't mean any of what I said. I don't want you to be mad at me for this."

Eren continued to repeat that phrase like a broken record as he clung to Lathe, his knees starting to weakly give out from under him, a coughing fit soon following as he leaned more of his weight onto Lathe.

Lathe was stunned, his eyes becoming glassy as he wrapped his arms tightly around Eren, one hand holding the back of his head as he started to break down, feeling Eren leaning on him and slowly lowering them both to the floor, Eren in his lap as he sobbed into his shoulder. "E-Eren, I... I though t-that... s-something happened and... and I w-was so w-worried, I..." "I was so scared that maybe you were dead... "I-I'm sorry... W-we can fix w-whatever it is y-you think n-needs fixing... Just l-let me know w-what I can d-do to m-make this better... T-Tell me. I can change." Anything

Eren just shook his head, clinging to Lathe as much as his weak grip would allow for, he continued to cry uncontrollably. "N-no... It was...was my fault.... I didn't -" Eren was cut off again as a much longer coughing fit raked through his entire being. Eren whimpered as he curled up into Lathe's strong arms, sobbing, trying not to talk and risk another coughing fit. He slowly let go go his grasp moving his hand, palm up, for Lathe to forgive him. Eren stared at him with pleading eyes. Please forgive me... I went too far, and I don't know what I would do if you didn't..."

Lathe immediately brushed his hand down Eren's palm twice before cradling him again to his chest, pressing kisses to the top of his head, his temple, his voice worried. "You sound so sick... Are you okay? Did you get hurt?" Lathe shook his head to clear it, trying to sound less frantic. "J-just point to where it hurts if you can't speak. Or sign it. Help me help you, please..." Lathe pulled back, giving Eren room to use his arms.

Eren shook his head, leaning his body against Lathe's chest as his body shook again in another long coughing fit. It hurts... Eren kept a hand on his chest as he continued to cough, sounding like he was about the throw up any second. Why do I feel like shit? I was fine before... I can't even get warm. Eren lifted an icy hand up to Lathe's cheek, to try and get him to understand just how cold he was. I'm freezing, and I can't fucking breathe without coughing immediately.

Lathe's eyes widened, his hand coming up to hold Eren's, feeling his fingers like ice against his skin. "My god, did you get hypothermia? How long were you outside to get that cold? We need to warn you up." He brought a hand to Eren's forehead, not as cold as the rest of him. "And you're going to have one hell of a fever after you stop feeling like a popsicle." He pecked Eren's forehead. "Do you feel well enough to eat anything? I can get you something for that cough, and any nausea that might be with it. But we need to get something in you food-wise, you haven't eaten really for 24 hours." Lathe looked as his medical bag was suddenly set next to him quietly, sending Spades a grateful look as he returned his attention to Eren, fishing for aspirin and cough medicine along with a small water bottle. He handed two small white tablets to him with the water bottle, pressing them into his palm. "You know the drill Eren, down the hatch. And then..." He poured a small capful of cough syrup, handing it to him after the pills went down. "This too." I promise it doesn't taste awful, and it'll make your throat feel much better."
Eren nodded, struggling not to cough and actually ingest all the medicine that Lathe was giving him. His eyes were starting to close. *I'm exhausted too... Fuck, Dad, you're warm.* "Since... Nine..."
Eren whispered quietly, snuggling his head into Lathe's chest, his body shivering in his hold. He managed to actually take all the medication and stay awake while Lathe continued to hold his cold body. *I feel frozen.... It's so weird.*

Spades looked to Eren, shivering in Lathe's arms. "I got there at 2:30ish, and the chief at Deerhead said that he hadn't eaten at all, and he wouldn't move from his spot, or accept a blanket at all.... He was out there for a long time." Lathe's probably right, it's too cold for someone to stay outside for long periods of time right now. He probably does have hypothermia... Shit, I should've called to make sure he was put in a cruiser, at least for warmth.

Since 9... Until 2:30?! It's way too damn cold out for that! Lathe thought for a moment, keeping Eren close and trying to warm him up. "How about, then, we get some pasta in you, and then get you straight upstairs into bed and do everything we can to get you warm, okay? I'm not going to let you go an entire day without food. And if you don't think you can eat, if you're too tired, a vitamin at least should be sort-of okay until tomorrow. It's up to you, Eren." You look ready to fall asleep right here... I don't know if you can stay awake long enough for food or not.

....I want food. I'm starving... I didn’t eat much dinner last night... “…food…” Eren whimpered curling up to Lathe, trying to keep himself awake. I want food, I’m hungry.... I want pasta.... Eren’s body started to quake as he went through another large coughing fit.

Lathe nodded, shifting his feet under him and scooping Eren up. He carried him to the kitchen table and hooked his chair with his foot, setting Eren at the table and pressing another kiss to his forehead. "Alright, food's ready. I'm guessing you want a big plate?" Lathe smiled as he nodded, his hand sliding from his shoulders as he went to help Levi serve everyone, an extra chair having been brought up from the basement.

Casper thanked him as he was handed a plate, and as Lathe turned back to get a plate for Spades, he didn't see him purposefully take Lathe's usual place at the head of the table, nodding Levi towards the spot across from Eren. He looked to Spades and winked, grinning. Come on, it's way overdue. I want this damn ship to sail.

Eren watched as Spades sat down next to him, he smiled even though he was starting to sweat, his fever finally coming into full force from all the blankets wrapped around his body. "...Mom... I... I can't..." Eren started another coughing fit, weakly curling up to himself, his whole body felt like lead. I don't think I can move.

Spades looked over, sitting beside him and moving her chair closer to him, "It's okay, Eren, I'll help you eat, don't worry." ... You said it again... Not that I have any problems with it. She had a soft smile on her face as she helped Eren eat his pasta, smiling as he slowly ate forkful after forkful, his head a little to the side, almost leaning on her.

Lathe looked over to Eren as he spoke, his eyes widening a fraction. Mom? He calls her Mom now? ...that would mean... Lathe blushed a bright crimson, his eyes focused determinedly on his plate and flickering with a hundred different emotions. No, that's not realistic, she'd never be interested... Would she be? She's done so much for Eren and I... She hasn't ever hesitated to be
there for us... No way... ...way...? Would she? I mean, I'm just kinda... Lathe... And she's Spades... Brilliant, and strong, practical and kind, generous... Really pretty... Wait. **What.**

Levi looked up to Casper as he snickered, quirking an eyebrow at his amused expression. **...Now what? Is this about Eren calling Spades Mom? She definitely acts like it enough.** He watched as Casper met his inquiring gaze, motioning a bit for him to look over. He turned to look at Lathe, whose entire face was flushed scarlet. **Wait... So if Spades is Mom... oh. **Oh. **Levi looked between Spades and Lathe, catching Spades' eye. He watched as she grinned at him, resuming her feeding Eren, and he didn't miss her nudging Lathe's foot under the table, nearly making Lathe jump out of his skin. ...**that. Is the most adorable thing I have ever fucking seen. ...**I ship it.

...**I act like it enough, it's warranted, I feel like he's my kid, I worry about him enough.** Spades continued to feed Eren slowly, helping to get the sauce off of his face when he happened to slurp a noodle and it went all over his face. **Oh, now you are just asking for it!**

Eren giggled like a little child as Spades fed him, his eyes brightening up. **It's so good, and I'm starving.** He looked down to notice his plate almost empty and Spades picking at her own food as he ate slowly. **I want more.**

Lathe picked at his own plate, tensing as Spades nudged at his foot. **What.** He stared at her for a long moment before he let his foot creep forward and push back at her, a tiny smile on his face as she hooked their ankles together. He rested his head on his hand, looking between his pasta and Spades much of the time, watching her feed Eren. ...**she cares so much about Eren... she really does act like his Mom. ...I wonder...** He had a bit of a dreamy look in his eyes as he pondered the concept, looking over to Eren's plate. "Do you want more pasta Eren? There's still plenty left." He stood as Eren nodded, lifting his plate and turning to the stove to get him more.

Casper immediately began to sign frantically to Spades as Lathe turned away, and she practically signed over him, both of them grinning widely. They both gave each other a thumbs up after an instant, and dropped their excitement the second Lathe turned back around, Casper sending Levi a pointed look. **You're going to have to deal.** He looked over to Eren, seeing his eyes flickering with happiness. He just nodded, smirking. **You're going to have to deal with this now. I'm not sorry.**

Eren looked to his second large plate with a wide smile on his face. ...**It looks so good, I'm still starving!** He lifted his head up a bit to let Spades give him the next forkful, his eyes watching her as she moved to eat from her own plate. He watched everyone eat with a happy smile. **Well... maybe I helped him out I guess? I mean.... actually I don't know... does Spades even want me to call her mom?** He closed his eyes for a second, trying to take in a deep breath but his whole body shaking violently as a coughing fit started. **It fucking hurts... Shit, it really fucking hurts.** Eren tried his best not to cough everything he had just eaten up.

Spades' eyes widened, shifting to help sit Eren up. "Shh... Eren, it's okay, don't freak out, we're right here." She glanced over to Lathe with a worried expression. **It sounds like he's going to throw up with each cough.... What do I do? Lathe... help! Now! Before Eren throws up!**
Lathe stood immediately, moving to Eren's other side and rubbing small circles into his back, his voice a quiet murmur. "It's okay Eren, don't try to breathe so deeply, just focus on getting little breaths in and out. Little breaths. Just relax. It's okay, you just need to relax." *We can't have you throwing up everything you just ate... you need to keep it down since it's been so damn long since you'd had food last.* He kept his hand on Eren's back, his other arm loosely around him as Eren's coughing fit began to subside, relief in his eyes as it stopped. *Thank god, dinner didn't make a reappearance.* He noticed that Eren had started sweating, holding a hand to his forehead. "You're really warm. As soon as you finish dinner you're going upstairs. But for right now, focus on eating and taking calm breaths and just chill, okay?" Lathe gave him a warm smile, slipping back to his place across from Spades. He looked up as Spades immediately tangled their feet together, blushing lightly. ... *she is really great...* He caught himself with his head in his hand staring dreamily at her, suddenly blushing furiously and trying to get his hair to hide his red face as he picked at his plate. *Dammit, stop being so obvious... Shit. I'm already in way too deep...*

*Oh thank god it stopped.* Spades kept her feet tangled with Lathe's helping to move Eren closer to her to help feed him once he looked to her for food again. *I know, I know, I'm getting it, hold on.* She watched as Eren gingerly took the next bite, his eyes brightening back up again, asking for more, and he soon finished off his second plate. ... *God, he must've been starving... how did he not crash? He drank half a bottle of crown... on an empty stomach and my breathalyzer was completely zeroes... I don't get how that's a thing.* Her eyes flickered over to Lathe's direction, his hair barely covering the pink dusting across his face. *I gotta say... teasing him is fun... but, I wonder if he'd actually be interested... I mean, we basically grew up together, and here we are fawning over his adoptive son.*

Eren whimpered a bit as he struggled to move, his body aching as he leaned back in his chair, moving his head towards Spades' shoulder and watching as Levi got up to start doing the dishes. *He's really home... and he's still wearing his digital camo... When did he get here? It must've only been a few minutes after I left... Wait... I broke Dad's nose... shit!* Terror flashed in Eren's eyes as he turned his head to look at Lathe, his face already starting to bruise. *Fuck, he's gonna be mad at me for hitting him... shit... Will he even let me sleep with him anymore after I pulled this shit in a drunken rage? Fuck.*

Lathe looked up as he felt Eren's eyes on him, meeting his terrified gaze. *Why do you look like you expect me to kill you? ...well, given everything that's happened... "Eren, you don't have to be afraid of me. I'm not mad about anything that happened, I swear."* He gingerly, and very lightly prodded at his nose. *That's gonna hurt like a bitch for a while, though. He nevertheless grinned at Eren, speaking with an accent. "'Tis but a flesh wound!" ...I had him watch that, right?*

Eren's terrified eyes slowly softened as he remembered Monty Python and the Holy Grail. *That was a great movie.* He chuckled, which led to another short coughing fit, leaving Eren completely exhausted and sweating profusely as his body started to finally warm up, his high fever finally showing up to it's fullest. *I'm sick aren't I? I feel so cold... and wet. That's gross.* He whimpered softly, nuzzling into Spades' shoulder a little more.

Spades could only smile softly, bringing a hand up to gently run through his soaked locks. *His fever must be high... his hair's completely soaked, but it's okay, if it makes him feel better that's okay.* She continued, listening to Eren mewl at her soft touches, her fingers gentle against his warm head. *He even feels warm... Lathe will take care of you, you don't need to worry. You'll never need to worry.* She placed a gentle kiss on the top of his head, letting him lean into her more after she finished eating, not really noticing that Levi had taken her plate and started on the dishes with Casper.
Lathe thanked Levi as he took his plate, helping to put plates and silverware away until the kitchen was clean. He walked around the table, feeling Eren's forehead again. "We need to get you upstairs to rest. It's been a hell of a day." He chuckled quietly, glancing up to Casper next to him.

Casper smiled easily to him. "I'll get out of your hair, you've had plenty to deal with for one day. And thanks." He stepped forward a bit and hugged Lathe, patting Eren gently on the shoulder. "I'm glad you're okay, Eren." He looked to Levi, his eyes warm. "It was great to finally meet you, Levi." He sent Spades a knowing look, soon slid on his shoes and left, his bag slung back over his shoulder.

Levi moved forward a bit, gently coaxing Eren off of Spades' shoulder. "Here, how about I get you upstairs? I'm guessing you want to sleep with Lathe?" He gave him a soft smile as he nodded, gently lifting him and hesitating for a moment. "Um, Spades... Thank you." His voice was small, looking to her with gratitude.

Spades smiled softly, watching as Levi took Eren's almost limp body up the stairs as he started to move his hands a bit more, the numbness in his body starting to fade. She felt her phone buzz in her pocket and she furrowed her brow.

What the hell?.... Email? Oh, the toxicology report... 0.02, so he really did drink... but did he drink all of that. "Lathe, I'm gonna get going, okay?" She turned, walking up to him, her hand coming up to reach for his collar. Well... I mean, maybe I should get him to look my way... this'll work. She tugged him down by the collar, on her tippy toes as she placed a small peck on the corner of his lips, pulling back with a large smile on her face. "Bye Lathe! Make sure you talk with Eren tonight!" she called as she walked out, turning away from him, a huge blush forming on her face.

I can't believe I just did that... It felt so right...

Lathe barely heard her as she spoke, his eyes wide as her lips softly pressed against the corner of his mouth, completely stunned. ...she... she's... All he knew was that it felt so unbelievably right, and he watched as she smiled, and before he knew it she had gone, the door shutting behind her. He stood in place, still feeling the ghost of her lips on his skin. ...she... Lathe flushed scarlet, a dreamy smile taking over his expression, his eyes full of stars. ...she did. He stood in the quiet for a moment before her voice seemed to catch up with him. ...Eren. A sense of foreboding pushed aside his weightlessness, and he looked to the stairs, swallowing hard. He walked up to his room, seeing Levi had already tucked Eren in, and he grabbed pajamas from the armoir, changing quickly in the bathroom and retrieving a glass of water, snatching a small bottle of pills from his bag downstairs and checking the door was locked (not without another moment of daydreaming) and going to Eren's side, pressing two orange tablets into his hand and handing him the glass. "This should help somewhat with your fever." He propped Eren up with pillows, taking the glass once he was finished and sliding in next to him, his arms around his middle. "Eren, we need to talk about what you said all this morning. Know that I'm not mad at you, I just want to know if you really meant some of it. I can change, we can fix whatever it is that you don't feel that great about... Just tell me, please. You don't have to keep it to yourself and try to cope with it. Please, I'm listening." He pressed a kiss to his temple, gently running his hand through his damp locks. I need to know what's getting to you, fix what needs fixing...

He... he wants to fix it?.... I was just ranting really... I don't know if I could do that... I don't know if i could actually ask him to change. I'm the one who's supposed to bend. Eren looked down at his
hands, coughing a little bit, and his damp locks falling in front of his face. So I have to tell him? He swallowed hard, his eyes coming up to meet Lathe's eyes, his eyes heavy with emotions, regret, fear, sadness, and guilt laced across the pools of ocean color. But... I'm afraid to ask. I... I like the way you are... and I don't want you to change. It just, everything got to me and I snapped.

...You should probably tell him that.

Eren almost jumped in his skin as he heard the voice come back. His grip on Lathe tightened, and his breath hitched in almost fear.

What are you doing here?

Eren, I already told you...

No! I don't want to listen to you anymore!

...Fine, you don't have to.

I'm not gonna!

But you should tell him that much at least.

.... Okay...

See, you still listen to me...Ha

His eyes closed shut at the mocking tone that entered his mind. His grip still tight on Lathe's shirt, struggling to move, but managing to lean his head onto Lathe's shoulder. "I..." Eren started but shut his mouth, so unsure of how to actually tell Lathe that he just snapped...

Lathe kept his hold strong around Eren, brushing his dark locks from in front of his eyes. "Eren, I can tell there's something in your mind you want to say... And whatever it is, if you don't know how to say it, just start talking. Just say it and get it out. It doesn't have to be eloquent or make grammatical sense, just get it out of your head where it's doing nobody any good and out here where we can do something with it. Just pick a word to start and let it all tumble out. It's okay. I'm all ears, Eren. Please." He pecked his forehead and looked into his eyes, his small smile warm. You can tell me things. No matter what they are.

Eren nodded, slowly curling up to Lathe. "I-I just... I feel useless in this house, you give me everything I could possibly ever want, and I-I'm happy about that... but... you don't let me do anything around here... You haven't even let me do the dishes in awhile... you always do the cleaning, I haven't even touched my...my clothes in...in..." Eren drew a blank for the last time he had actually done his own laundry. I can't even fucking remember...Fuck... I must sound like such a fucking brat.

...oh. Lathe nodded, understanding. "I'm sorry I made you feel useless like that. You're definitely more than capable of doing stuff around here... I guess I've just been so used to doing all of it by myself and I didn't want to seem like I was asking too much of you. We can delegate stuff, write down a list of who's in charge of what on certain days or something like that, keep it on the fridge and stick to it. ...after you get better, of course, which I sadly don't think is going to be too soon, it doesn't look like it... But would that work? And I don't even know if I've ever dragged you with on
errands, let alone had you run some for me... If any of that would help?" *I could use an extra set of hands... That'd be really nice, actually.*

...*That would work, it should at least.* "O-okay.... That sounds good.... I-I...." Eren trailed off trying to reign in his courage all over again. ".I didn't mean w-what I.... what I said." Eren buried his face into Lathe's chest, struggling to move into his lap to get more comfortable in his arms. ".I-I.... I don't hate you... I never- never meant to yell at you... I just... I couldn't take it a-anymore." Eren started to sob into his chest, coughing periodically as he cried. His warm body violently shaking in Lathe's arms.

Lathe shifted Eren into his lap, one hand tangling in his hair and the other rubbing his side gently. He pressed small kisses to the crown of his head, his heart heavy as he spoke, his voice soft. "I understand, Eren. And I want you to not be afraid to tell me stuff like this. If you keep it all in like that, then this exact sort of thing will happen. I... Even if I sound too much like a broken record I'll say it again because I can't say it enough. I love you, Eren. And it's okay. I forgave you the *second* everything happened." Lathe held onto him, waiting a bit for his sobs to subside before carefully shifting pillows around, laying down with Eren on top of him, gently rubbing circles into his back. "Let's get some sleep, okay? It's been a very long day." *We could both use plenty of sleep after what all happened.*

Eren sighed in relief at Lathe's words. *He forgives me... Thank god...* Eren nuzzled his head into Lathe's chest, his eyes shutting in only a few seconds....*I'm exhausted...* Eren's breathing evened out, with the occasional coughing fit, which happened to wake him up every so often, but he stayed curled up to Lathe in his arms.

Lathe drifted in and out of sleep, grounded with Eren’s weight on top of him. He jolted awake with each of Eren’s coughing fits, rubbing circles into his back and murmuring lowly until the fit passed and his breathing evened out. Neither of them slept for more than an hour at a time, Lathe waking up in the middle of the night and fishing for tissues in the nightstand as Eren started coughing up mucus, wiping his mouth and waiting for his breathing to even out again. He carded his fingers through his damp locks, feeling him relax with his ear to his chest, listening to his heartbeat. He stayed in bed with him late into the morning, his eyes heavy as he gently pet him in the dim light. He looked up to the clock, reading the hands. *It's nearly noon. We should probably get up...* Lathe quietly spoke, his voice rough with sleepiness. “Eren, I need to get up, do things… and we both need to eat.” *...and we kinda abandoned Levi... ugh.*

Eren moved his head with a small groan. “Cinnamon rolls…” His voice was hoarse, another coughing fit soon ensuing and reaching for the tissues to spit out the mucus in his mouth. *That tastes like shit... Fuck. My body is so sore... I don’t want to get up.* Eren struggled to move, his whole body stiff as he slowly got off of Lathe, his clothes almost completely soaked through from his sweat. *That’s gross, I’m fucking soaked, and it’s making me feel even colder.*
Lathe helped guide Eren to his feet, rubbing at his tired eyes. ... *I need coffee...* “Eren, we don’t even have any cinnamon rolls downstairs. I didn’t buy any more.” He helped him stand, letting him lean heavily onto his side as he started them towards the bathroom. *You need a bath. Badly.*

Eren groaned. “I want cinnamon rolls... You’re just gonna have to make them.” Eren’s words were childish as his fevered body somehow made it through the hall and to the bathroom without collapsing. “I feel gross.....” *I feel so fucking tired too.*

Lathe smiled, rolling his eyes in mock exasperation. “Fiiiiine, I’ll make you cinnamon rolls *after* you have a bath. You certainly need it- no offense. But you *are* kinda soaked.” He led him into the bathroom, turning to Eren. “Are you okay to do this by yourself, or...?” He sighed as he felt Eren put nearly his entire weight on him. *Why did I even ask?* He smiled, gently sitting him down on the toilet seat and starting the water in the bathtub, rolling up his sleeves and letting it fill with very warm water. He turned to Eren, coaxing him out of his soaked pajama top and bottoms, leaving him in just his boxers as he stopped the water, feeling it and nodding. *Just warm enough.* He moved to Eren, lifting him up and gently lowering him into the water, grabbing the shampoo bottle and pouring some into his hand, setting it aside and beginning to massage it into Eren’s hair.

Eren seemed to almost purr as Lathe started to wash his hair. *It’s warm... I like it....* He had a soft smile on his face, coughing every once in awhile, his eyes coming up to see Lathe’s heavily bruised face. ...*I did that... Fuck, he’s gotta be really mad at me.* He avoided eye contact, looking down at the bubbles in the water, his fingers poking at a few and popping them. His head came to rest against Lathe’s hand as he worked. His cheeks completely flushed as his eyes closed, his breathing evening out as he fell asleep to the calming motions and the warm water surrounding him. *It feels nice.... Really nice.*

Lathe smiled, his hands rubbing his scalp in small circles, brushing away the bubbles from his eyes, lost in thought. ...*do we even have enough stuff to make cinnamon rolls? I don’t know... dammit. Uh...* Lathe looked to his soapy hands, to Eren’s sleeping face, to his pocket. ...*My phone’s in there...* He quickly rinsed a hand off and reached his hand into his pocket, dropping it on the rug before he could get it any more wet than necessary. He moved his foot, tapping out Levi’s number and putting it on speaker, letting it ring. *Come on, pick up dammit!*

Levi looked to his phone on the table as he ate his sandwich, quirking an eyebrow at the 16-bit ringtone Lathe had set for his contact. *Why the hell are you calling me? You’re literally upstairs. ...like, literally thirty feet away.* Levi took his sweet time putting down his sandwich and getting up as his phone continued to ring, sauntering up the stairs and turning the corner to Lathe’s bedroom, looking confusedly at the empty bed. “Where are you guys?” He asked the quiet, looking into Eren’s room, also empty. *Where’d you go?*

Lathe looked over his shoulder, whisper-shouting. “Bathroom- come in quietly, though.” *I really don’t want to wake Eren up- he’s sleeping without coughing for the first time since he came home.*
Levi quietly opened the door, looking in with a furrowed brow until he spotted Lathe gently rinsing shampoo suds from Eren’s hair as he slept soundly. *Ah. That explains it.* “Sorry I didn’t pick up, I thought you were being lazy or something. No offense.” He smirked at Lathe’s playful glare.

“Wooooow, Levi, glad to know you think so highly of me. I’m flattered.” He turned his attention back to Eren as he started to rub conditioner into his locks. “So, the thing is, Eren’s demanding cinnamon rolls, and we both know he’s not going to leave us alone until he gets his damn cinnamon rolls. So because I’m such a pushover, I’m delegating that to you. My wallet’s on the counter, keys are on the hook by the door, please take the car and get stuff for cinnamon rolls from the store. Oh, and let Blake out into the backyard to run around. I’ll wash him later, don’t worry about the mud.” Lathe moved to pick up a damp washcloth, rubbing a bar of strong soap into it and starting on Eren’s shoulders.

Levi nodded. “If you really want to deal with the aftermath of Blake being let outside during the muddiest season of the year, by all means. I’ll look up what you need for cinnamon rolls. I’ll assume we need at least a double batch, with extra icing.” He chuckled quietly as Lathe looked at him over his shoulder.

Lathe had his eyebrows raised, grinning. “No shit, Sherlock. Now shoo, yeah? I need to finish giving Eren a bath and then start on food before I die of hunger. *...sorry for pretty much abandoning you, by the way. The way things have been... I feel we haven’t really been paying you much attention.*” He gave him an apologetic look. *You’ve come home after a long time... this is a really weird way to welcome you home.*

Levi just shrugged, a faint smile on his face. “It’s fine, really. The way things have been, paying Eren so much attention is warranted.” He studied Eren’s peaceful face, his eyes warm. “He’ll get better soon. He just needs lots of rest. And I don’t think he’s going to want to leave you at all during the rest of break. It’s completely understandable.” His face resumed a neutral look. “I’ll get the stuff from the store, let Blake out. I won’t take long.” He quietly closed the door after Lathe nodded, walking down the stairs and nudging Blake outside into the backyard, letting him run in circles while he went to the store, looking up cinnamon roll recipes on his phone.

Lathe gently scrubbed Eren clean, trying not to tickle him awake as he washed his feet, setting the soap down and moving to rinse out his hair, cringing a bit as he saw the streams of mucus draining from his nose. *...gross... at least he can breathe now...* He wiped off his face gently, soon letting the tub drain completely, and before Eren could get cold he wrapped him up in a towel, drying him off and retrieving fresh pajamas for him, quickly switching his soaked boxers for a clean pair and dressing him, picking him up and carrying him downstairs to the couch, setting a pillow under his head and tugging a thin blanket over him, feeling his forehead. *You’ve still got a really bad fever... I need to get those pills back down here. And clean up the bathroom.* Lathe was gone for no more than three minutes, the bottle and his phone in his pocket, the bathroom straightened out as Levi unlocked the front door, a small bag in his arms. He took the paper bag from him, thanking him
and confusedly taking his phone as well as Levi handed it to him. “What are you giving me your phone for?”

Levi pointed to the title. “It’s a cinnamon roll recipe, the one I used to figure out what to buy. It looked pretty legit.” He looked over to Eren sleeping on the couch, a faint smile on his face. “He’s still sleeping.” He walked over, running a hand through his drying locks, leaning down the press a gentle kiss to his forehead. Get better soon, Brat. He turned when he heard Lathe chuckling and walking past him to the kitchen. “There a problem?” He smirked.

Lathe quietly laughed, skimming the recipe. “Nope. Not at all.” He grinned at Levi. You two are just too damn cute. ...though you and another OTP of mine are completely tied… He suddenly blushed furiously as he thought of what had happened the day before, a dreamy look starting to take over his face as he thought of a certain redhead, slowly making the cinnamon rolls.

Levi snickered and poked at Lathe's side. "Having fun over there? Caressing the cinnamon rolls, and enjoying it?” His face blank as he deadpanned his words. You'll either bust out laughing or you'll blush even more, either will work. He pulled out his phone as it buzzed on the counter, he picked it up reading the text. "Apparently Armin's sick too... it's amazing how similar the two of them are." He texted Erwin back, asking if he was taking care of him or not.

Lathe's scarlet blush crept to his ears, focusing intently on what he was doing. " No ... I'm not even thinking about the cinnamon rolls.” Lathe spoke, internally wincing. Dammit, I'm practically asking you to ask what the hell's occupying my thoughts... Change the subject and hope he doesn't prod at it. "That is weird, that they're both sick at the same time. Do you know if Erwin's taking care of him? Or is his Grandfather?” It kinda sucks that both of their boyfriends are sick when they come home... Scratch that, it really sucks.

Levi picked up his phone as it dinged again. "His grandfather... And if you weren't thinking of Cinnamon Rolls... Would you be possibly thinking about a certain someone?” Levi smirked, wiggling his eyebrows at him a bit. Come on... It was like you were daydreaming! You need to spill!

Lathe made the grave mistake of looking at Levi as he spoke, immediately looking back down and hoping his hair covered his red face at least somewhat. ... dammit . "...only maybe..." ... there's only a very slim chance that I was thinking about Spades... ... Spades ... Lathe had a faraway look in his eyes as his thoughts again were consumed by her, still able to feel a wisp of a kiss on the corner of his lips. ... She's wonderful... He seemed to forget entirely that Levi was still there, though he jumped as he cleared his throat, dropping his eyes to stare at the floor, embarrassed. ... how could I not? She kissed me when she left... it was so light, but it was a kiss nonetheless... and she's just... she's Spades... She's done so much for Eren and I and she's been way too kind and she's got such a strong character and she's really, really pretty... He looked up as he heard Levi snickering, his eyes going wide. ...I said that out loud, didn't I. Fuck.

"Oh! So she did kiss you? That's awesome, you're going in the right direction then.” He smirked, watching as Lathe's face got even redder. "Alright well, I'm gonna go see what Erwin's doing... I'll
be back before dinner, and don't forget that Blake's outside." He told him, standing up from where he was leaning against the counter. *Maybe Eren'll have a Mom again if Lathe plays his cards right.*

Lathe watched as Levi walked to the front door, stopping for only a moment to run a hand through Eren's hair in goodbye before opening the front door and locking it behind him. He stared after him, still embarrassed beyond belief, tugging a bit at the collar of his shirt. ...*I thought I was the only shipper in this household... Apparently not.* He continued on with the cinnamon rolls, soon sliding a tray full of them out of the oven, tracing plenty of icing over their tops. He let himself daydream about red hair and emerald eyes, a smile on his face. He jumped as he heard a loud, dull thunk, putting down the bowl of icing immediately and moving around the table, seeing Eren on the floor, tangled up in the blanket. *Shit*.

Eren groaned as he splayed on his back, starting to cough horribly. He tried to weakly curl up to himself, whimpering from the pain shooting up his back and his head throbbing. *Fuck... That hurt.* Eren whined when he couldn't roll over to push himself up without the pain stopping him. "...Dad..." Eren's voice was hoarse, a coughing fit starting right away.

Lathe immediately knelt down next to him, brushing the hair from his face. "I'm right here Eren. I'm here. Just stay calm. Focus on breathing." He held onto Eren's hand as he coughed, sighing in relief when his fit soon subsided. "...I'm going to try and get you back up on the couch, okay? If it hurts when I do that, I'm really sorry. But you being on the floor isn't doing you good." He slid his arms under Eren, lifting him and quickly setting him back on the couch, tucking the blanket snugly around him, pecking his forehead lightly. "You're still burning up, so I'll get you a cinnamon roll after you take your medicine, okay?" He retrieved a water glass, handing it to Eren along with two orange pills, waiting with liquid cough syrup in hand for him to finish the glass of water.

Eren nodded, taking the pills and the liquid medicine without complaint and trying to drink from the glass of water, only to start coughing and nearly choke on it. He struggled to sit up, whimpering as he continued to cough. The fit finally subsiding after awhile, leaving Eren curled up to himself and whimpering horribly from his back. *My back... It hurts... And so does my head... Fuck.* He grabbed at his head, rubbing his wet locks and whimpering continuously. *He's got to be in a lot of pain... From his throat, and his head must hurt like hell right now. Aspirin for right now, the strong kind.* Lathe moved to his medical bag, drawing out a small white bottle with a yellow stripe running across it, pouring two pills into his hand and giving them to Eren, making sure he didn't spill his glass of water. "Eren, come on, two more. These will help with the pain." *I don't want to give you morphine if I don't have to... That's tricky stuff to work with...* He pressed them into his palm, helping him sip at the glass of water, rubbing his back soothingly as he tried to get them down. He took the glass from Eren when he had finally emptied it, pecking his temple and taking the glass from him. *You'll feel better soon, Eren. Swear it. Do you want to try and eat, or do you want to give it a while?"

Eren looked to him with hopeful eyes. *Food, definitely food, I'm still starving... And it smells amazing. "...I'm hungry..."* He whined with an adorable little pout, and he curled up to himself, laying on his side to try and give his back a break. *What the hell did I do to it? It fucking hurts!*

Lathe was no match for the most adorable puppy eyes Eren could give him, and immediately caved, his smile full of warmth as he ran a hand through Eren's drying locks, nodding. *Food it is.* Lathe stood, going to the stove and setting two rolls on a plate, bringing it over to the couch and helping Eren to sit up, placing the plate in his lap. "Try not to get crumbs everywhere, okay?" He soon came back with his own plate and a bunch of napkins. sitting next to Eren and starting to eat,
his mind still drifting through his favorite memories of Spades. ... I'm in too deep already... And I kinda don't care.

_Hmm... What's he thinking about? ... I wonder if he would be okay with Mom coming over for dinner? I wanna see her again._ Eren was close to stuffing his face with the cinnamon rolls, the only thing stopping him was a long coughing fit. It only lasted a few tense moments before Eren stuffed his face, the icing dribbling down his chin as he ate hungrily, groaning as the magnificent taste filled his mouth. ... _it's really good... I want these more often... I don't care what you say Dad._ He ate the two rolls quickly looking to Lathe to get him more food, clearing his throat, looking down a bit, still not meeting his direct gaze, to afraid to still. "Um... Can um..." His eyes flickered up to meet Lathe's once he got his attention, "Can Mom come for dinner?" He asked quietly, his voice timid. _I want Mom to come over, it reminds me of when she used to sit next to me and feed me when I was little._ A small sad smile crossed his face at the thought.

Lathe's mind was immediately filled with the memory of a bright smile, and he blushed, nodding. "I-I'll ask her, see I'd she can come." He looked up, grabbing a napkin and wiping the icing off of Eren's chin. His eyes seemed to shine as he thought, wondering how he would ask, what he would make... What he would wear... _I need to calm down, yeesh it'd just be inviting her over for dinner... "What should I make, do you think?" But of course it needs to be something really nice..."

"STEAK!" Eren's answer was immediate, and he gave the puppy dog eyes just as quickly. _I want meat! We haven't had it in forever! And I want it!_ Eren tried to move his stuff body to get up. _But I want more cinnamon rolls... Like now..._

Lathe's eyes widened a bit at his enthusiasm, his hands coming up to keep Eren on the couch. ... _steak. Perfect._ "That's a great idea! And stay put, please. I'll get you more cinnamon rolls if you want more cinnamon rolls." Lathe took his plate and retrieved two more for him, setting it in his lap again. _You've got me wrapped around your finger, and you know it, too..._

Eren sat back on the couch, his head leaning back and resting against the back. ... _YAASSSS we're having steak! I'm so excited!_ Eren tried to move his legs a bit, whimpering as his joints popped every few seconds as he struggled to stretch on the couch. _My body feels so sore..._ He thanked Lathe as he came back, another fit of coughs attacking him, though it wasn't long before he was stuffing his face again. _These are so good!_

Lathe grinned, his voice bright. _"Yeesh, slow down a bit, you're eating them like you're afraid they're going to stop making them."_ Lathe looked at the clock, thinking. _She'd still be having lunch right around now... I should call her while she's not busy and I have the chance. "I'm going to call and invite Spades, okay Eren?"_ Lathe gently ruffled his hair before walking over to the kitchen, taking the phone on the wall off the hook and dialing her cell phone number, suddenly feeling very nervous as it started ringing. ... _what do I even say?_

_Spades looked up from her food as her phone buzzed in her pocket. ... _Is that?... It is!_ Her hand couldn't move fast enough fumbling for the phone and she smiled more as she looked at just who was calling. _Shit... What do I say? What if it's not even about the kiss? Fuck it..._ She set all her nerves aside and picked up the phone. _"Hi Lathe.. What's up?"_ Her voice was soft, trying not to blush too much.

_Lathe tapped nervously against his leg, leaning against the wall and trying to keep his voice even, his cheeks slowly turning bright red. "Hey Spades... Um, Eren and I both wanted to know if... if..."_
you'd like to come over tonight for dinner?" *Please please please* say yes...

... he's asking me over for dinner? Would this be considered asking me out on a date?... No it can't be... Eren probably asked cause he wants his new 'Mom' around... But maybe... Lathe's asking? "Um.... What time?" She asked, struggling to keep her heart from pounding out of her chest, reaching for her book to see what she need to get done. *I'm literally gonna be here until like 7 tonight... Shit ...* They eat dinner early... But I wanted to go see him again.

Lathe glanced to the clock, thinking. *She's probably working late... "When do you get out of work? I know you have a lot to do as commissioner... we have no problem eating a bit later than we usually do, if you're worrying about that."

Spades looked up at the clock, tapping her fingers against her desk. "I believe I can get to your house by 7:30, if that’s okay?" *I really hope it it, I wanna see you again.*

Lathe smiled, his bangs swept over his eyes. *I really want to see you again, even if that meant you could only come over at one in the morning... and you deserve a proper kiss. "That's more than okay. I-I mean," Lathe blushed furiously. "-uhm, yeah, that's fine. Seven thirty. Got it. We'll see you then, okay?" Dammit, stop sounding like an overexcited puppy.*

*He sounds excited... Maybe he was asking me on a 'date' of sorts. Spades gave a light laugh as he changed his excited tone to try and hide it. "Okay... I'll see you then, bye." She hung up and started to work again. *I need to get this shit done.*

Eren had struggled for a good few moments and managed to stand up on shaking legs. His steps were small as he made his way to the kitchen, leaning on the wall, holding his empty plate, looking for more cinnamon rolls, but he stopped when he saw Lathe in dreamland. "Dad?" He asked, taking a wary step towards him.

Lathe's hand with the phone hung by his side, his other hanging onto the back of his neck, leaning back against the wall and staring off into space with a dreamy smile on his face. *She said yes... She's coming over* Lathe jumped a bit at Eren's voice, surprised as he saw him leaning against the wall with his plate in hand, putting the phone back on the hook and moving to make sure he didn't fall. "Eren, you look like you're about to fall over. If you wanted more cinnamon rolls you could have asked when I got off the phone." Lathe took Eren's plate, guiding him back to the couch and off of his shaking legs. "Oh, and Spades said yes. She'll be here around seven-thirty, though, so we're eating a bit late." Lathe grinned as he turned to get Eren more cinnamon rolls, his cheeks tinting red a bit as his mind wandered. *I wouldn't mind her coming in the dead of night... Lathe handed Eren back his plate, going to start coffee and grabbing a roll for himself, soon coming back over with his own breakfast and sitting next to Eren. He handed him a mug of tea, nibbling at the treat and soon losing himself in his thoughts. It'll be a while until she's here... there's plenty of time to get stuff ready...* Eren sat back on the couch, munching on his cinnamon roll. He turned his head over to Lathe to ask him about something, but seeing the way his gaze was far off, Eren stopped short. ..... *Oh...never mind then... I can probably find something.* He got up to put his dish away, before slowly making his way towards the scripting room, and towards the closed door, Blake following him down into the basement as he looked around for things to do. ... *What should I do?*
Lathe stared off into space, only realizing he had been daydreaming for so long when he went to sip at his coffee and it had gone cold. Damn, was I really out of it for that long? ...totally worth it, though. He looked to over to his right, about to speak to Eren when he realized he wasn't there anymore, his eyes widening. How the fuck did I miss that? He stood and went to the kitchen, putting his dishes in the sink and starting to look around the house, calling up the stairs, to be met with silence. ...the basement? My god, he looked like he could barely walk... What the hell is he doing trying to manage stairs? What if he fell down all of them? He walked over to the basement stairs, padding down and looking over the banister, seeing Eren studying his collection of art supplies, sighing in relief. "There you are, I'm sorry I was so out of it. I hadn't even realized you left." He gave him a sheepish smile, walking over to him. "I'm going to go take a shower and then run out to the store to get stuff for

Eren nodded. "Do you have any bigger canvas?" He asked point towards a 18x20 canvas. "Any bigger than that?" He asked curiously, pulling out a bunch of paints. I have something in mind... But it needs to be bigger... Or I'm gonna need to use 4... Or more...

Lathe stared at the canvas, thinking hard. He turned to look at the far wall behind the sewing machine, suddenly getting an idea and moving forward, carefully and steadily pushing the bookcase shelves aside and and turning to the fresh patch of wall, looking back to Eren and gesturing to it with both of his arms dramatically, humor in his voice though he was completely serious. "Is this an adequate amount of space?"

Eren looked over to him, and his eyes downcast at Lathe's words. Does he not want me to paint anymore? I mean... . "I...I don't have to paint. I've done a lot of walls upstairs already... I can just do charcoal." I don't want to make him mad... I can do something different...

Lathe was a bit confused at Eren's response, moving forward a bit with worry etched into his features. "No, it's more than okay for you to paint the walls. I'd really like it if you did. I was being sarcastic, I do that a lot." He pulled Eren into a hug, trying to get him to smile. "Please, go right ahead. Enjoy yourself. I'm certainly not stopping you." I moved the shelf for you! I'm encouraging this. He pulled back and held him at arm's length, meeting his eyes and smiling. How have you lived here this long and still not know my language of sarcasm?

... You're not mad that I asked? Eren's eyes looked up to meet Lathe's for a brief moment, fear clearly held in them. Grisha... He would've never done anything for me after I did something like that... He would've strangled me... Eren's gaze flickered to Lathe's smile and his fear started to subside a bit. He'll let me do it?

Lathe caught the flicker of fear in his eyes, sighing quietly and pressing a kiss to his forehead. "You don't have to be afraid that I'm mad or that I'm not going to let you do stuff because of what happened yesterday. I meant it, you're forgiven. Completely, no hard feelings whatsoever. As long as you don't make it a habit." Lathe joked, his smile warm.

Eren swallowed hard. "But... But your nose... Should you be mad about that?" He asked quietly, a timid hand coming up to touch a bruise on his face, his eyes still holding a hint of fear. "It's a big bruise now...." Eren trailed off. I fucked up...

But he said you're forgiven.

I still fucked up.

You shouldn't be so hard on yourself.

I can't help it... I grew up used to beatings... It's honestly odd that he hasn't even yelled at me for
drinking...

Or punching him... Or driving away...

You're not helping.

Sorry, I'm gonna shut up now.

Lathe shrugged, pulling back a bit from his hand when he touched his face. "Ow..." He finally registered the dull ache in his face. Oh yeah, that... He smiled faintly, his features soft. "I'm not mad, Eren. You're sounding as if you want me to be mad. Yeah, it hurts, but being mad isn't going to fix it, and it definitely won't make either of us feel better. All I know is that I'm not keeping any more alcohol in this house where it isn't locked, and that to any strangers I now look really tough." He chuckled. "Don't worry about it. It'll heal. And you know I'm not capable of being angry at anyone for more than five minutes max." ...with two exceptions. But that's beside the point.

Eren nodded, pulling his hand back and grabbing some large paint cans, gasping quietly when he realized something. "Umm... I forgot that we're out of glow paint...." Eren trailed off with a sheepish smile, rubbing the back of his neck. ... Well there goes that idea... Fuck.

Lathe shook his head, laughing. "Well then, it's a good thing the craft store isn't too far from the supermarket. I'll get a bunch more while I'm out. So, just do without until I get back, okay? It won't be much more than an hour." There are things that need doing. Lathe grinned, waving as he ascended the steps to go and quickly shower. He locked the door behind him and stripped, turning on the shower and stepping under the hot spray, just standing there and letting the water run over him for a moment. His thoughts immediately drifted off, only able to think of what Spades' lips felt like on his, what her hands might feel like behind his neck, his shoulders, in his hair... He immediately flushed in embarrassment as he felt a pulse through him, trying to force it down. Nononono that's creepy, get your fucking head out of the gutter, yeesh... He snatched the shampoo and just tried to focus on getting clean, hopping out of the shower and inspecting his nose in the mirror. He tilted his head, nodding in approval. ...this totally earns me infinite cool points.

He quickly dressed, his hair still a bit damp as he snatched his car keys and drove out to the store, acquiring groceries and paint. He stopped at a florist after a thought occurred to him, carefully setting a red-tipped dark orange rose on the seat next to him. He set it in a vase with water in the center of the kitchen table as soon as he got home, putting the food away and bringing the bucket of paint to Eren downstairs, smirking. "Delivery for one Eren Yeager!"

Eren looked up from where he was, he already had a dark background, along with a mountain starting to take shape, he had a brush in his mouth, the paint dripping down to his shirt, but he didn't care since he had changed into his crap clothes. His right hand was occupied with getting the shape down, his left free as he dropped the brush on the drape under his feet. {Did you get at least a gallon of it?} He barely glanced over his shoulder as he continued, wanting to get the mountain shape perfect. I'm gonna need at least that much...

Lathe set the large tins on the table. "I literally got two of the biggest things of it they had. So, yes. Many times so." He studied the beginning outline of a mountain, nodding. "Nice. That's gonna look fabulous when you're done." His expression suddenly shifted to one of worry as he felt the dull pain in his nose. ...Is Spades going to think I look awful with a black eye? Shit, I look terrible, don't I? Fuck. He reached up, one hand ghosting over the bruised skin, his eyes cast to the floor. ...what if she thinks I look ugly with it and won't kiss me?

Eren was oblivious to Lathe's inner torment, finally spitting out the brush. "When's Mom coming over?" Eren's voice was quiet as he tried to jump and paint the top of the mountain. Fuck I can't
reach it... Dammit. Eren struggled to reach for the tip of the dark grey shape. Eren turned his head back, giving him the puppy dog eyes, "I can't reach... Help.." He whined, a pout forming on his face.

Mom . Lathe felt a small wave of panic run through him, looking to Eren, and then to his hands, which had begun to shake. "I'll get you a stool." Lathe retrieved one of the short stools from the table, setting it next to Eren, his brain working overtime to make sense of the nervousness that threatened to take over. ...Eren sees Spades as a mother figure... but if Spades and I don't work out, or if we never really even start anything official in the first place... I'd be denying him that... Lathe swallowed hard, trying hard to keep his composure, unable to keep from stuttering. "S-she'll be here about s-seven th-thirty."

Eren thanked him, slowly getting up on the stool, and able to reach the point he wanted and started to paint down to the floor. "Okay, I should hopefully have the mountain done... You should wear something flannel... Maybe red and black? If you have a shirt like that?" He asked quietly, continuing to focus on his painting as he started to add more brainy within the outline. This'll look really cool, I think Lathe and Levi will like it.

Lathe nodded, taking a small step back. "G-good idea, I do have one like t-that. I need to go do... S-something." Lathe turned and raced up the stairs, shutting the door behind him and fleeing to his room, closing it behind him and burying his face in his hands, leaning back against the door and sliding to the floor, trying to get his erratic breathing under control. Calm down, it's okay, calm down, it's nothing... You just have to either marry Spades or fail your son. Lathe tried to force down tears, his head shooting up as he heard scratching and whining from behind him. Blake... Lathe moved forward a bit from the door, opening it and letting Blake come up to him and nudge him to lay down on the floor, sitting on his chest and licking his cheeks, seeming to know to avoid his bruised nose and eye. He pet him with shaky hands, letting out a shudderey breath and shutting his eyes, not able to stop a few tears from sliding down his face. This is too much pressure to put on me so soon... We haven't even started a real relationship yet, and I already know that with what happened, if I don't marry her... I could lose her completely... Eren would lose her, too... I... I don't know if... If it will work, and... And yet Eren finally has someone in his life to act the part of a mother... I... Lathe had one hand covering his reddened face, the other a tight fist near his side, barely even recognising Blake's weight anymore.

Levi opened the locked door, hearing almost nothing but a few noises coming from the basement as Eren moved around. He smirked going into the scripting room and down the stairs, he leaned over the banister to find Eren completely entranced in his painting. Not gonna bother him, guess I can go find Lathe right now... He headed back up the stairs and finally finding the first floor completely empty. Guess he's upstairs? He started up the stairs, hearing Blake whining about half way up. Blake's with Lathe? He went into Lathe's room, finding him on the floor with Blake grounding him and licking his cheeks. "Lathe?" Levi walked slowly over to him and kneeled down at his side. "Lathe... Can you hear me?" He asked carefully. Assess the situation, we don't want him to panic, find out how far gone he is...

Lathe was sobbing into his hand, hearing Levi next to him and trying to speak. "L-Levi... I c-can't... I-if I don't m... marry S-Spades, t-then Eren w-won't have a m-mom... but I don't e-even k-know if we'll w-work out... I d-don't know w-what to d-do... S-she's coming o-over f-for dinner a-and I don't k-know if I should c-call it off... I d-don't think I c-can do this......" Lathe let out a choked sound, tears falling down his face. I can't... I'm sorry Eren, I need to stop this now before anyone gets hurt... I... I can't do it. I can't.

Levi looked down on him, gently cupping his cheek as he cried. "Lathe... What's got you so worried? I mean yes, Spades is a Mother figure for Eren, but that doesn't mean you need to marry
her. Even without her being married to you he decided to call her Mom on his own. That doesn't mean you need to marry her... But I think you guys would be really cute together, you don't have to call it off, aren't you excited to see her? And wasn't she the one to kiss you first? And that was with your broken nose, so I think she'll love you no matter what your face looks like, and in my honest opinion it gives you multiple badassary points... So... Can you calm down? And I'll help you make dinner?" He asked trying to get him to calm down. Geez, you would think he would be more confident since he's known Spades for years.

Lathe struggled to take deep breaths, trying to calm down as he processed everything Levi had said. ...I guess maybe Eren calling Spades Mom is just a thing he does now... maybe I don't have to marry her if it doesn't work... because Spades is Spades... she wouldn't cut all ties if we didn't work, we'd just go back going being best friends... and my nose must have been pretty bruised by then too, and she still kissed me... ...we would make a pretty cute couple, wouldn't we... but only because Spades is too damn gorgeous for her own good. ...you know what, fuck it. I'm going to make this work. Lathe let out a slow breath, his hand gently petting Blake as he faintly smiled. "...thanks, Levi. I... I could use the help." He brushed at his eyes with his sleeve, looking up to him. "Can you give me a little bit to get dressed and stuff? An then we can get to work?" I need a minute to get composed...

Levi nodded, getting up with Blake. "Okay, I'll be downstairs then, Eren's preoccupied." He took out a bit of the food Lathe had brought home and started to get things ready for cooking. Steak... Nice choice Lathe.

Lathe sighed heavily, heaving himself off of the floor and walking down the hall to the bathroom again, taking a washcloth and gingerly washing his face, trying to will away the uneven redness. He stared at himself in the mirror for a long moment, scrutinising his black eye. ...she kissed me while I had that... He tilted his head, grinning. ...in that case, I'll stop complaining. He sipped from a water glass before going back to his room to change, grabbing his red flannel and wearing it over a plain white tee, the buttons undone. He donned a pair of deep blue jeans and a brown belt, trying in vain to make his hair look presentable, and only succeeding in making it look even messier than it already was. Dammit. He gave up and padded down the stairs, grabbing an apron and tossing one to Levi, forcing down his nerves and going into chef mode. "Alright. The thing is that right now it's just about five, and Spades won't be here until seven thirty ish because she works late. That being said," Lathe grinned, a determined look in his eyes. "We have just enough time for an apple pie." They both set to work, the next two and a half hours passing quickly for them. Lathe was grateful for the extra set of hands, the help in cleaning up as they went and keeping an eye on the multiple pans going at once. He had just turned off the grill outside and set a lid over the pan of steaks as he heard the doorbell ring, immediately looking up to the clock. Seven thirty on the dot. She's right on time. Lathe untied his apron and hung it on the peg on the wall, taking a deep breath as he crossed the piano room to the door, unlocking it and pulling it open, looking to Spades, a blush immediately crossing his face, his eyes widening a fraction as he took all of her in, his voice seemingly breathless. "...Spades." ... How the hell have I never realized how damn fine she looks in that uniform? He studied her eyes, noting the red tint in her cheeks, something inside of him screaming at him to move. His nervousness seemed to vanish, and he let go of the door, taking a small step forward, his hands moving to gently rest on her waist as he pulled her close. He kept her gaze as he simply held her against him for a moment, before he leaned down to press his lips against hers, his eyes sliding shut as they kissed, chaste and sweet. ...you actually came.

... He's wearing a flannel over a white shirt, holy shit... He's sexy as all hell. She watched as he wrapped his arms around her, her cheeks flushing as she looked up to him, her eyes a bit lidded as Lathe leaned down to kiss her. She smiled softly, moving up to her tippy toes to meet his kiss, her arms slowly wrapping around his shoulders as she tilted her head to deepen the kiss a bit. ...God
damn you're a great kisser.

Lathe's arm wound tightly around her middle, his other coming up to cradle the back of her neck, his thumb lightly grazing over her jaw. ...Spades ... Lathe suddenly jolted back as Spades shifted their kiss, accidentally jostling his nose, breaking their kiss, his hand moving from her neck to hover over his nose, trying hard to fight the immediate urge to touch it. "Ugh, that hurt." ...Damn it, and I was kinda in the middle of something. He still sent Spades a wide smile as he saw a bit of worry flicker in her eyes. "Don't worry, I'm fine." He gave her lips a light peck before he let his arm loosen around her, gently pulling her inside by her waist and shutting the door behind her, reluctantly letting her go so she could take off her shoes. He gave her some room, stepping back and allowing his eyes to trace her up and down, his eyes sparkling. ...she's so wonderful ...

Spades watched with worry as Lathe pulled back, seeing him try not to touch his nose. ...Right.... That's a thing... Note to self: already have the head turned for making out before we start to make out. She gingerly took off her shoes and looked around the room, Levi had his back turned, padding into the kitchen and Eren was no where to be seen. "Thanks for inviting me over... Where's the rascal at?" Her voice was soft and playful as she went back towards Lathe and picked up his hand, twining their fingers together, her eyes widened a bit when she heard a large bang coming from downstairs and Eren shouting in another language. That's German... we should go make sure he's alright... "Downstairs?" Her voice a bit questioning as she started towards the scripting room, her hand never leaving Lathe's, so she just pulled him along with her. What the hell is he doing in the basement?

Lathe smiled as Spades laced their fingers together, giving her hand a light squeeze and about to speak when he jumped at the loud bang, hearing Eren swear loudly in German. ...he was standing on that stool to paint. ...Shit. He followed Spades at her heels, carefully descending the steps and turning with her to the far wall where Eren had been working when he left.

Eren was on the ground, the stool he had been using under his legs, he looked as if he had been sitting on it. His mouth was flying with curse after curse, as he kicked the stool a bit away so that he was able to sit up. <"Motherfucker! You would think you'd be able to fucking lean back an inch to pick up the fuck mothering brush, but instead the damn stool drops like a ton of fucking bricks!"> Eren continued to swear heavily as he slowly sat up, rubbing at his lower back. <"Is today hurt Eren's fucking back as much as you fucking can day?!?"> That fucking hurt!

This time Lathe was the one to pull Spades forward, moving up next to the drape on the floor, wary of the paint in various drying stages splattered over it and Eren. ...that shit stains... And I like this flannel. ...oh my, if he tried to hug Spades, she'd need a whole new uniform. "Eren, are you okay? And I think eight swear words is a bit of overkill." Nevertheless his features were etched with worry.

Eren nodded, rubbing at his back. It still fucking hurts though... He looked back towards where he had heard Lathe's voice, and his eyes widened when he saw Spades. "Mom!" He said happily, moving to slowly get up and stand, almost covered in paint. Well, can't really hug her... Fuck. "Do I have time to take a quick shower? Or no?" Eren's voice was still a bit timid as he asked Lathe, but his eyes held onto Lathe's gaze without moving away.

Spades smiled as she saw him get up. Well someone's excited to see me... Awe, he looks like he wants to hug me so bad right now, but he can't cause he's covered in paint. She squeezed Lathe's hand gently still. He's okay... That's the good thing, and he doesn't seem to be in that much pain. She looked up to Lathe as Eren asked him a question, not knowing what time they were actually eating.
He's so excited to see Spades, and thats too damn cute... and he looks like he's okay. That's good. "Well, because of the ridiculous amount of paint you've succeeded in getting onto yourself, and because we can't have paint getting everywhere and staining everything, you can. But be quick, it isn't going to be very long before the rest of the food is ready." He grinned at him. "It won't be more than ten minutes- mainly because the potatoes are being stubborn and refuse to cook. So if you're that fast..." His tone was light-hearted. *He actually looked at me when he asked! That's great!*

Eren nodded, starting from his spot and sprinting off to the stairs, Blake at his heels as they made it upstairs to start and take the quickest shower of his life.

Spades watched him run up the stairs without another word. "Well, that seems to be taken care of. So, Lathe, what are we having for dinner?" She asked and looked up to him, a small smile on her face and a faint blush. *My hand fits perfectly inside of his...*

Lathe looked to her, a red dusting over his cheeks. *Damn, can I just kiss you again now? Please?* "Steak, potatoes, asparagus, apple pie and all the works..." He took his hand from hers, sliding his arms back around her waist and leaning their foreheads together, looking into her eyes. ...Levi can take care of the potatoes. He tilted his head and kissed her again, feeling a fluttering in his stomach as she kissed back, his eyes sliding shut. ...*I'm now rather... occupied.*

Spades put her hands on his chest, pushing him back against the wall, deepening the kiss as she leaned up to meet him. *This feels so right... It's amazing, and he's such a good kisser too...*

Lathe let Spades back him up, feeling himself hit the wall, Spades pressed against his front and making his cheeks flush. ...*This is quite the interesting development.* He let one hand travel up her back, holding the back of her neck, his fingers weaving into her long fiery locks, pulled into a high ponytail that reached her waist. He tentatively swiped his tongue over her lip, not sure how she would react to his asking for entrance.

Spades leaned against his body, slowly opening her mouth for him to enter, her hands running slowly down his chest and then back up to wrap her arms around his strong shoulders. ...*I never knew that you would want to do this again... Especially after what happened...*

Lathe seemed to hear her thoughts, and he nearly froze, his brain running into overdrive. *It's been years since...* Lathe for once didn't shut down at the thought, and instead just held onto Spades a bit tighter, his tongue slowly beginning to map out her mouth. ...... *It's been so long...... I want to be happy. I want to love again. And I'm going to let myself have what I want for once.* He whimpered quietly into her mouth as their tongues rubbed against each other, coiling his around hers. Lathe's strong arm was still around her waist as he stepped forward, off of the wall and gently tilting her back onto her heels, pouring so much affection into the kiss. *You taste so sweet... I love it.*

Spades let Lathe tilt her back, her arms still tightly wrapped around his shoulders, a hand coming up to weave through his inky locks, moaning into the kiss as their tongues grazed against each other's. *You feel so good, and your hair's so soft ... I can't believe I didn't consider this before... How could I be so oblivious?* Spades tugged gently at his hair, moving to get her own tongue into his warm cavern. *I wanna taste you too.* She pressed her hips closer to his, feeling comfortable in his embrace, like the two of them fit together like a mold, it felt so right for the both of them.

... *in all the years that have gone by, how did I let myself miss out on so much?* Lathe softly moaned into her mouth, his tongue retreating and letting hers into his mouth. He let her press up
against him, pulling her flush against him, blushing heavily as Spades moaned, the sound music in his ears. He soon had to break for air, staring into her eyes, his own shining with love and awe. *this... this feels right... I think..."* Spades sounded breathless and blushed furiously, suddenly scared to say it so soon. *...It hasn't been long... but I just..."

*... Is he trying to...* Spades leaned her forehead up to his and flashed a smile full of pearly white teeth. She pecked his lips softly, her soft emerald eyes staring into his moonsong ones. "You don't have to say it... If you're not ready to... I'll wait..." She whispered, leaning up to kiss along his jaw gently. Her left hand tangled in his hair while she was pressed right against Lathe's chest, running her other hand down to feel the curve of each and every muscle under his white shirt. *I'm surprised you've allowed me this much, but I can't complain at all, you're a wonderful kisser, and it's a good thing you're strong. I've fallen ages ago...* Spades continued to kiss his jaw up to his ear and kissing that as well, though she had to pull him down over her so that she could reach. *I'm gonna need to get some higher heels so I can kiss him better.*

Lathe sighed as she kissed along his jaw, shivering as she nibbled at his ear, dipping down so she had better access, nibbling lightly at the skin under her ear, trailing down slowly, though not hard enough to leave marks, kissing the underside of her jaw, his voice small. "T-thank you..." He smiled faintly against her skin, not wanting to ever have to let go.

"A- hem..."

Lathe pulled his head back from Spades, though his arms didn't give up their hold as he looked over to the stairs, glaring at Eren. *"Ex-cuse me?"* He brought Spades up from her tilt so she could stand, though he still held her middle protectively. *Just because I did it doesn't mean you get to do it.*

Eren smirked and motioned them to come upstairs. "Come on, Levi said the potatoes are done..." He then turned and left but not after taking multiple pictures of them with a smile on his face. He went to help Levi set up the table upstairs, and he had a happy smile on his face. *... Maybe I will have a Mom again?... I hope so.*

Spades watched him leave with a cheeky smile, letting out a soft chuckle. "I can only imagine what he's gonna do with those pictures." She turned her head back to Lathe, a heavy blush settling across her cheeks as her eyes raked over his appearance. *I gotta say... You look great in flannel... And if I'm being completely honest the busted nose gives you even more points on your sex appeal... But ya know, I think the abs that I just found out about today did that too..."

Lathe just shook his head and grinned. "All I can think is that the whole group isn't going to be in the dark very long." He watched as Spades' eyes traced him up and down, smirking. "See something you like?" *I certainly do.* **Damn, do you look good in uniform.** Lathe chuckled as she blushed furiously, nodding to the stairs and gently tugging her along. "Come on, let's go eat." Lathe kept his hand in the small of her back as they ascended the steps, only letting go of her once they had entered the kitchen, pulling out her chair for her.

Spades blushed, moving to sit down, but before she could, Eren came up to her. She felt his hand gently cup her cheek, a smile spreading across her face. "Hello to you too, Eren." Stepping up to him, she wrapped her arms around him in a tight hug. *So this is how you greet me now? Not that I mind... Not at all, I'm happy you greet me in a special way.*

Eren had a happy smile on his face as he wrapped his arms around her as well. *"Hi Mom!"* He
sounded so much better than he had earlier, but he was still a bit nasally, signalling that he was still pretty sick. *I probably shouldn't get Mom sick though.* Eren pulled back and motioned for her to sit.

Lathe pushed her chair in after she sat, moving to help Levi set down potholders and serving dishes on the table, starting the coffee maker and setting a kettle on the stove. "Let me guess- you two want tea?" He smiled as Levi and Eren nodded. He turned to Spades, asking. "Coffee, tea, or something else? I know you drink both." *It's not like I don't pay attention to these things.*

... *Well, I've been drinking coffee basically all day so...* "A glass of water's fine." Her eyes scanning the food that Lathe had made, and apparently Levi as well. "It all looks amazing!" *I wonder if he remembered that asparagus was my favorite? Or did that never come up?*

Lathe set a glass of cold water in front of Spades, handing Eren and Levi both a mug of tea and setting down coffee for himself. He made sure everyone had silverware before he sat down, immediately feeling Spades nudging against his feet with her toes. He nudged her right back as they started passing around the dishes, taking as much steak, mashed potatoes, and asparagus with lemon as they wanted. *Yes, I remembered that asparagus was your favourite. Don't underestimate me.*

Levi passed Eren the dish of asparagus, smirking and starting to play footsie with him. *You're starting to look less sick, though you still sound like it. You'll be fine soon enough, though.*

Eren made sure he had a good amount of everything, passing off the dish towards Lathe. He picked up his fork, starting with the asparagus, but as soon as he took a bite, his face distorted with disgust for a moment. He put the asparagus back down on his plate, starting with his steak and finding that it was to his liking. *I don't like the asparagus...* *I still don't...* Eren continued to eat without touching the asparagus he had taken, not really looking over to Lathe. *I don't want him to be upset that I don't like it...*

Eren couldn't look over to him and just didn't touch the food. He finished up the rest of his plate, still wary of looking over to Lathe. *...I've never liked asparagus... Or a lot of things... But I've eaten them for you, I didn't want you to be mad at me... Or upset that I didn't like everything you made...* Eren wasn't sure what to do with the asparagus on his plate as he just reached for more steak and potatoes, though when he looked back to his plate he found the veggies gone and his brow furrowed. *Huh? They were right there...* He looked up to see Spades grin.

*I got it Eren, don't worry.* She had a large grin as she ate the asparagus Eren had pushed off to the side. *It's so good... I could get used to Lathe's cooking more often. I wouldn't mind coming here after work for dinner.*

Lathe smiled as he watched Spades snitch the veggies off of Eren's plate, easily noticing how off-put Eren seemed. His tone was gentle as he spoke. "It's okay to not like something I make, you know. Everyone doesn't like *something* when it comes to food. For example, if someone offered me broccoli I'd probably laugh in their face. Well, I'd actually just say no, but it proves the point better. Either way, it's not gonna happen. Which is why I never make it." Lathe chuckled, his expression suddenly falling. *...maybe it's not just the asparagus.* "Eren, answer me honestly. Have you just been eating everything I give you so I don't get mad?" *...It sounds like something you'd
... **Fuck.** Eren's shoulders slumped as he nodded, putting his fork down and putting his hands in his lap. **Dammit... Now Dad knows... I don't like a lot of what you make... But I eat it all anyways...** He just stared at his food, feeling suddenly full for the first time in months... **I don't want to eat anymore than that.**

Levi watched in surprise as Eren nodded, reaching his left hand over the table and tugging on Eren's sleeve, coaxing one of his hands up onto the table and twining their fingers together, giving him a small reassuring smile. **You know Lathe would bend over backwards to make sure you liked the stuff he made... He wouldn't be mad. He'd probably feel better knowing the stuff he made you really enjoyed.**

Lathe sighed, one foot unhooking from Spades' for just a moment to nudge at Eren's, giving him a faint smile as he spoke, his voice and features warm. "Eren, you don't have to do that. You don't have to be afraid that I'll be mad of you don't like something. I'd rather know I made something you genuinely liked rather than not knowing I made something you hated and thinking the opposite because you ate it anyway. If you don't like what I'm making, you can just not take any or ask for something else. I'd be happy to accommodate. You just need to tell me, okay? We can tell each other things. It's the only way we can solve problems, if everyone talks to one another. Please, mention this stuff." **It's okay to not like things. And in my position, I want to know this so I can make sure you're happy.**

He's not mad at me? Eren looked up to meet Lathe's eyes. "...it's.... It's okay?" Eren asked timidly, his gaze latching onto Lathe's, his eyes timid. **It's okay to be picky?** He sighed a bit as Levi grabbed his hand and smiled reassuringly at him. **At least Levi's okay with it... But is it really okay?**

Lathe smiled brightly at him. "Eren, I'd be totally cool with it if you were picky, vegan **and** avoided gluten like the plague. It's totally fine. I'll make to sure to ask now what you want to eat instead of just handing stuff to you. And just start telling me this stuff. A meal isn't supposed to be dreaded, it's when we're all at the table. We're supposed to enjoy it. Help me make sure we can do that, okay?" Lathe kept his gaze as he spoke, his features soft. **It's okay to ask, to tell me all this. To look at me while doing either. It's all fine. Swear it.**

So... **He's okay with it then? I don't have to force myself to eat everything he puts in my plate?** His eyes seem to brighten at his words, a small smile forming on his face. "O-okay." He said and smiled softly, his fingers twining further into Levi's hand. **I guess it really is okay.**

**Progress... I think he was actually looking Lathe in the eye and telling him... I wonder how much he's forced himself to eat for Lathe? It can't be that much... Can it? It seems like he's enjoyed most of the food Lathe's made for him in the past year and a half, and he seems to have filled out nicely since then as well.** She smiled softly and continued to eat as Eren continued to hold eye contact with Lathe.

**He's actually keeping eye contact with Lathe. This is great!** Levi gently squeezed Eren's hand, using his free hand to pick at his plate. He soon set his fork down, his right hand moving to twine with Eren's other hand, their feet still tangled under the table.

Lathe's eyes were bright as Eren held his gaze, only returning his attention to his plate and his girlfriend— **...this is official isn't it. Spades is my girlfriend...I don't think I'd ever get tired of saying that. - after Eren turned his attention back to Levi. He brought his left foot back to push against Spades', finishing his plate shortly and setting down his mug, noting everyone else was**
finished. "Would anyone like dessert? Apple pie, and vanilla ice cream if anyone wants some?" He looked to the three of them. *I have to remember to ask now.*

*That just sounds sweet.* Eren shook his head, his hands still holding onto Levi's. "No thank you." His voice was still very nasally. *I still sound sick.*

*Eren still sounds sick.* "I'll have some, more pie though, I haven't had it in forever." Her smile was very wide as she got up to help with some dishes. *I can at least do that much...*

*Levi nodded.* "Just a small piece, please." *He didn't move to get up, not wanting to unlace his fingers from Eren's.*

Lathe nodded and stood, getting ice cream from the freezer and turning as he heard the sink, seeing Spades starting to wash dishes. *Spades, you really don't have to...* He just lightly chuckled as she looked at him, nodding her head. *She's not giving up anytime soon.* He set the carton on the counter, noting where the plates were with a mischievous grin. *They're above Spades.* He stepped behind her, one hand deciding to rest on the counter edge next to her as he reached overhead to the cabinets, lightly pressing Spades against the counter. "Excuse me." His voice had dropped an octave, his lips ghosting over the shell of her ear and winking at her as he too soon had to move aside with the smaller plates, cutting up the pie and scooping ice cream.

Spades blushed heavily, her eyes trailing over Lathe's relaxed form. *He looks really good, that shirt... It makes his arms pop out, along with that mop of hair he's got. It just... Holy shit, he's sexy... How did I never realize this before?* Her eyes trailed down to Lathe's hands as he worked to delicately place plates at the table with ice cream and pie. *His hands... God, what would they feel like? Gentle, heavy, large... Shit! You need to stop thinking about that, Spades! You know he's a complete virgin! He'd think you're way too pushy!* Spades' face flushed completely, her gaze focusing on the dishes and finishing them up, trying not to sneak looks at Lathe and failing miserably. *Let's see, his hands... They'd probably feel amazing... Who am I kidding? I'm in way too deep already and he hasn't so much as led onto the fact that he'll really be comfortable with me... I mean, he did have someone that he was with before... Viola, bless her soul... but I don't want to make him think I want to take her place... But it just feels so right being next to him.* She put the dishes away, trying to calm herself down, her cheeks almost matching the same shade of her hair. Her smile widened a bit as she noticed the large amount of pie in front of her seat. She sat beside Eren picking up her fork and letting out a quiet moan as she tasted the sweet pie. *He hasn't made me one of these in forever.*

Eren watched the three of them sit down and eat the sweet desserts. *I... What if Lathe gets angry with me when he realizes I don't like a majority of the food he makes? You'll be fine... Don't worry!*

*But how can I not? I've been forcing myself to eat everything he made for a year and a half...*

*Well, you must've figured out what you don't like by now, right?*

*But won't he get tired of making me something different everytime he makes food that he likes?*

*Probably not... But you should probably ask him.* Eren nodded, taking in a deep breath, regretting it as he started to cough horribly, whimpering when he had enough time between coughs to breathe. *It still fucking hurts.* He curled up in his chair, trying to alleviate the pain in his chest everytime he
coughed.

Lathe smirked as he felt Spades’ eyes on him as he worked, noticing her heavy blush. ...*Did just a bit of teasing really make her face the same shade of red as her hair? Or is her mind getting away from her? ...*Probably the latter.* Lathe set down his own plate and immediately tangled their feet together again, blushing as he heard her quiet moan. ...*I don't think I'd mind hearing that again... maybe a bit louder...* Lathe Autonomous Quo, stop that right now! It hasn't even been a day and you're going to start fantasizing? *Naw. Chill.* He stared intently at his plate, but when he heard Eren roughly start to cough he was immediately at his side, rubbing small circles into his back and trying to get him to relax. "It's okay, Eren, just stay calm, it'll pass..." Lathe murmured to him until his coughs died down, retrieving cough medicine from his bag and handing him some. "Your throat is getting a bit better it sounds like, but we can't have you coughing yourself awake so much overnight again." *That was fun. Lol no it wasn't, that's a lie and everyone knows it.*

Not that stuff again... Eren looked at the medicine with a hint of disgust in his eyes and he tried to swallow it down like a trooper. He got halfway through the medicine before his eyes widened and he struggled to keep in a coughing fit, coughing horribly, enough that he coughed the syrup like medicine all over his shirt. He continued to cough, his whole body shaking as he gripped onto Lathe's arm. His eyes now full of fear from almost choking on the coughing medicine. *No... I almost choked on that stuff...* His fit lasted much longer than the previous one, dying down a bit after Eren was already completely exhausted, his hand weakly reaching out for the napkins on the table.

Spades stood up and moved to help clean Eren up. *That must've taken all his strength to keep his food down... He looks completely exhausted.* "It's okay Eren, we're right here, don't worry." She took the napkins from him and wiped at the drool from his chin along with the medicine from his shirt and helping to try and calm him down, letting Blake get close to him and lick his face. *That probably scared him, when he almost choked on that... Dammit Spades! This is not the time for you to be thinking like that! Get your mind out of the fucking gutter!*

Lathe set down the medicine on the table and held onto Eren, which was all he could do while waiting for the fit to pass. He carded a hand through Eren's hair, gratefully looking up to Spades as she helped to clean him up, pressing a kiss to his temple. "I guess we'll wait

Eren shook his head, struggling to breathe without starting another coughing fit. *No! Not again! No!* His eyes had fear laced in them as he looked up to Spades as if asking her if he really needed to take them and risk choking on the water. *It hurts ... I don't want to do it again.* Tears were quickly forming in the corners of his eyes as yet another fit started though thankfully this one wasn't as long as the previous, but it left Eren utterly exhausted. *I'm fucking exhausted... And my body feels like frozen lead.* He leaned back into Lathe, his whole body ridiculously warm, yet he felt as cold as ice, his eyes half-closed, and the sweat already starting to form from all of this. *I wanna go to bed.*

Levi stood and stepped around the table, Lathe moving out of his way as he caught Eren, pulling his chair out and scooping him up. He cradled him close to his chest, looking to Lathe. "I'll get him in bed, don't worry." He looked to Spades, not sure of what to say and simply nodding, giving her a faint smile and turning to go upstairs to tuck Eren into Lathe's bed. *Lathe needs to say goodbye to Spades... and I get the feeling they're not just going to use words.*

Lathe looked back to Spades after Levi had disappeared, not sure of what to say or how to say it. ... *she has work tomorrow... And she has to go, but I want to hold onto her just a little bit longer... Crap, I'm no good at this ...* Lathe nervously took a step forward, blushing as he took gentle hold of her waist and pulled her close. He rested his forehead against hers, enjoying the feeling of her
pressed against him before he tilted his head and kissed her, sweetly and deeply.

Spades blushed, her lips meeting his with added vigor. His lips are so soft, it's amazing... She pulled back a bit, her hands moving to his shirt collar and pulling him towards the door taking him into the piano room only a few feet. She moved to push him down on the couch, giggling at his slightly confused expression. This is gonna be great. She kneeled on the couch, straddling his lap, her hands coming up to cup his face. So gorgeous... She closed her eyes, leaning in to kiss him deeply. Couches are my favorite, cause his damn legs aren't in the way... And I can kiss him without either of us craning our necks.

Lathe's eyes widened a fraction as Spades straddled him, blushing scarlet as she seemed to loom over him, his head in her hands. He swallowed hard, though he relaxed when Spades kissed him, his tongue swiping across her lip and tangling with hers as she granted him entry. He moaned softly into the kiss, his hands moving of their own accord and slipping into her back pockets. ...it's a good thing you're this forward, because I'm sure as hell not. You feel so amazing... I... I can't help it... But I know you're definitely interested that way... Lathe smiled faintly into the kiss. Can't exactly say I don't feel the same...

Spades let out a soft gasp as his hands moved into her back pockets, gently cradling her ass. Fuck his hands are huge... I swear to god... This is probably the best I've felt in a long time, and I've never fucking realized how close it was to me. She moved to kiss him deeper, happy that his tongue tangled around hers in a sweet dance. So soft... So wonderful. Spades pressed herself down a bit onto his lap as his hands stayed in her pockets. Her own hands left his cheeks and wandered from his collar to slowly trail down his abs over the white shirt he wore. Her eyes closed as she felt every inch of Lathe's trunk.

Lathe quietly whimpered into her mouth as her hands moved down over his sides, feeling a small pulse run through him as she pressed herself further into his lap. ...but it's only the first date, technically... Dammit. Lathe pushed the feeling down, breaking the kiss and moving to suckle on Spades' neck, leaving tiny red marks in his wake. His hands gently massaged Spades' ass as he kissed and licked and nibbled down to the soft skin at the joint of her neck. ...I want to hear you...

Spades let out a quiet gasp, her hands coming up from his abs to tangle in his black hair. A soft moan escaping from her lips as she felt him nibble at her neck. "Lathe." She let out a soft sigh as she moved her hips with his hands, inadvertently grinding onto him. "Lathe... Not too dark okay?" She asked quietly, her hands carding through his soft hair. His mouth feels so good... Everywhere...

A shudder ran through Lathe's body in double time as Spades ground against him, forcing down the feeling of arousal and shifting her back just a bit, humming in assent and being careful not to leave a mark that would bruise. Right, she needs to look professional tomorrow... and I don't want to go much further than this for right now... Lathe's hands slid from her pockets, having a mind of their own as they moved lower to cup her ass, running down her thighs and up her front, wandering freely all over her as he kissed to the other side of her neck, tugging her collar aside and deciding to attack a spot well hidden by her uniform shirt, sucking harder at the skin. I need to hear you... please.

Lathe! Spades blushed as she moaned out a little louder than she intended to. "Ha... Lathe..." She looked down to him with hooded eyes. You feel so good. Her hands traveled down to the hem of his shirt, slowly letting her hands travel underneath to his warm skin. "So good..." She moaned out quietly in his ear, letting him move her around. Lathe... I want more... His hands felt like fire, leaving a trail of sensation wherever he touched her body. No man has ever made me feel like
this... None of them have... This is amazing... And he's been right here... This whole time.

Lathe shivered as her fingers brushed over his skin, melting under her touch as she traced the lines of his chest. He moaned into her neck as her voice became a bit louder in his ear, biting her neck one last time and pulling away as a thought occurred to him. ...she can't read minds... I still need to do some thinking before I decide if I'm okay with going further... If I'm okay with bending my rules for you... Because I've... I've never done this before... Lathe gently placed a hand on Spades' chest, his eyes pleading with her to understand. "Spades, I... I really like this, but.. I don't want to go further than this just yet... I need to think about it. I'm sorry..." Lathe looked away from her, embarrassed. I probably got her hopes up too much to only let her down... Shit...

Does he think I'm upset with him? Spades chuckled softly, moving her hands from under his shirt and gently holding his cheeks. She made sure he was looking directly at her and leaned her forehead against his, looking into his eyes, her own soft. "That's okay.... I told you I would wait." She smiled softly, leaning down give him a chaste kiss before sitting up a bit. "I should probably start heading home though." She murmured against his lips.

Lathe's eyes shone as she spoke, leaning up to meet her chaste kiss with quiet fire. Thank you. He broke away from her, pulling back and studying her flushed face, a look of awe on his face as he brushed stray strands of hair from her face, his fingers ghosting over her cheek. Beautiful. He suddenly spoke, his voice laced with hope. "Do you want to come over again tomorrow?" His hand drifted from her chest to her waist, a gentle weight. You can always come over. All the time.

Hmm... That's tempting. She smiled softly as he kissed her. "7:30?" She asked quietly. I'll probably have time to change tomorrow though, I need to get out of this uniform though... She slowly clambered off of him to standing, a frown on her face as she had to get away from his arms. I kinda really don't want to leave.... But.... I'm assuming that Eren's gonna be sleeping with Lathe today... So I should probably head home.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe looked up to the clock, noting the time. She'll be here soon. Spades and I have the house all to ourselves today... Eren was doing absolutely awful for three days after she first came over, able to hold pretty much nothing down. The flu passed, though, and his fever finally broke. He's finally doing much, much better, and Levi dragged him over to his apartment earlier today to spend the night. Finally, he and Eren can have their time together... He set the table for the two of them, a fresh red rose in a vase in the center of the table, the lights dim with a small candle burning next to the flower. Faint piano music could be heard in the background. ...hopefully I didn't go too overboard... I just want this to be special... I've done so much thinking, and... I want to bend my rules for her. I'm okay with it. And I know she's been holding herself back, she's been so understanding... I want to make this about her. She's been too wonderful... She deserves it. He had just finished setting everything up when the doorbell rang. He looked up, tugging on the collar of his dark red dress shirt- he figured out quickly Spades loved him in red, and decided the red dress shirt with a black tie and dress pants would be perfect, given she was always in formal uniform- and padded over to the door, opening it and smiling warmly to Spades, sweeping her inside by the waist and sweetly kissing her, pushing the door shut with his foot behind him and cupping her cheek with his free hand. He breathed against her lips, his eyes sparkling as her looked into her eyes. "Hello~" His voice had dropped an octave, looking into her eyes.
Spades had a wide smile on her face as she kissed her, the smallest blush already across her cheeks. *You look sexy as all hell, then again, you are in red, sly bastard...* Spades smiled as she put her bag down by the staircase, blushing a bit at what she had actually brought. *Maybe a tank top is too revealing for him?... Well not that I'm bragging or anything, but no tank tops fit well with my rack.* She smiled as she saw that the lights in the kitchen were turned down and the house relatively quiet save for the piano music in the bathroom. "No kids today?" She asked with some surprise. *I would've thought at least Eren would've been home... But that's fine, it'll be nicer for the both of us then.*

**Lathe smirked, a light in his eye as he responded. "Nope, they're spending the night at Levi's apartment." He stepped forward, catching Spades by the waist again and purring into her ear. "We have the house ~all to ourselves."**

Spades had a huge blush on her face. *Did he just...? Did he invite me to spend the night because the house was empty? .... Does that mean...? I mean it could, but I shouldn't get my hopes up, I know his rules that he's abided by. She turned her head, pecking at his cheek. "So, what's for dinner?" She asked quietly, leaning over to get out of her high heels. Feels great to finally get out of them... I've been in them all day. Once she got out of her heels she stood up, now a full 8 inches shorter than him, and smiled softly at him. *I'm really looking forward to whatever it is that your brilliant mind decided to make me.*

**Lathe chuckled quietly as he saw her heavy blush, smiling as she pecked his cheek. "Shrimp scampi over homemade pasta. Dessert..." Lathe trailed off, grinning devilishly. "-something sweet." I can only imagine... He gently pulled her along to the kitchen, pulling out her chair for her. "What would you like to drink?"**

Spades' face flushed completely and she sat down at the table. "U-um... just w-water please." She smiled softly, trying to hide her face with her fiery hair. Wait... hold on... Am I being considered dessert? Wait, does he actually want that? I mean, I'm happy about it, but I don't want to push him. She watched as she was served and thanked him starting into the food and smiling widely. "It's really good Lathe, thank you." She blushed, her face showing just how happy she was to be alone with him. *It's really good... Fuck it, I'm in too deep, and I love that he cooks.*

Lathe smirked as he saw her go scarlet to her ears, setting a generous plate in front of her along with a glass of cold water. He immediately tangled their feet together after he sat down, smiling as she spoke. "Thank you, I'm glad you like it." He let his eyes wander over her soft tan features, following the curve of her lips with interest before returning to his food, trying his hardest not to stare and set her too on edge. *I can't help it... She's just too damn gorgeous.* They ate quietly, enjoying the solace and the other's steady presence, the soft ambient sound of piano music keeping away the stress of a need to fill the otherwise complete quiet with some sort of chatter. Lathe waited until Spades had finished to take their plates to the sink, simply setting them in before padding back to the table, his nails tracing over the wood as he spoke, the flickering of the candle reflecting in his eyes. "So then, Spades..." He pushed her chair back a bit with his foot, one leg coming up to kneel next to her as he cupped her face gently, his eyes shaded as his head dipped down to rest their foreheads together, his voice a low and quiet purr. "...are you ready for dessert?... I know I'm being really forward, but I can't get you out of my head... I really, really want this..." *He's serious*? Spades watched him get closer with wide eyes, but she put her hands on his chest gently pushing him off of her, her eyes glancing away from him. "L-Lathe... um... how do I say
this... Isn't this against your rules? I don't want you to feel like you need to do this... I don't want you to be pressured to do anything. So please don't force yourself to do this..." She trailed off as her eyes came up to meet his. He looks so sure of himself... But... Isn't this against his rules?

Lathe let his hands slide down to her shoulders as he pulled away a bit, giving her a soft shrug and smile. "Spades, believe me, I wouldn't be so forward if I wasn't sure I wanted this. By 'this,' I don't mean all the way; that part of my rules isn't breakable. But everything else... well, you know me." He gave her a small grin. "I tend to bend rules. If it's for you... I think it'd definitely be worth it. I really, really want this." His eyes held a hopeful look. "-so may I?" Please, say YES!

So he is completely serious... So that means... Oh wow ... Spades blushed and bit her lip in an almost seductive manner, standing up to wrap her arms around his shoulders, pulling him down to her height. "If you'll let me..." She purred playfully into his ear and kissed the shell of it. He's really hot when he's like this... I like it... I didn't think I would, but it's great when he's this confident.

Lathe shivered as she spoke, his arms moving around her waist and tugging her with him. "Upstairs." He pulled her to the staircase, snatching her overnight bag as they passed it and bringing her into his bedroom, the lights inside dim as well, setting the bag by the door and kicking it shut. He kissed her deeply as they made their way to the bed, gently pushing her back onto it and climbing over her, able to keep his weight majorly on his knees as his hands wandered over her figure freely, tracing her curves, tangling their tongues together and tasting her greedily. He didn't try to force down the pulse of arousal that ran through him, for the first time allowing the sensations to take him over.

Spades allowed him to take her through the house, happy that he grabbed her bag. He always thinks of everything... She let their tongues tangle together when he pushed her down on the bed and climbed over her. His hands left trails like fire down her body, making her shiver under his gentle touch. She pulled back with a gasp, looking at him with hooded eyes. "L-Lathe..." She stuttered softly as she saw the lust in his eyes for the first time. "Fuck he's sexy as all hell... and he's with me... Her smile grew as she lifted a hand up to cup his cheek, her hair splayed out under her on the bed. Her other hand went down to his buttons and started to slowly undo them. Damn you for wearing red... you know it's my favorite color.

Lathe relished in the lustful look Spades had in her emerald eyes, tugging at his tie and loosening it, dipping his head down as he lifted the loop over his head and discarded it on the floor next to the bed uncaring and letting his mouth wander over her jaw towards her neck, himself starting to undo the buttons of her uniform jacket and shirt. "Stop being a damn tease already." He murmured against her skin, shuddering and not feeling too patient, starting to leave small marks down her neck as he kissed and licked and suckled on the soft skin. He shrugged off his shirt as she finally finished unbuttoning it after an agonizingly long moment and tossed it aside, pulling back from her as he tugged at her now unbuttoned uniform top, wanting her to help him get rid of it. This is coming off now. But I don't want to tear it. But it has to go.

Spades smirked, slowly sitting up and moving to discard her uniform shirt, leaving her in a white tank top, which was barely able to hold itself with her curves every which way, though she would let Lathe explore that, along with the black lace bra she wore under it. She tilted her head to the side, giving him a show of her bare skin which was now exposed. Come on, I wanna see you go
crazy ... Spades was already playfully reaching down to unbuckle his belt, and got it off of him, tugging at the hem of his dress pants, staring at his ripped torso with hungry eyes. How did I not notice you before? She let a hand come up to splay down his chest, towards his defined v-line. I can only imagine what awaits me down there.

Lathe grinned, looking down at her almost predatorily as her hands ran down his chest, studying the skin clear of any mark except one nearly faded bruise. ... Now that just won't do. He leaned down and immediately began suckling at the soft, sweet skin, leaving a collar of hickeys in his wake. His own hands wandered from her shoulders down her chest, feeling the soft flesh through the thin fabric as he cupped her breasts, sliding lower over her stomach to tug at the waistband of her pants. He felt Spades pulling at his own, and he murmured against her skin. "Please." He unbuttoned her own, tugging down the zipper and letting her kick them off. His hands played with the hem of her tank top before pulling that over her head, pulling back and drinking in her form, blushing heavily as he noted her choice of lingerie. ... holy fuck. He shifted to kick off his dress pants after Spades unzipped them, unable to keep himself from staring in awe at her. ... my God, you're absolutely stunning ...

Spades visibly swallowed as her eyes scanned over Lathe's toned body, both of her hands coming up from where she lay on the bed and sliding over his skin. He's so handsome... Her hands had minds of their own as they trailed down Lathe's muscular arms, back up to his shoulders and starting to go down his chest, relishing in the muscles rippling under the sweet skin. She let out a loud moan as he gripped her sensitive breasts and she allowed him the full sight of her in black lingerie. I wonder if this was a good idea? I was hoping for this... So I decided with the black. Her hands felt each and every muscle in his chest, slowly coming down to meet with his boxers, her thumbs fooling with the edge, one hooking in and pulling them down, but not enough to reveal his length. No no, not yet, I want to tease you first. Her sly smile faded to a look of pure surprise as her hand cupped his bulge, feeling just how large Lathe really was. ... Holy shit! The saying's not lying in his case... Holy crap... He's fucking huge! Spades' face was full of wonder, surprise, awe and excitement all in one, and completely there for Lathe to see. "Well you certainly are packing."

Lathe moaned quietly as her hand cupped his length through his boxers, not trying to hold back from the pleasure. At her words, it was the first time in this entire encounter that Lathe felt a flicker of nervousness, breathlessly chuckling as his own hands ran down her skin and toyed with the lace hem of her panties, one hand running up the piece of slightly damp fabric that covered her folds. "Well you certainly look like you hoped this would happen." ... why else would you wear that? ...You're too damn good to me.

Spades shivered as she felt his hand run up between her legs, letting out a soft moan. "Trust me... I've been waiting long enough." She murmured seductively, her hands trailing back from his bulge to the hem of his boxers, beginning to pull them down. She bit her lip seductively as she watched his massive length spring free from it's confines. Spades moved a bit closer to him, sitting up to lean up and kiss him as her hands ghosted over his throbbing muscle. He's fucking huge... Not that I'm complaining... But will I be able to show him a good time too? She tilted her head a bit to get a deep kiss, moaning as she felt his hands roam all over her, mostly on her lace lingerie, and toying with them.

Lathe shifted to kick off his boxers, whimpering quietly into the kiss as he felt Spades' hands tracing over his length, his toes curling at the sensation, the pleasure completely uncharted territory for him. I'm not going to last very long, I hope she realises that... I've never done anything like this before, and that includes touching myself... but she knew my rules... and this isn't all about me.
This is about her. Lathe coiled their tongues as one hand slipped behind her back, feeling the latch of her bra and tracing down it, deftly undoing it. He slipped the lacy bra off of her shoulders, dropping it on the floor next to the bed. His hands moved to gently massage her breasts, his thumbs teasing her hardening nipples.

Spades moaned as soon as his hands touched her sensitive globes. Her head pulled back from the kiss as she moaned even louder when her nipples were teased. Dammit Lathe.... Her back arched a bit as he continued to message her soft flesh. "Ha... Lathe.... Ha...." She moaned out his name, her hands letting go of his length and favoring the sheets underneath her. His hands.... Holy shit.... It's almost like he's done this before.... But I know he hasn't... it feels so good.. Her cries came in loud strings as Lathe's thumbs continued to graze her now completely hard nipples, but never focus on them completely. Tease.... But I don't care....

Lathe dipped his head down to suckle on her neck, his mouth drifting below her collarbone to her chest, his hand running down across her stomach to play with the lace hem of her panties as he began to suckle on her breast. His tongue circled the hardened nub as he rolled the other between his fingers, lightly grazing it with his teeth before switching to the other, his hand tugging her panties over her hips, helping her kick them off and dropping the dampened lace off the bed. His hand lightly ran up her folds, rubbing her clit experimentally. He was deaf to the rest of the world, his full attention on Spades, every sound she made, every arch of her back and curve of her body. You sound so damn sexy ... I could listen to you forever ... The way my name sounds from your mouth, holy shit...

Spades let out a sharp cry as Lathe's finger rub her clit, moans escaping from her plump lips without restraint. Her legs moving a bit farther apart to give him access to her folds, moaning as his hands continued to rub over her sensitive areas. "L-Lathe.... ha... right there.... ha, give me more.... Please." Spades' body writhed under his magical hands, letting him work her body, steadily getting hotter and her whole body flushing as he continued. His hands.... they're so good. They feel like fire ... everywhere he touches feels so hot. Spades let out a soft mewl as his hand continued to massage her large breasts, his mouth like magic on her nipples.

Lathe's mouth released her abused nipples, kissing down her stomach, his hand moving from chest to run down her hip and up her inside thighs, pressing butterfly kisses to her hips. He kissed and nibbled down her inner thigh, coming up slowly and teasingly, switching between the two sides as his hands roamed her stomach. He slowly kissed upward, tentatively reaching her folds and forcing down his nerves, licking the rosy skin.

Spades let out a loud gasp as Lathe's warm, wet tongue trailed across her folds. Holy shit... She couldn't help turf curling up to him, her legs roaming over his shoulders, her heels digging into his back. " Holy shit ... Lathe... Right there! God Yes! " Her back arched off the mattress, giving him a good angle to see her whole body as she shuddered under his touch. So fucking good.... I haven't felt and like this in a long time... She continued to moan, her left hand coming to cup her abandoned breast and tease herself as he continued, the other making it's way to his inky locks and tangling her fingers in them.
Lathe looked up her with hooded eyes, his gaze raking over her body, a panting moaning mess. *Shit, that's hot...* He watched as she teased herself, his length throbbing at the sight, her moans reverberating in his head. ... *That sound, holy fuck... ... How have you been right in front of me this whole damn time and I haven't noticed?! And about that...* He reached his hands up to massage her globes, pinching and rolling her nipples between his fingers. His tongue trailed up to her clitoris, suckling hard on the nub. His teeth accidentally slipped, lightly biting the nub. His eyes widened, pulling back a bit and looking up with a flicker of worry, though he was slightly confused as Spades' moans got even louder, recognition suddenly passing over his features. He dipped back down, licking the small nub in apology and lightly biting it again, listening intently. He smirked as she let out loud strings of moans and his name, deciding to move and teasingly nibble along her folds, his broad tongue licking long strips up the abused skin. *So that's how you like it...*

Spades almost screamed from the pleasure she was experiencing. *That's it! Do it like that! Holy shit! Lathe you feel amazing... Oh my god do it more! Do more to me! I wanna feel everything, go harder!* Her thoughts everywhere as she felt his tongue and teeth graze her sweet folds. *It's so warm... I feel so hot... Lathe... You make me feel... Amazing... and I fucking love it.*

Lathe shuddered at her voice, his length throbbing almost painfully from neglect. He barely noticed, his fingers twisting harder at her nipples as his mouth moved back up to suck roughly on her clit. He brought one hand down from her breast, fingers splayed and trailing down her stomach, bringing one finger to her entrance, swiping over it teasingly before he pressed his index finger in slowly, feeling up her soft wet walls and thrusting in and out, soon adding a second finger as she quickly loosened for him, his fingers slick with her arousal and his pace speeding up as her hips tried to move against him. He moaned against her as her hand tugged sharply on his dark locks, looking up and meeting her eyes, his own filled with lust.

Spades gasped out of shock as he entered her, moaning even louder that she already was, her frantic cries filling the room. *Lathe... It feels so good! Your fingers... they're like fucking magic. Dammit... I want you to do more... God, I want more, I'm obsessed... god dammit. Lathe..."* Give me more, Lathe! Haaa... It feels.... Haaa... It feels really good!" Her voice was high, as she arched her back. *It feels so good...But he hasn't found my- Spades let out a soft scream when Lathe's fingers finally grazed her g-spot. "There! Right there Lathe!" She shouted out to him, her back arching further up, and her heels digging even more into his back to try and rock her hips to get more of his fingers inside of her. "Fuck! Please don't tease me Lathe! Fucking shit...* Her body started to curl in on itself, trying to feel as much pleasure as possible, the pleasure starting to build as Lathe continued to find spot after spot which made her go wild. *

Lathe moaned against her, sucking hard on her clt and slipping a third finger inside of her. He decided to have mercy and aimed for her g-spot, his other hand tweaking her nipple as he abused the spot deep inside of her, licking long streaks up her folds, tasting her and letting his teeth graze the sensitive skin. ...*You taste so sweet... I love it.* His eyes were hooded as he looked up to her, her flushed skin and dark eyes, the soft curves of her body and her lips as she moaned unabashed. He curled his fingers inside of her, hitting that spot dead on with relentless thrusts. *I want to hear you
Spades moaned out loudly, her body continued to shiver. "L-Lathe... R-right there.... ughh... I can't... much longer..." Her moans were loud as he whole body throbbed. *It feels good... It feels really good... Lathe you're a f**king sex god, dammit... How have you never done this before?* Her hips moving of their own accord, rocking back in time with Lathe's fingers. Her own hands were tangled in both his hair and the sheets below her and gripping relentlessly as she felt the pressure start to build in her lower regions. "Lathe... I'm almost..." She couldn't continue as she moaned out from the continued pleasure.

*Your voice, my God...* Lathe's hand thrusted into her fast, deep and hard, aiming without hesitation for that same spot, nibbling her clit and toying with it with his tongue. He caught her gaze with his dark eyes, not pausing for an instant in his movements as he held her sight. His eyes were dark, his pupils blown wide with lust.

*Then let go. Let go and let me hear you.*

Spades let out a very loud scream of ecstasy, her whole body shuddering from Lathe's movements, and his mouth flooding with her juices. "*L athe!*" She cried out in complete bliss as the orgasm continued to it's finish, her body starting to go limp in his hands, her arm coming up to hide her flushed face. *Holy shit... I don't think I've actually had an orgasm like that before...* Her body heaved, trying to get her breath back from the extreme bliss.

Lathe drew his hand from her, lapping up her juices before he leaned forward, her knees sliding from his shoulders as he reached to move her arm from her face, his hand cradling her cheek as he pressed butterfly kisses to her jaw, his length painfully hard against his stomach as waves of arousal coursed through him, from hearing Spades moaning and screaming his name. His touch was gentle, his other hand resting on her side as he let her catch her breath. His voice was a low whisper near her ear, kissing the lobe. "Do you know how damn sexy you looked? My *God*, you're gorgeous ..." He played with the fiery hair at the nape of her neck, his thumb rubbing lightly over her side. *Take all the time you need...*

*I can only imagine what the hell I looked like...* Spades chuckled softly, her eyes soft as her hands came up to push Lathe off of her and beside her. "Yeah, that felt amazing ...but..." She moved slowly up to sit between his legs on her knees, a soft smile on her face as her hair came over her shoulders to cover her breasts. Her hand came up to gently grasp his throbbing length. "You could use some... attention ..." She smirked, moving to lay down between his legs, her face close to his exceptional muscle, her breath warm on the base. *But I'm gonna tease you first.*

Lathe's eyes widened as she flipped their positions, blushing as she moved between his legs. He moaned as she took hold of his neglected length, fluttering completely as he felt her breath on his shaft. ... *Please ."S-Spades... I won't last l-long..."* He panted, nervous and excited. *I've never... It feels so good already... But it's not going to be long...* He fisted at the sheets, his eyes hooded and latched onto Spades. *Please .

*Oh... I know you won't!* She smirked and teasingly licked a stripe up the base of his member, licking from base to tip and swirling it around his massive head. "L ateh... You're so big... I love it." She whispered against the hot skin, kissing him from base to tip until she took his whole head in her mouth, sucking gently. *I know you won't last... But you make up for it in size .*

Lathe groaned loudly, his head dropping back against the pillows, his toes curling and heels
digging into the bed as Spades sealed her lips over the head of his length, flushing at her words. He quietly whimpered, loud moans and fragmented words tumbling from his mouth. "S-Spades... Nngh... D-don't stop... S-so good ..." ... *this is worth bending those rules a thousand times over.*

Spades smirked and came off of him with a seductive pop. *Hmm... I wanna tease him.* "I dunno, I think I should stop." She watched him with a mischievous glare. Her hand grasping him tightly at the base to hold him off. *Lathe... I wanna see you beg for it... "That is, unless you decide to beg for it..."* She told him softly, with a sweet smile.

*Anything*. Lathe was breathless as he responded, his words running together in desperation. "N-No, Spades, don't stop, *please* don't stop, it feels too good, you have to keep going, *please* ..." *I don't care if I have to beg just for the love of god don't stop.*

*That worked.* Spades returned her mouth around his monstrous length, nearly choking as she tried to take in more than a few inches. *I can't even fucking give him a proper blow, he's too fucking big...* She had a gentle hand on the base, stroking whatever she couldn't fit and struggling to suck whatever she could fit inside her mouth. *So fucking big.... I can only begin to imagine what it would feel like inside of me.* Her whole face flushed as bright as he hair with just the thought, though she knew better than to get on top of him without his consent, knowing she'd need to have a ring on it to be with him. She hummed gently on his thick prick. *Come on... I wanna see you when you cum.* Her eyes stayed glued on his face as he watched her.

Lathe moaned loudly as she took as much of his length in as she could, unable to tear his eyes away from Spades as she sucked him, feeling a pressure quickly building in the pit of his stomach. *"S-Spades, I-"* Lathe tried to warn her, though he let out a loud moan of *Spades' name as she hummed on his length, his expression one of pure bliss as he finally came and came hard, becoming limp on the bed and letting Spades suck him dry. ...*Oh my God...* Lathe felt Spades leave his length, trying to find the strength to lean up on his elbow somewhat and gently pull Spades closer to him by the chin, kissing her deeply and cupping her cheek. He rested their foreheads together, looking warmly into Spades' eyes, his voice a quiet whisper against her lips. "...I love you... Ieva." The name, so often unused, sounded so familiar in his voice, warm and full of awe.

Spades smiled softly, moving to get closer to him, so that she could lay down beside him. *That was a huge load... he wasn't kidding when he said he's never touched himself...* "I love you... Lathe..." She smiled more, leaning her body against his, her head ducking down to his neck and starting to suckle gently at his skin, leaving a few light marks across the skin. *Even his skin tastes wonderful...*

Lathe sighed contentedly, leaning his head back to give Spades more room to mark him. He pulled her close to him, his hands a steady weight on her waist. He glanced down and hooked the blanket with his foot, one arm reaching to pull it up over their still naked bodies. He was too happy to have Spades marking him, his eyes suddenly feeling heavy with sleepiness. He nudged Spades to pull away after she had given him plenty of marks, turning her away from him and wrapping his arms
around her middle, pulling her flush against him. He pressed butterfly kisses to her shoulder blade, soon burying his nose in her fiery red hair and mumbling quietly and sweetly against her neck, a small smile on his face. "G'night, Spades... Sleep well." ... Thank you.

God... He's so comfortable. Spades murmured something softly, but the words so soft, Lathe wouldn't've been able to make it out. Her body pressed flush against his under the covers, molding together as if they were meant to be together. Her eyes fluttered shut and it wasn't long until Spades had fallen asleep in Lathe's arms. I would do this a hundred times over... It feels so right...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe was the first of the two of them to wake up, his eyes taking a moment to focus before he recognised a shock of red hair, a soft smile coming over his face, his eyes holding so much affection as they traced her shoulder up to her face, hidden from him. He glanced to the clock, deciding ten was late enough and started to lightly nibble up the back of her shoulder, her neck, pressing light, feathery kisses to her skin, his hands keeping her close. "~Spades..." He quietly whisper-sang against her skin, his nibbles moving to the back of the joint of her neck. Time to wake up...

Spades shifted a bit under his arms, feeling something pull her close to warm skin. Her eyes fluttered open as she yawned, widely, humming as she took in the new surroundings. Where the fuck am I? ..... oh... Oh... Oh, I'm in Lathe's room... I'm in his arms. She shuffled around a bit under the sheets, a blush creeping across her face. And the both of us are completely naked... We certainly did that last night, it wasn't just a hopeful dream on my part... it actually happened! A smile spread across her face as she leaned her head to the side a bit, giving him even more access to her neck. "Mhmm, 'morning..." Her voice was a bit rough from having just woken up, but she looked like the pinnacle of beauty as she looked back to Lathe with sleepy eyes.

Lathe had stars in his eyes as he gazed up at her, feeling like he was falling in love with her all over again. He softly kissed up her neck, moving up to cup her face, his words quiet against her lips. "Good morning." He kissed her sweetly and chastely, his other hand remaining at her waist as she shifted to face him more. Their legs tangled together, warm and content in their embrace. ... I would mind waking up like this more... or all the time...

... This is nice... I like this, his arms fit perfectly around me... She smiled, rolling closer to him and kissing him lazily on the lips, giggling softly as she batted her eyelashes at him. "It certainly is good... Isn't it." She didn't seem bothered in the least that she was completely nude in front of him, she knew he wouldn't mind and that he had the decency to not grope her so early in the morning. Not that I would care... Last night was hot... I kinda want round two...

Lathe hummed in agreement, and couldn't help smiling, brushing a stray lock of hair away from her face, his voice a quiet whisper. "...with you here it is." He pecked her lips one last time before he spoke quietly, his thumb running lightly over her jaw. "Can we get up? Have breakfast?" ... I would never ask to get up from this if I didn't have to... but I'm hungry...

Spades hummed in acknowledgment, moving closer to him to kiss his ear. "Only if you make pancakes." She purred into his ear and kissed it before moving a hand down to remove his hands from around her waist. I think that was probably the best sleep I've had in awhile... Especially if I
slept in until 10... I don't think I've ever done that. Spades gently removed herself from his arms, burying herself in the sheets, as if she were nervous about her bare body around him. "You get dressed first, I'll meet you downstairs..." She murmured to him, placing a gentle peck on his nose.

Lathe smiles, pecking her cheek before shifting to get up. "Okay, pancakes it is then. Take all the time you want." If you're not down when they're done I'll bring them upstairs, why not? He stepped down from the bed, crossing the room to the armoire and donning a pair of clean boxers, sweatpants and socks, He slipped on a white tank top before ambling to the door, sending Spades a wink before quietly closing the door behind him. He descended to the kitchen, the dishes from last night still in the sink. A bit of cleaning up first is in order. He washed the dishes and had them quickly put away, perusing the fridge for what he needed. His eyes landed on the large containers of strawberries, remembering something. She loves strawberries on her pancakes, yeah? That's how it always was in high school. He picked up the container and shut the door, setting everything on the counter and starting to mix the batter. He retrieved a can of whipped cream out of the fridge as an afterthought. Sweet stuff for breakfast. Perfect.

Spades groaned quietly, moving to get out of the bed, heading towards the bag Lathe had dropped near the door. Better get dressed... hmm... what to wear? Oh... I know. Spades quickly slipped into the extra set of deep red lace lingerie, before slipping on another white tank top which still didn't fit her properly. She shrugged, moving slowly back into the comforts of Lathe's warm bed. So warm,,. But I want him back upstairs... but I want pancakes... Oh well, he'll come back upstairs to wake me back up. She slipped under the covers, closing her eyes to get a few more minutes of sleep before Lathe would come and wake her up for breakfast.

Lathe plated the pancakes, arranging plenty of strawberries and whipped cream on top before standing still, listening for anything from upstairs. .... nothing. Breakfast in bed it is! Lathe quietly chuckled, searching in the pantry for the food trays meant for it, carrying two plates of pancakes with silverware, two mugs of coffee and a glass of juice upstairs, easily balancing it on one hand and lightly knocking on the door, quietly opening it and smiling as he saw Spades still nestled in the sheets, padding over to her and setting the tray on the armoire for a moment, gently shaking Spades' shoulder and pressing a kiss to her cheek. "Come on, Spades, wake up. I brought pancakes and coffee." It's practically noon already, and I don't want the food getting cold.

Spades murmured something about being woken up again before she smelled the pancakes and her eyes instantly snapped open, her eyes searching the room for her beloved pancakes, gasping in happiness as she saw them. "You remembered I liked strawberries?" She asked from where she lay, moving up a bit, her tank top pulling down a bit, revealing dark red lace as she sat up. Strawberries... you are perfect Lathe!

Lathe glanced down as he saw a sliver of red, swallowing hard as he saw it was another lace bra. ... Damn. Lathe looked back up to her, trying to restrain himself and smiling. "Of course I remembered. How could I not? You were always crazy about them." Food first. Ravishing later. He gave her lips a light peck before moving to retrieve the tray, setting it carefully in front of her and climbing onto the bed next to her, starting on his own plate of pancakes and trying hard not to stare at the red lace teasingly showing from underneath her tank top. He blushed nearly every time
he looked to Spades as they ate, forcing himself to keep his hands off while they were still eating. *If I try anything with this tray here, God knows it'll get kicked off the bed and things will break, including the mood.*

*They look amazing!* Spades had a happy smile as she quickly engrossed herself with her pancakes, groaning in bliss as her mouth filled with strawberry and cream pancakes. Her plate didn't last long as she giggled, not really noticing that her tank top had slipped a bit, allowing her bra to show; she was so used to it that it didn't bother her. She picked up her coffee periodically as she ate, smiling more after she finished her plate and picked the mug up as she looked up to Lathe. *He looks so hot... just in a tank top and sweatpants... god, how did I not even consider you before? Really? You've been so good to me.*

**Thank god.** Lathe set down his knife and fork, sipping from his coffee mug and waiting for Spades to set hers down again. When she did, he set down his own mug and picked up the tray, carrying it back the armoire and setting it down, turning back to Spades with a predatory grin, his eyes shaded. He sauntered back over to the bed, climbing on top of Spades and letting one hand gently tug at the hem of her tank top. "What did you think you were doing, teasing me with lingerie like *that*?" He purred, a finger slipping below her tank top and brushing the lace hem of her panties. His other hand cradled the back of her neck, tangling in the fiery locks there. *I've been going nuts not being able to do anything...*

*Hmm... So he did notice then?* She had a large grin on her face as she felt his hands all over her. "Well... I was hoping that my tank top would keep it a secret, but it seems as though it's *failed* me... " She moaned softly as his hand tangled into her fiery hair. She leaned up to kiss his cheek. "But... was I really teasing you? You seemed so *well* behaved." She purred into his ear, a hand coming up to cradle Lathe's head. "And the pancakes were delicious, thank you." She murmured and started to slowly kiss down his jaw, her legs coming to tuck themselves under her for support as she sat up with him.

Lathe hummed as she kissed down his jaw, feeling her fingers threading into his hair and leaning his head back in invitation for her to bite down his neck. His hand moved from her neck to her hips, whimpering quietly as her lips moved across his neck. His hands cupped her ass, squeezing as he pulled her against him to straddle his lap, deciding too much fabric was in the way and sliding her loose pants down over her hips and tossing them off the bed, feeling the lace under his hands as he massaged her ass. *... This is worth the wait.*

Spades moaned loudly against his skin. "Lathe..." Her lips ghosted his skin as his large hands grabbed her ass which sat nicely in his lap. "Your hands are so big... they feel so good." She murmured to him and smiled softly, her gaze returning to his skin and biting down on his shoulder after moving his tank top aside. *He's really good to me... I should really be good to him.* Her hands wandered down from around his shoulders and splaying over his toned abs. "You're so fit too, I *love* it." Her voice soft, yet full of lust as they finally made it to the hem of his sweatpants, one pulling it away from his skin and the other snaking in to grab his member and stroke it teasingly. *You should feel just as good as I did last night.*

Lathe's cheeks darkened at her words, groaning softly as she bit his shoulder. He flushed completely crimson as her hand closed around his length, letting out a loud moan as she began to
stroke him. He felt himself hardening in her hand, his grip on her hips tightening, nearly leaving small bruises. "S-Spades... mng... f-feels good..." His hips tried to move in time with her strokes, yearning for more friction. "M-more... please ..." I need more... Please.

Well, I guess it's only fair. She smiled as she pulled her hand back to pull down both Lathe's sweatpants and his boxers, letting him kick them off before shoving him down on the bed, grabbing onto his length again and gently stroking him, waiting for him to get hard. "Does this feel good?" She asked quietly, her voice near his ear as she laid beside him, her leg tangling over Lathe's as she continued, twisting her wrist to give him more sensations. I hope it does... I wanna hear you beg.

Lathe gladly let her push him onto his back, moaning as she purred in his ear, his length hardening as she twisted her hand. He fisted at the sheets, stuttering out some of his words. "M-my God , Spades, yes .. P- please ... D-don't you dare stop. I-I'll beg as m- much as you want, j-just don't stop." He panted, hismember soon becoming fully hard in her hand, one hand reaching up to tug at her tank top. "... Off ." His hands reached to pull it over her head, his eyes raking over her curvaceous form, clad in dark red lingerie that made her look very appealing in his eyes. His head dropped back against the pillows again, his eyes hooded as they traced her body. You look so damn sexy ...

Spades smirked, leaning down to kiss as his collarbone, her hand continuing to rub up his large length. "I think I can do that... but I don't know what feels good Lathe... you'll need to tell me... Tell me everything." Her breath was warm as she continued to mark his collarbone, thankful he had skin open which would easily be able to be hidden. She stopped her motions for only a seconds, lifting his tank top off of his chest and kissing down his toned flesh, leaving multiple bites and bruises all over him. "Tell me Lathe, or I won't know." Her mouth came close to his length, but never touched him with her lips, only slowly handling him with her soft touches.

Lathe moaned loudly as Spades marked his chest, trying to speak and stammering, unable to keep strings of gasps and moans from interrupting his words. "I-it... hng... It feels g-good w-when you b-bite m-me... aghhh... w-when you twist y-your hand... w-when you... haaa... w-when your thumb r-runs over t-the slit... Nnnh... P-please, don't tease m-me..." Lathe felt her breath against his length, his hips moving under her seeking more friction.

"Hmmm... well you're being a good boy, I guess I can stop my teasing..." She trailed off moved to kiss his entire length, her index finger teasing his slit as her hand abused his sensitive head. Her kisses were wet, allowing for some lubrication for her hand as she held him a little tighter. "Should I bite here, Lathe?" She asked gently, her tongue trailing up Lathe's member in one motion, like it was a giant lollipop. I want you to crumble ....

Lathe's eyes widened a fraction, shaking his head and moaning unabashed as Spades' tongue dragged up his length, her hand abusing his head. He tried to speak coherently, somewhat succeeding. "N- no , d-don't bite there, j-just do w-what you're doing n-now, please ." His knuckles were white as he gripped the sheets, his toes curling and heels digging into the mattress, trying to keep his hips still.

Spades giggled like a school girl as she removed her hand from his head, trailing it down to his
base and clamping it. "You're not allowed to cum yet... Lathe." She breathed out his name, taking in a deep breath as she licked her tongue around his abused head, flattening her tongue as she took whatever she could in and sucked gently on him, trying to get him to get as close to the edge as possible. Then I'll stop completely until the feeling's not there anymore... Then go right back to starting it all over again... Hahaha! He'll be a fucking mess ... I love doing this to him, his face is priceless, and he's sexy as all hell... Holy shit...

Lathe whined as her hand clamped down around the base of his length, groaning as she started to suckle his length. The pressure in the pit of his stomach was building, and he so desperately wanted to let go and release, though he couldn't with Spades' hand where it was. "S-Spades... I-I..." Lathe's body began to shake from the pleasure, too overwhelming.

Spades lifted her head, her mouth coming off with a lewd pop, her hand still holding the base of him to make sure that he wouldn't cum. "What's wrong Lathe? You can tell me..." She purred innocently, waiting as she felt his body tremble. Come on down from that... I'll let go when you're not gonna cum the second I do...

Lathe shuddered as she spoke with mock innocence, whimpering when he realized she wasn't starting again. "W-why... why'd you stop? Spades, please ..." Lathe tried to move in vain, Spades effectively pinning down his hips. He became limp on the bed as he felt the pressure slowly uncoiling, pleasing with Spades, his stammer gone. "Spades, please, have mercy. I want to cum... please, do something, anything ..." Lathe sounded resigned, whimpering and looking down to her with desperate eyes. Please, I need you to keep going... my God, and don't stop....

... Not until I know you won't. Spades shook her head, holding him without moving her hands as all. "I'll continue... But I want you to wait ..." Her words were seductive as she stayed by him, waiting until he had started soften a bit in her hand before letting go of his base, attacking the head with her mouth. He'll thank me later... She flattened her tongue and took in as much as she could, gagging when she went too far and having to come back up to breathe, a trail of saliva connecting from her lips to his head. Her darkened eyes gazed over his appearance. Probably should try not to choke on him... I dunno, he may like it though....

Lathe shivered at her words, trying to keep his breathing under control as he forced himself to lay still, knowing better than to do anything other than what she said. He gasped as Spades suddenly attacked his length, moaning loudly as he hardened again in her mouth, panting as she sucked hard on his tip. He groaned as Spades choked on his length, trying his hardest not to buck up his hips, lifting about an inch from the bed, his back arching up. ...it feels too good... He looked down to Spades with dark eyes, his pupils blown wide with lust, a flicker of worry passing them by. Is she okay...? I don't want to hurt her...

Hmm... He seemed to like it a lot... She licked a trail up his entire length, before trying to take the whole thing in her mouth and sucking until she gagged on his massive length yet again. So fucking big. She tried to stay on him as long as possible before doing up with a lewd pop again, panting herself from keeping down on him even when she was gagging on him. "So big... Lathe..." She purred against his length, licking him up and down before she proceeded to choke herself on his thick prick again, getting progressively farther down his length.
Lathe was getting louder and louder as her lips progressed further and further down his length, panting and moaning and gripping the sheets until his knuckles were white. He tried to keep from moving under her, bucking up no more than an inch at a time as she bobbed on his length, going lower and lower. "...nnngh... S-Spades... s-so good, my God..." Lathe moaned out strings of Spades' name as he felt her nose press against him, her lips at his base. His entire body was flushed, his back arching as she suckled on his shaft. "S-Spades... I-I can't..." He felt his coil tightening quickly, overwhelmed with the sensations.

Spades hummed as she pulled back from his base, sucking the entire time. *I actually got the whole thing in... That's awesome! ... Thought technically I was choking on him the whole time... but he seems to like that.* She pulled back till her lips were closed over his head, sucking hard as she ran her hands down the inside of his thighs, her tongue teasing at his slit. *I want you to cum, I want to taste you again. So cum for me...* She wiggled her ass teasingly as she sucked on his swollen head, hoping to finally set him over the edge.

Lathe let out a strangled cry of bliss, litanies of Spades' name rolling of his tongue and his eyes raking over her erotic form as he came hard in her mouth, his back arching off the bed as he gripped the sheets tightly. He let her suck him dry, falling limp on the bed and breathing hard, his entire body flushed and falling into a post-orgasm glow, pulling Spades up to him and kissing her deeply for a moment, holding her close while he tried to get his breath back. He flipped her onto her back, remembering the night before and kissing her roughly, his touch firm as he traced her chest and her sides, his hands coming up to massage her breasts, whispering against her reddened lips. "...now, let me." Lathe gave her one last deep kiss, tangling their tongues and gently biting her lip before he moved to the base of her neck where her uniform hides her skin, biting and sucking marks over her collarbone, his hand going to trace up the inside of her thigh teasingly.

Spades gasped as she was flipped over. "Lathe, ngh... you don't need too." She murmured softly, a blush quickly forming on her face. Her body shivered under him as his hand grazed her thigh, getting teasingly closer to the deep red lace which surrounded her. *You really don't need to... I wanted you to feel good... And you already gave me an orgasm yesterday...* Her hands splayed across his chest, pushing up against him.

Lathe pulled up from her collarbone, looking up to her with shaded eyes, moving to kiss her passionately and purr into her ear. "No... But I want to." Lathe kissed back down her neck, one hand slipping behind her back to unhook her bra, slipping the garment from her shoulders and dropping it over the side of the bed, kissing and nibbling down to her chest, taking one of her nipples in his mouth and suckling hard, tweaking the other nub and rolling it between his fingers, lightly biting the one between his teeth. *My God, for everything you've done for me, you deserve it.*

*Holy shit, Lathe... Your tongue is like magic.* She whimper as he nibbled at her sensitive bud,
gasping in pleasure as he tugged at it with his teeth. "Lathe... Haaaa... There..." She mewed as he continued to please her sensitive body. Your hands feel so good... I want more.

Lathe gave the bud another light bite before switching to the other, his fingers teasing the one he had just abused. He tugged gently on the nub with his teeth, suckling hard before he moved further south, nibbling and suckling down her stomach, leaving small bruises until he reached the deep red lace, his hands massaging her globes as he pressed teasing kisses along the hem of her panties, pressing a kiss to her folds through the thin fabric before teasingly trailing gentle bites down and up the insides of her thighs. If you got to tease me like that...

...You're gonna tease me now? Spades groaned as he passed right over her sensitive area, her panties already starting to dampen, and her thighs trembled as he bit lightly up and down their sides. "Lathe... M-more..." She started to beg, stuttering quietly as her hand gripped the sheets under her.

Lathe had a small smirk on his face as he heard Spades starting to beg, his bites becoming a bit harder as he trailed back up her thighs, his hands trailing down to play with the lace hem, pressing kisses to the edges before pulling them over her hips agonizingly slowly, tossing them off the bed and pressing butterfly kisses to her hips, wandering closer to her folds and away again, his hands running up and down her body with feather-light touches. He decided to have mercy as she shuddered under him, licking a broad stripe up the rosy skin, nibbling up to her clitoris, suckling on it and paying it extra attention with his tongue, lightly biting it and licking it in apology, his hands cupping her ass. How are you mine?

Spades was a mess under his teasing touches. "L- Lathe ... ngh... More p- please ...haaa..." She moaned, her hand coming up to hide her blushing face from him as her other moved to his black locks, pushing his head down a little further towards her entrance and away from her abused clit. No more there, otherwise I'll cum too quickly. Her gentle hands tangled into his hair, tugging at it when he found sensitive spots and her legs curling up around his head, and pulling him closer to her. I want you, Lathe.

Lathe's eyes darkened even more at the sound of her voice, letting her nudge him to her entrance. His tongue darted out to trace the opening, pressing forward and licking up her soft walls before he pulled back, one hand coming up from her ass and pressing a finger past her entrance, which soon became two as she became slick. He broadly licked up her folds, relishing in the sounds she made.

Her back arched up off the bed, both hands coming down to Lathe's head and gripping onto his hair as she felt his mouth all over her. "Haa... Lathe... right there... oh my god..." Her breathing was ragged as Lathe continued to please her, which made her voice a bit higher as she moaned out his name. "More Lathe... mhn... give me more!" She cried out to him as her legs crossed over his shoulders her toes curling at the pleasure.

Lathe moaned against the sensitive skin as she cried out his name, adding a third finger and picking up the pace, searching for her g-spot and finding it quickly. He brushed over it, never hitting it directly as his thrusts became harder and deeper, tasting her sweet skin. His other hand gripped her
Oh my god Lathe! Spades was a panting mess as he started to get a bit rougher with her. "L-Lathe!" She cried out his name, her cries resounding throughout the room. It feels so good, it feels even better than yesterday... and yesterday felt amazing! She could already feel the pressure starting to build in her abdomen as Lathe continued.

Lathe kept up his relentless pace, aiming for her g-spot as he thrusted deeply into her, moaning at her cry as he sucked hard on her clit. He bit the small nub as his grip became even tighter, his hand pounding into her. Let's hear that again.

Spades screamed out his name as she tightened around his fingers, his hands flooding with her juices as a massive orgasm hit her. "LATHE!" Her whole body shook from the intense pleasure she felt with his fingers buried into her, moans leaving her lips as she tightened her legs around him, keeping him there. She shuddered with each aftershot, her back still arched off the bed, and her hair sprawled all over the place. "...so good..." She mewled out to him, in her blissful state.

Lathe shuddered as she screamed his name in bliss, lapping up her juices and drawing his hand out of her. His touch was light as her legs fell limp from his shoulders, climbing up to lay next to her and pulling her flush against himself, pecking her lips sweetly and pressing light kisses to her jaw as she caught her breath. "I really, really love you, Ieva." You're too good to me...

Spades let out a soft chuckle. "You haven't called me by my real name in a long time..." She murmured quietly to him and kissed him back just as sweetly, catching her breath after a few long moments and curling up to him. "So... are we considered more than boyfriend and girlfriend now... or are we still going to keep that title?" She asked curiously. Would we be considered friends with benefits? Or... Just leave it as we are? I think we would leave it as we are. She pecked his nose playfully. "I would love you either way, I hope you know that." She told him and pecked his neck before sitting up, straddling his lap and giving him a good view of her body, not giving him a chance to reply. "I feel gross though, so we're going to take a shower, now." Her words were firm as she stepped off the bed, her hips swaying as she did so.

Lathe lay on the bed, an answer on his lips before Spades straddles him and demanded they go shower, stunned for an instant. He got off the bed, needing to speak his mind and gently grabbing Spades’ arm, turning her around. He looked in her eyes, swallowing hard and trying not to stutter too badly. "S-Spades... I’ve given you so much... I don’t want it to be for nothing... Only for you to not be the one... "...is it okay if w-we’re exclusive?" His eyes were hopeful, though already crestfallen, as if he expected her to say no. ... but would she really be okay with just me?

... Exclusive? I think I could pull that off for you. Spades had a smile slowly spread across her features, tugging him closer to her as she held his gaze. "Of course it it, I would've expected you to ask earlier, I kinda figured we would be, but I wasn't sure." She smiled as she stood on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek, and tugged him towards the door again. I don't mind being your's, especially if you make me feel like that all the time.
Lathe felt as if a huge weight had fallen from his shoulders, relief in his eyes before it was overtaken by a dreamy look, letting Spades tug him along to the shower, one thought on loop in his head. ... *She’s mine.*

Spades had a wide smile on her face as she pulled Lathe into the shower with her and looked over him with happy eyes. *You look so perfect, and you're all mine... I hope you know I love every bit of you.*
Chapter 25: Shit Happens

Lathe looked through his cookbooks, a website full of recipes pulled up on his laptop. He sighed, narrowing his eyes at the ingredients lists. I don't know how the hell Eren was surviving eating everything I put in front of him... hell, I don't know how I'm going to survive making stuff he'll want to eat. He hates everything! Fish, onions, tomato, celery, sweet potatoes, sweet pickles, a ton of cheeses with a few exceptions, barbecue sauce, mustard, relish... And how the hell can he like broccoli? That stuff's awful, and he loves it! He eats it frozen for dessert! Who does that!? And he's been obsessed with peanut butter and strawberries, and it's the weirdest damn thing... He went through two jars of peanut butter in a week, so I have to buy the big jars wholesale. And of course, I know exactly when we're out- when Eren just walks up to me holding an empty jar with a spoon in it and giving me the puppy eyes that he knows will make me drop what I'm doing and go to the store every damn time. At least with the strawberries he leaves the bowl just empty on the counter after he's finished going the through the five pint's worth. What even are his eating habits tho... I don't understand. He loves the grilled cheese sandwiches, and those have tomato, so it's the only time he'll eat it. He'll eat literally anything you put in pasta, though. I see lots of scampi in our future. I gave Eren this whole cookbook with a pencil and just told him to circle everything he would eat and there are only ten things circled in it. Mainly in the pasta section. And this thing is more than two inches thick! ...well, at least he's not vegan. Lathe immediately knocked on the wood of the kitchen table. That would be even worse. He hates anything sweet, except fruits and cinnamon rolls. My God, he adores fruit. He's in the midst of this craze for apples, and it's actually getting pretty ridiculous- he comes with me to the store nowadays, and we leave every time with a bushel of apples. I ended up getting a cider press for him, and now we buy even more apples. ...really? ...it's some pretty impressive dedication, though. Eh. At least breakfast is easy. Scrambled eggs and toast, or french toast and cinnamon rolls every time. But lunch or dinner? Yeah, I don't know what I'm doing.

Eren was sitting with a book open with headphones on his ears, blocking out the noise in the room as he did so. He was oblivious to whatever Lathe was doing as he was engrossed in the large novel, a peanut butter jar and a spoon in hand. Hmm... I gotta do some more recordings... Put I think Jeff called Lathe the other day about something... I dunno, maybe it wasn't Jeff.

Lathe looked up as the phone rang, standing and glancing to where Eren sat on the couch as he walked to the phone, looking at who the caller was before answering, his tone bright. "Hey Jeff! What's up?"

"Hey...I talked with Nate, and he's cool with you guys coming over for a week to record, and I believe with the way his YouTube videos are going... We could do a deluxe edition. Would you have enough written by then? I hope you do... I really would like to get Eren out there... He's getting more popular with the constant cover videos.

"Hey...I talked with Nate, and he's cool with you guys coming over for a week to record, and I believe with the way his YouTube videos are going... We could do a deluxe edition. Would you have enough written by then? I hope you do... I really would like to get Eren out there... He's getting more popular with the constant cover videos.

Lathe nodded, leaving against the wall. "Yeah, we actually probably have at least that many songs written out from Tilt. We'd need to tweak a bunch of them, because half of them kinda aren't English... Yeah, lapses of Korean or French are a thing... Eh. "But we'll have plenty for you. That sounds amazing, thank you!" Lathe beamed, moving over to the scripting room and picking up the binder, flipping through the many many songs inside. "There's literally at least fifty here to pick from. It's a good thing there are so many, because now that I'm rereading some of them, half don't even make sense. But that kinda happens when you go from English to Korean to French and back again every sentence." ... that's not how language is supposed to work.
Jeff nodded at the other end of the phone. "Alright, So we'll see you guys the last week in September then? And make sure Eren brings whatever musical instruments he wants because we've really only got a bunch of guitars here at the studio." He told him, going through a list of things he needed to talk about. "We also need to give over how the money situation would be handled." I don't know if Eren's set up for his own bank account, I mean he should be, right? He should get enough money from his videos, I would imagine at least.

"Yeah, that sounds about right." He moved back to the kitchen, looking to Eren as he passed him on the couch. "And I'll get back to you hopefully sooner rather than later about the latter part of that statement. I need to talk with Eren about the money situation first." Yeah, he's been getting plenty of money from YouTube and from Full Tilt... We need to do some discussing about money later. "But yeah, we'll bring all the instruments we need to. Which may be a lot." I'll need to make sure we can get all that over there by train.

"That sounds like a plan, call me back as soon as you got dates and times for the train and we'll see who's picking you guys up from the station... We'll see the three of you then, bye!" Jeff hung up on the other end of the phone, before Lathe could respond, returning to his work.

The three of us... but Levi's in college. ...and if they're expecting three of us...Lathe looked to the phone as Jeff hung up, his brow furrowed. He looked to Eren, then to the door, an idea occurring to him. ... Could I bring Spades with? He glanced to the clock, seeing it was table after he hung up the phone, scrolling through blogs with lists of dinner ideas for picky eaters, finally settling on one. This looks like Eren won't hate it. ...close enough. He went to the fridge and fished for ground beef, onion and cheese, and a few rolls of crescent rolls.

Eren sat up, putting his book down after he finished up with the chapter he was reading. His steps were quiet as he went to find Lathe. I need to ask him... because... Well... He might actually want me out... I mean, he's got Spades now.... so... Eren took off his headphones, setting them on the kitchen table silently, turning towards Lathe and tugging on his sleeve as he made food. "Umm... Lathe...um... Are you gonna kick me out now?" He asked quietly, his eyes glued to the floor, his hair hiding his eyes, waiting for a reply.

Lathe looked up confusedly, reaching for a towel to wipe off his hands and turning to Eren, a questioning look on his face. I haven't heard you call me anything besides Dad in a long time... this isn't good, is it. "Wait, what?" Kick you out? What the hell are you talking about?

Eren kept his gaze on his bare feet, his voice quivering a bit as he spoke. "Are you... Are you gonna kick me out of the house? Since I'm 18... You don't need to keep me anymore..." Eren's voice sounded broken as he lifted his head, his eyes reflecting as much brokenness as his voice. I don't want you to kick me out.... I like it here.

Lathe's entire demeanor changed, setting down the towel and pulling Eren into a hug, a hand tangled in his hair. "Eren, what on Earth gave you that idea?" He looked to the kitchen table, recognizing the title of the novel. "...it was the book, wasn't it? Eren, just because you're 18 doesn't mean I want to kick you out. I love having you around, and I'd probably go mad with the house being so empty after it's always had someone besides me in it for so long. I don't really want you to leave so soon... of course, I can't stop you if you ever do want to leave. But you can stay here as long as you want. You're very welcome to."

Eren kept eye contact with him as he was pulled into Lathe's arms. "O-Okay..." Eren trailed off and looked over towards the balls stuffed with meat on the pan which was on the counter. "What's that?" Eren asked, his interest piqued. They look really good... Is that hamburger meat?
Oh thank god he doesn't hate it on sight. Lathe let him go, turning to the counter. "That, is dinner. Cooked hamburger meat and cheese rolled up in crescent rolls, soon to be baked." You better like it- if not I'm just going to give up.

Eren nodded. "When's dinner done?" His eyes went right back up from the food to lock onto Lathe's, feeling more comfortable to keep eye contact with him. I want to ask more questions....

Lathe smiled warmly, leaning on the counter. You're getting better at asking questions. "I'd say about seven minutes after they go in the oven, and I want to wait a bit until Spades gets home. Any more questions?" You can ask anything.

"Can you curl your tongue?" Eren asked quizzically, his eyes still locked onto Lathe's. I'm going to bombard you with randomness.

...Random. I like it. Lathe grinned and stuck out his tongue, curling it into a clover-leaf. "Yep."

Eren's eyes widened a fraction as he saw the display. What. The. Actual. Fuck. "Are you right handed or left handed?"

"Ambidextrous. I kinda got my right hand broken when I was in high school and had to learn to write with my left. It's convenient to know how to write with both hands if one ends up occupied or indisposed." Yeah... that was a bitch to hide from mom.

"...Indisposed?"

"Broken. Shattered. Punched to bits. Y'know. Unavailable to write with." ... it was still worth it.

"How did that happen?" Why would you're hand be broken in high school?

":.. I kinda got into a fight in high school... I punched incorrectly and without protecting my fist, and I had to do it multiple times... my hand was a wreck by the time it was over..." Lathe looked really sheepish, rubbing the back of his neck, uncomfortable with talking too much about his past. ...It wasn't the best time of my life... but it was necessary. And worth it at the time. I'm just grateful as fuck I set it correctly... I probably wouldn't've been able to play piano if I didn't.

Eren nodded. "So... Did you win?" Please tell me you did... that would be awful if you lost and had to put up with a broken hand.

"Oh, I kicked their sorry asses. They never bothered Phoebe again." Lathe's eyes widened a fraction, his hand coming up to cover his mouth. Fuck... I'm saying too much... I don't like talking about it... His eyes seemed to fall as he thought. ...There's a lot I'm not proud of when I was a kid...

...He doesn't look like he wants to talk about that... "Uhh... Sorry... I- I didn't mean to..." Eren looked down at his feet, slowly backing away from the other and disappearing away from the kitchen. I made him say something he didn't want to... shit... I hope he's not mad at me... He might be though, if he didn't want me to know. Eren moved to go up to his room. He probably won't want to answer anymore questions.

Lathe looked up as Eren started to leave, moving to grab his arm, his eyes downcast to his feet. "I- I'm sorry, Eren, it's okay. I just don't like talking too much about..." He swallowed hard, looking up to Eren with steely eyes. "A lot of stuff happened when I was a kid that I'm not too proud of. I just... It's not the nicest thing to think about sometimes." He gave Eren a weak smile. "Don't worry about it. Please."
Eren looked up to meet his smile. "O-Okay... um... W-Which is y-your favorite P-Pokemon?" He seemed a bit hesitant to ask, but his curiosity got the better of him.

Lathe looked a bit surprised at the sudden change, though he suddenly became thoughtful. "...It's a tie between Charizard and Gardevoir." *Breathing fire or the best psychic abilities... quite the contest.*

Eren nodded, looking around the room a bit, struggling to keep eye contact with Lathe for more than a few seconds. "H-Have you e-ever milked a cow?" His voice still timid as he asked his random questions. *I don't want you to be mad that I brought something up....*

*Where the actual hell are you getting these from? *"...Yes. School field trip, they decided to take us to a farm... we went to go see the cows, and the farmer guy asked if anyone wanted to milk a cow, and everyone else in the class was too chicken to say anything, and I just kinda raised my hand slowly after a moment. So, yeah. ...y'know, you lived out in the middle of nowhere in Germany. Have you ever milked a cow?"

Eren looked up to Lathe, his face completely blank. "We owned three." A small smile spread across his face as he thought of another question. "Do you know how to Yo-Yo?" *I can only do a few tricks.*

"I am the yo-yo master. There's probably one buried in my closet upstairs..." *That was always fun!*

"Can you erect a tent?" Eren asked, complete innocence on his face.

*What the hell did Eren just say? Yes... YES he can... but you don't just ask that! He's mine!* Spades came into the room, looking utterly confused, Eren's back facing her.

Lathe flushed completely red, face palming. "...yes, I can pitch a tent..." *I'm so done with you.* He looked up and saw Spades, swallowing as he saw her, arms crossed and staring him down. *...shit.* "Uh, h-hey, Spades! Welcome home!" He turned and put the tray in the oven quickly before turning back to her, shuffling his feet a bit. *Eren's here... I can't exactly shove my tongue down her throat... that'd be awkward. Dammit, but she's mine...*

Spades smiled softly as she watched him shuffle around a bit. "Eren, why don't you go wash up for dinner?" *I want to kiss Lathe... like now... but I know he won't kiss me unless Eren's out of the room.*

Eren nodded and he scampered off, going up the stairs, Blake stretching in the doorway, finally having woken up from his nap and going to sit by his food bowl.

Spades watched him stretch and smiled softly, unfolding her arms and taking two steps to Lathe before pulling him down by the collar and locking lips with him. *I really like kissing you... I wish I could do it more often.*

Lathe immediately melted into the kiss, wrapping his arms around her middle and thumb brushing her side gently as he kissed her fervently, his tongue brushing against her lips as he pulled her flush against him. *I missed you... I wish you were around a little more... You always work late...*
You feel so good... Spades wrapped her arms around him, her hand curling up into his hair a bit as he pulled her close. She pulled back to breathe, a small smile on her face as she looked into his eyes.

Lathe leaned their foreheads together, a smile on his face and lights dancing in his eyes as he met Spades' emerald ones. "I'm glad you're home." He whispered against her lips before he gently kissed her again, his tongue making its way into her mouth and coiling around hers. I love you.

"It's good to be home, Lathe." She smiled as she cupped his cheek with her hand. It smells good, what did you put in the oven? "What's for dinner?" She asked softly, looking over towards the oven as the timer got closer to zero. It certainly smells delicious.

Lathe turned to the oven, one arm still wrapped around her middle, sighing and running the other through his hair. "I've been going through forum after forum to find something that Eren'll eat... They're called hamburger bombs, crescent rolls wrapped around cooked hamburger meat and cheese. I swear, finding something he'll eat is a nightmare.

Spades smiled softly rubbing his back. "You're doing fine Lathe, you've survived 5 months so far, I think you're doing great... And dinner's always good. They smell amazing!" She smiled as she heard the timer going off, going to get plates for the three of them. I hope Eren'll like them.

Eren came into the kitchen and went to put the kettle on the stove to start water for himself. "They smell good." Eren told Lathe as he saw Lathe pull them out.... "They look really good too!" Eren said excitedly. I wanna try one!

Oh thank god. Lathe set them on the stovetop, shutting the oven and grabbing a spatula. "Let's hope they taste as good as they look." He grinned, putting two on each of their plates and handing Eren his. He picked up his coffee mug, sitting down across from Spades at the table with his own plate. He cut off an end piece of one of the rolls, biting it and nodding in approval. This is good- Though maybe I'd use it as more of a weekend lunch thing. But I like it.

Eren took the first bite, his eyes widened as he dug into it. It tastes really good... Eren finished off the first one pretty quickly before reaching for the second one. "Have you ever walked into a wall?" He asked quietly, looking up to the two of them. I wanna know.

He likes it! Lathe's brow furrowed at his question, his cheeks tinting red as he thought. "...a couple times, yeah..." He looked up as Spades looked at him questioningly. Dammit, you know why. I'm not telling him. TMI.

Spades snickered. "Oh yeah he has... Lathe likes to sleepwalk and when he does he walks into all kinds of things." There is no way he wasn't gonna find out.... Your probably gonna do it again eventually.

Eren's interest was piqued, his eyes full of curiosity. "Why do you sleepwalk?" Eren asked, taking bites of his burger bomb. I wanna know...

Oh you are in for it... "I'm not gonna handle that one, that's all you." She giggled a bit getting up to get more bombs for Eren and herself. That's all you, Lathe.

Dammit. Lathe rested his face in his palm, looking over the table. "...well, here's the thing- as you may or may not know, things happen in college." He glared for an instant at Spades as she snickered, playfully speaking to her in a stage whisper, a small grin on his face. "Hush. As if you
were unaware." He looked back to Eren. "So, a bunch of peeps from the squad would drag me to parties off campus, and they'd try to get me drunk, because apparently I wasn't any fun sober. Then again, they were all drunk when they said that. But they'd try to get me to drink, and the only real problem I had with it was that I hated the taste of beer. It's awful, I can't stand it, but that's what they'd always have and they'd somehow get me to drink it. Or they'd have whiskey and I'd be much easier to convince. And when I went to sleep later, still drunk, it was pretty much guaranteed I'd sleepwalk. I would do the most random shit sleepwalking- I've made terrible sandwiches out of things that aren't exactly food, lined up all the silverware on the counter, painted, and I accidentally tried to steal Casper's cellphone once and I remember none of it. I'd only wake up when I tripped over something or walked into a wall, or y'know, when Casper smacks me because I'm trying to steal his cellphone. But if I don't try and tie a foot to the bed when I'm about to go to sleep when I'm drunk I sleepwalk." Lathe shrugged, taking another bite of food. "I'd rather wake up after hitting the floor than accidentally order $100 worth of Chinese for delivery again.

That's impressive... Note to self: never let Lathe get drunk and do random shit. He nodded, thanking Spades as she set more food in front of him and taking a bite into the bomb. "Have you ever owned a goldfish?" He asked quietly, taking another bite. He was actually opening up to them, and he was holding eye contact with the both of them.

Spades smiled and nodded. "I had a whole tank full of goldfish once, they were adorable, and I would come home from school and tell them all about my day, so I've had hundreds over my childhood." Her eyes turned over to Lathe's as Eren's gaze moved. What about you? Have you had a goldfish?

Lathe shook his head. "I've never really had any pets. I fed the fish in the park pond every day for years after school, if that counts for anything." It was nice... nobody bothered me at the park... I talked to the fish and the ducks all the time.

"Snowy or Rainy Days?" Eren asked, his focus on Lathe as he ate his bombs, Spades continuing to bring him more food as he needed it, which was pretty quick cause they were a decent size but Eren was going through them like mad.

Spades happy that he was at least eating something of nutritional value, and let him eat as much as he wanted. I know Lathe's been struggling to find more food you would like. "Definitely Rainy, less accidents I need to oversee."

He's really looking at us and talking, asking all these questions! This is great! "Snowy for me, I love building snowmen, though I haven't gone sledding since I was a kid. But some of my best- and worst - memories are from during winter." He smiled faintly, sipping from his coffee mug, losing himself in thought for a moment.

Eren nodded, thinking about a few things. "Have you ever had a surprise party?" He asked quietly, his eyes a bit downcast, guilt clearly across his face as Lathe lost himself in thought. I didn't mean to make him remember.

Lathe nodded. "The group threw me one my senior year in high school for my birthday..." He smiled, his gaze faraway, looking past the coffee in his mug. "It was really well thought out, and everyone had a great time... But I'm more of the kind of guy to plan out the surprise parties."
Eren sighed looking down at his plate and pushing it forward, not wanting to eat it anymore. "Umm... Can you juggle? Or solve a Rubix Cube?" He asked softly, his eyes looking down at his hands in his lap, his self-esteem starting to drop as Lathe continued to stare almost blankly back at him. I didn't mean of you to remember, I'm sorry... I know you don't want to think about it.

Lathe! Put yourself together... Eren's stopped eating already! She kicked him under the table to get him back to reality. "I know I can't do either of those things, how about you Lathe? Can you juggle or solve a rubix cube?" I know you're listening to me now, so I repeated what he asked, make it look like you were listening to him or he'll close in on himself! Dammit!

Lathe winced minutely as Spades kicked him, nodding and trying his best to look and be present. "Yeah, I can juggle up to five things at a time, my record was eight in the air one time I remember, and I used to solve rubix cubes insanely fast, but it's been awhile. Pretty sure I still could, though." Stop thinking about it... you can't wander off and shut him down now, Eren's been doing so well...

Eren looked up to him, a little more hopeful that he had answered. "A-Are you a good a-actor?" His voice was small, his body curled up into a ball, his plate still pushed into the center area of the table, food uneaten on it. I... I didn't mean it... I promise...

I'm fine. For an unseeable instant, Lathe's eyes were flooded with pain, remembering the broken hand he couldn't either afford to have set or have his mother notice, the dozen markets and shops he was banned from for stealing food from in a fit of desperation, hypothermia in winter on top of the hunger that never went away, his collapse on the sidewalk senior year the eve before Christmas and his utter resignation that that was how he dies, trying to pry someone he at that moment couldn't recognize off of him until he blacked out, saying 'I'm fine, I'm fine...' ...but an old switch flipped. Lathe shrugged, giving Eren a warm grin and standing to help with the rest of the dishes. "I know I'm a horrible actor, I can't hide my emotions very well, but I guess that's okay..."

Spades sighed softly, helping to clean up the dishes. "I know I'm a horrible actor, I can't hide my emotions very well, but I guess that's okay..." No Eren, don't close up again...

Spades smiled softly. "Eren it's okay to ask questions, we're here to answer for you." Come on... Open back up to us.

Eren visibly swallowed before looking back at the two of them. "H-have you e-ever had a-an egg... Fresh from the c-chicken... For breakfast?" His voice small as he finished off his bomb reaching for the last one on his plate. They're really good, from what I remember.

Lathe nodded, moving to wash his own dishes at the sink. "A few times, yeah. They're really good if they're that fresh."... it's too bad you stole all of them... Lathe handed his dishes to Spades, who started to dry them, his expression one of practiced ease.
Spades was surprised at Lathe's answer but shrugged it off as Eren brought up his plate, taking it and washing that as well, a soft smile on her face. "I've never had the pleasure of having fresh eggs." Who knows, maybe Eren will beg Lathe to get a chicken.

Eren looked at the kitchen table as he stood behind the two of them, finally seeing the mark on Lathe's neck. "Dad... What's that mark on your neck?" He asked, completely oblivious to the fact that Spades and Lathe had gone a step beyond kissing. Why does it look like a bruise? Where would you have gotten a bruise there from?

Lathe's act was forgotten in an instant, his eyes widening a fraction as he felt Eren staring at his neck, reaching up subconsciously to the fading mark and blushing furiously, looking to Spades, lost for any words. "Uhm... Dammit. His voice was small as he looked back to Eren, wearing a sheepish expression. "...i-it's kinda called a hickey..." . .awk-ward...

So.... Spades is really gonna be my Mom? Eren's face lit up with excitement, moving to wrap his arms around Spades waist and giggle as he hugged her from behind. "Mom..." He said softly and put his cheek against her back so he looked back at Lathe, still holding onto Spades. "Have you ever planned or built your own dream house?" He asked, his eyes filled with happiness. So I have a Mom again? Since Lathe has only been with Spades....

... He's hugging me... And giggling... So he's happy then? Spades' heart melted at the sound of Eren's childish giggle, a large smile creeping across her face as she looked to Lathe. I've gained his approval, that's good at least. He probably thinks I'll become Mom for him, which I wouldn't mind in the least... But Lathe would have to do something about that... Hmm... I wouldn't mind being a Mom... Spades finished up with the dishes, leaving Eren's arms around her. "I have not thought about a dream house, but I know if I had one I'd have a theater room, with those cool recliner chairs."

Lathe watched as Eren's expression became one of excitement, clinging to Spades and looking to him with happy eyes. He looked to Spades as she smiled, a thought passing through his head, drowning out everything else in his mind. ...I kinda want to marry you... Lathe smiled, suddenly feeling the overwhelming urge to kiss her, stepping forward to peck her lips sweetly. He spoke after he pulled back, the new question bouncing around in his head. "No, I haven't really given it too much thought." ...that's actually a really good idea. It's a bit crowded with the four of us here, and if... if we ever have kids running around the house... He blushed at the idea, putting the rest of the dishes away. ... don't get too far ahead of yourself... whether they're yours or Eren and Levi's... someone has to get married first. ...and the idea sounds more and more appealing every time I think of it...

The realtor opened up the house, the door swinging open into the dreary surroundings. "This is it... A bunch of broken furniture... I believe it's been on the market for awhile, but no one wants it because it was the scene of an investigation for a crime." He clicked on a flashlight and looked around the house, still the same as when they had left it two years ago. "If I may ask... What do you plan to do with the house when you buy the property?" He asked, carefully stepping around the debris of broken furniture and broken bottles.

"Knock it down." Lathe looked around the familiarly barren house, scanning the rooms for anything important, a large cardboard box in hand. "It's old, and there's not much here really to
salvage. Build from the ground up. There's tons of land around it up for sale as well, so there'll be plenty to work with." Lathe stepped in behind him, the door shutting behind him. Still as awful as I remember it... but there's still a bunch of Eren's stuff upstairs we never took when we left. I need to take all that.

The man followed Lathe as he walked through the house, and up the stairs. "If you're going to knock it down... Why are we looking through the house?" I don't understand this man... He just wants to knock it down... So why are we going through the trashed house?

Lathe entered Eren's old room and was about to speak as he heard a crunch underfoot, looking down and bending over, picking up a pair of busted glasses. He looked through the lenses, seeing how strong the prescription was. ...he needed glasses, and didn't tell me? He turned to the realtor, looking to him with a deadpan expression. "This is why." He set them on the desk. "I adopted the kid who used to live here. I want to get all the stuff we couldn't when we left." He set down the box on the bed, opening the blinds and starting to gather up all the drawings from the floor, the walls, the drawers. He began filling the huge box with books from the bookshelf, speaking. "So yeah, I'll take the house. That I know for sure." He watched as a picture fluttered out from one of the books, picking it up from the floor, his breath catching in his throat as he studied it. Eren, no more than two or three, held in the arms of a woman who looked strikingly like him, beaming to the camera as Eren giggled and clung to her. ...that's his mom. They look so much alike... Lathe carefully set the picture in the front cover of a hardcover novel, protecting it before he set it in the box. "I-I'm sorry, there's a lot in here to get together..." I want to do a good job, get all this stuff home...

Oh... I see. That's why he came up here. "No no, take your time, I'll get the paperwork together by the car for the the property." He told him, leaving quietly down the stairs and out the barren house, doing as he said he would and getting the paperwork together, informing the bank that there was someone taking the house.

Lathe watched the man leave, sighing heavily and packing up everything that was left of Eren's room, not missing a single book or piece of paper, finding everything on top of the tall dresser or hidden in the mattress, not bothering to look anywhere else as he came downstairs with the heavy box, ready to be done with the house, and to sign whatever papers the realtor had for him. It wasn't very long until he parked the car at the side of the road on Trost, his green scarf still wound around his neck as he stepped back into the autumn air. He waved as he passed the pharmacy, Casper and James visible behind the counter and grinning to him as he walked by, turning back to look down the street, seeing the small corner grocery store a few doors down, looking in the windows he passed as he walked. He stopped and stepped to the side, out of the way of foot traffic as he saw a display of rings glinting back at him, thinking. ...I want to marry her. Lathe had a bright light in his eyes as he stepped to the door, walking inside. He left a while later, waiting the only thing left to do before the custom ring was finished. His step never felt lighter as he did the grocery shopping, going home and setting the grocery bags and the large box on the kitchen table, going upstairs to find Eren and show him his busted frames. "Eren, I didn't know you needed glasses! Why didn't you tell me?" How have you managed with such awful vision?

Huh? Eren looked up from his drawing, turning off the recording. He glanced over to Lathe, seeing him holding his busted glasses. "Umm... I've... I've been managing." Eren told him looked back towards the computer, enjoying the clearer image in front of him. "I... I didn't want you to be mad at me... Cause I didn't know where I left them." He told him honestly, his cheeks tinted red from embarrassment. I figured you'd be mad that I would need new ones...
Lathe set the glasses down on the table next to him, sitting on the chair next to Eren and pulling him into a sideways hug, smiling warmly. "Come on Eren, you know I'm not capable of anger. Especially when it's you. And they're glasses, you need them to see! So, even though that's a really cool drawing you've got going on, you're stopping and coming with me. We're getting you to the eye doctor." Lathe stood, lightly tugging on Eren's sleeve. "Come on, this is important! You're really straining your eyes...

... Well, at least he's not mad. Eren let Lathe tug him downstairs and slipped on his metal-toed boots, and his large dark green jacket that Lathe got him a little while ago. He followed him out to the car, shivering as the cold air hit him full force. "Why's it gotta be so cold! It's the second week of September!" He whined, waiting for Blake to hop into the car before he hopped in as well. Too fucking freezing... But being able to see would be really nice... I wouldn't need to copy Armin's notes in class anymore...

Lathe shrugged, tugging on his thick scarf and sliding into the driver's seat, starting the car. He suddenly froze, looking over to him. "Last time you checked, what was your prescription?"

Eren thought about it for a few seconds, scratching his head trying to think. "I think 4.25 and 5.75..." He trailed off not sounding to sure about that. I think that's what it was... But I don't remember.... My Dad was furious that I needed them, I remember as much.

Lathe just leaned his head in his hands, his voice small and shaky. "...how the hell could I let you drive... and you had Armin in the car too... how could you think driving blind was a good idea?" ... losing Viola was bad enough... if you hadn't asked that question and I didn't go through to find your glasses, and you drove again...

Well... I learned to drive blind... So I figured it was okay. "Umm... I took my drivers test like this, and I've been driving fine, it doesn't really bother me anymore, cause I can tell where things are, cause the colors are different...

Lathe cleared his throat and pulled himself together quickly, starting towards the optometrist on Trost Street. "Well, you're going to have to learn to drive not-blind. You being able to see details at longer distances can mean you don't hit a deer or can avoid debris, or notice something about to happen that you need to be careful of." It was barely five minutes before the car was parked outside the optometrist, Lathe shutting off the car and getting out, his hair getting in his eyes from the breeze. He held the door open for Eren and Blake, leading them up to the receptionists' desk.

The receptionist smiled at the two of them as they came in. "Hi! Welcome to Trost Optical! My name's Krista. How can I help you?" The small blonde with baby blue eyes greeted them with a cheery smile.

Eren looked up to Lathe, not really sure what to tell her as they got closer. I don't know how this goes... I haven't had my eyes checked since we moved... And that was years ago... With... Him...

Eren shivered at the thought, Blake whining until Eren bent down to pet him and calm himself down.

Lathe glanced worriedly to Eren for a moment, before looking back to Krista. "My son Eren here
needs an eye exam. We don’t have an appointment, but we can wait for the next available spot or make one now if we need to. He really needs glasses.” Or contacts. Glasses might get in the way. We could get him a pair and keep them as backups if he wants. I’ll ask him in a second.

Krista clicked a few times on her computer. “We actually don’t have anyone scheduled right now, so I can slide him in now, if that works?” She asked sweetly pulling out a few books and papers. “Does Eren have a file with us?” She asked, getting ready to pull a few sheets out for Lathe to sign while Eren sat down on the floor, and let Blake lick his face.

Lathe furrowed his brow. “Actually, I don’t know...” He looked to Eren on the floor next to him, chuckling at the sight. “Eren, do you remember coming here before?” I dunno where you got your first glasses...

Eren thought about it for awhile before nodding. “Y-yeah... Umm... H-He brought m-me.” Eren stuttered his eyes downcast, Blake whining and licking his face. He was really mad that he had to bring me here...

Lathe gave him a sympathetic look, leaning down a bit to gently ruffle his hair before looking back up to Krista. “That’s a yes, then. Eren Jaeger, spelled E-r-e-n Y-e-a-g-e-r.” ... at least you don’t have to worry about him anymore.

Krista nodded and typed in the information. “Okay, Eren’s six years over due for a check up... And he lives at 104 Rose Wall Ave. So you must be his father, Mr. Grisha Yeager?” She asked to make sure all the information was correct.

Eren froze when his father’s name was said, Blake continuing to whine as Eren clung to him. Eren’s eyes were wide and full of fear as he looked up to Lathe.

Is he here? Is he gonna hurt me?

I’m not that piece of shit. Lathe suddenly looked down to Eren as he stared up to him terrified. Fuck . He got down next to Eren, pulling him into a hug and carding a hand through his hair, his low voice soothing in his ear. He glanced up as Krista peered over the edge of the desk confusedly until she registered Blake, the look in her eyes apologetic after an instant. Lathe spoke quietly. "N-no, I recently adopted Eren... a lot has changed... could you just give me whatever forms I need to fill out for all the new information?" I can’t exactly get up right now... A clipboard works if us sitting here for a second until I get him calm and into a chair in the waiting room is okay...

Krista nodded, printing out a few papers and coming around the desk and giving Lathe the clipboard. "I'm sorry..." She apologized quietly, though she backed up when Eren's grip tightened on Blake and Lathe.

Eren's grip tightened on Lathe as Krista got closer to him, though he was starting to calm down as Lathe held him and talked calmly in his ear. Blake continued to lick his face to keep him calm, which was definitely helping to get him calmed down again.

Lathe nodded, taking the clipboard with his right hand and giving her a look that it was alright before he turned back to Eren, his voice still a calm murmur. "It's alright Eren... how about we go sit in the waiting room? It'll be more comfortable than the floor.” Lathe rubbed his arm with his thumb, thankful that Eren was calming rather quickly.

Eren looked to him and nodded, using Lathe to help get into his feet, and able to walk to the waiting room and sit down next to Lathe. He's not here, you need to calm down... I really need to calm down. Eren sat down, hunching over his knees, petting Blake to help calm him down.
completely, Lathe's arm a grounding weight over his shoulders. It was only a few minutes until the doctor came to take him back and they went to a back room with Blake at Eren's side.

Krista came up to Lathe after that. "I'm sorry, I really didn't mean to bring up something that would do that to him, will he be alright?" She asked softly, her hands out to take the completed papers to put them into Eren's file.

Lathe handed her the clipboard, a weary smile on his face. "It's okay, you wouldn't have known. And yeah, he'll be okay. He just needed a bit to calm down, but he's fine."

Meanwhile, an optometrist was handing Eren a plastic eye cover, a projector showing large letters on the opposite wall. "Alright Eren, cover your left eye for me and read the line of letters."

Wait... That paper thing over there has letters on it? "I... I um... Can't read any of them... It's just white...with some black blurs in a line..." He told the doctor honestly removing the cup and looking to the chart again, this time the lines a little darker black instead of the blur, but he still couldn't read any of the letters. Is... Is this normal?

...Seriously? The optometrist nodded, moving instead to the machine next to Eren, moving a large set of interchangeable lenses in front of him and starting him on a -6.00 in each eye. He moved so he could see the chart. "Is that any help?"

"A...a little... I can see the b-black lines now." He told the man and continued to pet Blake to calm himself down. Is it bad that I can't see it? What is he trying to get me to read?

He nodded, adding more lenses to bring him up to a -7.50 in each eye. "Any letters yet?"

*I think I can see that...* "Is that letter a C? Or a G?" He asked, his gaze focusing on the first letter on the second line. *I think it's a C.... But I can't tell.*

"Here, let's try this. We'll just work on your right eye." The optometrist blacked out the left eye, bringing the right up to an -8.00. "Is that still blurry?"

"Um... A little but not too much. It's a G..." Eren told him and continued to pet Blake still a little on edge from before. *Am I really that blind? I wonder how blind I am... Actually, I don't want to know because Lathe'll probably kill me for driving while I'm blind...*

The optometrist turned a dial, switching slowly between -8.25 and -7.75. "Which is better? This first one? Or the second one?"

"The second one, that one's a lot better." He had a smile on his face, actually being able to see something far away for the first time in two and a half years. *It's so cool...*

The optometrist gave him a small smile. "Alright, is that perfectly clear then?" He blacked out that eye as Eren nodded, switching to the left and bringing that up to a -8.00. "Better at all?"

"It's still kinda blurry..." He told him honestly, trying not to squint to see what the letters were since the doctor made them smaller so he could read them. *So I'll be able to see after this?*

The man again turned a dial, switching between a stronger and weaker view. "The first or the second one? Which is clearer?"

"The first one." Eren said with a large smile on his face. *I can see!!*
The man nodded, letting Eren see through both eyes and changing the projection to small letters. "Read the bottom line for me if you can, Eren."

"Z-R-T-C-U-G-A-Y" Eren said happily, getting all the letters right without skipping a beat. "I can see!" He said happily, a huge smile on his face, as he giggled happily. I can see! I'll be able to see the board in school! Cool!

The optometrist couldn't help but beam, sitting down at the computer to type his prescription for glasses in quickly, speaking over his shoulder to him. "Alright Eren, that seems to be the best script for your eyes. Have you thought at all about whether you're going to get contact lenses?" We'll need to measure your eye if you do plan on getting them.

"Um... I think contacts would work... But, I really want glasses too." Eren told him, looking down, as if he would be told he wouldn't be getting glasses. I kinda really want the glasses... Will Dad let me get them too? I hope so.

"Well, nearly all people who get contacts keep a spare pair of glasses at home for backups, in case they run out of contacts or decide to leave them out for a day. We actually recommend you keep a spare pair of glasses around. It's your choice, so if you do want contacts and glasses we can do that."

"O-Okay..." Eren stuttered but nodded all the same. "That sounds good." Eren still sat in the chair, not wanting to move until the man wanted him to do so. I don't want him to be angry at me though, I hope it's okay.

The man pulled up a new screen, standing from his stool and moving the large glasses from in front of him. "Alright, just come with me for a moment, Eren, right this way." He led Eren down two doors and had him sit in a chair, a machine sitting on a table in front of him. "Alright, just rest your chin on this stand and rest your forehead against the top bar. Look straight ahead for me."

Eren rose from the chair and followed the man into the next room, sitting and looking ahead as the man turned on the machine, a small barn slowly coming into and out of focus. What? Why am I looking at a barn? Why does it look so weird? Where are the animals? ...I kinda miss the animals from back home...

The man read from the small screen, a small slip printing into his hand. He skimmed it, turning to a large cabinet full of organized contact lenses in all strengths and brands. He picked out two boxes near the very top, reading the sides of them and handing them to Eren. "We have your prescription on hand, as we do for every script available, but since you need something so strong it's rare they do anything besides sit around until they expire, so we can give you these."

Eren nodded, taking the contacts from him and going towards a mirror. He struggled to get the first contact in after nearly dropping it on the floor a thousand times, but after a few tries he finally got it down and moved to the next one to put it in his eyes and he looked around the room, his eyes wide as everything was finally put into perspective, and clearer than it had been in a long time. Everything is so clear.... It's awesome!

The optometrist smiled to him, closing the boxes and throwing away the small plastic containers
from the lenses. He grabbed a box with contact lens solution and a lens case in it, handing it to Eren. "Alright, I'll explain what everything in this box is when we get out front, so your father can hear all this too." He led him out front, Lathe coming over to them from the waiting room.

Lathe looked to Eren and grinned, his voice warm. "So, how'd it go?" He's holding a box of contact stuff... is he wearing them now, or...?

Eren's focus turned to Lathe and he stopped in his tracks, taking in Lathe's whole features, his eyes widening more as he stared at him, not sure what to do. "So... that's what you look like...." Eren's words barely more than a whisper as he took in every inch of his features. I can finally see him...

Lathe's face became blank, staring back to Eren, his voice small. "...you... you didn't know what I looked like?" It's been two years and you... didn't know? Lathe swallowed hard, stepping forward and pulling Eren into a crushing hug, one hand tangled in his hair, trying not to cry into his shoulder. ...I'm just glad you can see now... that's what's important.

"No... um... I-I'm sorry... I was scared to tell you at first.... and I just figured out how to get around it... and then..." Eren started to sob as Lathe pulled him into a hug. I wasn't sure that you wouldn't be mad at me...

Lathe let out a shuddery breath as he held onto Eren, trying hard to keep himself composed and brushing a single tear away from his eye. He smiled, light dancing in his eyes. "I'm just happy you'll be able to see everything clearly now. How strong of a script did you end up needing?" If you didn't know how I looked... probably pretty damn strong.

The optometrist spoke for Eren. "He needed a -7.75 in the right eye, and a -8.25 in his left. He's very near-sighted, and everything more than a foot or two away from his face is blurry." It's terrible vision- most people don't need anything much stronger than a -5.00.

Lathe swallowed. That's fucking terrible vision... His grip on Eren tightened a fraction more, his head dropping onto his shoulder, his voice quiet as he cried. "...how did I let you drive..." You could have gotten killed. You've driven with Armin in the car... and drunk. ...really drunk. ...You could've ended up like... "...you could have ended up like Viola..." I don't want that to happen again... you need to see and I need to make sure you're okay...

...I'm sorry... Eren stopped sobbing and looked up to Lathe, looking at him through teary eyes, but he was finally able to see Lathe's pale face clearly. "...I-I'm sorry..." Eren sniffled and curled up to him. I'm really sorry, don't be mad at me please...

Lathe murmured into his ear soothingly, trying to stop the tears from falling down his ashen skin, composing himself. "I-It's okay, Eren. You can see now, and that's what matters." Lathe pulled back from him after a long moment, wearily smiling. "So, you've got contacts- I'm guessing you need backup glasses too. And did he give you the spiel, or...?" Lathe tapped the box of fluid Eren was still holding. "These are a big responsibility, you know. You need to take good care of your eyes."

"Okay..." Eren trailed off and shook his head turning to face the optometrist. "No... Not yet." He murmured and rubbed his eyes to get the tears away.

The optometrist smiled softly. "Okay, so these are a big responsibility. You need to clean these gently every day after you take them out, always wash your hands when you handle them or touch
your eyes. When you wash them you put a bit of the solution in your hand and gently rub the contact with some more solution. When you put them away, put them in the case that I gave you and make sure that there is enough solution in each side of the case that the contacts float in it." He smiled when Eren nodded in understanding. "Good, now you can pick out some frames, and we'll order them."

Eren nodded, going around and soon finding some frames that he liked and putting them on to show Lathe. "How do these look?" He asked putting on thick black frames which fit nicely on his face. *I hope he likes them.* His tears had since dried and Eren had a hopeful look in his eyes.

Lathe grinned, studying how he looked with the frames on. "Those look really good on you, Eren. But that's just me. Don't go too fast picking out some frames; keep looking I'd you see something better. But I'd say that's a definite maybe." They do look really good on you.

Eren nodded and went around the room for a few more minutes, before coming back with the same frames in hand. "I like these ones." Eren told him, holding them close, the thick black frames, which were relatively cheap compared to other frames. *I like these ones... And they aren't that expensive either...*

Lathe nodded, smiling warmly. "They do look good on you. You can get those, of course."

Eren smiled and nodded. "I'll get these ones then." He held them out to the man standing there with them and looked over to Lathe. "Ummm... What do we do now?" Eren asked quietly, shuffling his feet under him, his eyes meeting Lathe’s for a few seconds. *What do we do now?*

The optometrist took the frames, inspecting them and nodding. "Alright, you guys are set for now, try out the contacts see if you like that brand before we do anything else, we’ll call you when everything is in, then we’ll have you pay for everything. So you guys are all set for now.” He told them with a soft smile on his face.

Lathe thanked him, shaking his hand before turning to Eren as they moved to leave. “Alright then, it’s time for lunch. How about we walk down Trost, see if there’s a place that looks good?” He led Eren out the door, walking past their car and ambling down the street, stopping in front of the pharmacy and looking through the window to the back counter, waving to catch Casper’s attention. {Hey Casper! How’s life going?}

Casper looked up as he saw furious waving in his peripheral, waving back. {Fan-fucking-tastic! How about you?} He smiled more as Eren poked his head from behind Lathe’s shoulder. {Sup’ Little Shit?}

Eren’s eyes narrowed as he watched Casper’s hands move, lifting his own hand with the bird flipped, continually glaring at him until he saw Casper double over in laughter.

Lathe laughed, signing once Casper was looking back up to him. {Are you seriously just going to call him Little Shit now? Is that now a thing?} *That does sound like something you would do.*
Casper nodded. {Oh yeah! That is so a thing now! So what’s up? Just walking up and down Trost for the hell of it? Or are you looking for something for a date? I know you got one! Spades has been raving about it all day.} Casper had a huge smile on his face as he signed quickly.

Lathe shook his head, a pink dusting over his cheeks. {No, I already know where we’re going. But yeah, that’s a thing that’s happening tonight. But we’re looking for someplace nice for lunch. Eren can finally see now, we’re hungry, and I don't want to cook today.} Why does literally everyone in our group ship us so much? ...if Casper is this enthusiastic, I don't even want to know what’s going through Scotty’s head...

Oh, that’s too perfect… Wait… What? {Eren can see now? What’d the fuck you do to his eyes now?} Casper rolled his eyes as James shouted at him for swearing. I can swear as much as I fucking want!

“Why are you swearing?”

“He made me!” Casper instantly pointed to Lathe through the front window.

James walked down the hall to look at who Casper was pointing to, his eyes landing on a waving Lathe. “Oh no, not this fucker again.”

Lathe read his lips, instantly raising his arms wide, jokingly speaking loudly. “You wanna go, bro? Cause it looks like you want to.” He straightened himself up as Eren shuffled even further behind him.

Eren watched the new figure come into view on the other side of the glass. Who’s that? Will they be mad at me… Wait. Why does he want to fight Dad? Eren’s grip on Lathe’s shirt tightened as he slowly peeked over his shoulder. Blake whined, starting to paw at Lathe's pants in a hope to get him to calm Eren down.

Casper watched as Lathe straightened up, hiding Eren completely from view. Wait… He never straightens himself out… something’s up… What is it?.... Eren ...he looks terrified. “James, don’t be a threatening asshole, you’re probably scaring Eren.” He informed him and nodded to the brown mop of hair as it slowly became visible over Lathe’s shoulder before disappearing in only a second.
James looked towards Lathe, at his full height. “Well shit… who pissed in his cereal this morning?” He slowly moved towards the counter in full view.

Casper glared at James, and shoved him a bit. “I said ‘You’re probably scaring Eren! The Little Shit’s clinging to Lathe like his life depends on it.’ His glare didn’t lift as he crossed his arms. It’s probably because Lathe spoke so loudly as soon as James was visible.

He looked back at the door, finally seeing Eren’s mop of brown hair before it disappeared in an instant. “Sorry… I didn’t mean to frighten him… also… why doesn’t he just come in like a normal human being?”

Lathe moved forward and pushed open the door, Eren still right behind him as he locked eyes with James and spoke. “Hey, this {fucker} can read your lips, ya know.” Lathe signed the swear, still at full height as the door swung shut behind them, looking behind him to Eren. “It’s okay, Eren, don’t you worry. James was just being mean again. But he’s cool. ...come on, Eren.” Lathe let Eren cling to his arm, bringing him a bit more into view as he slowly approached the counter, still a bit wary of James as he recognised how scared Eren was of him. He’s cool. But letting Eren know that no matter what he’s okay is more important than my being chill.

Eren slowly moved from behind Lathe to his side as they got to the counter. Why are we here? Isn't this the drugstore?... I think I came here with Armin, to get my morphine... Eren swallowed as he saw Casper's dark purple hair, the features of his face finally visible and he stared at him in curiosity, his eyes wide as he took everything in.

Casper raised an eyebrow as Eren stared at him. Okay, that's a little unnerving... Why the fuck is he staring at me like I'm something he's never seen before? He's seen me before! Many times!
"What's up with you, Little Shit? Why're you staring?"

James sighed, smacking his arm. "Is that really any way to talk to him?" Really, how much of a child can you possibly be?

Eren snapped out of his trance, raising his middle finger at Casper. "Sorry... you look... different..." Much different than what I expected you to look like.

What the hell is he talking about? What I 'look 'like? You've seen me before though! You literally cannot mistake my hair for anyone else's! Casper turned a questioning gaze to Lathe. You did say something about Eren being able to see now... enlighten me.

Lathe nudged Eren's side gently with his elbow as Eren's other hand still clung to his arm. Even though Casper pretty much deserved that... ...honestly though, I can only see this being normal between the two of them. "So, apparently Eren's needed glasses for a really long time and never told me. He lost his old pair and never mentioned that he couldn't see for shit for more than two years, until I found the old pair when I accidentally stepped on them. He didn't even know what I'd looked like this entire time! He's around a -8.00. It's that bad. But we just got him contacts, which he's currently wearing, and ordered him glasses, so don't be suspicious that he's staring. He didn't
know what you looked like, probably besides being the blob with the purple blob on top."

Eren nodded, slowly feeling comfortable enough to let go of Lathe and look around the pharmacy for the first time and he wandered a bit, Blake at his heels.

James watched him look around and shrugged. "You must look so weird to him Casper." I mean really, purple hair?

Casper shrugged. "He probably thinks everything looks weird, not being able to see in two years... And something has me believing that he hasn't been able to see for longer than that." He shrugged, Eren had finally disappeared from their view, presumably looking around. "So... He couldn't even see you?"

Lathe shook his head, letting Eren wander around the short aisles. “Nope. He had his contacts in when he came out of the back rooms in the optometrists’ place, and just stared at me like ‘that’s what you look like.’ I can't believe it was that bad! And he’s been doing so well in all his classes without even being able to see the damn board! I don't get it.”

Casper nodded. “Wasn’t he driving too?” God, I can only imagine how you'd take that... Especially after Viola.

Eren wandered silently through the aisles, managing to slip past all three of them without notice as he stared at everything. Many colorful bottles of high-strength opioids lining the shelves, his eyes set on the magenta bottles in front of him. That’s morphine... Hmm... Eren continued to look around, finding more of the magenta pills on a counter, obviously in the process of being counted. He reached his hand out on instinct and picked up a small pill.

A pencil whizzed through the air towards his hand, knocking the pill out of his grasp before skittering off under a shelf. “Eren! What’re you doing?” Lathe looked to him with wide eyes, worry and disbelief flitting past. How the hell did you get back there and we didn't even fucking notice?!

Eren gasped sharply, jumping back a bit in surprise as Lathe stared him down. “Is... Is that what morphine looks like?” His voice was small as he spoke, slowly coming closer towards them and out from behind the back counters. I was just curious.

Casper’s eyes widened and he straightened himself, moving to herd Eren out of the back area. “Come on, Little Shit, you need to stay out here, not back there.” That could’ve gotten dangerous really quickly.... I don’t think the local hospital has Narcan... He could’ve overdosed with just a few pills.

Lathe gently tugged Eren by his sleeve back over next to him, not letting go, his voice worried yet gentle. “Yeah, that’s what morphine looks like, but that’s not for you. You can't just try to take
medicine if it’s just laying around. And there was a sign on the door- don’t try and go back there anymore, okay?” That’s not a good idea, to let you just chill back there...

Eren let Lathe pull him close, nodding as he curled up to his side. “Okay.” He murmured quietly, looking around the room from the safety of his arms. Everything looks so clear… Is so cool.

Casper looked at Eren and shook his head. “Eren, you realize that if you took those pills… Any more than three would’ve killed you, the hospitals around here don’t have Narcan yet, we never would’ve been able to pull you out of that, do you understand?” He asked, holding James back from screaming at the kid. H’ll scare the hell out of Eren, maybe even give him a panic attack…. Can’t have that happen.

Eren looked up to Casper as he spoke. So they we worried I would take it? Eren nodded and shuffled behind Lathe as he saw the glare on James’ face. He’s angry at me…. No, I don’t want to get hit. Eren’s hand gripped Lathe’s shirt as he tried to hide himself, Blake starting to whine as he started to panic about it.

Lathe wrapped his arms around Eren protectively, shooting James a look. “Chill out, James, he’s already terrified of you.” He understands, you don't have to glare at him like he broke twenty laws and murdered your dog. Calm the fuck down. He tucked Eren’s head under his chin, speaking and trying to change the subject a bit. “But yeah, he was driving without anything correcting his vision. I wouldn't've let him if I knew. The good thing though is that it’s possible to correct it, and he has glasses on the way as well as contacts in right now. It’ll probably take awhile for him to stop looking at everything with awe.” He gave them a small smirk for an instant, though it disappeared as most of his attention went back to Eren, rubbing his arm with his thumb lightly. James better not lose his head… No more panic, please...

You need to calm down, Dad’s here… He’ll protect me. Eren buried his face in Lathe’s neck, taking in a few deep breathes to calm himself down. I don’t want him to be angry…. He’s angry at me… He’s gonna hit me. Eren’s hand shakily found Lathe’s and started to move his fingers to sign on them. {Can we go?} Eren was scared, and didn’t want to stay in the same place as James anymore.

Lathe nodded, looking up to Casper and speaking, his arms moving back around him. “We’re gonna get going. We could both do with something to eat, and you two are on the clock.” He sent a quick glare to James before he shrugged to the both of them. “See you two around, I guess.” He let Eren cling to his arm as they left, leading him down the street and past small shops. “Sorry about James, he can be kinda intense sometimes. Got a bit of a temper.” He skimmed the signs. “See some place that looks good, Eren? It’s your choice.” All these places look alright for lunch, really. But that’s me, and I’m not a picky eater.
Eren stopped in his tracks as soon as he saw something through the bakery window. *What are those? They look really good.* Eren kept his eyes trained on a fresh batch of cinnamon rolls before looking to Lathe with questioning eyes. *What... Are those magnificent things?*

Lathe stopped as soon as Eren did, looking in the bakery window and following Eren’s sight. *Those look really good...* He watched as Eren looked at him quizzically, grinning. “Eren, those there that you're staring at-” He pointed to the tray. “… *those* are cinnamon rolls.” *As in, the things you can't stop eating when I make them.*

Eren’s smile widened. “I want one.” His voice was quiet though a he continued to stare through the window, not really sure about how he would get to the cinnamon rolls, but now his interest was piqued.

Lathe chuckled, tugging Eren along, whose arm was still hooked around his. “Then we can get cinnamon rolls for lunch if you really want. That's a thing we can do.” He nodded to the door, leading him inside. He grinned widely as he recognised the person behind the counter. “Hey Marco! Long time no see!”

“Mr. Quo... You substituted my PE class yesterday... We literally just tried to punch each other all class.” He told him, his voice soft and his smile kind as he saw Eren by his side, still holding onto his arm and Blake agitated on the floor. *Is he having a panic attack? Or did he have one?... Wait, why is he staring at me?*

“Yep!” Lathe chirped brightly, looking over everything in the case at the front. “Well, I wouldn’t just say that … I'd say you were learning how to properly defend yourselves without a weapon all class. But that’s just me.” He looked to Eren. “See anything specifically you want to try besides the cinnamon rolls?” There’s a lot here that looks really good... But I don’t think you've ever had any of this kind of stuff...

Eren shook his head, but kept his eyes on Marco as he brought up a few suggestions, never leaving his face. *He’s got freckles! He looks cute!*

Lathe nodded, looking back to Marco. “O-Kay!” He noted the slightly uneasy flicker in Marco’s eyes. “Oh, Eren got contacts not even fifteen minutes ago, and he can actually see for the first time in like two years. But let’s see…” He started counting off on his fingers, skimming the labels of the baked goods in the case. “It’s a lot, so be warned- six cinnamon rolls; a dozen croissants, half chocolate; and one of every muffin that you own.” *That sounds just about adequate.*

Marco took the order with disbelief. “Wait... Mr. Quo... That’s thirteen muffins, are you sure that
many?” He asked softly, going to get started on the cinnamon rolls. So Eren’s been blind this whole time? … How is he valedictorian of our class if he’s blind!?

Lathe just looked at him with a blank expression, looking around before speaking. “…and your point is…?” … I want my muffins. Is that a problem?

Marco nodded. “Muffins coming up.” He set a large box with cinnamon rolls on the counter in front of them before he went off to get another box for the croissants as well as a bag for the muffins. He filled both and set them all on the counter. “Alright, Cash or credit?” He asked and got it all set at the register.

“Credit, please.” Lathe handed him his black credit card, taking it and a receipt from him a moment later. “Alright Eren, help me carry all this stuff?” He picked up the box of croissants, the bag of muffins on top.

Eren nodded and grabbed the cinnamon roll box and followed him out. I wanna eat one of these, like... now. “Home?” He asked quietly as they made their way outside, Blake at his heels.

Lathe nodded, balancing the box on one hand as he fished for the keys in his pocket, unlocking the car as they got close. “Home.” He helped Eren situate in the passenger’s side with the many baked goods, driving them the two minutes home and helping Eren get everything inside, setting the boxes on the kitchen table and opening the one of cinnamon rolls first. “You get first pick, kid.” Lathe grinned. They all look way too good…

Hmmm… Eren finally picked up one of the large cinnamon rolls and put it on the plate and sat down to eat it in silence. He seemed to stay quiet, even with Lathe around, and just took everything in. It looks really cool in here…

Lathe got a plate for himself as well, picking on of the cinnamon rolls and sitting across from him, quiet and letting Eren simply look around at everything. He’s going to be so confused as to what everything is, probably. If he didn’t recognise a cinnamon roll, he’s not going to recognise a lot. I’ll let him inspect the house, figure out what everything is. ...I have a feeling he’s going to cry when he sees his mom’s instruments…

Eren finished up his first cinnamon roll, picking up another and taking it with him as he stared at the croissant box. “What the hell are these?” They look sooooo weird, like really weird, what the fuck are they? Are they even edible?
Lathe gasped and placed a hand over his heart dramatically, grinning as he spoke. “Are you insulting the croissants? The wonderful croissants which you **need** to have one of?” *They're awesome.*

Eren nodded. “I’ll eat one after.” He moved towards the cabinets, pulling out random shit. *Literally what is all of this??*

Lathe just shrugged as Eren started to pull the kitchen apart, finishing his cinnamon roll and setting his plate in the sink. He looked to the clock, his brain kicking into overdrive. *Think, it’s about two right now… I need to shower, shave, fret about what I’m wearing… Red of course… Do I have any of my red shirts washed?… Shit.* Lathe went to the staircase quickly, going upstairs and scrutinising his closet. He came back downstairs with a basket full of red laundry, Eren catching his arm and holding up a whisk with an inquisitive look. “…Eren, that’s a whisk.” He watched as Eren simply nodded and continued to stare at the utensil, going back to laundry mode after a second. He left the small hall that led from the piano room to the laundry room and garage, Eren catching him again on his way to the shower, holding up another utensil. “Eren, that’s a potato masher.” He looked into the kitchen, seeing everything on the counters and table. “Can you put all that back after you're done? I really need to get ready for my date tonight.” He continued on his way after Eren nodded, showering quickly and shaving carefully, making sure not to cut himself before scampering back downstairs as the washer buzzed, moving things either into the dryer or onto hangers to air-dry.

Eren cleaned up the kitchen, and was now staring at the Grand Piano in the piano room. *That… That’s mom’s… They weren’t lying to me… I thought they just bought me a bunch of instruments…* But… *This is really Mom’s.* Eren let his fingers gently trace over the dark edges, memories instantly flashing through his head as he looked at the stool in front of it. His Mom sitting with him in front of the beautiful keys, giggling and singing as they played, moving then to when he was older and actually learning the keys instead of just mashing them playfully. He started to cry as he remembered everything that happened. *This piano started it all… This is Mom… She’s here with me again.*

Lathe walked through the piano room with an armful of clean laundry, stopping as he heard and saw Eren sobbing. He understood as he watched Eren stare at the keys, walking over and patting his shoulder.

Eren continued to cry as he gently touched the piano, moving to sit down in front of it, his fingers gently grazing the ivory. “Y—you… Weren’t I-lying…” Eren cried as he gently started to play the first song his mother had taught him. He could almost hear her encouraging him from behind. *It’s really here… but why can’t she be here too?* Eren’s tears continued to fall as he played beautiful and slow music, slowly starting to sing in German, his voice soft and melodic. *I want her back…*

Lathe’s hand fell from his shoulder as Eren sat down to play, standing next to him and listening to the sweet music, watching Eren’s fingers move with practiced ease over the keys. He immediately
had understood what Eren meant. *no, I wasn't.... It's really her piano.*

Eren continued to play beautifully before he started to slow down his playing, his mouth opening again as he steeled his nerves. His voice was deeper than it’d ever been before while he sang his favorite song, the way it was supposed to be sung. His voice was loud, reverberating against the walls, his eyes closed, his fingers slowly moving over the ivory keys. *The way Mom taught me....* Eren continued to sing that familiar song, Der Mond Ist Aufgegangen, in a lower octave than he’d ever sung before. His tears subsided as he finished, a small sad smile on his face. *I really wish you were here.... You’d love Dad... And my new Mom.... You’d like both of them.*

*I've never heard him sing that low... Usually his voice is so much higher.* Lathe listened intently, Eren’s lower voice sweet and unfamiliar. *He still sings so well that low...* He was silent as Eren’s fingers slowed their movement over the keys to a stop, not knowing what else to do besides step a bit closer to the piano bench and rest a hand on his shoulder, his thumb moving over his arm comfortingly. *...she’d be so proud of you, of everything you've done.*

Eren looked up to Lathe as he felt his hand over his arm. He swallowed visibly before moving to get up. “So... What are those croissant-thingies?” Eren asked softly, trying to keep his focus off the piano, so that he wouldn’t break down right then and there. *I need a distraction... I need it...*

*I understand.* Lathe gave him a small smile, his free hand leaving his shoulder as he got up, knowing Eren wanted a distraction from the piano. He led him into the kitchen, his voice quiet and light. “Croissants are this awesome pastry thing- they're flaky, and they taste amazing, and you need to try one.” He opened the top of the box with his free hand. “Some croissants have things baked into them, like these six, which have chocolate chips in them. Or the rest are plain butter; pick whichever you like.” *Either is delicious.*

Eren watched Lathe open the box up and point out the different kinds of pastries. His hand timidly reaching forward and grabbing a butter croissant, staring at it with confusion as it started to flake in his hands. *How the hell do you eat one of these?*

Lathe quirked an eyebrow in amusement as the pastry completely puzzled Eren. “It’s gonna flake, I warned you. It can get kinda messy. But just take a bite out of the end.” Lathe shrugged. *There's kinda only one way to eat a pastry, you don't have to look at it like it's a rubix cube that needs solving, as amusing as seeing that may be.*

Eren continued to look at the flakes on the croissant for a bit longer before taking a bite and his eyes opening up a bit more. *This is really good. I like it.* Eren took another bite and another until he was licking the flakes off of his fingers, not really caring that Lathe was right there while he did it. *I wonder when he'll leave with Spades? I get to see Mom too! Yay!"*
Lathe just shook his head good-naturedly as Eren finished off the pastry quickly, taking a step toward the stairs behind him. “I really need to keep getting ready for tonight. Feel free to on tinge attacking the croissants. We have a lot of them, and they’re not really going anywhere.” He grinned, ruffling Eren’s hair before turning to cross the piano room and ascend the steps, fretting in the mirror over what he wore and how his hair refused to do what he wanted it to. He finally surrendered and let his hair stay as wild as it always was, deciding his dark red dress shirt and black tie, dress pants and polished shoes would do fine. ... would a suit jacket be too much? Probably... I don’t know though... It’s dinner and a movie, I’ll skip the jacket then. He looked to the his door as the doorbell rang, immediately moving to the stairs, his shoes clicking quietly on the floor as he stepped onto the wood, pulling the door open. His warm expression changed to one of awe, his words of greeting dying on his tongue as he took in Spades. ... holy fuck she’s gorgeous.

Spades stood in the doorway, her hair down for a change instead up in a ponytail, letting the long hair fall down her back. Her dark blue sleeveless dress suited her curvy body well and ended at her knees. She smiled as she took in Lathe’s dress outfit. You look handsome... Damn.... Do we have to go out? I kinda just want to strip you now. “Hello, Lathe.” She smiled widely, moving up to kiss his cheek, her arms wrapping around his shoulders as he stared at her still. “You like what you see?” She whispered quietly in his ear, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

Eren came in from the kitchen, slowly padding close to them. His eyes glued to Spades as he finally got to see her for the first time. She’s so pretty.... She looks so beautiful, Dad’s lucky... He seemed to hide a bit by the stairs behind them, watching them as they greeted and kissed. That’s my new Mom? That’s Spades?.... Nice... Eren had a soft smile on his face, but kept his eyes on Spades’ face, taking in her details.

Lathe blushed, his hands going to rest on her waist, his voice quiet against her lips as he turned his head. “Definitely.” He pressed a kiss to her lips, full of quiet fire. He beamed at her after he pulled away, keeping an arm around her waist as he turned to look to Eren at the stairs, smirking. “You have our cellphone numbers, and there’s plenty of food in the kitchen. We’ll be home pretty late, just warning you. Try and get to sleep at a reasonable hour, alright?” Just two minutes, and Spades is all mine for the night.

Eren nodded, still keeping his eyes glued on Spades as he spoke, “Good pick.” He moved his hands up to give Lathe two thumbs up before scurrying up the stairs and into his room, Blake following him up the stairs.

Spades watched him leave quickly with furrowed eyebrows. “What was that all about exactly?” Her arm pulling on his to take him outside. I wanna go so I can get you home sooner.... If that’s even possible.
Spades stepped into his black car, her eyes wide. *He… He couldn’t see anyone.* “Wait… How could he even drive? Let alone drunk… How the hell could he drive?!?!” Her voice raised a bit as she buckled in. *I can only imagine what you felt like when you found out… How bad are his eyes? If he’s just seeing me for the first time.* “Did he… Did he see you for the first time?”

Lathe slid into the driver's side of the car, shutting the door and shrugging before he nodded. “I taught him to drive while he couldn't see, so I guess he just got really good at driving blind while at least I was in the car with him to help guide him… And yeah… He came out of the back room of the optometrist with the contacts in and just stared at me, and he even said ‘that's what you look like.’” Lathe buckled in, looking over to Spades. *I don’t get it… But he managed, and he’s okay now, and that’s what matters.*

Spades nodded, letting him drive. *I can only imagine how broken you felt after that…* “So you’re going to have to teach him to drive all over again aren’t you? Think he’ll be alright in the house by himself?” Her voice was soft as she looked out the window, her left hand coming up to her hair, her fingers twirling with the long locks. *So that was the first time he saw me?*

Lathe nodded, keeping his eyes on the road ahead. “Yeah, I need to teach him driving all over again. And he’ll be okay by himself, it’s not like we’re leaving him alone for a week. And he has our cell numbers and Blake with him. He’ll be fine.” It wasn't a very long drive until they reached a small, fancy restaurant as they got a bit further into the city, parking the car and slipping out, smoothly moving to open the car door for Spades.

Spades smiled as she stepped out, her heels clicking on the concrete underfoot. *Italian… Nice choice.* She hummed, hooking their arms together as they walked towards the door, smiling as they were welcomed with warm air rushing by. *Italian… Hmm, seafood and pasta, probably red wine, that’s a great start to the date.*

Lathe beamed as they entered, making their way to the hostess stand, his eyes bright as he spoke. “Reservations for Quo?” He followed the woman at the stand as she nodded and led them further into the restaurant, setting menus at both of their places and leaving to send over a server. He unlinked their arms as they reached the table, pulling out Spades’ chair for her before sitting opposite her, looking up over the small candle that flickered in the middle of the table.

Spades smiled as she sat down, looking up to meet Lathe’s gaze. The two of them talked quietly as
they waited for their server, finally ordering after a few minutes and wine being brought out for the two of them. She had a smile on her face the entire time they were at the restaurant. The food was good, the atmosphere light and enjoyable, conversation easily flowing between the two of them. Once dinner was done Spades was led back out to the car, Lathe driving them further into the city and to a large movie theater.

Lathe had parked the car and led Spades up through the front doors, speaking to the man in the ticket booth. “Two for the next showing of ‘The Great Gatsby,’ please.” He soon had two tickets in hand, giving one to Spades as they went further into the theatre. It wasn’t long until they had reached their theatre, able to get seats near the middle, a good view of the wide screen. Lathe couldn’t help but glance over to Spades every few minutes as the movie played, grinning as he saw her expressions change as the story unfolded. He didn’t care it was way too cliched as he yawned, stretching his arms over his head and letting one fall over Spades’ shoulders, holding her a bit closer to him as an armrest didn't separate them, pushed up and out of the way.

Well that was sly, cheeky move Lathe. Spades simply smiled as she moved closer to him, leaning her head against him as the movie played out. She blushed as Lathe took her hand and led her back out towards the car, it was already late and they still had an hour or so drive until they got back home, once they were situated in his car, she leaned over the center console and kissed his cheek. “Thank you for tonight.” She murmured softly, moving slightly to kiss him directly on the lips. Lathe kissed her back for a moment before pulling away, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face, smiling to her. “As much as I would like to continue that right now, wait until we get home, okay?” Lathe pecked her lips one last time before starting the car, the drive home in his mind impossibly long, one thought running back and forth in his head. ...she’s been so wonderful to me... and I just know she’s the one... she’s going to stay... I kinda want to break that last rule of mine...

It was nearly an hour until they got home, Lathe unable to wait any longer after he shut off the car, unbuckling and leaning over to Spades, kissing her fervently, his hands wandering from her shoulders down her sides, letting her tangle their tongues together. ...if that’s what you want... if you ask, or... if I ask and you say yes... I’ll break it. I know you're not going anywhere.

Spades kept her head tilted to the side a bit, her hands coming up to cup Lathe’s face as she kissed him deeply, moaning into the kiss as she felt his hands over her sides. She pulled back to breathe, resting her forehead against his. “Should we... Should we go inside?” Her voice was a bit breathless as she spoke. I wouldn’t mind spending the night here... I planned on doing so.

Lathe looked into her eyes, his own shaded as his voice dropped an octave, a small smirk playing over his lips. “Please.” He pressed one last kiss to her lips before they broke apart, getting out of the car, Spades immediately coming around to press herself close to him, Lathe kissing her deeply as they walked to the front steps, his arm wound tightly around her waist. ...I want to break it. I really really want to. Lathe was searching for the right key on the key ring when he suddenly broke away from Spades, wide-eyed and staring hard at the door for an instant. ...did I just hear... Lathe listened intensely, instantly letting go of Spades as he heard Blake bark, all of his emotions replaced with worry. ...did someone break in? Is Eren having an attack? What the hell happened?
... is someone trying to hurt Eren? Lathe had the door open in a second, his face set and stony as he scanned the first floor quickly, spotting Blake moving in circles at the top of the stairs, his fur discolored with large patches of drying paint. He took the stairs three at a time, his fists raised defensively until he saw Eren’s door shut, resisting the immediate urge to kick it open and trying the knob, gasping at the sight of Eren laying lifeless on his side on the bed, staring blankly ahead of him and cradling an empty jar of peanut butter to his chest, his chest barely moving as he breathed. He was covered in seemingly random smears of paint, small shreds of paper surrounding him and littering everything in the room, the drawings from his wall all taken down and nowhere to be seen. **Fuck.** Lathe strode over to him and brushed the hair from his face, trying to get Eren to look at him as he cradled his cheek. “Eren, can you hear me? You still there? Please, give me something.” The light’s gone from his eyes…

Eren didn’t move in his arms, he wasn’t there, his eyes wide and glassy, his body limp and lifeless. This was definitely the worse attack he had ever had. Eren couldn’t hear Lathe talk to him, couldn’t feel him as he was moved, forced to remain in his broken state.

Spades had followed Lathe upstairs in an instant, gasping as she saw the state of Eren’s room and Blake as he climbed up in bed with Eren whining horribly, yet Eren didn’t move at all. She looked down to the paper littering the floor. *Is that...? Are those all his drawings? Did he rip them all up?* She looked at the carpet, seeing smears of paint underfoot, following them to the recording room. She gasped as she saw what the room was now. In the center of the room, all of his instruments were perfectly arranged into a circle, in the middle a space just big enough for someone to sit in, which currently held another empty peanut butter jar. *Wait… He was holding one? How much did he eat?* She finally looked around the room, spotting all the paint cans thrown into the corner of the room, looking at the large wall opposite the camera. *She… she looks like Eren.* Spades looked at the wall, all the detail that must’ve gone into painting it, turning to get Lathe and seeing the red light flashing on the camera. *It’s recording…* “Hey Lathe!” Spades called for him, stepping carefully back into the hallway towards Eren’s room.

Lathe barely heard Spades as she called for him, speaking to Eren in stuttery German as he searched for the right words, pleading with him and trying to reassure him that everything was alright, hoping that he would come out of it soon. He looked up from his spot as he knelt on the floor next to Eren’s bed as Spades walked in, her heels clicking quietly on the floor. “W-what is it?” *What more is there…?*

Spades licked her lips, looking down to try and formulate the right words. “I think he painted a picture of his mom… The instruments are all laid out on the floor and he’s got a jar of peanut butter in the other room…. But his camera….” She trailed off, her eyes landing on Eren’s still form. *Eren you need to come back to us… Can you hear Lathe?*

... well, **fuck. Not good.** Lathe nodded, pressing a kiss to Eren’s forehead and standing, looking to Spades and giving her a hopeful look. “I’ll take care of that. …talk to him, please, see if he’ll listen to you… I don’t think he can hear me, but… maybe it’ll be different if it’s you. And you know more German than I do.” He kissed her cheek before moving to the recording room, seeing the
striking image of Eren’s mother painted on the wall. *he must have found the picture… She really does look just like him.*

Spades nodded, moving Eren as she sat down on the bed above his head, gently picking his head up and moving to place it safely in her lap. <*“Eren? Can you hear me?”* Her voice was soft as she carded her fingers through his paint stained locks. <*“Eren… I need you to be strong, you need to fight it, you gotta come back to us, please. Dad’s really worried about you, I’m worried about you too. Can you hear me Eren? It’s Mommy.”*> *Come on kid, you need to wake up, you need to come back to us.* She watched as Eren’s fingers let go of the empty jar of peanut butter, letting it fall to the ground.

*Mommy? Is that you? Is that really you?… No…. It can’t be you…*

*You’re right, it can’t be her.*

*Why not?*

*Because you killed her-*

*I didn’t kill her!*

*Yes you did*, you fucking retard.

*No I-I didn’t…*

*Uh huh, just keep telling yourself that… You know you did it though.*

*But she’s there… I can hear her!*

*No you can’t, that’s not your Mom. You killed her, and you can’t have another one.*

*But…*

*No. You can’t have another one, because you’ll just end up doing the same thing.*

*But-*

*Did you not listen to anything I just said? You stupid piece of shit, you don’t understand anything do you?*

*I just…*

*No, you can’t do anything about it.*

*I can hear her…*

*That’s not your Mom, that’s a fake you tried to make into your own. She doesn’t love you, she can’t… you’re not her own, you’re in the way… She can’t have her own kids with you here.*

...*She told me she loves me…*

*She doesn’t*. 
Eren’s body started to shake as his mind tormented itself, shaking in Spades’ arms as he started to come back to reality. *I want Mommy to love me.*

Spades continued to talk with Eren in a soft voice, hoping to get even the slightest movement out of him, though when he started shaking she called for Lathe in a panic. *What if he’s having a seizure? I don’t know what to do! He just started shaking all of the sudden…* Spades looked into Eren’s eyes, realizing that his eyes were starting to focus again. *Is he coming back to us? Or is he getting worse? I can’t tell… Dammit, Lathe! Get your ass in here!* "Eren, honey, can you hear me?"

Lathe immediately set down the violin case he was holding as he heard Spades call for him, noting the panicked tone in her voice. He was still careful with the case’s contents before he rose to quickly move back into Eren’s room, seeing Eren shaking in Spades’ lap. *Is he having a seizure?* Lathe knelt down next to him, studying Eren’s eyes for a moment. “He’s not having a seizure if that’s what you were worried about. Eren? Come on, say something, please. It’s Dad… let us know if you can hear us, please…” *We’re really worried about you… come back to us, please…*

Eren’s eyes were still wide but he was finally able to focus them on Lathe… *Daddy?* “…D-D-Dad?…” Eren’s voice was hoarse, like he’d lost it from screaming or something of that nature. He tried to move his fingers, able to claw a bit at his chest, but any more movement besides that he wasn’t able to do. *My head hurts…. I…. I thought I wasn’t gonna make it back….*

Lathe let out a sigh of relief, one hand going to carefully clasp Eren’s and keep him from trying to claw at his chest, the other going to thread into his paint-matted hair, cradling his head. “I’m right here Eren, it’s okay.” He glanced up to Spades for an instant, trying to find the right words, though they came easily after a moment. “Mom’s here too… We’ve both got you, Eren, we’re right here. Just relax.”

Eren looked up towards Spades, feeling her hand card through his hair gently. *Mom…? But… Doesn’t she hate me?* Eren swallowed visibly, his eyes showing a hint of fear. *Does she hate me? For killing my first one? Does she think I’m gonna kill her too?*

Spades looked down at him with soft eyes, seeing his eyes lined with a hint of fear. "It’s okay Eren, Mommy's got you."> Her voice was soft as she gently rubbed his head to help calm him down. *You don’t need to be afraid of me.*

Lathe kept Eren’s hands firmly in his grasp as he petted him reassuringly, understanding Spades’ German easily. *She really does feel like Eren’s Mom, then… when the hell is that ring going to be in?* Lathe pushed the thought back a bit in his mind as Eren coughed hoarsely, his voice warm and quiet. “Do you want me to get you some water, Eren?” *…as soon as you’re feeling up for it, you could use a bath… there’s paint literally everywhere… and I kinda really hope it didn’t stain Spades’ dress, I like this one...*
Eren looked over to Lathe and nodded slowly as his body shuddered, another round of coughing got through him. *Water sounds really nice.* Eren looked back up to Spades as she started to softly speak to him in German again, getting completely sucked into her soft voice as she spoke and told him some stories to calm him down, and it worked wonders.

Lathe was back with a glass of cool water in a moment, gently guiding Eren with Spades’ help to sit up, helping him drink the water as Eren’s hands shook terribly as he tried to take the glass from him. Lathe couldn't help but be drawn in as well by Spades’ voice. *…she’s so perfect for this… she knows how to calm Eren down, and she treats him like her own son… Dammit, the second I get that ring, you are mine.*

Spades sigh in relief a bit as Eren started to talk softly back with her, Blake finally calming down enough to paw at Lathe and look at him like he expected to be bathed. *Well, they could both use a bath…* She ran a hand through his hair. <“Eren, why don’t we get you into the bath? We’ll help you wash up… Okay?”> She watched him nod, turning to look at Lathe. *Alright you’re gonna have to help out with this one… I’m in heels, I can’t carry him.*

Eren scratched at his chest while he was moved from his room to the bathroom. He didn’t even realize that he was scratching at his chest, all he knew was that he was trying to move his hand around. *Move, dammit… I’m fucking exhausted.*

Lathe lifted Eren from Spades’s lap and the bed, nodding to the nightstand and addressing Spades. “Grab his contact lens stuff please.” He carried Eren to the bathroom, gently sitting him down on the toilet seat so he could start the bath, unbuttoning his dress shirt and taking it off, a white tank top underneath. *That’s just going to get soaked and/or stained with paint otherwise, and that’s between you and Blake.* Lathe thanked Spades as she handed him the contact lens case and the bottle of fluid, dumping out the case and adding fresh solution before handing it to Eren. “Eren, I know for a fact you're going to fall asleep in the bath again, so take out your contacts now before you're too sleepy to.” *No eye infections please.*

Eren looked to Lathe as he spoke to him, still absentmindedly scratching at his chest. *Contacts… Right… That’s why I can see right now.* Eren’s hands shakily moved to take them out, struggling for only a few moments before he finally got them out. *I'm tired, I wanna sleep…*

Lathe capped the small case, setting it on the counter near the sink and beginning to move to undress Eren, though he stopped short as Blake pawed at his leg, looking back up to Spades. He was at a loss for words and looked down, not really knowing what to say or how to say it. “U-um…” *I don’t know what you want to do now that all this has happened… There’s no way I can let Eren sleep alone after this… I feel like I need to say something, and I don’t know what…*
Spades smiled softly, leaning down to peck his cheek. “I’ll go grab my overnight bag from my car, get changed and then get some pajamas for Eren, okay?” She asked softly, ruffling Eren’s hair before she turned to leave. *I know you won’t let Eren sleep alone tonight, but you have a king bed… We should all fit on it…*

Lathe’s eyes widened a bit as she kissed his cheek, watching her leave. *you’re wonderful …* He smiled faintly before turning back to Eren, nudging the door more or less closed before helping Eren out of his clothes, leaving his boxers on before lifting him into the tub filled with very warm water, reaching for the shampoo and a comb and starting to carefully work the paint out of his hair. *...it honestly looks as if you just dumped a bucket of paint on your head… This might take a bit.* He brushed the colorful bubbles away from Eren’s eyes, massaging his scalp gently before finally being able to rinse his hair, working conditioner into his locks before grabbing a washcloth to gently scrub the color from his hands. He looked up as Spades tapped at the doorframe lightly before entering, setting fresh pajamas, underwear and socks nearby. He thanked her as she left, his attention soon returning to getting the stains of color off of Eren.

Spades smiled and slipped out of the bathroom, closing the door as she went to Lathe’s room, changing out of her dress and slipping into sweatpants and a tank top that fit her a bit better. *Well… I wonder what that camera recorded? Now I’m completely curious…*

... *it feels nice.* Eren let Lathe message his head as he was bathed, not putting up a fight, though his left hand came up to scratch at his chest, leaving long marks on the skin. He continued to scratch and claw, like he couldn’t stop. *Does mom hate me?*

Lathe tried to get to stop clawing at his chest, stopping his motions to hold onto Eren’s hands. “Eren, please, stop scratching at your chest. It’s okay.” *It’s okay, you don’t need to be worried anymore. It’s all alright now.*

Eren slowly lifted his head, his weary eyes meeting Lathe’s after a few moments. “Does Mom hate me?” His voice was hoarse as he asked, his hand stopping its motion and as he leaned to the side, his head resting back in Lathe’s hand.

Lathe’s eyes widened as Eren spoke, his thumb soothingly running over his knuckles as he responded. “Eren, she doesn’t hate you. Trust me on that.” He gave him a small smile, his eyes twinkling. “I think she loves you very much.” *She does.*

... *Does she really?* “But… Aren’t I in the way?” He asked softly, his eyes closing to rest as he listened to Lathe speak. *She can’t have any kids… She’ll want to get rid of me… So she can have her own…*
Lathe’s hand carded through Eren’s now-clean brunette hair, his voice soft. “Eren, you're most definitely not in the way of anything. Please don't think that you being around is getting in the way of either of our lives. She loves you like her own son...I certainly don't think she minds you being around. She loves you, Eren. She has no reason to be mad.” You being here isn't about to stop our lives from going on. Whatever happens- you'll be there to see it.

Eren opened his eyes, coughing a bit, his voice still very hoarse. “But won’t she want to get rid of me? So she can have her own? Won’t she hate that I’m around?” He asked quietly. I know Mom always wanted me to have siblings before the fire....

Lathe blushed at the idea of Spades and him having kids, almost able to hear the pitter-patter of tiny feet on the floor behind him. ...I've never thought about it too much... But I do like the idea... But I don't know if Spades would want kids... Dammit, I need to marry her first, then I can think about that. “...Eren, there’s always going to be plenty of room for you and for any kids. She’d never want to get rid of you- she’s done so much for you. She adores having you around, and I don’t see that changing anytime soon.”...kids...

Eren nodded, but his head grew limp after a few seconds, signalling that he’d finally fallen asleep in the bath yet again. I’m tired...

Lathe quietly chuckled as Eren fell asleep, gently finishing cleaning the paint from his skin and rinsing his hair before draining the tub, scooping him up with a towel and drying him off, changing him into his dry clothes and carrying him to his bedroom. He smiled warmly to Spades as she laid on his bed reading a book from next to his nightstand. He set Eren down next to her as she pulled back the quilt for him, his voice a quiet murmur as he spoke to her. “Let me clean up Blake, and then I’ll be back for bed, okay?”

Spades nodded, shuffling closer to Eren to card through his hair, murmuring softly to him as he slept, a smile across her face.

Blake had already hopped into the empty tub, waiting for Lathe to get back to wash him. His tail wagging with his ears perked, the paint all over his back and sides like Eren had tried to paint a vest onto him.

Lathe filled up the tub again, getting a sturdier brush and a blue bottle of shampoo out from under the sink, the water quickly changing from clear to murky with the many colors of half-dried paint. He soon drained the bathtub again, grabbing a fresh towel from behind him and drying Blake as best as he could before he hid behind it as Blake shook out his fur, grinning and cleaning up the bathroom quickly before following Blake back to his room, Spades holding onto Eren and looking
up as Blake hopped up at the foot of the bed. Lathe shrugged, untying his dress shoes and taking off his dress pants, rifling for a pair of sweatpants in the armoire before clambering into bed next to Spades, curling up behind her and pressing a few kisses to the back of her neck. He murmured against her soft skin, his voice sleepy. “Thank you, Spades…” You do too much for the both of us...

Spades smiled softly, leaning back a bit into Lathe. “You’re welcome… mm… We should get some rest, and tomorrow we need to look at his computer…. It was recording from the time we were gone to the time we got home.” She told him quietly, carding another hand through Eren’s hair as he slept peacefully, curled up to her. He looks so peaceful now… I wonder what happened? He covered his jungle scene up with paint… I wonder if he’s gonna do something else on the walls?

... we’ll be able to see exactly what happened, then… Lathe hummed against her shoulder in assent, his arms wrapped around her waist as he tangled their legs together. …you’d be a wonderful mom...

~~~~~~

Well, we figured out what’s wrong with Eren… Sort of. He had a mental break down along with a panic attack yesterday. He went crazy is basically what I’m getting to, so Lathe’s been all over him today, trying to get him to stay calm and not freak out about what he did. Paint is literally everywhere, it’s gonna take awhile to clean and he’s paranoid for some reason that we’re gonna hate him for it. I don’t like seeing him cry, and he was getting upset with being cooped up in a room all day so I offered to take him to the kitchen and teach him a few things, and what did he ask to know how to make… Grilled Cheese, the way I make it… with a tomato… Spades was getting out the ingredients they needed to make some sandwiches through trial and error, letting Lathe and Blake scurry around the house cleaning up. I’m actually really surprised how much of a help Blake is… It’s like he was tried for being a blind service dog as well… Hmm… Maybe he was.

Lathe was carrying a bucket of hot water and soap, a rag in his hand as he tried to scrub paint off of the floor and out of the carpets, having given up on the random smears on some of the walls. …Let’s see, for the walls Eren hasn’t painted yet, I’m going to need to paint over them again…. The sheets on his bed and all the ones downstairs are pretty much ruined, which sucks, I spent a hell of a lot of time on some of those quilts…. Lathe tried in vain for twenty minutes to get the stains of blues and yellows out of the carpet, though he gave up and took the bucket back downstairs and started on the hardwood at the base of the stairs, Blake following him. Downstairs is a total war zone, I’ll work my way down there… But it looks like he was just dripping with paint as he went back upstairs, there’s so much of it… He looked up as Blake nudged at the bucket of water, picking up one of the soaked rags and dropping it on the floor, moving it around with his paws, trying to copy Lathe. He chuckled, letting Blake help him as they worked their way to the scripting room stairs, propping the door open and starting to clean down the stairs. …there’s so much red paint splattered everywhere, it looks like there was a mass murder ten minutes ago… Lathe looked around the basement with weary resignation, boxes of sharpies tipped over, things thrown across the room and bottles of paint open everywhere, the walls and some cabinets smeared
with color and the notes to German music, their lyrics slanted and spotty. ...he got the chalkboard too… I’ve had those diagrams up since I first bought the damn place. Ugh… Hopefully it didn't get in the crack and dry in the mechanism. Lathe started with cleaning up the many many paint bottles, capping the ones still good and pitching the ones too dry to save, rinsing them off in the sink in the corner and replacing them on the newly-scrubbed shelves. He cringed as he realized there were unopened condom packets scattered around the room, quickly dropping them back into the shoebox that still resided in the room, shoving it back onto the shelf, then moving to strip the bed of the ruined sheets and blankets. He cleaned the floor before going over to his sewing machine, spending the better part of an hour cleaning out the mechanism and trying to save it before he gave up, dropping his head on his arms on the table, exhausted from trying. It’s wrecked. God fucking dammit. I liked this machine, it’s a really good one. Well, was. Lathe looked up as Blake nudged his leg, sighing heavily and standing, taking the cleaning supplies back upstairs after a few solid hours of cleaning had passed, tossing the many rags in the laundry and putting the bucket away. He traipsed into the kitchen where Spades and Eren had since finished making lunch, Lathe going to ruffle Eren’s hair and noticing he was shaking like a leaf when he moved away from his hand, his eyes trained on the sandwich in his hands. Oh no... Lathe sat down adjacent to Eren, his voice warm and quiet, trying to get Eren to look at him. “Eren, you doing okay?” I don't want you to be scared of me...

Eren nodded slowly, his eyes still trained on his sandwich, bringing it up to his mouth and barely taking a bite of it before he set it back down on his plate. He swallowed hard, still unable to meet Lathe’s eyes. He’s mad at me... He has to be... paint is everywhere... He probably wants to hit me.... That's why he came up to me...

Lathe slowly reached a hand out, covering Eren’s hand with his own, his tone soft as he murmured to him, trying to keep him calm and from panicking. “Eren, I'm not mad at you. You don't have to be afraid of me for anything. It’s okay. You can look at me.” I don't like seeing you so scared of me... Lathe ran his thumb soothingly over Eren’s knuckles, willing him to understand.

Eren kept his eyes trained on his sandwich still. No... I can see him... I don’t want to see him when he’s angry... He is angry... He’s gotta be...

Oh he is, don’t worry.

....

How could he not be angry at you? I mean look at you! You’re pathetic, weak, you make a mess of everything and you’re afraid of literally everything!

....

He hates taking care of you! You should just run away! Make his life easier.

But... He said...

No! He hates you!

Eren slowly drew his hand back from Lathe and picked up his sandwich to eat in fear of what Lathe
would do to him. He finished it off before going to put his dish in the sink and run off, Blake at his heels.

Lathe thanked Spades as she silently tapped his shoulder and handed him a sandwich, sighing as Eren quickly left. He set down half of his sandwich uneaten after a little while, simply staring at his plate, his head in his hands. *...he’s so scared of me... it sucks...*

Spades watched him from where she sat, eating her own meal. *He’s gotta have a million things running through his mind. Eren’s not exactly keen on staying in the same room as him.* “Do you want me to talk to him… We need him to get to trust you again before we leave in a week.” Her voice was soft, trying to cheer him up a bit. *We can’t have him be scared with you in the same train car as him.*

Lathe looked up to her, suddenly looking much older than he was before he weakly smiled to her, quiet. “Please… I don’t know how to get through to him about this…” *If he doesn’t even want to be in the same room as me for too long… I don’t think he’d be too open to whatever I had to say...*

Spades nodded. “You know… You guys should do something that will help the bond between the two of you… I know that might seem really weird, but I get where Eren’s coming from… Lathe, you’re huge, that’s the easiest way to put it. You could easily overpower him and he knows it… I think we just need to show him that you’re not a monster and more like a teddy bear, but it won’t be like a switch of a light, it’ll take time…” She got up to put her dishes away, coming behind him to give him a nice hug. *I don’t want you to be so sad, I know you’re trying your best at this, you really are.*

Lathe shrugged, letting Spades hug him, leaning back into her touch. “I don’t know how, though… What would I do with him? I’m no good at thinking of this stuff…” *...I guess I do kinda have a threatening figure... Well, Judo and gymnastics will do that to you, I guess... Hmmmm... No, that’s a dumb idea, he wouldn’t have any interest... would he?* “Spades, let me know if this sounds like a really dumb idea… you know how I always go over to the gym some days after class? I wonder if Eren would want to come with or something, maybe find a niche there with all the classes and stuff going on…”

She nodded, hugging him a bit closer. “That sounds like a good idea, maybe you can show him how to do the bars… He’s certainly got the body for it, I think it’s be a good experience for the two of you, why don’t you go ask him if he wants to go? But don’t go in the room with him, stay in the hall, but you might want to crouch down if he’s on the floor, alright?” She released him from her grasp, giving him a peck on the cheek. *I think you two will get better with trusting each other after that.*

Lathe nodded, tilting his head to peck her lips before standing, not wanting to finish eating his
sandwich. He padded from the room, heading upstairs to the recording room, where he thought Eren would be. He was right, looking in to him quietly reading on the floor in the center of the room. He glanced up, the image of Eren’s mother smiling back at him. *...she really is your mother...* Lathe sat down on the floor outside the door, still in the hall as he gently tapped the doorframe with his knuckle, his voice soft. “Hey, Eren?” *Please don’t look terrified when you look at me, please...*

Eren lifted his head for only a second, realizing that he was outside the room. *He’s not coming in?... He doesn’t want to hit me?... Okay...* Eren looked up from the book, but still not meeting Lathe’s eyes. *Are you gonna yell at me for making a mess?* He swallowed hard, his voice still pretty hoarse as he stuttered. “Y-yeah?” *Please don’t hurt me... I don’t want you to be mad at me like Grisha would be.* He set the book down and reached for the empty jar of peanut butter, holding it close to his chest.

... *oh yeah, he needs more peanut butter.* ... *wait. I bought those two things yesterday. That’s a ton of peanut butter to be eating!...well, I’m getting two things from the store today, then...* “I just wanted to know, since you’re not in too many clubs at school, if you maybe wanted to come to the gym with me after school Tuesday? That’s where I always am, doing Judo and gymnastics stuff. You don’t have to if you don’t want, though.” *I don't want you to think I'm forcing this on you.*

*what’s that?* “What are gymnastics?” Eren asked quietly, finally looking up to meet Lathe’s eyes with his own curious ones for a second or two before he looked down at the jar again. He slipped his hand inside and rubbed around, pulling it out and licking the last of the peanut butter off of his fingers.

Lathe grinned at Eren’s question, pulling his phone out of his pocket and clicking on a bookmark, pulling up a video and sliding his phone across the floor to Eren. “The kind of stuff you see during the summer Olympics, with the people doing all the flips and fancy footwork stuff. That video is the kind of stuff I do. Play it.” *That was a really good one.*

Eren looked to the video questioningly before picking the phone up with his hand that wasn’t covered in peanut butter and played it. His eyes were glued on the screen as he watched Lathe do the uneven parallel bars, shifting a bit to sit on his knees. *This is cool. Is this him? He’s doing flips!* Eren watched as Lathe moved swiftly from the first bar to the second, his feet pointed the whole way, and never missing a beat as he performed various tricks on both the high beam and the low beam. “Is this you?” Eren asked quietly, his eyes wide as he watched in fascination. *This is really cool.*

Lathe nodded, his smile wide. “Yeah, that’s me. The manager guy for the gym figured out kinda quickly I was there all the time, and he kept seeing what I could do or heard about me from the other employees watching the floor. They asked to record one of my routines from last year, and I said okay. They’d gotten a lot more people to join after that, and they keep asking me to help teach
a gymnastics class. I don't like turning them down so much, but I just like doing my own thing when it comes to that. If you wanted, though, I could try and teach you some stuff… But only if you wanted me to.” Lathe shrugged. “There might be another video of me under the martial arts section, if you wanted to see that…” It’ll either intimidate or intrigue you… I honestly don’t know which it’ll be.

What’s martial arts? Eren fiddled with the phone for a bit before finding the video, watching Lathe down opponent after opponent, his eyes going wide, struggling not to drop the phone in fear as he watched it. He…. He can hurt me…

You knew that already, dumbass.

But… He knows how to really hurt someone!

So? He might as well be trying to warn you of what’s coming.

….no…. I don’t want that to happen again.

Eren stopped the video and slid the phone back over to Lathe, moving to the complete other side of the room, trying to hide himself a bit, curling up defensively. I don’t want him to hurt me too… But I thought the gymnastic stuff was cool too…. But I guess he’s telling me he can hurt me.

He doesn’t want you to fuck up again…

How did I fuck up?

You’re really asking that now? You painted the fucking wall in peanut butter!

But…

Yeah yeah yeah, I know, you couldn’t find the right color, but really? Peanut butter? You’re probably gonna make him go out to the store and get more.

Eren let out a soft whimper and kept his back to Lathe, afraid he would be beaten, and because of that fear, he stayed in his defensive ball.

Lathe seemed to wilt as Eren shrunk away from him, picking up his phone as Eren curled into himself in the corner in fright. Fuck… he barely watched thirty seconds of it… I knew I shouldn’t have mentioned it…. what could possibly change his mind about me? I’m not about to hurt him… hmm… Lathe pulled up his YouTube account, clicking on a private video and sliding it back across the room to Eren, the phone stopping a foot away from him. He’ll maybe like seeing that… maybe it'll do something...

Eren flinched as he heard the phone sliding towards him, a shaky hand reaching out for it, grasping it loosely and looking at the video. He played it, seeming to calm down a bit when it wasn’t martial arts. His eyes were glued to the screen as younger versions of Lathe and Spades took up a dance floor, dancing through various jazz songs, along with tapping together. He watched with fascination, going through all the videos in the YouTube account. That looks so cool…. Like, really cool. Eren has a soft smile on his face as he watched the phone, but he was still curled up in the
corner, far away from Lathe.

Lathe smiled weakly as Eren started to unfurl a bit from his small ball, relieved at the small smile on his face. Thank god. As he waited for Eren to go through the many videos, he suddenly became aware of the scent of peanut butter. ...I thought the jars were empty? Why is the smell so strong? He glanced around the room, soon looking up to the portrait of Eren’s mom and noticing her skin looked shinier than the rest of her. What kind of paint did he use for her skin? It’s glossy... He thought, recognizing the color after an instant, his eyes widening. ...it’s peanut butter. ...fuck, I need to clean that later.

Eren continued to watch the videos with pure interest, moving a bit to get closer to Lathe, though his movements were small and he was very timid. He stopped about six feet from the door raising the phone and pointing to a tap video. “...M-mom dances with y-you?” He stuttered, his eyes meeting Lathe’s for a split second before looking away. They look really good too... I think they do at least.

Lathe nodded, his features soft. “Yeah… In college, we took dance classes together. I really wanted to learn, I needed a partner, and she thought it would be fun… and it was a lot of fun. I loved dancing with her. I don't dance as much as I used to, though… You know the boots of mine you wear around all the time? And the ones I have now? They click so loudly because they were meant for tap dancing- I had them modified awhile ago, and the screws they have in them are flush with the soles, but they still click on the ground on the toe and heel. Not nearly as much as they would with plates on, though.” Lathe chuckled, getting a bit lost in thought. “My favorite videos on there are the tap ones. And the one for ballet, if you can even call it a real video. It’s just me failing to balance in ballet shoes for a solid seven minutes while Spades teases me about it and acts as a crutch for me, because the bar thing they had for you to hold onto to balance wasn't enough.” ...maybe I should try that again sometime... I have much better balance now... Maybe I should... ...I wonder if Eren thinks it’s dumb that I even tried ballet... It’s not exactly something all guys are into...

Eren nodded slowly, taking everything in. I wanna ask him... but will he say no? “C-can we do the bar thingy? F-from... from before?” His voice was quiet as he slid the phone back. I wanna try to do the bar thingy... it looked really cool when Dad did it!

Nice choice. Lathe smiled, taking back his phone. “Of course we can. That’s a lot of fun to do. It’s Friday today, and I normally go after classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but if you really wanted to, I don’t think there’ll be too many people there at one in the afternoon....” That would be epic, actually.

Eren looked up to meet his eyes as he spoke. “W-we can g-go?” He was surprised, and his small voice gave it away, along with the questioningly look he held. I thought he was gonna hit me... But he wants to take me there? We can go?
He's looking at me! Lathe nodded, his eyes bright. “If you really want to, that is. We can find some clothes in your closet you should wear, I'll grab my stuff, and we can head over if you like.” ... I’d have to ask Spades to fix dinner... she taught me how to make grilled cheese. She can definitely manage. “Sound like a plan?”

Eren nodded, waiting for Lathe to move out of the way, not wanting to get that close to him to get out of the door. Nope.... He can grab me and hit me, I don’t want to get that close to him. Eren stayed sitting where he was, watching Lathe with cautious eyes.

Lathe shifted forward a bit so he could start to stand, suddenly freezing as he looked to where Eren was six feet away from him, no longer there. He looked up to the far corner of the room, Eren huddled into himself, staring at him with wide, scared eyes. ... I didn’t even hear you move. Lathe crouched down on the floor, trying to keep calm for Eren, his voice soft. “Eren, it’s okay, you don't have to be so scared of me... I'm sorry if I seemed... threatening... but I'm just trying to stand up. It's okay. Please.” ...I hate having you so terrified of me...

Eren slowly nodded, seeming to relax a bit when Lathe explained himself. He’s not gonna hurt me... That’s good. He watched Lathe get up, slowly standing up in the corner as well, his eyes never leaving Lathe, but never looking him in the eye. I don’t want him to hit me... I wanna be able to trust him... But he’s mad at me... Isn’t he?

You’re still asking that? We’ve gone over this!

... But...

There is no way that he doesn’t hate you...

... I know...

Eren looked down, looking away from Lathe, a guilty feeling making his stomach twist into knots.

Lathe took a small step back, beckoning Eren towards the door and softly smiling. “It’s okay Eren, really. Please, let’s go find stuff for you to wear.” ...he doesn’t trust me. does he. “...Eren? I love you.” I feel like I need to remind you more often. You look like you expect me to bite your head off, and I'm not...

Eren looked up at Lathe at his statement, nodding and his feet moving slowly as he went up to him. He was timid as he slowly leaned his forehead against Lathe’s chest, his hands coming to grab Lathe’s shirt, closing his eyes. Don’t hit me... Please... I don’t want you to be mad at me...

Lathe immediately wrapped his arms around Eren’s middle protectively, his fingers tracing
soothing circles into his back. He held Eren like that for a short while, murmuring softly into his ear. He shifted back a small bit to look at Eren in the eyes, trying to catch his gaze. “Are you gonna be okay? You still want to go?” *If you want to bail that's very okay…*

... *He’s not gonna hurt me.* Eren nodded, moving closer to his chest, feeling safe in his arms. *I kinda don’t want him to let me go though… “y-you’re…. Y-you're n-not m-mad?”* Eren stuttered as he curled up to him, his shaking arms slowly wrapping around Lathe’s middle. *I don’t want you to hurt me… Or be mad at me…*

*Well it’s too late for that!*

...W-why?

*He hates you... But he trying to gain your trust back so he can hit you.*

*I don’t want him to.*

Lathe shook his head before resting his cheek on the top of his head, quiet. “I’m not mad, Eren. Everything that happened wasn't your fault. I understand, and it’s okay. I really do love you, I hope you know that.” *There’s no way I tell you enough... you should know that.* He held him for a bit longer before he pulled back from him, smiling wearily. “So, how about we get you ready to go, huh?” *It’ll be fun, take your mind off things.*

He seemed to sigh in relief as he heard Lathe’s words. *He… He loves me.* Eren nodded and he started towards his room, leading Lathe into it. *I dunno what to wear.* He stood back and let Lathe go towards his clothes, simply watching him as he looked through his clothes. *What is he looking for? I literally only own jeans…*

Lathe dug through Eren’s closet, his brow furrowed as he searched. *He pretty much only owns denim... Hmm...* He shrugged, pulling out a pair of black sweatpants and handing them to Eren, along with a form-fitting tank top. “These should work fine for just your first day, at least. It doesn't really matter what you wear on your feet, as you do it barefoot anyway. Get changed while I grab my stuff, okay?” Lathe gently ruffled Eren’s locks, smiling before going to his room and hunting through his own closet.

Eren nodded, getting dressed quickly and going downstairs to get his boots on. He looked around for where Spades was, finding her in the scripting room, grooming Blake’s thin coat. *Hmm... I think I painted him yesterday too...* Eren looked down by the door, grabbing Blake’s vest and slowly coming up to the two of them. He curled up to Spades on the couch, watching as she brushed out Blake’s coat and hummed along.

*Hmm... I take it it went well if you’re dressed like that? “You going to the gym with Lathe today?”* She smiled more as Eren nodded, putting Blake’s vest on him. *That’s great! Lathe must be*
Lathe soon came down the stairs, wearing a black tank top and red pants that were elastic at the ankles, setting down his bag by the stairs and moving over to them, stopping short as he looked at the two of them. \ldots you know, if Spades and I had ever had a kid… Eren looks a lot like he’d be it. Lathe smiled, going to peck Spades’s forehead. “We’re going over to the gym for a while. Is it cool if you’re in charge of dinner tonight?”

Spades smiled more as he pecked her forehead, a blush creeping across her face. “I think I can manage something from that fully stocked fridge of yours.” I’m sure there’s something that I can make. “You guys go have fun. Seriously, go, shoo.” She made the shooing motion with her hands and got Eren off the couch towards the doors.

Eren hopped off the couch, Blake at his heels as they waited by the doors. To the gym! I wanna try the bar thingy!

Lathe chuckled, following Eren and picking his bag back up, slipping on his metal-toe boots and slipping on a black jacket, snatching a green card as he felt the cool wind of outside as Eren opened the door. He locked it behind them as they went to the car, the drive only taking ten minutes. He parked in front of the gym, shutting off the car and subsequently the radio. “We’re here! This is gonna be fun.” Lathe grinned.

Eren nodded, getting out of the car, grabbing Blake’s leash and holding it close to his chest as the entered the large fitness center. This place is huge! His eyes were wide as he looked down a long hall, glass on both sides leading into different areas, on one side an Olympic sized pool, and on the other a large gymnastics area, and even further down the hall split off into a T and led off into smaller private rooms, each containing various items for different classes which ranged anywhere from Aerobics to Judo to Zumba and everything in between.

Well… Things have been going good I guess. I’m going to be going to LA soon, and Lathe said we’re going to be staying at Nate’s house again! I’m really excited to see him again, and he said he already got me the paint so that I can paint his ceiling, which he’s been wanting a galaxy painting ever since he saw Lathe’s study. I’ve been doing better with my relationship with Dad, I still freak out a bit when I do something wrong, so I try to stay out of his hair as much as possible. Though that has already led to a few misunderstandings of me trying to avoid him at all costs… Though I guess I kinda have been without realizing it. He’s been really cool about it though, and he let’s me take on a bunch of chores now which keeps me busy. Schools been going good, nothing major has happened yet. Jean apologized to me… again… He keeps opening his mouth and saying stupid
shit, but honestly, I don’t think anyone really listens to him anymore… Well maybe Sasha and Connie but they can be talked into literally anything as long as food is involved. I was happy, Levi’s been calling me on a regular basis when he can now that his class schedule is a little more regular. I’ve been totally okay with him being gone, cause I know he’ll come back, and he sounds genuine when he tells me that he loves me… And I honestly can’t wait for him to come home at Thanksgiving. But anyways back on topic. We go a day off today… so Jean insisted that everyone come over to my house today. Why I have no fucking idea… So I agreed once Sasha gave me puppy dog eyes, I’m pretty sure she just wanted to see what the hell the recording studio looked like. But Armin canceled last minute, to take care of his grandpa, which I was okay with, I know Mr. Arlert hasn’t been doing all that great in the past few weeks, so we let his absence slide. So when everyone got to my place at around 10 in the morning, Lathe had already left for the staff meeting at school. What I didn’t know was that Jean had asked to come to my house because they’d all been kicked out of everyone else’s house for doing what we are fucking doing right now. I can’t believe I agreed to his spout of lies. They’d already fucking lit the joint by the time I came up to my room with drinks. Then of course Jean had to push all my fucking buttons until I took a hit……. And after that… I doesn’t seem to bad anymore.

Lathe stepped through the front door of the house, moving to take off his boots and noticing the many pairs already set by the door. Ah, Eren must have friends over. He tugged at the end of one lace, his brow furrowing as he faintly smelled something odd. He took a sniff at the air, his eyes widening as he recognized the smell. He ceased trying to get his shoes off, hanging his bag on the banister and immediately striding upstairs, furious as he heard the voices of multiple people coming from Eren’s room. I know that smell. He stood in the open doorway, his gaze hard as he looked over the six of them, a lit joint in Eren’s hand.

Annie was the first to look to him with sober eyes, immediately pointing to Jean and speaking. “Jean bought it, he brought it with. It’s his fault.”

All eyes suddenly snapped to him as they became aware of Lathe’s presence, their hazy eyes becoming slightly sharper as they realized what was happening. Lathe looked furious, his gaze still on Annie, words sharp with malice. “I. Don’t. Care.” He looked over the group. “The lot of you can get the fuck out of my house.” I knew at least one of you was a complete idiot. But all of you? And Eren? I thought you all knew better than that. I guess I was wrong. Lathe stepped aside and his gaze burned into them as they filed past, Eren moving to follow them, at the tail end of the group. Lathe barely moved, grabbing him by the scruff of his neck, his voice even. “And just where do you think you’re going?” You are not getting out of this without some kind of repercussion.

Eren looked up to Lathe with innocent eyes, though he was high enough to be surprisingly relaxed even with Lathe practically manhandling him. Why are you stopping me? “You… You told us to leave.” Don’t you want me to leave too? Eren moved in Lathe’s grasp so he was facing him, his eyes following Lathe’s arm, which was now on his shoulder, and following up to his face, finally realizing just how furious Lathe was. Shit…. He’s mad.
...he’s high as fuck right now. Lathe heard the front door close behind the last of the group, some of the anger draining out of his expression. His hand released Eren’s shirt from it’s tight grip, instead resting on his shoulder. “I didn’t mean you too, Eren, you live here. And I don’t exactly want you to stick around those kids at least for right now.” Lathe looked back to Eren’s room, scrunching his nose at the strong smell of weed. Well, can’t exactly banish him to his room for a bit. I need to keep him occupied, is what I need to do. ...you know, I’ve always wondered... “Here, come on, Eren. It’s okay, don’t look at me like that.” He gave Eren a tiny smile as he pulled him down the hall and helped him down the two flights of stairs to the basement, sitting Eren down at the large table and handing him a big pad of paper and setting out boxes of paints and pencils.

“Here, do whatever you want with this for right now, okay? I’ll be back down in a little bit.” That’ll keep him amused for a few hours. At least two. Lathe ruffled Eren’s hair before trudging back upstairs, his expression darkening again as he went to open all the windows on the second floor, trying to get the smell and smoke out. He went to his office and grabbed the school directory before going to the kitchen picking the phone up off the hook and calling the school office. After he informed the principal he hung up, going back downstairs to check on Eren’s progress. 

Eren had used close to half of the pad already, 12 sheets devoted to sheet music he made on the fly, and each sheet getting progressively more difficult. The thing was though that Eren never composes music. Sometimes he’ll write some lyrics down, but beyond that he’d never really write for too long. The music looked like he had written it in a rush, which of course he had, but it was fluid melody, which could rival some classics in complexity. Eren had also somehow managed to find Lathe’s hidden stash of oil paints, three sheets of abstract art, it’s main focus, Blake staring at him with wide eyes as he giggled contagiously. He’s so cute... Hahaha. Eren was currently working on the fourth page of Blake, the only thing that may have been a surprise was that there were no brushes, not even a mixer… He was using his fingers, and colors were everywhere, all the way up his arm, but he had thrown on his crap clothes that he kept in the basement, his other clothes neatly folded in a pile for a change. He continued without a care in the world to paint Blake, though the backgrounds, and sometimes what he was wearing was always changing. Yes, wearing, Blake looked like he was standing on two hind legs and walking like a human with human clothes on. Eren could stop laughing.... That’s funny as all hell.

...how are you finger painting that well. And with oil paints. He grinned, gesturing to the pictures of Blake. “These are all really good, Eren! Blake looks really cool in all of them.” He’s impossibly better while high- he’s like me like that. ...college was stressful, man. Wait, is that music? Lathe looked to the sheet music, reading over the melody and humming along with it as it grew more complex. He never composes... and this is great! It sounds really good, and that’s even without the accompaniment! “Want me to transfer this music over onto sheet music? So you can play it on the piano later?” I'm very impressed, actually.

Eren looked up to Lathe with wide eyes, finally taking in his presence in the room, his large eyes moving towards the sheet music in his hand. “It’s on sheet music.” Eren insisted that it was, even though he had drawn the lines, and returned to his finger painting. “I’m hungry.” He whined as he started out another picture, food becoming the object as his stomach growled. I’m really hungry. Like, I could eat a whole cow...
Lathe just chuckled as he saw Eren painting the beginnings of a cow, shaking his head. Of course, he’s got the munchies… “I forgot you haven’t eaten lunch yet. I’ll get you something good to eat, okay?” He patted Eren’s head before going back upstairs, soon returning with a plate full of hamburger bombs. He set it down next to Eren, snitching a couple and putting them on his own plate before tapping his shoulder to tear his attention from the flock of chickens now taking up the paper. “I brought food.” He moved to sit across from him, pulling a smaller bit of paper and a pencil close to him, absentmindedly sketching as he ate. This entire ordeal is infuriating, and worrying, and oddly amusing all at the same time. ...dammit Jean.

Eren looked at the steaming bombs. What the fuck is that? What’s coming off of it? It looks like fucking tentacles… Eren wearily reached out with his clean left hand and sniffed at the food, his mouth watering from just the scent. Eren took a huge mouthful, continuing to paint his chickens, a smile on his face, his eyes an unnaturally large size, the drugs still affecting him. He ate a lot of food too, before he looked at his paint covered hand, not knowing what to do with it. So many colors… What the fuck is on my hand?

Lathe looked up as Eren stopped painting, staring intently at his hand in confusion and surprise. ...this is all just really weird at this point. “Those are some nice-looking chickens, Eren.” He pointed to his picture with the end of his pencil, his plate long since cleared and delicate long-stemmed roses taking shape on his paper. “Are you done? Want help getting the paint off?” He watched as Eren looked confusedly from his hand to him, down to the chickens, and back up to him, not doing anything besides staring at him with his paint-covered hand raised for a long moment. “...I’ll take that as a yes.” Lathe stood, setting down his pencil and moving to tug Eren over to the sink in the corner of the room, grabbing the soap and a sponge, running hot water and trying to get the oil paint off of his skin. This isn't going to be easy...

Eren watched Lathe grab his hand and scrub at the paint. His mind was going in circles as it tried to picture what the hell was actually on his hand that Lathe was trying to get off. Am I bleeding? Is that blood? Is he trying to cut off my hand? No… Please don’t cut it off. Eren watched the excessive amount of red paint come off of his hand from the red barn he had just painted moments ago. What did I do? Why can’t I feel any pain? Eren’s eyes were still wide as he watched helplessly, not knowing what the hell to do. He visibly swallowed as Lathe’s scrubbing got a bit harder and the drugs started warping everything around him into complete oddities. His heart starting to beat a mile a minute in his chest as he looked around, the room changing constantly. Blake was picking up on his agitation and fear starting to whine and get closer to them, yet for some reason all Eren heard was Blake talking and telling him to ‘be a good boy’ before the dog disappeared except for his sadistic looking smile and Eren really started to freak out then.

Lathe looked up as Blake whined, registering the panic in Eren’s eyes despite his being completely still, setting down the sponge and grabbing the towel from next to him, wrapping it around Eren’s hand and holding it in place so as not to let the oil paint get anywhere as he wrapped his arm around his shoulders, pulling him close. “Hey, Eren, it’s okay. Whatever it is that’s freaking you out, you don’t have to worry about. It’s alright.” Don't freak out- no matter what I say if you really start panicking, you won't hear me right anyway.
Eren could barely understand what Lathe had actually said to him. His eyes were still wide as he saw Blake reappear before his eyes, with that same sadistic smile. *Holy fuck... That’s scary as all hell.* Eren could only watch as Blake started to speak to him again, the words a screwed mess of words as they floated in the air, as if they were written out and animated. Eren tried to reach out at the words in front of him, grabbing at one as they tried to flee and escape. His fingers grasped the words, gasping and jumping back into Lathe as the words shattered to the ground and laid in a heap of neon colored glass. *What the actual hell? I can’t touch the words? But... They’re fucking moving!* “They’re.... Moving...” Eren said and watched as Blake’s words ran around the room and often colliding into each other and making new words out of themselves.

*I forgot that being high means that for a couple hours you're absolutely mental. I dealt with this enough in college, so either I shouldn’t have to do this or I should know by now how to deal. Eh. “How about…” Lathe looked around, an idea coming to mind as his eyes landed on the chalkboard. “One second.” He let go of Eren, taking the metal card out of his wallet as he walked to the wall, opening the sliding board and immediately heading for an old cardboard box. He went to a box of old patterns, pulling out a single felt glove that went to the elbow. Eh, *Eren won’t remember how to get in here anyway. And this is way too small to fit me anymore, so-* Lathe stepped from the small room and stopped dead in his tracks as he watched Eren running around the room, looking as if he were chasing an invisible butterfly and jumping in surprise as if it dropped something heavy near his feet every few seconds. He simply followed Eren’s path with a confused expression. ....*drugs, man...* Lathe caught Eren as he ran past, his hold gentle but firm as he get the glove on his hand, the towel long since having fallen off. “Can’t have you staining anything with oil paint- how about we go upstairs and watch some TV, okay?” *Whatever the hell it is you were doing, something is going to go wrong with you running around doing that.* Lathe ushered Eren over to the stairs, trying to help him ascend without tripping over his own feet.

Eren had just about made it up the stairs as Blake scurried by him, more of the words floating up from the dog’s sadistic grin, which always seemed to show now. *More words!* Eren picked up his pace and tried to get at the words which floated around him. He was almost in the clear, but lunged for one of the words, shattering it, only to trip and smack flat on his face on the last step. He laid sprawled on the ground confused for a second, looking around for the shattered glass which he should’ve fallen on. *What the hell? It doesn’t hurt....* Eren had a very confused look on his face as he felt his stomach. *What the hell? That should’ve hurt!*

*What the hell?!* Lathe reached to catch Eren by the back of his shirt as he suddenly ran up the stairs, missing and grimacing as Eren tripped over the last step in a lunge. *Fuck!* Lathe immediately was next to Eren, trying to help him to his feet. “Oh my God, are you okay? Does anything hurt?” *He probably doesn't understand a damn thing... if he doesn't start limping, he’s probably fine.*

Eren let Lathe help him up on his feet, his eyes still glued on his stomach. He poked around with his left hand, a curious look on his face, he reached to his shirt and practically ripped it off, inspecting his unscathed skin. *The glass didn’t hurt? What the hell?* Eren reached up to grab one of the words, watching it shatter in his hand then looking at his unbleeding hand. *What the hell? “It doesn’t hurt? That’s fucking weird as all fucking hell.”* He muttered, moving to try and get another
word. Blake watched from the couch, ears perked as he watched Eren stumble around the room to catch whatever the hell he was trying to. *They stopped coming? Where did they fucking go?* Eren stood in front of the couch, turning to look at Lathe with pure confusion.

...*I'm so fucking done right now.* “Eren, come on, sit down.” Lathe tugged Eren to the couch, sitting down and pulling him into his lap, keeping an arm firmly around his waist as he reached for the remote and turned it on. Lathe scrolled through the channels, and as it was the middle of a weekday, Spongebob was on. He settled on that, making sure Eren didn't try to get up and succeed. *That should work… and at least it’s entertaining enough.*

Eren had his wide eyes glued to the screen, completely entranced by the screen. Though what he perceived to be going on in the episode was completely different from what was actually happening. He managed to get Lathe to let him lay down with his head in his lap, he watched without a care in the world as time passed. He consumed episode after episode in his delirious state. He barely heard the door opening, he kept his eyes on the yellow square creature on the screen. *Why the fuck is it yellow?*

Lathe looked up as Spades walked in, still in her uniform and leaving her shoes by the front door. ...*I totally forgot the time. Fuckfuckfuck.* He didn't even have time to speak as she went upstairs with her bag. ...*she's going to smell the weed and she'll know and then it's going to be all over…* *Fuck* .

Spades made her way upstairs, like she normally did now with her bag of clothes to get changed after work, though when she reached the top of the stairs she stopped in her tracks. *Is that…?* Her steps quickened as she made it to Eren’s room and the smell even more prominent in his room. *Oh my god, he was smoking weed… Holy shit! Does Lathe fucking know!?* She went to his room, leaving her bag on the bed before making her way downstairs, finding them easily in the scripting room. She crossed her arms when she found them. *Why in God’s name is Eren shirtless?? And why are you sitting there like nothing fucking happened!? You must know he’s high! I mean all the fucking windows are open upstairs!* She cleared her throat loudly, though she only caught Lathe’s attention. “So you care to explain *why* he was smoking weed?” She asked, her tone as cold as ice.

*Fuck.* Lathe swallowed hard at her sharp tone, not used to it being directed at him, stuttering for a moment and try to explain. He was immediately on the defensive, and seeing such anger directed to him while she was in uniform struck an old chord in the back of his mind. “S-Spades, it wasn’t all Eren’s fault, a bunch of his friends had come over and pressured him into smoking with them. I came home while they were all still here and kicked them all out, but Eren’s…” He glanced to the mop of brunette hair in his lap, looking back to her, defeated. “I called the school already and told them everything, and believe me, it’s not as if I’m not letting Eren get away with it, but I didn't know what else to do with him besides distract him until he was in his right mind again.”

Spades kept her arms crossed as she listened to everything he said, nodding, before looking at Eren.
We should make sure he’s okay first… I can only imagine what everything must look like to him now. “How long?” She asked quietly, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a light to come look at Eren to try and gauge if he needed to go to the hospital or not. Don’t want his body to shut down if he’s been high for too long for the first time.

Lathe tried his best not to flinch as Spades knelt down next to them, though he couldn't help leaning away from her a tiny bit, paying rapt attention to her every move. “U-uhm … about… Seven hours? Ish?” His hold on Eren’s arm tightened near imperceptibly, protective of him. You’re trying to make sure he’s okay… but… I know how this goes...

Spades nodded, sighing quietly as Eren reacted to the light in his eyes much quicker than he would’ve seven hours ago. Well, that’s good. She turned a bit as Eren pushed the light away, curling up to Lathe to sleep and get away from the light. “Well, it looks like he’ll be fine, but you should know that if I didn’t trust that you wouldn’t let this happen again… you would be in the back of a cruiser right now, so don’t let it fucking happen again. I don’t want Eren to get addicted, and neither do you.” She turned to go start on dinner in the kitchen, knowing that Eren would want to sleep with Lathe for a bit. Was that too harsh? I mean… I technically should have him in the back of a cruiser right now… but we’ll let them off with a warning and I’ll talk to Eren about it later. She looked through the fridge, pulling out some ingredients to start and make food.

Lathe shook his head as she spoke, his eyes tinged with pain and fear and feeling the telltale prickle of tears as she left, swallowing hard and turning his attention to Eren in his lap, carding a slightly shaky hand through Eren’s locks. She's really furious… she swore… She's only sworn once before, really… I don't want her to be mad, I don't want Eren like this, I just wish this whole mess never happened… My God, she looked half ready to rip out my throat… what the hell am I thinking? How could she be ready to kill me? I know this is all terrible… I guess I kinda expected something… she wouldn’t. You know that. …no… this sort of thing hasn't happened before… I don’t know. maybe I need to hold off on the proposal… she’s just so terrifying when she’s mad… and the uniform isn't helping… Lathe suppressed a shudder, one hand moving to pet Blake as he nudged Lathe’s leg, trying to calm down. ...I knew the whole damn time Jean wasn’t the kind of kid okay for him to hang out with, far from it… I wouldn't be surprised if she had actually hit me… I’d deserve it.

Eren stayed curled up to Lathe as he slept through the last of his high, at least another hour before Spades announced that dinner was done from the kitchen, which woke him up. Fuck… I feel so fucking weird. Eren struggled to so much as lift his head from where he laid, though managed after a few attempts, confused on his surroundings, his head pounding. What the hell…? He looked up at Lathe and he almost instantly paled. He’s gotta be fucking furious with me… I fucking agreed to having them all over, but I didn’t fucking know they were gonna be smoking weed in my room!

Lathe felt the sense of dread in the back of his mind double as he heard Spades call for them, looking down as Eren raised his head from his lap. He's terrified. ...exactly how I feel right now. “Hey Eren- don't look so scared. We’ll deal with what happened it a bit. First, go get a shirt
on. Dinner’s ready.” I’m not ready for this...

“Why don’t I have a shirt?” Eren’s eye trailed over his bare torso. How the fuck did that happen?

“You tore it off for some odd reason, which is okay because it was your shit painting shirt. Now go, get a new one.” Lathe gently shooed Eren off of the couch, looking to the doorway, his lips drawing into a thin line. ... well fuck this.

Eren only nodded, stumbling a bit as he hoisted himself off the couch. He made his way upstairs, shivering as he entered the cool room. The fuck? Why the hell are all the fucking windows open? Eren slipped on a long sleeve shirt before trudging back downstairs and into the kitchen to sit at his normal seat. “Mom, what’s for dinner?” He asked quietly, rubbing at his head, and managing to mess his mop of hair even more than it already was. It smells really good.

Well, you sound like you’re at least somewhat back with us… “Chicken, roasted chicken.” She murmured to Eren, setting a plate down in front of him, turning to Lathe with a soft smile. “Tea or coffee?” Her words were soft, her anger from before completely gone. I hope they like it, I haven’t made roasted chicken in forever.

Lathe’s eyes were a fraction wider than normal as he studied her every move, hyper-attentive. “U-uhm… C-coffee, please.” Lathe was tensed for anything as he sat down in fluid motion, Spades always at least in the corner of his eye as his fingers drummed on the edge of the table. His feet were drawn close under him, on his toes, his shoulders up near his neck and trying to look small. She’s progressed to calm fury. Shitshitshit.

Spades got their respective drinks along with her plate and Lathe’s plate. She sat down adjacent to Lathe, across from where Eren was already digging into his food. Well... That chicken isn’t going to last long is it? She shook her head, starting on her food quietly.

Eren looked up from his plate, already halfway through with the food he had. “So… What if life is like a video game? I mean it could happen right? That we all just experience the same thing from different monitors… But what happens if one of the games is fucked up and we see the same object, but for some weird ass reason the gun I’m holding is black in my screen, and another person picks up the same gun and it’s a bright ass purple motherfucking gun… like what happens then? Is it still considered the same object? Is it still considered the same game? What would happen if a someone went back into the video game’s history and changed it? Would that lead to every single screen being completely changed because someone went and changed something that created the game?” Eren stopped only to fill his mouth with more food. Philosophy motherfuckers.
Lathe mostly stared at his plate, picking at his food as he listened to Eren, most of his thought still devoted to keeping an eye on Spades, though his attention was caught at the term ‘video games.’ You’re still high as fuck, obviously… props for bringing up video games at the dinner table, but minus points for doing it when I’m unable to properly appreciate the memes. Lathe gave up trying to eat, sipping at his coffee and staring hard past the table, in his own thoughts. I can’t do this… I want out. Can I just… leave? Is that a thing I can do? Because even though Eren is being hilarious I can’t enjoy it and I don’t want to be murdered but if I don’t help with dishes I might still get murdered… fuck.

Spades watched Eren eat the rest of his plate, and seemingly looked around for extras. Well… I guess he gets broccoli now… there’s no other chicken… and where the hell did all that come from? Spades started to get up to get him some more food, only to stop when Lathe pushed his plate over to Eren, who happily accepted it. What the hell? Why aren’t you eating? You love my chicken! I don’t think I’ve ever made it without you eating it before! She sat back down, picking at the rest of her plate as Eren continued speaking absolute nonsense. You’re not even laughing… what’s wrong? I don’t understand…

Lathe noticed Eren was looking for more to eat, nudging his plate in front of him, keeping his gaze solidly on his mug. I’m not going to eat it… it’s amazing, it’s not that I don’t like it… but I can’t eat when I’m this anxious… it just doesn’t work… Lathe started to tune out Eren’s babbling sort of subconsciously, lost in thought before he decided he wasn’t being of any help just sitting silently. He stood up, going to empty his mug in the sink and start on the dishes. I should help clean up, she did a lot of work… and I don’t want to get yelled at more… she’s still really mad at me…

Eren ate the rest of the plate, excusing himself from the table once he finished to go lay on his oversized bean bag in the computer room. It’s soooooooooo fluffy!!

Spades shook her head with a sigh, picking up a few plates and coming up behind Lathe. She gently put a hand on his shoulder, setting the dishes in the sink. I hope you’re doing alright, I can only imagine what you felt like when you saw Eren smoking weed.

Lathe nearly jumped out of his skin, dropping the dish in his hand that surprisingly didn’t break as it clattered back into the sink, his hands raised defensively and scared eyes locked onto Spades. He held his breath as she looked at him, trying to force himself not to completely panic and run. …this is Spades we’re talking about. Spades. The… the police officer who swore at you and looked ready to castrate you… I- I can’t… really think that she… she’d…

Spades’ eyes widened and she backed up defensively, raising her hands to try not to seem threatening. I haven’t seen that look in your eyes in years . Spades face shifted to one of concern. “Lathe… Calm down… I’m not gonna do anything.” She kept her voice low and reassuring. He’s panicking… Why the fuck is he panicking???
I don't know that. ... it's. **Spades, for fuck's sake!** Lathe looked to his own hands, forcing them to his sides and staring hard at the ground, his hair barely hiding the conflicting fear and shame in his expression. "I-I'm sorry, I-" Lathe's voice cracked, still impossibly scared and trying not to break down. *I don't like seeing you so mad at me… I hate it… I don't want you to be mad…* Lathe took a deep breath, forcing himself to speak, his words shaky. "I- I just…” Lathe shook his head, burying his face in his hands and turning, trying to make for the stairs, wanting desperately to get away from her if for just a minute to regain his composure. *I can't do this.*

Spades acted quickly, catching him around the waist and hugging him to a stop, her voice soft as she murmured in his ear. "Lathe, it's okay, you don’t need to be scared, please don’t be….” She held him close, nestling her head between his shoulder blades. “Please talk to me… Even if it's only a few words.” *I don't want you to be scared….*

Lathe tensed as he felt her arms wind around his torso, and yet he felt that same tension drain out of him with her soft voice. He leaned back into her touch, sniffing and rubbing at his eyes. "I-y-you…. you looked and s-sounded so m-mad when you came home… I was honestly afraid y-you were going to hit one of us, and you swore and… I'm not used to seeing you like t-that, especially to me, and it reminded me too much of w-when… when I w-was a kid…” *You terrified me. ...I hate remembering…*

.... Oh shit… Spades wrapped her arms around him tighter. “I… I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to do that…. I swear…. I just… I don’t want him to make a habit of that… And you know how addicting that can get, I was scared…. Eren’s like my own son… I don’t want him to get hurt.” She held Lathe close to her, not wanting to let go anytime soon. *Please don’t be afraid of me… I couldn’t live with myself if I knew every time you saw me you were terrified of me.*

It’s **Spades**. Lathe relaxed into her hold at her words, his hands dropping to hold hers in place over his stomach, not wanting her to let go. “I-It’s okay… I get it, I'm still mad at Eren for what happened... I didn't get here in time, though, to stop anything… just don't make scaring me like that a habit, okay?” Lathe gave a small laugh at his last sentence, trying to stop his crying. *It brings back too much stuff I want to forget… hopefully that's the last time that'll have to happen.*

Spades nodded, letting go of him for an instant to get to his front and wrap her arms around him again, burying her head into his chest. “I promise… I was just so mad…. And so worried…. I’m really sorry Lathe.” She murmured quietly to him. *I don’t plan on doing it again… Don’t worry.*

Lathe turned to meet her embrace, one hand tangling in her hair, resting his cheek on her head, his voice low and quiet. “It’s okay Spades, I really do get it… It’s okay…” He stood there and held her for a long moment, before finally calming down enough to pull away, pecking her lips. “Let’s get the dishes over with and then get upstairs, okay?” *You had your reason. I'm just glad that's over.*
Spades smiled and leaned up to peck his nose sweetly. “Of course.” Her smile was bright as she broke away to collect all the dishes. I’m glad we were able to talk it out.

Eren obviously did not get away with smoking weed. None of the kids did. They all ended up getting called to the office the next day and got in-school suspension for a week, and Eren was grounded for that whole week, left to himself, his homework, and his recording when he had to upload on schedule. But that was it, and I made sure we talked about what happened. He really should have known better- I need to stop ranting like the overprotective parent I am, my God… Nothing else of note happened leading up to us departing for LA. Spades of course stayed the night before we left, her suitcase all packed and ready for the morning. The train ride was nice, everything on time and running smoothly. It was only a tiny issue trying to wrangle the instrument cases with us on the way over, but we somehow managed. We were tired when we got there even with such a good ride over, so Eren spent the first day painting Nate’s bedroom ceiling and we just chilled. But after that, we dragged everything over to the recording studio and Eren just went to town, playing what he’d been practicing or sometimes just making stuff up, but he got so many good songs for the album done it was amazing! It seemed that everyone who was in the studio that day either knew that Eren was there, or was there because of him. He’s popular even with the popular artists! A few had new songs written, and asked him when he wasn’t singing if he wanted to sing with them. Everyone just adores him, it’s nuts! We finally got him in the pool, too- there was a chill day in the middle of our trip where we had nothing to do and all day to do it, and Eren asked if we could teach him how to swim. It was a lot of fun, and it’s a good thing Spades and I are practically mermaids anyway so he’s catching on really quickly, though I still don’t trust him in the deep end. Naw. Everything that ever happened on the trip of course was posted to Twitter and Instagram, and there have been too many tweets and retweets to count. I don't think I'll ever understand just the extent of his popularity. He’s been calling Levi nearly every day too, making sure his German isn't getting rusty yet, keeping him updated on everything. Oh, and he showed me a sketch idea for the cover of his album Full Tilt, and it’s literally the story of my life, I love it way too much. Pretty much, Eren gets to sit on the corner of the roof of a house, leaning forward and looking from the camera angle that he’s perfectly right-side up, while I ‘tumble’ off very… not gracefully. And then there’s today… Oh my God, today… Nate and Charlotte, my God, they are the best people ever for this, they’ve promised to keep Eren occupied so I can take Spades out to dinner, dancing… and then propose. I’m proposing to Spades. I’m fucking proposing. I’m trying so hard not to completely freak out, but it’s kinda hard when you’re in essence saying that you want to live with that specific human for the rest of your damn life, however long it will be, and that you’re not going to stop loving them not matter what. …I want her to say yes so badly, I really really really want her to be mine…

Eren picked up his head from sheet music as his phone rang. He instantly reached for it and smiled more as he heard Levi’s heavenly voice on the other end. You sound so good… I really wish you were here. He set the sheet music aside on his bed, laying back to relax. <“Hi, Levi. You’re calling pretty early.”>
Levi quirked an eyebrow. <“Um, no I’m not- you hadn’t called me yet. I’ve been waiting nearly an hour.”> Lost track of the time, have we?

...Huh? Really? Eren swallowed hard, looking up at the white ceiling. <“R-really? I didn’t realize…. I’m sorry”> Eren apologized as he looked over at the alarm clock. It is 5 and I generally call him at 3 or 4…. So maybe he has been waiting. His eyes trailed down to the countless sheets of sheet music, both all over the bed, and all over the floor in the room. <“I didn’t realize I had that much done…..”> He trailed off, reaching to the closes sheet and picking it up to read the lyrics to himself.

Levi quietly listened to Eren murmuring the lyrics of one of the songs he had written, his eyes widening a fraction. Death…. Death… and more death. Damn. Levi put Eren on speaker, turning the volume a bit lower while he pulled up another app, texting Lathe.

=[Lathe, you need to get Eren out of that room.]


]=]Just get Eren out of that damn room. He’s apparently been writing about waaaay too much death and needs to get out of his own head right now.]

]=]And hi]

]=]...Eren like /never/ composes. Oh my I’m coming]

Lathe set the bowl of ground beef on the counter, padding up the stairs and lightly knocking on Eren’s room, pushing the door open and speaking softly. “Hey Eren, how’s it going?” He looked around with wide eyes at the multitudes of sheet music scattered around the room. He picked one up from the dresser near the door, reading through the lyrics. …this one has Blake dying… well then. Lathe set the sheet back down, speaking up. “O-kay Eren, you’re coming with me.” Lathe strode over to the bed and didn’t give Eren a chance to protest before picking him up, carrying him out of the room and making sure he still had his cellphone in hand. “I need help with dinner.” And you’re going to go insane in there if I let you keep writing.

Eren blinked in shock as he was carried downstairs and into the kitchen. “What’s for din-…. MEATLOAF!” Eren’s smile returned to his face, looking down to the phone he clutched in his hand and moved to set it on the counter. <‘Levi! We’re making meatloaf! We haven’t had meatloaf in forever!’> I think that’s the only thing I really liked that he made us originally… aside from the chicken… and pasta.

Lathe grinned as Eren beamed, setting him down and going to retrieve aprons for the both of them. [Hi Levi!] He spoke to the phone on speaker on the table, handing Eren a green apron and tying the
maroon one behind him. Yes, I’m being mean and making you juggle two languages. [Finally, I have something that Eren loves that I can actually make besides pasta and chicken!] He moved to set out more ingredients on the counter, setting out a large bowl.

Levi glared at the phone. [You’re really going to make me struggle between two languages? Really?] Not cool man, German is hard enough! I don’t speak French often enough for it to be as easy as it used to be!

“Si, Senor!” Lathe joked, hunting through the cupboards for the meatloaf pan. [Be glad I didn’t try to teach you Korean. And that I don’t know anything in Spanish besides that.] Lathe nudged Eren over to the sink to wash his hands.

Eren let Lathe lead him to the sink and smiled as he washed his hands. <“The fuck are you two talking about? Oh guess what Levi! I went swimming yesterday! But Dad won’t let me in the deep end.”> He whined as he washed his hands thoroughly. Why won’t he let me in the deep end? I can swim now!

Levi smirked. <“That’s great! Though it’s going to be a while before you’re a good enough swimmer to go into ten-feet-deep water. That’s a given.”> We don’t want you tiring yourself out or struggling... drowning... no, that won’t happen, Lathe and Spades will keep a very good eye on you.

Lathe nodded. [Yeah, we don’t want you in deep water until we know for sure you can tread for longer without struggling. It’ll be a bit, but tust me, it’s for the best.] He ruffled Eren’s hair, turning to the table after drying his hands. “O-kay, meatloaf.” Lathe cut open the package of ground beef, emptying it in a large bowl. “Alright, start mixing Eren.”

Eren nodded, putting his hands into the bowl, squishing around the meat as Lathe added eggs, cheese, dry oatmeal, and ketchup. It feels sooo fucking weird. After a few minutes of mixing the meatloaf was on it’s way to being made into balls on placed on a oven sheet and into the oven. “Now what?” He asked quietly, looking up to Lathe with his hands covered in meat-mixture. I can’t take my phone and go talk to Levi elsewhere.... Speaking of which. <“How has school been Levi?”>

Levi shrugged with one shoulder, his face expressionless. <“School’s been good. Training’s been tough, but I’m surviving. I ranked up in marksmanship the other day, though. That’s a thing that happened.” Nothing else too interesting, really.

Lathe nudged Eren back over to the sink, turning on the tap and making sure they both used plenty
of soap. [That’s good to hear! You getting along with everyone down there?] Lathe started the timer on the oven. I wonder when Spades and Charlotte will be back...

Levi groaned at the question. <“They put me in charge of a few kids basically… They act like three year olds, I swear the six of them are worse than you and Eren combined, I hate them all with a burning passion.’’> God they are such asshats.

Eren giggled as Levi mentioned the guys he complained about all the time. Well… If they’re worse than me… Then I think his hatred is warranted. <“Well just glare at them… You’re good at that.”>

Did you really just say that Brat? <“Any more out of you Yeager and I’ll make you run with me at 3 in the morning while I’m home!”> You wouldn’t fucking last more than two miles…

Eren gasped, drying his hands off. <“You wouldn’t!”> no… He wouldn’t make me? Would he? Eren reached for the phone, grabbing it as he turned towards the hallway to go back upstairs. I wonder if I can go swimming…. I wanna try in the deep end.

Lathe caught Eren by the elbow effortlessly, reeling him back into the kitchen. “Don't you try and go anywhere, I want in on this conversation.” And I want you out of your own head for a while more. [And don't drag him out of bed that damn early, you and I both with have to deal with a cranky Eren literally all day. Or a week if he really wants to just spite you.] Lathe smirked, going to his bag hanging from a peg in the mud room and returning with some pencils and a pad of paper, handing a sheet and pencil to Eren and sitting at the island. “I kinda can't leave the kitchen while there's stuff in the oven, so you're stuck with me, kid.” Nope.

Levi groaned as he thought about it. <“On better judgement, I’ll just wake him up when I get back….So if you guys are in LA I assume your in Nate’s house? Where is he?”>

Eren looked to the sheets of paper and pencil, a wide smile coming across his face. He picked up the pencil, already starting to sketch Levi.

The door in the mud room opened with a loud bang, a loud voice shouting to them. “I heard my name! What’d I do this time?” Nate beamed at them, kicking off his shoes and dropping his bag next to them. He meandered over to the island, seeing the name alight on Eren’s phone. “Hey, is that Levi? Hi Levi!” Nate waved at the phone, even though Levi obviously couldn't see him.
Levi chuckled at the other end. “Good to hear you too, Nate…. And you do realize that waving without me being able to see is useless?” He asked, a soft smile on his face as he kept the phone to his ear.

Eren continued to draw Levi, a small smile on his face. *The meatloaf is already starting to smell good... Like really good... And I'm hungry...<“Dad? When’s dinner?”>*

Nate dropped his hand, smiling sheepishly at the phone. “You know me way too well... and I know, but I don't care.” Nate waved again at the phone enthusiastically before plopping down on a stool. “Something smells amazing, by the way. What is it?” *Food sounds really good right about now.*

Lathe chuckled. “Give it about five more minutes and we can eat, okay? It’s won't be long. Still, I'll check it.” Lathe padded to the oven, looking in through the glass. “Yeah, just about five minutes. I'll get a kettle on and plates out.” Lathe did just that, also setting out mugs and turning on the coffeemaker, pulling the meatloaf out of the oven when the timer rang. “I don't know how hungry you all are, so come serve yourselves.” Lathe didn't take any, instead opting to sip at a mug of coffee. *I have dinner later to look forward to-*

*Well... If they’re eating...<“Alright, if you guys are gonna be eating now, I’ll hang up, I gotta wake up at 0300 hours anyway.... Good night, Eren, I love you.”>* *I really do.... You better fucking know it brat.*

Eren nodded. <“Goodnight, I love you.”> he called back before ending the phone call. “We’re having meatloaf with mashed potatoes and broccoli!” Eren told Nate happily, scampering over to make himself a plate as the mudroom door opened again. *Mom’s home!*

Spades followed Charlotte into the house, her long fiery hair let down and curled with shorter curls framing her face. Her perfectly manicured nails were a dark, shimmery blue, and she had a bag with tissue paper hiding the contents held in the crook of her arm. “Hello! We’re back!” Spades toed off her shoes before crossing the room, kissing the top of Eren’s head as he passed her and stepping up to Lathe to kiss his cheek sweetly. “Should I go upstairs and get ready, then?” She smirked as Lathe nodded, noting the blush creeping over his cheeks with a glint in her eye. “Alright then, it looks like you should as well.” She tapped his chest with her nail, rising up on her toes and kissing his cheek again before striding to the stairs. *I hope he likes what I had done to my hair... and he better love this dress. I really think he will.*

Lathe watched as Spades left, dumbstruck and unable to speak for a moment, his face beginning to flush crimson. ...*damn. “Charlotte, you are the best.” Her hair looks great like that, and I like the color of her nails... I wonder what she’d gotten... Lathe smiled widely, finishing off his mug and setting it in the sink, ruffling Eren’s hair again as he passed him, giving Nate a fistbump. “I need to*
Nate grinned, setting down his plate. “Of course, Lathe! Anything! Now shoo, you have to get ready!” Nate waved Lathe on to the stairs, giving him a thumbs up before he disappeared from the hall. That’s that, then. He turned to Charlotte, snaking his arms around her waist, smirking. “I really like your hair like that- it suits you.” If Eren wasn’t right there, I might say something else… but no embarrassing the hell out of the two of them.

Charlotte blushed a bit, letting Nate’s arms wrap around her. “Thank you, I guess we timed it right if dinner’s ready.” She smiled sweetly, pecking Nate’s cheek before going to make her own plate and join Eren at the table. I wonder if he knows? I won’t say anything until I know they’re gone.

Eren was already sitting and eating his plate quietly at the table, though he gave Charlotte and Nate a questioning stare as Lathe left. “Nate..? Where’s Dad going?” Are they leaving me? Do they not want me anymore? What did I do wrong??? Eren felt his stomach twist in knots at just the thought of Lathe leaving him behind.

Nate immediately noticed Eren’s discomfort, giving him an easy smile and untangling himself from Charlotte, going over to pat his shoulder. “Lathe and Spades are going out to dinner tonight- they wanted to go on a date while they were here. They're going to be back, of course, but you'll probably be asleep by then.” They're not leaving forever or anything like that, of course- Lathe just has something very important to do.

Eren looked down at his plate as Nate spoke and nodded. Okay... That’s okay.... But Dad’s not gonna be here to put me to bed... What if I have a nightmare? What if I can’t sleep? Eren curled up a bit to himself as he raised his fork to eat. Blake had come from his spot in the corner to sit by Eren’s chair and put a paw on Eren’s lap, whining.

Nate’s face fell as Eren seemed to shrink in his chair, Blake trying to get his attention and not seeming to calm Eren very much. Dammit... what do I do? ...who do I ask? Nate pulled out his phone and quickly typed, sending the message.

-Yo Levi, little bit of a problem
-Lathe and Spades are going out on a date
-And Eren kinda already misses them even though they haven’t left yet
-So I don't know how to deal with a sad Eren
-Halp

= oh… He’s afraid he won’t be able to go to sleep…

=Lathe’s been putting him to be recently… Cause his nightmares came back

=Maybe he’ll let you put him to bed?

-Alright we’ll see how that goes over

-We need to distract him for awhile, it’s still waaaay too early for anyone to sleep

-…any ideas? I'm shit at this kind of stuff I'm sorry

= It’s okay… um let’s see… Charlotte’s with you right?

-Yeah, why?

= He’s probably got good paper with him… ask him to do a picture of you two, it’ll take him a bit since he isn’t used to drawing you two.

-That’s a good idea! Thanks Levi! You're a lifesaver

-Two minutes of Eren being sad is two minutes too many for me tbh

Nate put his phone back in his pocket, moving back over to the stove and getting himself and Charlotte a plate of meatloaf for the moment. He sat down adjacent to Eren, quiet until he saw Eren was nearly done with eating. “Hey Eren, after dinner, would it be cool if you did the art thing and drew a picture of Charlotte and I?” Having a drawing of the two of us would be really nice...

Eren looked up from his meal at Nate’s words and nodded hurriedly. “You’ll let me do it?” He asked quietly, picking up another forkful to stuff his face with the glorious food. I wonder if I can do it in pencil? Or would they want me to do something else?

Nate grinned. “I just asked you to, yes I’ll let you do it. However you want, too. If you’ve got something over than pencil, I mean. But I think a drawing of the two of us would be really nice to have.” I know exactly where I would put it, too.

Eren nodded. “I have really good paper for graphite…. Can we do it on the patio outside?” He asked curiously. They’d be really cute on the swinging bench out front. A smile overtook his face as he could already see how he would draw the picture.
Lathe straightened out his black tie, tugging on the collar of his crimson dress shirt—Spades’ favorite, he made sure—and buttoned his suit coat. He decided after messing with his hair for five minutes to just leave it as the mess it always was, hoping for the best. He patted his pocket for the tenth time that minute, making sure the small ring box was still there. *I’m actually going to do this. This is actually happening. Oh. My God.* Lathe tried to pull his thoughts together before finally turning off the lights to his room, up back into perfect order, the bed made and certain… amenities left in the bedside table. His dress shoes tapped on the wood of the hall, down the stairs and to the now empty kitchen. He walked to the fridge, opening it and reaching to the back of one of the drawers, pulling out two small plastic boxes, one with a small red boutonnière, the other with a similar corsage. He looked up as he heard the clicking of heels down the hall, his face flushing as he saw Spades.

Spades came around the corner, wearing a nicely fitting dark blue dress with silver accents, the hem nearly reaching the floor, a long slit up both sides exposing a sliver of her tan skin. The dress had one sleeve on her left shoulder, and matched the color of her nails. Her heels were a few inches, but nothing too extreme, black and chic. All her jewelry, her earrings necklaces and bracelets all silver and matching. She had a small black wallet which she held delicately in her hand at her side, her other hand placed on her hip. She blushed as she took in Lathe’s appearance, smiling as she came closer to him. *Well… He looks simply dashing… And I hope that we look okay together. Cause he is mine, and I’m not gonna let anyone else think otherwise. “So… Do you like the dress?”* She asked softly. *Gotta break the ice somehow…*

*...Do I like the dress?* Lathe smirked, his eyes sparkling as he set down the small boxes on the island, stepping forward and gently pulling Spades to him, resting his forehead against hers. “I do… you look absolutely **stunning.**” He pressed a soft peck to her lips, gently pulling her to the table. “Here, so we match…” He carefully lifted the corsage, tying it around her wrist.

Spades’ face flushed as he put her corsage on. *It looks so pretty… When did you have time to get these today? I knew you were with Eren all day… I wonder where we’re going for dinner? You literally won’t tell me anything about this date.* She let him finish off the tying neatly before reaching for the other box, pulling Lathe close to her so she could gently pin the boutonnière to his lapel. *Can’t leave without that on…* Her smile was warm as she looked up to meet Lathe’s eyes. *So handsome.*

Lathe blushed as Spades pinned the red flower to his lapel, his hands lightly resting on her waist as she looked up to him, smiling and kissing her sweetly. **Mine.** He pulled away from her, his eyes bright. “What do you say we get going?” He offered Spades his arm and they walked out back to the driveway, a red Corvette sitting in the driveway. Lathe had rented a car this time around, and knowing what he had planned, decided on something nice. He opened the door for Spades, sliding into the driver’s seat. It wasn’t twenty minutes of driving before Lathe parked the car, thankful he was lucky enough to get a spot on the crowded street just two doors down from the restaurant. He opened the door again for Spades, feeling like a million bucks with her hand on his arm as they walked to Pearl Street.
Spades looked around at the very nice up class area they were in. Small shops and boutiques line the area, some of the places her and Charlotte had come to look for nice dresses. She let Lathe lead her to a very elegant red brick building towards the middle of the block, one look in to see the crowded tables and she knew this would be a good place. *I wonder how far in advance he planned this? There’s no way you could ever sit down without a reservation!*

Lathe led them inside, going up to the hostess table. “Reservation for Quo, please.” He followed the woman that brought them further into the restaurant, pulling out Spades’ chair for her before sitting down across from her at one of the quieter sections. *You look too damn good in that dress…* He ordered a bottle of wine for the table, smiling to Spades. *I hope this all goes well- I hope it’s not too much…*

Spades blushed a bit as he sat down across from her. *Pulling out all the stops….. Well we haven’t had an actual date like this since Eren’s nightmares came back…. This is really nice. A warm smile overtook her lips as she looked up at Lathe. And he’s wearing my favorite dress shirt too… Damn does he clean up great!* Spades enjoyed the great food which they ordered and the wine was also a big hit with her, though when Lathe paid the bill and led her to the car she expected to be driven home. *Where the hell are we going?* She was left in the dark, no matter how much she pestered Lathe to tell her where they were going, he wouldn’t budge. When he pulled up to an old style club, the valet took the car, and Lathe led them in, past the line of people outside waiting to get in. *A club? What the hell are we doing here?* Spades was amazed when they walked in and it was a huge dance floor, filled with people between two very modern-looking bars. A smile again graced her face as she finally listened to the music and saw that the people dancing were around their age. “So I take it you did a bit of digging to find this place?” She asked a bit louder than normal but she was still easy to understand. *I wanna dance now… And this place is perfect!*

Lathe smirked, nodding and speaking up a bit. “I wanted us to do something fun while we were out. I thought you’d like it.” He led her over to the bar, his arm around her waist and handing the keep a twenty, ordering them both a drink. “The best part about it is, though, that they don’t just play the popular songs from the radio. I made sure that the DJ working tonight also favoured another certain genre…” He sipped the amber liquid in the heavy glass he was handed, a mischievous light in his eye. “Listen.” *It’s only the best dancing music.*

Spades listened as she waited for her cocktail to be made. *Electro swing… classic dance music, and great for anything you can think of… well aren’t you a sly devil?* She sipped at her drink watching as the body to people swayed with the music. *It sounds amazing! I wanna dance soon! And if the DJ likes this kind of music, I can only imagine if we ever come back out here together, we’re coming to dance here. I wonder if he would tap with me? I could probably pull it off in heels… It can’t be that hard right?*

As soon as they had finished their drinks, Lathe pulled Spades onto the dance floor with him, grinning as they moved in time with the music. They danced and tapped with the energetic crowd late into the night, pressed against the other and completely enraptured by the music. It was nearing midnight as they left, Spades hanging onto Lathe’s arm. He started them walking, though
instead of heading back to the car, he crossed the street, a park a very short ways ahead. He led her along one of the walking paths, their way well lit by a full moon and many night lights. *I'm really going to do this.*

Spades looked around at their surroundings, listening to her heels click on the concrete path. “Lathe where are we going?” *It’s late! And this was an awesome date... But I'm worried about Eren being without you for getting put to bed.* She followed along anyways, looking in awe at how the trees waved in the breeze gently, the moon shining through to guide them towards a beautiful pond. *Oh my god, this is.... Beautiful.*

Lathe slowed as they came next to the pond, turning and letting his arm slide behind Spades’ back, holding her close and clasping her other hand. He smiled warmly at her, leaning his forehead against hers as he led them in a slow dance down the walk, softly beginning to sing.

The shade in your alleys is dust and the light’s made of gold
And even the ice in my water refuses the cold
They say to get lost and I'm happy to walk on your stones
And I'll walk and I'll talk and I'll ask what you‘d possibly know

And I~
I just can't help but laugh sometimes~
For no reason except that I~
Can't remember what ‘Once’ was like~
And I~
I can't help but feel free sometimes~
Know that I've left the bad behind~
That I carry the good inside~

I'm saying ‘I Love You’ in words that you don't understand
And I feel the cool water of fountains run over my hand
Exposed brick, tarnished brass, and your pendant’s shining glass, it’s just all I see
With no ring on my finger, they'll sing and they'll linger although I've got places to be
With you~
I'm so glad I don't have to choose~
Between two of my favourite views~
One my city and one my muse~
With you~
I can't help but to hum old tunes~
Fight off all these old love-drunk loons~
Know that I've got but naught to lose~

Not me~
No I'd rather not talk ‘bout me~
Not the mistakes I make regularly~
Not the sap I don't wanna be~
No, please, not me~
There's some things I can't stand to see~
All the secrets I've buried deep~
The demons that drag me under their sea~

But please~
I was hoping to not be ‘he’~
I was hoping you not be ‘she’~
I was hoping to make us ‘we’~
So, us~
Won’t you marry me just because~
Turn that ‘is’ alone into ‘was’~
‘Cause you've reminded me what’s in love~

Lathe looked into Spades’ eyes, reaching in his pocket for the ring and getting down on one knee, the dark stones reflecting the lights brightly, silently pleading with her. Please… say yes.
... Is this really happening? Is he just singing nonsense? Like what is he...is he... Oh my god he is!
He’s proposing! Oh my god I was not expecting this. Spades’ face lit up with pure joy as Lathe got on his knee to show her the ring. Her hands covered her mouth as she watched him, starting to cry as she nodded. “Yes!” She couldn’t help but cry as she held her left hand out for him. Oh my god, I’m getting married... Well that’s happening now.

Lathe beamed, his eyes full of stars as he slid the ring on her finger, getting to his feet and holding her close, a tear running down his cheek. Thank you thank you thank you!!! “Spades... I really, really love you.” He pulled back to kiss her sweetly, a scarlet blush over his cheeks. He leaned their foreheads together, quietly chuckling. I’m so happy. “Let’s go home, hm?” ...I want to break my last rule.

Spades smiled more, looking into his eyes as she nodded. “I think... I think that would work.” She leaned up a bit to peck his nose, a soft giggle escaping her as she did so. I want to go home... Yeah... I would like to do that, I can only imagine what lies ahead of this point... I mean, I’ll move out of my apartment eventually? Right? I basically live at his house now. Spades pulled back out of his embrace, taking his hand and leading him back out of the park and towards where they parked.

Yes it will. Lathe grinned as she tugged him along, matching her pace and bringing them back to their car, sliding into the driver’s seat and starting the drive home, his mind trying to wander as time went on. It’s not too far until we’re back... but Spades is being kinda distracting... y’know, existing... damn, does she look good in that dress... Lathe pulled into the driveway, shutting off the car and finally allowing himself to look over to Spades, his eyes shaded. ...I want you... really badly... Lathe, house first. Lathe broke their heated gaze and opened his door, locking the car and walking up to the door with Spades, his arm tight around her middle. Thank god the door’s unlocked, I’d’ve fumbled with the key for a solid minute at this rate... Lathe hung the key on the ring by the door, both of them toeing off their clicking shoes before going upstairs, Lathe shutting the door behind them and locking it, turning his complete attention to Spades. One hand twined in her fiery locks, he immediately attacked her mouth and neck, his other hand keeping her pressed against his front. Mine.

Spades gasped as his warm lips found her skin on her neck, letting out a few mewls as she let her hands explore his shirt, already starting to undo his tie and the buttons. This needs to come off, everything does.

Lathe shrugged off his jacket when she had undone the buttons, breaking away from her neck to pull his tie over his head before his lips reconnected with her neck, his hand trailing from her hair down over her side, lightly tracing up her leg through the slit of the dress. He smiled faintly against her skin. ...I like this dress.
Spades shivered under his touch, his hands feeling like fire on her body. She continued to undo his buttons, shrugging his dress shirt off, leaving him bare on his torso. God yes, you're so fucking sexy Lathe. Her hands moved then from the shirt now somewhere on the floor to his chest, gently grazing every indent of muscle she found. You feel so perfect, and you're all mine.

Lathe lowly hummed as her hands found his bare skin, one hand wandering up her back and tracing over the tiny latch of the dress, unclipping it and dragging the zipper down agonisingly slowly, his mouth trailing lower to the joint of her neck, licking and suckling a dark mark onto her tan skin. He trailed his tongue up to her ear from the mark, nibbling and suckling the lobe, tracing every curve of it.

Spades let out a loud moan, her nails digging into his flesh, enough to to leave a mark but not to open the skin. “Ngh… L-lathe...” She groaned out his name, her legs feeling a little weak as he continued to assault all her sensitive areas. I feel warm... Hmm, I want all this off... He'll be really happy with what's underneath.

Lathe drew back as he gently pulled the dress from her shoulders, letting it slide down and pool at her feet, his eyes hooded as he drank all of her in. Dark blue lace... He smirked, murmuring as his hands wandered. “…And you somehow managed to look even more gorgeous.” Lathe kissed her passionately, his tongue taking advantage of her surprised gasp and tangling with hers, lifting Spades and carrying her to the bed, climbing on top of her. ...how are you mine? You're too damn good to me...

Spades let him pick her up without a struggle, her eyes trailing over his body with pure lust as she took it all in. Those need to come off though... Her hands traveled down his torso to cup at the growing bulge in his pants. “Shall we have some fun?” She whispered seductively to him, a playful glint in her eyes. I really want you...

Lathe shuddered at her touch, his hips moving forward trying to get more of the delicious friction, his voice low. “...Please.” He ducked his head down to nibble at her other ear, his hands coming up to cup her breasts, running his thumbs over her nipples, still hidden under the dark lace.

Spades groaned along with letting out a high pitched whine when he brushed over her nipples. She fumbled with his buckle for a few seconds before she removed his belt, pulling down the zipper to his pants without hesitation, her thumbs hooking on his pants and tugging. “...I want them off, Lathe.” His name rolled off her tongue in a heavy voice, close to his ear. I want your everything...

Lathe shuddered at her heady tone, kicking off his dress pants and not caring that his socks followed, sitting back for a moment and letting his eyes rake over her, her hair in torrents splayed under her, tracing her curves and meeting her eyes, his cheeks scarlet when he realised the look she
was giving him. ...I want everything. Lathe looked over her, his tongue trailing down her neck to nibble across her chest, nipping lightly at her breasts through her bra, one hand running up the inside of her thigh, lightly brushing over her panties, his voice quiet and rough as he kept up his motions. “You’re so wet…” ...I should tell her. Lathe moved up to look Spades in the eye, serious for a moment. “Spades… I want to go all the way.” Everything.

Spades eyes widened a bit in shock at his statement before they closed, her head leaning up towards his, kissing his jaw. “Okay… As long as you’re alright with it… I’m on the pill, it's okay.” She murmured quietly to him, kissing his jaw up over to his ear. I would love it if we could...

Lathe whimpered quietly as she kissed at his ear, turning his head and giving her better access, braced on one arm and letting his other still roam over her. You’ve been so patient with me... thank you. He brushed again over her panties, slowly beginning to rub her clit through the thin fabric. I love the way you sound...

Spades’ was in bliss at Lathe’s movements. “Haa… Lathe… I want it off…” She murmured to him. She wiggled her hips a bit to try and encourage him to strip her. Her left hand wandering down to his crotch and rubbing at his length, starting to impatiently pull down his boxers as well.

Lathe hooked his thumbs over the thin fabric, pulling them down and dropping them off the bed. He let her tug off his boxers, freeing his length and kicking them off. He trailed his hands upward and behind her back, deftly unclipping her bra and sliding the straps from her shoulders. He dropped the garment on the floor as well, going to massage her globes, moving to suckle at the other side of her neck, leaving a large dark mark and lapping at her sweet skin. I want everyone to know you’re taken...

Spades let him mark her, tilting her head to the side to give him better access, one hand carding through his dark locks and the other teasing his impressive length. “Lathe... So good.” She moaned out her words, her back arched off the bed, pressing herself against him as much as she could. God... This feels so right.

Lathe groaned against her skin, a shiver running through him as her hands ghosted his length, arousal pulsing through him. “S-Spades… nnngh… p-please...” I want to feel you... Lathe shifted their positions, Spades on top of him, freeing both of his hands to trace every curve of Spades’ body, wandering south and massaging her ass.

Spades gasped out, letting his large hands cup her supple cheeks. “Mmm, Lathe… Harder.” She moved a bit so she was sitting on his length, grinding on him, and groaning as she felt him slip through her folds, gradually becoming slicker in her juices. Fuck that’s hot...
Lathe moaned as Spades ground onto his length, his hold on her firm as he slowly moved his hips up against her, becoming slick from her juices and the precum dripping from his head. He gazed up at her hungrily, his breath catching in his throat at her pleasured expression. *You look so damn sexy, my God…* Lathe’s heels dug into the mattress, slowly lifting Spades a little higher, his head brushing her folds as he leaned up to kiss her jaw, his voice a whisper. “…c-can I?”

Spades let him kiss her jaw, letting him move her around as well, not minding for right now. “Y-yeah.” She gasped out as she felt his large head already begin to poke at her entrance. *Fuck he’s huge, and he’s not even inside yet.* “Slow…” She murmured to him, letting him venture the way he wanted to. *I can control it later.*

Lathe nodded, gently and slowly easing her onto his length, kissing her jaw and her cheeks lightly as she whimpered, stopping every few inches to let her adjust, his head dropping back as he sank into her to the hilt, letting out a long moan at the overwhelming sensation. “S-so… n ngh… feels so *good …” I haven’t even moved yet…* He gently stroked her sides, waiting for her to let him know he could move.

Spades was breathing hard for a few moments, trying to get used to his massive length all the way to the hilt. *God he’s so fucking big….* She slowly shifted her legs to get a better stance above him. *Need to stay balanced on him.* “You… Can move.. Slow though.” She murmured to him quietly.

Lathe nodded, slowly lifting her and easing her back onto his length, trying not to move his hips too much and beginning a slow, steady rhythm. He tried to stop from groaning loudly, waiting for her cue to move faster. He shuddered as Spades moaned in his ear. *Oh my god… I can’t take it.* Lathe took it and picked up the pace a bit, going a bit faster as Spades’ moans seemed to get louder in his ear. He smoothly flipped their positions, bringing Spades’ legs over his shoulders and thrusting deeply into her, kissing up her neck and groaning. *So good…*

Spades couldn’t help her legs curling around his shoulders as she felt him thrust deep inside. *Oh my god… This is amazing!* Spades cried out in bliss when Lathe thrusted in a certain area, her nails digging into the back of his scalp. *There!*

Lathe’s loud moan was muffled against her neck, letting her hands tug at his hair roughly and aiming for that one spot inside of her, looking up at her with lidded eyes as she let out another cry. *There it is.* Lathe pounded into her, his tongue dragging up her neck to trace the crevices of her ear, feeling a pressure beginning to build in the pit of his stomach. *My God… if I keep this up…*

Spades continued to cry out in bliss, though her soft walls were starting to close around Lathe’s large length. “Haaa… Lathe… ngh… Mmph… I… Can’t…aha…” She moaned in his ear as he continued. *It feels so good, I love it! Holy shit…* “Fuck… Me… *Lathe …”*
Lathe’s coil nearly snapped at her words, his pace becoming erratic as he rammed into her, shuddering. “Spades… I... hnn...” Lathe let out a loud moan as the pressure released, feeling Spades’ walls clamp down on his length and milk him for all he was worth. He slowed, dropping his head against her shoulder and pulling out from her, moving to kiss her fervently, his fire burning down to a glow. I love you.

“Lathe!” Spades cried out in pure bliss as her own coil snapped. That felt amazing... Oh my god, that was better than anything he’s done to me before. She panted, trying to catch her breath as he pulled out of her. She moved her legs from over his shoulders and a shaking hand came up to cup his cheek as she kissed him. Her other hand came up to card through his damp hair. So good.

Lathe broke their kiss, collapsing next to her, pulling her flush against him and kissing her slowly, starting to feel tired. “Spades, I really fucking love you.” Lathe smiled, meeting her gaze for a moment. He pulled the sheets up with his foot, covering the both of them and nuzzling close to her. That... that was amazing.

Spades smiled softly, curling up to his chest. “I love you, too.” It feels so right ... You're so warm, it feels really nice. She snuggled up to him without a care in the world.

Eren woke up relatively early the next morning, slowly sitting up and swinging his legs over the edge of the bed. He was quiet as he got rid of his pajamas, looking at his bare chest and sighing quietly. I still can’t get over the fact that whenever I have my shirt off... all the scars show... well, no one’s gonna see them anyways. Eren dug around for his swim trunks and stepped into them quiet as a mouse, not even waking up Blake who lay at the foot of the bed. I guess I’m going alone, that’s fine. Eren quietly slipped out of his room, leaving the door open as he grabbed a large dark green towel to wrap his chest with. He padded with bare feet down the stairs silently, walking through the kitchen quietly, and unlocking the backdoor. He was outside without waking anyone in the house. Eren hopped off the back porch, landing on the soft wet grass which caused a small shudder to run through his spine. The dew makes the grass feel really weird in between my toes! He smiled softly, walking across the lawn and to the gate, opening the large metal door and leaving it slightly ajar. He tiptoed over to the large pool, leaving his plush towel on a chair. Don’t want to get that wet... It’s also pretty chilly out this early, even for California. He looked over to see the water shimmer in the orange glow that was slowly coming into view over the large fences surrounding the house and pool. He stepped down the stairs at the shallow end of the pool, soon up to his neck and letting out a sigh of relief. At least the pool is warm. Thank you Nate for having a heated pool! Eren slowly made his way out into the middle of the deep end, struggling a bit to keep his head above the water, managing it for the moment, but a sense of overwhelming dread hit him like a ton of bricks in that instant. I... I can’t.... Touch the bottom. Shit! Eren’s eyes widened as panic started to set in, memories flooding through his mind of a similar situation that happened years ago. His
legs were starting to give out, struggling to keep his head above the water. No! No! I can’t reach the bottom! Eren tried to open his mouth to call out for help, and to breathe, only to suck in a bunch of water, sending him through a coughing fit, forcing him even deeper under the water, the air escaping his lungs quicker than he thought would ever happen again, only to be refilled with water. .... Fuck! I can’t breathe.... Dad, help me... please...

Eren’s eyes started to close, seeing the last of the air escape his lungs and head to the surface. .... I can’t reach the bottom.... Eren tried in a last effort to reach the surface to breathe again, but it was already starting to get darker. It hurts.... I can’t breathe... it burns... I’m drowning... I’m gonna die.......... I don’t want to die. Eren couldn’t help his eyes start to close as he succumbed to the water in his lungs.

Lathe stirred from his deep sleep as he heard a quiet sound, his mind taking a minute to rise to consciousness. He blinked the sleep out of his eyes, focusing on the waves of long hair in front of his, smiling and remembering the night before, pressing a soft kiss to the back of Spades’ neck. I love you. Lathe carefully untangled their legs, stepping onto the carpet and meandering to the dresser to put on clothes before leaving for downstairs to make breakfast. He looked over Eren’s room, seeing the door slightly ajar. He lightly knocked and poked his head in, seeing Blake sleepily starting to get up, Eren nowhere to be seen. It took a second for Lathe to recover from the sensation of the floor falling out from under him, trying to calm down. This happened before. He didn't even wait for Blake to follow him before thundering down the stairs, sliding into the kitchen and seeing the back door unlocked. Fuck. He ran into the backyard, looking around for any hint as to where Eren might be, not seeing him in any of the fruit trees at a glance. He looked to the gate, his eyes wide as he saw it ajar. He said yesterday he wanted to go in the deep end. ...he can barely swim. “Eren!” Lathe shouted towards the pool as he ran to the gate, quickly opening it and taking in the towel on a chair nearby, a shadowy figure at the bottom of the deep end, the surface calm. ...he's drowning. Lathe didn’t give it more than an instant of thought before he sprinted across the concrete to the deep end, diving into the water and reaching Eren’s limp form under the water in a second, holding onto him and kicking up from the bottom hard, kicking for the edge of the pool after breaking the surface. He heaved himself onto the concrete, one arm still around Eren’s drenched torso before he could lift him up, splayed out on the ground, unmoving. He felt Eren’s neck for a pulse, his face going pale. Nothing. “Spades!!” Lathe shouted to the house as he started CPR, praying that Eren would open his eyes and cough out the water and start living again please. Tears started to stream down his face, trying in desperation to get him to wake up. I can’t lose you.

Spades woke up, hearing Lathe’s shout for Eren, figuring they were downstairs in the kitchen. She sat up, putting some clothes on at a leisurely pace before she heard Lathe shout for her only a minute later. Wait.... Why is he calling for me? She quickly slipped on a t-shirt and shorts before making her way outside of the room, seeing Blake stretch in front of Eren’s door. Oh no... this can’t be good. Spades left her hair down as she ran down the stairs, Nate coming out of his room in confusion as to why they were shouting so early in the morning. Spades paid him no mind as she looked around the first floor, not seeing them in the house. Where the hell are you? She looked out the window, overlooking the back part of the yard. Her eyes widened when she saw the gate to the pool wide open. That was closed yesterday.... No, don’t tell me Eren tried swimming in the pool! She raced outside, letting out a high pitched scream as she saw Lathe leaning over Eren’s limp body. “Oh my god!” She immediately went to Lathe’s side, looking for a pulse. It’s so faint....
Nate sleepily lifted his head at Lathe’s shout, confused. *What the hell…? It's too damn early for this.* He dropped his head back against the pillow, trying to fall back asleep. *Probably not important, he’s always cray. What do I know?* He furrowed his brow as he heard him shout again, this time for Spades, kicking at the covers. *Okay, what the fuck is going on? And why is everyone but me involved?* He left his room, seeing Spades run down the stairs, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He started to pad down the stairs after her, stopping dead as he heard the back door slam. *The fuck? Did something happen?* He picked up the pace a bit, becoming concerned as Blake passed him in the hall, pawing at the door. His eyes widened as he heard Spades’ scream. *Fuck.* He ran to the door, letting Blake out first and following at his heels to the pool, his eyes wide as he saw the gate wide open. *Not good. Not good.* He ran onto the concrete, freezing as he saw Lathe trying in desperation to start Eren breathing. Spades next to him and feeling for any sign that he was alive, his hands covering his mouth in shock, eyes wide. *...oh my god.*

“Anything?!” Lathe addressed Spades as he kept pressing on Eren’s chest, his expression stony though his eyes were full of fear. *He can't be dead. He can't be. He’s not even twenty. He can't die now, he has so much left to do, he has a life to live... he has to marry Levi... he can’t...* Spades felt Eren’s neck, breathing out in relief. “Yeah... keep going...” She cried, moving to hold Eren’s head as his heart rate started to pick back up. *Come on Eren! Breathe dammit!* Lathe doubled his efforts at her words, hoping beyond hope he would start breathing. *Come on Eren, we know you're in there, wake up and start breathing again. ...you have to. I won't ever forgive myself if I let you leave us, you need to wake up.* Tears never stopped falling down Lathe’s cheeks, blocking out nearly everything around him as he focused on Eren. *Eren. Don't you dare die on me.*

A few seconds later, Eren’s body shook as he struggled to cough out the water, instinctively moving to his side, Spades helping him to move as he coughed out the water in his lungs. He took in a deep ragged breath, letting Spades hold his head. *I… I thought I died....* Eren coughed up the rest of the water he still had in his lungs before he laid still again, trying to calm himself down, not even realizing that he was crying until he couldn’t see clearly anymore. *I almost fucking died…* Spades sighed in relief once Eren started to cry, her hands gently going through his hair. *I thought we were going to lose you.... Please don’t scare us like that again Eren.* She cooed to him as he cried, curling into a ball as he cried. “Eren… Eren, hun.... we need you to focus on breathing okay? You need to lay flat… come on.” She coaxed him to unfurl from himself and lay on his back as he took in ragged breaths.

Charlotte was the last one out of the house, wrapped in a bathrobe. She had her cellphone in hand, coming up to Nate’s side gasping as she saw Eren on the ground, surrounded by Spades and Lathe. She got a full view of the silvery scars lacing his chest. *So… That’s why he was so adamant about*
wearing a shirt while he was swimming yesterday. “Is… Is he okay?” She asked quietly to Nate, looking up to him with wide eyes. Do I need to call an ambulance? Does he need to go to the hospital?

Lathe’s wide eyes went to Eren’s face as he coughed the water from his lungs, stopping his motions and grasping Eren’s hand, letting out a quiet sob, relieved. He’s breathing… he’s breathing. He’s going to be okay. “E-Eren… don’t you ever scare me like that again…” Lathe buried his face in his hand, trying to calm himself down, running his thumb over the back of Eren’s hand soothingly. Lathe, keep it together. Eren’s okay, he’s alive, but he’s not going to be exactly in the best shape for a while. Lathe finally looked up for a moment, realising Nate and Charlotte’s presence across the pool, both of them worried and Charlotte pointing to her cellphone. He called to them over the pool, trying to keep his voice from wavering too much. “He’s okay, you don’t need to call for help.” Lathe looked back to Eren, leaning down to peck his forehead. “I’m so glad you’re okay… never do anything like that again.” His voice held no venom, only relief.

Eren looked up to Lathe with teary eyes, trying to speak, but his voice so ragged and scratchy that he couldn’t make out more than a word at a time. “I-I’m… sorry…… I thought… I-I could… swim…” Eren’s grasp was so weak as he tried to squeeze Lathe’s hand. I can’t even hold his hand… I feel so weak. He barely recognized that Blake was there until the dog started to lick at his face, whimpering and whining.

Charlotte nodded as she heard Lathe call to her. “I’m going to get towels for him, go see if they need any help.” She hurriedly walked back towards the house to grab a stack of dark blue towels and started on her way outside, to help them with Eren. I can only imagine how long he was at the bottom of that pool.

Spades sighed quietly in relief as Eren tried talking. “Eren, hun, don’t try talking yet… you need to keep breathing… just focus on that.” She continued to run her hands through his hair in soothing patterns on his scalp. We can’t have you go into shock, that’ll only make things worse.

Lathe gave Eren a weak smile and squeezed his hand back, looking up as Charlotte and Nate approached them with towels. He thanked her, taking one from her and gently wrapping Eren in it, not even noticing he himself was soaking wet until Spades draped one over his shoulders. He rubbed Eren’s shoulder soothingly as Spades gently dried Eren’s hair until it was only damp, making sure he was bundled up well before speaking again. “Eren, we’re going to get you inside where you’ll be warmer, okay? Just focus on your breathing, that’s all you need to do. You’ll feel better in a little bit, I promise.” He watched as Eren nodded, slowly and carefully getting his arms under him and lifting him up, trying not to let him curl into himself too much as he carried him to the house, keeping his steps even so as not to jostle him. We need to get you inside, into dry clothes, wrapped up with warm blankets, and some tea and pain reliever.

Thank fuck he’s okay. Nate kept ahead of Lathe a couple steps, opening the door for them as he
stepped inside. Lathe is in doctor mode, Spades has that Mom-mode-activated look... they've got him. Nate went to the counter and started the coffeemaker, putting a kettle full of water on the stove and setting out mugs. Today’s going to be a recovery day for Eren then... he isn't going to be doing any singing, that's for sure. He'll get better though.

Charlotte followed them into the living room and helped to rearrange the moveable furniture, and spread blankets out so that Eren basically had a large bed under him that could get damp from the towels and keep him warm as well. “I can get more blankets and pillows.” She offered quietly to them. I wanna help but it looks like you guys've got everything.

Spades smiled softly at her. “I’m sure Eren would love a nest of pillows and blankets if it isn’t too much to ask for?” I know that Eren always like to sleep in his nest at home whenever he feels like shit. Spades smiled as Charlotte nodded and went off to get more blankets and pillows, and Nate coming in with a few mugs of coffee and tea. These guys know us pretty well.

Lathe nodded gratefully to Charlotte as she offered to bring more pillows and blankets, about to go get his medical bag from the mud room when Nate came in holding two mugs, his bag slung over his shoulder. “Nate, you're the real MVP.” Lathe warily smiled to him, accepting his bag from him and riffling through it as Nate set down the mugs on a nearby end table and left to retrieve more, pulling out a small bottle of aspirin. He shook two into his palm, moving close to Eren and pressing them into his hand. “Eren, these are just some strong pain relievers. I'll get you your mug of tea to help them down.” He picked up the mug, helping Charlotte as she returned to prop Eren up slightly on a pillow so he could take them. “Easy now, take your time.” Down the hatch.

Eren looked to the pills, weakly lifting his hand to his mouth and taking one at a time, sipping at the tea. He took both without hesitation and looked at Lathe hoping he would take the mug from him. It’s too heavy... I can’t hold this. He watched as Charlotte and Spades worked on getting Eren comfortable in blankets and loading the huge square of couches pushed together with more blankets and pillows. Are we all gonna stay in here?.... Wait... do I have a fucking shirt on!??!? Eren’s eyes widened as he realized all his ugly scars were there for everyone to see. Shit... not good, I didn't want them to see! I didn't want Nate to see them.... He’ll pity me if he does... I don’t want him to pity me... I want him to be my friend! Blake whined as Eren freaked out, jumping up onto the couches and going to sit by Eren, trying to calm him down.

Lathe set his bag and Eren’s mug down when Blake leaped onto the couches, he himself going to join Eren, running a hand through Eren’s hair to calm him, not even noticing his own dark locks still soaked and dripping onto the towel around his shoulders. “Eren, it’s okay, we’re taking care of you now... you don't have anything to worry about right now. It’s okay. Swear it.” You don't need stress piled on top of what just happened... I'll make us all breakfast and lunch and dinner today, whatever you want, and Spades and I will make sure you're comfy and dry and happy. That’s what’s important now. Nothing else.
Eren shook his head, looking at Lathe with panicked eyes. *No... they can see my chest... I didn’t want them to see it... they can see it.* Eren weakly reached to pull up the blankets to cover his chest and he tried to hide the ugly scars away, getting frustrated when he was too weak to pull it up past all the scars. *It won’t make it. “I... I can’t.”* Eren was struggling to pull it up over his scars still. *I need help.*

Spades looked to Eren struggling to pull the blanket up, climbing up onto the couches on the other side of Eren and helping him pull the blanket up to his chin. *Lathe’s still soaked... well, I can stay with Eren for right now. “Lathe.... Get off the couch, you’re soaking wet, go get dry clothes on and get Eren dry clothes too.”* *Come on, the drier his surrounding area is the better.*

Lathe’s expression flickered with confusion until he noticed his shirt sticking to him, suddenly realising the room felt colder than it probably should have. “...I literally completely forgot. I’ll go do that now.” Lathe gave her a sheepish smile before getting up, walking to the stairs and trying not to slip on the wood floor. He toweled off his wet hair, retrieving clothes from the bedroom before shutting the bathroom door behind him, hanging up his soaked clothes and changing into a plain white tank and red sweatpants. He went over to Eren’s room, looking through the dresser and getting him a loose long sleeve, sweatpants, and dry boxers and socks. He padded back downstairs. “I got you dry clothes, you can change whenever you feel okay enough to. I’ll make us all breakfast. What do you want to eat, Eren? Anything.” *You call the shots today.* Lathe leaned on his elbows on the back of one of the arranged couches, the clothes still in his arms, smiling warmly to him.

Eren nodded weakly. “I... wanna... change... first.” Eren told him quietly, trying to struggle and get up, wincing as he sat up, clutching at his chest. *It fucking hurts to move.... Like a lot... shit... Did I do something to my ribs? They fucking hurt.*

Lathe noticed him cringe, gracefully leaping over the back of the couch and landing softly next to him, his clothes still in hand, resting a hand on his shoulder. “Your chest hurt?” He hummed knowingly as Eren silently nodded. “I’m not surprised, that can happen when you do CPR... it’s probably a fracture, nothing too serious, but I want Scotty to be the one to take a look when we get home. Just don’t try to aggravate it and you’ll be okay. The painkillers should kick in and help soon, but if not I’ll get you something a bit stronger. ...do you need help getting changed, or can you do it?” *At this point, I don’t trust nobody besides Scotty or I to be in charge of any medical stuff that goes down.*

Eren nodded his head. “Just... hold the blanket... I can get my underwear.... Myself... but I don’t think I’ll be able to do much else...” *I feel so fucking weak right now. I don’t know if I can do that.*

Lathe nodded, helping ease him back down and handing him his boxers, holding the blanket in place while Eren struggled to change them, finally handing him the wet garment. He let Spades
take it from him, pulling the cover back so he could gently help him into his shirt, tugging on his sweatpants and socks before tucking him back in. “Your painkillers should have kicked in… are they enough? Do you need something more?”  

I don't want you in too much pain…

Eren shook his head. No… it hurts a lot, but I can deal with it. It's payback for even attempting it I guess. He looked up to Lathe with pain in his eyes. “Can… can we have… french toast?” Eren asked quietly to him as he shifted a bit, whimpering in pain as he tweaked it without realizing it. Fuck that hurts, alright, well moving by myself is gonna be a bitch today.

Spades sighed quietly. “Alright Eren, Lathe’ll make breakfast, but you gotta stay still so that you don’t hurt yourself more.” She shifted and helped him move up onto a mound of pillows so he can comfortably see the TV.

Charlotte was currently flipping through channels trying to find something that Eren would most likely enjoy. Well… Freeform is doing the Harry Potter weekend for like the fifth time in the last two months. That should work. She turned it on, smiling as Harry took over the screen. “Eren, is Harry Potter alright for today? They have the marathon running this weekend.”

Eren nodded subtly to Charlotte, a smile forming on his face, and he looked to the TV completely engrossed into it, not noticing Nate come into the room.

Nate finished up drying the floor from all the water tracked into the house, going to chuck it into the dryer and coming back into the living room. “Alright Lathe, I got Eren’s tea on the table behind you, and I guess I’ll be your slave in the kitchen. Charlotte is gonna stay with Eren and Spades to make sure he’s got all the nesting materials he needs, so- ready to make breakfast?” It's been one hell of a morning… Damn.

Lathe nodded, chuckling quietly and picking up the mug of coffee next to Eren’s tea behind him. “As ready as I'll ever be, I guess.” He petted Eren’s head lightly. “You just chill and watch Harry Potter, I'll have breakfast ready before you know it.” He followed Nate into the kitchen, tossing him an apron and getting to business. It wasn’t long before he was carrying a tray table with French toast and all the fixings into the living room, waiting for Spades to help Eren sit up a bit before setting it in front of him, setting his tea as well in front of him. He ruffled his hair before going to help retrieve plates for everyone else, all four of them settling around Eren in the couch square to eat, snitching the maple syrup and buttercup from his tray and watching Harry Potter, some quiet chatter passing between them. Lathe took the dishes back to the kitchen when everyone was done, Nate offering to help and following him to the sink, drying the dishes Lathe washed.

Nate’s voice was quiet as he spoke. “Do you think it had something to do with what he was writing yesterday?” I can't help but wonder if he was trying to drown himself… I mean… His past would warrant an attempt. Nate set to putting the dishes away once they were dried.
...he wouldn’t. Late shook his head, his voice calm. “I know that Eren has a lot of ghosts and bad memories he can’t let go of, but he only wrote all that because given such an outlet for it, he’ll get lost in his own mind. He even said himself he thought he could swim in the deep end, and I knew he didn’t really like that I wouldn’t let him yesterday. He just, quite literally, got in over his head. But it wasn’t anything intentional.” He handed Nate another plate. *He’s not like that, anymore at least. He’s been getting so much better.*

Nate sighed quietly. *Lathe… Did you read all his music?* “One of the songs was about drowning himself.” His voice was broken as he spoke. *I’m not trying to imply anything… I’m just worried about him… I saw the sheet music all over the floor in his room when I got home, and it just picked it all up and read it all …*

Lathe looked up, setting down the plate he was holding and drying off his hands, setting a hand on his shoulder as he spoke. “I only read one line of one of the songs he wrote… I know everything he wrote wasn’t pretty, but I really don't think he meant it literally. It could have been an extended metaphor, for all I know. But he said himself, and I have very good reason to believe he wouldn't. I understand why you'd be worried, and I'll keep a closer eye on him, but I really think he’s okay.” I trust his word, and I know he’s been making progress, and if anything were bugging him, I trust he’d let me know before it escalated.

Nate nodded. “Sorry, I’m really worried about him… He’s like the little brother I never had… And are those scars… Are they from…?” Nate trailed off looking at the hallway leading to the family room. *Are those from Grisha beating him?*

Lathe’s eyes suddenly flickered with recognition. *Nate saw the scars. Charlotte saw them too… and Eren was so adamant about swimming with a shirt on… was he freaking out earlier because he didn’t want them to see?* Lathe sighed, nodding. “They’re from his biological father, yeah… but he’s so self-conscious about them, I’m pretty sure he didn’t want you two seeing them. He swam with a shirt on yesterday, that’s why… just don't ask him about it or anything. But yeah…” *He has so many… too many…*

Nate nodded. “My lips are sealed. Shall we make popcorn now or later? I mean we’re going to be watching movies… Aren’t we?” *I think keeping Eren happy today will be the best action for today… But how will he take popcorn?*

Lathe nodded. “I’d say today is a chill with Eren and watch movies day. I’m sorry, but no singing is probably going to happen too soon, because his lungs need time to recuperate from all that chlorinated water. But at least I will want popcorn, since you brought it up I'm assuming you'll eat some too, and Spades loves it, Charlotte I don't really know, and Eren is a maybe, so yes. Popcorn is a thing that needs to happen.” Lathe looked over to a cabinet he knew held a huge pot.
“...preferably in large quantities.” *Legit, once we have it, we’re going to eat it. That's no question. “But let’s finish these dishes first, cool?”*

Nate nodded helping him finish the dishes they already had. Once they were done he helped fish out some rather large bowls he had for some reason. *Still don’t know why we have these but we do... These should work.*

Lathe lifted the heavy pot onto the stove, hunting through the cupboard for the large plastic jar of popcorn kernels he’d bought not too long ago. He watched Nate struggle to fit the large bowls out of a cupboard, grinning. “’Y’know, for someone who apparently never cooks, you sure have everything in a kitchen you could ever need.” *I'm surprised. And low-key impressed.*

Nate chuckled as he finally got the bowl out, setting it with the others. “Well, I mostly used these for parties.... I think? But I haven’t hosted a party in years… But they would make excellent popcorn bowls.” He smiled cheerfully as he helped get out whatever he needed to make popcorn.

Lathe nodded approvingly, starting the stove and setting an absurd amount of popcorn kernels to pop with the perfect amount of butter and salt, needing oven mitts to shake around the pot as they popped, trying to leave as few unpopped kernels as possible. He filled one of the huge bowls before starting another pot, letting Nate put whatever he wanted in it and filling the second. They carried the two bowls into the living room, Lathe settling next to Spades who was on Eren’s right, setting the bowl in her lap so Eren could reach it and draping one arm behind her, shifting to share her blanket. He leaned over to peck her lips before lightly pecking her neck and resting his head on her shoulder, weary. *It’s already been a hella long day…*

Eren watched them come into the room curled up a bit to Spade’s side, surrounded by even more pillows and blankets. He was fairly quiet, but didn’t really make a move for the popcorn, afraid it would hurt if he did. *I don’t want it to hurt, I’m finally comfortable… No pain please.*

Nate looked surprised by the amount of extra blankets and comforters that were added to Eren’s nest since they left to do dishes. *Charlotte’s doing most likely. I know Eren loves blankets and pillows.* Nate settled in between Eren and Charlotte on Eren’s left and made sure to give Blake space to move around. *Don’t upset the protective guard dog.*

Spades lifted her head up a bit to peck Lathe’s cheek with a smile. [He’s doing better… He finally got comfortable next to me.] *I want him to get better just as much as you do… I mean, he’s gonna officially be my kid soon too…*

Lathe smiled, quiet. [That’s good, that he’s feeling a bit better… but he did say the pills didn't do
much…] Lathe’s brow furrowed, lifting his head and speaking to Nate. “Nate, my bag’s leaning against the couch next to you, can you pass it and Eren’s mug please?” I have something a bit better. He accepted it with a quiet thank you, Spades holding Eren’s mug while he rifled for a different bottle, thinking for a moment and pouring one into his hand, pressing it into Eren’s palm. “This’ll really take the edge off any pain.” It’s fast-acting too. You’ll definitely feel it.

Eren looked at the light blue pill in his hand. What the fuck is this? It’s got a 15 on it? Does that mean something? Eren shrugged, slowly moving away from Spades and wincing as he felt a sharp pain in his chest. He hesitantly raised his arm and took the pill, drinking from his mug afterwards, staying where he was and not daring to move. I wonder what the hell he gave me… I don’t think I’ve ever had that before...

Lathe set his bag next to him, gently petting Blake as he shifted around and resting head back on Spades’ shoulder, reaching for the popcorn and quietly munching, glancing up every minute or so, waiting to see the shift when the pill kicked in. That’s the lowest dose of morphine I can give you...it won’t not work, so any minute now...

It didn’t take much longer until Eren shifted against Spades, curling up to her, completely oblivious to the ring she was wearing. She let him curl up on her lap, and he seemed okay as she carded her fingers through his dried locks. Her hands feel nice. It was towards the beginning of the second movie that Eren passed out, his breathing even as he slept with his head on Spades’ lap.

Lathe moved the bowl from her lap to his to make room for Eren, smiling as Eren fell asleep in her lap. His arm held her close to him, murmuring in her ear. [You make an absolutely wonderful mom, you know that?] He smirked as she blushed, giving her a sweet kiss before resting his head again on her shoulder, settled and warm. [I love you, Spades… If I fall asleep on you too, it’s okay to wake me up when everyone wants lunch. I’ll be nice and make food.] He pointed to Nate with his left hand, tiredly joking. [Anything to keep him away from the stove.] Let’s be real, he can burn water. And that takes skill.

Spades nodded and smiled with a blush. [Alright, we’ll let you sleep… I know it’s been a long day already. Get some rest.] She kissed his forehead, still rubbing Eren’s head to keep him calm as he slept. She looked over to Nate. That reminds me. “How did you guys put him to sleep last night?” I remember he was asleep when we got home… And he’s had nightmares recently so it’s hard putting him to sleep if you’re not Lathe.

Nate chuckled a bit. “Interesting you should ask…. Well, we had some extra gloves… Filled them with beans, put them in the microwave and then put one on his back and one on his head to make it feel like someone was there with him… Worked like a charm. He was out after a few minutes.” Thank you, Internet.
Lathe lifted his head and just stared at Nate for a long moment before turning to Spades, motioning to him with his right arm. [This is exactly the sort of shit I'm talking about. We can't even trust him with a damn microwave, so why the hell did we trust him to care for Eren?] ...I'm both amused, and concerned. [Legit, how did you not start a fire?] Lathe addressed Nate, his expression and tone deadpan, too tired to realize he was still talking in French. I'm so done with you.

Charlotte giggled at Lathe’s words. “Well… I made sure that he just put them in long enough to warm them up, so he didn’t burn the house down.” Yes, I know French and you guys are so perfect for each other it’s amazing!

Nate watched this whole conversation take place. “Why do I feel like I’ve been made fun of for this entire conversation? Come on! You gotta give me some credit! He fell asleep without having to have you put him to bed. I think I succeeded in my first parenting lesson…

Lathe just gave Nate a look. [I’m just grateful on the behalf of landlords everywhere that you don’t rent.] That would be a nightmare. [I get the feeling that all the landlords in the state would have you on their do-not-rent lists, or at least ban you from having anything at your disposal more technologically advanced than an apple peeler.] ...I'd probably have that as a basic requirement. And I'm me.

Nate just huffed. “Yeah yeah… Talk all the smack you want, and get to bed before your kid wakes up…” Nate made a shooing motion, before getting closer to Charlotte and watching the movie still. I feel as though he’s majorly insulted me…

Lathe dropped his arm, snaking it around Spades’ waist and again using her shoulder as a pillow, mumbling tiredly. [Sorry, that was mean… but I'm tired and trying to be humorous and it’s apparently not working.] He studied his expression from his spot. [...you don't speak French, do you.] He waited for a response, getting none and sighing. [Charlotte, do me a solid and translate everything, pretty please. I can't English right now…] Lathe yawned, slipping into a light sleep.

Charlotte chuckled and translated everything that Nate needed to know which only got him angry for a few seconds before he laughed it off. “He’s probably right though… At least he’s asleep.” That’s good on a lot of levels. She smiled and the three adults awake fell into relative silence going through two movies before Eren started to stir.

Eren whimpered in his sleep heavily, tossing and turning rapidly. No… No… Not again! I can’t reach the bottom! I can’t… Reach…. Eren woke up screaming, panting hard and scrambling away from Spades and everyone else and struggling against the multitudes of blankets. Blake was whining trying to get him to calm down as he freaked out. I need to get out of here… He’s gonna
Lathe's eyes snapped open, focused as he moved the large popcorn bowl out of the way and shifted forward onto his knees, his arms gently encircling Eren's torso and murmuring to him, trying to calm him down. “Eren, hey, it's okay. I'm here, Lathe’s here… you're fine, it was just a nightmare…” Another one... we need to try to stop those...

Eren was still struggling against the multitudes of blankets he was currently wrapped in and freaked out more when Lathe tried to hold him until he started talking. It's Dad... It's not him... He’s not gonna throw me in the lake... I'm not gonna die... Eren slowly started to calm down from his panicked state, starting to cry as he remembered everything that happened almost a decade ago.

Lathe slid one arm under Eren and gently lifted him, bringing part of the nest with him as he settled back next to Spades, setting Eren in the space she had made so he could be between them. He held him close to his side, rubbing his arm and murmuring into his ear to calm him down. It's okay. You have nothing to worry about. We'll try and keep the nightmares away.

Eren continued to cry into Lathe’s side, his hands shaking as he clung to him. I must look so pathetic to them all.... I'm 18 and I still cry like a baby... Over a fucking nightmare... No. It’s not a nightmare, it was a memory... Two actually. My mind meshed two of them together... Me almost completely dying today, and Grisha throwing me in the lake when I was 9... Eren just buried his head in Lathe’s shoulder, continuing to sob and starting to hiccup because of it. <“I don’t want him to kill me…”>

Lathe’s hand carded through Eren’s brunette locks, letting him cling to him, German flowing from him a little more easily. <“Eren, he’s gone. He’s not here, he’s not going to hurt you. We’re here to keep you safe. You’re alright now. You don't have to be scared.”> It’s my... our job, to keep you safe. You’ll be okay. You scared me more than half to death today, but at least that’s all it was- a scare. ...you’d be in trouble for swimming by yourself if you hadn't more or less drowned...

Eren could only nod as he whimpered, struggling against the blankets to get into Lathe’s lap. He succeeded after a bit, not paying the movie any mind as he held onto Lathe’s shirt, his whole body trembling along with his hands. .... It was so... So terrifying. I don’t want that to happen again. Eren looked over to Spades as she put her hand on his back, rubbing soothingly, noticing that she had a reflective object on her left hand. Is that a ring? Is Mom married? Wait... Is Mom... Someone else’s real mom? Eren swallowed hard, trying to stop his cries and hiccups. But.... I... What if she’s not gonna come back?

Lathe pressed a kiss to Eren’s temple, seeing him staring hard at something and following his line of sight. He gave Eren a warm smile, his hand going to clasp Spades’ and bring it a bit closer to
him so he could see the ring, speaking quietly. “Did you see this? You know what this ring means?” We were going to tell you today, this morning… that didn't exactly happen.

Eren looked up to him with broken eyes. It means Mom’s not gonna be my Mom... Why are you smiling? I thought you wanted her to yourself... Eren sighed quietly and just looked down at his still-shaking hands.

You don't look too happy... but you love Spades! ...I don't know what state his mind is in, so I'll just say it. Lathe’s hand left Spades’ hand to pull her close, pressing a sweet kiss to her cheek. “Eren, it means she’s mine.” Lathe grinned, a barely visible pink dust over his cheeks. Mine. ...I really like how that sounds...

.... What? Eren looked up to Lathe's face with a slightly hopeful look. “She’s not someone… Else’s mom? S-she’s my M-mom?” Eren asked quietly, slowly looking between the two of them. Please tell me that’s the case... That she’s my new mom... And not someone else’s mom...

Spades smiled brightly at Eren leaning forward to kiss the top of his head. “Of course I’m gonna be your Mom… I wouldn't want to be anyone else’s.” She smiled more as a similar feature overtook Eren’s face. Well that worked to lift his spirits.... But he really thought that I was marrying someone other than Lathe? How insecure about people staying by his side is he?

Lathe smirked, addressing Eren light-heartedly. “You dare to underestimate my charm?” He rested his head again on her shoulder, turning after a moment to peck her neck lightly. “I'm not letting her go anywhere.” Oh no, she’s mine.

Eren looked up to them and smiled happily. I really have a mom again... But... What if I’m in the way? Eren felt a second overwhelming sense of dread for today as he curled up in Lathe’s lap, his back pressed against his chest, focusing again on the TV. What if Lathe won’t want me in the house anymore? I guess I could always go back to my old house... Clean it up... Who am I kidding? There’s blood everywhere...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe was in the kitchen fussing over a chicken about to go into the oven, having left the other four to their Harry Potter marathon. I kinda sleep-snapped at Nate a bit, and I don't want to press him into service too much while we’re his guests... at least I'm not blindly guessing at what Eren would want to eat for right now. He wanted pasta for lunch and chicken for dinner. Straightforward. He quirked an eyebrow as his phone rang in his pocket, hearing a quiet rendition of Jenka playing. The hell...? Levi never calls me. Lathe set down the chopping knife and pressed the answer button,
holding the phone to his ear. [Hey Levi, what’s up? If anyone, normally I’m not the one you call.] 

Is something up?

[WHERE. THE. FUCK . IS. EREN. AND WHY IS HE NOT ANSWERING HIS FUCKING PHONE!] Levi’s voice was full of rage and panic as he practically roared into his phone. I’ve been calling him for an hour, and not a single reply! What the hell is wrong with him!? Two days in a row he’s forgotten to call me! He’s giving me fucking heart attacks when this happens! The damn Brat is gonna pay for it!

Lathe held the phone from his ear as Levi yelled into his ear, trying to get a word in edgewise.

...that’s a thing… fuck. He doesn’t know anything about what happened. [Whoa whoa whoa Levi, please calm down Eren is fine, a lot just went down and there hasn't been too much time to tell you. Just let me explain.] Lathe took a deep breath, stopping his cooking for the moment. [I would just like to begin by saying that Spades has quite the pretty rock on her finger, if you catch my drift.]

Levi rolled his eyes and chuckled. I see- so that was why Nate was texting me…

[So… You finally grew a pair and asked her? So how many years has it taken you to do that?... Anyways… Answer the damn question what the hell happened to my Brat??] Congrats that she said yes… But I need to know why Eren didn’t call me… Or return my calls today!

Lathe shook his head as Levi spoke, grinning until his more serious tone returned. [Alright,you're not going to like hearing this… you know how Eren had said he wanted to try swimming in the deep end of the pool, even though he’s only swum once?] Lathe listened to Levi hum in assent, pausing for a moment before forcing himself to speak. [Well, he tried that this morning while we were all still asleep, nearly drowned, was damn lucky I woke up and found him in time to do CPR and just spent today recouping from all that and a fractured rib… his voice isn't the greatest right now because his /lungs/ aren't the greatest right now, and he hasn't been up for anything more than Harry Potter movies and snacks…] He listened tensely to the eerie silence on the other end. [...should I give him my phone so you two can talk?] For being so many miles and miles away, I feel oddly threatened...

Levi held his head in his hands as he spoke in his phone. [Lathe, you’re going to be completely honest with me about every last detail, or so help me god I will castrate you in your sleep! Is that clear?] His voice was cold, strong, demanding, carrying an air of importance. I need to know everything… I need to know it before I say anything that might send him into a panic attack, cause he can't handle that if he drowned this morning.

Lathe subconsciously straightened up at his tone, grappling for the right words before regaling the entire ten-minute ordeal to him, and narrating the rest of the day. It feels like it wasn't just ten minutes from wake-up to Éren's-not-dead… it was hours… but it wasn’t.
Levi was quiet for a long time. *He was dead… His heart stopped beating… Oh my god, how long was he under the water for? [Thank you, Lathe… I know that must’ve been a shock this morning…] Though I can’t say my day was any better with all the freak accidents that happened here today. [Thank you for bringing him back…] I don’t think I could live with myself if he died without my arms around him when we’re old as fuck…*

Lathe smiled wearily, running a hand through his hair and leaning against the counter.[Of course… he means a lot to everyone. Especially to you.] *You two deserve to have a hell of a lot more time together than that. [Do you want to talk to him?] He’d love to hear from you.*

Levi let out a sigh of relief that he didn’t realize he was holding in. [Yeah, that would be great… Thank you… Get back to making dinner for all of them.] He waited patiently to hear Eren on the other end. *Come on, I wanna make sure you’re alive…*

Lathe padded to the living room, stepping behind the couches and gently patting Eren’s shoulder. “Eren, it’s for you.” He handed him the phone. *He really wants to hear from you… and I don’t know if you’ve known you could use talking to him too.*

*Huh? Who’d call on your phone for me? Oh my God… is it Scotty? Does he know something about my ribs? I can’t even feel them right now to judge by myself… my god, that morphine was great…* Eren held the receiver to his ear. “…Hello?”

Levi let out a huge sigh in relief. *Oh thank god you’re alive! “Eren… it’s me… How are you feeling?” I would love to drop everything and go over there to protect you… but I need to clean up after some shit-for-brains underlings that I have.*

*…it’s so good to hear from you. “…high as fuck.” Those were some good drugs.*

Levi shook his head. “It’s great to know morphine has the same effect as Marijuana.” *God… I can’t believe you tried to hide that from me too.*

Eren giggled a bit at Levi’s snark comment. “Yeah… I guess… but my chest……. Doesn’t hurt as much…” His voice was still pretty ragged as he spoke, but he had a soft smile on his face as he leaned back a bit. *When are you coming home? I miss you.*

Levi’s face softened for an instant, his eyes full of relief. *That’s good. “Alright, well, I just wanted*
to make sure you were okay, Brat. Don’t go scaring Lathe like that again, understood?” *I need to get back to the superiors soon.*

Eren nodded, blushing a bit as he called him Brat. “Yes I understand…. Levi?” *I need to ask.*

“Yeah, Brat?”

“When are... you gonna be home?”

Levi paused for a bit thinking about his suspension for the moment. *Probably sooner than you would think.* “I’ll be home waiting for you tomorrow, okay? Now get some rest, I’ll see you tomorrow okay?” *Can’t hurt, I can ask for a short leave… especially after what happened today.*

Eren’s eyes lit up like a fucking christmas tree and he squealed in joy, a large smile on his face. “Okay… I’ll see you tomorrow.” *I get to see him tomorrow!*
Chapter 26: Broken Bones... and Spirits... and Hearts....

Eren was pretty chill the next day on the train, and he was asleep for the majority of it. He was really lethargic and his body was still weak from nearly dying. Well, not nearly... But they brought me back... I guess? At least, I think they did? He was either in Lathe’s or Spades’ lap for the entire ride, and often woke up from a nightmare, but he was quickly calmed down by the two of them before it got too serious. I don’t wanna think about that anymore.. I wanna see him, I haven’t seen him in forever. I wanna be home, I wanna paint some more pictures. What Eren was completely oblivious to was the amount of his music that was on the radio on the car ride home. He didn’t even acknowledge it at all, completely lost in thought. I wanna see Levi... He said he would be home... I really wanna see him. Eren was impatient as he got home, running out of the car before Lathe even parked in the driveway and running up the porch and into Levi’s arms. He’s really home! He’s really here! Thank god! Eren wrapped his arms around Levi’s waist, burying his head into Levi’s chest, taking in a deep breath of his smell. He smells like cigarettes… That’s so weird... He’s never smoked before....

Levi had a soft smirk on his face, crushing the cigarette he had just finished into his full ashtray, watching Lathe’s car pull around the corner. I need to cut it for today, the Brat probably thinks it smells weird anyways. Levi looked up as they parked, moving from the railing to the steps, seeing Eren run out of the car to hug him. He raised his hands to hold Eren, carding through the soft chocolaty locks which made up his mop of hair. “Hey Brat.” It’s good to see you’re well... And alive...

Lathe stopped the car, Eren having darted out of it quicker than he could yell at him to be careful. Eh, understandable. ...was Levi smoking? Lathe watched as Eren leaped into Levi’s arms, spotting the full ashtray sitting on the front step....he was. Lathe eyed the object with distaste, sliding out of the driver’s seat and ambling up the front walk, smiling to Levi. “Good to see you in one piece, Levi.” Lathe, this exact moment is not the time to give a damn lecture. He simply nodded to the ashtray. “Make sure it stays outside.” I’d have your head if you smoked in the house. Well, not really... but no.

Spades got out of the car last, coming up as well. “It’s good to see you again, Eren’s missed you.” She looked over to the full ashtray, eyeing it warily. When did he start that up? He doesn’t smoke regularly... Does he?

Levi nodded at Lathe. [Yeah I’ll keep it outside, but could you stay up with me tonight?] I need to tell someone... I think my conscience would be better after, and I don’t want to snap at Eren.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow. You did sound kinda distressed on the phone, and not even just about Eren... you said something hadn’t exactly gone okay... [Yeah, I’ll stay up. If you need to talk, I’m here to listen.] That kinda also explains why it looks like you smoked a whole pack of cigarettes waiting for us... it must be bad.
“You've only been home with us a minute and you're already having secret conversations again…”
Eren mumbled into Levi’s shoulder, refusing to let go of him. You two could be saying literally
anything… I should ask you later to start teaching me… that would be cool. Eren started to tug
Levi to the door. “I wanna go inside…” I just want to have you to hold on to for a while…

Levi nodded. “Yeah, let’s go downstairs.” Levi grabbed Eren’s shirt and led him inside, leaving
Spades and Lathe there on the porch. I guess I can let you monopolize me before dinner.

Spades looked over to Lathe once they left. “Does he normally smoke?” She asked quietly, starting
back to the car to get their luggage. It seems odd for him to just start out of nowhere… He seems
like he’s got something on his mind too..

Lathe shook his head, coming with her to help get their suitcases from the trunk. “It’s apparently a
new habit… he certainly didn't smoke the last time he was home. I just didn't want to lecture him
when he hadn't been home long at all. I'll talk to him though, later. He’s got stuff on his mind. I
won't be in bed until late- he said he needed someone to talk to.” What could have happened?

...hmmm… That’s really weird, but understandable. “That’s fine, I’ll be waiting for you in bed.”
She murmured quietly, an arm wrapping around his waist for a moment. “What are we gonna make
the chicklins for dinner?” She had a soft smile on her face, kissing his cheek as they unloaded
everything.

Chicklins? So like chicks, as in flock of chicks, and children... a flock of teeny humans... I need to
tell her, I really want kids... and lots of them... Lathe grinned at the thought, tilting his head to peck
her lips before speaking. “Hm, corned beef is easy enough, and it’s been a long enough day even
though it’s only noon really…” Lathe shut the trunk, his own suitcase and Eren’s in either hand,
following Spades to the door and carefully setting Eren’s out of the way in the scripting room. “I
need to call Casper after I unpack everything. We still need to find Eren nightmare meds that work
and don't make them worse.” Everything we’ve given him so far for them hasn't gone well at all...

Spades nodded and she took her suitcase upstairs to the room, setting it by the door. “I’ll unpack
after you, I’ll start getting everything together.” Then we can cook together... I really want to do
that again. “Tell Casper I said hi too... oh, and tell him about my ring!” She called from the
kitchen as she started getting everything ready, humming along.

Levi pulled Eren close to his chest, carding through his hair still. I keep worrying about you... you
take so many risks to try and prove you can do something. He let out a soft sigh, holding him close.
“Don’t make me worry so much, Brat.” Levi’s voice was quiet against his ear, holding him close,
not wanting to let him go.
Eren kept his arms tightly wound around Levi’s waist, guiding them both along from their spot near the foot of the basement stairs to the bed, just wanting to lay down and hold Levi. “M’sorry… I didn't think that would happen… I just really wanted to… but I'll be more careful, promise…” I wasn't trying to get myself drowned… I need to be careful about this stuff… Lathe normally never tells me I can’t or shouldn't do something, so if he does, it really is probably for a good reason… but I'm just glad I still get to hold you… Eren nudged Levi onto the bed, laying down next to him and tangling their legs. I missed you… but you're only going to be leaving me in a little while… and then I'm not going to see you for a long time again...

Levi nodded, leaning his head down a bit and kissing the top of his hair. “I can only stay for a few days, but I’ll stay with you, unless you go to school, I’m not letting you skip that now.” Nope, you need to serve your suspension… Yes, I know about that too. A smile graced his lips as he thought of something. “I can drop you off and pick you up in the morning if you want?”

Eren nodded, his voice soft and quiet. “Mm, that’d be nice…” I'd like that… Eren suddenly let out a high-pitched squeak as Levi’s hands ran over his side, jumping a bit at the touch and suddenly realising what sound he had made, his face turning scarlet. ...did I really just squeak? Oh my god that’s embarrassing… He looked away from Levi, hoping he would ignore it.

Levi’s eyes widened only a fraction as he listened to Eren. Did touching him really make him squeak like that? That was fucking adorable… Oh god and I was gonna let him off the hook cause he almost died, but there goes my patience. Levi instantly moved them so that he was pinning Eren down to the bed, his lips barely touching Eren’s ear, his voice deep and luxurious. “And here I was, thinking I would control myself… but you’re too fucking cunning.” You are mine. Levi started to attack his neck, his hands moving up and down Eren’s sides. I wanna hear you again.

Eren let out a surprised gasp as Levi flipped him onto his back, tilting his head back as Levi attacked his neck, giving him more access. Eren let out a quiet moan as Levi left small marks down his neck, shuddering as Levi’s hands grazed his sides again, letting out higher-pitched, soft sounds as Levi licked and suckled his skin. I've missed this… I've missed you so much… He brought up his hands, unzipping Levi’s jacket and pushing it off of his shoulders, running his hands over his torso and feeling the chiselled muscle through his form-fitting shirt. Mine...

Levi smirked, his eyes darkening a bit as he felt Eren’s hands on his chest. God, he knows how to drive me insane with only a few touches. He let his cool hands run under Eren’s shirt, feeling the warm skin underneath, and finally pulling the shirt off of him and attacking the tanned skin to bite and mark him. I want everyone to know you’re mine. All mine, no one else’s…. But I think I should let you relax for today. Levi made sure to keep Eren’s movements restricted so that he could pleasure him right, littering his chest with hickeys and bites.
Eren’s brow furrowed a bit as Levi moved and held down his hands, shivering as his mouth wandered over his torso. “L-Levi… nnngh…” Eren tried to protest his not being able to move, though he soon just surrendered to him, letting out soft mews and whimpers as Levi’s tongue traced over every sensitive spot. *You’re too damn good at this…*

Levi continued to kiss and mark all of Eren’s sensitive areas, making sure that he was leaving large dark marks, often going over them multiple times to darken them up further. *These will stay longer… hopefully.* He trailed up towards his nipples, taking one into his mouth, and sucking gently at first before he got a bit rougher, and rougher, soon biting teasingly at the abused nub.

Eren writhed underneath Levi’s hands, feeling his hard teeth tug at his nipple. *Holy fuck… it feels really good… don't stop. “...L-Levi… nnngh… d-don't stop…” god no… Please don’t stop, whatever you do don’t… But I wanna please you too.* Eren continued to struggle against him to try and reach for Levi’s crotch.

Levi’s hands came up to catch Eren’s wrists, pinning them to the bed and looking up with dark eyes from his place on his chest. “Eren, right now, this is about you. Let me…” Levi gave Eren’s abused nub one last lick before nibbling to the other, sucking and gently biting it, smirking inwardly as Eren moaned above him. He shifted so he held both of Eren’s hands with one hand near his head, his other trailing down his chest and to his jeans, teasingly running over the growing bulge in the front. *I love the way you sound… my god I've missed this…*

Eren groaned more at the light pressure, trying to grind his hips against Levi’s palm. “Levi… I want more…” He whined as he tried to get more friction. *I don’t want to be teased… I want you Levi! Eren let out a soft whimper as he shifted under him, still trying to find a way to pleasure Levi as well. I want you to feel good, not just me… please?*

*Of course.* Levi for the moment let go of Eren’s wrists, his mouth still latched onto his chest as he went to unbutton Eren’s jeans and tug them off his hips, his bulge pronounced through his boxers. Levi kissed and lightly bit down Eren’s stomach, pressing light kisses along the edge of his boxers until he latched onto the fabric with his teeth, pulling them down his legs and freeing his length. Levi kissed and licked up Eren’s leg, dragging his tongue up the inside of one thigh and down the other again, purposefully avoiding his length until Eren squirmed uncontrollably, pinning his hips with his hands and licking a broad stripe up the underside of his shaft, starting to suckle on the tip. *I want to make you feel good… you just let me take care of you.*

Eren let out a loud moan, his hand coming under him and grabbing the sheets. His eyes widened in surprise as Levi sucked at the tip of his length. *Holy crap… it feels so good… Like really good… I want more.* Eren tried in vain to buck his hips a bit but was unable to get out from under Levi’s hold as he whimpered from the pulses of pleasure coursing through him. *Fuck.*

Levi slowly started to inch down Eren’s length, taking in as much as he could and bobbing his
head, his tongue flat against the underside. He took one of his hands to grasp the base of Eren’s length, pumping and twisting his hand in time with the movements of his head. A shiver ran through him as Eren let out a long, loud moan, humming with arousal, his own length straining against the front of his pants. *You sound so damn sexy…*

Eren’s grip on the sheets tightened his whole body shivering under him as his coil started to tighten. He was a gasping and moaning mess under him, and quite honestly he didn’t care. *I can’t last much longer… fuck… Levi if this keeps on…* One of his hands came up to grab Levi’s hair, tugging gently as he cried out in bliss, having been touched in an especially sensitive area on the base of his length. *Sweet mother of God! Levi I can’t!*

Levi noticed what made Eren cry out like that, and attacked that spot with his hand, letting out a small moan as Eren tugged at his hair. He sucked hard on his length until Eren came, swallowing his load without hesitation and milking him for every last drop, a small drop nearly escaping out of the corner of his mouth. He came off of Eren’s length with a seductive pop, licking the corner of his mouth while staring straight up at Eren, climbing up to kiss him fervently, one hand cupping his cheek.

Eren laid almost limply under Levi, his lips barely moving against the other’s, trying to force himself to stay awake, though he soon found it impossible as he blacked out, his body becoming completely limp under Levi, a soft smile on his face. *That felt great… shit… I’m tired….*

Levi pulled back and watched as Eren’s eyes didn't open again, his breath evening out. *He’s dead asleep…* Levi shifted uncomfortably, pecking his cheek lightly and tucking Eren back in before shifting off of him and pulling the blanket over the both of them, willing his hard-on to go down as he pulled Eren close. *Dammit… at least I get to hold you…*

Eren laid where he was, his head to the side as he slept, seemingly peacefully for now. But he had a thousand things running through his head, his body shifting towards Levi’s warmth, trying to get some much needed rest. The bags forming under his eyes were a clear indication that his nightmares were back. Blake came downstairs, hopping up onto the bed and sitting by Eren’s chest watching him in full alert, as if he were preparing to ground Eren right from the get go. But still, his breathing was even and his face still peaceful as he slept.

Levi soon relaxed, though he quirked an eyebrow at Blake as he jumped onto the bed, staring at Eren and seemingly ready for something. *The hell are you doing?* Levi reached for his phone, one arm still around Eren’s sleeping form, texting Lathe upstairs.

=Lathe, what the fuck is Blake doing?  
)I dunno, what /is/ he doing?
He’s just standing there on the bed, staring at Eren.

Is Eren asleep?

Yeah, he looks pretty peaceful to me, I dunno what his deal is

...hate to be the bearer of bad news, but that’s not going to last for long.

Levi’s brow furrowed as he read his texts, looking up as Blake moved to settle on Eren’s chest, grounding him. What the hell is going on? Levi looked to Eren’s face as he shifted in his arms, starting to shake. Oh my...

Eren’s expression contorted to one of pure fear, his whole body shaking as his mind tormented him in his sleep, his breathing hitched and his arms jerking a bit before his eyes snapped open and he let out a loud petrifying scream as he started to panic, trying to move away from where he was, but unable to get up due to Blake grounding him. Panic was clearly set in his eyes, trying to take in his surroundings, his eyes darting over to Levi’s confused expression. Fuck... I’m home... I had another nightmare.... Fuck... they all feel so fucking real... dammit... Eren couldn’t control himself when he started to sob almost uncontrollably, Blake moving a bit to reach his cheeks and lick the tears away to try and calm him.

...Nightmares. He has those... Levi pulled Eren close to him when he recognized him, tangling their legs and running one hand soothingly through his hair, murmuring to him. “Hey, Eren, it’s okay, you’re fine… I’m here, you’re alright…” I remember Lathe saying something about nightmares awhile ago… I didn’t know they had come back...

Eren continued to sob, his head finding its way to Levi’s chest. Blake got up off his chest, allowing Eren to curl up to Levi to cry in his arms. The dog went off to go upstairs, sitting down by Lathe’s feet. Eren stayed in his arms, his breath shaky as he tried not to cry. God... I hate that I can’t fucking stop crying... or freaking out... I must look like such a cry baby.

And he probably hates you just enough to leave you.

... He’s never done it before though.

That doesn’t matter, he came back only because you almost died.

But he came back!
Do you think he loves you enough to take off more than a few days? He’s leaving you... he doesn’t care.

I want him to care....

Eren kept his head buried in Levi’s chest.
Levi cradled Eren against him, tilting his head down and kissing the top of Eren’s head. “Do you want to talk about it?” Whatever it was, it really freaked you the fuck out… was it Grisha? If anything could scare him like that, he really takes the cake…

Eren started to hiccup as he sniffled, looking up to Levi with teary eyes. *Does he…? Yeah… I can tell you…* Eren’s voice quaked as he tried to talk, his head still resting on Levi’s chest. “He…H-he … He t-throw… me i-in… And I… c-couldn’t…” Eren started to sob more, his voice getting higher and higher in pitch as he struggled to continue. “I-I-I… c-c-couldn’t r-reach the b-bottom…” Eren cried, his hands clutching Levi’s shirt, his whole body shaking as his sobs and hiccups started all over again. *I don’t want to swim anymore…*

Levi was quiet for a moment, thinking over what Eren had said. “…did Lathe throw you in?” *That would explain the sobbing… it’s not something you’d want to think was real, especially when you start to drown…*

Lathe had stopped his silent walk down the stairs on the third step as he heard Levi quietly speak. *Huh? …Eren’s nightmare was him getting thrown into a pool? …makes sense… he wouldn’t really think I’d do something like that, would he? I’m not that mean…*

Eren shook his head against Levi’s chest, continuing to sob. *No… It wasn’t Dad…. He wouldn’t do that… But… But Grisha would… And he did… And I couldn’t reach the bottom.*

Lathe tiptoed down more stairs in time to see Eren shake his head, his brow furrowed.*…then what are his nightmares? I know he used to have them because of his PTSD… and then, nearly all of them were memories… mostly about Grisha… did Grisha throw Eren into a swimming pool? Try to drown him when he was younger?* Lathe gently rapped on the banister, Blake trotting back down the stairs and to the landing next to him. “Are you two doing okay down here?” *Do you have this handled?*

Eren just continued to sob, one hand shaky as he let go of Levi’s shirt, moving to sit himself up as he sobbed, his eyes starting to burn from the excessive tears. *No… It was really bad… I imagine I died again… but it felt so real… I thought I was dying and this was all a dream.* Eren hiccuped again, his face blotchy from all the tears.

*I take that as a no… it must’ve been really bad…* Lathe walked across the dim room to them, sitting on the edge of the bed near the two of them as Blake jumped onto the foot of the bed. He shifted as Eren reached for him, pulling him close and carding a hand through his hair, quiet. *It’s okay… we’ve both got you.*
Eren continued to cry in Lathe’s arms, his hiccups becoming more and more frequent. *My chest hurts now... Fuck... I need to calm down, but I can't... “He... H-he t-threw me i-i-in.”* Eren explained to Lathe as he cried, burying his face into his chest, his hands still clutching Levi’s shirt though, not wanting to let go of him completely. *I don’t wanna be thrown in again.*

*Grisha almost drowned you when you were a kid... didn't he?* Levi sat up, moving so Eren was between the two of them, holding his middle and resting his head on his shoulder, his thumb running over his side. “It’s okay Eren, we’ve got you now. That’s not going to happen again.” *I'll make damn sure of it.*

Lathe hummed in assent with Levi’s words, still quiet, though his mind was in overdrive for a moment. *You nearly drowned as a kid... probably more than once, knowing him... we’re going to be a hell of a lot more careful with you and pools. ...And lakes. And the occasional ocean.*

Eren started to calm down after a few minutes, thoroughly exhausted from both not being able to sleep much and from crying so much already today. He was able to compose himself with Levi and Lathe both helping him calm down. *Okay... Eren looked up to the both of them with eyes full of regret and pain. “I’m s-sorry…”* He said quietly, his voice still pretty shaky, but it was progress from the broken sobs of a few minutes ago. He felt exhaustion hit him like a ton of bricks, swaying forward a bit, struggling to keep his eyes open. *I feel really tired.*

Levi caught Eren as he swayed forward, looking to Lathe and flashing him a soft smile for a second. “I think we’ll be fine, he just needs to sleep.” *I should be able to take care of you when you have nightmares... hopefully...* He watched as Lathe nodded, giving Eren one last kiss to the temple before quietly disappearing upstairs. Levi shifted, laying Eren on top of him and pulling the covers over the both of them, still carding his hand through his soft hair. *Just sleep... you'll feel better.*

Eren fell asleep in Levi’s arms, managing to stay asleep for a long time, long enough he had to be waken up for dinner, groggily sauntering up the stairs, his tank top moved so far down that his chest showed off a majority of the scars as well as a large purple bruise forming in the center of his chest, he whimpered as he rubbed at it. *Fuck it hurts... Like a lot.* “Daaaaaa~d it huuuuu~rts!” Eren whined grumpily as he sat down.

Lathe fussed over the stove, speaking as he towedled off his hands. “Don’t worry Eren, we’re taking you to Scotty tomorrow, so don't-” Lathe turned to the table, his eyes wide as he caught sight of the edge of a huge bruise, stopping dead in his tracks. “-my God that looks horrible.” Lathe reached behind him and turned off the burner, stepping around the table and inspecting the bruise. “I couldn't have cracked more than one or two ribs, but you've bruised so badly... let me get you something to help with the pain. It’s a good thing we’re taking you in first thing in the morning.” *Yep, no school for at least half of tomorrow, that’s for sure.*
Eren nodded sitting patiently, waiting for Lathe to bring him some pain relievers. *It really fucking hurts, and I can’t hide the bruise unless I wear a long sleeve shirt…* Crap… Eren thanked Spades as she set a plate in front of him, Levi sitting down across from him where he normally did. *What is this?*

Spades chuckled at his perplexed expression. “It's corned beef Eren, I know you’ll like it, don't worry.” Her smile was soft as she leaned over him, kissing his forehead.

*You better- I like corned beef.* Lathe handed Eren a small blue pill, setting a mug of tea in front of him, just the way he liked it. *Levi’s taste might have changed while he's been gone- it’s been awhile already.* “Still up for tea, Levi?” He asked over his shoulder, fixing coffee. *Can't hurt to ask.*

“Yeah, tea would be great. Thank you.” Levi responded thanking Spades for his food as well, smirking as Eren tried the food, and instantly started to wolf it down. …*Still don’t understand his eating habits.*

*Well… I guess he likes it.* Spades smiled as she set out their food as well, taking her seat across from where Lathe would sit, a smile across her face. *I could get used to seeing this at the kitchen table… I could get used to this a lot.*

Eren took his pill, drinking from his tea every so often as he engulfed the food. “Umm… Can I sleep with Levi tonight?” His voice was timid as he asked, still unsure if Lathe was wary of him having a nightmare again. *I wanna sleep with Levi…*

Lathe gave Eren a small, warm smile, setting down his silverware and picking up his mug. “You don't have to ask- of course you can. He’s your boyfriend. But if anything happens-” Lathe sent Levi a deliberate look. “-you come get me, okay? Or yell. …or call my cellphone and hope that if it’s on the ringing wakes me up. Either.” *I know you missed sleeping with Levi- you go right the hell ahead. …that means I get Spades to myself. …Yes!*

Spades looked up to see the familiar glint in Lathe’s eye. *Oh I see your mind is still in the gutter… Well, I guess my teasing will do that to you, but I'm okay with it… I hope you didn’t forget you’re staying up with Levi today…* “I’m probably gonna head up to bed after dinner, it’s been a long week and I'm exhausted. Eren you should get some sleep too, okay?” Her voice was soft and caring, the same as her expression. *I need sleep, and I know you do too.*
Eren nodded, finishing up his plate and putting it in the sink. *My chest hurts and I'm tired... Fuck I wanna go back to sleep, it felt nice sleeping in his arms for a couple hours... I miss that so much.* Eren sat back down at the table to sip at his tea, watching everyone else start to finish up their plates as well.

Levi finished up next, starting to help with the dishes, making sure Eren stayed awake at the table, and starting to load the dishes in the dishwasher. *I should do something productive...*

Lathe stood after a short while, helping with the dishes which went quickly between the three of them, sending off a very tired-looking Eren with a light ruffle of his hair, chuckling at the done expression he showed for an instant. He gave Spades a chaste kiss on the lips as she began to head upstairs. “I'll be up later, okay?” *I need to hear out whatever Levi’s got going on later.*

Spades nodded as she went off and upstairs, snuggling into their bed, taking in all of Lathe’s scent with a happy sigh and curling up under the sheets.

Levi seemingly disappeared for a few moments before he came back with a full bottle of Jack Daniels, setting it down on the table and moving to get some heavy glasses. “I need to drink if we’re going to talk.” *I need to I don’t think I can tell anyone while sober.*

...when the hell did you acquire *that*? ...and nice choice, honestly. “...how the actual hell did you manage to get that thing past customs? Or get it in the first place when you're still a *minor*?” Lathe sat down at the table again, breaking the seal of the bottle. *If you need to drink to tell me whatever the hell it is you need to... damn.*

Levi shook his head. “I can’t tell you anything about how I get it, or why... I have my ways, that’s all you need to know.” He murmured quietly to him, sitting down with their glasses with ice. “I can’t tell you this sober... I don’t think I even told my CO what happened sober.” *It was a bitch to deal with, mostly cause it was my fault...*

*Well shit.* Lathe poured their glasses full, sliding Levi’s back over to him, sipping at his. “That’s fine, whenever you’re ready, just start talking.” *I'm all ears.*

Levi nodded, though was silent until he had consumed two full glasses worth of Jack. “Well... Everything happened Saturday... Those asshats that I take care of... We... We were at the range, and I was showing them the ins and outs of our rifles... I told them not to fuck around with the rifles... But the one guy... He didn’t believe me when I said they were loaded... He shot himself in the leg, right through an artery... I-I... I couldn’t do anything to stop the bleeding... I tried... And I couldn’t do anything ... “ Levi raised his glass to finish off the third one, filling it right up
again and tilting it back and finishing it off. “He bled out so quickly… I couldn’t stop the bleeding… Why couldn’t I stop the bleeding.” Levi’s voice was shaky at best, wavering the whole time he spoke. He topped off another glass, but he slowly sipped at it. He bled out in my arms… And I couldn’t fucking do anything at all…

Lathe sipped at his third glass, his brow furrowed at Levi’s words. …I don’t understand how anyone could be so dumb as to even pretend to shoot their foot… that went so horribly wrong… Lathe didn’t know what to tell him, though he capped the bottle of Jack and slid it back from Levi. I’m cutting you off… that’s your fifth glass, and you’re not exactly a big guy… …what do you tell people who’ve had other human beings die in their arms? Completely unexpectedly like that?

Levi watched him take the bottle away from him, probably for the better. He sighed loudly, sipping at his drink, his voice still shaky as he spoke. “He only lived an hour away from base… I had to go deliver the news to his parents…. I had to take his dog tags with me… Do you know how hard it is to tell someone’s parents that their son is dead… And that he died before he even made it overseas?” That was a fucking nightmare… I’m glad they accepted my leave for a few days, I don’t think I could’ve stayed there…

Lathe set down his empty third glass, his arms loosely folded on the table and looking up to Levi sympathetically, sadness in his eyes. “...I’m sorry you had to go through all of that… it all got thrown on you so quickly… it’s awful it had to happen.” ……I can only imagine how I’d feel if someone came to tell us… that you weren’t coming home… I don’t want to think about that...

Levi only nodded, lifting the glass to finish off the last bit of his drink, he set it down on the table with some force, but didn’t break the glass. He rose up closer to the table to reach for the bottle of Jack. I need another motherfucking glass… I’m not drunk enough to deal with this...

Lathe reached forward and caught Levi’s wrist, his other hand going to take his glass from him. “That’s it Levi, I’m cutting us off.” Nope, I’m tipsy and you look pretty drunk. “Come on, we should get some sleep. Can you handle the stairs?” Let’s hope I don’t have to carry your sorry ass to bed.

Levi nodded, managing to get up off the seat without falling over completely. He was struggling not to bump into things as he made his way over towards the basement door, opening it. “Goodnight, Lathe… I’ll make sure Eren wakes up for his appointment tomorrow.” God… I haven’t drank that much in a long time… fuck… Levi successfully made it down the stairs without smashing his face into a wall, settling into the bed beside Eren, who immediately curled up to him.

Lathe stood and placed both of their glasses in the sink, turning and staring at the bottle on the table for a minute, thinking before grabbing it by the neck and taking it upstairs with him. I need to hide this. Lathe quietly entered his- and Spades’, too… it’s really nice that I get to say that.- room,
burying the bottle in one of the bottom drawers of the armoire, shedding his clothes and clambering into bed with a tank top and boxers on, trying to think. ... Foot. Tie. Lathe began to reach for the green scarf that always hung from one of the short posts at the end of the bed, only to immediately become distracted and stop as he felt arms wind around his middle, a gentle pair of lips pecking at his neck, humming contentedly and letting his arm drop.

Spades smiled as she pulled him back into bed with her. *I wanna sleep with you... Since I need to go to work tomorrow.* She pulled him closer to her, laying her head on his chest. *It's nice... That I get to sleep with you like this... Everyday now.*

Lathe had forgotten completely what he wanted to do, pulling Spades close and settling into bed, pecking her forehead before drifting to sleep. *This is nice... I wouldn't mind doing this for the rest of my life...* Lathe slept peacefully for about two hours, though as his dreams became especially vivid, he shifted, Spades not on top of him and keeping him from moving out from under the covers slowly, deliberately, his feet touching the floor and standing, his eyes still shut. He swayed slightly as he started to walk, leaving the bedroom and traipsing down the stairs, staring without looking at the scripting table, as if in thought before continuing down to the basement, going over to the large table near the bed and patting it as he walked, as if searching for something.

Levi picked up his head, hearing some noises from close by. *What the hell is that?* He blinked a few times, rubbing at his eyes, trying to wake up. He froze when he saw a body near Eren’s side of the bed, only to calm down noticing it was Lathe after a while. *What the fuck is he doing down here?* Levi sat up a bit, about to ask him a question as to why the fuck he was down there, only to realize Lathe had his wallet. *What the fuck is he doing with my wallet!?* Levi got up grabbing his phone when Lathe started towards the stairs, noticing his sway and closed eyes. *Wait... Is he asleep? Oh my god... Is he sleepwalking? He's fucking sleepwalking... Well, better get this on video...* Levi wasted no time in unlocking his phone and following Lathe, Blake waking up and following the two of them up the stairs.

Lathe started towards the kitchen, turning around the stairs and leaning a hand on the side table near the door as he swayed, hitting a small vase and nearly knocking it over. He stopped, steadying the vase, feeling it as if trying to identify it. He stared at it for a few seconds before turning away, patting the top and muttering quietly. “Nice to see you, Mr. McKinnon...” He carried on, going up to the fridge and staring at it for a solid minute, assessing the situation. He picked up his arm, holding the wallet straight in front of him, the end of it touching the right side of the front of the fridge. He suddenly dropped it, the sound of it thunking onto the floor not phasing him. He moved his hand after a second, pressing two imaginary buttons right underneath it. He dropped his arm to his side, his brow furrowing slightly in apparent confusion as he looked down, then up again. He waved off the fridge without much enthusiasm, turning to leave it. He meandered in the general direction of the piano room, bumping lightly into the wall at the edge of the doorway. He stepped back a bit and patted the wall at face level, muttering something about Patricia before continuing on, then overcompensating and bumping into the piano. He patted the flat top of it, then moved his hand against the surface as if ruffling someone’s hair, wandering the first floor and walking into things, mumbling pleasantries to various people before continuing to somewhere unpredictable. It wasn't until he walked into a floor lamp and did a complete 180 before he finally tripped, Blake
having gone to sit next to him as he chatted with the fixture, confused and concerned. He near completely faceplanted into the floor, the house completely silent for a second until Lathe finally became conscious. “....ooooooooooowwwww....” Lathe rolled onto his back, splayed on the floor and gently holding his face. Paaaaaaaain.....

Levi could help but laugh, ending the recording as Blake went to lick Lathe’s face curiously. Well that was fun while it lasted… Levi shook his head as he heard movement upstairs, and saw Spades come down the stairs.

“What the hell was that?” Her eyes were wide as she saw Lathe sprawled out on the floor rubbing his face. What the fuck happened?

Lathe cracked open one eye, looking around in confusion. “Wha…? Why ‘m I…” Lathe sputtered as Blake licked his cheek, gently nudging him away from his face and struggling to sit up. I'm on the floor... downstairs... and I drank last night- ...tonight?- with Levi. ...fuck, I sleepwalked. “...what weird shit did I do this time?” Lathe just pet Blake as he tried to find the will to stand up, still very sleepy. This is gonna be good.

Levi chuckled, sending the video to himself to make sure Lathe didn’t delete it. “Would you like to watch the video?” Levi asked, holding out his phone to show him the 8 minute long video. You did some really weird shit.

Oh fuck. Lathe took the phone from him, Spades meandering over and sitting next to him as he played the video. “...is that your wallet? Did I really steal your wallet? What the hell?” Lathe looked perplexed as the video went on, laughing at his interaction with the fridge. “Oh my god, I must think it’s a vending machine. That’s great! ...did I just apologise to the wall? I just apologised to the wall. I just called the wall Patricia. …do I even know anyone named Patricia? Who the hell are these people I’m talking to? ...apparently the lamp makes for good conversation. ...Oh my god. Blake, I'm really sorry.” Lathe reached out to pet Blake behind the ears, chuckling as he heard himself make a noise of pain as he woke up before the video cut out. I literally sounded like I was dying. “And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why I tie my foot to the bed whenever I go to bed drunk, which I would have done, if somebody hadn't distracted me.” Lathe looked to Spades, grinning amusedly and pecking her cheek. It was a nice way to fall asleep. You're good.

Spades blushed a bit. “Well, let's get you back upstairs, since you're in a tank top and boxers… Come on… Let’s go back to bed.” She moved a bit away from him, getting up to make her way towards the stairs, stretching out a bit as she yawned, which ended in an adorable little squeak. Well... That was degrading.

Lathe handed Levi back his phone, following Spades to the stairs and smiling as she squeaked.
...you're too damn adorable. Lathe shut the door behind them as they walked into their bedroom, Lathe catching her middle from behind gently before she could reach the bed, softly kissing and lightly nibbling at the back of her neck. ...I just think you're the most adorable damn thing in the world sometimes...

Spades blushed as he grabbed her around the waist, leaning back into his hold a little bit, moving her hands up to rest over his. “Do we still need to tie you to the bed?” She asked quietly, his voice soft as she turned her head, which gave him more access to her neck. If we still need to it’s probably for the better...

Levi watched them leave up the stairs before slipping quietly back downstairs and into bed with Eren again, who had moved to the far side of the bed, curled up into a ball. Well... He probably shouldn’t be in a ball... He reached over to him, grabbing around his waist without waking him. Levi gently pulled Eren closer towards his own torso, hoping he would turn and hold onto him. I know you like sleeping in my arms but you are getting way too big for that!

Eren barely stirred as he was moved, but after a few minutes he turned over, his head now on Levi’s chest and his body sprawled out over the rest of Levi and the bed around them. Warm....

Lathe woke up early the next morning, tumbling out of bed confused and hitting the floor with a thump, saving his face with his arms, perplexed until he realised his foot was still tied to the bed. Oh yeah, that's a thing. Lathe twisted around to untie the knot, hanging the abused scarf back up and sighing a bit as he looked to the bed, empty. Work calls. Lathe moved to get dressed, deciding to take the scarf with him and padding down to the basement, knocking lightly on the doorframe before descending quietly, smiling faintly at their dark outline and shaking Levi’s shoulder. “Come on, you two need to get up and dressed. Eren has a thing at the doctor’s.” He chuckled as Levi grunted in affirmation, going to make them breakfast. He’ll get them up. ...hopefully.

Levi cracked open one eye as he felt Lathe shake his shoulder, understanding what he was saying in general and waving him off, shifting. Right, I have to get up. Doctor. Thing. Breakfast. ...actual food. I don’t have to run today! ...I actually should probably go run anyways... Levi smiled faintly as he felt Eren’s fingers curl in his shirt, pulling him close and pressing gentle kisses to his lips and cheeks, murmuring quietly. “Wake up, Eren. You have a thing with the doctor.” That’s important.

Eren groaned as he cracked open an eye, wincing as he moved around. He coughed, curling up to himself in pain. It hurts... Shit.... He coughed loudly, whimpering as he did so. It really fucking hurts... Fuck it. Eren looked down to his chest through the loose fabric and his eyes widened as he yelped. Holy shit... That’s so.... It's so purple... And dark... And big... Holy fuck!

Levi pulled back a bit, his brow furrowed as Eren shook coughing. You don’t sound too good... Levi followed Eren’s line of sight, seeing the large bruise on his chest. ...well shit. “Eren, I know it
looks really really bad, but you don't have to panic. Just stay calm- it can be fixed.” Levi carefully cradled Eren to keep him calm. “Let me go upstairs and get you some painkillers, make it more bearable, okay? I'll only be a minute.” You sound like you need it.

Eren nodded, his eyes still wide as he gently prodded the bruised skin, wincing the whole while. It’s so fucking sensitive... And it covers my whole fucking chest. Eren whimpered as Levi shifted away to run up the stairs, having been jostled, tweaking his chest. It really hurts… Fuck… What did Dad do to me?

Levi ran up the stairs, having slipped from Eren as smoothly as he could, sliding into the kitchen and speaking to Lathe, who had his back to him at the stove. “Lathe, Eren’s in a lot of pain- it hurts to move. They’ve only taught us sprains and minor cuts so far- I have no idea what to do.” Help me help him!

Well fuck. “Alright, go into my bag, there’s a small blue bottle of morphine pills- the lowest dose they can give, 15 mg. Show me the bottle so I can make sure you've got the right one, and then if you got it I'll let you give one to Eren. My hands are full, so you're going to have to do my job for me right now.” Let's see if you can do that.

Levi nodded, moving over to his bag on the banister and rifling through it, soon returning with a tiny bottle. He grabbed a glass of water after Lathe nodded, filling it with water and taking out one pill, leaving the bottle upstairs as he returned to their bed downstairs, gently trying to coax Eren into sitting up- sort of, at least. Come on, this morphine shit works.

Eren let Levi move him, starting to cry from the pain as he was forced into a sitting position. He struggled to get the pill down, along with the water. “It hurts…” Eren whined as Levi waited for it to kick in, mellowing out after the pain had subsided at least a little bit. He slowly moved, to wrap his arms around Levi’s shoulders. I do not have the energy to move around... You’re going to carry me around. “Fo~od” He whined, leaning his head on Levi’s shoulder. I missed you carrying me around.

Lathe turned to greet the both of them as he heard heavy footsteps behind him. Levi must be carrying Eren around and being cute again. “Good mor-” Lathe turned, his greeting dying on his tongue as he caught sight of the huge bruise on Eren’s chest. “-oh my God that looks horrible.” I really did a number on you...

Eren looked over towards Lathe, a small frown on his face. “Thank you for stating the obvious.” He mumbled quietly, his eyes turning away from Lathe. He thinks I look ugly… Doesn't he?... He did it too......... Does Dad not want me anymore? Eren struggled to swallow the lump in his throat the formed at the thought. … Is he gonna turn out like Grisha....?
Lathe saw Eren’s saddened expression, wincing internally. *Dammit, I need to watch my damn mouth.* Lathe turned off the stove, setting the pancakes off the heat before moving around the table. “I’m sorry Eren, I was just surprised—how are you feeling? Did the medicine kick in yet, or enough? Do you want me to get you anything?” Lathe rested a gentle hand on Eren’s shoulder. *I don’t want you to be in a lot of pain… I want you to be okay.*

Eren barely looked over to Lathe, but he did after a bit. He shook his head, looking down at his placemat in front of him. *No… I don’t really want anything…. It still hurts a lot, but I don’t think I can do much else for it…*

Lathe’s hand slid from Eren’s shoulder, nodding quietly. “Okay, you don’t have to eat anything if you don’t want to.” Lathe sighed, moving back to the stove to serve pancakes, setting out plates with fruit for himself and for Levi. *He’ll feel okay enough to eat soon enough.*

Eren watched them in relative silence, seeming to zone out a bit.…. *Is he really gonna turn out like Grisha? Is he gonna do this again? It really hurts…. It hurts a lot, I don’t want it to hurt.* Eren absentmindedly reached to rub his pained chest, hissing as he felt something shift under his fingers. *Fuck… That hurts! Though Eren tried to ignore it as he continued to rub around his chest, wincing every now and then, waiting for Levi and Lathe to finish up their food.*

Lathe had his back to Eren to pour coffee, a violent shiver running up his spine as he heard a faint yet distinct scraping sound. *I hate that sound.* Lathe turned worriedly, seeing Eren rubbing his chest. “Eren, stop that. You’ll hurt yourself more.” He watched as Eren didn’t even seem to register that he had spoken, and in an instant was leaning over the table, Eren’s wrist gently yet firmly in his grasp. He looked into Eren’s eyes as he spoke, making sure he got the message, his voice calm and without anger. “Eren, stop.” *Don’t fuck with your ribs… Now I really know that they’re broken…*

Eren’s eyes snapped up to meet Lathe’s intense gaze, seeming to shrink back a bit. He looked at his wrist, firmly in his grasp. *Oh… What was I even doing? Eren seemed to nod, and kept his hands away from his chest. It’s sore… And I want to rub it… It took only seconds for his mind to return to LaLa land, and his residency becoming stable.* What can I do to make it stop? I wanna rub it… It’s so sore…

Lathe let go of Eren’s wrist after a moment, patting his shoulder gently before returning to fix them breakfast. It wasn’t much more than an hour later before Lathe was leading Levi and Eren into the hospital for x-rays, greeting the woman at the front desk. *Let’s see… he didn’t notice he was shifting his own busted ribs around… he didn’t notice when I put a bowl of cut-up strawberries in front of him, and he loves those… I’m pretty sure he didn’t notice we drove him here… or that he’s currently walking/being dragged by Levi.* Lathe signed a few forms before handing a clipboard
back to the nurse, the three of them not having to wait long before Scotty came to retrieve them.
Lathe had to help Eren up onto the x-ray table. *He’s still got the thousand-yard stare… he’s really out of it… he’s not panicking or anything, so I don’t know what to do, really…*

Scotty greeted them in his usual manner of back slaps and snarky comments. “So… Did you leave his consciousness at the bottom of that pool? Or is he, like, on off mode right now?” He was focusing on positioning Eren the right way for the machine to get a good image of his chest. *I can only imagine what it’s gotta look like, Lathe texted and said it got worse…*

Lathe chuckled quietly, though his expression quickly became neutral again. “He’s just been out of it all morning. I dunno what it is, probably just an overload of stuff over the past few days, he’s probably just getting down to processing it all.” *Too much has happened- you do know there’s such a thing as a too exciting life?*

Scotty nodded, sending Levi out to the waiting room for now. *Don’t need him to get radiation poisoning… Nope that would be bad.* He fired up the machine, bringing Lathe back to look at the pictures on the computer screen. “Well… For starters… Congrats, you know how to do CPR and manage to break a majority of ribs while you’re at it.” His tone poked at Lathe’s doing in all this. *That’s really bad though… There’s like 3 that are fractures… And the ones left are breaks… How the hell did they break from CPR? I mean 1 or 2, maybe 3 or 4, I could expect… But almost all of them?*

Lathe was about to reply to his comment, though his retort died on his tongue as he looked over Scotty’s shoulder, paling as he saw the shattered mess that was Eren’s ribcage. ...*I did that? I was being careful not to be too hard, and yet they’re all broken in some way? How?!* “…How did I manage that? I mean, I was careful…” His brow furrowed. “Um, Scotty… I’m no X-Ray technician, but it’s not a good thing that his ribs are showing up a light greyish instead of white, is it?”

Scotty’s brows furrowed at Lathe’s statement, quickly sending a page out for a technician to get Eren’s file. “I wanna see his last x-Rays… But he looks like he’s got the ribcage of a 80 year old woman with osteoporosis.” *That’s not good in any way shape or form… But I know they’d been broken before, so I need to see how weak they were then and compare them…* He looked around the picture, zooming into a few of the breaks to try and figure them out. *I can't open him up either… That takes out the options of surgery for anything.*

*Osteoporosis? He couldn't have that, I can see some of his other bones, they look perfectly fine… which is really weirdly selective… oh no. “...um, Scotty? This… that wouldn't possibly have anything to do with the anticonvulsants I put him on after he had his first seizure, would it?” If that’s what this is, I'm going to be really mad. ...well, mad at probability. Damn is Eren unlucky lately.*
Scotty thought about it for a minute, nodding his head. “Eren’s one lucky son of a bitch…
depending on which one you have him the percentages were around 5 to .01% chance of this
happening to him.” Wow…. That’s… Juvenile selective Osteoporosis. *What more could this kid
possibly have to deal with?* “Well, hate to break it to you but we can’t open him up… And these
aren’t gonna heal on their own without putting them together properly… So I’ll have to set them.
….That’ll be so much fun.” Scotty moved to look at Eren laying still on the large metal table. *We’ll
have to move him…. And then try and set it, but i’ll need to wrap his chest.* “No singing… He
won’t be able to until they’re healed.” He warned, grabbing the wheelchair from the corner of the
room, setting it by the table, on Eren’s left.

Lathe helped Scotty to carefully lift Eren into the wheelchair, letting him wheel Eren down the hall
and going to retrieve Levi and Blake from the waiting room. Lathe lifted Eren onto the table,
moving out of Scotty’s way and sitting in a chair against the wall, giving him room to work. *Just in
case he becomes conscious of life again while this is going on, I'm right here.*

Scotty washed his hands in the sink in the room, waiting for Lathe to put Eren on the table. He
donned his usual light blue mask as he turned on the brighter lights above Eren’s chest. *This’ll
probably take a while, since I have to reset all of them.* He got out a wrap to start wrapping Eren’s
body around his shoulders and clavicle to keep his body stable. His large hands were gentle as
could be against his body as he shifted his chest ever so slowly, getting the top few done in awhile,
carefully wrapping his chest as the bones stayed in place. *Well, first four are done… Usually it’d be
16 more, but he’s only got 12 more.* Scotty barely noticed Eren stirring until he heard a large pain-
filled groan, signalling that Eren had finally come back to reality. *Well… He’s back… This’ll be
fun.* Scotty continued to set his ribs, and continued to wrap his body tightly.

Eren had started to feel sharp pains in his chest, as if someone were stabbing a knife repeatedly
into him, yet after a few moments the pain would die down to nothing, then start back up again in
a different spot. *What? What’s happening?* Eren’s eyes finally started to focus on everything that
was around him. *It’s so white… Where the fuck am I?* His eyes wandered to the man in blue scrubs
looking over him, his hands on Eren’s chest and shifting things around. *What…?* Eren let out a loud
groan when his rib was snapped back into place and wrapped tightly. “W-who…?” Eren’s question
died off as he met Scotty’s eyes, seeing a straight stare back.

...oh... *This is so good!* Scotty couldn’t stop himself as he thought of what to respond with. “Your
worst nightmare.” He then continued on resetting Eren’s ribs without a care in the world, yet he
found it difficult with Eren’s panicked shaking, looking up to see his face he realized something.
*That ... That’s complete and total fear....*

Eren’s eyes widened in fear, his body shaking as a sickening crack was heard. *It.... It’s Grisha....
He’s hurting me... No ! I need to get away! But I can’t! I can’t No! No! Nonononononono!*
Eren’s body continued to shake, starting to panic as he watched Scotty continue, locking eyes with him yet
again. *Let me go!*
Lathe immediately was on his feet, smacking Scotty upside the head. “Don't give him a damn heart attack! Eren, Eren hon, it’s okay, it’s fine, Dad’s here, you don't have to be worried. Scotty is just being a meanie. It’s alright, I promise.” Lathe moved into Eren’s line of sight, running a hand through his hair. ... Scotty. Fuck you.

Eren looked up to Lathe’s face, panicking more as he cried out in pain, feeling Scotty snap yet another bone into place and wrap it. Owww! Fuck! That hurts! Eren cried out again in pain as Scotty finally finished up the last rib and wrapped his chest all over again. Eren started to cry, finally feeling the full extent of the pain coursing through his chest, trying to calm down and not freak out. He’s hurting me… He’s hurting me, he’s really hurting me, I don’t want it to hurt anymore… Grisha’s back, I wanna get away… Dad he’s right there… Get him away from me! Don’t tell me it’s okay! He’s gonna kill me!

Lathe ran his hand through Eren’s locks, murmuring to him calmly the entire time. He looked up after Scotty pinned the wraps well into place, speaking a bit more clearly to Eren. “Don't worry Eren, it’s over. All Scotty did was set your ribs in place and scare the crap out of you- fuck you, by the way, uncool.” Lathe looked up to Scotty, glaring at him for a moment before returning his gaze to Eren, his voice softening. “-but what he did was put your bones back in place so they can heal properly, because they won't on their own. But don't be scared of Scotty- he really wants you to be okay. He just somehow hasn't gotten kicked from the Healthcare system for his badly-timed humor yet.” He’s a nice guy- ...ish.

Scotty gave a sheepish smile as he pulled down the light blue mask hiding his face. “Sorry Eren, I couldn’t help myself… I’ll go get you some more morphine for your chest, so calm down, I’m leaving…” Scotty patted Lathe’s shoulder as he made his way to the door. I know, I know I can be an asshole from time to time, but… You got this… Scotty left without another word.

Eren watched Scotty leave with widened eyes, the tears quickly welling and falling. He tried to stop his crying, beginning to calm down after Scotty had been gone for awhile. “It…. It hurts…” He croaked out to Lathe, looking up to him with frightened eyes. I don’t want him to come.

Lathe gently threaded his fingers through Eren’s hair, his voice soft. “I know it hurts a lot right now, but you'll feel a lot better once Scotty comes back with the morphine- please don't give me that look, I know he didn't give you a good impression, but you shouldn't be terrified of him.” Lathe reached for his kerchief, wiping the tears from Eren’s face. “Just hold out a little bit longer and you'll feel better- we both just really want your bones to heal.” We want you to be okay.

Eren nodded as he tried to calm down, his tears fading after a few minutes of Lathe carding through his hair. His hand feels nice…. I’m tired, but it hurts too much to sleep… He waited patiently for Scotty to come back, jumping a bit when the towering man threw open the door with a syringe in
his hand, ready to use. *He looks more terrifying… Why does he look like Grisha too?* Eren watched with wide eyes as Scotty came closer, and shrinking away in fear as he started to clean the area in his inner armpit, sterilizing it for the syringe. *What is he putting in my arm? Why does he need to do it?* He almost freaked out as Scotty put the syringe in his arm, but it was already emptied before he could react to it, which was violently pulling his arm away from Scotty in pure fear… *does he wanna kill me too?* Eren didn’t have time to get more than a whimper out before his body seemed to go lax around him, the pain easing away from his chest and allowing him to breathe a bit better. … *Hmm… Morphine… Damn… I’m tired.* “I’m… T-tired…” He murmured quietly, his eyes starting to close as he passed out from exhaustion and lack of sleep over the past few nights. *So… tired…*

Scotty sighed as Eren passed out. “Well, at least he’s asleep. That’s good, it means he’s not in so much pain that he can’t sleep… But we need to talk about how we’re going to go on from here. We need to have a plan if his ribs don’t start to heal, and how the osteoporosis will affect him from now on.” Scotty moved to the computer, opening it up and starting to type down everything Eren was restricted from doing. *No school, no sports, no singing, he can’t curl up in a ball, his chest must be wrapped at all times, he’s gotta use a wheelchair for a few days until the bones at least start growing back together.*

Lathe just glared at Scotty. “Morphine doesn’t make you pass out like that. Either you terrified him enough with that huge-ass syringe which you put no effort into wielding in a non-threatening manner, or you didn’t just give him morphine.” Yet, he didn’t stop carding his hand through his locks. “But I know he’s not going to be able to do a lot of stuff for at least a little bit, until he starts healing. Which I think he will- he’ll get better eventually.” *His arm healed well- and he’s a tough kid. He’ll be okay.*

Scotty shook his head. “He looked like he needed sleep, so I gave him a sedative that’ll let him sleep.” He continued to type, looking back at Lathe every now and then. “No, he’s not gonna be able to go to school for awhile, I don’t want someone bumping into him and rebreaking his whole chest… I can only imagine if he said this hurts how much pain he must be in… He barely said anything about his shattered wrist.” *That’s just weird that he can handle that kind of pain… But I guess he’s just one of those weird people… And at least we know he can feel pain… He did say that his chest hurts.*

Lathe nodded. *He never really complains about anything hurting ever… if he’s in enough pain to cry from it… this isn’t good at all. …and I caused all of it… even if it did keep him from drowning, he’s in so much pain… he’s not going to be able to do a ton of shit… “What are the restrictions? ...What can he do is probably a better question at this point, actually…”*

“He can’t do much of anything… I’m gonna send him home in a wheelchair… He’s gonna be staying in bed for the majority of this week, he can’t take Blake on any walks, he needs to eat soft foods, soups and soft bread or rolls work wonderfully. He can’t sing, **absolutely not**, he’s not allowed to sing at all until I say he can. He won’t be able to breath very well, so you gotta watch to
make sure he doesn’t get pneumonia. I want him to try to take a deep breath at least once every hour to stop that from happening. His arm movement will be restricted and I don’t want him moving around a lot either, hence the wheelchair. He’ll be using the wheelchair when he gets back to school for awhile, I don’t want him to be jostled in the hallway, and Blake appears familiar with the device.” Scotty motioned towards Blake coming in with Levi, immediately sniffing at the shiny chair with wheels. Yeah... No stairs for Eren, cause I can already see him running or jumping down them... And jostling the bones apart. “No stairs, I don’t want him being carried up them either, that’s a hazard for him and whoever’s carrying him… Sorry Levi, you’ll need to be chill with the huge ass beanbags for a bed while you’re here.” Though I don’t think you’d mind.

Levi just shrugged, moving so he was on Eren’s other side. “It’s no big deal. Anything so that he gets better.” I get to hold you still, so it’s okay. But it’s going to suck, being pretty much under house arrest for a while… and it sounds like it could be a long while. And you’re not going to be singing at all, that pretty much brings your YouTube stuff to a screeching halt, unless you get to the point where you can move enough to play piano without harming yourself... Levi looked over to Blake where he had inspected the wheelchair to his liking, sitting down next to the shining wheel and looking up at him expectantly. “That’s good- Blake looks like he’s already familiar with wheelchairs.” Eren’s going to really need him- doors and stuff.

Lathe nodded. “He’ll need all the help he can get in getting around. He’s going to pretty much be bedridden all week and maybe more, and just chill at home. Let’s hope he’s not the kind to get stir-crazy.” He might end up just sleeping a majority of the week… he’ll be stuck on the first floor… I can bring art stuff upstairs, give him Netflix on the big TV… but he’s not going to be doing much. And I see many soups in my near future. I might have to take the first week or two off from classes, make sure nothing happens until he can get around by himself...

Scotty nodded. “I’ll write him a prescription for Morphine…. He’s gonna need it, and 15mg won’t be enough, I’m writing him for 30mg…. Also do you want me to write one for a sedative? It looks like he hasn’t slept in days.” He really looks like he’s the walking dead. The bags under his eyes are huge !

Lathe took a moment to really look at Eren, his expression finally peaceful after fitful nights of nightmares and sleeplessness. That kind of sleep... is sleep. Dreamless. He needs it. “...you probably should. If it keeps him asleep, do it. He’ll need it... the nightmares came back.” Lathe held up his hand before Scotty could reply. “Remember that whatever you recommend isn't going to help. Everything only made it worse the first time around we tried that. Casper and I are working on it- though honestly, we could use help… I can send you my notes later. But nothing for that now- I'll be working on it while I'm home taking care of him.” That’s my schedule now. He really does need those...

Scotty nodded and quickly wrote off a few prescriptions, sending them to Casper’s pharmacy. They’ll be able to pick them up as soon as they get there... they should have them on hand. “They’re at Casper’s, you can pick them up there, but for now, he’s all set to go, just make sure you drive carefully. I don’t need you slamming on the brakes and making him come right back to
get his ribs placed back into the right spot.” With that said, Scotty got up from his stool, moving to
the table and gently picking Eren up, mindful of his set ribs and setting him gently into the chair,
making sure that he wouldn’t lean forward and fall off. *Don’t want that to happen.* “Alright, you
guys are all set to leave, call me if anything goes haywire… I can always try and reset them at your
house if they do break again, I can get to your house probably faster than you can get here… since
I live in the middle.” He stood up, patting Levi’s back. “So how long are you staying home?” *I
know he’s gotta go back eventually, I hope Eren will get enough of him until Thanksgiving.*

Levi looked to him, his expression still neutral. “Just two more days- it was a short leave they
granted me. I'll try and help keep him occupied while I'm still around, keep him from doing
anything that would hurt him. And, um… thanks.” *I'm glad someone besides Lathe and I give so
much of a shit about Eren not being in pain and/or dying. ...he’s one or the other too often.
Dammit.* Levi stepped behind the wheelchair, taking hold of the handles and gently pushed him
down the hall as Scotty led them, Blake trotting alongside Eren and moving with Scotty to hold
open doors, always immediately returning to his place next to the wheel. *He'll be really helpful
when Eren does this thing by himself…* Levi waited for Lathe to sign some papers before they
made their way to the parking lot sans Scotty, guiding Eren out of the wheelchair and into the
backseat of his Sorento. “I honestly don't know what we would have done if I had to hold him in
my lap the whole way home- borrowing this was a good idea.” He held Eren upright on the way to
the pharmacy, Lathe quickly going in and out to get Eren’s meds before getting them home.

Lathe helped get Eren back into the wheelchair, though he stopped Levi as they came to the front
steps, looking to Eren, the steps, and to Eren again before he looked at Levi, shrugging. He took
hold of the frame of the chair and helped Levi lift it up, opening the door and getting them into the
house without incident. He helped him lay Eren on the couch before patting Levi’s shoulder, his
voice gentle. “I'm going to make us all some food- I don't know when Eren’ll wake up, perhaps in
the next hour or so- so I’m going to make a pot of soup. You can chill with him until he wakes up,
or cook with me if you need a distraction- anything.” *It’s a lot to take in- if you need to talk, you
can.*

Levi just shook his head. “No thanks- I need to go for a run. But thanks for the offer, really. I just
have thinking to do…” *Too much has gone down lately… I need to process it all.*

Blake’s ears perked as soon as he heard Levi utter the word ‘run’. *My human’s human is going for
a run? I wanna go!* Blake instantly got up and went to the door grabbing both his leash and his
jacket in his mouth and racing back to Levi’s side, pawing at his leg. *I wanna go too! You better
take me! Or I’ll lick your face to take me outside early tomorrow!*

Levi looked down at Blake, smirking for an instant at his enthusiasm. “I guess I'm not going alone.
Alright, give me a second to get running stuff on- jeans aren't the best for it.” He scratched Blake
behind the ears, kneeling on the ground to get him into his jacket and clip on the leash, bringing
him downstairs to quickly change into a light jacket with sweatpants and sneakers, waving goodbye
to Lathe before shutting the door behind him and starting to run down the block, sighing and
beginning to let his thoughts run without a filter.
Blake took instantly to Levi’s pace. This human is faster than my human…. He’s not taking me where my human likes to go either…. Where are we going? My human never goes this way. We always go to the park! Does this human have a ball? Why am I on a leash? My human doesn’t put a leash on me… I’m not gonna run away, I just wanna run! Blake pulled ahead of Levi, whining as he tugged on his leash, throwing their tempo off. He had gotten used to Eren taking his leash off as soon as they were away from the house, and being able to walk beside Eren. He was unused to running with a leash on as well.

Levi nearly stumbled, slowing them down to a stop as Blake tugged on the leash, whining. ...Huh. Well, when we walked home from school, we never did keep the leash on long… Levi unclipped the leash from Blake’s collar. “Better?” He smirked faintly as Blake wagged his tail, beginning to run again with Blake beside him. I can understand not being used to the leash. Eren probably took it off of you whenever he didn’t really need to keep it on you.

Blake managed to keep up with Levi’s pace, keeping his sight forwards, not bothering to take into account the dogs that were being walked around. He didn’t really care for them, or their rude barks at him. Rude… I’m running with my human’s human! Blake had no idea where they were going but he stayed by Levi’s side, his tail wagging the whole time.

Levi brought them past Armin’s house and down the long stretch of empty road, the leaves tumbling over the asphalt next to them in the light breeze. Levi furrowed his brow as he heard the sounds of construction further up the road, continuing up to the plot of land where Eren’s old house still barely stood, much of it in ruins as workers actively demolished it. The fuck? Someone bought that crappy house? How did I never hear about it? Levi looked down as Blake seemed to go into a panic, shooting off to the rubble and barking, unable to catch him. FUCK. “BLAKE!” He could get killed!! Levi turned his efforts to catching the attention of the construction workers instead, Blake refusing to listen to him. You need to stop working because Blake’s officially gone cray and if anything happens to him I'll not only feel awful but have multiple people after my hide!

Blake rushed into the construction zone, running past people trying to stop him, he went right for the rubble that used to be the house, expertly hopping up and finding stable footing for himself, looking around and barking. Human! Where are you human? I can smell you! Where are you human! You need to come out! You need to be okay! Blake continued to bark for a bit, finally digging into the rubble, seemingly disappearing.

Levi ran up near the rubble where a few construction workers had congregated, everything having been immediately brought to a screeching halt. “BLAKE!” Levi waited a moment, hearing nothing that could be Blake over the rustling of the trees. “We can’t go after him, can we?” The workmen next to him shook their heads. “Then… I guess we just have to wait.” You better get out of there on one piece.
Human! Wait… That’s not my human… Blake’s tail halted in it’s wagging, as he took one of Eren’s old bloodstained hoodies from the wreckage of what used to be his room. He whined and whimpered, looking for Eren, but when he couldn’t find him after a few minutes, Blake took the bloody jacket and carefully ran back to Levi, sitting by his feet and pawing his leg, whining.

Levi knelt down, taking the jacket from Blake and petting him, trying to calm him down. You smelled Eren in there- that explains it. “Hey, good job- Eren’s okay, don’t worry. It’s just his hoodie. Eren’s home. I promise.” It’s good to know you’re as dedicated as you are to him. He stood, clipping the leash back onto his collar for good measure and addressing the construction workers. “Sorry about that- he smelled his owner’s hoodie in the rubble, got worried. Could I ask who bought this house, by the way?” Who the fuck would be in their right mind and want it?

The worker nodded. “Smart dog you got, keep him on a leash though.” He motioned for them to follow him off the sight as the other workers got back to knocking down the rest of the house. “We got the job from a man with the last name of Quo…. He got us to knock down the house and then fill the basement and cover it up… I believe he bought the surrounding areas as well.” He motioned them to exit the construction zone and shooed them away before getting back to work.

...what. Levi let the man shoo them away, starting to run back to the house with Eren’s hoodie in his arms. ...Why the hell did Lathe buy the house? Levi ignored Blake tugging on his leash, letting him figure out that he wasn’t going to get off of it anytime soon. Once they got to the house Levi took Blake’s leash off, setting it and his vest near the door. “Lathe?” He called softly, entering the piano room, seeing Eren still dead asleep on the couch. Well. He’s asleep. Still.

Lathe turned from the stove, setting down the large wooden spoon he held, smiling softly. “Hey Levi.” His expression changed as he saw the hoodie Levi held, noting the blood spots on it, recognising it. ...Wait. “How did… but….” They were supposed to knock it down today… you went there? ...You know now. You must. “You can’t breathe a single word about any of this to Eren. It’s supposed to be a surprise.”

“If you had given me a heads up, I wouldn’t’ve taken Blake off the leash…. And what the hell are you doing buying a bunch of land like that? It's literally nothing but fields! What are you even gonna do with all that space?” You can’t possibly be thinking of doing what I think you’re doing. Though you literally are insane so possibly.

“Wait, what. Why’d you take Blake off the leash? I thought that was illegal or something.” Lathe just shrugged. “You know what? I guess not. But that’s not important. First off, it’s fields and trees. And second- things. Maybe I’m just really into real estate. Maybe it used to be an old Indian burial ground and I bought it for ironic purposes. Who knows, I’m insane. Just deal.” Lathe was about to return to his soup before he turned again dramatically, pointing to Levi. “And no telling Eren.” Surprise.
Levi just nodded. “So… How much is yours?” If I remember correctly… The trees were very far back behind the old house. Levi filled a kettle and put it on the burner to make some tea. “I’m surprised you haven’t said anything… Especially with your big ass mouth… Oh yeah, does Spades know?”

“Do I know what?” Spades’ voice resonated after she closed the door, calling into the kitchen. She bent down to kiss Eren’s head, venturing into the kitchen with her uniform on. What is it that I know? Or not know? Well… I guess I’ll know soon.

Crap. Lathe jumped a bit as Spades came in, immediately straightening up a bit and smiling, trying not to look guilty and failing miserably. He was about to greet her before a metal bowl that had fallen off the counter clanged on the floor, nearly jumping out of his skin. Everyone was silent as he stared at it before looking back up to Spades and Levi, swallowing hard and standing up straight again, trying to ignore the bowl and look anywhere but them. Dammit… I’ve got to tell them now; haven’t I?

Levi sighed, shaking his head as he made himself a cup of tea. “He bought the house Eren used to live… And the surrounding area apparently, and I was running over there… Blake freaked out, cause he thought Eren was in the wreckage, but some construction guys are knocking down the house, filling the basement and then covering it… Knowing him he’s planning to build a house, or something.” Crazy person… That’s what he is, pure insanity.

Lathe’s face grew scarlet as Levi spoke, trying to speak, his words running together as he looked to Spades, trying to explain himself. “I didn't know what to tell you or when to tell you but I really wanted to before things got too far along, I thought it’d be okay if I did and I was just thinking about the future for everyone and I might've gotten carried away at least a little bit but…” Lathe’s words caught in his throat and he stopped, dropping his arms to his sides and hanging his head in shame. “I just wanted it to be a nice surprise for everyone… I wanted to tell you so we could plan it out together and stuff… but I really wanted it to be a surprise for Eren… we don't have enough space anymore…. I just wanted us to live somewhere nice, with enough space for fun things and life to happen…” I just wanted all of you to be happy with where we all lived… I really did want to tell you… I’m sorry if I stepped over the line doing this without telling you…

Spades just shook her head. “I expect a theater room with reclining chairs… And lots of them. Think you can manage that, Sugar?” Spades winked a bit at him, stepping up to kiss him on the cheek. “I didn’t expect you guys to be home when I came home for lunch… How did the appointment go?” She asked quietly, looking around taking in the scene of Lathe’s cooking soup. This kitchen is a mess… but the soup smells damn good.

...that’s it? “…you're not mad? I didn't ask you or tell you anything… is it really okay?”...shouldn't
you be mad at me? Lathe tried not to flinch as she kissed his cheek, expecting something else. I don’t want you to be mad…

Spades shook her head. “Why would I be mad? I agree with you that this place is getting pretty small for all of us, and I can only imagine what Thanksgiving would look like. All I ask is you get a very large custom four-post bed, we need to be able to have Eren sleep in between us if he needs to…” Or… Maybe another ‘chicklin’. She paused, thinking, leaning forwards, her arms wrapping around his neck, her voice soft in his ear. “I need somewhere to put the handcuffs too.” She kissed his ear softly before coming down off her tiptoes and just hugging him around his waist. You can’t deny me… You’re mine, so I get to do this whether you like it or not. “I also want a huge kitchen, and a game room, God knows we’ll be hosting parties… I want in on the designing of this magnificent thing we’re building.” I want a pool and a hot tub too.

Lathe was absolutely crimson at her soft words, his arms hovering over her waist, stammering and unable to form words. ...what. Did she just say.... What I think she just said? Lathe swallowed hard, forcing down the pulse that ran through him. He tried to compose himself as she kept talking, letting his hands rest on her back and holding her close. ...mine. “A theatre room and all of that is very doable… and what’s this about parties?” ...oh riiight, the Spades from college parties hard... damn I haven't seen a body move like that in years .... Lathe was immediately bright red again, enunciating purposefully and trying to calm down. “As long as they're not all strangers and I get to occasionally hide in the kitchen…” Yeah... parties and I are not the best of friends... Y’know, she never stayed through parties... all I really remember is her being there and then at some point not... she was always just hanging out with some random guys... ...oh my god. Those were all one-night stands.

“We all know Eren’s gonna be popular... His music was on the radio when I came back, I can imagine he’ll want to host some parties for friends... And probably some college kids too when he gets there.” She moved fluidly through the kitchen, getting out 4 bowls for them. I wouldn’t mind hosting a party or two if we had the room to do it...

He’s on the radio. Lathe nodded, giving her a small smile and going to turn the burner on low, finding a ladle for the soup. “Fair point... oh, and to answer your earlier question, the appointment went... well, it wasn't exactly great.” Lathe filled the bowls she set on the counter, then helping Levi carry mugs to the table. “Every one of his ribs got broken... they've been set, Scotty did a really good job of that... but he’s pretty much not allowed to do much moving at all for the first week, and extremely minimal stuff for a long while... he’s not going to school for a week or maybe a bit more, and then he’ll have to use a wheelchair, which Blake is familiar with, thank God... but I really hope you like soup, because that’s pretty much the only thing he can eat for a while- liquids.” Lathe set down his coffee at his place, looking up to Eren still asleep on the couch. “Let me see if I can get him awake to eat.” He’ll need it. Lathe moved next to Eren, carding his hand through his hair and murmuring to him quietly. I can’t exactly shake you awake... “Hey Eren, wake up- it’s time for dinner. Can you hear me, or are you still out-out?” The sedative should’ve worn off by now.
Eren’s eyes started to open slowly. Dad….? Eren groaned, trying to lift his head up, quickly finding that his whole body felt like lead. I can’t fucking move…. I can barely lift my head… And my chest feels really weird...

Lathe reached for a pillow near Eren’s feet, gently and slowly guiding him to sit up. “Come on kid, we need you awake for a little so you can eat… we’ll let you go back to sleep real soon, okay?” I’m not going to try and move you to the kitchen table just yet… you look like you can barely move. Lathe pecked his forehead before moving back to the kitchen, picking up one of the bowls of soup and a spoon, setting it on a potholder in Eren’s lap and making sure that he could hold it without it spilling. “Try and get as much of this down as you can, okay? But you don’t have to finish it. Just try.” You’re going to need your strength.

Eren weakly nodded, reaching for his spoon. His movements were slow, lifting the spoon to his mouth and whimpering a bit as he struggled to swallow. Damn… It tastes so good… I want more, but I don’t know if I can handle that… Eren was silent aside from a few whimpers of pain as he ate a majority of his soup. My body still feels heavy...

Lathe left Eren to eat his soup, still glancing up every few seconds to make sure he was okay while they ate at the table. He soon emptied his bowl, setting it in the sink and going to take Eren’s bowl from him as well, pecking his forehead again. “Do you want anything else, Eren? A glass of water, maybe?” He watched as Eren slowly shook his head no, helping him ease back down and moving pillows out of the way, pulling the blanket back up to his chin. “Just chill here then for right now, sleep. We’ll get you a better setup in a little bit.” Can't have you only on the couch- we’ll figure something out where you and Levi have more space. Lathe helped finish up the dishes, the leftover pot of soup going into the fridge on pot holders so as not to burn the shelves. “Alright, we need some sort of better sleeping arrangement for the two of you- more space. The couch isn't really going to cut if for two months. Any ideas?” Something we can easily arrange, comfy… hmmm...

“I would suggest the beanbags… But we only got the two small ones, which won’t necessarily help with two of you.” Spades mentioned, getting up from the table and taking her bowl up to the sink and starting to grab everything together that she needed for work. “I need to get going, so I’ll be home for dinner unless anything changes.” I wonder what kind of soup we’d have for dinner? Spades went over to Lathe, going on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek, hugging him tightly as she did so. “Keep me updated on Eren, okay?” Her voice was soft as she spoke to him with a happy smile on her face. I don’t want to leave… But I kinda have to...

Lathe nodded, smiling and hugging her back tightly, pressing a sweet kiss to her lips. “Alright, can do. We’ll see you later then, Hon.” He let go of her, looking back to Eren as she left, his brow furrowed. “The beanbag thing was a good idea, but the ones he has now would be too small… ...I was gonna wait until Christmas, but I guess I’ll pull them out now.” Lathe disappeared down the basement stairs, soon reappearing and dragging two large beanbags behind him. “Merry very early Christmas, Eren!” Lathe pulled them near the piano, tucked into a corner of the room and going to put the smaller ones next to them. “If we get some smaller pillows too, and fill in all the spaces, with a quilt over everything it’ll be big enough and plenty comfy, I would think.” ...We’d need a lot
of safety pins to keep all that in place around the edges…. “I’ll grab the one from the upstairs closet if you gather up all the pillows from his room and downstairs?” Lathe addressed Levi, pointing to Eren as he struggled to shift. “Not you. You’re not supposed to be on your feet at all for a while. Sorry, kid.” You may or may not get very bored and antsy very fast- it’s probably too much to hope you’ll just sleep a lot.

Eren looked over with a pout on his face. “But… I can get up and help.” He insisted, still trying to struggle to sit up. I wanna help too, I can’t just sit here and not do anything! Eren only stopped when Levi put a gentle hand on him to push him back down onto the couch.

“Come on, Brat. You gotta listen to Lathe, you can’t be moving around much. Got it?” He sighed a bit, seeing Eren nod in understanding. Levi then went off to get all of Eren’s nesting supplies together and piling them next to the beanbags. Okay… I got everything you need. How you gonna make this work, Crazy?

Lathe stared at the pile for a moment, dropping the quilt behind him and dropping a small container on the pile of nesting material, exclaiming and answering Levi’s question. “Safety pins!” And lots of them. “Levi, get over here and help me pin all this crap together. It isn't going to stay in an elliptical shape by itself.” Yeah, objects never really behave the way you want them to like that. They always decide to follow something called, like, physics or something, which is totally lame.

Levi just shook his head before coming up and helping Lathe pin the makeshift bed together. I hope Crazy realizes that if one of these pins comes undone and rips a hole, he’s gonna have a hell of a mess to clean up…. Well, not my problem… With the two of them working on it, soon The large ‘bed’ had Eren’s approval for all the nesting materials. Well time to load this with blankets and pillows now that Eren approves.

Lathe sat back on his heels, admiring their handiwork and thinking quietly. “…..what if something rips though… should we have just tied it together with some of the fleece I have downstairs…? I could go get that and tie it around it as it is right now, keep the pins from being too strained…” He looked up to meet Levi’s glare, raising his hands in surrender. “Not to say that I pressed you into service for nothing, but with the first beanbag-getting-torn incident I’m taking all of them and using all the beads to make one huge one. Which would be too huge a production to do right off the bat. Let’s just hope this works. I'll be right back.” Lathe scurried off to get a long piece of fabric, having quickly stitched lengths of the fabric the quilts were made of together and laying one of the red and gold patterned blankets over everything, tucking it underneath the oval of pillows and tying and pinning it in place. “…that actually kinda worked. I’m honestly surprised. Now.” He turned to Eren, padding over to him. “Wanna test it?” He held out his arms as he offered. It’s no good if you don’t like it.

Eren looked up and nodded, struggling to shift and swing his legs over the edge of the couch. I wanna get up and do it myself, dammit!
Lathe stopped Eren, slipping his arms under him and carefully and smoothly lifting him up from the couch, blanket and all. “Eren, really listen to me. I know you- I understand you have a strong independent streak, but you need to just chill with it for a while. Otherwise your ribs are going to refuse to heal and you'll be in an unnecessary amount of pain for an unnecessarily long time. And hon- for as long as your ribs are broken, you aren't allowed to sing. And you need that voice of yours. So just chill, okay? We only want you to get better.” He pressed a kiss to his temple, laying him gently on the makeshift bed. “How is it? On a scale of one to ten, one being awful and ten being ‘I never want to get up’?” Please let it be not horrible. If I have to sew you a huge bean bag bed the beads are going to get everywhere and I don't want that struggle.

Eren flopped his arms around, trying to feel the surrounding area. *I guess I could get used to it....* “About... A 7 maybe?” He couldn’t remove the uncertainty from his voice, no matter how much he tried. *That sounded very reassuring...*

Well, at least he doesn’t mind this for his bed from now on. Levi slowly made his way onto the ‘bed’, being careful to try and not jostle Eren, and he soon had Eren surrounded in his nesting materials. *You'll like it better like this.*

Lathe helped him pile on the blankets and pillows, smiling at the sight of Eren peeking out at him under all of them, Levi curled into his side. *This is too damn cute.* “It’ll work for right now- I'll put you something that’s not as impromptu together sometime soon. But if you can live with sleeping here for right now, that’d be best. I’ll let you chill on the couches during the day though, give you access to the TV and Netflix. After a couple weeks you’d be able to chill at the piano too and play as much as you want. But for this moment...” Lathe moved to the floor lamp that was next to the makeshift bed, turning it to its dimmest setting and shutting the front blinds. “You look like you want nothing but to sleep for eons... and you're going to need it, honestly. ...don't look at me like that.” Lathe smirked a bit as Eren pouted, nudging the blanket pile with his foot. “You're going to have to deal, and I know it sucks, but I think everyone would prefer if you were all in one piece. And not in pain. ...either. We’ll try and make this as not-suckish as possible. Now sleep. If you're not up by then, we’ll wake you up for dinner.” Now meaning soup. “I take it that goes for you, too.” He chuckled as Levi nodded, leaving them to clean up the dishes, then disappearing to the scripting room.

Eren let Levi wrap his arms carefully around him, his eyes watching Lathe get up and leave towards the kitchen. He spoke in a soft whisper, turning his gaze to Levi beside him. “Do I really have to stay still? Why can’t I do anything?” Eren whined, struggling to move himself to get closer to him. *I don’t want to just lay here...*

Levi gently rested a hand on Eren’s shoulder, shifting so he was pressed against his side, moving his head to gently kiss Eren’s neck. “Eren, moving too much with your ribs struggling to grow back together isn’t doing your body any favors. For your bones to grow back, you can't shift too much and force them back apart. While they're busted, you can't move too much, you can't walk, you
can't even sing until they're healed. I know it’s awful, but we want you to get better. You'll learn to cope, I guess.” It's just the way it is... a chest full of broken ribs was the price paid for not drowning... though I'm pretty sure it’s worth it, for just a month or two of... well, what to you is going to feel practically like hell for at least the first week. ...Lathe will find you a distraction. Hopefully.

Eren groaned. “I need to stay like this? Until they grow back?... But it doesn’t even hurt!” Eren tried to make an excuse for him to be able to move. I don’t want to sleep... I don’t want to have a fucking nightmare.

“Eren, you're on morphine right now. We both know that’s a lie.” Levi gently kissed up Eren’s neck, shifting to peck his lips before settling back down next to him, pressed to his side. “Eren, I know you want to move, but you need to promise me you won't do anything Lathe tells you not to when it comes to moving around. He knows a lot more about how you can get better than you or I do. So just stay put for right now, okay? Sleep. We were up a great deal of the night- we both could use a decent nap.” Levi yawned, letting his eyes fall shut. I could barely get any sleep...

Eren shook his head. “No… Levi… I can’t go back to sleep!” Eren cried out, a hand coming up to shake Levi’s shoulder. I don’t want it to happen again.... I don’t want him to come back... Eren’s eyes were full of fear at just the thought of going to sleep.

Blake picked his head up. My human! He got up and scurried to the kitchen, pawing at Lathe’s leg. Older human… Help my human… He’s freaking out again!

Lathe had looked to the piano room as he heard Eren’s voice, though he dried off his hands and walked quickly back to them when Blake came to get him, kneeling next to him and carding his hand through his hair, murmuring to him and trying to calm Eren down. “Eren, Eren hon, it’s okay, just stay calm… what’s wrong?...why don't you want to sleep?” You look exhausted... why not? “...nightmares?” That would explain it...

Eren struggled to swallow the lump in his throat as he nodded, his eyes still full of fear as he locked gazes with Lathe. “I don't... I don't want him.... To come back… I don't want him to kill me…” Eren was a hair short of crying. I don’t want it to happen.

Lathe nodded, speaking to him softly and waiting for him to calm down, slowly drawing back from him when he didn't look on the very verge of tears. Actually crying will just complicate things further... “I have just the thing... You really need the rest, and this should make your sleep relatively dreamless...” Lathe quickly retrieved the bottle from the counter and a small glass of water, bringing them back to Eren and giving him one of the pills. “Down the hatch, kid. You look like you need it.”
Eren nodded, taking the pill slowly, and within a few minutes, his eyes closed and his breathing became even.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe heard his phone ringing in his pocket, setting down a wooden spoon as a complex piano ringtone played, answering and holding the phone to his ear with his shoulder, fussing over multiple things in the kitchen. “Hey Hon, what’s up? I was just about to wake up Levi and Eren for dinner.”

Spades let out a long sigh as she heard his voice, her head against the steering wheel as she held the phone to her ear. “I won't be home for dinner…” She sounded worn out, really worn out. Dammit. I wanted to actually make it home on time.

Lathe stopped, his face falling a bit, turning off the burner under the tea kettle. “What’s going on? You sound like it’s been really rough since you left.” What could've happened in just a few hours? Maybe a really bad accident or something…

There was a pause, Spades trying to figure out if she could tell him… Sighing when she remembered. “I’m…. I'm not at the liberty to say…” I really can’t tell you… I’m sorry...

Lathe leaned against the counter, his voice sympathetic. “It’s okay Hon, I understand… you stay as long as you need to, I'll be up waiting for you to get home, okay?” I get that you deal with a lot of stuff you can't talk about… it’s okay. But I still worry...

“Are… Are you sure? I might not be home until really late. And I don’t have a key… So can you keep the back door open?” I completely forgot to grab it on my way out after lunch.

“Okay, I will. We need to get you an actual key for your key ring instead of just giving you the spare. And of course- I want to make sure you get home okay.” Someone has to give you your kiss goodnight. Lathe set out three bowls and mugs on the counter, turning off the stove.

Spades nodded at the other end, taking in a deep breath. “Okay… I need to go. Work calls… I love you, Sugar.” Her voice tired as she spoke, hanging up after.
“Love you too.” Lathe put away his phone when Spades ended the call, filling his and Levi’s bowl and only filling Eren’s halfway. He didn’t finish lunch, so I don’t know how hungry he’ll be. Lathe padded to the makeshift bed with the two bowls on potholders, setting them down before gently shaking Levi awake, threading his fingers through Eren’s hair to wake him up. “Dinner, you two.” He helped sit Eren up a bit before handing each of them their soup. “You can eat here if you promise not to spill it; Spades isn’t going to be home to eat with us- something’s going on that she needs to stick around for. She’ll be home late.” It’s something you’d expect from time to time at least, really.

Eren nodded slowly. He took a few bites, not really finding that he had the stomach for the soup. I’m not that hungry and I wanna sleep… But I don’t want it to happen again… I wanna be able to sleep. Eren looked over to Levi, watching him eat. He’s not gonna be here long is he?

Levi looked up to Lathe. “Is she alright?” Usually what Eren tells me is she’s home around dinner time… Even if she’s late. But then this could be a special case.

Lathe had since gotten his own bowl, having decided to return and sit on the floor next to them, quiet as he ate. He shrugged at Levi’s question. “She sounded really worn out. She’s normally home around now, but something came up. She deals with plenty of sensitive stuff, so she couldn't really say what was up… something bad must've happened. But she’s okay. She’ll be home pretty late though. I’m assuming it was an accident of some sort she has to deal with.” Who knows, really.

Levi nodded, switching between his soup and tea, helping Eren carefully sip his tea when he wanted some. “You look like you could use a few more hours, Brat.” I wouldn’t mind sleeping with you for tonight like this- it’s warm, and I get to hold you.

Eren nodded slowly. I wanna sleep… “I can’t though.” His voice was soft as he struggled to move the pillows out from under him so he could lay back down. I can’t eat any more… I wanna go to sleep… But I can’t… He’ll come back and kill me...

Lathe helped him lay back down, thinking. “I don't want to give you too many of those pills though… you've already had two today… well, if I do, this day will be the one exception. Then after this, it’s just the one for getting you to sleep.” Or if anything goes wrong… “I’ll be working a lot with Casper over the next few weeks so we can get you something meant to keep away those nightmares instead of it just being a side effect.” That’s important. It’s been important, but now it’s even more necessary because we can’t have you crying or thrashing in your sleep. Lathe retrieved the bottle again after getting rid of all their dishes except Eren’s mug of tea, handing him one more pill. “Here- and Levi is going to be right next to you. You haven't got anything to worry about.”

Eren nodded, taking the pill, weakly sipping at his tea to help it down. I don’t want to have to take
pills... But I’m too afraid that whatever I see is gonna be real... And that he’s really gonna kill me. It didn’t take much longer at all for Eren’s head to roll limply to the side and his body grow slack as he fell asleep.

Levi sighed, running a hand through his long brown locks. “Those pills work well with him... I’m probably gonna fall asleep soon too, I hope you don’t mind.” Levi’s eyes never left Eren’s sleeping features. He looks so calm, and relaxed.

Lathe shook his head, taking Eren’s mug and pecking his forehead, giving Levi a warm smile and standing. “You go right ahead and sleep. I’m leaving the light on very dim though, just so Spades can make it to the stairs without tripping over anything. Goodnight.” Lathe went to the kitchen, finishing the dishes and putting the leftover soup in the fridge as well before leaving the lights on low, making sure the back door was unlocked before heading upstairs, changing and getting into bed, settling and reading a book from the nightstand next to him.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

It was close to 1 in the morning when Spades slipped in through the back door. She made sure she was quiet, knowing that Eren was probably asleep somewhere on the first floor if it wasn’t on the couch. I remember being told he was confined to this floor. She took off her shoes to make sure she stayed quiet, slipping up the stairs having only woken Blake, who promptly went back to sleep. She got to the hallway, her brow furrowing as she saw the light on in their room. He’s still up? Her steps got a little faster as she got closer to the doorframe. I want you... I want you now.

Lathe looked up as he heard the back door open and close, smirking as he heard the distinctive, if soft, click of her shoes across the piano room before it was traded for the padding of feet up the stairs. She’s home. Lathe smiled to her as she entered their room, his voice warm. “Welcome home.” He was caught off guard a bit at the absolutely predatory glint she had in her eyes as she shut the door behind her. “W-what-” He stuttered a bit as he put the book down beside him, surprised as she walked straight up to him and climbed onto the bed, looming over him. W-what are you...

Spades leaned down, her lips locking onto Lathe’s as her hands wandered down his strong arms and slowly took hold of them by the wrist. She guided them up over his head and towards the headboard, one hand taking over both wrists and the other quickly grabbing her handcuffs. It didn’t take her more than a few seconds to lock his hands in the cuffs, yet he was restrained around the headboard. That’s better. She picked her head up, staring into his eyes, piercing them with a darker look. “Bad day at work... So stay fucking still.” Her words were harsh as she moved to straddle over him, her hands going to the hem of his shirt and pulling it up, as far as it could go, past his head, leaving it dangle by his wrists. Spades let her eyes scan over his toned body, her hands following suit as she traces every line of muscle. Mine... I hope you’re at least somewhat ready for this.
Lathe melted into the kiss, letting Spades move his arms above his head, returning her advance with fervor. *I like where this is going*… His eyes snapped open as he was suddenly handcuffed to the headboard, breaking their kiss and looking up. He looked to Spades, only for his words to catch in his throat at the dark look in her eyes. A shiver ran up his spine as she spoke and started to move his shirt off of him. *Yes ma’am.* Lathe quietly whimpered as her hands moved over his now bare chest, trying not to squirm under her with either the urge to touch her, or with the growing hardness in his pants.

Spades smirked as she heard him whimper, leaning down, making sure her ass was still rubbing against his crotch as she did so. *Mine.* Spades was gentle at first, kissing his chest all over, though she got increasingly harder with him, sucking a few hickeys onto his skin, then progressing to larger darker hickeys, and finally ending out with just biting him, and letting a trail of teeth marks litter his chest. *That’s better.*

Lathe quietly moaned as she kissed up and down his chest, his head having fallen back against the pillows. He gasped as she ground against his length, his hips rising the inch he allowed them to meet her movements. As she became rougher, it became harder for him to stay still, and he fought the urge to jerk away from her as she started to bite his chest, whimpering as she marked him, his heels digging into the bed and letting out a low moan as she ground hard against his clothed length. *That kinda hurts… but it feels so good….*

Spades eased up on his chest, moving off of him and her hands moved to pull Lathe’s pants and boxers down in one swoop. *Well, someone’s definitely excited… That’s good.* She got up off the bed and snatched two scarves from around the room, coming back and tying both his ankles to the footboard of the bed. *You’re really not allowed to move.* “You’re being so quiet… Come on, I wanna hear you.” She teased his length with her finger, gently rubbing the slit and letting her finger run up and down his length. *I wanna tease you as long as I can.*

Lathe blushed crimson as she let his erection spring free, watching her tie his ankles to the footboard deftly and climb back on the bed, in between his legs. He let out a gasp as she traced his length with her finger, moaning as her finger trailed over the slit, a shudder running through him. He tried to curl up his legs, though they were quickly stopped by the scarves, held taut and keeping him spread apart. …*I really like this…*

Spades smirked softly, a dark glint in her eyes as she hand took hold of his length, slowly pumping it. “Is someone sensitive?” Her voice sly, her lips coming close to his length, grazing over his skin gently. *Time for you to become a puddle.*

Lathe let out a long moan, his breath coming in shorter pants as she stroked his length, shuddering as he felt her breath. *So good… it’s so much…* “S-Spades-”
Spades shook her head, squeezing his length a bit in reprimand. “No, I’m not Spades… I’m your Master, and you will refer to me as such, is that clear?” Oh, if you’ll actually call me that it will make this that much hotter.

Lathe gasped as Spades squeezed his length, looking up to her, his eyes darkening further with lust as she spoke. “Y-yes… master.” Lathe groaned as she started stroking his member again, his cheeks crimson. Being tied up and completely open didn't bother Lathe- rather, he relished in the attention Spades was giving him. That's how this is going... I really like this...

Spades smirked and continued to rub his length, though soon she let go of him, letting his length stand tall without attention. She moved off of him going to his nightstand and pulling out a black tube, she came back over to him, uncapping the bottle. Spades kneeled down on the floor, reaching to remove her panties from under her skirt and throw them somewhere. Her eyes were glued to his length as she let the cool gel slowly escape the bottle and drip onto his waiting member. God, this is gonna be hot as hell.

Lathe whimpered as she stopped pumping his length, his eyes following her as she moved to the nightstand, his eyes lidded as he watched her take off her panties and drop them without care. He looked to her as she held the small black tube over him, shivering as she let the cool lube drip onto his length and slowly run down. He whimpered, looking to her with pleading eyes, his hands tugging a bit at his handcuffs, impatient. “S- master, p-please…” I really, really want you...

Spades smirked more, “I guess you’ve been a good boy…. I think I can do that for you.” Her voice was soft as she got back on the bed, not letting him protest as all as she sat down on him, filling her all the way. She let out a loud whine, feeling him fill her again. “Ha… Lathe… Ha…. you’re so big… you’re such good boy.” Fuck I missed fucking you.

Lathe let out a loud moan as he sank into her, shuddering at her praise. I love it when you talk like that... Lathe couldn't help but buck up his hips into her, though he struggled to keep his hips in place. I'm not supposed to move... I want this to keep going like it is, I don't want to mess with it, it feels too good to mess it up...

Spades continued to move on him, up and down, in a fluid motion, rolling her hips so he hit all her sensitive spots. “Ha…. Lathe… Oh my god! It's so good!” She let out a loud cry and moaned constantly, not wanting to let up from on top of Lathe. It feels so good, and you look simply wonderful under me.

Lathe’s head fell back, his face flushed as he gazed up at Spades riding him, not caring if he was
loud as he moaned, his hips thrusting up minutely to meet her movement. You sound so damn sexy… He felt a familiar pressure building in his stomach, stuttering and trying to speak. “M-master… I’m not… haa … going to last l-long… nnnh…” It’s so much…

Spades cried out in pure bliss as she shifted, hitting her g-spot, feeling her own coil quickly tightening. “Me… Ngh…. Neither…. Lathe!” Spades cried out his name as she clenched around him, crying in bliss as she climaxed around him. Holy crap… That felt great! She kept her motions going to get Lathe to his climax as well.

Lathe let out a loud moan as Spades cried out his name, driving him to his own climax and releasing into Spades, letting her milk him for all he was worth. His heels dug into the mattress, panting as Spades slowed her motions, trying to catch his breath. Fuck… that was amazing… Lathe tugged at handcuffs, wanting nothing more than to hold Spades at that moment as she nearly collapsed on top of him. “M- Spades, the cuffs…” I want to hold you…

Spades looked up at him with hazy eyes. Right… She slowly reached up and undid the cuffs around his wrist, letting him go. She slowly got off of him, moving to untie his legs before clambering off of him. I need to get this uniform off. Her motions were slow as she got undressed, leaving nothing to his imagination as she took off every single article of clothing. She blushed as he came up behind her.

Lathe stretched his arms, shrugging the shirt still looped near his wrists back on and snatching his boxers after Spades had untied his feet. He put them on, stepping off of the bed as Spades began to unbutton her uniform shirt, hugging her from behind and kissing her neck gently, his own hands moving to unbutton it. “That was wonderful… I really love you.” I really, really do.

“I love you, too.” Her words were soft, finally slipping out of everything with Lathe’s help. Well, he won’t mind if I steal one of his shirts. She dug through the drawers taking out a large shirt and jumping back into bed, pulling him in with her. “That’s better.” She groaned a bit as she finally settled into his arms, her body finally feeling stiff and tired after the happenings of today.

Lathe smiled a bit as he saw her don one of his shirts, much too big for her, and climbed into bed after her, pulling her close and tangling their legs. It took a moment for him to remember his earlier thought, wanting to ask and yet scared to. He took in a deep breath, mustering up the courage. “Uhm, Spades… remember in college when you’d go to parties, and you’d stick around awhile, but then leave with some guy…” …fuck how do I say this...

... Where is this going? “Yeah… You know I don't do that anymore… Right? Those were all one night stands, Lathe. Nothing to me… Meaningless, you don’t have to worry about me.” She murmured and moved in his arms to face him, leaning up to kiss his neck. “I love you, and only
“No… I didn’t catch anything, we used condoms, and I need to take a yearly blood test, and I’ve been clean since I started yet work in the force. You don’t need to worry about anything,” Spades reassured him and kissed his neck again, snuggling close to him. *I would tell you something like that… Don’t worry.*

Lathe hummed as Spades kissed his neck, feeling that bit of tension from his worry drain from him. “Okay. I had to ask…” Lathe shifted so he could properly face her, his arms coiled around her as he gently nipped at her neck for a moment, settling into her shoulder. “Goodnight Hon.” *I love you.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Daaaaa~d!” Eren’s call came from his nest in the piano room. His body was surrounded by pillows to cushion him up into a sitting position, books piled around him. He set the book back down on his lap, keeping his page, waiting for Lathe to respond from wherever he was in the house. *I don’t want to read anymore…I’m sooo fucking bored. Levi’s gone and I’ve been reading books for like a week already! I want to actually get up and do something but Dad won’t let me.*

Lathe set down the stack of notes on loose leaf on his desk, shouting in the enteral direction of the staircase. “Whaaaaaat!” He waited a minute with no response, making an overdramatic sound of annoyance and getting up, descending a few of the stairs and leaning over banister, still yelling even though Eren wasn’t that far from him, grinning. “Whaaaaaat!?"’

Eren looked over to him, sitting up a bit, or at least trying to. “Will you go get my homework… Please?” He asked quietly. *I wanna do something productive…*

Lathe just dropped his head, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. “Eren, you literally have one of the best excuses ever to do absolutely nothing, and you want to be *productive*? What kind of teenager are you?”

“But Dad—’
“Why? Why do you want to do your homework? You could be watching Netflix for all I care.”

Eren sighed. “Please? I wanna keep my valedictorian position… But I can’t do that if I don’t do my homework…. So could you please go get it?” Eren whined from where he was, looking as if he was about try and get up.

Lathe was instantly next to him, his hand gently on his shoulder, keeping him in place. “Alright, alright. I’ll go get your homework.” Lathe grinned, a glint in his eye. “Guess I shouldn't really complain about you being a hard worker.” He ruffled his hair, grabbing his jacket from a hook near the door and his keys, slipping into his boots. “The office will probably have all of it like always. If not I'll go pester the teachers. Or Armin. But I won't be long. And remember, you stay put.” Lathe smiled to him, snatching his bag from the banister before disappearing outside, soon driving off to the school. Valedictorian is a big deal- I could only think he'd want to stay valedictorian. Lathe was able to get a small stack of papers from the office without much fuss, soon returning home. He hung up his scarf, studying Eren’s setup in the corner of the room with a furrowed brow. Was his setup always like that? I thought he was facing the stairs more, not the piano… Lathe didn't mention it, handing Eren his stack of homework. …why is his hand sticky? Lathe quirked an eyebrow, though he shrugged and ditched his shoes, going into the kitchen to the coffeemaker, his gaze wandering over the counter as he waited, counting the fruit in the bowl when it clicked. ...there were five apples this morning… there are only four now… Lathe looked over to Eren, trying to decide if he should say something. He can't think he can get away with this… I really should say something… Lathe fixed his mug of coffee and grabbed a napkin before traipsing back over to Eren, crouching down and speaking softly. “Eren, if you want a snack or something, just tell me, okay? We really can't have you getting up just yet. It's worrying when your bones have barely had time to heal. I'm not mad, just don't do it. For anything. Please.” He handed him the napkin. Your teachers probably don't want sticky homework.

Eren looked up to him with wide eyes. Well… It didn’t take long for him to figure it out… Shit… He nodded quietly, his gaze returning to his work. “umm…. Can you bring my computer down here… By any chance?” Eren looked down a bit, embarrassed that he had to ask. “I mean… I know it'll be hard… But… Um… Nevermind… I can do without it.” Eren couldn’t look Lathe in the eye and tried to hide his face with his papers. I shouldn't have asked… It'll be such a hassle to move it down here...

Lathe smiled, resting a gentle hand on Eren’s shoulder. “Eren, it’s fine to ask. Don't worry about it. The whole computer, tower and all? I need my laptop, so that’s not the best of options… yeah, I think I can do that. The wifi might even be better down here, with the router in the Scripting room. If you really wanted, there’s a thing we can do so the TV is the monitor, and move your setup in there if you want. It wouldn't be too hard, actually. Or could could chill in here still. Whichever you like.” I'd just have to carry a bunch of stuff down some stairs. Not that big a deal.

Eren thought about it for a second. “Can you bring it in here?” He asked quietly, his eyes peeking
up from behind a few papers. *I don’t want you to push yourself though...*

Lathe nodded. “Give me a couple minutes. It really is no trouble, Eren.” *Come on-* you **must** know you’ve got me wrapped around your finger. Lathe stood, padding upstairs and leaving his coffee on his desk, going into the recording room and switching everything off. He unplugged the tower, drawing tablet and keyboard, bringing them and an extension cord downstairs and setting everything up, able to turn it on after a few minutes, the cord stretching the length of the room behind the piano. “That work?” *You should be good- unless you want your speaker or headphones or something. ...I should get those.* “Actually…” He ran to grab them, handing them to Eren. “**Now,** do you need anything else? Or is this good?” *I don't think I missed anything.*

Eren looked over his set up. “No… I have everything now… Thank you.” He smiled pulling up a sheet of paper with his math homework, and pulled up an empty screen to use his tablet to do his math homework on. *This’ll work… Cause then I can email it to him… Yeah that’ll work.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe tested the soup for what seemed to be the uumpteenth time, finally deciding the barley no longer resembled small rocks in texture. He ladled a decently-sized bowl, holding it in a potholder and padding over to Eren, sitting next to him and getting his attention. “Come on Eren, it’s time for dinner. You haven't even eaten lunch, you need to stop working and get some food in you.” *It'll do you good.*

Eren shook his head. “I’m not hungry… I wanna finish this up.” He barely looked over to the soup Lathe was holding. *I don’t want soup anymore... I just wanna finish this and send it in.* Eren continued to type away at the keyboard, very into the essay he was writing.

*Here we go.* Lathe sighed quietly, setting the bowl on the small tray next to his makeshift bed. “Eren, it’s going to be right here. Please please **please,** try to eat it soon. And if it gets cold by the time you get to it, I’ll be up, guaranteed. Yell and I'll heat it back up for you. And there’s always more. But learn to take a break, you'll wear yourself out.” Lathe pecked Eren’s temple, standing and going to eat some himself. *He’s working really hard, which is good... but he’s neglecting himself a bit... he’s not eating too much...*

Spades came in through the door, heaving a sigh as she took her heels off. She looked over to see Eren at work with his stack of papers spread out over him. *Well, he’s certainly into that... He didn’t even say welcome home.* “What’s he got himself into?” Her voice was soft as she came into the kitchen to meet Lathe.
Lathe sighed in relief as she greeted him, turning from the counter to kiss her in greeting, pulling back and looking weary. “I got him his homework from the school- he’s been at it for so long and he’s not eating… can you maybe try and talk him into eating something? He isn't listening to me.”

“I'm worried.

“You got him his homework? Isn’t he supposed to be resting?” She asked quietly, peeking in to see him continue to tap at the keyboard, though he lifted his arms to stretch, wincing as he did so. Still hurts to move I see… I hope he didn’t just tweak something. “When was the last time you gave him morphine?” She asked quietly.

“This morning… oh, and he got up while I was gone getting his work. He got an apple for himself, didn't take long to figure it out… why?” Lathe looked over to Eren, studying his expression. Does he look to be in pain?

“Well… He winced when he stretched out a bit, I can only imagine what it’s like laying on that all day… Why don’t you get him off the bean bags? And bring him in here to eat with us?” I think getting him away from it will help him out...

“Good idea…” Lathe nodded, giving her one more chaste kiss before walking over to Eren, nudging his leg with his foot. “Okay kiddo, work is now officially on pause. Dinner time, and you're eating at the table for a change.” Get everything in neat piles so I can get you out of your nest for once.

Eren thought about it for a second before he started to save everything, getting the paper clips to clip some papers together and formed neat piles. “Do I need to eat though?” Eren asked in a quiet whine. I'm not really that hungry... And we’ve been eating soup for a week! More than a fucking week!

“Yes you do. Your bones are working hard to piece themselves back together, and you should help them along by eating. You skipped lunch- and no, an apple doesn't count- and only nibbled at breakfast. And I'm trying to have plenty of variety in all the stuff I'm making us. So.” Lathe reached down and carefully scooped Eren up. “That’s a yes.” He carried Eren over to the kitchen table, gently setting him in his chair and pushing him in, going to retrieve the still-hot bowl of soup from next to his nest.

Eren looked around at the kitchen. “Oh… Welcome home mom…” Eren’s voice was small as he finally noticed her. I wish my bones would just hurry up and heal...

Spades smile softly, going over to ruffle his hair. “Thank you, I'm gonna go get changed, I’ll be
done in a minute.” And with that she went off to the stairs and towards their rooms.

Awww... I like you in that uniform... Lathe barely caught himself from protesting, pointedly trying not to stare as Spades left and sitting down across from Eren, having set down bowls for himself and Spades. “I really think you should take a break from work for a little; you can tell you're wearing yourself out.” You look really tired, actually... just generally worn out...

Eren shook his head. “I got stuff that’s overdue... I gotta send it in, so it’s gotta get done tonight.” Eren told him, slowly picking up his spoon and starting to eat. Well... It’s good, it’s got that going for it.

Lathe nodded, himself only really able to pick at his food. “Alright then, it’s understandable. Just make sure you get to sleep before one, okay?” I'm not surprised you're expected to keep up even with a chest full of busted ribs...

Eren shook his head. “I can’t promise anything... Sorry.” He mumbled a bit under his breath, looking down. I know you're worried... But I have shit to get done.. Cause I couldn’t get it before today. I wish I didn’t need to make you worry.

Spades came in after a few seconds, going to sit down at her seat. “Alright Eren.. Should we cut you off at one then?” I don't want you two to wear yourselves thin.

Y'know... time stamps on assignments usually run by the deadline of midnight. “I'd say that’s fair, given that anything due today is past due after a midnight deadline, and you need your sleep.” He held up his hand, stopping Eren as he opened his mouth to protest, looking up to him tiredly. “Eren, please don't. You need the rest, and you've been doing nothing but work since nearly noon. It’s for your own good. I'm not trying to be mean.” But I know it must feel like it...

Eren looked up to Lathe, nodding with somber eyes, not voicing a complaint. “O-okay.” He murmured quietly, his gaze training onto his food as he ate. I'm sorry.

Lathe was silent for the rest of dinner, barely able to eat, his head feeling heavy as he got himself to his feet, starting on dishes. I don't feel that great... This whole thing is really wearing me down... Lathe carried Eren back to his nest, settling him in. “One. That’s it. Then you need your meds and you can sleep, okay?” He kissed the top of his head. “I'm going upstairs to crash- but you either yell or my phone’s ringtone is on if you need something. Goodnight.” Lathe padded upstairs, collapsing after changing into his pajamas. I'm so tired...
Spades followed suit, coming into bed with Lathe and snuggling up close to him. You’re warm… It feels nice…

Eren continued to work for a long time, finally passing out around 12:30 in the morning. Though, the boy had forgotten to take his sleeping pills, which led him to have a horrible nightmare, waking up in tears and screaming only 3 or 4 hours later. Eren had thrashed so much that his whole body had made it’s way to the floor in a painful way, where Eren couldn’t move from his spot without causing pain, which freaked him out enough to make him scream louder.

It wasn't a minute before Lathe quickly descended the stairs, immediately getting down next to Eren and shifting him so he was on his back, cradling him in his lap and murmuring to him softly, blocking out everything else. Nightmares… he must've fallen asleep without taking his meds. “Eren, hon, I've got you… shhh… it’s okay, I've got you. Dad’s got you…” It’s okay.

Eren continued to cry, his whole body shaking from both fear and pain. It hurts… dammit… I don't wanna go to bed… Eren’s hand had a shaky grasp on Lathe's shirt.

Spades wasn't far behind him, running down the stairs and seeing Eren sobbing in Lathe's arms. Well fuck, that's not good… “Lathe… What do you need me to do? What can I get you?” I don’t know where his pills are… And he sounds like he’s in a lot of pain.

Lathe looked up to her, nodding to the kitchen. “I forgot he’d need a glass of water for his pills- grab one, please. His pills are already over here.” He must've just fallen asleep before he got the chance- his papers are still pretty much everywhere… He took the glass as Spades returned, setting it on the tray and snatching up the pill bottles, pouring one of each into his hand and offering them to Eren with the glass. “This’ll make you feel much better, Eren. Come on, down the hatch.” You must be in a lot of pain right now- we need to fix that.

Eren eyes the glass wearily, though the pain forced him to move to take it. He was barely able to swallow down the water, but managed under some miracle. It fucking hurts… I don’t wanna… I don’t want him to come back...

Lathe helped Eren sip at the water, cradling him and whispering to him soothingly until his eyes slid shut, drifting into a forced yet peaceful sleep. Lathe set down the glass, shifting and lifting Eren back into his nest, wrapping him back up in his blankets and moving his papers and computer out of harm’s way. He finally stood, stumbling for an instant before he righted himself, looking to Spades and running a hand through his noir hair. With how weary he looked, he looked nearly a decade older than he really was. “Let’s get back to bed- he’ll be okay.” Why is my head so heavy… Lathe trudged up the stairs with Spades, falling back into bed and pulling up the covers, only to kick half of them on his side off. When did it get so warm…
Spades crawled into bed with him, curling up to said human and finding peaceful sleep for a few more hours. She started to stir at around 7, feeling a warmth that wasn’t hers around her. *It’s warm…* She cracked open an eye, a smile crossing her lips as she saw Lathe. *Hmm… He’s warm.* It took Spades a few seconds to realize that Lathe was burning up, completely and utterly burning up. *Holy shit! He’s a fucking furnace! He’s never this warm.* Spades hurriedly sat up and put a hand on his forehead. *Dammit… He’s got a fever… He’s sick isn’t he?*

Lathe cracked open one eye, breathing heavily as Spades felt his forehead. *I feel terrible …* Lathe didn’t even try to speak, signing sloppily. {I’ll be okay- bag on stairs, small orange bottle, Ibuprofen. Water. Please.} *I know how this works… eight hours of me feeling like crap, and then I’ll be either totally fine, or suckish for two weeks. Either.*

Spades nodded, getting off the bed and going down to dig through his bag, locating the orange bottle after a few minutes. Looking over to Eren on his bed, she smiled softly. *At least he’s still asleep.* She came back up with water and the bottle of pills for him. “Do you want me to call in? Take the day off with you?” *I wouldn’t mind, and it’d probably be easier for you… Since you won’t have to worry about Eren as much.*

Lathe took the bottle from her, pouring out two small pills and sipping at the water, setting them both on the side table, his sign language clumsy. {I know your job is really important… but Eren has been getting progressively more of a handful even with me not dying… could you please? Just this once?} *I don't want to keep you from your job... but I'm in no shape to do anything right now…*

Spades nodded. “Get some sleep, I’ll go call Dave, tell him I won’t be coming in, and he can handle things… Eren’s still asleep so get some yourself, you need it.” She bent over and kissed his forehead before pulling the blankets up to Lathe’s shoulders. She got dressed into more comfortable clothing and left him to sleep in peaceful silence. *I’ll let him sleep, I can take care of Eren.* She made it downstairs without waking Eren, made breakfast for herself, she took Lathe’s breakfast back upstairs, setting the tray on his nightstand. Spades leaned over, kissing his forehead and his ear. “There’s food if you want it on your night stand, Sugar.” She whispered into his ear before getting up to go see if Eren would wake up anytime soon. *I wonder how long it’ll be for the sleeping pill to wear off? Well I guess we’ll find out.*

Lathe opened his eyes slightly, trying to get Spades’ attention after she had turned, deciding to smack the bed until she turned to look at him.

Spades looked back over to him, hearing his flailing. “Yeah?” She asked quietly, coming back over to Lathe, sitting by his side, a hand running through his hair. *Why can’t you talk to me?*
Lathe let his eyes slide shut as Spades threaded her fingers through his hair, leaning into the touch and trying to sign, finding strength enough only in the one hand, spelling words and waving them off when he misspelled, trying again to get his message across. {Can you call Scotty sometime, tell him Eren flailed pretty violently, ask if he needs to have his chest checked and maybe reset…} *He might have to… something could’ve gotten out of place… he looked to be in a lot of pain…*

“Alright, I’ll call him, do you want anything else? And why aren’t you talking? You barely have the strength to sign properly.” *I didn’t even get my ‘Good Morning’ greeting this morning… What the hell?*

Lathe dropped his hand, giving Spades a weak smile, forcing himself to speak, his voice wispy and faint. “…I’m not talking… because I can’t.” Lathe lifted his arms again, trying hard to sign cleanly. {I don’t want to screw with my vocal chords while they’re dead, so I don’t want to push it. Oh, and good morning.} Lathe made a heart with his hands, smiling. *I didn’t forget.*

Spades smiled softly, her hands still stroking through his hair softly. “Alright, I’ll call Scotty, my phone’s on when you need me, okay?” She leaned forward to kiss his forehead. “I guess I can forgive you for right now. Better go call Scotty. Spades stood, stepping down from the bed and padding over to the door, dimming the lights before closing the door quietly. She went downstairs, looking back over to Eren and moving to pick up the pill bottles still next to his nest, reading the back of the sedative. *Blah blah blah… Boring stuff… Eight hours. Oh, okay. He’ll be out for awhile then.* Spades moved them to the counter in the kitchen, calling Scotty on the home phone. She leaned against the wall, waiting for him to either pick up or direct her to voicemail. *I know you're busy, but come on…*

Scotty picked up the phone after a few minutes, not paying attention to the number that came through. “Sisters Hospital, this is Dr. Octavian… How can I help you?” *What do I gotta do now? I’m actually free for once… I don’t want to do another emergency surgery for the next week.*

“Wow, Scotty, so formal.” Spades smirked, her legs crossed at the ankles. “It’s Spades. We might have an emergency, sorry to drop it on you on pretty much no notice…”

Scotty sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Alright… Who broke their wrist from recoil *this* time?” Scotty only shook his head, getting up to see if the OR was free. *This might take a while to fit them into the hospital schedule.*

“Actually nobody that I'm aware of. I took the day off from work. Eren kinda forgot to take his meds really late last night- last time we let that happen- and he had a terrible nightmare, and thrashed around a lot. We want to know if we need to bring him in to see if something came out of place” *Which it might have- it was pretty violent.*
“You? Skip work? That’s simply blasphemy….” He paused listening to the rest of Spades’ words. “Alright, I’ll be over in an hour, don’t move him.” Scotty hung up the phone in his office, picking up a few things from his desk, grabbing his coat before he left the room. *I need to make sure that he didn’t do anything to mess with his ribs.* Scotty arrived at Lathe’s house around an hour later, greeting Spades at the door. “Where is he?”

“He’s in here.” Spades opened the door up for him and led him to the giant bed they had made for Eren.

“Well, Lathe wasn’t kidding when he said he found giant bean bags online. Alright, I’m gonna check his chest if that’s alright.” Seeing Spades nod, he went over to get Eren in a stable position and removed the blankets from him, looking over his chest. *Let’s see here…* Scotty’s brow furrowed as he gently pressed on Eren’s chest. *What the hell?* Scotty looked up to Eren’s face, gently prodding an area where there had been a severe break. *He’s not even flinching in his sleep…*”

Spades… Get Lathe… Like now please….”

Spades nodded going up to Lathe, shaking him awake. *Come on.* “Wake up, Scotty’s gotta talk to you about Eren’s chest… I think something’s really wrong.” Spades’ voice was wavering a bit. *I can only imagine the worst… And I don’t want to have to take him to the hospital without you knowing.*

Lathe opened his eyes, forcing himself to sit up, worry etched into his features. *Oh no…* Lathe cleared his throat, trying to speak somewhat clearly. “Wait, did Scotty make a house call?” *He has time for those?* Lathe got onto his feet, dragging the quilt with him as he followed Spades down the stairs, walking over to Scotty sitting next to Eren. Someone might as well have drawn squiggles around Lathe’s head, he was so out of it. His eyes were a bit glassy, his brow furrowed as he looked to Scotty, not recognizing him for a moment. “…why is there a perv feeling up my son in my own home.” …*what. Why isn’t Spades doing anything.*

“Really? You’re calling me a perv?” Scotty asked, moving his hands back from Eren’s chest. *What the actual hell is wrong with you.*

“Dude, quit feeling up my son’s chest, you’re an old man.” Lathe weakly smacked at Scotty’s shoulder. *No. Bad human.*

Scotty looked at Lathe with wide eyes. “What the hell, Lathe?! You’re the one who’s older than me! By two whole years!” Scotty raised his arms to brace himself. *What the hell? Like actually… What the hell are you going on about?*
“Wha…? I ain’t old…” Lathe stopped, looking hard at Scotty before dropping his arm and taking up a much more casual tone. “Oh… hey Scotty. What’s up?” He looked over his shoulder. “How’s Eren doing?” *Is hooman okay?*

“I don’t know how… But… His ribs are healed….” He pressed gently on Eren’s chest. *It’s so weird… They’re completely healed… From what I can feel… It’s a fucking *miracle*. How can he be healed… It’s only been two weeks!"

Lathe stared at Eren, trying to process this new information. “So… his ribs are healed… as in he can get up and walk and just do normal stuff now healed?...is that even physically possible?"

Scotty nodded. “From what I can tell, they feel perfectly normal, which is a miracle in itself, but… I wouldn’t let him do much strenuous activity in case they break again.” Scotty’s brow furrowed as he took both hands and ran his thumbs up and down Eren’s chest, feeling for any give… And feeling none. *This kid… Is unhuman.*

Lathe stared at Eren for a moment, silent. He then turned to Scotty, his expression completely neutral. “Bullshit.” *No way … I understand I’m delirious when I’m sick, but I’d never be sick enough to fall for that.*

*Well… This is gonna be fun convincing him.* “Lathe, I’m being completely serious… Just feel them, they feel like normal… The ones that are there at least.” He mentioned that last bit after remembering that he only had 16 instead of 20 ribs.

Lathe looked to Eren again and shrugged, kneeling down next to him. “Okay. But no homo.” Lathe gently prodded down Eren’s sternum, carefully feeling at every rib still there, his eyes widening as he was met not with give, but with solid resistance. “…what the hell happened? He’s in one piece…” Lathe dropped his arms, pulling the red and gold blanket back around him, looking up to Scotty. “Does this mean I don’t have to worry as much about him getting hurt if he does stuff right now?”

“He can do stuff, I would suggest nothing strenuous, so no school at least for a couple days, but he can walk around the house, and curl up a bit.” *I think he should be able to move around now.* Scotty put Eren back together and tucked him in. *It’s amazing really… I don’t know how your body managed to heal them all in two weeks.*

...*I take that as a yes.* Lathe nodded, and after a moment he shifted from sitting on his legs to just
sit on the floor, pulling the blanket fully around him and looking up to Spades. “Can I have a snack?” I want food...

Spades looked back at him with a soft smile, relief clearly in her eyes as she heard Eren would be okay. “Yeah, what do you want to eat?” She asked softly, ruffling his hair. I guess you can have a snack since you didn’t eat breakfast.

“Pockeys please.” Lathe looked to Eren’s nest, then to the Scripting room, quietly mumbling. “I want a nest too…” He got himself to his feet, padding over to the couch in the Scripting room, stealing the pillows from the couch across from the piano before he plopped down, burrowing into the pile. ...where’s the remote... I want my Netflix...

Do we even have those? Spades got up and moved to the kitchen, going through a few cupboards. We do not have any... But I don’t think he’ll know the difference between pockeys and chocolate Teddy Grams. She grabbed the box of teddy bears and went to give it to him, helping him turn Netflix on as well before moving to see Eren shift in his nest a bit. He’s still asleep... Hmm...

Scotty looked over Eren with a soft smile. “I’m glad he’s okay... But it’s so weird...” I don’t understand this at all... Scotty turned to Spades, one eyebrow quirked. “...and is Lathe in his right mind at all? He’s been acting quietly deranged and it’s weirding it me out.” Normally, he seems rather... sane.

Spades shook her head, a quiet chuckle escaping her as Lathe turned on anime. “No, he’s actually quite sick right now... I think he worked himself thin with Eren’s condition and the nightmares on top of everything.” That would be my guess.

That sounds like something he’d do. Scotty looked in the direction of the TV questioningly, furrowing his brow at the animated roses taking up much of the screen as the theme played. “Oh yeah, I heard that Lathe being sick was a bit of an event.” The man’s gone mad. “Honestly, good luck. I’ve heard really odd things. ...and please text me about anything amusing he does.”

“Oh I will, you want some soup for lunch? Since Eren’s eaten nothing but that for the past two weeks?” Gotta get rid of this... He probably hates the thought of soup by now, and we might as well give it to someone who will eat a ton of it in one go.

“...did Mr. Crazy over there make it?” Scotty sounded slightly skeptical though he still stood and made his way to the kitchen, his expression brightening as he saw the beef and barley stew. “...please and thank you.” That looks really good, and I’m so tired of takeout... Scotty looked to the coffeemaker, approaching it- and stopping. ...how do you use that... “...Spades...” Scotty
looked over to her, his face blank and eyes quietly pleading. “...help.” I might be a doctor but that doesn't change the fact that I don't know how this machine you people have works... and I want coffee...

Spades looked up from ladling up the soup from the large bowl into a very large container. “Coffee… Right, I’ll get it in a second.” She maneuvered over to the coffee machine and starting out a new pot for Scotty. “So I know it's early for lunch but do you want anything to eat? You’re taking this home.” She motioned to the large container she had just filled. You’ll be back for more.

Scotty thanked her as she started the coffeemaker, fishing a mug out from the cupboard. He scratched the back of his neck, not wanting to impede too much. I didn't eat breakfast... per usual... and you do make them really well... “...I don't want to seem demanding... but I haven't had one in forever... can I have a grilled cheese please, maybe…?”

Spades nodded, “Yeah, I can do that. Go see if Lathe wants food.” She got out what she needed for the grilled cheese, getting ready to turn on the burner. I don’t mind making grilled cheese.

Scotty smiled sheepishly. “Thanks.” He left with his mug, traipsing over to the couch where Lathe was huddled, the TV enjoying his rapt attention. ...he’s really into his anime. “Earth to Crazy, come in Crazy. Houston requires a decision as to whether you want grilled cheese for lunch or not.” In order to communicate with the cray, one must become the cray.

Lathe looked up to Scotty after a moment, tilting his head a bit. “...the one with tomatoes?” He watched as Scotty nodded. ...good food. “Okay. Tell the waifu I said thank you.” ...food.

“O-Kay…” Scotty turned to leave, though he stopped and watched the screen for a second. “...just what the hell are you watching?” He cringed a bit at an overdramatic ‘intimate’ shot. This is just cringeworthy... how are you watching this. He decided to take his leave as Lathe just kept murmuring about OTPs, still paying the twins onscreen attention as he retreated to the kitchen. He just looked at Spades. “That otaku you call a fiancé gives thanks to his waifu.” ...Even I don't understand what I just said.

Spades let her eye twitch a bit at the sentence that just came out of Scotty’s mouth. What the actual hell? Spades smacked him upside the head. “Don’t repeat what my deranged fiancé said.” She chastised him as she got him his plate. “Alright, eat and I’ll warm up some soup for you too.” I wonder if Eren will wake up for this? He’s been sleeping... And it'll be noon soon.

Scotty raised his hand in surrender, sitting down at the kitchen table. “Yeesh, I was only telling you what he told me to. Deranged or not, it was a direct order.” He was only met with a glare. “But I
won't do it again! Promise!” Anything that gets me a real lunch. He thanked her as she handed him a plate and a bowl, not speaking much as he ate. ...I literally cannot remember the last time I honest to God cooked a meal ... it's a struggle...

Spades took a sandwich out to Lathe, giving him the plate. “Eat, alright? Then get some rest.” She went back to sit at the table with Scotty. “So, when should I be worried and wake him up? We gave him pills at 4 in the morning.”

Scotty finished what was already in his mouth, looking down at his food. “Um… I would say around midnight tonight… If he’s still asleep, call me and we’ll bring him to the emergency room, but he should wake up on his own.” He should wake up soon enough.

Lathe had fallen asleep around the fifth episode, the season of Ouran still on auto play as he woke up, his plate long having been set on the coffee table and his head less fuzzy. ...my head feels weird... at least I don't feel as awful as I did earlier... ...I must've gone into otaku mode, didn't I. Lathe paused Netflix, yawning widely and stretching, looking to the time. It's a bit after four... pretty sure that's PM.... Lathe stood, dragging his quilt with him and regarding the pillows that fell off behind him with indifference. ...I can clean that up later. Lathe padded to the stairs, looking over to Eren’s nest with a small smile. ...he’s getting better really quickly. I'm slightly concerned, and at the same time just glad it's better and not worse. He stopped as Eren shifted, going next to his nest and sitting down next to him as Eren moved slightly, running a hand through his hair.

Eren’s eyes cracked open a bit, whimpering as the light flooded in. He blinked a few times, feeling Lathe’s fingers through his hair. What? Huh? What happened?... My head hurts...  Eren stayed relatively still, but nuzzled into Lathe’s hands.

Lathe furrowed his brow a bit, his voice low and a bit rough. He still smiled a bit to him. “Hey Eren... too bright?” Lathe reached up with his free hand to make sure the blinds were still fully closed, standing if for just a moment to turn off the lights in the room, padding back to Eren and sitting next to him. “You know Eren, you really are something. Your ribs are solid; you can walk and do very chill stuff for a little bit, and soon you'll be as good as new. We can move you back downstairs if you like, to sleep if you're still tired. Or cook you some actual food to eat, since you haven't had anything all day. Your call, kid. Anything.” I don't have to drive myself insane with worry anymore... at least for right now.

Eren took in a deep breath, closing his eyes slowly. He shook his head but nuzzled into Lathe’s hand as it continued through his hair. I just wanna stay here... Your hands feel nice... Really nice.

Lathe just seemed to melt, shifting forward. “Watch out kid, I’m coming in.” Lathe pulled the blankets back over them, one arm around Eren, continually threading his fingers through his hair.
I'm probably going to fall asleep... but you are too, so it's okay... Lathe yawned, and after a short while drifted in and out of sleep, Eren safe in his arms.

Eren fell asleep within only a few minutes, yet he was woken around 6 in tears. “Dad... It... It hurts...” He whimpered into his father’s chest, his head throbbing. *It fucking hurts and I don’t know why.*

Lathe gently ran his hand over Eren’s back, his voice soft. “Eren, what hurts?” *Is it your ribs or something else because I’m not giving you morphine if you don't need it.*

Eren whimpered, burying his head into Lathe’s chest. “My head hu~rts” he whined as he held onto Lathe. *My head is fucking throbbing...* Eren held onto Lathe’s shirt, still crying and whimpering from the pain in his head.

Lathe pecked Eren’s forehead, remembering after a moment what it was. “Eren, you must've hit your head really hard this morning when you woke up with nightmares... you need aspirin. Give me a moment- One second, promise.” Lathe slipped from the ‘bed’, going to retrieve a glass of water and some strong aspirin, handing the small white pill to him and helping him with the water. *You'll feel better with this.*

Eren let Lathe move him around and took the medication without putting up a fight. *Okay... I’ll be laying down here... For awhile I guess... Oh well. I'm not really all that hungry.*

Lathe set the glass on the nearby tray, settling back in with Eren and murmuring to him as his tears reduced to sniffles. “Y’know, I’d thought you’d really be one to jump, nearly literally, at the chance to move around. We’re serious too. But you still do look tired- try and sleep more if you can.” *I'm surprised that barely got a reaction out of you.*

Eren shook his head. “I don’t wanna get up.” His words were mumbled, his head nuzzling into Lathe’s chest. *I want you to rub my head again...* 

Lathe took the hint, helping Eren shift comfortably and carding his hand through his dark locks, letting himself relax for once. *He's okay... he’s okay...* Lathe drifted to sleep again, Eren’s breathing long since even, weary and worn.

Eren slept for a few more hours before the two of them were woken by Spades so that the two of them would eat. *I'm hungry. Really hungry.* Eren got up or at least tried to, falling down on top of
Lathe’s chest when his arms gave out. Well shit... I’m fucking weak as all hell.

Lathe chuckled a bit when Eren fell on him, carefully picking him up and getting to his feet, carrying him to the kitchen and setting him in his chair. “I see your limbs don't want to cooperate at the moment, which is to be expected. You didn't use them for more than a week.” Lathe sat down at the table, looking up as Spades set a plate in front of either of them. “Spades, do I ever tell you how awesome you are?” He tugged her down gently to peck her cheek, smiling. I'd've been able to manage nothing by myself... you're amazing.

Eren quietly picked up his spoon and started to eat the chicken noodle soup which Spades had put out in front of him. Well, I guess this is nice... I like this soup, so I'll still eat it.

Spades blushed a bit at his statement and how he kissed her cheek. “I believe you’ve stated it once or twice… How are you feeling now? You look much better.” She ruffled his hair before moving to go make a bowl of her own to sit down in her usual seat. I hope he’s better, I want them both to be okay.

Lathe smiled as she ruffled his hair, stirring the soup with his spoon. I passed the anime phase- that's a good sign. “A lot better, but I'm still really tired. I guess now that Eren’s gotten so much better I don't need to worry myself sick as much.” That's really what happened… He took a spoonful of soup, nudging Spades’ foot under the table, tangling their legs. “This is really good, Spades... I love you.

Spades’ face flushed in a full out blush, looking down at to her bowl and eating some more, the relative silence settling in around them. “I was also thinking about some dates for the wedding… Do you mind if we have a summer wedding?” She asked softly, blushing up at him.

Eren seemed to shrink a bit at Lathe’s words. I got him sick... I... I didn’t mean to. Eren finished up his bowl in silence before just staring at it, lost in his thoughts. I got him sick... Shit... He probably thinks I’m an inconvenience. Eren seemed to shrink even further at Spades’ statements. Married? They're already planning to get married?... They must think I’m in inconvenience... shit.

Lathe blushed a bit, thinking... Spades is going to be my wife. “…is there a Friday the thirteenth during the summer? For the memes?” ...just for ironic purposes, of course.

“No, we cannot get married on Friday the 13th...” Spades trailed off, seeing his pout. Dammit. “Fine… We can get married the month after.” Spades gave in after only a few seconds of Lathe's puppy eyes. I can't go against that for very long.
Lathe smiled, leaning over to peck her cheek. “Thanks Hon.” Hmmm… which of the whackjobs I call friends am I going to have be my best man… Lathe looked up to Eren, his expression changing a bit. Was Eren slouched over like that earlier? Lathe pretended to look for something under the table, noting his feet were also pulled up under him. He's trying to curl into a little ball… why? “Hey, Eren…” Lathe gently prodded Eren’s hand with the end of his spoon. You look really sad…

Eren jumped back a bit in surprise, his eyes wide as he made eye contact with Lathe. What? What did I do wrong? Are you gonna kick me out now? Is that what you want to tell me?.... I mean I knew that I was an inconvenience… But...I don’t want to leave… And you’re gonna tell me to leave. Eren averted his gaze and just stared at his empty bowl as he curled up, pulling his legs close to his chest, hugging them as he curled into a ball.

Lathe set down his spoon, resting a gentle hand on his shoulder and slowly coaxing Eren to unfurl from his ball, murmuring. “Eren, hey, don't be scared of me… I just wanted to know if you were okay… What’s wrong? Come on kid, talk to me.” I don't like seeing you like that…

Eren barely looked up to Lathe as he spoke, he made eye contact with him for a few seconds, seeming as if he was going to tell Lathe something. Though he thought better of it, shut his mouth and turned away from him shaking his head. No… I’ll leave before you kick me out… I don’t want you to worry about me… I don’t want you to kick me out… I’ll leave before that ever happens… Because I still like you… And I wish you would like me enough to keep me… But you guys are getting married… And you won’t want me around… I’ll leave before you don’t want me anymore.

Lathe shifted his chair around the corner of the table a bit, pulling Eren close to him and hugging him. “Eren, whatever it is that’s bugging you, please don’t worry about it. If you ever want to talk about anything, we’re here to listen. Okay? We love you.” Lathe let go of him, giving him a small warm smile and shifting back again to give him space. It’ll be okay, whatever it is.

Eren only nodded, still not looking at the two of them. He unfurled from himself, struggling a bit to get proper footing and putting his bowl in the sink. Eren quietly went into the piano room, stopping to hide himself behind the wall as he peered in. “Thanks for dinner mom.” His voice was small as he stood there, hiding behind the wall, aside from his head. He moved away from the wall to curl up in his makeshift bed and hide under the blankets.

Lathe looked back to Spades, sighing quietly. “He’s gotta be under a lot of stress with just everything going on… I think he could manage by himself tomorrow though. The school’s been emailing me nonstop about coming back to sub classes, because some of the teachers have been running around like cray.”
Spades nodded, getting up to clean the dishes. “Alright, why don’t you go pick up the stuff you took to the scripting room that’s all over the couch and we’ll let Eren figure out a few things, okay? But let him sleep tomorrow, I gotta go in early, just so you know.” She told him, looking back to their plates, continuing to do the dishes. *I can’t believe we ate this late… But I didn’t want to wake them up… It’s like 10:30 already… Geez.*

Lathe nodded, standing and going to pick up in the Scripting room, hanging the quilt on the banister to go back upstairs and putting all the pillows back in place. He turned off the TV, bringing his plate from lunch back into the kitchen, smirking as he set the dish in the sink, his hand resting on Spades’ waist and pressing up behind her. “Thanks for taking care of the both of us today… you’re really wonderful.” Lathe pressed light kisses to her neck, smiling as she blushed. *You’re adorable. And the best fiancée I ever could ask for.*

Spades chuckled a bit at his statement. “Well, I know that I would much rather have the both of you well, and taken care of, so I figured it was the least I could do for the both of you… Are you gonna go in to work tomorrow? Now that we know Eren can be left alone?” *I hope you’ll be able to do something other than brood over a PTSD medication.*

Lathe hummed in assent, his arms winding around her middle. “The school won’t stop bugging me about it, I’ve gotten emails from some teachers saying they want to have their free periods back instead of trying to teach math they forgot years ago… I really should. And I’ve been doing nothing but fussing over too many chemical formulas for days… I need something besides that to occupy myself with.” He lightly nipped at her neck. “Eren’ll be fine home by himself. He can walk around and get snacks and stuff, so he’ll definitely live. And depending on who’s out tomorrow I might even be home early. He’ll be okay.” *He knows how to survive- he’s eighteen, for God’s sake.*

She nodded, finishing up with the dishes and turning around in his arms, wrapping her own around his shoulders loosely. “Okay… Well, why don’t you make sure that he took his pill and I’ll go upstairs and get ready for bed, okay?” She stood on her tip toes so that she could reach his nose, giving it a small peck with a large smile on her face. *I will never get tired of doing that.*

Lathe blushed, smiling as he let her go, moving over to Eren’s nest. He was about to speak but stopped as he saw Eren asleep, clutching the bottle of sedatives to his chest, his breathing even. *...I’ll take that as you took your meds already.* Lathe smiled warmly, reaching down to gently pry the bottle from his grasp, setting it on the nearby tray and pressing a kiss to his forehead before standing, shutting off most of the lights and following Spades upstairs. *...I’m never going to get tired of having you two with me.*

Eren waited a few hours to make sure that everyone was asleep before he slowly got out of his nest. His steps were quiet with practiced ease over the hardwood flooring, heading towards the stairs and quietly ascending them. He made it to his room without waking anyone, closing the door quietly. Eren started to grab a bunch of clothes and put them in a large backpack that Lathe had
gotten him for traveling on the train. *This’ll work for awhile I guess… I can always just stay at that house… It can’t hurt… And I think there’s clothes there too…* Eren packed up a few other things that he would need for a few days before he found where he would permanently be staying. *I can figure that out later… They’ll want me out of here…* He finished up making his backpack full of things, bringing along a blanket and silently creeping down the stairs. *Food. They won’t notice that the apples are gone… Or some bread…* Eren was quiet in the kitchen as he packed some food into that giant backpack and then remembered his medication, fitting those bottles into the bag as well. *I think that’s everything I need…* Eren set his bag down gently before he started to rearrange the pillows and blankets in his nest and made it look like he was still sleeping on top of the makeshift bed. *That’ll work… They’ll never know I was gone… I doubt they’ll actually check though, they don’t want me…* Eren sighed quietly as he took the house key off of his key chain and set it down on the counter. *I don’t need this anymore… And I can come get the car later…* Eren made sure everything was in order before slipping out of the house without anyone hearing him at all. *I need to get away.*

Lathe cracked open his eyes as he heard his alarm on his phone go off, smacking his hand on the side table to find it and shut it off. He looked over to the other half of the bed, finding it empty and long since cold. *Spades is long gone- she must've had to get up really early.* Lathe kicked off the blanket and got up, dressing and padding downstairs with his laptop bag in hand, smiling as he saw Eren’s nest and trying to be quiet as he made coffee and typed at the kitchen table, going through his emails over a bowl of cereal. *I don't want Eren to wake up- God knows he needs his rest.* Lathe got up from the table a little before seven, washing his dishes and packing up his things. He slid on his shoes, having left a post-it on the table near the door: ‘Gone to work- don't worry! There’s food in the fridge. Be home soon! -Lathe’. He shut the door quietly behind him, driving to the school.

Classes seemed to pass quickly, only having to take over science classes for the first half of the day. He was home a little after noon, having stayed for an extra hour to help grade tests, opening the door and nearly tripping over Blake as he tried to step inside. “Hey Blake- what’re you doin’ trying to get me?” He started to close the door behind him, looking up to Eren’s nest, his brow furrowed as he saw it hadn't shifted at all since that morning. *...wait.* Lathe looked down as Blake pawed at his leg and whined, quickly walking over to the makeshift bed, worried. “Hey, Eren-” Lathe went to gently shake Eren’s shoulder, only to find little resistance. He brought back the quilt, revealing nothing except a pile of pillows. *...he’s gone. And he’s been gone.* Lathe looked out the window as he heard a particularly loud clap of thunder, the rain that had been steadily coming down all day still pelting the windows. *He’s outside… and his raincoat is still by the door. ...oh this is bad. This is very very bad.* Lathe immediately took out his cell phone, holding a button and automatically dialing up Spades. He didn’t have to wait long for her to answer, not letting her even get in a greeting edgewise before he spoke. “Spades, you need to send out a missing person’s patrol. Eren’s been gone since six this morning, and I just realized when I got home now. He must’ve left sometime during the night, and it’s pouring, and he doesn’t have Blake.” *...where the hell is he.*

Spades’ eyes widened as she heard the words that came out of his mouth. *Gone? He’s gone?* Spades dropped her pen, grabbing the dispatch box, clicking a few numbers. “Dave?”

“Yeah?”
“You remember what Eren looks like, right?” *Please tell me you do.*


“He’s gone, the last time we saw him was last night at our house, around 10:30ish… He doesn’t have his service dog… and it’s been pouring out all day. He’s not in the house, I can’t report it for almost another day and a half, and it’s too cold out for him to be soaked, so start looking for him, but only you, got it?”

“Yeah, Over and out, I’ll be on the search.”

Spades sighed softly, putting her ear back to her cell phone. “Lathe, Dave’s going to look for him right now… but I can’t do anything other than that… it hasn’t been 48 hours yet, if I were you I would start looking around for him, take Blake with you… we have no idea what mental state he’s gonna be in after this… and make sure you take some dry clothes with you… text people and see if they’ve seen him anywhere…. But for right now, the law says I can’t do anything because he’s not considered a minor anymore. I’m really sorry I can’t do anything else Lathe.” *I can’t even go out to look for my own step-son… I need to stay and do all the paperwork I didn’t do yesterday…. I can trust that Dave will help as much as he can. He needs to come back home… Home… the house key. “Lathe… did you leave out a duplicate key on the counter last night?” Please… PLEASE… PLEASE tell me that Eren did not leave his key and then run. Why would he run in the first place?*

Lathe could only stare out the window at the street, trying to process everything. “…no, I didn't. Why… he left it. He didn't plan on coming back.” ***does he not want to?*** “Why would he just leave like that… you know, right now, it doesn't matter. I need to grab stuff, send out a mass text, and get out looking. We’ll call each other if anything turns up, okay?” Lathe started for the stairs, going to get dry clothes together and packing a blanket as well in a spare white messenger bag. *If he got soaked- which he did, there’s no denying it at this point- he’s got to be freezing. He’s probably going to get hypothermia out there… or at least a terrible flu…*

Spades nodded, trying not to let emotions overwhelm her. “Yeah, I’ll keep you posted if anything comes up.” She hung up, trying to go back to work, and finding it hard enough to do anything at all. *This sucks… where the hell is he?*

**Group Text Created: HELP THINGS ARE HAPPENING**

**LQ: I've created this group text of all the people in my phone that don't live miles away for this purpose**
LQ: EREN HAS GONE MISSING AND IT'S RAINING AND HE DOESN'T HAVE BLAKE

LQ: BUT HE’S TECHNICALLY AN ADULT SO SPADES CAN’T CALL IN A SEARCH THINGY

LQ: So I'm going around looking and if you see him please please PLEASE stop him and call me

CP: Does he have Blake with him? If he doesn’t I think I might have saw him earlier this morning.

LQ: READ YE MINE WORDS

LQ: BLAKE IS WITH ME IN THE CAR AS WE’RE DRIVING AROUND SUPER SLOW LOOKING

LQ: AND WHEN THE FUCK WAS THAT

CP: At around like 8...ish, I think, I didn’t think it was him, cause he didn’t have Blake, but that was definitely him, and he looked like a drowned rat. Shit, I wish I would’ve stopped him, but when he walked away I didn’t think it was him...
LQ:...that's kinda understandable but still DAMMIT

LQ: Let's just hope he hasn't collapsed somewhere or been abducted

LQ: Don't say that shit isn't gonna happen because it's so unlikely it's my job to worry about Eren becoming another statistic

LQ: Btw hi I'm driving past your pharmacy thing now

CP: STOP DAMMIT!

LQ: FIIIIINE

It wasn't a minute later that Lathe pretty much kicked open the door of the pharmacy, closing his umbrella as Blake shook himself off in the doorway. He walked up to the counter, just giving Casper a done stare and leaning his elbows on the hard surface. “What.”

Casper sighed as he looked at Lathe. “He was wearing a black hoodie, and darkwash jeans… he had sneakers on… And he had a huge backpack that looked bigger than him on.” Casper took in a shaky breath. “He was walking that way down the street.” His hand pointed the way Lathe was going, and away from the town center. He was going away from everything... He could be anywhere... it’s nothing but woods that way after awhile.

Lathe glanced over his shoulder the way Casper pointed, nodding. “Okay…” He dropped his head onto his arms for a moment, taking a deep breath before lifting his head again. “You let me know
if you see or hear anything, okay Pandreivitch?” He could be anywhere by now… but we’ll find him. We will.

“Yeah, I will, don’t worry… Or should I say don’t stress so much?” He asked quietly, going back to the pills he was counting. “When I close up.. I’ll help you look if you haven’t found him.” I will promise that.

“Thanks… and about stressing about it, I can't promise anything.” Lathe shrugged, pushing himself off of the counter. “I'll see you later.” We've got a long day ahead of us. Lathe led Blake back to the car, starting their drive again.

AA: Why the heck am I in this group chat?

AA: OH! That’s why…

AA: Come pick up the drowned rat… he’s walking by my house… heading to his old house…

LQ: ARMIN IF YOU WEREN'T EREN'S COMPETITION FOR VALEDICTORIAN I'D CHANGE ALL YOUR GRADES TO A'S

LQ: ALSO I REGRET THAT THAT'S ILLEGAL BUT YAY I'M ON MY WAY

Lathe immediately stood from where he had stopped in a cafe for a snack, leading Blake to the car and heading for Armin’s, waving to the blonde visible in the window as he passed and continuing on to where Eren’s old house once stood, soon coming upon it and parking in the gravel patch that used to be a driveway, getting out with his umbrella. He slowly approached Eren, sitting on the concrete black that was the front step, staring at the freshly planted patch of grass covering the concrete-filled basement. He held the umbrella over him, kneeling next to him and pulling him close with one arm, his head dropping against his shoulder. “Eren… I'm so glad we found you…” Lathe looked up as a violent shiver ran through Eren, snapping out of his moment of relief seeing how soaked and freezing he was. ...well shit. “Eren, we need to get you home. Come on.” Lathe took the bag Eren had set next to him, slinging it over his shoulder and pulling on his arm to get him to stand, only for Eren not to budge. ...you're really making me do this? Lathe closed his umbrella and shoved it in the bag, reaching under Eren and heaving him up into his arms, heavy with all the water his clothes had soaked up, dead weight against him. He somehow managed to get the car door open, setting Eren inside and letting Blake lick at his cold cheeks while he started the car, setting the heat on as high as it would go and getting them home quickly. He didn't care about any of their bags at that moment as he carried Eren inside, kicking the door shut. What would be the fastest way to get you warmed up… Lathe started for the upstairs, maneuvering the bathroom door open and setting Eren on the toilet, starting a hot bath. He turned back to help Eren get out of his soaked clothes, only to find him gone. ....NOT AGAIN! Lathe walked out of the bathroom and caught sight of Eren halfway down the stairs, snatching him by the scruff of his neck at the landing to stop him. “Eren, you're not going anywhere. Come on, don't make this difficult.” Lathe swept Eren into his arms again, bringing him right back upstairs and sitting him down again, tugging at his hoodie. He found it difficult, not only with the fabric clinging to him because it was soaked, but
also because Eren didn't move to help him at all; if anything, he purposefully resisted. “Eren, you're a human popsicle right now. You're already going to be horrendously sick when this is over—don't make it more of a struggle, please. If you don't I'm just making sure you don't have your phone and setting you in.” I only care about you not having hypothermia.

Eren just shook his head, not meeting Lathe’s eyes as he started to strip himself out of his clothes, not even caring that Lathe was in the room, and stripped completely, stepping into the very warm water and sitting right down, not caring that his skin was screaming. Why did he need to get me… I'm not supposed to fucking be here… What the hell? I left the key here… this isn’t my home anymore.

Lathe looked away, surprised as Eren completely stripped. ... uhm… Lathe waited until he could hear that Eren was in the water until he turned around, quickly snatching a bottle of bubble bath from under the sink as the faucet still ran, grateful the bubbles quickly covered the surface of the water. He stopped it running after a moment, rolling up his sleeves and reaching for a washcloth.

“Eren… why’d you do it?” Lathe sighed, his voice sounding broken and weary. ...do you not want to live here anymore? ...am I not doing a good enough job as a parent? It’s that, isn't it. I must suck as a Dad. I've been trying really hard... and it’s no good, is it...

Eren looked up to Lathe with defeated eyes. “Why’d you come get me?.... You guys don’t want me anymore…” Eren sat there, looking down at the bubbles after that. “I’m just a burden, all you do is worry about me… It would be better if I left, wouldn’t it? And I didn’t want you to kick me out… Mom wouldn’t want me to stay here anymore… so I figured I could go back to my old house… but… it’s not there…… anymore.” Eren’s voice got progressively smaller as he spoke, he curled up to himself, but let Lathe rub the warm washcloth against his skin.

Lathe helped the warm water run over Eren’s shoulders and hair, reaching for the shampoo. “Eren, Spades and I love you. We don't see you as a burden, no we weren't planning on kicking you out at all. And of course we worry- we’re your parents. It’s our job. Eren, you’re more than welcome to stay with us for as long as you want. Honestly, if you ever did want to move out, I'd probably be clinging to your leg until the end, begging you to stay. ...I don't really know what I'd do if I didn't have you around. You're my son. ...and that means I care about you. A lot.” I give many, many shits about you and what goes down in your life. I want you to be happy, to succeed... and if I suddenly no longer had to do the things I did to make you happy, to help you go where you wanted to... I don't know what I'd do with myself.

“Won’t I just be getting in the way? You guys are getting married… why would you want me around still? Won’t you just want your own kids?.... And when you have your own kids…. I’ll just become something that you can just throw away so that you can focus on your own children…I didn’t want that to happen all over again!” Eren jumped back a bit as he shouted at Lathe, scaring himself from how loud he was. Shit... I didn’t mean to shout. Eren dropped his head in shame as he started to cry, all his emotions just overpowering him, and making him sob.
Lathe’s eyes widened as Eren shouted, his expression full of sympathy as he started to shampoo his hair, hoping it would help calm him as he spoke, pecking his temple after a moment. “Eren, I know it’s hard for you to believe it… you wanted to leave before we made you… but Eren, we never were going to make you leave. Spades and I are getting married, but that doesn’t mean that suddenly there’ll be no time for you. Us having any kids doesn’t mean that you suddenly become less important. Anything that happens doesn’t make you anything less than my son, and I love you to bits and I just hope you can understand that at least a little, that I don’t want you to leave. I’d much rather hold onto you and not let go.”…you’re always going to mean a hell of a lot to me.

Eren looked up to Lathe, meeting his eyes for a long time, not pulling away from their intense gaze. “You… Y-you don’t want me t-to go?” Eren asked quietly, starting to calm down as Lathe’s words started to sink in a bit more. They don’t want me to leave? That actually want me? I don’t have to leave?

“Absolutely not. This is your home- and you're always welcome here. You're family. And I really want you to stay, for what I hope will be a long time still. I'd hate to see you go.” If I so much as heard you think about leaving, I'd beg you to stay. I really don't want to let go of you… at least for quite a while...

Eren let his tears fall freely, moving closer towards Lathe, as if his presence would help him get warm. I can stay… and they won’t make me go away… Eren’s tears now were for a completely different reason, having finally figured out what ‘being wanted’ felt like. He had been so afraid that Lathe would throw him away at some point, that he had never felt truly at home in this house. But here he sat, finally realizing where his home was. … I’m home… I’ve finally found a real home.

Lathe smiled, rubbing his eye with his arm, sniffling. “Come on kid, now you’re gonna make me cry.” Lathe rinsed out Eren’s hair, pressing a kiss to his forehead after the soap was rinsed away. “Do you still feel cold?” Lathe felt Eren’s hand, his other feeling his shoulder. “… I think that for the most part did it… let’s get you dried off and in warm clothes, okay?” Lathe pulled the plug for the bathtub, turning away and handing Eren a towel. He draped another over his shoulders after Eren had wrapped his waist, gently nudging him to his room. “Get dressed in something warm and head downstairs- I’ll make you something to eat after I get our stuff from the car, okay?” I need to tell people that we found you too...

Eren nodded, going into his room and pulling out his boxers, two sweatpants and two sweatshirts and slipping everything on. He smiled to himself happily, feeling like he was on cloud nine for the first time in years. I have a home.

Lathe brought everything into the house, going to throw all the wet clothes Eren had in his pack in the dryer, going into the kitchen and seeing Eren come into the piano room, having stolen one of his quilts and looking happy. He beamed, going to give him a hug, just holding onto him for a long moment. This is your home. I really hope you stay awhile. “Now, because you can have real food
now…” Lathe pulled back, his eyes shining. “What do you want for lunch?”

Eren grew flustered at Lathe’s words. *What do I want? But it’s never really about me…. “Um…. Can…. can we have french toast?”* Eren asked quietly, looking down and shuffling his feet a bit. *I don’t know what I’m allowed to do… Dad said I can eat and walk around now... but am I allowed to do the laundry and cleaning now? I wanna do it…*

Lathe nodded, his smile warm. “Do you want to help? Or do you just want to chill?” *French toast is a good choice- I haven’t made it in awhile.*

Eren thought about it for a second, before a small grin formed on his face. “Can I help?” *I wanna know how to make it. You haven’t taught me yet.*

“Of course!” Lathe looked down as his phone buzzed. “Oh my- hold on, people don't know you're okay yet.” Lathe took out his phone, typing quickly.

*LQ: Armin was the real MVP and now I have Eren home*

*LQ: He’s just chilling right now we’re all good*

*CP: Oh thank God! Go Armin! WOOO!!!*

*AA: Will you tell him to get his butt back in school? I miss him! I need someone to tell nerdy jokes too, and lunch is boring without him!*

Eren watched as Lathe’s phone buzzed. “You told people I was missing?” Eren asked quietly to him, looking as if he wanted to see what was being said, but still too timid to actually do that with Lathe.

Lathe looked up from his phone to him with his eyes a bit wide. “Of course- you had me worried sick. Y’know what, here. Might as well read the whole group chat.” Lathe scrolled to the top and handed his phone to Eren. “And after you read that, I've got to call Spades up, tell her she doesn't have to keep whoever it is she has looking on watch anymore. And of course, she’d probably want to hear that you're okay from you .”

Eren took the phone carefully and scrolled through the conversation pretty quickly, though he seemed to shrink when Lathe told him. “D-Do I have to talk to M-mom?” Eren stuttered out of nervousness, carefully holding the phone back to Lathe. *I’m scared of what she’ll say to me… What if she doesn’t want me...*
Lathe took his phone back, pausing for a moment. “...Eren, you don't have to, but I think you should talk to her at least a little. Here, how about we put the phone on speaker, and we all talk together? Would that be okay?” *Spades has got to be worried sick right now...*

Eren looked down at his bare feet and nodded, just staring at his toes, so unsure of what he would say, or how she would react to anything at all. *I don’t want her to hate me... I want her to let me stay.*

Lathe gently pulled Eren to the couch, settling him on his lap and setting his phone on the coffee table, on speaker and speed dialing Spades. “Hey Spades- I have some good news.” Lathe gently nudged Eren to speak. *You need to tell her you’re okay. She really needs to hear it from you...*

“What am I supposed to say?” Eren asked in complete confusion. *What the hell am I actually supposed to tell mom so that she doesn’t hate me? I don’t want her to be mad at me... I just... I didn’t want to get hurt again.*

*Is that... IT IS!* “Oh my god... Eren you’re okay!” Spades’ voice rang with happiness when she heard Eren talk on the other end. *Oh thank god.*

“I kinda called in help- Armin saw him wandering around. He’s warm, we’re going to get some food in him, and we’ve reached an understanding. It’s all alright for right now.” *...anything besides that to say?*

Spades seemed to sigh in relief. “Okay... I won’t be home until late, so I’ll eat when I get home, don’t wait for me... it’ll be way too late for that.” There was a pause at her end, and a few mumbled words. “Alright, I need to go... I’ll be home when I can, I love you both.” She murmured before she hung up.

Eren watched the phone, not necessarily sure what the hell he was supposed to say after that. *Mom loves me too?*

“We love you too.” Lathe did. He reached over as the call ended, pocketing his phone. “Eren, she didn't yell at you. She was worried. And you'll have plenty of time to talk to her later, probably tomorrow when you're both not exhausted.” Lathe nudged Eren to his feet. “Come on, let’s make us some French Toast, okay?” *Food sounds good right around now.*
Eren followed after without much prodding. “Okay, that sounds good.” Eren’s voice seemed to even out a bit as he calmed down around Lathe. His eyes were wide as he watched Lathe move around to gather all the supplies they needed.

Lathe set out their ingredients, finding the bread, eggs, milk, cinnamon and nutmeg, also fetching a bowl for them to mix everything in. He went to the pegs on the wall, taking down his own apron as well as Eren’s, tying his deftly before helping Eren with his, tying it in a neat bow. “Alright. Here’s how French toast works—” Lathe got out a bowl, two forks, and pan and a spatula while he spoke. “We mix some eggs and milk in this bowl with a fork, soak the bread in it and then drop them in the pan and sprinkle cinnamon and nutmeg on top while they cook. Will you do me the honor—” Lathe held out a fork to Eren reverently, looking completely serious. “—of doing the mixing?” ...It’s quite the important job. But I’m sure you’re up to the task.

Eren watched Lathe move around the kitchen with practiced ease, nodding as he was handed the fork. He kept his eyes glued to the bowl as he mixed it, letting Lathe move around him to get the pan ready for the French toast. This should be good.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren lifted himself up into a sitting position, focusing on the movie that was playing on the TV. I wonder if he’ll answer it… I don’t remember who’s ringtone that is...

Lathe quirked an eyebrow, his hand falling from petting Eren’s mop of hair to dig his phone from his pocket, pausing the movie and answering it. “Yo. What’s up, Nate?” ...you never call me…?

Nate’s worried voice came from the other end. “Hey… I was just wondering if Eren’s alright? He hasn’t posted anything recently, and I got worried ‘cause it’s been like 3 weeks already.” I’m really worried about him.

“...Nate, check Twitter. It'll explain everything.” I wrote a whole thing on it!

“That’s the problem! Eren hasn’t posted anything on Twitter!”

“Not his, mine! It’ll be up there.”
“I… I didn't know you have one.”

Lathe pinched the bridge of his nose, sighing. “…well Nate, now you know it's a thing. Here, my username is- all one word, by the way- coffeegodsAutonomous. Can you handle that?”

“Autonomous? Was that the last one?” He asked, writing it down on a sheet of paper.

“That's the one. Read all the status updates- and there should be a new photo up too.” Because of course photos.

Nate put his phone on speaker, looking up the Twitter feed, quietly mumbling it to himself as he read it. “So… You broke his ribs… He’s not allowed to sing… Okay… Well that’s a thing… And stuck to a bed for a bit… God that had to suck… Is he okay now? Like how bad were the breaks?” Nate’s worry reflected in his voice.

“Honestly, the breaks were awful, his entire ribcage was kinda in pieces… but apparently Eren is capable of sorcery and they've grown back together. At this point he’s just got to really take it easy, so we're not letting him do anything strenuous. And that’s going to include singing until we get the all-clear from the Doc. But he’s fine- he’s just been chillin. He’ll go back to school soon, which is good, he’s been antsy lately. Oh hush, you’ve been fretting about school and grades and getting frustrated because you do all your homework the second you get it. You know it's true.” He spoke to Eren as he shot him a look. “We’re waiting until Monday, so he’ll have the weekend to get his bearings back.”

“That’s good… How’s he doing without Levi?” I’m like a protective older brother… Geez. I really want to know…

“He’s been okay. I don't think it’s as hard anymore for him- it’s the way it is, though he calls often enough. Doesn't mean we don't still miss him. But it’s a little easier.” Still though, of course we both miss him, though Eren does a lot more… but he’s been taking it well enough.

Nate nodded in understanding. “Alright, well, keep me updated on things, and also have you guys listened to the radio recently? I swear it’s all his songs, and that's all Twitter talks about now… It’s going really well.” I’m proud of him, really proud.

Lathe chuckled. “I know, I get in the car to drive to work and the first thing I hear on the radio is
one of his songs. It really is amazing everything that's happened. And yeah, I'll keep you in the loop. I'll send you all the Snapchats you could possibly want.” He grinned. "probably more than you would ever want… or that society deems acceptable…

Nate chuckled a bit. “Alright, I’ll make sure to check every few hours for all the snaps…. Okay, well that’s what I wanted to call about, so I guess I’ll talk to you guys later.” I’m going to assume that every 20 minutes you’ll send me snapchats…

“Alright Nate. Bye.” Lathe pressed a button to end the call, turning to Eren and smiling. “Nate says hi. He wanted to know if you were doing okay.” He held up his phone. “Wanna send him a Snapchat and let him know?” …I did explain Snapchat to you… right?

Eren thought about it and nodded. “Yeah… That’s okay.” Nate was worried about me too.. Well then.

Lathe grinned, opening the app. He shifted a bit, holding up the phone and smiling at the camera, making sure you could still see Eren’s faint smile as he peeked out from his cocoon of blankets before he took the picture. “What should we caption it? Hm… important decisions… eh, let’s be simple about it. ‘The hooman is no longer dying and says hi!’ That good?” Lathe showed Eren the screen.

Eren looked over it, peeking out of the blankets a little more before nodding. He settled back down, laying his head on Lathe’s lap again. Eren let out a soft whine and nuzzled his head against his leg. I want you to rub my head again.

Lathe sent the Snap, rolling his eyes good naturedly and putting his phone away on silent, starting the movie again and threading his fingers through Eren’s hair again, carding through his long locks. You're too adorable sometimes.

Eren’s breathing evened out after only a few minutes, though Blake was by his side instantly, watching him intently, and staring at him, like he did so many times when Eren was asleep.

Blake looked to Eren pinning his ears in agitation. My human is panicking…how do I help? I can’t get on his chest can I?

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at Blake, reaching his free hand over to pet him. “Eren’s fine, Blake. Don't worry. I'm here in case anything goes wrong.” Your human is safe.
Blake began whining, quite loudly, his head switching between Eren’s face and Lathe’s face. *My human is panicking! Can’t you tell? He needs help!* Blake moved to lick Eren’s face as his brow started to furrow, the first sign of his progressively worsening nightmares.

... *oh yeah. Eren still needs his meds to sleep.* Lathe gently shook Eren by the shoulder, waking him up before his nightmares could get too bad. “Eren, hon, wake up. You can't sleep off you don't take your meds.” *I forgot about that- good catch, Blake.*

Eren’s eyes snapped open as he was shaken awake. *What…? What happened? I was… I was…* Starting to drown… “Sorry.” Eren murmured moving to shift from Lathe’s lap. … *I’m hella tired though.*

Lathe rested a gentle hand on Eren’s shoulder, not wanting him to be uprooted from the couch. “If you really are tired, we can let you get to sleep. God knows it's been a really long day. It’s up to you though.” *Too much has gone down.*

Eren nodded, reaching to rub at his eyes as his mouth opened wide in a loud yawn. “I’m sorry… I’m exhausted, can I got to bed?” *I want you to hold me until I fall asleep.*

Lathe nodded. “Of course, kid. Come here,” Lathe stepped down from the couch, gathering Eren up in his arms blankets and all and carried him back to his nest, setting him down and leaving only for a moment to get a glass of water and his pills, settling down next to him and handing him the small white pill. “You know the drill.” Lathe gave him the glass, making sure he had a good grip on it before letting go. He set it on the tray after, shrugging and laying down, pulling Eren on top of him and running his through his brunette locks.

Eren was asleep after only a few moments, his body going slack in Lathe’s arms. *I’m tired…*

Lathe was tempted to fall asleep as well, though he tried to wake himself up after a few minutes. *Come on, you should probably make food for when Spades gets home.* Lathe carefully manoeuvred out from under Eren, tucking him in and pressing a kiss to his temple before padding to the kitchen to make dinner for the two of them.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

It’s been a really long two weeks. Lathe walked through the quiet halls two minutes late for his first
period class, cradling his precious scarf-wrapped cargo gently against his chest. *Eren hasn't been able to sit still or just not do work. Even though we moved all the chores between Spades and I (mostly me though) on the list, Eren still tried to do the laundry. ...and do the dishes. And vacuum upstairs. ...okay, he cleaned the whole damn house while I was at work and we had to handcuff him to the table so he wouldn't go do shit. ...which is weird, given that normally I think you have to force teenagers to do the chores in the first place... but eh. The handcuffs got the point across. I've been trying to really include him in decision making and random stuff around the house, sort of making sure he understands he has a say in the household goings on. Armin actually came by over the weekend, wanted to make sure he was doing okay. That kid really is a godsend. ...is it really only two weeks until Thanksgiving? I thought we had more time... well, it's alright. Levi’s coming home in a week, and so it’ll be the four of us for Thanksgiving this year. That reminds me, I- I mean we need to plan the feast. Lathe finally reached the physics room, backing into the door to open it, not wanting to potentially harm his cargo. He didn't even greet the class or give them a chance to react to his entrance, finding Eren with his eyes and stating decidedly. “Eren, we're keeping him. I don't care what you say, and I don't care that Blake might not like it. We're keeping him.”

Eren picked up his head from the desk, looking up in confusion. “We’re keeping wh-” His voice died down as a small black kitten popped his head out of the green bundle of Lathe's scarf, a collective “awe” sounding around the room. "Oh my god.. Yes!

Lathe smiled as the class gave the kitten their full attention, speaking. “Class, as you may have noticed, we have a shadow with us today.” He set the bundle on the cleared front desk, taking off his messenger bag. “Anything you’d like to say to the class?” Lathe sat on the desk, looking to the kitten. It looked back up at him, giving him a tiny mew and looking back at the class as another awe sounded. Lathe addressed the room, smiling. “Don't worry, I speak cat.” He reached over to pet the kitten with his finger behind the ears and under the chin. “His name is Salem, he’s about six weeks old, former tenant of the parking lot and current resident of my scarf. He enjoys tuna sandwiches and trying to climb up my sweater.” And he's adorable as fuck. “Now you just chill while I teach these impressionable young people about physics in a way that will inevitably scar them for life, which is what this entire class ready is about, m’kay?” He just beamed as the small kitten started back up at him innocently, mewing and pawing at the warm fabric around him. He turned back to the class, beginning his speech about the differences in velocities on the x and y axis. He continued on as Salem shortly clambered out from the scarf, pawing at his wrist and trying to climb up his arm. He simply moved his scarf under his arm as a safety cushion, his arm near the middle of the desk as he kept going. “...and so the object will continue moving horizontally at the same velocity unless there is some sort of resistance, no matter what the vertical velocity may be…” It didn't take a genius to realize that even Armin had stopped taking notes, all eyes on the kitten halfway up his sleeve. ...you could totally mess with them right now. “...take this for an example: McDonalds. Let’s say that at around one in the morning while working the graveyard shift you attempt to give some random lady the chicken nuggets she obviously ordered which she soon finds inadequate for some reason, and perhaps throws the package of nuggets at the cashier who took her order. The nuggets would move at a horizontal velocity that is decreasing inconsequentially with wind resistance until making contact with the employee, resulting in the package to slow to a stop and then bounce off, as well as resulting in an assault charge and a fine or prison time, perhaps on multiple counts if they played their card right and had each individual nugget count as a separate weapon… and Armin, the answer would be…?”
Armin suddenly looked up to him, with a deer-in-headlights expression. “U-uhm…” I wasn’t paying any attention… oh no… uhm...

“Yes, that is correct, the answer is the terrorists would win.” Lathe deadpanned to him, looking over the class with a judgemental stare. “Nobody noticed my tangent, huh.” ...it’s literally just a sea of guilty people. Lathe looked over as he felt something soft nudge his ear, picking up Salem gently. “...okay, this kitten is being rather distracting. Here.” He carefully placed him on his head, the kitten getting a good hold on his thick hair. “Now I'm wearing him as a hat. Is that better?” Someone take a picture of this.

Eren instantly pulled out his phone and took a picture of the sight. Blake had stood up against the desk and had a stare down with the cat currently on Lathe’s head. Oh my god, we have a cat now… I wonder if Blake’s jealous?

Lathe beamed at the camera, looking to Blake and trying to keep his head steady all the same. “Blake, it’s a cat. I understand your first instinct is to chase away the cats, but we’re keeping this one. You're gonna have to deal. It doesn't mean we don't think you're awesome though.” He grinned. Jealous of my new hat?

Eren chuckled, petting Blake to calm him down a bit. It's okay, he'll be friendly… You two will become good friends. Eren looked up to Lathe again. “And technically would the answer be 20 years in prison and a $50,000 fine?” I'm pretty sure that's it if I remember it correctly.

Lathe gave him an impressed look after a few moments. “You could actually keep all that stuff Spades was talking about straight? Technically, that is… if the package had exactly five chicken nuggets in it. Which pretty much is your standard size of chicken nugget order, so. Yes.” ...niiterrrrrce.

Levi’s coming back home today. Lathe was driving home from the grocery store, listening to the radio and drumming his fingers against the steering wheel. I needed to get all the shopping done so I can cook us a real meal when he gets home- we really needed a lot, it’s been nearly two hours already I've been gone. Eren’s been fine with chilling at home by himself- though honestly, he’s been having Scotty and his colleagues for company more often... it really is weird that Eren’s chest was able to heal so insanely fast, and it is pretty miraculous that he apparently doesn't have osteoporosis anymore which is apparently a thing, but Scotty’s dragged at least four of them over at once to take notes and grill Eren with questions. I swear, they're going to assume it's what he's been eating, publish ten articles and then I'll get rich selling soup and telling people it'll make you
immortal. On the subject of food… Levi’s coming home for Thanksgiving and it’s gonna be lit. ...or just entirely composed of me cooking things and then just chilling with Spades while we let Eren and Levi have their time to themselves doing I’m not going to ask. ...but literally Salem is the most adorable thing. He loves climbing all over me while I’m watching TV or something and he loves to sleep on my head- he’s the cat who’s a hat. And he’s great- he’s been trying to make nice with Blake, and he’ll nudge Blake when he’s laying down and try to curl up to him because he’s so tiny compared to him, and Blake just looks and him and seems to huff and let him. I swear though, Blake likes him at least a little. Lathe turned onto his street, furrowing his brow as his drive was full of cars, having to park a little ways down the street. The fuck? Who’s in my- Lathe recognized the red sedan near the front of his driveway, his expression darkening a bit. ...Scotty . Lathe marched up to his front door, quickly opening it just in time to see a colleague of his prod at Eren’s bare chest with the end of a pencil, others researching frantically on laptops and taking furious notes as Eren stuttered to answer some question, looking incredibly uncomfortable. Enough. Is. Enough. “YO!” Lathe shouted over their buzzing and keyboard-tapping, immediately grabbing their attention. “All of Scotty’s nerd friends- get the fuck out of my house.” I’m not letting Eren become some science experiment of yours.

“But…” Scotty picked up his head from his notebook, continuing to scrawl some notes on the paper. We’re not done yet though!

“No buts. This is my house, and if the nine of you don’t high-tail it, I won't call it being annoying, I'll call it trespassing. I've got the Police Commissioner for a fiancée. Out.”

“That’ll get you 6 months in jail… And your license will be revoked.” Eren off handedly mentioned it, moving to grab his shirt from the couch where it had been thrown. I remember mom told me about that. He watched as a majority of the men grumbled and started packing up to leave the premises.

Lathe held open the door for all of them with his foot, his arms crossed and glaring at them as they left, kicking it shut after the last of them and turning to Scotty. “You.” Lathe strode over to him in two quick steps, grabbing the front of his jacket and shaking him a bit as he spoke. “What the hell are you thinking? Eren is not your latest science experiment. I really hope you get that through that thick skull of yours. I agree, it’s pretty amazing that he was able to heal like he was, but that doesn't mean you get to endlessly poke and prod at him. Pack up, and don't bring any more of your lackeys with you to study Eren. You're done.” I'm so over this...

“But-” Scotty could barely get a word out before Lathe interrupted him yet again.

“No buts, Scotty. This investigation of yours is over.” Lathe glared at Scotty evenly.
“Gluteus Maximus!” Just because you said I couldn’t say it… I’ll rephrase it. “I’m not done getting notes from him though… There’s a Professor at Stanford that wants to look at his case.” That is legitimate.

Lathe stared at him hard for a moment, before he turned to look at Eren. “Eren, you're your own person. I legally can't speak for you. Do you really want to allow these people to look at your case?” I get the feeling you're going to say no. You kinda did just get fussed over incessantly by ten nerds probably asking questions that are waaay to personal or weird.

Eren looked up as Lathe spoke, picking his head up from his homework. His face was blank for a bit, his eyes darting from Lathe to Scotty and back to Lathe only to repeat the process multiple times. My case? Am I some sort of diseased human? Why do they need to test me… I don’t want people to know. Eren shook his head, looking down and trying to focus on his homework as Scotty whined.

“But... Eren…” Scotty stepped up to him poking at his shoulder. “If we know how your body did it we might be able to figure out how to fix other people.” I just need a few more blood tests...

Eren shook his head more, moving away from Scotty and farther down the couch, bringing his homework with him. “I don’t want anymore tests or needles! I still have a bruise from where you took blood from!” Absolutely not. No fuckin’ more!

“You drew blood? Did he agree to that?” How far did you take this?

“I asked!” Scotty defended himself instantly.

“I agreed to 1 vial… Not 6.” Eren countered, his tone a bit hostile. No more… I don’t want to be a test subject again… Absolutely not… It brings back way too many fucking memories… Shit… Blake was by Eren side in only a moment to whine and calm him down. I need to calm down before I panic.

Lathe’s expression darkened, stepping in between Eren and Scotty, staring him down with cold eyes. “Scotty, you have your answer, and ten seconds to get your shit out of this house and your car out of the driveway.” That crosses the line.

Scotty’s eyes widened a bit at Lathe’s obvious display of anger, quickly moving to gather his things and get out of the house. Well, he needs to come back for a check up anyways… So I guess
I’ll get to see him again.

Eren’s eyes were wide as he tried to calm down by petting Blake who was still whining, trying to get Lathe’s attention as well. No… I… I can’t be another test subject. I can’t go through that a-fucking-gain.

Lathe immediately turned his attention back to Eren once Scotty had left, sitting down next to him on the couch and pulling him close, murmuring calmly into his ear. “Eren, it’s fine, you’re not going to have to go through all that crap. It’s alright, don’t worry about it. I’m not about to let anyone turn you into some science experiment. It’s okay.” Scotty better have a damn good apology for all this shit. My God, you’d think he forgot Eren is a human whose word means something. Lathe carded a hand through his hair, trying to calm him.

Eren shook in Lathe’s arms. “I don’t want to… I don’t want to be opened up again… I don’t want to be toyed with.” His grip tighten on Lathe’s shirt, moving into his lap and curling up to him. I don’t want Grisha to come back.

Lathe pulled Eren close, tucking his head under his chin. “I’m not going to let that happen… they can’t do that. We’re not going to let them force you to do anything you don’t want to. You’re the one in charge of what happens to you. Your word goes. I’ve got you…” …couldn’t Scotty lose his license for this…?

Eren nodded, curling up to him more. “Okay.. When he asked if he could take blood… I thought he meant one vial…But… He took so much… I was scared that he was trying to get me to pass out… And I was terrified… Terrified he was gonna drag me somewhere and cut me open… He’s huge… I can’t do anything against him.” Eren cried as he spoke to Lathe, opening up to him about his fears more than he ever had before. I trust you… You should know...

Scotty is taller than me… you don't really know him too well… and with everything Grisha did… oh my... ...fuck you, Scotty. Not cool. “It’s okay, he’s gone right now. We have to go back for your checkup, but if you really want we can ask for a different doctor. But if you were scared, you should’ve asked him to stop, or called or texted me to come home. But he’s not going to do this anymore- I won't let him. That checkup is in about a month- should we schedule it with someone else?” I can understand if you don't want Scotty to be your doctor anymore...

Eren shook his head. “I was scared he would hit me… I didn’t want him to hit me… I don’t know… I don't want him to do that anymore.” He cried and let Lathe card through his hair. “Can you do it?” Eren asked quietly, sniffling and attempting to calm down. Why can’t you do it...
...huh. “...I technically could… I don't have the x-ray machinery the doctors at the hospital have, which is what they'd use for your ribs, but honestly it’s not completely necessary at this point. It really was just a thing to make sure the healing process is going well, and it obviously has…. you really don't even need it. I'll send an email later asking both for the blood test results and for the appointment to be cancelled- rather strongly-worded, of course.” That checkup thing is a moot point, given that Scotty has been hovering over you for two weeks straight. “Oh, uhm… there are things in the car we can't have melting… help me carry stuff in?” I bought the good ice cream. Also there are frozen chicken nuggets out there.

Eren nodded, slowly starting to untangle himself from Lathe’s arms. I can help.. Eren got up from the couch, petting Blake to calm himself down for a few seconds. He made his way to the door, slipping on his boots and coat. I can help… I wonder when Levi’s gonna be home?

Lathe led him outside, pulling the car up from the street into the driveway and making sure to hand Eren the lighter bags, the two of them taking a few trips to get everything inside. “Alright, we need to get all this put away, and then I’ll be able to fix dinner so it can go in the oven when we get home from the airport. It’ll be about two hours until we can leave, okay?” Levi’s going to be home for… is it really two months? That's a long break. Not that either of us are complaining- Eren's always happier with Levi around. And I kinda miss his deadpan humor. I just never hear of a long break like that besides summer break. But I am a teacher, and he’s in training to be a marine. Distinct difference.

Eren nodded, helping shuffle everything out of bags, and onto the counter for Lathe to put away. He helped sort the fridge with the perishables, and made sure to restock the freezer with the frozen foods. A gasp sounded after Eren rifled through the last bag. “You got the dinosaur ones!” Eren excitedly squealed as he put the chicken nuggets in the freezer. He actually got them! Yay! I wonder if Levi would like them?

Lathe grinned, looking over his shoulder as he sorted through vegetables. “Well, they were on the list… therefore it was imperative we get them.” You were the one to write ‘the dinosaur kind’ next to chicken nuggets on the list I had going on the fridge- you have the ability to add stuff to it. Lathe quirked an eyebrow, a mischievous glint in his eye. “Unless I got the wrong kind of dinosaur ones… y’know, I don't know if those really were the right kind. I can take them back if you don’t want them…”

Eren hurriedly shook his head, blocking the freezer with his body. “No! It’s mine!” Eren instantly frowned, defensive over the frozen nuggets, leading him to adopt a weak fighting stance in front of the freezer door. Mine… You can’t do anything!

Lathe raised his hands in mock surrender, still smirking. “Hey hey hey, no need to get all threatening about it. I understand that as a result of your burning love for chicken shaped like their evolutionary ancestors, you are willing to beat me up, and I respect that. Mercy!” Lathe grinned.
Yay, my brand of humor is working with you!

Eren seemed to giggle a bit more at that statement. *My chicken nuggets! I want Levi to come home, I wanna snuggle with him still.* Eren moved out of his fighting stance, moving to go and hug Lathe from behind. “When’s Levi coming hoo~me?” He was getting impatient to a point where he was asking every 20 minutes. *I want to snuggle with him!* He kept his arms right around Lathe’s midsection, not wanting to let go of him until Levi came home.

Lathe had rolled up his sleeves, chopping vegetables and starting on a stuffing for the chicken. “A bit more than one and a half hours, kid. We've still got a while until we go get him.” Lathe looked back at Eren, seeing him stare up innocently at him over his shoulder. “You’re not letting go anytime soon, are you.” He chuckled as he shook his head, tilting his head back to peck his forehead. “Didn't think so.” Lathe continued to make the chicken, answering Eren every time he asked when Levi was going to be home with endless patience. He had just arranged the chicken to go on the stove, about to put plastic over the large frying pan so they could leave it out until they got home, when the doorbell rang. “Eren, hon, could you get that? My hands aren't exactly clean. ...and unless they're selling thin mints, tell all the salespeople no.” *I want my thin mints. ...and those coconut cookie things. ...Dammit, it better be a Girl Scout now. The two in this neighborhood know I buy, like, $50 worth.*

Eren groaned, reluctant to let go of Lathe, but opted to go get the door. He passed to the front door, opening it without interest. “Can I help- LEE~VIII!” Eren’s voice went from quiet to insanely loud in a matter of seconds before he instantly launched himself at Levi. He wrapped his arms and legs around Levi, not caring that he was much larger than the shorter man. He hummed in content as he held onto him, taking in his scent. *I missed you...*

Levi chuckled, catching Eren with ease. “Hey Brat. Missed me?” *I know I missed you ...* Levi held Eren firmly against him, turning to wave at Erwin who still sat in his car before carrying Eren inside, kicking the door shut. He leaned back against the door, nuzzling into Eren neck and lightly kissing his soft skin, relishing his scent. He tilted his head to meet Eren with a proper kiss, setting him back on his feet and pulling him close. *Mine.*

Eren tried not to let go of Levi as he kissed him. *I missed you so fucking much. I don’t want you to ever leave me again.* Eren pulled back only to breath, his arms still tightly wrapped around Levi’s shoulders and his head buried into the older’s neck.

Levi held onto Eren tightly, quiet for a long moment and just glad he was able to hold onto him. He sighed contentedly, looking up from his mop of brown hair to see Lathe smirking at him amusedly from the kitchen, chuckling as they made eye contact and just shaking his head, mouthing to him: ‘Welcome home.’ ...*home.* *It's nice to be home.* Levi shrugged off his backpack, leaving it next to the door and guiding Eren over to the in the Scripting room, laying down with Eren on top of him, wary of his ribs as he reclaimed his lips, tilting his head to deepen the kiss. *I missed you...*
Eren let Levi move him around, keeping his body pressed against him, basking in the happiness that he was home. Their first few kisses were very heated, Eren making sure they were French. *I missed you so much.* Eren pulled back for a breather, taking in a deep breath as he laid his head down on Levi’s chest, hearing his heartbeat.

Levi kept his arms wound around Eren, kissing him with just as much fervor, tangling their tongues together. He quietly painted as they broke for air, dropping his head back and tangling their legs, grounded with Eren’s weight on top of him. *I missed this...* They laid there for a long while, either making out or simply being content having the other to hold on to until Lathe called them for dinner.

*I’ll let them have their own time for now.* Lathe went back to the stove, starting again to cook and turning on the stove, cleaning the mess while the chicken simmered. It was a half hour before dinner was ready, and he set out plates, shouting across the house in their general direction. “Oi, Lovebirds! Dinner!” *I’m not going over there and telling you.*

...*I get to eat actual food now.* Levi smiled faintly at Lathe’s shout, rolling his eyes and gently nudging Eren, who still laid on his chest. “Eren, let’s go eat dinner. Come on.” *I want food.*

“Fo--od.” Eren grumble a bit and sat up, yawning as he stretched.

As he got off, Blake jumped up on top of Levi’s chest and began to lick his face wildly. *My human’s human is home! He’s home!* Blake’s tail wagged furiously, smacking Eren directly in the chest with each whack, but Eren didn’t seem to mind.

Levi sputtered as Blake licked his face enthusiastically, turning his head from the onslaught and trying to keep him away, sitting up and petting him. “Hey hey chill, I missed you too.” He wiped his mouth on his sleeve, scratching Blake behind the ear and noticing Blake’s tail whacking Eren’s chest, his eyes suddenly widening. “No no stop that! You’ll hurt his chest! He still has to heal! Off, come on.” Levi shifted and nudged Blake to hop off his lap, looking to Eren worriedly. “Are you okay? Did he hurt you?” *We don’t want to make your broken ribs any worse...*

Eren shook his head, a small smile on his face. He took Levi’s hand and gently put it on his chest. “Feel them...” *I’m completely healed... I thought Lathe told you already?*

Levi looked up to Eren uncertainly, wary of his ribs as he gently pressed with his hand, his expression changing to one of confusion. He brought up his other hand, gently pressing against
every rib down his front. “...they're intact...” His voice was quiet. “How the hell are they intact? Bones don't grow like that!” *That's just weird. ...what the hell has Lathe been feeding you?*

Eren nodded. “We don’t really know how or why... But they are.” He pulled at Levi’s sleeve as he got up. “Come on... Food! And it’s Chicken!” Eren scampered off to the kitchen, Blake at his heels as they got closer to the food. *FOOD!*

Levi was a bit stunned as Eren dragged him to the kitchen. *Bones don't grow that fast, though...* The thought was pushed from his mind as he was met with the delicious smell of dinner, Lathe having just set down plates for him and Eren, a mug of tea waiting for the both of them.

Eren almost drooled as he sat down in his seat, instantly locking their heels together in happiness. *Food!* It didn’t take long for Eren to start stuffing his face.

Spades stepped through the door pulling her high heels off. “Lathe!? Why are there a bunch of 100% chocolate bars around here?! *I thought you hated those...* She walked into the kitchen seeing Levi, she smiled. “Oh Levi! You’re home! I thought you were gonna be another hour or so?” *I thought I was going to have to pick you up.*

“There are what now?” Lathe looked from Spades to Levi. “Did you bring home pretty much just pure cocoa in the shape of bars?”

Levi waved to Spades, before turning to Lathe, shrugging. “Yeah, pretty much. I've got a literal ton in my bag- as much as it could carry, really.” *...because reasons.*

*... He got me the chocolate!!* Eren squealed with delight as he put his fork down. *His bag’s gotta be full of them!* Eren started to get up off his chair. *I want chocolate!*

Lathe followed Eren with wide eyes, setting down his fork. “Eren, if that’s pure chocolate, I assure you you're going to hate it if you just take a huge bite. You don't even eat regular chocolate!” *...this isn't going to end well...*

Eren ignored him as he got to pick up a chocolate bar and took a small bite, a small groan sounding from the other room as he savored the cocoa’s taste. *This is so much better than regular chocolate.* Eren took the bar into the kitchen and took another bite. “...Hank.. Ou Lev...” Eren tried to say thank you with his mouth full of chocolate as he took another huge bite of the bar. *It's so good.*
Lathe just watched Eren with wide eyes. “...the fact you can just gobble that up scares me.” ...it's also pretty impressive... “...though I guess it makes sense given you hate sweet things.” Lathe turned as Spades walked behind his chair, catching her and pulling her down to his level to kiss her cheek. “And welcome home Hon.” Lathe chuckled as she blushed, letting her get a plate and looking back to Eren. “At least you don’t really have to worry about me getting into your stash any more than I have to worry about you getting into mine.” Our stashes are both relatively safe—though yours much more so because I can't think of anyone else who can eat pure cocoa like that.

Spades nodded, getting her plate together and sitting down at her seat. “Alright, enough of the cocoa, put it away, you can eat it after you finish your dinner.” I don’t need you to fill up on Chocolate.

Eren took another bite before he wrapped up the rest of the bar and set it on the counter, going to sit down in his spot. He leaned over to kiss Levi’s cheek. “Thank you, I like them a lot.” Eren murmured to him, sitting back and returning to his plate. I get to eat chocolate!

Levi blushed lightly, smiling to Eren faintly, replying quietly. “I’m glad you like them.” He tangled their legs again under the table, savoring Lathe’s cooking, the rest of dinner passing in comfortable quiet. When he finished his plate, he was about to stand to wash his dish when Lathe took it from him, heading to the sink with his own. Levi was about to protest when Lathe gave him a pointed look, nodding over to Eren. ...you’re awful. Levi glared at him for a moment, punching him in the arm half-heartedly. Dammit. Levi went to the counter, picking up Eren’s half-eaten chocolate bar and stepping around the table, leaning his arms on the back of Eren’s chair and leaning down to smoothly murmur in his ear. “You finished?”

Eren felt a shiver run down his spine as Levi’s deep voice graced his ears. Holy fuck... He nodded, getting up to give Lathe his plate. I wanna go downstairs...

Levi tugged Eren along with him the second Eren’s plate was no longer in his hands, mumbling a thank you to Lathe before his arm slipped around Eren’s middle, leading him to the Scripting room. He scooped up his backpack on the way, slinging it over his shoulder and opening the door to the basement, making sure it was closed completely behind them before descending the steps, dropping his bag when they reached the landing and turning to face Eren, his undivided attention on him as he pulled him flush against him, leading him slowly backwards to the bed, claiming his lips in a heated kiss. I really, really missed you...

Eren let Levi push him down, his arms wrapping around Levi’s shoulders and his legs going to wrap around his waist. I missed you... And I have a feeling I’m going to be spending the night awake... At least my homework’s done...
Levi quietly moaned into the kiss, relishing in the feeling of Eren clinging to him, breaking their kiss to let his mouth wander down his jaw, down his neck, nibbling lightly at his earlobe before trailing to the joint of his neck, licking and suckling at his skin. He licked across his collarbone, biting and leaving a dark mark where it could be easily hidden, licking it apologetically and lightly kissing to the other side of his neck. His hands moved from Eren’s chest, wandering over his sides, one going to teasingly trail up between his legs.

Eren gasped as Levi’s hands traveled up and down his sides. He continued to writhe and moan under those skilled hands. “Levi… Please… More… I want more…” Eren pleaded with him. His eyes became increasingly filled with lust at just small touches.

Levi looked up to him with shaded eyes, smirking against his skin. As you wish. Levi continued to kiss Eren’s neck, only breaking away tug Eren’s shirt off, his lips reconnecting with his chest, worshipping every inch of tan skin with licks and small marks as he unbuttoned his own jacket, tossing it off the bed and getting rid of his own shirt, revealing rippling muscle. His hands traced Eren’s body, playing with the hem of his pants, one hand slipping down to palm at his still-clothed hardening length.

Eren whimpered as Levi teased his growing tent. “Levi… Please, don’t tease me,” he whined, trying to thrust his hips up into Levi’s palm. I want more. I want to pleasure you too… Eren tried to reach over to Levi’s crotch to rub at his growing bulge as well. “You too.” His hands ended up running down Levi’s chest, feeling all the muscles as his fingers traced over them. I missed you… You look even more buff than I remember.

Levi quietly groaned at the friction, faintly shivering as Eren’s hands traced over his chest. He smirked as he kissed down Eren’s chest to the hem of his pants, unbuttoning them and dragging them down his legs and off the bed, his hands running up the insides of thighs and firmly pinning down his hips, teasingly pecking Eren’s length through his boxers before getting hold of the hem with his teeth, tugging them down and letting his length spring free. The boxers out of the way, he gently kissed up to Eren’s length, deciding to have mercy and licking a broad stripe up the underside of his length, taking the tip in his mouth and starting to bob his head, looking up at Eren with lust in his eyes.

Eren shuddered instantly, a soft cry of pleasure escaped his mouth. Holy crap, I didn’t think he’d ever do it again. Eren couldn’t contain the moans and gasps which followed after Levi started to bob his head. So good… Holy fuck.. Levi don’t stop! “Don’t stop… Please!”

Levi bobbed further and further down Eren’s length, humming in assent to Eren’s words, the vibration running through him. Levi fought the reflex to choke on his length, succeeding in taking in his entire length, his nose against Eren’s base. He moaned as Eren let out a loud cry, his tongue
pressed flat against his length.

Eren’s hand slowly came up to grab at Levi’s hair, as if trying to pull him off. Too much... Too much! I can’t take that much pleasure! Stop! I’m gonna fucking cum... “L-Levi...” Eren could barely get a stutter out trying desperately not to cum and possibly choke Levi.

Levi slid up Eren’s length agonizingly slowly, though his mouth still remained on the head of his length, teasing his slit. “Hmm?” Go ahead- I want to taste you.

Eren’s eyes widened a bit at Levi’s actions. I’m not gonna be sleeping tonight... Nor walking right all of tomorrow... Eren only needed a few more licks until he was sent over the edge, his mouth opening, letting out a loud sound of complete and utter bliss. Holy fuck...

Levi swallowed Eren’s load, not letting a single drop escape and coming off of his length with a seductive pop, kissing up Eren’s chest to finally meet his lips, his hands gently tracing up to cup his cheeks. He broke their kiss after a long moment, quickly reaching over to the shelf next to the bed and snatching a small black tube from the shoebox, reclaiming his lips as he snapped open the cap, pouring some onto his fingers, his hand lightly running over Eren’s entrance. “Just relax, Eren, tell me when.” It’s been awhile- I don’t want to hurt you...

Eren nodded, spreading his legs a bit further to give Levi a better angle. I’m ready... he blushed as a thought crossed his mind about what he did for the past weeks or so. He’s gonna find out... Isn’t he?

Levi nestled into Eren’s neck, lapping at his skin as his first finger easily pushed past the ring of muscle, surprised and looking up to him with a hint of confusion. ...next to no resistance... After a second it clicked, and Levi smirked, whispering lowly into Eren’s ear. “Care to tell me what you've been… up to, while I was gone?” Now I have that image stuck in my head... that's pretty hot, actually.

Eren blushed as Levi brought up the thought to his mind again, hurriedly shaking his head. I don’t want that... I don’t want to say it, it's embarrassing. “Y-you know what I d-did....” He couldn’t help but stutter as he let Levi continue to finger him, the cool digits gracing the inside of his soft walls gently.

“I don't know... do I?” Levi slowly thrusted his fingers deeply inside of Eren, feeling up his soft walls as he spoke, a mischievous glint in his eye. “You'll just have to tell me, make sure I know...” I want to hear you say it.
Eren let out a squeak as Levi continually hit his sensitive spots within his warmth. *Holy fuck… Is he really gonna make me say it.* He sputtered, trying to get the right words out. *You are evil.* “I-I… Ngh… I did it… m-myself…” *Please don’t make me say anymore.*

Levi’s fingers brushed teasingly over his sensitive spots, nibbling his ear and murmuring smoothly. “Eren, I’m not sure I follow… what did you do?”

Eren tried to hide his face with his hands, as if trying to hide from Levi, even though he was out in the open. *I feel so fucking exposed… And you’re acting like a perverted old man!* “N-no… I don’t wanna… Agh! … say…” Eren let out a sharp yelp as Levi found his prostate, touching it directly.

*I love it when you get so flustered…* Levi smirked, drawing out his hand and reaching for the tube of lube, slicking himself up as he spoke. “Don’t be like that…” Levi tossed aside the tube, letting the head of his length brush over Eren’s entrance. “Please… enlighten me.”

Eren watched Levi’s fluid motions through the hand that was currently covering his face. *I don’t want to tell you dammit.* “D-do… Do I h-have to?” He asked, his voice if pure innocence coming out to try and help get him from having to talk about what he did to himself. *I don't want to tell you how many times I tried and failed… Then ended up taking a cold shower to get it down… That's so embarrassing.*

...*I'm not getting anywhere with it, am I?* “No, I suppose not… but I think we both know anyway.” Levi nipped at the joint of Eren’s neck as he slowly thrusted into him, burying himself to the hilt, letting out a low moan at the feeling of Eren’s walls pressing against his length.

Eren’s whole body shuddered as Levi entered him. “Holy shit… Levi… Haa… Oh my god… **Yes …**” Eren’s hands moved to feel Levi’s chest as the other held himself up above him. *Holy shit, you’re fucking perfect… It feels so good to be filled again.*

Levi groaned into Eren’s neck, starting a slow deep rhythm that soon became rougher, arousal pulsing through him with every moan Eren let into his ear. “Eren… s-so good…” Levi felt Eren’s legs wrap around his waist, pounding into him deeply, one hand coming down to stroke his quickly hardening length with long, firm strokes.

Eren could already feel that familiar heat start to pool in his abdomen. “Levi… Haaa… More… **Fuck me.**” *I don’t want to be able to walk straight… I want a thorough fuck...*
Holy fuck… Levi’s eyes held a predatory glint at Eren’s words, shifting Eren so he was on his side, holding his legs apart as he rammed into Eren, able to thrust even deeper with this position and all too happy to give him what he wanted. He felt his coil tightening in his abdomen, though he held himself, wanting to wait for Eren.

Eren barely had time to think about what was happening to him as he felt the pressure within his body build. “L-Levi! Ngh…. Haaa I… I can’t…” I’m gonna fucking cum, Levi. Don’t stop… It feels so good.

Levi could feel his own coil about to snap as he thrusted deeply into him, leaning forward so his lips brushed the shell of Eren’s ear, his words a quiet, smooth demand. “Then cum for me.”

Eren cried out in pleasure as his coil began to snap, his whole body pulsating with heat. “Levi!” Eren cried out his name in pure ecstasy, his legs wrapping around Levi’s hips tightly, forcing him deeper into his twitching cavern. Oh my god, yes… This is amazing… I want more.

Levi let out a long moan, coming undone at Eren’s cry and thrusting deep, releasing into him, panting. My god… Levi was still for a long moment, panting before he drew out of Eren, collapsing next to him and pulling Eren close, kissing him and tangling their tongues. I love you I love you I love you

Eren let Levi pull him close, moving his arms to wrap around Levi’s shoulders to keep his body flush against Levi’s. He pulled back only to breathe heavily, his eyes still hooded with lust and wanting as he looked at Levi. “Mm… I don’t wanna stop, Levi.” Eren’s voice came out near his ear as a seductive purr, his hips grinding into Levi’s.

Levi groaned quietly as Eren ground against him, quirking an eyebrow and smirking. “Insatiable, are we?” Levi shifted so Eren was straddling him, his lips ghosting Eren’s ear. “It’s not my fault if you can’t walk straight tomorrow…” …I can’t say I want to stop either.

Eren only giggled at his statement, moving to reach for the lube on the shelf. “I think I can agree to that.” I want to please you… I want to be able to do something for you. Eren moved to straddle Levi, his hand moving to lube his large length up again. I guess I can ride you… I know you like watching me do that…

The rest of the night was really a blur of fucking, hot and sensual fucking. I can’t say I didn’t enjoy it… But my back fucking hurts. Eren currently stood in the shower trying to clean himself out and not fall over in the process. My legs feel like jello, and I think I might need to actually wear a
Eren’s breakfast is getting cold- if he doesn't get down here to eat now he’s either going to be late or miss breakfast. And neither of those is a nice option. Lathe moved to the foot of the stairs, about to head out himself. He hit the handrail a couple times, trying to get Eren’s attention and shouting up to him. “Eren, you're going to be late if you don't get down here and eat something now!” He heard a muffled shout coming back from the bathroom, shrugging. “I need to get going- make sure you eat something, anything! I'll see you later!” If he can't eat his omelette, he knows where the granola bars are. He can eat and walk. Lathe grabbed his medical satchel and laptop, shutting the door behind him, locking it but not bothering to bolt it. He has a key, he knows the drill. And when the hell did it get so cold?

Eren groaned as Lathe shouted at him from downstairs. “I know!” He had shouted back, trying to grab a longer sleeved shirt and he got some clothes together for him to wear, and he groaned when he realized that there were still hickeys visible no matter what he put on. Fuck it. He ran down the stairs, well as fast as he could -which wasn’t really a run nor was it a walk, Blake following closely at his heels. He grabbed a granola bar, and got Blake ready for the car. “I do not have time to walk right now, so we’re going for a drive buddy.” It took only a few more minutes for Eren to rush into his first period class and the stares to begin. Goddammit, everyone can fucking see them… And they fucking notice them! So Eren sat through the whole day, whispers and stares around him until lunch when Sasha finally asked him why the hell he looked like he got strangled. Does it really look like I got strangled? Eren had rushed to the bathroom to see the bruises himself, and gasping as he saw what everyone else was finally seeing. Well… It does look like I got strangled… Thanks Levi… I’ve now become the oddity at school. He sat through the rest of his classes, most of his classmates acting like they were seeing something out of a science fiction novel. I fucking hate this… It’s like freshman year all over again!… I wanna go hide somewhere…

Lathe packed up from English class, saving the slideshow of impromptu notes for later and stowing his laptop in his bag, looking up as he noticed Armin approaching him, smilingbrightly. “Hey Armin! …what's up? You look worried about something.” …who do I need to beat up?

Armin looked around to make sure no one else was around to hear their conversation. “Um… Is Eren okay?... Grisha didn’t come back… did he?” I need to know... Eren looked like a nervous wreck this morning.

Lathe’s brow furrowed, setting down his bag and turning his full attention to him. “What makes you say that?” …if anything happened I don't know anything about it… he hasn't really left the house long enough recently for anything to have happened, and I know for certain we don't have a stowaway somewhere…
Armin put his backpack down, leaning against the large hardwood desk. “Well when I saw him in
the hallway this morning he was a nervous wreck and Blake’s had his ears pinned all day… He’s
not himself right now… And at lunch, his shirt showed his neck… Lathe, he looks like he got
strangled… I don’t want Eren to be hiding anything from us… So I was wondering if you knew.”
I’m really worried about him.

“…….” Lathe simply stared at Armin before facepalming, blushing and sighing exasperatedly. ...that
explains the ungodly amount of time he took upstairs this morning... I'm going to need to let him
borrow a scarf or ten for a while... “Armin, Levi came home yesterday. Just chew on that tidbit
for a moment.” He dropped his hand, staring at Armin until he saw red bloom on his cheeks,
nodding. “... Now you're getting it. Eren’s fine, probably self-conscious as all hell, but fine. You'd
understand.” Given Erwin also just came home. “ More so than that, probably. But it’s really nice
of you to tell me- you really are a good kid. Thanks for looking out for him.” It's good knowing
Eren's got a really good friend like you.

Armin blushed as he thought about everything. Okay… I see how that would line everything
together. “I get it now… And also… You might want to give him some aspirin. He’s been walking
funny all day.” Armin then hurried out of the room to go to where Erwin was waiting to pick him
up. I’m glad that it wasn’t Grisha, I’ll have to tell Erwin to text Levi to cool it with the hickeys .

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren came home, Blake still whining as they got out of he car. Today was horrible, no one wanted
to talk to me… Not even the teachers… Fuck… Eren got Blake’s vest off of him and let the dog run
off in the house, still whining loudly. He’s been whining at me all day… Dammit… I just wanna go
hide. Eren got up and moved to the beanbag bed in the piano room and buried himself under the
covers. I don’t want to be found.

Blake whined as he came upstairs to the recording room and pawed at Levi, who sat looking at the
new mural Eren had painted. Human… Look at me and respect me! My human needs you! He’s
freaking out still, a lot of freaking out! I can’t calm him down, he won’t let me! You need to help
me human! This is my human we’re talking about! Blake continued to paw at Levi, trying to get
his attention from the vast beauty Eren had painted.

Levi tore his eyes from Eren’s painting, looking down with a furrowed brow. ...what? Did
something happen? Levi stood, albeit a bit reluctantly and followed Blake down the stairs to see
the lump of blankets that was Eren hiding in his beanbag bed. Dammit. Levi carefully sat down
next to Eren, tugging at the blankets and pulling Eren in his bundle close to him, pecking his
cheek. “Hey Eren… what’s wrong? You're hiding…”
“No shit, Sherlock.” Eren glared at Levi for all of three seconds before getting out of his hold and burying himself yet again in the blankets. *No… You’re the reason I look like I was strangled! And I refuse to come out of my hiding!* Eren made no move as Blake even jumped up on the beanbag and worriedly tried to lick his face.

Levi shooed Blake off of Eren. “Blake, chill.” *Let me.* Levi maneuvered himself under the blankets, affectionately running his hands over him, trying to coax him to unfurl from his little ball, finding his neck and lightly pecking at his skin, his lips. He felt Eren minutely begin to relax, pulling him close and poking his head out of the bundle, finally able to see Eren’s neck and the ring of very visible bruises around his neck. *…oh.*

Eren moved away from Levi once again. “Leave me alone, asshole.” He buried himself back into his blankets, hiding even further. *Thank god I don’t have to go back to school until after thanksgiving.* He didn’t even move when Lathe came in through the front door. *I don’t want to come out of here, it’s too embarrassing.*

Lathe kicked off his shoes, seeing Levi look at him from the nest with Eren buried and turned away from him, shooting him a sympathetic look. *Rough day for him, huh. How do we fix that?* Lathe hung up his bag, looking over to Blake’s dog bed underneath the piano, Salem seeming to wake up at the sound of the door closing, looking to him and trying to stumble from the bed and across the room to him. *Perfect.* Lathe crouched down and gently scooped up the kitten, tiptoeing over to the nest and handing him to Levi, his expression serious. *Use him wisely.*

Levi just looked at him. *...I have a kitten now. ...wait, that’s a thing?* [Since when do you have a cat?] He quirked an eyebrow as Lathe simply pointed to Eren, mouthing the kitten’s name. *...Salem. O-Kay…* Levi set the kitten on his lap, the small fur ball immediately clambering up his arm as he gently nudged Eren, trying to get his head out from underneath the blankets. “Eren, Salem wants to say hi.” As if on cue, Salem tumbled from his sleeve, noticing Eren and padding over to his mop of hair, pawing at it before laying down on his head, purring. *...Hooman.*

Eren sighed quietly, reaching over to his head and gently scooping up Salem in his hands. He sat up, letting his neck show to the both of them. Eren continued to glare at Levi, giving Salem back to Levi. “I said to leave me alone, asshole, and you didn’t need to wake him up, let him go back to sleep.” Eren’s voice was hard as he curled up to himself. *I don’t want to talk to you. I sat through hell today because of you!*

Levi took Salem back, his eyes a bit wide. *...he’s pissed…* Levi studied the bruises around Eren’s neck while he could still see them. *...he looks like he’d been strangled… dammit, I thought I didn’t make them so damn visible! Crap…* Levi looked to Lathe, not knowing what to do. *...help?*
...that's why Armin was so worried. Lathe took Salem back as he began to squirm in Levi’s hands, letting him crawl up to perch on his shoulder sleepily and giving him a sympathetic look, not sure himself what to do. I don't know how to handle the pissed as all hell Eren... [...permission to go downstairs for a second?] ...eh, it's better than nothing.

... What the hell are you thinking about... [Granted...] Levi watched Lathe go off in utter confusion. What the hell is he doing?

Lathe left for the basement, coming back with a handful of chocolate bars, setting them next to the nest and shrugging, lifting Salem off his shoulder to set him down next to Blake, the kitten immediately scampering up to him and nuzzling against his legs.

...Good idea. Levi picked up one of the bars, laying down and curling up around Eren from behind, setting one of the bars on top of the covers near his hands. “Eren, there’s chocolate if you want it...” I don't know how to do the apology thing please stop being mad so I can hold onto you and just do the mushy crap I can't do while I'm hundreds of miles away...

Eren stilled for a moment, finally poking his head out from under the covers as he eyed the chocolate bar. Bastard... You play dirty... “Can you open it?” His voice was a little less hard as he was thinking of ways for Levi to make it up to him.

Anything. Levi unwrapped the chocolate bar, seeing Eren didn't look as if he were going to take his hands out from under the covers. So that's how we're going to play this game... Levi broke off a piece of chocolate, holding it up to Eren’s lips.

... You learn fast, good. Probably why the marines like you so much. Eren opened his mouth, taking the small piece from his fingers and eating it, though he kept his eyes elsewhere, not focusing on Levi at all, mostly watching as Blake stood there, putting up with Salem’s antics. Well, that's damn cute... Eren finished that small piece of chocolate relatively quickly before he opened his mouth, expecting another piece.

Now we're getting somewhere... Levi broke off another piece, holding it for Eren to eat, doing the same with nearly the rest of the chocolate bar, the last piece in his hand. ...hmm... should I? ...dammit, yes. Do the thing. Levi held the last piece in his teeth, leaning over Eren and looking at him, his eyes pleading and apologetic. Stop being mad... please?

Eren finally looked up to meet Levi’s gaze, unable to look away. He didn’t know what to do,
laying there frozen, watching Levi move around him, but what really got to him was Levi’s eyes. He’s never had that emotion in his eyes before… They look… They look almost blue… Not grey… Eren was timid as he reached up to bite at the chocolate piece from between Levi’s teeth, unsure of what else to do. I want my damn chocolate… But what do I do after I have my chocolate?

Levi amusedly noted Eren’s timidness, moving his head forward a bit so their lips met, opening his mouth and pushing the chocolate into Eren’s with his tongue, swiping across Eren’s before he withdrew, smirking. Success!

Eren watched him pull back, letting out a soft ‘hmph’ as he looked away from Levi, still slightly irritated with him, or at least it appeared that way until Eren opened his mouth again. I want you to keep feeding me.

Levi was worried for a split second until Eren opened his mouth again, reaching behind him for more chocolate and unwrapping it, doing the same thing with another bar of chocolate, feeding Eren the small squares and stealing kisses as he did.

Eren let Levi continue to steal kisses as he was fed the chocolate bars, soon opening back up a little bit and curling up to Levi as he was fed. He seemed a bit more mellowed out, and let Levi’s lips linger on his lips longer than necessary. Hmm…. As long as you don’t make me move… I think I can let him do this for awhile.

Levi lingered in their kisses the tiniest bit longer and longer until he had reached the last of the five bars Lathe had brought up, giving Eren the last small square and tentatively letting his tongue slip into his mouth as well, kissing him slowly and sweetly. I'm sorry, school must have been hell… I didn't mean it to be, I got carried away.

Eren let Levi kiss him, curling up into his warmth after he pulled away. “No more hickeys, asshole.” Eren grumbled at him, burying his head into Levi’s chest, still a little pissed at him, but getting over it pretty quickly. I still look like I was strangled though.

Levi shifted so he was under the blanket as well, pulling Eren close to him and sighing, a bit relieved. “Okay, no more. …at least on your neck.” Levi smirked as Eren glared up at him, chuckling and pecking his nose. “Oh hush. ...even if you didn't say anything. You were thinking too loud.

I swear to god if you mark me up again you will have hell to pay dammit! Eren grumbled about something in incoherent German as he curled up to Levi more. “What’s for dinner?” I know that tomorrow is turkey day… God I can only imagine what Dad’s gonna do for that.
Lathe was standing in front of the fridge, trying to count on his hands what he could use to cook dinner and what was for something tomorrow, deciding to give up and shutting the fridge, calling to the other room. “At this point, I don't know. ...well…” He checked the freezer, pulling out a package of frozen meat. “Grilled chicken sound good, you two?” *That’s easy enough, doesn't take much effort... and I won't have too much of a mess so I'll still have plenty of room to make pie and stuff tonight.*

Eren nodded against Levi's chest, moving to bury himself under the covers completely out of view, his arms wrapped around Levi’s waist as he closed his eyes for the moment, trying to relax and calm down. *I wanna sleep... But I can’t do that without taking the pills still...*

“Survey says yes!” Levi called back to Lathe, knowing he couldn't see Eren from his spot in the kitchen and pulling Eren on top of him, content to have his steady weight on his chest. *...tomorrow’s Thanksgiving… and Lathe enjoys cooking waaaay too much... I get the notion nobody is going to have to cook for a solid week.*

Lathe nodded, starting to thaw the meat in a basin of hot water and moving around the kitchen, starting to set up some of the things for making pie. It wasn't an hour before he had dinner on the table, chicken on top of a pile of lettuce. He looked to see if he could shout into the piano room, deciding against it as he saw Levi drifting. *...Of course. He smiled, padding over and nudging the nest with his foot. “Dinner, you two. Then you can sleep all you want.”*

Levi blinked awake at that, looking up confusedly before remembering where he was and nodding, turning back to Eren and coming face-to-face with Blake, surprised. *When did you get there?* Levi looked down to Eren, moving aside the blanket and seeing him peacefully asleep on his chest, his breathing soft and even. *Wait, isn't he supposed to take meds for that... “Um, Lathe… was Eren falling asleep without pills or something a bad thing?” I get the feeling it wasn't something he was supposed to do...*

Lathe furrowed his brow, studying Eren’s expression. “Well, at this moment he looks peaceful enough… wake him up. But for overnight, he definitely needs the pills to sleep.” *Wait... wouldn't you already know that? “Did Eren not take them last night? I'd think you'd know by now.” He looked to Levi, seeing scarlet start to bloom across his face, not looking at him. “...he didn't sleep, did he.” Silence. *Nope. “...honestly, I probably should have expected that. But yes, he needs pills to sleep. Now get him up so he can eat and take his pill so he can go collapse and get some rest.” Lathe just rolled his eyes, going back to the kitchen. *Probably should have expected that. He just came home after months, so.*

*...dammit Lathe...* Levi gently shook Eren by the shoulder, leaning his head down to murmur in his ear. “Come on Eren, wake up. Dinner.” He lightly kissed his ear as Eren stirred, smiling faintly as
Eren yawned. ...you're too damn adorable.

Eren yawned, stretching out with a squeak, which led to Blake coming up to him and licking his face feverishly. What the hell? I'm being licked... But I was just....... I was just....... I wasn't here... Eren swallowed hard gently pushing Blake away and moving to get up. What the hell.

Levi immediately noticed Eren seemed a little off-put, pulling him back down and letting him sit in his lap, winding his arms around his middle to keep him in his place and speaking quietly into his shoulder. “Eren, what's wrong? Tell me.”

Eren took a few seconds to try and come to himself after he thought about it. “I... I wasn’t here anymore....” Eren told him in a quiet voice. I wasn’t here anymore... I was back in the burning house again...

Nightmare... Levi gently nipped and pressed kisses to the back of his neck, trying to keep him calm. “...you're here right now Eren, you're okay. ...do you want to talk about it?” I don't know what to say...

...I... I was back in the burning building... “I... I...” Eren could barely get the words out of his mouth. I... I was gonna die...

Levi carefully turned Eren, kissing him softly. “You don't have to... it’s okay. Whatever it is... it's alright now. I promise.” Levi shifted his feet under him, standing and bringing Eren with him, setting him on his feet. “Come on, let's get some food in you. It'll do you good.”

Eren was really out of it as Levi dragged him to the kitchen and put him in front of his food; he couldn’t stop thinking about it. I don’t want to die.... I... I don’t want to...

Lathe set down mugs in for the both of them, seeing Eren’s scared eyes. “Eren, you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost.” Lathe rested a hand on Eren’s shoulder. Did you have a nightmare? ...was that it?

Eren swallowed hard, looking up to Lathe with scared eyes before he looked away nodding. Yeah... I'm okay... I'll be okay... Eren almost couldn’t contain himself as tears started to form around his eyes, reaching up to rub at them. No... I can't fucking cry at the dinner table...
Oh my… Levi moved around the table, swinging Spades’ chair around as Lathe nudged his own over, wrapping his arms around Eren and hugging him close, his thumb rubbing his side soothingly. Levi and Lathe mirrored the other’s worry, and Levi spoke quietly, his tone soft. “Eren… it’s okay if you need to cry… talk to us, please. It might make you feel better.”

Eren leaned into Levi’s touch as he took in a shaky breath. “I…. I was at the house… And everything was burning…. And no one was there to come…. To come get me…” Eren’s voice was barely more than a hoarse whisper, and his sobbing continued for a few more minutes.

…oh. Levi held Eren close to him, glancing over as Lathe pressed a red cloth into his hand, sending him a grateful look and turning his attention back to Eren, giving the kerchief to him and speaking quietly in his ear, trying to calm him. “Shhh… it’s okay, Eren, it’s over. We’re both right here… you’re fine, it’s okay…”

Eren leaned into Levi’s hands as he continued to cry, though his tears started to lessen as Levi soothed his nerves. I don’t want it to ever happen again.

Spades came in through the door, kicking off her shoes and her brow furrowing as she heard Eren’s sobbing coming from the kitchen. Oh no… What happened?

Lathe looked up as the door opened, looking to Spades with a bit of worry, though he gave her a weak smile, shrugging a bit and mouthing to her. ‘Later.’ Levi’s got this for right now… and I don’t want Eren to have to say it again if he doesn’t have to…

Levi glanced up, not catching that Lathe had ‘said’ anything, but seeing Spades carefully approach, worry etched in her features. He nodded in silent greeting before he looked back to Eren, who had buried his face in the cloth, though long since stopped shaking with sobs. “Eren, you okay? Can you eat?” I’d understand if you weren’t hungry, or didn’t want to eat anything…

Eren sniffled, nodding his head as he gave back the handkerchief. His eyes didn’t follow, he was always staring at his food as he started to warily pick at it. I don’t want it to happen again… Eren barely noticed that Spades had come home and that everyone was sitting down to eat.

Spades sat in her normal seat, feeling the uncomfortable silence that had formed in the kitchen. She glanced over to Eren with worry. He looks so out of it, usually he eats like the food is gonna get up and run away… But he… He’s picking at his food like he doesn’t want to eat it. It’s so weird.
Lathe had stowed the kerchief back in his pocket, keeping an eye on Eren as dinner went on, not knowing what, of anything, he should say. He’s barely eating... and he usually eats as if it’s going out of style. It was a while before Lathe stood with his clear plate, washing it and coming back to the table with the bottle of pills from the counter. He gently tapped Eren’s shoulder, speaking when Eren turned his head in his general direction. He’s so out of it... “You done eating, kid? You haven't touched it in a while.” He waited for Eren to nod before continuing. “Here, you could do with some sleep. It’s not hard to figure out you must be exhausted.” Lathe offered the bottle of sedatives to him. You really need the sleep, it looks like... Eren didn't move for a moment, and Lathe frowned a bit, opening it and taking a single pill from it, setting the closed bottle down and picking up Eren’s hand which lay on the table, setting it in his palm and crouching down to try and meet his eyes. “Eren, you need sleep. You gotta take this.” Don't make this harder on yourself... please.

Eren simply shook his head and closed his palm, and turned it upside down and left it on the table before he got up and disappeared into the house, Blake whining as he followed. I can’t.... I don’t want to sleep.

Lathe watched Eren leave with a defeated air, turning to Levi after Eren had gone. “...listen Levi, if Eren doesn't take that pill and falls asleep, he's gonna have another nightmare and make everything worse. And it’s not a matter of if he sleeps. He needs to. If he doesn't he’s going to be a literal zombie.” Lathe handed Levi the pill. “You've gotta convince him. If you can't, well.” He turned to Spades, shrugging. “You're the third line of attack. I just don't want this getting any worse.” Nope.

Levi nodded, taking the small pill and Eren’s mug of tea after him, downstairs into the basement, seeing Eren zoned out and painting flames on the last open wall space, not even acknowledging presence. Levi moved next to him, his voice soft, yet firm. “Eren, you need to take this. Please, you need sleep.” Nothing- Eren went on with his painting. “Come on Brat, please take it. We both know you're fucking exhausted so do yourself a favor- you need the rest, and its dreamless! You don't have to worry!” Still nothing. ...well fuck. Levi gave up after a few more minutes of asking with zero acknowledgement, coming back upstairs and handing both things to Spades. “Spades, see if you can talk some sense into him. He had an hour nap earlier, had a nightmare, and now refuses to sleep. He kinda didn't get any last night, as in literally, but that doesn't matter because we can't have his mood or mental health declining any more.” ...Help.

Spades sighed quietly, taking the pill and Eren’s mug. “Lathe... I got an idea, and I’m gonna need the both of you for this.” She looked down at the pill in her palm, rolling it around in thought. I think it'll work...

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at her, intrigued. “Alright... what’re you cooking up?” Now I'm suspicious.

“You can still sing that German lullaby that Eren sings a lot?” We need something that he’s
familiar with, and I think if I’m there I can act as his Mother for him.

“Well, yeah… are we playing mind tricks on him? Because I don't see where else this is going.”...hmm.

Levi looked to her curiously. “And how am I involved in this?” I have no clue where you're taking this...

“You’re gonna be the one who gets him to move around, I’ll help clean him up but your gonna hold him in bed until I can get him to take the pill… Lathe you’ll need to start singing when we take away the paint brush, got it?” She looked between the two of them hoping they at least understood a bit of it. I see this working… I hate that we have to play mind tricks on him… But he needs sleep.

Lathe just looked at her, before picking up his mug and drinking the rest of it, setting it back down and clearing his throat. “Singing non stop until this works. I'm in.” He needs sleep… I feel kinda bad, but he needs sleep.

Levi thought a moment, finally nodding. “Alright, I'll help. Anything so that he doesn't look like the dead tomorrow.” I guess we have to.

Spades nodded bringing the two of them down to the basement. She looked to the bed and pulled back the covers a bit before going to Eren. “Eren, hon, it’s Mommy, we got to get you ready for bed, okay?” Her voice was soft as she gently took the paintbrush from his hands. Alright, time for the rest of you. She pointedly looked to Lathe to start singing and motioned Levi to come help her move him away from the paints.

Lathe stepped quietly behind Eren, quietly and lowly beginning to sing, noticing him nearly immediately start to relax. He took the paintbrush from Spades, knowing to reach over and drop it into the water-filled cup in the sink as they walked by it.

Levi took gentle home of Eren’s other side, helping steer him to the bed, noting his dreamy state. At least he gave up the paintbrush...

Spades helped Levi move Eren to the bed, sitting him down on the edge. Come on… You gotta help me with this. She took the pill put it against Eren’s lips, gently speaking to him. “Down the hatch, come on Eren, you can do it, Mommy’s got you…”
Eren didn't really know what was going on, really letting what was going on around him happen. *I want Mommy back...* Eren opened his lips, taking the pill offered to him and feeling a pair of strong familiar arms wrap around him. *Mommy's home... And she's singing again...* Eren was in his own world when his eyes finally shut and his body slumped against Levi’s as exhaustion finally took hold of him.

Levi pulled Eren along with him, letting him rest on top of him as he laid down on the bed. He carded a hand through his brunette locks, murmuring quietly after a moment to Spades and Lathe. “I can't help but feel kinda bad... but I don't know if he'll remember anything in the morning...” *I don't like tricking you like that... but it was necessary.*

Lathe ceased singing as Eren went limp in Levi’s arms, shrugging and sitting on the edge of the bed next to them. “I know... but it’s for the best. He probably won't remember...” He patted Levi’s shoulder. “But he’s getting rest, which is good. ...don't worry yourself about it. He’ll be much better after he gets his sleep.” *He really needs it.*

Spades nodded, carding her own hand through Eren’s chocolate locks as he slept. “Why don’t you two get some sleep.... You’re probably tired too, and you wake up early to go for a run don’t you?” She asked softly, ruffling Eren’s hair before bringing her hand away from his head. *I only need to go to work if I get called in... Which means I don’t have to do anything unless some idiot makes a fool of himself.*

Levi nodded, pulling the blanket still on the bed over them, settling himself comfortably as Lathe and Spades stood to leave them be, letting his eyes slide shut. *Yeah, I need to wake up at three for that.... Eh.* It took nearly an hour for Levi to drift to sleep, though Eren’s weight was reassuring, listening to his even breaths.

Lathe padded silently back up the stairs with Spades, quietly shutting the door behind them and walking back to the kitchen with her, starting dishes. He dried his hands after he handed the last plate to Spades to dry, wrapping his arms around her middle from behind and resting his head on her shoulder, pressing tiny kisses to the back of her shoulder blade. “Thanks for that, Spades.... I don't know how we're going to get him to take his pill voluntarily if he becomes afraid of sleep...” *We can't have that happen...*

Spades nodded, her hands placed on top of his on her stomach. *I know.* “That would be.... That would be worst case scenario right there.... But I'm hoping I can convince him tomorrow to take it, or Levi might be able to... But I'm not letting him take any naps tomorrow... That is not going to happen, I'll keep him occupied with Levi while you cook dinner, unless...” She trailed off as she turned around in his arms, wrapping her own around his shoulders and leaning up to kiss his cheek, “...Unless you want help in the kitchen....” *Not sure if I'd really be a help though....*
Lathe pulled Spades flush against him, leaning down to kiss her properly, mumbling against her lips. “I can manage dinner easily, you don't have to.” *Eren would need a distraction other than just Levi...*

Spades gave a small pout, along with a whimper as Lathe spoke. “Awwwww…. you don’t want me in the kitchen?” She asked quietly, her lips pursed up and her brow furrowed as she playfully glared at him. *Doesn’t sound like you at all.*

Lathe smirked a bit, speaking quietly with a mischievous glint in his eyes. “I never said that... who knows.” Lathe slipped his hands into her back pockets, resting their foreheads together and murmuring lowly. “…I might need a distraction.” Lathe kissed Spades deeply, before moving to kiss across her jaw, nibbling at her neck. ...*Mine... oh my god. She’s mine.* The next three hours of the two of them making pies while constantly flirting passed quickly, the can of whipped cream following them upstairs. The next thing Lathe knew he was blinking awake, seeing Spades naked and in his arms, sleeping peacefully, a few dark marks on her collarbone and shoulder. Lathe smiled, laying there contentedly for a few minutes. ...*I’m so glad you’re mine... and you’ve never tasted so sweet... ...I’ve got a dinner to make.* Lathe pressed a loving kiss to Spades’ cheek, slipping out of bed and tucking the blankets back around her. He went to shower and dressed leisurely before heading downstairs, wearing jeans and a tee shirt and having slipped on converse for all the running around he was going to be doing that day cooking. He saw Levi in the kitchen as he went to get his apron, smiling to him and retrieving a bagel for the toaster and a mug for coffee. “Mornin’ Levi. You sleep okay?”

Levi nodded, sipping his tea and poring over the paper. “Yeah, wasn't too hard to fall asleep so early, surprisingly. Eren’s still out.” He looking over his shoulder, looking through the glass double doors to the concrete patch outside the door. “So where’s the fryer for the turkeys? I meant to ask yesterday.” *It’ll take a while to cook them.*

Lathe looked over his shoulder, quirking an eyebrow. “...what fryer?” ...*that's not a thing, at least for me.* “We’re using the oven.” *That’s how you cook turkeys.*

Levi set down the paper, leaning back in the chair and sipping his tea. “It’s how I cook turkeys; I thought that was what we were doing to do. I even asked about it in my text to Eren- did you miss that part?” *This changes things.*

Lathe set down his mug. “... *what* text?” *I never got anything...* ...

... *this is bad.* “You didn't get the text I sent? The one with the stuff about the guest list and everything?” A blank stare. ... *crap.* Levi pulled out his phone and pulled up the text, tossing it to
Lathe. “There are people coming over for dinner… I almost had you go out to get three turkeys and not just the two.” There’s plenty of people on there...

Armin, Mr. Arlert, Erwin, ...Jean?, Marco, Connie, and Sasha. ...add the four of us... and because Casper and Scotty now have to come so it’s not just a table of teenagers minus three... I'm cooking for thirteen people. And at least two of them I hear are black holes when it comes to food. Lathe looked up from the message to Levi, trying to process everything.

Levi was quiet for a minute, before he spoke. “Want me to go get that third turkey?”

Lathe was silent before he moved to the fridge, grabbing a pen and writing a list down the paper magnetically clipped to the fridge, tearing it off after twelve or so items and handing it to Levi with his credit card. “Run.” Shit just got real. ... and I'm going to need help. Lathe finished his breakfast quickly, soon beginning to chop vegetables to be cooked later that day, also starting to boil eggs and prepare smaller snacks to munch on throughout the day, setting out shrimp to thaw as well. He was chopping apples to make applesauce when he heard someone coming down the stairs, turning to see Spades. “Good Morning Hon- sleep okay?” Lathe dried off his hands and went to give her a kiss good morning. It was nice to wake up with you still there for a change...

“Apparently it’s not just the four of us for Thanksgiving- there’s thirteen people including us.”

"eh, if Levi can manage to find everything on that list, we’ll be fine. I bought too much to begin with anyway.

Spades eyes widened. “I’m sorry did you just say 13?” Did I just hear you say 13 people including us? Who the hell is coming over?!

“Yep. Apparently Levi texted this stuff to Eren and he never passed on the message. Armin, his Grandfather Mr. Arlert, Erwin, Jean which I don't understand because Eren and him I'm pretty sure hate each other but whatever, Sasha, Connie, Marco who's a total sweetheart, and we need to call Casper and Scotty and invite them over so there’s more than just three adults for eight teenagers.” That's an unfair ratio. “Levi’s out being a runner for me, getting another turkey and some extra stuff now that I know this. I honestly had nearly enough anyway since I was planning on not cooking for a week, but that's not going to happen now.” He pecked her cheek, trying to get her to stop worrying. “But I've got this. Really.” It's a good thing we couldn't agree on what kinds of pie to make so I just made four... and that I bought backup whipped cream... “So could you call Casper and Scotty and tell them they have no choice and they're coming over for dinner?” It's free food. They'll come.

“Yeah, I’ll call them, you should probably go wake up Eren before he runs out of the sleeping pill...” She told him and kissed his cheek before going off to retrieve her phone. I can manage a few calls
Lathe smiled, padding over to the basement stairs and descending quietly, flicking on one of the dimmer lights so he could see and going next to the lump under the blankets that was Eren, gently shaking his shoulder. “Wake up kid, it’s nine. You've slept more than ten hours- it's time to get up.”

Eren woke up with a jolt and looked at Lathe with fearful eyes before he calmed down. It’s just Dad… It’s just Dad… No one’s hurting me… Eren nodded after a bit, sitting up and rubbing at his eyes, wiping away some tears before they formed. No… No one’s here to hurt me...

Lathe didn’t miss the obvious look of fear Eren gave him at first, sitting down next to him and pulling him into a hug, pecking his temple. “It’s okay, Eren. Just me. We all know I'm too wrapped around your finger to be scary.” He patted his shoulder, smiling. “I had Levi run some errands for me, because apparently, we’re having thirteen people over and I only planned for four with enough leftovers to last a week. Hear anything about that?” Lathe chuckled. You're already forgiven. The past couple weeks for you have been whack.

Eren’s eyes instantly widened at the statement. Oh shit I forgot… Dammit, he’s probably mad… I completely forgot about it. Eren raised his hand palm up, asking for forgiveness as he hung his head. I completely forgot about it… And Levi even texted me to remember to ask you… Fuck...

Lathe chuckled, immediately running his hand down Eren’s before pulling him into another hug. “Eren, come on, it’s cool. The more the merrier, I'd say. It's a good thing I love cooking for you people.” He smiled to him warmly. “After you get dressed and stuff, do you maybe want to help? It doesn't have to be right away- there’s going to be plenty to do until everyone gets here. ...and honestly… I don't even know when they're going to arrive… that's a problem. Here,” Lathe pecked Eren’s forehead. “-how about you send a mass text to your friends, tell them to be here between five and five thirty, okay? I'll have Spades do the same with Scotty and Casper.” If we can control at least that, we’ll be golden.

Eren nodded, looking down a bit. “I um… I told them 6 already… And um… W-Why are … Are we inviting Scotty?” That man is a maniac … And all he fucking wants is my fucking blood! Eren felt his stomach tighten at just the thought of being prodded with another needle. I don't want it to happen again… Why does he have to come?

“Eren, first off, six is perfectly fine… and I'm telling you right now that Scotty knows that he can't so much as look at you wrong without me personally castrating him. And Casper will have no trouble keeping him in check. But he's been one of my best friends for years and years- and otherwise, it'd be the same as other years. He’d have no one really around to celebrate with. I’m giving him a chance. But he won't do anything, especially with the three of us keeping an eye on him.” We'll stop anything even vaguely suspicious dead in its tracks.
Eren seemed to heave a sigh of relief as Lathe spoke. *Okay… I think I can deal with that.* He nodded as he moved to get up and stretch. He sat on the side of his bed, yawning as Blake ran downstairs and almost tackled him and licked his face. “B-Blake!” Eren stuttered as he was tackled onto the bed. *Excited to see me or something?*

Lathe laughed as Blake leapt up onto Eren, grinning and heading for the stairs. *He’ll be fine.* He was about to ascend when he heard a tiny sound, looking up to see Salem at the top step, looking down the steps, too scared to try and climb down. *Aww, he’s trying to follow Blake. …that’s too adorable. …WAIT THAT REMINDS ME.* Lathe went up the steps to pick him up before he fell, coming immediately back down and next to the sewing machine, picking up a small piece of cloth. *I finally cleaned out and fixed the damn thing last week… and I had to make something to test it out…* He shook out the tiny piece of white fabric, setting it on Salem’s head. …*a tiny chef hat. Because why not.* “…Eren, you need to Snapchat this. Or Instagram it. Do something because I’m dying of a cuteness overdose.” Lathe beamed as Salem looked to him with wide eyes, keeping his head still enough for the tiny hat to stay on. *This is literally too perfect.*

Eren looked up from where Blake had pinned him to the bed and saw Salem with his white chef’s hat. *Oh my god, he has a hat on. That’s fucking adorable.* He gently pushed Blake off of him and got up to get his phone, his shirt hung loosely around him showing off a majority of the bruises he had acquired from Levi two nights ago. *I’m still very sore… Fuck.*

...*I can really understand why school yesterday was hell.* Lathe held Salem up for the picture, the kitten peering at the camera curiously, reaching a paw out for it and mewing as it was too far away. He smiled, ruffling Eren’s hair after he took the picture, setting Salem on his shoulder. “You’d better send that to me- me and my assistant are going to be upstairs cooking. Levi’ll be home soon with emergency groceries.” With that, Lathe went back upstairs, texting Casper and Scotty what time to show up, and telling Casper he had to keep Scotty reigned while using a generous amount of winking emojis. *Tonight is going to be interesting.*

**CP: Did you say free food? /AND/ Scotty? I’m in! Need me to bring anything?**

**LQ: Called it. Just bring yourself- and btw, help keep Scotty from going into creepy doctor mode, okay? I’ll let you sit next to him~ ;)**

**CP: You are one sly devil. XD**

**SO: Did you just invite me to thanksgiving at your house? As in free food?**

**LQ: That’s what I said! Free food…. as long as you don’t do the doctor thing with Eren**

**LQ: Like, seriously**

**LQ: Otherwise I won’t let you take any leftovers home**
SO: … I won’t bring the case files with me… And I’ll try not to ask questions. Who else is coming?

LQ: The only person besides the fam you’d know is Casper

LQ: Don’t worry, he’s next to you at the table so nobody goes insane from the overwhelming population of teenagers ;) Eren and Levi’s squad is all coming… plus Mr. Arlert, one of their grandfathers

LQ: This is all a thing now

SO: Isn’t Levi like… 20 something now? I can’t remember… I know he was old before… But how old is he again? Does he still count as a Teen? I think he’s more mature than that.

LQ: …stop making me feel old, dammit

LQ: and he’ll turn 20 this Christmas

LQ: but to be legit he's still got a shred of juvenile delinquent in him even if he is in training to be a marine

LQ: So he counts. As does everyone else because they’re even more delinquent-esque than he is

SO: Did you just make up a new word?

LQ: Except maybe Armin and Marco they’re both awesome and have manners but everyone else sorry but nah

LQ: And yes, I did

LQ: by the way LOOK AT MY CAT

*sends picture of Salem wearing a hat*

SO: you put a hat on him… I’m debating if I should bring Felix over…

LQ: …who is this animal of which you speak

LQ: or did you get a boyfriend and not tell me in which case how /dare/ you

SO: I got put in charge of the Therapy dog at the hospital! His owner is out of town!

SO: and DAMN you for even suggesting that I’m gay! Fuck you man!

LQ: Hey man I call it like I see it

LQ: and bring him over, why not! As long as he doesn't feel the need to maul Salem we're good

SO: okay I'll bring him over, he’s a good dog, so I don’t see him bringing much of a disturbance except maybe fight with Blake over who’s gonna calm Eren down if he freaks out..
SO: and I’m not gay dammit!

LQ: you just keep telling yourself that

LQ: and that sounds like a plan! Remember- six o’clock!

SO: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I’ll be there don’t worry! Bye Asshole!

Lathe set down his phone as the doorbell rang, looking to the clock. *It's barely noon- what? Don’t tell me someone’s here already…* Lathe walked quickly to the door, opening it to Armin and Erwin, stunned to see Erwin had a good few inches on him. *…dammit. Either you’re growing way too fast or I’m getting short. But we can't entertain at this moment, I'm busy and so is Levi and Eren is doing something I don't know what…* “Hey you two! Uhm, you're really early. Levi is out in the back trying to start the fryer, and Eren’s… I don’t know…” He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. *I don't want to turn you two away, but I kinda have to, I think…*

Erwin just let out a deep chuckle, holding a few grocery bags out for Lathe. “We know, I’m gonna go help him in the back with the fryer, and Armin wants to help in the kitchen.” *It'll work out, I'm sure Eren’s probably taking a shower or something…*

Lathe didn't know what to say, hesitating in taking the bags from him. “I-I don't… y-you really don't have to…” Lathe took them with a grateful look after a moment, letting out a small sigh. “Thanks. We could all definitely use the help. Keep your shoes on, the both of you.” He stepped back to let them in, kicking the door shut and leading them to the kitchen. “So welcome to the well-coordinated disaster zone. Levi’s area of chaos is right over there in case things go wrong.” He set the bags on the kitchen table which was surprisingly clear, making sure Erwin fully shut the glass door behind him before turning to Armin. “Alright, kid. How well can you cook?” *There’s a lot going on at once, so…*

Armin followed Lathe into the kitchen, helping him with the bags. “I’m a good cook, whatever you need me to do, I don’t mind if I’m just chopping up vegetables, I can do it…” Armin trailed off as he helped to unpack all the bags with Lathe.

Spades came into the kitchen in her uniform with a large sigh. “Alright, I gotta go, some idiot started his garage on fire…. I’ll hopefully be back for dinner, and if not, I’ll be a few minutes late as I put Dave in charge.” She went over to hug Lathe and kiss the back of his neck. “So I guess I’ll see you later? And Eren’s just getting out of the shower now, and I gave him a scarf…” She looked over to find Armin helping in the kitchen. “Hello Armin, how are you? Thanks for helping Lathe out.”

Armin smiled softly, a timid blush across his face. “It’s really no problem Mrs. Quo..” *Is that what I’m supposed to call you? I’m not necessarily sure… I know Eren just calls you Mom… but I don’t*
know what the hell I’m supposed to call you…

...That does have a nice ring to it. Shaking her head, she chuckled as Armin seemed to internally freak out. “It’s okay, you really don’t need the formalities, just Spades is fine Armin.”

“O-Okay.”

Eren came down the stairs, a scarf wrapped around his neck, and long sleeves and sweatpants on. Blake following at his heels until he spotted Armin and went to go whine and get his attention. “Alright, enough of that Blake… let Armin help… Thanks for coming Armie.” Eren snickered as he saw Armin flush even more.

“Eren! You know you’re not supposed to call me that!” Armin stood flustered as he was given veggies to chop, and turning to cut them up.

That sounds really nice… but you’re still always going to be Spades to me. Lathe pecked her cheek as she left, chuckling as Eren spoke and made Armin flush, addressing Eren with a mischievous scolding tone. “Come on Eren, have mercy on Armie. He’s being helpful.” Lathe grinned as Armin sputtered a bit. ...I approve of this.

Armin looked at Lathe with wide eyes. “How can you take his side! That’s the nickname Erwin gave me and only Erwin is…. Supposed to…” Armin trailed off as his face flushed completely, not noticing Eren take a picture of him.

“Alright, no more, got it… Also what am I being arranged to do?” Eren asked stepping up to the counter.

Lathe set a bin of apples and a peeler in front of Eren, going over to get him his apron and tying it behind his back. “You're peeling apples for Armin- oh, I forgot-” Lathe went back to the pegs, rifling through the small stack of aprons.

Yeah?” Lathe heard Eren and Armin respond in unison, only to be followed by a quiet “Shit…” Lathe had since draped a light blue apron over his arm, looking back in worry as Eren inspected his hand, a drop of blood running down his finger. ...of fucking course. “Eren, you missed the apple entirely. On your FIRST TRY.” Lathe went to run his finger under the tap, patting it dry with a napkin and fetching a bandage so he could keep cooking. “Listen kid, you don't have to look up to respond to something someone says. Careful with the peeler, Kay? Now try that again.” Lathe
nudged him back to the counter, smiling and turning to Armin. “Alright Armie- excuse me, we don't want Erwin to be mad. Armin.” He snickered as Armin glared at him with a furious blush, holding out the apron. “You're going to need this.” It's going to get real pretty soon- eventually, I need to make bread. Or should I say... knead to make bread. ...Lol. Lathe set first to peeling the sack of potatoes on the counter, suddenly stopping and setting it down loudly on the cutting board. “Oh my God.” He turned to Armin and Eren, having caught their attention. “Is anyone vegetarian or vegan?” That would complicate things.

Armin furrowed his brow a bit. “Yeah, Marco is. But that’s it.” That can be easily worked around, though.

“Which is it though? Vegetarian or vegan? I actually understand there's a big difference.” Yeah-vegan is the problem one. But vegetarian isn't too big a struggle.

“Vegetarian.” Thank god you understand this stuff. Some people just give up and just practically give him a head of lettuce. Not too tasty.

Lathe placed a hand over his heart and breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank god, I panicked there for a second. He’ll have plenty to munch on that isn't turkey or that doesn't necessarily involve gravy. And there's plenty of salad stuff in the fridge.” That works.

“He likes collard greens.” Levi’s voice sounded as he came in through the back door. I made sure to get some. “I got the stuff to make it... Also, do you have a thermometer?” I kinda need one of those... “Actually, I need two...”

Lathe just looked at him with a done expression, speaking plainly. “Two things. A, if you need two thermometers, and I need the one, someone should have bought some because I only have two. And B, what the hell are collard greens?” I don't understand.

... Did you just ask me what collard greens are? Levi just glared. “Alright, I’ll send Eyebrows out to get another one, and call Spades if you can’t figure it out.” God you would imagine that the cook would know.

“Ex- cuse me for not being a rabbit.” Lathe’s words died on his tongue as he looked out the door to Erwin monitoring the fryer. “...and did you just call Erwin ‘Eyebrows?’” ...oh my god. Lathe put a hand over his mouth, trying hard not to laugh loudly at that. That's too perfect!
Levi just shook his head. “Yeah, I did, they take up half of his face… So why can’t I?” Levi took
the thermometer that Lathe gave him and went back outside with it. It was only a few minutes later
that Erwin took his car to get another thermometer.

Eren looked over to Lathe. “You better call Mom.” His voice was soft as he continued to peel the
apples with ease. *Mom knows how to make them.*

“Probably should. I have no idea what I'm doing with the rabbit food.” Lathe finished peeling the
potato he had started before wiping off his hands and going to the landline on the wall, dialing
Spades’ number and leaning against the wall, waiting for her to answer. “Hey Hon! I'm sorry if
you're in the middle of things, but I just found out one of Eren and Levi’s friends is a vegetarian.
Can you tell me real quick how to make collard greens taste not horrible?” *That would be great.*

Spades closed the car door as she took in Lathe’s sentence. “Did you just ask how to make collard
greens? And you live in **Kansas** …” *I find that both amusing and concerning… Doesn’t everyone
who lives in **Kansas** know how to make **Collard greens**??*

Lathe’s cheeks tinted a bit pink in embarrassment, responding. “Sorry I'm not a rabbit, Hon. Just
please help… I literally don't know what I'm doing.” *Halp.*

“Alright, easy Tiger, I’ll help, go to the fridge I gotta make sure we got a few things.” She started
the car, putting her phone on speaker as she set it down. *Even i’m not allowed to talk and drive…*

Lathe blushed furiously, making a small noise of disbelief before just shaking his head in
resignation, going over to the fridge and opening it, staring at the assortment of groceries and the
pies taking up much of the top shelf. “A-Alright, I'm staring at the open fridge. Now what?”

“Okay you’ll need, olive oil, bacon, an onion, salt, pepper, chicken broth, and fresh collard
greens… Do we have that?”

“...you do understand that bacon isn't vegetarian, right? And neither is chicken broth.” ...I hope
those two things aren't important because otherwise I'll just have to sift through online forums on
feeding vegetarians. Or just give him plenty of salad.

“Well… You’re going to put the bacon in the skillet and use the grease it makes to sautée the
onions… Then put all the collard greens in a big pot and let it simmer in chicken broth… So, I
don’t see how a vegetarian would eat this in the first place…”
Lathe hesitated a moment before holding the phone to his chest, turning to Armin and Eren. “Are you guys sure this guy’s vegetarian? Because collard greens isn't exactly vegetarian.”

Armin quirked an eyebrow, setting down the apple wedge and knife he was holding to dry off his hands and use his phone. “I'm positive… did you say it had bacon and chicken broth in it?” That's weird. He probably has a special recipe for it somewhere. “Here, let me text Marco and ask him how he makes collard greens, spare everyone a headache.” He hadn't sent the text a minute before his phone pinged, an image of a recipe coming up. Armin handed Lathe his phone. “Here-vegetarian collard greens.” That ought to clear things up.

...I think we have all this. Lathe read over the recipe, holding the house phone back up to his ear as he studied it. “Marco sent us the right recipe Hon- thanks though. Oh, when do you think you'll be home?” There aren't many days when you have the option to be home...

Spades sighed quietly. “I'm not sure Lathe, I have a few frozen turkey bombs to attend to.” They always put the frozen ones into the fryers.

Lathe’s expression fell a bit, though he tried to let it go. “I'm sorry, I know you've got a job to do…” But that doesn't mean I don't sometimes wish you weren't gone all day, every day... “Just try to be home for dinner, please. And smack those people upside the head for me for not knowing the basics of turkey cooking.” ...and does everyone cook their turkeys in fryers now? What the hell! ...I'm feeling old again. Crap.

“I’ll try, I make no promises, I'm sorry, El Tigre…” She smirked, almost able to hear his face flush. You gotta be completely flushed...

Eren looked to Lathe’s face and instantly took a picture of his father with the resemblance of a tomato. That's already going to the group chat... And.... Sent.

“W-wha...” Lathe didn't have time to respond before he caught sight of Eren snapping his picture, pointing to him immediately. “You delete that picture right now.” I know I'm probably red as hell right now but No . I'm so done. He tried to snatch Eren’s phone, only to miss as he moved it out of reach.

“Don’t worry Dad! It’s deleted…” and by that I meant sent...
Spades looked at her phone as it buzzed with the picture that Eren had sent to the group chat. *That's adorable… “Alright, I gotta go now, I love you Tiger.”*

“L-Love you too, S-Spades.” *…Dammit.* Lathe hung up, immediately turning his full attention back to Eren. “Show me. Prove it.” He looked as Eren showed him the end of his camera roll, seeing it was nowhere to be found. *Good.* His relief was short-lived as he heard his phone buzz, looking at it and reading the addition to the group chat.

**SO:** So… What did bae say /this/ time?

Lathe saw the image above it, looking up to Eren and glaring. “You *didn't.*” … *he did.* Lathe immediately moved to grab Eren’s phone back, succeeding and fleeing the scene, trying to get rid of the picture from the group chat as Eren followed, having to resort on holding it way above his head while trying to delete it while Eren struggled to reach high enough to take it back. *Nope nope nope not cool.* He had just gotten rid of it when another number pinged the chat, one he hadn't seen in awhile.

**PB:** thank god I saved that XD

**EY:** NO DAMJFHRFRENEWLW

**EY:** Dad stole my phone YAY

**LQ:** Eren, I'm texting you whilst standing two feet away from you to let you know you're awful sometimes.

**EY:** I am? I wasn't aware that’s how you viewed me… And hi Phoebe!

**PB:** sup man

**PB:** and come on lathe that picture is too good not to share

**PB:** not sharing that epic blackmail material totally normal image with the world is like

**PB:** probably a crime somewhere

**PB:** idk I’d ask Spades but she's probably saving someone from their own dinner right around now

**PB:** also easy on the guy he’s just exercising his freedom of speech

**PB:** and nothing about your right to privacy or whatever

**PB:** this is important stuff

**LQ:** Traitor. …also that's exactly what she's doing.
LQ: And I'm only /kinda/ sorry.

EY: Mom had to save people from exploding chickens!

PB: ...that's the single best sentence I've ever read

LQ: ...turkeys, Hon. They're exploding turkeys.

PB: people really can be dumb when it comes to food

PB: as in making it explode

PB: that just lets you know who's... y'know. not smart

EY: wait.... They're not chickens? What the hell's a turkey?

DR: Do you seriously not know what a turkey is.

DR: Lathe, when were you gonna teach him the /important/ stuff?

LQ: Well sor-ry, /Damien,/ if that is your real name,

LQ: I thought Thanksgiving went without much explanation

LQ: It literally goes make food

LQ: Eat food with other people

LQ: Not cook for a week

PB: pretty self explanatory

PB: and I mean you don't /have/ to have turkey

PB: we had lamb once and I didn't sure as hell didn't complain

DR: ...I probably would've.

DR: For a good five minutes and then gotten over it because... well, food.

EY: SO WHAT THE FUCK IS A TURKEY??!

DR: They're these big birds with dark brown feathers that only look big because they have an ungodly amount of feathers

DR: Seriously the feathers sometimes stop shotgun shot

DR: It's legit

DR: But they're... they're /turkeys,/ man.

DR: Here.

*sends image of a turkey*
PB: they also have this annoying habit of wandering into the middle of intersections and not leaving

PB: I was late to work twice because of them

LQ: We literally had turkey last year, Eren. Do you /not/ remember this? (!)

EY:.... That wasn't a chicken?

LQ: ...oh my god

PB: LOL

DR: LOL

PB: IM DYING

PB: this is getting snap chatted right now

DR: Same

EY: ..... So it wasn’t a chicken?

LQ: .....................

LQ: ......no, Eren.

LQ: that was not a chicken.

PB: this is my lock screen now

EY: then what was it?

LQ: IT.

PB: WAS.

DR: A.

LQ: TURKEY!!!!1!!111111111

EY:............... Oh

LQ: yeeerreeeeeeeeaaaaaah.

SO: that whole conversation has made it to iFunny... And is currently trending... Congrats

PB: wait... don't you have something to be not burning?

LQ: CRAP

DR: Twenty bucks says it's a plot to get Spades back home

PB: I'm not betting against that
PB: it sounds too much like something he would do

LQ: SHUT UP I NEED TO MAKE BREAD

EY: If you burn it, maybe Mom will come home.

LQ: ……that is /really/ tempting, but then I'd be in trouble…

LQ: no she’d have to file paperwork of some sort I think

LQ: I need to shut up and cook now because APPARENTLY were having over NINE OTHER PEOPLE and I found out this MORNING. ...EREN.

EY: I regret nothing… Blame Scotty for distracting me.

CP: What’s this about Scotty?

SO: What! What did I do!?

PB: that timing tho

PB: OTP

LQ: OTP

DR: OTP

CP: wtf?

SO: HOW MANY TIMES DO I NEED TO TELL YOU HEATHENS!

SO: I’M /NOT/ GAY!!!

PB: suuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuure you’re not

DR: We sooooooooooooooooooooooooooo believe you

LQ: there's nooooooooooooooooooo way you could be, y'know…

LQ: in denial

PB: disillusioned

DR: Wrong

CP: delusional

LQ: ……tooooooooooooooooooooooooooooootally.

SO: God dammit, fuck you all!

CP: Gladly ;)

SO: I’m bringing Felix by the way!
CP: .... Who’s Felix?
LQ: he’s nobody really, just some guy who’s chillin’ at Scotty’s for the long weekend
LQ: great guy, I've heard
SO: Fuck you Lathe!
LQ: Sorry bro someone already called you

Text message from CP
CP: Are you serious? He has a boyfriend already. _-_
LQ: only sorta
LQ: he’s a boy
LQ: and his friend apparently
LQ: but the thing is he doesn’t talk much
LQ: doesn’t really say anything other than woof
LQ: but y’know
CP: .... Do I have to come tonight…. I don’t think I can anymore
LQ: dude Scotty is bringing a therapy dog from the hospital he’s been put in charge of because the trainer is sick or something
LQ: you have no competition
LQ: please please please please PLEASE come… there's food and trust me half the people at the table are trying to get this ship to sail as of right now

CP: Well, we all know how well that’s gone so far… Don’t push it Lathe, okay? I don’t want him to hate me more than he already hates gay people…. And don’t mention anything… I still don’t think I could handle him looking at me differently.
LQ: I'll have place cards out on the table, you two will be next to each other. I won't push it more than that… okay?
CP: Thanks, I still… I’m too scared to tell him dammit...
LQ: This'll all work out in due time, don't worry.
LQ: If you think you should, do it.
LQ: But I’m not pushing it tonight
LQ: Promise.
The kitchen was a mess of food, noise and nerves until five thirty approached and the doorbell first rang, Scotty having arrived early with Felix in tow, Blake assessing him from afar in the kitchen, Salem on his head and still wearing his hat as he gazed at the new animal. New doge? Why new doge? I like this doge… I don't wanna share… Salem memes at the dog, trying to assume a strong stance, only to look cutely dramatic. New doge. Is doge threat to my human? I don't think so- bigger human trusts doge, and the other other bigger human too… Blake had warily approached Felix, left to stare at him as the two of them silently debated who the better doge was while people began to arrive, Levi and Erwin having taken over in the kitchen with last-minute cooking. Lathe had to tell them to keep the volume of their shit jokes to a minimum on his many trips between the kitchen and the long table, having been brought up and set up, covered with a tablecloth and neatly set, small place cards on thick card paper having been made quickly in Lathe’s calligraphic hand. The table was also heavy with many pots and bowls and trays, all sorts of snacks and sides and of course, the large turkey platters laid out. Lathe had set down the last few things, the two baskets of fresh dinner rolls and the mashed potatoes and gravy, double checking everything was out before calling everyone to the table. He cast a sad look to the spot next to his seat at the end of the table, empty, when the doorbell rang and he beamed, going to sweep Spades inside. “Welcome home, Hon. We just sat down.” I missed you.

Spades smiled softly as she looked to everyone as they were herded to the long table. “It smells wonderful in here.” She leaned forwards and kissed his cheek as she went to go upstairs to go and change out of her uniform quickly. I’ll be down soon.

Eren came over to Lathe, a curious look on his face. “Um… Do you want anything to drink? Since I’m getting drinks?” He asked quietly. I don’t want to seem rude and forget you or Mom.

Lathe smirked, nodding. “Let’s see if you remember how to make coffee- I know there’s already a pot made, but do you know what I put in it is the question.” Just because school isn't in session doesn't mean I can't give a pop quiz. “Your mother is going to want water, most likely. Thanks, Eren.” All of the help! Lathe herded people to the table as Eren took drink orders, sitting down next to Spades after everyone had made it to the table, nudging her foot with his toes. You’re home-now. Who’s going to say grace?

“Does anyone else want say grace, or do I have to?” I just want to eat already- there's enough to feed an army here and it looks too damn good! Nobody objected, so Jean shrugged and started to lead them in the short prayer. “Bless us O Lord… well, everyone but Eren… and these thine gifts, even if they are technically Lathe’s and not yours, which we are definitely bound to receive as they are right in front of us, from the bounty of Whole Foods, All Hail the Wolf Lord Beowulf and Glory to Arstotzka, A-men.” Yes. I remember. Two can play the asshattery game. He looked up at the silence that followed, just looking around at their shocked expressions with indifference. ...can we eat now?
“........amen?” What the actual fuck? Why are we putting up with you again? Lathe looked at him incredulously, before shrugging and just shaking his head in defeat. “Y’know what… close enough.” Food.

“Well, now we know that you’re retarded too, Horseface.” Eren’s snide remark came from across the table and between Armin and Levi.

Lathe held up a hand and promptly silenced the two of them, looking between them. “Listen, you two, instead of using your yaps to insult each other… use them to eat your turkey.” I don't want to hear your bickering for the entire night. I've heard it gets bad and I've already heard enough.

Eren sighed. “That's fine…. Food! ” It only took a few seconds for everyone to have their plates filled with food. I’m gonna eat the fried turkey, cause Levi made it… Eren filled his plate along with everyone else. It was relatively quiet for the first few minutes of the meal until Marco spoke up.

“Mr. Quo, they’re perfect, especially for your first time making it…” Marco had a bright smile on and a radiance around him as he ate another forkful.

Lathe smiled. “I'm glad you like them, Marco. And please- just call me Lathe.” Really. I don't need the titles.

Marco shook his shyly, smiling sheepishly. “I'm sorry, Mr. Quo... I really can't.” You're an adult. I have to- it feels wrong not to.

Lathe grinned. “Sure you can. Here, say it- Lay-the.” Easy.

Marco feigned a look of concentration in forming his words. “…Mmmister Quo.” This is how this works.

Lathe just raised his hands in surrender, giving up. “Fine, I guess I'll live. Can't really complain about you having manners, though.” Nope- if anything it's a good thing.

Eren joked around with his friends as they sat around at the table, a majority of them bringing up
questions from tests that either Armin or Eren had taken… And most were answered with ‘Oh’s and ‘Dammit’s, not that anyone really minded, the teens were at the farther end of the table, allowing the adults to sit together, and be dismissed from their conversations, which bounced from topic to topic.

“So, Fagger, what do you want for Christmas?”

“A horse would be nice, but I definitely don’t want you.” Why can’t you not insult me for one day? You know it’s not gonna turn out well.

Jean snorted. “Believe me, I wouldn't want you either. I'd probably kick and aim for your head the second I got the chance.”

“We know Horseface, you should be thankful we haven’t sent you to the slaughterhouse, yeh lame fucker.” Eren countered back just as quickly.

Lathe just dropped his head into his hand as he heard Eren and Jean’s voices shoot across the table. ...here they fucking go...

“Are you kidding? Who here exactly is the one that wouldn't stand a chance in a fight against, say, Elvis? Who is dead, should I remind you?”

“I believe that’s you, yeh fucking pansy, shall we remind you of who screamed like a girl the second they saw a spider on their desk.” Eren snickered along with the rest of the teens who had been there to witness that incident.

Jean ignored the snickers around him. “At least I don't need some animal to constantly provide me with moral support, you suicidal bastard. I'm just glad he keeps you from jumping and screaming at the sight of your own shadow .”

“At least Eren’s not the one I had to write up at the station a month ago.” Spades countered quickly, taking another forkful of her food. I knew I remembered you from somewhere... And I kinda agree with Eren... He does look like a horse.

Jean sputtered at that, looking up to her in disbelief as he heard her speak. “W-what… how’d
you…” *How did you know that?* His eyes flickered over to Lathe, swallowing hard as he saw the look of utter hatred directed his way, though he caught a glint in them as he spoke calmly.

“How did you know that?” Lathe smirked, his eyes still holding malice as he gestured to Spades next to him. “This is my fiancée, whom you may know as Commissioner Spade. She is also Eren’s mother.” *You fucked up.*

Jean paled, looking between the two of them when something clicked, looking back to Eren for clarification. “Faggot I thought you already killed your mother? What, were you looking for another one to burn up?”

Eren instantly stood up at that comment, grabbing Jean from across the table and picking him up. “I was nice enough to invite you to my own house, and here you go, not only insulting me! Which I can fucking take! But you go on and insult my dead mother?” Eren swung his arm back, nailing Jean in the face and throwing him backward. “Learn some fucking manners you hot-headed freak!” Eren moved out from his seat and started towards the other side of the table. His eyes blazed with fury and the amount of curses he was throwing at Jean, having finally switched over to German, was appalling.

*I've had enough.* Lathe stood, walking over to the two of them evenly and leaning down to pick Jean up by the front of his shirt, Scotty having to come around the table to keep Eren from following to beat the tar out of him. Lathe dragged Jean to the front door and practically shoved him past the stoop, throwing his shoes after him on the concrete walk and locking the door on him. *fuck…* Lathe went back to Eren, still struggling against Scotty’s hold, and grabbed his fists with his own, stilling him a bit and getting his attention. “Eren, as much as Jean deserves it, I’m not letting you go beat the tar out of him. That’s the last time he’s allowed in this house. It’s over, kid. Just try to chill, and sit back down, alright?” *I hate him too. But I can't just let you let your anger take over.*

Eren huffed and stopped his struggling, ripping his arms from Scotty’s hands, managing to rip the bandaid off of his finger. *Well shit… I’m gonna need another one…* Eren looked to his hand to see if his finger was still bleeding as heavily as it was before, his eyes widened as he saw that his cut had healed… Completely.

“What- oh, crap. You're probably going to need another one.” Scotty moved to Lathe’s bag, knowing he had bandages.

Lathe watched as Eren inspected his finger, seeing it was completely healed over. *what. “U-um, Scotty… he’s not going to need it.” He's okay…*
“What do you mean? He must've been bleeding pretty badly to need it.” There was plenty on the old one. “How would he not.” Scotty stopped with the small box in hand as he saw Lathe inspecting his fully-healed finger. “...that’s a perfectly intact finger, Lathe. I think you’ve got the wrong one.”

Lathe just shook his head. “He cut his finger with an apple peeler earlier today. ...but now it’s fine.” ...I don't understand.

Scotty looked down to the blood on the old bandaid. “Are you sure you have the right finger?” I swear... this kid just keeps getting more and more complicated as I learn more about him. I doesn’t seem possible that one could heal this quickly from a cut.

“Pretty sure, Scotty.” That’s just weird... wait. Lathe turned back to Scotty and pointed to him, his expression neutral. “Remember what you promised , Scotty.” If you try to run away with this I'll run you out onto the street too. “C’mon kid, your plate’s getting cold.” Lathe nudged Eren to go back to his seat, sending one more pointed look to Scotty. Don't. Lathe went to sit back down again, not knowing if he needed to apologize to Mr. Arlert, feeling a bit out of place at his own table all of a sudden. Dammit…

Eren swallowed hard and moved away from the both of them quickly and moving to sit down in his seat again. “Why does he always need to be like that?” Eren mumbled quietly, feeling a sudden drain as he ate. I feel really tired… fuck… cam I still not caught up on sleep?

Scotty rolled his eyes, getting back to his own seat. He started eating again and the tense air seemed to clear as the conversations started back up again. I'm still glad I could get off today... and Felix seems to be doing fine. He noticed that Blake got up and went right behind Eren’s seat…. Is Eren gonna panic or something? Scotty let it go since Eren seemed fine for now.

Casper looked up as Eren passed him, his brow furrowing as Blake went under the piano to let Salem hop off before going to sit behind Eren’s chair. Hmm... He glanced up every now and then to check on him. ...am I losing my mind, or does Eren keep getting paler?

Levi noticed Eren shift next to him, resting a hand on his knee and whispering quietly. “You okay? You seem out of it. And you don't look too great…”

Eren picked his head up a bit as Levi spoke, nodding a bit, leaning closer to him, regretting that he had in fact nodded. Fuck… I feel dizzy... He looked to his empty plate, reaching to pick it up, and
stand up to start bringing dishes in. He stood up rather quickly, but what he wasn’t expecting was to sway forward, unable to keep his balance. *Fuck it.* Eren couldn’t focus on anything as he dropped his plate the few inches he had managed to pick it up.

Levi had immediately moved to catch Eren from swaying forward, bringing him back and easing him onto the floor, Scotty, Casper and Spades standing to come help him while Lathe went to get his medical bag. *Fuck.* Blake stayed just behind the four of them, letting them close to him. *Many big humans want to help my human? Big humans I trust…? Yes. I trust big humans. My big human is coming to help too. If he trusts humans, I trust humans.* “Just take it easy, Eren. Don’t try to move too much, just breathe.”

Eren took in a deep breath, feeling completely and utterly incapacitated as he was laid down on the floor. He felt Spades move to get a pulse on his neck, feeling her warm hands against his skin. Her touch felt unusually cool from the heat emanating from within him. *I feel hot…* Eren moved to lift his head, his nose starting to bleed heavily as he did so, making his dizziness increase tenfold.

Lathe knelt down next to Levi, digging for gauze in his bag and pulling out a wad of it, helping Levi to ease Eren up to sit on the floor. He had Eren press the gauze against his nose to stop the bleeding, wiping up the blood that had already streamed down his face. *Not good. Not good.*

*What the hell happened?* Casper puzzled over what happened, himself holding Eren’s wrist for his pulse. “My god, your heart is beating like crazy… and you feel like you're on fire.” Casper felt his forehead, his brow furrowed. “Dizziness, bleeding nose, fast heartbeat, really high temperature… all I really know right now is you're burning up. Which isn't good, obviously. But it doesn't immediately add up to anything I can think of.” He thought hard, his gaze flicking back to Eren’s hand, a gear turning. *...what if his cut healing so fast had something to do with it? ... probably not… I dunno. I'll run numbers later.*

Scotty shook his head. “I’m not sure either… but it seems like he’s got a fever and a nosebleed, and he’s a little lethargic.” Scotty caught how Casper was looking at Eren’s hand. …Did this happen because his body healed a cut on his finger?

Eren moved his head to lean back into Levi, struggling to lift his own arm to hold the gauze which was becoming saturated with blood at this point. “...’m… fine…” He flailed a bit, moving his arms to shoo them away. *I’m exhausted… I wanna sleep.*

Mr. Arlert, who had been relatively quiet during the dinner, smiled as Eren shooed the small crowd away to give him some space. He watched as Levi lifted Eren up and sat him back into his chair for the moment, speaking with an amused tone to the table and the small crowd hovering around Eren. “It really is convenient that there are five doctors in the house.” *And three of them live here.*
Eren smiled and nodded, holding the gauze to his nose still, his chair close to Levi’s as he leaned back into him. *Yeah… But I just kinda wanna curl up and sleep in a corner…*

Lathe chuckled, ruffling his hair gently as he went back to his chair, his bag hanging off the back. “You’ll be able to lay down soon enough, Eren.” And he was right- it was not long before everyone had eaten as much turkey as they wanted, dessert plates and pies with whipped cream passed down the table, everyone sipping from fresh tea or coffee from their mugs if they had them. Armin had left with his Grandfather shortly after dessert, having to drive the two of them home. The teenagers at the one end of the table were engrossed in their own conversation, having moved to the other end of the room so Eren could lay down on the beanbag bed, his head in Levi’s lap as they conversed. The adults were clearing the table and putting away leftovers, Scotty and Casper having insisted on helping with the dishes. They chatted freely, the conversation somehow drifting to Eren and Levi being gay.

“I don’t see how it’s so hard to wrap your head around the concept.”

“I just don’t understand how it could possibly last! I mean they’re both men! That means one of them has to take it up the ass! That’s both disgusting, and I don’t see how either of them could enjoy doing it.” *I don’t see how any man could love another man… At all.  “I don’t see how their relationship could possibly last! A man cannot love a man for that long.”*

Lathe laughed, snapping the lid on a container of applesauce, speaking without thinking. “Oh, please. Casper’s loved you since freshman year!” Lathe eyes widened the instant the words left his mouth, realizing what he’d said. **FUCK.** Lathe immediately looked up to Casper, his eyes apologetic, guilty and scared all at the same time. “Uhm…” **Dammit.**

Scotty looked up in disbelief from the plate he just dropped in the sink. “You can’t be serious… That’s a fucking joke.” **Nope… He can’t be serious… Why would Casper even like me?**

...*first he outs me… and then Scotty laughs it off like it’s nothing… Casper’s expression switched from shock to anger to terror, before settling on heartbroken. Casper simply finished the last dish he was holding, handing it to Scotty to dry, his eyes downcast and chest hurting. **You really haven’t changed… at all… I need to let it go, but… I don’t want to…** Casper dried off his hands, looking over to Lathe, too sad to be angry and instead mouthing to him behind Scotty’s back. ‘Distract everyone.’ … **Something that’ll let me talk to Scotty. We need to set things straight.**

Lathe was puzzled, closing the fridge and looking around for an idea. *Just do what he says. Uh… oh!** Lathe’s eyes landed on the piano, nodding to the other room to everyone and leading them out
of the kitchen, Spades seeming to catch on and herding Scotty along. He sat down at the piano, looking underneath and checking for Salem, who trotted over to his foot as he sat down. It's loud down there- Lathe picked him up and set him on his shoulder, deciding what to lay as the teenagers in the corner seemed to notice what he had in mind to do, getting their attention. Lathe’s hands hovered for a moment over the keys before starting to play.

Thank the fucking lord you're doing this right. Casper waited until Lathe had started to sing before grabbing Scotty’s sleeve, dragging him out of the room and into the Scripting Room, near the basement door.

“C-Casper! What the hell are you doing?” Why are you taking me away from everyone? What the hell?

“Keep your voice down, you idiot.” Casper whispered to him, stopping him at the door and taking a deep breath, trying to muster up his courage. He finally spoke, his eyes shut as he held his hand in a fist at his side, the other still gripping Scotty’s sleeve near the cuff. “Two seconds ago, about me… l-landing you since high school… he…” SAY IT. “…He wasn't lying.” There. I said it.

Scotty took a few seconds to put everything together.…. Wait… “Casper… It’s been years…” Why the hell were you waiting? Why didn't you tell me? I could’ve put an end to your waiting game! It’s not gonna result in anything!

Casper let out a heavy sigh. “…it doesn't matter.” I don't care that so long has gone by with nothing. He finally found the courage to look up, both terrified and determined. “That doesn't change the fact that I feel that way.” …you know what. Fuck it. Casper reached up with his free hand to grab the front of Scotty’s shirt, pulling him down to his level before he could protest and kissing him, both chaste and at the same time as if when they broke apart Scotty would go from being his friend to hating him. I don't want to lose you… but at the same time, doing nothing...means I've already lost...

... He just kissed me… I was kissed by my best friend! What the FUCK!? Scotty stood there, stunned into silence as he looked at Casper. What the fuck do I do? I’m not gay at all… Nope, I’ve liked tits since day one… Why the fuck would I change now?

Casper held their kiss as long as he could stand it, breaking away and looking to him, seeing the overwhelming confusion in Scotty’s expression. Well, he didn't smack me… that's a good sign… I guess? “Scotty, please, just… think about it.” Casper let go of Scotty, walking around him and back to the others, Scotty following him dazedly. ……what have I done?
Scotty just followed him, leaning against the wall, just staring at the floor. Casper just kissed me like his life depended on it... But he’s a guy... So... What the fuck do I make of this? Casper was lost in thought as a few of Eren’s friends left and it was only him and Casper left as guests. What the hell am I supposed to do?

It’s getting late- Eren’s passed out, Levi looks like he wants to, even Salem is yawning and you two look really out of it. ...What did you do? “Alright you two, it’s getting late. You should probably head home.” Lathe gave the both of them a hug and a weary, warm smile. “Drive safe, okay?” There’s probably a million thoughts on your minds- but don't let them impede on driving, okay?

Casper nodded, giving Lathe a weak smile and slipping on his shoes, bidding goodbye to everyone before leaving, turning as Scotty followed him outside, not sure how to say goodbye to him. Please don’t tell me I ruined things....

Scotty seemed to wake up a bit more as they stepped outside into the cold air. It’s snowing... He watched the white specs fall in peaceful silence. “Casper... I’ll see you around... I think I’m gonna take the job offer I got in Wichita...” He trailed off, not knowing what else to say. It would give me a reason to put some distance between us.

Wichita... that's a ways away... I won't see you as much, if at all, really... but... Casper sighed, offering him a weak smile. “I guess if it's what you want- take the offer... If you do think that's where you want to go.” I wouldn't want you sticking around just for me anyway if there's a better job for you somewhere. If you want to... I'm not going to stop you. That wouldn't be right. ...I don't like it... but if you want to, do it. “...I'll see you around, Scotty.” Casper turned to his car, snowflakes catching in his hair, and as much as he didn't like the idea, he let it go. It'll be okay.
Chapter 27: 26.5: Tides Turn

Well, the holidays went fast... And I’m finding myself calling Levi more often than not, It’s need almost 8 months since the thanksgiving incident and I’ve been on sleeping medication ever since. We’ve tried three different PTSD medications... I think we’ve tried them all... But none of them have worked... I passed Junior year with flying colors... I tried making peace with Jean. That did not go as planned at all... And Mom wasn’t too pleased when she had to have Dad pick me up from the station... I’m not even gonna get into what stupid bet I won... All I care about is that I won and Jean got arrested for it! Sucks for him, really, fresh outta high school and he’s already got a record to him. Ha! Anyways, Levi’s gone already, and the Academy told him that he won’t be able to come back for breaks... But I guess that’s what happens when you’re gaining ranks left and right. I’m really proud of him, he’s doing great! I can only hope that he’ll come home in one piece again... This is my last summer before I graduate high school, god where has the time gone? I’m 19 right now... It’s officially been a decade since I moved to the states... And it’s been 3 and a half years since Lathe adopted me... Mom and Dad have been around a lot, Mom’s been taking some time off to get their wedding together, and they’ve been calling literally everyone they know so that they know they can come to the wedding. But I got to invite Mark and Jack! Which I’m excited about because they said yes! They’ve been gone every now and then planning everything out, they meet with a few different people, and I can’t keep anything straight anymore. But enough of them, I just got off the phone with Levi for our daily calls, and now I feel like I can actually do this.

Eren took a deep breath as he came back into the recording studio, Lathe and Jeff waiting for him inside. Nate was late as usual, but would be there soon. Time to sing about sex.

“You done on the phone yet? Think an hour of German will tide Levi over until after dinner?” Lathe grinned mischievously, looking up as Eren entered again. You’re talking to him so much these days- if you’re on the phone, it’s with or about him. ...I do get it, though. We all miss him. But you’re here right now to put those vocal chords of yours to use.

Eren had a soft smile on his face. “Yeah, I’m ready... Um... Are the guys warmed up?” I’ve never sang with an actual band behind me before... It’s gonna feel soooo weird...

“Yep, I’d say so. Head on inside- you know the drill. Just be chill- you’ve done this tons of times.” Lathe smiled, grabbing a set of headphones connected to the switchboard in front of them. This’ll be... weird, to say the least. I’ve seen the list he’s doing. ...I’ll try not to cringe too hard. Keep it internal.

Eren nodded and went inside and grabbed his head phones. “Okay, Soulja Boy first, ‘Kiss me through the phone’.” Eren took a drink of water and he waited for the band to start behind him and he felt the room come to life and the exhilaration from the vibrations around him let him just unwind, loosen up, and let it all out.

...first try, and it sounds really good. Lathe nodded along to it, giving Eren a thumbs up after the
Eren smiled a bit wider and he continued to list of song after song, only stopping when the band needed a break, or he ran out of water in his water bottle. They managed to crack out a huge album of covers in a few hours:

- Kiss Kiss: Chris Brown
- It Wasn’t Me: Shaggy
- Carry Out: Timbaland
- S&M: Rihanna
- Talk Dirty: Jason Derulo
- Ain’t No Other Man: Christina Aguilera
- Turn Me On: David Guetta
- Pony: Ginuwine
- Gimme More: Britney Spears
- Sexual: NEIKED
- Grind With Me: Pretty Ricky
- Ignition (Remix): R. Kelly
- When I Grow Up: The Pussycat Dolls
- London Bridge: Fergie
- SexyBack: Justin Timberlake
- Money Maker: Ludacris
- Drop It Low: Ester Dean
- Lollipop: Lil Wayne
- Bubblegum: Jason Derulo
- BedRock: Young Money
- Scream: Usher
- Side to Side: Ariana Grande

Lathe got used to listening after a few songs. Eren has a real knack for sounding like a girl if he wants to. And for rapping. Yeah, he’s good at that. I’m seriously impressed. ...I get the feeling Levi would pay a ridiculous amount of money just to hear one of these songs once. He’s going to like this album. Lathe cheered as they finished the last song, their final take successful. “That was amazing! You did a really good job, Eren!”

Jeff nodded, dismissing the band as he looked at the recordings they had. “They look great! Oh, while you’re here… Um, you wanna look through the list of artists that wanna sing with you?” There’s a bunch and I know you’ll say yes to at least a few of the big names.

Eren nodded, following Jeff to his office to get the large stack of folders and papers. The stack was at least a foot and a half high, filled with papers and songs. “That’s all for me?” Eren asked with wide eyes. What the hell?
Nate grinned, flicking through the top packets of papers all stapled together. “Oh yeah, Eren. You're popular! Everyone wants to sing something with you! ...or in at least one case, play the cello with you.” That's a thing.

“No way! 2Cellos wants to play with me ?!” I can't believe it. Eren took the papers from Nate and his eyes widened even more. Oh my god... They really do! So does Rihanna, Halsey, Imagine Dragons... Bruno Mars too? Oh my god these guys are so big though... What happens if I screw up?

“They'd be crazy not to want to play with you! You're so popular, and for good reasons, too!” Lathe beamed, flicking through half of the stack of requests. Oh my god. This is great!

Eren swallowed hard, and after about an hour of flicking through the whole pile, they had it down to a 6 inch stack of artists that Eren would perform with, a majority of them being very large icons in the music industry. Beyoncé even put one in.... Holy shit ...

Jeff took the stack. “Okay, I'll take these, and I’ll call you guys to come in tomorrow so we can get a schedule all set up and make sure deals get settled relatively quickly… But for now, you guys are all set for today, good job Eren.” Jeff had a smile on his face as he patted Eren’s back. I can only imagine what the music videos are gonna look like for these songs... And he actually agreed to music videos!

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Well, I think that summer went by without me spending a week at home... It was really weird, it was alms or like we were always in LA, and we stayed at a hotel for a majority of the time, Nate had us over for dinner a shit ton, I got to meet a bunch of people and make a bunch of videos. I got invited to perform on stage... Yeah, can you believe that? I was invited to be on stage with Katy Perry while her tour was in LA. I was on stage! Again! I was so nervous! But the crowd absolutely loved it! And I can tell, cause I was trending on Twitter for basically the whole summer. Dad also let me go around LA with Blake and let people come and take pictures with me all day! It was literally called #FindMe=Selfies... Yeah I had a lot of people and groups come and find me, it was a little nerve racking, but Jeff convinced me it would help with sales... And sure enough, I had achieved the record of most albums sold on ITunes... Yeah, I now hold the record with my songs about sex. Which we ended up calling: Covering It Up. People went wild... I actually sat down to talk with Dad about colleges too, and I don’t really want to go, I kinda don’t have to either… I mean, I don’t have to… I’m set for life at this point, and so is Dad because the sales increased from our first album from a year ago. I also signed a contract with Spotify and Apple, so that’s taking in the cash… But before I could think about it, I was thrusted into recording videos and that took up all summer. I managed some how to make music videos for almost all the songs, and we actually set up my own Vevo account, which has alms or all my subscribers on it. Those months were exciting, and before I knew what was happening, I was thrusted back into the school
workload, months coming and passing before I had a chance to even blink. I've really been doing nothing but work and some recording for the past few months, I finished up my final exams... And so I'm on my way to Levi's apartment after heading to the grocery store. I moved on about a month ago..., it's kinda weird living on my own but I don't mind it. Dad was a little reluctant to let me come over but I convinced him that the soon-to be weds should be able to have a proper honeymoon period. Levi's gonna be coming home in about two weeks. So I'm gonna be waiting in his apartment for him to come home after his final exams this year...... It's Friday... And I just wanna get home.

Eren got out of the car, Blake at his heels as he got out, taking all the groceries up the stairs to the top floor. I still can't believe no one's moved in around me... Then again Levi's got some deal with the owner of this place to get old people who can't hear next to him... For some reason... Probably because whenever we come over here... We... Fuck... And I'm loud.... And the walls are thin.... Oh well, it's quiet, and we don't get any noise complaints. Eren came in and messed with the loose door handle, trying to lock the door but giving up after a few moments and just letting it go. Fuck it, it's not like anyone will come in anyway...

Eren walked inside, getting the groceries that he needed to get in the fridge into the fridge. He pulled out what he needed to start making his dinner. He was softly humming along, starting to chop up multiple different things and throw them into a skillet with oil. He let it sizzle loudly, his humming quickly turning into singing.

Blake got up from where he was, going to the door, his ears perked. He watched as it opened and a man with a similar scent to Eren's walk into the house. He followed, sniffing the man, putting blind trust in him for the moment and following him as he went up to Eren. Why is this human not announcing himself? Blake got confused as this new human picked up one of the last cast iron pans Eren had kept out because it was drying. Why is this human bigger than my human? And is he helping with the dishes?

Eren was oblivious to anything as he stirred the veggies, just barely hearing the floor creak behind him as weight shifted on it. Huh? Eren didn't have time to turn around before the cast iron pan made contact with the back of his head, turning everything black before he even hit the floor.

And that was all I remembered....
Lathe looked up from his place at the piano as he heard sirens approaching, standing up as he watched an ambulance speed by, watching as it turned the corner. *It sounds like it stopped near the apartment building... and that was one of the fire-rescue ambulances, too. Someone isn’t doing too well over there... Probably someone older fell or something of that sort.* He watched as police cruisers sped after it not too long after, quirking his eyebrow. *It must be really bad if they've called in for an escort. I hope whoever it is that got hurt is okay...* He looked up as Armin pulled into the driveway in his Grandfather’s baby blue 1940 Chevrolet KA 2-door sedan, stepping out of the driver’s seat with a worried look on his face. He opened the door as he approached, giving him a concerned look. “Hey Armin. What’s up? You look worried.”

“Is Eren here? He’s not answering any of my texts or calls, I thought maybe he overslept or something from your movie night last night.” He came inside as Lathe motioned him in. *It’s so weird, he hasn’t talked to me in like two weeks... I don’t get what’s up with him.*

Lathe’s brow furrowed. “...He told me that you two were the ones having a movie night. And he told me he lost his phone, something about moving all his stuff to Levi’s apartment, that it might've gotten shuffled with other stuff in transit.”

Armin’s brow furrowed this time around. *What? “... That’s not what he told me.... He said He broke it.... And that he couldn’t answer right away ‘cause he’s been feeling sick lately... but I figured he was better since he told me he was coming here for movie night with you....”* Armin trailed off. *Why the heck would Eren lie to us? He’s never lied to me before... has he?*

The gears started turning in Lathe’s head, his eyes snapping back to the window as the ambulance and it’s escort flew past. He suddenly was hit with an overwhelming sense of dread, hanging onto the edge of the piano with his hand so his legs didn't give out under him. *No, no... It’s just got to be a coincidence. Nothing could have happened, there wasn't any real danger posed to him in that apartment, he... he lied... and he cried when he was recording last... could...* He jumped in surprise as his phone rang, quickly recognising Levi’s ringtone. *...Oh no, please don't tell me...* He reached a shaky hand into his pocket, lifting it to his ear and answering it, slowly walking towards the front window. “...Hello?”

Levi’s voice was full of panic and fear. “Lathe, it’s me.... Grisha came back... We’re headed for one of the trauma centers in Wichita... I don’t know if we’ll make it in time-” Levi was pulled away from the call for a second as the EMT in the back of the fire rescue truck with him shouted at Levi to clear as he gave Eren a shock to start his heart. Lathe would’ve been able to hear it, along with the shock. “Lathe I gotta go, meet us here, please.”
That was the sound of a defibrillator. All the color drained from Lathe’s face, consciously trying not to drop his phone as the line dropped. Oh this is bad. This is very very bad. He stared after the sound, one thought hitting him and pulling out of his shock. My son is dying. He shoved his phone in his pocket, grabbing the keys to his bike and stomping on his boots, turning to Armin with a determined look on his face.

“Armin, we’re going for a ride.”

Nothing stopped Levi from practically unloading his weapon on Grisha, taking large steps as he got closer, watching as the man slowly fell to the floor with a soft thud. Two to the head... He’s definitely dead, the others were for added measure. He stepped up to him, his gun still trained on Grisha’s limp form, kicking away the knife he was holding, slowly reaching down to check for a pulse. None... Good. He turned to get to Eren immediately, seeing his large eyes widen with amazement, but also slight fear. “It’s okay, Eren, he won’t ever hurt you again.” He didn’t care that his pants soaked up a lot of blood from the large pool under Eren. He’s bled out a lot already. His eyes roamed over Eren’s thin frame. Two knives in either shoulder, one in each of his wrists, and one in each of his feet. They were trailed down his extremities... His stomach is covered in bruises, and it appears as though he has lacerations all over him. He’s burned on his wrists, along with his feet... He needs an ambulance... No he needs fire rescue, that’s closer. Levi fumbled for his phone, his bloody hands smearing against his dress clothes. He finally got it out and called 911, immediately put through to the operator.

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“Code 3 fire rescue needed at 200 Corps. St. Apt. 104. Delta response, deceased attacker on scene, victim’s name is Eren Yeager... 20 year old male, excessive blood loss and losing consciousness quickly. Victim is suffering many stab wounds, as well as lacerations and contusions, breathing is unstable, and eyes are responsive, but slow. Trained personnel on scene in need of assistance, immediate evac required. Hot ride to Wichita trauma center needed, possibly an IC unit as well.” He’s lost so much, but the hospital here can’t handle this.... We need an actual trauma center.

“Fire rescue is being dispatched to your location, can you stay on the phone?”

“I’m putting you on speaker then.” Levi was moving around frantically to find anything he could to apply pressure to his bleeding wounds. I am not letting you bleed out. Absolutely not.

“What personnel is on scene in need of assistance?”
“Lance Corporal Levi Ackerman, Medic for Marines infantry.” I’m training to be an EMT too, but I can take control of the situation when that happens.

“Okay, and you mentioned a deceased person on site as well?”

“Yes, it’s the victim’s biological Father, Grisha Yeager, Age unknown.” Fuck the bastard, thank god he’s dead.

Levi’s still struggling to put pressure on all of Eren’s wounds. “Eren stay with me, keep talking.”

“B--lake…” Blake… I need him...

Levi looked over towards a soft whimper that came from Blake. That asshole put him in a fucking cage!? Levi’s eyes noticed the large lock on the cage. My gun… That’s the only way it’s coming off at this point. Levi got up to pick his gun back up from near Grisha, leaving Eren for only a few second. “Sir, cover your ears, I need to use my gun again to get the victim’s service dog out of a locked cage.” Levi gave him no other warning before he shot the gun with precision, leaning down to open the door and help coax Blake out of the cramped cage, noticing the long gash on his side. Grisha would be a dead man if I didn’t already kill him...

Blake limped out of the cage once he was released and went to Eren’s side. The voice on the phone the only thing that snapped Levi out of his rage towards the dead man lying on the floor, in a puddle of his own blood.

“The victim is blind or deaf?”

“Victim is a mental patient, PTSD.” Which is now going to be worse thanks to that asshole.

“Okay, fire rescue is on scene now, they’ll help you, stay on the phone with me though.”

“Got it. If I can’t get a hold of the victim’s adoptive parents, please contact Lathe Quo to tell him his son is being sent to the hospital in the city.” Lathe should pick up when I call him though… He’ll leave the house in a heartbeat.
“Of course, once the fire rescue get there repeat the information to them that you told me earlier.”

Levi lifted his head to the open door, seeing a bunch of men come in and rush over to kneel beside Eren as well, opening their bags in an instant. I hope they have enough bandages, this is gonna take a long time to secure everything.

“Alright what we got?”

“Seven knife wounds, four can be safely removed without too much blood loss, the others are too close to internal organs or arteries to be removed.” Levi rattled out and that what they started with. It took a long time to gently take out the four knives lodged in his feet and his wrists. He’s being quiet…. I need to keep him awake. “Eren… Keep talking to me, you need to stay awake.”

“… I…. I love you… Levi…” I want you to know that… I can’t stay awake… my body feels like it’s on fire, my head hurts so much.

Fuck, don’t make me cry over this you shitty brat! Levi moved closer to Eren, leaning to kiss his forehead. “You’ll be okay, I promise Eren… But you need to stay awake, you need to.” Levi was distracted as he heard Blake start to whine, more people coming into the room. Fuck… This is a lot of people. “Enter slowly!” Levi called watching the guys with the stretcher slowly enter. “Victim is a PTSD patient and requires a service dog 24/7… The dog has been injured, can someone tell the hospital? He’ll need to see a vet.” Levi rattled off and kept Eren from freaking out as his bleeding wounds were wrapped to keep him from bleeding out on the ride to the hospital.

Eren watched the men move him around, fresh tears falling down his eyes as he was wrapped. It hurts… Levi make it stop… It hurts…. “Levi....” Eren’s strangled voice got Levi’s full attention again. “I-I’m so…. Sorry.” Eren’s eyes started to slowly close. I can’t stay awake anymore…. My head hurts.

“Eren!” Levi’s eyes widened as Eren’s eyes started to close, his body becoming limp as he lost consciousness. “Alright! Time to go!” He said and motioned the stretcher closer to him. “On my count, ready?” Levi looked up to see the men nod, following his commanding lead quickly and surrounding Eren to transport him. They lifted him up swiftly, Levi’s eyes widening as he saw the state of Eren’s back. “He needs burn treatment as well, he’s got third degree burns on not only his wrists and feet, but his whole back as well.” Levi’s voice was cool as he struggled to keep his composure in front of the men. He hadn’t even noticed how much blood was on his uniform. Blake’s gotta stay with him. He reached down and picked him up, laying him down at Eren’s side, quickly locating his vest and draping it over Eren’s lap. “Let’s move, now, do we have cruisers here?” Levi asked and one of the men carrying the stretcher nodded. “Good, we’ll need an escort.
on the highway, we’ll be hitting the lunchtime rush hour.” Levi told them.

Eren was unconscious as they got him in the back of the fire rescue truck, some policemen followed the fire fighters up to the apartment to inspect the crime scene, and finding Grisha laying dead on the floor, Levi’s issued gun on the ground by him. Levi went right to one of the guys about to get in his cruiser. “Get back in your car, we need an escort, code three the whole way.” Levi informed him, the man nodding and just getting back in the car to start on the sirens. He raced back to the ambulance, hoping in and the vehicle sped off towards the city. We’ll make it there, we need to.

Eren stopped breathing before they even got to the highway. His heart rate flat-lining only moments later.

Levi ran a hand through his hair, letting out a shuddered sigh as the EMT started to bag Eren, putting a monitor on him to check his abnormally low heart rate and blood pressure. Fuck… I need to call Lathe. Levi fished out his blood covered phone from his pocket. God, don’t kill me for this Lathe.

Levi’s voice was full of panic and fear. “Lathe, it’s me…. Grisha came back… We’re headed for one of the trauma centers in Wichita… I don’t know if we’ll make it in time-” Levi was pulled away from the call for a second as the EMT in the back of the fire rescue truck with him shouted at Levi to clear as he gave Eren a shock to start his heart. Lathe would’ve been able to hear it, along with the shock. “Lathe I gotta go, meet us here, please.” Levi’s shaking hands ended the call and buried the phone deep into his pocket. Shit shit shit shit shit! Eren come on! Eren wake up! He watched in horror as Eren went through another round of shocks, the ambulance bustling along as they got onto an empty section of the highway. Come one Eren, you need to wake up!

Levi and the EMT continued to struggle to keep Eren’s vitals up… He had flat-lined twice more in the back of that ambulance, and had never regained consciousness. Come on Eren, we need you to breathe…. Please, I don’t want to lose you… Not you too. Levi continued to talk softly to Eren, hoping that he could hear him, hoping that he could survive the trip. The sirens were blaring, and the vehicle which was traveling well over 80 miles an hour for most of the highway started to slow and the buzzers sounding as they approached the city.
“HOLY SHIT! LATHE WHAT THE FUCK!?"

Lathe had chucked a motorcycle helmet at Armin, tightening his goggles and taking off after the ambulance, his gleaming red Harley screaming down the road after the ambulance, catching up to them quickly. He kept them close to the ambulance and the cruiser at the back of the escort, but made sure he wasn’t in their way at all.

“Um… There’s a vehicle tailing our escort. Should I pull them over… Or?”

Spades snatched the receiver from her partner before he could answer, speaking clearly. “Please describe the vehicle and it’s operator.”

“Let’s see, it’s a red Harley, and the driver’s a thirty-something male with short black hair wearing goggles.”

“Are there any passengers on the bike with him?”

“Yes, a teenager wearing a helmet.”

“Does this teenager happen to have blonde hair to the shoulders, can you tell?”

“...Yeah?”

I should've expected this. “Yeah, I know who it is. As long as he doesn’t get in the way, don’t stop him. Just give him a speeding ticket or something when you get there.” Spades put the receiver back. Just don’t fucking crash the bike with Armin on it, you’re doing at least eighty following the ambulance like that. I’m not giving two shits about his reckless driving today. One shit? Maybe. But two shits? No.
Lathe had Armin’s screaming behind him completely tuned out, focusing on following the ambulance. *My son is in that ambulance. His heart has stopped at least once, and with an escort like that… This is very very bad.* He looked over, reading the markers on the sides of the highway as they flew past. *We’re making really good time…* He glanced down to his speedometer. *…probably because we’re doing 110 miles an hour. But it’s a rather straight highway, and it’s fucking abandoned at this hour, so it’s warranted. I wonder if I’m going to get in trouble for going 40 miles an hour over the speed limit, tailgating a police-escorted fire-rescue ambulance.*

*…Probably. I don't even fucking care anymore. They have my son in there.* He kept his eyes set on the road ahead, deathly calm. *We have an hour to go, at this rate. An hour. Eren, you need to hold on. It’s only an hour. I don't know how bad it is, but you need to hold on.* Lathe gritted his teeth as they had to slow down for the rising city traffic, going 60 at most as they headed for the hospital. *Via Christi Hospital St. Joseph. Okay. He reluctantly broke from his pursuit of the ambulance, pulling into the general parking lot, forced to park near the back of the full, huge lot. He shut off the bike and hopped off quickly, taking the helmet from Armin and cutting off his furious shouts, his voice serious and eyes full of rising panic. “Armin, I'm sorry, I'll make it up to you, but right now my son is dying and we need to get in there and make sure he’s okay.” He put the helmet and his goggles on the seat of the bike and turned, running to the front doors of the hospital, Armin at his heels. He pushed open the doors, going straight up to the emergency room desk, his hands on the edge of the tall tabletop, looking intensely to the woman at the computer. “Eren Yeager, just came in in a fire-rescue ambulance?” *You can tell me something. Anything. Please!*

The heavier-set woman looked up from her computer, typing in a few things before she shook her head. “I’m sorry dear, but he’s in the OR now, and I’m asked to direct you to the in-patient waiting room over there. The police will be with you shortly for some questioning. I’m sorry.” Her voice was kind, but she she pointed to the room down a hallway, completely empty of people, filled with chairs.

Lathe seemed to droop in defeat, his eyes red as he walked to the waiting room silently, sitting down on a bench in the corner, his head in his hands. His leg bounced impatiently, rising after barely a minute to pace up and down the room, his hands buried in his hair, his eyes wide and tracing over the floor. *This can't be real. This isn't real. Eren can't be so hurt… there’s no way Grisha... No…*

Three police officers filed in after a few minutes, walking over to Armin and Lathe. “Excuse me sir, we need to have a word with you.”

Lathe couldn't even hear them, lost in his own mind. He kept pacing up and down the room, barely seeing what was in front of him. *Nononononononononono……*

The officers tried and failed for a solid five minutes to get his attention, unsure of how to get through to him. “…Sir? We need to speak to you. Sir. Sir!”
Spades practically kicked in the door, striding in with her partner behind her. She took two seconds to assess the situation, officers trying in vain to question an in-denial Lathe, walking straight up to him and smacking him clear across the face, grabbing the front of his shirt and shaking him, looking him dead in the eyes. “Pull yourself together, dammit!”

Lathe looked at her, stunned. “...Spades……” Tears started falling. “Eren... He’s…” He needs to be okay he can't not be okay he needs to hang on.

Spades eyes were sympathetic, her face still set and stony. “Lathe, two minutes. We need you to be strong for two minutes and answer some questions, and then you can break down. Two minutes. Here, first, sign this.” She took the pad of paper and pen from the other officer, shoving them in his hands.

Lathe couldn't even read what the paper said, signing where she pointed quickly, his writing shaky. “W-what’s this?”

“That’s your ticket for going 40 miles per hour over the limit down the highway following the ambulance.” She tore off the ticket, handing the rest of the paper and the pen back to the officer and stuffing the ticket in her pocket. ...poor Armin. Lathe can deal with the ticket later. It's justified, what he did- at least to me. “Now, tell me, what do you know about the circumstances surrounding Eren’s attack? Anything odd been going on that you’ve noticed?”

Lathe nodded, stuttering, shaking. “E-Eren t-told Armin and I d-different things about where he-hed be l-last night, saying he was w-with Armin t-to me and v-vice versa. He t-told me his p-phone was lost, but I didn't w-worry because he was only t-two b-blocks away at Levi’s apartment... Armin s-said Eren told him h-his phone was b-busted, but he could still u-use it, but take longer to reply b-because h-h... he was s-sick... H-he c-cried during his r-recording s-session two w-weeks ago... He n- never does t-that...” Lathe leaned more of his weight onto Spades, looking utterly broken. “T-that m-must've been h-here for two w-weeks... W-why d-didn't he t-tell us? H-he... I h-had no i-idea...” We should've paid better attention... We should've gotten him a new phone... We shouldn't've let him leave our sight... We... We could've kept him safe... And we didn't...

Spades pulled Lathe close, hugging him tightly, gently rocking them back and forth. “It’s okay Lathe, he’s in good hands now. Thank you for telling us that. He’ll be okay, I promise. Shhh…” Eren you better be okay or I swear to fucking god I will bring you back from the dead and murder you again. And then bring you back again so Lathe can stop looking like he did when Viola died.

Levi came into the room, wearing scrubs, his hair damp from taking a quick shower in the locker room a nurse had showed him to. He had his bloody uniform in a bag at his side. His eyes landed
on Lathe as he sobbed into Spade’s shoulder. *He looks like hell, I can only imagine what must be going through his mind.* Levi swallowed, slowly approaching them, Armin instantly standing to come up to him. *He brought Armin too?*

Lathe looked up from Spades’ shoulder as he heard Levi’s footsteps, pulling back a bit until his eyes landed on the bag Levi was carrying, part of the blood-stained uniform visible to him. His face went ghostly pale, the events of the past hour and a half really hitting him all at once. *Eren’s dying.* Lathe’s legs gave way under him, unconscious in an instant.

**Fuck.** Spades quickly moved under Lathe and caught him, his arm draped over her shoulder, 175 pounds of dead weight. “...And he’s out.” She looked around quickly, beginning to steer him to a bench as she caught sight of a familiar figure walking past in the hallway across the room. **...Right.** “Armin, you see that really tall doctor guy with the short hair in the hall over there? He was at Thanksgiving two years ago, remember? I need you to catch him for me. His name is Scotty. Go, hurry please!”

Armin looked through the glass and nodded instantly running off and catching the man before he rounded the corner. “Umm… Excuse me? Dr. Scotty?” Armin asked wearily as he looked up to the looming man. *Holy shit… he’s taller than Erwin… I forgot that was possible.*

Scotty stopped, turning to the blonde. **...Dr. Scotty? What?** “If you're going to call me Scotty, then it’s just Scotty. Whatcha need?” **...wait.** “You're that Armin kid, aren't you?” *Weren't you at some thing forever ago?*

“Yeah, uhm… Spades told me to grab you… Lathe kinda passed out… I’m assuming they know you since you were at Thanksgiving?” Armin’s voice was timid, having to crane his neck to look up to meet Scott’s eyes. *Um.... Did I say the right things?*

“Oh, Christ. Come on.” Scotty rushed back into the in-patient waiting room, seeing Spades and Levi holding Lathe up, Levi dressed in scrubs. *He’s in scrubs… Oh this can't be good.* “Come on, you two, let’s get him in back to one of the break rooms.”

Levi nodded and moved to get a better angle on Lathe. “It’s okay Spades, you can let go of him, I got him.” It took Levi little effort to pick Lathe’s large frame up and hold him in his arms securely. *Well… Training for the marines does shit to you.*

Spades didn't have much time to be impressed as they were quickly led back into a maze of hallways, Scotty opening the door of a small break room with a cot shoved against the wall. They filed in, Spades wasting no time after Levi set Lathe on the cot to speak, sitting on the edge of the
cot and holding Lathe’s hand, twining their fingers and running her thumb over his knuckles. “Okay, I want to know absolutely **everything** that you know about what happened to Eren. Don’t skimp on details. **Everything.**”

Levi swallowed hard, moving to lean back against the wall. *This is gonna be a fun talk… isn’t it?* “So… should I start from where Eren texted me on Lathe’s phone two weeks ago? Or this morning?” Levi asked quietly. **How far do you need me to go back?**

“I want you to start with the first odd thing that happened. If that happens to be Eren texting you on Lathe’s phone, then start there. But go as far back as you can think.” She pulled a small pad of paper and a small pencil out of her pocket, her gaze intense. **I need to get all this down before anything gets forgotten.**

“Okay… Eren texted me on Lathe’s phone at around lunch time in this time zone two mondays ago. I knew he was at Lathe’s house because it’s his regular recording day and he was texting me on Lathe’s phone. He told me to look at his videos as soon as they were uploaded.” *He’s never fucking done that before.* “He’s never texted me to specifically look at the list of queued videos before. It was really weird to get that text from him, so I waited for them to upload onto his YouTube account and signed in so I could see them.” Levi paused as he remembered the list, a shaking hand running through his hair. “I should’ve known something was wrong with him… It’s so obvious to tell that he was trying to say something was wrong… How can I be so fucking stupid?” Levi pulled at his inky locks, tears threatening to fall down his cheeks as he slumped down against the wall down to the floor. **How did I not realize it sooner?**

Armin brushed at his own eyes, moving next to Levi and placing a hand on his shoulder, trying to comfort him. “Don’t beat yourself up about it, Levi. Just keep going. What else?” **You need to just get this over with, get the hard part done.**

Levi swallowed thickly. “The songs… he had them set in two playlists… One was l-labeled ‘Titles’ and the other ‘Lyrics’. I can’t believe I was so stupid… The fucking titles sent a message clear as day to anyone paying attention to them…” Levi let a few tears fall. **What if I didn’t get there in time? What if I wasn’t going to surprise Eren? He’d be dead…. Oh my god… no.**

Scotty spoke up quietly, his eyes heavy with worry. “W-what did the titles say?”

“I’m So Sorry. Get Home. I Will Wait. Heathens. Come to Me. I Don’t Want to Be. Immortals.” *He wanted me to get home…. He didn’t want to die… I’m horrible… how could I not see that before?* Levi let even more tears fall, burying his face in his hands. “He was trying to tell me he was in trouble…”
Spades wrote quickly and quietly, her features softened from their stone. *I'll need to look at that later... Dates and timestamps. But that was clever.* “What about the other list?”

“.... The lyrics one?.... When I’m Gone... Amnesia, he cried through that whole song... Move Along.... It Ends Tonight...” Levi’s eyes widened a fraction. “Oh my god... He thought he was gonna die.... The last one came out today on his channel... He was trying to tell me Grisha was gonna kill him.... Oh my god...” Levi couldn’t stop sobbing as he figured out just how much Eren had tried to tell Levi he was gonna die. *Eren knew what day I was supposed to come home... Grisha was gonna kill him before I got home... thank god I was gonna surprise him early.... But what if I wasn’t early enough?*

Lathe cracked his eyes open, looking up as Levi sobbed against the wall near his head. He sat up, his hand falling from Spades’ as he tugged on Levi’s sleeve and pulled him into his arms, trying to comfort him and shove down his own grief. He felt Spades wrap her own arms around him, the torment in his mind feeling heavy. *It’s gonna be okay... I really fucking hope it’s gonna be okay. He has to be okay.*

“L-Lathe... I’m so sorry....” Levi sobbed in Lathe’s chest. “He tried to tell me... he tried to tell me...” Levi sobbed enough to soak Lathe’s shirt. *I feel horrible.* “I should’ve texted you earlier... I’m so sorry...”

Lathe rubbed small circles into Levi’s back, his cheek resting on Levi’s head, his voice quiet, forcing it not to shake. “Shhh... It’s okay, Levi. It’s not your fault. You showed up in time, that’s what matters. You don’t have to apologise for anything. Just...” He took a deep breath. “Thank you for showing up when you did. He has a chance. He’ll be okay. ...Grisha, is he...” *Tell me you killed him. Tell me he’s gone.*

“When I opened the door.... He was going to stab Eren again... I reacted so quickly I didn’t know what was happening... I unloaded my entire pistol’s magazine into him.... I shot him twice in the head, but I just kept shooting him.... I couldn’t stop.... That bastard was going to hurt him more... He had Blake locked up in a cage...” Levi couldn’t control himself as he sobbed. *I killed him Lathe... I actually killed him...* 

Lathe felt as a heavy weight fell from the back of his mind, relief conflicting with overwhelming worry. “...is Blake okay?” *Eren needs him... He needs to be okay too...*

Levi nodded. “He got picked up by a vet when I was getting changed... the wounds weren’t too deep on him... he should be okay... Grisha had him cramped in a small cage... it was padlocked, Eren couldn’t let him out.” Slowly Levi’s sobs were starting to subside. *I hope Eren pulls through... He died three times on the way here.... His heartbeat was so irregular... and so slow.*
Lathe held onto Levi tightly, trying to be calm. “At least we know Blake should be okay. Eren’ll pull through this, he’s a tough kid. Right now, it’s just a waiting game.” He looked up, registering for the first time exactly where he was, looking up to Scotty. He gave him a weak smile. “Do you happen to know anything about how Eren’s doing right now? Or can you find out, please?” I want to stay on top of this… I need to know he’s okay.

“Lathe… He died three times on the ride here…. He’s lost at least ¾ of the blood in his body. He had a knife in his gut… I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s hemorrhaging or getting his organs closed… His feet, his back, and his wrists are completely burned… the bastard broke them too… and his feet… He had two knives lodged in his clavicle… They were so close to his arteries… His whole abdomen was covered in contusions, lacerations, rope burn… He was also….” Levi stopped and sat up a little straighter, his face paling as he realize another gruesome fact.

Oh my god… How much did Grisha mess with his head?

Lathe swallowed hard, his voice beginning to tremble.….oh my God… That… Those aren't good odds… “W-what?” What else could he have done?

“Eren was drooling… He had a seizure… at least one while Grisha was there. I don’t know how many… He could barely talk when I tried to keep him awake… He told me that he loved me… then he fell unconscious… Lathe, what if there’s something seriously wrong with his head now?” Levi asked, his sobs starting right back up again as he hid his face. What if he doesn’t come back to me? What if he doesn’t wake up?

Lathe’s hold tightened around Levi’s middle, his mind racing. “Levi, it’s not Eren’s first seizure. Even if he wasn’t exactly treated correctly for his seizure, he would most likely remember things after a little while. He remembered you… And he knew that he loved you. That says a lot. I don’t think his mind would’ve been too messed up.”

“He hasn’t had a seizure in such a long time Lathe… Grisha was too much stress on him… What if Grisha raped him again? What if he was put up like a prostitute again? He won’t trust us again…” Levi cried harder after realizing that fact. I’d rather have him say he didn’t remember me and trust me than to remember what happened and never trust me again.

Lathe moved his hand up to card through Levi’s hair, sighing heavily, tears again beginning to fall down his face. “All we can do right now is hope he didn’t… But trust can be earned again, if we have to.”

Scotty’s eyes widened in surprise as his pager went off, quickly fishing it from his pocket and reading the message. His eyes went wide, his voice quiet. “I- I have to go. I'm being paged to the
OR to patch up Eren’s broken bones. It’s… It's his ribs… And his wrists… And his legs… And
feet… Thank the Lord, his spine is intact.” He looked up, stowing the pager away and moving to
rest his hands on their shoulders. “I'll make sure to take good care of him, and to have him fixed up
good as new. I'll keep you posted on everything I know the second I know it, alright?” I’ll make
sure he’s okay. You haven't been this torn up since...

Lathe nodded. “Thanks, Scotty.” He watched as he left, noticing the determination that set into his
features.

Spades closed her notepad, resting a hand on Lathe’s shoulder. “I need to go too, Lathe. I have to
help survey the crime scene.” Her voice was quiet, pressing a gentle kiss to his temple and patting
Levi’s shoulder, her touch light. “I’ll be back soon, okay? …and don’t worry too much. He’ll be
okay. He’s in good hands.” She left, the door closing silently behind her.

Lathe simply nodded absently at her words and held onto Levi for the five hours they waited,
going up to the ICU after Scotty returned.

Scotty led them up to the Intensive Care Unit, his expression grave as he relayed what he knew to
Lathe. “This isn't going to be easy to tell you… Eren isn't doing too well right now, I'm warning
you. His ribcage is shot. I had to remove four shattered ribs, his arms and legs and feet are all
pinned and plated back together, and he’s not breathing on his own anymore… He’s on a ventilator
and a dialysis machine due to kidney failure. He died on the operating table in the middle of
surgery… we got him back, but, Lathe... he’s in a coma. We don't know if he’s gonna wake up.”
Scotty opened the door to a private room, leading them in.

Levi’s eyes were bloodshot as they stepped in to see Eren laying in the bed, covered from head to
toe in either casts or bandages, hooked up to an IV drip of morphine. His mouth was open to
accommodate the large blue ventilator tube.

Oh my god Eren…

Levi looked up to his vitals, so
utterly low that one would mistake him for an elderly patient dying from old age… His body…
He’s had so much stress over the past two weeks. Levi swallowed as he stepped forwards to take a
seat beside Eren and gently touched one of his fingers. “Hey… Brat… Can’t you wake up for us?”
He asked, his voice so broken, it didn’t even sound like him anymore.

Lathe slowly stepped forward, steeled for the worst as he studied the screen of vitals, his facade
 crumbling as he read the numbers…he… it doesn't look too much like he’s gonna make it… He sat
down next to Levi, tears silently streaming down his face as he studied Eren’s broken form. …I
don't want you to suffer… But that doesn’t mean I want it to end like… Like that. I want you to get
better. You have to. He forced himself to think about what Scotty had said, his eyes sparkling in
recognition. “S-Scotty, you said something about kidney failure?”

Scotty nodded, his face solemn. “Yes, um… He was missing one of his kidneys, and the other
was… Was pretty much useless as it was stabbed. He’s in need of a transplant, and unless we can get him a local donor quickly, he’ll be on the waiting list for weeks… It’s such a common need, a kidney…” His eyes widened a fraction. …you’re going to say it, aren’t you.

“I’ll donate one of mine.” Lathe responded near instantly, looking up with determination set in his eyes. “I’m an O- blood type. We’d be compatible.”

“Lathe… Let me… Please… I want to help him all I can because I didn’t notice this sooner… Please…” I’m an O- too…. Whenever I give blood, they always take extra because of that...

Lathe looked over to Levi, patting his shoulder. “Levi, you’re young, and a marine. I’m much older than you, and just a teacher. You need your kidney more than I do. I know you want to help him, I really do, but I don’t want you putting yourself in a tight spot just to do that. Please.”

Levi looked down, defeat clearly written across his face. Okay, you win … Levi nodded before turning his attention to Eren’s heart monitor as it gave a warning sound. His heartbeat is becoming irregular again...

Scotty moved quickly, sticking his head out of the door and shouting down the hall. “Code Red!” He watched as an attendant rushed to the room, making room and letting them head for the defibrillator, trying to shock Eren’s heart back into a regular pattern. Eren’s body jolted as he was shocked, the monitor showing an erratic pattern before it stabilised, his heart still beating much slower than normal.

Lathe’s knuckles were white as he gripped the edge of his chair, flinching as Eren jolted at the shock. Lathe, you can't totally break down now. …you promised him you'd be there for him whenever he needed you. You fucking swore it. Now keep your damn word and keep your shit together. He breathed deeply for a moment, speaking quietly to Scotty again. “When will he be stable enough for surgery again?”

“…about a week, if nothing goes wrong.” Here’s to hoping. I dunno how long he’s gonna last.

Lathe nodded. …I need to stay here, keep an eye on you. I'm not letting you out of my sight again. It’s such a long drive back, and we need things though… But… I swore on it... “L-Levi…” It’s going to be a lot to ask, and I kinda feel terrible shoving this on you, but I don't think I could live with myself if I left for even half a second...

Levi looked up to Lathe, his eyes full of concern. “Yeah?” What does he want? He looked over his shoulder to see Armin at the doorway, tears running down his face. Oh my god, Armin… I forgot
“...Levi, we’re not really prepared t-to stay here for Eren… Armin needs to get home, a-and… I promised Eren I’d… I’d stay…” He buried his head in his hands. “I know it’s a lot to ask, but I don’t think I can leave and focus on anything other than Eren and if he’s okay right now… Please…” I’m really fucking sorry… but I need to stay. I promised him I would.

... He’s asking me to leave...? Levi swallowed hard, trying to keep his composure, nodding after a few moments. “I’ll…. I’ll take Armin home… Give me the keys to your bike…” He reached his hand out as he slowly stood up, leaning over Eren’s pale body to press a kiss to his forehead. I’ll be right back… Please don’t leave while I’m gone.

Armin tentatively moved forward as Levi took the keys from Lathe’s shaking hands, his hand hovering over Eren’s. “...Please be okay, Eren.” ... You need to wake up. You need to graduate, you need to give your speech as valedictorian, you need to live ... He turned to Levi, silently following him out of the room, staring at the floor as he walked.

Levi took in a deep breath as they got outside. The sun is already starting to go down… Have we really been in there that long already? “I’m going to apologize now for Lathe’s reckless driving earlier… He didn’t tell you I called did he?” Levi asked as they walked across the street to the general parking area. “Do you remember where he parked?” His voice was somber as they walked through the still-crowded lot.

“He’s over here… And no, I didn't know what was going on… He was going so fast following the ambulance and I don't know how I didn't put the pieces together until we got here…” He picked up the helmet as he approached the bike, offering it to Levi. I should've known… Lathe acted as if his life was depending on him following that ambulance...

Levi shook his head, grabbing the goggles. “No, you take the helmet, since there’s only one.” He got on the bike and started the engine, feeling it rumble to life under him. “I’m not going to be as fast, so if you want to call Erwin… Tell him you're with me, and tell him we’ll be home in two hours, you should do it now.” Levi told him and waited to see if Armin would call Erwin. I wouldn’t mind waiting.

Armin nodded, holding the helmet in his left hand as he fished for his phone with his right, tapping a few times before holding it to his ear. It picked up after one ring. ‘Armin, where are you? I’m at your house right now and your Grandfather said you left to go to Eren’s house, and nobody’s home… Where are you?’
Armin tried to keep his voice level. “I’m in Wichita right now, about to head back. I'll explain more when I get home, which should only be in about two hours, but… Eren isn't doing very well. He’s in a coma, and Lathe heard about Eren being in critical condition when Levi called him and hopped on his bike, dragged me with… Levi’s bringing me home, don’t worry, but Lathe’s staying with Eren. They’re going to be down here for a while, it sounds like… I'll tell you the rest of what I know when I get home, but I just wanted to call and let you know I'm okay, and I'll be home soon, okay?”

“Alright. I’ll see you at Lathe’s place in two, then. Bye Armie.”

Armin just ended the call, shoving his phone back into his pocket. He wanted to get home as soon as he could, and he didn't want to talk any more and start sobbing in front of Levi again. He brought the helmet over his head and got on the bike behind Levi, holding onto him. At least he won’t drive as crazily as Lathe did… I won't have to worry as much.

Levi made sure Armin had a good grip on him before they got out of the parking lot, and headed down the street towards the highway entrance. “So Eren told you he was sick?” He asked, turning his head to the side for only a second before returning his eyes to the road. No accidents, no speeding either.

Armin spoke loud enough so he could hear him, trying to keep his voice from cracking. “He did… He said that he wasn't feeling too good, so that would explain if I texted him and didn't get a reply too soon after.” And I totally bought it.

Levi nodded. “Armin, I’m going to be completely honest with you… I don’t think he’ll be going to graduation…. Would you… Would you read his speech for him?” He asked turning onto the highway and speeding up to merge into traffic. I know it’s finished… He read it to me over the phone… It’s a really good speech too.

Armin paused for a moment, nodding. “I'll do it for Eren.” …even though he should be the one to do it. He deserved as much...

Levi nodded and the two of them were mostly quiet for the two hour ride back to their hometown. He pulled up into Lathe’s driveway, seeing Erwin sitting on their porch, standing to come and greet them. Well Eyebrows is gonna see how red my eyes are… Fuck.

Armin pulled off the helmet quickly and set it down, running up to Erwin and jumping up to give him a hug, his face buried in his shoulder. “I missed you so much, I'm sorry I wasn't here when you got here but welcome home, Erwin.” I really missed you.
Erwin smiled as he wrapped his arms around Armin. “It’s good to be back… And I understand… I understand where you were, you don’t have to apologize.” Erwin leaned in and kissed Armin’s cheek, setting him down gently as he saw Levi walk up in scrubs. “Didn’t you leave with your dress uniform on this morning?” Erwin asked with a raised eyebrow. *What the fuck actually happened?*

Levi just shook his head, trying to hide his red eyes. “Armin can explain what happened… I have to get things ready to head back down to Wichita.” He hoped Erwin would just let him walk up to the house, not question him. *Let me just do this and go, please.*

Erwin stopped him with a firm hand before he passed, “If you need us to grab anything from Lathe’s while you guys are up there, Armin’s got a spare key… So don’t hesitate to ask. Come on Armie, let’s head home. Your grandfather was worried about you.” He led Armin into his car, holding a hand out for his keys to drive them back.

Armin handed him the keys, sending Levi a weak smile. “It’ll be okay, Levi. We’re here for you if you need us.” He slid into the passenger’s seat, closing the door and thinking of where to start explaining.
Chapter 30: 28 Part 3: Heart Problems

Think. Levi dropped one last bag into the trunk of Eren’s car, running through a mental checklist. Clothes for everybody… I pitched the food in the fridge that would spoil… Everything’s locked… I have Lathe’s laptop stuff and his medical bag, both of which he needs… I have notebooks and pens, and some sharpies too, Lathe didn’t look anywhere near about to leave that hospital room… Blake’s food and bowls, ‘cause he should be okay and back with us in no time, his wounds weren’t too bad… That’ll have to do. If I forgot anything not worth the trip we can just buy it down there. He slammed the trunk shut, having changed out of his scrubs into jeans and a tank top, sliding into the driver’s seat and making the journey back in silence, left to his own thoughts. He drove in the streets around the hospital, finding a hotel a few streets away and successfully getting a room, dragging a majority of their things upstairs before going to look for a grocery store. He wandered the aisles, picking ingredients for things he knew he could make and paying with a credit card he found in a smaller wallet in Lathe’s drawers. He brought it back to the room before driving back to the hospital, Lathe’s bags slung over his shoulder as he made his way to the room to see how Eren was doing.

Lathe had moved to a chair against the wall so he could lean back, looking up to Levi as he entered, his face grave. “No improvement. Nothing really happened while you were gone… I’m sorry for making you leave him…” …But I can’t.

“It’s okay…” Levi reached into one of the bags, holding out a container of food for him. “Thought you might want something to eat.” He said quietly. I know I’m hungry. Levi reached in and pulled out his own, along with silverware for the two of them. “I got a room in a hotel a few streets away, we can crash there after we eat.” Levi told him and started to dig into his food. It’s almost ten now, we need sleep after today.

Lathe picked at his food, not feeling able to eat. He spoke quietly. “Scotty did a little bit of rule-bending… usual visiting hours would be over by now. I dunno if… if I want to leave him alone.” I have to stay...

Levi only nodded. “Okay, well, I need sleep, so I’m going to leave soon. The option is open for you; I’ll text you the address and the room number. Your clothes are in that bag, your laptop is in the bag next to your medical bag.” Levi rattled off what he had brought him, taking another forkful of food. I hope I didn’t forget anything else.

“Do you have paper and a pen anywhere?” Lathe looked down at the bags. He remembered everything else...

“They’re with your laptop, a few notebooks and some sharpies…” Levi trailed off as he yawned.
“Are you gonna stay here? Or you gonna come to the hotel with me?” Levi asked quietly. *I'm fucking exhausted.*

*If I leave, it's going to be either to go to the bathroom or to get more coffee. That's it. *I'm gonna stay here.*” His head snapped up, a questioning look in his eye. “How did you pay for all this stuff? A hotel isn't exactly cheap.”

“I found one of your credit cards in a wallet in your room while I was looking for clothes... I left my wallet here, with my uniform... So I was glad I found it.” He motioned to the bag with his bloodied dress blues in it. He slowly stood up, making his way over to Eren. “Wake up soon, Eren. Please.” Levi kissed his forehead, his hand over Eren’s rubbing his cool skin soothingly. *... What if he never does?* Levi moved over to Lathe and bent down to give him a hug. “I’ll be back tomorrow with breakfast for us then.” His voice was quiet and solemn. He straightened himself and made for the door.

Lathe caught his arm for a moment, giving him a weary, reassuring smile. “He’ll be okay, Levi. He’s tough, and he’s got a great team of people working to help him. I'll let you know if anything happens.”

Levi nodded and disappeared into the darkened hallway. He barely got any sleep that night, always checking his phone for calls or texts. None ever came, and Levi came with an extra-large cup of coffee for Lathe along with a muffin. He came with his own breakfast, handing Lathe his food before sitting down beside Eren’s side, looking over his vitals. “His heart beat... It’s slower than it was yesterday.” Levi pointed out, looking over Eren and noticing a patch of intricate gold lettering and flowers taking over a section of Eren’s white cast on his right arm. *... Lathe must be stressed over the slower heart beat.*

Lathe nodded, sipping the coffee, the skin under his eyes darker than before. “It’s not by much, it was a gradual progression through the night, but at this point any drop is worrying.” He studied the golden patch on his cast. “I couldn't focus enough last night to crunch numbers and try and come up with anything to help... I just kinda doodled on his cast. Too much white.” He allowed a ghost of a smile to cross his lips before he became expressionless again. “Thanks for bringing breakfast, by the way. I'm sorry... I dunno how much use I'm going to be if I'm in here for as long as it could take for him to wake up.” He nibbled at the muffin, trying to eat at least half of it. *Come on, you can't let yourself go down the pipes, too.*

Levi only nodded, he would talk occasionally to Eren, hoping that he would hear him and wake up, but that was mostly the only sound that was heard in their room. Scotty dropped by an hour later with Blake in tow. Blake looked well rested, his abdomen wrapped, with his vest on top of the bandages. He instantly made himself comfortable at the foot of Eren’s bed. *He's back in shape... I wish Eren could wake up to see that Blake is alright now.* Levi watched over Eren for the whole day, only leaving to get food for him and Lathe or leave to use the restroom. *Nothing is*
happening… Which I guess is good, he hasn’t worsened but he hasn’t progressed either. Levi stayed as long as he possibly could before he had to call it for the night around 10pm. After he left, Eren’s heart rate spiked up a bit higher than it was, dropping back down to it’s deathly low pattern after only an hour.

Lathe’s eyes brightened a bit as he saw Eren’s heart rate go up, texting Levi that he didn't have to come around, but his heart rate was closer to normal than before. After barely an hour of researching comas, he looked up, his heart breaking as he saw it had returned to it’s same low pattern. He texted Levi the news, still grateful in the back of his mind that at least he knew Eren was fighting it. He read further, unable to sleep, coming across an interesting article. ...familiar stories, read by family members? Lathe looked up to Eren, shrugging and scrolling through a list of books. Might as well give it a shot. He moved to a chair closer to Eren where he could hear him better, if he could, reading him aloud ‘The Goblet of Fire’ until he fell asleep, nearing five in the morning.

Levi came back in with Blake at around 8:30 in the morning, seeing Lathe asleep beside Eren. He smiled softly. Better let him sleep . Levi glanced up at Eren’s vitals. They’re still down… It looks like they almost didn’t go up at all... Oh well, I should just let him sleep. Levi sat down quietly watching over the two of them.

Lathe woke up not an hour after Levi arrived, yawning widely, his laptop still open on his lap. He smiled faintly at Eren, his voice quiet. “Good morning, Eren.” He looked over to Levi and Blake. “Good morning you two. Did you sleep okay?” He reached down to pet Blake as he came over to him, looking up to check his vitals. Still the same. At least he’s not worse.

Levi shrugged. “As well as one can… I was almost ready to get over here when you said his heart rate increased…” Levi told him and looked up to the monitor, his eyes widening as he saw the heartbeat start to increase at a rapid pace. Is that actually happening?

Lathe looked up as the beeping quickened, his eyes sparking for just a moment before a look of concern overtook his features. “...It’s not stopping.” It's going up too fast.

Eren’s body started to move, his head arching back, along with his shoulders, his arms splaying out over the edge of the bed. His body started to shake violently, a few monitors starting to scream in alert as Eren’s heart rate went through the roof during his seizure.

Levi could only watch in horror as doctors rushed in and slowly moved Eren onto his side and held him in place. This is longer… It’s not stopping… Why's he still seizing? Levi’s eyes widened as they passed the 30 second mark, then 45, then a minute… Then a minute and a half and Eren’s body was still writhing uncontrollably.
Lathe pushed his chair back to give the doctors room, watching in fear as Eren didn't stop seizing. *Oh no. Oh no. He’s not stopping. Think. What could possibly help? ... Can anything possibly help?*

Eren’s body continued to violently convulse for a full three minutes before his seizing finally stopped and he was moved onto his back again, the doctors ordering for a sedative to be administered for his rapid heartbeat.

Lathe picked up the paper from the floor and his sharpie, looking to the nurse holding a syringe as he scribbled down numbers, his mind in overdrive. “Excuse me for asking, but what’s the concentration of that?”

The nurse gave him an odd look, wondering why he dared to question their authority. “He needs about 15 cc's of Primidone, why?” *I think I know what I'm doing, hon.*

Lathe’s hand moved furiously across the paper, his thoughts being scratched down very quickly, his eyes never leaving the nurse’s. “I apologise for questioning your judgement, however as a former general surgeon, I thought you would allow me to weigh in. Given the amount of blood he’s lost and taking into account the limited number of transfusions available to him on such short notice, and knowing that his response to that particular drug will be at fullest effect as he has never previously experienced it's influence, and because his heart rate has been abnormally low for the past 36 hours at least and I do not advise returning it to that level, I would think 5 cc’s in an isotonic saline solution would be more appropriate instead of administering it all at once..”

The woman looked at him, stunned. *...oh. He does have a point...* "Um… Y-yes sir. I'll prepare that right away.” She left for only a moment before returning with an appropriate IV, inserting the needle into Eren’s arm and starting the drip. “It will take effect soon, and empty after about an hour. He may require another afterward depending on his body’s responses after it initially wears off.”

Lathe nodded, the end of his sharpie tapping against the full page of notes. “Thank you.” He watched as the team of doctors left after a moment, turning to a new page and scratching down more notes in a more legible hand. *I hate having to argue over this sort of stuff. And I always have to pull the ‘general surgeon’ card. You'd think they'd pay more attention to his file before doing something like that.*

Levi’s eyebrows raised at Lathe’s almost hostile tone. *He’s a general surgeon? Well, that explains a lot, I guess.* He waited for Lathe to calm down before speaking up. “So his heart rate won’t be as low with just 5 cc’s?” Levi asked and looked over to the bag drip attached to Eren’s arm. *He looks so pale....* He reached out to take Eren’s fingers into his own and just watched them in silence,
waiting for Lathe’s reply.

“It’s common sense, really. I had hoped they’d pay some more attention to his papers before giving him something like that. If you gave him too much, his heart might slow down too much…” Or stop. He dropped his hands, looking up with an apologetic look. “I’m sorry if I sound mean, or if I sounded too hard on them. I just want to make sure everything checks out with what they're giving Eren. I have to keep pulling the general surgeon card for these people to listen to the guy who knows his file backwards and upside down. It just gets frustrating after a while.”

Levi nodded, mostly quiet for the rest of the day, watching over Eren as the day went on without another incident.

Lathe sighed, scratching down notes as Eren’s IV was changed and reading more Harry Potter to him late into the night.
Nothing much has changed. Eren’s heartbeat went back down to that low, low pulse even with such a lower dose. It was okay for a bit and just went back down from there. Levi’s been getting a little bit of sleep at least, Blake… I don’t speak dog exactly, but he’s doing okay. Don’t think he understands what’s going on at all. He’s good company for all of us, though. Me? I’ve barely been getting any sleep. I’ve just kept picking books that I know Eren has read before, the good ones with good stories, and reading them to him at night. I’ve doodled up and down his casts, all sorts of flowers and well-wishes, and I think I finally found a compound for his PTSD that won’t send Eren spiralling. I’ve got Casper looking it over to see if my sleep-deprived self made any mistakes. I hope not. The people here have finally recognised my authority as a voice in what happens with Eren medically. Once Scotty got involved and had to yell at a nurse for nearly fucking killing him when I said the same exact fucking thing he did they started to listen to me. I was in the middle of adding silver highlights to his right arm when a doctor came in, right on time, wearing a practiced expression and his voice an overused grave tone. I didn’t even bother looking up because I knew every syllable in what he was going to say. And no. No. Just no. There’s hope. Sometimes his fingers twitch or I see a muscle in his face tense up and I know that he’s in there, so shut up and get the fuck out of here so I can make his casts nicer than a plain white and read him all the stories he likes. …That was the day before the surgery. Yesterday. The surgery’s today. Lathe let himself be led onto a table, psyching himself up and calming himself down at the same time. Chill. Chill. It’ll all go over well. He grinned as Scotty came into view over him, his eyes the only thing visible besides his blue scrubs, his smile carrying up to them.

“It’s a really great thing that you’re doing. I’ll make sure this all goes over smoothly. His body should be under a lot less of a strain after this.”

“Here’s to hoping.” Lathe recognised the OR too well, and in minutes was out like a light. He woke up eight hours later, his head heavy and blinking at the bright lights above him. “Ugh, it’s bright, and I have a headache. I need aspirin or something…” He looked down, recognising the stark white, feeling a neat row of stitches on his side. …Oh yeah. That’s a thing. He glanced down to the floor next to his bed, noting his laptop stashed in his bag with plenty of paper in arm’s reach. Thanks, Levi. He talked with Scotty occasionally as he had the time, learning the transplant was a success, and that his heart rate hadn't risen by too much, but it was progress. Lathe was officially discharged after about a day, immediately returning to keep his vigil in Eren’s room.

Levi greeted him as he returned, one less machine crowding Eren’s right bedside. “He looks better, he got his color back finally… And his heart beat is up.” It’s been a week and three days… He’s not showing signs of any real improvement… How is this gonna go over with him? “…. He’s not gonna wake up for prom… Is he?” Levi asked with a defeated tone in his voice. There’s only three days until prom… And I promised I would dance with you all night..

“I wouldn’t say that. I’d be more concerned about him going in anything other than a wheelchair, with his legs the way they are. He just had his feet busted. I’m really sorry, Levi, but he still needs
time.” He brushed the hair from Eren’s face gently, pecking his forehead and sitting next to Levi. He rested a hand on his shoulder. “I know it doesn’t look like it, but I really think he’s gonna come out of this. It’s worrying that it’s been this long, but we haven’t hit the point of no return by any means. I think he’ll be okay.” I really hope so. Lathe’s eyes widened as he heard a phone ring, both of them reaching for their pockets, Levi’s display alight with a familiar number.

Levi picked up the phone and held it to his ear, struggling to keep his composure. “Hello?” His voice surprisingly calm. Who is this and why are you calling me?

“Hey Levi! It’s Nate. I was trying to call Eren’s phone, but he wasn’t picking up. He hasn’t posted anything in awhile, and I just wanted to know if everything was okay over there?”

Levi took in a shuddery breath. “Nate…” Levi trailed off as his voice started to crack. How am I supposed to tell him Eren’s in a fucking coma?!


“N-no.” Levi couldn’t stop his voice from cracking so much that he stuttered out the short word. “No… He’s not.” How do I fucking tell him?

“Levi, oh my god, what happened? Tell me.” Oh this isn't good, this is bad. This is very bad.

“Nate… Eren’s in a coma… He’s been in one for a week and three days… And he hasn’t shown significant improvement at all…” Levi finally sobbed out the harsh reality of their situation. He’s not going to wake up… Is he?

Nate was deathly silent on his end, trying not to drop the phone or lose his own composure. He ran up the stairs and grabbed a backpack, dropping random things in it before stomping back down the stairs, pulling the phone away from him, yelling to the living room. “Charolette, I need to go to Kansas!” He brought the phone back up to his ear. “Levi, I'm so sorry to hear that. I'll be down there to visit soon, okay?”

Levi sniffled as he wiped away some of his tears… “Yeah, call me when you get to Wichita, I’ll come pick you up…” Levi trailed off knowing that Nate would be here by the end of the day since he would probably take the next flight out. He probably will too, he’s already fucking packed… Knowing him.
“Oh no, you should stay with Eren. I'll call for a cab or something. Tell me which hospital you're at and I'll find you, okay?”

“We’re at Via Christi Hospital St. Joseph, I’ll meet you down in the lobby so they let you in… So text me when you get close, okay?” Levi asked quietly, tears still streaming heavily down his face once more.

Nate threw his backpack into the passenger’s seat, starting the car. “Alright, I will. I'll be there soon, Levi. It'll all be alright. I've got to go now, okay?”

“Okay…” Levi trailed off, hanging up on Nate and putting the phone away.

Lathe ran a hand through his hair, studying the sharpie doodles on the cast on Eren’s foot. “Nate’s coming?” Knowing him he’s already on his way to the airport.

“Yeah… He was in his car when I hung up…” Levi got up to kiss Eren’s forehead. “Nate’ll be here soon… Won’t you wake up?” Levi asked his hand still holding onto Eren’s fingers. It would be a miracle if you did once he gets here. Levi watched over Eren’s heartbeat, it would increase every now and then, only to go back to the higher low that it currently beat at. Is he having small seizures when that happens? I don’t know…

Lathe tapped away furiously on his laptop, holding email conversations with every doctor he had ever met that would know more about comas than he did. His face was lined with worry, his eyes dull as he skimmed through article after article. He looked up sluggishly as someone quietly knocked, recognising her bright red hair. “Hey Spades.” Lathe tried to smile.

She gave him a small smile, padding in quietly, holding a vase full of flowers. “Hey… I brought flowers, I thought the room could use a little color.” She eyed Eren’s colourful casts as she placed them on the small table next to Eren. You certainly went all out on them… “I've got the next few days off of work, but it’s only for a little while.” She studied Lathe and Levi’s faces, noting the darkness under their eyes. “Have you two been sleeping okay?”

Levi shook his head. “No… But how can you blame us? Eren’s in a coma.” Even though I go to the hotel… I had to cry myself to sleep sometimes just to get a few hours… I’m always next to my phone, dreading Lathe’s text to tell me Eren decided by himself to go….

Spades sighed quietly, her eyes full of worry as she walked next to them. “You’re right. I
understand. I just can't stand to see you two running yourselves into the ground…” She made it to Lathe, bending down to kiss him sweetly, trying to reassure him and feeling him weakly trying to kiss back. You're exhausted. Rightly so… She broke their kiss, Lathe still with closed eyes and bringing up a hand to cover hers as she cradled his cheek. Oh my… it’s been rough, hasn't it… and I haven't been able to come… She looked up and over Lathe’s head, her brow furrowing as she reached up with her free hand, plucking something from the back of his head. What the hell?

Lathe’s eyes cracked open, his other hand weakly trying to shoo hers away. “What was that for?” He stared as she dangled the hair in his face, the normal black instead a light grey. What?

“Lathe, you're thirty-eight. And you're going grey.” Spades dropped the strand on the floor, leaning back up to look at his shaggy hair. “Lathe, you’re too young to be going grey…” …Must be the stress you're putting yourself under...

“Spades is right Lathe… You need to actually get some sleep. You were just discharged this morning. Why don’t you go to the hotel and sleep for the rest of the day?” Levi asked, his eyes full of concern. You need to be healthy for when Eren wakes up… If he does.

“You were what.” Spades looked at him, her eyes wide. “Let me get this straight. You just got discharged from having your kidney removed, and the first thing you do is come straight back here, obviously sleep-deprived and researching everything under the sun? Lathe, you need rest. If there’s a hotel room waiting for you, take the opportunity and sleep. We both know you need to.” Please, I can't stand watching you ignore your own needs like that.

Lathe shook his head immediately, his eyes stony. “I'm not leaving.” What if Eren wakes up? What if something happens? What if the doctors or nurses decide he needs something and nearly kill him again? “Spades, I understand you're worried, but I'm worried more about whether or not the doctors are going to nearly kill him again. The people they've sent in don't know the entire story about what is and is not right for him. I need to make sure he’s okay. I swore it, Spades. I'm not moving.” I'm not.

Spade’s eyes softened, knowing Lathe wasn't about to budge. He’s set on it. And I know how he feels about keeping his word. She glanced to the clock on the wall. “I'm going to go grab us all something to eat, okay? I won't be too long.” She pecked his forehead, her hand slipping from his cheek and making her way to the door.

Levi got up and kissed Eren’s forehead before following Spades. “I'll come with you.” I need to actually ask you about something. Levi followed Spades out to her car in the parking lot. I assume we’re taking your car...
Spades was quiet as they walked to her car, not knowing what to say as they got in and she started the engine. _Lathe’s stubborn, and he’s smart… I hope Eren wakes up, and if all Lathe has said is that he can see the tiny signs… I can only hope it isn’t just something his mind made up._ “Do you care where we go to get lunch?”

“No… I don’t. There’s a bunch or restaurants if you head down this road a little bit, the plaza’s on the left side of the road…” Levi kept his gaze on the road in front of them. _His heart still hasn’t come up to a normal heartbeat…_

Spades nodded, turning into the plaza after a short while, parking near a Macaroni Grill. “Alright, let’s go, I guess. We’ll just ask for stuff to-go…” Spades slid from the car, locking it and walking up to the doors, still very quiet in her thoughts.

The woman saw them walk in and got the to-go menus out for them. “Hi deary, how is he?”

Levi just shook his head. “No improvements… Um, I’ll get the two pasta dishes I usually get. Spades, you wanna look over the menu for a bit?” _I’ve come here so much they know my order already… And they know Eren’s in the hospital…_

Spades nodded, skimming quickly over the menu. “Just the farfalle in meat sauce, please.” _I don’t think I could eat anything more than just that…_ She handed the woman the menu, moving with Levi to sit as they waited. She just stared at her hands, unsure of what to tell him.

“So… I wanted to ask you if I’ll be facing charges…” Levi asked her softly, tapping his foot on the ground in anxiety. _I don’t think the academy would be quite happy with me if I was charged with manslaughter._

Spades immediately shook her head. “First off, with such an obvious scene any charges would’ve already been processed. You’d’ve heard about it by now. And because Kansas has a stand-your-ground law, and because Grisha was putting Eren in obvious mortal danger, you had every right to shoot to kill. It was a bit excessive, what you did, but not illegal. You did the right thing.” _Nobody could hold anything you did against you._

“So… I couldn’t stop shooting him… I loaded his body with 11 bullets… I only had one left to get Blake out of his cage…. I need to get another clip for that before I go back.” Levi ran a hand through his hair. _It was issued by the marines… I need to take it back…_
“You left your gun at the scene, I remember. It should be out of processing by now, given that there’s no case against you to justify it being held… I’ll make sure you get it back soon, and get you some more bullets for it.” That’s another thing to do. You’ll need that back. She swallowed hard. “The initial shock, seeing Grisha hurting Eren like that, I’m not surprised you seemed to feel like a bystander to your own actions. But you reacted amazingly well. I heard part of your conversation with the 911 operator, the last half of it. You kept it together really well, and made sure he got the exact help that he needed.” I’m really proud of you, for doing that so well. “He… He has a chance, because of what you did.”

Levi could only nod, his foot still tapping the floor as the anxiety coursed through him. “But did I do enough? He’s still in a coma, and I can’t help but think if I noticed what was happening to him before… This all could’ve been avoided.” He wouldn’t be in a coma… We wouldn’t be waiting for him to wake up… We would be home, eating lunch together like a family.

Spades shook her head, giving him a faint smile, resting her hand on his shoulder. “Levi, don’t blame yourself for what happened. What happened wasn’t your fault at all. I’m just grateful that you showed up when you did, reacted the way you did, and knew what to say and who to say it to. Don't blame yourself for what isn’t. Just know that he’s in good hands right now, that he’s okay.”

“Do you know… How fast we were going on the highway? I didn’t really pay attention to how fast we got there… Armin just told me Lathe was driving like a madman.” I just remember how slowly his eyes closed…. They haven’t opened at all…. “Did I do the right thing? Would he have been better off in a regular ambulance?”

“Levi, a regular ambulance wouldn’t’ve gotten there in time. And the escort you got him let you get him there in amazing time. You were going over 100 miles an hour. You couldn't do better.”

Levi nudged Lathe out of his half-asleep note-taking daze when they got back, handing him his container of pasta. “Here- we got you lunch.” You look like you're about to pass out over your notes.

Lathe looked up, smiling tiredly as Levi handed him his food and silverware. “Thanks, Levi.” Lathe opened it and set the lid aside, spearing a piece of the bow tie pasta. “Nothing’s changed much- Casper sent me a couple more possible medication formulas to check. We think we're close to finding the one.” It'll stop his seizing, we hope.
Spades sighed, taking his notebooks from him and letting him eat. “You gotta eat, alright? Then you can do whatever you want.” She kept his notebook, making sure he was eating as she was eating as well. *I really hope you'll wake up Eren.... We need you in our life...*

Lathe made a quiet sound of protest as Spades took away his notes, but after a moment redirected his attention to his pasta, picking his way through about half of it before stopping, reaching down for the travel mug that still had coffee in it next to the leg of his chair. *I need to stay awake- I need to get through a couple more formulas, and read to Eren later, tell him everything that's happened today... I really want him to be awake...*

Spades watched Lathe’s sluggish movements. *He's gonna fall asleep, isn't he... Yup, well at least there's a room for all of us tonight.*

*Right... I've got work to do...* Lathe was able to hold out for a few more minutes, the coffee seeming to have little effect on him as he reached for his notebook again, his pen clattering to the floor as he passed out over his notes, his breathing even. *I can't help it... a small nap won't kill me...* Lathe was completely out for more than twelve hours, blearily blinking in the early hours of the morning. *... it’s really warm... and comfy... but... I was in the hospital room... I'm supposed to be there...* Lathe lifted his head, seeing the electric clock on the side table and looking at their unfamiliar surroundings, seeing Levi asleep in a second queen bed on the other side of the room, realizing Spades was asleep next to him. *...I'm at the hotel. But I promised to stay, and now he's what he wouldn't want to be- alone.* Lathe kicked off his sheets, not bothering to be too quiet as he got dressed and washed up in the bathroom, checking the dressing over his stitches before seizing his bags from the foot of the bed and nudging Blake gently awake. “C’mon Blake, we’re going back.”

Spades woke up as she heard Lathe move around the room. “Lathe..?” She was confused as she sat up. “Lathe... Come on, come back to bed... It’s too early.” *Really early.* She moved to grab around his waist, trying to pull him back into bed.

*You made me leave him alone.* Lathe stepped out of her hold, turning to her, his expression one of anger. “Spades, I told you I was going to stay with Eren no matter what until he woke up. Not only did I promise Eren that, but it’s my duty not only as a doctor but as his father to make sure the nurses that don't bother reading his file don't kill him, to make sure if anything happens there is immediately someone there who can help, to find something that'll stop his seizures, and to make sure that he neither wakes up nor dies alone, because even I’m not able to tell anymore which it's going to be and I'm terrified..” Tears started to stream down Lathe’s cheeks, wiping at them with his sleeve. “So I’m going back, and I’m going to stay there. And I understand that you might not like it and might be worried about me too, but there is nothing you will do that can stop me.” *...Eren deserves more than to be left alone... now more than ever.* Lathe turned away from her and left, Blake obediently at his heels as he tried to keep from slamming the door shut. *You better not pull that shit again.* Lathe asked for directions from the man at the front desk, walking the five minutes to the hospital and nodding to the receptionist, who simply let him pass without asking,
both recognizing him and seeing Blake. He had just made it into Eren’s room when Scotty and a nurse were moving Eren to sit up, blood running down from his nose at an alarming rate. *Crap.* Lathe immediately had a wad of gauze pressed against Eren’s nose, trying to stop him from bleeding. *There’s blood everywhere … not good.*

“If he keeps bleeding like this he’s gonna need a transfusion again… Jackie… Go get him one, O neg.” Scotty looked as the nurse nodded and went off, letting Scotty and Lathe work on him. “I was about to call you, his alarms went off and then his nose just started bleeding heavily… Did you get any sleep?” *I hope you did, and you don’t look that exhausted… Which is good.*

“I’d been passed out from noon yesterday to twenty minutes ago. I wouldn’t have gone to the hotel if it were my choice, though. But I am glad I don’t feel like a zombie for once.” *There’s one upside to this. …still not entirely worth it, but I’m here now.*

Scotty looked to Lathe as he spoke, looking to the Gauze as it became saturated with bright red blood. *Well… This looks like…* Scotty’s eyes widened. “When was the last time he had a nose bleed…” *I think… And I’m hoping I’m right… But I can only hope, I haven’t been able to research into his case a lot.*

“…a bit after we found out his finger healed itself really fast…” *huh.* “He hasn’t had a nosebleed until then, really…” *hmm… “…Scotty, as much as it kills me to say it… if you need samples from Eren to test because you think there’s something going on… do it. We’re already in this deep. If it helps us to better understand what the fuck is going on, okay.” …*why not.*

Scotty nodded, looking as Jackie came back with a transfusion. “Before we put that it, get me a few vials, I gotta take some blood before we give him blood.” *I need to figure out what the hell is going on with him….* The nurse nodded and left them yet again. “Do you think he might be healing himself again? If that’s even possible?” He asked quietly. *I really hope that's the case… Even if it defies all laws of health.*

“Scotty… honestly, I have no fucking clue.” Lathe switched the gauze, the wad in his hand saturated. “But that's what the test is for. …it’s a nice thought to have.” …*maybe there really is hope…*

“Hopefully…” He focused as he took 15 vials worth of blood before he moved around and started to put the transfusion into his system. *That’ll be enough.* “Alright, I’m gonna take these to the lab, has his nose at stopped bleeding at least a little bit?”

Lathe tentatively checked, seeing the streams had dwindled to a slow dribble. “Yeah, almost. I'm
going to get some of this blood cleaned up- there's a lot of it.” *They didn't get here when it had just started, that's for sure...* Lathe went to the sink after dropping his bags at the foot of the bed, coming back with a wet cloth and starting to clean up Eren’s face. “Wish those lab techs good luck with that- anything that helps us figure out what's going on with his body. I'll be crunching numbers, like always.” Lathe was able to ease Eren back down after his nose ceased bleeding, wiping up the last of the dried blood from his skin and from the thin sheets and clothes he was in as best as he could. *That'll have to do.*

Scotty nodded before leaving the room, letting Lathe stay with Eren’s still body. *I can imagine the shock of seeing that must blood come from his nose.*
Chapter 32: 28 Part 5: Late Night Calls

Levi and Spades were waiting for me when I got there at around four. I could tell Levi had barely been sleeping, and going up to the room... I could tell Lathe was barely functioning. ...Eren looked so... I don't know. I don't know if he’s gonna wake up. With so many injuries, with what I'm told about his seizures, his heart spikes... I don't know what to think. Levi’s letting me stay with him at the hotel, and I'm always with them in the hospital room, or on food runs. Spades comes up whenever she can, and so many people have been coming to visit him as time goes on. A lot of friends from school. Erwin and Armin have come up a few times, and they've brought Marco, Jean and Annie with them. Levi’s cousin Mikasa, too. She’s really worried about Eren, and she’s worried about Levi. They've all brought flowers. There are so many of them, taking up all the open spaces on tables and chairs in the room. A bunch of Lathe’s friends have come to see him, too. Marc and Brook, Larry, Desce... Ryan... They've all said the same thing to each other, to me... That Lathe looks as bad as he did when... when Viola died. They all... We all... We all want Eren to wake up. But he keeps having seizures, and Levi gets more and more tense and silent with each one, and the bags under his eyes just keep getting darker... the only thing that makes them look up in hope is when his finger twitches, and that stopped by the second week. Or when his heart rate spikes, and they both look so hopeful that his eyes are going to open and every time it goes back down and they slump back in their chairs looking even more shattered than before. Around the first week I was here, this guy Casper came up with some new PTSD medicine, and Lathe and Casper gave the doctors hell until they cleared it for use on Eren. It stopped his seizures, but it stopped the heart spikes too. ...Every day, a doctor comes in and asks Lathe if he wants to keep Eren on life support. ...Lathe just laughs in their face every time, going back to his research or his writing or I don't even know. ...Eren has to wake up. We want him to wake up and stay awake and be better and stop breaking everyone’s hearts...

Scotty’s face was somber as he leaned into the room from the doorway. He couldn't find the strength to look into Lathe’s eyes, instead studying the tiles underfoot. No... He knows what I’m about to say, he’s got to. “Lathe… Can you come into the hall with me for a second?”

Lathe looked up from his laptop, setting it down on the chair next to him and standing, quietly walking around the bed, a defeated look on his face. You’re going to say the same thing, aren't you. That's all anyone’s talked to me about lately. He closed the door quietly, turning to Scotty.

“I know you don’t want to hear this… But listen to me please.” Scotty took in a deep breath. This is hard for the both of us... I don’t want to see you break down again. “Eren’s brain activity has been decreasing for a week… Even you know his fingers haven’t moved in over a week… Eren’s heartbeat isn’t spiking anymore… Are you sure you want to keep him on life support…. If Eren were to ever wake up… And I say if…. Not when, you need to understand that Eren could possibly never wake up.... We don’t know the amount of damage that Eren’s brain has acquired over the last three weeks...” Scotty had to keep his eyes off of Lathe’s broken features to get through this without breaking down with him. “Are you sure?... Are you sure you want to keep him on life support?” I can’t believe I need to tell you this Lathe... But I can’t have you kill yourself from stress over Eren.... I don’t think he’ll wake up anymore. He’s had no improvement in over two weeks.
Tears streamed down Lathe’s face, his head dropping and looking at the floor. “Scotty, I… I can’t… I can’t lose him…” Lathe buried his head in his hands. … Eren… I don’t think if he didn’t wake up that I’d even want to… “He’s staying on life support. One more week. He needs a bit more time, and I know that the people who wake up after three weeks are few and far between, but he will, I know he will… H-he… He has to.” Lathe looked up, his eyes red. “Scotty, I know it might sound selfish, but he’s staying on life support for one more week. Please. And if nothing happens by then…” He swallowed hard, his entire body shaking. “… then I’ll let him go.”

Scotty nodded. “Okay… I’ll give him one more week. I’m sorry Lathe.” Scotty moved forward and brought Lathe into his arms, holding him tight against his chest. He let out a shuddery breath. “I’m so sorry… Lathe, I really am.”

Lathe leaned heavily on Scotty, burying his face into his shoulder. “T-thanks. Scotty… I j-just… I don’t w-want to lose him… I can’t …

Scotty gently rubbed circles into Lathe’s back. “…. We don’t want to lose him either… I’ll let you get back to him… Call me if anything happens, okay?” Scotty asked, reaching up to wipe the tears from his own eyes. I hope Eren wakes up…. But I don’t think he will.

Lathe sniffled, nodding. “Okay.” He turned back to the room, pecking Eren’s forehead before taking his place back next to his bed. He quietly wrote down notes from journals on PTSD and seizures until he heard Levi and Nate stand, bidding them a goodnight and leaving for the hotel room. He closed the notebook, looking up to the clock. It’s late, it’s nearly eleven… Time for books. He pulled up The Prisoner of Azkaban, moving his chair a bit closer to Eren and reading to him, a faint smile on his face.

“Snow had started to fall outside the windows, and the castle was very still and quiet. ‘Pssst! Harry!’ He turned, halfway along the 3rd floor corridor, to see Fred and George peering out at him from behind a statue of a humpbacked one-eyed witch. ‘What are you doing?’ Said Harry curiously. ‘How come you’re not going to Hogsmeade?’ Said Harry curiously. ‘We’ve come to give you a bit of festive cheer before we go.’ Said Fred with a mysterious wink. ‘Come in here!’ He nodded toward an empty classroom to the left of the one-eyed statue. Harry followed Fred and George inside. George closed the door quietly and turned beaming to look at Harry. ‘Early Christmas present for you, Harry.’ He said. Fred pulled something from the inside of his cloak with a flourish, and-

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren laid there still on the bed, the ventilator helping keep his lungs moving. What is that sound? He strained to hear the noises that surrounded his head. Harry?…. Harry Potter? Hogsmeade?
What’s going on? I don’t understand… Eren struggled to listen as the voice became clearer in his
mind. Fred and George?... What’s happening? Is someone reading Harry Potter to me?... Is that
the Prisoner of Azkaban? Is that?... Is that Dad’s voice? Eren willed himself to open his eyes. I
wanna see Dad... I want him to know I’m still here... Eren’s eyes slowly cracked open, his
heartbeat slowly rising, but not by much. Dad? Where are you? I can’t see you…. Why can’t I see
you? Eren’s fingers started to move towards Lathe. Dad? Where are you? I can hear you... Where
are you?

Lathe’s voice cut off abruptly as he noticed Eren move, his eyes immediately going to his face,
sighing in relief as he saw Eren’s eyes open. Oh My God Thank You! “Eren! Oh my God, Eren,
you're awake.” He moved his laptop from his lap and moved his chair close to Eren’s side, gently
holding Eren’s hand, still allowing his fingers to move freely. “Here, since you can't speak with the
ventilator… How about you try and tap my hand once for a yes, twice for a no, okay? Can you try
that?” He beamed as he felt Eren weakly tap his palm once. “Okay, just let me send a quick
message out and let people know you're awake, okay?” He felt Eren tap his palm in assent before
he drew his hand back, typing furiously on his phone, not caring about spelling errors and sending
it. He moved his hand back under Eren’s, moving to gently kiss his forehead.
I was so worried
about you… Then again, we’re not home free yet. Lathe, doctor mode. Focus. “Can you see me?”
You've got the thousand-yard stare... I wouldn’t be surprised if you can’t yet.

Think about it Eren... You can see a fucking blurry ass object in front of you... And you can hear
Lathe... Eren’s finger tapped once onto Lathe’s palm again. I can see you... You’re so blurry
though... Why can’t I see you?

Lathe noted his hesitance to answer, his other hand moving to pick up the paper from the floor,
scratching down notes without his eyes leaving Eren’s face. “You still have an odd look to you…
Am I blurry?”

Eren’s face tensed slightly. Blurry is an understatement... You’re a black blob... I can’t see your
eyes... Why are you so dark? I can’t see your face Lathe... I’m scared. Eren’s finger weakly tapped
again on Lathe’s palm. I’m scared... What happened to me? My body feels like lead... Why can’t I
move? Why does it hurt so much? Eren’s eyes, though his look was distant, started to cloud with
pain.

Scotty rushed in as Lathe moved to cover Eren’s hand with his other hand, speaking quietly. “Oh
no, Eren, don’t you worry. Scotty’s here, he’s going to help you feel better. We’ll make the pain go
away.” Lathe turned to Scotty, his face stony. We’re not in the clear just yet, and I know that.
“Scotty, he’s awake, can move his fingers at will, though weakly, he can hear and understand
speech, vision is blurry at best, and he’s in pain. Give him morphine, but not too much.”

Eren’s fingers weakly moved against Lathe, as quickly as he could, which wasn’t very quickly. It
hurts... Lathe... It hurts... I can’t take it... Eren’s eyes were starting to close, still clouded with
Lathe immediately started to speak, his voice louder and clear. “Oh no, Eren, come on, don’t close your eyes. It’ll go away soon, the medicine is going to take effect any time now, just you hang on. I know it hurts, I know you don’t like it, but Eren for the love of God stay awake.” You can’t sleep yet. Not yet, please.

Scotty had immediately rushed to add morphine to the IV, making sure not to add an excessive amount. “Alright, it’s not even going to be two minutes. Two minutes and you’ll feel much better, Eren. Stay with us, here, you can do it. Stay awake.” Scotty’s eyes scanned over his vitals, going back to Eren’s face, his mind in overdrive. Your vitals are steadily going where they should, but that’s going to be worth jack shit if you fall asleep on us. Don’t do it Eren, you can stay awake. I know you can. You have to fight.

Eren struggled to keep his eyes open, and through some miracle he was able to keep them open, his face relaxing as the morphine kicked in. That feels so much better… Why does it hurt so much? Eren’s eyes were no longer laced with pain, but that distant look held fear in it now. What’s happening…? Am I not breathing anymore? Why am I in so much pain?

Lathe uncovered Eren’s hand as he noticed him relax the smallest bit, allowing his hand again to more freely move. “Eren, don’t be scared, please. I’m right here, and you’re in good hands. You got really banged up, and we’re making sure you get well. I need to keep you awake, and I’d rather save a lot of the details for when you're feeling better, but… You really gave us a scare, but you're awake now, and that’s what matters. I hope you weren't too bored while you were asleep…” Lathe gave a breathy laugh, feeling as if a huge weight had fallen from his shoulders. “I told Levi and Nate that you woke up, so they're going to be here soon…” He heard loud footsteps quickly approaching, Levi and Nate bursting into the room, out of breath and wide-eyed. “Speak of the devil. You've got visitors, Eren.” Lathe beamed at them. “You two run the whole way here?”

“No… We took… the stairs up here.” Levi told him, out of breath, instantly moving forward to Eren’s bedside. “Eren?” He asked and leaned forward to kiss his forehead. “Can you hear me?” Levi’s hand touched Eren’s, tears of joy running down his face as Eren’s fingers moved in his palm. Thank god...

Nate moved forward, his hands holding his head as he looked at Eren’s open eyes, crying in relief. Oh thank fuck he’s awake. He swallowed hard, a small smile on his face. “Good to see you're… awake, Eren. We… we were really worried there.”

Lathe looked up to Levi’s face, his voice quiet. “If you ask him something, one tap is yes, two taps is no as a response. He can see a little, but it’s blurry at best. We just have to keep him awake for a
while now, give him time to stabilise.” He looked back to Eren. “Eren, have you been able to hear us this whole time, maybe in bits and pieces? If you only just started to hear me today, answer no.”

I could hear them… Bits and pieces… So that’s a yes then. Eren’s finger tapped once and stayed against Lathe’s palm. Is that Lathe? Or who?.... I can’t see anyone? I can’t… Who is it? Eren’s eyes were still laced with fear.

“Okay… Your eyes apparently find the ceiling very interesting, I see… Let’s make sure you know who’s here exactly.” His phone buzzed silently in his pocket, taking it out and grinning as he read the message. “I’m on your right side; I’ve got this hand.” He gently squeezed Eren’s hand, running his thumb over the back before letting it slacken. He looked pointedly to Levi, silently asking him to properly declare himself. Reassociation of voices, because your head is gonna be a bit fuzzy, no doubt.

Eren’s eyes started to close a little bit as his hand rested in Lathe’s. Levi’s here?.... I can’t see him… Where is he…? I’m tired… I’m really tired…. What time is it? It’s so bright… Why is it so bright?

Levi stepped forward, leaning over him so that he was in Eren’s line of sight. “Eren, I’m right here… It’s Levi… I’m right here with you.” His hand reached up to move the hair from his eyes, his own widening as Eren’s started to close. No! Don’t go back to sleep! “Eren!”

Lathe kept his eyes trained on Eren’s face, his voice deathly calm. “Scotty, give him something. Caffeine maybe. Wait, that’ll mess with his heart... Anything that’ll keep him awake.” I can barely think ...shit.

Scotty ran out into the hall, finding a cabinet with medicine and skimming over the labels quickly, returning and adding caffeine to his IV. “Caffeine is right, Lathe.” ...That’s a given, caffeine to keep him awake. How’d you doubt that? I’ve read his file. It should be fine. He watched as Eren’s vitals crept closer to normal levels, running a hand through his short hair. Okay. He’s okay, and should wake up more fully soon.

I’m confused… What did he put in my arm? Who put something in my arm? Eren’s heartbeat started to rise as he started to freak out, Blake waking up and whining, moving carefully to Eren’s side. Did Grisha put something in my arm? I can’t see… What’s happening? Did Lathe and Grisha become friends? How long has Grisha been here!?

Scotty’s eyes widened, taking in the rapidly rising heartbeat. That’s not the effect of the caffeine, it’s been two seconds and it’s nowhere near enough to do that. “Eren, don’t panic, it’s me, Scotty,
the doctor guy who set your arm a while ago. Remember? I just gave you some caffeine so you
don't fall asleep, that’s all, it’ll just feel like you’ve had a mug of tea to wake you up in the morning
or something like that. That’s all I just did. I promise.” *Oh no if your heart rate keeps going up like
that you’re going to seize up again.*

Lathe’s hand covered Eren’s, rubbing the back of it. “It’s okay Eren, Scotty’s just trying to help
you. He’s not going to hurt you. You can trust him. It’s okay, I’ve got you. It’s alright.” Lathe
 glanced up to the screen, willing the numbers to even out. *Come on, be calm. Be calm. It’s fine, I
swear. We’re taking good care of you.*

Eren’s fingers locked up, his hand starting to shake in Lathe’s hands, Blake leaned up, practically
climbing on top of him and starting to lick his face which helped Eren relax slowly but surely. It
took a long time for his shaking to stop. *I don’t want to see Grisha again… I don’t want him to find
me here… He’ll kill me… He’ll kill you Lathe! You can’t know he’s here!!*

A flicker of recognition passed Lathe’s eyes. “…Oh.” *He must not know.* “…Eren, we have
something important to tell you. I’m not going to dance around it, because you really can’t. Grisha’s
dead. He’s gone for good.” *You don’t have to worry about him any more.*

Eren’s body stopped shaking as soon as those words were said. *He’s gone? He’s dead? …He’s
really gone. I wanna see Dad…* Eren was struggling to turn his neck to the side. *I don’t want to see
white anymore! Please!* Eren’s head jerking as it turned to see Lathe… Or at least the outline of his
body.

Lathe shifted, his chair moving closer to Eren’s head, one hand resting lightly on his shoulder.
“You don’t have to worry about him any more, Eren. It’s okay.” He pressed a kiss to his forehead,
his eyes glassy and bright. *No more worrying about him coming back.*

Eren struggled to lift his arm up to try and reach out to Lathe. *Dad? Is that you? I can’t tell if that’s
you or not… I can’t tell.* Tears welled in Eren’s eyes, his look still distant as the tears fell down his
cheeks. *I can’t tell who you are… That’s scary.*

Lathe’s smile fell a bit as he reached in his pocket, wiping Eren’s tears away gently with his red
kerchief. “Don’t strain yourself, Eren. You need to keep your strength. It’s okay, don’t cry, please.
It’s all alright.”

Eren’s tears flowed more as he saw the red come near his face. *It’s really Dad… It’s really him…
He’s here… He didn’t leave… Thank god… I thought he was gonna leave me after I lied to him… I
promise I’ll never lie to you again… Please don’t leave me…*
Levi’s shoulders slumped, relief clear across his face as tears still fell down his cheeks. *He can turn his head... He looks like he really recognises Lathe. That’s amazing, for being awake not even an hour that’s amazing progress already.* He rubbed at his eyes, the tears slowing as they felt heavy. *It’s the middle of the night, and I can’t believe you’re awake, and I want to stay, but I don't know if I want to pass out in here...* He glanced up to Nate and back to Eren, giving him an unsure look. “...Eren, it’s really late at night, and Nate and I need to get some sleep. We’re going to be in a hotel nearby. We’re going to come back tomorrow as soon as we wake up, don't worry. We will be back. But we need sleep, okay?” *Please don't worry... I really do want to stay, but Nate and I both need proper sleep now that you're awake.*

Eren tapped his finger once against Lathe’s hands, his eyes starting to close still. *I'm tired, I don’t blame you for being tired.* His vitals started to slow, to a point where it was at a normal levels for someone who was asleep. His eyes were still slightly open, but they were so dull, and his look so far off it seemed like he was asleep with his eyes open.

Lathe gave him a small smile, moving to close his eyes before stowing his kerchief in his pocket again, looking up to Levi. “You two should go sleep. I'll stay here for when he wakes up.” *Not if. When.* Lathe relaxed at that thought. *When. When sounds nice..*

Levi nodded. “Okay, we’ll be back when we wake up... It's already morning... Shit...” Levi sighed as he saw the time on the clock in the room. *12:23am... I need to fucking sleep.* Levi turned to Nate, wondering if he would say goodbye as well.

Nate gave Lathe a weary smile. “We’ll see you later, Lathe. Try to sleep a bit, okay?” *You could use it.* He turned to Levi. “We should probably leave Blake here, if Eren needs him.” *Now that he’s awake... You just don't know, I guess.*

Levi nodded. They left Blake in the hospital room, making their way back to the hotel and collapsing, both of them were able to sleep soundly that night.

Lathe chuckled quietly as Blake curled up at the foot of Eren’s bed, asleep in a moment. *Back to normal. Finally.* He looked up to Scotty, and looked to Eren, a melancholy look overtaking his features, his voice small. “Scotty... can I sleep with Eren now? I promise I'll be careful of the IV and stuff...”

*... Is he really asking for permission? “I honestly thought you would’ve already been holding him in his sleep... You can get in on this side, there aren’t any cords you can mess with here...”* Scotty patted his shoulder. “If anything happens call me...Make sure you actually sleep... Please.” He stretched as he walked out of the room.
Lathe nodded, getting up and rounding the bed, kicking off his shoes before slowly and carefully sliding onto the bed next to Eren, his arm gently snaking under his neck and around his shoulders, the other resting over Eren’s middle, holding him close and leaning his head back. *I've got you.* He fell into a dreamless sleep, out for more than ten hours, much more than the three per night he’d been barely functioning on for weeks.
Chapter 33: 28 Part 6: Dumbass Dok

Eren’s eyes cracked open at around 10:22 in the morning. His hand moved to have his fingers latch onto Lathe’s shirt. Is this Dad? I can’t tell… Eren’s head slowly shifted, his movements quicker than last night, but still slow. I still have a tube down my throat… It feels weird… It feels really weird…

Levi came in, holding Lathe’s usual extra-large coffee and a muffin. He stopped in his tracks as he saw Lathe still asleep holding Eren. His eyes saw Eren’s hands move. “Eren, you’re awake…” Levi said and came up to his other side, gently taking his hand. “It’s me, Levi… I brought Nate with me too… Do you want to see him?” He asked loud enough for him to hear. Your eyes look so distant… Can you hear me?

Eren’s fingers slowly tapped onto his hands once. His face contorting in discomfort. It feels so weird… I want it out. I want it out… Eren tried to spit it out, which caused him to start choking on the large pipe, his body writhing from the feeling. … I want it out! It hurts!

Lathe’s eyes shot open as he felt Eren convulse, shifting to look at him. “Levi, what happened?” He looks like he’s choking on the ventilator tube. His fist hit the red button nearby to call for assistance, unsure of how to remove the tube. It’s in the way for Eren, it looks like. “Eren, sit tight, someone’s coming.” He looked up as Scotty rushed into the room. “Scotty, the breathing tube. It needs to come out.” He slid from the bed, giving Scotty room to work. I don’t know how to do that, I really hope you do.

Scotty nodded and came right to his side. “Eren, I’m your doctor, Scotty. I’m going to pull out the tube that’s down your throat, but you need to try and stay still, you can cough all you want once it’s out.” Scotty made sure it wasn’t taped in place before he started to gently pull the tube out. It needs to come out, he’s choking on it. That’s good, that means he’s trying to breathe on his own.

Eren’s eyes were wide, tears in his eyes, his fingers curled tightly around Levi’s hand. It hurts! Make it stop! He struggled not to cough as the long blue tube was pulled out slowly. Once it was out Eren coughed horribly. His whole body shuddered as he did so, the tears not stopping. That hurt… That hurt a lot… My whole body hurts again… Daddy make it stop!

Lathe moved forward again as Scotty moved out of the way, wiping away his tears again and gauging the pained look in his eyes. “Scotty, more morphine would probably help.” He gave Eren a small smile, speaking just loudly enough for him to hear. “It’s okay Eren, this all means that you’re getting better, you’re breathing without help right now. That’s great! Just relax, that’s over.” The pain will go away soon.
“I’m way ahead of you, Lathe.” Scotty was already adding morphine to Eren’s IV, picking up a small bit of tubing. “Alright Eren, you’re breathing on your own, and that’s really good, but I’m going to make sure you’re getting enough oxygen. This is just going to go around your head and these two little nibs will go in your nose, and you should breathe a little easier, okay?”

Eren moved his head slowly towards where the voice was coming from. His eyes hadn’t moved from where they were, his gaze still far off. He tapped on Lathe’s hand once before moving his fingers to Lathe’s long sleeve and started to hold onto the hem of it. This is Dad right? I can’t tell… Eren moved his head slowly back towards Lathe’s black form… Who are you?

Lathe chuckled a bit as Eren took hold of his shirt. “That’s my shirt, yes. You’ve caught Dad. Want me to climb back up there? Is that what you’re asking?” I wouldn't exactly mind more sleep, knowing you're okay now…

Eren’s moves were jerky as he pulled on his sleeve more. I want you to hold me… I’m so scared… Please… Eren let out a little shuddery sigh and his breaths were shaky as tears welled in his eyes. Hold me please…

Lathe immediately began to shift his weight back onto the bed, his free hand snatching his kerchief again as his arm reached around Eren’s shoulders, pulling him close as he wiped away his tears, murmuring quietly into his ear. “It’s okay, Eren, I’m right here, don't cry, there’s nothing to be afraid of. I've got you, and I'm not going anywhere anytime soon.” He pressed a kiss to Eren’s temple, his head dropping onto the pillow as Eren’s oxygen tube was set in place, his hand carding through his hair, just beginning to feel the full force of three weeks with nearly no sleep.

Eren’s whole body relaxed as he felt Lathe’s fingers run through his hair like they had so many times before. It is Dad… Thank god… Eren’s body didn’t shake and his eyes didn’t hold an ounce of pain in them once the morphine had finally kicked in. He kept his head back with Lathe’s hand but he would turn it towards voices and he was starting to hear a lot from the number of nurses that had found themselves at the door watching the formerly comatose patient become more alive than they had seen since his arrival. Who are they? There’s so many, who’s here? Eren’s ears strained as he heard Blake growl and felt a shift in the bed near his feet. Blake had gotten to his feet, his teeth bared and ears flattened at the noisy nurses in the doorway.

“Alright everybody, please step away from the doorway. Return to your jobs; this is police business right now.” A familiar voice cut through the chatter in the hall, dispersing the small crowd. A tall man entered the room, his dark short hair and thin moustache giving his face a narrow, mousy look. “Eren, I'm officer Nile Dok, and this is my partner, Officer Dennis Eibringer.” He gestured to the shorter brunette to his left. “We need to ask you some questions about the altercation regarding your biological father.”
Lathe lifted his head from his sleep, looking to the officers, his face immediately becoming stony. ... really. He’s awake for less than twenty-four hours and you’re going to try and question him? “I’m not sure this is a good time, Officers.” Lathe’s words were sharp with barely-hidden malice.

“Nonsense. Eren is conscious and we require him to give a statement before anyone has the opportunity to… influence his responses.” He looked pointedly to Levi. We can’t have you convincing him it was all for the best when his father’s been pumped full of lead.

“Sir, I understand that, but he is in no condition to respond coherently, he doesn't have any of his bearings back.” You're fucking crazy!

Nile stepped forward, his face set, glaring at Lathe. “Sir, anything else from you and I'll have you cited for obstruction of justice. You and all others in this room need to leave now so that we can commence our interrogation-”

“...Ex cuse me, Officers.”

A sickly sweet voice cut through the air like a knife, a usually warm tone turned to absolute ice. Spades leaned in the doorway, her badge gleaming gold around her neck as she fixed Nile with a cool look. She smiled, her eyes narrow. “May I ask what it is you're doing?”

Nile visibly swallowed, stepping back a foot to look at Spades’ whole body. “Ma’am, we’re here for police business, we’ve come to get the victim’s statement regarding the Grisha Yeager case.” Nile finished off his sentence with a hostile glare. “Could you please help me escort this man out of the room so we can properly do so?” He asked turning his menacing glare from Levi to Lathe. He hadn’t noticed Blake move from the foot of the bed to Eren’s chest, licking at the boys face…

His eyes so distant he looked like a breathing dead body.

“...Let me get this straight.” Spades pushed off of the doorframe, taking a few steps into the room, her voice even and sharp. “You came here to interrogate this young man, who just so happens to be my son, about the case regarding his severely abusive father, Grisha Yeager, less than twenty-four hours after he woke up from a three-week-long coma. You came here expecting to get a coherent statement from that young man who can barely tell which way is up after being out for that long. Are you really telling me that I have to tear that man’s adoptive father and my fiancée away from him, one of the only people able to comfort him after nearly being killed by his biological father and after his peace was so rudely interrupted by two goons that obviously didn't read into the case for shit? You expect me to follow the orders of an Officer lower than me in rank, from another county, trying to hijack the proceedings of a case that is under my jurisdiction, and has been for more than three and a half years? If you really thought all of that, which by coming here, you do, I hate to be the one to break it to you…” Spades sneered at the man, her gaze cold. “...but you are
sorely mistaken. Now do me a favor and get the fuck out of his hospital room.” I’m done with your shit.

Nile raised his hands as if he were trying to calm her down. “Ma’am calm yourself, you’re out of your county, this is not a dispute which you can have with me… In my eyes, you are a simple civilian outside of your own jurisdiction! And my partner and I have been assigned Grisha’s case by the Chief commissioner himself; getting Eren’s statement before his memory has been tampered with by anyone is vital to our investigation. We were told to treat this investigation as a homicide. So we will do as such!” Nile shouted right back at her, stepping up to her, thankful for the few inches he had on her.

Eren’s eyes were wide, fear laced in them. No one was really watching him, mostly trained on the fight happening in the rest of the room, a lot more nurses were stopping and staring at the two yell back and forth at each other. Blake was whining, but Eren couldn’t hear it anymore. He only heard ringing. No! Please! Stop! Don’t hurt me! Don’t hurt me… Don’t hurt me Grisha please… I promise I won’t tell! I promise I won’t tell! Don’t hurt me! Eren’s heart rate was going through the roof, his head tilting back along with his shoulders arching up as his body started to convulse violently against Lathe’s solid form. Make it stop! I promise I won’t tell! Please don’t hurt me! Eren could only hear the ringing in his ears as the machines around him started to blare one after the other.

Lathe’s eyes were wide as he moved Eren onto his side, looking up at Scotty as he raced into the room, Spades holding Nile and Dennis back from interfering at all. “He’s having another seizure, it must’ve been the arguing that did it, how did I not even notice?! He ran his hand though Eren’s hair as Eren seized, willing him to calm and for the convulsing to stop. Three minutes passed agonisingly slowly, the only sound the blaring of the machines and the shaking of the bed as Eren’s body jerked. He finally began to calm, Lathe sighing in relief as Eren fell limp, holding him closely. Eren’s eyes were open, but he wasn’t there at all. Lathe suddenly remembered that look. The thunder. The lightning. On the ground. Shock. “He’s in shock.” He leaned back from Eren so he could look him in the eyes, reaching for his hand and holding it carefully, his other hand carding through his hair. “Eren, Eren please listen to me, it’s okay. It’s okay, there was an argument, but it’s over for right now, okay? No one’s gonna hurt you. I’m right here, and so is Levi and Blake, and we all want you to be okay, and we’re going to protect you. Nothing’s gonna hurt you, Eren. Nothing.” Come on, snap out of it!

Eren just laid limply, his gaze looking right through Lathe. His pupils dilated despite the bright light in the hospital room. No… All lies… It’s all lies…. All lies…. All lies… Eren’s lips barely moved, a soft whisper almost unheard by him. “…..lies…..”

Spades sent Nile and Dennis a glare that would have put Medusa to shame, jerking her thumb out to the hall, speaking under her breath. “I’ll have a word with you after I know he’s okay.” She slowly approached Eren’s bedside as Nile and Dennis silently obeyed her, watching Scotty walk out after them, a usually dormant look of fury in his eye. That’s not gonna be pretty.
Scotty walked out after the two Officers, closing the door quietly behind him, his radiating anger enough to quickly disperse the growing crowd. He spoke quietly to the two Officers, his voice and tone demanding. “Follow me.” He led them to a private break room, shutting the door behind them, turning to the two officers and leaning against it, stoic and silent for a long moment before he spoke, his voice low and cold. “I hope you now understand that you're not going to get an ounce of information out of Eren, especially at this time.” His gaze switched between the two of them, resting for the most part on Nile. “Patients who have recently regained consciousness after being in a coma, especially for that long, need weeks to reach a point where they are coherent. Eren is barely able to recognise his own father right now. I hope that puts this into perspective.” His voice grew louder, sharper. “If you had bothered to pay attention to the man you were trying to cite for obstruction of justice, you would realise he is a former general surgeon whose input is highly regarded in this particular establishment, as he knows Eren’s medical history forwards, backwards and sideways, and is fully aware of Eren’s fragile mental state as he suffers from PTSD. Or did you not notice the service dog with the patches all over the vest?” He crossed his arms over his chest. “Your inability to go into a case, not even your own, so grossly unprepared that you try and tear a scared and disoriented man from his own father and shout in the face of your superior who has intimate knowledge of the case you apparently have been assigned is a disgrace to the entirety of your force, and made the son of my best friend wrongfully suffer a seizure, putting him at an even higher risk of permanent brain damage.” His eyes widened as the door was sharply kicked, recognising the odd way of knocking and turning to open the door for Spades, a dark look on her face.

“First of all, Scotty, Eren’s okay, he’s just a bit shaken up. He’s probably going to be napping for a better part of today. Now.” Spades hooked the edge of the wooden door with her heel, shutting it behind her as she entered the room. “I politely request that you two keep your mouths shut as I talk.” She leaned back against the doorframe, mirroring Scotty. “I would first like to address the problem of you two supposedly being assigned Eren’s case. It makes no sense at all that officers of another county would be assigned to oversee cases in my county. As commissioner, I think I would know that. And even if you were, with the way you’d acted I’d have you up to your teeth in citations before you could blink. I don’t know how they let you into the force.” She practically ignored Dennis, her eyes fixed on Nile who miraculously kept his mouth shut. “We’ll clear that up in a moment. Secondly, I would like to address the fact that although you’ve supposedly been assigned to this case- and not the case itself, make no mistake- and despite your apparent… zeal in acquiring a statement from Eren Yeager, your showing up at this moment in time indicates that you’ve ignored 99% of the facts in the actual case. If you read a sentence-long summary of the entire ordeal, you’d know that this was by no means a homicide. Lance Corporal Levi Ackerman, according to the existence of the stand-your-ground law in this state, and drawing from the mortal peril Grisha Yeager had put Eren Yeager under, an extensive history of which exists, Levi had every right to shoot Grisha Yeager until he was sure the threat was terminated.”

Nile’s snarky voice entered the silence. “Because 11 bullets is needed to kill a man… Grisha was shot twice in the head… It appears as though this Lance Corporal of yours was shooting with pure rage, not uncommonly found in instances of homicide. ” Nile was blatantly ignoring all of Spades’ previous words.
Scotty’s body seemed to move of it’s own accord, punching Nile with everything he had square in the nose, feeling the bone crunch under his knuckles. He felt Spades jerk him back by the back of his collar, holding him from doing any more damage. She didn't look at all affected by the blood dripping from Nile’s nose, it’s disfigured look. “Well, I suppose that if I saw the man who had raped, dissected and tortured my boyfriend was one knife out of eight away from killing him, I’d make damn sure he was dead, too.” Her gaze was stony, taking in his shocked expression. “You acted without any prior knowledge of the case and caused him unnecessary pain at a time when his mind is vulnerable and his health fragile. It’s not exactly appreciated.” She studied his nose, grinning after a moment. “You know, that reminds me. Levi had mentioned something before I left to find you all. Does it hurt any less the second time your nose gets busted? I’ve always wanted to know. I hope it doesn’t. The first time, when Eren punched you at the Nate Ruess concert for shattering his arm and acting like a pedophile? You deserved that as much as you deserved this.” She let Scotty go.

Scotty went ballistic, his fist reconnecting with Nile’s face. “You’re the fucking bastard who shattered his fucking wrist? What the fuck is wrong with you?!” Scotty landed punch after punch, Dennis simply watching and shaking his head, as if he had expected this to happen.

Spades decided to intervene again when Nile passed out on the floor, not having been able to retaliate at all against Scotty’s onslaught. She nudged his head with her boot, noting his slack face with an unamused expression. “Fucking pansy.” She let his head drop back to the floor, pulling out her phone and tapping out a familiar number, placing the phone on the table on speaker. It rang twice before it picked up.
Chapter 34: 28 Part 7: Police Commissioner of Wichita

“Ah, Spades! I’m glad you called! Did Nile and Dennis make it to your office yet?” He asked, his voice cheery and kind so far, hoping the guy had actually done something right for once...

Spades quirked an eyebrow, pacing the room slowly. “Actually, they did not. I found them attempting to take an official statement from Eren Yeager. They say they’ve been assigned my case.”

“Oh for the love of fucking God! Can that asshole do anything fucking right!?” Gordon’s voice was furious. “I sent him to go to your office to get the case files… I wanted the previous statements… God is he a fucking idiot?! Don’t let him fucking leave. I’m on my way to the hospital now, that bastard has drawn the last fucking straw from my patience!” Gordon abruptly hung up the phone, presumably to come to the hospital to pick up the two officers.

Oh don't worry, he isn't going anywhere. That same sickly sweet smile came across her face, her voice laced with too much sugar. “Scotty, could you do me a favor and wait for Commissioner Ramsey in the lobby? He shouldn't be too long.” She moved as he left, watching Nile as he slowly regained consciousness, getting impatient quickly and stamping her boot by his head, shocking him enough to be fully awake. The clock hit the five minute mark as he scrambled to his feet, and hearing heavy footsteps down the hall, she opened the door before his fist could connect with the frame, moving aside.

Gordon took three steps into the room before he was staring down Nile, watching as the man shrunk in his presence. “Nile fucking Dok. Stand the fuck up.” He growled out, his eyes harsh, his tone even harsher.

Nile swallowed hard and forced himself to stand up straight, trying to steel himself against Gordon’s words and horribly failing, his eyes wide with fear. “S-sir?” ... I die today, don't I?

Gordon grabbed Nile by his shirt, quickly yanking him off of his feet and taking another step forward slamming him into the wall with all his strength, a good six inches off the ground. “What. Did. I. Fucking. Tell. You. To. Do. This. Fucking. Morning?” His eyes blazed with pure anger and rage. You will not have another chance, not with any police force in any other fucking city... I’ll make sure of it dammit!

“To get the statements on the Grisha Yeager case, S-sir…”
“Oh? Is that all I told you?” His voice a little softer as he let Nile drop down to the floor.

“Y-yes?”

Gordon’s hand came across Nile’s face in an instant. “No, it fucking wasn’t! Can you do one single fucking thing right? I’ve given you chance after fucking chance to try and try again… But you’re the worst fucking cop in the world! You’ve disgraced the entire police brigade with your actions both in the past and today!” His hand came smacking back the other way, back handing him hard across the other cheek, the sound of skin on skin reverberating through the small room.

Nile’s eyes were wide as he slumped down against the wall. “I-I’m s-sorry S-Sir… I-I thought-”

“You do not fucking think, Nile! You clearly don’t since I asked you to go pick up a fucking file folder two hours away and you come to a hospital five minutes away to interrogate a mental patient!” He roared back, smacking his face again. “I heard from his doctor that you caused a fucking scene and put him through a fucking seizure! You are not fit to be a called a policeman! Give me your badge!” He shouted, holding his hand out.

“B-But-”

“No buts! I’ve given you three fucking chances already and you blew it! Badge! NOW!”

Gordon’s angry yelling had caused the nurses to avoid using the hallway around the room, he was so loud and even the muffled sounds escaping the room radiated out fury and malice.

Nile looked down hanging his head. “Y-Yes Sir.” He slowly reached for his badge.

“I don’t have all fucking day, Nile! I need to go clean up your fucking mess now! Hurry the fuck up you slow ass!” Gordon had his badge a moment later. “Good, now I need your gun, your taser, and your radio.” His voice full of pure anger as he got everything and handed it off to Dennis. “Go back to the office, I’ll question you later.” Gordon turned back to Nile. “And if you so much as step foot in this fucking hospital again, I will not hesitate to throw you behind bars… I’m also making sure that you never get hired by another police force ever again, and you can bet your skinny ass on that one! Now leave, asshole!”

Gordon’s fury had Nile out of the room in seconds with Dennis following close behind him. He sighed once they both left. “I’m so sorry about all that, Spades. And I need to go apologize to your fiancée, can you show me the way?” Gordon’s voice was soft and full of concern. Eren better be alright, or I’m gonna fucking hunt that asshole down.
Spades nodded and gave him a faint smile, leading him down the halls quietly. It was a short walk back to their room, Spades poking her head into the room before entering, knocking softly on the frame, her face falling as she watched Eren sleep fitfully in Lathe’s arms, muttering about lies.

Gordon followed her silently into the room, not caring that Scotty followed in after and ignored him to go straight to Eren. *Shit… I’m not good at this, Spades, introduce me.*

Spades immediately caught on, coming up and giving Lathe a small smile. “Lathe, I’d like you to meet Gordon Ramsey, the police Commissioner of Wichita. Gordon, this is Lathe Quo, Eren’s father and my fiancée.” *… I will never get tired of saying that.*

Lathe sat up a bit, not leaving Eren’s side and reaching out his hand for him to shake. “It’s nice to meet you, Commissioner Ramsey.”

“Please, the pleasure is all mine.” Gordon shook his hand with a firm grasp. “I came to apologize for my subordinate’s behavior earlier today, it was rude and unwarranted, but all I can do is offer my sincere apologies.” Gordon hung his head a bit. *I hate cleaning up after that fucking retard.*

Lathe gave him a sympathetic look. “Thank you for that. It’s…” *It’s not really alright... Eren’s muttering about lies in his sleep!* He sighed, running a hand through his hair. “It’s on the Officer that came in here, what Eren went through. I just hope he’s okay, he’s muttering…” He held Eren tightly as he curled further into him, his words running together. *I hope it’s not permanent, because if it is... I’m pressing charges against him.*

“Thank you for that. It’s…” *It’s not really alright... Eren’s muttering about lies in his sleep! He sighed, running a hand through his hair. “It’s on the Officer that came in here, what Eren went through. I just hope he’s okay, he’s muttering…”* He held Eren tightly as he curled further into him, his words running together.

“It is former officer, Nile has since been stripped of his badge and all titles associated with him from the Police Academy. I can assure you as much.” The man’s words were solemn as he watched Eren’s words start to mesh together, some just random noises coming out. *I hope it’s not permanent, because if it is... I’m pressing charges against him.*

Lathe looked to him, a bit of relief passing his eyes. *Good, getting rid of an officer like that from the force. “Thank you… I suppose it’s a good thing he can’t go and wreak more havoc elsewhere. I’m sure Eren will be okay. It’s just some temporary quirks from the seizing, the shock. He’ll be fine.”* He rubbed small circles into Eren’s back, letting Eren further tangle their legs together. *I’m not getting up anytime soon, am I? Not that I’d want to, exactly.*

Gordon nodded. “Alright, well I should be going… If you need anything Spades, don’t hesitate to call, I owe you big time for this.” Gordon said polite goodbyes before exiting the room quietly.
Eren’s heart rate spiked like it had so many days ago, his face contorting in fear and his grip tightening on Lathe’s shirt, letting out a few whimpers.

Lathe’s eyes widened as his gaze met Scotty’s. Of f**king course. “Nightmares.”

“Nightmares.” Scotty quickly moved to retrieve the container of PTSD medication, adding another dose to the IV. *It makes so much more sense.* “How the hell didn’t we realise it sooner? The spikes would’ve most likely been while in periods of sleep, and the PTSD medication stopped the spikes, and what was it supposed to stop during periods of sleep normally? Nightmares.”

“We’re such idiots.” Lathe watched as he added the drug to the IV, gently shaking Eren’s shoulder. “It’s not going to take immediate effect. It’s moreso preventative than anything. Eren, wake up for a moment, you’re not doing too well.” Two minutes, and then you can sleep again. Surprise overtook Lathe’s features when Eren opened his eyes.

Eren’s pupils constricted from the blinding light in the room for the first time since he was awake. Eren’s shocked expression gave away everything as he slowly reached up to touch Lathe’s face. *Oh my god… It’s Dad… I can see him again…*

Lathe’s eyes were wide as Eren’s hand moved to his face, noting the recognition in his eyes. …*He can see me.* …*He can see me!* Lathe turned onto his side and pulled Eren into a hug, careful not to crush him as he started sobbing into his shoulder. *He can see me and he can recognise me and he’s awake and he’s okay…*

Eren was stunned as he was grabbed and he let out a strange noise before a hand moved to grab Lathe’s shirt again. He looked around the strange whitewashed room he was in. *It’s so fucking white… What the actual hell?* His eyes wandered the room, finally spotting Scotty and he stared down the tall doctor with a curious gaze. *Who is that? What’s he doing in here?*

Scotty shifted under his gaze, offering him a small smile. “H-hi, Eren. It’s me, Scotty. I patched up your wrist a while ago, set your ribs and stuff before… Remember?” Don’t still be terrified of me, please…

Eren’s brow furrowed, letting out a garbled noise. *No, I don’t remember… Is that why I can’t move my wrist?* Eren looked down to his hand closed around Lathe’s shirt, his eyes widening a fraction when he saw the expanse of detail on all the casts he had. *Oh… That’s why I can’t move anything… That’s f**king wonderful… Probably why it hurts so much whenever I wake up too…*
Lathe pulled himself together, pulling back and looking to Eren with a weary smile. “Your words aren’t back yet, I hear. And signing isn't going to do too well with those casts, at least by yourself.” He shifted to offer Eren both of his hands, palms up. “Sign through me, whatever you need to say.” You seem capable. And that’s a fucking miracle.

Eren looked to Lathe, his mind at war with itself. He wants to know why you lied. You shouldn’t have lied to him. He probably hates you. I bet he wishes you were dead… Eren’s eyes trailed down to his casts. He got bored… Yeah you honestly expect him to be entertained watching a motionless body all day? Eren only shook his head, reaching a shaky palm up to him, his eyes not looking up to Lathe’s. You think he’ll forgive you after the shit you pulled?

Lathe’s eyes softened, slowly reaching out a hand to run down his palm once, twice. He took hold of his hand gently, twining their fingers. Whatever it is you’re apologising for, I forgive you.

Eren’s eyes still never met Lathe’s again. He shut up… He didn’t even try to talk, and he didn’t move to use Lathe’s hands. How fucking stupid can I be? Grisha was right… Lathe would be better off with me dead….

Lathe quietly talked with Levi, Nate and Spades, Scotty having gone to continue his work day. He practically ended up moving Eren into his lap, his chin on his shoulder and arms around his middle protectively. You're so quiet… I was guessing you'd be a bit out of it from the seizure and the shock, but you're nothing like yourself. You remind me of… of you. When I first met you. He looked up as Nate stood from his chair, checking his watch and sighing reluctantly.

“Guys, I'd give anything to stick around, but it’s been two whole weeks I’ve been out here. I need to get back to LA and back into doing work.” Nate hung his head a bit. I probably should've mentioned this a bit sooner. ‘I'm flying out tonight, I just need to grab some stuff from the hotel room, really… I just made the arrangements this morning, so I would've told you sooner if I knew what was going on. I'm sorry about that…’” He looked up to Eren, giving him a small smile, patting his shoulder lightly. “Feel better soon, okay Eren?”

Eren shied away from the gentle touch on his shoulder, seemingly curling up on himself. No… You’ll be nice to get me closer…. No… No more… don’t touch me… You’ll hurt me… Eren eyes stayed trained on his hands which were situated in his lap.

A hurt look flitted across Nate’s face before shrugged it off. I guess he's just still scrambled up from earlier… “Alright. I'll talk to you all later, cool?” Nate bid them all goodbye before leaving, his packing taking minutes and soon on the way to the airport. He’ll be okay. They'll all be okay.
A week passed, and Eren didn’t look anyone in the eyes anymore. He didn’t open his mouth at all, and it wasn’t long until they realized he wasn’t going to try eating, so Scotty had to put the feeding tube back into him after taking it out three days before. He got more edgy around everyone, even Scotty and Lathe but especially anyone that was new in his room, and he wouldn’t let Levi get close to him at all. He would always move out of the way of his hand and either plaster himself to Lathe or turn his head to bite the hand trying to touch him. He had already bitten at least three nurses since his biting habit started. His eyes were wide but their color held so much sadness that they always appeared dull and glazed over. Eren soon started to move away from Lathe’s arms after the feeding tube was put back in. He didn’t like when people came to feed him, he’d always try and struggle against it… Never making a single noise at all, but always trying to claw his way out of it. No… I don’t want to eat… I’ll get fat… Everyone will hate me more if I get fat! I don’t want them to hate me more! I don’t want Lathe to hit me! I don’t want Levi to hit me! Is Scotty gonna kill me? Did Grisha tell him to? What’s he putting in my IV? Eren always watched Scotty move around the hospital room with an empty gaze. He’s the only one who had actually made direct eye contact with him for the last week. But whenever Scotty looked, he only saw a shell, like Eren wasn’t really there. He’s gonna kill me… He hates me… He hates that he has to come here…. He doesn’t like me at all… Lathe’s mad at me… But he won’t leave me…. Is he trying to look for things to give him a reason to hit me? Eren’s mind was in shambles as he tried to scratch at his wrists, only managing to scratch away some of the color from his casts. Blake had tried to get him to stop, but was roughly pushed away by Eren himself. Blake didn’t know what to do anymore, he whined a lot, Eren always seemed to be scratching at the casts. I want them off… I want to cut… They’ll be happy if I cut… They want me to die… Grisha was right… I would’ve better been off dead… One of the doctors had suggested that they move Eren out of the intensive care room and into a regular patient room since he was off of the ventilator, but that idea was quickly shot down when Eren bit the doctor that got close to him. I don’t trust you, I don’t know who the fuck you are… Get the hell away from me… You’re going to hurt me… Get away. Eren seemed to always look like a cornered animal in his hospital bed whenever anyone new was introduced into his room. He no longer recognized his friends from school as people he could trust when they came to see him, he actually tried to bite Armin when the blonde had mistakenly come up to give him a hug. No… Armin hates me… I need to stay away from him… Armin hates me… I lied to him…. Armin hates me… He hates me… Erwin had been able to pull Armin back before he was bitten and he looked over to Levi, asking if Eren knew he needed to leave soon. Levi’s leaving? Grisha was right? He’s leaving me? He hates me? …Levi hates me? Erwin’s words brought the first tears out of Eren’s eyes after a week and a half of silence. He tried to curl up to himself as he cried, but he couldn’t manage much with his legs in casts and his whole body wrapped tightly. No… I don’t want him to hate me…. I don’t want him to leave me…. I don’t want Grisha to be right…. Eren rubbed at his face a lot, mostly whenever Lathe wasn’t looking. No… He can’t know I’m drooling… No one can know I’m drooling… They’ll hit me… They’ll tie me down… They’ll think I’m a whore. Eren rubbed as his face until it was red, but made sure that Lathe never saw it. I’m a whore… Grisha was right… Lathe will think I’m a whore for him….

Lathe had refused to leave Eren’s side, trying to keep him calm when others were around, when Scotty added something to his IV, when he had a sudden thought and scratched at his casts. Lathe would talk to him quietly, trying to reassure him, read with him, draw the color back onto his casts as he slept. His heart broke when they had to put the feeding tube back in. He had been so hopeful that Eren’s state would only improve. He tried to keep Eren from biting people, a nasty habit he
hoped would be short-lived. But when Eren woke up from a nightmare in Lathe’s arms, jerking him awake as his teeth clamped down on his hand, he felt his heart shatter and knew they were back to square one. ... He doesn’t trust me. Does he. Lathe still held Eren tightly, war raging in his mind, frustration and fury and brokenness and misery all at once. His face was more often than not stony, lost in his thoughts. He held his middle as Eren cried, hearing Levi had to leave soon, murmuring in his ear that it was all going to be okay, that he would come back soon enough. Even holding Eren, laying on the bed next to him, he barely slept, his moonsong eyes dark. ...How am I supposed to earn back your trust, the trust we built up over three and half years? How do I... How am I supposed to do that?

Scotty had come in to give Eren his medication in the morning through his IV drip as he usually did. He saw the bite marks across Lathe’s fingers and his eyes fell. He doesn’t trust Lathe.... How did that happen? He felt Eren’s empty gaze burn into the back of his skull as he was being stared at. It’s so empty.... He looks like nothing's there behind his eyes... It almost looks like he’s dead, except for that small trace of fear he has in them everyday.... I wonder if he’s looked Lathe in the eye yet... I wonder if Lathe knows that Eren isn’t ‘there’. He decided he would come back when Lathe was actually awake to talk to him about it. I think he’s only stared at me this whole week. It’s almost like he thinks I’m going to kill him with everything I’m putting into him. He watched as Eren lifted his arm to rub up against his face. His face is so red from him rubbing it all the time. I wonder why he’s doing that.... He’s been doing it a lot, I wonder if Lathe noticed? Or does he hide it from him?

Lathe woke up not too long after, the only four hours of sleep leaving his eyes heavy, the skin under them dark and pronounced against his usually ashen skin. He shifted a bit so he could sit up, giving Eren a weary smile. “G’morning, Eren. You sleep okay?” His left hand was always palm up next to Eren, if he even wanted to respond or talk. He wasn’t surprised at his silence, his palm untapped. He reached for his phone, reading the screen. “Levi’s coming to spend the day with you today, before he has to leave.” He turned back as he picked up his notebook and a thin sharpie, seeing Eren’s palm offered to him. He ran his hand down it twice, giving him a gentle peck on the temple, wary of being bitten again. ... Baby steps. Baby steps. He settled against his side again, using his legs as a slanted table and drawing some of the flowers at the bedside, more always being added as the older ones wilted. It wasn’t long before Levi gently knocked on the doorframe, walking in slowly with a faint smile, a bag in his hand.

Levi stepped into the white room wearing his digital camo gear. “Good Morning, Eren.” He put his large bag down near the door of the room but out of the way before he slowly walked towards the seat. “How are you this morning?” He watched Eren lift his head to watch his lower half move closer. He still won’t look at me... Why? Why won’t you look at me? Levi sat down in a chair next to Eren’s bedside, watching with sadness in his eyes as Eren sat up and moved away from him and towards Lathe’s side. You always move away from me... What did I do?

Eren watched his legs as they moved, he knew he was coming too close. No... You’ll hit me... You’re going to yell at me... You’re leaving me... You hate me... Why are you here? You hate me! His body shook slightly as it pressed against Lathe, not trusting the new person in the room.
Lathe wrapped his arm around Eren, looking to Levi in silent warning that Eren would lash out if he got too close. His features were weighted down with sadness as he dropped his Sharpie for a moment, showing him his fingers, the curving red marks of Eren’s teeth still visible. He doesn't even trust me, Levi... For right now... It’s not going to go over well.

Scotty poked his head in the door. “Oh, Lathe, you’re up… That’s good, can you come talk with me in the hall? I need to tell you something.” Levi doesn’t need to know this... Not when he’s leaving.

Lathe looked over and reluctantly nodded, slowly slipping from the bed and giving Levi another look, speaking quietly. “I won't be long.” He padded after Scotty, quietly closing the door and turning to him. “What's up?”

“Eren hasn’t looked you in the eye, has he? Like actually held eye contact with you?” Scotty asked and his tone seemed worried. That bite mark looks like it hurts. Scotty shifted from one foot to the other repeatedly. I wanna make sure I know before I say anything else.

Lathe’s small smile fell, his eyes drifting to the floor. “...No, he hasn't… He bit me this morning. Didn't break the skin, though.” He held up his hand, his eyes glassy as he studied the dark red curved line. He doesn't trust me... He just... Doesn't. Can't, I suppose…

“Okay… So I am the only one...I went around this morning and asked all the nurses to see if he’s looked any of them in the eye, and they all said no… But for some reason he always stares at me… It’s one of those stares you feel follow you through the room, but when I turn around… He looks at me in the eye. Lathe, it looks like he’s not there, the only thing that makes him look the slightest bit alive is that they're always laced with fear after I put his medicine in… Has he done anything to talk to you? About what happened? Have you talked to him about what happened?” Scotty continued to switch his feet occasionally. I think I might know why he doesn’t trust any of us... But it might take a long time to convince him... But it's worth a shot. “A-And do you want me to bandage that?” He asked, pointing to Lathe’s hand. Can’t keep the doctor from coming out, can you Scotty? Should I ask him about Eren rubbing his face a lot?

Lathe shook his head, his eyes downcast. “No thanks, I'm fine… And I haven't really told him anything… I was hoping to wait until he was more stable mentally to tell him the whole story of it, but… I probably should just tell him everything, while Levi’s still here to give details I don't know…” He looked up, his eyes narrowing, reading Scotty’s expression. “Was that the only thing you noticed about Eren and his actions?” I've been asleep a lot more, I could easily have missed something.
Scotty shook his head. “No… He’s been rubbing his face a lot… I’m worried he’ll rub his chin and cheeks raw with how rough his casts are… Have you noticed him doing anything weird while I wasn’t around?” “I’m worried about him…. He hasn’t even tried to start talking yet… It’s almost like he’s become mute.

Lathe nodded, running a hand through his dark hair. “He keeps doing this.” He reached out his hand, palm up. “The way Eren learned sign language, it’s how you ask for forgiveness. He started asking at least twice a day, but I can't think for my life what he could be apologizing for…” If he’s pretty much how he was when I first met him, it could be general forgiveness, maybe thinking it’s an inconvenience for me to be here, for not getting better fast enough… What else could he be apologizing for?

Scott straighten himself, taking in his words. “When did Eren start asking for forgiveness? And do you say anything with it? When you ‘forgive’ him?” Scott asked, pulling a small notepad out from his pocket and starting to write things down. We need to know what’s wrong with him… With how fast he’s improving… He should be able to talk by now.

“He started asking ever since he woke up. I just… I don't know what else I could say. I don't know what he’s sorry for…”

“What happened before he came here… What did he do…?” Scotty was still scratching everything down trying to piece it together. Didn’t Spades say something about Eren lying to Lathe?

Lathe shrugged. “I don't know where he was or what he was doing the entire time, because he didn't have his phone because he…” Lathe’s eyes widened. “…Because he told me he lost it, and he told Armin it broke. He’s apologizing for lying, isn't he.”

Scotty looked down to Lathe. “That would do it… Has he lied to you before?” Scotty asked tapping the pen against the paper trying to rack his brain for what to do. Is that all it is?

Lathe shook his head. “Never. Not that I can think of.”

“Has he had trust issues before?” What can possibly be going through Eren’s head right now?

“He’s really… He’s acting a lot like he did when I first met him. So, yeah. He’s very wary of new people, of people he doesn't recognize, of people he doesn't know too well…”
“Okay…. Umm… Do you know what happened to him the first time? Like when you met him first?” Scotty scrawled down on his pad of paper, drawing arrows to certain things. Why doesn’t he trust you?

Lathe’s voice was quiet. “...I found out that before I met him, when his… Grisha was still around, that Grisha would often get into a rage, beating him and burning him… Breaking his bones… raping him, dissecting him, which explains the single kidney… Just, horrible things…” Lathe blinked. ...He can’t think I'm the same, does he? Does he think I’m mad? That I'll hurt him like Grisha hurt him?

“So he doesn’t trust people who are angry at him… Do you think he thinks you're mad at him?” Scotty asked looking at Lathe with solemn eyes. Grisha Yeager… The ‘Do No Harm’ Doctor… How could he do that to his own son? That’s sick.

Lathe was still for a moment, slowly nodding. “I think that must be what he thinks. Because he lied. He thinks I know that he lied, which I do, and that I’m mad at him for it and are just waiting for an opportunity to hurt him. But we’re in the middle of a hospital, no one would have an opportunity, and it’s just a crazy thought…” Paranoia. Outlandish assumptions… “But he’s still scared of you, too, I can see it when you give him his medicine. ...He must think you're in on it, or something. He must be convinced I'm trying to get him killed.” It makes sense, and that’s fucking scary. Grisha really fucked with his head…

Scotty nodded, putting away his notepad in his pocket. “I think you should go talk to him and clear things up… That’s the only way I can see him start to trust you again.” At least we figured out an idea…. And it makes sense… I just hope if that’s really what it is that Eren can be swayed back to proper thoughts.

Lathe nodded, giving Scotty a small smile. “Thanks, Scotty. I guess I’ve got some explaining to do.” He turned to head back into the room, opening the door and gasping in surprise. He looked to Eren, teeth sinking into Levi’s bleeding hand. Fuck. Lathe rushed forward, wrapping one arm around Eren’s middle and pulling him back, his other hand moving near Eren’s mouth. He spoke quietly into his ear, pleading with him. “Eren, let him go, please, Levi’s not going to hurt you, please don't bite him, let go, come on, let him go.” You’ve drawn blood. Every tooth that got him, too. That’s gotta hurt like a bitch. And I thought I warned him enough to chill, but… He’s his boyfriend, what could I really expect?

Eren kept Levi’s hand locked in his mouth. No… He’s gonna hit me if I let go… He’s gonna hurt me! Eren bit down even harder, only getting a slight facial change out of Levi as he did so.
Levi looked up to Lathe. “He’s biting harder…. It hurts…. But I should’ve known trying to brush the hair out of his eyes was going to provoke him. Shit.

I really really don’t want to have to pry open your jaw. “Eren, come on, Levi’s not a threat, he’s not going to hurt you if you let go, he’s here to keep you company and make you happy, not scare you or hurt you.” …don’t you remember he loves you? “Eren, please let him go.”

Eren clamped down on Levi’s hands harder, locking his jaw in place. No… He hates me …. I can’t let go… He wanted to hit me…

...fuck. “Eren, I’m really sorry about this.” Lathe moved one hand to get a firm grip on his jaw, the other on his forehead, trying in vain to pry open his jaw. Holy fuck he’s latched on. “Scotty!” Lathe kicked the red button next to the bed, trying to get Eren off of Levi’s hand.

Scotty came rushing in a minute later, he stopped at the sight of Levi gripping onto his chair with white knuckles as Lathe tried to pry Eren’s mouth open and off of Levi’s right hand. “Should I just get the relaxers now or..?” Scotty came forward slowly seeing how Levi lurched, more blood spilling, Eren closing his jaws more as he got closer.

“Hurry and get them. Do it quick.” Lathe’s hand on his forehead moved down to cover his eyes as he watched Scotty preparing the shot out of the corner of his eye. Just make it quick.

Scotty had the right dosage prepared, turning to see Eren’s eyes were covered and Levi trying not to scream in pain. Well this must’ve escalated quickly. He moved past Levi and to Eren’s cheeks. I’m sorry, Eren. He injected half of the medication in his left half of his jaw, racing over to where Lathe was and injecting the other half. “It’ll only take a few moments for his hand to be able to come out… And you are not getting away without me wrapping yours.” Scotty’s voice was hard. What made him snap enough to draw blood and lock his jaw?

Lathe’s grip on Eren lessened as he felt his jaw began to slacken, letting Eren’s head go as Levi’s hand fell from his mouth, pulling Eren onto his lap as Scotty dragged Levi by the arm to a sink, grabbing antibacterial cream from a cabinet as they passed it and washing his hand, wrapping it quickly and sliding a pin in place.

Eren felt his jaw widen, as if it unhinged itself. Shit! I’m drooling. Eren felt the warm streams start to roll down his chin, hurriedly raising his casts to rub at his face. No no no No NO NO! Lathe can’t know!! He’ll leave me…. He’ll kill me… He can’t know I’m drooling! Eren’s hands worked as quickly as they could to rub away the drool away from his face, the skin quickly becoming red.
with how rough he was being with himself.

_That's the rubbing Scotty mentioned._ “Eren, you're hurting yourself, stop that, please.” Lathe shifted to pry Eren’s casted hands from his chin, his eyes widening as he saw drool dripping heavily down his face in small streams, his eyes coming up to meet Eren’s own horrified ones for the first time in weeks. _Oh._ “Eren, why didn't you tell me?” Lathe let go of one of his hands to reach for his kerchief, his hand coming up to intercept Eren’s before he could rub at his chin again, gently wiping the drool from his mouth. “You don't have to keep that to yourself, it’s important we know if that’s happening.” _It’ll go away soon enough, but how did you manage to hide that? I never suspected, and you're drooling really heavily…_

Eren’s eyes welled with tears as Lathe wiped his red chin. _No… You're mad at me… No, I don’t want you to hit me… I don’t want you to leave…. You're gonna leave! Grisha’s always right! You’re gonna leave me because I’m drooling…_ Eren’s fingers flexed in agitation as his tears made it down his cheeks. His eyes were full of fear, he was mortified Lathe knew he was drooling now.

Lathe sighed as he watched Eren cry, wiping those away with the corner of the red fabric. _Please don't cry… I'm not going to hurt you, and I'm not mad at you… I could never be mad at you._ “Eren, I need to tell you something.” Lathe held his gaze as he spoke quietly, putting down the kerchief for only a moment and taking hold of his casted hand. “I want you to know that I’m not mad at you. For anything. I don't know if you think you're an inconvenience, if you think you're not healing fast enough for me or any of us, if you think I'm mad because you're drooling, but you need to know that despite anything you may think I could be mad at you for, I'm not. And I’m not mad because you told me your phone was lost. Eren, I know you lied, but I'm not mad. I could _never_ be mad at you.” He ran his fingers down Eren’s palm once, twice. “I forgive you for lying. It’s okay, and I of _course_ still love you, and I'm going to stay right here and make sure you get better, okay?” _Don't doubt that._

Eren started to cry more, his breath shuddery as he tried to calm himself down. _Okay… Eren’s hand moved to take Lathe’s hands with his fingers, furrowing his brow as he tried figure out how to do this on Lathe’s hands again. {O.K.}Eren sniffled as another large amount of drool dribbled down his chin. Okay… _I don’t want you to be mad at me._

Lathe smiled, one hand slipping out of his grasp to again wipe away his drool with the red cloth, shifting so Eren was in his lap, letting one hand rest palm-up on his leg. “...Thank you. Do you want me to tell you about what happened? We never gave you too many details.” He rested his chin on his shoulder, leaning back against the pillows, studying Eren’s expression. He looked up as Levi and Scotty came back into the room, Levi’s hand wrapped with a clean white bandage. _We might need to have Levi clarify something… About what happened, sure. But also let Eren know he forgives him for that. Which he must have; there's no way he’s holding it against him._

Eren looked down at his hand when he saw the bandage on Levi’s hand. _I’m sorry_. He reached a
shaky hand out towards him, palm up.

Levi recognized the gesture from the many times he’d seen it lately. *He’s apologizing for my hand, isn’t he.* Levi reached out and gently ran his fingers down his palm, his voice quiet and tone comforting. “It’s okay, Eren. I forgive you for biting my hand. It’s okay.”

Eren drew back his hand and moved to curl into Lathe’s side. *He’s still mad at me for being fat though…. That’s why he’s leaving.* Eren closed his eyes, leaning his head against Lathe’s chest as he drooled uncontrollably. *It’s so much worse with my jaw like this... fuck.* Eren reached to Lathe’s open palm and tapped once. *What happened after Levi came home?*

Lathe moved so his kerchief was under Eren’s jaw, the drool not stopping. *I’m gonna need a towel at this rate.* “Scotty, can I have a towel or something please?” He watched as Scotty took the kerchief, placing a towel under Eren’s chin. *I’m gonna need that back eventually. Eh, I can hound him about it’s whereabouts later.* “Alright, storytime.” Lathe kept his hand open and up as Levi described what happened as soon as he entered the apartment and directly afterward in the ambulance, Lathe helping to tell Eren everything he could remember about the weeks he was unconscious, rattling off who had visited, how Eren’s health had fluctuated occasionally… he left out no details, including a couple words on his arguments with the doctors. *I had to make sure you were okay, even though it meant hounding doctors and challenging nurse’s judgments. And I’m not about to apologize to anyone for that.*

Eren followed along silently with the story, listening to every word. *I remember that…. I could hear people arguing... I heard a lot... You read to me a lot... I liked the Harry Potter books you read to me.* Once Eren had regained the use of his jaw his drooling decreased a considerable amount. He kept his grip on Lathe’s shirt, his eyes starting to close after he had finally finished rattling everything off. *I’m tired... It’s been a long day... Levi’s gonna leave soon.... He’s not coming back is he?*

Lathe pressed a kiss to the top of Eren’s head as he dozed off, gently shifting out from under him and pulling the thin sheet of a blanket over him. *It’s about the time Levi has to get going.* He slid his shoes back on, looking to Levi as he stood up. *Not the best way to say goodbye to Eren...*

Levi smiled softly, taking slow steps towards Eren. *I hope he doesn’t bite me for this.* Levi gently leaned down and kissed Eren’s forehead, a soft smile on his face when Eren didn’t make a move to maim him. “I’ll be home soon, okay Eren?” He pulled back to look into his eyes only to find them closed completely. He sighed as he moved back and away to get his bag by the door. *Time to go already…. I don’t want to leave him, but the academy would have my head if I don’t go back.*

Lathe followed Levi out the door, closing it softly and following him down to the lobby and stopping him near the front doors, giving him a crushing hug. “You come back soon, alright? And
make sure you call often, Eren and I want to hear from you. Study hard, and try not to get into too much trouble, okay?” Lathe beamed at him. *We’re gonna miss you.*

Levi chuckled, a small smile gracing his lips for a few seconds. “I promise… Hopefully I’ll be back for Thanksgiving…” Levi smiled back at him. “Oh and by the way… You’ve lost a lot of weight these past few weeks, make sure you eat, and make sure Eren doesn’t struggle against the nurse trying to feed him too…” Levi smiled softly before slinging his bag over his shoulder. *Erwin’s probably outside waiting for me by now.*

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him, smirking. “Note taken. And you **better** be. I'll try to get him back to actually eating.” His eyes softened. “I'll see you soon, Levi.” *Hopefully as soon as Thanksgiving.*

Levi nodded and walked out the doors without another glance, a black car waiting for him just beyond the doors.
Chapter 36: 28 Part 9: Problems Surface

Scotty strode into the hospital room with a look of fury on his face, a few syringes in one hand and a copy of the paper in the other. He shook Lathe awake, thrusting the paper at him. “You need to see this.”

Lathe blinked the sleep out of his eyes, taking the paper and giving his eyes a second to adjust before he could read the headline, his eyes wide at the huge photograph covering the top half of the front page. ‘FAMOUS YOUTUBER BECOMES AN AGGRESSIVE PSYCH PATIENT.’ He looked to the image of Eren, alone in the hospital bed drooling onto the white cloth. *What. The. Actual. Fuck.* He read the beginning paragraph of the article, his hand shaking as he got further along, stopping after a tense moment to look up to Scotty, handing him the paper. “Hold this.” He reached into his pocket, pulling out his phone and holding down one button, holding it to his ear as it dialed for Spades, picking up after two rings, his voice deathly calm. “Spades, have you read the paper this morning yet?” He held the phone from his head after she spoke quietly, a moment of silence before she swore loudly, saying something along the lines of being there soon before the line cut. “She’ll be around soon to investigate this, and because it’s another county she’ll probably be calling in that favor from Gordon.” He stowed his phone in his pocket before taking the paper back, reading the article in its entirety. “Scotty, whatever happened to ‘patient confidentiality?’ It must have been someone who works here, it’s too detailed to be drawn solely from a picture or two. Haven’t they had pretty much the same nurses attending this room this entire time? They would know this much stuff. I’d track down that roster if you could.” He thought a moment. “We’re dealing with the press here, too. Reporters could start flooding in. You might want to warn the people at the front desk not to send anyone up to Eren Yeager’s room without my own permission.” *We need to think this through, because it could get very real very quickly.*

“I’ll go alert the front desk now, and I’ll get you that list.” Scotty’s hands were balled in fists until he saw Eren grab Lathe’s shirt and almost hide behind him. *Shit… He’s scared… Did he hear us?*

Eren looked at Scotty’s fists with eyes full of fear. *Why’s he mad?* Eren’s eyes moved to Lathe’s fists holding onto the paper in pure fury. *Lathe’s mad too… What did I do? I don’t want him to be angry at me… Is that a picture of me?* Eren’s eyes snapped open as he saw that he was drooling heavily in the photo. *No… No no no no no!!* Eren’s grip tightened on Lathe’s shirt and he buried his face into his shoulder, not caring that he was drooling onto Lathe’s shirt. *People know… People know I’m drooling… No…*

Lathe dropped the paper in his lap, shifting to pull Eren close, not caring that he drooled on his shirt as he pecked his forehead, speaking quietly. “Hey Eren, don’t worry, we’re going to get all of this straightened out in no time. Spades is going to help sort this all out, and she’s gonna know exactly what to do, and we’re going to keep this from happening again, okay?” *This fucking sucks, but we’ll straighten this shit out and get the nurse who took that photo fired.* Maybe this is enough to arrest them… Pretty sure it is, actually.
Scotty watched Eren nod and curl up into Lathe more before he left to head downstairs. It took awhile for the elevator to come to the seventh floor but he waited for it, sighing as he got on going down to the lobby. He took large steps to get to the desk, greeting the heavier-set woman at the desk. “Hey Mary, we’re going to deny all visitors for Eren Yeager until further notice… Unless you call up to his room and Mr. Quo gives him permission, if police show their badges they’re allowed to come up as well but that’s it.” Scotty’s voice was hard, no room for argument.

“Two already came in… This morning, but I won’t let anymore in, they came in five minutes ago and went up.” Mary’s voice was quiet, “I’m sorry Scott, I didn’t know.”

“WHAT?” Scotty’s rage radiated through the room as he stormed to the elevators to make his way back up to the seventh floor. *This is bad, really bad, if they found his room… Oh God, Lathe don’t go overboard… Fuck this slow ass elevator!* Scotty fished for his phone in his pocket, pushing a few buttons and raising it to his ear.

Lathe’s head turned to the door as there was a sharp knock, not recognizing it and swinging his legs from the bed as the door creaked open, an unfamiliar face poking in. *That’s not a hospital worker. They already got here.* “I’m sorry.” Lathe’s voice was cold, ignoring the buzz of his phone and crossing the room in two steps to block his entrance to the room and view of Eren, hand and foot keeping the door in place. “Eren isn’t taking visitors at this time.” He stared the shorter man down, standing up straight. *You and you friend behind you can get the fuck out.*

“I’m sorry sir… We’re just here to talk to Eren, it’ll only be a few moments, please.” His smile faltered as Lathe stood up to his full height.

The doors opened to the elevator down the hall, Scotty and two security guards on either side of him making their way over. “Them… Get them out of here!” Scotty growled, causing the two reporters to turn to see the security guards. Scotty was furious and when he stood at his full height, the reporters left in an instant, being escorted out of the building. “Is Eren okay?” He asked once they left.

Lathe turned back to Eren, huddled in a ball, or as close to one as he could be, in the center of his bed. *Shit.* Lathe quickly moved to get back beside him, pulling him close again, murmuring into his ear and carding his hand through his hair. “I’m sorry about that Eren, they’re gone now, and we’re trying to make sure no more show up, okay?”

Eren shook in his arms, his hand tapping twice in his palm repeatedly. He couldn’t stop the massive amount of drool coming from his mouth as he stressed. *No… This is bad… Why are they coming for me? Is Grisha still trying to kill me!*
Lathe picked up the towel from where it fell into his lap, gently wiping his chin and speaking quietly, trying to meet his eyes. “Eren, please don’t worry, we’ve got a lot of people trying to keep anyone from bothering you about this, and Spades is on her way and she’s got a whole bunch of tricks up her sleeve and we’re all going to keep you safe and out of harm’s way, okay? We’re doing what we can.” It’ll be alright.

Eren’s panicked eyes met Lathe’s, completely laced with fear. No… People know… People know! I didn’t want them to know! I didn’t want you to know! Eren’s hands gripped onto Lathe’s shirt.

Lathe murmured into Eren’s ear, holding him close and calming him down until Spades walked in with Gordon and Scotty at her heels. Her eyes softened immediately, seeing Eren curled up to Lathe. This isn’t going to be easy at all for any of us. The press is a bitch to deal with. “Hey Eren, good afternoon. I brought backup.” She nodded to Gordon, grinning. “We’re going to get all of this sorted out.” She stepped forward timidly, wanting to give Eren a hug but knowing she couldn’t. He’s going to be especially on edge today. She looked back to Gordon, thinking for a moment. He doesn’t know you yet, does he? He was asleep when he came around. She motioned for Gordon to come up, still giving them plenty of space on the bed. “Eren, I have someone I’d like you to meet. This is Gordon Ramsey, he’s the police Commissioner for Wichita county, a good friend of mine. And Gordon- this is Eren Yeager.” She watched Eren’s face carefully, not sure how he would react to the man. You’ve been so wary of new people...

Eren’s grip tightened on Lathe’s shirt as Gordon got closer, and he moved to press himself to Lathe’s chest as Gordon came to the bed. He’s too close… He’s gonna hurt me… He’s gonna yell at me!

Lathe’s hold tightened on Eren, sending Spades a pleading look and feeling Eren relax a bit more as Spades took Gordon’s arm, bringing him a step back with a sympathetic look. New person for him. He needs space. Sorry ‘bout that. Lathe sent him a similar look, shrugging one shoulder a bit.

Gordon stepped back as soon as Spades pulled him back. “Ah Sorry, I didn’t know…. You can call me Gordon, I’m here to help you.” He looked over at Scotty as he handed him a list. “22 people working yesterday?” He asked and sighed. “This’ll take all day… We’ll start with the ones he’s bitten… How many does that narrow it down to?”

“Seven… That’s better than 22 though.” Scotty told him and came up to Eren slowly. “Eren… I gotta take some blood from you, I need to make sure your kidney’s doing okay.” Scotty moved to get the needles ready. It’s better to just tell him now than to take it without warning and freak him out more.

Eren looked up to Lathe. Is he gonna hurt me? Why does he have a fucking needle … I don't want
to have him put more drugs in me!

Lathe looked between the two of them, seeing the fear in his eyes. “...Would you rather have me do it, Eren? It's not a big deal, really, getting blood taken. It'll be over before you even know it started.” It’s not even two minutes. You'll be okay no matter who does it. But you need to have it done. We need to make sure you're okay.

Eren thought about it before he tapped on his hand once, his eyes following their movements, he flinched as Spades and Gordon moved towards the door to interrogate the nurses. They're just leaving… I need to calm down. His eyes widened as he saw the large needle Lathe was coming towards him with.

Lathe moved his free hand to grab a handful of the sheet, pressing it into Eren’s hand. “Just squeeze this as tight as you can, Eren. I promise I'll be careful. It'll be over soon. You can close your eyes if you want.” He took a small alcohol wipe and cleaned the skin at the inside of Eren’s elbow, taking the needle and inserting the needle into Eren’s arm, holding his arm gently as he drew blood, switching the vials and filling three before drawing the needle from his arm, handing the syringe to Scotty and pressing a small bit of gauze to his arm, taping it down and pressing a kiss to his forehead. “There, it's all done. You did wonderfully, Eren. No moving or anything.”

Scotty thanked him. “Alright I’ll go send these to the lab and I’ll be back with his food… Don’t let anyone in besides the three of us, I’m taking over all of his care from now on, I can’t trust anyone.”
He took the vials and then left the room swiftly.

Eren’s eyes were shut tightly, his hands shaking. No more needles... Please...

“You don't have to tell me twice.” Lathe moved to sit on the bed again, pulling Eren against him, mumbling into his shoulder. “It’s all over now, no more needles. We’re just going to get some food into you, and you’ll feel much better then, okay? But it’s over for now. Don't worry.” You'll feel better after lunch.

Eren’s whole body shook at the mention of food. No... I don’t want to be fat... That’s why Levi left... I’m too fat for him... I don’t want him to leave me... Eren made a small noise that sounded like a hiccup, trying not to cry as he was in Lathe’s arms. I don’t want to eat.

Lathe rubbed up and down his back soothingly, offering his hand. “What’s wrong, Eren? You can tell me. It’s okay if you need to cry…” It’s better not to let it bottle up when so many things are happening right now...
Eren just let the tears fall and curled up to himself as best as he could in Lathe’s arms. No… Lathe’ll agree that I’m fat if I tell him… I don’t want him to be mad at me… I don’t want that formula anymore! Eren watched as Scotty came in, carrying a white substance in a small pitcher and all the tools he needed to give Eren his food. No! I don’t want it!

“All right Eren, you know the drill, can you lay down for me?” He asked as he started to get things ready for Eren, though he didn’t hear any movement coming from the bed, he sighed as he looked over his shoulder. This isn’t going to be easy is it?

Lathe shifted carefully, gently trying to move a not-budging Eren onto his back, still worried about his sudden breakdown. It wasn’t just the needles, he’d tell me if it was. Why doesn’t he want food? “Eren, you need to eat. Why won’t you tell me why you don’t want to? I’m not going to be mad, whatever it is you’re worried about. Tell me, please.” He offered his hand again, meeting Eren’s eyes, giving him a pleading look. Just tell me.

Grisha’s always right… Why should I tell you? Eren looked down and complied without another fit, but he made no move to tell Lathe what was wrong. No… I don’t want to be fat… But I don’t want Lathe to get mad at me… I know he will… Eren couldn’t meet Lathe’s eyes as he let Scotty come up and start to feed him through the tube, his tears never stopping. I’m sorry Levi… I just keep getting fatter… And fatter…

Lathe gently wiped away Eren’s tears with the corner of the white cloth, one hand still open for him if he wanted to talk, still trying to meet his gaze. “Eren, we just want to make sure your body has everything it needs to get better. Please, talk to me. I won’t get mad, no matter what it is you say. I swear it.” And I mean that. Nothing you could say would make me mad at all, and never nearly as much as you’d think.

Scotty was grateful as he finished feeding Eren without incident, looking over to him as he turned his head away from Lathe. He’s not talking… It’s probably got to do with Grisha messing with his head… that would be my first guess. He swiftly cleaned up and moved Eren into an upright position against the bed and smiled softly at him. “You did great, Eren!” He watched with defeat as Eren simply looked down to his fingers in his lap, not looking up at Lathe or himself. Well, I should go see what Gordon and Spades have found so far. “I’ll be back later with your test results… And then we need to take you down to x-Rays to see how your arms and legs are doing.”

Eren looked up as he heard the door click shut before he looked down at his hands again, raising one to rub at his face out of habit. I don’t want to be fat… I don’t want Levi to leave me… I want him to love me… Not hate me anymore… He knows I’m a whore… He doesn’t want to love a slut… Eren sniffled as he tried to keep in his tears.
Lathe caught his hand before it could touch his still-raw face, his features heavy with worry. *I'm not going to drop this. I told Levi I'd get you back on regular food and dammit we're getting to the bottom of this.* He sighed heavily, his gaze dropping. “Eren, I'm really sorry I keep pressing the matter…” He held up his palm, asking for forgiveness, still speaking. “I just want you to not worry as much as you are. I want you to get better, and I want you to know that I mean it when I say no matter what you tell me, I wouldn't get mad. I could never be mad at you, even the tiniest bit. You can talk to me all you want, you can cry if you need to, but I'm not going to make you if you really don't want to. I just…” A tear slid down his cheek. “I just want you to be okay.” *if all you do is forgive me for being as stubborn as I am, and then drop it… I'll understand.*

Eren glanced at him, raising his head slightly. *Grisha's always right.... But you should tell him, he won't get mad...That's what they all say... But he'll still be here... He'll still comfort a whore? Yeah right....* Eren slowly reached out his hand and ran his fingers timidly across his open palm twice. He stared at it slowly moving to try and make a letter and getting frustrated after the first few tries. *... Fuck I don't remember what it looks like...*

Lathe picked up his other hand, slowly spelling out the alphabet. *Here, a little refresher.* He stopped as Eren moved his hand and caught him at the letter F. “Okay, want me to keep going through it like this? Have you stop me at the letters?” He nodded as Eren nodded, returning to A and stopping as Eren tapped his wrist. *F... A...* He started again, running through the letters and ceasing as Eren tapped his wrist at T, his eyes widening. *Fat? You think you're fat?* “No, Eren…” He moved to hold Eren close, one hand running through his brunette hair. “Eren, trust me, you're not fat, you're not anywhere near being fat. Us feeding you isn't going to make you put on that much weight, and if anything you're a bit thin. But you're perfectly healthy at the weight you are right now, don't you worry. We’d all love you no matter how much you weighed. It’s okay. It really is.” *Is that really what's been keeping you from eating? Eren, you don't have to worry about that. You really don't.* He brought his hand up again. “Do you want to tell me anything else?”

Eren nodded slightly. Bring his palm out and signing what Eren had made up for Levi’s name so many years ago. *He remembers, right? What the sign for Levi is?* Eren paused for only a moment before signing the word ‘can’t’ pausing again to think of what to do next. *I think it's a hand over the heart?* He moved Lathe’s hand over his heart, motioning for ‘love’. Eren stopped his motions, staring at his hand open for him as a single tear traveled down his face. *I don't remember how to spell it...* Eren waited for Lathe to start going through the alphabet all over again.

*W....H....O....R....E....* Lathe looked so broken at that, holding onto his hand and lacing their fingers, one hand still running through his hair, trying to catch his eyes. *Grisha raped him again. Didn't he.* “Eren, you're not a whore. The things that Grisha did to you, you didn't ask for. You didn't do them because you wanted to. He forced you. That doesn't make you a whore. Don't think of yourself as that, please. It’s not what you are.” *It’s the furthest thing from the truth. He let Eren’s hand go as he struggled to move them in his grip, running through the alphabet again at Eren’s silent demand. M... O... R... E... Does that mean it was... More than just Grisha? “It wasn't... Just Grisha, was it?”*
Eren shook his head and started to hold up his fingers for Lathe to see. 37… 37 men… I’m a whore… I enjoyed it… They gave me drugs…. I wanted it more than anything…. I’m a whore… Just like Grisha said… He’s always right. Eren let a few tears fall as he leaned his head against Lathe’s chest. Levi can’t love a whore.

Lathe’s arms shakily wrapped around Eren, holding him tightly and rocking him gently, shutting his eyes as tears stream down his face. I had promised… I promised I wouldn't let it happen again… “Eren… He’s gone now, gone for good… That’s never going to happen again, and this time we know that. And please, never call yourself a whore. Nothing could be further from the truth. And Levi… He’s so absolutely smitten with you, he loves you more than anything in the world… What happened in the past couldn't possibly make him love you any less. He loves you, Eren, absolutely adores you. I can see it every time he looks at you.” He really does love you. I wish… I wish you could see that.

Eren just started to break down in Lathe’s arms. I don’t want Levi to leave… I don’t want him to hate me… I don’t want him to leave me alone…. I don’t want him to come back in a box… Grisha said he would… Grisha’s always right. Eren started crying heavily, starting to drool heavily as well. He didn’t even notice Scotty come into the room with a wheelchair, the x-Ray room waiting for them to go down.

Lathe wiped the drool from his face, shifting his arms under Eren. “Eren, we’re going to get you downstairs for an x-Ray, okay? I’m just going to lift you into a wheelchair, but don’t worry, I’m coming with you.” He slowly lifted Eren up, stepping onto the floor and carefully setting Eren in the wheelchair without incident. “Any word from the tag-team downstairs?” Lathe looked to Scotty. They must’ve found something by now.

Scotty shook his head. “No one is ‘fessing up, they went through the whole list and no one admitted to anything… They went down to check the tapes.” Scotty told him and looked to Eren’s tear-stained face. ‘Is he okay?’ Scotty mouthed to Lathe with worry in his eyes. He wasn’t like this when I left… What could’ve possibly happened?

Lathe sadly shrugged, giving him a so-so motion with his hand. ‘Later.’ We can't talk about it right now, I have a feeling Eren would lose it if I told Scotty with him in earshot… He walked next to Eren as Scotty wheeled him to the elevators, descending to the first floor, greeted with the sound of a nearby commotion as the doors opened. Lathe was immediately on the defensive, his ears straining. That’s… That’s got to be the reporters. Damn, they’re persistent. “Please tell me we’re walking away from the mayhem.” Lathe looked down the hall, worried and prepared to guard Eren if he had to.

Scotty took in a deep breath, shaking his head. “Nope… We need to go towards it to get to X-
Rays… That’s the only hallway that leads to it on this side of the hospital… Fuck.” He muttered the last word under his breath as they neared the commotion, Eren already starting to get on edge as they rounded a corner… No one saw them yet…

Lathe shook himself out to his full height, between Eren and the loud noise, steeled for the worst. This is going to be bad.

All it took was for one reporter to spot them from the mass, which led to the mass of reporters starting towards them in the hallway. Eren was already freaking out, holding on tightly to his towel to hide his face from them, cameras flashing, reporters shouting for his attention to answer their questions. Go away… Go away… They’re gonna hurt me! He closed his eyes tightly and kept his face hidden by his hair and the towel. Eren heard a whimper sound by his ear before the whimper turned into a full fledge snarl. Blake wasn’t wearing a leash in the hospital because he mostly stayed at the end of the bed. His teeth were bared as he started towards the large crowd of reporters. He looked completely vicious with his ears pinned back in anger and his blue eyes sharp and full of hostility to anyone who got close.

“Spades!” Lathe shouted, hoping she could hear him as he moved between Eren and the reporters, radiating fury as they came closer, trying to stare them down. Don’t do anything stupid. This is the media. Just don’t be an idiot and fuck shit up more. He looked up as Spades and Gordon came running from a hallway behind him, moving to let them deal with the crowd of reporters.

“ALRIGHT!” She shouted over them so they all heard her, their commotion quieting slightly, their advance slowing. “I don’t CARE if you have questions for Eren. I don’t CARE if you want pictures. He is here to get better, and you all are doing NOTHING to help and EVERYTHING to make it worse. You’re in a HOSPITAL. Act like you should as human beings and have some damn RESPECT for that.” Her voice boomed over them, her eyes icy, blocking their progress down the hall, her badge gleaming gold around her neck. Fuck. This.

Gordon watched her display of anger and malice without so much as batting an eye at her. That’s to be expected. “Alright everyone, leave, Eren is a patient here. Go back to the lobby and hound the desk all you want to be able to see Eren, or you will be escorted to my station down the street in a matter of minutes, so any volunteers to see what the back of a cruiser looks like?” Gordon clapped his hands as he walked towards the mass of people, which backed off as soon as he got close, Blake following still growling at his heels. Ah… That’s Eren’s service dog… He’s not on a leash… Intimidation is key. “You see, Eren’s got a very protective service dog… I wouldn’t mind letting him go after all of you, as you’re doing more harm than good at this point. So I suggest you… Run.” Gordon smirked as Blake lunged towards the crowd, effectively chasing them down the hall and into the lobby and most of them out of the door before he came back to sit by Gordon, expecting to be pet. Demanding, are we? Well, you did a good job, bud. Gordon gently reached down to pet Blake as the dog wagged his tail, happy to be praised again.
Lathe turned from the display of rage and looked back to Eren, coming over to him and rubbing his shoulder, Eren’s hands over his ears and his eyes screwed shut. He glanced up as Blake charged the group down the hall, gently running a hand through his hair and tugging on his arm, uncappping an ear. “It’s okay Eren, the reporters are gone now, they’re all away for now. You can relax, please, it’s over for right now.”

Eren’s eyes slowly cracked open and he timidly looked up to meet Lathe’s eyes. *That was scary, I don’t want to do that again… Not again please…* He unfurled from himself in his chair, but kept a firm grip on Lathe’s shirt sleeve, too afraid to let it go. *No, don’t leave.*

Scotty sighed in relief once it was over, wheeling them down the hallway and into one of the x-Ray rooms. “Okay, ready Eren?” His voice was quiet as they entered the dark room and towards a large table, with the machine above it. *I know how to use this so it should be good, I’m the one who wants to see his x-Rays anyways…* “Lathe will you help me move him?” Scotty moved Eren’s wheelchair towards the table, getting ready to help lift Eren’s thin frame to the table.

Lathe nodded, moving to Eren’s side, making sure they both had a good hold before gently lifting him up and onto the table, careful as he set him down and laid his head on the hard surface.

Eren laid still on the cold table, watching Scotty start to move the machine to get a better angle on one of Eren’s legs. He moved to the wall and got a lead cover, laying it on Eren’s chest. “Okay Eren… I need you to stay still for me… Okay? Can you do that? Lathe and I will be on the other side of that wall looking at the pictures of your leg okay? Just stay still for us okay?” Scotty smiled as Eren nodded motioning Lathe to follow him behind a wall and to a row of computer screens. “Okay Eren don’t move until I say you can!” He called over the wall, clicking a button and hearing the machine fire up and take a picture of his leg. “Do you want to talk about earlier?” Scotty asked, his voice a mere whisper as he pulled the first picture up and you could clearly make out all the metal holding the bones together. He blew up the photo to examine the breaks and how they have progressed. *Not much progress at all… That’s worrying… We’ll see what his other leg looks like first before we start to panic. I hope Lathe is okay… He was crying too… I don’t like to see when he cries too.*

Lathe slowly nodded, his face devoid of emotion as he studied the image, noting the lack of progress in healing. His voice was very quiet, a low murmur. “Eren told me why he always puts up such a fight when you try and feed him. It’s… everything that Grisha did to him really fucked with his head. He said he didn’t want to get fat, that he thought he was too fat to eat anything. And… he’s so worried that Levi won’t love him if he’s fat, and if he knew… it happened again. Grisha had gotten a lot of men together, and they all raped Eren… He can only think of himself as a whore, and is so scared that Levi won’t love him anymore because of it.” *…we need to make sure he stops thinking that. He shouldn’t ever think such horrible things…*

Scotty took in a deep breath, thinking of what to say before he moved to maneuver the machine
over Eren’s other leg, in silence. “You’re doing great Eren!” Scotty somehow feigned enthusiasm as he came back to take the x-Ray of his leg. “That’s horrible…” The machine fired up and soon another almost identical image popped up on the screen. “He’s not healing quickly… We’ll need to put new hard casts on both of his legs… Let's go and move him into the wheelchair again so I can get his arms at a good angle.” I need to get you distracted after that.

Lathe silently nodded, moving with him to lift Eren back into the wheelchair, giving him a weak smile and bringing his arm onto the table as Scotty maneuvered the machine, moving back to the monitors after a moment. His eyes were dull as they took in the new image of his arm. “His arms have healed miraculously well, there’s just a little left to be mended. We can take the casts off and keep them off, just wrap them instead, which’ll be easier on his skin and maybe he could actually write with just the wraps on.”

Scotty nodded, blowing up the picture just to be sure. “Yeah, we can take it off this arm… Let me get the other arm checked.” Scotty left and reappeared again after only a moment clicking for another picture and the same case appeared. Wow… His arms healed really well, really quickly too, it’s amazing. “I think we can go take him back upstairs and I can take them off up there…” Scotty said and logged out of the computers and went over to Eren, taking the lead vest off of him. “Ready to go back upstairs?” Well at least he can respond with a head nod now… And not just tapping on people’s hands.

Lathe followed them as they wheeled Eren down the now much-quieter hallway, Spades poking her head from around a corner hearing the wheelchair. “Hey Scotty, I need to steal you for a sec.” She walked up to them, Gordon right behind her. “We have a good image of the face of the nurse who took the picture when Lathe was out of the room, but we need you to identify who exactly it is.” She glanced over to Lathe, her eyes narrowing a fraction. Why does your shirt look so loose?

Scotty looked to Eren then to Lathe. “You wanna take him upstairs? I can go look and be back up with what we need for him, it should only take me a few moments.” His small smile reassuring. I want to see which asshole it was that would violate more than half of the HIPPA laws.

Lathe nodded, moving to take hold of Eren’s wheelchair and continue on his way to the elevator as Scotty went to the security room.

Spades stopped him, a hand on his arm before she tugged at his shirt, feeling an excess of fabric. How is this too big? It’s your favorite shirt, you wear it all the time. “Lathe, have you been eating?” Her voice was quiet.

Lathe was silent, his eyes looking down. I’ve been too worried to eat much of anything anymore… I’m just not hungry half the time.
Spades took his silence as an answer. “Have you eaten anything today?” More silence. *Come on, Lathe.* “Lathe, you need to eat. I'll run and grab you some food when I get the chance. And no arguments.” She held up a finger as Lathe opened his mouth to speak. “You need at least something in your stomach.” She pulled him down to kiss him gently, breaking away after a moment and sending him a sympathetic look. “You need to take care of yourself too. I'll let you go up. We called for a guard to keep the reporters away as long as they keep coming; you shouldn't be bothered.” She lightly, timidly patted Eren’s shoulder and gave him a small smile before she left for the security room. *I'm going to have to hound him about this, aren't I? ...Yeah, he’s not about to hear the end of this.*

Gordon and Scotty were hunched over the security monitors, rewatching the events unfold, Scotty finally seeing how Eren latched onto Levi’s hand so tightly and then releasing him, and Lathe holding him, Levi forgiving him then the two of them leaving to go downstairs… A man walked in almost immediately after, a cell phone in hand. “That’s not a nurse…” Scotty trailed off as they watched it over and over again, even stopping it on a clear view of the person’s face. “It’s definitely not an ICU nurse.” He told him and he moved to another camera around the same time in the hallway. The same man was talking to one of the nurses Eren had bitten. “That’s so weird… I’ve never met him before…” Scotty continued to rewind videos and follow him as he walked through the hospital finding each of the nurses that Eren bit and speaking with them. *Who the fuck are you….*

Spades watched over their shoulders, her brow furrowed. “...Why the hell does he look familiar? Keep following him.” *Where the fuck have I seen you before?* She watched as the man left the building, walking to a white car near the front of the lot, reaching over and stopping the video on a frame with a clear plate. “There it is. That’s how we find him.” She fished in her pocket for a notepad, jotting down the plate number. “Well put this in the computer in the cruiser, should turn something up quick enough. Thank you, Scotty.” She rested a hand on his shoulder, a tired smile on her face.

Scotty smiled softly. “Alright, well I gonna go get back up to Eren, so I’ll be taking my leave, make sure you catch that asshole.” He got up and made his way out of the room, taking the elevator upstairs and going to get all the bandages, wraps, and towels they would need. *He needs a sponge bath… His skin needs to get cleaned out too… I wonder if he'll let Lathe cut his hair… It’s so long…* Scotty returned to the room with everything in a large bucket in his arms. “Think you’re up for a bath Eren?” He was slow as he neared the bed, knowing fully how hostile Eren could become in seconds.
Lathe looked down to Eren, who returned his look with a questioning one. “That means you get your casts off. You up for it? It’s do you good, let your skin breathe.” His hand moved to inspect Eren’s hair. *Could probably do with a haircut, now that I think of it. I could easily manage giving you one.*

Eren looked down at the casts on his extremities. *I want white ones again…* Eren nodded and he curled up in Lathe’s lap a little more, watching as Scotty slowly approached with a long, thin, hard piece of plastic, and a tool with a saw at the end of it. *What’s he doing?* Eren watched with wide eyes as Scotty slid the long piece under the cast on his left leg. *What’s he doing?*

“She, I don’t want you to freak out, but this is the ‘saw’ we use to cut the casts off, It can’t cut through the plastic, that’s for me to cut along… Don’t be afraid of it touching your skin….” He turned it on and touched it to his own fingers for a few seconds showing him intact flesh. “See? No need to worry.” Scotty reassured him as he cut through the colorful casts one by one and removing them, the whole horror of Eren’s scarred legs and his butchered arms coming on display… His tattoo was ripped, large angry red marks running up and down his whole arm, on both sides, the writing that Grisha has cut into the back of his arms leaving ugly scars. The amount of burned flesh on his body which had started to flake off multiple times left a sickly pink color all over him. *He definitely needs this bath… He’s not getting out of it.*

Lathe’s heart sunk as he took in Eren’s torn up skin, the scarred words and the messed-up tattoo. *Oh my… That hasn’t been healing well. The bones, sure, but your skin, my God…* Lathe rubbed Eren’s side gently as the casts came off one after the other. “…We need to get the wraps off of your back, too, and see how that’s doing.”

Eren looked up at Lathe and he rose his arms up off his sides so it would be easier for him to take off the wraps. *I’ve done this before…. Years ago…. I wonder how bad it is this time?*

Lathe slid the pins out of place, unraveling the bandages and carefully peeling them away from his back, flakes of skin coming with it from being burned, reminded too much of what his back first looked like when he saw it, but worse. The burn covered the majority of his back, the words ‘slut’ and ‘whore’ scarred into his skin, their carvings permanent. *He’s… Even worse than the first time around… And it was awful then.* He looked down as Scotty swore under his breath, barely catching it. *What now?*

Scotty was looking at Eren’s charcoal colored feet, gently prodding it to assess the state of the skin and how much Eren could feel. The burnt skin cracked without so much as Eren turning his head over to his foot. *He can’t feel it.* Scotty swore again, moving to get a clean syringe… “Lathe cover
his eyes, I don’t want him to see this…” Scotty’s tone was grave as he left to fill up two syringes of localized anesthetic. I need to remove the skin myself… God, this is going to be gross… It’s been trying to heal for 6 weeks… But it hasn’t been given the chance to… I don’t know if he’ll ever be able to feel it again… He didn’t even feel the skin crack…

Lathe shot Eren a sympathetic look before covering his eyes with his hand, his other pulling the rest of the bandages away, a pile next to him. Gross, there’s skin all over them… But that means it’s trying to heal, so… He looked down to Eren’s feet, his eyes wide, swallowing hard. Holy fuck that looks horrible! Oh my God!

Scotty came back with the two full syringes, emptying them in various parts of Eren’s feet, waiting for it to set in before he washed his hands again donning on new gloves, sanitizing his leg above the ankle and getting a fresh scalpel out. This is not going to be pretty. He had to put on a blue mask and he made careful incisions into Eren’s feet, the skin cracking, but no blood was to be found at all. That’s not a good sign either.

Lathe kept his hand over Eren’s eyes, rubbing his shoulder with the other soothingly as he waited for Scotty to finish cutting of the black skin, not able to stand looking at him work. Oh that doesn’t look good that looks horrible, oh my… He winced as he heard the skin crackling and cracking under the knife. …Here’s to hoping he can still walk.

Scotty worked as quickly as he could, clearing away the charred skin from Eren’s feet, leaving smaller and bright pink feet in the aftermath. Now let’s see what he can do. “Eren… Can you wiggle your toes for me?” He asked and sighed in relief when Eren was able to wiggle all ten of them. Thank the fucking lord… How his feet got burned so badly… I don’t want to know… Not now. He got up and cleared the area of the skin from Eren’s view. “Lathe you can let him look, it’s done with.” How he didn’t feel me cutting and cracking the skin off… Not flinching even the slightest bit… I hope his nerves weren’t damaged irreparably.

Lathe opened his eyes, letting his hand fall from Eren’s eyes and looking down himself. Ouch. At least he can move them… hopefully his nerves aren’t damaged… “Okay, so. Let’s get you clean, okay?” Lathe took the small pile of bandages from next to him, looking for somewhere to properly get rid of them.

Eren nodded and let him get up, laying back down almost completely nude in the hospital bed. Scotty had closed the blinds, and had managed to wrap a towel around his crotch, and the horrors of his skin was left out in the open for the two to see. Eren slowly raised a thin arm inspecting the ripped tattoo, his eyes dull. No more tattoo… I guess. Eren raised his right arm and looked to the countless neat lines on his wrist. …. Right…. Eren’s eyes were dull as he stared at his own skin. I’m ugly…. I’m really really ugly. Levi will never love me if I’m ugly… I wanna scratch. Eren felt the temptation to scratch as he stared at his ugly arms. Too ugly… I’m hideous… Grisha’s always right.
Scotty was moving around the room making sure that Eren never saw the thick black pieces of skin which he had cut off. He put the bandages from around his back in the biohazard container which held the charred skin. “Okay, make sure to scrub him, but try not to make him bleed from scrubbing too hard, and don’t be afraid to touch his back, just be gentle, I’m giving him morphine now, and I called in for new sheets, so it’s okay if these get wet.” The water is warm enough for you to start, and he trusts you at least somewhat now… So I would wash him if I were you. Scotty moved to the closet, getting a dose of morphine and a dose of his PTSD medicine, moving to Eren’s IV and inserting them, still feeling Eren’s stare bore into the back of his head as he went to dispose of the needles.

Lathe nodded, picking up the bucket and setting it near Eren’s feet. He rolled up his sleeves and reached for the soft sponge inside, squeezing a bit of the water out and starting to gently scrub Eren’s legs, the dead skin beginning to flake off onto the sponge. I’m probably going to need clean water after a little while… He carefully lifted Eren’s leg a few inches, trying not to put too much strain on the still-broken bones as he scrubbed the underside, setting it back down and moving to his other side, doing the same for his other leg. The room was quiet except for the beeps of the machine and the sounds of Lathe washing him, and Lathe noticed when he heard a ragged sound. He looked up to Eren, who looked like he was struggling a bit to breathe. “Eren, are you okay? Is something wrong?” He set down the sponge and moved to his side, offering his hand if he wanted to spell. Is breathing itself hard? Did I hurt something? Does something else hurt? What could you be thinking?

Huh? What does he mean. Eren’s brow furrowed not knowing why Lathe was asking him if he was okay so suddenly. I’m fine… You’re not hurting me.. He slowly reached for Lathe’s hand making quick work of a few words. {I’m fine. Y?}Eren took in another ragged breath, not seeming to realize that he was struggling to breathe.

Lathe looked over to Scotty, worry etched into his features. “Scotty, Eren’s having trouble breathing. He can’t even seem to tell.” ...I was worried this would happen...

Shit… Scotty put down what was in his hands and made his way over to Eren pulling out a stethoscope and gently putting it to Eren’s chest. He was worried when Eren raised his hands to block his face, pure fear in his eyes. Shit, I can’t get close enough to have him calm down and breathe normally. “Lathe?” Scotty handed the instrument over to Lathe. You’re gonna have to do it and tell me what it sounds like… We need to make sure his lungs aren’t collapsing… He doesn’t have much holding him in place anymore...

Lathe took the instrument, one hand on Eren’s shoulder as he set it on Eren’s chest. “Breathe deeply for me, okay?” He kept the end on his chest as Eren started to cough on his first breath, only able to wait for it to pass. “Then… Just breathe normally.” He moved the instrument up and down his chest again, listening intently. He’s wheezing… “Oh my.” Lathe’s voice was quiet, taking off the stethoscope and handing it back to Scotty. “Fluid in the lungs, so he’s got
pneumonia. I don't think anything's collapsed or anything like that, but we might want to get him x-rayed or get him an MRI, just to make sure and see how bad it is.” It shouldn't be too serious, if it’s just the fluid in the lungs. I’m not too surprised, I actually kinda expected it.

Scotty thought about it for a minute. “We’ll go to MRI… I wanna see how his kidney looks too.” Scotty slowly moved away from Eren and watch him visibly relax and move to cling to Lathe’s shirt sleeve, his eyes widened when he saw the blood running down Eren’s wrist and the scratch marks running down them as well. He was scratching… Shit… That must have been terrifying...

Eren whimpered softly, holding onto Lathe. No I don’t want to go downstairs… I don’t want people to see me… Eren had scratched at his wounds, opening up quite a few of them, all traces of how much he had been cutting with Grisha around.

Lathe brushed the hair away from his eyes, trying to calm him. “Eren, it’s okay, we’re going to make sure you're doing okay in there, that nothing too serious is going on.” He turned to Scotty. “Please tell me the MRI isn't on the first floor.” If it is this is going to be a lot harder than I'd want it to be.

“No, it’s on the second floor, but I’ll see if we can squeeze you into the schedule… Keep washing him, there’s more water in the sink if that gets too dirty…. Wraps are on the counter… You should probably clean those out.” Scotty told him, motioning to the opened wounds on Eren’s wrist. Not as hard as it would’ve been...

Eren watched him leave and looked up to Lathe with fear in his eyes. Are you going to yell at me for scratching? For being ugly? Eren’s grip tightened on his sleeve as the last thought crossed his mind.

Lathe’s eyes softened, moving to peck his forehead. “It’s okay Eren, you don't have to be scared about anything.” He studied his expression for a moment, his eyes drifting to his wrists. “And you certainly don't have to be scared of me. I'm not mad that you scratched, if that’s what you're worried about.” He decided cleaning out his wrists was his first priority, moving to grab antiseptic and clean wipes, picking up a white roll of bandages and starting on his right arm. There were a lot of cuts, across his arm all the way up to his elbow. Eren... He gently cleaned the cuts, quickly and carefully wiping antiseptic over them and wrapping his wrist and arm expertly to his elbow, putting the pins in place. He moved to do his other arm, the only open wound the line Grisha had cut. He cleaned it, wrapping his arm and setting the bandage in place. “Alright, I'm going to keep cleaning your legs now, okay? I'll try not to get those wet.” He took Eren’s hands, gently linking them over his stomach and out of the way as he moved to continue washing his legs, keeping an eye on his hands as he gently scrubbed upward to his lower torso. He gently took his arms again, moving them above his head so they wouldn't get wet, washing Eren’s chest. He stopped after a minute, looking into the bucket. “I need clean water. One sec.” He quickly switched out the bucket for the one with clean water sitting in the sink, the water much more warm as he continued up Eren’s
chest, scrubbing gently up his arm, careful not to open the words cut into the skin on the backs of his arms. That’s horrible… He patted the skin on his arms dry so they wouldn't drip onto the wraps, gently nudging Eren’s shoulder forward. “Can you sit up for me and turn to the side?”

Eren nodded, slowly pushing himself up into a sitting position, the towel still over his nether as he turned away from Lathe. The skin was flaking off in so many places, it looked as if Eren’s body had been torn to shreds all over again. The lines carved into his back were deep, permanent… The burns over such wounds ran from his shoulder blades all the way down to his ass. Eren had been relatively silent during this whole ordeal, not voicing a single complaint to Lathe.

...it’s so much worse than the first time around… Lathe silently began to wash his back, being extremely careful as his skin crackled and flaked under his touch. Eren hasn't said anything or even flinched this entire time. It’s can’t be that he’s lost his nerve endings… Has he? “Eren, can you feel what I'm doing right now? Do you feel anything?” ...now that I think of it, he was laughing at the tattoo place...

Eren turned his head slowly to look at Lathe. His head slowly nodded. Yeah... I can feel it... I can feel everything... Nothing hurts anymore though... Nothing can hurt as much as it hurt getting these. Eren turned his head back and moved his arms, starting to scratch at the bandages on his arms.

Lathe immediately set down the sponge, gently moving and holding onto Eren’s arms. “Eren, please try not to scratch. You're not going to do damage with the bandages but you need to really try and resist the urge to.” His eyes were dark, quietly pleading with him. ...this is all too much... But you need to work with us here and really really try.

Eren looked up to Lathe with broken eyes. I can’t feel pain anymore Lathe.... Nothing hurts anymore... That’s scary.... Why can’t it hurt anymore? I can’t feel the pain in my wrists anymore... Eren felt the tears fall down his cheeks, letting the drool dribble down his chin. I can’t feel it.... How will I know what’s real if nothing hurts? Eren cried, leaning his head into Lathe’s chest, able to move and pull his legs up into a small ball in Lathe’s lap. His body shook as he cried, his wheezing more pronounced as he sobbed. My security.... It’s gone.... I can’t feel pain anymore...

Lathe was careful of his wounds as he held onto him, trying to ease his legs down straight, trying to comfort him, not able to stop a few tears from streaming down his face. “Eren, shhh, it’s okay, I know you're scared but I promise you don't have to be right now. Please, be careful of your legs.” He reluctantly shifted out from under Eren, torn between comforting him and making sure he didn't aggravate his injuries further, the latter winning out for the moment. He twined their fingers together as he gently cupped Eren’s cheek, his voice quiet. “Eren, my getting up doesn't mean I don't love you, I just want to make sure you don't hurt yourself even more. Please, please don't cry… I'm right here for you, and I want you to get better, and we’re going to take as many steps as
we need to get you better, okay? I know it’s scary but please, don't worry. I'm right here.” Lathe caught his eyes, his own glassy and pleading. You'll get better, and I'm going to make sure of that, but we also can't have you working against it in the process...

Eren tried to take a few deep wheezing breaths, but he was stopped short. I can’t breathe.... It feels weird. Eren slowly brought his palm up for Lathe, asking for forgiveness, his eyes still locked onto Lathe’s gaze. Will I be able to feel pain again soon? I need to cut.... Grisha told me I need to do it to make people happy… I want Lathe to be happy...

Lathe noticed Eren’s breathing had stopped, running his fingers down Eren’s palm twice, speaking quietly. “Eren, can you breathe?” He lifted Eren’s legs back onto the bed, turning him so he could lay down if he needed to. This could get very bad. Please, don't let it.

Eren struggled to get even a small breath in. Why can’t I get it in? Why can’t I breathe right? Eren move to lay down, curled up on his side, his back to Lathe as he still struggled to breathe. Why?.... What’s wrong with me?

Lathe gently moved Eren, trying to keep him from curling up. “Eren, please, I know it’s getting really hard to breathe and you're scared but you need to lay flat and make it easier on your lungs.” Curling up is going to make it worse... His brain kicked into overdrive as he thought what he could do to make Eren feel better and breathe easier. Think think think I can't give him anything for pneumonia because we’re not entirely sure that’s what it is… He just needs to hold out for a little bit until we know, then... Shit. He took the bucket, washing Eren’s back as he lay straight on the bed, the skin beginning to peel in large sections from his back. Lathe carefully removed the large bits of skin, pieces much bigger than playing cards and leaving his entire back smooth and as pink as his feet. Damn... At least there's not going to be any scarring, and we know his body is really working overtime trying to heal. Good. But if his body is so focused on healing his skin and bones... Lathe rested his hand against Eren’s forehead, his eyes wide as he felt his extremely high temperature. That’s a really high fever. Like, thank-god-you're-already-in-the-hospital high. His body’s too busy healing to fight infections. We’ll fix that as soon as we figure out what the hell is wrong with your lungs. He glanced over his shoulder, disposing of the skin pieces in a biohazard box, waiting for Scotty to return.

Scotty wasn’t gone for much longer coming back into the room holding a few sheets of paper with a grim look on his face. This is not going to go over well with Lathe... He picked his head up as he heard Eren’s struggled breaths. “How long?” He asked Lathe and slowly went up to him to examine him, Eren too out of it to fight back or even raise a hand at him. Shit... Scotty saw that his back was completely pink. How was he burned that the skin would peel off like it was cooked? Like a hard crust around him? That’s so weird... Scotty touched his forehead and his eyes widened. “Okay, Lathe, we need to get him wrapped and put back in casts before we can take him anywhere… We need to be quick, I’ll call for ice packs… Okay?” Scotty asked and had his pager out in a second typing away the command. How long has he had that fever and we didn’t notice?
Lathe immediately nodded, moving to grab the wraps from the counter, gently guiding Eren to sit up, wrapping his back with practiced motions in record time. He snipped off the excess, sliding plenty of pins into place and looking to Scotty, halfway through one of the casts on his leg. “Want me to start on the other?” Lathe picked up the materials as Scotty nodded, gently rolling a soft sock onto Eren’s leg, up past his knee to the middle of his thigh, retrieving another sock and rolling it over that, for more padding. Lathe picked up the white outside wrapping in a plastic bag, handing it to Scotty. “Here; you know what angle his knee needs to be at.”

Scotty smiled and thanked him softly. “He’s been quiet, make sure he’s awake… We want him awake.” Scotty looked up to see Eren’s hooded eyes and his face a pained expression with every wheeze. He must’ve had it for awhile and all that moving around today wasn’t good for him… Fuck. He started to expertly wrap Eren’s leg, smiling at his symmetrical work. “Well with his casts off he should be able to try drawing so he can doodle on his casts.” Scotty told them and helped him into his gown before a nurse knocked on the door with the ice. Okay, we need to keep him under blankets though. “Lathe, go to the closet and pull all the blankets out from the top shelf and put them on him… We’ll put the ice packs on top of them.”

Lathe nodded, faintly smiling as he moved to the closet and picked up the stack of thin blankets from up top, bringing them back and helping to spread them over Eren, helping arrange the ice packs over him. “Alright, so we’re just going to try and get his fever down for now… When can we get him an MRI? And I see you got the blood test results back.” He glanced over to the stack of papers on the table end. Hopefully nothing too serious came up. But then again, those are quite a few papers for if everything came back clear...

Scotty took a deep breath. “You might want to come into the hall with me.” Scotty’s tone was grave. “We can get him in after he eats again in an hour or so, but for now the ice packs are gonna stay on.” Scotty grabbed the papers back up and motioned for Lathe to follow. If Grisha wasn’t dead I know you’d kill him for this...

Lathe’s brow furrowed, following him silently out into the hall, steeling himself. ...This isn't gonna be good. Chill. Hope for the best. If he does have something, we can only hope it’s not too bad... Or curable... Or treatable... Oh my. Lathe closed the door behind them, swallowing hard and shifting to his other foot, his face clear of emotion, sounding resigned. “What’s the verdict, Scotty?”

“Eren’s fighting off a very bad infection, his white blood cell count is through the roof, he also… He also…” Scotty swallowed hard and looked down. “He has an STD… He’s been trying to fight it for awhile it looks like… But he’s fighting off off pneumonia too… His oxygen levels are low enough to point to that.” Scotty told him and handed him the six sheets of paper with the horrible numbers across them. “… We should be thankful though… His kidney seems to be working wonderfully.” At least there is a small shred of hope.
Lathe took the papers from him slowly, reading them over with a stony expression, anger written into the lines of his face. ...motherfucker. “Which one does he have. Chlamydia?” Isn't that one really easily treatable?

“Yeah… But the problem is finding strong enough antibiotics for his pneumonia and Chlamydia… And it can’t screw with the PTSD meds or anything else we may need to give him if the fever doesn’t die down… That’s the hard part… And he’s had it for a long time Lathe, it’ll take awhile for the infection to leave him… It’s most likely spread all over his body by now.”... I still can’t believe he let his own son contract an STD… That’s despicable.

Well, I know what I’m doing tonight when I can't sleep. Math. ...Lots and lots of math. “I'll do research later tonight, cross-reference every drug I can think of and then something. If I need to give Casper another call and draw up something new again we will, it could be a lot simpler to if this gives us a lot of trouble. But… As long as it takes, Scotty. We can treat it, so we will. He can take all the time he needs and wants to focus on getting better. He has time.” Lathe handed him the papers back. “Are those already in his online file? I need the numbers for later when I'm scratching stuff out.” We need to be careful, with how much stuff he’s on.

“Yeah… And Casper’s on his way up, I texted him as soon as I saw the WBC count.” ...I don't know how any conversation we have is going to go… I just texted him, it'll be different talking… He told him and put a hand on his shoulder. “Has he spoken to you? Not signed… But actually spoken?” He needs to try… Even if it just comes out as a garbled mess. I need to make sure his vocal cords aren’t messed up from the tube…

“No he hasn’t… But he’s getting more comfortable signing. He’s making some sounds occasionally, just whimpers, really… But I'm hoping that he’ll start speaking soon. I think his quietness is so much a product of Grisha’s abuse, like he’s afraid to. Now that he’s got the casts on his arms off I'm hoping he’ll maybe start writing stuff down as a small step. He does need to practice speaking, but I'm really thinking it’s voluntary muteness, and less so his vocal cords being unable to work properly.” With the PTSD, it’s not that far out of an idea.

“Okay, can you try and get him to talk… Even if it’s his name… Or even if he tries to say a letter… I want to make sure… I don’t want him unable to sing for the rest of his life… That’s basically his job now…” Scotty said and rubbed the back of his neck. “That reminds me… Have you checked his social media accounts? He’s been inactive for like what…. At least two months…” Scotty took the papers back and looked over them again, sighing as he ran a hand through his hair.

Lathe’s eyes widened. “I haven't been checking it at all, really. I really should, at least send a tweet out or something letting everyone know he’s getting better.” That needs doing. ...I don't know how the Internet is reacting to that news story… And I don't exactly think I want to know. “Oh, and thanks for calling Casper up. God knows I could use the help. And yeah, I'll see if I can get a few
words out of him, something simple. Maybe if we build up the strength in his voice again, singing with him could help calm him down, ease his nerves and his worries. It could be good for him if we started doing musical stuff again.” I haven't actually listened to music in a really long time… It'd probably be good for both of our sanities.

Scotty nodded. “Alright. I’m gonna go get his formula together… And Spades texted me to make sure you eat something so what do you want from the cafeteria downstairs?” Scotty’s smile was soft and laid-back as he looked down at Lathe. I think music will help him feel better. “He should be able to wear headphones… It shouldn’t bother him.”

Lathe nodded, rubbing the back of his neck with a sheepish grin. “Uhm, you can just pick something from the Subway downstairs, I guess… just anything that’s not cold. Please.” Of course Spades is getting Scotty in on this. “I’ll go put a playlist together for him, I suppose.” Good thing I have a pair of headphones stuffed in my tech bag...

Scotty nodded. “Okay I’ll be back and we can all eat together, I’ll text Casper to see what he wants.” He walked towards the elevator, his thumbs flying over his phone. Oh good, Casper will be here soon.

Lathe walked back into Eren’s room, closing the door quietly and crossing over to his tech bag next to the nightstand, giving Eren a peck on the forehead before sitting down, skimming quickly through his old iPod and grouping together the songs he thought Eren would like. He plugged in a set of earbuds, making sure the volume wasn't set too high, holding them out to Eren. “We have a bit of time before you need to go down for an MRI, so if you'd like to listen to music a bit you can.” It’ll help keep you awake and chill, and maybe you’ll find something you'd like to cover later.

Eren timidly took the earpieces, slowly putting them into his ears. He was instantly greeted by the sound of a grand piano, a small smile creeping on his face as he listened quietly, starting to hum along without realizing it, his fingers moving across his lap, as if he were playing the piano. I know this one… Did mom teach me this? Eren seemed the happiest he’d been in over two months as he listened to the music flowing through various melodies.
Lathe let himself relax as Eren’s mood lifted, lifting up a notebook and a pen with a small smile on his face, beginning to list medicines and compounds off the top of his head in neat loopy handwriting. He looked up as Scotty returned a while later with Eren’s formula and three sandwich bags from Subway, handing one to him and setting the others on the chair next to him.

Scotty looked up as Eren began humming along to some odd tune, a smile creeping across his face. “He’s smiling…” Scotty’s voice was soft as he got ready to feed Eren, and Eren didn’t really seem to care at all. Well this is a first, he’s not even trying to hit me away from him… Scotty made sure not to make quick movements as he started to feed him his formula. He picked his head up from his work hearing the phone in the room ring. ... Casper must be here already… trying to get up here... oh my...

Lathe stood and picked up the phone, his voice brighter than it was before. “Hello?” He listened for a moment. “Yeah, he’s cool. Send him up, please.” He set the phone back on the hook. “Casper’s here, he’ll only be a minute.” It wasn’t long before there was a quiet knocking at the door, the same familiar pattern. He opened the door with a smile, greeting him. “Hey Casper, thanks for coming up.” He stepped back, letting him into the room.

Casper grinned at him, a brown and red backpack slung over his shoulder, giving Lathe a fistbump and walking slowly into the room. “Course. It’s the least I can do.” He stopped short as he saw Eren, blissfully unaware of his surroundings. “Uh… Lathe, I think it would be best if you let him know I’m here.”...Yeah, no violence or fear, please. I'd rather not have my hand looking like Levi's did... and that was Levi! As in his own boyfriend!

Lathe nodded, shutting the door and walking over to Eren, his touch light on his shoulder. He gently pulled out one of the earbuds, his voice warm. “Eren, we’ve called up an old friend. He’d like to say hi.” You shouldn't freak out; with his violet hair, you'll recognize him in a heartbeat.

Eren looked from Lathe over towards where Casper stood in the doorway. Who’s that? Eren’s eyes were a bit more lively but full of curiosity and wariness. I don’t want him to yell at me. Eren’s fingers tugged on Lathe’s shirt sleeve.

Casper very slowly walked forward a bit, staying calm and looking unthreatening. “Hey Eren, it’s me, Casper. I was the guy behind the desk at Trost pharmacy when you came in a really long time ago. I was at Thanksgiving two years ago too.” He stopped with a decent bit of space between them, trying to stay far enough back to keep Eren comfortable for the moment.
Lathe rubbed Eren’s shoulder soothingly. “He’s the guy I’ve been working with for a while to get you a PTSD medicine that works. He helped a lot to make it, and he’s going to help again with figuring out what medicines you need for everything that’s going on, so everything goes smoothly.” He’s absolutely brilliant, and he’s so willing to help you, and already has done so much. I really owe him big time for this.

Eren’s brow furrowed. I don’t….. Eren slowly raised his own hands to sign by himself for the first time. [I don’t remember him.] Why don’t I? He looks like I’ve seen him before but I can’t tell… It’s all fuzzy… Eren looked over to Scotty as he continued to feed him. Wait… How long has he been feeding me for?

Scotty looked up as Eren’s heart monitor spikes a bit. “Eren you're okay, I’m almost done, last bit.” His voice was reassuring as he poured the last bit into Eren’s feeding tube, sighing in relief when he finished without incident. That went better than I thought it would. He got up to clean up from the formula and picked up Casper’s lunch, steeling himself before going to hand Casper his Sub. “Uhm, here- this one’s yours.” What do I say?

Casper took the sandwich from him, giving him a small smile, a spark of affection in his eyes. “Thanks. It’s…. it’s good to see you again.” It really is… Casper didn't linger and make it awkward, giving him a thankful nod and going to sit in one of the chairs around Eren’s bed. He set his sandwich in his lap and signed back to Eren. {That’s okay; It was a long time ago.} You did only see me like, twice, and then not really hear about me for two-ish years… Understandable. He unwrapped his sandwich, starting to eat quietly.

Scotty simply stood there for a split second, a bit surprised. That went not horribly… he looks happy to see me. …not many people do. He moved to make sure Eren was comfortable in an upright position. Well, he’s eaten… That’s a good starter.

Lathe replaced Eren’s earbud, sitting down and beginning to eat, Scotty joining them, munching in (to Scotty and Casper, surprisingly) comfortable silence. Lathe’s thoughts were occupied, numbers starting to run through his head quickly. We’re going to get plenty done, now that we’ve got reinforcements. You'll get better in no time, Eren. Really.

Eren listened to the ear buds, mostly looking over the various ice packs lined around him. The song changed to White Winter Hymnal by The Pentatonix. The first sounds of hands beating against the body sent Eren’s eyes wide. No… I don’t want to get hit. His eyes were wide as the room changed in front of him to the scene of Levi’s opened apartment. Men were everywhere in various stages of undress, two prominent men Eren knew because Grisha had always invited them stood there, beating down on Eren with their closed fists, connecting with his chest and his legs. No. The voices that started in the song had sent the memory further along, some men were fighting over who was going to follow the man already raping Eren at that moment. Eren had tried to scream, to cry out, only to have a red scarf tied around his mouth to silence him. His arms were taken and pinned, a
syringe entering his arm and emptying its contents. Eren was turned around, his own father holding a large knife with a sick and twisted grin on his face as he came closer, the men beginning to turn him and pin him to the table. Eren tried to get away as the knife cut deep into his back, the multitudes of men cheering at the sight of blood dripping down to stain the white carpet. *NO!* Eren’s body reacted without anymore thought, ripping the earbuds from his ears and throwing the device away towards his feet. The machines around him screamed from his rapid heartbeat, his eyes full of fear as he started to cry. *No… No… I don’t want it to happen again!* Blake jumped up onto the bed and tried to calm Eren down but his rapid heartbeat wouldn’t come down and his cries became progressively louder as he tried to curl up to himself. *I need to hide…*

Lathe had set down his sandwich and stood at Eren’s side in an instant, sitting down next to him and wrapping his arms around his middle, holding him close, his voice a quiet murmur. “Eren, Eren no, please don’t cry, it’s okay, we’re right here, nothing’s gonna hurt you. It’s alright, shhh…” *What happened?* His ears strained to make out the music still playing from his iPod, recognizing it. *What about that set him off? …oh. Oh.*

Eren turned to cling to Lathe, his voice garbled as he tried to form words. *I don’t want it to happen again… I don’t… I thought I was gonna die…* Eren’s sobs caused his whole body to shake, his drool starting to come out in thick streams. “…. n-no….” Eren had finally spoken in his broken sobs and held onto Lathe like his life depended on it. *Not again…*

*…He spoke.* Lathe held onto him tightly, running one hand up and down his back soothingly, glancing up as Scotty rose and handed him a towel, taking it and wiping the drool from his chin, the tears from his cheeks. “It’s okay, Eren, just let it out… It’s alright.” He rested his head on top of Eren’s as he leaned against his chest, his eyes shutting as he sighed. *…I’ll make sure I go back through that playlist, take out anything that could do this to him…*

Eren clung to his shirt as he sobbed heavily, his whole body shuddering, coughing often because his lungs were almost full of liquid. “….. h…..hu……hursts….” Eren finally managed to speak again, his face contorted in pain from not being able to get anything but a short breath in. *It hurts…. It feels like I’m being stabbed again…. I don’t want to be stabbed again…*

Scotty instantly stood up to add more morphine to Eren’s IV. *You shouldn’t be hurting from crying… How full are your lungs?* “Lathe… I’m going to go get a bed… He needs to go down to MRI now.” He made sure Eren wasn’t looking before he ran out of the room to get a bed that they would be able to take him downstairs with. *I’m not risking jostling him in a wheelchair.*

Casper watched with wide eyes as Scotty sprinted from the room, standing and grabbing a notepad and pen from his bag before slinging it over his shoulder as Scotty returned with a bed on wheels, moving to help him position it next to the bed. *Crap, Eren doesn't sound too good… We need to figure out what’s going on here.*
Lathe shifted, lifting Eren as Scotty disentangled him from the many tubes and wires, laying him flat on the bed and running a hand through his hair as they left for the elevator, just trying to keep Eren calm. “It’s okay Eren, just focus on your breathing, we’re going to get you in for an MRI right now, and we’ll help fix whatever’s going on. Just hang in there.” He stepped into the elevator after them, the short wait agonizing with his worry, and they rushed him down the hall the second the doors opened.

Scotty made sure that everyone had all the metal removed from them. Thank god we did the titanium… Not magnetic… They hurriedly brought him to the MRI room, carefully moving him into the MRI bed. The technician then led them to the imaging room while Eren was put through the machine. It only took seconds for Scotty’s eyes to widen. …shit! “He’s gonna drown… Get him out and get him sitting up!” Scotty raced out of the room. I need to do it in that room. He’s got Pulmonary Edema… He’s gonna fucking drown if I don’t get an aspiration kit now!

Lathe and Casper immediately moved to the next room, getting him out of the machine with the help of the technician and coaxing him into a sitting position. Lathe noticed his eyes were-half shut, swaying as if about to fall asleep. ...well fuck that. “Eren, hey, stay with me, we need you awake. Come on, you can't sleep now, you need to keep those eyes of yours open! Please! Come on, you need to fight it and stay awake for me!” He tried to keep Eren’s gaze, gently shaking both his shoulders, pleading with him with a loud, clear voice. Fuck stay with me here! Work with us, Eren, come on!

Eren was struggling to breathe, and soon he couldn’t breathe at all anymore. I’m sorry… Lathe… Eren’s eyes closed as Scotty rushed into the room with a huge lot of supplies.

“When did he stop breathing?” He asked with wide eyes as he started to rip things out of sterilized containers and tilting Eren’s head back with a gloved hand. Come on, Eren! You need to fight this! Scotty got a long thin tube down his throat and he took only two seconds before he hooked it up to a syringe and started to suction out the bloody murky liquid. Fuck… This is bad, really bad. As soon as he had a good portion of the liquid out of one lung he laid Eren back down and started to give him CPR. Come on Eren… Breathe! Breathe dammit!

Lathe moved back to give him room with wide eyes, tears threatening to spill. “I-it’s barely been ten seconds…” He watched in horror as Scotty pumped bloody liquid from Eren’s lungs, his hands holding the sides of his head as Scotty gave Eren CPR. Eren you need to breathe again you need to breathe and be okay please.

Eren’s body laid still for a solid minute before he finally sucked in a breath of air. It hurts…
Scotty sighed in relief, stopping his actions and moving Eren to the bed to take him upstairs. “Upstairs… Now, he’s breathing but we need to drain both of his lungs… I only got a portion of his right lung drained… he drowned…” Scotty made sure to bring everything with them, and Eren was put in an upright position. He was breathing but his eyes weren’t opening yet. We need him to wake up… But I need to finish draining his lungs...

Lathe talked to Eren quietly as Casper helped Scotty steer the bed as they came back upstairs, trying to wake him up. He lifted Eren back onto the bed, still asleep as he kept him upright, holding onto him as Scott worked. “You need to wake up soon, Eren. Scotty’s going to drain your lungs and you're going to be able to breathe normally again and it’ll all be okay. Come on, please wake up. Please.” At least he’s breathing right now.

Scotty continued to work, finishing draining his lungs. …. Five point eight…. Liters …. He drowned in his own body. Scotty slowly pulled the small tube from his lung, hearing him finally able to take a deep breath without a problem. He waited a few tense moments with Lathe as Eren’s eyes slowly cracked open.

Eren opened his eyes, met with a blurry environment until he blinked a few times. What happened? Eren’s eyes were full of confusion as he found Lathe’s panicked ones. What happened?

Lathe sighed hugely in relief, shifting to pull Eren into a hug, his face buried into his shoulder. “Oh my god, you're okay… You're okay…” You had me scared there, Eren. I thought we’d… We’d lost you… You practically drowned in your own lungs.

Eren’s brow furrowed in confusion. I can breathe?…. It doesn’t hurt…. Eren took in quite a few deep breaths as Scotty reattached him to all his machines. He slowly reached a hand up to tangle his fingers in Lathe’s hair. “…..O…..k…..?” Eren’s voice was hoarse as he tried to move Lathe’s head to look into his eyes. What the hell happened to me…. Why couldn’t I breathe before? But now I can?

Lathe moved to look into Eren’s eyes, his own glassy. ... You're talking! I haven't heard your voice in months ... it’s scratchy as hell, but you're speaking again! And I guess we have to explain the thing. “Eren, we were really worried, your lungs…” He swallowed hard. “They were filling up with fluid. You’re fighting off pneumonia, and that caused the fluid to gather in your lungs it’s why you… Couldn't breathe easy. They filled up with so much fluid because we hadn't checked to see if it was what was really happening, until they got so full that… That you started to drown in your own lungs.” Lathe gave him a weak smile. “But Scotty drained your lungs the second we knew what was wrong, and we’re going to get you on new medication to help fight your pneumonia, and hopefully we won't have to do that again.” You're alright now.
Eren nodded and leaned forward a little to put his head on Lathe’s shoulder. *It doesn’t hurt…. I can breathe…. Eren’s hand moved to tug on Lathe’s sleeve, his eyes darting to the door as Spades came in with a worried look across her features. Spades?*

Scotty got up to greet her. “It’s okay, he’s awake and breathing… He drowned in his own lungs… I drained it… Don’t worry.” He put a hand on her shoulder. *He’s alright… Don’t panic… His heart rate came back up as soon as he woke up. I do not need him having a seizure today too.*

Spades sighed in relief, her hand over her heart as she gave Eren a weak smile, stepping further into the room. *Yeesh, you just never stop scaring us, do you?* “Hey Hon, good to see you’re still in one piece.” She moved to give him a hug, stopping herself before she got too close to him, still wary of his reaction. *…right. Can’t do that…* “We’ve gotten an ID on the guy who took that photograph, he’s being taken care of as we speak. Gordon’s out tracking him down right now. We’re getting this all straightened out as soon as we can.” *We can’t exactly reverse what damage has been done, but at least we can do everything we can to stop it from happening again, and make an example of him to deter this sort of shit from happening to others. Justice is being served, and that’s a step in the right direction.*

Eren watched her come up to the bed, but he didn’t really do anything besides watch her. His fingers which were grabbing Lathe’s sleeve let got and he moved his hand to reach for Spades, his hand gently touching one of her cheeks. *Thank you… Eren was gentle and his eyes told her everything she needed to know as he kept eye contact with her. He was finally starting to come out of his shell.*

*…That’s what you always do. That’s how you always say hello and goodbye to me…* Spades sighed a bit in relief, holding his gaze and slowly unfolding her arms from in front of her and reaching out timidly, her voice quiet. “…is it okay if I give you a hug?” *From what I hear… You’ve never done anything like this to anyone besides Lathe.*

Eren pulled his hand back from her face and looked to Lathe holding him around his middle before looking back at her. His head slowly nodded. *You can… I can trust you for right now….*

Spades smiled warmly, slowly leaning down and pulling Eren into her arms, resting her head on his shoulder, sighing heavily. *You’re getting to be more like yourself… That’s wonderful.*

*...Mom.*

She let him go after a moment, rubbing at her eye before shifting to her other foot. “Is it alright if I chill here with you for today? Maybe help you doodle on these too-white casts?” *They could use a*
Eren looked to Spades and nodded, making a motion for writing. *I wanna draw… Their faces are so clear…* Eren turned his head to look at Lathe, seeing his head was still buried in his shoulder. *Is he going to stay here too? I wanna draw…*

*Well, Lathe doesn't look like he's about to get Eren drawing stuff anytime soon. So…* Spades reached out to drag a chair over, sitting down and glancing through the tall legs of the bed to where the strap of Lathe’s bag had fallen, reaching her foot out and hooking it with her boot heel, dragging it over and fishing out a fresh notebook and some thin-tipped sharpies, handing them to Eren and taking out some thicker sharpies for herself. *…might as well make myself at home.* She took out a red-covered notebook with too many notes scribbled in it and lightly smacked Lathe on the top of the head with it, handing it to him as he looked up with a black pen. “You up for math, Lathe Autonomous?” She smirked as she sent her a quick glare, chuckling as she started to doodle on Eren’s foot, the pattern full of oranges and reds and metallic bronze and gold.

Lathe took the notebook from her, quirking an eyebrow. *You never did get over how ‘ridiculous’ my name sounded.* “Maybe I am, Ieva Velanova.” *That always was fun to say.*

Casper tried to hold back a snicker, covering his mouth and looking apologetically to Spades, losing it as she glared at him, doubling over in his seat, the sharp notes of a yet unplaceable accent noticeable. “…s-sorry, Spades… r-really…” *Oh my god, I haven’t heard anyone say your name in forever…*

Spades rolled her eyes, a smirk playing at her lips. “Yeah yeah, we all know it’s a weird name, blah blah we get it.” She chuckled, her smile bright. *Yeesh, I missed you two.*

Scotty managed to hide his chuckle. “Do you guys wanna come see what we can give him? I can show you to the room with the antibiotics we have in liquid form.” *We’re still keeping his IV in… I am not risking getting bit if he refuses his pills.*

Lathe nodded, pressing a kiss to Eren’s temple as he shifted from the bed, following him and Casper out to the hall, his pen twirling in his hand. *Alright, time for way too much math. Fun.*
Eren watched them leave before returning to his work. He worked furiously for around 10 minutes, writing the number 1 in the corner before he turned it and showed it to her. Can you recognize him?... He’s in the videos my dad recorded…. I know he is…. He never wore a mask…. 

Spades looked up from her work, a small colorful scene blooming under her hand before her sharpie stopped dead, her eyes wide. ...What. She kept her eyes on the image as she capped the marker and pulled out her phone, tapping out a familiar number and holding it to her ear, Scotty nearly instantly picking up.

“What’s wrong?” Scotty’s voice clearly laced with panic. Did he stop breathing again? Is he freaking out? What’s wrong?

“No no, nothing’s wrong, Eren’s okay. I just had to ask you, did you show Eren a picture of the man who came in and took the picture of him?”

...what? “...Noooooo…. I didn’t…. I didn’t even mention it to him… Why, what happened?”

“...he kinda just drew an exact image of the guy.” Why the hell does he look so familiar to me still? And for Eren to know him well enough to draw him with that much detail? ...wait. Does that mean... And the 1... There were a lot of them... I need to make sure they run his prints the second they get the chance.

“Should we come back up? Is he okay?” Scotty’s voice still filled with worry. I don’t know how he drew that man... He was obviously asleep.

Eren ripped the sheet off and started to draw another picture, starting to form the face of another man and draw him with a lot of detail as well, the face quickly becoming another familiar one. He never wore a mask either.

Spades gaped in awe as Eren continued to draw perfect images of the men from the videos. I know that face too. “...I think we’re good. You keep doing what you're doing. He’s okay. I'll call you if anything changes.” She hung up before Scotty could reply, immediately sending a text message to Gordon. ‘When you catch that guy, the /first/ thing you’re doing is running his prints. He was one of the men involved with Grisha in sexually abusing Eren. It’s /imperative/ you catch him soon.’ She soon received a message back. ‘Can do. He’s already in the cruiser; wasn't hard to find. We’ll
get him fingerprinted as soon as we get him back to the station.’ Good.

Eren soon pulled off another picture with the number 2 in the corner and handed it to her before he started yet another picture of another man. I can help…. I don’t want it to happen again...

Spades studied the pictures as he handed them to her, looking up with sympathetic eyes. “Eren, do you know any of their names?” That’d help a lot if you could write them down for me. She held them out to him again. “Can you write them down if you know them? Anything specific about them that you can think of, like a job or title?” Anything. They weren't in the system when we first got the prints, or the next year, or last year... Nothing.

Eren thought about it for a second and he started to write their names down, matching the first name to the name of the guy in the back of Gordon’s cruiser. He’s a professor… At the college in the city.. Eren wrote down as much as he could for the first two and continued to draw the third man. The other guy… He’s a horse breeder....

Spades nodded, smiling gently as he handed her page after page of faces and names and occupations, taking pictures on her phone and fishing in Lathe’s bag for a folder, finding one and stashing the pictures carefully inside. He won’t mind if I steal this. She continued to doodle over Eren’s foot, a galaxy unfurling over his leg when she glanced over her shoulder to the door, the three of them filing in holding papers covered in notes and seemingly random numbers and letters, Scotty holding two small jars and two syringes. “Find somethin’ that’ll work?” She glanced over as she heard the quick rustling of paper, Eren hiding the picture against his chest, his eyes laced with fear as he watched them walk in. Oh my. “Eren, it’s okay hon, don't worry.” She gently laid a hand on his arm, her voice quiet and warm. You’re doing a wonderful job; you don't have to hide the pictures.

Eren hurriedly shook his head and his fearful eyes latched onto Lathe’s, his body beginning to shake. No... He’ll think I’m a whore... He can’t know....

Lathe stopped in his tracks, his brow furrowed in concern. “Eren, what’s…” He glanced to the notebook pressed against his chest, effectively hiding it from view. “Eren, it’s okay. Please, don't be so scared.” He slowly moved next to him, brushing the hair out of his eyes. “I don't think any less of you because of what happened. You don't have to be scared that I’d be mad or anything like that. From what I hear…” He glanced to Spades. “You've been a great help, drawing out those pictures. It’s okay, really. I promise.” He pecked Eren’s forehead. You just keep helping Spades with this. Anything you can do to help this along.

Eren looked down at the notebook in his hands and slowly back up to Lathe. You won’t think I’m a whore? Eren repeated his question in sign language, everyone else in the room able to read his
hands, but he didn’t realize it. *I don’t want you to think I’m a whore…. I don’t want to be a whore anymore….*

Lathe picked up his hands, sadness written into his expression as he signed back, feeling everyone’s eyes bore into him as he signed back. *{Eren, I could never think of you as that. Nothing is further from the truth.} I don’t think he knows we can all understand sign language… We all learned it for Spades before she had her hearing aids… She couldn’t afford them for a long time…*

Eren looked to him and nodded, leaning over to lean into him as he put the notebook down and showed another detailed picture. He wrote a 7 in the corner and wrote the man’s name, ripping it off and handing it to Spades, defeat clearly written across his face. *I don’t want to be a whore anymore…. I want Levi to love me… Not hate me…* Eren started to draw another detailed picture quickly and accurately.

Casper’s emerald eyes were wide, silently moving to sit down again, his expression one of sadness and disbelief. ...*How could he possibly think of himself as that? How could anyone seem so convinced that they’re a whore? …How could he think that Lathe who loves him more than anything could think of him like that? For any reason? That’s… that’s… his father- no, Grisha really fucked with his head… That’s horrible…* He looked up to Lathe, who was content to rest his head on Eren’s, watching him draw with dark eyes. He glanced over to Spades, who gave him a tiny shrug and a look that that was just the way he thought. ...*oh my…* He moved his chair forward, closer to Eren’s other leg. “Are you just going to let Spades have all the fun, Eren? Is it okay if I draw a little, too?” He tried to keep his tone light, though it didn’t follow to his eyes very much.

Eren watched him come close, looking up to Lathe for a second before back at Spades. *He can’t hurt me right? He’s just going to draw right?* Eren gave a weary nod before he looked over to Scotty watching him empty two syringes into his IV. *What’s he putting in there now?*

Scotty moved to dispose of the syringes. …*Lathe wasn’t lying when he said Grisha fucked with his head…. How Eren could lose complete trust in Lathe is horrible… But to have him always think everyone hates him… That’s even worse …* Eren, how can you think like that? Don’t you know Lathe would do anything for you? He already gave up a kidney… I don’t think he would hesitate to do everything in his power to keep you alive. Can’t you see that? He still sleeps with you every night, he’s stayed by your side the whole time. Scotty leaned against the wall watching him. He’s gonna need his third meal in an hour… then his last one around 9….*

Casper gave him a small smile, reaching to the pile of markers at the end of the bed and starting to scratch out a winding crystalline pattern, tiny gold lettering scattered throughout the pattern. He glanced up as Eren tore off another image, Lathe asleep on his head, his grip loose around Eren’s middle, but still there. ...*How can you keep doubting how much he loves you? How much he’s willing to give up for you?*
Spades took the picture, studying it before stowing it in the folder. She looked to Lathe with a small smile, capping her marker and standing. “I have to go for right now, get these pictures to the right people. I'll be back later though, and I'll bring dinner with me for everyone, okay?” *Might as well start having these processed... And I think you all could all do with something other than takeout.*

Eren reached for her hand and tugged on it to get her attention. {One more…} *I know one more...* Eren started to furiously sketch out a pudgy face for Spades to take. *I know his name and what he does...*

She took the paper, studying it. *It's all the same with them... Doctors and supposedly 'model citizens.' They all have a clean slate, that's why their prints haven't come up at all... “Thank you Eren, is that it?”* She smiled at him as he nodded. She stowed it in the folder, carefully giving Eren a hug. “I'll be back later, okay? I have to make sure this one eats something.” She leaned up to kiss Lathe, feeling him melt at her kiss. *...I get it. I'm feeling kinda touch-starved myself...* She started to straighten up, pausing as Eren brushed a hand over her cheek in goodbye, waving to Casper and Scotty as she left, her ponytail swinging behind her. *This makes my job much easier.*

Scotty couldn't help himself but watch as Spades left, looking back to Lathe unapologetically. *[...That bust though.]* *I can see part of why you're so damn smitten.*

*Really. [Scotty, that's my waifu. She’s mine. Step off.]* Lathe sent him a glare, his gaze returning to Eren’s drawing for only a second before he looked up again, smirking a bit with a spark in his eye. *[And no- ...those hips though.]*...*just... damn.*

Casper just dropped his head into his hands for a moment, shaking his head. *[You two need to stop…] I'm so done.*

Eren watched her leave, his eyes trained on Scotty as he came closer.

*“Can I check your lungs, Eren?” I want to make sure that they aren’t filling right back up again...* He gave a reassuring smile as Eren timidly nodded. He stepped forward and listened to his deep breaths, sighing in relief when he didn’t hear anything out of the ordinary. He slowly went down the bed towards Casper, hesitating for a moment before speaking. “I have a question for you.” He asked quietly as he picked up a sharpie from the pile and worked up towards Eren’s thigh, sitting next to him. *I want to know how his pneumonia got so bad without us realizing it... you would know.*
Casper glanced up, a slight brush of pink tinging his cheeks. “Shoot, Scotty.” He... kinda sounds like he doesn't want Eren to hear. [If you don't want him to hear, I still know all my French.] I think all of us still do.

Scotty turned to see Eren continue to draw without even batting an eye at them. I guess that could work. [His pneumonia basically snuck up on us... How did we not realize it sooner?] How did neither of us hear him wheezing before this morning?

[You weren't looking for it, pretty much because you couldn't.] Casper continued to doodle, his brow furrowed in thought as the French flowed easily off his tongue. [His body is focusing everything on mending his physical injuries, his broken bones and such, so his immune system is pretty much shot. He's got a lot of white blood cells, but next to none of them are getting the energy they need to fight infections, because all that energy went to his arms and legs and skin. Literally, anything could have happened. Any kind of random infection. This time around just so happened to be in his lungs, which is admittedly a bit more common, but you’d have to be looking at everything at once to catch it. As for the wheezing and the fluid in the lungs, that could easily happen spontaneously as the body suddenly realizes fighting it is a priority, and the result was his lungs filling with fluid so fast because of the sudden onslaught of his body’s attempts to fight it off. You did what you could, really. I'd just be grateful the symptoms showed up when he was awake and able to communicate his discomfort before it got really worse.]...literally anything could have gone wrong. At least you two caught on to it.

Scotty nodded, taking everything in. Casper’s got good intuition... Maybe he’ll know... [Do you think the STD made it worse? He’s had it for a long time... It’s spread in his blood system... It could’ve gone straight to his lungs.] I wonder if you’d have an idea about the burns Eren had... I took pictures to show other doctors to see if they had seen anything like it... And no, they have not.

Casper wrinkled his nose, his head tilting from side to side. [...eh, I don't think it made it worse as much as it redirected his body’s attention. The body can't really fight off an STD too easily, and it had long since spread to his lungs and such, so I'd say it didn't do much actual damage. What it did do is act as a sort of bait, have the immune system, when it did have energy to fight off infection, fight what it couldn't win against and what had been around for a long time instead of a new infection that hadn't spread as much yet. Chlamydia doesn't cause symptoms of any kind, anyway, so you wouldn't have been able to tell at all exactly when it reached his lungs, so chances are it reached there a really long time ago.]...it was just a distraction from the real, previously indiscernible threat.

[Okay... And I wanted to ask you one more thing... But are you prepared to see something gruesome?] His voice was soft as he pulled out his phone. I wanna know... I wanna know what that bastard did to him.

Casper quirked an eyebrow at him, leaning over. [Go for it, Scotty.] He looked at his phone as he
pulled up a picture of Eren’s blackened feet, wincing. [...] Wow that looks awful. What about it?

Scotty swallowed hard. [He couldn’t feel it…. You know how when you get a heat blister it bubbles up? Well it looked like it was layers deep, the bubble… And then almost like it was cooked until they could come off…. His feet… And I think his back too… Are this like sickly pink that shows he’s been trying to heal it…. But he couldn’t feel it when we took it off and I’m worried…. How did he get burned like that? And why can’t he feel it?]

Casper studied the image, his chin resting on his hand. Let’s see… His feet were pretty much charred. And pretty much the same thing happened to his back. The heat would need to be extremely intense, and over really fast so it didn't go more than a few layers into the skin. Probably a flame of some kind to get every bit of skin like that without missing a single spot, even between the toes. So, a controllable heat source, probably something of a mechanical origin to control where a flame went, like a lighter. But much more powerful than a lighter; a huge one, like a… “A blowtorch.” Casper’s voice was barely a whisper so only Scotty could hear, his eyes wide in disbelief as he started to speak a bit louder. [That’s what it must have been. I don't know what the word for it is but that's got to be it. It’s controllable, intense, thorough, and quick. It’s good, that his skin is pink now, trying to heal. Just watch for infection while his skin isn't still fully healed. And as for why he couldn't feel it…] He sighed, his brow furrowed. [It wasn't too deep of a burn. It’s miraculously shallow, actually, so I don't want to say nerve damage. What I would like to mention is that I remember a little while ago, when Eren got his tattoo, that Marc went in the group chat about it and told everyone how he was laughing in the chair. And tattoos really hurt, Scotty! And he didn't flinch for a tattoo! I'd say he just has a crazy high pain tolerance, probably built up from…] He swallowed hard. [From what Grisha did to him.] … How could anyone literally torch their own son?!

…. A blow torch? To your own son? That’s…. Thank god you're dead…. Or Lathe and I would’ve personally come to kill you. [The Tattoo on his arm? Damn…. The kid is gonna need to get that fixed…] Scotty looked up to Eren’s upper arm, where a little bit of skin was showing still, a nasty red line cutting through the intricate design. [You think Marc can fix it?] I hope he can for Eren’s sake. Grisha carved so much into his skin…. I can’t believe Eren didn’t bleed out. [He carved a lot into his skin…. The lines run all the way down his arms. His back is covered…] Scotty looked down at the cast in front of him. [Covered in the horrible words Grisha implanted in his mind….] He felt a shiver run through his whole spine. How? How could anyone convince their own son… That they were a whore? Scotty glanced over to the pages Eren was working on, watching him rip yet another face off the notebook, a 13 written in the corner. 13?…. How many more could’ve been there? I want to know which of them gave him that fucking STD and punch his face in. How could you transfer an STD to an adolescent?…. He’s not 21 yet… He’s technically still a minor I believe in that jurisdiction. [Casper… Do you know anything… About drugs used commonly in gang rape?] Scotty’s voice was soft, as his eyes glanced over the words Eren had scrawled onto the top of #13. Drugs and syringes… Doctor. [What would they use that a doctor could get to?] His toxicology reports… I think we have them. Lathe would definitely know. But he’s asleep...

Casper shrugged. [First off, Marc could easily touch up his tattoo. Secondly, there are so many different medicines and sedatives that could have been used the only way to know is for me to see
his toxicology report. Anything would come up there, including anything that isn't a mainstream sedative or something not intended for human use, which I was told was the case in a few instances…] That really is fucking awful...

Scotty nodded, getting up to gently shake Lathe’s shoulder. I hate having to wake you up, but you can get it quicker than I can. “Lathe, wake up… We need to look at something.” Come on Lathe, I don’t want to have to slap you to get you awake...

Lathe blinked at him blearily, yawning widely, though his arms didn’t move from Eren’s middle, his head still using Eren’s head as a pillow. “Wha-? What’s up, Scotty?” His voice was a bit rough, and he looked down to see Eren still drawing, his eyes widening as he saw the number in the corner. Fifteen? That many?! And he doesn’t look like he’s about to stop, either… Oh my god. Lathe’s arms tightened a bit around Eren’s waist, glancing around and brow furrowing. “Where’d Spades run off to?”

“She went to go run through the pictures Eren drew and she said she’d come back with dinner for us….. But we need to see his toxicology reports… From when he first came in, I know you have them.” Scotty told him and backed up slowly so Eren wouldn’t freak out.

Eren simply ignored them, ripping off the 15th sheet and put it on the table with the others in a neat pile. He started to write the number 16 on the top of the sheet and wrote a man’s name and started drawing another face. I want to get these done while I can still remember...

“I do?” Lathe rubbed his eye, looking for his bag next to him, not seeing it and looking over the other side of the bed, seeing it was moved. He held out his hand for it. “Bag.” He took it as Scotty handed it to him, setting it directly next to him and rifling through it, pulling out a Manila folder and thumbing through it to the back of the papers, pulling out the report. “Oh, I do. Here.” He held it out to Scotty, replacing the folder and putting the bag on the floor in arm’s reach, resettling to return to his nap. “If you’ve got it covered, I’m still really tired…” He yawned again, his eyes sliding shut. You can wake me up for food later...

Scotty chuckled, taking the paper and returning next to Casper. [Alright… So we have an extremely high blood alcohol content…He’s got…] Scotty’s brow furrowed at the next high amount. Ketamine? But we didn’t give him any form of anesthetic before this was taken… What the hell? “Ketamine.” He whispered quietly to Casper. What would that do? It was in such a large amount… How much was he given? Scotty’s eyes flew over the paper. [He had a pretty high WBC count too, but not nearly as high as earlier today…. And his blood had signs of kidney failure with such high levels of creatinine and BUN.] Just how long did he have that knife in his side?

[The white blood cells present at the time were probably for fighting that STD, the high BAC…}
Well, that explains itself. The BUN and creatinine are waste products, of course, pointing to kidney failure. And ketamine… I used to deal with it all the time when I worked for a veterinary clinic. That’s a sedative not intended for people. It's for dogs and cats or what have you before a surgery. And they gave him a shit ton of it.] Casper’s eyes were wide, one hand tangling in his shaggy violet locks. [With that much of it in his systems, the symptoms would have been so strong… I'm surprised it didn't force him to go into cardiac arrest. Hallucinations, a distorted perception of sound, impaired motor control, though it does relieve pain and… would make you docile. That’s what they were using… It's not terribly hard to get, because it's so commonly used…] ...that could've killed him. That high of a dosage- it's a miracle that in the minutes right after administering it that it all didn't just go to shit. [How did nobody mention this?! Did nobody look it up when they saw something they didn't recognize?! The doctors and nurses first in charge of his care would have seen it!]

[I don’t know… He was put in surgery right away.] This is horrible. [Even I didn’t realize how high it was… That was just 1/4th of his blood too… I can’t imagine how much else was in the rest that he bled out…. It’s not a common date-rape drug… No one probably looked into it.] We don’t see Ketamine much here, especially after we stopped using it as a sedative so many years ago.

Casper looked over the paper with sad eyes, sighing. [I'm just glad nothing you gave him during surgery reacted negatively with it. It would've taken a while to get out of his system completely, with such a high dose. …I guess it could have been seen as normal to be in his system, and by normal I mean not something to worry about, because we did use it before… But that's just awful.]

[It is awful… And we know that some of his fears could be because of that… We don’t know how much of his mental state was fucked with.] If his mind lapsed… We couldn’t know who he saw raping him… Or what he heard… [If what I remember correctly from that high of a dose, he’ll have hallucinations… Right?] 

[Oh most definitely. With a dosage that high there's not a doubt in my mind his memory of the events are distorted with hallucinations. He could have thought someone he knew was there… Doing those things… He could have thought he heard something in their voice…]

Scotty nodded. [We can only hope that that didn’t happen…. We won’t know until he opens up though.] I hope it wasn’t Lathe… But he seems okay around Lathe… But he really bit Levi that one time...

[I guess we’ll just have to wait and see… Though if he’s drawing out the men who raped him, and he’s got them all committed to memory… I guess we’ll just have to see if he starts drawing anyone we know he knows… I hope to God neither of them show up on those papers…] He nodded to Lathe, his look telling Scotty who else he meant. …if he hallucinated that either of them were there... It would have seriously messed up his perception of Lathe, especially… and I don't think
he’d ever really trust Levi, to be... Intimate. He seems cool around Lathe, but he did bite Levi pretty badly, from what I heard, so… I dunno. We can only hope.

Scotty nodded and the two of them were silent as they both colored, Casper a calm presence next to him. He really hit the nail on the head with that... he really is brilliant. Casper seemed to read what Scotty was going for as he drew, picking up a few sharpies and setting them next to him. ...is he some sort of wizard? Scotty took the next hour and a half to just sort through his thoughts, overwhelmingly about the patient in front of him but also about the man next to him. His drawing looks really good, too. I didn't know he liked art. It took a few minutes for Scotty to relax and get used to being next to him, stiffening as Casper shifted one foot, his left leg coming over Scotty’s right, their shoes pressed against the other lightly. ...what... Scotty glanced up to Casper to see him with his head ducked low over his work, trying to get his hair to hide his blush. ...he really does give quite a few shits about me, doesn't he. Scotty let out a small sigh, relaxing again and letting it be, not missing the tiny smile on Casper's face. Eren had gotten up to 23 as the door creaked open about an hour That would be Spades… I’ll go get Eren’s food. “...I’ll be back with food for Eren, you should wake Lathe up to eat.” He slid his foot from Casper’s and stood up, turning to Spades to greet her.

Spades smiled at Scotty as he passed her, gently shutting the door behind her and walking up to Casper, her eyes bright, a large paper bag in her hands. “Hey Casper, I brought food for everyone, so...” She dug into the bag, pulling out a smaller one and handing it to him along with a bottle of water. “I hope you like grilled cheese.” She smiled knowingly, her eyes widening as she saw the growing pile of faces on the bed next to Eren. So many more… “You're doing a wonderful job, Eren.” She smiled reassuringly to him, gently patting his shoulder and picking up the papers, setting them out of the way on the table next to him. These all have full names, without occupations… We’ll have to be more careful with putting them through, then. I'll see if Lathe has another folder in his bag for them after we eat. She moved around the bed, gently shaking Lathe awake. “Come on Lathe, you need to wake up long enough to eat dinner, because I actually made food and I'm not letting this stuff go to waste.”

Lathe yawned widely, stretching his arms over his head, looking up to Spades quizzically. “Why’d you-” His words were cut off as she shoved a paper bag into his hands. Did you...?

“I made food. Eat. And you’d better like it.” Her eye glinted as she handed him a water bottle, moving to reclaim her seat on the other side of the bed, retrieving her own and setting the other two aside. One for Scotty, and... it’s wishful thinking really... But if Eren wants one... She looked up as Scotty returned with Eren’s formula, setting her own food down and moving to talk to him quietly as he set the formula on the table. “Scotty, I need to ask you something…” She glanced back to Eren, not wanting him to hear right away. [Is French okay for right now?] She sighed a bit as he nodded. [Before you feed Eren, I had to ask… Do you think he might be up to eating? Like, actually eating food? I know it was wishful thinking but I made a grilled cheese sandwich for him too just in case but I wanted to ask you before I tried to offer it to him…] ...maybe I'm just being too unrealistic... I have no way of telling right now, really...
Spades nodded, moving to retrieve one of the paper bags, stepping up to Eren. Lathe was already munching on his, looking at her with curiosity. Her voice was soft and quiet. “Eren, I made dinner for everyone, and I just wanted to know if you’d want a grilled cheese sandwich too? There the ones that Lathe makes too, with tomatoes… You don't have to have it if you don't want to, though…” ...

Eren looked over to Lathe already digging into his grilled cheese. They are the ones I like… Eren turned to Scotty. {Can I try it?} I wanna try it.

… He wants to try it? Of course! Scotty nodded with a smile on his face looking over to Spades. “Let's see how much he can eat.”

Spades smiled warmly to Eren, handing him the bag and reaching for a water bottle. “Don't worry if you can't finish it, that’s perfectly okay.” She went to sit down, returning to her sandwich. Let’s see how this goes.

Eren picked up the sandwich carefully examining it, his drawing abandoned for now. It is the same one… Eren slowly took the first bite… Picking up his sharpie to start to draw with his right hand, his sandwich secure in his left hand. I think I can eat it like this. Eren managed to finish both his drawing and his sandwich without making a mess.

That’s amazing… He actually ate something… I think we might be able to take the tube out.

[Lathe… If this keeps up… We can take the tube out.] Scotty had a smile on his face as he finished off his own sandwich getting up to put the formula back.

Lathe beamed, taking a small sip from his water bottle. [That’d be amazing if we really could. It’s a great step in the right direction, getting him to actually eat something, and getting it to continue could only get easier, really. Thank you, Spades.] Nice thinking. This could only get better!

Spades grinned at him, crumpling up her napkin and shrugging. [It’s… It’s nice to know he’s getting better.] She rose for a moment only to gather up the trash and throw it out, sitting back down after a moment. [Lathe, you were out for pretty much the entire time I was gone, I gather… So Casper, anything notable unfold while I was gone?] I refuse to be out of the loop on anything that’s going on.
Uhm, besides the fact I just might be getting somewhere with Scotty? Casper tossed her another sharpie, a smile of his face before his brow furrowed a bit. [Scotty and I took a look at his toxicology reports, showing an extremely high level of Ketamine which, because of when it was administered, we think could have distorted his memories of the gang rape and the abusive episodes… As in, thinking someone he knew was there when they really weren't. But we're not sure. We’ll have to wait and see who he keeps drawing for that. Also, um…] He held up one finger, quickly tapping away on his phone, speaking after a minute. [Well, we think we determined what gave Eren those horrible burns on his feet and back. I don't think you'd know this word in French; I didn't.] He showed Spades his phone, handing it to Lathe after her eyes went wide, taking it back from him after a second. [It’s the only thing that could explain how he got such a severe burn that shallow, so thorough even between his toes and… controlled as it was. It’s horrible… But he’s healing, so that’s good. No nerve damage, we think, which is always a good thing.]

[...Eren told me not too long ago that he could still feel me washing his back when we changed the wrappings, so his back at least hasn't suffered nerve damage… At least, not a lot. But he’s so worried because he doesn't feel much pain anymore.+] Lathe spoke quietly, his eyes worried. A blowtorch? His arms wrapped again around Eren’s waist, holding him tightly. ...that’s unthinkable…

[I’d chalk it up to just having an extremely high tolerance for pain. With some of the things Grisha had done to him… smaller amounts of pain must not even be a blip on the radar, and get ignored completely by his body. That’ll go away after a while, he’ll become more sensitive as time goes on without abuse or major incidents. All in due time.] ...now that Grisha’s gone, that shit won't happen anymore, and he’ll be better able to tell if anything’s wrong.

They settled into a comfortable silence, Casper and Spades decorating Eren’s casts as Lathe watched Eren draw. Spades stood after a while, picking up the stack of papers. “I should get going… It's late, a long drive back, and I'm expected to be a functional human being tomorrow.” She smirked, her smile fading as she studied the newest pile of faces. He’s got twenty-one more sheets for me… And he’s still going. “I’ll have these all put into the system, Eren. Good job.” She gave him a warm hug, pulling back after a moment to give Lathe a kiss. “You- remember to eat something tomorrow. And you-” She turned to Casper, giving him a fistbump. “Thanks for helping find the right medicines. And Scotty.” She turned to him, her eyes narrowed as she jerked a thumb at Lathe. “Do him a favor and hound him about eating for me, will you?” She chuckled, waving as she disappeared out the door. “I’ll see you all soon!”

Scotty nodded, watching her leave. ...it's getting really, really late… Lathe is staying here overnight, that's a given… Casper would have to drive two hours to get home, and then two back every time he needs to come back to work. “Okay, Uhm…” ...it'll be okay. He’s the sweetest thing alive- nothing awful will happen. You’ll live- and he knows how to cook, too. “... Casper, uhm, do- do you wanna come home with me? There’s plenty of room at my place… It is pretty late and you should stay close by for tomorrow… we should see how well the antibiotics work and see if we need to switch anything...” Hopefully his lungs won't fill over the course of the night… That would
be terrifying. But I don't think I'll mind too much... if anything happens I'll set things straight... whatever that may come to mean at that moment.

Casper looked up in surprise, though he offered him a grateful smile and nodded, dragging over Lathe’s bag and letting his hair hide his reddened face as he replaced all the sharpies. “T-That sounds great, thanks.” He moved Lathe’s bag back within Lathe’s reach, looking up to him. He swallowed as Lathe gave him a knowing look and shot him a quick thumbs-up, which Scotty and Eren missed. “Uh… Remember that if anything seems off, don't hesitate to call us. I have my ringer turned on as loud as it will go. We won't miss it.” Casper stood, slinging his bag back over his shoulder, giving Eren a warm smile. “I'll see you tomorrow, Eren.”

Eren nodded, ripping off yet another sheet of paper and starting on 32. I wanna finish this...

...Good luck, kid. Lathe waved as Scotty and Casper left, trying to keep from nodding off in the dim room against Eren’s head, watching his sharpie drift over the paper. You should stay awake for awhile... Make sure that his lungs don’t start filling up with fluid again... But he’ll start wheezing again, which will wake him up, and he knows to wake you up if something’s wrong... Lathe drifted to sleep, only waking at the sound of Eren sobbing. He looked down to Eren’s last drawing, his eyes wide and full of shock. ...No... The ketamine... It...

Eren was sobbing as he wrote the 39th man’s name: Levi Ackerman, Marine. He hates me... I know he does. He thinks I’m ugly... I’m fat... I’m a whore... I’m a bitch to play with... He’ll never love me anymore... Eren continued to sob, his body shuddering as he tore it off and put it on the pile over the picture of Grisha. It’s done... I’m finally done.... Eren’s cries led him to drooling a lot, all over the place, he looked over to Lathe with tears in his eyes as his drool dribbled down to his chin and to his hospital gown, more streams following after the first. He hates me... I know he does... He told me so... He wanted me to die... He hit me....

Lathe reached blindly for a towel next to him, grabbing one and wiping away the drool and the tears, kissing Eren’s temple. I need to explain. “Eren, I need to explain something to you. Please don't cry. Levi wasn’t there when you were hurt and raped, it was a hallucination. The drugs Grisha gave you made you hallucinate, and let me reassure you that whatever you think Levi said or did, he didn't. It was all just the drugs making your mind play a trick on you. You might think he was awful to you, and you might find it hard to believe, but Levi loves you more than anything in the world. I can see it in the way he looks at you and in the times you two play footsie under the table and you think I don't notice and the way he smiles only when you're involved and how every other time I look at you two he’s decided to kiss you just because. He loves you Eren, adores you and I swear that with everything that happened with Grisha, Levi being there was not real. He would never do anything to you to make you feel bad about yourself, unloved or uncomfortable in your own skin. He’s so absolutely smitten, and it’s the cutest damn thing I’ve ever seen and you need to believe that. He’d tell you everything about why he loves you until he went red in the face and he’d barely make a dent in his list of reasons. Believe that.” You need to know that Levi loves you, and even with everything that’s happened, you two need to make this work.
Eren shook his head hurriedly. “...no..... lies....” Eren’s eyes looked so full of hurt and emotional pain. No... I know he hates me.... Grisha told me you would lie to me... Grisha’s always right. {Grisha said you would lie to me... He said you would! He was right about everything! I’m fat! I’m a whore! I’m a bitch to play with! Levi’s leaving me! He hates me! He’s gonna come back in a box.... Levi was there.... Then he left... Just like he did yesterday...} Eren broke down in sobs as he pulled away from Lathe to curl up to himself. All you tell me are lies.... Levi was there... I know he was...

...He can't come home in a box. He... He can't. Lathe shoved down the sense of dread that threatened to overwhelm him, gently reaching for Eren’s jaw and forcing him to meet his eyes. “Eren, tell me this because I don't understand. Why the hell would you trust someone who enjoys your pain to tell you the truth? How can you think that Grisha is right? ...Do you remember a really long time ago, what I said about learning to respect yourself? You need to know that no matter what’s happened to you before, you are always a person with dignity that deserves respect from everyone, especially yourself. And Eren, Levi was the one to shoot Grisha full of lead the instant he saw he was about to kill you. He was the one to call an ambulance and do everything in his power to keep you alive. I held him in my arms as he cried, worried sick that you weren't going to make it. He was with you every day that he could while you were in a coma, hoping beyond hope you would wake up. His leaving is only temporary, he’s leaving because he has to go back to college, but that does not mean that he doesn't love you. Eren, he loves you so damn much and it’s been killing him to know you don't believe it, and he’s going to do everything he can after he’s deployed to come home to you in one piece. So please, try to believe that.” Lathe let a tear run down his face, still keeping Eren’s gaze. Don't you fucking dare keep thinking Grisha was ever right. He told lie after lie to get what he wanted from you.

Eren looked down after a few moments of sobbing. {Then why did he hit me? Why did he tell me he’s never love me again? Why did he let other men rape me too? Why? Why did he do that?.... Why did he punch me? Why did he stab me? Why?...} Eren’s hands were shaking as he continued to sob. I want him to love me... But he can’t he told me so.... So many times. {Grisha said you hate me too… That you want me dead…. That you would’ve been better off getting married and having your own kids… Instead of having to deal with a useless musicrat murderer like me…. I don’t want you to hate me… I don’t want you to want to kill me.} No... I don't want you to hate me.... I want my Dad again... I want him back...

Lathe swallowed hard, unable to stop the tears from falling. He took in a shaky breath, rubbing Eren’s back soothingly, forcing his voice to stay even. “Eren, the drugs Grisha gave you, they made you think Levi was there. They forced you to think he was there, when he wasn’t. It was a hallucination. It wasn't real. The things that happened to you were real... But Levi wasn’t the one doing them. He was still states away, waiting to come home and see you. But he would never do or say those things. He loves you, and...” Lathe tried desperately to not break down. “and Eren, I love you too. I could never hate you, and I never want anything bad to happen to you. The way things have worked out, I don't think I could ever want anything other than having you as my son. You’re far from being useless. You’ve brought me and so many other people happiness. And please, stop blaming yourself for what happened to your mother. Everything that Grisha told you was wrong.
You're not useless, you're not a murderer, and you're not a burden. You're the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me and I want you to know that. I just want you to be happy and feel safe. Really.” Lathe hugged Eren tightly, his head dropping onto his shoulder, sobbing. I don't know what I could have been doing now if I hadn't met you... And I don't think that whatever it could have been, if I'd have regretted this. I never could.

Eren let himself be hugged, sobbing right alongside Lathe, slowly moving to wrap his arms around Lathe’s back, his own head buried into Lathe’s neck, a small smile creeping into his face. Dad… He doesn’t want to hurt me… Does he? Eren’s grip on Lathe’s shirt tightened and he pressed himself against Lathe’s chest, enjoying the comfort of strong arms around him. “.....thank….you....” Eren’s voice was soft, and hoarse as it sounded near Lathe’s ear. Thank you…. For being my Dad again.

Lathe smiled, pecking his cheek and shifting so Eren was in his lap, leaning back against him. He settled so they were lying down, one hand coming up to run through his hair as his other stayed around his middle, his voice a low murmur near his ear. “...of course. We should get some sleep, okay? It’s been a long day.” We could both use the rest...

Eren nodded slowly, still crying pretty heavily into Lathe’s neck, but it died down as Eren finally fell asleep. His grip loosened only a little bit from Lathe’s shirt, drool already starting to puddle onto the shoulder below his face, his legs tangled with Lathe’s even in the casts. His face looked completely calm, and it was the first time Eren actually slept without a single nightmare coursing through his mind.
Chapter 40: Side Story 1: Scotty and Casper

Scotty sighed as he parked his silver sedan in his driveway, opening his door. “Come on, let’s go.” He motioned Casper to follow him up the steps of his two story home. Home… God, I haven’t been here in like... Three weeks.... Maybe more... Holy shit... He grabbed his keys out of his pocket and pushed open the door. “I’m gonna attempt to make pasta, that okay with you?” I mostly keep non-perishables here...

Casper followed him up to the house, thanking him as he held the door open, taking off his shoes and looking around a bit. ...you can tell you’re not home much... when was the last time you came back here? “Anything would be great, thank you. Need help, or can you and your Ph. D. handle boxed pasta?” Casper joked, his smile warm. I remember in college you excelled at everything- including burning water.

Scotty groaned, picking up a few boxes as they wandered into the kitchen. “I should probably be monitored, my Ph. D. is in surgery not cooking...” Scotty moved around to get the large pot they needed. I think this should work. Scotty filled it with water and set it on the burner. I think I can handle this much at least.

Casper quirked an eyebrow as Scotty stopped halfway through step one, staring at the pot with a furrowed brow, obviously not knowing where to keep going with it. I'll help. He set his bag on a chair at the table, padding over to the pantry and pulling out a jar of tomato sauce. “Here, let’s get the sauce going too.” He set the jar on the counter, patting Scotty’s arm. “Turn that burner with the water pot on high, okay?” He went to find a sauce pot, hunting for the correct drawers before locating a couple utensils. We'll need these. Casper looked back to Scotty, nodding to the jar of sauce. “Know how to deal with that?”

“Not really, I didn’t even know I had it…” Would you look at that… I have a semblance to actual food in my house.

Casper rolled his eyes, smiling good-naturedly. “Of course you didn't. Here, let’s begin with the basics.” Casper picked up one of the utensils, holding it up in front of Scotty, his expression serious. “Scotty, what is this?” If you don't know this ...

Scotty looked at the tool in Casper’s hand…. What the fuck is that? “I’m pretty sure it's used to scrape something…. Therefore let it be known as the scrapey thingy.”

Casper just looked at him, taking a deep breath, before answering him flatly. “...no. This,” He gestured to it. “Is called a spatula, however yes, it can and is used for scraping food out of things
and into other things. So, here. Your first task—" Casper handed him the tool, pointing to the jar of sauce. “Try to get that, without making a mess,” He pointed to the saucepan. “-into that.” If you can manage. ...This'll be amusing.

Scotty looked between the two objects for a moment before he was able to appropriately use the utensil to help the sauce out and into the pan. That worked... Better than I expected it to.

...At least you didn't get any on your clothes. Casper went along with Scotty, helping him figure out how much salt to add to the water and how hot the sauce pot burner should be. Casper stood behind Scotty, one hand on the counter next to him and the other directing him on his other side to set a timer for things, remember to stir the pots, and check the penne noodles. Casper noticed that as he went on, with his light humor and warmth, Scotty relaxed, not even minding when Casper leaned against him to lift the lid of the saucepan occasionally. Casper decided to take a tiny chance, his arm moving from the edge of the counter to rest gently on Scotty’s waist, feeling him tense for just a moment before calming back down. ...is this really getting somewhere?

Scotty stressed a bit over the pasta and sauce pot, not used to cooking at all. At first, Casper's presence right behind him was sort of intimidating, though his calm voice and guiding directions helped him calm down, relaxing and watching over the food on the stove without much worry. ...he’s being so nice... he knows how to cook, and he’s not mad that I can't do it for my life by myself... he’s just so chill about all this. Scotty felt Casper’s hand drift to his side, nothing more than a steady presence, calming after a moment. ...it's just Casper. It's okay. You're okay. It's all okay. Scotty looked up as the timer beeped, following Casper’s direction to test the pasta. “...it tastes like pasta always does. I think it's done.” ... Pretty sure.

Casper himself tried a piece, nodding. “Yep, it is. So, let’s turn off that burner- let me do this part, you'll get burned.” Casper retrieved a pair of oven mitts, running cold water in the metal sink and putting the lid on the pot, holding it in place as he drained the pasta, steam curling up around his arms. Yep- this is how it's done. No way I'd let you burn yourself and dump out dinner trying it. He set it back on an unused burner, checking the sauce one more time and seeing it just beginning to bubble. That’s done too. “Scotty, can you get bowls out for the two of us? And silverware, please?” I dunno where most of the things in here are...

Scotty nodded, getting out bowls and forks for the both of them. I actually get to eat something that’s not purchased at the Canteen... Or bought on the way home... Thank you, God! Casper is a godsend at the moment! Scotty let Casper dish out their food, and moved to sit down at the small kitchen table. It could've gone worse I guess... And we didn’t make a huge mess... That's a plus.

Casper walked over with his own bowl, setting his bag on the floor and sitting across from Scotty at the small two-person table, eating quietly for a short while before speaking up a bit, giving Scotty a small smile. “It’s really good for a first try.” He nudged his foot under the table, not wanting to overstep anything.
Scotty tensed up a bit as he was nudged, his fork stopping for an instant before he picked it back up and ate the forkful. *What’s he doing? I don’t want him to get the wrong idea or anything...* *Fuck this is harder than I thought it would be... I guess I’ll be taking the couch tonight... Oh well, still better than a cot.* Scotty nodded at Casper’s words, agreeing with him. “It really is my first try... I don’t know why I even had the pasta in the first place...”

Casper drew his foot back to his side off the table, picking at his penne, chuckling a bit. “Never too late to learn, I suppose. We need to fix that.” *Cooking is, oh, I dunno... kinda important.*

Scotty chuckled a bit, stabbing into the pasta again. “That’s pretty funny... Why would I need to know how to cook when I haven’t left the hospital for 3 weeks...” *it’s like that a lot... Especially with the ICU position I have now... I’m no where near as free as I was back home... Home... I kinda want to go visit again... Maybe I should transfer back... I kinda miss it..."

Casper stopped his fork, looking at him in surprise. “Did you just say three *weeks*? As in three weeks of never leaving that hospital? Of nonstop stress and taking power naps on some cot?” *...what the actual fuck?! “Scotty, you're going to go mad doing that- or at least drive everyone else mad if the sleep deprivation turns you into the grouchy, which has happened, don't deny it.”...finals week was never fun... “My god, either you're already insane or they just won't stop mailing you solid gold bars.”*

“Hmm... Just shy of solid gold bars... And I really haven’t left since Eren got his kidney transplanted... But I guess you could say I’m used to it now... I don’t really get that much sleep, but on occasion I’ll take the day off and recharge the whole day, pretty much sleeping it away.... Remember how I only drank coffee when I needed too? Well, coffee and I have become very good friends...” *I used to hate it until college... But my sleeping habits are almost as bad as Levi’s apparently.*

“Hmm, and let me guess- your idea of ‘on occasion’ is once every decade?” Casper just looked at Scotty for a moment, noticing the dark shadow under his eyes. “Scotty, that’s not good for you. You’d think being a doctor, you’d know that.” Casper gently nudged his foot a second time, standing with his empty bowl. “Are you done? I'll do dishes, and then we’re getting you upstairs to get some damn rest.” *You need it...*

Scotty nodded, standing up to take the dishes from Casper. “I’ll do the dishes, those I can at least do... And you can take the bed... I’ll take the couch down here.” *I’m still not sure if I should sleep in the same room as you...* He took the plates and took them to the sink, rolling up his sleeves and washing the dishes. “And I know it’s not really the greatest, but my body’s adapted over the past two years... I’m used to no sleep... So I usually can’t fall asleep anymore.” *Sucks to be me.*
...Bullshit. Casper let him take the dishes to the sink, though he insisted on drying them. “Scotty, all I know is that for your first time home in three weeks, I'm not going to force you to be subjected to the couch. You're sleeping in a bed. And you're going to get a half-decent amount of rest if it kills you.” Which it most certainly will not.

“I don’t want you to sleep on the couch though, that’s rude… You're a guest, you should get the bed…” Scotty handed him the dishes to be dried after he washed them all. I mean… I wouldn’t mind sleeping in my bed for once… But I probably won’t be able to sleep at all tonight…

“Well then, I guess we’ll just have to share it.” YAS. Casper was able to figure out where everything had come from, setting the bowls and forks away as Scotty stowed the pans. “Come on- you need to at least try.” Casper snatched up his bag and tugged Scotty by the arm to the staircase, letting go when Scotty led them up, turning off the downstairs lights as they went.

Scotty sighed, going up the stairs, letting Casper follow him. Well, there goes my plan to avoid an awkward situation… It's fine though… He’s okay, he’s just trying to let you rest.

Casper looked around the rather scarce bedroom....huh. You really can tell he's never around... ...should I just...? ...I think he can deal. Casper set his bag own on the side Scotty hadn't seemed to claim, shrugging of his jacket and setting it on his bag neatly, shortly followed by his button-up and jeans, leaving him in a white tank top and plain grey boxers. Casper hopped up onto the bed, stretching a bit before settling. ...comfy. I approve.

Scotty looked away as Casper stripped down to his boxers and tank top. Well… He’s not nude… That’s good… It took him a few minutes to unbutton his shirt and slacks, letting them fall to the floor. He stood there in just his boxers, unsure of what to do, but eventually pulling back the covers and slipping into his side of the bed. God… I don’t remember the last time I actually slept in this bed… Scotty just laid there, staring at the ceiling, wishing he could fall asleep. I wanna sleep... But I fucking can’t.

...he’s not going to fall asleep anytime soon, is he. Casper looked over to him, seeing how tensely he was holding himself and staring at the ceiling. “Scotty, you’re never going to fall asleep if you don’t just let yourself relax.”

Scotty shook his head. “I really can’t… I haven’t been able to fall asleep for a long time…” I’m not exhausted either… He let out a heavy sigh, turning his muscled back to Casper and laying on his side. I need to calm down... He’s not gonna do anything...

......should I…? Casper thought hard for a moment, deciding to go for it. He tentatively shifted, on
his side behind Scotty and letting his hand rest on his side, pressing a feather-light kiss to his shoulder blade, his voice quiet. “......do you want me to help you with that?” Please don’t freak out...

Scotty tensed as Casper put a hand on his side, feeling a surge of blood run to his face and his ears as he blushed. “W-what…. Are you implying?” What the hell are you thinking...

Casper gently pulled Scotty onto his back, his arm over his stomach and holding his side lightly, looking up to him. “...would you trust me to show you?” You can say no if you really don’t want to... but I know you don’t think I’m serious... I really want to show you I meant it...

Scotty only had a look of confusion on his face as Casper draped an arm over his bare skin. What the hell?.... Well, it can’t be that bad… Can it? “Alright...” He let his body relax, letting Casper move around him, and watching him with confused eyes.

Thank you. “If you want me to stop…” Casper lightly pecked his shoulder. “-just say the word.” You sound like you don’t know what you’re getting yourself into... Casper moved so one of his knees was between Scotty’s legs, giving him leverage over him as he leaned down to gently kiss and lick at Scotty’s neck, conscious both of leaving no marks and of Scotty’s immediate reaction.

Scotty let Casper move around him, feeling him kiss at his neck. ....What is he doing?... Is he... No he can’t be... He’s my friend... He wouldn’t try to do that, would he? Scotty closed his eyes to try and get his mind out of the gutter, letting Casper do whatever the hell he was doing.

Casper switched to kiss at the other side of his neck, his hand slowly drifting to the hem of Scotty’s boxers. He tried to gauge Scotty’s reaction as he brushed the hem, still not thinking he had caught on yet. Casper slowly kissed his way down Scotty’s chest, looking up to him as he reached his lower half. “...Scotty...” Casper let one hand play with the hem of his boxers. “...may I?” I really don’t want to do this if you don’t... that'd just be wrong...

Scotty watched him, his eyes following Casper’s hands as they played with the hem of his boxers. Does he think I’ll sleep better with them off or something? “S-sure....” Scotty gave him permission, yet his face gave away that he was completely clueless in the matter.

...you really are a dense motherfucker. Let’s see if this makes it click... Casper nodded, pressing light kisses to his stomach as he pulled them down and off, still leaving them close if Scotty suddenly stopped him. Casper trailed down to his half-hard length, watching Scotty’s expression through lidded eyes as he licked a long stripe up the underside of his length. ...get it now?
Scotty’s eyes widened as he felt Casper’s tongue on his length, feeling it twitch in response……
What the fuck!?! “Casper! What the hell are you doing?” Scotty almost instantly moved away from him, his length starting to get hard from just that small touch… fuck, I’m hard now…

Casper let him scramble away from him, looking away in shame, his face burning. ...I shouldn’t’ve… “......S-Scotty, I just…” He swallowed hard, trying again, his expression one of guilt. “...I didn't exactly plan this if that's what you were thinking… I… I knew you didn't think I was serious w-when… when I told you I loved you at Thanksgiving forever ago… I still really, really do, and it killed me to not put up a fight when you wanted to transfer, but that wouldn't be right, to stop you from doing what you wanted… I… I guess I just wanted to do something to prove it… that I love you… I just wanted to make you feel wanted… but I guess I misread everything.”
Casper rubbed at the tears prickling at his eyes. “...look, if you want to kick me out and never see me again… I'll understand. ...I deserve it.” ...what was I thinking...

Scotty watched Casper as he started to cry, feeling guilty as all hell…. God, I hate seeing him cry. “Alright… Fine… One night… Then no more…” I don’t want to kick you out… That would be rude… And you’re the one who fucking got me hard...

...okay. ...then... then I'll let it go. “...Okay.” I'll take good care of you, for what I've got left… “Still, if I overstep anything… tell me.” Casper leaned forward to bring Scotty back so his head rested again on the pillows, kissing again down his chest, his hands running down his sides and his hips as he came back to his length, kissing the tip before taking it into his mouth, suckling on it and bobbing his head, going progressively further and further down his length.

Scotty watched Casper with hooded eyes as he groaned. Fuck it… “Ca… Casper… Ha, Shit...” His hand moved to grab his hair, tugging at it in bliss as Casper continued to suck on him. Holy fuck, it feels sooo good...

Casper kept his eyes on Scotty’s expressions, letting him grab at his violet hair and humming on his length, soon reaching the base of his length, his tongue pressed flat against the underside. You sound wonderful… He continued to bob his head, his hands keeping Scotty’s hips from jerking up too much.

Scotty continued to moan, getting progressively louder as Casper continued with him. Holy fuck… “Casper… I’m… I can’t… Haa...” Scotty's toes curled up as he felt his coil beginning to snap. Holy shit...

Casper pulled up on his length, suckling his tip and playing with the slit at Scotty’s words. Casper let Scotty release, struggling a bit to swallow his large load, only a tiny drop escaping from the
corner of his mouth, though he licked that up as he came up off of Scotty’s length. ...I don't really expect you to repay anything… you're letting me do the work… but I need to ask. “Scotty… you can say no, but…” Casper looked up to him, his hands holding his sides lovingly as he spoke. “...can I have you?” I don't know how else to ask and not make you possibly freak...

Scotty thought about it for a second. “Y-yeah… That’s fine… I don’t have any lube though…” I really am not prepared at all for this...

Casper nodded, his head dipping down to let his mouth wander over his chest, finding and gently nibbling at any sensitive spot he came across. I want to make you feel really good… “...what about condoms?” I don't know where you keep your shit in this house… or if you have any… I planned on nothing so I don't have any...

“The night stand…. I can get Vaseline… If we need it.” I'm not necessarily sure what the hell you need.

“That would probably be the best… could you?” I don't want to hurt you or make this uncomfortable… Casper let Scotty get up to retrieve Vaseline from the bathroom, opening the nightstand and snatching a foil wrapper from inside. He get rid of his tank top while he was at it, though he left his boxers on for the moment. Casper leaned forward as Scotty came back, wrapping one arm around his waist and pulling him back into bed with him, helping him settle again. Casper opened the lid of the small container, swiping some onto his fingers and massaging it a bit to warm it up. He set the container aside, going to kiss at Scotty’s neck as his hand rested waiting near Scotty’s entrance. “Whenever you're ready, Scotty.”

Scotty took another deep breath, letting Casper kiss wherever he wanted. I'm actually gonna let him do this... He nodded, looking at Casper with hazy eyes. I'm assuming you know what you're doing...

Casper nodded, pressing his first finger past the ring of muscle and feel up Scotty’s soft walls, feeling him tense around him. He leaned up to murmur in his ear. “Scotty, you've gotta relax…” Casper kissed at the spot below his ear, nibbling at his soft skin as he felt a faint shiver run through him.

Scotty tried his best to relax as much as possible. It feels so weird… What the hell am I doing? Scotty closed his eyes, trying to relax himself more. “I’m trying…”

Casper nodded, waiting a moment before pushing his second finger past his entrance, his other hand still giving him leverage above him as licked and kissed at his neck across to his collarbone.
He waited a long moment for Scotty to adjust before he started to slowly thrust in and out, searching for his prostate before scissoring him. *You're still so tense...*

Scotty took a deep breath, feeling better after a few minutes, the burning sensation of being stretched starting to fade. He let out a loud cry as he saw stars, feeling Casper’s fingers graze his prostate. “Ngh… Casper… There…” *That felt really good… Holy fuck…*

Casper smirked against his skin, teasingly grazing that same spot a few more times before adding his third finger, steadily thrusting in and out of Scotty. *You didn't think anything like this would feel good- having second thoughts?* Casper gave it another long moment, letting Scotty adjust again before drawing his hand out of him, moving to ditch his boxers and open the condom, rolling it on and lubing up with more Vaseline. He lined himself up with Scotty’s entrance, his hands holding his sides and looking up to him, silently asking for permission. *Whenever you're ready.*

Scotty took a few seconds, looking up to Casper with lust filled eyes. *Fuck… It feels good… I kinda… I kinda want more.* He nodded, moving his hips a bit against Casper, hoping that it’d help him relax a bit.

Casper’s eyes darkened seeing the lustful look Scotty was giving him, slowly pushing into Scotty, his head dropping into the crook of his neck as he buried himself to the hilt, unable to keep from letting out a long, quiet moan. *You… you feel really, really good…* Casper stilled, waiting for Scotty’s cue to continue.

Scotty grabbed the sheets under him as he was filled with Casper’s length. *Holy shit… It feels like he’s gonna break me…* Scotty lifted an arm up and grabbed his hair, pulling his head up from his neck and moving to kiss him hotly. *Make me forget the stretch… Make me forget everything…*

Casper was stunned as Scotty pulled him up to kiss him, melting into it and letting his eyes slide shut, kissing him passionately and letting a single tear fall from his eye. *Please… I don’t want this to be the only time I get to have you..* Casper tilted his head and swiped his tongue across Scotty’s lips, his tongue tangling with Scotty’s as he was granted entrance. *...I really, really, really want this… you, to be mine…* Casper’s hands wandered over Scotty’s chest, feeling more free to explore and after a short while he drew back and thrusted again into him, beginning a steady rhythm and quietly moaning into his mouth. *...so good…*

Scotty’s arms wrapped around Casper’s torso, pulling him close as Casper started his slow pace. “C-Casper… Ngh… More… Please…” *Shit… It feels really good… He keeps touching that spot.. It feels so good… Don’t stop…*
Casper shuddered hearing Scotty’s voice, speeding up his pace before he was steadily thrusting deeply into Scotty, aiming for that one spot that made him go crazy. Casper broke their kiss, murmuring next to his ear. “S-Scotty, please… let me hear you…” Casper let one hand wander further south, teasing his quickly hardening length before taking it in hand, slowly and firmly pumping it. *I want to know how good you feel...*

Scotty’s back arched up off the mattress, his moans getting louder as Casper asked for it. *Holy fuck....* Scotty scratched at his back, his legs coming to push his hips further into him. *I need you.. It feels so good... Holy shit...!

Casper took the hint and was soon pounding into him, aiming for his prostate and hitting it dead on, twisting his hand as he pumped Scotty’s own length. He couldn't help himself as he ducked his head down to suckle at his collarbone, leaving a single small dark mark that could easily be hidden. He whimpered as Scotty scratched at his back, feeling his own coil beginning to tighten. “S-Scotty… nngh… I’m not gonna… ha… last much longer...” *It’s so much ...

Scotty could barely nod as he felt that familiar warmth pool in his abdomen as Casper hit his prostate dead on. *Holy crap, it feels... So good ... Better than anything I’ve felt before...

Casper’s pace grew a bit erratic as he neared his climax, gasping and letting out a long, loud moan into Scotty’s neck as he released, still going and pumping Scotty’s length with firm, long strokes, wanting to drive him over the edge, looking up to watch his expression. ...*you're so amazing ... I want to see you come undone...

Scotty’s expression quickly changed to one of extreme bliss. His coil snapped as he came all over his chest and Casper’s hands, his mouth opening wide and letting out a huge cry of bliss and ecstasy. *Holy crap... “Casper...”* His voice was small as his body slumped underneath the man above him, his legs coming off from around him and his arms dropping from his shoulders. *My body feels like jello.*

Casper drew out of him, lapping up his release from his chest and hands, tying off the condom and dropping it into the wastebasket next to his bed, collapsing next to him. He panted, though he still shifted up, his hand on his cheek as he kissed him chastely. *Thank you.* He pulled away, looking to him, his eyes full of love and happiness, though there was a spark of fear. ...*is this really it for me? ...is it over? “S-Scotty, I......” I really, really love you... and I'm terrified.* Casper couldn't bring himself to say anything else, his arm slung over Scotty’s chest and burying his face into his shoulder, trying not to sob. *I can't lose you.... I can’t ...

Scotty wrapped a loose arm around his waist, pulling Casper close and pulling up the sheets around them. “Get some sleep… We gotta wake up early…” *I'm tired ... we can talk in the morning...
Casper nodded, trying to calm down as Scotty’s arm wrapped around him. *whichever way this goes… at least I have you now.* Casper drifted to sleep, willing himself to be calm, his sleep dreamless.
Chapter 41: The First Attempt

Scotty woke up as his alarm went off, groaning as his phone blared. *Fuck... My hips are sore...* His eyes widened as he remembered what he let Casper do to him last night. *... That wasn't a dream... Holy fuck... I let him fuck me... Goddammit...* Scotty looked to the empty bed around him, his brow furrowing, but he got up and got dressed, making his way downstairs, stopping. For a minute as he smelled food coming from downstairs. *Casper?* His steps quickened to the kitchen where he saw Casper making breakfast for the two of them.

Casper looked over his shoulder from where he was at the stove, already fully dressed and cooking breakfast, the mess on the counter very well contained. He gave him a small smile, wary of what he was going to say or do. “G’Morning, Scotty... I woke up early, went and got us stuff to make breakfast. Pancakes and bacon okay?” *You already had pancake mix, and everybody likes bacon, so.... please interpret this as the peace offering it is.*

Scotty nodded. “That sounds good.... We need to eat quick though... Eren’s gonna wake up soon and I gotta feed him...” *I don’t want to say anything about last night.... I wanna forget that it happened at all...*

Casper nodded, soon handing him a plate and nudging him to the table, silverware already set out along with maple syrup and butter, a mug of coffee waiting for him. Casper came over with his own plate and mug shortly after, sitting across from him and trying to eat, picking at his food for a tense minute before he stopped, still staring at his plate, sounding broken. “Scotty, I'm just going to skip straight to the point. This... this isn't going to happen ever again... is it.” *You've already made it obvious you don't want to speak about it or remember it happened. Just tell me so I can be heartbroken in peace without it hovering over my head.*

Scotty looked up from his plate sighing. “Can we not talk about this now? I don’t want to think about this right now, let me think about it and I’ll talk to you about it later.” *I really just wanna set to work, and put my mind to something...*

...*he'll think about it... but he doesn't sound like he's about to say yes anytime soon...* “...okay. I'm sorry, I won't bug you about it.” Casper sipped at his mug of coffee, having lost most of his appetite. ....*was this all a mistake...?* They both picked at their food in silence, Casper getting up first to do the dishes and clean up the mess from the counter quickly. ....*we do need to get going soon...*
Eren’s nose had started to bleed all over again that night, and the oxygen tube was starting to fill with it along with his clothes. His eyes were groggy, his whole body hot as he laid there in Lathe’s arms, blood pooling everywhere.

Lathe blinked awake as he felt something run over his hand, looking down and gasping as he saw blood everywhere. *Fuck.* Lathe immediately got out from under Eren, grabbing a damp towel from the sink and mopping up the blood with one hand as he moved the oxygen tube from his face and pressed gauze to his nose with the other. *Shit… you lost a lot…*

Eren let Lathe move him around, feeling him press the gauze to his nose as he bled heavily. He had blood all over his face, the blankets around him, Lathe’s hands and even his pillow. The blood had also managed to run down the oxygen tubes as well, blocking the oxygen from entering his nose, and depriving him of oxygen for who knows how long. *I feel hot… And exhausted…*

Lathe cleaned off his hands and everything as best as he could, trying to get Eren to hold the gauze in place and failing, having to try to unclog his oxygen tube with one hand before the blood flow finally stopped, able to focus on getting the tubes cleared… which didn’t work. Lathe was struggling with it until Scotty came in a few minutes later, sighing in relief as he saw him.

“Mornin’ Scotty- Eren had a nosebleed again, this oxygen thingy got clogged. I don't know where to get another one.” He looked behind Scotty, seeing Casper and smiling to him, though his face fell as he saw the obvious brokenness in his smile. “Are you okay? Need someone to talk to? +You don’t look okay, and if this is what I think it is… you'd be the one needing someone to talk to more.*

Scotty moved to get a different tube out for Eren, giving him the proper oxygen he needed. *Alright, that should work for right now.* He looked over to Lathe and Casper talking about something in another language foreign to him. … *I bet that’s Russian… Probably.*

+Yeah… I fucked up… I really fucked up this time… I… I can’t believe I actually did that… Lathe, what if he doesn’t want to see me anymore? What happens if he does want to talk to me anymore… What if I can’t see him anymore? + Casper moved to sit down at the table, trying not to let the tears pricking in his eyes overflow… *I can’t…*

Eren let Scotty move him around, not having the strength to fight him off, his breathing ragged as he was sat up. He weakly closed his eyes as Scotty put a cold stethoscope on his chest, listening to him breathe. He started as Scotty removed the stethoscope and ran out of the room, a worried look on his face. *What?…. Where’s he going?*

Lathe looked up from where he had joined Casper at the table, both of them looking up as he darted out of the room. “What the hell happened?” *Where the fuck did he go? What's wrong?*
Eren’s breathing was ragged as he struggled more to take in air. *I can’t fucking breathe… My head hurts…*

...

"*his lungs are filling again.* “His lungs. The pneumonia.” Casper and Lathe looked at each other with wide eyes before standing, going to Eren and getting his attention, trying to keep him awake and calm until Scotty came back with a respiration kit. Lathe looked up as Scotty came back into the room, setting up a different sort of kit. “...the fuck is that?” It looks different. Lathe’s eyes widened as he saw the huge needle in the kit. “... *oh.* … Well *fuck.* Lathe understood somewhat what needed to happen, having Casper help him shift Eren so he was sitting up and moved to where Scotty could get at his back, finding Eren’s hand and gripping it as Scotty got everything ready. ...*you're not going to like this.*

Scotty worked quickly to clean up and sanitize the area around where he would need to cut him open. *I don't like that I need to do this to him with his back like this…* Scotty got a scalpel out, and cut a small incision in his back. He got the large needle ready to put in near the incision. “Hold him still.” He told them, waiting for them to hold him. *Eren hasn’t even flinched yet.*

Lathe and Casper both stood on either side of Eren, holding a shoulder and one of his hands, trying to keep him still and calm. Lathe nodded to him after they had a good hold on him, murmuring soothingly to Eren as Scotty began.

Scotty felt his gut wrench as he stuck the needle into Eren’s back, attaching it to a syringe and beginning to suck out the bloody liquid. *He didn’t even flinch at all… he looks so pale….* Scotty watched in shock as Eren’s nose started to bleed heavily yet again. *This is bad, he’s losing too much blood.* He put the tube into another jar and it gave the amount of liquid they were draining from him. *We're already at a 1000 cc’s… this… I’ve never seen this before.*

Casper reached for Lathe’s bag, pulling out another wad of gauze and pressing it to Eren’s nose an instant after Lathe moved the oxygen from his nose. *Fuck, not good.* He noticed Eren’s eyelids beginning to flutter, seeing him nearly begin to sway in their hold. *Oh no fuck that.* “Eren, come on kid, stay awake for us. It's really important that you do- we need you to stay with us.” Casper managed to stay completely calm, trying to get and keep Eren’s attention. “Scotty, how much more do you have to go?” *Hopefully not too much more.*

Scotty shook his head. “I gotta drain his other lung too… That one’s full… He’s… He almost drowned again…” Scotty moved to get another incision, and put in another large needle to start draining his other lung. *God…kid, how can you not flinch at this?? He’s not even making a noise… “you need to keep him awake…” if he falls asleep… I can’t say what’ll happen…*
Eren could barely keep his eyes open but managed to look up to Lathe and look into his eyes with a fearful gaze. *I... It hurts... I can’t breathe...*

Lathe tried to keep Eren’s attention, speaking to him quietly and evenly. “Eren, I know it hurts, and I know it must hurt to breathe right now, but you need to just stay calm and not panic. This is going to be over soon enough, we’ll get you the medicine and everything that you need, and you’ll feel much, much better, okay? Now just stay awake for me, that’s all you need to do.” *Come on- it’ll be done soon.*

Eren managed to stay awake while his lungs were drained, whimpering a majority of the time. *I want it to stop.* He took a deep breath and began to cry as Scotty pulled the large needles out of his back and bandaged him. *That fucking hurt...*

Lathe helped Scotty bandage him up, helping Eren to lay back down and murmuring quiet praises as Scotty got his IV going again. “You did a great job, Eren- we’re getting you something now to make the pain go away. Just give it a minute, it’s okay.” Lathe wiped away his tears as Scotty finished the IV drip, sighing in relief as Eren seemed to calm as the medicine took effect. *...better.* Lathe ruffled his hair, drifting back from him and back over to Casper as Scotty hunted for another oxygen tube, sitting him back down. “...look, I don’t remember much Russian... do you need to go somewhere else and talk, or...?”

“I... I just... I wish that I didn’t fuck it up...” Casper sighed putting his head in his hands. *I really... I can’t lose him.*

Eren listened to their conversation quietly as he held onto Lathe’s shirt sleeve, wanting to hold onto him. *I don’t want you to leave... I don’t want to be left alone... They’ll drug me... And cut me open again... No... I don’t want to...*

Lathe looked to Casper helplessly as Eren refused to let go of his sleeve, sitting down on the edge of the bed and pulling Casper over by the arm to sit next to him, trying to comfort him and murmuring to him so that only he could hear. “I guess all you can do is hope for right now... I know how much he means to you... if at any point something happens, you can always tell me, okay? I wouldn’t breathe a word of it to anyone.” *If you don’t even know, and you’re this torn up... what did you do?*

Casper nodded, looking up as Scotty came into the room. *He’s acting like nothing happened... What am I supposed to do?*

Scotty looked to Eren, “How do your legs feel, Kid?” *I hope I’m right about this... I think it may*
have happened again…

Eren looked over to Scotty with a confused look, looking up to Lathe in confusion. Why is he asking me how my legs feel?


Eren took his hands and started to form a few letters. S.T.I.F.F. They feel really weird in the casts now. I don’t know why… He made a small noise of discomfort as he tried to move his toes, able to move them all and feel Scotty poking at them, and letting out a high pitched garble as he pulled his toes away. What the fuck is he doing to my toes??

Casper reached out to shoo Scotty away from his toes, noting Eren’s discomfort. “Scotty, stop that, you're weirding him out. We can figure out how his legs are doing if we just get him in for an x-Ray.” That’ll be a lot easier on Eren’s sanity so he doesn't have to figure out whether or not you're a threat to his limbs.

Scotty nodded, moving out of the room to go get a bed from the hallways. “Alright, time to get another X-Ray, Kid.” I hope I’m right…

Eren looked to Lathe, knowing he needed to switch to the bed Scotty brought in. Are there gonna be those people again?? I don't wanna go!

Why are you panicking? ...oh yeah, yesterday didn't go too smoothly. “It’s alright Eren, everyone’s much more prepared to deal with any reporters. And we have some extra backup right off the bat.” He nodded to Casper. “We've got you.” We’ll keep away anyone we don't want around.

Eren nodded, and let the three of them move him downstairs and get him to the X-Ray table without incident. He allowed Scotty to move the machine around to get the proper view, and he relaxed, knowing he wasn’t allowed to move. Why am I here again?

Scotty motioned the others back to the monitors in the back of the room, allowing the machine to fire up and take the shot and what he saw… He didn’t understand. They’re completely healed… They were broken… Yesterday! “Lathe… They’re… They’re not broken… What the hell… I
think… I think I was… Oh my god… I was right…” *His body is healing himself… How? How does he do that? Can he control it? There’s so many things I wanna test…*

Casper looked at the screen as Scotty pulled up yesterday’s x-rays and today's. … *That’s… That’s impossible! A full break can’t heal like that!*

Lathe covered his mouth in shock, studying the x-ray. *That’s… that's not normal.* His voice was a shocked whisper. “How in the…” Lathe looked back to Eren. “How do you do that…?” *That's impossible… but… you did it… are you trying to do that, or does it just… happen?*

Eren looked at Lathe in fear as he asked. *What did I do? What are you asking me?* He knew he had to stay still. *Scotty’ll get mad at me… Why are you mad at me too?*

Lathe shook his head as he saw Eren’s fear, holding up his hands and revealing a disbelieving smile. “No no Eren were not mad or anything, that’s amazing. It’s weird and slightly terrifying, but it’s amazing that you can do that! Don’t be scared! …Your legs are somehow completely healed! That's amazing!” *HOW?*

Eren looked at him and nodded, watching as Lathe spoke. *So can I get the casts off?* He watched as Lathe was pulled back towards the monitors.

Scotty came back out and repositioned the machine to get a picture of his chest. *I think I saw… No they couldn’t’ve grown back… Bones don’t do that…* “Stay still Eren.” He went back and took he another x-day of his chest. He gasped as he saw the image pop up. “Th-that’s… That’s impossible.” He hurriedly looked up more pictures from Eren’s file to compare them. 12 ribs… Had turned into 20. *No fucking way.*

Lathe gasped at the new image. “…Bullshit. Did he…” Lathe stepped up close to them. “He was missing eight of them. Where the hell did they come from, bones don’t do that!” Lathe sounded incredulous. *What the actual fuck? I mean, that's awesome… but what the fuck?!!*

Casper stared intensely at the x-rays, his thoughts racing at this new information. …*you healed your arms in record time… then your legs in barely a day… and now you went and grew back the half of your ribs that had been shattered and taken out… at this rate, we should be surprised you didn’t grow a new kidney before they had the chance to do the surgery. But as for an explanation… there isn’t one. “…we should go see how his lungs and kidney are doing… see if anything there changed too.” One hundred bucks he grew back some other organ… like his other kidney. …it sounds just crazy enough to be true.
Eren seemed to shrink as he heard them all talking about his situation. *Why am I so different from everybody else…? Why… Am I gonna be a new test subject?* Eren started to cry. *I don't want to be a science experiment again… And i'm gonna be one now aren't I?* Eren moved to his side and struggled to curl up to himself… *I wanna hide…*

Lathe looked over as Eren shifted around, realising how they sounded. *We're all talking as if we can't wait to open him up and see how he works… crap.* Lathe moved to the table, moving aside the machine and carding his hand through Eren’s hair, trying to calm him. “Eren, hey, please don't cry… we’re just shocked that this is what it is. You can do something amazing and we’re excited about that, because if whatever you do can be replicated it could help hundreds of thousands of people. But that doesn't mean we’re turning you into a science experiment. It’s not as if we’re going to break something and then stare at it as it heals. No no no, nothing like that.” Lathe pecked his forehead as he sobbed, wiping away his tears. “Listen, Eren, Scotty has his blood samples from you already. He needed them to do blood tests anyway, and that’s what we have now to work with. But we're not going to do anything at all if you're not okay with it. For right now, we’re going to get these casts off of you, then get you an MRI to see how your- or should I say my- kidney is doing, how your lungs are holding up, and if there's anything going either not well or great, okay?”

*You're fine. Don't worry.*

Eren looked at him and nodded, sniffling as he tried to curl up to Lathe. He let Scotty come close to take his casts off, thankful he could pull his legs under him and curl up to himself now.

Casper helped steer the bed out into the hall and to the elevator to the second floor, trying to coax Eren out from his little ball as they reached the room with the MRI equipment. “Come on Eren, you need to do as the technician says and lay flat for this. We’re just one room over; you'll be fine.” *We need to see how your body is doing.*

Eren nodded and laid flat on the equipment. *I wanna get this over with.* Eren closed his eyes taking in a deep breath. *I'm okay… I'll be okay…*

Scotty, Casper, and Lathe stood waiting for the results of the imaging. *I really hope it’s what I think it is… Cause then he can be transferred down to a regular room.* Scotty watched as a few of the images came in, smiling as he saw no liquid, or other signs of Pneumonia. *That’s a good start.*

...*if I had actually bet something… I'd be a hundred bucks richer.* Casper went up to the image, pointing to a certain spot and turning to the two of them. “What is this?” *Oh I know exactly what it is- you two just wouldn't look for it otherwise and notice.*

Scotty leaned forwards to inspect the screen. *That’s… “His missing kidney… Lathe… Here’s*
yours… Wasn’t this one removed?” He asked, pointing to the other kidney on the screen. *This is unbelievable…*

Lathe nodded, his eyes wide as he approached the screen. “Yeah, that one's mine… it’s completely healed in place and connected… he grew back his other kidney.” Lathe cringed a bit as he remembered his pieces of kidney floating in jars. *Dammit, that was horrible… and he took part of his liver too, a lot of it… wait.* Lathe looked to his liver. “His liver is the right size, too. He’d had a big piece of it removed, and it was taking it’s time growing back the last I knew…” *...what the actual hell?*

“He grew back his kidney and the rest of his liver, he recovered from pneumonia faster than you can snap your fingers… My God, how does he do it?” Casper ran one hand through his hair, staring at the images in shock. “...Scotty, I heard Lathe say you already had Eren’s blood for testing. You need to have those techs test the shit out of those samples. There is something really weird and slightly scary and miraculous going on and we **need** to know what it is. If whatever you find could be replicated…” Casper’s hands fell to his sides, shaking his head in disbelief and looking to the two of them. “There would be so many people who wouldn't have to suffer or die before their time.”

Scotty looked down at his pager, hearing it go off. “Lathe, can you manage taking him upstairs? … I wanna take Casper down to the lab with me, they got some results.” *I wanna see what the hell is going on for this to happen…*

Lathe nodded, sending Casper a reassuring look before going back to retrieve Eren and wheel him back upstairs. *...I swear to fucking god, if they come back upstairs and Casper looks like he’s gotten his heart smashed and has been crying I'm going to drag Scotty somewhere I can knock some fucking sense into him.* He got Eren back upstairs without incident and into bed with his oxygen, giving him his phone and earbuds while he still scratched out more figures all over his notebook.

Eren looked over to Lathe, moving to try and grab him, but Lathe was too occupied with his notebook. *Why won’t you hold me?* Eren moved the oxygen away from his nose, shifting to swing his legs over the edge of the bed, trying to put his foot down to walk and having it instantly give out. *Fuck…*

Lathe looked up as he saw Eren beginning to stumble from the bed, immediately dropping his notebook and pen to catch him before he hit the floor. “Whoa, chill. You can't just expect to walk like normal-” Lathe lifted him back onto the bed. “After a good two months of not being on your feet at all. ...we probably should get you acquainted with walking again, though. Wanna give it a go?” *I'd be here as your crutch- anything to get you back to how you were before.*
Eren nodded, looking to Lathe with weary eyes. *I wanna try... But it feels really weird. I really wanna stop being a nuisance...*

“Don't you worry- I'm right here.” Lathe brought one of Eren’s arms over his shoulders, his hand supporting Eren’s other side and leaning down a bit so he could step down. He was particularly careful of the cuts on Eren’s body that hadn't healed yet, trying not to hurt him. “Baby steps- go ahead, step down. I'll catch you; don't be afraid to lean on me.” *You've got this.*

Eren nodded, leaning down to step on the floor. He whimpered as he put his full weight on his feet, his hand tightening its grip on Lathe’s shirt. *Why does it still hurt??*

Lathe looked to him, worried as he whimpered. “It’s either the fact the skin on your feet isn't back completely, or it’s the muscle deficiency from not being on them for a solid two months. I'd say the latter. . .look, I'm not going to make you suffer. Up you go-” Lathe lifted him back onto the bed. “…until I get you some morphine so we can work on that and not have it hurt like hell, alright?” Lathe disappeared for not twenty seconds a few feet down the hall until he came back with more morphine, adding some to his IV. “Alright kid, let's try that again.” Lathe held Eren up again, helping him take his first steps in weeks.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Scotty came back upstairs without Casper, and he just shrugged and said he’d gone the other way when they’d gotten off the elevator. It wasn't hard to find him; if you got close enough you could hear the sobbing and the Russian swearing. He was so thoroughly shattered, it took an hour for him to stop crying. I was ready to punch Scotty’s face in after that. But... I didn't. I went back up and somehow saved the yelling until I got him in some random empty break room but he told me what happened and he hadn't been an asshole about it, so I didn't maul him. Surprisingly. I just hope he knows what he’s missing out on and hops off the crazy train the next chance he gets. I reminded him of some stuff- Hopefully it’ll bring him back to his senses. Our new favourite OTP aside, things for the past week having been going... there is no word for it, really. Eren isn't walking right now because we can't have him stumbling and breaking something else while he’s still so fragile, and not all of his cuts are healed yet, so. He’s not in the ICU anymore, which is a good change. He’s still in a private room, but he’s doing somewhat better. Spades managed to get that guy they tracked down to crack, and now they’ve got a few more guys behind bars accountable for some of the stuff that happened in Eren’s case. . .He’s also picked up the odd and frankly creepy habit of licking me and Spades on pretty much any of or exposed skin... I've woken up to him licking my cheek like it's no ones business. ...I swear though, seeing him licking Spades is just fucking weird because he's my son, but at the same time that's my fiancée but I can't just tell him to step off because it's his mom but you don't do that to your mom and it's supposed to be a temporary sensory thing but I would appreciate it being over soon. Although, Scotty had it worse- he bit him again. Thankfully he didn't break the skin, but he bit him nonetheless. No one besides the three of us can get too close to him anymore. . .understandably enough, Casper isn't around in person anymore. He left after that... incident... and read over everything electronically. He sends his notes all the time though. We’re still trying to figure out what the weird readings from the blood tests
mean. ...oh, Eren's off of the feeding tube, and actually eating stuff! ...well, he's still hella picky... and there's plenty he can't have or that isn't right for him... and he might end up pitching all of it back up most of the time and is getting really skinny which isn't too good... but he’s voluntarily eating, so... yay? But it's pretty much official he’s now selectively mute. Can't get a peep out of him no matter how many bad jokes you tell him. ... all things in due time, I suppose.

Eren watched as Scotty came in and gave him another shot of morphine. That... That's like 15 now... That should do it right? It'll help... Dad won’t have to worry about me... And he’ll be able to have his own family....

Lathe was lightly dozing on Eren’s shoulder, it still being very early in the morning, looking up as Scotty came in and lazily waving hello to him, mumbling something about coffee before going to back to sleep. No time like the present to catch up on a few weeks of sleep deprivation....

Eren watched him leave before he moved his arm to let out the kink in his IV, feeling the overly cool liquid enter his system. Good bye, Dad... I’m gonna go be with Mom now....

Lathe was woken with a start after a minute by the blaring machines, looking to the screens and seeing Eren’s heart rate dropping fast. Fuck. Lathe stepped out from under him, hitting the red emergency button to call someone to help, not sure of what to do. He looked up to see Eren completely calm, his expression not changing at all. “Eren?! Eren, are you awake? Eren!” Lathe shook his shoulder, praying that help would arrive. What the fuck am I supposed to do?!

Scotty came in after only a few more seconds, his eyes widened as he saw Eren seemingly peaceful, but the machines screaming as his heart was starting to falter. Shit. He stepped out of the room, screaming down the hall. “SOMEBODY GET ME 15CC’S OF NARCAN!” He immediately ran back into the room and took the IV out of its connection. “He’s overdosing...” How the fuck did that happen? I didn’t give him enough for that.

Lathe tried not to panic, waiting on a nurse to come back with NARCAN. “How the hell could that have happened? You changed the IV just last night, and you only gave him 5ccs today!” This makes no sense...

“No, I didn’t.... I thought you changed it last night....” Oh my god, how much morphine do you have in you? Scotty administered the NARCAN into his system, before yelling at the nurse to give him the whole bottle. “Come on, Eren… Stay with us!” He shouted, trying to get him to wake up. It took two minutes for Scotty to administer over 500cc’s of NARCAN to Eren before his heart rate started to come back to normal... And he sighed in relief as Eren’s eyes snapped open and his gasped for breath. Thank god... That’s way too much morphine for you!
Lathe had a hand over his heart as he sighed in relief, moving back onto the bed next to him and pulling him close, dropping his head onto his shoulder. “Eren…. my god, you scared me… what happened?!” Explain.

Eren looked to everyone with wide eyes, struggling to move away from Lathe. What? I thought I overdosed! I'm not supposed to be alive anymore…what happened is right! Eren kept his lips sealed and never looked into Lathe’s eyes.

... you did this on purpose. Didn't you. “Eren, come on. Stay put, please.” Lathe kept his arms wrapped around Eren’s middle, keeping him close and pecking his temple. “Eren, just tell us… did you do that on purpose?” Lathe offered a hand to him to sign on. Just tell us, please.

Eren looked away, shaking his head and struggling to get out of his grasp and get away. He still refused to talk, and tried to get away. No! You’re gonna hit me! I’m not supposed to be here anymore!

Lathe didn't let go of him still, Eren nowhere near hurting himself by his movements so he kept him in his lap, murmuring soothingly into his ear. “Eren, I'm not mad, I'm not going to hurt you… if that's what you're worried about. I'm just really worried. We both are.” If you tried to do that to yourself… “Now Eren, please tell me…” He held up his hand, open for him to sign on. “Did you do that?”

Eren gave up after a few more moments of struggling, nodding his head with a defeated whimper. He moved to hide his face away from Lathe, starting to cry. He’s probably really mad at me! I’m not supposed to be here! Why the fuck am I here??

...why? We’ve gone this far to help you live, so why do you just… want to give up? Lathe held Eren tightly, trying not to break down as he tried to comfort Eren. “...but why? I didn't think…” I just didn't see it coming… “Eren, talk to me. Help me understand.” Lathe kept his hand outstretched for him.

Eren just shook his head. No... I can’t tell you why… If I Tell you… You’ll hit me! You’ll want to pump me with more drugs... I don’t want to be a science experiment again! I can’t take this anymore! Eren started to cry and whimper without stopping, starting to struggle to break free again. You’ll be mad at me!

...what do I have to do to let you know I’m not mad? That I’m not about to hurt you? That all I want
is for you to be okay physically and psychologically and be happy… I'm always worried that maybe I'm not doing the right things to make you happy. Maybe… you'll tell me? “Eren, I'm sorry… here.” Lathe shifted out from under Eren, though he still sat next to him on the edge of the bed, holding out his hand. “Eren, can you please tell me what it is I need to do to make this right? ...to make you happy again?” I'm at a loss… I don't know what to do or how to do it...

Eren looked down at his own hands as he was let go, before he raised his own palm up to Lathe. I'm sorry, I didn’t… I didn't want you to worry about me… I'm not someone you need to take care of... Why are you worried? I’m sorry I’m still alive...

Lathe ran his hand down Eren’s palm before lacing their fingers. “Eren, don't apologise for making me worry. Me being worried is not the thing you should be worried about. It’s your own self that needs your attention. Look… promise me you won't try that again? There are so many people who would be so broken to see you leave, and you've got so much time ahead of you… you have a boyfriend who wants nothing more than to see you again when he next comes home. Stay with us. Please.” I can't lose you… you're my son... you can't...

Eren swallowed hard, finally looking up to meet Lathe’s eyes with his own broken ones. I... I can’t. Eren pulled his hand back from Lathe’s, moving to start signing on his own for the first time in a week and a half. {I can’t promise anything....} It would be better if I were dead… No one would care... Well, maybe all those men... They wouldn’t care if I was dead or not… They’d still fuck my sorry whore ass...

Lathe tried hard not to cry at Eren’s words, signing back. {Eren, I don't know what has put the idea in your head that maybe you'd be better off… gone, but it’s nothing further from the truth. We all want you to be okay, and that includes being okay with…. well, being. We want to help you. But you have to let us. ...I'm just going to say for right now that you have a family that loves you to bits, and you have friends who are waiting at home for you to come back and be yourself again, or are the people who've been working so hard for you to get better and piece you back together.} Lathe looked over to Scotty, swallowing hard as he looked back to Eren. {I want you to really think about that… and try to believe it. Because it's true.}

Eren could only shake his head. {I can’t do this Lathe… I can’t live with the thought that I've been raped by more than 50 men! Multiple times over! And that Levi is only gonna hate me now! How can he even consider touching me ever again? Especially after what happened to me, how can I even trust him after what he did to me! He said he’s never gonna love me again… Why would I want to live knowing he’s gonna hate me for the rest of my life?} Eren simply broke down, his hands coming to hide his face as he cried. No one… No one will what a broken piece of shit like me...

Lathe couldn't sign back as Eren wasn't looking at him, trying to steel himself after a moment to speak, the only sound he made a broken noise, immediately closing his mouth and burying his own
face in his hands, trying to keep from sobbing in shock and worry, in frustration and overwhelming sadness. *We’re back at square one… you’ve gone from defending the honour of your mother with your fists at the dinner table to doubting your worth anything in the eyes of Levi who loves you… I… I don’t know if I’m capable of getting you back up from there… I… I don’t think I can. …you don’t want me comforting you, you’ve made it obvious with your trying to shove me away…* Lathe stood, leaving their room at a quick pace and heading back to Scotty’s office trying to hold it together so he could at least be a wreck in peace. *…I can’t do it… I can’t…*

Scotty watched Lathe leave in a hurry, worry and concern lacing his features. *I need to talk to him.* “Jackie… Come in here and watch Eren so that I can talk to his father.” It was only a moment until he was following Lathe to his office. *We can’t have him trying again.*

Lathe had made it to his office and shut the door before he finally let out a ragged sob, leaning back against the door and sliding to the floor, curling into himself and letting misery wash over him. *…I can’t do this… I… I failed… I’ve already lost him… I’d lost him from the second he woke up… I was too dumb to read the signs… and… it’s over…* His head shot up as he heard a knock on the door behind him, weakly trying to brace against the door. “D-don’t come i-in…” *I can’t deal with anyone… I can barely deal with myself now…*

Scotty sighed, moving the door and shutting it behind him. “Lathe… If you leave him right now…” He sighed, moving to sit down with him. “Come here…” He opened his arms and pulled Lathe into them. *You need someone to support you too… And Spades isn’t here right now…*

Lathe let Scotty pull him close, trying to sound coherent through his sobbing. “S-Scotty… it was h-hard enough the f-first time… it’s even w-worse this t-time around… it’s n-not that I d-don’t w-want to help… I d-don’t t-think I can. I-I’ve given everything I c-could… I d-don’t know w-what e-else to d- do … I didn’t r-read the signs… I had o-one job as his Dad, to keep h-him s-safe… Scotty, I fucked up… I c-can’t do it…”

Scotty held Lathe close. “No… Lathe, you can do it, trust me… You have Spades to help you this time around, and you know what sets him off… And you know what happened to him so you can be there for him to talk. I think he just needs to let it out… He needs to be able to do it… He needs to be able to talk to you, I’m sure that if you try and open up to him again, that he’ll open back up to you…” Scotty held him closer, carding a hand through Lathe’s long hair. “You can’t leave him…why don’t we go down to sit with Eren and keep him company?” *I need to get you to do something… And I need to call Spades… She needs to come here…*

“S-Scotty… S-Spades… she’s gone from before I w-wake up to dinner or when we’re asleep… s-she n- never gets days o-off… and if s-she does, she’s on call a-and h-has to go half the time… I h-haven’t b-barely j-just talked to h-her lately… I’m b-by m-myself…” Tears streamed down Lathe’s face, not even trying anymore to stop them. “W-when w-were… we were supposed t-to get married… a-and… I barely t-talk to h-her… with everything that h-happened… and she’s so b-
busy, I… I d-don't w- want to l-leave him, b-but… I can't even help m- myself anymore… I'll just b-break down more… I d-don't want t-to m-make him g-guilty…” … I want Spades back… I miss you and I love you and I can't do this alone and I'm alone...

Scotty nodded. “Alright… I’m gonna call Spades…. And I’m gonna go down and talk with Eren… Do you think you want to come with me? Or do you want to stay here?” His voice was quiet, his arms still wrapped around Lathe, holding him close. I think I might know what you're going through… But not nearly as much.

Lathe shook his head. “T-thanks… a-and… I would put b-be able to k-keep it t-together… I-I'm sorry…” Two minutes of talking, and… my composure would go out the window...

Scotty nodded, moving Lathe over to his cot in the corner. He kissed Lathe’s forehead. “I’m gonna go call her…” I need to talk to her too, tell her what happened.Scotty went out to the hallway and pulled out his phone to call Spades, waiting for her to pick up. Come on… Pick up.

Spades searched for her cellphone amidst her desk of paperwork, finding it and looking at the ID with worry, answering. “Hey Scotty. Did something happen?”

“Yeah…. We just officially put Eren on suicide watch… But… I need you to drop everything, give Dave the reins for a week or so… And come help Lathe, he needs you. He needs you now, he doesn’t believe that you two can get Eren’s trust back…” Scotty tried to steel himself as much as possible. I can’t cry… I can’t, I gotta go talk to Eren about it… Fuck.

... oh my god. “Are you… oh my god… but…” Spades looked around her to the piles of work still unfinished. ... how the hell do I drop all of this, though? For so long? “Scotty, is Lathe at least somewhat holding up?”

Scotty shook his head, the tears prickling in his eyes. “Not even slightly… He broke down the instant Eren admitted to attempting suicide… And gave him the reason for it…” I don't blame him at all. “You need to come for the both of them… This is your future husband and your son we’re talking about!”

...he’s right. “...Scotty, I'll be there as soon as I can. Don't worry.” She ended the call, going to tell Dave the new plan and abandoning her work to change and make the drive to Wichita.

Scotty rubbed away his tears as Spades hung up, taking a deep breath before heading up to Eren’s room again, dismissing the nurse attending him and pulling up a chair next to him. He sat down, doing his best to seem neutral. “Eren, I need to ask you some questions, okay?” He watched as Eren
picked at the thin sheet, and shrugged after a moment. “Will you be completely honest with me?”

Eren looked over to him before he nodded, still picking at the thin sheets that covered his crossed legs. I guess I can be honest with him…. It’s not like he can do any worse to me than what’s already happened.

He’s acknowledging my existence. That’s better than not. “Do you want to talk about it?”

…. Can I trust you? I mean…. I don’t really know if you’d want to hear about it. {No…. I don’t want to yet…}

…at least there’s a ‘yet’ in there. Even so, I’ve got to keep going. “Why did you feel the need to leave?”

Eren swallowed hard and looked down at his hands, his eyes tracing up his scarred tattoo. … He’s going to ask more questions…. Isn’t he? {Why would someone want a broken whore like me?} that’s really the question right now… Isn’t it. {Even Levi said he’s never going to love me again… And he beat me too, and he laughed… And watched as the other men raped me…}

That… how can you call yourself that? And the thing with Levi… that was a hallucination. “Eren, Levi was miles and miles away when that happened. It was a hallucination induced by the drugs you were given. Anything you think he did with those other men didn't happen.” …you’re not going to easily believe anything we tell you… “Eren… Do you still want to live with Lathe and Spades?”

Eren’s eyes grew somber as he thought about Lathe and Spades. They probably don’t want me around anymore. {What day is today?} I don’t even know what day it is….

“It’s September the 15th. It's Friday.” That’s a non-sequitur if I ever saw one… and you look as if you don’t want to think about them at all… you probably think, with Lathe leaving like that… he doesn't want you. “Eren, it’s not a question of if they’d want you to live with them. I’m asking what you want. Do you still want to live with them?”

Eren’s brow furrowed further, his hands moving quickly. Wait…. Oh god… Please don’t tell me… {Did…. Did they get married?} They put so much time and effort into that… Oh my god… I wish I was dead… They would’ve been able to get married…. What happens if they’re not gonna get married because of me?
Scotty shook his head. “Eren, they put everything off when they knew you needed the most of their attention. Everything’s postponed right now until you're better and everything settles down again.” Scotty watched as Eren’s face washed over with guilt. “Eren, don't feel guilty about it- nothing that happened was your fault. You couldn't control any of it. You're their son- they didn't want to get married knowing that you were somewhere else, in pain and alone… not even woken up yet. They wanted you to be there. And you can postpone a wedding. You can't as easily put off taking care of someone who needs it.” All that time went into making medicine and researching like hell instead. ...Well-spent time. “They loved you enough to put you before them. So Eren, one more time, and please be honest- do you still want to live with them?”

Eren had started crying again as Scotty spoke. They gave up so much.... And I’m not worth it. {I really shouldn’t… I don’t want to put the stress of me living with them on them…. I can’t do that to them, not with how much I’ve already messed with their lives.} Eren tried to stop his crying, wiping away at his tears. I can’t do that to Dad anymore...

You feel like a burden to them. They've given so much... I can understand feeling like that. “Do you want to start going to therapy?” It'd really help, I think.

... Therapy... {Isn’t that was this is right now?} Aren’t you just trying to get me to spill?

“Eren, I'm no therapist… a therapist could do a lot more good for you in this department than I can. Honestly, I think I'm just doing interrogation. It’s much different. But would you be open to it?” I'm not the one fit to do that job… I'm a surgeon, dammit, not a psychologist! And apparently one with sub-par social skills...

Eren only nodded. I think I could manage that.... But I don’t know if I’d trust them enough not to tell anyone.

Good- a step in the right direction. “Do you want me to call someone for you to talk to? Anyone.”

{Can you call Mom?}

...Spades, I hope you can get plenty of time off… there are a lot of things we need you here for. “I'll call her- and she’s coming to be here later today, too. She took time off.” Scotty pulled out his cell phone, dialling Spades’ number and handing it to Eren. She should pick up- it hasn't been too long, so she’s probably getting things together still.
Spades looked at her cell phone, halfway through packing up a small duffel bag to bring with her to Wichita. Scotty again? She answered. “Hey Scotty- you just called, did something else happen?”

_Do I need to worry even more now?

“.... M….m-.... M-mom?” Eren’s voice was hoarse as he struggled to speak for the first time in well over three months. God... My voice sounds horrible...

Spades stopped dead in her tracks, dropping the shirt in her hand. ...Eren. “Oh my god, Eren Honey… Eren we’re all so worried about you… how are you feeling?” You haven't said anything to anyone really since... since two weeks ago... And that was only two words...

Eren coughed a bit, trying to clear his throat. “I…. I’m…. I’m s-scared.....” I’m so afraid.... Why isn’t Dad here? I don’t want to be a burden... But I’m all alone...

“Eren Hon, don't be scared- you've got Scotty and Lathe there and there are so many people trying to help you… I'm getting ready as we speak to come down there. It’s okay, really.”

Eren shook his head, holding the phone closer to his ear. “M-mom…. I… I… I don’t… w-want to b-be an experi...ment…” Eren’s voice was starting to get stronger the more he spoke. I'm scared they're gonna open me up again... Like Grisha said they would...

...I get it... it's weird having Scotty going from overboard about figuring it what makes your body heal so fast to being your primary source of care there... and you don't know really any of the other doctors or nurses... “Eren, the doctors there can't do anything to you without it being absolutely necessary or admitted by you. They can't try to pull anything without you giving them the OK. We’re not going to let you become another experiment- that'd be cruel. You'll be okay- you're in good hands.” ...you really are.

“... H-he gave me… He gave me s-something… And He swore that I’d a-always be an... experiment… He did something to me… And I can’t get it out… It keeps making my nose bleed....” Eren started to cry all over again as he started to remember Grisha pinning him down and injecting something into his system. I don’t like it... He said I was gonna be cut open for the rest of my life....

That doesn't sound like Scotty...it must be... “Eren, I…” Grisha gave him whatever it is that's healing him? It's not some gene, but something that can be replicated and given? “Eren, you don't have to worry. He’s gone, never coming back… but whatever he gave you is the thing that's piecing you back together. But we’re not going to treat you like some experiment.... you're my son ! We don't want you to be miserable or treated like you're less than human. It might make your nose
bleed, and the fact that He gave it to you is scary... but it’s doing great things for you and you shouldn't want it to go away.”...it's ironic, isn't it.

Lathe’s hands holding a notebook he had found shook as he stood outside of the door, not seeing the scribbles on the paper as he listened to Eren speaking. He’s... he’s talking again... he’s really talking...

“M-Mom…?” Eren’s voice was really quiet as he fiddled with the sheets over his legs. I.... I want it....

“Yes, Honey? You can ask me anything. Go ahead.” Her voice was soft, gently coaxing him to speak. It's okay.

Eren coughed a bit more, clearing out his throat again. “C-can I have mac’ n’ cheese?”

Oh my god. We never gave you any, we were scared it would set you off... “...how about I bring you some when I come around, okay?” Of course you can.

Lathe’s eyes widened, looking up and finally pushing the door open, timidly stepping into the room, his voice quiet and willing himself to smile faintly. “...do you want me to get you some?” It's good... you're talking... and I thought just the idea of mac n cheese scared you... maybe we can get somewhere...

Eren looked up from where his eyes were on the blanket, seeing Lathe, his eyes widening. He pulled the phone away from his face and put it down by the edge of the bed, moving away from it and moving to curl up into a ball. Mommy’s gonna come... But I don’t want them to cut me open before that....

Lathe stopped, his facade cracking as Eren curled into himself. ...w-what did I... I messed it up... he was doing great and... I came and messed it all up... you don't want to talk to me... You'd rather talk to her than me.... “I-I....” Lathe looked helplessly between Eren and Scotty, dropping his notes and fleeing, his head in his hands. I've been here this whole time... and you're not talking to me, but to Spades.... you've talked to her more than I have at this rate... Lathe shut the door behind him, trying to hide from everything and hiding under the desk, his legs pulled close to his chest and his head on his knees, crying. ...do either of you even love me anymore....?

Scotty got up, taking the phone. “Spades...” Scotty paused as he picked up Lathe’s notes, looking
over the list. Well, we could try those. “I’m gonna take my phone over to Lathe, he ran to my office again, I’m putting someone in charge of Eren for a few minutes hold on.” Scotty took three minutes until he was in his office again and moving to sit down near his desk. “Lathe… Spades is still on the phone…. I think you guys should talk.” I hope so, because I know Eren can’t sleep without you beside him… And I think the only reason he opened up to Spades… Is that she’s not here… He can’t see her face… And I think facial expressions are getting at him between the two of you… If you stayed to look at his face… He looked so guilty… I bet he’s still thinking about how you guys couldn’t get married because of him.

Lathe looked at him with glassy eyes, nodding and talking the phone from him, holding it his ear and trying to speak somewhat clearly. “S-Spades?” Are you really there?

“Hey Lathe… Talk to me, I know you need to, I’m on my way to come up, okay? I’m gonna put you on speaker while I finish packing a bag.” I missed your voice… I wish I had time to call you at work, I would give anything to be with you two more.

...You're always doing something else… “S-Spades, I… I miss you… y-you're n-never around h- here… and n-not j-just here, but even at h-home you're g-gone before I w-wake up and sometimes d-don't come h-home until w-we’re asleep… I h-haven't just t-talked to you in so l-long, a-and… and E-Eren t-talked to y-you and I h-haven't gotten a w-word out of h-him… a-and I don't k-know if… if y-you or even h-he…” He swallowed hard, his voice tiny. “...I don’t know if you love me anymore.” He shook his head, trying not to bawl. “I’ve h-had to be strong f-for the b-both of us and there’s n-nothing really for me to l-lean on, and I… I’m r-running out of h-hope… I-I’m alone and my head h-hurts from doing n-nothing but th-thinking of what to d-do or g-give h-him and I c-can't sleep and I’m never h-hungry anymore and I’m really, really l-lonely… I just w-want you to b-be here… p-please…” I miss you… I need someone to hold onto me for once...

Spades had stopped what she had been doing after the first sentence was out of his mouth. Oh my god… What have I done? “Lathe… I’ll be there as soon as I can… Around two hours okay? And I took the whole month off, so I’ll be right there with you, alright?” She took a deep breath, trying not to cry herself. “I… I didn’t mean to push everything on you, and I don't want to make any excuses… But… Lathe, never think that I don’t love you… I love you more than I could ever love someone else. I care about you just as much as you care about me. We’re making some big changes… And I’ve been working on getting Eren’s rapists behind bars… Just stay strong for two hours… I’ll be there in two hours and then we can all talk together… does that sound okay?” I really hope you’ll understand, I’m coming, I need to hold onto you too.

A month… but life is longer than a month… then it'd just be me again… “Two hours… okay…” ... I don't want you to just go back to never being around after the month is over… “...we still n-need to talk w-when you get h-here, yeah…” I’ve never said anything… I need to... “...I can hold on for two h-hours… I’ll s-see you t-then… I l-love you…” More than anything....
“I love you too, Lathe.” She hung up, quickly getting Salem over to Armin’s and then racing as quickly as she could to the hospital.

Scotty sat there with him, watching them talk. Well, I can understand everything that he says... but I hope that I can give him some relief. “So... I was talking with Eren like I’m supposed to, and I think I might know why he won’t talk to you. He didn’t talk to me… He only talked on the phone.” He feels so guilty...

“B-Because we w-were actually t-there?” Lathe handed him his phone back. So it wasn't just me...?

Scotty nodded, taking his phone back. “Do you want me to call you while I’m with him in the room? You can stay here… I know he feels really guilty about you guys not getting married because of him.” The expression he had on his face after you ran… It gave everything away.

Lathe nodded. “...please… I want to a-actually talk w-with him…” We need to clear some things up...

Scotty nodded. “Alright, I’ll call you in a second… Just know that Spades knows where you are so if you wanna stay here, you're more than welcome to.” I know you’ll probably wanna stay in the same room for awhile.

Lathe nodded, fishing his phone out of his pocket. “Yeah, thanks... I'll just stay here for now…” Lathe stared at his phone as Scotty left, answering it the second it rang not five minutes later. “...Hey Eren… how are you holding up right now? Please… talk to me.” I know I stormed out… I don’t know what could possibly be going through your head?

“... I-I… I’m sorry, Dad..” Eren’s voice was still very hoarse as he spoke. I still sound horrible...

“...Eren, you don't have to apologise for anything… if anything, I'm sorry… I got frustrated, and stormed out… I'm just really worried about you. Just…. Could you tell me why?” Why'd you try to leave?

Eren let out a breathy sob, trying to regain his composure. “I… I didn’t want to be an experiment… He told me that I would be cut open for the rest of my life… And I don’t want that anymore… He gave me something… And it makes my nose bleed a lot... Daddy… I’m so scared… I don’t want to be...” Are you gonna keep me as an experiment?
The thing that heals you… Grisha gave you? “Eren, we’re not going to let you be a science experiment… it wouldn't be right to do things you didn't want that weren't necessary. If anyone tried that, you know I'd have their head.” Lathe weakly chuckled. “You… you don't have to be scared. He’s gone, and Scotty and Spades, Blake and I are going to keep you safe. You're my son, Eren. I'd do anything for you.” Really. ...even though I might not think I'm all that great at it.

Eren sniffled a bit, shifting in his bed. “You… You’re not mad… That you couldn’t marry mom… Because of me?” I ruined everything for you… And everyone had plane tickets and everything... I wonder if they came just to look at my body and wish I was dead? “Are your friends mad at me?”

Lathe shook his head, his tears somewhat subsiding. “Eren, how could I be mad? What happened wasn't your fault. And everyone we told when we had to announce it was being put on hold understood immediately- that you being okay was more important than us getting married. It’s okay.” They were all really cool about it.

Eren sniffled as he held the phone. “Scotty said that… That I was hallucinating… Is that true?” I wanna know… Cause it felt so real… And it was so horrifying ...

Lathe nodded, sniffing and clearing his throat. “Yeah, you were. You were, uhm… given a sedative that isn't supposed to be used on people. It makes you hallucinate. T-that's why you… why you thought Levi was there… but he, well, he wasn't. He was miles and miles away.”

Eren seemed to calm down a lot after Lathe told him that. “I um… I… I don’t… I didn’t want to tell you… I was scared He was gonna kill you… I’m sorry Lathe… I’m sorry about everything.”

“Eren, that’s okay… do you want to talk about it?” I know it's hard… but you need to do something with it other than keep it to just yourself.

Eren thought about it for awhile before he made a soft noise of affirmation. Yeah… “He… I came home after my exams… And he broke in, cause the lock didn’t work in the apartment… And he hit the back of my head with something… He beat me, and he screamed at me for the next three days… But he only beat me where you wouldn’t be able to see it… He knew I had to go record on Monday… He told me if I said anything to you that he was gonna kill you… And… And… And……” Eren trailed off as he started to sob all over again. I didn't want you to die...

I knew something was wrong when you came to record that day… “Eren, if you'd spoken up we could've gotten out of there before anybody knew anything… I know we can't go back and change
anything, so don't feel guilty thinking you could have done something different... but you should have said something when I asked if you were okay... I went to hug you and you winced and moved away from me... but, thank you... you didn't want to risk getting me hurt... I understand. It's okay, you don't have to cry... you can keep going if you want..."

"I tried telling Levi... With the playlists... And... And the text... Grisha took my phone away from me... And he locked Blake in a cage... I couldn't let him out... He was stuck in there for so long..." Eren paused to try and wipe away his tears. "W-when I got back home... He... He pinned me to the kitchen table and he got out a knife... He cut my back open... And started to carve everywhere all over me... But then he got out the syringes... And he started injecting something into me... And he beat me to make sure he broke a rib... He kept putting that clear liquid into me until my nose bled... he kept beating me... And he tried to drown me in the bath tub too. He... He... He made sure that I was always naked, and he made me sleep on the floor... And he... He kept doing it... For days... He broke almost everything... And my nose kept bleeding even though it wasn't broken." Eren sniffled again, trying not to cry. "He did that for a few days before they all came... And they made me drink whole bottles of alcohol... Multiple times over... And they gave me drugs... They beat me too, and they fought over who was gonna rape me next... They gagged me... So I wouldn't make any noises... And they kept going one after another... I didn't get to rest for days... I passed out multiple times... And I know I had seizures... I'm still drooling from them..." Eren paused to sniffle again and struggle to compose himself. "Soon Levi was there too, but I guess that was just the drugs making me think he was there... When they got tired of me, the pulled out the knives... And tied me to the kitchen table... And they had their fun carving whatever they wanted into my skin... They cut off part of my ears... and they laughed about it... But what really hurt... Was that he got a blowtorch... And he burned everything on me... He did it multiple times... And..." Eren started to cry all over again, moving to curl up to himself. *It hurt so much.... I don't want to go near one of those again....*

...oh my god, Eren... "Eren... words can't... there aren't any for how horrible that must have been... But you were very smart, trying to use the titles of the songs, and texting Levi... I'm proud of you for that. But it's okay now, it's all over... you know, Spades told me that they've been finding a lot of the men you drew pictures of. They're admitting guilt and getting locked away... I'm really proud of you both for drawing those pictures, and for telling me this. It's important that we know. And it's okay, you can take your time... take all the time you need, I'm not going anywhere."

"He made me... Tell him when Levi was coming home... He was gonna kill me before Levi came home... And I couldn't do anything but lie to you and... And Armin... Cause that was the only thing I could do... I was hoping that maybe you guys would figure it out... But, I couldn't say more than that.. He would've killed us all..." Eren curled up into a smaller ball, starting to violently sob.

*I can't just let him cry like that...* Lathe got out his hiding under the desk, beginning to walk back up to the room. "Eren. I'm so, so sorry we didn't figure it out in time... you did an amazing job trying to tell us, you did well, but we just didn't get it in time. I'm really sorry for that. It's okay, it's okay..." Lathe took the stairs two at a time going back to Eren’s room, stopping himself from
bursting in and lightly knocking on the door before slowly opening it, poking in his head and
looking over to Eren curled into himself. Oh no… Lathe’s voice was small and soft, stepping in and
closing the door quietly behind him. “Eren…” Lathe ended the call, walking across the room to sit
on the bed next to Eren, pulling him into his lap and carding a hand through his hair, trying to calm
him. It’s over now… you’re safe.

Eren looked up to him with puffy eyes and he instantly grabbed onto Lathe’s shirt and started to cry
into his chest. “I’m… I’m so sorry…” Eren sobbed as he spoke, sniffling to try and calm down but
only to break out into tears again.

It’s so nice to really hear your voice again… “It’s okay, Eren… It’s all alright… It’s over, and
nobody’s mad, and we’re just going to focus on you getting better.” Right now… that’s all that
matters.

Eren nodded and stayed curled up in Lathe’s arms, his crying subsiding after a good while and he
was given a bit more NARCAN to keep his overdose from acting up. Scotty said he could sleep
but he would wake him up when Spades got to the hospital. I wanna sleep. Eren closed his eyes
and fell asleep in Lathe’s arms.

Lathe gently rocked Eren in his sleep, resting his heron top of his and tiredly trying to process
everything, worn out from everything that had transpired in seemingly so little time. [Did you get
the list I dropped earlier?] Lathe tiredly mumbled to Scotty, waving his hand at him after he
nodded. [I couldn't remember everything he was on… just give him whatever doesn't interact with
anything besides the PTSD stuff, which I already checked for…] …Too many medicines to keep
track of… too many numbers… ugh….

Scotty nodded looking at the list again, crossing off one as he looked up the ingredients. [This one
he can’t have… But the rest of them we can try…] I don’t see a problem with the other ones.
[Spades is bringing Mac N’ Cheese for him?] I thought he can’t have that?

Lathe nodded. [I’m surprised he asked for it… do you know what happened when he was, like,
eight?] He watched as Scotty shook his head, sighing quietly and closing his eyes tiredly,
explaining. [When he was little he wanted to have mac and cheese but his mother said he couldn’t.
So of course, he went ahead and tried to make it, but the stove was gas and had an exposed flame.
The macaroni went in the pot without water, the empty box fell into the flame… and we all know
how that ended.] Lathe looked up to him again. [We never gave it to him because we didn’t want to
set him off. But he asked, so… he can have it.]

Scotty nodded. [I can only imagine what must be going through his head…. But do you feel better
after talking to him?] I really hope you do...
Lathe nodded, looking down to Eren’s peaceful expression as he slept, letting out a heavy sigh. [I think… actually talking to him… we need to really open him up and let him know he can talk to us… just, hearing nothing and having to guess at what was bugging him if ever something happened, having to guess at when he might be in pain or bored or sleepy or hungry… that was the hard part. I…] Lathe tried to keep from starting to cry again. [I just hope he can start to tell us what's wrong so we know what needs fixing…] Then we can actually fix things.

Scotty nodded, humming as he texted Casper about the anti-depressants. When he got a text from Spades he got up to go get her, smiling as he saw the large container with mac’n’cheese in it. She’ll really go all out for the both of them. “They're in Eren’s room…”

Spades nodded and followed Scotty up to Eren’s room, smiling softly as she saw Eren curled up to Lathe. [How is he?] He tried to kill himself earlier today… I can only imagine how much that had to bother you… And I should’ve been here from the start.

Lathe looked up from Eren, swallowing hard as he saw her and reaching out an arm for her. [He and I talked… he’s okay right now. We're going to get him help.] We know more now- and now we can really help.

Spades nodded, moving to go sit beside him, setting the dish on the side table. [I brought all the syringes that we found at the scene… You think one of them has the residue of whatever Grisha gave him?] I have all 136 of them.

Lathe pulled Spades close, his arm wrapped around her middle and resting his head against her shoulder. [Spades, I can't believe I didn't think to ask. There's got to be something left in them that'll tell us what made Eren’s body heal so well. Thank you…] Lathe leaned up to peck her cheek, steeling himself to ask. [...] I'm not going to dance around it… after the month is over… is it going to go back to it just being me? You'll go back to your long hours, I'll still be the only one home most of the time? Because… I don't know if I want it to… I'm sorry if that's selfish, but… I hadn't seen you much before, and lately I haven't really at all… and I don't want to go back to that…] I miss you so much… you're home for dinner, and then sleep… but that's always it. Never really any time off… and I've put up with it...

Spades shook her head. “I talked with a lot of people over the phone, I’m gonna step down after this… And I’ll be home a lot more… I’ll still be commissioner, but Dave is gonna do it with me…” I won’t be alone, so I can go home whenever I need to...

...Dave is my new favourite person right now, present company excluded. Lathe smiled, feeling like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. [Thanks…] I won’t be all alone anymore.
Eren looked around as he woke up, seeing Spades and Lathe in each other’s arms. He nuzzled his face further into Lathe’s chest and whimpered a bit as he shifted his legs out from under him. *Still fucking hurts to use them a lot.*

Lathe immediately looked back to Eren as he whimpered, concerned. “Is it your legs?” He watched as Eren nodded. “Yeah, it's going to take a while for you to use them again like normal- you've lost a lot of muscle tissue in three months of no use. It'll come back though, with practice walking and stuff.” *We'll get there.* Lathe quirked an eyebrow as Eren brought his head up, his eyes widening as Eren licked his cheek, though he just assumed a done expression. “...well, this is a thing again.” Lathe stated to nobody in particular, looking over to Spades and quirking an eyebrow in amusement as her gaze went between Lathe and Eren incredulously. *Yup. Welcome to my life for the past three months.*

Spades looked at him. “Has this been happening the whole time?” She stared at Lathe, looking for an answer. *Has this really been happening the whole time?* She barely noticed Eren shift to her and lick her cheek as well, her own eyes widened. “Eren!” What she didn’t expect was how Eren reacted to that.

Eren shifted away from both of them immediately, moving far away from both of them and moving off of the bed, and surprisingly able to keep his legs steady. He made sure to keep his front to them, and his eyes staring at them. *Do they want to hurt me? Did I do something wrong?*

*Dammit.* Lathe held up his hands in a gesture of surrender, slowly moving off of the bed after him. “Hey Eren, it’s okay, you didn’t do anything. Spades was just really surprised, she didn't expect you to do that. It’s okay, really. Come back up with us, please. We don’t want you stumbling and getting hurt.” *She was shocked, that's all it was.* Lathe held out his hands to Eren, offering them for him to come back onto the bed.

Eren watched Lathe move around and moved to grab his hands and move back up onto the bed with them. *What’s Mom holding?* Eren looked at her warily, seeing the container she held. *What’s that?*

Spades smiled softly, opening it up, and giving him a fork. “I got you some Mac’n’cheese.” Her voice was soft, leaning her head against Lathe’s shoulder as Eren shifted. *He’s just watching it.... Is he gonna eat it?*

Lathe watched as Eren studied the noodles, addressing Spades. [Yeah… if it's not some medical calamity Eren licking me is my alarm clock. It's a sensory thing. It won't happen forever.] *That's a thing that occurs.* “…are you going to eat it Eren? Or keep staring at it until it moves? Which it
isn't going to do, I'm joking.” Lathe immediately corrected himself when Eren seemed to tense a bit. *No figures of speech right now- just let him ponder the macaroni for now.*

Eren looked at it for a long time before he stabbed at it with the fork. *It’s…* *It looks like Carla made it…* Eren lifted the fork to his mouth, and just a let the tears prickle at his eyes. *I miss mom…* He started to eat the macaroni with vigor, a soft smile on his face.

Spades smiled softly. [At least he likes it… you think he’ll be able to hold it down?] *I really hope so… He looks like he does…* Spades gently wrapped her arm around one of Lathe’s arms. *I missed cuddling with you…*

[I hope so.] Lathe gently patted Eren’s shoulder. “Don’t eat that too fast, kid. You want to keep it down.” *You're getting really skinny as is- we can't have you getting much thinner.* Lathe sighed and leaned against Spades, shutting his eyes and resting his head on her shoulder. …*I missed having you to hold onto… to hold onto me…* [Did you call around for a hotel yet? It’s getting later in the day, and you’d want one closeby.] *After Levi left, we didn't see the point in keeping one available.*

Spades nodded. [Yeah, I did, are you gonna come and stay with me tonight?] She asked him quietly. *I really want to hold you tonight… And maybe a few other things.*

Eren slowed down at the macaroni, but he looked up at their conversation with confused eyes. *What are they talking about?*

[...I want to… here, I dunno if Eren’ll feel okay alone for the night- that hasn't happened while he was awake at all this entire time.] Lathe looked to Eren, smiling sheepishly at confused look. “Sorry about that- is it alright if you sleep by yourself tonight?” *I want Spades to myself for at least tonight…*

Eren stopped eating and put his fork down. “Y-yeah… I can sleep alone…” Eren told him quietly, a soft smile on his face, though it didn't really follow through to his eyes. *I can make it… They don’t need to worry about me…*

“Thanks kid.” Lathe pecked his forehead. “You’ll have me back tomorrow, though. Don't worry.” *But you'll be okay. Scotty's going to be around, pop in occasionally. You'll be fine.* [Thats a yes, then.] Lathe smiled to Spades. *Yay… sleeping in a bed… an actual shower… other things in those places… dammit Lathe, she’s here for five goddamn minutes and look where your mind went.* …yep. Of course.
Eren nodded. *I can sleep the whole day tomorrow... so I can stay up tonight... I won't be able to sleep without someone holding onto me.* He held out the almost empty container to Lathe. *I can't eat anymore...*

Spades smiled softly. “Thank you Eren, really, thank you.” She took the container from him and set it aside, moving to Eren’s other side and letting him get close. *He’s still pretty quiet... But he’s talking... That’s good.*

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, the three of them quietly chatting on the bed and Eren speaking up occasionally, Spades eventually picking up one of Lathe’s notebooks and starting a game of hangman between the three of them to pass time. Lathe had an arm wound around either of them, leaning his head on Spades’ shoulder. It was around six thirty when Lathe looked up to the clock, noting the time. [*Should we maybe get going? It’s going to get dark soon.*] *We both need food, I need a shower... and there'll be plenty of time for sleep among other things...*

Spades nodded, looking over to where Eren was doodling a bit on the notebook. *“Eren we’re gonna get going... Alright?”* She watched him look up at the two of them with somewhat guilty eyes. *Is he gonna be okay?*

Eren swallowed hard and nodded. *“O-okay... That’s... That’s fine...”* Eren told them, looking away and back at the notebook. *Are they gonna come back? They’re gonna come back, right?*

Lathe gently slid out from under Eren,, pressing a kiss to his temple. “Thanks, Eren... we’ll be back in the morning. Promise. You'll be okay for the night.” He thought about bringing his bags, deciding against it and leaving the laptop bag within Eren’s reach. *“My laptop and all the sharpies and music stuff is in here if you want it, but try to sleep, okay? We’ll see you tomorrow.”* Lathe ruffled his hair, waving goodbye to Scotty on their way out, his arm around Spades’ waist. *I have you back... mine.* “So, what are we doing about food? Any ideas?”

“Well, Macaroni Grill was good the last time we had it. Wanna go there?” She asked quietly to him, leaning into his side. *I don’t mind... Whatever is fine.*

Scotty shuffled some of his papers together after Lathe and Spades left, picking up his notes and double checking the screens of the monitors around Eren, looking back to him as he seemed to begin to panic, setting down his papers and immediately going to try and calm him down. *Fuck.* *...do I need to get those two back here?* “Eren, it’s okay, don’t worry, you don’t have anything to panic about... I-it’s fine, really...” *dammit...*

Eren looked to Scotty, curling up a bit, a hand going out to grab his shirt sleeve. *“I... I-I... I’m*
Scotty sighed, giving him a weak smile. “It’s fine, really…” He gently tried to pull his arm away, stopping when Eren clung tighter to his sleeve, sighing. “You didn't want them to leave, did you? But you knew they wanted to be with just each other, so you let them go?” I’m starting to get how your mind works..

Eren nodded, holding onto Scotty’s shirt before he realized he was holding on, letting go when he realised it. “S-sorry…” He looked down, his hands shaking in his lap. “I-I… I’m sorry…”

...you should. It's what you should do. Scotty sighed, patting his shoulder gently. “…would it make you feel better if I slept with you?” Who knows–maybe you’ll get more than two hours for the first time all month! ….well… second… cr–

Eren looked up to Scotty with shock, his hands stopped their shaking before they started up again. “N-no… It’s okay… You don’t have to…” It’s okay… Really. You don’t have to...

Scotty sighed. You’re not going to admit that you want anything, are you. So, you know what? “Then let me put it this way: I’d like to. May I?” Just say yes to what you want when it’s offered. It’s not being a burden if I’m offering to do it anyway!

He… He wants to? “O-okay…” That works… I guess, if you want to…

There we go. Scotty shed his lab coat, leaving it on a chair before climbing up next to Eren, not sure what to do besides simply lay next to him. His question was soon answered as Eren curled up to him, letting him lay half on top of him and wrapping his arms around him, his head dropping back against the pillow. ...I don't know how well I'm going to sleep… I... I still don't know if what I did was the right thing… but I don't know who to talk to about it who isn't seriously biased… Scotty glanced down to Eren as he fiddled with a button on his shirt. ...if anyone, he’d be one to talk to… but how do I ask? Maybe I should just… ask. Go for it. “Uhm… Eren? Is it okay if I ask you some stuff?” I need answers...

Eren looked up from Scotty’s chest. … I could do that. “Y-yeah…” His voice was quiet, his forehead buried into Scotty’s chest. What are you gonna ask?

“...how did you figure out you were gay?” …because right now I'm not sure what the fuck I am...
“Well… Girls were… They were always mean to me… And I never liked any of them… Cause I was… I was afraid that they would all turn out like… Like my mom… And I didn’t want to lose anyone, I just kinda… Started liking guys more… They gave me attention… For all the wrong reasons… But I was noticed…” It was really… Really hard getting through middle school and the first year of high school before Levi came along…

You had your own way of figuring that out… I didn't have that circumstance… but I do kinda get it, girls never really paid me much attention… I did tend to hole myself up studying, especially in college… “…how did you know you were… in love?” You and Levi give so many shits about each other and you were all over each other when he was home…

Eren blushed a bit. “I… I… I um…. Well, I… When… When I used to think about Levi… I felt calm… I felt relaxed… I missed him whenever he was gone… And my… My heart… It used to do this weird thing… That it would flutter all the time… When I thought about him, and I always was waiting until I could see him…” Eren’s voice was soft and tender as he spoke, a few tears trickling down his cheeks as he spoke. And now… I can’t see anything but fear…

...I can count on one hand how many times he’s been anything other than rational… and I’d need a calculator for how many times he’s stopped me from going insane. Scotty sighed, thoughts bouncing around his head, his brow furrowing a bit. “How do you know… That… That’ll work out?” How do you know it won't go up in flames or anything?

“I didn’t… And I thought that… That it had ended once already… And that was… I thought it was all my fault… But Levi went out and… And showed me… That he wanted me… I made a last ditch effort… And it paid off…” That song… I don’t know if that was the best decision of my life… Or the worst for screwing everything up for everyone… Probably the latter.

...every other time I was with someone… and it was always just the one night…. …I didn’t feel so… wanted. I… I told him it was just that night… it was his last-ditch effort to convince me he… he loved me… “But… how do you know you won't grow bored of each other?” There's got to be a point when things stop being interesting… and it couldn't pick up again… could it?

“You don’t know that either… Levi and I haven’t hit that point… Well maybe we have and we just don’t know it… But… I know if both people are interested, the mind can do some kinky shit…” I know what Levi likes to do to me… And I can satisfy his desire… Or well… I used to be able to…

Scotty winced as his mind conjured up a few images. Note taken… Uhm… “Are … uhm, are you the bottom? Wait, no, that’s too personal, but uhm… whichever you are… can the roles switch?” I don't know how it works like that with two guys… is it always the same, or…?
Eren nodded. “Yeah, I’m the bottom… and the roles can be reversed… I’ve topped before………..” Eren went almost instantly silent. *I don’t know if I’ll ever want to have sex again…* Eren let the tears forming in his eyes silently fall. *Levi won’t want a whore…*

Scotty started to regret asking as Eren started to cry, reaching for the tissues and pressing some into his hand. “Eren, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you cry like that… I'm sorry...” He tentatively reached up to card a hand through his hair, waiting awhile for Eren’s sobs to subside. “...how often do you go on dates?”

Eren sniffled a bit, wiping away his tears. “We… Didn’t really go on a lot of dates… But… That was mostly cause he was gone a lot… And I can’t sleep well without someone anymore… So we spent most days just lounging around and napping…. And he’s gonna be gone soon.” …. *He’s gonna come back in a box… I can’t fall asleep next to him if that happens…*

...I really made things difficult for him… I moved two hours away and didn't even give him a proper chance before doing it… “That reminds me, actually… one second Eren, I'll be right back.” Scotty slipped out from under Eren, going to put a new dose of Eren’s PTSD medication in his IV before returning, letting him immediately reclaim his shirt. *If you're going to sleep soon, you'll need that.* “...what's your definition of a perfect date?” ...*how does this whole ‘courting’ thing even work is probably better, but that'll have to do.*

Eren nuzzles his head into Scotty’s chest, closing his tired eyes. *I haven't been on a date in over a year.... “I’m not really sure... But… I know that being able to have fun is worth it.... I remember one of our first dates... Was walking Blake to the dog park... And letting him be a dog...” It was really nice...* Eren closed his eyes and with seconds his breathing had evened out and his grip loosening on Scotty’s shirt.

...*something where you can just be? And have fun.* Scotty absentmindedly fiddled with Eren’s hair as he thought, the softening sounds of the hospital familiar white noise. *Just think normally for one second... ditch anything you have in your head about ‘manliness’ and just hear me out because manly is something you are not- He- Stop using the damn pronoun only- CASPER is funny, brilliant, able to keep you from losing your shit, able to make food, artsy, loyal… and he made me feel wanted... I haven't really felt like that much... ...maybe I should transfer back... and give it a chance.*
Chapter 42: The Second Attempt

Spades curled up to Lathe’s bare torso on their King sized bed, happily kissing his skin with light pecks. “Hmm… I went to go see the new house while you were here… They’re almost done building it… It’ll be built, along with the barn, before Winter hits…” I know you really want to surprise Eren with the house.

Lathe held Spades close, humming contentedly as she kissed his skin, happily knowing he must have a ring of marks around his neck. Yours. “That’s good, any snow slows or stops everything. What about the furniture for inside? We had that binder full of stuff- did you check or plan on anything, or did you want me to help make those decisions?” We've got lots of space, we need something to put in it...

“Well, I stuck with a black and white kitchen… So all the kitchen stuff is ordered… And I got granite counter tops… They're custom made, so they’ll take forever to come in…” She moved a bit closer to him, tangling their legs together. I missed doing this. “I got Eren more bean bags too, and I ordered that couch… Remember the one that Nate has… That could be rearranged?”

Lathe nodded, grinning. “Nice choice- that was a neat thing. The stove isn't gas, right?” He nodded when she shook her head. “Good. Uhm… did they start putting in flooring yet? Because the floor in the room with the uneven parallel bars is weird because it has give to it- they might have a problem with it.” Hopefully they won't. But you don't know.

Spades chuckled leaning up to kiss his nose. “The professionals already came in and installed everything to the specifications and standards all gyms have, and they’re finishing up with the wood floors on the second floor… They finished the tile floor in the basement earlier this week, and they got the pool too… That’s in, along with the hot tub, they just need to be filled… They’ve made a 15 acre field for the horses that’s fenced in… And the driveway is paved all the way down to the barn…. The trails have also been created in the forest you got, along with the other 300 acres of fields that you bought. It’s coming together really well...

“They really made progress, haven't they? That's great! We’ll need to make sure the land is posted later on, don't want hunters or something wandering in. Is the attic getting wood flooring too? We were going to need it, the space would be good storage…” It's all falling into place...

“Yes, I made sure the Attic is getting wood flooring. And I made sure that all the walls are painted white, so that Eren can go nuts with whatever he wants to do on the walls. And you guys have your own studios in the basement too… And the theater room is down there too.” It really is coming together beautifully.
I adore how much cuddle potential that theatre room has. ...and it’ll be epic if I figure out how to hook up an Xbox or something to the projector. ...oh my god yes. Lathe smiled, making a small sound and tilting his head back as Spades nipped at his neck. Yours… and I couldn’t ask for someone better… “We’ll… we’ll move in during the winter? At least… nn… at least when the counters come in?” ...snowball fights and snowmen for days...

Spades nodded. “How many horses do you want to start with? The barn has room for eight… But I don’t know how many stalls we’ll use for tack and storage… So, what do you think we should start with?” I don’t mind getting him whatever the hell he wants...

“Start with one, I’d say… for Eren it’s been awhile since he’s taken care of one, and he’ll have a cow and chickens to fuss over too. We can always get more.” ...that also depends on who else falls in love with horses and demands one to fuss over themselves...

Spades smiled and nodded. “Should we get him a trail horse? A jumper? What should we get him? What would he be interested in?” I still don’t know him as well as you do Lathe...

“Trail- one he can ride around the paths in the woods, or just out in the field. I dunno if he’s ever jumped on a horse before… probably not, but I don’t know. But a trail horse to begin with.” Sounds reasonable to me at least...

“Alright, I’ll look for one for him.” She leaned over to kiss Lathe’s lips. “You did an amazing job with him, and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise, okay?” She asked softly, her eyes gleaming with pride and happiness as she spoke. You are mine...

Lathe smiled wearily, pulling her close and kissing her deeply. Okay. Thank you… ...wait. Lathe broke their kiss, looking to her in worry. “What about Salem?” Did you forget and leave him home? Who is taking care of him?

Spades chuckled a little, moving to kiss his ear. “It’s okay, I took him over to Armin’s house, so he’s in good hands.” I figured Armin could use some company in that empty house since Erwin left.

Lathe sighed lightly in relief, his head tilting so she could better access his neck. “Good idea… Armin could use the company. Did he seem like he was doing okay? I haven’t talked to him in awhile.”
“Yeah… He seemed like he was alright, I think he’s taking it rather well, but that’s my opinion, I just hope he doesn’t get too lonely in that empty house.” I remember how much of a wreck he was at the funeral.

“Yeah… Who knows, maybe he needed something to fuss over and keep him company.” I wonder if Salem became the cat hat on him- hopefully he’ll figure out it’s a thing that just happens.
“Thanks for thinking of that… for so much, really… my mind's been a jumble lately…” Too much so. “…I… I just really, really love you…” I need help with all this.

Spades smiled softly. “I love you too…. Let's get some sleep alright? Eren’ll be worried if we’re not there in the morning.” I don’t want to stress either of you two.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Scotty blinked awake early in the morning, confused of where he was for a moment, finally registering the weight on his chest and looking down to see Eren. ...oh yeah. What time is it... He looked for the clock. Seven thirty... wow. I actually slept. Scotty laid still for a short while longer before gently slipping out from under Eren, pulling his lab coat back on and double-checking his vitals and changing his IV, writing the date and time on it. Need to keep track of that. It was a short while before the phone rang, Scotty running over to pick it up before it woke Eren. “Hello? ...who again wants to come up?” ...aren't those famous people that Lathe rants about all the time? ...I do remember hearing all about them, actually. Should I…?

“Uhm, sure, send them up.” He hang the phone back on the hook. They better not be too cray. Scotty went over to Eren, gently shaking him awake by the shoulder. “Eren, wake up- both breakfast and visitors soon.” Hopefully you're up for it- and hopefully they'll know not to be too loud or overbearing.

Eren looked to Scotty as he moved to stretch, wincing a bit. Mom and Dad are coming home soon. He moved to sit up, pulling the blankets under him as he sat up. I wonder what’s for breakfast today? Eren let Scotty leave to go get his food, rubbing his eyes to try and rid the sleepiness from them.

A soft knock was soon heard at the door, Jack poking his head through the door and smiling softly as he saw Eren, opening it more widely for him and Mark. “Hey Eren- good morning.” He was holding a small vase of blue flowers with a small card attached, moving to set it on the table near Eren, noting the wary look he was being given. ...you don't look like you remember me. Huh...

Mark smiled more as he saw that Eren was awake. “Eren! You’re awake! I’m so happy we could see you! We’ve missed recording with you!”
Eren watched as Mark got closer with opened arms. *Who is this guy? Why’s he so loud? He’s scary… Why is he coming closer?* Eren moved away from him as Mark sat down on the edge of his bed. *What is he doing? Is he gonna hit me?* He sat there, frozen in fear as Mark leaned in to hug him.

*…that isn't going to end well. “Whoa whoa whoa Mark, hold on, he looks terrified.”* Jack caught him by the arm and pulled him off the bed, assessing Eren’s expression. *…do you recognize us at all? You're so scared… “Uhm, Eren- do you remember us? Mark and Jack?”* He pointed to Mark and then himself. *It doesn't look like you do.*

Eren immediately shook his head, moving away from both of them, stepping off the bed to the floor on the other side of the room. *No… I don’t know who the hell you are!* He watched them, his heart pounding in his chest, and his legs shaking to hold up his thin body as he coward in front of the two of them. *Who are you? I'm scared…*

Scotty opened the door with Eren’s breakfast, assessing the situation for a solid second before setting down the tray and moving forward. “Could you two give him some room, please? His memory could be fuzzy.” Scotty sidestepped the bed, coaxing Eren back onto the bed. “It’s alright kid, they didn't mean anything bad- it’s alright, just come on.” *…this is why I should've stayed until they came up.* He settled Eren back into bed, turning to the two of them. “He scares easily, and, I'm sorry but… he might not remember you right away, if at all… some serious things happened. Just be extra careful, okay? I'm sorry…” *That can't be easy to hear for anyone.* Scotty went to bring Eren’s breakfast tray over, setting it in front of him. “Don't you worry, kid. I'm here.” *From what I've heard, I'm sure they didn't mean for anything like that to happen. Nobody does…*

Jack nodded, slowly stepping over to one of the chairs next to Eren’s bed and sitting down, pulling Mark with him into the chair next to him. He gave him a small sheepish smile. “Sorry 'bout that, Eren… how’re you feeling?” He did his best to not seem like a threat, projecting calm. *I'll keep Mark reined in, don't worry.*

Eren watched the two of them with wide eyes, still not sure what the hell to do with either of them staring at him. *What do they want? I just don’t understand at all. {Who are you people?}* His hands moved fast, his eyes still wide as he was moved away from the both of them, picking up his banana and started to eat it.

Mark watched his hands move. *I don’t know sign language… So what is happening with him? What is he saying? “Jack do you know what he’s saying?”* Mark turned to look at Jack, seeing him stare at Eren intensely. *Does he understand?*

Jack pondered his movements, signing something. *{Slow down, please. I didn't catch that.} I don't know too much- but anything I know won't do any good if I can't understand what you're saying.*
Eren’s interest seemed to pique as he slowed down his motions, spelling out a few words for Jack to make it easier. {Who… Are you two?} I don’t know who the hell you are but you obviously know me… And I’m scared...

{I’m Jack, and this is Mark. We met at the YouTube Space in LA a few years ago. We play video games on YouTube. We played Undertale together. We heard a bit about what happened, and wanted to come wish you well.} Jack’s movements slowly became a little more fluid, speaking as he signed so Mark would know what he was saying.

{What… Is Undertale?} Eren’s large eyes were focused on Jack’s hands, though he was as still going through the motions of eating his oatmeal. Where are Mom and Dad?? I want Mommy!

Where are Mom and Dad?? I want Mommy!! Eren’s hands shook as he held the bowl, his heart rate increasing as he started to panic a little.

Scotty came over and rested a hand on Eren’s shoulder, sitting down next to him and murmuring quietly. “Hey, it’s alright Eren. Lathe and Spades will be back soon- they texted saying they got breakfast and they’re on their way. It’s fine.” You're fine.

Jack smiled a bit at that, his eyes widening a fraction. You don’t remember Undertale? His expression fell to one of concern as Eren started to shake, not signing anything until Eren seemed to calm in Scotty’s immediate presence. {You don’t remember Undertale? It’s a video game. We played it on your laptop- Lathe had it.} Jack caught sight of the familiar messenger bag next to the bed, pointing to it before signing. {Do you want us to show you again? It’s a lot of fun.} You loved it- the fan art you did was amazing!

Eren nodded, leaning into Scotty a bit, since the man next to him was bigger than either of the two in front of him. I want Mommy… I don’t know these people! Eren was still quivering a bit as Jack moved to get the laptop out.

Mark looked to Jack. “Do you remember the passwords for that?” If I remember correctly it was a pretty lengthy one.

“Sure- he tried typing the super long one, but he kept typing it incorrectly. He got frustrated and typed something different and- because he is a technology wizard- typing ‘coffee’ bypassed it.” Jack tapped quickly away, stumbling through the desktop with the weird finger pad. The hell… is this thing inverted? “Finally-here.” He found the Undertale icon in a folder full of games, memes, audio files and half-finished art, starting it, seeing it left off where they had stopped in LA forever ago. He hit reset, handing the laptop to Eren. He set it back in his lap as Eren didn't move to take it, unsure of what to say or do. Uhm…
“Oh my god.” Lathe looked from the ajar door with wide eyes, trying to contain his excitement. ...I'm dying. He looked over to Eren with a warm smile, seeing his look of fear and immediately crossing the room to him. “Are you okay? You look scared.” He sat on the bed as Scotty stood, pulling him close as Eren curled up in his lap, trying to hide. Oh my… He carded a hand through his hair, trying to calm him as he looked to Jack and Mark, his voice soft. “I'm sorry- last night was the first time he was by himself overnight while awake, and his memory can be fuzzy… he’s been terrified of his high school classmates… it is what it is, I suppose. But it really is so nice that the two of you came.” Lathe smiled gratefully to them. I know you two are so busy all the time...

Mark smiled softly. “It’s alright, we wanted to see how he was doing and if he was up to doing anything with us… But when we found out he was still in the hospital, we figured we should come and give him a few more friendly faces to see.” Maybe we can still record stuff? If he wants to play Undertale? I’m not even sure if he knows who we are still… He looks like a overly large frightened three year old.

Lathe smiled, though he looked worriedly to Eren, still shaking in his arms. “I’d say give him a bit to calm down- but I think he’d be open to it. And it’d give the world more than just a couple tumblr posts a week to look forward to.” Lathe grinned a bit mischievously, trying to calm Eren as they talked. They're nice people- you don't have to be scared.

Eren stopped shaking after a few minutes of Lathe holding him, his face was still very much buried into Lathe’s shirt. What's that noise? Eren picked his head up to look for the sound of the strange noise that was coming from somewhere. “N-noise…” Eren’s voice was very quiet as he looked to the laptop.

Jack smiled faintly at his small voice. So he's selectively mute. {It’s the beginning music from Undertale. The first part is kinda scary, but it doesn't last long, and everything else is really cool and funny. Do you maybe want to play it?} The first flowey sequence is unnerving as hell… But everything else is funny and great! And you seem cool around Lathe- maybe you'll be okay?

Eren watched Jack’s hands, timidly reaching out to grab the laptop from where it sat. He shifted so he was sitting in Lathe’s lap, comfortably facing the computer and he started out the game. What the hell is that Flower??? He was confused as the flower became a terrifying beast. Huh? What the hell? What… No… No, what is that! Eren put the computer back down and moved to hide again, grabbing the blanket and pulling it over his head to hide against Lathe’s chest again. No… That’s frightening.

Well crap. Lathe held Eren close, pressing keys and making the story move along, getting Eren to look at the screen for the last bit. “Eren, watch this-” Goat mom to the rescue!
Eren timidly removed the blanket from over his head like a three year old and looked over to the screen. “Scary…” He watched the flower stop, a fireball be thrown across the screen and knocking him out of view, some animalistic character entering. “Goat…thingy…”

Lathe beamed. “Yep, that’s Toriel- Goat Mom.” That’s really what she is.

...we don't need to record. Jack smiled, waving a bit to get Eren’s attention before signing. {Is it okay if we sit next to you so we can watch?} But saying no is okay.

Eren looked between the two them, slowly nodding, but staying in Lathe’s lap all the same. They can sit on the bed too. Eren timidly played with the game a little more and quickly becoming engrossed into the game and becoming completely silent.

Spades was in the hall with Scotty. “How was he last night?” I saw how fearful he was when we came in… And I’m pretty sure those guys have done things with Eren before.

“He panicked a little bit after you left… He really wanted to let you two have each other to yourselves for the night, but he was terrified to be alone. I ended up sleeping with him. I did get plenty of rest…” ...and. “...And some insight… about being gay, and if I should've given Casper a real chance… which I think I will.” For all he's done… He deserves it. ...and I do want to see him again...

Spades eyes lit up. “Really!? That’s awesome! Well.. Not the panicking part… But I’m hoping that he’ll be able to sleep by himself again soon. I miss sleeping with Lathe…. So you finally realized you swing the other way?” She chuckled softly, looking through the cracked door as Jack and Mark sat on the bed with Lathe and Eren.

Scotty rolled his eyes, shifting his weight. “Well, I'm still kinda skeptical about the whole thing… and I've just kinda decided it’d be pretty dumb of me to not give him a chance. I like him enough to do that.” He thought for a moment. “And I think he’ll be okay sleeping by himself soon enough- he just really needs the support right now, he needs to feel safe, but I know you two lovebirds miss your ‘you time.’ You'll get it back, don't worry. Give it a week or so; baby steps. Start with someone sleeping close by on the chairs or something and work from there.” He shrugged. ...but yeah. You and Lathe have a relationship to maintain… and it sounded like there's plenty of catching up to do.

This week went too quickly. Spades was holding Eren as he played another platformer, moving a small character around in what seemed to be a huge system of caves. Mark and Jack have been wonderful- they're so nice, and so sweet I'm worried about cavities just sitting next to them!
They've gotten a Eren to play a bunch of different games Lathe had on here, and logged into their own accounts for a ton of different ones we didn’t. Some of the ones we had were modded with different audio files, and they noticed- and then begged Lathe to send them to them. But he got more and more comfortable around them, and they did an experimental recording of something with rocket soccer- they somehow managed to fit four of them with four laptops sitting sideways on the bed and had just one shot of all of them playing. Eren didn't talk much, but he was expressive- and even though the setting of a hospital room was kinda odd-looking, it was something. There were so many well-wishes in the comments, it was really nice. Eren’s sort of okay with us sleeping nearby in the room, which is progress. And after the mac and cheese, he went to eating plain oatmeal, and a few days ago Scotty was a dear and found some apples, brown sugar and cinnamon to add. And he’s obsessed. He only wants to eat that for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. ...it’s been three days. He needs to eat something other than that- he still needs vitamins every day. They've been throwing powdered vitamins in with his oatmeal. He’s actually gaining weight- a pound about every two days. He’s getting meat on his bones- that's great!

Scotty waited for a break in the four’s antics to tap Lathe’s shoulder. “Hey Lathe, can I talk to you in the hall for a few minutes?” Things need to be discussed.

Lathe looked up from his laptop, his wide smile still bright. “Sure.” You don't sound like I should be concerned- but I'm kinda skeptical. Lathe followed him into the hall, leaning against the wall with his ankles crossed. “What’s up?”

Scotty leaned against the wall. “You haven’t sold your house yet, right?” I really hope you haven’t.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him. “...noooooo? It hasn't even been put on the market yet.” ...why?

“Don’t put it on the market… I’ve been thinking about moving back to work at the hospital there… And it’s be a good spot to get a house.” ... And Casper wouldn't need to rent anymore. He wasn’t really aware he had said the last bit aloud, and so stood there, tapping his foot in hopes of a response.

Lathe’s eyes widened as he heard Scotty mumble under his breath, beaming. “...duly noted. We’ll be seeing more of you then- when are you planning on moving back?” Is this a thing? Did you not tell me? Lathe covered his mouth with one hand, happily whispering under his breath. “...my favourite ship is sailing…” YAY! But shut your damn mouth- let it sail, let it sail... don't fuck with the rigging, just let it sail... no titanic moments please...

... Awesome… But I'll be living at the hospital for awhile though, Spades told me that your new house isn’t ready yet. “I’m transferring to the hospital over there as soon as Eren is discharged…
So I’ll be living there for a bit until you guys move out.” I wonder if Lathe’s gonna say anything? Or is he gonna let Casper be surprised? I have a really good idea.

You already live at a hospital. And it doesn’t do you any good… you know… “Y’know, Eren doesn’t use his room anymore really, he’s either sleeping in the beanbag bed in the living room or downstairs in the basement… you could crash in his room for awhile if you want.” Maybe you'll actually get some damn sleep and eat something other than takeout for once in your life.

Scotty picked his head up at Lathe’s words. “Really? That’d be awesome… and, Eren’ll be released in a week, I’ve been weaning him off of the morphine, and he’s gotta go to therapy, but I’m not worried about his legs anymore. He’s been showing progress over the past week, and is better at moving around.” I really wanna see Casper again. Scotty looked into where Eren had curled up to Jack’s side, watching the screen with the other two. I wonder if they’re watching one of his videos?

...One week. Keep your trap shut for a week and some change… and then for a hell of a lot longer to ensure smooth sailing. “That’s good- he’s physically doing much better, socially too, to a degree… but yeah, I’d be surprised if it wasn't arranged or at least recommended he go to therapy.” Lathe looked past him, smiling at the three of them. “…things have been going kinda sorta okay… I can live with that.” He’s getting better… getting the help he needs.

Scotty smiled, patting his back, a sympathetic look on his face. “He’s gonna be on a cocktail of drugs for a long time… and he’s gonna need Blake a lot more now… But… I hate to break it to you… but if his PTSD gets too bad, he might be having seizures a hell of a lot more.” That in itself is a handful…. I wonder if he’s gonna want oatmeal again for lunch… or if he’s gonna want something else?

Lathe sighed quietly, nodding. “We’ll do our best to keep him on schedule with his meds… and we’ll do our best to keep him in one piece. We’ll be careful.” He’ll get the help he needs. He glanced to the clock on the wall. “Lunch. Let me guess… hmm, I'm not sure if he's gonna want oatmeal or be sick of it by now.” Let's find out. After Scotty nodded, Lathe led them back into the room, gently tapping Eren’s shoulder. “More oatmeal, kid? Or are you sick of it yet?” Lathe smirked a bit, joking. You’ve been eating it as if your life depends on it.

Eren looked up from the computer screen in Jack’s lap, his eyes very large as he sneezed. He looked at Jack and Mark with weary eyes and then over to Spades as she sat in a chair on her phone with Dave, answering his questions. “C….Can...I have… mac’n’cheese...?” I want that…. I want cheese...
Eren’s been obsessed with oatmeal and mac n cheese for the past two weeks. It’s either one or the other from day to day- we’ve added all sorts of random stuff to both of them, like putting bacon in with his macaroni or going through all kinds of fruits and spices in his oatmeal. ...he’s surprisingly not too picky about what we put in them. Which is nice. Jack and Mark being around to chill with Eren was a total godsend- Eren was talking more and came out of his shell a bit more. The videos they took are on Eren’s channel now- and I know how much effort it must have taken to prepare an entire week of videos in advance to come and visit him. Eren’s length of quiet on the internet has finally been broken, which is good. I get the idea people were getting tired of nothing besides my dumb puns and statuses on twitter. We just got home- Mark and Jack left two days ago, and it didn't take too long for Scotty to pack up his entire house which he’s lived in for two years and looks abandoned. It literally didn't even take three boxes in the trunk for us to haul everything over. Pretty sure Eren is at least sorta cool with Scotty chilling with us for a little while. Spades is cool with it too, of course. ...I’ve been internally dying all day because Scotty looked so nervous when he got up for breakfast this morning and actually tried to do something with his hair and I need to stay out of it but... murr... I’ve given myself errands to do so I don’t try meddling with anything. I’ve promised. No meddling. ...so early in the relationship. Lathe stepped into his boots, picking up the car keys and his scarf before heading out, having said goodbye to everyone already.

Scotty got up to get his own shoes on. “Alright, I’m gonna head out too, and go look at my office really quickly as well, to make sure I got everything I need for it.” Yes, that’s it... cover up the date! God I hope he’s still interested.

Eren timidly poked his head around the corner and stared at the two of them with large eyes. Where are they going? Mom’s at the office helping Dave still.... Are they gonna leave me alone for a little bit? He watched Lathe leave and Scotty following him only after a few moments. They left me alone.... Eren ventured back up the stairs, moving to his room to rummage through a few things before going to the bathroom and locking the door behind him. I can do this....

Blake watched Eren lock himself in the bathroom, whimpering and whining at the door. My human... No... My human! I thought you were better! I thought you got rid of the stabby thingy! Blake’s whimpers fell to silence, no one home to hear them.

Scotty stopped at the flower store, getting a dozen red roses before walking down to the Pharmacy. He peered into the window, seeing Casper at the counter on the computer, and James in the back. You can do this dammit! He reached out to the door and entered, going right up to the counter, shouting to the back. “James! Casper’s taking his lunch break!” Now you are mine... god my heart is doing flips right now... please say yes.... Cause I think this is the thing Eren was talking about...
I'm… Casper looked up in surprise, shocked to see Scotty, and trying to comprehend the sudden shout. “I'm… what?” He looked to the roses in Scotty’s hand, his thoughts racing. those can't be for me… I'm probably his wingman or something… if so, you've really got some nerve… Casper sighed, closing the window onscreen. Apparently this is a thing. Casper got up and got his coat, coming around the counter and joining Scotty, following him onto the sidewalk. “...so, who’re the flowers for?” ... Mind telling me who it is I'm helping you catch? Casper looked rather saddened, trying to weakly smile to him.

Scotty held them out for Casper, a small blush dusting his cheeks. “They’re for you.” I'm not lying either.

Casper looked to him with wide eyes, slowly taking them from him, stunned. ...wait… “...are you serious?” ... please be serious.

“Completely…” Did I do something wrong? I mean… You're a guy, so was it wrong to get you flowers? He dragged Casper into a corner cafe and pulled him to one of the window two-seaters. We’re having a ‘date’ and I hope you don’t smack me across the face for denying you before...

Casper looked between the roses and Scotty in disbelief, before flushing and letting out an airy laugh, smiling and shaking his head. “All I can say is it’s about damn time.” Casper beamed to him with bright eyes, nudging Scotty’s foot under the table. ...you're serious. ...this is a date. ...this is a date!

Scotty seemed to sigh in relief. “Oh thank god…. I thought you were gonna smack me across the face and then leave…” Which I almost kinda expected… I should definitely ask Spades though… When’s a good time to tell him I’m buying Lathe’s house? Scotty thanked their waiter as she gave them menus, and ordered a water for himself to drink, looking over to Casper and wonder what he would get.

Casper chuckled, shaking his head. “Now why would I in my right mind do that? There’s no good reason.” ...even if you did kinda turn me down by moving and then leading me on. ...eh, I'll let it slide. You often have your blonde moments. He thanked the waiter as he was handed a menu. “Uhm, could I have hot chocolate please?” Chocolate for the win.

.... I probably should’ve guessed… You haven’t changed… and I’m really glad about that. Scotty moved his foot against Casper’s, a smile appearing on his lips, radiating happiness for once in the past 2 years. I just realized how much you mean to me in the past two weeks… I owe Eren one… or two… maybe 12…
Casper tried to read the items on the menu, failing miserably and getting distracted every other moment by Scotty simply existing in front of him, blushing furiously. ...*dammit, you just need to exist and suddenly I can't function like a normal human being.* Casper glanced up as Scotty tried to hold back a chuckle, flushing even redder at his realisation. ...*fuck, I'm thinking out loud.*

Scotty quirked an eyebrow, suddenly even more curious. “So… my existence is a bit… distracting?” Well, *that’s great to know*… You’re *having the same effect on my heart, can’t tell if it’s just a heart attack, or true dedication*… Scotty looked over the menu, finally deciding on a fish sandwich. *Well, it’s food.*

*That’s quite the understatement.* Casper skimmed the menu, looking up as the waiter came back around, handing it back to them and ordering a chicken panini with a name he valiantly tried to pronounce. *They put all sorts of fancy stuff in it, and it sounds good- why not?*

Scotty made a bit of small talk with Casper as they waited for their food to come out. *It feels so much better to get to talk to you again.* Neither of them really took into account the world around them, completely entranced in each other.

*Did the optometrist’s office just magically disappear?* Lathe walked down Trost, looking for the distinctive sign, glancing into the windows. *Eren needs his eyes checked and we need an appointment for that, and I didn't cancel the contact order in time... Where the hell...* Lathe stopped short as he looked in the front window of a cafe across the street. *Is that...* He saw the bouquet of roses near Casper’s arm, he and Scotty talking and blushing. ...*I ship it so hard...* Lathe had a moment of silent fangirling across the street from them when a thought occurred to him. ...*wait. I didn't know Scotty was going out today. Eren's still home... alone.* Lathe felt a sudden rush of dread, having long since learned not to ignore it. He turned around to head for his car, driving home. *He's on suicide watch- he can't be by himself.* Lathe opened the door, looking up the staircase as Blake barked, circling at the top of the stairs. *Fuck.* Lathe grabbed his medic bag and raced upstairs, long claw marks on the bathroom door and silence from inside as he pounded on the door. “Eren! Open the door!” Lathe suddenly caught the smell of blood from where he stood, his eyes wide. *Fuck it.* Lathe was about to snatch the key when he remembered the new mech in the doorknobs, sharply pushing it forward, the lock sliding out of place as the door opened. He saw Eren with his sleeved rolled up, both of his wrists slashed and bleeding into the bathtub as he held them there. *Oh my god.* Lathe immediately and quickly went to snatch the razor from Eren’s hand, managing not to get cut and dropping it into the wastebasket for that moment. “Eren, what are you *doing*?” He felt Eren sway as he caught his wrists, realising just how much blood he had lost. *Crap. Stop the wrists from bleeding, meaning clean and wrap, break out an IV, and keep him awake.* ...*do I even have an IV? Fuck, I don't know... I need help.* Lathe quickly took out his phone and dialled Scotty’s number, putting it on speaker and beginning to work quickly, cleaning out Eren’s cuts as Scotty picked up. “Yeah, hi Scotty, sorry to bother you on your date, but I really, *really* need your help. Eren cut while he was home alone and I wouldn't have left if I knew you were going to but he’s lost a lot of blood and I'm trying to clean his cuts but he needs some sort of IV and I don't know if we have one or not... seriously, sorry, but *please* I need help.” Sorry Scotty, Casper... *Eren's losing blood.*
... I forgot… how cold I forget!? I was the one to put him on the damn watch! Scotty’s face was growing a bit pale as Lathe continued to talk. “He… He tried… again?” Scotty was in complete disbelief, but started to get up from the table not putting the phone down. I’m sorry Casper… but I fucked up… I’m gonna need to take a rain check.

Eren watched Lathe move his wrists, feeling the slight discomfort of the gauze cleaning out his cuts. …What? Why?…… I’m supposed to be dead…. Eren’s head swayed, his cheek finally coming to rest on the rim of the tub, his body starting to get slack. I lost a lot… maybe I will die this time?

Eren tried what again? …he doesn’t mean… Casper’s eyes widened, standing along with him. …we have to go, don’t we. {Scotty, is there anything he needs?} Casper signed to him so he could still hear Lathe. I'm coming with you. No argument.

Scotty moved the phone for barely a second. “We need to go to the hospital…. Now.” I need to get an IV and probably a blood transfusion… this is gonna be fun…. “Alright, Lathe, keep him awake… We’ll be there in ten minutes.” Scotty quickly hung up the phone and practically pulled Casper out of his seat, not caring. This is my fault.

Casper followed Scotty quickly to his car, not before leaving notes on the table to pay for the food they’d ordered, running with him to his car. Keep him awake? That means- “We’re getting IV stuff, aren’t we?” Casper’s expression was etched with worry as Scotty nodded. …hang on, kid. We’re coming.

I don’t know if we have ten minutes. Lathe continued to swiftly and carefully wrap Eren’s arms, pulling him up to sit upright, starting to talk. Just babble. About anything. Keep him awake. Lathe stuttered for a moment before beginning to jump from one subject to the next, keeping asking Eren if he was awake to hear him and trying to hold his attention. Stay with me. Lathe finished wrapping his arms and picked Eren up from the floor, carrying him downstairs and setting him on the couch, still talking and making awful puns in hopes they’d keep him from falling asleep, Eren nodding off in his hold. COME ON, DAMN IT!! Lathe had nearly begun to panic as the front door swung open, Scotty and Casper immediately coming to their side. Thank god backup.

Scotty immediately set to work on Eren, getting an IV in on one arm, and a transfusion going on the other arm. He’s so fucking pale…. I should never have fucking left, god dammit! “I’m sorry, Lathe.” His words were quiet as he set everything in place. Come on, Eren, wake up! Having noticed Eren’s eyes closed completely, Scotty moved over him, grabbing the boy’s face in his hands. “Eren! Wake up! Can you hear me!? Eren!” Scotty continued to call for Eren to wake up, looking over the bandages. “How deep are they? Do they need stitches?” I hope that he’s not still bleeding out… that we’d need to take him back to the hospital for.
He’s so pale… Casper set the flowers on the small table as near the door, coming in behind Scotty and moving to stand near Lathe, letting Scotty work and trying to silently comfort and calm Lathe. ...oh no...

Lathe shook his head, moving to let Scotty work, his hands covering his mouth, his voice muffled slightly. “N-no, they don't need stitches… they weren't that deep…” ...but there were plenty of them...

Eren’s eyes remained closed, his color not returning to him, even with the transfusion nearing it’s end.….. That’s…. Dad…. I can …. hear him….. Eren’s breathing weakened a bit, along with his heart, but both were still functioning, he hadn’t managed to bleed out, but he wouldn’t be back to one hundred percent in awhile. ………….. Dad…………

Scotty continued to talk to Eren, trying to wake him up, slapping his cheeks lightly to try and wake him up. Come on, Kid, I know you’re in there…. You can’t give up on yourself now. You need to come back to us!

Lathe tried to snap out of it, kneeling down next to Eren and brushing the hair from his face, he himself taking over talking, trying to keep from panicking with every passing second that Eren didn't open his eyes. …Eren, come on… please… you need to be okay …

It took almost ten more minutes for Eren to crack open his eyes, he still looked deathly pale, but he was alive, and awake. …. What the hell…. Happened? His eyes, lidded with exhaustion, were full of confusion. I can’t… remember...

Lathe sighed in relief, tension draining from his body as Eren woke up. “Eren, my god, you scared us…” Lathe pecked his forehead, his temple, giving him a tiny, weary smile. “How are you feeling?” Probably pretty awful… but we need to get you talking.

Eren’s brow weakly furrowed as Lathe kissed his forehead. What do you mean? I thought it would be better off if I was dead? You and mom wouldn’t have to worry about anything anymore. Eren had a blank stare, too utterly exhausted to even move at this point, his eyes starting to close as he tried to fall asleep. I’m tired...

...wait. The PTSD meds. “Hang on Eren, don't fall asleep yet-” Casper snatched Lathe’s bag from his shoulder, rifling through it and producing one of the small doses of PTSD medication. He needs this before sleeping. Casper only needed a minute to add the medicine to the saline drip.
“Alright kid, we get you're sleepy. You take a decent nap, okay?” You look like you need it, if your complexion reminiscent of a piece of paper is anything to go by.

Lathe’s shoulders slumped as Eren drifted to sleep, looking up to Scotty and Casper, standing and rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. “M’sorry I interrupted your date- I kinda panicked and needed help…” unintentional meddling. That’s got to be a new high score for you in the game of annoyance, Lathe.

Scotty sighed quietly, rubbing the back of his neck, and moving Eren to let him lay down comfortably on the couch. “Don’t worry, it’s my fault… I’m sorry, I completely forgot… and I’m the one who put him on the watch… and I left him alone… god dammit.” Scotty hung his head in shame, have expecting to be slapped by either of the two in the room for his negligence.

Casper sighed and rolled his eyes, moving to smack Scotty upside the head. “You need to stop constantly having blonde moments.” seriously. Stahp. “We’re worried sick of course, but thankfully Lathe has inherited the parental gut instinct and we were close enough to the hospital to get what we needed to. It doesn't make it okay, but at least right now things are sorta fine. Well… not really. But now we know how pressing it is that Eren go to therapy when he’s up for it.” He needs it.

Scotty nodded, wincing a bit at Casper’s smack. “Yeah, he needs to… Spades is gonna be home soon I would imagine…” Scotty trailed off a somber look overtaking his face as he remembered something. I need to take you back to work... And we never got to eat lunch... Well, I singlehandedly fucked up our date....

You look really sad all of a sudden. ...wait. “Hey Casper, aren't you supposed to be working or something?” That’s a thing… right? He raised an eyebrow as Casper nodded. “...when is your lunch break over?”

Casper glanced at his watch. “...I've got twenty five minutes, why?” ...oh yeah, we never really ate... dammit, I was looking forward to that sandwich...

... okay. Slight meddling. Lathe shooed them to the scripting room. “Alright then, you two go chill in the Scripting room. I'll make lunch real quick.” I can cook fast enough for you to be back in time- I know James can be real strict on you being back in time.

Scotty just looked down, walking over to the couch in the scripting room. Well, I fucked that up majorly. Dammit... He's probably not gonna wanna ever go out to lunch with me after this... Scotty heaved a sigh as he put his head in his hands.
He’s really beating himself up about this. Casper wrapped an arm around Scotty’s middle and pulled him onto the couch next to him, his other arm wrapping around him and keeping him pressed to his side, coaxing him to lean back. ...it’s okay. Casper hooked the coffee table with his foot, pulling it closer so he could put his feet up, resting his head on Scotty’s arm. ...Lathe, just an FYI… choosing this instead of the table was a great decision.

Scotty let Casper move him around. What the hell are we doing? He watched with wide eyes as he was cuddled. Okay... This is now a thing? I guess... Apparently? Alright, I could get used to this. Scotty was a bit unsure about moving his arm, but soon brought it out from under him and around Casper, pulling him closer.

Casper smiled faintly as Scotty wrapped an arm around him, quiet as he simply held onto Scotty until he heard Lathe approaching shortly with food, handing both of them chicken sandwiches and setting water glasses on the table. He noticed Lathe seemed to be trying hard not to say anything. ...you still ship it so hard, don’t you. ...same tho. Casper thanked him and quietly ate his food, simply enjoying Scotty’s presence next to him. He looked to his watch after his plate was clean, looking to Scotty. “I need to get back to the pharmacy- don’t want James to bust a vessel if I’m a second late.” He really is too uptight- eh. You get used to it, I guess.

... You have to go so soon? Scotty nodded, putting his glass of water down on the table. “I’ll drive you.” It’s a thing I can do, and maybe I’ll be able to kiss you after this? Make up for my stupidity?

“Thanks.” Casper smiled to him, standing with his plate, Scotty following him as they brought their dishes to the kitchen. Casper tried for a moment to insist they do them, Lathe instead shooing them back to the door. Fiiiiiiiiine. “Thanks, Lathe. We’ll see you later, okay?” Casper looked over to Eren, pale and still asleep on the couch. See ya around, kid. He shrugged on his coat, following Scotty to his car. It was a short drive, and before he knew it they were standing back outside of the pharmacy. Casper still holding the small bouquet of roses, not quite knowing how to say goodbye. ...fuck, how do you do the thing... I don't know, I haven't really had a real date before, and I'm not sure if this really counts... I mean, maybe...

Scotty felt his heart flutter even more. I swear, I'm having a heart attack... But it doesn't hurt. He leaned down, gently pecking Casper’s lips, a smile on his face as he pulled back. “Thanks... I’ll make sure to call you before I drag you out to lunch again.” I surprisingly had a good time.

.......you call that a kiss? Casper stood on his tiptoes, pulling Scotty down by the front of his shirt to kiss him again, smirking a bit as he heard his gasp in surprise. Better. Casper broke the kiss after a long moment, a dark blush on his cheeks, smiling. “That’s probably a good idea.” Advance warning, please. “I’ll see you again soon, yeah? Text me.” It'd be nice to start talking again. Casper turned at that, going back into the pharmacy. ...that was a nice date... sort of.
Scotty just had a huge blush as he backed up a bit in surprise. “Okay, see you later.” Holy crap…. He kissed me!

James was standing at the counter, his arms crossed as he looked at Casper coming in. “So who’s the new guy?” Did you finally get over him now?

Casper set the flowers down on the desk, smiling as thoughts ran through his head. “The only guy—that was Scotty.”

James’ face shifted to utter confusion. “Wait, you’re telling me you just kissed the asshole that made you cry for a solid week?!” What the hell is wrong with you?!

...weeeellllll…. “...well, that asshole is now apparently my boyfriend, so yes, I am granted that privilege.” …..mine.

“Casper! Was this your make up date or something? Why the hell did you take him back?!” I really don’t understand you at all!

“Scotty I never ever were a thing before because he was being a stubborn asshole and refused to consider the fact that maybe being gay was okay! But you know what? He’s come to his senses and took me out on a date and he was being hella sweet and I’m gonna give his sorry ass a chance at this.” He deserves one. He was an asshole, but he still deserves one.

James shook his head, sighing quietly, and going to the back. “Get back to work.” Get your mind off of the lips you just smacked.

Eren’s eyes cracked open a few hours later, groaning quietly to himself…. I feel like I’m gonna be sick. He barely had the strength to roll over, his body convulsing a bit as he threw up everything in his stomach for a whole minute. Fuck… It hurts…. Dammit… It didn’t work… I’m still here.

Lathe slid into the room from the Scripting room at the sound of Eren’s retching, wincing. Fuck, you look awful… and now I have to clean that. “Oh my… you must feel horrible… I understand
that, you lost a lot of blood earlier. Just stay cool, it’s fine…” Lathe carded a hand through his hair, avoiding the puddle on the floor for the moment. “I'll clean this up… is there anything you need? A blanket? Some water?” ...*gross*

....My whole body hurts… what do I do? Eren shook his head for now, his body feeling like lead. *It hurts… why didn't it fucking work?* Eren’s eyes were barely open as he watched Lathe, his head starting to feel light and his nose once again started to bleed. *Fuck…*

_Fuck_. Lathe immediately pulled out his phone again, dialling Scotty. “Scotty, Eren’s nose is bleeding. He needs another transfusion- and please steal as many isotonic saline IVs as you can without getting fired.” _That would be bad_. He went to get gauze from his bag, pressing it to Eren’s nose.

Eren lost consciousness relatively quick, his eyes fluttering shut as his nose bled. _My head hurts…_

Scotty’s eyes widened as he heard Lathe’s frantic voice. “Look at his wrists, I’m heading out now.” _What the hell is with your luck, Kid? Thank god I was already here._

Lathe shook Eren’s shoulder, trying to get him to wake up to no avail. _He’s out._ *Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck* Lathe stopped trying after a moment, looking to his arms and unravelling one of his wraps as Scotty had told him, revealing his cuts and seeing the red exposed flesh in the slits. His eyes widened as he saw thin threads of pale skin seemingly move to cross the gap, beginning to stitch the cuts together. Underneath, thin red strands of flesh started to weave their way between each other, pulling taut and sealing the cut. The last few threads of skin spiderwebbed across the surface of his skin, the faintest traces of the cuts fading into a scarless pale, the last thread at the end of the seam drawn under the human hem until it was gone, no evidence of its existence left behind. Lathe stared, unraveling the wraps more and more as the healing travelled up his arm, the wraps falling to the floor as his wrists were sewn seamlessly shut.

Spades walked in a few minutes after Lathe called Scotty, worry crossing her face the instant she saw Lathe knelt down near Eren. _Oh no_. “Lathe- I'm home. What-” Spades looked over his shoulder, falling silent with shock as his cuts stitched themselves back together, Lathe unwinding his arms and inspecting the skin carefully. ....*oh. My fucking god.*

Scotty was stuck with silence. “Lathe! What’s happening? Talk to me dammit!” _What the fuck is happening to him!? Do I need to call a fucking ambulance for him?_

Lathe’s mouth opened and closed wordlessly, gaping like a fish for a long moment as he tried to find words. “U-Uhm, S-Scotty… I d-don't think an ambulance is necessary… but… his cuts are,
for a lack of a better w-word… they're sewing themselves back up.” …what. The actual. *Fuck*.

“Wait… Did you just say they’re sewing up? By themselves?” *What the hell?* Scotty rushed in his car getting to the driveway and rushing in, he put in the new transfusion as well as another IV. His hands stopped as he spotted Eren’s arms slowly stitching themselves up. *The…. *Fuck … *Is that?*

Lathe shifted a bit out of Scotty’s way, still mindful of the mess under him as he kept the gauze pressed to Eren’s nose. “His nose is still bleeding heavily… if what we think is right, he better stop healing himself soon or he’ll run out of blood. I’d rather him heal at a normal rate than lose too much.” *Come on, Eren. I’m getting worried- what you’re capable of because of what Grisha gave you is amazing but it’s scaring me with how much blood it makes you lose.*

Eren’s eyes barely cracked open, his color still gone from his face. *I feel like shit… What’s happening. “…..w….wa….warm…mm” My arms feel like they’re on fire!*

Lathe dabbed at Eren’s nose, the stream finally dwindling to a trickle. “Eren, are you okay? Tell us how you feel.” …*what are the immediate effects of this? Can you feel it? What does it feel like? …oh no. I’m turning into Scotty.*

“H….h-h….hot....” Eren groaned as he tried to move, feeling his stomach tighten and moving his head, his body starting to lurch as he was throwing up all over again. *I feel sick… I’m exhausted....

… *Woah….* Scotty had already taken photos and video of the miracle of Eren’s arms healing, and winced a bit as Eren hurled the rest of the stomach acid in front of Lathe. *Well damn… He looks really sick. I wonder if that’s an effect he always has? Or is he just sick right now? Or is it because he’s healing skin for the first time? It looks almost alien what his skin is doing… And is his nose bleeding a signal that he’s healing something? How much blood does he bleed, and does the amount represent how much energy it takes to heal whatever it is he’s healing?*

Lathe moved back, wincing and covering his mouth with his arm as Eren threw up. …*it’s a good thing being a doctor for that long gets you used to this sort of crap. “…I’m going to get stuff to clean that up. ...but first, I’ll get an ice pack for you, you must have a fever…”* Lathe carefully stepped back, going to the kitchen to make a ice pack for him and bringing it back, handing it to Scotty before going to get cleaning supplies from the laundry room, mopping up the mess and setting a bucket next to the couch. “That is in case you need to pitch again. At least try to aim.” *I don’t want to have to clean up more puke than I have to.*

Spades looked up to Eren worriedly, moving so she was behind his head near the arm of the couch, threading her fingers through his hair gently. “You do feel very warm… I’ll get you some water, if
only to stop the burning, okay?” ...*that's never a pleasant experience...* She left for the kitchen and came back after a moment with a glass of cool water, carefully handing it to Eren, helping him sip it as his hands shook too hard trying to take it. *You really are unwell...*

Eren looked up to Spades, trying to croak out a few more words. “My... A-arms... T-they’re... Warm...” Eren whimpered, trying to touch the searing skin. *They're so fucking warm... It hurts...*

Spades gently caught his hands, trying to keep him from the healing skin. “Eren, the heat must be from the healing... don't touch it, let it do what it's doing. I know it might hurt but it’s important you don't mess with it.” *We can't have you getting scarred or hurt any more ... wait. You cut.* It finally clicked, having been distracted by the cut’s healing. *You tried again... didn't you.*

Eren whimpered more. “Mo~~mmy... It hurts.” Eren whined as she held his slow healing arms. *It hurts so much why does the skin hurt so much!? It’s never hurt like this for broken bones!* Eren started to cry from the pain radiating from his arms.

Spades brushed away his tears, murmuring to him soothingly. She snatched Lathe’s kerchief from his back pocket as he passed her, wiping at Eren’s cheeks and pecking his temple. “Eren honey, it’ll be over soon, I know it really really hurts but you're getting better... it won't be forever, don't worry... I've got you, Mommy’s right here...” *You'll be okay when this is all over.*

Eren looked to the red handkerchief, jerking his head away from her in fear, starting to cry even harder. “N-no... N-no m-mm-more... Pl-please...” Eren started to beg, moving away from everyone. *They’re gonna tie me up! They’re gonna kill me! No! No more!* Blake’s whining started to turn into small growls, trying to alert them of his beginning stages of panic. Eren had thrown up his PTSD medication...

Spades looked to him shocked for a moment that he was moving away from her. *What... is it the kerchief?* Spades dropped it out of sight behind her, murmuring calmly into his ear still. She rested a hand on his shoulder, her other threading through his hair, trying not to seem threatening. “Eren honey, it’s okay. Mommy’s here... I'm not going to hurt you... the kerchief will stay away if you don't like it, but you're okay, I promise...” *...Lathe’s gonna need to find a different one to carry around then. He sure needs it plenty of times.*

Eren looked to her, leaning into her touch, but still freaking out, flashes of memories passing through his thoughts. *No... No... Not again...* His tears increased, Blake finally just jumping into the couch to ground Eren as he laid down to try and calm him down.

*My human needs help... He’s panicking! I can’t stop it! He’s panicking! Bigger humans! HELP*
Blake whined at all of them, his full weight on Eren’s chest. *He needs to calm down!*

He threw up all of his medicine… don’t have to look that hard to see them… still really fucking gross… Lathe returned after the mess was cleaned up, assessing the situation, seeing his kerchief on the floor abandoned. apparently that’s no use anymore… Eren’s freaking out… Blake’s being surprisingly ineffective… yep. While he’s vulnerable to throwing it back up, shots it is. Lathe went to his medical bag, fishing out a small metal box of the PTSD doses in tiny bottles, also fetching a syringe. In a moment he had a dose added to Eren’s IV, packing up and kneeling down next to him, holding onto one of his hands. “Eren, you don't have to be so scared of us. We just want you to be okay- we don't want to hurt you.” *Come on… we all love you too much. You've got all three of us around your finger, even if you- or Scotty too, for that matter- don't know it.*

It took a bit, but Eren calmed back down, though Blake stayed on his chest, which meant that Eren was panicking a bit still. He looked over to Lathe, the tears having subsided. “It burns… Are they done healing yet?” Eren pleaded for an answer. *I don’t wanna look!*

Lathe looked to his arms, seeing the cuts had finally sealed all the way up his arms to his wrists, nodding. “Yeah, they are. And the burning will go away- it’ll be fine.” Eren stayed put on the couch until dinner, when they moved him to the table to try and eat. Lathe made sure Eren slowly nibbled at his food to make sure he could hold it down, giving him his pills when Eren ate without his dinner reappearing. After he ate, Lathe carried Eren over to the beanbag bed, not trusting Eren to walk as he sleepily swayed in his chair after finishing. He settled Eren in and pulled the covers over him, setting it over Blake as well as he came to settle next to him, and then making room as Salem followed Blake over. *Eren has quite the moral support group.* “Goodnight, kid. Sleep well.” Lathe pecked his forehead, standing and going back to finish the dishes, soon letting Spades drag him upstairs with her.

Scotty watched Eren sleep for a few minutes, running through the footage he took as Eren’s arms healed themselves. He went up to his own room about half an hour later, falling asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.
Chapter 43: Seizures

It wasn't much more than an hour later that Scotty was suddenly jolted awake, flailing a bit in confusion as Blake pawed at him and tried to get his attention. “W-wha… what the hell, Blake? ...what’s wrong?” Scotty whisper shouted to Blake. What's going on? Why'd you wake me up?

Blake watched him, tilting his head a bit as Scotty spoke. My human is convulsing! I can’t stop it! And my Human’s big humans are moaning out in utmost pain! But they’re door is closed so I can’t do Jack shit about it! Get the hell up! Blake growled lowly, pawing at his chest, a few moans heard over him from the next room over.

Why the hell didn't you go to Lathe or Spades first? Scotty suddenly heard a sound over Blake, listening and trying to figure out what it was for a split second, suddenly turning crimson. ...that’s why… damnit. “I'm coming, I've got to make sure Eren’s okay… and need to get away from those traumatising noises…” Scotty swung his legs over the side of the bed, Blake jumping off the bed and racing down the stairs. Scotty followed him to where he sat next to Eren, his eyes widening as he saw Eren jerking. He's having a seizure. Fuck, how long has it been? Not a minute since I woke up, and god knows how long before that! Scotty moved next to Eren, getting him on his side as he seized, waiting out his seizure with anxiety. He glanced to the clock, making out the hands. If he goes over three I'm calling an ambulance. Scotty sighed in relief as Eren stopped an agonisingly long two minutes later, shaking. Oh my. Scotty shifted so he was laying down next to Eren, holding him close and feeling him cling weakly to his shirt.

Blake watched them, whimpering a bit as he moved to lick Eren’s frozen face. Why does my Human look like that? Why aren't his eyes moving??

Fuck… what do I do? I'm not getting any help from upstairs anytime soon, what the fuck do I do? Scotty shifted as he felt himself laying on something, pulling out Eren’s phone from under him. Right. Scotty looked up his number from the group chat, sending a text.

SO: Casper, it's Scotty, borrowing Eren’s phone- he had a seizure and is in shock and I don’t know what to do please can you come and help I know it’s late but can you?

CP: what the hell are you doing up at midnight for? And aren’t Lathe and Spades there?

SO: They're rather occupied with... Uhm... each other... and Blake went to me and woke me up when he started seizing

CP: Alright, I'll be over soon... Did you guys give him his medicine?

SO: Yeah he was sick earlier so we gave him his PTSD stuff in an IV, and he held down his meds after dinner.
CP: Are you positive that he held it down? Because he’s supposed to be completely knocked out...

SO: ...there’s not another puddle of vomit visible...

CP: He didn’t like choke on it did he? Or did he get up to vomit? I know the beanbag’s close to the bathroom.

CP: Open the damn door…

Scotty quirked an eyebrow at that before he heard rapping at the door, getting up and opening the door for Casper. “I’m sorry for making you get up so late, I don’t think he was in any shape to walk to throw up his medicine in the bathroom, and he didn’t choke on it, there’s no evidence to see…” Scotty closed the door behind him, unsure of what to do at all. Fuck… and now I have to deal with two confusing circumstances… but it was my only choice.

Casper nodded, moving to Lathe’s bag and getting Eren’s medication. He moved to Eren’s limp body, injecting the medication into his system and then disposing of the syringe. “I’m gonna check something…” He quietly padded towards the bathroom turning on the light and sighing. He threw up… He only somewhat made it to the toilet… “Scotty.” He called softly for the taller man to come look at the development. We can’t give him pills right now…

Scotty followed him, shaking his head at the mess. ...points for effort... but no dice. “So he sorta made it in here… he’s still really sick… I’ll get the stuff to clean this… but he’s not going to be able to sleep much without his medicine.” ...by himself. “...at least not alone. I’ll probably sleep with him tonight. And I’m really sorry, having you come out here I keep thinking was just really unnecessary and ugh I'm sorry, forget it I can't words…” Scotty dropped his head a bit, turning to get cleaning supplies. I think I know where Lathe keeps them…

Casper watched him leave. Well... I don’t really mind... I mean, I got to see you, I would consider that trip not wasted. Casper moved back over to Eren, carding through his hair as Blake laid on his chest, trying to get him to calm down a bit. You’ll be on injected PTSD for awhile, until we know you’re not gonna throw up again. He watched as Eren started to fall asleep, a soft smile on his face. That’s it Eren, relax and sleep, Scotty and I will stay with you tonight…

It was awhile until Scotty returned to the beanbag bed, seeing a Eren curled up to Casper, who was on his side. ...how do I...? ...you know what. Fuck it. Scotty sat down next to Casper, pulling the blanket up and tentatively winding his arm around Casper's middle. ...mine.

Casper looked over to Scotty, a soft smile on his face, though he shifted over Scotty to lay on his other side. “You should be sleeping next to Eren… In case he wakes up and needs you.” You’re like an older brother to him…. Casper laid his head on Scotty’s chest, listening to his heartbeat, and
his fingers playing with his shirt hem. Are Lathe and Spades actually doing it upstairs? And that’s why I was recruited to come?

Scotty sighed as Casper laid down on top of him, shivering a bit as he first started to play with the hem of his tank top, calming and feeling a warmth settle over him. …mine. “Y-yeah… and thank you.” I’m glad you came… Scotty drifted to sleep, deeply contented with life as Casper slept on his chest.

Lathe cracked open an eye early the next morning, yawning widely, looking over and smiling as Spades slept peacefully next to him, smirking. I love you. He pecked her cheek lightly, slipping from bed to slip on clothes and pad downstairs, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He nearly missed the setup on the beanbag bed, stopping as he saw a familiar mop of violet hair. …when the hell did Casper get here? And Scotty’s there too… that’s adorable… but it also means something happened with Eren… and we were kinda busy, so we couldn’t be called for help… awk-ward… but good thinking. Lathe let it slide, trying not to wake them up as he went to get coffee.

Scotty cracked open his eyes after a few more minutes, looking around in confusion before registering the weights on his body. What the hell? Oh… Right… Eren had a seizure… And Casper is… Oh my god is he hard? Scotty blushed crimson as he felt Casper’s morning wood pressing against his leg. Oh fuck me…

Casper started to wake up as Scotty shifted a bit underneath him, letting out a small sound as Scotty’s leg rubbed a bit near his crotch, his face suddenly feeling like it was on fire as he realised he was hard. …oh fuck… Casper moved to push up from on top of Scotty, stuttering apologies, his gaze fixed anywhere but his face- when he felt Scotty’s own morning wood poking at his ass, looking up at him and flushing completely, a small spark of guilty lust in his eyes. I really want to take care of this… but I don’t know if you’d be okay with that yet...

Scotty didn’t miss the look Casper gave him. Fuck it… We can be quiet, and the bed upstairs doesn’t creak… Scotty carefully removed Eren’s hands from his shirt and moved Casper off of him, getting up himself before yanking on Casper’s arm and dragging him up the stairs quietly. I kinda want to take care of this… And now would be great.

Casper stumbled after him, letting him drag him upstairs, lazily grinning as he realised what was happening. Scotty had just gotten them inside his temporary room and shut the door when Casper pressed him against the door, hungrily kissing him, pressing flush against him. Please… if you want this… because I really want this...

Scotty kissed back just as hungrily, though he moved around to switch their positions, pinning Casper against the wall, and kissing him with vigor, moving his head down to kiss his jawline and then all the way down to his neck and collarbone. Fuck it… You’re mine right now...
Casper’s eyes widened as Scotty suddenly took the lead, gasping as Scotty trailed to kiss at his neck, letting out a quiet moan as he nipped at his skin. *oh my god…* His arms wound around his shoulders, keeping him at his neck, arching up to keep their bodies flush. He gasped as Scotty’s hands found his ass, panting and trying to keep his voice down. “S-Scotty… nnngh… p-please…” *please… make me yours.* His hands ran down Scotty’s back, trying vainly to keep quiet. *Whatever you want, you can have it. I want to give it to you. Anything.*

Scotty smirked at the response he got from Casper, easily lifting him up and walking over to the bed, practically throwing him down on the mattress, turning to the nightstand and pulling out a bottle of lube and a few condoms. *I might need more than one with how pent up I am…* Fuck… He grabbed a scarf that he had brought, pulling it taut. “Think you can keep quiet?” *I’m gonna gag you if you say no…*

There’s no way with you looking at me like that. Casper shook his head, giving him no resistance as Scotty then gagged him, his eyes hooded as Scotty then tied his hands to the headboard with the other end of the fabric, whining a bit. *But I want to touch you too…* His length strained against his boxers, trying to coax Scotty on top of him with his eyes. *Get the fuck over here.*

Scotty stood back for a moment, admiring his handiwork. He lifted Casper’s shirt over his head and left it there on his arms, looking to make sure the door was locked before he grabbed Casper’s boxers and tore them off in one go. Looking over his bare body, Scotty had no reserve as he touched him everywhere. *God, he feels wonderful, and I’m not even in him yet.* He reached out and flicked one of Casper’s nipples experimentally. *How do you take that?*

Casper let himself moan freely into the gag as Scotty’s hands travelled up and down his body, trying to roll his hips up and find some friction. Casper’s eyes raked up and down his body, wanting him to get rid of his clothes too. *I want to see you, damn it…* Casper let out a sudden loud groan as Scotty flicked his nipple, his hips bucking up. *Please… my god, just fuck me already…*

Scotty’s eyes darkened as he watched Casper’s body react under him. “I hope you're prepared… Cause I don’t exactly know how to be gentle…” He reached up behind him and took off his shirt and slipped out of his boxers, his own length dripping in precum. *God damn…* Well… Time to open him up. He grabbed the lube and condoms, moving in between Casper’s knees, a single finger going to teasingly poke at the hole, his other hand reaching up to flick his other nipple. *I wanna have you shudder under me…*

Casper spread his leg widely for him, his eyes darkening as he drank in the sight of Scotty’s impressive length and wide girth, precum dripping from the head. *It really is true, what they say…* Casper nodded as he spoke, trying to speak around the gag. “…don’t be.” *I don’t want gentle. I want to be had, any way you want. Please.* Casper thrusted his hips down when Scotty poked teasingly
at his entrance, groaning as Scotty flicked at his perk nipple.

Scotty watched with hooded eyes, moving his hands and finally lubing a finger up and gently prodding at Casper’s pucker before inserting the finger in one go. *I have no patience but I know you need to get prepped... Or I can’t fuck you...*

Casper’s head fell back against the pillows, moaning as Scotty felt up his walls, thrusting back onto his finger. *Please... I have zero patience... I want you...*

Scotty’s one finger quickly became two, which just as quickly became three. His pace was almost merciless as he had located Casper’s prostate and teased all around it. *I know exactly where it is... you will be mine ....* His hands were almost a blur as he put on a condom and lubed himself up. *I can’t believe I’m actually doing this... But it feels so right.*

Casper moaned without shame as Scotty teased and prodded at his prostate, his hips meeting the thrusts of his hands, precum streaming down his length as he relished in the feeling of being stretched. He whimpered as the hand was suddenly gone, looking down to see Scotty putting on a condom, his legs spread very wide and hips moving down to encourage him to go forward as he lined up with his entrance. *I don't know if you know just how flexible I am... and please... just take me already...* Casper whined with need, the look in his eyes lustful and desperate. *Please.*

Scotty’s grin looked almost sadistic as he moved Casper up a bit, his knees tucked under his lower back, his length pointed to his entrance. All it took was one solid thrust and Scotty’s massive length plunged deep into Casper. *Holy... Fucking shit... He’s fucking tight... And god this feels amazing. I haven’t even moved yet, either. That damn look should be illegal.* He waited only a few seconds for Casper to adjust, then rolled his hips to force himself even deeper, a groan rolling off his tongue. He dipped his head down, biting at Casper’s collarbone, making sure his mark was hidable.

Casper panted with excited anticipation as Scotty propped him up a bit, gasping as he suddenly sheathed his huge length inside of him, feeling tears prick at his eyes as he was stretched to accommodate his girth and long length. “S-Scotty... h... HA!” Casper gave a sharp cry as Scotty rolled his length even deeper into him, letting out a long moan. Casper bared his neck to him, uncaring. *Mark me. Please. I want everyone to know I'm yours. I want something to be damn proud of.* He groaned as Scotty sucked hard at his collarbone, turning his head and trying to coax him closer to his throat. *Let me have something to show off.*

Scotty’s eyes lit up as he heard Casper’s muffled moans of his name, begging for a brutal pace, pulling only halfway out before slamming back into him, teasing his prostate with each thrust. His pace soon became quicker, and his head moved as Casper coaxed him, making his way up to
Casper’s neck and biting the supple flesh until it gave way a bit, lapping at it in some sort of apology, tasting the metal tang of blood on his tongue. *Mine.*

Casper’s muffled groans became louder as Scotty thrusted faster into him, moaning wantonly as he teased his prostate. “S-Scotty… p-please…” Casper gasped as Scotty bit his neck and drew blood, sighing as he lapped at it apologetically. *You… I haven't had too many people… but nobody ever would give me what I wanted… and then, thank fucking god, you get it right.* Casper moved his hips to meet each thrust, completely surrendering to Scotty, his legs going to wrap around his waist and push him even deeper.

... *Message received.* Scotty immediately pounded harder and deeper into Casper, shifting just a bit to directly aim at his prostate. *Let's see if you can come without me touching your dick at all… You certainly sound like you can…*

Casper cried out as Scotty hit his prostate dead on, meeting it completely with every hard thrust. *Oh my god… “S- Scotty… p-p- please, I can’t… mnngh …”* Casper felt a hot heat pooling in his abdomen, his own length painfully hard and dripping onto his stomach, the slightly painful throb of neglect arousing him even further, drinking in the absolutely predatory look Scotty was giving him. *I can't last much longer…*

... *Hot fuck.* Scotty’s eyes glinted with pride as he continued to roughly pound into him. He was starting to feel that warm sensation beginning to form in his stomach. “Casper… I want you to cum for me… Okay? But we gotta cum together.” *You’ll have to wait for me… Heh.*

*Is that an order?* Casper tried to hold down the need to cum for a while longer, finding it immensely difficult as Scotty kept up his absolutely brutal pace, nailing his prostate with every thrust. *I'm trying…* Casper forced down the want for as long as he could, immensely aroused by the throb of his length as he kept from cumming, trying to speak. “S-Scotty… I-I c- can’t… mnngh… I h-have to cum… I w-want to so bad… j-just let me cum… p- please…”

Scotty smirked, moving towards Casper’s ear and nipping at it. “Then *cum* for me, Casper, cum for me.” His voice was dark and sultry as his thrusts grew erratic, feeling his own coil beginning to unwind. *I’m gonna cum too.*

“*SCOTTY!*” Casper cried out as he came hard, a large load decorating their chests as he panted and moaned Scotty’s name over and over like a mantra, going limp and letting Scotty use him until he came... *that felt so good…* Casper relished in the feeling of being filled, his eyelids fluttering as his gaze raked over Scotty's body. *...I’m yours.*
Scotty could barely contain himself as he heard Casper’s muffled shout and felt his walls clamp around him. He gave a couple more erratic thrusts before leaning over him and emptying out his huge load into the condom. He didn’t pull out, simply laying there above Casper with Casper in his arms. *That felt amazing, I haven’t been in something so right in a while.*

Casper panted, loving of the feeling of Scotty still inside of him and on top of him, his eye sliding shut and head falling back, tired and letting Scotty hold his limp body, his hands working to try and undo the knot around them. *I wanna touch… let me… please…*

Scotty looked up feeling him wiggling in his grasp. *Oh, you wanna be released… That can be done I think.* He reached up helping to get his hands out of the scarf and then remove it from his mouth. “It worked great as a gag.” *Which is awesome… I wonder when I’m gonna tell him that this is my house now?*

Casper wasted no time in taking hold of him and kissing him deeply, his hands grabbing his shoulders, taking small breaks between kisses to speak. “Scotty… I’ve never… ever… been with someone… who gave me… *exactly*… what I wanted.” Casper looked up to him, his eyes full of pure adoration, a tear trailing down his cheek as he thought. *…the fifteen year wait… at this point… it was worth it.*

Scotty gave Casper a lopsided grin. “Well, I’m glad you enjoyed yourself… And there’s… Definitely gonna be…. More than that… Later on.” *I can definitely say that. Well… I had fun! We’re gonna need to head back soon, Eren’s probably gonna wake up soon.* He moved to kiss Casper’s marked neck. “I also didn’t mean to draw blood.” His licks were gentle as he remembered.

Casper sighed quietly, lost in the feeling. “T-that’s very okay… I was fine… I thought you were doing it on purpose, actually…” *That was very okay.* ‘S-Scotty, Uhm… I kinda want to say something else. I just… I love you.” Casper spoke quickly and quietly, not sure how Scotty would react to those words.

Scotty held Casper a little tighter as he spoke. “I… I-I can’t…. I can’t right now.” He told Casper softly into his ear before going back to lap at his huge bite mark apologetically. *I can’t say that yet…*

Casper nodded, one hand cradling the back of Scotty’s neck as he lapped at the mark, his other lovingly tracing patterns over his back, his shoulders. “That’s okay… you take your time saying it.” *This was all a pretty quick development for you- but I’ve been waiting to say that for forever. I knew you’d need time.* His eyes fluttered shut, and he would have been content to just lay there forever.
Scotty’s licks soon turned into sucking, getting focused as he started to mark Casper’s neck all over. … You are mine, and everyone will know that. Scotty could almost feel the blood rushing down to his length, getting harder yet again, still inside of Casper. I wonder if he’d be up for another round… I certainly can. Scotty moved teasingly, rolling his hips to gauge how Casper would react to it. They won’t mind if we’re gone… Payback from last night dammit. I won’t be able to last long with how tight Casper is right now, so it won’t take long...

Casper let out a long sigh as Scotty marked him, gasping as he rolled his hips again, his hips bucking up at the sudden action. More. “S-Scotty… m-more…” Casper was very aware that he was no longer gagged, trying not to get too loud. His arms wound around his shoulders, pulling him close, his legs coming up around his waist, starting to harden again. Please...

Scotty smirked, continuing to roll his hips into Casper’s tightness. Holy fuck… It feels amazing… Scotty moved around, moving Casper’s legs from around his back and flipping over so Casper was on top of him. I want you to ride me… I haven’t gotten ridden since college, holy shit…. Scotty let his large hands fall on Casper’s hips, letting him stay pressed against his chest, but moving him at an almost frantic pace.

Casper let Scotty move him on top of him, propping himself up for better leverage, rolling his hips and meeting every thrust of Scotty’s, flushed completely as he drank in Scotty’s pleasured expression, panting and gasping with every thrust. “S-Scotty… hah… oh my god… s-so good…” He dipped his head down, suckling at Scotty’s collarbone, leaving a trail of marks. Mine. Yours. Everything.

Scotty let Casper mark his collarbone, letting out soft moans as he did so. Fuck this feels great. His hands never left Casper’s hips, his grip tight as he forced Casper down onto him with each thrust up. God, your voice sounds wonderful, damn….

Casper’s voice heightened in pitch, no longer caring and moaning loudly with each thrust, gasping as Scotty found his prostate again. He could feel his own climax coming quickly, trying to speak clearly. “S-Scotty… ha… n-not… much… haaa… longer… c-can't l-last… nnngh…”

Scotty smirked pulling Casper back down onto him so he was flush against him, bending his knees to get leverage and then brutally attacking his prostate. “Cum for me Casper… I wanna hear you moaning my name.” God your voice is awesome… I want more ...

Casper’s head fell into the crook of Scotty’s neck, panting and moaning loudly, crying out as Scotty attacked his prostate. “SCOTTY!” Casper let his name fall from his mouth like his life
depended on it as he came again, his hands everywhere on Scotty’s chest, becoming limp, putty in his hands as Scotty still pounded into him. ...you... you feel so good....

Scotty continued, his hands still had their iron grip on Casper’s hips, most likely forming bruises as he kept up his relentless pace for another minute before his own coil snapped. *Fuck*... *That felt great*... His breathing was harsh as he held Casper’s hips down, making sure he was buried to the hilt. *Damn, that condom is fucking loaded*... *I can feel it oozing out, fuck, well it's fine, it's not broken at least*... *No messy clean up.* Scotty’s hands moved to Casper’s back, keeping him pressed against his body. “Feel good?” He asked, his voice quiet and sensual as he spoke into his ear. *Felt amazing for me...*

“M- more than good… that…” Casper lifted his head, capturing Scotty’s lips in a deep kiss, tangling their tongues. *Perfect... I really really like having you top...* Casper broke their kiss after a long moment, dropping his head down again, resting exhaustedly on Scotty. “...I really don't want to move... but we kinda have to…” *I don't wanna do anything that isn't me just holding onto you...*

Scotty nodded, holding Casper close still. “Well, soon I’ll have a house… Hopefully.” *If the paperwork goes right, which it should... And they’re already starting to move stuff over to the new house. I know Eren’s instruments were moved, along with almost all the art supplies...* Scotty shifted under Casper, slowly pulling out of him, groaning as he did so, “Fuck, you're tight...” His length slipped out of his heat. “Hmm, we should get dressed, when do you need to be to work by?” *I’m still very unfamiliar with your schedule....*

Casper shifted at the odd sensation, rolling over. “Ugh, I think ten?” *It's hard to think straight when that just happened...* Casper went to stand, wincing as he stood up, shifting around his weight. *Or walk straight... this is gonna be fun. What even is the time?* Casper looked to the clock, seeing it was almost eight thirty. “There's plenty of time for me... when are you supposed to be at work?” *Your schedule is new, so I don't know it.* He looked around for his boxers, trying to locate his clothes. *Dammit, where did all my stuff go?*

“I’m on call this week... Then I’ll start having office hours, so I’ll be staying home with Eren today... Want me to bring you something for lunch?” *I’m sure the Kid and I can figure something out between the two of us...*

*Staying home? “Uhm, if you want to, that'd be really nice... isn't Eren supposed to be starting his therapy soon though?” That's a thing that's happening... and where the hell are my clothes? Did something get left downstairs? I'm missing a jacket and pajama bottoms because I couldn't run over with just boxers on.*
Scotty got up and got his clothes, helping Casper locate the rest of his clothes. “Your jacket’s downstairs… You took it off before we fell asleep.” I remember watching you take it off… “Yeah, he’s starting therapy, but I don’t know when or where that is…” I assume that Lathe is taking him?

Casper finally found his pj bottoms, donning the rest of his clothes. “Thanks- and yeah, I'd assume that Lathe would be the one on top of that… don't know how much he'll talk though, at least for the first few visits…” He’s still very quiet. Casper finished dressing, crossing over to Scotty and simply hugging him close, his ear resting on his chest, listening to the steady thud of his heart. Legitimately pondering calling in sick so I can be attached to you for the day… I'm such a clingy bastard… ugh, but I can’t just flake on James… “Dammit, work…” Casper finally forced himself to let go, standing on tiptoe to peck his cheek, swaying a bit as he came back down. Damn… I ache… not complaining, though. “Come on, let’s raid the kitchen.” Free food. Casper pulled Scotty along with him, not caring that a decent number of dark marks were very prominent on his slightly tan skin. I'm Scotty's. ...I like the way that sounds.

Scotty nodded, following Casper down the stairs, and towards the kitchen. He was immediately greeted by Eren slamming into him and holding onto his shirt, his whole body shaking. What...? What the hell happened here...? “E-Eren?” He gently ran a hand through the boy’s hair, looking up to Lathe. What happened?

Eren kept his head buried in Scotty’s chest, his whole body shaking as he clung to Scotty’s shirt. His eyes were wide as he was panicking, Blake whining behind him. I don’t wanna go to a therapy... No, that's scary... I don’t wanna go!

Lathe ran a hand through his inky hair, sighing quietly. “Eren’s first thing of therapy is today… I was trying to explain the whole thing of it to him, and he obviously doesn't want to go… but he really has to, and the school hasn't stopped calling and emailing me, they need me back to work, and today it's for the latter half of the school day. I would need to drop him off… but I think we can tell that's not going to work. ...Scotty, Eren adores you… could you maybe take him? His appointment is at eleven, and I'd give you the address…” He looked to him with a pleading look. You're not paying rent or giving me anything for food. I let you having your boyfriend over slide, and you do your duty as Eren’s honorary older brother. We’ll call it even.

Scotty looked down to Eren and sighed quietly, still running a hand through the mess of brown hair. “Yeah, I guess I can do that, when’s his physical therapy?” I can probably take him to that too, and that I know is at the hospital.

Eren looked up to Scotty as he agreed, a small smile on his face before he again buried it into Scotty’s chest and clung to him still. I don’t wanna go alone, that’s terrifying! What if they’ll think I’m a whore? What if they try to rape me?
“One- after lunch. Each is supposed to be an hour or so for his appointments. I'll give you money and you two can pick somewhere to eat out in between.” Lathe moved and gently rested a hand on Eren’s shoulder, sending Scotty a grateful look. “I'll make breakfast for everyone- French toast okay?” He smiled as Scotty nodded, moving to the kitchen.

Casper followed Lathe to the kitchen, stretching his arms above his head, sway in his step. “I'm helping- Need to make sure you don't do anything weird with your French toast.” He started rifling through Lathe’s cupboards, turning on the coffeemaker and. making himself right at home.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him. “Since when can anyone make French toast weirdly? It’s all just tasty breakfast in the end.”

“Lathe, come on. Even though we both let our French toast swim in maple syrup, I still need to ensure the toast itself is made correctly.” Casper set a frying pan on the stove, and soon the two of them were locked in a staring match, silently judging the other. Casper quirked an eyebrow at the few marks not concealed by his dress shirt, and somewhat by his hair. “You have fun last night?”

Whilst Eren was sick?

“Couldn't have had more fun than you two minutes ago, if your screams were anything to go by.” Lathe immediately shot back. "...I've accepted too many heathens into this household...."

Scotty just shook his head. Change the subject before it gets out of hand. “I can handle lunch Lathe, I’m not some needy college student, I can at least do that. Do we need to do any shopping while we’re out?” Might as well get that out of the way too… Scotty ushered Eren into his seat, helping to calm him down along with Blake, getting up to get him his tea. I’ll take care of Eren… You two continue with your pissing match.

Eren looked up to Scotty, taking his tea and sipping at it quietly. {What are they doing?] Why do they stare at each other in almost hatred like that? Why does Dad hate Casper? I thought Casper was nice?

Scotty sighed putting his head in his hands, looking up as Spades walked downstairs and greeted them. “Morning… Everyone.” Her voice was unsure as she went up to Lathe, kissing his cheek. Well, now I know what the screams were… Those two… God, Casper’s loud as all hell. “Why do you two look like you’re having a pissing match?”

“Because we are, apparently.” Lathe kissed Spades’ cheek as well, his arm slipping around her
waist. “And that’d be nice Scotty, if you've got time to. The grocery list is the orange list thing on the fridge.” Lathe went back to staring Casper down as the violet-haired man in question made breakfast. “Y’know, if you really think my cooking is that suspicious, I might as well just not cook anything for Scotty. I don't think you’d approve of me giving your boyfriend suspicious food.”

Scotty, I’m making you take one for the team. “You could just delegate cooking to Scotty instead- at least that’d be suspicious cooking I’d approve of. I'm just thinking about the children, Lathe.” Casper nodded back to Eren, continuing their roasting match.

Scotty sighed quietly, rubbing his temple. “Will you two knock it off and play nice for once? You’re freaking Eren out.” God, he was already clinging to me… And now he is currently curled up in my lap trying to hide. “Seriously… Think of the children, of which we don’t have.” I don’t know if we’re even going to consider it, you act like such a child sometimes.

Yet. Casper looked back to Eren apologetically, speaking. “Sorry Eren, it’s okay, we’re just being idiots and doing a thing where we just roast each other for five minutes. It just happens randomly. Everything’s okay though, we’re still friends.” Obviously. “Right, friend o’buddy o’chum’ o’pal?” Casper gave Lathe a shit-eating grin.

Lathe just stared at him before facepalming. “That last statement makes me want to disagree. But yes…” Lathe looked up between his fingers, seeing Casper still staring him down. He sighed, resigned. “…friend o’buddy o’chum o’pal.” …this is my life now.

Spades just shook her head, looking over to the coffeemaker. “Who else needs coffee? Given that exchange, it’s obvious you’ve had none.” Pouring myself a cup, Lathe’ll want one, and I’m not sure what you guys’ll want.

Eren slowly turned his head to look at them. “M-mom?” Eren asked quietly, setting his empty tea mug down. His voice was pretty timid and quiet as he sat in Scotty’s lap, looking like an oversized child.

Spades set down the mug she was holding, going over to him. “Yes, Eren? More tea?” Spades looked to his empty mug, her gaze warmly inquiring. …Scotty really does look like your older brother… he’s sure been acting like it.

“C-can I have hot chocolate?” He asked softly, his eyes large as he sat there quietly waiting for an answer. I haven’t had it in a long time.
I didn’t think you were one for sweets? But okay, of course! “Of course you can, hon. Just plain, or all the fancy stuffs?” She smiled as Eren held up two fingers, nodding. “Can do, Hon.” Spades went about making it after Lathe had helped take over coffee duty, soon setting a mug with the hot chocolate and marshmallows in from of Eren, a teeny bit of cocoa powder on top of some whipped cream. She pecked his temple as she set a spoon next to it. Just in case. “That okay, Hon?” “you honestly look like Christmas came early right now.

Eren looked over the hot drink with bright eyes, nodding, a small smile gracing his lips. They were becoming more frequent a sight, but not nearly as much as he had before the incident. He raised it to his lips, taking a sip and sighing quietly, staring at the drink, unbeknownst to him that he had gotten whipped cream on his nose. It’s really good.

Lathe looked to Eren, a spark of disbelief in his eyes. First the mac n’ cheese, now hot chocolate... next thing it’ll be him eating sugar straight from the bag with a spoon. Lathe stopped for an instant, knocking on the wood of the table before continuing to fix coffee, handing some to Scotty before going to his stash of chocolate in the cupboard, snatching a square and munching on it as Casper finished cooking. Eren wanting chocolate made me want chocolate. ...that is totally how this works.

Casper soon began plating French toast, Spades taking the plates he finished to the table. “I’m just making the entire loaf if that’s cool, because I assume at least someone here is going to eat like a starved wolf.” Which is a safe assumption. And if nobody else is the starved wolf if the pack, I will be happy to accommodate.

Scotty thanked Spades as she handed him a plate, setting it next to Eren’s on his right. He shifted a bit so he could try to reach around Eren’s middle, failing to reach a knife and deciding to just cut it up with the side of his fork. That works. “Thank you for the totally not suspicious French toast, Casp.” He took a bite, smiling and quickly going for another piece. ...I don’t understand how you’re able to actually cook shit. Scotty looked as Eren suddenly shifted in his lap, beginning to scarf down his food. “Whoa Eren, slow down, your food isn’t gonna grow legs and run away. Don’t choke on it.” Yeesh, you’re eating like your life depends on it. ...more than it normally does in human life.

Eren looked back and nodded, beginning to eat a bit slower than what he started eating at. But it’s good, and I like my food...

Spades elbowed Lathe in the side, staring as Eren scarfed down his food. He’s getting back to normal! Lathe look! It’s amazing!

Lathe looked to the table and watched in shock as Eren ate quickly, slowly shaking his head in
disbelief. He’s been talking a bit more, being a bit more social… he’s healed physically, for the
most part… we’ve gotten him the right medicines… and now he’s eating again… he’s getting
better. Lathe smiled, sitting down adjacent to them with his own breakfast- of course- covered in
maple syrup and butter.

Casper sat down across from Eren and Scotty, a mug of coffee done the way Lathe makes his in
front of him, nudging Scotty’s foot with his own. You really are a good influence on him, I’m
thinking. …you’d be great with kids. He winked to him as he looked up, enjoying the look of his
face flushing before turning his attention to his food. Food.

Eren continued to scarf down his breakfast, finishing off his plate and getting more. I’m starving…
I threw up all my dinner last night.

Scotty smiled softly, helping Eren get more food when he wanted. This is working out well, Eren
seems to have calmed down a bit. Scotty finished off his own plate, letting Eren stay in his lap.
He’s doing well, I’m not gonna complain.

Casper sipped at his coffee for a while, looking at the time and standing when he saw it was a bit
before nine thirty. “I should get going- I have to be at work by ten, and I still have to run home to
change and then book it to Trost.” That’s how this is going to work. “Thanks for putting up with
me and my antics- sorry about that Eren, it’s just a thing that happens.” Our entire relationship is
built on us roasting each other. Casper moved around the table to retrieve his coat and slip on his
sneakers, staring at the door in all of his mismatched glory, commenting over his shoulder. “How
suspicious do you think the neighbors would be to see me walk home like this in broad daylight?”

Lathe grinned, calling from the kitchen. “Casper, don’t worry. Nobody will notice your clothes
what with that huge purple rat on your head!” Lathe noticed Eren look to him worriedly, curling
into himself. He called to the front door again. “I still love you though Casp! No homo!”

“I’ll fuck you later, Casper!” Scotty shouted back, feeling Eren shift uncomfortably in his lap as he
did so. Did I scare him with how loud I was? Hmm… But I’m not wrong… I would love to fuck him
later.

Eren let go of Scotty’s shirt after a moment, moving to his own chair and just watching them all
from where he sat. What the actual hell just happened…? Am I… What? I don’t know what
happened…? Are they friends? Do they hate each other? Are they mad because of what I did? Are
they mad I threw up last night? A million what-ifs formed in Eren’s head as he curled up to
himself, only unfurling a bit to pet Blake, who took hold of his hands, making sure he wouldn’t
scratch at his skin.
Lathe looked across the table to Eren worriedly, setting down his mug. “Are you okay Eren?” When Eren didn't even really look up to him, Lathe sighed a bit. “If it’s about everything that just happened, we’re sorry. Casper and I roast each other all the time because we just do and it’s probably not what you’re supposed to build a friendship on but it works. And then Scotty joined in on the asshattery. Point being, we were all being asshats, and we’re sorry. Except for Spades. She roasted me because I deserved it. ...which is also why she wouldn't apologise for it if asked to. And I respect that.” Get on topic again, Lathe. “Just please don't look so scared of us- we’re not about to yell at you, sarcastically or otherwise. No, I'm not mad.” Lathe immediately responded to the spark of doubt in Eren’s eye. “You didn't do anything. It’s fine. But we, in the words of Casper, didn't keep the children in mind, so.” Lathe reached an open palm across the table, facing Eren. **Forgive me for that?**

Eren barely looked up during Lathe’s spiel, keeping his hands to himself and his eyes down. He looked up briefly every now and then but he froze when Lathe reached out across the table. **If… You said we were all asshats... except for mom... So does that mean I’m an asshat too? I… I didn’t mean to…** Eren held a guilty expression on his face as he slowly reached up his own palm, placing it on top of Lathe’s, asking for his own forgiveness. **Huh?** “Why do you need forgiveness? You weren't being an asshat unlike the rest of us- oh. Oh, Eren, by ‘we’ I meant Casper, Scotty and I. You were just chilling with your hot chocolate not doing anything. You don't have anything to apologise for. From today, or ever.” Lathe moved his hand to close Eren’s hand, reopening his palm for him. “So… can you forgive me and the rest of us for being mean to each other?” ...**There’s so much I should be apologizing for…** Eren slowly ran his fingers down Lathe’s palm twice, carefully withdrawing his hand back and curling up to himself. **I’m a failure as your son… You shouldn’t be apologizing to me…**

Lathe drew his hand back, standing and walking around the table to Eren’s side, holding out his arms as he bent down to his level, gently wrapping them around him and studying his expression for permission to carry him. When Eren didn’t object, he lifted him and carried him to the couch, sitting down and carding a hand through his hair, trying to coax him to unfurl and calm down. **I know it's stressful, having all of us around, loud and outspoken and sarcastic… and you've got therapy, and you must feel awful for everything you've been through and put us through ourselves… I'm sorry about that...**

Eren let Lathe pick him up, his eyes never coming up to meet his, as much as he didn’t want to be touched at that moment, he put up with it. **He's not gonna hurt me.... He's not gonna hurt me.... He's.... He's not.... I... I think...** Eren stayed curled up in his small ball as Lathe tried to get him to unfurl. **I'm a pain in the ass for him... Why doesn't he just throw me away? Why can’t he...give up? On someone as worthless as me... As traumatized as me?**
Spades walked down the stairs, her uniform nearly put together. She walked into the piano room, instantly spotting Eren curled up to himself and Lathe trying to coax him to unfurl. *He doesn’t look comfortable in the slightest right now. “Lathe… You need to let go of him…”* Her actions were slow and steady as she came up to Eren and started to free him from Lathe’s grasp. *I’m not necessarily sure that he likes being held anymore… Unless he says it's okay first.*

“Huh- What? Why?” Lathe still let Spades take Eren from his hold, letting go of him and watching defeated as Eren shuffled away from him on the couch, curled to himself and tugging at the quilt on the back of the couch, trying to hide in the fabric. *Oh. “I'm sorry, Eren… I'll let you be…”* Not knowing what else to do, Lathe stood, going to the kitchen to do the dishes.

Spades followed him, her arms going to wrap around Lathe’s middle. [What do you think set him off? I think this is what we get to deal with now… Instead of panic attacks.] *But….He ate today, which is progress, even if he did ‘run’ from Lathe. We still need to figure out his new list of triggers.*

Lathe immediately felt tension drain from him as Spades’ arms wrapped around him, sighing and thinking. [It was Casper and I roasting each other, I think, and then Scotty’s comment… us being sarcastically mean to each other. He was suspicious of Casper and I and then after Scotty spoke he was scared of him too- he moved from his lap. I was just used to holding him to calm him down…]

Spades nodded, holding onto Lathe still. [I can imagine him being unable to do the touchy stuff you guys did before… I can only imagine what it makes his mind think of now.] She turned her head to look at Eren curled up into a blanket, trying to hide, the whole blanket shaking along with him. *He must be going through so much… And he’s so quiet…. I wish he could just talk to us.*

Scotty slowly made his way over to Eren, crouching down by the couch where he was ‘hiding’. *Come on, Kid, we gotta get ready for your appointment. “Eren?”* His voice was soft, trying to coax him out of hiding. “Eren, come on, we gotta go to your therapy sessions.”

Eren simply shook his head. *I don’t wanna go, I don’t wanna be left alone with a stranger…. What if they’re one of the guys that raped me? What if they try to do it again?* He hid himself under the quilts, or at least tried to.

“Eren, please. It’s going to be a lot of help, and I'm going to be with you the entire time. It won't be long, and we’ll eat wherever you want in between. You'll be okay.” *I'm not going to just leave you there. I'm staying with you.*
Eren stopped shaking, slowly removing the blanket from over his head. *You’ll be with me? I won’t be alone.* Eren nodded slowly, removing the blanket from around him. He sat there quietly, looking at Scotty, unsure of what to do. *What do I do now??*

*Alright. We’ve gotten somewhere. You gonna get up and get downstairs to change and stuff? ...not by yourself, huh? “Alright, if you're not gonna go downstairs to change **yourself** …”* Scotty went and scooped him up like a child, walking with him to the Scripting room. “I guess I’ll have to do it for you.” *No fucks given. ...I feel like an embarrassing sibling right now.*

Eren had wide eyes as Scotty picked him up, letting out a surprised yelp. *What the hell?! Why’s he carrying me!?* Eren looked around in confusion, though he started to figure out what was happening as he was set on his bed. *Okay… Um… Are you getting me clothes?*

*You seem like you just want to hide from the world today...* Scotty rummaged through the dresser that had been moved downstairs, soon handing Eren a long-sleeved shirt that wasn't too thin, a hoodie, and sweatpants, along with thick socks. “Here you go, kid. Get dressed, and then come on upstairs, okay?” *You’ll be fine.* Scotty smiled to him, leaving him to get dressed and going to make sure he himself didn't look like a total mess. *Let’s go see how epically I can fail at looking like a functional human being...*

Eren was upstairs in his clothes after only a few minutes. He was silent as he got upstairs, curling up to himself in his spot on the couch. *So... Where are Mom and Dad going?* He watched in silence as they were getting ready to go out. *Where are they going? Are they leaving me here?*

Lathe set his coffee mug in the sink, tugging at his tie as he walked to get his medical bag, stopping to press a kiss to Eren’s forehead, answering his inquisitive look. “I'm going to get back to teaching classes, Eren. They won't leave me alone.” He smirked. “You’ll be fine for today. Scotty’ll take care of you. Try not to worry too much, okay? I'll see you later, Eren.” *You'll be fine.* Lathe picked up his medic bag and laptop, slipping on his boots, blushing as Spades kissed his cheek goodbye and shut the door behind him.

Eren watched him leave, curling up to himself as he was left alone. When Spades came over to kiss his forehead as well, he timidly moved to lick her cheek before moving to hide again under the quilt. *You two are leaving me... Are you going to come back? Is Scotty gonna be keeping me now? Why aren’t any of the instruments here anymore? Are you guys moving out.... But leaving me here??*

Spades was long since used to being licked, and saw his worried look, smiling warmly. “I’ll be home later tonight, Eren. I’m on duty again starting today. You don't have to worry about anything. If there’s ever anything on your mind that's really bugging you, you know you can tell Lathe, Scotty or I. And your therapist, too. They need to know stuff to help you. We’ll all listen to you.
Okay?” She smiled as Eren timidly nodded. “Okay. Love you, Hon.” She pecked his forehead one more time before going to slip on her shoes, waving as she closed the door behind her. *He’ll be okay.*

Scotty came downstairs after a little bit, having taken a quick shower and attempted to make his hair slightly less cray with little success. “I guess I look functional enough. You ready to go, Eren?” Scotty walked to the couch, deciding to sit on the floor in front of Eren. *He’s not going to get up easy, I don't think. Let's see if I need to talk him out of his cocoon.*

Eren poked his head out of the cocoon, quickly ducking back into his safe haven after shaking his head. *Nope… I don’t wanna go, I don’t wanna talk to anyone… I already told Lathe what happened… I don’t want to talk about it anymore…*

Scotty reached out calmly after a moment, fiddling with the corner of the quilt, his voice quiet and tone soft. “Eren, I know you don't like talking about it… but you don't have to talk about everything today… little bits at a time… and you need to talk at least a little if you want to get better and move on… we don't want to judge you, we just want to help…” *That's all we want to do right now.*

Eren just stayed under the quilt, shaking his head repeatedly as Scotty spoke. *No… I don't wanna go! Dad already knows what happened! And I don't want to tell anyone about it! I don't want people feeling pity for me! I don't fucking want that!*

“…Eren, don't you want the nightmares to stop? It can help fix that… it can help you stop being scared of everyone, have a little more confidence in yourself… help you put everything behind you, and move on. I think it’s important you go… because of all that.” *It's important.*

Eren slowly crawled out of the quilt looking at Scotty tensely for a moment. {But… I’m not worth it though…} *I wasn’t worth saving in the first place… I wish I would’ve died after the first day… Everyone would’ve been better off… Even Levi…*

{Eren, you're more than worth it. Believe me. You've made a lot of people unbelievably happy and you're inspiration for a huge lot of people, and there are a lot of people that love you. Including me. Please don't think you're not worth it. Because you are.} Scotty sent him a warm smile, standing up and signing something else. {Ready to go?} He held out a hand for him, still trying to act as non-threateningly as possible.

Eren looked at Scotty, his eyes downcast in defeat. *Okay… I guess you can take me. He gave Scotty a shaking hand as he finally came out of his quilt shell. I don’t want to go… But you’re*
gonna make me… Aren’t you?

Scotty eased Eren to his feet, resting his arm over his shoulder and guiding him to the door to put on a coat and get on his shoes, driving him to the psychiatrist’s office. It wasn't barely ten minutes until they had arrived, parking and bringing Eren inside without much resistance. He signed him in, and soon they were led back to see the psychiatrist. Scotty froze the second he saw the man as he turned to greet them, instantly recognising him. I know you… oh no. Eren… Eren drew you as one of his rapists. what a fucking coincidence.

Eren looked at the man, simply going pale and moving into the room very slowly, he curled up in a far chair, curling his legs to his chest, hiding under his hoodie and simply closing his hood off to try and hide. Blake quickly moved to try and help him. I don’t want him… I don’t want to be raped again… No… Scotty brought me here to be raped… I wanna hide.

The therapist got up from his chair, a soft smile on his face. “Hi, Eren. It’s great to finally meet you, and I hope you’re as excited as I am to get to know each other on a more personal level.” I know I can’t wait to have access to that ass of yours.

Scotty instantly stepped between the two of them, staring down the man with an icy look. ‘Finally meet you’ my ass. “I think you two know each other plenty already. I'm afraid we can't stay. We have other places to be. Cancel our appointment. And don't bother trying to reschedule.” I'm so fucking done. Scotty knew Eren wasn't about to move on his own and instead picked him up, carrying him out of the office, ignoring the receptionist except to snatch a business card from the holder and going to the car. He set Eren in the passenger's seat and buckled him in before slipping in the driver's side and calling Spades, looking at the card. “Hey Spades… I found one of the nameless men Eren drew at the hospital. And he’s got a name. He’s Eren’s psychiatrist, Grant Cartmann.”

Spades put her pen down as she furrowed her brow. “Are you sure?” That would leave us with only 15 left to find.. Instead of 16. “I need to make sure, I’ll send a cop there now with a warrant…” I can’t believe we sent him to one of his rapists… Oh my god, what if Lathe had to drop him off… And left him there… alone?

“Spades, if either Eren’s shutdown or my instant recognition are anything to go by, he’s one of them. I'm just damn grateful I was there to get him the hell out.” I'm staying put until the cops show up- I don't want him running or trying something stupid. “We’ll head home in a little bit, try to get Eren calmed down and fed… we’ll see if we have to cancel the physical therapy…” His mentality is really really fragile… and this isn't helping...

Spades nodded, talking for a few seconds before a policeman was on their way with a warrant.
“Call Lathe… He should know… He needs to, how’s Eren? Is he okay? Is he panicking?” Oh god, I can’t think of what would’ve happened if you weren’t there, Scotty.

“Eren’s…” Scotty looked over to Eren, curled up to himself in a small ball, Blake pawing at him and whimining. “…isn’t that great. I’ll call him. Thanks…” Scotty hung up after a moment, calling Lathe. “Lathe, I’ve got some not great news… Eren’s psychotherapist was one of his unnamed rapists… Spades has sent a cop over to get him, but I’m just glad I was able to recognize him and get him out. You had to know.” Not good.

Lathe stopped his speech to the biology class as his phone rang, motioning that he would soon be back and stepped into the hall, his eyes wide as Scotty spoke, one hand running through his hair in shock. “Oh my god… how is he? Is he holding up?”

“Not that great, he’s…” Scotty turned to look to Eren again, only to see him begin to jerk, his hands clutching at his chest. Fuck. “He’s having a seizure.” Scotty hung up the phone and dropped it, getting out of the car and going around to Eren’s side, unbuckling him and getting him into the back seat so he could lay down, trying to calm him, holding onto him as time passed, keeping an eye on the clock. It was a solid three minutes before Eren slumped into the seat, his eyelids fluttering, beginning to drool. Scotty grabbed tissues from the console and wiped at the drool, gently guiding Eren after a little while to sit up on the backseat so he could get them home. He managed to buckle him in, Blake soon claiming the spot next to him, and went to drive them home before he saw his phone on the floor of the car. He decided he shouldn’t call Lathe again during his class, instead sending a group text to the two of them.

SO: So, the breakdown of what just happened is we go in, we recognize the guy, Eren slowly sits down in the chair and just draws away from the world, the guy tries to introduce himself as if they’ve never met and was just being a suggestive creep, I pretty much tell him to step off and that I’m onto him, carry Eren out, and get him in the car. I call Spades who dispatches a guy, then Lathe, Eren starts seizing while I’m talking to Lathe, I hang up, wait out the seizure, Eren is now sitting in the back of the car, I’m texting this. We are going home, getting him lunch (something to nibble at), and we are cancelling physical therapy for today. He is in even worse shape right now and cannot go.

IQ: That’s fine, I’ll be home before dinner and Lathe should be home soon. I’m really glad you were there Scotty, thank you.

SO: Of course Spades- I’ll see what I can do to make sure he’s okay

LQ: Thanks Scotty- I’ll be home about three. Thank you so much for taking care of Eren. You're the real MVP.

SO: Go back to teaching your heathens, Lathe. ...and you're welcome.
Scotty looked up as he saw an officer, nodding to him as he passed. *I can get going. ...yeah, I'm not staying to watch the show with Eren here.* Scotty left before anything more could happen, getting them home and carrying Eren inside. He set him on the couch, bundling him up in a quilt in the piano room, where he could see him from the kitchen. “Eren, I'm going to make us something for lunch. What would you like?” Silence. To be expected. “...how about you just nod or shake your head for these, Eren. Hot or cold?” *Give me something to work with, Eren.* More quiet. *you're predictable... “Mac n’ cheese?”*

Eren slowly nodded, starting to curl up to himself, beginning to drool all over again. *He was gonna rape me... He wanted to rape me... He... He was going to....* Eren’s eyes prickled with tears which he let overflow. *He was gonna rape me again...*

*Crap.* Scotty ran to the laundry room, snatching a blue kerchief from a clean pile and coming back, drying Eren’s tears and wiping up his drool. “Eren, hey, it’s okay, we got you out of there before anything could happen. We had no idea that’s who your psychotherapist was. If we knew we wouldn't be brought you there. But he was arrested right as we left, so now he’s going to be going away for a long time. One less person for you to have to worry about. It's okay, right now, we’re safe, and nothing more is gonna happen, okay?” *We’re getting close to having this be all over with.*

Eren could only nod, moving to grab Scotty’s shirt and cry more. *I don’t want to be a play thing, I’ve had enough of that...* Eren clung to Scotty, not wanting to let go at all, his grip white-knuckled.

Scotty held Eren close, letting him cry into his shirt, running his hand through Eren’s hair, trying to help his sobs to die down. *You don't want to let go, do you.* “Eren, if you don't want to let go, but you want food... do you want to watch me make mac n’ cheese? Help if you want to? You wouldn't be in the way at all if you wanted.” *I don't want you to think you'd be a bother.*

Eren calmed down after a solid 15 minutes of crying. He nodded to Scotty’s words before he shifted to hold onto him. *I don’t wanna be alone... He’ll come back... He’ll rape me... He’s gonna find me... He's....* Eren sniffled as he clung to Scotty still, silent otherwise.

Scotty stood up, Eren walking along with him, his arms around his middle as they went to the kitchen. Scotty acquiring a box of mac n cheese from the cupboard, determined to get it right. *Stovetop. Okay.* Scotty tried his best to correctly make the macaroni, remembering to set the timer and stir it as he needed to. He panicked a bit internally as he read the second-last instruction. *Strain it?* Scotty remembered the cloud of steam from when Casper did it, though he went about getting pot holders, determined to do it. He carefully set the tap to cold and, bracing the pot against the edge of the ceramic sink, kept the lid in place on the pot as he strained the water from it, the steam warm but not hot as he thought it would be on his arms. In no time he was stirring the cheese and milk into it, getting out two bowls and serving some to each of them, giving Eren the bowl with
more in it, along with a fork. “Here you go, kid. Lunch.” I really tried- I hope you like it. Scotty herded Eren to the couch, sitting down next to him to eat.

Eren looked to the bowl, slowly starting to eat it. He was very quiet, and stayed curled up to himself, his eyes never coming up to meet Scotty’s eyes. Eren stayed where he was, not even acknowledging the world around him. He didn’t notice Scotty come and take his bowl away, or Blake trying to comfort him. He didn’t even notice Lathe coming him hours later, he was just kinda there. I don’t want it to happen again… I don’t wanna be here anymore, I can’t live like this....

Scotty tried to get Eren’s attention after lunch, not getting anywhere with him. He's not there...

He's wrapped Eren back up in his cocoon of quilts again after taking his empty bowl, not knowing what else to do. He and Lathe talked quietly after he came home, neither of them really knowing what to do.

Lathe leaned his head on his hand, staring at his coffee mug. “There's not much art stuff left, his instruments were all taken over… I don't know… he needs some sort of distraction… ...how about I try and play some piano, see if he responds to that? If not, we rule out music and set up a movie?” He didn't talk to me when I tried to… I don't know what else to do.

Scotty shrugged. “Might as well try, I suppose. If not, then we’ll try that.” Go for it, I guess.

Lathe went to the Scripting room, picking up a binder from the middle shelves of the bookcase. He sat at the piano, picking out a few pieces and setting them up, beginning to play Ruins from Undertale. You were doing so well...we want our social Eren back...

... I don’t want it to happen... Is that music.... I hear music... Eren picked his head up slightly, starting to hear some of the things around him. Who’s playin music?

Lathe looked up as Eren moved a bit, switching to the Undertale theme. You can hear me! Well, the piano. Do you recognize it?

Eren picks up his head a little more. It’s the flower… It’s gonna hurt me… He wants me to suffer... Eren shifted back a little further into his cocoon. I wanna hide.

Lathe immediately switched tunes as he saw Eren shuffle a bit deeper in his cocoon, starting a bright rendition of Bonetrousle. Come on- everybody loves Papyrus. He’s the slightest bit cray and the sweetest thing ever. Don't hide, please.
Eren took a bit but poked his head out of his cocoon, finally peering around the room with dull eyes. *What’s happening…?*

Lathe smiled to him, slowing and faintly playing Dogsong, ending on a high note. “Hey Eren—” Lathe stood from the piano, slowly walking over to him. “…how’re you feeling?” *Maybe we can get a word or two out of you...*

Eren looked at Lathe with large eyes, but his gaze went right through him, he wasn’t completely there. *What? It stopped? The music stopped? Why?*

*The music.* Lathe immediately backed right up again, sitting down and starting to play Dummy!, keeping an eye on Eren and calling to Scotty. [Yo Scotty! Try and talk to him!] *That would maybe work.*

...*it’s working.* Scotty moved to the piano room, sitting on the floor in front of Eren, signing. {How’re you feeling, Eren?} *Give us something to work with here, please...*

Eren moved his gaze as everyone moved around in front of him. … *What’s this??* His eyes were starting to focus as he was coming back to reality. … *I like the music...*

Scotty tried again as Lathe played on, switching smoothly to Ghost Fight and Spider Dance. {Are you okay, Eren? How do you feel?} *You seem to like the music- isn't it from that game you played in the hospital with those YouTube guys?*

Eren’s eyes were finally able to focus on Scotty in front of him. *What’s he doing?? I don’t understand...* Eren gave him a blank stare as he watched Scotty move his hands.

...*does he not remember sign language?* Lathe was thinking the same thing, having begun playing the song of the same title as Scotty tried signing again, mouthing the words. {Do you understand me?}

Eren looked at his hands, raising his own palm towards him, open and up. *I’m sorry, whatever I did, I’m sorry...*
...maybe you'll remember it like this... now how did it go... Scotty ran his hand down Eren’s palm before shifting up onto the couch next to him, signing through his hands. {Do you understand me like this? Are you okay? How do you feel?} Come on, work...

Eren’s brow furrowed as his hands were grabbed. ... Wait... I know this.... {Y?} I don’t remember much of it though. Eren let Scotty take his hands, feeling as his fingers were moved. Why does he need to know?

{Because we want to know how to make you feel even better, what we need to do to accomplish that.} Scotty smiled faintly to him. Temporary memory loss. He’ll be back in no time.

{Where’s... Mom?} Eren’s hands were a bit shaky, but he was starting to calm down with Lathe playing music behind them.

{Mom is at work right now, but she’ll be home before dinner.} Scotty smoothly signed, Death by Glamour starting up behind them. Just like she promised.

{Mommy’s with the cows?}

...that was a long, long time ago... {...Eren, Spades is at the police station. working.} I don't know what else to tell you.

{What’s Spades? I want Mommy…} Eren started to panic a bit as he looked around the unfamiliar surroundings. Where am I? Mommy I’m scared!

...what’s Spades? Lathe looked to Eren, knowing Eren’s memory temporarily wasn't intact, but it still stung all the same. He switched tactics, playing Moonsong. I remember I played this on the cello for you forever ago... we just need to keep you calm at this point. Anything to keep you chill and okay right now.

Eren looked up and away from Scotty, taking in Lathe’s presence at the piano. That... Song... What is it? Eren whimpered quietly, struggling to get up by himself from the couch to make his way to the piano. What is it... I want to learn it.

Lathe looked up as Eren made his way to the piano with Scotty’s help, scooting over a bit on the bench, his right hand still playing. “Do you want to play the song with me?” You don't look like
you really know what a piano is right now... Lathe quickly went to snatch a different binder from the shelves of the Scripting room, coming back with the sheet music, the four-handed version and setting it up. Then again, you're acting like you would if Carla was alive, so... you might know. Lathe pointed to the top two bars, indicating they were his, and beginning to play. I wonder if you can catch on...

Eren looked over the music for only an instant before raising a shaky hand, though he instantly started to play along with Lathe. I like this song! I wonder if Mom knows it... Am I at Hannes’ house right now? Where is Hannes? His house looks different than the last time I visited.

Lathe keep flipping through the pages as they went through them, soon putting the binder on the stand and flipping from song to song, from Balcony to Quiet and everything that wasn't fast and intense. Lathe didn't know what else to do, simply letting him play along with him, taking over when Eren swayed tiredly on the bench more than an hour later, Scotty still faithfully there to scoop him up, softly playing Awakening as Eren started to drift. He made absolutely sure Eren was asleep on the beanbag bed, where Scotty had carried him, before finally stopping, burying his face in his hands and heaving a heavy sigh. ... what is Spades?

Spades opened the door not a few seconds later. “Where is he? Is he okay?” Her words frantic as she looked between the two of them. He looks like he’s asleep but he could be in shock...

Lathe looked up to her, his expression melancholy as he stood from the bench, going over to give her a hug, burying his face into the crook of her neck, mumbling a reply. “He’s okay, Scotty’s got him... as part of having a seizure, you can temporarily have memory lapse, which is what happened with him. He was unresponsive until I started playing the piano, and he... he asked for Mom and then didn't know what a Spades was and I played the piano with him for more than an hour, and he fell asleep not even a minute ago...” Lathe still did not let go of her, not wanting to. I'm just glad you're home...

Spades rubbed soothing circles into Lathe’s back, hoping he would calm down a bit. “Okay... But we should be thankful... It could’ve been much worse...” It could’ve happened again... He could’ve gotten kidnapped... And he could’ve gotten killed, it could be so much worse. “You said it’s temporary... Right? Well, we’ll just have to wait... Okay?” Spades felt the tears start forming in her eyes. He doesn’t remember me?

“Okay...” Lathe pulled back, trying to calm down, kissing her cheek and trying to keep her from crying. We’ll be okay... he’ll remember things soon enough. Lathe reluctantly let his hands slip from her middle, though he followed her like a lost puppy as she moved, not knowing what else to do and simply needing to be around her.

Spades sniffled, wiping away at the tears that formed in her eyes. “Lathe... What are we gonna do?
What happens if we can’t protect him? And we can’t stop it from happening next time?” Spades had led Lathe to the kitchen, her voice becoming increasingly higher as she spoke, turning so her head was in Lathe’s chest. That was almost disastrous… But what if we couldn’t stop it next time?

Lathe pulled Spades close, resting his cheek on her head, sniffling a bit before speaking. “…we’re just going to do the best we can to find the rest of these John Does so we don’t have to worry anymore… and until then, we need to be really careful… that’s all I think we can do.” I don’t know what other option there could be...

Spades nodded, sniffling as she held onto his shirt. I wish everything didn’t happen to him… I wish he was okay, and could be a normal teenager… “Why did this have to happen to him?”

“I… I don’t know… Eren just so happened to be one person to really get shortchanged by life, so to speak… it sucks… it really, really sucks.” Lathe pulled her along with him to the piano room again, sitting down on the couch and laying down, spooning Spades and just needing to hold onto her. Eren has some of the worst luck...

Spades made no comment, feeling better that Lathe was holding her. She laid down peacefully with him, Scotty having laid down with Eren. He really is a godsend… What are we gonna do when Scotty goes to work? Or when we move? Is he gonna be okay?

Eren shifted in his sleep, opening his eyes to stare at Scotty. Where’s Hannes? When’s Daddy gonna bring me home? Is mommy still sick?

Fuck… I can’t believe I’m thinking this, but damn, you’re awake… “Uhm, Lathe… he’s awake…” What do we do now?

Lathe wanted nothing more than to bury his face in Spades’ shoulder and hide, though he gave a resigned sigh and lifted himself over Spades and off the couch, crossing to the piano and sitting down, tired. Think, lullaby… Lathe had just rested his hands on the keys when he stopped, having heard a sound. ...did he say something?

<“When… When is… Hannes gonna… Be home?”> Where is he? He normally takes care of me… Where is he?

...who’s Hannes? He's never talked about him before…< “Uhm, Hannes will be home in a little while, Eren. Don't worry about it.”> I'll need to remember that… ask later… I had words written
out for this forever ago, why can't I think of them…?

<“But… Hannes knows when Daddy’s coming to pick me up… Is mommy still sick?”> Where are they? Mommy promised she would be better soon.

<“…Hannes said he’ll be back before… before your dad comes to get you. And mom is getting a bit better, little by little.”> That son of a bitch doesn’t deserve to be called your dad… and… who the hell is Hannes? He took care of you… how often? Sounds like he did it often enough...

<“… Hannes and I need to make dinner together… Are you Hannes’ friend?... I’m gonna make dinner for him!”> It’s gonna be dinner time soon! Eren moved to get up from the bean bag and start towards the kitchen, looking around like a child. Wait…. <“Where’s the icebox?”>

...He doesn’t remember me… Lathe stood from the piano, trying to fight back tears, faintly smiling. <“I-I'm Hannes' friend, Lathe. It’s… it’s nice to m-meet you.’> Lathe went to give him a hug, just wanting Eren back. ...I want my son back...

Eren turned to see Lathe come up to him, a large smile gracing his face as he was hugged. He let out a small giggle and moved his arms to tickle at Lathe’s sides. <“Lathe… Do you know where the icebox went?”> This isn’t what I remember… Did Hannes move?

Lathe’s eyes widened in surprise, jumping back and laughing as he was tickled, holding out his hands in defence, his expression changing as he looked to Eren smiling to him, giggling. ...I can't remember the last time you were that happy… Lathe’s eyes were suddenly filled with torment, his mind racing. He ducked his head down to hide his tears, mumbling an apology and suddenly going for the stairs, speaking quickly to Spades as he passed. “Spades, I need a few minutes, I'm sorry…” He disappeared upstairs with his laptop, his face in his hands, trying not to break down right there in front of him. I can’t...

Eren watched Lathe leave, confusion clearly written across his face. <“Did I do something wrong?”> I didn't upset Lathe… Did I?

Spades watched him leave with worry, standing and going to Eren, smiling to him weakly and ruffling his hair. <“No, you didn't do anything wrong. He’s just been having a rough day, had something to do. It’s okay.”> She gently led him over to the fridge. <“Now, the icebox got an upgrade. It’s all new- all the food is in here now.”> We just have to play along...
Eren opened the fridge up after a few moments of contemplation, steeling his nerves as it opened. He looked inside with wide eyes. <“It looks different….“> It doesn’t look like the food I’m used to. <“Help?”> Eren turned his head towards Spades, a completely innocent look on his face. I don’t know what’s what...

<“Okay.”> Spades showed him the ingredients they’d need for chicken noodle soup, guiding him through everything and chopping the vegetables as he watched. Spades was directing Eren to measure out water as she heard Lathe quietly pad up behind her, wrapping his arms around her middle and rest his forehead on her shoulder, mumbling something inaudible. “What was that?” She turned to look to him.

Lathe picked up his head, looking to her with tired eyes. “Spades… I quit my teaching job. I just… I don't want to be away from Eren while he still needs so much help and guidance. It's not like I extended my hiatus from it. I flat-out quit. I… I felt like I had to. I don’t… Eren is happy right now. I don't want the only reason he’s ever happy to be that he can't remember all the bad stuff. I want to help him, and I need to be home, with him to do that.” Mike understood… I’m grateful for that. Hopefully all the students will too.

Eren looked up to them, like they had their heads cut off. What are they saying? I don’t understand at all… Eren moved to continue to cut the veggies like he was supposed to.

Spades pulled Lathe around in front of her, wanting to keep an eye on Eren while he had a knife in his hand, hugging him close. “I understand… that’s a big decision to make, and he really does need someone around, now more than ever. ...thank you. ...you really are the best father he could ask for.” Spades pulled him down to kiss him chastely, letting him hold onto her still after they broke apart, as she and Eren cooked together. He couldn't have asked for anyone more devoted as a father. You care so much… I'm lucky you're mine, too.

Eren didn't seem to mind that everyone around him talked in a different language that he didn’t understand. He was just his bubbly self as he ate his chicken noodle soup. When’s Hannes gonna be home. <“When’s Hannes gonna be home?”> I need to take care of my horsy.
Chapter 44: The Third Attempt

...it was like that all week... Eren was so bubbly and happy all the time, chattering away with us about everything and nothing... I thought his memory would've been back by the first day or so, but... no. We had to tell him that he was supposed to stay with us for awhile until his... Grisha, I'm not saying it to describe him... until he came back from a trip to some family. We had to tell him Hannes was gone too, at a wedding across Germany. He just nodded like it was nothing. ...I get the idea he wasn't raised by his family so much as family friends... that living with new people for an entire week and more is- well, was- so normal for him... I just... he was so happy... and... he never is anymore... I really, really want him to be that happy all the time... even when he's not mentally eight- or four, we can't tell... I just want him to be himself again and remember us and still be happy... I'm so torn, I love that he's happy, but... it's hard not to cry at night knowing your son doesn't recognize you as their dad... but as their... friend they met days ago. ...I can barely sleep... everything's been moved to the new house, which is where we're going today to show him everything, move in officially. I had to get registered as a hobby breeder so we could keep all the animals we have. I hope he likes them all... with his mentality right now... in the barn, it'll be as if he never left home. Lathe took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down before going downstairs, smiling to Eren amidst the largely empty room. <“Hey kid, you ready to go?”>

Eren looked up from his book of doodles. Huh? <“Where are we going?”> Are we going to meet Hannes somewhere? <“Is Hannes coming?”> I usually stay with him... So why am I not with him?

<“Hannes is still far away- it takes a long time to get across the country. And where we're going... it's a surprise.”> Lathe grinned impishly, offering him a hand from where he sat on the floor doodling. ...you'll like the barn the most.

Eren held a bright smile on his face as he took Lathe’s hand and followed him towards the door, Blake quickly following after. Is the doggie coming with us too? <“Doggie?”>

Lathe nodded, picking up Blake’s vest and leash from its spot near the door, helping Eren get his coat on. <“Yep, the doggie is coming with us. His collar has his name tag on it. He’s Blake.”> Lathe pet Blake, letting him and Eren go out the door first, taking one last look around the barren house, staring up and reading the golden script on the wall one more time, the last line two days old, before shutting the door and locking it, leaving it under the mat for Scotty when he came home. ...it's his home now. Lathe led them to the car, unlocking it and buckling Eren in up front, getting in to drive them to the new house. He remembered something as they nearly passed Armin’s house, pulling into the driveway for a moment. <“Stay here for a little bit, okay? I have to go get someone.”> Lathe walked up the drive after Eren nodded, knocking on the front door. He quirked an eyebrow as Armin yelled for him to come in. Why isn't he just answering? Lathe opened the door, walking in a few steps and looking around before seeing Armin, amusedly grinning at him.
Armin sat on the couch, perfectly still, his eyes wide and worried. “Hi, Lathe… Um… Is this normal for him?” Salem has literally been on my head since he first came here… I don’t want to move, and make him fall off though… What do I do?!

Lathe just stared for a moment before throwing up his hands happily, exclaiming “My cat hat is okay!” Lathe beamed, walking up to Armin and kneeling next to the couch, looking to Salem. Salem regarded him with interest, coming up from his laying position to stand up on Armin’s head, leaping off of him to Lathe’s shoulder, where he climbed on his head to sit, perfectly upright. *My throne hath returned.* He chuckled, looking to Armin and standing. “Purrr-fectly normal. He give you any trouble?” *Hopefully not.*

“Besides insisting that he had to be on my head, he was perfectly fine.” Armin stood up, a sigh of relief that he could stand without worrying about making Salem fall off. “I was worried he would fall if I stood up…” *But I’m glad he’s used to it at least.* “I’ll go grab his things…” Armin left him there for only a few minutes before he came back with his cat box, his bed and the food all neatly put together.

“Eh, the Saylay does what the Saylay does. If he was gonna fall off he’d either shift or jump off. But thank you so much for taking care of him.” Lathe gratefully took the box from him, Salem moving around his shoulders like a boa, his tail flicking back and forth contentedly. *Should I tell him…?* “Uhm, a heads up, if you see Eren around in the near future- his memory is kinda shot, temporarily. At least, we hope it’s temporary. If you see him and say hi and he doesn’t remember you… it’s not permanent. He’ll be okay soon.” Lathe smiled to him weakly. *He doesn't remember me either.* Lathe tried not to let a shadow cast over his face at that, not really succeeding. *I'm still just a stranger, really…*

Armin didn't miss the look on Lathe’s face. “He doesn’t remember anyone… Does he?” *I can imagine what you would feel like… If that’s permanent…. Who would break the news to him? God… That’s horrible. “How old is he? Can you tell?” It could be really bad for all we know…*

Lathe dropped his head, staring at the box in his arms, not really acknowledging Salem licking at his cheek. “…he asked me the other day what a ‘Spades’ was… he thinks I'm a friend of some guy named Hannes. He only speaks German, and he’s so happy and bubbly, endlessly chatty… we think he’s between four and eight… he thinks Carla, his mum, is still around… nothing bad had happened yet. I…” Lathe couldn't stop a tear from running down his cheek, trying to wipe it away quickly. “It’s been an entire week, and… we’re beginning to worry it’s… if it's not temporary.” *It has to be…. I want to be his Dad again, Spades needs to be his mum again, he needs Levi to be his boyfriend… he’s my son… and he doesn't think so…*

Armin nodded, moving to give Late a hug. “If you ever need to talk to someone, you’ve got a neighbor with a good ear and a lot of time.” *I mostly work from home… So I’m here a lot. “I’m here if you need me.”*
Lathe sighed heavily, weakly nodding. “...Thanks, really... I should get going, today’s moving day. I'm taking him to see the new house. He’ll like the barn, it’s got all the kinds of animals he used to have. You need to come over and visit, when things are a little more smoothed out.” Lathe smiled to him, looking to Salem as he whacked his mouth with his tail. “I know, I know, you're bored. Deal.” Lathe wearily chuckled. “I’ll see you around then Armin, okay? And I just might take you up on that offer.” *God knows I might soon need it...*

“Of course, whatever you need. I’m here.” Armin smiled warmly at him. “Go get him his horse.”

*He should be happy.*

Lathe nodded, trying to return his smile. “Alright.” Lathe left, Armin shutting the door behind him. He opened the door to the car, Salem jumping in off of his shoulder and making himself at home around Eren’s shoulders, purring. *My other throne hath come to lavish me.* <“Eren, this kitty here is Salem. He looks like he really likes you- he's always climbing all over the people he likes.”>

Lathe put the box in the trunk and got back in the car, letting Salem and Eren get acquainted on the drive over. It wasn't two minutes before they arrived, soon announcing they had arrived. ...*this is home now.*

Eren looked around, reaching up to pet Salem gently. He saw the house, looking at it with gleaming eyes. <“Woah… It looks so cool.”> *what is this place? Am I staying here now?*

Lathe smiled, getting him out of the car and taking the box with them into the house, setting it on the floor inside the door for that moment, looking around the large entryway with a staircase leading upstairs just off to the side. He walked them through to the kitchen, straight through the house and setting Blake’s vest and leash on a hook near the back door, opening it to the back porch and leading them down a path to a barn in the back. <“You'll see the rest of the house soon- but I wanted you to really see the barn first.”> Lathe opened the barn door, natural light filling the space. *You'll love this.*

Eren looked into the barn, curiosity quickly taking over as he ventured in. <“Charlie!”> Eren’s eyes lit up as he went over towards the horse stall where a nice Bavarian Warmblood Stallion stood. *It’s my horse!!*

*Charlie? ...you must've had a horse that looked just like him.* Lathe ambled up to them, patting Eren’s shoulder. <“Yep- we brought Charlie over from the house. He and you are going to be staying here for a while, and he needs someone to take care of him. His food and grooming supplies are in the next stall, if you'd like to give him his lunch and brush him?”> *I'm glad you like him!*
<“Can I?”> Eren asked excitedly, jumping up and down a bit. *He brought Charlie! I can ride Charlie!* Eren gave a very joyous squeal as he went to get the grooming supplies.

Lathe smiled as Eren scampered off to get the supplies, keeping a close eye on him for a bit before going to feed the chickens, checking he was doing well every couple of minutes. Salem had since jumped from Eren’s shoulder and was lounging on a wooden divide between stalls, looking at the rest of the animals with interest. *He’s doing okay.* Lathe returned after a little bit with the feed bag, storing it and coming up to Eren as he was brushing Charlie, ruffling his hair. “You come back up to the house after you finished brushing him, okay? Then I’ll introduce you to some of the other animals and where everything is kept.” Lathe left after he nodded, going up to the house to begin unpacking kitchenware. *He’ll be fine- and it won’t be too terribly long until we can feed the rest of the animals.*

Eren was still brushing Charlie, in the middle of the barn on the ties, Eren happily humming along. He had finished after about half an hour, but what he wasn’t expecting was for Charlie to bolt back into his stall and go right out into the open gate. He cried out in pain, as Charlie stepped on his foot, effectively crushing it under his weight. He hobbled in pain towards the door, closing it and locking it. *It’s gotta be locked.* He sat down on the floor looking at his crushed foot. *It fucking hurts…* He cried out in pain as he felt a heat start to form in his broken foot, his nose starting to bleed heavily. *Oh my god… It’s… It’s happening again.* Eren’s eyes were wide as he started to remember everything that happened to him. … *I can’t live like this… This is horrible…* Eren waited out the pain of his foot healing at an incredible pace before he wearily stood on it. *It burns… But it doesn’t hurt anymore.* He got up, looking around, soon locating rope and a bales of hay. *I can do this, the rafters can support my weight…*

Lathe looked up as he heard Blake barking in the distance, running to the house at breakneck speed and coming through the doggie door, barking at him. He nearly broke the glass in his hand as he dropped it on the counter, running to the barn as fast as he could, his eyes widening in terror as he saw Eren hanging from the rafters, blood streaming from his nose steadily. *He’s alive. There’s time.* Lathe reached for a saw on the wall, running over to him and jumping up onto a stall door swiftly, climbing the rafters over to where Eren hung. He wrapped his legs around the rafter, hanging upside down and looping an arm under Eren’s arms and lifting so as to take the pressure from his neck, sawing the rope from the rafter and tossing away the saw as it broke through. He loosened the noose and tossed it away, getting a better grip on Eren with one arm and shifting so he was dangling by one arm over the pile of hay beneath them, letting go and getting underneath Eren so he wouldn't be hurt by the impact, wincing as the hay poked harshly at his back and scratched at his bare neck, his skin through his clothes. *Fuck.* Lathe moved to lay Eren down on the hay pile, keeping him flat and pressing a blue kerchief to his nose to stop the bleeding. *What the hell happened? ...you tried to kill yourself again, so… you remember. The Eren you used to be certainly wouldn’t have done that. What happened? Why is your nose bleeding so heavily? “Eren? Eren please, can you hear me?”*

Eren shifted a bit, his eyes opening a crack and looked around in confusion. “D-dad…?!” Eren’s voice was hoarse from his neck being crushed. *What is happening? My foot still burns… But my nose is bleeding… It burns… It’s healing again...*
Lathe dropped his head against Eren’s shoulder, still keeping the fabric pressed to his nose. He lifted it back up after a long moment, a tear falling down his cheek as he nodded. “Yeah, it’s me… it’s Dad. Eren… w-what happened?” Tell me. Please.

Eren nodded, moving his head towards Lathe’s hands. “I named him Charlie… Didn’t I?” He asked softly, his voice still very hoarse as he started to curl up to Lathe. I don’t know what to do anymore...

Lathe nodded, shifting to pull Eren into his lap, laying down on the pile of hay and helping Eren curl up next to him. “Do you… remember anything from this week? What’s the last thing you really remember?”

“You don’t remember any of it… “Is your foot okay?” That… and other things… explains why your nose was bleeding...

Eren nodded. “It’s healed… It still burns though… I tried doing it again…” He mumbled the last bit, as if he didn’t want to tell Lathe that he had tried again, and failed. God, you must hate everything I do...

Lathe breathed heavily, trying not to completely break down. He pulled Eren on top of him, burying his face in his shoulder, trying to speak clearly as he all but sobbed. “E-Eren… I’m not m-mad, but p-please… running away f-from everything isn’t the w-way to f-fix things… if y-you l-left, S-Spades, Scotty, C-Casper, L-Levi… they… they’d all be h-heartbroken… I… I w-wouldn’t be able to live with myself i-if you left… ...I…” Lathe swallowed hard. “...I might try to f-follow y-you… please… g-give getting b-better another chance… p- please…” I don’t want you to die. You’d take me with you.

Eren started to cry at Lathe’s words, holding onto his shirt. “Why? Why would you even think… O-of following me?” Eren reached up to wipe some of his tears away. “Dad… I don’t- I don’t understand… Why you would want to… Y-you have M-mom… You h-have a-a-all your friends… And you’d have Blake… And L-Levi… But… I f-fucked everything u-up.” Eren sniffled more, trying not to cry, failing miserably. “I can’t sleep alone… I can’t sleep without medication to knock me unconscious… If I oversleep the eight hours, I still have a nightmare… I can’t think about Levi the same way anymore… I… I can’t do this Dad… And I’m scared… Because I can’t feel anything anymore… I can’t feel any emotions anymore… Everything is numb…
“Eren… you're the reason I'm not still just a t-teacher, alone with j-just a piano to k-keep me c-
company… you're the reason S-Spades is m-mine, why we can afford the house and all the
animals… y-you're my s-son. Everything that happened to you… everything that came from it can
be fixed. We can fix nightmares, we can fix the sleep problems, we can fix the numbness… but
even with so many friends… you can't fix a missing son. Y-you can't…” Lathe sniffed, staring up
at the rafters above them. “Eren, I've done my best to fix you up when you get hurt, I've adopted
you, fed you, drawn and made music with you, helped you adapt to the world with your PTSD,
with Blake, done everything I could possibly do for you while you were in that damn hospital and
then some, sleeping with you and reading to you, designed and built a fucking **house** with a barn of
animals for you, and I quit my job as a teacher so I could be here to help you because I knew you'd
need it. If you were gone… then it’d all be for nothing. I'd stop being a dad. ...I'd probably just do
nothing besides feed and take care of the animals, having forgotten what else I'm good for. I
wouldn't know what to do with my time besides just sit and think of how pointless it is. I'd get
ideas. ...I might even think they were worth it.” Lathe held onto Eren tighter. “...I want it to all have
been for something. I'm in too far… I care too much. If you leave… you'd have to take me with
you.” ...**I don't want to lose you.**

Eren couldn’t help but cry as Lathe brought up every memory he had of Lathe teaching him to be a
normal kid, even with all of his flaws. “I-It’s…. It’s not… W-worth it…. Is it?” Eren sniffled,
trying to stop his tears. **It’s not worth killing myself over…. It was two weeks… And I’ve had years
of better…. And hopefully more to come...**

Lathe shook his head. “Eren, you've got years and years of success and happiness to be had ahead
of you. What happened is done and over. It’s not worth it. It never is.” Lathe took a deep breath,
trying to calm down. “Please, stay… things will get better. You'll learn how to be happy again.
You will.” **I'll teach you.**

Eren nodded, still clinging onto Lathe’s shirt. “C… C-can I… Can I sleep with you… And Mom?”
**I don’t wanna sleep alone tonight.**

“Of course you can. Here, how about we go inside and get something to eat, then come back to
feed the animals together?” Lathe slowly sat up, prepared to carry Eren inside if he wanted. **We
need to take a break, calm down a bit...**

Eren nodded, moving a bit off of Lathe’s lap, moving to stand. He stood there, waiting for Lathe to
take him inside, rubbing at his quickly bruising neck. **My foot still burns… But I can walk… So that
means it’s not broken right?** He looked down at the bloody t-shirt he wore, sighing quietly. **I gotta
change too...**

Lathe started to guide him to the house, concerned as he limped. “Are you okay? Do you need me
Eren nodded, quietly answering as he was guided to the house. “I’ll be fine, it just burns is all…” It really burns, a lot… How much of my foot did he crush? “We should probably call Scotty though… And make sure it’s still not broken…” I honestly can’t tell because I feel nothing but a burning sensation…

“Okay, that sounds like a good idea. He’ll definitely be able to tell; I’m rather out of practice.” Lathe opened the door for him, walking in behind him and closing it. He pulled out his phone and dialled Scotty as Eren looked around, finally hearing him pick up after two rings. [Hey Scotty. Eren’s found his marbles- and he got stepped on by his horse. Can you come over to look at his foot, see if it's still broken?] That’s obviously not the full story, but… yeah.

Scotty nodded on the other end. [Yeah, I’ll be over soon… You said he’s back to normal now? Make sure you don’t leave him alone…] Don't want him trying again. [But that’s great news, make sure you send the group a text.] The squad should know.

[Yeah yeah, I will. ...and I'll explain the rest of it when you get here. But for right now, I have to make food. Shit went down. But I'll see you soon, Scotty. Thanks.] Lathe hung up before Scotty could reply, stowing his phone and looking to Eren. “Whatcha in the mood for, kid? Anything you like. Doesn't have to be lunch food, either.”

Eren thought about it for a second. “Do we have stuff for burger bombs?” We haven't had those in forever. Eren was in the middle of looking around the large living room, including the moving couch and the piano, and the large flat screen TV. The windows are huge! They go from the floor to the ceiling! That's so cool!

“Maaaaaybe. Maaaaaybe not.” Lathe smiled mischievously, getting ingredients from the fridge. “Maaaaaybe I remember how to make them. Maaaaaybe not. You'd better help, make sure I don't accidentally do it wrong.” There'll be plenty of time for exploring the house. Right now, I want to spend time with you.

Eren looked up from the piano keys he was inspecting and went over to where Lathe was at the large kitchen island. “This place is huge…” He murmured, looking up at the very tall ceilings. “When were you gonna tell me?” You built a house! And if I remember correctly…. This is where my old house was...

“When it was done and everything was moved. We really wanted it to be a surprise. So, today.” Lathe opened his arms wide to the new house, smiling. “Surprise! And welcome home!” Home.
“There's still lots of unpacking to do everywhere, and all of the walls are white so they can be painted on, but it'll feel lived in soon enough. Oh, and a heads-up…” Lathe turned to look out the window to the back of the house, the barn in sight. “Charlie’s a trail horse, and there’s an ATV on the way, but they're for the more than 300 acres that is now the backyard. And the boundary is paved and posted, so you know where it is.” Yep. That's a thing.

Eren looked over the backyard, his face seeming to light up a bit. “Can we go riding after lunch?” I wanna go riding again… Eren perked up when the doorbell rang loudly in the house, looking around in confusion. “What was that?” I have no idea what that was… It's so loud!

“That is the obnoxiously loud doorbell that I will have to fix…” Lathe set down the bowl he was holding, herding Eren to the door. “...because otherwise it's going to scare the crap out of us every time someone uses it.” Lathe unlocked the door and opened it, smirking. “Hey Scotty, thanks for coming. Come on in.” Lathe let him enter, shutting the door and herding Eren to the couch. “He’s gonna check your foot to make sure it’s healing okay, so ditch the shoe and sock, okay?”

Eren nodded, sitting down at the couch and talking off his shoe and sock to show a swollen and puffy foot. It doesn’t look pretty…. And it burns…. Fuck.

Scotty came in, taking his shoes off and leaving them by the door. [So are you gonna tell me after I look at his foot… Or while I look at his foot?] I need to know what happened… You said shit went down… I can only imagine what happened.

[I guess while, can't hurt.] Lathe sat down next to Eren on the couch. [Eren was still not in his right mind this morning when we went to come here. On the way we stopped to pick up Salem from Armin, but nothing too eventful happened, Salem’s fine, and Armin’s okay. When we got here I led him straight through the house just so I could set down some stuff and brought him into the barn to meet the animals, and immediately he recognised the horse as Charlie, so I'm assuming he used to have one that looked just like him. I let him feed and brush him to get acquainted, I stayed long enough to feed the chickens to keep an eye on him, and then I came up to the house because I thought he could handle himself out there, and told him to come up after finishing with Charlie. ...soon enough, Blake was running up to the house barking like mad, and when I went out to the barn… he was hanging himself from a rafter. ...I managed to cut him down and get him down safely, and I knew he was alive because his nose was bleeding… and we had a real talk between the two of us, and there was a lot of crying involved… but I think we've reached an understanding. That it's not worth it, when all's said and done. So, we've agreed to have some lunch and chill for a bit, go and feed the rest of the animals, have him meet all of them…] He looked to Eren, switching tongues. “And the only thing that’d keep you from riding is how your foot is coming along. You kinda need it.” That's important, as much as I don't like telling you no.

Scotty nodded, taking everything in that Lathe had said. “Well, it feels alright, I don’t feel any breaks or fractures, and you're not hissing in pain every time I press somewhere, but it is swollen,
and that’s probably from the blood rushing to heal everything, so I think if you keep it above heart level, and the swelling goes down, you can go out riding.” I don’t see a problem with it. [But… You got to an agreement about it yes? So you think he’s gonna try it again?] Scotty moved to look over Eren’s foot one last time to make sure he didn’t miss anything.

[I think he’s gonna really give this whole moving on thing another chance. But I don't think he’s gonna try and end it again… honestly, I told him he’d be taking me with him… and there are too many people he’d be leaving behind. We just understand each other a bit better, I think. And I hope this new house and all the new company is like a fresh start for him. He can start over.] He can learn how to be happy.

Scotty sighed, putting his head down for a minute before he reached his hand up, smacking Eren across the face, hard enough to leave a sting on his hand. “Don’t you ever think that it’s worth it. Do you understand?”

Eren’s head was tilted to the side, his eyes wide with shock as he reached up to touch his stinging cheek. He nodded, looking down as he lifted his other hand to try and hide his neck. I deserved that… Didn’t I? Because I’ve been ignoring them for weeks...

Lathe reached an arm around him, hugging Eren to his side, noting him ducking his head down. “Now don’t you go trying to hide on us again. Help us help you. Talk if you need to talk, and come find someone when you need help with anything. …or if you just want to talk about anything. The point is, we’re open ears for you, Eren. We only mean well. Now, let’s do what Scotty said before he decides to smack you again.” Lathe grinned, helping Eren shift and prop his foot up on the arm of the couch. [So, now for me to ask before I get smacked. Are you staying for lunch?]

Scotty nodded, dragging Lathe over towards the kitchen before smacking him across the face as well. [Don’t you dare even say that you would follow him! Even if he did everyone would be sad yeah, but if we lost you too? God I could only imagine what would happen to Spades! Don’t you ever say you would do something like that, got it?] I don’t want to have to tell Spades that she needs to watch you too… Scotty moved to rub at his eyes, trying to wipe the tears that hadn’t formed yet. [We can’t lose another friend…]

If he did try to end it… and succeeded… […]he’d drag so much of me down with him…] Lathe buried his face in his hands, trying to calm down. [I care too much… I’ve given him everything… and if it turned out to be for nothing…] I'd be half of a person… […]I'm scared… scared he’d still try…] I don’t want him to… to leave...

Scotty nodded and pulled Lathe close to him. [I know… We all are, which is why we need to be there for him now more than ever, okay?] He rubbed Lathe’s back in an attempt to calm him down.
... Come on, let’s make some lunch… I got some news of my own to tell you…] You should hear it… I think you’ll be happy about it…

Lathe pulled away from him after a moment, wiping at his eyes and nodding. He went to wash his hands and fetch aprons, handing Scotty one. [You’ve got news? What is it?]

Scotty took the apron, tying it around him as he spoke. [Casper’s moving in with me… and I wanted to ask if Eren could come paint the walls and ceilings?] I really hope that doesn’t sound rude… But I kinda want the galaxy to be in the master bedroom… And not in the study.

[We can only allow that to happen if first, we get a saw and cut out the old ceilings and walls that were already painted…] Lathe was obviously joking as he moved to set up the rest of the ingredients, finding a cookie tray and starting the oven. [-then put in new ceilings and walls and painted them solid white first, all at your own expense of course, and let us keep the old ones.] He gave Scotty a mischievous grin. [I'm completely joking. You'd have to ask Eren about that, see what he says. And one moment-] Lathe stopped for an instant, putting a hand over his heart and staring off dramatically into the distance, stage whispering. “My ship is sailing.” YAAAAAAAAS DOE [Oh! But actually, question- were you thinking of painting over the wall in the Scripting room on the right wall of the house? The one with everyone’s writing on it? The one with everyone’s writing on it? I mean, it has the club motto on it and all the inside jokes, I dunno…] I took tons of pictures of it, but I’d hate to see it go...

Scotty shrugged. [I was gonna talk to Casper about it, I’m not to sure about it in all honesty. But if we do decide to, I’ll take a bunch of pictures for you and I’m sure you can find a wall to paint it back on to in this giant place.] I’ll have to ask Casper about it though, see if he wants to keep it or not...

[Okay- I was just curious.] Everyone helped paint it when I had my housewarming… Everyone’s handwriting is on there. [So, how’s moving in going? Anything interesting happening?] Any drama to be spoken of?

Scotty shrugged, moving to help Lathe roll out the roll dough. [Well, we got new people coming in next to us, but we haven’t seen them at all… We’re hoping that it’s not gonna be a frat house, or a sorority… either of those would be a nightmare. Casper got called into the city to do some big interview on someone who’s coming in to try and work at the pharmacy… ] I’m still kinda surprised they called Casper in and not James… I mean, the head asked for one person from each branch…

[That would definitely make life more interesting. I didn't even know the house next door was for sale. That's what you get when you have quiet-ass neighbors. ...and why did Casper be the one to
go down to the interview? I’d’ve thought they’d ask for James. He seems less… insane.] Yep. ...if it’s a sorority, I’m very sorry. ...sort of.

[You think I have any idea? I bet James just declined so that he wouldn’t have Casper holding down the fort alone…] Scotty shrugged. “So what exactly are we making again?” What involves the cooked meat you’re making… cheese, bacon… rolls? And Onions??

“Hamburger Bombs- one of the lunch-dinner things Eren actually likes. Because he’s just that picky.” Lathe joked lightly, looking up as the phone on the wall rang. Huh. Lathe wiped his hands on a towel and went to answer the phone. “H’yello?”

“Lathe, it’s me… I’m coming home in two weeks for Thanksgiving… but are we gonna be at your old house… or are we at the new place yet?” I literally have like two exams… And that’s it.

Lathe froze as he heard Levi speak. “Uhm, we just got to the new place, but… Levi, I think you and Eren really need to talk. A lot has gone down in the past week, and it needs to get sorted through. I'm not the one to tell you all of it.” That's Eren’s job.

Scotty looked over to Lathe as he froze. “Who’s on the phone?” Scotty continued to make the burger bombs, setting them on the tray once they were put together.

“It’s Levi.” Lathe looked around the corner to Eren, his voice soft. “Eren, it’s Levi on the phone. You two should talk.” Lathe walked over with the phone, holding it out to him with a reassuring look. You can do this.

Eren almost instantly paled, looking at the phone in fear. No… I don’t know what to do… I can’t talk to him, I’m in trouble.

Lathe sighed quietly, holding the phone against his chest. “Do you want to talk to him together?” It might work better for you. He nodded as Eren weakly nodded, turning the phone on speaker and setting it in the centre of the couch arrangement, sitting down next to Eren and shifting him so his head was in his lap, petting his hair. <“Okay Levi, you're on speaker.”> This’ll work a bit better for you two…

<“Okay… what happened? Should I be worried?”> What's going on?
Eren swallowed hard. <“I… I tried again… today…”> His voice was small, as he tried to hide himself away from the voice on the other end of that phone. *He’s gonna be mad at me…*

<“Oh my god Eren, are you okay? Eren, talk to me. Tell me everything. I’m not mad- I just want you to talk, tell me why. I want to understand.”> *You've just moved to the new house… why now?*

*Eren doesn’t entirely know what happened…* <“Scotty took Eren in for his first day of psychotherapy… lo and behold, the therapist was one of the unnamed rapists… he shut down, and Scotty got him out of there and called the cops to get him apprehended… but Eren had a seizure in Scotty’s car. When he woke up… it was as if he was still four years old. He was so bubbly and bright, and chattered about everything and nothing… he asked when someone named Hannes would be home, asked if Carla was getting better, when he would be back to get him… but… He asked what a Spades was… he didn't remember any of us. We pretended to be the people in charge of him for a week, and when we came to the house and introduced him to the animals, he lit up at the sight of the horse, naming him Charlie. I kept an eye on him as he brushed and fed him, and he seemed fine, so I went up to the house… but then Blake was barking and I ran down to the barn and Eren was… he was hanging from the rafters… I cut him down and landed him safe, he had gotten stepped on and his foot busted, his nose was bleeding pretty badly… we had a serious talk, and I think we better understand each other…”> Lathe gently nudged Eren to say something. *Talk. You know what all happened now. Say something.*

<“ I…. I asked where Hannes was?”> Eren swallowed hard, looking down at his hands as they began to shake. *I haven’t thought about him in forever…. I haven’t seen him in so long too…* Eren sniffled, <“I tried again… because I remembered everything that happened… and I thought that it was worth it.”>

Levi sighed, worry etched into his features. <“Eren… I know it’s never nice to think about… but it’s over. Everything that happened to you is over and done. You can’t change what happened. The only real other option… the only option left that’s worth it is to move on. If I lost you… Eren, I want someone to come home to. I… I love you, and… I want you to be okay… I’m going to be home in two weeks for Thanksgiving. I look forward to all the time I have to be home because I get to spend it with you… I’m glad you’re okay, and I’m glad another one of the guys got caught. Eren… please give learning to be okay a chance.”> *I want to have someone to hold onto when I come home…*

*…. But….* Eren forced himself to nod in Lathe’s lap. <“I will… but I can’t promise anything when you come home….”> *I can’t feel anything but numbness…. I don’t like being numb, but I can’t shake the feeling… and I don’t think I’ll ever be able to feel the same way about you ever again…* Eren started to quietly cry as Lathe ran a hand through his hair, sniffling every few seconds.

[Levi… Eren’s having a hard time feeling anything that isn’t sadness or just numbness… there’s no quick fix for it either… it has to just be helped along. It doesn't mean it’s over- it just means it
Levi nodded, understanding. [I get it- he needs time to understand again what everything means… I'll be careful about that.] *He needs time.* <“Eren, you can take all the time you need to in doing things again. Just take your time learning how to feel again. It’s very okay- I understand.”> *I'd be surprised if you didn’t need time*

<“O-Okay…”> Eren sniffled, rubbing at his face as he sighed quietly. *I don’t know if I can properly love anyone or anything… ever again…*

<“I just wanted to know how things were going… I’ve been doing okay, training’s been alright. But I'll talk to you more around Thanksgiving, okay?”>

Eren nodded silently, moving to curl up to Lathe’s side, wanting to hide. *He’s gonna be mad at me when he gets here… He’s gonna hate that I don’t love him.*

Lathe hugged Eren close, speaking to Levi. [He’s going to do his best, Levi. I don't know how far he’ll get while you’re here, but he'll try. We have to help him learn. We’ll see you soon. Good luck on your exams.] Lathe smiled wearily as he ended the call, still threading his hand through Eren’s locks. “You’ll be okay… promise. Just focus on getting better.” *That's what matters.*

Eren nodded, curling up and burying his face into Lathe’s lap. *I don’t want to feel nothing.*

Lathe kept his hands threading through Eren’s locks, taking a deep breath. He was surprised a bit as a timer suddenly buzzed, Scotty waving to him with an oven mitt. *...did you really…? “I thought you couldn't cook? ...and I don't think either of us is gonna move.” I don't smell anything burning… huh.*

“I can’t… you gave me the recipe awhile back… I found it in my phone.” Scotty located some plates and napkins and brought the food out for the two of them. “I brought food for the both of you, now come on and eat.” *It’s not poisonous… I promise.*

“As long as you didn't accidentally do something to poison it, okay.” Lathe joked, taking a plate from him and nudging Eren to sit up a bit, leaning against him still, but not wanting him to try and eat while lying down. He made sure Eren had a good grip on the plate before letting go, going to dig into his own food. “These are good Scotty- thanks for taking over.” Lathe shot him a thumbs up. *I approve.*
Scotty nodded, sitting down with the plate in his lap. “I didn’t accidentally put something in it, don’t worry about it.” He smiled softly as he took a bite into the first bomb. They taste pretty good.

Eren picked at the food he had on his plate, managing to finish it all off. It... It tastes the same as before... that's good. Eren sat there looking over the two of them with large eyes in relative silence. “How’s Casper?” He finally spoke up looking pointedly to Scotty. Someone should be allowed to be happy for once.

Scotty quirked an eyebrow for a moment, speaking after a second so he didn't choke. “He’s doing pretty well- he’s in the city today to do an interview for someone wanting a job at the pharmacy. Why he, the loose cannon, went instead of James is pretty odd, but it's what it is. ...you know, he’s moving in with me today. I'm honestly pretty excited about that.” ...we get to christen the house.

Eren nodded, moving to get up and set his plate by the sink. He looked down at his hands, his head ducked down a bit as he sighed quietly. I don’t know if I can be happy again… Am I gonna have to learn to fake it all over again? Eren reached for the soap nearby to start cleaning the dishes. Maybe if I can distract myself... I can do something about it.

Lathe got up and followed Eren to the sink, going to dry them. He watched as Eren looked to him and gave him a smile, one that almost believably reached his eyes. “Eren, you don't have to force it... I get that you're used to faking it... but you don't have to. Just let it happen. It's okay to not be happy all the time.” Don't force it... it'll make it harder to actually feel happy...

Eren looked down, nodding, letting the smile fall from his face. “So... can we go riding? It doesn’t burn anymore.” I really want to go riding again.

Scotty came up behind with his own plate and nodded. “Yeah, your foot looks like it’s back to normal, so it should be fine to go riding, just take it easy. I’m gonna head home, alright?” Casper’s gonna be coming home in an hour and I wanna make sure the bed is made.

“Alright-” Lathe set the last plate in the cupboard after a moment, walking him to the door. “Drive safe. And have fun~.” Lathe grinned impishly and laughed as Scotty facepalmed, sending him off and coming back to Eren. “Alright kid, you're gonna need your sock and shoe again, and we’ll go out. But we need to feed the other animals first, okay?” They need lunch too.

“Okay, so, besides Charlie… what do we have?” Eren moved back over to the couch to put his
shoe back on. He then went over towards the back door where Lathe was waiting for him. “But we can go riding together right?” Eren asked quietly, looking up to Lathe with questioning eyes. *I know I heard chickens… but what else do we have?* Eren looked out the window to see another dog running around with Blake, his brow furrowing. “Did we get another dog?” *Do I need two PTSD dogs now?*

“Yep- she’s a Malinois. Her name is Maisie. I thought Blake could use some company; and the animals could use a bit of protecting if a random fox or something got any ideas. But we’ve got a small flock of seven chickens, two cows, and a pig. Let’s go say hi, shall we?” Lathe opened the back door, holding it open for Eren. *I think you like Maisie. And all of the animals, really.*

Eren nodded, stepping out and whistling loudly, which stopped the two dogs in their tracks and got them racing towards the door and up the stairs to meet them. “Can they have puppies?” *THEY WOULD BE SO CUTE!!! I WANT THEM!!!*

Lathe chuckled, kneeling down to pet Maisie. “They could- though I think that requires Blake taking Maisie out to dinner first.” He joked, looking up to him. “She’s nice- come say hi.”

Eren slowly knelt down, reaching a timid hand out to the dog, who sat down next to Blake by Lathe’s side. *They look cute together.* He gently pet her, a small smile creeping onto his face as she moved to lick his face. *She’s really cute.* “Have they been around Charlie?” *I wanna take them with us when we go riding.*

“Well, Maisie was raised on a horse farm, and Blake is generally chill- they haven't been around Charlie much yet, but I think they'll get along just fine. You thinking of bringing them with?” He watched as Eren nodded, smiling as he noticed the faintly happy look on Eren’s face. “I think we’ll be okay in doing that. Let’s bring them down to the barn.” Lathe stood up, starting them walking to the barn. He first brought them around the side of the barn to a henhouse, the flock of chickens inside the netted area contentedly clucking. “Here be the chickens! I haven't named all of them yet. I started running out of name ideas, and then all of them just started sounding weird.” Lathe entered the pen, the chickens swarming around his legs in interest. “Come on in if you want kid, the feathers are fine.” He chuckled. *Best. Decision. Ever.*

Eren slowly stepped in, closing the gate behind him and watching the two dogs sit down and watch the chickens all move around. He moved down to gently pick up one of the white hens, a happy smile on his face as she let him pick her up and pet her gently. “They’re pretty calm…” Eren let out a gasp and looked up to Lathe. “Can we use their eggs for breakfast?” Eren asked in pure excitement as he held the soft white chicken.

“What else are we going to do with them? Of course. And soon enough we might have a bunch of
chicks.” He smirked at the roosters running around, one of them suspiciously looking at Eren from one side of the pen. *What, did you designate that hen as your waifu or something?* “They really do need names, though… how abooooout…” *Just start naming them random historical figures or something.* “Your name-” He motioned to the rooster half-trying to stare down Eren. “Is now Thomas Jefferson. Because why not. You can be John Locke because reasons-” He nodded to the other rooster in the pen, smiling as one hen tried vainly to lift from the ground, flapping her wings for a long moment. “…and you’ll be Amelia Earhart.”

Eren pet the chicken in his arms gently. “Can we name this one Carla?” He asked quietly, his voice a bit timid as he spoke. *You seem to have a theme going on… but I like this white chicken.*

Lathe looked to him, faintly smiling and tentatively going over, gently petting the chicken in his arms, his voice soft. “I think that’s a wonderful name.” *She fits right in.* “You can name the other three hens, too.” *It’s a team effort.*

“Umm…. I… Ieva?” Eren asked quietly. *I’ve heard that before… but where? I don’t remember.*

*Spades’ name.* “Ieva. As in Ieva Velanova Spade- your Mom’s name. I think she’d like that. It’s not really as if she ever uses that name much. Someone might as well- it’s pretty.” *I always thought so. Besides me poking fun at it in the hospital… I don’t really remember the last time anyone really used it.*

Eren nodded quietly, gently putting Carla down and picking up another nameless hen. “Um… can we call her… Gwynn? And the other…. Um… Thalia?” *I like the sound of those names.*

Lathe smiled warmly, bending down to pick up Thalia- or trying to, flapping her wings at him. He chuckled, reaching out to pet her, which she seemed to allow. “I think those are wonderful names.” Lathe stood after Thalia clicked and turned her head from him, petting Gwynn before Eren set her down. “How about we go meet the other animals? I already gave the chickens their lunch today.”

Eren nodded, moving out the pen and moving towards the barn. “Where’s Charlie?” He asked, looking at the empty stall, though going to see that the stall led out to the meadow where Charlie was walking around and eating. *Oh… that’s where he is.* Eren slipped into the stall, moving to whistle for Charlie, calling for him as well. “Charlie!” He called out, watching as the stallion picked his head up and started for the barn, picking up speed as he came close. *He really is just like Charlie… he’s got the same patches in the same places too.*

Lathe went to get a lead, approaching him as Charlie slowed and clipping it on. He led him into the barn in the open area of the centre, tethering him to the walls. “His tack and everything is in the
next stall over; you know what to bring out?” Help please.

Eren nodded and went into the tack room first grabbing a rather large saddle and saddle cloth and situating it on Charlie’s back. He reached down to make sure it was secured, and pulled down on it to make sure it wouldn’t move on them. He went back and came out with a bridle situating it gently over his ears and smiling as Charlie nickered at him. He even sounds like Charlie… He made sure that everything was tight but not too tight. “Okay, I’m gonna ride him around for a few feet to make sure I know how he handles, before you get on. Okay?” I don’t necessarily know how fast he turns or how quickly he follows instructions. Eren unclipped the lead, dropping it as well as the tethers from the side of him, letting them swing back to the walls as he held Charlie by the bridle.

“Hold on for just a second, Eren.” Lathe went to the tack room to pick up a helmet, coming back and handing it to him. “You’re gonna need this.” He let Eren put on the helmet before backing up, following Eren out of the barn and around it as he rode. He looks like he never stopped riding.

Eren had a huge smile on his face as he walked Charlie, turning to Lathe. “Are the trails dirt?” They should be… He’s got shoes on, so I hope so… I wanna see how he trots.

“Yeah, they are. Whatever it is you’re gonna do, just be careful! I’m right behind you!” You're about to try something- let's hope I can keep up!

Eren nodded, getting a proper hold on the bridle as he shifted in the saddle, so that his butt was up a bit more, and he looked like he was a jockey, as he kicked Charlie into gear. First with a nice trot before picking up a Canter and pulling away from Lathe as Charlie picked up speed. Lathe would’ve still been able to hear Eren’s laughter as he continued. He can run! Oh my god! This is amazing!

Lathe gave up trying to run after them, watching Eren laugh happily as he and Charlie went down one of the trails in the large meadow. He beamed, watching them. He looks and sounds so happy… and he rides so incredibly well. It was a few minutes before Eren and Charlie began to make their way back, making sure they had room, grinning up to Eren. “So- what do you think?”

“He’s… He’s amazing.” Eren breathed out as he leaned down to pat Charlie’s neck. “He’s a really great horse too…” I missed riding. “He should be able to handle the two of us, so should we feed the rest of the animals?” He asked swinging his leg over and flawlessly hopping down, holding onto the bridle still.

Lathe nodded, impressed. “Yeah, we should, before they get too antsy. Come on.” Lathe led the
two of them back to the barn, leading Eren to the far end where two cows stood, as well as a pig. He picked up a feed bag from one stall, as well as a few fruits and vegetables from a bin. “Alright-this guy here is Oliver.” Lathe led him over to a pig no taller than his knee, looking up to Eren and him with curiosity. He handed Eren a sweet green pepper, himself holding an apple. “He’s nice, don't worry. Here~” He held the bag of feed as he crouched down, holding out the apple to Oliver. He sniffed at it before taking it from him, munching happily on it. He patted him before standing, looking to Eren and nudging him forward a bit, his voice quiet and reassuring. “Go ahead.” *He'll like you.*

Eren leaned down to give Oliver the pepper that he held. “Is he just gonna eat?” Eren almost jumped back as Oliver came up to him to take the pepper. *He just takes it from you? Okay… That works.* He let Oliver take the pepper from him, looking up to Lathe, to make sure he did it right. *Hannes didn’t let me play with or feed the pigs… So I’m not sure if that’s right.*

Lathe smiled to him, moving to put some feed in his trough. “Well, I thought he’d be a nice addition. And eventually, well, breakfast. But not for a long time. He’s still very young.” Lathe patted his head as he ate the feed, putting the feed bag back and grabbing a different one, along with two cobs of corn, handing one to Eren. “Last, but definitely not least…” He led them across the way to two heifers, nodding to them. “These two are Gill, and Jill.” He set down the feed bag, breaking the corn cob into thirds, holding one on his flat hand and offering it to Gill. Gill looked to the food, then to him, then to the food again, then to him again, before stepping up to take the food and stepping back after taking it, munching quietly. Lathe smiled, looking back to Eren as he waited to finish feeding Gill the corn. “Do as I'm doing- Jill doesn't bite. I'm right here.” *It's okay.*

Eren took the corn and gently held the corn out for Jill, stepping close to her and letting her come the rest of the way before she moved with Gill to go towards the feed trough, continuing their munching. *They want food…* Eren giggled a bit as they mooed impatiently for Lathe to put their lunch in the trough.

Lathe rolled his eyes, chuckling. “Alright, alright, I'm coming…” Lathe poured the feed in the trough, also tossing in the rest of the corn he was holding. They immediately nudged forward to eat, Lathe putting away the bag of feed. “I've still got to get a fence set up around the property, but I think they're okay to graze while we're riding.” Lathe straightened out the stall and soon led the two cows out into the field, letting them graze on the tall grass. *They're chill- they're not going to go running off, I don't think.* He went to get a helmet of his own, fastening it and coming back to Eren. “Alright- you're gonna have to tell me what to do. I know how to take care of horses, but not how to ride them.”

Eren nodded, moving to get a tall stool, setting it on the left side of Charlie. “Alright swing your leg over, and stay in the back on the saddle, I’m gonna sit in front of you.” Eren moved to hold onto Charlie so that Lathe could get on.
Lathe nodded, tentatively standing on the stool, carefully swinging his leg over and settling in the back of the saddle, keeping his balance. “Okay… now what’s gonna happen?” This is all like Greek to me, honestly.

Eren smiled and held onto his bridle. “I’m coming up.” Eren stepped into the stirrup and vaulted over Charlie. “Okay, ya ready Dad?” I am sooooooo ready for this! Eren waited for his signal, moving his hands around his waist. You better hold onto me…

Lathe held onto Eren’s middle tightly, a bit nervous as Charlie shifted under him. “No, but go ahead anyway because that answer may never be yes…” This is so weird… Lathe made a small sound of surprise as Charlie started to walk, looking down at the ground, whispering in a nervous voice. “We’re moving…” Help.

Eren smiled more. “Yeah, we’re moving!” Eren said excitedly as they started down the trail towards the empty fields.

Eren had a huge smile on his face as they rode Charlie around the trails. “It’s pretty nice out for riding… Would you mind if I made jumps for us?” He would definitely be able to handle them.

“Uhm, you can jump him… I’m gonna pass though… I’m terrified enough right now as it is.” Lathe made a small sound of surprise as Charlie turned a corner rather suddenly, holding onto Eren tighter. He blushed in embarrassment as Eren laughed quietly, his voice small. “Stop laughing, this is new to me…” ...murr.

Eren smirked, turning Charlie around towards the barn once they were a decent ways away. “Hold on tight!” Eren called clicking Charlie into a nice trot which was only slightly faster than a walk, but still faster nonetheless.

Lathe held onto Eren tightly, yelping as Charlie suddenly sped up, burying his face into Eren’s shoulder. This is terrifying. “Slowdownslowdownslowdown pretty please…” Lathe pleaded with Eren. I didn't sign up for this!
Eren went a few more seconds before slowing Charlie down to a walk again. “You did great, Dad.” Eren turned to look at Lathe, a huge cheeky smile on his face. *This is fun… I like this…*

Lathe looked at Eren, annoyed and embarrassed, his cheeks flushed a furious red. “You could at least **warn** me if you’re gonna try something like that… not to say you can warn me and then just do it… I’m not exactly a regular horse rider… this is still really scary to me…” Lathe looked down to the ground, studying the grass. *I have no idea why it's terrifying… maybe because it’s a huge animal that doesn’t speak English, can harm me and has a free will to do something other than what it’s told… that probably has something to do with it.*

Eren chuckled a little bit as he urged Charlie into a gentle walk. “It’s okay, you stayed on! I’m really proud of you Dad! You’re doing great for your first time on a horse.” *You’re doing great! I wonder… If I can make some jumps… Before dinner… “Is there any extra wood lying around? Or do I gotta take Charlie out to the forest and cut some branches?” Gotta be able to remove them if he hits them… But I know that his breed has great tact… He should be able to clear anything in his limit…*

“Uhm, yeah, there’s a huge pile on the other side of the house from all the trees that were cut down from around the property border- why? What’re you gonna make with it?” *…and the fact that I stayed on is an achievement isn't that reassuring…*

“Some jumps… Do we have a sled somewhere?” *I know there’s enough rope to get him to pull a sled full. I’ll have to move them all over here and make it. “I’ll also need a drill, and some screws… And paint…”*  

“There’s all that stuff in the garage if you need it, and a toboggan too, but I dunno if that's the right thing to get a bunch of wood over here. …unless it is. I don't know. I'll show you where everything is, and I'll let you use all of it if you're careful.” *You sound like you know what you're doing…*

“Okay, sounds good.” Eren led Charlie towards the barn. “So you wanna get off first? Or do you want me to get off first?” *I mean, it doesn’t matter to me, if you want me to get off first that’s fine.*

“Uhm, I'm gonna be too clumsy to properly manoeuvre off with you still on… you first?”

Eren nodded, easily maneuvering off of Charlie and holding onto him so he wouldn’t move while Lathe was getting off. “Swing your leg over this way again.” *Always stay on the left side of a horse.*
“Okay…” Lathe held onto the saddle to keep balance and swung his leg over, shakily stepping down. “...I'm sorry, but it's going to take plenty of convincing to get me to do that again.” ...I'll brush and feed them and take care of them. But you can ride them. ...not me. Lathe watched as Eren led Charlie back to the tethers, putting back his helmet and helping Eren switch out equipment, carrying back the saddle as Eren fastened on harnesses. “This is for dragging around wood, yes…?” It's a good thing Charlie is pretty much an everything horse… he can wear all these hats you're putting on him to an extent.

“Yeah, evenly distributes the weight over him.” Easier for him to pull. It didn't take Eren more than five minutes before he moved to get rope and a crop. I need to do something with him too make sure he can do commands. “Do me a favor and close the barn door.” Gotta try something, there's enough space for him to do this.

...well this is suspicious. “Okay.” Lathe went to close the barn door, the space still illuminated by lights hanging overhead. He backed up, watching to see what was about to happen.

Eren let Charlie off of the tethers getting the crop out and gently tapping it onto his hind quarter to get him to walk. He stood with him shoulder to shoulder, turning right along with him. He was walking him without using a lead. He seems good off of a lead.

Lathe shied further away from Eren and Charlie, worried. He's not on a lead... oh my... Lathe watched Charlie's movements intently, looking ready to scamper up a beam at any moment.

Eren stopped walking a few times, Charlie stopping right away and backing up with him to stand shoulder to shoulder, needing only a slight tap of the crop again to get him moving. “Okay, Dad! Let's go get the wood!” Eren stood excitedly side by side with Charlie who just looked up to Lathe, an ear towards Eren, and one towards Lathe. “You can open the door up.” I got the rope... And the sled is in the Garage...

Lathe slowly went to the door, never taking his eyes off of Charlie as he opened them again.
“Okay, t-this way…” Lathe decided to walk backwards showing them to the garage, very wary of Charlie being off of a lead. I don't like this... but he isn't acting up... yet... Lathe brought them around the side of the house, going to punch in a code to the door opener and walking in to first retrieve a toboggan from the wall, carefully bringing it outside. “Now you'd better be careful with this- don't break it and we'll be okay.” I've had this toboggan for forever. He set it down behind Charlie where Eren could hook it up, going to fetch a drill and screws for him, finding the tool and a box of screws after a few minutes, then locating leftover white and red paint from the painting of the house. He set them on the sled. “Okay, the logs and stuff are obviously on this side of the house,” He optioned to the wall of logs leaning against the house. “-but there's even more wood and branches and bigger logs on the other side. The huge pile is visible from the road- and it's a lot bigger than you'd expect. Though a bunch of it is firewood now.” Lathe warily turned around, judging how Charlie would follow back around the house. I still don't like this...
Eren let Charlie over towards the first section of wood, finding the right size that he needed and starting to load up the toboggan. He lashed the wood together well, getting a sled-full. He got up towards Charlie’s front and tapped him with the crop, getting him to move and pull the sled along quite nicely. *That’s it! He’s doing it!*

Lathe watched as Eren had Charlie pull the sled full of wood, keeping distance. He glanced to his watch. *It’s been about two hours…* Lathe checked over his shoulders, Gill and Jill still rather close to the barn in the meadow. *Good.* Lathe looked back to Eren. “Uhm, if you're okay out here, is it alright if I go inside to do some unpacking? There are entire rooms that are still boxes right now…” *Mostly the kitchen… and the bedrooms.*

Eren nodded. “Yeah that’s fine- I’ll start building jumps!” Eren said and he took care of everything he needed too.

**Chapter 46: Progress**

*Levi’s home! I wish we could've given him a bit warmer of a welcome- kinda hard to do that when Eren shied away from a hug when he got home.* Lathe was writing in loopy script in a notebook, lists of names and dishes, and an even longer list of ingredients. *Levi really wants to spend time with Eren, doing stuff or just talking or not even talking and just being, but I get the feeling Eren’s been kinda trying to avoid him…. he’s been avoiding talking to anyone about what happened like the plague. He’s holed up in the barn half the time, and the other half is spent riding Charlie. He’s really good- I got a bunch of videos of him jumping to put onto YouTube because something has to go on there… today’s really no different. He’s been taking care of the animals all morning… he’ll be back inside for lunch in a little while though. I have pigs in a blanket in the oven- he’ll be out of the painting room to eat soon. Levi and Erwin are out, shopping for Turkeys. We’re hosting even more people this year than we have been in past years- now that I think of it, I need to see if we have a long enough table for everyone…* Lathe was counting guests as the doorbell rang, looking up and setting down his pen, padding to the front. He opened the door, looking down to the woman standing there. “Hello, can I help you?”

*You don't look like a salesperson- what's up?*

Hannah looked up to Lathe as he stood a full foot above her. *Holy shit! Casper! You never said he was a giant!!!* “Um… I-I…” She stumbled over her words, looking down as she played with her hands. “I… I heard through the grapevine… that you have a space in your barn for another horse… a-and I was… I was wondering if um… maybe I could board my horse here? I… I can pay you for the space she uses….” *Oh god… please tell me he’ll be okay with it? Even if I pay $500 a day to him… I’m saving from where she’s being boarded now.*

...you look terrified. Probably because I'm tall. That's a thing. And who would’ve told you about the barn? Probably either Scotty or Casper, really. ...probably Casper. He can't keep his yap shut about anything. ...okay, let’s see if we can convince you I’m not about to attack you. Lathe kept a
perfectly straight face, not shifting or wavering in his response. “I wouldn't be adverse to you boarding a horse here, but it'll cost you your first-born child.”

Hannah’s eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, her face instantly paling. “That’s not funny…. That’s really not funny, Mr. Quo, my wife is pregnant!” This man is either crazy, or has a weird sense of humor…. Either way that was not the right way to say anything.

...wait. Lathe paled a bit, recognition crossing his face, immediately and profusely apologising. “Oh my god, I'm really sorry about that, I’d heard about you but I didn't recognize you- Hannah I'm sorry about that, I wasn't trying to be mean or scare you or anything.” He gave her a sheepish smile. “Casper had told me plenty about you and Sharon- I didn't mean that. Having you board your horse here would be very doable. Come in and we can talk?” Lathe offered her to come inside. I hadn't seen a picture of you- I didn't know who the hell you could be!

Hannah stood there, frozen for a few moments before nodding. “Uh… yeah, that sounds good- I’m not interrupting anything am I?” Oh god… I knew I should have asked Casper about calling you first to make sure you weren’t doing anything. She followed Lathe into the large home, looking around with wide eyes. “It’s gorgeous.” She almost didn’t notice Eren peeking around the corner of the wall until he started to talk a bit.

“Oh….” Eren’s voice died off as Lathe led in a woman he’d never seen before. Who is she? Is she gonna yell at me? What is she gonna do? Why is she here? She’s not gonna try something is she? Is she nice? His mind was racing as he stared at the two of them with large eyes.

“Not much, you're fine- and thank you, my wife and I did most of the designing.” We haven't actually done the wedding thing yet... but fuck it. Close enough. He smiled, noticing Eren peering around the corner. He smiled softly to him, looking back to Hannah for a second, holding up a hand for a moment before going over to Eren, his voice soft as he tried to coax him out from behind the corner to meet her. “Eren, let me introduce the two of you, okay? She’s very nice- you don't have to be worried.” He gently led Eren out a bit by the arm, gesturing to Hannah with one arm. “Eren, this is Hannah Laskowski. She’s Scotty and Casper’s neighbor, and soon will have her horse boarding with us. And Hannah, this is my son Eren.” I hope you can understand he’s really shy...

Hannah smiled softly, her eyes almost seeming to close as her large cheeks rose to show off a large smile. Ah, you’re Eren, I’ve heard a lot about you too. You’re quite the interesting fellow and I swear we only listen to your music while we work in the lab, Casper insists on it... “It’s okay, Eren. If you want to stay there where you're comfortable, it’s fine! I completely understand.” I know exactly what you’re going through kid.
Eren looked over from Lathe to Hannah and then back over towards the door which led to his painting room. She’s…. She doesn’t mind that I wanna hide? Hmm…. that’s a first… usually Dad’s always trying to find me around the house, I like hiding in random spots… I don’t like being in a room with people in it anymore. Eren nodded, looking down to his bare feet. I could go ride Charlie… Wait… didn’t Dad say she’s gonna board her horse here?

Thank god, she gets it. Lathe smiled gratefully to her, turning back to Eren. “Lunch is in the oven, and it’s almost done- how about you clean up a little and then come out to eat, okay?” You’ve got paint all over your hands. He let Eren scamper off, nodding for Hannah to follow him to the kitchen, going to the oven. “I just need to get him lunch, and then we can properly talk. Do you want anything to drink or anything? And there’s plenty of food to go around if you'd like.” It’s lunchtime- It'd be rude not to ask.

“Ah… Um… If you have any tea, that would be great, but you don’t have to hassle yourself. And thank you for the offer, but I really shouldn’t.” It’s kind of you to ask, but I can’t… I wonder what Eren was painting? His mural videos were always pretty cool.

“It’s no trouble really- and Eren only drinks tea, so he’s getting some too.” He nodded to the kettle, which had long since been set on the stove, fishing in the cupboard for two mugs and teabags. “Earl Grey okay? We have other kinds if you’d like one better.” He looked to her as she nodded, going ahead and making the tea, handing her the two mugs. “Could you please do me a favour, take this to the painting room over there? Eren needs to come out and eat.” He pointed to the door of the painting room. He needs to pretty much be bribed into coming out of hiding...

Hannah nodded carefully taking the two mugs towards where he was pointing. She walked over quietly, gently kicking the door with her foot in mock knocking. Don’t want to scare you. “Eren… Your Dad says the food is ready?... I brought you tea. Which one do you want?” I don’t know if you have a specific mug that you use all the time, but I’m hoping that you’re not feeling threatened that I’m in the doorway.

Eren looked up from where he was setting the paints away. His eyes watched her every move and watched her stop a fair distance from him in the doorway. Well, she’s friendly… And she understands… Eren timidly got up, making his way over to her and grabbing the mug from her left hand. This one is mine… It’s nice she let me pick which one I wanted.

Hannah smiled faintly to him, moving out of the way and slowly shepherd Eren out to the living room, sitting a fair distance away from him on one of the couches. ... you were all the internet was talking about a bit ago. There’s still buzz, but I remember reading a couple snippets about what was happening… I’m actually one of the few people working on refining the serum found in one of the syringes… we think it’s what Grisha gave you… I can’t just dump that on you right now, though. But, I get it. More than you’d think. She spoke after a long moment of silence, her voice soft. “Eren, I just wanted to tell you that I understand what you’re going through, and… if you ever
want to talk to someone about it, I'm here. But I'm not gonna force it on you… because I know how hard it is to talk about it.” ...just putting it on the table...

Eren picked his head up from staring at the tea in his hands. … Huh? “H-how? How do you know?” Eren asked quietly, his voice wavering in uncertainty. How would you know how I feel? Of wanting to hide from everyone? Of not wanting to be touched…? Of not being able to feel anything?

“It happened to me, too… I was on my college campus, miles and miles away from any family, because I was dorming… I didn't want to tell anyone, I just wanted to forget it ever happened and never have to bring it up, pretend nothing happened. But, it had happened, and when I called or Skyped any of my friends they could tell something had changed… it was really really hard to tell anyone, and I just felt so disgusting and awful about myself… I haven't even told my own parents about it yet, and it's been a really long time… but when I finally told my inner circle of friends, and when I told Sharon, from then on it was small steps towards understanding I was still someone deserving respect, and that not all human interactions have a malicious intent… that that awful thing can happen and you can still be liked and respected and wanted… I've had my share of days where I’d just hide by myself, where everything is numb and I wouldn't even be able to stand someone touching my shoulder or even being in the same room as me… but, it gets better. It took a long time, and my way of figuring things out may not be your way of doing it, but I got better. I've been there. If you need to really talk to someone about it, someone who understands your situation immensely well, call or find me.” I understand, kid… I've been there. And nothing about getting better was much fun besides the fact I was getting progressively closer and closer to being normal.

Eren sat there and listened to everything Hannah was telling him. She’s been through that? She knows… She knows what it feels like… Maybe I do need to talk to someone about it… And you seem to understand. “Umm… Well, my biological father… Was the one that started it. He had been watching the house until he knew I would be home, popped the lock, and came into the house…. He beat me...He used his fist, he threw chairs as me…. He took rope and tried to drown me in the bathtub… And he got the knife out... And he started to cut things off… He cut parts of my ear off, patches of skin… And he boiled water and threw it on me to burn everything up. He didn’t let me sleep, at all, he wouldn’t let me take Blake out of the cage, and he was in there suffering and whining…. And I couldn’t do a damn thing about it...” Eren paused as his voice wavered a bit, looking up to find Hannah still intently looking back at him. She’s listening... She’s not judging me about it either.... Hannah’s pretty nice... “I… Uhm… I probably said too much already, you don't want to talk about it....” I'm probably reminding you of something you'd rather forget.

...that’s horrible… Hannah shook her head, giving him a reassuring look. “No, really, it’s fine, I'm listening- you can keep talking if you want to.” If not, I understand. But don't think I'm just tuning you out.

Eren looked up from twiddling his fingers, his eyes looking to her for only a moment before looking around the room at anywhere but her. He took a few sips of tea, trying to collect his
thoughts. “Um… H-He took my phone… And he held a knife to my neck… And he told me, that I
wasn’t allowed to tell anyone that he… That he was beating me… He said if I told Dad… That he
would bring Dad into the apartment… And he told me that he was gonna take him, and tie him
up…. and that he was gonna beat dad…. And do everything he had done to me to him… And he
said he would let me watch him bleed out…” Eren had to stop talking as he tried not to cry, his
mind bringing up horrible images of Lathe covered in blood lying broken and battered on the floor
in front of him. No… That can’t happen…. He can’t die… That can’t happen.

Lathe stopped with a plate in his hands, looking around the corner to Eren and Hannah. He's
talking… and… he used me to keep Eren from talking…. Lathe quietly rapped on the wall, wanting
to get their attention for just a moment, his voice quiet as he patted over to them. “I'm sorry for
interrupting… here…” Lathe made sure a Eren had a good hold on the plate before leaning down
to peck his forehead. ...should I leave you two to talk? “...do you want me to stay for right now?” If
you want to keep talking, without me here, I get it.

Eren looked up to Lathe, shaking his head as he picked up a piggy and ate it quietly. No… You
don’t need to know yet… You don’t understand how I feel…. But Hannah does… And she’s letting
me talk…. She’s not judging me. He looked over to Hannah as she sipped at her tea. I think I can
talk to her about it…

Lathe nodded, ruffling Eren’s hair a bit before leaving them to be, out of sight around the corner.
However, he stopped and leaned against the wall to listen to Eren speak, wanting to know more
about what exactly had happened. He doesn't talk about any of it; I need to know more about what
happened… I knew it wasn't good, but… it was so cruel...

Eren spoke quietly in between bites of food. “Ummm…. After I agreed that I wasn’t going… To
tell Dad or Mom that he was there…. He let me go try and do my recording day at Dad’s old
house… And umm… He told me that he was gonna kill me before… Before Levi got home… And
I didn’t know what else to do… Except try and tell him, and I ended up crying during my
recordings....” Eren looked down at his plate, suddenly feeling full, unable to eat another bite.

Hannah gave him a sympathetic look, listening intently. She noticed Eren had stopped eating after
a little while, speaking up softly as Eren’s words lulled. “...do you want to talk any more?” You
look like you don't want to much- you probably want to go back to hiding… She watched as Eren
paused for a second before shaking his head, setting his unfinished plate on the couch before
scampering off upstairs, bringing his tea with him. She let him go, getting up and picking up his
plate. She padded to the kitchen, handing Lathe the plate. “I'm sorry, he didn't finish…”

Lathe nodded, taking the plate from her. “That’s alright, as long as he kinda ate it he’s okay. But he
had breakfast. He'll be okay.” Lathe shrugged and set it down leaning against the counter and
snitching one of the piggies, deciding not to waste them. “So, I'm cool with you boarding your
horse here, obviously. I take you out to see the barn in a bit if you like, but before I do that, let me
say this.” Lathe looked to her with a serious expression. “Eren hasn’t known you for more than fifteen minutes and he’s told you more about what happened than he has to anybody else. Even me. For you to board your horse here, $300.00 would be more than fair, and it would be amazing if you could come over occasionally to just talk to Eren. ...he refuses to go to therapy and for a good reason, and it would be such a help. It’s the most he’s talked in weeks....” Lathe silently plead with her. “How does all that sound?” 

...I think you could really help Eren...

Hannah smiled gently, her smile a bit smaller as she nodded. “I think that would be good, that would definitely let me save a lot from where she’s boarded right now.” That would help a lot! And she’ll have someone to get along with. She put her tea mug down on the counter, looking back up to Lathe. “Um, could we go see the barn so I know where I’m gonna bring her tonight?”

Lathe nodded, motioning for her to follow him. “Of course- oh, we’re gonna need our shoes.” Lathe led her to the front door, stepping into his boots while she slipped her shoes on, leading her through the house and out the back door. He wolf whistled out in the direction of the fields, not seeing Blake or Maisie. It wasn't a second later he heard a bark, both of the dogs running down the trails to them. They slowed as they approached the two of them, looking at Hannah with curiosity. “Hannah, this is Blake and Maisie. Blake’s Eren’s service dog.” He does lots more of derping around than servicing now it seems. Eren never really leaves the house except to go to the barn... that’s probably why. With a nod of his head, Lathe had Blake and Maisie following them as they ambled to the barn. He opened the barn door, flooding the inside with natural light. “Welcome to the barn!” He led her further in, saluting to Salem as he lounged on a rafter above their heads. “The stalls are here on the left- there’s plenty of hay and grains, fruits and vegetables to go around. And we’ve got heaters in here so the animals aren't freezing in the winter.” That would be bad.

Hannah nodded looking up all around to inspect the rafters to see if there were any more cats. Hmm... So many spaces and no horses? “You only have one horse here?” Luna should fit in here... Hopefully. But Bavarians are known for being docile around others.

“Yeah, just the one. We decided just to start with Charlie and see how well Eren could take care of him and the rest of the animals. Though, he is taking very good care of all of them. We’re thinking of getting one for jumping.” He put a finger to his lips. “-but you didn't hear me say that.” That's gonna be a surprise. “Tell me a bit more about your horse- all I know at this point is that they exist.” He chuckled quietly.

She chuckled softly as she looked around a few of the other stalls. “Well, I have a Bavarian Warmblood mare, she’s 6, her name is Luna and very well trained, we do jump often… Does Eren know how to jump?” I’m curious…. I did see some painted poles but those could just be for walking around and getting the gait right.

That's Charlie’s breed. “Yeah, Eren does- he built a bunch of jumps and set them up around the backyard. Charlie’s a Bavarian Warmblood too, oddly enough, and he can jump with him really
“It’s really impressive, actually. “He hadn’t ridden in over a decade and yet he picked it right back up like it was nothing…”

Hannah nodded, completely understanding. “Once you learn to ride, you never forget… And I meant to ask you… But do you know where the closest riding center is? I usually ride Luna where she’s boarded but it’s becoming too expensive at the one in town.”

“Hannah, come here real quick.” Lathe led Hannah back outside, stopping her where she could see the meadow and the trees. “Just look for a second. Every bit of land that you can see right now I own- there are plenty of trails and open spaces and jumps to go around. You're very welcome to ride your horse here.” That’d be very okay.

Hannah stepped out with him to look at the land around where he motioned. It’s… That’s all yours? Holy shit! “Oh… Wow… Um, that’d be really nice, thank you very much.” I would love riding here. She looked over towards the field, seeing a dark bay horse. “Is that Charlie?” She asked pointing over to him. “He’s beautiful.”

Lathe nodded, grinning. “That’s him, alright. He really is something. And don’t worry, the area they’re fenced into right now isn’t permanent. We’re trying to find a company that can put up enough fencing to go completely around the property, and get fencing at least for a decent bit of the front of the house before winter. We just can't have them wandering off in the meantime. That would be bad.” Yeah, no.

Hannah nodded, watching as he trotted around the fence, as if looking and expecting something. “I know this is kinda off topic but…. Is he gelded?” I wonder if they would be up for breeding them? Bavarians are hard to come by in the States...

“No, he’s not.” Lathe thought a moment, quirking an eyebrow at her. “Why, whatcha thinkin’?”

“Well… Bavarians are hard to come by in the States… If you wanted to… We could breed them, I wouldn’t mind. It would probably pay decently for a colt or a filly, though we would probably need to get permission from Germany to do that so they would be official….” Hannah started to trail off as she thought of the possibilities they could have with the two Bavarians. It would definitely make a lot of money somewhere… And around here, people are crazy about their horses...

...they would be worth a lot… hmmmm… “That’s definitely a thought…” He thought a minute before nodding. “I’m alright with that- we’d need to get permission like you said, and then have pedigrees made, things like that- but I think that’s a fine idea.”
Hannah nodded. “Well, I’m gonna head out and go pick her up and then bring her to see how they get along with each other, is that okay?” *I hope it is… The quicker that they know each other... The better...*

Lathe nodded. “Of course- I understand you'd need to move her as soon as you could. And yeah, we’ll see how they get along.” *We’ll introduce them soon, then.* “I’ll write up a contract while you're out getting her. Can I just get your contact information before you go?” Lathe offered her his phone, a new contact pulled up. *In case stuff happens.*

Hannah took his phone, taking only a minute to put in her contact information and texting herself so that she had his number. “I’ll be over around 6ish if that’ll work?” *Need to take the truck to get the trailer and then go get her and then load her in, and drive her over here... And maybe pick up Sharon on the way here...*

“That’d work just fine-” *Six-ish... “-Since it would be so close to then, what do you think about maybe joining us for dinner? You and your wife, of course.” I'd like to meet her, too.*

…. *That could work, I'll tell Sharon while I'm picking up the trailer at home.* “That sounds good, um, can I ask what we’re having? Sorry but I’m just curious.” *Sharon’s been having really weird food cravings and it’s kinda freaking me out a little bit.* She rubbed at the back of her neck as she kicked a pebble around on the ground.

...oh, right. *That's to be expected.* Lathe chuckled, understanding. “Chicken cacciatore- whole chicken cooked slow, over pasta with mushrooms, onions and peppers. ...and you're not asking for you, are you?” *I'd bet not.*

Hannah shook her head. “No… I mean yes… but not really. Don’t be offended if I don’t eat all the fancy stuff you put with the pasta… but I was asking for Sharon, she’s been getting really weird cravings as of late.” *Just so she knows what she’s getting into.*

Lathe nodded, shrugging. “I figured. I'd be surprised if she wasn't. And that’s fine- I know not everybody likes all foods. I have to feed Eren, so believe me. I know.” He chuckled. *I'm laughing because it hurts. That was a struggle, finding out what stuff he likes. ...would anything I'm saying sound weird because you probably don't know I was a doctor? ...maybe. I maybe sound kinda creepy... dammit.* “Uhm, side note, in case any of that sounded weird or creepy, I used to be a doctor.” *I've talked to too many spouses of pregnant women- I understand the struggle. ...that sentence just made it more awkward fuck* “...I'm sorry, I can't words…” Lathe facepalmed. *Good job.*
She let out a light-hearted laugh as the two of them walked towards the house again, and towards her truck. “That’s completely fine, I can’t words either… it’s completely fine, um… if you could give Eren my number too, that would be great so he can text me whenever he wants.” *I know I wanted to talk about it at the randomest times when I finally got the strength to talk about it."

*He’ll actually talk, maybe.* “I’ll make sure to do that. ...and really, thank you for that.” Lathe gave her a grateful look. *It would mean a lot.* He slowed as they approached Hannah’s truck, his tone light. “I’ll see you, Sharon and Luna around six then.” He waved as Hannah pulled out of the driveway, going back into the house. He grabbed his laptop from it’s place on the banister, setting it up on the kitchen island to type up a contract. He sat down, pulling out his phone. *Eren’s hiding again somewhere… this’ll be easier.*

LQ: Hey Eren, I have a couple things to tell you

LQ: Hannah wanted you to have her cell phone number, and text or call anytime you need to or want to talk. It’s XXX-XXX-XXXX

LQ: She’s going to be boarding her horse Luna here, and she’s bringing her over around 6 o’clock. We’ll introduce her to Charlie; they’re the same breed, and we want to see how well they get along. She’ll be riding her here too, taking advantage of the trails and jumps.

LQ: Hopefully you're willing to share *grins because I'm joking around*

LQ: Also, I invited Hannah and her wife Sharon over for dinner tonight. Mom is going to be home by the time they get here, you seemed to like Hannah, and I'm sure Sharon is nice- I don't think you have to worry. We're not gonna force you to talk or anything.

LQ: Does that all sound okay?

EY: … Yeah… That sounds okay, what are we having? For dinner?

EY: And I saved her phone number… Thank you…

EY: Her horse is the same breed as Charlie!? *gasp* we could have a foal running around in a year!

LQ: We were literally thinking of that- we're going to see how the two of them get along

LQ: And we’re having chicken cacciatore

LQ: It's the chicken over pasta with the fancy vegetables in it

EY: okay… Is that the one you made like two weeks ago that I liked?

LQ: the one where when you ate the bits of vegetable I silently cheered?

LQ: because if so, yes.
EY: yeah… No mushrooms please? Blake didn’t like them...

LQ: ...I didn't know Blake ate the chicken with us

LQ: He wouldn't have, because there are bones in the chicken.

LQ: …you know what, that’s 3:3 dissent against vegetables

LQ: You veggie-haters win-no mushrooms.

EY: … You’re not mad…. Right?

LQ: Of course I'm not mad. It’s fine, really!

LQ: Anything to make you and the guests happy :)

Lathe nearly dropped his phone on the counter in surprise as Blake suddenly rushed in through the doggy door, running up the stairs. Maisie wasn't far behind him, running up to Lathe and standing up on her hind legs, licking at his face. What the hell? Lathe held up his arms to get her away from his face, wiping his mouth on his sleeve. “Whoa, down Maisie, chill.” What happened? Lathe stood from the island, letting Maisie lead him up the stairs to Eren’s room. He looked around the large bedroom, seeing Blake’s tail sticking out from the closet. Oh my… Lathe went over to the closet, pulling the door back a bit and seeing Eren huddled on the floor, his phone pulled to his chest, hiding under a pile of clothes. “Eren, are you okay?” Remember… he doesn't really like being touched. Lathe sat down on the floor opposite of Eren, giving him a few feet of space. He needs space.

Eren shook his head, barely able to reach out to pet Blake, who was whining for attention, trying to distract Eren. Come on human! You can do it! You can pet me! You can’t panic right now… The really big doge is looking for you… He wants you to take him for a walk too! Calm down, think about me. Blake moved to force his head into Eren’s hands and allowed Eren to pet him rather awkwardly.

... you don't like talking... me being your dad changes things a bit... Lathe pulled out his phone from his pocket after a minute, able to type without having to look at the keypad.

LQ: ...do you want to talk about it? ...type about it, if that would be better?

Eren looked down at the text from Lathe who sat down in the same room as him. I… I guess that would work. Eren’s left hand petted Blake, while his right held his phone, typing with his thumb.

EY: He told me that you would always hate me….
LQ: Eren, none of what he told you was true… I could never hate you.

LQ: You're my son. I'm always going to love you.

EY: …. I’m not really your son… I’m his… And he made that quite clear.

LQ: Eren, so much has happened since we met.

LQ: I took you in and did my best to fix what I could

LQ: I /officially adopted/ you

LQ: And I've given you everything I could to try and make you happy

LQ: You're my son, not just because a bunch of papers say so

LQ: But because I love you and treat you like one of my own

LQ: ...and why else would I ask you to call me ‘Dad?’

EY: …. He told me not to tell you… I couldn’t do it… I couldn’t, he said he was going to....

LQ: ...Eren, it's okay… I understand. You were scared of what would happen. I can't hold it against you.

EY: he told me he was gonna get you too… And he was gonna beat you, rape you, cut you open, play with you while you were awake, let the other men do whatever they wanted to you…

EY: he told me I would watch it all happen, and then they would come to me once they had killed you, let you bleed out and lost interest in your dead body…

EY: that image has been haunting me for /weeks/.

LQ: ...Eren, is it okay if I give you a hug?

Eren looked to the text, slowly propping himself up, shedding the clothes from on top of him. He moved timidly and slowly, still quite afraid that the image would become reality in a matter of seconds. I don’t want this to be a dream…. I don’t want you to die… Eren sat there in the closet, wanting Lathe to hold him and tell him it was okay more than anything, yet so afraid to have those arms wrap around him, in fear of them becoming cold and limp.

Lathe shifted forward, moving some clothes out of the way for just a moment as he moved next to Eren, pulling him and his nest into his lap, holding onto him tightly, his forehead resting against his shoulder. “Eren… I know it’s a horrible thing to think about… but I’m right here, and I'm in one piece, okay… you don't have to be scared that it could still happen.” Because it won't.

Eren started to sob as Lathe’s arms wrapped around him, shifting a bit so that he could curl up to
Lathe a bit better, abandoning his nesting material for now to feel Lathe’s skin, warm to the touch. *It’s not gonna happen… It’s not gonna happen… It’s not… Happening.… He’s not cold.…* Eren just continued to sob in Lathe’s arms as he was hugged. *I don’t want it to happen.*

Lathe carded a hand through his hair, helping him shed some of the nesting material and keeping him close, trying to to cry himself. He murmured soothingly in his ear, rubbing his side comfortingly. *Nothing is going to happen… I’m okay; you’re okay, we’re all okay. And for what we can see, that’s not going to change for a while.* Lathe leaned back against the pile of clothes, waiting for Eren’s sobs to subside.

Eren’s fingers shakily gripped onto Lathe’s shirt, sobbing still and creating multiple wet marks on the shirt. “It… It… It could still happen though… He… He… H-he… He told them a-all about y-you… I’m s-scared… They’re g-gonna f-find you… W-When you l-leave the h-house…” Eren started to sob harder, he was starting to let Lathe in, to know his fears, starting to open up to him. *I don’t want you to leave me alone… They’ll find me and kill me too…*

Lathe cradled Eren to his chest, willing him to calm down. “Eren, we have the pictures of the men you drew; I’ve memorised their faces by now. I wouldn’t give anyone the opportunity to try anything while I was out and about. And if anyone tried anything, I know Judo. It is scary to think that there are still these people out there, but we know what they look like and we’re doing what we can to find them. It’s not going to happen; I wouldn't let it. I’d fight tooth and nail against any of them- after all, I’ve got a family to come home to.” *There’s so much I have to live for.*

Eren nodded, his sobs starting to subside a little bit as he finally started to feel even the least bit comfortable in Lathe’s arms. *He’s really here… This isn’t a dream.… He’s real… Dad’s right here…*

Lathe pecked Eren’s temple as he started to calm down, his arms still wrapped around him. “I’m not going anywhere. Swear it.” Lathe crossed his thumb over his heart. *I’m not.* Lathe held onto Eren for a while longer, soon murmuring. “I have to get things ready for when Hannah and Sharon come over- want to help me cook?” *It’s okay to say no.*

Eren stilled as he thought about it for a moment before nodding. *Okay… I don’t wanna let go of you though.* Eren shifted a bit, still holding onto his shirt, and sniffling.

*…of course.* Lathe sighed good-naturedly, smiling and shifting his feet under him, stepping out of the closet with Eren in his arms. He kept Eren’s head tucked under his chin as he padded carefully down the stairs, setting him down once they were in the kitchen, raising up his arms as Eren immediately clung to his middle, behind him. He chuckled. “Alright- you can just watch me cook, then.” *That’s fine.* Lathe went to the fridge and started to get things ready to put in the crock pot, conscious of Eren right behind him, content. *I haven't gotten a hug in weeks from you… This is
okay. *Making up for lost time.* Lathe looked down as he was chopping vegetables for the sauce, seeing Blake and Maisie sitting and staring up at him, waiting patiently for him to drop something. He smirked, cutting a carrot in half and dropping the pieces. *I don't have anything else to give you that you'll like or that won't make you sick.*

Blake looked to the thing dropped in front of them. *What the heck is that? Is it edible?* He stood up to sniff at the odd food. *Can I eat it?*

*CARROTS !!!* Maisie instantly laid down to start chewing on the long piece of carrot, gnawing on it like a bone. *Sooo good. I haven't had one in forever.*

Blake looked over to Maisie, seeing her eat the carrot in front of her with vigor. He laid down to pick up the carrot, starting to gnaw on his as well. *I guess it's edible... You're not dead.*

Eren held onto Lathe, completely silent for a long time until he heard the key in the door, which could only be Levi coming back from shopping at this hour. It was only a few seconds more before Eren had let go of Lathe and went to go find another good hiding spot. *Nope... He's gonna be mad at me for hugging dad...*

Levi opened the door, announcing he was home loudly. He walked to the kitchen, setting a cardboard box on the table. *I've got the three turkeys.* *That should be plenty for the bunch of us.*

Lathe let Eren run off, looking after him with a sympathetic look on his face. He looked with wide eyes to the cardboard box. *Holy hell, that’s got to be at least 85 pounds of bird!* *That’s a lot of turkey!*

Levi just looked at him with a straight face. *Yes. Yes it is.* He looked around, quirking an eyebrow. *Do you know where Eren is?* *I want to try to say hi...*

Lathe looked back down to Maisie, seeing her gnawing on Blake’s abandoned carrot. *Eren ran off... he’ll be hiding somewhere upstairs. Just look and see where Blake’s tail is sticking out somewhere. I just went through this, so a bit of advice.* Lathe looked up to him, leaning against the counter. *Let him have his space. Wherever he is, don’t try to talk to him right away. Sit down a few feet away, and text him. Talk to him like that. He needs to talk to you, but he can’t easily do it in person. He’ll open up a bit. Just... give it a try.* *It worked for me.*

Levi just nodded, leaving the cardboard box on the island and traipsing upstairs, checking each
room and listening for any sounds. He heard Blake whining down one hall, walking down to Lathe and Spades’ room, looking in and seeing Blake’s tail sticking out from the closet. He went to the left door of the split closet, seeing Eren huddled on the floor in the corner, wearing one of Lathe’s midnight blue sweaters, a few sizes too big for him, other sweaters in green and red, purple and black tugged off of their hangers and draped around him. Oh my... Levi gave Eren a few feet and sat down on the floor, texting him.

LA: Hey Eren... do you want to talk about anything?

LA: It’s okay to type it...

LA: If you want.

EY: .... Were... were you there.... When it happened?

LA: No, I wasn’t. I was miles away, still in classes...

LA: I know you thought I was there, but Eren, it was the drugs they gave you.

LA: The things that you thought happened to you, they were mostly real.

LA: But not all of it.

LA: Like me being there.

EY: You... you didn’t encourage them to do that?

LA: Eren, if I were there I’d’ve been busy castrating all of those assholes for laying a damn /finger/ on you.

LA: They’d have to kill me before I’d encourage them to do the horrible things they did

EY: You didn’t hit me? Or strangle me? Or tie me down and cut me?

LA: ...Eren, I didn’t do any of that... it happened, and it was horrible that it did...

LA: But it wasn’t me.

LA: I’d never, /ever/ want to do that to you.

EY: You didn't say anything to me? You don't hate me? You don’t think i’m a whore? You don’t think you can never love me again?

LA: Eren, I could /never/ hate you, or think that of you, or say those awful things to you...

LA: ...and I never did stop loving you.

EY: How can I trust that it wasn’t you? He told me you're a liar...

LA: ...how can you think that the man who's done nothing besides beat you and hate you is telling you the truth?
LA: You can check with everyone in my classes. I was there when it happened.

LA: I wouldn't lie to you about something like that.

EY: Levi... In my mind, you’ve hurt me worse than he ever did...

EY: You took my trust... And you, you hurt me inside... You made me bleed more than any of the other men who raped me.

EY: you ripped me apart Levi.

LA: …Eren, =none= of that was me...

LA: The drugs they gave you fucked with your head, made you hallucinate

LA: And I get that since you think I did all that crap, because that's the way you remember it happening, you don't want to let me in again.

LA: I get it.

LA: But it //wasn't// me that did those awful things.

LA: I was really far away

LA: ...and I miss just being able to //see// you because every time I'm home you're holed up somewhere hiding from me

LA: I can't even sleep in the same bed as you because you freaked out when I tried...

LA: ……..I just miss everything……..

EY: You won’t do it again? You won’t hurt me anymore?

EY: You won't force me to be your bitch...

LA: ...Eren, I'd never do that.

LA: I care about you too much.

LA: ...I won't.

LA: The way you remember it... I won't.

EY: You promise?

LA: I promise.

EY: Okay....

Eren moved a bit to poke his head out from the closet, looking at Levi sitting across from him. Will he hold me? Eren crawled out of the closet and sat near the door, huddled in Lathe’s oversized sweater. I wanna stay in this though, it’s warm.
Levi set down his phone, slowly shifting forward, holding out his arms, his voice a quiet murmur.
“...is it okay if I hold you?” I really really want to... I haven't touched you at all since I can home...
I miss not having you to hold on to...

Eren slowly nodded, moving to curl up into Levi’s chest. His knees pulled up under the sweater as he sat down in Levi’s lap. You can hold me... You promised... But if it happens again... I-I wouldn’t be able to do it again... I wouldn’t give anything another chance.

Levi wrapped his arms around Eren, holding him close to his chest, burying his face into his shoulder. Finally... I missed you... I missed you so damn much... I'll be okay with this much... baby steps... Levi sighed heavily, his thumb gently running over Eren’s side, trying to hold back sobs.

Eren huddled into Levi’s arms. “You’re home...” His voice was quiet as he nuzzled himself closer into Levi’s arms. You’re warm...

Levi nodded, his voice cracking a bit as he spoke. “...I... I-I'm home.” I missed you... I missed home...

Eren nodded and stayed curled up to him quietly, his body was still a bit tense but he was beginning to relax around Levi. He won’t hurt me... He promised...

Lathe was downstairs, typing away at his laptop as the chicken cooked. He was a few lines in when his phone rang, answering it and knowing who it was at the ringtone. “Hey Scotty- what’s up?”

“What time should we be over for dinner?”

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at the question. “Uhm, on Thanksgiving, you can be here at five.” It's been the same for the past three years...

“No, I meant tonight. What time should we be over tonight?”

Lathe blinked. “...since when are you coming over tonight? Why?”
“Uh... Because free food... And Casper called you earlier... Or should have.”

“Well... he didn't call me. Although I understand the free food reasoning... and we are having Hannah and Sharon over anyway as well... screw it, you two can come. Be here six-ish, okay?”

*That'd work. I think.*

“Alright, sounds like a plan, see you at six!”

“Okay, see you two.” Lathe hung up, staring at his phone for a minute, speaking to the empty kitchen. “What just happened?” *...we now have more people coming over for dinner. ...I might have to add to the pot I've got cooking now...* Lathe stood up to add more chicken to the crockpot, looking over his shoulder as he heard heavy footsteps. He smiled gently as Levi padded down the stairs, cradling Eren in his arms. *I see things worked out a bit. He let Levi traipse to the living room uninterrupted, laying down with Eren on top of him. ...I'm glad things are starting to work out...* He finished adding more meat to the pot, going back to finish typing up the contract. He was scrolling through old sheet music he had saved to his laptop when another key turned in the front door. Lathe glanced to the clock. *Five-ten. Right on time.* Lathe stood, going to the door to meet Spades.

Spades opened the door kicking off her heels and rubbing at the arches of her feet. *I swear I can never get used to wearing them all day... They still hurt.* She picked up her head as Lathe came in, smiling as he got closer. “Hey, babe.”

Lathe swept her close, kissing her sweetly with a soft smile. “Hey Hon- welcome home.” He broke from her after a moment, still holding her close and leaning their foreheads together. “Eren actually let me hug him today... and he let Levi hold him too.” *It's a real improvement...*

Spades smiled even more at the news. “That’s amazing!” She leaned her head against his forehead, chuckling a bit. “At least your day was better than mine. So anything else happen today while I was gone?” *Has Levi acquired the turkeys?*

Lathe nodded. “Levi got the turkeys with Erwin, that's a thing. And we’re having people over for dinner. Casper and Scotty’s new neighbors have a horse they're going to board in the barn- Hannah came over today to talk about boarding. I invited her and her wife over for dinner, and apparently Scotty and Casper are joining us too. So that's all a thing.” *Things have happened.* He pecked her cheek, murmuring in her ear. “And I'm sorry you didn't have a good day... I'll try and make it better.”
Spades turned her head to look at Lathe, a smirk creeping across her lips. “Are you suggesting what I think you are?” You probably are… and I certainly wouldn’t mind doing anything tonight… and maybe Eren wouldn’t need to sleep with us, and we can be alone. “My feet hurt… I was standing around in heels all day.” I hate press conferences. “Alright, so we have a full table tonight, that’s alright, the more the merrier.”

Lathe smirked, trailing down to lightly nip at her neck. “Maybe I am… at least you won't need to stand for what I'm talking about.”...nope. Lathe chuckled as Spades made a tiny sound, pressing small kisses to her neck. “And yeah- we’ll have plenty of people to talk to tonight. Hannah’s very nice, and I would think Sharon is too. That is, if she's coming. She’s pregnant, so it all depends on how she's feeling.” I'd understand not wanting to come- not liking what we're having or just not feeling up to it.

Spades nodded, letting out a large sigh as Lathe held onto her hips. “Lathe? Should we move to another room? I'd rather not… um… in the doorway.” Not to mention that Eren and Levi are in the other room!

Lathe nodded, kicking the door shut and locking it behind them. He kept an arm around her waist as he brought her upstairs, leading them into their bedroom. He kicked the door shut behind them before pulling her flush against him, kissing her passionately, his hands running over her sides. I want to make you feel good...

Spades leaned into his touch as he kissed her, moaning a little as his hands touched over a sensitive area. Hmmm… I like this… I like this a lot. Spades was shifting uncomfortably on her feet as she held their kiss.

Feet. Lathe picked Spades up, carrying her over to the bed and setting her down, lightly pecking her lips as she got situated. He went to sit down with her feet in his lap, beginning to massage one. You really need this, I can feel how tensed up you are.

Spades groaned as his fingers ran over her arch. “Lathe…. Ah, thanks…” She laid down and relaxed, letting him work out the soreness in her feet. She would let out a hiss every now and then, signalling he found yet another painful area on her foot. God they fucking hurt… I need new shoes.

“I think you need to start wearing something other than heels to work every day if they hurt this much…” That'd probably be a good idea. Lathe worked out the knots in her feet, careful with each painful spot that made Spades hiss. He had moved on to her other foot, looking up to her expression, smiling faintly as he saw her eyes closed, her breathing even. She's asleep… Lathe finished massaging her feet, sliding out from under her and kissing her forehead. It's five thirty… I need to get ready for people. He left to go back downstairs, shutting the door quietly behind him and going to the kitchen. He washed his hands before starting to make noodles, the water in a pot
He had a large bowl of noodles ready to be cooked when the doorbell rang, hanging up his apron and going to the front door. He opened the door, smiling to Hannah, Sharon standing next to her. “Hello you two! You must be Sharon- it’s wonderful to meet you.” Lathe smiled to her, looking over to where her truck sat in the driveway, a trailer hitched to the back. “Is that her?” Must be.

Hannah nodded. “Yeah, Luna’s in the trailer, do you mind if we take her out? She gets temperamental when she gets cooped up in them for too long.” Don’t want her to get antsy while we’re here, that could get bad quickly.

Lathe nodded. “Oh yeah, of course! We’ll introduce her to Charlie.” Lathe stepped into his boots and closed the door behind him, following Hannah as she led them to the trailer. He held open the door of the trailer after she unlatched it, letting her lead Luna onto the driveway. He studied her, her black coat shiny, two white socks on her back legs and a white star on her forehead. She turned her head, an ear pointed to him, her blue eyes holding a flicker of curiosity. “...She’s a beautiful horse.” She really is.

Hannah smiled as she let Luna look around at the surrounding area. “Yeah, can you climb in and grab her equipment for me? You can just drape it on her back, she can handle it.” She looked over to where Sharon stood in the doorway, smiling widely. She’s got a permanent home for her... hopefully.

Lathe went into the trailer, picking up her equipment and carefully draping it over Luna’s back. He looked up, seeing Sharon still next to the porch, watching warily. Is something wrong? “Are you alright? Something wrong?”

Sharon looked to him suddenly, shrugging and chuckling nervously. “I’m still really nervous around her... or any animal that’s bigger than a cat, really...” She smiled sheepishly as Lathe looked to her in disbelief. “Yeah, I know we own a horse, you’d think with the three dogs at home I'd be over it. I'm trying.” ...I knew how much Hannah wanted a horse. ...and even though dogs scare me to death sometimes, I actually wanted one. And then Hannah made sure we got three.

...huh. She’s terrified of animals, and she’s putting up with three dogs and a horse. ...Hannah, you're damn lucky. “Then I'd best warn you, we've got a couple animals around- two dogs, two cows, Charlie who's our horse, and a pig. And then Salem, who's our resident barn cat. ...and the chickens, but they're about the size of a cat and in a different pen. You'll be okay.” We’ll help you be chill around them.

Hannah smiled as she saw Levi and Eren come up behind Sharon, Levi inviting her inside and out of the cold as Eren came outside.
“Time to get them to meet?” Eren asked quietly as he came up to Luna, immediately seeing the ‘B’ stamped into her left hind leg, surrounded by a crest. *She really is beautiful, and from Germany no less...*

Hannah nodded, following Eren as he led them to the barn, Luna followed after her with perked ears, prancing a bit, her knees coming up high as her ears flicked all around, not knowing what to focus on. *She’s getting antsy... But not too bad.*

Eren went into the barn, getting Charlie from his stall and putting him on a lead to bring him out to meet Luna. Once the two saw each other their focus was put on the other. *Well... so far so good.* He led him towards her, hearing him nicker as he tried to pull to get closer to her.

Luna did the same, stepping up and tugging at her lead, Hannah keeping control of her as the two of them inspected one another, seeming to understand that they would be staying together a lot. Hannah sighed as Luna flared her nostrils, Charlie doing the same and the two of them not showing any aggression towards the other. “Well, they certainly get along, that’s good.” *This also gives us great chances for them to do something favorable during her next heat.*

Lathe smiled, petting Luna’s neck after a moment. “That is good- they'll be just fine.” It wasn't long before they led the two of them into the barn, Lathe looked up to the rafters for Salem. *Huh.* “I don't see Salem- eh, he’s probably off being a wild cat somewhere. He’ll be back soon enough, I suppose.” *He can take care of himself.* Lathe helped situate Luna’s equipment in the tack room, leading the two of them back up to the house. He nodded to Levi, who was talking quietly with Sharon on the couches in the front room, a mug in both of their hands. They all looked to the front door as the bell rang again, Lathe nudging Eren and Hannah over to the front room. “That’s Casper and Scotty. You two go sit, please- dinner won't be too long.” *I just need to boil the noodles.* Lathe went to the door, opening it to the two of them. “Hey you two-” Lathe stopped as he saw what Casper was carrying, quirking an eyebrow at him. “...why the hell did you bring beer?” *Because of course you did.*

“Because we knew you wouldn’t have any, and we wanted something to go with dinner.” Scotty almost instantly responded as the two of them stepped inside. *Oh... right, he did say Hannah and Sharon were coming over.* He took off his coat, hanging it up on the coat rack and taking Casper’s coat from him.

Hannah and Eren went over to where Sharon and Levi were sitting on the couches and talking quietly to each other. “How are you, Hun? You okay?” She carefully slipped behind Sharon on the couch, her arms wrapping around her and gently resting on her large abdomen.
Eren moved to curl up into Levi’s lap, putting his head on his shoulder quietly. *I’m surprised that I can still fit in his lap like this. It’s really comfortable…*

Red dusted Sharon's cheeks as Hannah wrapped her arms around her, letting her own hand rest on top of hers and keep them in place, leaning back against her, chuckling quietly. “I’m fine Hannah, don’t worry.” She sipped from her mug, smirking as Eren curled up into Levi’s arms. *I'm surprised he fits- Eren’s so tall, and Levi’s shorter than me!*

Levi couldn't help but be a bit surprised as Eren made himself at home in his lap, though he wrapped his free arm around him, letting him nestle into his shoulder. *...I like this.* He saw the knowing look Sharon was giving him, quirking an eyebrow at her. “You got something to share with the class?”

Sharon tried to conceal a wide grin, a chuckle breaking up her words. “N-nothing. Nothing at all.” *You two are adorable.* She looked up as Scotty and Casper sat down near them, nodding to them with a small impish grin. “Hey party crashers.” She looked back to Eren, deciding after a moment to speak. *He looks really shy… and I've heard he doesn't talk much… can't hurt to try… if it's about horses, maybe it'll be okay.* “How are Luna and Charlie getting along so far?” Her tone was soft, smiling faintly to him.

Eren looked up, peering over to Sharon as she spoke to him. *Is she nice? Dad said she was nice… and she’s really big… is she far along? Or is she carrying twins?* He stared at her trying to figure it out before giving up and simply answering the question she asked. “They… they get along well….”

Sharon quirked an eyebrow as he stared long at her stomach before answering, smiling, *I'm really big because I'm so far along- that's probably why.* “That’s good to hear. And I'm eight months along- I can see you're wondering.” *Kinda hard not to. But that's great that the two horses are getting along so far- Hannah told me you might be interested in breeding them. I know they cost quite a pretty penny- that's an idea.*

Eren looked to her and nodded, curling closer to Levi. *What happens if he wants children? I can’t do anything about that… what if he leaves me because we don’t have a family? Does he want a family? Would he definitely come back to me if I had his kid?* Eren’s mind was racing, seemingly staring off into oblivion.

Sharon suddenly heard a sound from the kitchen, then the familiar pitter-patter of paws on the floor as Blake trotted in and straight up to Eren, coming up onto his hind legs, his paws on the couch, nudging Eren. *My hooman is stressed- stop being stressed!* Wait. Blake looked around, tilting his head as he saw Sharon. *New hooman. And second-newest hooman is behind hooman. Is hooman stressing my hooman?*
Sharon and Blake seemed to have a staring competition, Blake with curiosity and Sharon with a tight grip on her mug. ...dog. She put her hand on Hannah’s leg as she moved to shift, keeping her in place. ...you know what? I need to try. She carefully extended a hand for Blake to sniff, trying to keep her expression neutral. “H-hello, there.” She warily let Blake sniff her hand, after a moment looking back up to her and seeming to nod in approval and turning his attention back to Eren, deciding it would be easier just to jump onto the couch and sit next to him, nudging him and whining for attention.

Levi’s hold shifted a bit on Eren, a hand carding through his hair. “You doing okay?” You look really worried.

Eren was still internally freaking out and Blake was beginning to pull on his shirt, trying to drag him off of the couch right away. He... He’s gonna leave me... Levi’s gonna leave me.... Grisha was right... nonononononononononononono. NO!

Levi moved with Eren and Blake, letting the both of them be dragged to the floor. Levi spoke to him worriedly and quietly, trying to get and keep his attention. “Eren, talk to me. What’s wrong?” You started freaking out after she mentioned how far along she was- what could've triggered you to panic? Why’d you... oh. “Eren, is it about having a family?”

Eren looked up to Levi with worried eyes. You want one... don’t you? Doesn’t everyone? But I can’t give you one. His eyes widened as Blake grounded his chest, whining and trying to get his attention. His hands could barely pet Blake in attempts to calm him down, they were shaking horribly. Oh fuck... I can’t calm down...

...we need to talk by ourselves... too many witnesses. “Eren, I’m going to pick you up for a second, okay?” Levi shooed Blake off of Eren for just a moment, picking him up and carrying him upstairs to his room. We need a second for you to just calm down and to talk... Levi sat down on the bed, laying down with Eren on top of him, his hand running through his hair, speaking softly. “Eren, are you worried about having a family with me? ...about not being able to give me one?” Eren was quiet for a long moment, and so he spoke again. “If that's what it is... first of all, we’d cross that bridge when we came to it. We’d have a way to go before we really talked about that. But there are options for couples like us- it isn't as if we could never have a family if we wanted. You really don't have to worry about it.” It's okay...

Eren started to calm down at his words, his frantic heart beat starting to slow as he took everything in. He’s not worried?.... So he won’t leave me then... Oh thank god... Eren started to calm down, Blake jumping up on the bed with them and licking at his face, but he didn’t seem to mind as Levi held him close.

Maisie moved to give everyone space before she ended up jumping on the couch and sniffing
around Sharon’s enlarged abdomen, her ears point forward in curiosity before she leaned forward to lick her hands and then up to her face, her tail whipping around in excitement. *This human has a tiny human inside of her.*

Hannah watched as Levi hurriedly picked up Eren and left after only a moment. “Um… Mr. Quo, is Eren gonna be okay?” *Did we trigger something? Is he having a panic attack?*

Lathe watched as Levi left with Eren in his arms, sighing. “I think so- things have been stressful lately with everything going on. I’d say Eren just needs a bit to talk to Levi and calm down. He’ll be okay.” He pointed a wooden spoon at her, smiling faintly. “And it’s Lathe- we’re all a-dults here.” Lathe then looked to Casper, his expression shifting a bit. “Well… most of us.” *You are a child. This is a well-established fact.*

Casper put a hand over his heart, gasping dramatically. “You wound me, sir. How dare you. I am a well-edjamacated big person, and I deserve to be treated as such.”

Scotty sighed quietly, shaking his head. “Could you act like a normal adult for once? Hannah’s acting more like an adult that you are and she’s almost 10 years younger than you.” *I can see why she feels the need to call you by your last name Lathe, she’s trying to be polite, let her be polite…*

“Excuse me? What was that word?” Sharon leaned forward a bit, mischief well-disguised with an imploring look. “I don't understand that word you used, the really big one- what you say, ‘normal?’” She kept a poker face as Casper snickered, keeping eye contact with Scotty. “Could you please explain to me what this ‘normal’ of which you speak is?” Her eyes shone as she spoke. *I think I get it- this is how these people function.*

Scotty’s eyes widened as Sharon spoke up. *Huh? She’s generally quiet, normally Hannah’s the one coming up with the ‘define this’ shit. “Oh you know… Normal, the epitome of wrecks and shambles which is life, which clear away to form a functioning and pitiful adult.”* Scotty’s eyes instantly met Casper’s. *You are all mine, I hope you remember that when we get home.*

Sharon pretended to ponder this, soon nodding in an approving and understanding way. “…Pretty accurate description of my life. Except for the pitiful part. …well, at least I like to pretend I’m actually fabulous.” Sharon did a dramatic hair flip, her expression deadpan. *…literally the story of my life. …I like these people.*

Hannah sighed, leaning her head down on Sharon’s shoulder, just listening to their conversation, hiding her face. *I wonder which category I would fall under… Wrecks? Or shambles? Hmm… Probably both… I don’t know how you agreed to anything like this… Like me… God I wish I could
do more amazing things for you… Fuck. I forgot to get a damn turkey today… I was so giddy about getting Luna out of that stable that I completely forgot...

Sharon looked to Hannah on her shoulder, her brow furrowed and attention split at the moment between her and Maisie as she nudged at her stomach. Sharon shooed Maisie away from her for the moment, turning a bit and murmuring into her ear. “Are you okay? I can hear you worrying over here… what’s wrong?” *Something’s up.*

Hannah shook her head slightly. *Nope, I don’t want to know the answer… “I forgot to get the turkey today, that’s all…” Still can’t believe I fucking forgot about it…*

*That’s not all. Is it. “Hannah, that’s fine- Thanksgiving is still a day away. I know it's late in the game but you can still get a turkey. That’s okay.”* She pecked her temple. *There’s something else.* “Hey Hannah, guess what.”

“No-” Sharon pecked her lips lightly, smiling brightly and enjoying the sight of Hannah slightly stunned. “I just wanted to tell you I love you.” *I just thought you needed to hear that.*

Hannah nuzzled her head gently against Sharon’s once she had regained her composure. She held her closer, her hands resting over Sharon’s large stomach.

Scotty had ventured towards the kitchen, seeing Lathe starting to strain pasta from where it was boiling. “Hey Lathe, is Spades working late?” *I haven’t seen her yet.*

Lathe shook his head. “Nope- I was a ninja and went upstairs before I came in here to cook the pasta. She’s been taking a nap upstairs; she had a rough day at work. She’ll be down soon.” *After she gets out of her uniform and stuff.* Lathe carefully finished straining the noodles, setting the pot back on an unlit burner, getting out large bowls for everyone and beginning to put noodles in each of them. “Food is pretty much ready- could you do me a favour, actually, and find Eren and Levi for me? They're probably in either Eren or Levi’s rooms upstairs. …which you don't know where are. …just look for them please.” *That would be great. …and Eren needs to eat. Levi too obviously, but Eren can't be skipping meals.*
Scotty nodded. “Roger that.” He padded off, going towards the stairs and making his way up as Spades made her way down. He went on to locate the two boys.

Spades came down in a nice navy blue long sleeve sweater with black dress pants, her hair pulled back into a loose pony as she went to the kitchen. “Hun, you gotta introduce me to our guests.” I have no idea who’s who.

Lathe nodded, finishing dishing out noodles. “I will- as soon as I get the food on the table, we'll call everyone in and all introduce you, okay?” It wasn't another minute before the table was set, Lathe padding into the living room with Spades, where they were chatting happily. “Uhm, Hannah, Sharon, I’d like you to meet my wife Spades. Spades, this is Hannah and Sharon, Casper and Scotty’s neighbors.” He quirked an eyebrow as Spades gave him a look. “...oh come on, close enough.” You're literally still my fiancée, but close enough. It's been awhile.

Sharon stood, Hannah right behind her as she smiled to her, offering her her hand to shake. “It’s very nice to meet you.” ...cool. “I like your hair- it’s very pretty.” It literally looks like fire- that's pretty cool.

Spades took Sharon’s hand nodding. “Thank you, and it’s a pleasure to meet you.” Wow, she is very far along… I can see why Lathe wasn’t sure if she was coming or not. “And it’s a pleasure to meet you as well, Hannah.” Spades offered her hand to Hannah, who took it after a moment. “The pleasure is all mine, Mrs. Quo.” Hannah shook her hand politely. So... Is she Eren's Mother? I don’t want to ask a personal question but Eren’s last name is different than Mr. Quo’s and Eren looks more like the Mrs.

Scotty came down after a few seconds of silence. “I found them, god your house is like a fucking maze, Lathe.” It took me forever to find them! I looked into like 16 separate doors!

“It really is.” Levi came down the stairs, his steps heavy as he carried Eren on his back. I like the clinging thing- after so long not being able to, it's nice.

“Scotty, watch you mouth for once.” Lathe lightly chided him, pointing to Sharon’s stomach and tapping his ear. “Tiny ears.” I don't think they'd want their kid to come out cursing. “And Hannah, you really don't have to worry about titles. Lathe and Spades is fine.” ...it's too formal at a thing like this. I get the feeling because the two freeloaders showed up things are gonna happen.
Hannah looked up to Lathe, silently nodding, not sure what else to say at that moment. Okay… Umm…. I can try, I guess, I mean I still call Casper Mr. Pandreivitch. He doesn’t seem bothered by it at the lab whenever he drops by.

Scotty looked over to Sharon, realizing what Lathe had been pointing to. “Oh, I’m sorry, I tend to run my mouth, I’m going to apologize now if I say anything else tonight.” I can’t keep it shut… Just like Casper.

Casper raised his hand. “I'd also like to apologize in advance- I kinda can't keep my trap shut sometimes.” That’s a thing.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him. “Sometimes?”

“…okay, all the time. I'm trying, stop judging me!” Casper glared at him for an instant before grinning. I'll try not to be too loud-mouthed for once.

Lathe chuckled, taking a small step back, his hands raised in surrender. “Alright, alright- how about we all move to the kitchen to eat before dinner gets cold?” A sound of assent passed through the group, all of them moving to sit at the table, each pair sitting across from the other. Lathe went to get everybody drinks, Levi helping Lathe with tea after he set Eren down, next to Hannah and at the end of the table.

Levi set down a mug of tea in front of himself and Eren, sitting down across from him. He quirked an eyebrow as Eren stood right after he sat down, moving his bowl and mug next to his, walking over and pushing him back. Eren made himself right at home in Levi’s lap, shifting so he could comfortably hold him and still use both hands to eat. I actually need two hands for this. …this is gonna be a slight struggle.

Eren had no problem with eating as he sat between Levi’s legs on the large seat, which made it more comfortable for the two of them. He ate quietly, not really looking up to anyone, just enjoying that Levi had an arm around him, even if he was trying to eat with it. He’s holding onto me…. He’s not gonna leave… I don’t want him to leave anymore…

Levi half-listened to the chatter at the table, focusing on eating and keeping Eren pulled close to him. He sipped at his mug of tea, resting his chin on Eren’s shoulder. …what's he gonna. Be like when I need to leave again? ……that's in months. Just focus on the now for awhile. You can worry about that later.
Eren ate silently, not taking in anything that happened in the table conversation. He was just in his own little world as he ate his chicken and noodles. It’s good…. What happens if Levi can’t come back… And I lose him? I don’t wanna lose him. I can’t I can’t lose him. It would be like losing my mom all over again… Would Lathe beat me? If he doesn’t come back? Would Dad turn into him?

Levi set down his silverware, picking up his mug of tea, simply staring at the dark liquid for a short while. I do need to leave again… I guess… Levi pressed a tiny kiss to Eren’s shoulder. …all I can do is hope you’ll be okay after I do…

Eren lifted his head slightly as he felt Levi put a kiss on his shoulder. Where are you going? He turned to look at Levi with worried eyes. “Are… Are you leaving?” Eren asked quietly, a hint of fear clearly present in his small voice. I don’t want you too…

Levi quickly shook his head, setting down his mug. “Nonono, I’m not going anywhere now. I just… I just wanted to… was that okay?” If that’s still way too fast I understand...

Eren looked down, shaking his head and burying his face into Levi’s chest. I don’t want you to yet…. I don’t want you to go anywhere… Why can’t you stay here?

Levi cradled him close, noticing the room had become strangely quiet and looking up. everyone left. He looked around, pushing the chair back and scooping Eren up, carrying him into the kitchen from the dining room. Hannah was at one or the counters, making cocktails for Spades, Casper and Scotty. …well if that doesn’t look sketchy I don’t know what does. But where’s Lathe and Sharon? He immediately knew as piano music started up, four-handed and familiar. …why do I recognize it?

Eren picked his head up a bit. “Goat thingy….” It’s that goat…. Thingy…. From the game…. Eren turned his head to the side a bit to listen a bit better.

Levi smirked, chuckling quietly and bringing Eren into the living room, Lathe and Sharon sitting at the piano, playing. He went to sit down with Eren in his lap, watching as Sharon looked to Lathe and said something, the song shifting to something Levi didn’t recognize easily, the music from the Core. I think it’s from that game Eren couldn’t stop babbling about forever ago… she’s a video game enthusiast too? …I get the feeling she and Lathe are gonna be best friends after this. He nodded to her as she looked over her shoulder, still playing flawlessly without looking at her hands, smiling faintly as she saw Eren intently listening. ….she’s pretty nice.

Eren watched the two of them play, his eyes focused on their hands as they flew across the keys. However, his eyes widened in shock as he heard a loud goose-like noise followed by laughter.
What the fuck was that!? Eren moved to hide in fear, his face buried into Levi’s shoulder.

Hannah laughed loudly, sipping at her cocktail with Casper as the two of them laughed about one of the idiots that worked at the lab and thought he was superior to Hannah, even though Hannah was way more capable at doing his job.

“And there she goes.” Sharon looked over to Lathe as he himself turned to the kitchen, his hands pausing in their dance across the keys. She spoke both to him and Eren, noting him burrowing into Levi’s shoulder. “Hannah kinda sounds like a dying whale when she laughs- or a goose. Or maybe a walrus or seal. I love teasing her about it.” She chuckled lightly, looking to Eren. “But everything’s okay- someone just made Hannah laugh. It’s all alright.” She listened as the other three in the kitchen started to die of laughter, making her laugh louder. “And that made everyone else laugh, which means now she’s gonna laugh harder; give it a few minutes for everyone to calm down.” It’s always the same cycle- and it never stops being amusing.

Eren looked up a bit still shaking in fear as it continued. *That’s normal? That thing is normal!?* Eren was still freaking out as Eren huddled closer to Levi to hide.

“Casper…. Can I just… Take his job? I mean I do my projects and his projects… So can I just take over? He doesn't know what the hell his underlings are doing…..” *Like seriously… He thinks he’s sooo superior to the rest of us.*

Casper thought for a minute, thinking. *Let’s see… I have seen a few filed complaints against him… he does talk to people like they’re idiots, yelling at everyone even though he’s the one never returning results… I didn’t think he’d do well, but he was okay on paper at the time… but everyone just seems to hate the guy. “He’s inefficient, condescending, and you’re way more qualified… you know what, yes. I’m making you supervisor- and I’ll personally hand him his pink slip the next time he’s supposed to go to work. He’s had a long enough chance to do his job right, and you’ve barely needed a month.”* Casper sipped his cocktail, smirking to her. “Congratulations.”

Hannah raised her glass. “Cheers! Let's do some shots!” Hannah called out loudly, rummaging through the cabinets and pulling out shot glasses. *I know Casper will be up for them… What about the other two??* She got some vodka out and filled shot glasses for herself and Casper. “I guess I’ll be seeing you at work on Monday then?” *Cause we have off until after Thanksgiving… “Derek’s not gonna go in until after Thanksgiving, is he? I should probably head in and take care of the cultures.”* Yeah, I will, and I should.

Casper grinned, shaking his head at her last statement. “Nah, Derek’s obviously not going to try to take care of anything. That’d be for the best. Thanks.” Casper accepted the shot she slid over to him, nudging Scotty with his elbow, smiling mischievously. “Are you just gonna let us be the only
ones doing shots?”

Sharon quirked an eyebrow towards the kitchen, shaking her head exasperatedly. “Well, she’s not going to be driving anybody home… and I get the feeling Casper and Scotty aren’t either.” Crap, who’s gonna drive us home?

Lathe’s brow furrowed, looking back to her. “And you really shouldn’t be driving… y’know, how would staying overnight sound? We’ve got more than enough space, even if everyone had their own room- you’re very welcome to.” …you said you had dogs at home, didn’t you? “I also get the idea it’d be much easier for me to drive your three at least semi-obedient dogs over here than to drive you and three drunk adults over there.” I’d be fine with retrieving them… heh. Puns.

“A-are you sure?” She looked to the kitchen again as she heard a cheer, hanging her head for a moment. That’d be for the best… “That’s very kind of you… I’ll give you a key to the house when you go. They’re three American Black Labs, named Rico, Tove, and Spencer. They’re very good off of leashes and will follow you if you let them sniff you and then declare you’re taking them to the park.” That’d do the trick.

Lathe nodded, standing from the piano bench. “I should probably do that before it becomes midnight. Could I have the key?” Lathe accepted the key from Sharon after she got it off of her keyring, going to the door when she stopped him by the elbow.

“Uhm, you should be careful with Tove. She’s the only girl out of the three, and she’s expecting a litter soon. Coincidentally.” She smirked. “None of them should give you trouble. They’re all good in a car.” They’ll love you after five minutes.

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Alright- duly noted. I’ll be back within a half hour. Otherwise, send a search party.” He joked, stepping into his boots, waving as he shut the door behind him.

Spades picked up her glass of water, retreating from the drinking match which had started, and joining the others in the piano room. “Sharon… If you wouldn’t mind, could I talk to you for a bit?” She came to sit where Lathe had sat a moment before. I wanna know about this… Because I know Lathe wants this… he wants small children… And I don’t know if I’m prepared for that…

Sharon smiled, moving over on the piano bench. “Of course! What’s on your mind?” Something’s bugging you- what is it?
“What did you do? When you found out?” What happened while you were pregnant. Spades gently rested a hand on her abdomen. How am I supposed to tell him that I’m afraid of having children?

Sharon smiled faintly, her eyes sparkling a bit. “...probably cry in happiness before going to tell Hannah. We really wanted to have kids.” Her expression softened. “Are you and Lathe thinking about maybe having kids?”

Spades smiled softly. “I know Lathe really wants to… But…” She trailed off as she looked down to her hands. I don't know if I can.... “I’m afraid... Of having my own, I don’t know how to tell him...”

Eren picked his head up. Would I have a brother? Or a sister? Eren listened in more intently as he felt Levi card through his hair.

Sharon tilted her head a small bit, shrugging slightly. “...well, it’s a really big decision. It’s not something you can decide your answer to quickly. Has Lathe asked you about it specifically?” She watched as Spades nodded. “...and what did you say?”

“I said I would think about it... but, I’m afraid... I don’t know if my body can handle it... But I don't want to disappoint him.” I’ve had so many surgeries... My doctor said it would be next to impossible to get pregnant...

“Well, you’re obviously going to need time to mull it over... you can’t leave him hanging on ‘I’ll think about it.’ I’d say you should tell Lathe exactly what you just told me, except maybe the last part- but he should understand how big of a decision it is especially since you'd be the one carrying the child. You need time to think and figure out if you'd be physically able and psychologically ready to have one.” Lathe seems endlessly kind- I think he'd understand. But you really need to tell him that. He’s not psychic. ...Blake is. At least when it comes to Eren. But you two need to talk again.

Spades nodded. “What’s it like? To carry a life inside of you?” She asked, her tone soft as she looked over Sharon’s enlarged abdomen. I would give anything for Lathe... But I’m terrified that it’ll come down to me or the baby... And that Lathe’ll be forced to choose...

Sharon smiled faintly, her hands coming up to rest on her large stomach. “...there’s no word for it... it’s wonderful, and scary, and the best thing to have happen to you, and it can be stressful sometimes... but I wouldn't hesitate to do it again.” She glanced to the kitchen, smirking. “We both knew for a really long time we wanted a flock of chick’lins. I guess that makes it a little less taxing on the mind... but Spades, if there’s a legitimate concern that you couldn't handle it... if there's a
good chance if you do decide to carry, it’ll be you or the baby… don’t put yourself in that situation. That would be an awful decision that you… and Lathe… would have to make. There are other options.” She rested a hand on Spades’ shoulder, smiling reassuringly. “Talk to Lathe, and get him to understand you need time. It’s going to take plenty of soul-searching. Just try not to let it overwhelm you. It’s a big decision- but whatever you do decide to happen, I have faith you’ll make the right choice.” You know you better than anyone. Just listen to yourself. You’ll figure things out.

Lathe parked in front of the house, stepping into the cold winter air. It's gonna finally start snowing soon. He walked up to the front door, unlocking the door and hearing dogs patter to the front door as soon as he started to turn the lock, a dog barking from inside. He took a deep breath, slowly opening the door and keeping the two dogs that greeted him from running out, shutting the door behind him. “Hey you two- don't worry, I'm not a burglar, I'm a friend.” Lathe bent down slightly and extended his hands to them, trying to remain neutral.

Rico was the first to step up to Lathe, being the bigger of the two, leaning forward to cautiously sniff at his hand, his tail smacking hard against the wall and he licked it before running off somewhere into the house. I approve- he’s chill, gotta go back to Tove to make sure she’s alright.

Spencer looked to Rico as he ran back over through the house. Going back to Mom I see… He was a bit more timid as he stepped forward to smell him, before his own tail wagged. He’s a good human… Spencer sat down looking up to Lathe, unsure of what to do with him since he wasn’t Hannah or Sharon. Where’s my Humans?

Lathe gently petted Spencer, looking around the house for a moment. It’s nice- whoa. Lathe looked with disbelief at a player piano in the living room, boxes of rolls next to it and a detailed painting of ice crystals on a windowpane above it. ... very nice. Lathe looked back to where Rico had gone, remembering his objective and following him to where Tove lay, acting submissive as Rico stood when he approached, defensive. …Oh. He’s obviously gonna be protective of her, then. Lathe crouched down to kneel on the floor, slowly coming closer, trying to act as nonthreatening as possible. He slowly reached out a hand for Tove to sniff, very aware that Rico was watching his every move. ...please don't bite me… that would be bad...

Tove picked her head up wearily as the door opened. She didn’t move from her very plush bed however, staying down when Rico came back to her side. Who’s here? Are our humans home? She perked her ears as Lathe came into the room. Who is that? She let Rico stand up as if guarding her, though when he kneeled down and reached a hand out to her she sniffed at him. He smells like our humans… He’s okay… Tove laid her head back down, her puppy belly obvious. She was massive, and stayed laying in a very comfortable plush bed, not seeming to want to move. It’s almost time… and it hurts... I don’t wanna move from here...
I can't just let you walk around while you're so far along- you look much too far along for that… hmmm … Lathe stood, looking around quickly, soon finding what looked like an art room not a few steps away, some heavy cardboard stuck behind a shelf. Right. Lathe picked a correctly-sized piece, coming back and carefully slipping it under her and the bed, speaking with a soft smile to all of them. “I'm gonna be bringing you all to the park, okay?” That's how this is going. He gently and carefully lifted Tove, padding to the front door so he could get her safely in the car. You're carrying lots of teeny puppies- I need to be extra careful.

Rico and Spencer instantly followed Lathe as he carried Tove to the door. Rico came out to sit by the car door. To the park! We're all going, even Tove! Yay! We get to go play.

Mommy's coming! Spencer went and sat down right by his father, his tail wagging even more. I wanna go to the park!!

You're not reacting to this much... you seem especially tired… Lathe thought as he gently set her in the backseat, moving the cardboard in a way that it wouldn't slide around and retrieving a blanket from the trunk to keep the bed from sliding at all, and to keep Tove comfortable. ...you're ready to have your pups any day now, aren't you. You're big enough, and as far as I know you're acting it too... well, it's a good thing I've delivered kids before and Casper used to work for a vet. Just in case. Lathe let Rico and Spencer hop in after her, shutting the car door and getting into the driver’s seat. ....it really is convenient that there are gonna be five doctors in the house. ...two of which whom are guaranteed to be sober. ...well, one. Lathe carefully drove home, conscious not to brake too hard or turn too fast, pulling up to the house not too much later. He carefully tucked the blanket around Tove before lifting her from the car, carrying her to the front door and kicking it a few times. Let me in- I can't reach the doorbell!

Spades heard the knocking, picking up her glass and going to the door. Is it someone else? Or is Lathe too occupied with leashes to open the door? She opened it, gasping in surprise as she saw Lathe carrying a large dog with a large abdomen. “Lathe! Good heavens! Put her down! She's much too heavy to be carrying!” She looks like a full grown dog! And she’s carrying a bunch of other puppies too! She must weigh a ton!

Rico and Spencer came into the house not two seconds later, Rico staying with Lathe and Tove, Spencer running off towards the kitchen and quickly locating Hannah and whining to her. Mommy's having my brothers and sisters!

Lathe nodded, walking her inside and setting her and her bed near the couches, gently petting her. He looked with worry to her as she looked at him with slightly glassy eyes, Rico immediately nudging Lathe, licking Tove. He looked over as Spencer whined to Hannah, putting the pieces together. “It's a good thing I went to get them when I did- I think Tove is gonna have her puppies.
soon.” As in ‘let's hope Casper is still sober’ soon.

Hannah bent down to pick up Spencer, petting him with a smile on her face. “There’s my big baby! You’re gonna be an older brother soon! Aren’t you baby?” Hannah’s voice was loud and obnoxious, a clear indication that she was no longer sober. *My babies are here! Yay!*

Scotty looked over to Hannah finishing off his shot, his eyes looking almost bloodshot as he watched her pick up the large puppy. “Are you… Gonna get yours done? Or do I win?” *I wanna Win! Maybe Casper will let me fuck him tonight if I win?*

Lathe just looked at Hannah for a moment. ...*well she’s not sober.* “Casper, where are you?” Lathe stood and moved to the kitchen, retrieving a box of clean rags from the pantry a few steps away, rolling up his sleeves and washing his hands as he finally located Casper, who ambled up to him. ...*please be coherent.* “Casper, I hope you’re capable of thinking straight- you need to remember everything from your time working for the vet and help me deliver puppies.” *Duty calls.*

“Well shit, that escalated quickly… Um okay, water, rags or towels, we’ll need a bulb syringe, um… And I hope you realize I am not driving Scotty’s drunken ass home… He’s had *way* too much to drink already and they’re still at their pissing contest.” Casper sighed quietly rubbing his temples. *I swear to god if he’s throwing up all night I’m not gonna stay up with him.*

“Oh I know, you two are staying over because I’d have to drive Hannah and Sharon home as well- can't let Sharon drive, and you- well, you've just said so that you can't be driving.” Lathe dried his hands, going again to the pantry to get a basin from where it was stored on the floor, rinsing it out and filling it partway with warm water. “Okay, you're gonna have to talk me through this. That box has the clean rags and stuff in it. Carry it over please.” Lathe carried the basin over, setting it down near Tove and moving the blanket off of her, realising both how heavily she was panting and that the dog bed underneath her was soaked. ...*think.* Lathe’s demeanour seemed to switch a bit, understanding that he was more or less alone in this. He gently pet Tove, quickly pulling out his phone and tapping away into google, skimming quickly through one of the first articles he found. “...okay. I think I know what’s happening.” Lathe set his phone down, the page still open next to him, moving to get clean towels under her, patiently waiting. *It’s gonna be a while- you'll be okay by the end of it.*

Casper came into the room with the box of rags, moving close to Tove as she whimpered a bit. “Her contractions are starting… Okay, who else here is sober?” Casper picked his head up to look at the room seeing Levi, Eren, Spades, and Sharon. “Come here and help…. Once the first pup is born, it’s usually pretty quick after that…” *She’s doing well, which is good, I wonder if she’s done this before? She’s definitely ready to pop.*

...*things just got very real very fast.* Levi stood with Eren, making their way over to where Lathe
and Casper knelt next to Tove, Sharon and Spades behind them. “How do we help?” I don’t know anything about this...

Casper looked at them, a very serious air over taking him. “Alright, everyone grab either a small towel or a rag, I’m gonna show you how to stimulate a puppy to breathe.” He waited for them all to grab a towel before grabbing one himself. “Okay, so you gotta have a gentle hand when holding them, you don’t want to crush anything, but you need to rub them, rub them one way on their back and the opposite way on theirs stomach… Like this.” Casper took hold of Lathe’s wrist and demonstrated how to wrap the pup and rub them to stimulate breathing. Now it’s a waiting game, of when and how many...

Eren watched Casper with interest as he was taught how to help, taking Levi’s arm and practicing quietly on him before offering his own arm for practice. I get to see puppies! Yay! He was still mostly silent, but he had a gleam in his eyes as he waited patiently.

I knew she was far along… but not far along enough to happen today! Sharon listened and watched Casper intently, fiddling with the towel in her hands. “…and now, we wait.” More teeny puppies… we had to do this a couple months ago. I remember how this went down, more or less.

Spades had also sat down to help get the pups situated. It wasn’t even an hour later before Tove stretched out, looking much smaller than she had when she arrived. Seven healthy pups nuzzled against her side, but the eighth was in Eren’s arms, struggling to breathe even with an open airway. Dad… Help what do I do?? Eren looked up, worry and panic clearly etched on his face as he held the struggling pup. It’s the runt… I don’t know how to help it...

Casper looked up to Eren, looking to the runt and gently taking him, his hands a little tougher which was what the pup needed to warm up properly and start to sneeze all over the place. The small pup tried to curl up to itself in his hand as it was finally able to breathe. “It’s okay… Here, you wanna hold him Eren?” We’ll let him suckle in a second.

Eren nodded, gently taking the pup and holding him in his arms. He’s so cute… I’m worried… He’s so small. Eren held him gently, a soft smile on his face as he pet the soft black puppy.

Sharon gently picked up one of the pups from the bed, smiling and carefully holding her close as she squirmed a teeny bit in her arms. …you’re so tiny… you’re too adorable… She gently let her behind an ear, thinking. Just think…like Tove… I’ve got teeny life inside of me too. …it always seems so unbelievable every time I think that. Sharon let out a surprised sound as she suddenly felt the baby kick, placing a hand over her stomach as the baby kicked, her expression a mix of joy, nervousness and fear. “H-he surprised me, the baby’s kicking…” She chuckled nervously. …and it sounds more and more amazing and terrifying every time you remind me.
Spades went over to her side. “Do you want me to take you upstairs to rest?” *I know it’s getting late, and I don’t want you to be too uncomfortable if the baby’s kicking.*

Sharon nodded, gently setting the pup back in the bed with its mother. “T-that’s probably a good idea.” *I could use the rest.*... Sharon stood up with Spades’ help, leaning on her a bit as Spades led her upstairs.

*...they’re so small…* Lathe gently pet one of the pups behind the ear, smiling faintly, lost in thought. *...such tiny life… ...how long has it been since I asked? ...I really, really want kids… ...she said she’d think about it… but I think we need to have that conversation again…* He looked up as Spades came back downstairs, standing and going over to her, his voice quiet. “Uhm, Spades, after everyone’s upstairs, I think we really need to talk.” *I don’t want it to be dismissed completely and never brought up… it’s too important to me.*

Spades nodded motioning him to the kitchen where Hannah was finishing up a shot and Scotty was passed out on the floor. “Hannah, come on, Sharon’s waiting for you upstairs.”

“Huh?” Hannah wobbled on her feet for a few steps, giggling as she bumped into things. “Where’s my…. Wai-fu.” Her speech was slurred, definitely drunk.

Scotty groaned a bit, moving his head as Hannah giggled. *It’s so loud, hmmmm, but my face is cold… It feels nice…*

Lathe looked between the two of them. “...I’ll take the otaku. Scotty might still listen to reason, but don’t count on it.” Lathe stepped over to Hannah, tugging on her hand. ^I know where your wife is. Follow me- we can’t make her wait.^ ... maybe throw in some words she’ll still recognize? ^...your wife is very cute.^ ... *You’ll still understand what kawaii means.*

Hannah groaned a bit as she was dragged. “I-I know… MUR… What cate-gory am I in?” She asked as they somehow made it up the steps. *I wanna know… Sharon won’t tell me, but you must know Lathe...*

“...what are the options?” *What the hell are you going on about?*

“Wrecks… Or shambles?” Hannah was still trying to figure out what category she fell under in Sharon’s life. *She won’t tell me even if I ask… I gotta know though… She always deserves better.*
Weren't you all talking about life being wrecks and shambles earlier? “Neither- you're neither a wreck nor a shamble.” ... while sober. “I think you're fine, no need to think of yourself like that.”

Lathe pulled her down the hall, towards the nearest guest bedroom, the door ajar. Closest to the stairs; the shortest walk.

“If… If her life is wrecks and shambles… Which one am I? I gotta be one? Right?” Hannah stumbled a bit just outside the door, her voice loud enough for Sharon to hear her from inside the room. She won't tell me… Maybe you will...

“Heard every word.” Lathe didn't entirely know how to respond as Hannah asked him, hearing Sharon shift on the bed inside and pad to the door. He sighed in relief as Sharon opened the door more fully, gently pulling Hannah in with her. I heard every word. She smiled sheepishly to Lathe, mouthing ‘Sorry-and thank you.’ before quietly he closing the door. She hugged Hannah close, murmuring close to her ear. “You are neither a wreck,” She kissed her neck. “-nor a shamble.” Another light peck.

“You are the best damn thing to happen to me. Now, before you run your mouth,” Because you do that when you drink... She gently started to steer her to the bed. “-meander your way over here and get up so you can start to try to rest.” Because sleep kinda always hates you.

Hannah nodded collapsing on the bed and completely knocking out as soon as her head hit the pillow. The smell of alcohol was heavy on her, but bearable.

...oh. No drunken rant this time. Sharon sighed, her nose crinkling a bit at the smell of alcohol, though she simply decided to deal with it and got in the other side of the bed, dead asleep before long. ... you always worry. Worry that you’re not good enough. And I always worry-worry that I don’t tell you I love you enough. ...we need to fix that.

Spades sighed, rubbing her temples as she came out of the kitchen. “Casper, it’s your turn to get his drunken ass up off the floor, he’s too unreasonable right now.” I'm not even gonna try and lift his dead weight either...

Casper sighed exasperatedly, gently setting down the pup he was holding and padding to the kitchen, nudging Scotty with his foot. “Okay Scotty, party’s over. Get up.” I'm not heaving you off the floor if I don’t have to.

Scotty groaned, moving his head to the other side to look up to Casper. “Uhm... Did I win?” His voice slurred as he tried to lift his head, his whole body swaying as he struggled to his arms. I hope I won...
“Scotty, Hannah did two shots for each one that you took. So, no. You lost. Miserably. Now get up so I don't have to carry you.” You're heavy.

Scotty groaned rolling over onto his back, stretching his large body out as he yawned. “But… I can’t get… Ahh… Laid tonight…” Scotty’s yawn seemed to cut off a majority of the words he attempted to slur out, but he was still trying to get up, managing to get on his hands and knees, his body dangerously swaying, even though he was so close to the ground. If I had won… I would’ve gotten laid...

Casper facepalmed, sighing exasperatedly. “Scotty, even if you had won you'd still be way too drunk for that. You're literally wasted right now. You're gonna have to wait until you're at least sorta sober.” Yeah, no. Casper bent down and begrudgingly slung one of Scotty’s arms over his shoulder, heaving him to his feet, trying to keep steady as Scotty leaned his entire weight on him. “My god man, at least try to use your feet.” Casper started their slow journey upstairs, trying to keep them from falling and getting hurt.

Scotty had somehow managed the staircase, moving his other arm around Casper’s chest and clinging to him as he whined. “But Casper…. I wanna get laid….” He began to hump Casper’s side, trying to get the least bit of friction to get off. I wanna fuck...

...he’s a horny drunk… Casper kicked the door open to their guest room, kicking it shut and locking it behind them before moving to dump Scotty on the bed. “Scotty, you’re unbelievably drunk and not going to remember any of this in the morning. No.” You're way too drunk to give consent.

Scotty let out a soft ‘umph’ as he was dumped onto the bed. He felt the soft mattress under him, his arms and legs barely moved as he struggled to roll over onto his stomach. “Casper…” Scotty continued to whine, trying to hump the nothingness around him in attempt to get Casper to let him get laid.

...this is just weird. Casper moved to Scotty’s side, trying to get him out of his clothes and at the same time keep him placated. “Come on Scotty, you need to sleep so you need to get out of this…” Please just work with me...

Scotty let Casper get him out of his clothes, his eyes steadily closing as he was starting to give in to exhaustion. “Casper?” His voice was pretty slurred, but his eyes were almost shut, he’d be out in a few moments.

“Yeah, Scotty?” Now what? Casper had finished getting Scotty undressed to his boxers, his clothes
laid out on the bed near the footboard. He was tugging off his own shirt, leaving him in his boxers and an undershirt. Please let it not be creepy.

“I… I love you.” Scotty’s words somehow weren’t slurred as much as his previous speeches before he passed out. *Liquid courage….. Nighty night…*

Casper froze as he was getting into bed, his eyes wide. *I really really hope he actually means that…* Casper smiled faintly, slipping under the cover and turning off the lamp next to the bed, shuffling over to Scotty and kissing his cheek before curling up to him, listening to his heartbeat. *…liquid courage indeed.*

Eren had rearranged the couch in the other room so that he could lay in the middle with the runt on his chest, gently petting it. *He’s adorable.* It didn't take long for Maisie and Blake to come right up and jump on the couch to surround him, Spencer having some difficulty, but soon following both of them over the back of the couch. Eren had fallen asleep surrounded by fur, the runt still safely tucked on his chest.

Levi sighed as he saw Eren asleep surrounded by dogs, padding to the stairs. *I guess I'm sleeping alone tonight…* Levi disappeared upstairs, silently going to his room and shutting the door. *I'd hoped for once I'd be able to hold you as you slept… there's tomorrow, I suppose.*

Lathe faintly smiled as he saw Eren sleeping, though his expression soon changed to one of sympathy as Levi walked upstairs alone. *there's tomorrow.* Lathe carefully stepped over onto the couches, gently going to where Eren was in the centre, picking up the runt from his hand without waking him. *He belongs with his mother.* He went to set the pup in the towel-laden dog bed with his seven brothers and sisters, Tove sniffing him and licking his head before shifting her head again, letting him nuzzle close to her chest. *this is too cute.* Lathe stood and quietly walked to where Spades still stood waiting for him, shutting off the lights before walking with her upstairs, his arm around her waist. He pulled her into their room, shutting and locking the door quietly behind him before turning to her, taking hold of both of her hands and walking her over to sit at the edge of the bed. “Spades, we really need to talk about this, and I don't want it just dismissed and never brought up again just because it's a hard decision because it's *really* important, at least to me… I really, really want to have kids, and I've known for a long time that I did… I just want to hear what you have to say about it because it's been so long since I've asked about it, but it's not just about me. It's even more about you.” Lathe kept staring at their joined hands, patiently waiting for Spades to speak. *I don't want to be selfish… but it's a huge decision and it's really important to me… but even more for you... you'd be the one carrying if that what we decided… and I don't know what you want. Tell me.*

Spades took a deep breath, trying to put together her thoughts. *What do I tell him??* “Lathe… I’ve been thinking about it… But we’re not even… We’re not even married yet.” *I can’t believe I’m trying to hide my fear of reality with the ‘we’re not married yet’ shit…. Oh my god…*
Lathe seemed to imperceptibly flinch at that, trying not to cry. “Spades, talking about it now doesn't mean we start trying now or start thinking about names or where to adopt or anything this instant… I just want to know for the future because I've been so straightforward about what I want and I have no idea what you'd want… and at least twice tonight I've introduced you as my wife… why didn't it matter then?” Lathe whispered the last part of his sentence, not able to look Spades in the eye, almost expecting to be smacked for that. ...I don't like talking back to you like that… but I need answers...

Spades bit her lip, feeling the tears start to prickle in her eyes as she sniffled, trying her best not to cry. I don’t want to tell him I'm afraid… He wants his own kids… I can’t deny him that… I should've thought about that in the beginning…. Shit… “I’m sorry… I just…” Spades’ voice wavered a bit. “I’m just…” scared....

......maybe I was too pushy about it... Lathe lifted his head a bit, lacing their fingers together and looking Spades in the eye, a single tear falling down his cheek. “...can you just… please be honest?” I know there's something you have to say… that you don't want to. “I've been really blunt this entire time about what I want and I don't want you to think that everything has been a mistake if you can't give it to me. I want to hear what you have to say.” What you really have to say. Lathe pressed a kiss to the back of her hand, his head dropping back down, trying to stop more tears from following.

Spades let out a shaky sigh. “I’m scared… With my job, it’s an occupational hazard but… I don’t want to do that to you, if there was ever a case where I didn’t come home, and I left you, alone? With a child to raise?” She took in another shaky breath as she let go of his hand for only a moment to wipe away some tears, taking it back after she did so. “And I’m not necessarily sure about being a parent… Lathe I never really had a parental figure in my life… I don’t know how a mom’s supposed to act…” I can’t tell him… He’d be so upset if he can’t have his own... I’m hiding it with my childish fears of losing my mother after a car accident... The same one that caused all the surgeries... I’ve never told anyone... That it'd be next to impossible for me to conceive in the first place...

Lathe thought a moment, picking up his head and giving her a teary reassuring look, trying to speak evenly. “Spades, I know that with your line of work it’s always a worry, that something will happen and you won’t come home… but if we followed that train of thought, why be attached to anyone, if you could be taken away?” He pressed a kiss to her knuckles, mumbling against her skin. “I hope to God nothing like that happens, but you're smart, and you've got a lot of people behind you. Honestly, it’s a scary thought, but I don't think that's gonna happen.” He looked back up to her. “As for knowing how to be a mom- Spades, I don't think any parent knows exactly what they're doing. As far as I understand it, the experience of being a parent is scary and stressful and awesome and you don't know what to do so you just do things and hope they're the right decisions. No matter how much or how little you think you're prepared, I know you'd be a wonderful mom.” You really would be...
Spades nodded, leaning forward to start sobbing. “I’m sorry…I just didn’t know what to tell you.” I still don’t… How do I tell you? “I think we can do it…. Just… Not right away, okay?” She asked quietly as her voice wavered. I can’t bring myself to tell you this...

Lathe pulled Spades close, one arm around her middle and the other around her back, tangling in the hair at the nape of her neck. His voice was a quiet murmur, gently pecking her cheek. “Of course, we can wait… we can wait as long as we need to. ...thank you.” I can understand being scared… we can hold off as long as you need. “Let’s get to sleep, okay? We both need some rest.” ...it's been a long day...

Spades nodded, shifting to strip out of her clothes. She got into the bed, under the covers, waiting to pull him close to her. I want you to hold me…. Cause you might hate me for this later...

Lathe similarly undressed, slipping under the cover and moving behind Spades, pulling her close to him on his side, flush with her and nuzzling into her shoulder, lightly kissing her shoulder blade, his voice low and quiet. “Goodnight Spades- I love you.” Always will.
Chapter 45: Side Story 2: Scotty and Casper (The New Neighbors)

Scotty came home after going out grocery shopping for both him and Casper. *Who knows if we’re even going to eat tonight?* Scotty was in the middle of pulling groceries out when he saw a car pull in next door. *Ah... The new neighbors... Wait... Is that a college student? Fuck...*

*I swear, that chick from the interview followed me all the way here-* Casper pulled in not two seconds later, having stopped on the way home to get gas. *Wait... Casper got out of the car, cheekily calling over to her. “And now you're telling me you live next door?” Since when were they making Inception starring my life? This is just weird.*

Hannah jumped a bit from surprise, dropping her car keys, letting out a worried chuckle as she crouched down to pick them back up. “Mr. Pandreivitch, what a surprise, I... I didn’t expect to see you here.” *Oh my god... What the hell do I do? Sharon’s home right? Her car is still in the driveway.*

Scotty looked over to Casper as he spoke up. *Wait... You know that girl? “Casper, you know our new neighbor?” Wait? So is she a college student?*

Casper looked to Scotty, nodding. “This is the woman I and some colleagues interviewed today.” He looked back to Hannah, smiling. “And since we’re apparently neighbors, I’m not going to even try and remain professional. I’m honestly quite terrible at it. Just call me Casper. And this—” Casper went to pull Scotty over, his arm around his middle. “Is my boyfriend Scotty.” *Yeah, anything you thought you knew about me is now out the window. I'm not professional. Like... ever.*

“Is person home?” Someone looked out from the front door, a woman who was pregnant and showing, looking with curiosity to Casper and Scotty, smiling and waving. “Hello!” She carefully made her way down the front steps, ambling over. “Welcome home, Hon. And hello!” She nudged Hannah lightly. *Aren't you going to introduce me? I don't know their names...*

Hannah smiled leaning over to kiss her cheek gently. “Sharon, this is Casper and Scotty... Casper was one of the men who interviewed me today.” She said with a soft smile, an arm wrapping around her waist. “And this is my wonderful wife Sharon.” *Yeah, formalities are now out the window.*

Sharon blushed, speaking softly, her accent a bit tilted. “It’s wonderful t’mee you two.” *I think we’ll get along okay.*
Casper nodded, smiling. “It’s very nice to meet you too; we were honestly a bit worried we’d have a sorority or fraternity moving in when nobody showed up the first few days.” *now all we have to do is hope you don't have excessively loud friends. ...or party too hard.*

“Ah sorry, actually Sharon was home, since she works from home. I was coming in from Family then going straight to the interview today… And um.. Sorry to ask you this, but I don’t do well speaking to large groups.. But did I do okay?” She asked, looking up to Casper with a slight blush across her cheeks. *I wouldn't expect Sharon to go anywhere with the baby kicking around like he’s been lately.*

Casper chuckled. “Don't do well speaking to large groups? You could’ve fooled me. You seemed very collected the entire time- honestly, I was impressed. You're very qualified for the position.” *And since in the end, it's my call...* He winked, grinning. “I have a feeling you'll get the job.” *...because you will.*

Hannah smiled, nodding. “Thank you, I really appreciate it… Sharon, let’s get you inside, it’s getting cold out… It was very nice meeting you and your boyfriend, Casper.” *I really hope you're right, I’m hoping that you are… I don't have a fall back plan… fuck why didn't I think about that?*

Sharon nudged Hannah again as she spaced out for a second. *You're doing the thing again- the thing where you worry too much. I agree with him- you'll probably get it. You're more than capable of taking up the position.* She smiled to Casper and Scotty, bidding them farewell and leaning on Hannah as they walked back up to the house, going up on tiptoe to kiss her cheek. *Hooman is home.*

Hannah smiled, humming in response as she was kissed. “Alright, let's get you something to eat..”

Scotty grabbed the last of the bags from his car before going to grab Casper and almost drag him into the house. *Good thing I made sure the blinds were already closed. And I’m off tomorrow, and I’m gonna make you call in sick tomorrow...probably... You won’t be able to walk when I’m done.*

Casper stumbled up the walk after him, shutting the door and helping Scotty move everything that needed to stay cold into the fridge. *Why the hell are you so antsy? What the hell?* Casper hadn't shut the door to the fridge for a second before Scotty was all over him, feeling his back meet the edge of the counter as Scotty suddenly kissed him, melting into it. He broke for an instant, panting. “Y-you're so eager… I could tell the second we got inside…”

Scotty nodded. “You’re catching on.” He ducked his head down, his hands getting rid of Casper’s shirt in only a second. His hands were all over Casper in an instant, his mouth finding his
collarbone and biting hard on it. New house… Gotta fuck in all the rooms…

Casper gasped as Scotty’s mouth met his collarbone, tilting his head back and running his hands all over his back and chest, tugging at his shirt as his leg wrapped around Scotty’s. “I-is… are we… christening the h-house?” If this is how they do it these days… yes please.

Scotty let out a deep chuckle. You caught on pretty quickly. “It’s a good thing my hips can reach the counter space.” He had a huge smirk on his face as his large hands went down to cup Casper’s crotch. You are mine...

Casper let out a needy whine as Scotty cupped his hardening length through his dress pants, tugging his shirt off. Too many clothes… “Damn tease…” Casper ran his hands down Scotty’s chest, playing with the hem of his pants before pulling him closer, massaging his ass. Mine… and yours.

Scotty smirked even more, his eyes twinkling with delight as his ass was grabbed. “Hmm, getting a bit handsy are we?” He moved to nip at Casper’s perk nipples, looking up to him with dark eyes. It appears as though we’re starting with the kitchen.

“Y-you…nngh, started it… what am I supposed to d-do…” Casper moaned quietly as Scotty suckled at his nipples, his hands going to fist at his hair. I really like where all this is going...

Scotty smirked his hands quickly finding the buttons on Casper’s pants, in doing them and quickly moving them down along with his boxers. You are now mine… I hope you understand what that means! Scotty reached down, starting to gently rub Casper’s hard-on as he moved all over his chest, biting and sucking, bruise after bruise forming on his skin. His own pants became tight as he heard the sounds Casper was making.

Casper let Scotty get rid of his pants, moaning as Scotty’s hands found his length, his grip on Scotty’s hair tightening as he licked and suckled down his chest. “S-Scotty…. ha… w-what about y-you?” Casper pulled Scotty up from his chest after a moment, kissing him roughly and letting his hands drift to his side, fiddling with his belt buckle. He suddenly broke the kiss, smirking, dropping down to his knees, staring up to Scotty with dark eyes as he tried to undo his belt buckle with his teeth, unzipping his pants and pulling them down agonisingly slowly, along with his boxers. He pressed light kisses and licks around the base of his length, teasing him before finally dragging his tongue up the underside in a long streak, never breaking eye contact.

“Oh… Fuck me…” Scotty watched Casper drop down to his knees, his own eyes darkening with lust. Holy hell… I want him. Scotty moved a hand to gently grab at Casper’s hair, trying to guide
him to the tip of his length. *I want you to take the whole thing... You did it before, you can do it again.*

Casper grinned devilishly, seemingly reading Scotty’s mind as he kissed the tip of his length, the tip of his tongue swiping over the slit before he took the head in his mouth, bobbing his head and moving further and further down his length, his tongue pressed flat against the underside. His nose was soon pressed against Scotty’s stomach, and his hands moved, one going to gently massage his balls, the other massaging his ass. He hummed on his length, casting his dark gaze up to see Scotty’s reaction.

... *Holy shit... Casper.* Scotty’s hands came down both gently tugging at Casper’s purple locks for the moment. *I wonder if he would let me? That would constitute this room as Christened... And we could move to a different room.*

Casper bobbed on his length, soon coming up to suckle on the tip of his length, teasing the slit with his tongue before growing impatient, his length painfully hard between his legs. He drew off of his length with a lewd sound, standing and backing himself up against the counter, pulling Scotty flush against him and murmuring in his ear. “I'm getting impatient... just take me already.” *I want it... I want it really really badly...*

Scotty's eyes darkened a fraction more. “Your wish is my command.” *That ass is mine.* Scotty lifted Casper up onto the counter, spreading his legs apart to get a good view, licking a few fingers and trying to at least loosen him up a little. *Don’t want to tear anything, that would be bad, I wanna get the christening done without major problems...*

Casper linked his arms around Scotty’s neck as he prepped him, his legs spread wide for him. He moaned as one finger became two, then three, his hips thrusting back on his fingers. *I want it... I want you so badly... have me, please...*

Scotty soon removed his fingers, moving to lube himself up as much as possible. “I’m not getting a condom, Casper... I want your everything.” *I wanna actually feel you, I wanna feel how soft you are...*

*I know you're clean. And I'm clean.* Casper pulled Scotty close, kissing him deeply. “I want to give you everything.” *I want to really feel you... please...* Casper broke their kiss, his legs pulling Scotty’s hips closer. *Please.*

Scotty smirked, taking hold of Casper’s hips and thrusting in to the hilt in one large thrust, letting out a loud groan as he felt Casper’s tightness encase him in heat. *Holy fuck I could get used to*
Casper groaned as Scotty sheathed himself in him, feeling himself stretch, tears pricking at his eyes as he adjusted. *You’re so fucking huge*… Casper sighed as Scotty nipped at his ears, soon rolling his hips against Scotty, hoping for him to take the hint. *You can move.*

Scotty started off a bit slower, but his thrusts were still forceful, and deep, his teeth coming down to bite at the skin on Casper’s collarbone. *You’re gonna have a lot of bite marks… I hope you know that.* He lapped at the blood he drew, but made sure to keep his steady and forceful pace.

Casper let out a long moan as Scotty started to thrust into him, his hands running over his back for purchase as Scotty bit at his skin. He gasped as he felt Scotty draw blood, then apologetically lick the wound. *I’m going to have plenty of those by the time we’re collapsing, aren’t I? Casper panted, stuttering. “S-Scotty… h-ahaah… f-feels r- really good…”* More… *you can go faster.*

Scotty shifted a bit so Casper hung off the edge a little bit, his hand took one of Casper’s legs and put it over his shoulder, allowing him better access to squeeze Casper’s plump ass cheeks. *Hell YESH…* Scotty began a brutal pace, thrusting in multiple different directions to tease Casper around his prostate, and then finally hit it head on after a little bit. *You feel so tight.*

Casper slung his leg over Scotty’s shoulder, his other wrapped around his waist, groaning as Scotty grabbed at his ass. He started to get louder as Scotty began to pound into him, gasping and trying to move his hips to meet his thrusts. “S-Scotty… hah… s-so good… m-my god… f- fuck me…” *I want everything…* His voice began to get higher in pitch, moaning unashamedly.

Scotty groaned when Casper called out to him to fuck him. *Damn that voice… Just that sound… Should be highly illegal.* Scotty’s right hand was gripping tightly onto Casper’s ass cheeks, using them as leverage to thrust up into him. *I fucking love this.* “C-Casper… Y-your… So… F-fucking… Ngh… Tight… Haa…” Scotty moved at just the right angle to begin to just tease Casper’s prostate. *I wonder if he’ll move… To get it to be on his prostate?* Scotty’s left hand trailed up to grip Casper’s length, teasingly rubbing his hand up and down the shaft and rubbing his thumb over the slit.

Casper whimpered, his eyes clouded with lust as he reached up to link his hands behind Scotty’s neck. He used him as leverage to shift, gasping and moaning with every thrust that finally landed dead-on on his prostate, feeling a familiar warmth pooling in his abdomen. “S-Scotty… haaa… I can’t l-last… l-long… nghh… t-too good …” Casper pulled Scotty down to suckle at his neck, leaving dark marks up his neck. *Mine.*
Scotty nodded, moving at a quicker pace as he felt his own coil start to form. *You feel so fucking good, I want more. I'm so glad that you're mine.* His large hands were gripping onto Casper’s hips with enough force to start leaving bruises as he rammed into him, letting out soft moans as Casper marked his neck. *Damn, it feels wonderful.*

Casper’s back arched as Scotty abused his prostate, whimpering against his skin, leaving trails of marks and sucking bruises onto his neck. He murmured against his neck, overwhelmed with pleasure. “S-Scotty… I…” *It's so much…* Casper gasped, crying out against his skin. *“SCOTTY!”* Casper came hard, white decorating their chests, clinging to Scotty like a lifeline, panting heavily. *Yours.*

Scotty let out a loud cry as his own coil snapped, starting to fill Casper with spurt after spurt of cum. *Holy fuck he’s tight.* “Casper….” He leaned down to kiss Casper sweetly. “You’re fucking tight…” His voice was deep and dark as he held Casper close to him.

Casper kissed him back fervently, holding Scotty flush against him, moaning softly as he was filled. “You’re fucking huge… and I love it.” Casper smiled into the kiss, breaking away to catch his breath after a moment. He looked up to Scotty with lidded eyes, smirking. “That’s one room down…” His hands trailed down Scotty’s back, firmly squeezing his ass. “-with plenty more to go.”

Scotty nodded, his hands coming down to cup his ass, picking him up off the counter and walking towards the large empty room which used to hold a piano. *I kinda wish the piano was here… that would be great to bend you over… the couch will have to do.* Scotty kept himself lodged into Casper as he moved him around, so that he had him bent over the arm of the couch. “Ready, Casper?” His own length twitched within Casper as he held him down over the couch, a large hand firmly placed on his hips.

Casper whimpered as he was pinned to the arm of the couch, Scotty’s chest pressed to his back. He shifted, feeling the rough fabric of the couch arm rub against his length. He shifted his head and bared the back of his neck to Scotty, silently pleading with him to suckle and bite his skin. “R-ready.” He made a small sound as Scotty pulled out, and suddenly thrust back into him, moaning and dropping his head against the cushions.

Scotty started off at a very abusive pace, making sure to fully pull out of Casper before ramming back into him. He leaned down, deciding to stay buried to the hilt within him. He started kissing and biting around Casper’s neck and shoulder blades. *I want you to beg me to keep going.* “I wanna hear you beg Casper.” *You’re gonna have to beg a shit ton for me to keep moving.*
What? Casper lifted his head a bit as Scotty stopped, gasping and groaning as soon as Scotty started to nip and suck at his neck and shoulders harshly, his back arching as he attacked the joint of his neck. “S-Scotty… please, you can't stop… I-it feels too good, you need to keep going…” Casper’s legs were spread wide for him, pushing on the floor with his toes and on the arm of the couch, rolling his hips back into Scotty. “I-it feels too good to stop, please, my God, you can't stop… Scotty, fuck me, please…”

Scotty smirked, teasingly rolling his hips once before keeping Casper pinned. Oh, I love the sound of that. “You’re gonna have to do better than that.” Scotty’s voice was heavy as he kept Casper still to make sure he couldn’t move back to him. I want you to really beg for it.

Casper made a frustrated sound as he was pinned and unable to move, shivering at his deep voice in his ear. Fuck… “S-Scotty, d-don't tease me, please… my god, please, just fuck me… fuck me until I can't stand or walk straight or even think straight. Please, I need you, I want you so badly, just move… take me hard or any way you want, but please have me.” I need you… He dipped his head down, panting and frustrated, completely at Scotty’s mercy. My god, you can't stop now…

Scotty smirked picking Casper up off of the arm of the couch. He took him and sat down with Casper on his lap, buried even deeper now. “Good, boy.” He shifted Casper around, so that they were face to face with each other. “You're handsome, you know that?” Scotty’s voice was much softer as he pulled Casper close to him. I want you to enjoy it as much as I do.

Casper flushed scarlet at Scotty’s words, making a small sound as he was shifted, Scotty buried even deeper in him. He panted, looking to Scotty with dark eyes, twining his fingers behind his neck and pulling him close to kiss him deeply, feeling the mood shift and slowing down. …I love you… I love this… I want to keep you.

Scotty leaned his head up to deeply kiss Casper just as passionately back. Damn… Slowing it down… We haven’t tried this before. He pulled back to breathe, gently kissing Casper’s neck, leaving gentle kisses everywhere he could reach. You are mine… His large hands still rested on Casper’s hips, gently moving him up and down slowly. “You feel wonderful…”

Casper sighed heavily as Scotty kissed up his neck, letting out a long breathy moan as he moved up and down Scotty’s length. He gently threaded his fingers into Scotty’s hair, holding him to his neck before they moved to slide down his shoulders, sensually feeling every inch of exposed skin. “Y-you…you feel really really good…” Casper’s voice was soft, letting out quiet moans as he was moved, mewling as Scotty nibbled at his neck. I like this, taking it slow for once… It's nice just to feel …

… Damn that voice . Scotty nibbled gently at Casper’s neck, his head dipping down to suck gently
at Casper’s collarbones, infatuated with the soft skin underneath his teeth. His hips barely moved, his hands gently caressing Casper’s ass as he lifted him slowly. *I wanna keep a slow pace and enjoy this. I want to make sure Casper is feeling everything.*

Casper’s breath was soft and heavy, his head tilted back a bit to let Scotty get to his skin. He rolled his hips slowly and smoothly with every thrust, his hands wandering down Scotty’s front and back, ghosting gently over his sides. He felt slightly overwhelmed with the soft touches everywhere on his body, his eyes shaded with lust and love. “Scotty…” Casper quietly whimpered, loving every second that Scotty was kissing at his neck, gently bouncing him on his length. *It feels so good… too good… I love this… I love you.*

Scotty let out breathy sighs as Casper rolled his hips. “Casper… Hmm… It feels good…” His hands slowly loosened their grip, giving Casper more control with his actions. *Go ahead… You can ride me all you want… Whatever pace you want.*

Casper’s eyes sparked as Scotty loosened his grip, moving so his fingers were laced behind Scotty’s neck, pulling him up from his neck to kiss him. He slipped his tongue into his cool cavern as he lifted his hips, still going slowly, until barely his tip was inside before going back down, grinding down deeply onto him. He lowly, faintly moaned into his mouth, holding him close. *…mine.*

Scotty moaned alongside him, gently rolling his hips up into Casper as he grinded against him. *Holy fuck…. Casper… So fucking good, you feel amazing… And you can take in my whole length…. Scotty let Casper move at his own pace, moaning loudly as Casper continued to grind with him. He pulled back from their kiss to breathe, looking into Casper’s eyes with his own lust filled ones. I… I think I can say it…*

*Hot damn…* Casper took a deep breath as they broke apart, drinking in Scotty’s expression, lazily smiling after a moment, leaning their foreheads together, still rolling his hips. “...do you know how hot you look right now?” Casper kissed his cheek, the corner of his eye and his lips, playing with the hair at the base of his neck. He pulled back a bit to look into Scotty’s eyes, his cheeks red and eyes a mix of love and lust. “...I could get used to seeing you like this...” *I want this to be mine.*

Scotty smiled softly, closing his eyes slowly as he leaned in to peck Casper’s lips. *I can only imagine what I look like. “I-I-I… I…”* Scotty could barely get over the lump in his throat as he tried to speak, quickly getting frustrated as his words wouldn’t come out. *I can’t…. I can’t say it… Fuck !*

Casper’s brow furrowed minutely for only an instant, leaning in to kiss his lips, pressing butterfly kisses over his jaw, his hands soothingly cradling his neck, his voice a soft murmur. “You don’t
have to do say it just yet… it's okay. Take your time.” *I understand- it's an important thing to say.*

Scotty nodded, keeping his eyes closed as he took in a deep breath. *Okay… “Casper…. I want…. M-more….”* His hands slid up and down Casper’s thighs as he sat in his lap. *You feel wonderful… I want it all.*

Casper smirked, locking their lips in a deep kiss as he slid up his length before falling back down, rocking against him as their hips met. He let his tongue explore Scotty’s mouth as he pushed him further back against the cushions, his hands on his chest giving him more leverage over him as he picked up the pace a bit, moaning into the kiss. *You make me feel so amazing… I can do more.*

*...Holy fuck… you are so fucking tight.* Scotty moaned loudly, pulling away from the kiss as he thrusted his hips up to meet Casper’s thrusts. He looked up to him with hooded eyes, his hands moving to rest on his hips, rubbing his thumbs across the soft skin. “You’re so soft…. C-Casper… hmm… so tight…”

Casper thrusted his hips down to take Scotty in deeply, feeling warmth beginning to pool in his abdomen. “Nnngh… s-so big… haaa…” His eyes raked over Scotty underneath him, drinking in his image. “S-Scotty… I’m not… nnngh… gonna last m-much… haa… longer…”

Scotty shook his head, leaning his head back on the couch, feeling his coil starting to form as Casper continued to work on him. *...Holy crap… It feels so good. He’s riding me…. I want him to do this more often. Yup. It’s gonna happen a lot more now… and I like doing it without a condom. He feels so warm.* Scotty groaned, his body shuddering as he felt Casper start to tighten around his length.

Casper whimpered as pleasure flooded through him, arching over Scotty’s chest as he kept moving, having him pound into him. He gasped, crying out in pleasure as his coil finally snapped, clamping down on Scotty’s length still inside of him. He panted, his head dropping into the crook of Scotty’s neck. *I love you…*

*... Holy fuck!* Scotty took a few more thrusts before he came inside of Casper’s tightness. “C-**Casper !”** His voice was full of pure joy and lust as he pulled Casper close to his body. *You… are mine…* Scotty picked up Casper after a few minutes of regaining their energy, moving to the next room, and the next room, and the next room, finally ending up in bed hours later, exhausted, relieved, and in each other’s arms.
Lathe was humming as he worked in the kitchen, rolling out dough for a pie crust. *I can't do this while Eren and Levi are in the house- I'll have at least one of the two snitching something every ten seconds and then the pie's eaten before it's been baked.* Lathe snatched one of the apple slices from the bowl without a second thought. ... *but I'm the chef, so I have special privileges.* He had just placed a pie dish upside down on the flattened dough when the phone rang, going to rinse off his hands quickly. ... *it better not be those window salespeople again. Ten times in a week, my God...* Lathe picked up the phone, seeing the number wasn't recognised and picking it up. “Hello? If you're selling windows we don't want any.” *Our windows are perfectly fine.*

A soft chuckle was heard on the other end of the phone. “No, I’m not selling windows, Lathe, it’s me, Marcus.”

Lathe’s eyes widened a fraction, blushing faintly. “Oh, hello Marcus, I'm sorry, I had expected it to be telemarketers again- how are you?” *We haven't heard from you in awhile.*

“I’m doing well, how has Kansas been treating you guys?”

“Probably better than New York’s treating you- we haven't gotten any snow yet, and I'm sure it's all just going to hit us at once. It’s absolutely freezing though. You’re buried under a foot or two, I've heard. Very early this year.” ... *living up in New York has that side effect.* Lathe grinned. “But we’ve been doin’ alright down here. More than enough open space for everybody.” *Huge backyards for the win.*

“That’s good, and try 5 feet, then you got it right. Is Spades home? I was hoping about talking to her. I’m stuck in my house, so I at least wanted to say Happy Thanksgiving before... the power might get cut soon.”

“Oh my- and no, she isn't. She’s working today, but she’ll be home after six and then hopefully tomorrow if she doesn't get called in. I'll tell her you called, of course. You know, you need to come down here sometime, get away from the polar bears you call neighbors and your North Pole of a city for a little while. At least down here you don't have to ski to the store if you run out of milk.” ... *you ski to the barn instead!*

“Maybe I’ll come down to visit one Winter season, but I like my house up here, you get used to the snow after a while.” He chuckled. “How are you treating my daughter down there? And I’ll be there for the wedding, I can't send out an RSVP cause of the snow.”
Lathe smiled, leaning against the wall. “It’s good to hear you’re coming! I’ll make sure you get on the list. And I’d like to think pretty well. Things have been crazy lately, but we’ve been keeping it together okay. You still need to come down here and finally meet Eren though- I’m not letting you get out of coming to visit.” Lathe grinned. You have to now.

“Alright, alright, I will, don’t worry. How’s my future grandson doing? Is he out of therapy yet?”

“...he never actually went to physical therapy… he didn't need it. Everything healed spectacularly, and it didn't take long at all for him to be back on his feet again. It really is perplexing, how that works. But it did.” ...I don't know if I'm at liberty to tell you the specifics. ...so I'm not going to. We need proof and a finished serum first.

“Well that’s good, have you two filed for adoption papers yet? Or are you waiting until after you’re married for that?”

Lathe’s brow furrowed. ...huh? “Uhm, we’d decided that we were going to have kids in the future, but we weren't looking specifically to adopt- could I ask why you ask?” ...I'd think you’d assume the other way around?

“Lathe... Spades can’t have children. How drunk was she when she said she would have children?”

Lathe tried not to drop the phone, stunned, stuttering a bit. “S-she… she was completely sober, and so was I… s-she can’t have kids?” ...what...?

“No, she can’t. It’d be physically impossible for her. She can’t since she had surgery after the car crash, years ago... The one that I lost Darlene in…”

“I-I thought… I thought she’d been in the hospital for her broken legs… w-what…” Lathe was almost afraid to ask. “What h-happened?”

“The seat belt cut into her abdomen, and they couldn’t correct it completely. It would be near impossible for her to even conceive with it. She’s had so many complications that she’s been on birth control for years. The doctors told us she’d never be able to have children without risking her own life.... I don’t think she told anyone at school, but I would’ve thought she would tell you.”
... if Spades and I had our own children... it'd be her or the child, wouldn't it... that's not worth it. Lathe looked down, the hand not holding the phone shaking. *She didn't tell me... she was going to knowingly put her own life on the line just so we could have a kid together... but... it's not worth it. If you didn't call and tell me that... would I have ever known?* ..."I'd been so straightforward about what I wanted, I suppose... I knew I wanted kids, and a lot of them, for a long while, and I told her that... but..." Lathe gave up and sat down on the floor against the wall, still holding the wireless phone to his ear. "...she agreed to it knowing that it could end up being... her or the kid... I... if I never knew... how could anyone be forced to make that decision?" Lathe tried not to cry at the thought, rubbing at his eyes. "...thank you for telling me... she and I need to really talk when she gets home... I'm just glad I know now." *It's not too late... nothing's happened yet...*

"Well, I know that she's had a few more surgeries since she's moved out... So, maybe there is a chance that she can have a child, but I think you two should really talk."

..."we'd both need to talk to her doctor about that... someone who could tell us the risks... "O-Okay. I'll make sure we do... and I'll make sure that we talk to a doctor first about all this... I don't want her to carry if there's too high a risk for something to go wrong, with her or the baby... I don't want anyone getting hurt, or worse..." ...I don't want to have to make that choice... I could never choose...

"Alright, well I'll call later, and if the power gets cut I won't, so I wish you guys a happy thanksgiving and my love, talk to her Lathe... She has problems with telling the truth after what happened with Darlene.... But it's not really her fault, it's more my fault... I'm sorry."

Lathe shook his head slightly, even though Marcus couldn't see it. "I-It's okay... we'll talk, and we'll make it okay.... th-thank you, and h-happy Thanksgiving." Lathe hung up, staring long and hard at the phone. ...*she'd rather lie and risk her life trying to give me what I wanted... than tell the truth and not put everything on the line.* Lathe pulled his knees to his chest, trying for a long few minutes to pull it together. ...*calm the fuck down, you don't have to make that hell of a decision, it's okay, this'll get figured out... just finish cooking, distract yourself until she gets home...* Lathe stood, putting the phone back on the hook and reading the digital display. ...3:37. Lathe sighed heavily, going back to continue making pies, his mind only half on what he was doing. .......I don't want Spades to die.......
Levi immediately shook his head, his arms wrapped firmly around Eren’s middle, keeping him flush with his front and resting his cheek against his shoulder blade. “They're never gonna forget about you, Eren. Them having another kid wouldn't mean they’d have any less love to go around. You're their son- they adore you, and would give anything in the world to make you happy. And it doesn't matter that you're not their flesh and blood- they still love you all the same.” They really do- They’ve bent over backwards for you on so many occasions. They give a ton of shits about you.

Eren nodded, staying silent for another moment as he guided Charlie around one of the jumps he had left on the trail. “What happens if… if they adopt? Do I have to leave? What about you? Don’t you want a family too?” I can’t give you that.

Levi still shook his head, mumbling against Eren’s shoulder. “No matter how Lathe and Spades end up having kids, they’d always have room for you. That much is obvious- they love you to death. And I do want a family, but I know you can't exactly give me that. When we’re ready, we could always adopt. That’s always an option. But we are definitely in no rush to take ‘us’ further.” We need time. Lots of it.

Eren nodded quietly. “Don’t you want your own family though? From not having one yourself?” I know almost everything about your childhood now…. Grisha went through your files, how… I have no idea… but I feel horrible for not being able to give you what you wanted… If you ever wanted one.

Levi’s eyes widened at that. “H-how’d you… how’d you know? …how you know doesn’t matter… Eren, even if we adopted kids, they'd still be ours. We’d raise them like they were our own flesh and blood. It’d give them a home, and we’d have a family. …and if I were going to have a family, I'd want you to be a part of it.” …I don't know how you knew about me not having one… but I know that any family I'm going to have has to have you as a part of it. …I really want it to.

Eren nodded, taking another few minute to think of a few minutes. “What happens… if you find someone else in the marines… will you stay with them? If they make you happy?” Leave my sorry ass? Isn’t the joke always on me? Even Grisha said you would leave me… or love the marines so much that you wouldn’t want to ever come back.

Levi thought for a moment about the road ahead of them- the short months he was home, his coming four-year tour in Afghanistan, and how far they had been set back in their relationship. …then he thought of everything they were before, when Levi could do more than just hold onto a Eren. “Eren, nobody could make me as happy as much as you've made me happy. I don't think I could look at anyone else like that. …Eren, you're the one I want to come home to. …I love you.” Levi barely whispered his last sentence, his head resting against Eren’s shoulder. …I'm not sure if I
wanted you to hear that last bit or not... if I can't even peck your shoulder... how would you react to that?

Eren was quiet for a long time, leading Charlie around a few fallen trees. What do I tell him? Should I tell him to find someone else? I don’t think I could ever love him anymore.... Eren let the silent sting of tears overflow from his eyes, rolling down his cheeks. “Levi....” His voice was shaky as he started off, trying to think of things to say. “Um.... I don’t.... I don’t think I can do it again...”

...you don't think you can love? Levi ran his thumb soothingly up and down Eren's side, trying to keep it together himself. “Eren, I know with everything that happened it's hard to feel anything besides numbness... I understand... but with enough time you'll be able to piece things back together... there are some things only time can fix.” It's not gonna be easy, but I think you'll be okay... I think we'll be okay.

Eren shook his head. “Time’s a bitch Levi... I don’t feel numbness anymore either... after I talked about a few things, I feel.... Well, have you ever been in a pit before? Where when you make up your mind, you try and get out, yet the walls are too steep to climb out of... and the edges crumble under your fingers and you're forced back down onto that unforgiving floor? Have you ever felt that? You tell me if you’ve ever had that happen. Because that’s exactly what it feels like...” Eren took in a deep breath to try and calm himself down from raising his voice. “I’m trying... I really am Levi, but every time I try and grab that ledge, it crumbles, and I never have enough time to pull myself up out of that goddamned pit!” Eren shouted the last few words, finally able to get his frustrations and anger out of his system, which he had kept bottled up for who knows how long. “Time’s a fucking bitch... cause she always reminds you how everyone else can move on and you’re stuck in the same damn day that it fucking happened! That pit is stuck in fucking time, and trying to get out is like having the weight of the world on your fucking shoulders! I hate when people are trying to say that they understand what I’m going through, when they don’t understand shit!” Eren took a deep breath, his eyes wide and tears quickly rolling down his cheeks as he realized he had been shouting at Levi for more than a minute or two. “Fuck I’m... I’m sorry...” his voice a mere whisper now.

Levi’s head still rested on Eren’s shoulder, silently taking Eren’s shouting. Tears trickled slowly down his face, trying to speak evenly after Eren apologized, his voice quiet. “...you're right. I only know so much about being stuck in a pit like that, but nowhere near that extent. I don't understand, but... I guess we all mean we’re trying to understand. Because we want to help you get out. And yes, time is a fucking bitch sometimes, but just because it’s going to take a while doesn't mean that I should just give up on you. Just because it's going to take a while doesn't mean that you should just give up on yourself, either. I...” Levi buried his face into Eren’s shoulder, tears staining his shirt. “...I just want you to be okay again... no matter how long it takes or what we have to do to get you out of there.”...I love you too much to just give up on you. I could never.

Eren nodded, silent for an excruciatingly long time, having turned Charlie around to start going
back to the house. He hadn’t really spoken to Levi on the way back, softly starting to mumble to no one in particular.

“ There was a time when I was alone
Nowhere to go and no place to call home
My only friend was the man in the moon
And even sometimes he would go away, too”

Levi picked up his head a bit, sniffling. ...he's singing again... Levi tilted his head a bit, listening to him.

“Then one night, as I closed my eyes
I saw a shadow flying high
He came to me with the sweetest smile
Told me he wanted to talk for awhile
He said, "Peter Pan, that's what they call me
I promise that you'll never be lonely, " and ever since that day”

“I am a lost boy from Neverland
Usually hanging out with Peter Pan
And when we're bored we play in the woods
Always on the run from Captain Hook
"Run, run, lost boy, " they say to me
Away from all of reality

Neverland is home to lost boys like me
And lost boys like me are free
Neverland is home to lost boys like me
And lost boys like me are free
He sprinkled me in pixie dust and told me to believe
Believe in him and believe in me
Together we will fly away in a cloud of green
To your beautiful destiny
As we soared above the town that never loved me
I realized I finally had a family
Soon enough we reached Neverland
Peacefully my feet hit the sand
And ever since that day

I am a lost boy from Neverland
Usually hanging out with Peter Pan
And when we're bored we play in the woods
Always on the run from Captain Hook
"Run, run, lost boy, " they say to me
Away from all of reality

Neverland is home to lost boys like me
And lost boys like me are free
Neverland is home to lost boys like me
And lost boys like me are free

Peter Pan, Tinkerbell, Wendy Darling
Even Captain Hook, you are my perfect story book
Neverland, I love you so
You are now my home sweet home
Forever a lost boy at last
Peter Pan, Tinkerbell, Wendy Darling

Even Captain Hook, you are my perfect story book

Neverland, I love you so

You are now my home sweet home

Forever a lost boy at last

And for always I will say

I am a lost boy from Neverland

Usually hanging out with Peter Pan

And when we're bored we play in the woods

Always on the run from Captain Hook

"Run, run, lost boy, " they say to me

Away from all of reality

Neverland is home to lost boys like me

And lost boys like me are free

Neverland is home to lost boys like me

And lost boys like me are free”

Eren was quiet for a long moment. “Pretty accurate representation of my life… don’t you agree? If Dad was Peter?” At least that’s what I think.

Levi nodded, thoughtful. He murmured against his shoulder. “That sounds about right…” He forced himself not to give into impulse and peck Eren’s shoulder, so used to being able to do things like that when he wanted. ...I miss being able to do that...

Lathe was quiet as he stood near the barn door, a small basket of fresh eggs in one hand a bucket with milk in the other. ...Eren’s shouting at Levi… Lathe strained to hear, staring at his feet as
silence fell. ...he’s depressed, sounds like... ...we can fix that... Lathe’s head picked up again as he suddenly heard Eren beginning to faintly sing, stepping a bit out of the barn, out of sight yet able to hear him better. ... he hasn't sung since it happened... ...he needs to reacquaint himself with music again...

Eren fell into a calm silence, feeling a bit relieved that he had gotten everything out of his system that he needed to. He stopped Charlie outside of the barn, letting Levi hop off before he hopped off as well. He didn’t look up to Lathe, feeling too ashamed to even meet his gaze. I need to get Charlie back in his stall and feed the two of them... He brought Charlie in, not saying another word as he started to untack him and brush him, his eyes dull, simply going through the motions. The pit’s too tall.

Levi went to put his helmet away, hesitating a moment and coming up next to Eren, resting a hand on his shoulder. “...are you okay taking care of everything out here yourself?” He watched as Eren silently nodded, letting his hand slip away as he went out the barn door, joining Lathe walking up the house, watching his feet, silent. ... you heard everything. I don't know what to tell you...

Lathe had just opened his mouth to speak when Blake suddenly came out of the doggy door, running past them and to the barn. Hooman is distressed. Why is hooman distressed? Hooman!

Levi picked his head up, watching Blake run by them, Maisie quickly following after him, though stopping when she got to the two of them and whining for pets. “You think he’s okay?” Levi’s voice was worried as he knelt down to pet Maisie, allowing her to lick his face as he watched the barn.

“...I'm not taking chances.” Lathe turned right around, going back to the barn. If he's doing something he shouldn't be we need to know about it. Lathe stopped right outside the barn door, hearing Eren talking to someone. ...huh?

“No... I know that he really wants me to love him again... but I don’t think I can.”

“No... I don’t, I can’t tell if he really thinks about me anymore.”

“Yeah... I know Mom can’t have any kids... but what if they adopt and they forget about me?”

“Even if you say they won’t how do you know?”

“Even I can’t tell anymore... I’m losing my fucking mind...”

“I can’t even sleep anymore... I haven’t slept in over a week...”

“Yes, over a week, I meant it... no I was not asleep while you and the mistress were asleep last night.”
“What do you mean you saw me asleep? Yes I was laying there on the couch, but you were passed out right along side Maisie!”
“Don’t you fucking lie to me too right now! I can’t deal with that shit right now.”

“No calm down… geez I’m not gonna fucking try again.”

“Stop insinuating that I’m gonna do it again!”

“I already told you, I got thrown into that fucking pit again… and I can’t get out…”

“I need some fucking pixie dust again.”

... is he high? Lathe listened with an incredulous expression, thoroughly confused. “...he just had a full-blown conversation with Blake…” Lathe mumbled to Levi, thinking hard. “A couple of notes-who the hell gave him drugs; was he seriously faking sleep last night, and how the fuck did he know Spades couldn’t have kids? I just found out today…” “...did they talk about it? ...she’d tell Eren and not me?”

Levi looked at Lathe with shocked eyes. Spades can’t have kids? “Eren seemed to know a lot about my past too… maybe Grisha told him everything about us… he could’ve easily looked into all of our files if he knew someone… and freaked Eren out with it-” Levi stopped talking as he heard Eren start to pick up conversation again.

“No, Blake, I am not talking about cocaine… as much as that would make me feel better, that gives me worse side effects than a fucking bottle of vodka.”

“No, I’m not about to start drinking either at night, Dad would have my head, and you know it takes two bottles to get me drunk… for some god damn reason… so even if I did want to drink away my sorrows, I would need to drink everything in the liquor cabinet.”

“... No, why would I try and do that? You honestly think I’m that stupid? I haven’t tried to do anything to myself after Dad cut me down from the damn rafters. No bodily harm… I’m pretty sure I promised that somewhere along the lines of ‘If I go, Dad goes with me!’”

Luna let out a loud whinny, right along with Charlie a few seconds later.

“Oh my god, give it a rest you two! Breeding with Levi makes no difference in this situation! It’s already complicated as all fuck!”

Yet another whinny from Charlie.

“NO! God no! I will not be doing that, you’re out of your damn mind if you think I’m ever gonna touch a chick… I don’t even think I have the willpower to touch myself anymore.
“Charlie, shut the fuck up, this discussion is not about you, it’s about me, so shut it!”

Blake barked at Eren, whining as he stood up.

“Oh god, not you too, Blake. I am not going to ‘breed’, it makes no difference... because I can’t do it anyways... I can’t even sleep with him in the same bed because of the fucking nightmares.”

“Luna, I’m already on a cocktail of drugs, I don’t want to be on any more, thank you very much.”

Lathe listened with wide eyes, his mind in overdrive. “...there's no way he’s neither insane nor high right now... also, I need to give him stronger medicine for nightmares... and depression meds that won't interfere with stuff...” ...this is the most insane conversation I've ever eavesdropped on.

Levi nodded, intent on listening in. “Is he.. Like actually talking to the animals... are they giving valid responses to him?” It sounds like they are... but I have no idea how his mind is interpreting things anymore.

“Oliver... I can’t just throw myself and Levi into a mud pit and roll around, as much fun as that sounds. I don’t believe he’d be pleased with it.”

“No, Blake, I am not going to tell Dad that I haven’t been sleeping... I swear to god if you fucking tell him that I’m not sleeping... BLAKE!” Eren shouted as Blake came outside the barn and stopped, barking at Lathe very hurriedly. Eren followed out only a few seconds later. Fuck... they heard... They heard everything. “Um... I’m going to pretend that I didn’t see you, you’re going to pretend you heard nothing and I’m going to put Charlie back in his stall.” Eren instantly scurried back into the barn to put Charlie into his stall, or at least tried to before he was caught.

Lathe had since set down the bucket of milk and the eggs, and reached out quickly to catch Eren’s arm, tugging him back to them. He pulled him into a hug, speaking. “Eren, a few things. I’m not going to forget that just happened because what just happened was important. I’m going to strengthen your PTSD meds so you don’t have nightmares, find you antidepressants that work, and give you the sedatives to knock you out again so you get some sleep at night.” Lathe pulled back from him, taking a good look at his eyes. He rubbed gently at the skin under them, makeup smudging away to reveal dark circles under them. “...Eren, you can't hide stuff like this from us. We’re here to help you.” He pecked his forehead, smiling to him faintly after a moment. “...and I want you to know I'm proud of you for keeping your word.” Baby steps. “...you can go take care of Charlie now... it's okay.”

Eren sighed. “They’re all gonna yell at me to go to sleep... But um... do I need to be on drugs? Can I stop taking them... please?” I don’t want to take them anymore... Blake even suggested I stop taking them to see if I’ve improved any...
“That’s not how this works, Eren. No. I know you don’t like it, but it’s for your own good. They’ll help you get better. It takes time- don’t try to rush it.” Lathe smirked faintly, looking down to Blake. “And you tell the others to tell me if I should be worried about Eren, okay? I need you to be my eyes and ears.” He smiled, looking back to Eren. “Go take care of Charlie, then come up to the house, okay? Dinner will be soon.” Lathe gently nudged him into the barn.

Eren looked down a bit as he was nudged towards the barn. “But Dad…. I don’t want to take them anymore… Even Blake suggested that I stop taking them for a few days…. To try and clear my system… before I go back on them.” I wanna try and sleep without them… I haven’t been able to sleep with them… how about we try without…

Lathe just looked at him, then down to Blake. “Since when did you come a doctor?”

Blake looked up to him and made a low noise. Longer than you were born.

Lathe looked to his hand, counting on his fingers and shrugging after a minute. “Okay, technically I guess…” Lathe thought hard for a moment, turning to Eren with a stony face. “One week. One week you’re off the drugs, and if all you do is get worse you’re going back on. If you're doing horribly by the fourth day, we’re cutting it early and putting you back on. Just this once. Okay?”

Eren nodded hurriedly, racing up to hug him tightly for a moment, letting go of him and running back into the barn to take care of Charlie. I don't have to take pills anymore!

Lathe was surprised as he was hugged, letting Eren run off into the barn. “...maybe it's a good thing he’s off the pills. ...if he’s having full-on conversations with the animals, I think he needs a refresh of the system.”...and we're going to pretend that second bit about breeding never happened… Lathe turned from the barn, picking the bucket and basket back up. “I’ve got things in the oven- let's get back up to the house.” Eren’ll be okay. He started their trek back up to the house, Levi walking with him at his side.

Levi nodded. “We’re not gonna mention that to Spades… Are we?” Levi helped Lathe with the baskets, watching Spades pull up in the driveway through the front window. Yeah no… We’re not telling her that Eren just had a mental lapse...

“No, we’re not.” He looked to the clock, then to the timer on the oven. I’ve got about forty minutes for that to finish... “Levi, do me a favour and watch the pie so it doesn't burn. And can you put these away? Spades and I need to talk.” He left the bucket on the table, walking to the front door.
We need to. Lathe opened the door before Spades had made it up to the door, taking a deep breath as she stepped onto the porch. “Spades, your father called today.” His face was blank, biting the inside of his cheek. “...you lied.” ......you knew how dangerous it would be. And you didn't tell me.

Spades just stared at him with wide eyes, frozen on the front stoop. He... he told you... “L-Lathe, I...” Her eyes became glassy. “I-I'm sorry…” I was so scared to tell you...

Lathe simply moved forward to sweep her inside, his arm encircling her waist and locking the door shut behind her. He led her upstairs, quiet until they were in the quiet of their room, the lock turned. He leaned back against the door, pulling Spades flush to his front, his face buried into her shoulder as he hugged her tightly, a hand moving to let her hair down from her ponytail and tangling into her long locks. “Spades... I don't want to have to choose. I... I understand that I've been so upfront about really wanting kids and that you don't want to disappoint me... but you shouldn't try to give me what I want if what I want would kill you...” Lathe started to sob into her shoulder, feeling her shake a bit in his arms, both of them clinging to the other. “...I d-don't want you t-to try to carry i-if when it come t-time... I h-have to decide whether y-you or the b-baby gets to l- live... i-if that's what having kids would come down to... it's not worth it. I don't want anyone getting hurt just because of something I want. I don't want you to be pressured into it and have to pay for my ignorance...” Lathe kissed Spades’s neck, just wanting to hold her as if he’d never see her again. “W-we can always adopt, give a kid a home... but if the risk is too high for you to carry, then absolutely not.” Lathe nuzzled into her neck. “...I want you to be okay... I want you to live...” I care so much about you.

Spades clung to Lathe starting to cry right along with him. “L-Lathe... Honey... It’s not the carrying that’s the problem.... I had a surgery that corrected a majority of what would’ve cause complications... I’m sorry... I didn't know what to tell you... I know you wanted children... But...” It’s the factor of if I can even conceive in the first place.

...Marcus did say you'd had surgeries after that... “...so is it conceiving that’s the problem?” Lathe gently ran his hands over her back, trying to soothe her. “If the risk is still too high though, we shouldn't risk anything...” I don't want to lose you...

“It's conceiving... I can talk to my doctor.... I don't know if I have any more eggs left.... I’m sorry Lathe... I want you to be happy, and I can't give you that....” I’m so sorry Lathe... And I knew you wanted to have children... And I didn't tell you right away. Spades started to sob all over again at that thought. I didn’t want to tell anyone.... Because I was so afraid that no one would love a barren woman. “I-I’m so sorry.”

Lathe gently kissed her neck, nuzzled into her shoulder and embracing her, murmuring to her. “Spades, giving me children isn't the only way to make me happy... it's not as if I'm going to stop loving you because of this. It's okay.” He gently carded a hand through her hair. “I-if you really are okay with it... I think we should talk to your doctor before we do anything... but would you still
want to try?” "if there's a chance, and only you want to…

Spades looked to Lathe, nodding as she lifted her head a bit. “Y-yeah.” Her voice was still shaky, her face red and blotchy from crying so much, her makeup running. I’m sorry….

I don't like seeing you cry…. Lathe gently pecked her lips, her cheeks, still holding her and trying to get her to calm down, his voice quiet. “…thank you.” He pulled back and looked to her seriously. “Spades, if you ever change your mind, you tell me. Okay? This is even moreso about you than it is me.” He pecked her nose, her forehead.

Spades smiled softly before nodding. “O-Okay….” She sniffled, moving away from his embrace, covering her blotchy face as she made her way towards their bathroom, knowing that she would need to get her makeup off. I probably look like a wreck… Fuck...

Lathe let her go to get off her makeup, wiping at his eyes as he left to go back downstairs, smiling to Levi as he came back into the kitchen. “Thanks for holding down the fort- did you let anything burn?” Lathe joked, looking to the timer on the oven. …twenty minutes. Lathe turned to Levi again, looking around a minute. “…is Eren back up from the barn yet?” He didn't have much left to do… if he's caught up in a crazy person conversation I swear...

“Um… No, he hasn’t... I didn’t hear the door open, nor the dogs come in.” Is he still in the barn? Levi closed the fridge he had been inspecting, turning his head to Lathe. What if he…?...

Lathe paused for an instant before walking to the back door at a decent clip, Levi at his heels as they marched to the barn. What is it now. Lathe looked with wide eyes at the scene they came upon, Eren passed out on the floor of the barn, Charlie without his tack, still tethered to the posts in the centre of the room and sniffing at Eren’s head. “What happened?” Lathe rushed up to Eren, dropping to his knees and immediately feeling for a pulse. “…he’s alive- did he get knocked out? I don't see any bruising or marks on his head… ...he hasn't slept in a week… exhaustion, maybe.” ...that seems plausible. “He’s not crazy, he's just been sleep deprived.” Lathe looked over his shoulder to a worried Levi. “Levi, get down here and retrieve your boyfriend so we can get back into the house. I'll get Charlie in his stall.” You do that. ...and I'll wait so he doesn't get stepped on.

Levi nodded, carefully leaning down and picking Eren up gently, as if Eren weighed only a few pounds. “Okay… Um… What do I tell Spades if she asks?” I kinda don’t wanna lie… But this is kinda suspicious...

...the truth. “Tell her Eren hasn't slept all week- he's been faking it all week, and he passed out
from exhaustion in the barn. He’ll probably be sleeping all day tomorrow.” Lathe led Charlie into his stall, closing the door and following Levi, shutting the barn door. It'd be no use lying. Also it'd be a dead giveaway if and when he slept through till dinner tomorrow.

Levi nodded, taking Eren carefully up the stairs to the house and following Lathe inside the open door. “Well, maybe I’ll get to sleep with him tonight.” Though that might be stretching it a bit.

Eren had done just that, and slept right through the next day and up until Thanksgiving evening. A fresh blanket of snow had covered the ground around the property, all the way up to Eren’s knees, which would’ve made it impossible to drive unless one had a truck. Hmm… My body’s sore… My neck feels weird. It took a few moments before Eren realized that a familiar warmth swaddled him. What the hell!? Don’t tell me that I… That I was….? Where the fuck am I? Eren only calmed down when he turned his head to the side, seeing the barrenness of his room and sighing quietly. Oh… I'm home...

The downstairs was loud with many voices talking and laughing, Lathe fretting in the kitchen with Armin enlisted to help him. Let’s see, we have our squad, we have a large herd of teenagers that I refuse to call adults because they most certainly are not, a shit ton of food set out on the table… we’re missing the most important thing. “Armin, I’m going to run upstairs and wake up Eren, okay? Just don't let that soup boil over and we'll be okay- everything else is pretty much taken care of. Only because the turkey is not our job. Lathe left upstairs, having to wade through a crowd of people and going to Eren’s room, knocking lightly on the doorframe and peeking in. “Hey Eren-oh, you're awake!” Lathe’s voice was soft as he looked in, stepping in and watching Eren, who had sat up in bed, looking around confused as all hell. “You passed out in the barn last night, slept until now. We’re just about to have Thanksgiving dinner.” Lathe held out a hand, cheekily smiling. “Care to join us?” It’s food. You're coming downstairs.

Eren stared at Lathe in confusion for a few silent minutes before he slowly flopped back down into his bed and pulled the covers up to go back to sleep. My body… It feels like it can sleep forever...

“Oh no you don’t.” Lathe padded forward, tugging back the quilt from where it hid his head. “Eren, all of your squad is here and my squad is here and there's a ton of food downstairs… come on, don't leave the spot next to Levi empty…” Lathe tugged on his sleeve. “Pleeeeeeeeesease?” Lathe gave him the puppy-dog eyes, pleading with him. …. pretty please? With sugar on top?

“But I’m tired….. And I’m not hungry…..” Eren muttered, closing his eyes and weakly trying to pull the blankets up from where they were. His whole body was weak from sleeping for so long,
it’d be impossible to probably walk downstairs himself or even get dressed. *Fuck... I feel so weak....*

Lathe sighed. “They brought Tove and all of her puppies.” *Her puppies are all on the now-dry puppy bed with the cardboard, and they’re just the cutest damn things.... they’re so teeny...*

Eren picked up his head curiously. *Puppies?? I guess I can get up for puppies...* He slowly rose from his spot on the bed, stretching out with a whimper and whine. “I’m sore....” Eren swung his legs over the edge of the bed, slowly getting up on shaky limbs. He walked over to the banister, stripping out of his clothes and changing into some new clothes. *I wonder if I’ll get to pet the puppies?* Eren didn’t notice Lathe leave from his room until he had turned around fully dressed. He shrugged it off, moving to make his way slowly down the stairs. What he didn’t expect was the amount of people that were being herded towards the large table. *What the fuck? There are so many fucking people here.... What the actual fuck?* Eren was silent as he made his way to the front room where Tove laid with her puppies nuzzled against her, all of them except for the runt of the litter who was swaddled in cloth to keep warm. *Are you gonna eat too little buddy?* Eren picked him up gently, cradling in his arms, using a gentle finger to pet his soft fur. He didn’t notice anyone coming up behind him, not even taking in the fact that people were trying to call for him. He was in his own little world. That was until a hand came around him to give him a hug, all eyes watching as Eren immediately panicked. *No! It can’t happen again! It can’t happen again!!!* Eren’s jaw closed right around the hand trying to go around him, instantly locking it in place. *It can’t happen ever again!* He didn’t hear anything around him until the person behind him let out a horrifying scream. *Jean let out a humiliating scream as Eren’s teeth closed around his hand. “EREN!! WHAT THE FUCK!? LET GO!!!”* He tried to pry his hand from Eren’s mouth, only to realize it was locked in place and Eren was biting him even harder, still holding onto the pup gently in his arms. *It hurts! HOLY FUCK!!! “SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING!!! IT HURTS!!!”* Jean was reduced to tears in a matter of seconds as blood started to spill from under Eren’s pearly whites.

Jean let out a humiliating scream as Eren’s teeth closed around his hand. “EREN!! WHAT THE FUCK!? LET GO!!!” He tried to pry his hand from Eren’s mouth, only to realize it was locked in place and Eren was biting him even harder, still holding onto the pup gently in his arms. *It hurts! HOLY FUCK!!! “SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING!!! IT HURTS!!!”* Jean was reduced to tears in a matter of seconds as blood started to spill from under Eren’s pearly whites.

Lathe was still for a moment, hiding his laugh behind his hands. *...you deserve that.* Soon enough he was moving, going to his medic bag and bringing it over, letting Eren keep holding the pup as he saw how gently he still held him. He murmured to Eren soothingly as he rifled for a moment in his bag, soon enough producing a metal box and opening it, preparing a relaxer as he tried to calm Eren down, Blake having leapt to his hind legs and resting his paws on Eren’s chest and side, wary of the pup. “Eren, hey, it’s okay, it’s just Jean, and I know he’s a scary asshole sometimes, but he’s trying to be nice so just calm down and let go.” Lathe looked up in surprise as Jean screamed bloody murder, Eren chomping down harder in his hand the instant the words left his mouth. *...oh fuck, forgot saying that has that effect.... “Okay Eren, here we go, just breathe...”* Lathe administered the relaxer to Eren’s jaw, stowing his things away as Eren’s jaw began to relax, Jean pulling his hand from his mouth and holding his wrist, staring at his bloody hand in horror and shock. Lathe just looked at him, handing Eren his kerchief to stop any drool and bringing Jean over to the sink. *“Come on, let’s wash out your hand.”* He turned on the water and washed out his hand, rolling his eyes as Jean made a sound of pain as he used the soap. *Come on, it’s not that bad... it’s worse than Levi’s, but not that bad.* “Alright Jean, couch. I need to give you your rabies shot.”
Lathe started to herd him in the direction of the couch.

Jean was struggling to hold in cries as Lathe wrapped his hand with gauze. “I-I’m sorry… W-What did you just say?” Rabies shot?!? That fucktard has fucking rabies?? “No! No shots!” Jean immediately tried to pull his arm away from Lathe. I will not be getting shots!!

“Well, Eren does spend a lot of time in that barn… Casper, Scotty!” In two seconds flat Casper had Jean’s arms, and Scotty had his legs, lifting him and carrying him to the couch, ignoring his kicking and girly screaming. Payback’s a bitch, bitch. “We’re doing this because we care, Jean. He broke skin. Better we do it rather than not.” Lathe rifled in the same metal case, preparing the shot as he knelt next to the couch, Scotty and Casper effectively pinning him to the couch. He quieted an eyebrow as Jean tried to arch up off the couch, pulling up his shirt just above his navel and holding down his stomach with his left arm effectively, looking to Jean. “…and remember you’re gonna have to do this once a month for the next six months. Ready?” Lathe didn't give him a chance to reply before sticking the long needle into his stomach, keeping Jean firmly pinned as he administered the shot. ...this is really gonna hurt.

Jean’s screams could’ve curdled milk. That two-toned asshole was writhing in pain as the needle entered his abdomen. “LATHE YOU MOTHERFUCKER!!!” His body struggled ineffectively against Casper and Scotty, not noticing Connie and Sasha had gotten cameras out.

Eren watched quietly, blood still running down his cheeks, looking almost like a vampire. “Yes… Yes he is.” Eren looked down to the puppy, gently petting him. I hope that asshole didn’t hurt you.

Lathe flushed completely at Eren’s comment, embarrassed. “...shut up.” Murrr…. I’m getting you revenge, at least don’t work against me! Lathe soon drew the needle out, putting a small pink princess bandage over it just to rub it in. “Okay Jean, you can stop screaming like a girl, we’re done for now.” Lathe looked up to everyone in the room, seeing all of them laughing at their antics. “Casper, Scotty, you can let him go. And Eren, you need to wash off your face. You’ve kinda got something everywhere.” ...I don't think we want to stare at that while we're eating.

Eren simply nodded before disappearing with the pup in his arms silently. Everyone was again herded from the living room to the dining room and sat down before Eren returned with the pup and a syringe full of milk for the pup to help it feed. I’m not hungry anyways little guy...

Lathe moved up and down the table getting everybody drinks with Armin and Levi’s help, soon enough sitting down and just taking in how many people were at the table. “...there’s a lot of you.” ...I’m doing this every year. “Alright, before we eat- Jean I’m looking at you, put the fork down.” Lathe pointed to him and waited until he begrudgingly set it down, returning to addressing the
table. “How about we all go around and say something we’re thankful for?” A general murmur of assent was heard around the table, Lathe smiling. “Alright, I'll start us off then. I'm thankful for my family.” He nudged Spades’ foot under the table. “-all of my friends, and the fact we get to live the way we do.”...we really do have it made... Lathe glanced between Spades on his left and Scotty at his right. “Which of you wants to go next?” Which of you is braver?

Spades blushed a smile crossing her face. “I’m thankful for my husband, and all the wonderful food around us.” She looked over to Marc. I'm glad you guys could make it...

“I’m thankful for Eren being out of the hospital” Marc’s voice was soft and kind as he looked down to the distracted boy.

Larry nodded, looking down to Eren. “I’m thankful for Eren’s quick recovery.”

Erwin smiled softly. “I’m thankful for a safe return.”

Armin was up next. “I’m thankful we could get everyone together again.”

Sasha and Connie both nodded to each other before speaking in unison. “We’re thankful for this glorious meal.”

Eren was completely silent, still helping the pup eat with the small syringe, having tuned everything out.

Lathe smirked, looking down the table to him. “You gonna participate down there?” Lathe watched as the pup moved its head away from the syringe for a moment, making a tiny, adorable sound. “...close enough.” That was way too cute. And Eren's in his own world right now- I guess that's okay. He can do his thing.

Levi looked down a bit, his voice even but quiet. “...I'm thankful that everything’s starting to be okay again.”

Jean glanced up to Lathe, looking down quickly as he met his eyes. “...I'm thankful you're giving me another chance...”...you're still awful, though.
Marco slightly nodded approvingly, blushing as he fiddled with his fingers. “I’m thankful to be right here, where I am.” Next to you... Because I haven’t seen you in over a year.

Sharon smiled faintly, looking over to Hannah shyly. “...I'm thankful that our kid couldn't have a better mother...” I’m glad it’s you.

Hannah was quiet for a moment, her eyes slightly downcast. She’s talking about herself isn’t she? Hannah tried to think of something, her expression less happy, though any words she tried to use caught in her throats as she was nudged in the side, looking over to Sharon, who gave her an inquiring look.

Sharon tilted her head a bit, her cheeks dusted pink as she spoke, still lid enough for the whole table to hear. “You do know I'm talking about you, right?” She chuckled quietly as Hannah looked away and flushed red, leaning over to peck her cheek. “You're next, Hon.” You're gonna be an amazing mom. I just know it.

Hannah smiled faintly and soon shook her head, clearing her thoughts to try and come up with something. “Sorry, my brain is fried... Like that turkey, anyways I’m thankful for finding a place to board Luna reasonably and that my son will be born soon.” I can’t wait to see Maverick... He’s gonna be fucking adorable.

Brooke grinned, looking around to the group of people on her right. “...I'm thankful that I get to see all of you guys again in one place.” ...We need to get the entire group together again sometime...

Casper nudged Scotty, grinning. “I'm thankful that this one here will actually put up with me and my antics.” ... seriously. You deserve an award.

Scotty blushed faintly, nudging him back. “...I'm thankful that this one here will put up with my being a completely oblivious blockhead sometimes.” He watched as Casper just gave him a look, blushing and looking away. “...okay, a lot of times.” ...yeah... but thank you.

Lathe nodded approvingly, grinning. “Alright- everyone, you have proven that you possess the Thanksgiving spirit. Dig in!”

Eren didn't reach for any food, his plate totally empty as he focused on the pup in his hands. That’s it.... You're eating it! I wonder what color your eyes are gonna be when you open them...
Blake, Rico, and Spencer all sat behind Jean’s seat as if waiting for him to drop something, knowing he would be a slob when eating. *Dumb human will drop food.* Spencer moved to squeeze himself under the table as Jean in fact dropped some of his turkey. *Called it!* Spencer sat there, waiting for more food as Blake and Rico stared him down.

Your kin fits under the table…. Yet we’re too big to fit, this is completely unfair… And shouldn’t you be with your mate? She’s with her pups isn’t she? Blake carefully nudged at Rico, standing and trotting off towards Eren, getting up on his hind legs to see what Eren was holding. *He’s small… Much smaller than the rest of their kin…*

Eren didn’t really look up at the table, helping to finish feeding the pup in his hands. *He’s so small… I hope he’ll be okay… he’s not even half the size of the other pups.* Eren’s brow furrowed as he got up from the table, having not even touched his plate as he walked by everyone. *You’re done eating… you probably wanna be put down… and you’re awfully quiet.*

Lathe stood, trying to catch Eren’s attention. “Eren, you haven’t eaten anything- do you want me to maybe cut up some strawberries for you or something?” Lathe was surprised as Eren didn't even acknowledge he existed, walking right past him. …*well then.* “Love you too, Eren!” Lathe spoke with mock indignance, jokingly scoffing and grinning. …*eh, if he’s hungry he can raid the fridge.* He sat back down, still working on his plate.

Eren seemingly disappeared into the house, the pup gently put by Tove’s side, the other pups huddled close to each other. Blake followed Eren back up to his room to go and hide away from the loud people at the dinner table.

Jean sighed quietly as Marco forced him to help bring plates in once everyone was done with their dinner. “Marco why??”

Marco looked at him, an eyebrow quirked. “Why what?” …*what’d I do?*

“Why did you make me come here… I mean I know food… but Eren’s Dad is a bit sadistic towards me.” *I would like to leave with all limbs attached… including my balls.*

…*well, I can understand kinda where Mr. Quo is coming from… “I made you come because*
everyone else was coming. I thought you’d like to see everyone again- it’s been more than a year since we all got together, after all.” ...and I kinda wanted to see you again...

“Well, that’s to be expected, you guys are all in college. You left to go 5 hours away for God’s sake! Don’t blame me you guys didn’t go to the same college.” Do not put the blame on me... I did nothing... literally... I like where I work at the moment. Jean held the plates, carefully setting them in the large sink.

“I'm not blaming you.” Marco similarly set his stack of plates in the sink, moving the silverware in a pile next to them. “I'm just saying... I wanted to see you, and everyone again...” I'd have been happier if the college where I fit in the best was a bit closer... It's been a really long time since I've seen anybody... or you...

Jean snickered a bit. “You? Wanted to see me? Yeah right... you just wanted to see Lathe beat my ass because I tried to be nice for fucking once.” Jean started up the sink after a few minutes of pondering how the hell the thing worked. What the hell is this thing? How the fuck does it..... Oh.... that’s how it works.

Marco’s expression seemed to falter a little, feeling his cheeks burn in embarrassment. “I-I certainly didn't... just as a note, if Levi and Eren are barely on hugging terms themselves, I can understand Eren’s surprised reaction to you... even though it was pretty extreme.” Marco tried to hide his burning cheeks, taking a plate from Jean to rinse and set in the drying rack. “...and is it a crime to want to see you?” ......I'm awful at this.....

“Well... You don’t text or call me, it was kinda unexpected... But thanks, you saved me from buying a plane ticket to God knows where for the big gathering...” Jean shook his head, sighing as he gave Marco another plate. I honestly didn't want to see them... It’s been rough without Annie...

...I'm allowed to do that? “I need to fix that, then.” Marco’s voice was quiet, accepting the plate. “I thought you'd want to just eat dinner and chill, and that's guaranteed here...” I know things have been kinda tough for you in that department... He shrugged a bit. “...I thought you'd need it.” You don't have to act proper here- I know that can get tiring quickly, for you at least... for lots of people.

Jean nodded. “Yeah, it’s a good distraction.... When were you thinking of leaving?” We came in your truck, so I don’t want you to think I want to stay just ‘cause... “I don’t mind if we leave early.” I’ve been given a fucking shot... And I already got bitten by the fuckwad.

I don't want to leave too soon... that means you have to go too soon...“I know things haven't gone
amazingly for you so far, but don't be so eager to get going… we’ll stay awhile, and if things fall flat we can leave. But if we stay long, I was thinking nine or something like that, since it's seven right now… but I suppose it depends… I want to spend time with you and everyone while we’re all here in one place.” ...we're all so far apart, and have fallen way out of touch... we need to start a group chat or something...

Jean nodded. “As long as Short Stack and Captain America don’t beat the shit out of me before I leave I think I’ll be okay…” Jean sighed as he gave Marco the last plate. I guess it'll be okay to catch up...

Marco nodded, smiling a bit. “Don’t worry, I’ll fend them off- just don't hunt for Eren and you'll be okay.” Yeah, no. Marco set the last dish in the rack, about to go with Jean into the living room when Casper passed the two of them, a mischievous grin on his face. ... purple hair, evil grin, he brought alcohol... oh no.

“Who wants a drink?” Casper called into the next room, opening the liquor cabinet with a small gold key. Lathe is waaaay too easy to pickpocket. He set a couple bottles on the counter, going to fetch glasses as well from a cupboard. He glanced over to the two of them, quirking an eyebrow to Jean as the two-tone looked to the bottles, seeming to think hard. “What’s up? You old enough?”

Jean nodded, coming up to look at the bottles. “Hmm… I’ll take a Jack on the rocks with a shot of Fireball.” That’ll help me calm down, that’ll be loaded with alcohol.

Casper’s eyebrows shot up. “O-Kay, I'm taking that as a yes.” You don't sound like this is your first drink. Casper poured what he wanted into a whiskey glass, getting crushed ice from the fridge and handing him the drink. “Just don't gulp it, that shit is strong.”

Jean gave him a strange look as he lifted the glass to his lips and drank half the glass in one go, letting out a deep sigh. That's better, it helps to unwind, fuck your purple hair and not gulping it… It's the only fucking way to drink it…

Casper just stared at him, his expression going from incredulous to simply done, turning to Marco. “I hope you're gonna be able to handle this one when he’s drunk.” He looked back to Jean. “Just try not to get too drunk too fast- if you're the only one drunk it’s just gonna be awkward. Wait an hour, then go nuts.” He shrugged to Marco. “I'm no babysitter, kid. Just the barkeep, apparently.” He looked up as Scotty, Brooke and Marc meandered over.

...I didn't know you drink. That's some serious stuff he just gave you. “...Just come on.” Marco tugged on Jean’s arm, trying to herd him into the living room towards the others, half the couches
taken over with Lathe and Spades’ group, the other half with Levi and Eren’s. He sat down next to Armin, very conscious of Jean sitting down next to him as he listened to a heated debate between Sasha and Connie. He looked up as Lathe went over to Sharon, guiding her to stand and move to the piano. She had a nervous expression, seeming to stutter as she talked to him. …? What’s happening?

“N-No Lathe, really, I’m not that good, and there are a ton of people…. I-I dunno…” Sharon sat down at the bench nevertheless as Lathe guided her, staring at the keys. ...Uhm...

Lathe smiled reassuringly. “Come on, you sounded so excited when you were telling me about it- go ahead. Please?” It'll be really cool.

Sharon seemed jittery as she nodded, looking to the keys. She shuffled a bit, her hands resting on the ivory and ebony and letting out a deep breath as the room fell quiet behind her. She stilled, her nerves seeming to disappear as she began, playing a smooth melody that seemed to pick up as she went, traveling up the keyboard and taking a deep breath as she hit a higher note, starting to sing with a smile.

I'm the star tar of the navy
I'm the hit Miss of the sea
When the ocean's getting wavy
Leave those handsome sailors to me
I'm the swellswab on the poop deck
I'm the ship-shape shipmate in the hold
I'm the star tar
I'm the tar star
Of the navy blue and gold- Heave Ho!

I'm the top gob in the crow's nest
I'm the big bell sailors love to ring
In the foc'sle I get no rest
In the captain's cabin I'm the thing
I'm the sweet salt of the mess hall
I'm the true blue jacket to behold
I'm the star tar
I'm the tar star
Of the na~vy blue~ and~ go~ld.

She's the star tar of the navy
She's the hit Miss of the sea
When the ocean's getting wavy
What a prudent sailor that she'll be!
She's the swellswab on the poop deck
She's the ship-shape shipmate in the hold
She's the star tar
She's the tar star
Of the navy blue and gold- Heave Ho!

She's the top gob in the crow's nest
She's the big bell sailors love to ring
In the foc'sle she gets no rest
In the captain's cabin she's the thing
She's the sweet salt of the mess hall
She's the true blue jacket to behold
She's the star tar
She's the tar star
Of the navy blue and gold!

I'm the star tar
I'm the tar star
Of the na~vy blue~ and~ go~~~ld!

Hannah picked her head up as she heard Sharon singing. She’s beautiful…. I can’t believe she’s mine… But what happens if…. I don’t even want to think about what I’d do… Hannah got up and moved to stand by the wall looking at her with warm eyes. God I love you. She looked around after Sharon had finished, seeing multiple adults with drinks. God dammit, I can’t have any… Fuck… Hannah smiled anyways. “You sang beautifully.” Much better than I ever could...

Sharon blushed, her head dropping down a bit. “Thanks… I've been obsessed with that song for forever…” She turned a bit on the piano bench, seeing many adults with drinks in hand, turning to Hannah. “Hon, you're driving three people home. And since one of them is me make it four.” She placed a hand over her stomach, smiling sheepishly. “I'm sorry- but it’s just the one night. You'll live.” She just looked to Hannah as she gave her a look, reaching a hand out for here. “Come here a sec.” She waited for Hannah to get close before gently tugging her down to peck her cheek. “Love you, Hon.” I just wanna get home in one piece.

Hannah blushed, nodding. “I know, I love you too.” I really do. She help moved Sharon back to the couch, starting to talk with Marc about Tattoos. I gotta finish up the tattoo on my arm, it’s not done yet… But I don’t think anyone here has seen it yet.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Marco covered his mouth, trying to hold back laughter as Levi read each of the cards completely deadpan. The group had located Cards Against Humanity on a shelf in the room near the TV, and had talked him and Armin into playing. ...this is awful… and great at the same time... Marco turned from Levi and Erwin roasting each other to Jean as he suddenly leaned on his shoulder with his hand of cards, his newly empty glass in the other. ...isn't that like... your sixth glass? “Uhm, Jean… are you okay?”
Jean barely moved, his speech slurred as he set the heavy glass down. “Y-yesh… I’m perfectly oka…ie…” He moved his head into Marco’s neck. “Hmm… you’re purty….” Holy fuck… you’re hot… and I didn’t notice for four years on the football team.

Marco froze, a shiver running through him as he felt Jean’s breath on his neck. ... he's drunk… he... he can't mean it... “…not as much as someone else I know…” ...okay, you're pretty hot, I'm just going to put it out there right now. Marco didn't know what to do with himself, not moving away but unsure if he shouldn't move at all. What do I do someone help

Jean chuckled as Levi repeated the winner of the round, picking his head up a little faster than he intended, almost crashing it against the table. “M-mine… card…” Jean moved the cards to his other hand, his now free hand moving to grip Marco’s thigh to steady himself, his fingers dangerously close to Marco’s crotch.

Marco flushed as Jean’s hand gripped his thigh for balance, trying to hide his red face and willing himself to stay cool. Nope don’t do it don’t you dare... Marco took a breath to calm himself, his arm moving to Jean’s side to pull him back a bit from where he swayed over the table, keeping him more or less steady as he reached to get his card from Levi for him and put it on his pile. “Careful, you're going to hit the table if you don't watch it…”

Jean shook his head, rendering him incapacitated for a few moments. “I’m fin…” Jean somehow managed to pick up a black card, chuckling to himself as he read the card. “Vhat... do... As-e-ans h-ave? hehehehe…”

...huh? “Here-” Marco leaned over a bit, his arm still around Jean as he read the card. “Only Asian people have......” hmm... He rifled through his cards, hearing everyone else shuffling through theirs. What to use... Uhm, this word sounds Asian... Marco collected everyone else’s white cards from them, handing them and his card to Jean. This is gonna be good...

Jean could barely get through a majority of the cards, finally getting to the last one. “Vha’s wired ten-ankles hen-tie?” His brows furrowed in confusion as he read it. What the fuck is that.

Levi quirked an eyebrow. ...did he just...? He reached across the table and plucked the card out of Jean’s hand, reading it to the table. “Weird tentacle hentai.”

Jean looked at him in confusion before finally figuring out what the hell he was talking about. “OOOOoooooooo..... Hat one.... Def... hat one…” Jean moved closer to Marco, leaning into his chest. Hmmm.... I like that... I wanna watch some... I wanna go home... I haven’t since Annie.... Fuck... Jean had tears prickling in his eyes in a matter of seconds.
Marco let Jean lean into him, flushing red as his hand slipped to his crotch, forcing down the jolt that ran through him, chuckling nervously. “Uhm, o-okay, that’s me…” He took the black card, about to get a new one when he noticed Jean’s eyes becoming glassy. “J-Jean, you sure you’re okay?” ...I’m kinda not... well, if there weren’t as many witnesses... and if you were more sober than not...

Jean shook his head. “I vanna go hum…” I wanna go home... I wanna cry in peace. Jean got up rather quickly, stumbling out of his seat and going towards the door. I wanna go home... I’ll walk...

Marco immediately set down his cards, quickly apologizing to the group as he went to catch Jean from stumbling, slinging one of his arms over his shoulders. He turned to the group. “I’m gonna take him home- Connie can go for me.” He looked around, seeing Lathe amble up to them. “I’m going to take Jean home Mr. Quo. Thank you for having us, really. It was a great dinner.” He smiled to him. I enjoyed this...

Lathe smiled, nodding. “I’m glad you had a good time. Drive safe, okay?” He nodded to Jean. “And take good care of this one, okay?” ...he’s kinda in shambles. Lathe opened the door for him, waving goodbye as Marco led Jean to the car, locking it behind them.

Marco nodded, helping Jean as he struggled into his shoes and leading him to the car, getting him in the passenger’s seat before getting in the driver’s seat, buckling the both of them and starting the drive to Jean’s house. ...what do I do? He’s crying... I don’t know what about, or what to say... help. Someone. Anyone.

Jean just quietly started to cry, his eyes quickly getting blotchy. I miss her.... She didn’t even tell me she was leaving... she just... left... He leaned his head against the cold glass next to him, closing his eyes, trying to stop the sting of tears. “Mmmm..... Cold....”

The ride was rather short, Jean not that far away from Marco. ...I don’t know what to say... Marco pondered quietly for a long time, soon finding himself parked in front of an apartment complex, shutting off the car and looking to Jean. ...you’re not gonna be able to make it up the stairs... or in the elevator... or out that door... Marco got out of the car, opening Jean’s door and helping heave him to his feet. “Come on, let’s get you inside. What’s your apartment number?” I dunno which one is yours...

Jean started to laugh, stumbling along with him. “Hahaha... 420... blaez it... “
Marco rolled his eyes, walking to the front lobby and stopping as he saw he needed his key card to even get in. “Jean, where's the keycard?” He looked to Jean, who could only laugh while mumbling about 420. ...whatever. Marco kept his left arm around him to prop him up, his right rummaging through his jacket pockets, and then his jeans pocket, pulling out his wallet and inspecting it, soon producing a keycard. He stuffed it back into Jean’s pocket, swiping the card and somehow managing to prop open the door and half-carry Jean inside. He nodded to the bored and tired man at the front desk, getting Jean to an elevator and hitting the button for the fourth floor. It wasn't a minute until he was swiping the card to get into Jean’s room, shutting the door behind him which automatically locked and going to dump Jean on his bed. He stopped as he heard Jean start to sob. “Jean, hey, it’s okay…” Marco knelt down at the edge of the bed, looking to Jean worriedly. “What's wrong?” Talk to me.

“She… s-she… Just lef….” She didn’t tell me anything. Jean started to sob even more. I haven’t told my mom yet... And I don’t know what to tell her because Annie’s not here anymore… “she doons anver me….”

Annie... “Jean, I… I’m really sorry about that… I’m sorry…” Marco’s hand hovered unsure for a moment, soon resting to card through Jean’s hair. She just up and left... no goodbyes, no explanation, nothing. ...we don't know anything about where she is, what she's doing... anything... You took it so hard... obviously, the pain hasn't gone away...

Jean looked over to Marco as he started to comb through his hair with his fingers. “Stay?” Jean’s eyes looked so pained as he looked to Marco. I don’t want anyone else to leave me….

“Okay.” Marco’s mouth spoke for him before he could think about it, standing up and kicking off his shoes. I've got nowhere to be... He left his jacket on the floor, quickly folded on his shoes before tugging at the blanket, getting it out from under Jean and slipping in with him. He didn't know what to do then, suddenly feeling overcome by nerves.

Jean sniffled as Marco came into the bed with him. “...hanks...” He started to calm down, snuggling into Marco’s side. Warm...

Levi stayed downstairs as the crowd dwindled, only adults left by ten. He waited until Hannah had left holding up Scotty and Casper, Sharon right behind them, before heading upstairs, yawning. That was fun... we all need to stay in touch better... Levi walked to Eren’s room, peeking in and seeing him curled up to himself on the bed. He quietly walked in and shut the door, padding over to the dresser and changing into a tank top and sweatpants, trying not to seem threatening at all. ...I just want pajamas, no panicking please... He soon turned and climbed into bed, pulling up the blanket and shuffling over to where Eren laid, resting a gentle hand on his arm. “...is it okay if I
Eren opened his eyes, hearing Levi’s soft voice before he turned his head to look at him. He nodded, moving to roll over, his long sleeves pulled up a little showing off a few fresh marks he had made on his skin. You can hold me… I feel normal now… For some reason… Cutting made a big difference… My head’s a lot clearer now.

Levi saw the cuts, his eyes widening. “E-Eren, you… you cut. …you promised you…” You’d give it a chance… Levi bit the inside of his cheek, his expression dark. We thought you were making progress…

Eren pulled his sleeves up to show him just how far up his arm he had in fact cut. “I needed to clear my head, I feel a lot better.” I really do, my head is fucking clear as day right now. He moved to curl up to Levi, putting his head on his chest. I want you to hold me.

...I need to tell Lathe... Levi instantly relaxed as Eren curled up to him, one arm snaking around him to hold him close. ...if you heal by morning I won't remember... and Lathe needs to know now... but I don't wanna leave... Levi reached blindly for his phone on the nightstand, Eren seeming to pass out after barely a minute. He snapped a picture of Eren’s arm, showing the extent to which he cut.

LA: *picture of Eren’s arms*

LA: Lathe… it happened again

LQ: …….well fuck

LQ: tomorrow we're starting him on antidepressants.

LQ: whether he knows or wants it or not.

LQ: we can’t let this happen.

LQ: ...that's what he's been doing while he was hiding upstairs from the party, wasn't it… all this time

LQ: I'm so fucking dumb thank you for telling me

LA: There are so many faint scars... they're from him rapidly healing... the new ones won't even take an hour to close...

LA: And that would be for the best...

LA: I'll see you and Spades in the morning
Levi tossed his phone back on the nightstand, his other arm going to pull Eren more fully on top of him, grateful for the grounding weight. I...I get to hold you again... thank god....

Eren slept the whole night, their bed becoming Blake and Maisie’s resting place as well for the night. His eyes cracked open at around 9, looking down, feeling an odd warmth. He almost freaked out as he saw Levi underneath him. Calm down.... It’s just Levi... It’s just Levi... I need to calm down. He looked around to both dogs and smiled softly. Good... They’re not talking to me anymore... Yay! I’m not fucking crazy!

Levi woke as he felt Eren shift on top of him, smiling faintly as he saw Eren with adorably ruffled hair. “G’morning.” Levi leaned up a bit as if to peck his forehead, though he caught himself and stopped, his eyes widening and leaning back a bit, quietly apologizing. “I’m sorry Eren, I just forgot for a second, I’ll step off...” Levi looked a bit defeated as he spoke, his head dropping back against the pillows. ...I miss being able to do that...

Eren looked down to Levi, his voice quiet and a little hoarse. “Um… It’s o-okay.” He watched Levi’s every movement though, making sure he wasn’t about to try anything else with him. I like you holding me... But... You might do something...

Levi held Eren close to his chest, leaning on one of his arms as he shifted them to sit upright, Eren facing him in his lap. He stepped from the bed, carrying Eren with him. “Breakfast?” There are tons of leftovers downstairs.

Eren shook his head. “I’m not really that hungry… But we can go downstairs...” Eren clung to Levi as the two of them made their way downstairs. Is the puppy here still? Or did they leave?

Levi carefully picked down the stairs, bringing Eren into the kitchen and setting him on a stool at the island, going to open the fridge. He soon filled a plate with dark meat and gravy, as well as a smaller plate. He heated them in the microwave, setting the small one in front of Eren with a fork. “Before you say anything- You haven't eaten anything in more than 36 hours. I can understand that at this point it's hard to tell if you're really hungry or not. Just please. Try.” You're already so skinny...

Eren looked up to him with soft eyes before nodding reluctantly. He made it look like he was picking at his plate, but really all he was doing was moving the food around. He kept his head
down, and made sure that his sleeves were rolled down as well. *I wanna go cut.... My head’s getting fuzzy again.*

Levi gently nudged Eren’s foot, having watched him closely. “Eren, you actually have to lift food into your mouth in order to eat.” ... *that’s how it works.* “I know you don’t want to, but please. I didn’t give you much.”

Eren’s eyes blazed in anger for a bread second, calming down after he grumbled, picking up his fork and biting into the turkey, keeping his face turned away from Levi. *Stupid ass… I’m not fucking hungry, if I throw up later it’s your fault!*

Lathe had just padded down the stairs, fetching a bottle from his medical bag and looking up before he drew it out, seeing the cloud of fury hanging over Eren’s head. ... *fuck. This isn’t gonna be easy.* Lathe took two pills from the bottle, getting a glass of water and setting both in front of Eren. “Eren, Hon, can you please take these? They’ll make you feel better.” ... *please don't hit me...*

Eren shook his head. “You said I could have a week off the pills… I’m not taking them.” His voice was hard as he moved to push his plate forward, leaving it practically untouched. *I’m not taking those damn pills.*

*So that's how we're gonna do this.* Lathe’s face became stony, his tone even. “Eren, remember what else I told you about taking a week off? If you started doing horribly I’d start you back up again. You haven’t eaten in more than 36 hours and refuse any food, you’ve cut yourself, and excuse me, but you’re irrationally furious. I’m cutting it short, but this is all you’re going to be taking for the moment. Now please, do yourself a favor and take them.” *I’m not going to let you get out of this.*

Eren immediately shook his head, moving to hop off of the stool, turning to go back upstairs to get warmer clothes on. *I’m gonna go outside with Charlie. Fuck you all.*

Lathe caught Eren by the arm, his hold firm, not even budging a centimeter as Eren fought to break free. “I think...” Lathe’s eyes hardened as he looked to Eren. “-that you should listen.”

Eren froze the instant he heard Lathe’s tone. *Fuck.... I can’t move... I can’t move... Why can’t I move...? I can’t move...* Eren’s eyes were wide, frozen in place, too afraid to turn around to see Lathe.
Lathe tugged Eren backwards in front of the glass and pills, hyper aware of Eren’s terror. His voice was much softer as he spoke, picking up the pills and holding them out to Eren. “Come on- it's okay. I'm sorry…” Eren didn't move, so Lathe turned Eren to him, sitting him on a stool. “Eren, I'm sorry… please, work with me…” Lathe sighed as Eren stared blankly ahead, opening Eren’s jaw without much resistance and dropping in the pills, getting the water glass and putting it to Eren’s lips, thankful that Eren swallowed down the whole thing. He set down the glass and pulled Eren into a hug, gentle as he nestled into Eren’s shoulder for a moment, murmuring as he carded a hand through Eren’s hair. “I'm sorry for scaring you like that, Eren. I'm just worried and wanted you to get better… please don't be scared of me, I got carried away a bit and frustrated… I love you…” I'm really sorry for being scary... He pulled back a bit, his hold still very light on Eren, his expression worried. ...you can smack me now if you want...

Eren just stared at Lathe with wide eyes. No….it's gonna happen again. Eren barely thought about it, bolting from Lathe’s grip as soon as it loosened and running away from the both of them.

...well then, scary Lathe mode activated. Levi looked at Lathe, fixing him with a glare. “Wooooow, good job you asshat, now he’s more scared of you than he is of me.” That's an accomplishment. But shit got very real very fast.

Lathe let Eren run off, running a hand through his hair. “...I... I got mad… fuck...” Lathe buried his face in his hands, trying to think. “I got frustrated and I've been trying really hard for everything to work out and then he hasn't been eating and he cut and he was furious and didn't listen and… I got mad… fuck...” ...I don't think he's ever seen me mad... I'm never mad... but I know I get scary as hell... fuck...

Eren came running down the stairs a few minutes later, freezing in his spot as he saw Lathe in the kitchen. Fuck.... I can't move... I can't move.

Lathe put his hands up as he looked up to see Eren, shrinking and looking meek as he stepped to the front, giving Eren a good dozen feet at least as he moved. “I'll get out of your way, you can go to the backyard, I know you're gonna want to ride Charlie or take care of everyone... I won't bug you... Eren, I'm really sorry... I really do love you...” I don't hate you... I promise...

Eren looked down and nodded before going off, mumbling an apology. He made it outside, going off to the barn and getting Charlie saddled and brought the camouflage things out. I saw deer outside...

Lathe sighed, going to the fridge to make breakfast. He had just gotten a glass for juice, dropping it and letting it shatter as he heard a gunshot from outside, frozen. ... how did he get the gun.
Chapter 47: Understandings

Lathe leapt over the glass shards and ran for the back door, in his boots and out the door with a jacket in seconds, running across the field and following Charlie’s tracks in the snow. “EREN!!!!” Lathe shouted, looking for him with wide, terrified eyes. He darted into a path in the woods, still following the tracks and soon sliding to a stop as he looked down a path to his left, Eren tying a fourteen-point buck to Charlie for him to drag back. “Eren…?” Lathe walked down the path with caution, trying to keep Eren calm as he saw him look to him fearfully. “Eren, please don't freak out, just hold on, don't do anything…” Lathe slowly reached for the gun slung across Eren’s back, quickly clicking it on safety and lifting it from Eren’s shoulders. “A few things Eren, first off-how. Did you get. This gun.” Lathe looked to him, feeling a bit betrayed. “There was a trigger lock on it, and you'd need the safe key and combination for it too. Where the hell did you get it from??” Spades doesn't even know what the combination is. Who… wait… Casper pickpocketed my keys yesterday… did he… “... there was a metal tag attached to them with the combination… you took them off my key ring after Casper snitched them for the liquor cabinet key, didn't you.” …...why did I not just give Casper the damn key like he asked?

Eren looked down at the deer with a clean gunshot to the heart. “Umm… It was downstairs… I found it when I was hiding…And yeah… I took it off the key, because I saw a bunch of 10 to 14 tip bucks in the backyard.” He moved to continue tying the back hooves together with tough string. I got a big one… I wonder if Dad’l let me keep the antlers… “And… Um… Grisha… He um….” Eren’s voice faltered a bit as the memories started to pop up. I don’t wanna panic… Eren’s hands began to shake, not from the cold, but from his PTSD.

Lathe bent down and hugged Eren, rubbing small circles into his back. Don’t panic please… I know saying it stirs up stuff… “How did you get into the storage room? That's where it was…” You never knew how it worked at the old house- and that key's not on the ring, because it's a keycard.

“It… It was open… I was hiding in there….” Eren told him quietly. It was a good spot too.

“I-it was open?” That doesn’t sound right… I'm sure I closed it last time I was in there, getting out the table extensions and chairs... I'll have to check, and if it's not fitting right, I'll get that fixed. “Okay, that's not your fault… but Eren, you can't just shoot deer because you want to. You need a license, tags for a buck- because I wasn't out here something could’ve gone wrong. You didn't even put the safety on the gun while it was slung on your back. You're just damn lucky it’s actually deer season. Look, if you wanna hunt, you're gonna need more than just a gun and a target. There are a bunch of regulations. I have a license and tags, so I'll just tag this one as mine, but you can't hunt without the licenses and stuff. And it’s not quick- but you'd be able to hunt next deer season. Finish tying him up and we can drag him back home, okay? But if you're gonna do this sort of thing, ask. At least tell me- we heard the gunshot, and I didn't know what to think…” I was worried… “But it’s okay.” Lathe pecked his temple.
Eren nodded, finishing up tying the buck in silence. *When I was young… I got to hunt all I wanted… And Dad let me…* Eren moved to hop up onto Charlie, still mindful of where Lathe was at every moment that they walked back. *He’s gonna hit me…. He’s angry at me… He’s really mad at me…* Eren swallowed hard, trying not to shake, failing horribly, and his whole body shaking in fear of an angry Lathe again.

Lathe walked by Eren’s side as he rode Charlie back to the barn, noticing his shaking and reaching a hand up, gently patting his arm. “Eren, it’s okay. I’m not mad- just worried. You didn't know about any of this hunting regulation stuff, and I didn't know you had the shotgun. ...and I wasn't trying to be so mean earlier… I got frustrated, and then got carried away… I'm really really sorry about all that…” Lathe offered his palm to him, his eyes pleading. “…forgive me?” *I'm sorry… I feel terrible…*

Eren looked down to Lathe as he spoke, jerking a bit when he was touched, causing Charlie to move a few feet away before back into place. Eren timidly reached out to run his fingers across Lathe’s palm. *I don’t want you to be mad at me… “Um… Can I cut up the deer? I haven’t had venison in awhile.” I really want some… I think the last I had was after hunting with Hannes…*

Lathe nodded, smiling faintly as Eren forgave him. “Of course you can- and if you share at least a little, I don’t have any problems with it. Would you need help?” *It's a big project, it'll take a while.*

Eren shook his head. “I just need a **really** sharp knife…. And about 30 minutes.” *Hannes made sure I knew the inside of a deer like the back of my hand… I can cut up filets… But that’ll take a bit longer…*

Lathe thought, nodding after a minute. “Okay- while you're doing that, I think I'll make sure everyone gets their breakfast. Give Charlie a good brushing too, I think he needs it.” *I'm not leaving you unattended with a fucking filet knife. “I'll get you something for the job when we get to the house.”*

Eren nodded silently, the two of them getting closer and closer towards the house. *Where am I supposed to untie it? This buck weighs a ton, and I know because Charlie was pulling hard. Eren opened his mouth to speak, still afraid to speak up. I don’t want you to yell at me…*

Lathe looked up to him, gently tapping his arm again, running his thumb over his arm and trying to calm Eren. “You can say stuff… I'm not going to yell or get mad or anything. Swear it.” He crossed his thumb over his heart. *I won't let that happen again.*

Eren nodded. “Where do I put it? Once I untie it… It’s not moving…” *I don’t know where the hell*
I’m supposed to chop this up where I can clean it up after.

“Just inside the front bit of the barn would be okay, string him up by a rafter. If we put down a big enough tarp and wait until Charlie’s in his stall we shouldn’t have a problem. We’ll keep the barn door open, allow for fresh air.” And you won’t be too far away from me. Just in case.

Eren nodded, bringing the deer into the barn and using Charlie to help lift the massive beast and let him start to hang, tying him off and getting a tarp under the buck. Once that adventure was done, he started to untack Charlie. After he had gotten Charlie untracked he got out the brushes to give him a good brush over.

Lathe went to the house, getting the wood-handled fillet knife, still sheathed in it’s wooden block on the counter from the night before, and hunting in a cupboard for a large metal pot, bringing them out to the barn. He set them down on the tarp, going over to Charlie’s stall and holding out his hands for the brushes, nodding to the buck. “Take care of the buck awhile- I’ll take care of Charlie and everybody, okay?

Eren looked to him for a moment before he handed over the brushes. Okay… Time for deer… Eren quickly picked up the knife, able to cut through the stomach and remove the internal organs with relative ease, making sure to bag the bladder, then hosing it down, then he got up on his toes, slicing near the base of the neck to start to skin the deer. Hmm… He’s really big, the meat looks really good… But I should let it hang for awhile. Eren looked around, his brow furrowing when he couldn’t find a saw or a hook. “Um… Lathe… Where do you want me to hang it?…. And um…. Where is the saw?” It’s gotta sit so the meat is tender… We kinda can’t leave it in the barn…. But I get to eat the liver!

“The saw’s hanging on a peg on the wall over to your right, and um… will the garage work? It should, there's an open space.” Lathe set down the bag of feed, ambling over. “If you just get Charlie to drag the tarp with our friend here on it we’ll be good, and can hang him up for a while, no problem.” That could work.

Eren nodded, moving to set all the organs he wanted to keep into the large pot Lathe had given him. He then proceeded to grab a shovel and started to dig a bit away from the barn getting a decent sized hole, staging the tarp over there and dumping the rest of the organs in there and burying them. He dragged the tarp back to clean it off with the hose making sure that he had every bit cleaned off. Alright… This tarp looks clean.

Lathe helped Eren position the tarp back under the buck, going over to where the rope keeping the buck suspended was tied, carefully untying it and hanging onto the rounded hook with one hand, slowly lowering the buck onto the tarp, his arm shaking. Fuck it's heavy… He went to lead Charlie back out to drag the buck to the front of the house, getting a metal hook from the wall of the barn
and following as Eren walked Charlie up front, helping him get the deer into the garage and hanging it from a steel support beam that ran the length of the garage. “Okay- leave the tarp under him, and he’ll hang for a while. We can’t forget about him, though. You’ll have to finish the job after lunch. I’ll tag him when we get inside.”

“I’m gonna make the liver for lunch.” Eren told him before taking Charlie back to the barn. *I can’t wait to eat it...* Eren disappeared for a few moments before coming back into the house with the pot of organs. *I haven’t made liver in a long time....*

Lathe was filling in the tag at the kitchen island, crinkling his nose a bit at the pot. “...at least regarding me, just make enough for yourself- not a fan of liver.” *Ugh.* “I need the filet knife back- did you bring that in too?” *I’m not leaving it unattended.

Eren nodded, moving the wooden box out from under the pot. “Okay, I’ll make sure that I make enough for myself... Where’s Levi?” Eren seemed to shrink a bit as he came closer to Lathe.

Lathe looked to the floor, the tiles surprisingly absent of glass. “...I don't know… He cleaned up the glass I broke, but I have no idea where he went after that. We'd been gone awhile, so…” He looked up as he heard footsteps, Levi coming straight up to him, seeing the fury in his eyes. He stood from the stool, worried. “L-Levi, wait-” Lathe was about to worriedly explain when Levi backhanded him hard across the face, his cheek stinging from his hand, and his eyes beginning to sting with tears. *...maybe I deserved that...

Levi’s eyes blazed in silver fury. “You didn’t even tell me you had a fucking gun! Yet you let Eren go off and hide without watching him! You gave him the fucking opportunity to find the gun and use it!” Levi grabbed him by the collar, shaking him as he stood. *You really are an asshat.

Lathe weakly scrabbled at Levi’s wrists to pry him off, tears beginning to stream down his face as he stuttered a response. “I-I n-never thought I w-was gonna want to u-use it, and I d-didn't want t-to l-let you know about i-it b-because...” *...if Eren knew where it was...* “I-I’ll do b-better... I-I’ll get a new l-lock thing f-for the storage r-room sliding d-door... I-I’ll keep b-better track of my k-keys, and keep them on a lanyard tied to a belt loop so Casper e-can't pickpocket them... I’ll even get a new t-trigger lock i-if that’ll be okay... I-I can do better... I... I’ll do better...” Lathe’s legs started to slide out from under him, slumping to the floor, tears falling freely down his face, muttering and beginning to curl up to himself on the floor. “I'll... I'll do better...” *I fucked up... Everything I did wasn't good enough... I'll fix everything... I'll... I can do better... I'm not trying hard enough... Anyone else could do so much better... I... I'm not fit for this...

Levi sighed, letting him go, moving over to Eren and encasing him with a strong hold, tears threatening to spill. “Do you dare do that again, or I swear.... You scared me, Eren. Don’t do
that…” please never do that again.

Eren watched with wide eyes the scene that came before him until Levi came to wrap his arms around him. What is he doing? Is he gonna hurt me? What’s happening? Eren flinched as he was almost crushed in the strong hold. “L-Levi… Let go…” Eren pulled out of his grasp, moving to get cooking the liver, cutting it up into small pieces and putting it on the burner. Forget what just happened… Forget what just happened…. Forget…. Forget everything….

Levi sighed letting go of Eren and moving to where Lathe was on the floor. “Lathe?” Fuck… I yelled at him… Shit he’s not talking. “Blake!” Levi shouted for the dog, noticing his vacant state. Shit this isn’t good… Maybe I said too much… Fuck...

Blake came down the stairs quickly, coming into the kitchen and moving to sit beside Lathe. He licked his face, hoping to get him to snap out of his trance. Hooman come back to us… Big Hooman…

Lathe weakly leaned away from Blake, his hand limply swatting at Blake as he licked his face, mumbling. “s-stop it…” Lathe’s brow furrowed as Blake kept nudging at his, trying to get him away from licking his cheek. “Stop that…” Lathe’s eyes suddenly became incredibly sharp, his face turned to the floor, furious as he suddenly shoved Blake away from him, roaring. “STOP IT!!” Lathe breathed heavily, staring hard at the floor before the anger drained from his face, tears streaming down his cheeks. “...I… I-I’m…” Lathe covered his mouth with his hand, looking horrified, his face flushing with shame as he stood and fled upstairs, going to hide in his room. ...I want it to be enough… I want giving everything I have to be enough… why isn't it enough...

Levi’s eyes widened and he followed Lathe up the stairs, knocking quietly on the door. “Lathe? Lathe I’m sorry…. I didn’t mean to yell at you, and I got frustrated… Can I come in?”

“...sure…” Lathe was sitting on the bed, surrounded by a quilt and fiddling with the tag as the door’s lock clicked, Levi coming in quietly. He studied the small patch sewn by hand into the quilt, a familiar spark insignia done in shades of red and gold. “...I'm sorry for snapping… I just…” Lathe sighed, a tear streaking down his cheek. “You didn't know at the old house or here, but in the basement with the chalkboards there was a seam between the three bits of wall. You could open them with a keycard and there was a bunch of stuff stored in there… one of the things was the gun. ...it hadn't been shot in years… but I always get hunting tags anyway… it was my grandpa’s, so I always was careful with it… it was in the safe, with a trigger lock on, and the ammunition was hidden in a metal box on the other side of the room… an old instrument case, I think. But… I thought I did enough to keep it out of anyone’s reach… It’s hidden somewhere else right now, with the trigger lock on it… but… apparently the door doesn't shut right, probably because it's so cold, and Eren got his mitts on the keys when Casper pickpocketed me yesterday and the combination was engraved on a metal tag as just a line of numbers… I… I thought it would be enough… it clearly wasn't… it's all my fault, I'm really fucking sorry Levi… I fucked up…” I want it to be
His voice was incredibly small, hoarsely whispering as he started to cry into his hands. “When is it going to be **enough?**” ... never... *isn't it.*

Levi shook his head, going to lay in bed with him, looking up to the ceiling. “No, it wasn’t your fault....” Levi let out a sigh, moving a hand to cover his face. “I just got so worried... I mean....” He let out another heavy sigh. “I just thought of what if that asshat shot himself... And I...I-I....” Levi trailed off, trying hard not to cry. *I could’ve just lost him... That was scary as all hell...*

*Lathe looked over to Levi as he laid down next to where he sat, heaving a sigh before laying down side by side with him, sharing some of the quilt, fiddling with a corner of it. “...you weren't the only one scared that that was what happened... I'm going to see if I can change the combination on that safe at all, and if not, oh well... but...”* Lathe brushed at his eyes. “...that was terrifying... but he's okay... but he's not going to get his hands on a gun for a looong while. He wants to hunt... depending on how he's doing next year... and I'd go with him... but, well, now you know the rifle exists. I'm still not telling where it is... but I'm going to check all the time that it's still there...” *...yeah, he's not going to hunt unless he's much more sane. And okay.*

*Levi nodded, still keeping his face covered. “I’m sorry for snapping at you... I didn’t know what to do... I knew I couldn’t yell at him..... I actually got to sleep in the same bed as him last night...”*

*This was a terribly eventful morning... I want to take back so many things...*

*“...it’s...” **...you know what? No.** “Actually, it’s not okay. I didn't get a damn chance to explain all the crap I had done to prevent something like this, and the thing that caused Eren to find the safe in the first place wasn't my fault. I had it under lock and key and it’s not my fault that Casper learned how to pickpocket from me so well that now even I can't feel it. I couldn't control that Eren knew what keys to snitch off the key ring. I had no clue there was any chance of him getting it and much less finding the hidden ammunition and using it. And I'm **done** with saying everything is okay when it's clearly not. I'm giving everything I can to keep things in order, and it's not enough. I don't need more people reminding me that I could be doing a better job, because I know. Because it’s all I hear in my head- the only thing my inner voice constantly **screams** at me. It’s not okay... but I get it. We were both terrified when we heard that shot, and you got scared, then those nerves became anger, and you snapped at me. I get it. So I'm going to just forgive you and be done with it because I just want this whole thing about this morning to be fucking **over.”**

*Levi nodded. “Agreed... I'm really sorry though, I let my anger get the best of me...” **I didn’t want to lose someone else.** Levi let out a deep sigh. “Should I take Eren out to town?” **Get him away and try and get him to calm the fuck down.** “I could take him to go see Armin... Or maybe the puppies, I remember Sharon saying she works from home...” **I want everything to be alright, and I know that’s a lot to ask for... And I know you're struggling... And we all know it... And I can’t believe I snapped at you...**

*Lathe nodded. “Any of those sound okay, just know if you're going to visit Sharon call ahead- see*
if it's a good day or not.” Who knows how she’s doing, since it can be so random- and if she feels like crap she probably won't want to be bugged, but at the same time won't want to turn you two away… “But getting him out of the house would be good for him… and my sanity…” I need peace and quiet for a while… ...or a nap… ...both.

Levi nodded, uncovering his face to look over to Lathe. “Is he making food?” I can smell the spices from here… It smells pretty good, I hope he doesn’t burn it… He sat up, stretching a bit before rubbing at his eyes. He pulled out his phone to pull up Sharon’s contact information. I should probably call the house.

Lathe nodded. “Yeah, he's cooking the buck’s liver- what even are his eating habits anymore… Nobody knows. He nodded to Levi’s phone. “Defaulting to visiting puppies? If so, call the house. She won't be listening for her cell, because she wouldn't be able to hear it, because it's apparently always on silent.” That's a thing- Hannah ranted about it a bit yesterday.

Levi nodded, getting up to head towards the door. “I’ll call her, and get Eren out of the house…. I'll make dinner, so why don't you relax for the day?” God knows you need the day to yourself.

Lathe sighed in relief, letting his head drop back down onto the bed. “Levi, you are the best- I could really use it, thank you…” He burrowed further into the blankets, his eyes sliding shut. “I'm just going to take advantage of this chance to nap… and then maybe we'll see if I can be mildly productive. ...or not. Whatever happens. Oh, and tell Sharon I said hi. ...wait, that reminds me... where's…” Lathe slapped the nightstand looking for his phone, finding it and texting Sharon, relying heavily on autocorrect as he sleepily misspelled every other word. “I'm just telling her that with the music-sheet-sharing site she's on, I granted her access to my library… she has all my arrangements, and I asked to stumble around some of hers. ...she'll see it eventually.” Lathe tried to toss his phone back on the nightstand, missing and hearing his phone thud on the floor, his arm dropping on the mattress. “...I literally cannot bring myself to care right now.”...sleep sounds nice...

Levi chuckled, coming back to pick up his phone and put it on the night stand. “Alright, you nap, I’ll have dinner ready by 6:30.” Better get to calling her and then figure out plan B… If we need one.

“Thank you Levi… you're the real MVP…” ...me not having to cook is new… that sounds nice too… Lathe sleepily mumbled, and within a minute was knocked out, worn out from the already long morning.
Lathe woke up an hour later, blinking awake. *it's really quiet*… Lathe rolled out of bed, dragging the quilt with him downstairs and looking around, seeing a post-it on the small table near the door. *Sharon's, huh. Okay.* He went to the kitchen to get something to eat, seeing lots of leftovers. *...we don't have anything besides leftovers though… which is a problem if we want something besides stuffing. ...I should probably go grocery shopping.* Lathe looked out the window. *It's sunny for once, ...that actually sounds like a good idea.* Lathe ate and got dressed with no real hurry, driving to the grocery store and beginning to meander the produce section. He was barely five minutes into the trip when he looked over a display of apples, his eyes widening as he recognised someone. *...I know your face. ...you're one of them.* Lathe immediately turned away from the man, doing his best to blend in with the crowd and pulling over in the next aisle, getting out his cell phone and calling Spades, trying to act casual to the people around him. “Hey uh, Spades- we've got a problem. One of them is at the grocery store right now.” *Whatever happens, don't cause a scene. Crowd panic can work against you.*

Spades had picked up the phone almost instantly. “Okay, I’m sending Dave over, what’s he wearing?” *Dave is the closest to that grocery store right now…*

“Green winter jacket, blue jeans that look faded and dirty on the front, dark boots that look like work boots, and he’s got gloves in his pockets. Grey shirt underneath the jacket, I think it’s solid.” Lathe’s eyes widened as he realised the man didn’t have a cart, confusedly picking up a bag of apples and beginning to walk to the checkout. “Got to go I need to stop him from leaving too soon kaybye” Lathe hung up, immediately abandoning his cart and running quickly down the aisle where the man couldn’t see him, picking up a casual gait as he approached the man from in front of him, nodding to the bag of apples as he got close and speaking. “Those are a lot of Granny Smiths- you do a lot of cooking?” *You didn't look like you knew anything about apples. Talk about cooking.*

The man lifted his head up, a confused look on his face. “Huh?” He looked down to the bag he was carrying. “Ah… You mean these? Umm… I'm sorry, what did you say?” He looked up, his bright blue eyes locking onto Lathe’s. *Who the fuck are you?*

“You're buying more than a bushel of the most bitter apples they have here- I'd be surprised if you were planning on just eating them raw. What're you planning to make?” He shrugged. “Just curious is all.” *...you don't recognize me. ...huh. You'd think you'd've at least seen a picture...*

“Ummm… A snack…. For my truck?” He worriedly looked down at his dirty watch. “Look, I gotta go back to work, so it was a nice chat… But I gotta go…” The man started to walk away, holding the apples tightly still. I’ll get yelled at… *Since we’re short on staff as of recently...*
Lathe let the man pass him, thinking hard as he meandered back and watched the man enter a checkout lane. He suddenly met eyes with the cashier, immediately making the sign for ‘Silence!’ ...That’s Olivia! Thank fuck! {Olivia, stall him. Police are coming. Call a manager. Act. You have to.} I’m counting on you.

Olivia looked up as the man came to her lane, nodding hello and looking up for a split second, seeing Lathe and immediately recognising him, confusion flitting past in her eyes as he signed quickly, immediately pretending not to stare and tap at her register keyboard for a moment as she let Lathe finish signing, watch out of the corner of her eye. Got it, Lathe. She tapped in a certain string of numbers, hitting enter and letting the screen change minutely before bringing the bag of apples over the scanner, feigning a confused look as it didn't scan after a few tries. “I'm sorry sir, let me key it in and see if that works…” She moved the bag to see the tag, taking her time to enter in the numbers, the system not even letting her type in the item code. She reached over to flick on the switch at her register, the light above her blinking. “I'm very sorry sir, I have to call a manager—my system isn't responding. It should be an easy fix, though.” She smiled apologetically as the man grumbled, a manager soon coming over to her register. “My register isn't responding. I don't know if you know what’s wrong with it.”

“Alright, let me have a look.” The manager stepped around her, tapping at the keyboard for a moment when Olivia tapped his shoulder.

“Oh, you'll need my employee key. Here.” She handed him a post it, the writing on it not visible to the man.

...huh? The manager took the note and read it, soon understanding. ...he's wanted. Stall for cops. The manager pretended to copy off an employee key from the note, the system still unresponsive in the mode it was in. He soon turned to the man. “I'm very sorry sir, but this register is frozen. It’ll have to be rebooted. You can remain here for the few minutes it is powered up again, or go to another lane.” He nodded to the other registers, all of them having at least one other person in them. Thank god we only have this express lane open today.

The man grumbled, shaking his head, burying his hands in his pockets. “It’s fine… Just hurry up with the reboot.” I really don't have time for this but I'm not gonna yell at them for technology reasons...

Dave came into the front of the grocery store, looking around for the man he was supposed to find. Alright, Lathe said he was leaving, check out lanes first.

Lathe saw Dave as he entered, meandering over and shadowing the man at the end of the lane, leaving him with nowhere to go to leave except closer to Dave. He waited until Dave was only two empty lanes away, picking up a plastic cup from a nearby display and dropping it, making a loud
clattering sound, but not breaking or cracking it. He went to pick it up, noticing that Dave’s footsteps seemed to become a bit faster as he and the man were spotted. *Here we go.* “Look, friend-” Lathe put the cup back, stepping forward and blocking the man in the lane, soon enclosed on both sides by him and Dave. “-I think it’s best you go without a fight.”

….huh? “I’m sorry what?”

“Sir, come with me please, put your hands where I can see them.” Dave’s tone was unforgiving and heavy as he spoke. *I do not want to taze or shoot you.*

“Wait… What? What’s happening?” The man backed up into Lathe, his brow furrowing as he saw Dave.

“Sir, I need you to put your **hands** where **I** can see them.”

“Why? What did I do wrong, I’m trying to buy apples! I’m not even causing a scene!”

*Fair point.* “Sir, You have to the count of three to comply, put your hands where I can see them!... One…. Two….” Dave stopped stepping forward as the man turned around and put his hands up. He cuffed him in seconds, pulling him out of the store to the cruiser, telling him his rights as he did so. *I more down… 14 to go…*

Lathe followed so he could talk to Dave, fistbumping Olivia as he passed her. “Nice acting, kid. I'll see you around.” Lathe nodded to the manager and went on, waiting for Dave to shut the man in the cruiser before speaking. “Y’know, he didn't recognize me, which is weird as hell because I know that's one of them… and I'd think they'd know my face by now…” *Maybe he's just really dumb. After all, he was buying Granny Smiths as snacking apples. Who does that?*

Dave shrugged, moving towards the driver’s seat. “Well… Spades said if you wanted to come, you can come watch the interrogations.” *You might wanna come… But you also might not wanna come.*

Lathe immediately nodded. “I'm coming- I need to see this.” *I want to hear what this guy has to say.* “I'll follow in my car- I'll be right behind you.” Lathe went to his car, following Dave to the station and he was soon standing just outside the interrogation room, looking in as Spades sat the man down to question him.
The man watched Spades sit down opposite him; he was relatively quiet, not sure what to think about this. Why am I here? Is it that illegal to buy green apples?

Spades settled across from him, her hands folded in front of her on the table. Her expression remained neutral for the most part, a sharp glint to her eyes. “How are you? Could I get you something to drink?”

The man shook his head. “No, but thank you, ma’am, I’m alright for now. But I would like to know what a pretty little thing like you is doing in a place like this?” Shouldn’t a guy be interrogating me? She’s gorgeous!

...Ex cuse me. “Sir, you’re talking to the Police Commissioner of this county. I’d appreciate it if you showed some respect.” She shifted her hands, her ring visible on her left hand. I’m kinda taken. And I’m not exactly into raping minors, so.

Lathe’s expression shifted, scowling a bit and turning his head to Dave next to him, opening his mouth.

Dave caught Lathe’s arm immediately, cutting him off. “No murder.” Yeah, no. I like you. I don’t want to have to testify against you as a witness.

Lathe’s mouth snapped shut, pouting a bit and crossing his arms, muttering. “But that's my wife…” She’s mine, fucktard. Don't fucking hit on her!

The man looked down at the ring. “Oh, I apologize ma’am, I wasn’t aware. But, could you answer me as to why I’m here?” I have no idea what the hell I’m doing here. I don’t understand...

“How about you answer a few of my questions first, and you'll figure it out from there.” She quirks an eyebrow at him, her gaze cool. “Do you know a young man by the name of Eren Yeager?”

... Eren Yeager? “Do you mean the singer?” Is that who you’re getting at…? Are you his fan? I can see you liking his music. “Do you like his music, ma’am? I could agree it’s quite good… Especially his last cover album.” It was all songs about sex…. Hmmm… Are you a frisky woman?
...okay you can stop hitting on me now. “That is the person I'm referring to, yes... but do you personally know him?”

“Doesn’t he live in like... Los Angeles... With all the big shots?”

“Uhm... no.” Spades pretended to think about it, deadpanning her answer, judging him. ...you don't look like the sharpest tool in the shed. “What do you do for a living?” You look like a far shot from all the other lawyers and doctors on the list...

“I um... I reroof houses...” why does this have to do with anything? The man sat a bit uncomfortably in the seat across from her. “Can I ask why, ma’am?”

“No.” Spades spoke matter-of-factly, going through the Manila folder on the table, producing a picture. “Can you identify this man for me?” She showed him a picture of his own likeness.

“That would be my brother... It's even got the damn scar on his head.. But I believe that I’ve got better features than him... Wouldn’t you agree?” The man waggled his eyes, looking pointedly to Spades. You are damn fine.

“...that fucking asshole...” Lathe gritted his teeth, his eyes flashing dangerously as Dave still gripped his arm. The second you're out of there, I don't care about the assault charge. I really need to rearrange your face a bit.

Spades glared icily at him. “I can't say I agree. And I don't think my husband would approve of what you're implying. I certainly do not. I hope you can respect that.” Just shut the fuck up. “Now if this isn't you... what's his name and what is his profession?”

“He’s my twin... His name’s Clyde Blochefski... He’s a realtor... Though he screws a lot of people over... Is that what this is about?” Am I in here to eat my brother out?

“We're going to need to see your ID for a bit. You'll get it back in a few minutes.” I've heard the twin brother act too many times.

Chris nodded, moving to pull his wallet out and handing over his ID. “My name’s Chris... It’s Clyde that’s always fucking people over.” Not that I would mind fucking someone else over...
Spades nodded, her expression neutral still as another officer came to collect his ID. She pulled out photocopies of the drawings of the other men, starting to set them out as she spoke. “While your ID is being run, perhaps you can help identify these men for me. Recognize anyone?” She took out a pen. *Hopefully you’ve got a few names for us to check out.*

Chris nodded moving to scrawl out a few names in slightly messing handwriting. “Yeah, these are all Clyde’s asshole friends… Except for that guy… I dunno who that guy is.” Chris proceeded to fill out full names and occupations. *That’s all of them…. Wow, I wonder how much trouble they’re in… What company did they screw over?*

This is good. *But we've still got one loose, and he could be dangerous.* “Thank you very much for your help.” The officer came back, handing her the ID and a sheet of paper. “You're who you say you are, not wanted, things check out. Okay, this yours.” She handed him the ID. “We've got no reason to keep you here- you're free to go.” *…you giving us all these names sorta makes up for the fact that you're a dense fucker.*

“Of course, Ma’am… Um… Where do I go now?” *I hope my boss will understand…*  

“The door- where else?”

“Um… Don’t I have paperwork to fill out?” *’Cause I wanna stay and see you get up… And follow you, to see that magnificent view…*  

“The only one around here who'd have to fill out paperwork is me. There's nothing else for you to do here. You can go.” *And Lathe can go pound your face in.*

“Ah, okay, thank you ma’am, have a wonderful day.” Chris got up from his seat took his ID and the paper and headed for the door looking around to try and figure out where to go. *Now what do I do?*

Lathe had no sooner tugged his arm from Dave’s grip than he had Chris by the collar, suspending him from the ground by nearly a foot. His eyes bored into Chris’s, fury written into all of his features. “You. Stay the fuck away from my wife.” Lathe punched Chris straight across the face, breaking his nose and dropping him to the floor where he crumpled in a heap. “Learn some damn respect.” Lathe kicked him sharply with his heel, flipping him over onto his back and stormed out of the room. *Fuck you, man. That's my fucking waifu.*
Chris stayed in a crumpled heap on the floor, looking up to Dave. “Did you see that!? Go get him!”

_He punched me in the face! It hurts!_

“I saw you trip up the stairs, sir… Now I’ll have to escort you out…” Dave reached down to pick him up to his feet, and shoving him forward. _That’s what you get for messing with Spades… Wait… Is she still a Spade? I’m pretty sure it’s Commissioner Quo now… Damn… Now what?_

Chris somehow kept his footing as he was dragged outside by Dave. “Well… That was eventful to say the least.” He went back to his truck, which had been towed to the station and headed back to work. _I got to see a fair maiden…_
Chapter 49: New Beginnings

Fuck, that hurts like a bitch… Lathe rifled through his medical bag with his left hand, his right gingerly holding it open. I probably bruised it. …where’s all my aspirin? Lathe looked for a brand-name aspirin, then another, and then moving on to any generics he could have had. …where are they? Lathe’s brow furrowed. …I think there’s some other stuff missing too… inventory check. Lathe took the bag to the kitchen island and dumped out the contents, lining them up neatly on the counter, many plastic boxes with organised bottles of pills, all lined up by main ingredient and dosage strength in their slots. Except, some bottles were very light, and some missing altogether. …I’m missing nearly all of my aspirin, if the empty bottle counts as anything… the morphine bottle is empty, thankfully it was the lowest dose and only had like four left, I needed to replace it… oh my. The small bottle of hydrocodone is missing. …Fuck. None of this adds up to anything good. Lathe thought for a moment, weighing the empty bottle of aspirin in his hand. “Maisie!” Lathe called up and through the house, soon hearing the click of nails on the floor and the clink of tags, Maisie sitting obediently at his feet in a moment, her tail whacking against the island, expecting to be pet. Lathe scratched behind her ear, offering her the open end of the aspirin bottle he held and letting her sniff it. “Find this, Maisie. Find the aspirin.” Where did all of it go? Lathe followed as Maisie immediately got up and trotted off, following her downstairs and into the theatre room, sifting through a nest Eren had set up on one of the small loveseats they had down there, producing one of the larger bottles of aspirin. …he’s been taking drugs from my bag. “Good Maisie- where else? Find the aspirin for me.” There’s more… Lathe followed Maisie back upstairs and to the art room, seeing her paw at the sliding downstairs storage door. …oh. Lathe slid the door open, seeing the safe was still open, empty, and a box in the far corner was opened, an old wool blanket with a dark brown and tan design left on the floor with a person-shaped space in the middle of it, another aspirin bottle left underneath a corner of it. …now the last of it, the hydrocodone… “Maisie, find pills.” He looked to her, tapping the smallest bottle he had in his hand. “Find.” Please understand. He sighed a bit in relief as she seemed to nod and left, following her one last time upstairs, walking into his bedroom behind her, seeing her poke her head and nudge something inside. …he was here? Lathe went to the closet, his eyes widening a bit. …he is here. Lathe dropped to his knees, worried as he watched Eren peacefully sleep, passed out in the closet with the small bottle of hydrocodone clutched in his hand, Lathe’s oldest and favourite midnight blue sweater a few sizes too big for him hanging loosely off of his figure, more sweaters draped all over him. …fuck. “Eren? Wake up, Hon. Come on, Eren. Can you?” He gently shook Eren’s shoulders, to no response. …okay. “Here we go, kid.” Lathe nudged the other sweaters off of Eren, letting him keep his blue sweater on as he gathered him up into his arms, carrying him to the bed and tucking him in, the quilt pulled up to his chin. He brushed the hair from his face, smiling faintly, worry still visible in his features. …your body is obviously strong, and by that I mean capable of taking all this damage and turning out good as new. …you’ll be okay. …I need to keep my medic bag either on me or hidden now… I can’t just have you taking stuff… if you’re trying it all over again… no. Not again. Lathe left him to be, the lights dim and closing the door quietly, about to finish packing his bag back up and hide it.

Levi came inside the front door, kicking it shut as he brought in two large brown bags full of food. “Eren! Lathe! I’m home!” Levi called, coming into the kitchen and his silvery eyes spotting Lathe after a moment in the kitchen. “Oh you’re down here, do you know where Eren is? Blake’s downstairs, barking at Charlie still…” It’s as if they’ve been talking to each other this whole time…
Lathe nodded, staring into his cup of coffee, a blank sheet of music next to him, his hand on the table with a pencil. “Yeah… Eren’s upstairs, in my room… sleeping off an overdose of hydrocodone…” Lathe’s left hand moved to hold down the sheet of paper as a thought came to him, keeping it in place as he drew a solid line across the top row and every other, curving up and down and simply acting to show the flow of the melody before he wrote down the specific notes. “…he’s been taking pills from my bag, mostly aspirin, but he’s downed entire bottles… Maisie helped me find them, they were in all of his little nests scattered around the house… I… I don’t know how I missed it… The pill bottles I have are all in plastic organisers, I should’ve seen some slots were empty earlier…” I could’ve stopped this earlier...

Levi stood there in shock as Lathe spoke. “He said he was going to take a nap… What the hell happened that he’s sleeping off an overdose?” Levi asked and moved to set the large bags down on the counter. How did that happen? I thought he would be okay for a bit by himself, cause he wore himself out with the puppies. “Is he… Is he alright?” Levi asked worriedly, his lip seeming to quiver a bit.

Lathe shrugged, nodding a bit. “I think he'll be okay… he was passed out when I found him in my closet, he made a nest out of my sweaters again… but… I was gone for a while, wanted to go shopping for groceries because all we had was leftovers… Uhm… when I was there, I right off the bat spotted someone who looked exactly like a man Eren had drawn, called the cops and distracted him and held him up until Dave got there… I followed to watch the questioning, and it turns out this guy was the twin of one of the men… he named almost all of the others involved after he was shown the pictures, except for one. But, it took awhile… I never really got anything to bring home, and I maybe broke the guy's nose after he left the room of interrogation because he was being a serious creep and hitting on Spades and showing no damn respect that she's kinda taken… but that's why I wanted aspirin, for my hand… and then I had none and got worried… and that's what happened.” ...this is what happens when I try to take a day off... “I stashed my bag in the closet down here for right now, I'm going to keep it hidden away upstairs from now on though, but while Eren's up there I'm not taking it up…” Lathe read over the squiggles on the page, the sweet and sad sound clear in his mind, his mood reflecting it as he shifted, laying his head on his arms, his coffee untouched, the piano playing on in his mind. ...is one day where nothing horrible happens and I don't have a heart attack and Eren is more or less okay at least for a little bit too much to ask for…? ...I think I know what to ask for for Christmas, then...

Levi paused for a moment as he took out the groceries. “Where did you find the aspirin bottles?” I don’t understand…. He was always asleep in his nests.

“I said they were stashed in his nests… the empty bottles were hidden in the blankets or between cushions, just sitting there… he was doing more than just chilling or napping…” Lathe didn't care that he was being a bit snippy, his head still on his arms. ...just one fucking day...

Levi opened the fridge, putting the perishables in. “Was he using them to go to sleep? Since we
took him off everything? I know when I slept with him the night he cut his arms… He was waking up a lot, and shifting…” I woke up with him but he didn’t seem to notice.

Lathe was quiet for a little while, thinking. “…maybe. We should talk to him when he wakes up, and if he says that's why, we should probably start him on sedatives again.” That would make sense...

Levi nodded. “I think we need to call Casper and talk about him about it. He needs his PTSD meds, and sedatives… And keep him on the anti-depression.” I think that would help, discussing this now.

“Okay, might as well talk to him now and just do it…” Lathe lifted his head from the table, rubbing at his eyes as he pulled out his phone. “M’sorry, today has been a mix of an okay and seriously shit day and I'm just so done with life right now so if I'm snippy you know why…” It's not even three and I'm just so over today already… He had Casper set as one of his speed-dial options, setting the phone on speaker and waiting for him to pick up. Pick up the phone, dammit.

Casper took a few moments to pick up his phone. “Hello!” He picked it up with a cheery voice as he saw who it was. Okay… What did we forget at your house yesterday? I gotta be quiet though, Scotty's still asleep from last night… Or would it be this morning? Eh… Oh well..

Lathe’s expression shifted a bit as he heard Casper’s bright voice. Too cheery… ugh… “Casper, hate to dump this one you, but you're not going to be that happy for too long. I found a little earlier that I was missing a few bottles of aspirin, and one of hydrocodone… Maisie led me around the house and showed me that all the empty aspirin bottles were in Eren's nests around the house, and we found him upstairs sleeping off a hydrocodone overdose… we took him off of his meds for a few days to clear his system, but now it's apparent we have to put him back on something… besides antidepressants, what should we give him? We think he's been overdosing to get to sleep, so sedatives too, and we learned he had cut yesterday too, then… but what else should he be put on again?”…help.

“... So did his PTSD work? Have you tried a higher dosage?” I think he might not be getting enough…. So we might change his two pills to three...

“I haven't thought about that… we should probably do that, it might get rid of his crazy… he'd been having total conversations with the barn animals while he was on that dosage, so we'll see how that all goes… if he starts talking to walls though I'll let you know.” That might be it...

Casper nodded, pulling his feet under him on the couch, holding the phone to his ear. “Okay, that
sounds like a plan… And um… If we kinda did it… All night… And Scotty’s still asleep… I shouldn’t be worried… Right?” Casper blushed furiously as he thought about it. *But I’m really worried… It’s three already!*

“Casper, the first thing is that you’re on speaker and Levi can hear everything you’re saying. Secondly, combine the fact that you were ‘busy’ all night with the fact that Scotty and you were pretty much drunk when you left, add in that Scotty is not one known to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed when he wakes up after a night of drinking, and the answer equals only worry if he doesn’t wake up by eight. He’s probably fine.” …*probably.*

Casper blushed even more when he heard that Levi could hear him. “Oh my god.. I’m so sorry Levi… And Uhm, thanks... I think you'll be good with giving him that much… And you should have all that on hand right? Or do you need me to run to the pharmacy?" *I need to know if you need it, cause we won’t be going until Monday.*

“I’ve got plenty of all of it on hand, though you'll see me Monday anyway for stuff. I'll need to get refills on things, especially aspirin… and some others… but yeah, we’re set for just the weekend. That's all I needed to ask. Don't worry about Scotty until around seven, and call me in a panic at eight if he's dead asleep still. But smack him first either way. Have you tried actually waking him up yet? Smacking normally does the trick.” *Believe me- I know.*

Casper nodded. “Okay… I will, and I haven’t… Cause he didn’t really fall asleep… Until like… 6 ish… But I woke up around noon…” *I'm still worried… “Call me if anything gets worse…”*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Sharon tapped away at the keyboard, a music stream playing in the background as she had a word document, photoshop, and a 3D-animation window pulled up all at once. *It's a good thing this computer can handle everything I force it to... the quiet in the house is good for productivity, but it is kinda lonely when there's nobody around for productivity except a flock of dogs. Even though they all are totally adorable and I love them, they're not great for conversation. And since Hannah has a bigass truck, she can still get to work even with the ton of snow outside. We really got hit hard overnight with snow, it's ridiculous.... wait ... did I eat breakfast? She thought a moment, setting down her drawing pen and tablet. Eh, I could eat. She made a small noise of surprise as she began to stand up, feeling her baby kick a bit. She nervously chuckled, placing a hand over stomach as she got to her feet. “Okay, okay, I'll go get some food. I understand, you're hungry....” She meandered to the kitchen, only making it halfway before she suddenly swayed on her feet, catching the island in the middle of the kitchen for balance, feeling incredibly strange. ...*what...* She suddenly felt an incredible pain, collapsing to the floor and letting out a loud, pained sound, her hands on her stomach. “*Fuck that hurts...*” She swore loudly, hearing Rico’s nails click on the floor as he came over to her. *Fuck, it's time, isn't it.* She let out another loud cry as she felt as if she was kicked hard in the abdomen, suddenly feeling a wetness, her jeans becoming soaked. ...*my
water just broke… fuck it's happening. I need an ambulance, something. Sharon fumbled in her pocket, drawing out her phone. Thank god, I never have my phone on me usually. She tried to turn it on, only for a charge screen to light up faintly at her. ...it's fucking dead. She looked around angrily, trying to lean up on one elbow, throwing her phone at the wall phone. It made contact, the phone falling off the hook and clattering to the floor. At least I can throw. “R-Rico, here boy…” She fell back down, reaching up to pet Rico as he came near to her, sniffing at her stomach. She whistled to catch his attention, pointing to the wall phone on the floor. “Fetch.” I need that give me that.

Rico picked his head up at her voice. Human is hurting… Why is human hurting? Rico’s ears perked up a bit, looking over to the phone on the floor before moving to get it and setting it down beside her before moving to sniff at her large abdomen again. Are human’s pups coming? Are they coming now?

“Good boy, Rico…” Sharon let him sniff at her stomach as she picked up the phone, immediately dialling 911 and speaking to the operator. “H-hello, I need an ambulance right away, I’ve just started labour… my address is 413 Maria Avenue… w-when can someone get here?” Sharon tried to bite back a pained sound as she felt another sharp pain.

The man on the other end winced a bit. “Ma’am, we can’t get an ambulance out to your location until the plows get out of the yard and get the ambulances out of where they’re kept.” Shit… It could take hours… “It could be hours ma’am.”

... well fuck. “Do me a favour and as soon as they can get one out, here, send it. Thank you- I'm calling in backup.” She promptly hung up, her heels digging into the floor as she shifted to get a better look at the fridge, the entire thing covered in chalkboard paint, Casper and Scotty’s home number scrawled near the top. Thank fucking god I have that number- he'll know better what to do. Sharon dialled his number, setting the phone on the floor on speaker so she didn't have to hold it, breathing heavily as she waited for someone to pick up. She didn't even wait to know who had picked up before she spoke. “It's Sharon, I'm in labour, and an ambulance might not get here for hours. Do me a favour, call Lathe and tell him to get his ass the hell over here, and while you're at it get Casper to call my wife because I can't remember her cellphone number for shit, and then you and your boyfriend get the fuck over here because I'm in a fuckton of pain and I NEED. HELP. ” I'm not giving birth on this damn floor by myself.

Scotty’s eyes widened. “Casper! Call Lathe!” He shouted and moved hurriedly to run upstairs. “And get dressed! We need to go next door!” He put the phone back against his mouth. “We’ll be over in a few minutes, where are you in the house… And how far along are the contractions?” I need to know cause Lathe is gonna ask…

“I’m in the kitchen on the floor, the contractions started about five minutes ago- fuck, the door’s
locked. Uh... okay, when you walk up the front porch, there's that railing on the left between the patio and the garden... near the post on the left, it's hollow. There's a key on a hook underneath. Just please, hurry... **fuck,** it hurts...” *Someone better have something for this damn pain...* Sharon hung up after a minute, waiting for what seemed to be a long time in agony. *FUCK they said this hurt but this is so much worse than what I thought they meant... my GOD...*

Casper lifted his head as he heard Scotty shout, setting aside his laptop from where he sat on the couch. “W-what? Why? What happened?” Casper called back to Scotty, following him as he heard him thud up the stairs. “Scotty, what the fuck is going on? Why do we- oh.” Casper stopped as it suddenly clicked. “- **oh.** Oh **fuck** okay, I'm calling Lathe.” He pulled out his phone, calling Lathe and moving to get better dressed. *Shit just got real.* “Lathe, we have a **huge** fucking emergency. Sharon just went into labour and an ambulance isn't going to get there anytime soon with the snow. You need to somehow get your ass over here because if we need to deliver her fucking **child** it should probably be done by someone who *knows what the fuck to do.*” **HELP.**

Lathe picked up the phone as he puttered around the kitchen, his cheeky greeting dying in his throat as he heard Casper explain the situation. ... **fuck. Spades has the truck with her, how the hell would we get there? I can't walk, I'm too far away... if worse came to worse, we could use a snowblower... but there is a better option...** “Hey Eren!” Lathe called into the living room, locating Eren. “Could Charlie make it from here to the old house through the snow with two people and a bag of stuff on him?” *Please say yes.*

Eren moved off the couch and to the window. “Umm.... Yeah, it looks like he can... It might take a bit but he can make it... Your car... Not so much, why? What did my dumbass brother do now?” *He's a fucking idiot sometimes... Did he accidentally chop off a finger?*

“Scotty didn't do anything- Sharon just went into labour and if an ambulance can't get there in time, she’ll be giving birth in her house. I'm the only one here who's done it before. So get ready for a long, cold ride, kid- we’re taking Charlie over.” He turned back to the phone. “It might take a bit, but I’m going to get appropriately dressed and head on over with stuff we’ll need- we’ll be there as soon as we can. ...how far along is she? Do you know? How long has it been?” *I need to know this.*

“It hasn't been more than ten minutes. Hurry- I'm a pharmacist-slash-vet dammit, not a general surgeon who knows how this shit goes down. Run, man! And bring all your medical crap!” Casper hung up, running to get dressed and calling Hannah on the way back down the stairs, assembling a bag of medical things he thought he would need as he held the phone to his ear with his shoulder. *Come on, pick up you asshat, your wife is in labour and needs her support system now more than ever.* “Hannah, I don't care **what** you're in the middle of, you need to drop it and get the fuck home **now.** Sharon went into labour minutes ago and needs help because an ambulance sure as hell ain't getting here soon. She needs you, to keep her calm and talk her through with this- now more than ever. Fuck the cultures- just get here **now.** ”
Hannah’s eyes widened, dropping the pipet she was holding in shock. “What!? She’s in labour!? For how long? I’m on my way!” Hannah hurriedly moved to pick up everything she had brought out and put the cultures away before moving to the door and rushing down the stairs. “Are you with her now?”

“We will be in about two seconds- and it's only been about ten minutes, not even. Just hurry- and we’ve got Lathe on the way too, so he’ll know more of what to do. But get here quick as you can- you signed up for an important job at the beginning of this. Own up to it. We’ll talk soon- got to go!” Casper hung up, slinging his bag over his shoulder and stepping into a pair of boots, getting his coat on before running out the door behind Scotty, shutting it and practically swimming their way to Sharon’s through the snow, the snow to their waists. He clambered up the steps after him, seeing Scotty tear off a glove and fumble underneath the railing, producing a key and opening the front door, greeted by Spencer. Casper ditched his snowy boots and coat the second he was in the door, shutting it and running to the kitchen, sliding to a halt on his knees next to Sharon, his eyes wide and worried. “Sharon, we’re here, don't worry. Hannah is coming, and Lathe is on his way, he might take a bit, but he’s coming. How are you doing? Deep breaths, Hon. Talk to me.” Casper offered her a hand, which was quickly taken with a vice-like grip. *Fuck, I take it not well.*

Sharon spoke through gritted teeth, smiling sarcastically, pain obvious in her features. “...just… dandy.” *FUCK THIS HURTS.* She let out a pained cry as she felt another contraction, her shoulders and heels digging into the floor.

Scotty got out of his snow laden clothes after a few seconds to struggling with them. He followed Spencer to the kitchen where he kneeled down on the other side of Sharon, watching her cry out in pain. *Pillows… “Sharon… Where do you guys keep your extra pillows and blankets?”* *We should support your back during this…* 

“L-living room, next to the couch in the corner, just take stuff from there…” Sharon breathed heavily, trying to focus on that as Scotty left, looking up as he returned. “W-why…”

Scotty gently lifted her head up, his arm gently snaking down her back and taking a pillow and propping her up off the floor, he put quite a few more under her and then laid her down on them. “Back support… I'm gonna get you some water to drink, we need to keep you hydrated.”

Eren stumbled a little bit, coming down the stairs in layers upon layers of clothing. “Isn’t it early for Sharon’s child to come?” *I thought she said 8 months a few days ago?*
“Yep!” Lathe called from the closet nearby, having donned snow pants, his boots and a winter jacket, wearing a sweater underneath and wrapping a scarf around his neck, black gloves on his hands. “But when it happens, you just go with it, because there isn't any prolonging it at this point. Her water broke- it's happening, and there ain't no stopping it.” Lathe got Eren to come over to the closet, helping him into his boots and coat, getting a scarf on him and pulling a hat on himself and Eren, getting him earmuffs. “Keep your ears covered with it- we’ll just have to ditch any helmets.”

Oh well. “We’ll need to see- go get Charlie tacked up and ready for the cold. I'll be right back.” Lathe shut the closet and ran to the garage, grabbing his old-fashioned motorcycle goggles and then going to the wall of the garage to snatch a pair of ski goggles he commonly used as safety goggles. Eh, they're better for keeping out wood shavings. ...and perfect for snow. He ran to grab his medic bag from upstairs, running back to the garage on second thought to snatch up two pairs of snowshoes just in case, getting the wool blanket from downstairs and grabbing a second bag to put them in, running across the backyard to the barn. “How's it coming along, Eren?” He made sure he spoke loud enough for Eren to hear him with the earmuffs on. We need to get going the second we can.

Eren was almost done putting Charlie’s tack on, though he was in the middle of tying another set of stirrups in. “I’m almost done!” Eren called back, not looking up, but making sure that he had a place to tie down any bags they had and Charlie’s two blankets for wherever they were going to keep him. Almost ready. “What bags are we taking?” Eren looked up once the stirrups were attached and got the straps at the end of the large saddle ready to hold whatever Lathe had to give him. Let's hope you're not gonna freak out but Charlie’s gonna be almost jumping through this stuff...

“My medic bag, and then this one has a wool blanket and snowshoes for us just in case.” Lathe handed them both to Eren to tie onto Charlie, taking a deep breath to steady himself as Eren helped him clamber up, making sure he had a good hold on Eren as he led Charlie to the door of the barn and into the snow, heaving the door shut behind them from his precarious perch on Charlie. “Okay, that should keep everybody from freezing… I need to call Spades, tell her what’s happening, since we're not gonna beaaAAAAA!”Lathe let out a terrified shout of surprise as Charlie suddenly jumped into the sea of snow, immediately forgetting about trying to call Spades and clinging to Eren, trying to hold on as tight as he could both to him and Charlie. Fuck “Eren, he's jumping, Charlie's jumping, I don't wanna fall off why is he jumping ?!!?” Make it stop this is terrifying!!!111!

Eren turned his head slightly. Why the hell is he screaming now? He asked for it! “So we can get through the fucking snow! It's up to just under his stomach! Put your feet in the damn stirrup and straighten your legs out a little bit.” Eren’s feet were firmly planted in his own stirrups and his legs straightened so that his butt was off of the saddle, giving him ample amount of space to move as Charlie jumped around in the snow, whinnying in happiness as he did so. Charlie's happy.... For some damn reason....

Lathe realised that Eren was off of the saddle and moving with Charlie, kicking his feet into the stirrups and and straightening his legs, still holding onto Eren for balance and letting out another shrill yelp as Charlie jumped again. I thought when I bought Charlie I signed up for a horse not a
fucking kangaroo. Lathe struggled to keep his balance as they jumped to Maria Avenue, soon able to keep in his sounds of distress and focus on moving with Charlie, still terrified of the animal under him, yet slowly becoming more and more able to keep his balance independently. ...it's getting kinda easier the more you do it... but I'm no jockey... I'm fucking exhausted... Lathe sighed in relief as they made it into the driveway after nearly fifteen minutes, though he let out a surprised sound as Charlie suddenly stopped jumping, having moved as if Charlie would jump again. He ended up flying from the saddle and collapsing into the two and a half feet of snow below, the sparkling snow collapsing on top of him and leaving nothing but white. ...well fuck. Which way is up again?

Eren looked around as he heard a soft umph. “Dad?” Where the fuck did you go? Eren swung his leg over Charlie as he pranced around, itching to jump around in the snow more. He hopped down and landed right on top of Lathe, letting out a yelp of surprise and hurriedly stepping off of him. “Oh my god… Dad!” Eren looked down to the man buried in snow with worry. His hair is completely white. “You look like an old man.”

Lathe just glared playfully at him, standing up and shaking his head with mock indignance. “Well then, I think the white hair is rather becoming on me.” He flipped his hair, scattering the snow. “Eren, go see if the gate in the back is unlocked, and if it is, get Charlie back there. We need to keep him contained.”

Eren nodded, taking Charlie with him and letting him out into the backyard. Yeah, go play in the snow. Eren took his gear off before following Lathe back up the front steps and into the warmth of the house, setting the gear near the front. I put the blanket on him, and Lathe took the bags from me. Eren cringed as he heard another scream of pain come from the kitchen, followed by frantic swearing.

Lathe dumped his coat, snow pants and boots by the door, running with his medic bag to the kitchen and stopping next to Sharon, switching into doctor mode. “I'm here, Sharon, don't you worry. We’ll take good care of you. Just breathe.” He rifled through his bag, knowing already what the situation was, but turning to Sharon after a moment. “I don't have anything to make the pain stop- morphine would only make it worse, and I'm no anaesthesiologist… I can't really do anything for that… I'm sorry Sharon. We'll try and have this over safely and as soon as possible.”

Sharon gritted her teeth, a resigned look on her face. “So what you're telling me… is that I'm giving birth on this kitchen floor without anaesthetic?” She let out a grim chuckle as Lathe nodded. “Just my damn luck. As long as we both come out of this in one piece. I'm trusting you. Oh, and before I forget-” She looked up to Scotty and Casper, gripped their hands tightly as they knelt on either side of her. “Hannah and I wanted to ask you two to be the Godparents- Casper as the Godmother, of course.” Might as well tell you now before I pass out from exhaustion, from pain, or blood loss. Any.
Casper’s eyes went wide. *...you're asking us? They dysfunctional sort-of family? What the hell are you thinking? ...might as well give it a shot.* Casper placed his free hand over his heart, looking into the distance and speaking, trying to defuse some of the tension in the room. “I've always wanted someone to call me Mom…”

Scotty looked at Sharon in surprise. *What!?... When the fuck did I sign up for that shit? Am I going to be responsible for a child? Casper what the fuck did you get me into!?* Scotty could do nothing more than stare blankly at the conversation going around him. What do I do?... *Casper’s always wanted to be a mom? What the fuck Casper... You’ve never said a damn thing to me about this.*

Sharon looked up to Scotty, wincing as she laughed faintly. “If you need a minute to process that, just let me know if you're onboard before the day’s over. It’s kinda a decision we need to make.” She breathed deeply, suddenly letting out a loud swear as another contraction started, here back arched a bit. “**Fuck...** Lathe I hope you know what the **fuck** you're doing… and you'd better promise me damn good drugs by the time this is all over.” *Paaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaiiin....*

Eren watched in worry as Sharon started to swear like a sailor as he stood in the room opposite the kitchen. *She’s giving birth.... What’s happening....? Why is she swearing... Does it hurt?* Eren seemed to cower a bit as Sharon really started to scream and yell. *Is she mad at me?* Eren hid behind the wall, his head peaking out from behind the doorway, his eyes wide with concern.

Sharon looked over to the doorway, seeing Eren peeking out from behind the wall, trying to speak clearly, her expression softening as much as it could in her pain. “Eren... I-it's fine, I'm just.... In a lot... a lot of pain.... d-don't worry, it's okay.... P-please excuse the swearing...” She dropped her head again as more pain tore through her, cursing sharply. “**Fuck,** this shit **hurts...**”

Casper looked up as Sharon addressed Scotty, realising he had a shell-shocked expression, his eyes widening. *...we never discussed kids. Ever. “Scotty, don't panic, we can talk about this all later, okay? Let's just focus on making sure this goes smoothly for now.”* Casper reached around to grab Scotty’s other hand, squeezing it tightly. *We obviously need to have that talk today.*

*...you can't exactly be completely dressed for this, you sound like it's happening very soon. Lathe looked over his shoulder, addressing Eren. “Eren, go play with Spencer and the pups.” This isn't gonna be pretty.* Lathe stood, going to the kitchen sink and washing his hands, wringing his hands and drying them with a clean dish towel, going back to Sharon. “I know this isn't ideal, but you're gonna have to do your best to work with it, okay? We’ll talk you through this.” *... It'll be okay.*

Sharon nodded, shifting her mindset and preparing for long hours of labour. She had Casper and Scotty in a death grip for more than four hours as her cervix dilated, panting and focusing on her breathing with every contraction. They were just at the four and a half hour mark when she felt the
urge to push, looking to Lathe with slightly panicked eyes and telling him. When he nodded and moved to monitor everything, telling her to push when she felt she needed to, she nodded, taking in deep breaths and pushing hard when she felt the urge to. Lathe occasionally told her to fight the urge, give her more time to stretch, though it wasn't much more than an hour before Lathe was handing her her baby, washed gently with warm water and wrapped in a small, warm blanket.

“Congratulations, Sharon… it’s a boy.” Lathe smiled as he handed her the baby, a wondering, adoring look obvious in her eyes. 

...you're gonna be a great Mom. “What were you and Hannah thinking of for names?”

Sharon just silently stared at her baby, who stared right back at her with eyes as blue as the sky, squirming gently in her arms. “...he looks like a bruised potato.” Well, birth isn't exactly a comfortable thing. She smiled faintly, pecking his forehead. “But he's my bruised potato.” She looked up to Lathe, shrugging one shoulder. “Hannah and I had agreed that if they were a boy, she would name them. I don't know yet what his name is…” She looked back to him, pecking his forehead again, a finger brushing over the wisp of hair on his head. “...but he's mine. ...oh my god, I'm a Mom.” She laughed airily, not believing it. “...I'm actually a Mom now. ...what the heck... I get to do Mom things now, like feed him and then soon enough I'll be making lunches and driving him to hockey practice… but for now, all I have to do is hold you.” She beamed tiredly, pecking his temple and his nose. “I'm going to be the best mom I can be for you, ya hear?” She murmured to her son, relaxing and soon feeling the exhaustion of her entire body, her hold on her son slipping. “Oh no, uhm, someone take him, I somehow don't even have the physical energy to hold him anymore. Yeesh, I'm too tired to do the first job I'm given…” Help I don't wanna drop him! Sharon smiled as Eren suddenly stepped out from hiding behind the wall, going to carefully pick up the baby and gently cradle him in his blanket. “...someone take a picture of that, it's too cute.”

Eren looked down at the bright-eyed baby in his arms. He's fat.... And pudgy... But his eyes are like ice.... He's not crying either... is he okay? Eren sat down with the small child in his arms, cradling him, the two simply seeming to have a staring contest. What do I call him? Does he have a name?

Lathe smiled at the sight, doing as Sharon said and sneaking a picture of the adorable scene before returning his attention to her. “You're not completely done- though it's obviously gonna be much easier from here on in. You still need to deliver the placenta, then we’ll get you cleaned up and relaxed until the ambulance shows up. That sound okay?” He nodded as she murmured assent, the next hour passing rather uneventfully, the kitchen soon cleaned up and Sharon having been very carefully moved from the floor to the couch wearing a comfortable robe, finally feeling a bit more able to hold her son, letting him suckle as they waited for the ambulance. It finally came down the street, following a snowplow as it cleared Maria Avenue. She was brought out to the ambulance, everybody following her inside to go to the hospital, Charlie still gallivanting in the backyard.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Oh my god, it’s as bad as Buffalo… Holy crap! It took me three hours to shovel my car out of the snow! And then I could barely get out of the fucking parking lot! Sharon! I’m coming!” Hannah finally got home about half an hour later, pulling into the driveway, and hurriedly hoping out of the car. She came in right away, looking around in confusion to an empty house. What the hell? “Rico!” Hannah yelled out, hearing the patter of paws on the hardwood floor. “Rico, where’s Mum?” She asked him quietly and he whimpered and ran to the window, looking around for the car. She left? Where is she? Hannah went to the kitchen, looking outside as she heard a whinny. What… The… Fuck… She looked out the window, seeing Charlie running around backyard. Okay.. So I see that my wife has been abducted to the hospital… And Charlie is running around my backyard. She sighed, picking up his gear and going out to get her car. She got his bridle on him and got into her truck, she rolled the window down, pulling Charlie up to the side of her truck. Come on, taking you home… Hannah drove Charlie home, him walking on the outside of the truck. She got him settled into his stall, dropping off his tack and then getting back into her truck, she rushed to the hospital. I swear I hope he was born alright, and I hope you’re okay. She rushed into the hospital not a few minutes later, sighing in relief as she came across Eren sitting near the door of Sharon’s room, the baby in his arms. His small fists waved around, burbling as Eren smiled softly. Holy crap, that’s adorable… “Eren? Eren, can I have my son?” I really want to hold him.

Eren looked up from the child as Hannah spoke. I don’t wanna let go though, I wanna hold him… I want one… Eren looked down a bit as he gently shifted the baby and held him out to Hannah, who took him, gently holding him and walking into the room. Eren got up and followed her, going towards Lathe and moving to hide a bit in his shoulder. I want one…

Sharon looked up, smiling sleepily and cheekily as she saw Hannah come in holding their son, her voice soft. “Nice of you to show up, Hon. -Hey, ‘m kidding. It’s as bad as Buffalo out there. You’re here now.” She held out a hand to their son as Hannah came up and sat on the edge of the bed, a tiny hand grabbing her finger tightly, burbling happily. “…and I’m glad you’re here, and that he’s okay. I’m never going to be able to look at that kitchen the same way again. …now, we agreed. What’s his name?” That’s your call.

Hannah smiled softly, moving to sit down on the edge of the hospital bed. “His name is Maverick Kegan Laskowski.” He’s here… He’s really in my arms. Oh no… What happens if I’m not good enough? What happens if he comes out hating me? What if he doesn’t love me? A bunch of thoughts ran through her head as she held his small body.

Eren watched as Hannah sat down near Sharon with Maverick in her arms. What do I tell Levi? Does he even want one yet? He’s so soft… And fat… He’s cute… Eren gently tugged at Lathe’s sleeve, peering over his shoulder at the display in front of him. Would they be mad if I want one too?

Lathe smiled warmly at the scene in front of them, looking to Eren as he tugged at his sleeve. “What’s up, kid?” His voice was soft and warm. Today has been very eventful… …oh wait. We never called Spades. …crap, we need to do that in a minute.
Eren looked up to Lathe with large eyes, pondering everything around him. “Home… Charlie?” He asked quietly, moving to huddle close to Lathe as he shivered a bit. *It's cold… And I think Charlie would be cold too…*

Lathe nodded, wrapping his arm around Eren and keeping him close, picking up the second bag he had brought with him to the house and then dragged into the ambulance, taking out the wool blanket. Thank god there was room enough for everyone and then stuff… He wrapped it around the both of them, keeping Eren close as he rifled for his phone. “Here, let me call Spades and see if she can come retrieve us. She should be out of work by now…” Lathe looked up to Hannah after a second of thought. “Hey Hannah, you went back to the house before coming here, right? Did you see Charlie in the backyard?”

Hannah nodded. “Yeah, he’s back at your house, I walked him beside the truck, so he’s back home and safe.” *I took care of that… Shit, should I have come here first? Is Sharon mad at me? That I took care of a horse before I came here to see her?* Hannah froze for a moment, looking down at Maverick as he gurgled. *Don’t be mad at me…*

Sharon smiled. “Good- he’d been prancing around the backyard for hours. Can’t have him freeze outside.” She easily caught Hannah’s conflicted train of thought, struggling to sit up somewhat and leaning on an elbow, reaching her shoulder and rubbing it soothingly, her voice quiet. “Hey, what’re you beating yourself up about now? Charlie’s now home and warm, and you’re now here with us. And you picked a very nice name- I appreciate that his first name is one of my favorite words.” She lightly chuckled, her eyes tired yet bright. “Hey Hannah, guess what.” She gently booped her nose, a pink dusting over her cheeks. “Maverick and I love you. And you’re gonna be a great mom. I’m sure of it.” *We do. And you will be.*

Hannah blushed softly, a small smile creeping across her face. She nodded, a finger gently running over Maverick’s cheeks. *He’s cute… I wonder how long we’re gonna have to stay here… Cause he was born early… But he seems perfectly healthy.*

Eren looked up to Lathe, tugging on his sleeve again. *I wanna go home… I wanna tell Levi… I want one.* He had large pondering eyes as he stared at Lathe intensely, hoping to get a reaction from him.

Lathe quirked an eye at Eren, seeing the pondering look in his eyes. “What’re you cooking up?” *He’s got that same look he’s had all day, holding Maverick. …are you… “I’m going to call Spades and have her come to get all of us- and you and Levi are going to have to really talk and think about it.”* Lathe murmured the last bit in Eren’s ear, speed dialling Spades and holding the phone to his ear. “Hey Spades! Busy day, we’ll be able to explain in a bit. Are you free to pick Eren, Casper, Scotty and I up from the hospital?”
Spades’ eyes flew open at the statement coming from him. *Pick up from the hospital.* “Yeah, I'll be there in a few minutes. You’ll have to squeeze since I have the truck.” *Doesn’t have much of a cabin…. And I’m not even gonna fucking ask what the hell happened…*

“Thanks hon! We’ll explain what happened when you get here. Love you, tell Levi we said hi!” Lathe soon hung up, looking to Eren. “Alright kid, you don't have to wait too long, she'll be here soon.” He looked over to Scotty and Casper. “That includes you two- Spades is coming with the truck. We'll get you home.”

Sharon looked between all of them as they nodded, settling back down as she grew tired of keeping herself propped up. “All of you- thank you so much for everything you've done. I owe you four a million. I don't want to think about what would’ve happened if I was alone…” She shook her head at the thought, looking over to Scotty and Casper, seeing Scotty was still in a bit of a daze, thinking. Her voice softened immensely as she spoke. “You two do some serious thinking and talking about it, okay? We’d really like to know soon.” *I hope you’re okay with it, Scotty- Casper seems all over the idea. You…. not so much.* She looked back to Hannah as Maverick started to make small sounds that didn't seem as happy, his tiny arms flailing a bit. She chuckled, reaching for him. “Let me guess- he’s hungry.” *…you are too adorable for my mortal heart to handle.*

Casper nodded at her statement, looking to Scotty with a worried expression, who hadn't responded to her at all. *…this whole thing has really thrown you for a loop, hasn't it... we really need to talk, then... I eventually want kids... and if you're dead set against them... ...that could end up being a deal breaker…* Casper gingerly moved to lace their fingers, squeezing Scotty’s hand…. *it won't come to that... we’ll work this out... he just wasn’t expecting it to be dropped on him so suddenly... that must be it... ...please, let that be it...*

Hannah smiled softly, giving Maverick over to Sharon, moving to hug all of them. “Thank you… Really, thank you a lot.” *I don’t know what would’ve happened if Sharon had to give birth by herself.*

Eren giggled as he was hugged before moving to hide behind Lathe again, swaddled in a blanket. *I wanna go home!*

Scotty looked up a bit when Casper squeezed his hand, his eyebrows raised a bit, before he looked back down at his feet. *I have no idea what to think about this. I mean... Casper hasn’t even mentioned kids... And I know he always knew he would adopt... But... That’s a big responsibility, a kid...*

Lathe hugged Hannah warmly, beaming. “Of course- I'm just glad everything went as well as it
did.” No real complications. ...as long as you don't count giving birth on a kitchen floor as a thing that makes the process more complex. He looked to his phone after a moment, Spades having texted him. “Spades is here- I’ve got to get these two and my popsicle of a son home. Sharon, take it easy and feel better. Hannah, don't worry too much. I know you do that. And Maverick-” Lathe grinned. “...keep being adorable. We’ll see you.” With a wave, Lathe left the room with Eren, Casper and Scotty not too far behind. He led them down to the parking lot, sliding into the passenger seat of the truck he found waiting for them, pecking Spades’ cheek as he clambered up inside, his bag nestled at his feet. “So, big news- Sharon had her baby! The short version of the story is that she was a month early, and because of the snow an ambulance couldn't get to her house, and she called Casper and Scotty who called me and to abbreviate things I ended up delivering him on her kitchen floor after Eren and I rode there on Charlie. His name’s Maverick, by the way. Total cutie. In Sharon’s words, he did kinda look like a bruised potato. But he’s an adorable bruised potato. She’s doing okay even though she didn't have anaesthesia at all during the whole thing; everything went very smoothly. Hannah was snowed in at work, that's why she wasn't there until we’d already made it here. ...so yeah, that was a thing. How was your day?” ...that all just happened. Okay then. Apparently so.

Spades was quiet as she took everything in that Lathe had just rattled off, making sure everyone was squashed in before she started the truck. Okay… Well congrats to them, I hope they're doing alright. Spades pulled out of the parking lot, driving carefully to their old house to drop off Casper and Scotty. “Alright, out of the car yeh hooligans.” Eren’s curled up to Lathe still… I wonder what happened? “My day was pretty good… Had to help shovel the plows out today… That was fun.”

Lathe held Eren close in his lap, chuckling a bit at the way Spades kicked Casper and Scotty out of the truck. “It was freezing today- and I understand the struggle. Literally Charlie had to leap over the snow in order to get anywhere. ...oh, that's a thing we have to do. Feed the animals. That's kinda important.” ...that kid was too cute… ......I want one...... Lathe had a faraway look in his eyes, carding a hand through Eren’s hair absentmindedly.
Chapter 50: Progress Part 2


Lathe heard Eren’s teeth chattering, reaching over to turn the heat in the cabin all the way up, tugging the wool blanket closer around him. “My god, you're freezing. How are you so cold?” We were inside for hours after we got off of Charlie. Were you outside the whole time? “Were you with Charlie for a while outside?” That would explain it...

Eren nodded, showing his cold hands. “I b-built a fort.” I'm cold… My fingers…. I can’t feel them. Eren’s fingers had almost started to turn purple, his hands shaking. I hid inside with Charlie.

“Well damn. I wasn't paying attention. I was kinda occupied with Sharon giving birth. My god you're freezing…” Lathe held Eren’s hands, trying to bring warmth back into them. “The first thing we’re doing when we get home is everything we can to warm you up.” They were soon home, Lathe carrying a frozen Eren up to the front door, the blanket he was wrapped in becoming damp. ...his snow pants must be soaked… how did I miss that?

Eren shivered as he was brought outside, his teeth beginning to chatter as the cold wind whipped him in the face. “D-Dad…I-I’m cold…” I’m really cold… Eren coughed a bit, curling into the small amount of heat that Lathe’s body was giving off.

Spades parked the car, concerned as Lathe rushed towards the door. “Lathe? Is Eren okay!?” He can’t be with how fast you're trying to get in the house.

Lathe kept Eren balanced on his hip as he unlocked the door, quickly getting Eren inside. “He’s nearly hypothermic!” He called back to Spades, rushing Eren inside and kicking off his boots, setting him on the couch for just a second as he ran off to the basement, going over to a metal box affixed to the wall and opening it, turning a dial. Might as well- you'll need it. Lathe came back upstairs, going over to Eren for just a minute, brushing the hair from his eyes and layering more blankets over him. “Ten minutes, Eren. In ten minutes we’ll be able to warm you right up, okay?” He pecked his forehead and went to the kitchen, getting things out for soup as the ten minutes passed, soon retrieving Eren and carrying him blanketless out the back door, across the patio. He set Eren down on a wood bench, taking the cover off of a hot tub, steam curling up from the water. He set it aside, going to gather up Eren. “Work with me, kid. You'll thank me for this.” He set Eren into the tub quickly, holding him down by his shoulders in the hot water.

Eren had continued to shiver in his thoroughly soaked apparel, barely caring that Lathe had picked
him up. His eyes widened as the searing pain of sudden heat surrounded him, letting out a loud
screech. “Let me go! It hurts!” Eren cried out, struggling against Lathe’s hold. It feels like fire! NO!
I wanna get out! It hurts! It hurts! Let me go! I don’t want it to happen again!

Lathe kept a firm hold on Eren, wincing at his pained screech. “Eren, I know it hurts but give it a
minute, please, you'll feel a hell of a lot better soon. Promise, just calm down, and give it a
chance!” Stop fighting it- you need to be warmed up somehow.

Eren cried out in utter pain, shock setting in and the added weight from the water settling into his
clothes causing him to stop his frantic fighting to get out of the hot tub. It... it burns.... My hands
burn... so do my toes... it hurts.... Eren had tears quickly rolling down his cheeks. “Daddy… it
hurts…” He whined, turning his head to look up to Lathe. It hurts... let me go.

Lathe let go of Eren’s shoulders as he stopped fighting, laying down on his stomach near the edge
of the hot tub and reaching to wipe at Eren’s tears. “It’s okay Hon, I know it hurts, but you can't be
a popsicle forever. We need to warm you up, and this is one of the best ways to do that. Please,
you'll feel worlds better in just a minute. I swear.” Three minutes. Tops.

Eren whimpered a bit as he was touched with warm hands, his whole head icy still, though starting
to warm up. “It’s... It’s warm...” Eren murmured, feeling like his body was made of lead. I feel so
heavy.... But I don’t want to move either.... It’s warm...

Lathe smiled faintly. It's working. Lathe dipped a hand into the water, running it through Eren’s
cold locks. “You'll be all warmed up soon- I'm going to be inside making soup for dinner. Don't
worry- I'll send out a lifeguard.” Lathe winked mischievously, standing up after a minute and going
back inside. He saw Levi at the counter, moving as if to get more tea. “Hey Levi, here's the thing.
So, Eren was outside a lot today and pretty much became a popsicle, so now he's in the hot tub. He
kinda needs a lifeguard, so-” Lathe blushed as it seemed Levi had immediately stripped to his
boxers, his clothes now piled on a stool. Lathe just covered his face with a hand, pointing out the
door. “To the right on the patio, can't miss it...” He just shook his head as Levi padded to the door,
going to continue making soup. ....my god... you two are both equally nuts...

Levi padded quickly across the shovelled patio, slipping into the hot tub next to Eren, sighing
quietly at the hot water, soon relaxing into it. He looked over to Eren and smirked faintly, shifting a
bit closer to him. He reached out to toy with Eren’s long hair, suddenly realising how cold his head
still was. “Yeesh, you're still freezing. Here.” Levi shifted over a bit, bringing up handfuls of water
and pouring them over Eren’s head, gently massaging his head. You're so cold up there still.

Eren whimpered a bit at the sudden rush of warmth before he leaned into the touch of Levi’s gentle
fingers. Fuck... I never really realized what muscle he has.... That he has the ability to rip me
apart, yet he’s gentle as all fuck with me. Eren moved a bit closer, trying to get closer to the body heat, still surrounded by only lukewarm soaked clothing.

Levi soon felt Eren’s soaked snow pants brush his leg, noticeably cooler than the water. “Your clothes are still really cold- I think we need to get you out of them… okay?” He gently tugged at the zipper of Eren’s snow pants as he nodded, helping him out of his clothes and heaving them onto the patio until Eren was similarly left in just his boxers, Levi going back to massaging his head. ...why am I not allowed to kiss you…? I mean, I know why… but it's not fair… Levi sighed quietly, deciding to push it a little bit and shifting to put Eren in his lap facing him, his warm hands still tangled in his long hair. ...please don't freak out or be mad...

Eren looked down to Levi as he was shifted, a slight blush forming across his cheeks. Holy fuck… Thank the lord for my meds… and his glorious body. Holy shit…. I…. I… fuck it… I’m going to enjoy myself. Eren leaned down slowly, his lips barely pressing against Levi’s, testing the waters as he closed his eyes. I hope you won’t be too rough.

Levi’s eyes widened as Eren leaned down and kissed him, his eyes soon sliding shut and kissing him back, his hands still tangled in his hair. ...don't fuck it up, Levi. Levi kissed Eren back slowly, after a short while letting his tongue brush Eren’s lips, soon then retreating. ...fuck, I don't know how far you'll let me take this, I don't want to mess everything up.... A hand drifted from Eren’s hair down his back and side gently to rest on his hip, pulling him a bit closer.

Eren kept his head down, letting out a soft sigh as Levi’s hand ran down his side, feeling an electrified twinge as he was touched. Fuck…. I missed this sooo fucking much. Eren moved down to kiss him, his mouth open and waiting for Levi. If you’ll be gentle, you can do it. I don’t mind at all.

Levi took the cue to slowly press his tongue forward, exploring Eren’s mouth and tangling their tongues together, sighing into his mouth. ...fuck I've missed being able to do this... Levi’s other hand moved from his hair to his back, pulling him flush against his chest, shivering a bit as Eren’s hand tentatively reached up to tangle in his hair and play with his undercut. ...I missed you... Levi felt a pulse run through him as Eren made a small sound into the kiss after a while, breaking their lip lock and looking to him, his gaze serious, his thumb lightly brushing the hem of Eren’s boxers. “Eren… how far are you going to let me take this? I don't want to overstep anything…” I don't want this to end up with a huge setback...

... You don’t want to push it... that’s good. “I’ll…. I’ll let you do it… but you need to promise me something…” I really want a kid... and I know this is a backhanded way into getting one... but I want to hold a little cute monster again.
Levi looked to him with soft eyes, his voice warm. “Mmm? What do you need me to promise?” Levi’s hands ran soothingly over his side. Anything.

Eren took a deep breath, burying his face into Levi’s shoulder as he spoke up. “Can we…. Can we have a kid?” Eren asked his voice quiet, but loud enough for Levi to hear. I want someone to hold onto... cause I know you’re going to leave me....

Levi was quiet for a little while, simply holding Eren, lost in thought. A kid? Already? ...but I haven’t even proposed yet... but, at the same time... I have always wanted a family. ...it doesn't have to be this exact instant... ...and I already know I want to spend forever with you... Levi tilted his head, kissing Eren’s neck lightly, murmuring. “...I think that's a wonderful idea.” A teeny human... Levi faintly smiled against Eren’s skin. ...I approve. Levi kissed and gently nipped at Eren’s neck, moving to the joint of his neck, his hands playing with the hem of his boxers.

Eren made a bunch of small groans and gasps as Levi’s gentle hands ran over his sensitive skin. It feels so weird... but I like it.... I haven’t been touched in a long time... Eren moved a bit so that Levi’s thumb caught in the hem, tugging them down a bit. Come on, I know you want it too.

Levi quietly moaned as Eren began to make small sounds in his ear, humming against his skin and taking Eren’s cue, slowly dragging down his boxers from his hips, discarding them and letting his hands drift back to his hips, one hand holding his ass, the other trailing across his leg to his length, tentatively grasping his length and slowly pumping it. I'll be gentle, don't worry...

Eren shivered as he felt Levi’s hands move across his skin. His hands are warm... holy fuck... he’s touching me... what do I do? Eren took in a deep breath, letting out a heavy sigh as Levi continued to gently stroke him, his face lifting a bit as the pleasure set in. Fuck it feels good... We haven’t done this in over a year.... Fuck.... I haven’t done this in almost a year.... Fuck I want more...

Levi let his hand drift up from Eren’s ass, taking gentle hold of one of his wrists and placing it on his shoulder, murmuring in his ear. “You can touch too…” It's okay. Levi stroked Eren’s length firmly, his thumb running over the slit and continuing to kiss down to the joint of his neck, attacking with licks and nips. ....no marks. ...well, maybe a teeny one... Levi suckled gently on his skin, leaving a small dark mark. ...okay, that's it. He felt his own length beginning to harden as Eren panted in his ear, his eyes shaded. Fuck... it's been too long...

Eren nodded, his breathing becoming slightly heavy as he was touched more. His fingers warily found the hem of Levi’s boxers, tugging them down and off, leaving them somewhere in the water. He gently touched Levi’s hardening length, letting out a small gasp as his fingertips brushed against the warm organ. “F-fuck.... Levi... ” Eren shuddered as Levi’s thumb ran over his sensitive slit, his legs widening a bit, giving him better access. I really want this....
Levi hardened at Eren’s voice and at his touch, his eyes shades darker as he pulled back to look at Eren, smirking faintly at Eren’s pleasures expression, his cheeks scarlet. **You look so damn perfect.** Levi slowly shifted Eren closer, his hand dipping underneath him to gently prod at his entrance, pushing past the ring of muscle as he gauged Eren’s reaction. **I don’t want to hurt you… I need to prepare you for this.**

Eren shifted a bit, a little uncomfortable with the feeling of being opened after so long, but quickly becoming accustomed to it. His eyes were shaded as his hands continued to stroke Levi’s twitching length. “L-levi…. Hmmm…. More…” He moved his hips a bit to get more of Levi’s fingers inside of him. **I want you to feel good too….** His hand timidly wrapped around his length tighter, squeezing gently as he stroked him.

Levi quietly moaned, his hips rising a bit subconsciously into Eren’s touch. **Please…** Levi soon added a second finger, feeling up Eren’s walls and curling, scissoring him to open him up. He kissed at Eren’s neck, trying to get him to relax as it soon became three, slowly thrusting in and out of him. **I want you to feel good…**

Eren let out a soft whimper as he was stretched farther than he had been in a long time, but the pain that he felt was quickly overridden. **It feels… it feels good… I feel full…** Eren soon started to move against the three fingers within him. “L-levi…. Mmmm…. M-more…”

Levi smirked, his eyes glinting a bit as he drew his hand from Eren, his hands going to lift him up, squeezing his ass a bit as he lined him up, his tip at his entrance. He slowly pulled Eren down and onto his length, moaning as he was sheathed inside of Eren, the pressure on his length threatening to overwhelm him. **Holy fuck I’ve missed this…** Levi stilled as their hips met, his head resting in the crook of Eren’s neck. “T-tell me when I can move…” **You probably need to adjust…**

His breathing was hard, and his eyes were wide, his nails starting to dig into Levi’s shoulders as he was penetrated. “Holy fuck… Levi… shit…” His voice was loud at first, pain quickly setting in as he was stretched before it quieted. **It stings… He’s so big…** Eren held onto Levi tightly. “Not yet… don’t move…” **It fucking hurts…**

Levi nodded, nibbling at Eren’s neck and shoulder as he waited, keeping himself from shifting for a short while. After a little he held Eren’s hips, grinding gently up into him, murmuring. “Can I move?” **Please?**

Eren took in a deep breath, nodding as he tried to weakly lift himself on Levi’s length. He dropped back down on it with a soft whimper. **It still burns… but it’s a good burn…** Eren’s arms were wrapped around Levi’s shoulders, his legs shaking like leaves as he could barely control himself.
Levi’s hands cupped Eren’s ass, lifting him up on his length and pulling him back down, moaning at the delicious friction. He somehow controlled himself and kept the pace steady but slow; at least, until Eren began to moan in his ear. He picked up the pace a bit, panting heavily as he thrusted deeply into Eren. ...mine.

Eren cried out in bliss when Levi found his prostate, his toes curling in the warm water. His hair still chilled from the outside chill, though the steam from the hot tub helped to ease the bite from the windchill. “L-Levi… h-harder…” Eren moaned out as his arms tightened around Levi’s shoulders, feeling his large hands rest on his thin hips. I’m gonna have bruises tomorrow.

Levi switched their positions, Eren sitting on the bench as Levi got on even footing, holding him tight as he pounded into him, moaning into his shoulder. “Y-you feel really really good… you're so tight…” I love it. Levi suckled on Eren’s neck a bit lower, leaving a dark mark. Yours. Mine. Anything. He tried not to grip too tight, but he couldn't help it, his hold on Eren’s hips strong.

Eren gasped in shock as Levi flipped their positions. “Ha….. Levi… R-right there…. Ngh…” Eren shuddered as he felt the increasing warmth beginning to pool in his stomach and the feeling of being stretched increasing tenfold as he closed around Levi’s length. “Levi… I… ngh…” I can’t hold it… I wanna come…. Eren let his chin touch the water, trying not to freak out that he was so close to the water. I don’t wanna go under…

Levi brought his head up, kissing Eren fervently as he rammed into him, tilting Eren’s head back from his point above him as he tangled their tongues. He felt his own coil beginning to tighten, whimpering as Eren began to clamp down on his length. “E-Eren, I can’t… m-much longer…” Levi gasped as Eren suddenly clamped down tightly on his length, moaning into his ear, letting out a pleased groan as his coil finally snapped, still pounding into Eren as he came. Fuck… so good...

Eren’s cries rang out as he came into the warm water, the friction becoming too much between the two of them, his head falling slack as he passed out from the exertion of having sex. His body became limp, and his hair now finding the warm water, his face finally becoming warm from his close proximity to the water. Warm….

Aaaand he’s out. Levi withdrew from Eren, finding his boxers and tugging them on, getting Eren’s on him as well while keeping his head above the level of the water. He picked him up, cradling him in his arms as he stepped from the hot tub, scurrying quickly to the backdoor and into the house in two seconds flat. Fuck it's cold as balls out there… Levi kept Eren pressed to his chest, wiping his wet feet off on the carpet so he wouldn't slip and he began to move to the staircase, nearly jumping out of his skin as Lathe appeared seemingly from nowhere, looking between Eren passed out in his arms and him, his expression neutral.
“Where you running off to, Levi? Something… happen?” Lathe nodded to Eren, smirking a bit as Levi sputtered for a second. “I’m just messing with you. I can see the mark. Now get upstairs, dried off, and in warm clothes. Both of you. Soup will be ready in about an hour.” With that, he turned to go back to the kitchen, a pot with vegetables sizzling on the stove and bowls of more vegetables closeby.

Levi blushed, nodding and walking past him, getting Eren upstairs. He snatched a towel from the closet, getting them both out of their boxers and hanging them to dry, drying them off and getting into a tank top and sweatpants before dressing Eren warmly, getting him into a pair of sweatpants and thinking as he looked for a sweatshirt. …you know… Levi disappeared down the hall for a moment before reappearing, getting Eren into Lathe’s midnight blue sweater. …it seems to be his favourite. …and he looks hella adorable in it.

Eren laid there limply on his bed, moving a little in his sleep, murmuring soft incoherent ramblings. Warm…. It feels nice… I wanna stay here…. Eren’s fingers twitched sporadically, a side effect to his increased PTSD medication. I feel like I’m floating…. Why do I feel like I’m floating? Eren tossed his head to the side a bit as the rest of his body twitched and jerked. …Uhm, that’s a very vivid dream you’re having there… Levi slid into bed next to him, worried as he gently wrapped his arms around Eren, moving him so he lay on his chest, his hands resting on his back. …I kinda want to nap until dinner… though this is kinda disconcerting… side effect of the drug increase? Maybe? …he should be okay. …I think.

Eren’s body continued to twitch and jerk until his muscles seemed to lock in place, his whole body beginning to shake, his head lifting up and back arching down into the bed as he began to seize. Blake’s barks alerted to something wrong as he raced up the stairs, sliding into the room and jumping up on the bed with the two of them. Human is seizing…. Human smells weird… something’s wrong…

Fuck. “Oh no, Uhm…” Levi slid out from under Eren, shifting him so that he laid on his side as he seized, hearing Lathe soon run into the room as well. He kept Eren in that same position as time passed agonisingly slowly, Eren finally ceasing his shaking after two and a half minutes. Levi slid back onto the bed when it was just Eren’s fingers still twitching and locking up, on his side facing Eren and pulling him close, pecking his forehead and pressing kisses all over his cheeks. …please be okay….

Eren’s eyes barely opened, his eyes looking so completely broken as he looked around. Fuck…. I feel like I’m gonna be sick…. Eren struggled to get up, though he realized that both Levi and Lathe were holding him down. “….ugh…. Off… sick….” Eren felt his fingers twitch again, locking up in odd positions, causing him discomfort and his stomach to churn all over again. I feel like I’m gonna
Lathe’s brow furrowed, wincing a bit at Eren’s fingers locking up. Lathe moved from his hold on Eren, going to the hall and quickly returning with a bucket and towel, setting them on the floor next to the bed. “You need to try and get some rest... This will be here for if you need it.”

Lathe looked to Levi and nodded his head to Eren, letting him curl around him as he left the room, immediately pulling out his phone and dialing Casper as he went down the stairs. “Casper- it's Lathe. Eren had a seizure, and now his fingers keep locking up. He feels nauseous too. Any comment to make on that?”...anything?

Casper’s eyes widened. “I’m sorry what? Did you just say he seized? Is he okay? Did he hit his head?”

Nausea... What the hell?

“What pills did you give him this morning? Has he had them yet?”

He could be having withdrawal.

“He had his anti-depressants, and a higher dose of his PTSD meds like we’d talked about. But that was it. And no, he didn't hit his head while seizing. He’s okay, except for the nausea and the locking joints in the fingers of course, but he's okay besides that. He's been acting a lot more like his normal self today. Oh, hum... Pretty sure he had hypothermia when we got home. He was outside while we were taking care of Sharon. We got him in the hot tub to warm up, and apparently he and Levi were a bit, ahem, occupied with each other... But then they came inside to dry off and take a nap.” Up until now he’s been more like himself than ever.

“Okay... um... How high did you hike his meds? A half pill or a whole one?” He could have been having a bad reaction to the increase. Casper drew up a chart on a spare sheet of paper. “What’s his height and weight again?” I know you have it memorized.

“A whole pill... And he’s 115 pounds, 5’9.” He's getting tall. “...you're drawing out the entire chart right now, aren't you.” Yes you are. “Oh, you're gonna want all the actual compounds in the things, aren't you. Uh...” Lathe started listing off compounds, giving him the names of everything in the meds Eren had been and was currently taking. “...so is any of that pointing to anything?”

Casper hurriedly scratched everything off as it was listed, getting through the chart in a matter of minutes from having done it so many times before. “Yeah... I think he’s overdosing... But on the PTSD meds... You have a pill splitter, right? I think you should take him down to two and a half pills instead of three whole ones.” He’s not overdosing by too much, but I can see what his body’s reacting too.

Lathe nodded. “Yeah, of course I have one... I'll do that. Maybe that'll help somewhat. Thanks... We’re all worried.” We want him to be okay- and him taking that huge step with Levi again after so long is a real improvement.
Casper nodded at the other end. “Try that for right now and if he persists… Call me again.” I hope it's just half a pill too strong… Otherwise I have no idea what we’re going to do with him.

“Alright, I will. Talk to you later.” Lathe hung up, going back to the kitchen to continue making soup. We’ll all eat, and everyone should feel a bit better after that. ...we’ll try the new dosage in the morning when he takes them again, and hopefully he’ll do even better.
Chapter 51: 12 Days of Fucking Christmas Part 1

Day 1

Lathe stared at the large box sitting near the piano, assessing the situation. A picture of a fully assembled tree was printed on the outside of the box, though Lathe knew better as he mentally prepared for the mess of faux branches inside. "This is going to be a struggle." Lathe sighed, cracking his knuckles before getting to work, building the tree in sections, beginning with the base and setting it in place before working on the top half. He spent more than an hour sorting through the branches, finally going to attach the top part of the large tree to the base, looking over his shoulder as Eren came down the stairs, smiling. "Hey Eren! Going to feed the animals?" He watched as Eren nodded. "Okay- make sure the heater in there is on. We can't have anyone freezing out there. It's really really cold." He went back to screwing the two parts of the tree together, extracting himself after a minute and admiring the tall faux tree. "After Eren's back inside, I'll call everyone down to help with the decorations." Lathe busied himself vacuuming up the stray fallen needles, putting away the box and getting out the boxes of decorations. He had just begun to open the boxes of ornaments when Eren came into the room, holding a tiny black kitten, peppered with teeny white socks and a white ear, small patches of white and grey all over him. Lathe froze, staring at the kitten. "Eren… where did you find that?" "We never had Salem neutered. Is it his?"

"The barn… The others are frozen…" There were five of them… Just laying there completely cold. And this guy was abandoned in the hay, squeaking in the cold… "Salem brought the other feline… She’s in the barn with him…" Eren moved to go make some formula for the small kitten and starting a syringe so that the kitten could eat something, which soothed his squeaking. He’s so small… He was smaller than all the others…

...the others? Frozen?! Lathe immediately set down the box he was holding, running out to get on his boots and coat, going over to the barn and looking around for Salem and the other cat, seeing them up in the rafters. Lathe went to a post with pegs drilled into it, climbing up to the upper loft. He saw a pile of loose hay clawed out from a bale, scattered a bit from where Eren had gotten the kitten, five other kittens laying motionless in a small heap nearby. Oh my… Lathe moved over to the pile, seeing two of them had tried to drag hay over to them in an effort to keep warm, the others not completely physically developed. Three of them were stillborn… The others… Lathe gingerly picked up one of the two, his expression falling as he realised how cold they were. They froze. The kitten Eren picked up was definitely the runt of the litter… she rejected them… Lathe sighed, taking off his coat and tenderly piling the small kittens in the hood, bringing them down from the loft and setting the coat near the front door of the barn. He went to the wall of the barn and retrieved a shovel, going up the path dug from the barn to the porch and digging near the back steps to find the garden, nothing yet planted there. He was eventually able to dig a deep enough hole, going back to get the kittens and burying them, taking a carved stepping stone from underneath the patio and settling it on top of the dirt. I hope they didn't suffer long… Lathe went back to the barn to get his coat on again, going back up the loft and looking out to where Salem lounged on a rafter with another cat, white with some black spots on her head and neck, a black sock on her left front foot and a spot on her right hind leg. Lathe tried his best to act non-threatening as he carefully climbed out on the rafter, studying the cat. I don't see a collar, or an ear tattoo from where I am. Is she a stray? Lathe made it to where she and Salem lay, Salem keeping a close eye on Lathe and the cat hardcore judging Lathe as he slowly reached out a hand to pet her, getting her to slightly turn her head. No tattoo. I'm going to need to bring you to a vet then, see if there's a tracker in you or if you've got any diseases. And get your kitten their shots and stuff. I'd better do that as soon as possible. Lathe took off his coat again, offering his arms with the coat
across them to her, to carry her to the house and keep her warm, as well as Salem. *Come on, please work with me.* Salem soon understood and stood, moving over the cat and clambering into the coat and making himself right at home, looking to the other cat and seeming to convince her to climb in as well. He carefully climbed down with the both of them, getting them into the house. Salem climbed up onto his head as he approached the couch where Eren was feeding the kitten, setting the mother down for a moment and gently lifting Salem onto the couch, going to get his wallet and keys from the side table. “Eren, we need to get these two to the vet and checked out. You up for a ride?” He went to gently pick up the cat, having coaxed her off of it to get his coat on, looking to Eren and hoping it didn’t get annoyed and scratch him. *...be a nice kitty and not hate me please...*

Eren watched the white cat come up to the small kitten he was feeding and sniff it. *So you’re the mommy? Why did you let them all die?* He shifted to look at the kitten again. “Can we go after I feed him?” *Then I’ll put him in my shirt when we go, so he stays warm.*

Lathe nodded, letting the cat roam over the couch, keeping an eye on her as she sniffed the runt and Eren. *...why’d you let them freeze? Couldn’t you do anything?* Lathe went upstairs for just a moment before reappearing with a smaller blanket. He waited for Eren to finish feeding the kitten, scooping up the mother in the blanket as Eren cleaned the syringe in the sink. “Alright, let’s get them to the vet then, shall we?” Once they had their coats and boots on Lathe led them to the car, the cat bundled up in the backseat, Eren holding the kitten in his shirt as he drove carefully to the vet. *Thank god it's not that busy- today is really snowy, and that paired with the fact it's Wednesday morning means not many people have appointments.*

“Alright… Let’s see… Mr… Quo? Is it really you? Holy crap never thought I’d see you again! Mike told me that you quit from the high school. Eren, honey, how are you doing?” Hanji’s loud voice sounded in the small space. They seemed so much more energetic than they had years ago during Chemistry. “And who are these little munchkins you got here?” *God the cats are adorable.*

Eren’s eyes widened as he saw Hanji come up to him in quite a loud and obnoxious voice. *Huh? What’s happening… Why is Hanji here???* Eren instinctively moved to cover the kitten in his jacket. *Nope… I don’t trust you…*

Lathe stood up as he heard Hanji speak, grinning to them. “Hey Hanji! It’s good to see you again! And about who the cats are, that’s actually what we’re here to find out. My cat Salem had kittens with what we think might be a stray, and we didn’t know until today. We need to see if there’s a tracking device in the Mom, and they both need their shots up to date.” Lathe looked over as Eren seemed to shrink a bit, stepping back and gently tugging his sleeve for him to stand up. *C’mon Eren, it's fine. They’ll be okay. Promise.* *Hanji is slightly maniacal… but they won't hurt them.*

Eren nodded, slowly finding the courage to follow the two of them into the back. *Please don’t tell me they're crazy still… they're the reason the lab blew up in my face that one time during freshman year.* Eren gently pulled the kitten out, clutching him in his hands. *I want to make sure you’re safe… Your eyes aren’t even open yet.*

Lathe followed Hanji, making sure Eren was behind him as they came into an exam room, setting the cat on the table and taking back the blanket. She sniffed around the table a bit, looking up as Hanji came close, immediately switching to sass mode and judging her every move. “I didn’t see any tattoos on her ears and she didn’t have a collar. And the kitten’s only two days old, so.” Lathe shrugged a shoulder. *That's a thing.*

Hanji nodded, moving to get something that almost resembled a small metal detector, moving it all along her body. “Well good news is, she’s now yours. Bad news is… That was her first heat, and
she took, so she’s only around a year old.” Hanji moved their thumbs around towards her mouth, seeing the small incisors and judging her age. *Quite young.* “So, only the one kitten? Or did she reject them? He looks quite small to not be rejected.” Hanji rambled as they looked over the white cat with interest, and moved onto the kitten and inspected him as well. *They both need their shots.*

Eren nodded. “She rejected all of them… The other five died… Three were stills, and the other two froze… I don’t think she had them in the barn…” His voice was pretty quiet, gently stroking the kitten as he was inspected by Hanji. *They're not gonna hurt him right?*

Lathe shook his head a bit. “She wouldn’t have bothered moving the three stills into the barn a long way… or any of them if she rejected them… and Salem didn't look much like he was trying to keep them warm either. She had them there, alright… and I'd thought she’d be much older than just a year. And now she’s part of the family. Guess she needs a name…” Lathe pondered it, seeing Hanji try to examine the kitten while Eren still held it. Lathe gently nudged him. “They’re not going to hurt them. Let Hanji have a proper look, okay? They’ll be fine.” *This is their job. Hanji wouldn't keep it long if they were hurting animals all the damn time.*

Eren looked back to Lathe before he nodded and let go of the kitten. He moved to take the new cat, picking her up and gently holding her, seeming to purr as she was picked up. “Does she not know what to do with them? I mean they’re both first time parents….” That’s the only thing I can think of when I see her acting all cuddly…

Hanji nodded, looking over the kitten a bit more before she moved to get the shots and started to give the kitten all his shots, causing him to squeak. “It’s okay, little guy, you’re almost done.” *Two more… And…. Done.* Hanji gently picked him up before switching out the cats that Eren was holding and giving him the kitten while they began to give the white cat her shots, which she severely disliked, even managing to claw at Hanji in disdain.

“Hey, be nice to Hanji. We can't have you getting sick.” Lathe moved to pet the cat as Hanji finished giving her the shots, calming her down somewhat. He picked her up after Hanji had finished, petting her under her chin, smiling as she purred. “We really do need a name for you, we can't just call you ‘cat’ or ‘Mom’ forever… Eren, can we name her Abigail Williams for the memes?” *You read the Crucible. You'll understand. ...probably.*

Eren looked to the white cat, thinking about it. “I… I guess Abby is fine…” Eren nodded, moving to put the squeaking kitten back into his shirt to keep him warm, which led to the kitten quieting down once he was encased in warmth. “Can we go home now?” Eren asked quietly, looking up to Lathe with curious eyes. *I wanna hold him a bit more… And I want Levi to hold me again…*

He nodded to the kitten tucked into Eren’s shirt. “You get to name the kitten anything you want. And we’ll go home soon- I need to acquire paperwork and allow Hanji to steal my wallet I mean pay them.” Lathe glared at Hanji for a split second before grinning. ...*lol.*

Hanji giggled, shaking their head. “Hmm… I do remember stealing your coveted wallet on more than one occasion while we were coworkers… Meet me out front and I’ll get your paperwork.” Hanji seemingly disappeared, leaving them in the backroom with the cats. *Those were some good old days... teaching chemistry to students... and giving them a really hard time about everything because why not! HAHAHAHA!*

Eren watched them leave with wide eyes before looking down to his shuffling feet. *He’s being quiet... I wanna go home...* Eren gently stroked the kitten through his shirt, trying to distract himself.

Lathe gently took Eren by the arm, holding Abby carefully and bringing them out front to the desk,
setting Abby on the counter so he could sign things and write Hanji a check. She stayed put until Lathe picked her back up, curling into his arms as they made their way back to the car and to the pet store, looking around at the new surroundings. ...we're at another place now. Why this one?

“Come on, Eren. We need more food bowls, more food now that we have two more mouths to feed, and collars.” That's a thing. He went to retrieve Abby, holding her wrapped in the blanket. As long as she doesn't hiss at the collar we pick we're good.

Eren nodded, taking the small kitten with him and he got out of the car. He wasn’t really paying attention to where he was going, just making sure that he was warm. He jumped as a car slammed on it’s horn, freaking him out, and bringing him back to reality, his heart pounding in his chest as he quickly hurried back towards the safety of the car. I almost got hit.... That car almost hit me...

Lathe looked over his shoulder as he heard the car horn, watching Eren as he scurried back to the locked car. You were behind me for two seconds ... “Eren! Come on, kid, it's okay!” Lathe made his way back to the car, gently tugging Eren along by the arm. “You're in on this too. I know what just happened was scary, but you're okay. I'll keep you right next to me while we walk, okay?”

Lathe led him to the front doors of the pet store, making sure to watch for all cars. He let him go when they came in, looking around for the cat aisle. “Here we are, safe and sound. Now, let’s go pick out something nice for your kitty, okay?” He gently petted the kitten’s ear with his finger before continuing on, Eren right behind him as they looked at the collars they had for sale. They're all nice. “He’s your kitten, so you get to pick the collar for your kitten. I'll see if there's anything her highness here approves of.”

Eren nodded, timidly moving around the practically empty aisle. What to get, what to get... Eren moved to touch one of the small collars, his eyes widening as he saw how shaky his hands were. “D-Dad...” I'm fucking panicking. Eren’s eyes widened even more as he started shaking more. I don’t have Blake with me... fuck... no...nonononono....

Lathe immediately had an arm wrapped around him, murmuring soothingly into his ear. “Eren, it's okay, please don't panic, you don't have anything to worry about. I promise, you're fine, nothing bad is going to happen. Just breathe.” Even Abby reached out a paw and booped Eren on the shoulder, looking at him with curiosity. ...you look weird. Why?

Eren’s breathing started to worsen as he started to freak out in full blown panic. “I... I almost got... h-hit...” His lip began to quiver as his body locked up, not allowing him to move. I haven't panicked in a long time and I don't have Blake with me... fuck ...

Fuck we don't have Blake what do we do...?! Lathe looked up as he suddenly heard a dog trotting up to them, looking up as he saw Moblit following a dog with a bright vest on. ...he's training another PTSD service dog. Lathe backed up a bit to give space as the dark-furred dog went up to Eren and gently tugged him to the floor, grounding him and being very careful of the kitten he cradled, licking his cheek and whining quietly to get his attention. Human needs help. I can help human!

Eren felt himself being tugged down to to the floor, his breathing becoming ragged as he heard the whimpering and whining. Blake?? No... I don’t have Blake... Eren’s fingers spazzed a bit, trying not to lock, but ending up locking anyways, his movements jerky as he struggled to pet the dog on top of him.

Moblit had let go of the leash, knowing Eren needed to be grounded. How long has he been like this? “Where’s Blake?” He asked quietly, his voice filled with worry as they watched Eren struggle to calm down.
“Uh, he’s h-home… I know we shouldn’t’ve left the house without him, but… honestly, Eren and I
never really go places much anymore… it slipped the mind. We’re just really damn lucky you
were here.” Normally Blake just runs in when you need help and then leaves… because he’s
psychic… but he hasn’t been brought with us in forever…

Moblit nodded, watching as Eren took his time to slowly relax with Felix on top of his chest. “How
often… Does this happen often? Or did something trigger it?” Should keep him away from
triggers… And Blake should know better then to let him leave without him. Moblit watched as Eren
slowly began to regain the use of his fingers. At least he’s getting better.

“It doesn’t happen too much… but Eren kinda almost got hit by a car in the parking lot… it pretty
much just got through his head right now… it freaked him out.”

Moblit nodded, kneeling down next to Eren, gently touching his shoulder, seeing that he was
starting to calm down. “Eren, this is Felix, Blake’s younger brother.” Wonder if he remembers
me… Try and act non-threatening.

Eren looked to the darker dog laying on his chest. His name’s Felix? This is Blake’s brother? I
want Blake. “I wanna… Go home…” Eren’s voice was quiet, his eyes feeling heavy. I’m tired…

Lathe nodded, shooing Felix off of Eren and setting Abby in Eren’s lap. He rearranged the blanket
so that the kitten was also secured in the fabric, setting them in Eren’s lap and scooping him up
into his arms. “We can do his another day. Right now, we’ll get you home. Moblit, thank you so
much. We’ll get better about bringing Blake with us places.” Yeah, we have to. We’re not always
gonna have something like this happen.

Eren nodded, moving to curl into Lathe’s arms, his hands shakily going to cover Abby and the
kitten. Home… I need Blake… I’m tired…

Lathe nodded goodbye to Moblit, walking Eren out of the store and through the parking lot, being
especially careful. He got Eren into the car and then home safely, unlocking the front door first and
propping it open before going to carry Eren inside and set him on the couch, whistling as he went
to shut the door. He heard the tell-tale click of nails on the floor as Maisie and then Blake came
downstairs, sitting by his feet and then following him as he went to the couch, jumping up and
curling up next to Eren on the couch, neither of them minding having a cat with them. They’re
getting along with Abby so far- and by that I mean they haven’t mauled her yet.

Eren laid down on the couch where Lathe had left him. “Dad… L-Levi?” I’m gonna fall asleep
soon… and I at least want him to know where I am… Eren moved a bit, feeling the animals shift
around him and Blake start to ground him, careful of both cats he was with. He felt the calming
sensation wash over him as he felt the familiar weight on his chest. It’s Blake…

Lathe nodded, running upstairs to retrieve Levi from upstairs. Of course.

Levi soon was padding downstairs, having been told everything and approaching the couch,
carefully trying to maneuver onto the couch next to Eren without crushing anyone. He soon
succeeded, pressed against Eren’s side and pressing a kiss to his cheek. I’m tired anyway… I could
do with a nap...

Eren barely had enough energy to weakly grab onto his shirt, but he managed before his eyes
closed completely, and his grip loosened as he passed out from exhaustion. Blake was hurriedly
sniffing at his chest and his neck. Human still smells really weird… He doesn’t smell right… Blake
continued to sniff at him, sniffing at Levi for a moment to make sure it wasn’t his scent which it
wasn’t. That alone confused Blake into stubbornly whining. He doesn’t smell right… It needs
Lathe quirked an eyebrow as Blake began whining, coming back over to the couch and seeing Blake furiously sniffing Eren. *oh. Right. “Blake, you probably smell your brother on Eren- Felix had to help calm Eren down. It's okay.”* Lathe scratched Blake behind the ears. *Eren might smell weird, but he's okay.*

Blake continued to whine, moving to pull Lathe’s hand to Eren’s neck. *Hooman smells weird… He’s smelled like this before… It’s not right… I can smell Felix too… But… It’s not him….* Blake continued to whine, trying to lick at his neck as if it would take the scent away. *He smells… Like something that’s dead…*

Lathe quirked an eyebrow, murmuring confusedly as Blake guided his hand to Eren’s neck. “What are you going on about…?” Lathe didn't know what to do besides cup Eren’s jaw, trying to figure out what Blake was so scared about. *What could you possibly smell that’s so weird?*

Blake whined even more when Lathe’s fingers moved across Eren’s skin, releasing the pheromone into the air. His ears pinned back all the way, trying to lick at Eren’s neck to get the repulsive smell off of him. *He shouldn’t smell like this… He shouldn’t… Why does my human smell like this? And he tastes salty…. Fuck… Why? Why big human! Why?*

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up at Blake’s reaction. *…what the hell? He just feels clammy to me. I dunno, does Eren not sweat and I've never noticed or something? “Blake, he’s just sweating. People do that. Chill.”* Lathe petted Blake to calm him, trying to get him to stop licking his skin so fervently. “Let the guy sleep, he’s had a long day. It's okay.” *…what is up with you?*

Blake whines got louder as he was dismissed. *No! Something is wrong with my human! He needs to be looked after! His nose buried deep into his neck, licking more, and sniffing, trying to see if he got rid of the scent. It's not going away… Which means there’s more… It’s coming from the water he’s leaking… This isn’t good. Blake’s ears stayed pinned as he licked Eren’s face and neck. Wake up… You need to be okay…*

*…is there something weird about his sweat or something? Do you smell something you don't like? …what the hell could yo- …oh. He glanced up, seeing Eren completely knocked out and speaking quietly. “Blake, Eren took a lot of medicine he wasn't supposed to… maybe that's what you smell. It's normal to sweat it out when there's so much.”* He gently petted Blake, trying to get him to stop still. “Don't worry- human is fine.” *Promise.*

Blake’s ears perked up a bit as Lathe spoke, his licks still continuing around Eren’s neck. His whining quieted and he laid still, licking where his head could reach. *It smells like death… And chemicals… The lethal ones my first human made me watch out for. He said they were dangerous to all humans… I don’t like it…*

Lathe smiled faintly, still petting Blake for a short while. *…he does a good job taking care of you, Eren. A really damn good job. Lathe soon moved back from them, nodding to Levi who looked up to him with one sleepy eye cracked open and turning to go continue putting together the tree, getting out a very large box and beginning to set up train track around the tree, spiderwebbing around it and taking up a decent amount of space, areas left untouched between them so you could easily step over and around them. He set up a small village of painted houses and trees, the tree skirt white, making it look like a snowy landscape. He spent the better part of an hour carefully setting an ancient-looking train on the tracks, attaching the correct wires to the track and slowly beginning to run it, flipping the right switches on the control box he held to make it switch tracks or blow the whistle, which was quiet as it went slowly around. He parked the train under a tunnel behind the tree after a little bit, wanting it to stay safe. …we can decorate when everyone is home*
Eren woke up about three hours later, finally feeling awake enough to actually open his eyes.

God… My body feels like lead… But I’m wide awake… Fuck… Eren groaned as he shifted, feeling a familiar weight on his chest. His hand slowly made its way to pet Blake, and close his eyes for a moment as he felt the soft fur under his fingers. I had a panic attack…. Eren gently shooed Blake off his chest, looking around for the kitten in a slight panic, but feeling him nuzzled against his ear on his shoulder. Oh thank god, he’s okay… Eren let out a sigh of relief, moving to pick up the kitten, and slowly getting up. Fuck… I’m sore… I hate those fucking attacks, my body feels like I grew ten years older…. Eren winced as his body creaked and cracked as he walked towards the kitchen, knowing he had to make formula for the now squeaking kitten. “I know, I know… Food…” Eren looked up, noticing that the house was relatively quiet. “Where is everyone?” Eren’s gentle padding sounded in the kitchen as he made his way to the fridge, making the formula in a few quiet moments. Gotta feed him…. He’s gotta be really hungry… How long was I asleep for?

Lathe was tapping at a laptop, trying to connect the Xbox to the projector they had wirelessly. It’s supposed to be able to do this… but it doesn’t want to…. ...what was the projector password? ...we have one of those? Lathe just stared at the screen in confusion as Levi looked through the options menu on the Xbox, finally hitting something that allowed the two to connect, the image on the television they’d brought down to test with finally mirrored on the screen. “Aaaaayy!” Lathe happily exclaimed as the two connected, grinning. “Video games and Netflix just got sooo much better.” Lathe looked to the staircase as he heard a small sound, and then the hum of the microwave. “Eren’s up, finally. His attack really wiped him out. Maybe he’ll be up for a movie or something, helping us test-drive the setup.” He stood, setting down the laptop with the projector application still pulled up. He went up to the kitchen, smiling as he saw Eren sitting at the kitchen island, feeding the tiny kitten. He was silent as he got out his phone, taking a picture. That’s too damn adorable. “Hey Eren- how’re you doing? Feel okay?” Lathe went to sit down next to him, watching him feed the kitten.

Eren still had his focus solely on the kitten in front of him, not really doing anything to acknowledge that Lathe was there. It took a few silent moments for him to speak. “Sore…. I feel fucking sore, and my head hurts…” I have a fucking headache…

...I’d offer you aspirin, but y’know…. Lathe gave him a sympathetic look, patting his shoulder. “After you finish feeding…. he doesn’t have a name yet, so kitty… maybe you should take a nice hot shower, it might help. We’re setting up stuff for movies downstairs, we got the Xbox hooked up to the projector. When you're out you could come watch something with us. That sound okay?”

Eren nodded slowly as he focused on the small kitten in his hand, meowing as he ate from the syringe. “Okay… Um… Could you make me food? I’m starving…” Even if it’s toast, I’ll eat it… Fuck… I slept way too long. Eren’s hands were steady as he gently held the kitten, making sure he didn’t squish him.

Lathe nodded, standing to go get the leftover ingredients from his grilled cheese, soon setting an assembled sandwich in the frying pan and then on a plate in front of him. “It’s a bit before four right now, so I’ll understand if you don’t eat much dinner. ...yeah, you slept for about three hours. You were exhausted.” He spoke as he saw Eren’s surprised expression. Yep. You were out.

Eren pulled the syringe away from the kitten’s mouth, looking to Lathe with wide eyes. “I was asleep… For three hours?” God no wonder my body feels so stiff… “and I had Blake on me the whole time?” Unless he jumped on me when I was asleep, which I did not feel… And didn’t Levi sleep with me? “When did Levi wake up?” I didn’t even feel him move. Eren gently set the kitten
down on the counter, letting him look around since his eyes were now open, and showing off strikingly light baby blues. *He’s not really into crawling away yet, just staring at everything that moves...* Eren picked up the grilled cheese, biting into it cautiously, and simply groaning as the cheesy goodness erupted in his mouth. *It’s so good... I haven’t had one of these in a long time.*

Lathe quirked an eyebrow and smiled, chuckling faintly and shaking his head a bit. *Of course.* Lathe went to gently pick up the kitten, staring at it with warm eyes as it looked curiously up to him. “Hello, kitty.” He gently nuzzled their noses. “You’re quite the adorable one, aren’t you?” Lathe watched as the kitten stared at him for a long while before nodding once, holding the kitten to his chest as he looked to Eren, smiling proudly. “I connect with this kitten on a spiritual level.” He thought a moment. “You still need to name him. Y’know, eventually.”

Eren put his food down to look up at the sight in front of him. “Can we name him Lucifer?” He picked up his food, subconsciously eating as he waited for his response. *This is my kitty... Why are you holding him? I guess it’s okay though...* Eren took only a few more moments to wolf down the rest of the food.

Lathe just stared at Eren, surprised for a moment. “Uh... Suuuuuuure?” Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him, nuzzling the kitten gently against his cheek. “Even though he’s still teeny enough to be practically made of sugar, okay. But, why?” *I like this one.*

Eren looked up, his voice quiet as he responded. “We... We could always name him Krampus....” *He looks like a ghost cat... So he should be named after something undead.*

Lathe’s eyebrows disappeared under his long black hair. “...Lucifer is fine.” ...*Well then, I wasn't entirely sure if you knew what a Lucifer was. ...apparently you do. But we're probably going to name another addition to the family Krampus soon enough.*

Eren nodded, moving to put his plate in the sink. “Can you watch him? I’m gonna shower... With Levi.” Eren added quietly to the end of that sentence. *Yeah, no I am not showering alone...* Eren meandered over to the basement, calling down to him. “Levi... Come on, I wanna shower...” *and who knows? Maybe we’ll get a little frisky while we’re at it...*

Levi picked up his head at the sound of Eren’s voice, smirking. *Shower? I get the feeling that's not all that's going to happen.* “Coming!” Levi stepped over the Xbox and went up the stairs, a glint in his eye as he caught Eren staring. “Hmm? See something you like?” Levi leaned forward to peck his lips, a mischievous look on his face as he shed the rest of his clothes, turning on the shower and waiting for the water to get warmer, soon tugging Eren into the walk-in shower with him under the hot spray, careful that neither of them slipped. He reached for the bar of soap and a washcloth, beginning to wash Eren, letting his hands wander. *...I missed this.*

Eren’s body shuddered under Levi’s touch, more often than not on a location that was heavily scarred, or anywhere on his back, where new skin was finally starting to heal over his wounds. *It feels weird... when someone else is touching it...* He swallowed hard, watching Levi’s hand get
lower on his sides. *He’s gentle*... *Which is nice, this shower is much too big to use alone.*

Levi’s hands drifted lower and lower, stepping a bit closer to him as his hands drifted to his nether regions, one hand cupping his ass as his other hand cleaned his crotch, going to gently nip at his neck and nibble at the soft skin. He dropped the washcloth after a moment, the suds rinsed away and letting his hand ghost over Eren’s length, lightly pumping it and gauging Eren’s reaction.  

*...would you let me?*

Eren’s breath hitched as he felt Levi’s hands on his length, gently teasing him. *He’s touching me...*  

*He’s actually touching me... So it wasn’t a dream... In the hot tub? And it wasn’t my misunderstanding to expect this...* Eren pulled his head forward a bit, trying to evade the gentle kisses out of habit from the two weeks of torture. *Not my neck... Anywhere but there...*

Levi frowned a bit as Eren moved, deciding to switch tactics and moved his head to the joint of his neck before he could move out of the way, dragging his tongue up his neck and leaving a long wide stripe before going to suckle at his ear, nibbling the shell and sucking on the spot right behind and below it. His hand stroked his member a bit more firmly, stepping so a foot was between Eren’s, his other hand squeezing Eren's ass and pulling him close, their fronts nearly flush as Levi stood on tiptoe to reach his ear. *I want to make you feel good... you should enjoy this.*

Eren calmed down a considerable amount as Levi moved where his head was, the tension on his body draining as he felt the warm wetness trail up his neck and then to the shell of his ear, only beginning to panic a bit when Levi kissed all around his ear, but took no move to touch his missing earlobe. *He's not... Repulsed... That's it gone, is he?* Eren’s mind clouded a bit as his body moved against Levi to try and get more friction.  

Levi moved to suckle on his lower ear as he sped up his strokes a bit, his hand twisting around his length as he slowly began to back Eren against the wall of the shower, the tile heated and switching to the other side, suckling at his other ear, nipping at where the lobe would be. *I can tell you're kinda worried about it... I don't mind at all that they're not there. You're still the hottest damn thing I've ever seen.*

Eren simply melted against the warm wall as Levi pushed him up against it. *He doesn’t care... He doesn’t care... Does he?* Eren let off a small whimper when he nipped too hard at a sensitive area on his ear, but besides that he was starting to become undone with Levi handling him like this. *Shit... I think I’m gonna cum soon too.* Eren could already feel the heat starting to pool in his abdomen as his length was teased skillfully. *He’s so fucking good at this...*

Levi lapped at his ear gently in apology, his eyes shaded as he saw Eren’s pleasured expression. He slowed his strokes, nuzzling against Eren’s skin until Eren was panting heavily. He pulled back a bit to look into Eren’s eyes, keeping eye contact as he slid to his knees, his hands slipping down his sides, cupping his ass as he licked a long stripe up the underside of his length, taking in his tip and beginning to suckle, bobbing his head to take in more of his length. *I want to taste you.*

Eren’s eyes blew wide as he watched Levi take in his length, feeling the warm walls closing around him. *Holy fuck.... That's hot....* He watched, his length throbbing inside Levi’s hot cavern, his eyes unable to look away from the look of pure adoration Levi held on him. He was completely entranced, feeling the heat pool once more in his abdomen. *He’s so fucking good at this...*

Levi let one hand trail down from Eren’s ass to his front, gently massaging his balls as he bobbed further and further down Eren’s length, struggling a bit but finally managing to take the entire length in, his nose pressed against his abdomen. He hummed, his eyes full of adoration and lust as he watched Eren’s expression of bliss. He could feel his own length rock-hard and throbbing from lack of attention, pulling back on Eren’s length to suck hard at the tip, his tongue running over the
slit in the head as he squeezed his ass. *I want to see you fall apart.*

Eren let out a soft groan as he felt his coil tighten uncontrollably. *Fuck….* “Levi… Levi please… Haa…” Eren shivered as he finally let his coil snap. *Holy fuck… Levi…* Eren watched Levi struggle to take his whole load. His hands moved from the wall, where they were previously clenched, to his hair, gently going through his locks. “L-Levi…” Eren's cheeks were flushed, and his eyes full of bliss.

Levi quickly swallowed, trying not to let any of his release escape, licking up every last drop and licking the corner of his mouth where some tried to escape. He moaned quietly as Eren fist ed at his hair, coming off of Eren’s length with a lewd sound. He pressed a kiss to his hip, standing and letting his hands run up Eren’s front, wrapping around Eren’s middle and pulling their fronts flush, one hand trailing up his back to tangle in his very long hair, kissing him fervently. …*I want you…* His length ached between his legs, pressing forward against Eren’s leg, wanting some kind of friction.

Eren kissed Levi back just as passionately, his hands shakily coming up to wrap around Levi’s waist. “Y-You too…” Eren let his hands fall from Levi’s waist, moving to turn around to press his chest against the tiles, his ass moving towards Levi’s crotch. *I want you too….*

Levi’s expression shifted, his eyes hooded as he pressed against Eren from behind, reaching again for the white bottle on the shelf and coating his fingers with the slick liquid, his hand drifting to Eren’s entrance and pressing a finger past the tight ring of muscle. He let his other hand drift around to Eren’s front, running teasingly over his stomach as he nibbled and suckled at his back gently, careful of the new skin growing over his wounds.

Eren couldn't stop moaning as Levi started to stretch him out. “L-Levi… Please…” He continued to pull forward as Levi sucked at sensitive skin, his back feeling like knives as he was touched. *Gentle… Please… More gentle…. It’s starting to hurt.*

Levi realised Eren was in pain as he moved away and whimpered, very gently lapping at the small marks he’d left in apology, trailing his tongue over his back. He soon enough was stretching Eren with three fingers, thrusting in and out and searching for his prostate, curling his fingers. *I want you to enjoy this.*

Eren calmed down a bit when Levi stopped sucking at his back. Soon the whimpers subsides, and moans replaced them, though Levi still couldn’t locate his prostate. *You are nowhere near it.* He moved his ass back onto Levi’s fingers, gasping as he got further down, and the tip of his finger finally grazing over the sensitive spot. *There.*

Levi smirked as Eren let out a pleased gasp and a long, loud moan. *There.* Levi pushed a bit deeper, teasing the spot and brushing the bundle of nerves, pressing butterfly kisses all over Eren’s back and standing on tiptoe to nip a bit harder at the joint of his neck, his eye lidded as he heard Eren’s surprised and pleased gasp. *I like that sound.* Levi pulled his hand from Eren after a long moment, slicking his length and lining up with Eren’s entrance, pressing light kisses to his back as he sheathed himself inside of him, groaning loudly as he finally felt Eren’s warm walls around him. “Holy fuck, Eren…” *You feel really really good… ”* T-Tell me when…”

Eren shivered quietly, moving his head forward out of the way from Levi’s mouth. *Not the neck… No… You can’t… Not there…* Eren whimpered for a moment before keeping his head down, out of the way of Levi’s reach. “Y-you can move.” Eren’s voice was quiet as he spoke up. *Don’t bite my neck… Or my back…*
Levi finally got the hint as Eren moved his head and neck away, pressing light kisses and licking across his shoulders and his back in apology, his hand splayed across Eren’s hip and dragging up lightly and teasingly, avoiding his length. His other hand went to hold his hip as he drew out of Eren and slowly thrusted back inside, beginning a slow and steady rhythm. He let out small moans as he moved, careful not to suckle or bite his skin at all. *He doesn’t like that… temporary or not. …you feel really good…*

Eren slowly became a moaning mess, his legs shaking a bit from the complete and utter bliss he felt. *I feel warm…. He’s so big… How does he fit?* Eren moved his head back up to rest his forehead on the tiles as Levi started to pick up speed. *Fuck me…. “Ngh… Right there… Please…” Please…. It feels so good. You’re being gentle… And I like it.*

Levi nodded, his right hand trailing up to Eren’s length, his thrusts picking up speed and beginning to go deeper, aiming for his prostate as he began to stroke him firmly. His other hand kept a gentle yet strong hold on his hip, keeping him from falling if his legs gave out. I want to *hear you… you make such amazing sounds… I love it.*

Eren couldn’t help it as he got progressively louder over the next minute. He struggled to press back into Levi’s thrusts, though found it hard to keep himself on his legs as they wanted to buckle out from under him. *Holy fuck. I can’t keep myself upright…. Fuck… Levi… So good.*

Levi felt Eren leaning on him more and more trying to stay upright, stopping after a moment and drawing from him, turning Eren so his back was against the warm tile and lifting him, helping his legs wind around his middle as he lined up again with him. He brought Eren down onto his length again, soon finding his prostate again and bouncing him on his member, moving to lick and nibble at his adam’s apple. *I know this would drive you insane… does it still?*

Eren let out a soft scream as Levi hit his prostate and bit at his adam’s apple. *Holy fuck! Levi! “Ngh… Levi… Please…” holy fuck… I can’t say anything else other than that, this is too good … “Nngh, m-make me y-yours.”* Eren’s arms wrapped around his shoulders, pulling him close.

Levi moaned loudly as Eren let out that delicious sound, sucking at his adam’s apple more roughly and practically pounding Eren into the wall. He could feel warmth pooling in his abdomen, letting the pleasure flood him. “E-Eren… y-you feel so *good…” I love it.* His hold on Eren’s hips threatened to leave bruises as he rammed into him.

Eren let out a sharp cry of bliss as his coil suddenly snapped, leaving them covered in pearly white drops. *Fuck…. It’s everywhere… Eren moaned as Levi continued to pound his prostate, prolonging his orgasm. “Fuck… Levi.” Eren let his head rest on Levi’s shoulder, letting him finish off. I feel like jelly.*

Levi moaned loudly as his own coil snapped, filling Eren, his thrusts slowing, lifting him off of his length and gently setting him back on his feet, making sure he could still stand. He helped him stay balanced, bringing him back under the spray of the shower and kissing him sweetly, rinsing them off. …*I really, really love you.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 2

Lathe looked around the kitchen, trying to find the rolling pin again. …*today has been a day. There are gonna be a million different people coming around at different times over the next two weeks, so of course I’m just making Christmas cookies enough to feed an army. Spades has been very*
distracting the entire time… she’s always either right behind me or I turn around and she’s right there. Obviously handsy. I don’t mind it- if I would we’d have a problem- but I was so caught up with her and with baking it wasn’t until Blake was sitting in the kitchen staring at me for a good fifteen minutes that I finally figured maybe Eren wasn’t entirely okay. Levi was out on a run thing with Erwin- in the fucking dead of winter, I’ll never understand them, though it kinda makes sense given they’re kinda marines- so he wasn’t around to tell me that Eren was sitting with his back on the floor and his legs crossed on the wall in front of him, having a conversation with the wall, the painting on the wall, Maisie, and Lucifer. Not the demon, the cat. ...he’s probably been there for a while. I just kinda picked him up and put him in front of a tray of cookies with frosting and icing tubes, telling him to go nuts. I let Lucifer munch on part of a candy-cane-shaped cookie that broke. And Eren is just going hardcore decorator on those cookies, they look fucking fabulous. It wasn’t until we had eaten dinner around five that we all finally were home to decorate the tree. The tree is amazing, though Salem and Abby decided it makes for an excellent treehouse and like to hide in it. They've broken seven ornaments so far, one of them whacked by Salem’s tail only to go sailing and break against the wall. ...yeah. Lathe laid on the couch, sprawled under a warm blanket, a Santa hat Eren had found and insisted he wear a bit over his eyes as he lay watching the polar express with everyone. ...my feet hurt… I’ve been standing baking all day… Lathe smiled faintly as the hot chocolate scene came on, his eyes sliding shut, slipping into a peaceful sleep.

Spades sighed a bit as she watched the ending to the movie. Well, Eren and Levi went upstairs… And I’m pretty sure they’re occupied at the moment… So I guess we’re safe for right now. Spades moved to turn down most of the lights, and shut the blinds before quietly coming over to the couch where Lathe lay sleeping. She moved down to her knees, bending over the couch and silently and carefully unbuttoning his jeans and pulling them down. Good… He’s still asleep, he should’ve seen everything coming… He wore the red flannel! That’s my favorite! How could I not? Spades carefully got his pants down enough that she could pull his flaccid length out, quietly taking it into her mouth. Damn… He’s asleep and already getting hard.

Lathe made a small sound, his head feeling a bit fuzzy as he blinked awake, feeling a heat between his legs. ...wha...? Lathe lifted his head a bit, feeling a pulse run through him as he saw Spades’ head bobbing over his hips, his full weight going back onto his elbows as he fully became conscious, his head dropping back as he felt every motion of Spades’ tongue, moaning deeply and trying to speak somewhat clearly as his length fully hardened in her mouth. “...That's some way to wake up.” ...it feels really good...

Spades smirked, making a lewd slurping noise as she bobbed on his length again, pulling off of him with a pop. “Does it feel good?” I hope it does… It’s really hard to take your whole length in. She went back down to take in his whole length, gagging a bit on the sheer size of him. Spades had a hand down between her legs, rubbing herself through her jeans. Damn it… I really wanna try...

Lathe’s eyes darkened as he saw Spades rubbing herself, trying to keep his hips from bucking up into her mouth and choking her. His voice was low and rough, having just woken up and being seriously turned on by the sight before him. “It feels really good…” Lathe leaned up on one arm, gently bringing Spades off of his length and up onto the couch straddling him, his hand rubbing her through her jeans as his other undid the button on the front, soon getting rid of them and rubbing her through her panties, leaning up to kiss and suckle at her neck, leaving some small marks that could be more or less hidden. Mine. “I want you…” Lathe murmured near her ear, his tongue dragging up the shell of it, careful of the blue earpiece.

Spades groaned as he rubbed her through her panties. “Lathe… Don’t tease me… I want it.” She groaned as she rubbed herself against his hands, trying to get more friction for her soaking hole. Fuck… I’ve been horny since lunch. She shivered under his touch as his large hands left burning
trails down her skin. “I want it all…” I want your everything. Spades’ eyes were dark with lust as she pulled his head down and taking his head in both her hands, smiling softly before leaning down over him and kissing him heatedly. She ground down her hips on his, being gentle with his hardon, making sure not to hurt him as her juices coated his exposed length.

Lathe gasped as she rubbed herself against his length, feeling himself getting slick as she kissed him passionately. He kissed her back with just as much fervor, if not more, hand hands trailing up to the hem of her panties, smirking a bit into the kiss. “They're the dark blue ones… you know I like those.” Lathe soon pulled them down her legs, dropping them unceremoniously on the floor. “…but we don't need them right now. They're…” He slid a hand between her legs, brushing over her clitoris and teasingly dipping his finger into her entrance. “Mine.” Lathe moved Spades, his length rubbing her exposed rosy folds, feeling himself slicken up. He lifted her up, positioning her over his length, though he let her put her hands on his chest to steady herself, wanting to let her go as fast or slow as she wanted. I'm a lot to take… Lathe nipped at the spot under her ear. “…Take your time.”

Spades nodded, closing her eyes as she gently moved down on Lathe’s huge size. She had her hands on his chest, struggling a bit not to moan out from his mouth nipping all over her jaw and around her ears. She let out a higher pitched moan as he found a very sensitive spot, her insides squeezing around him from the pleasure. Fuck… That feels really good… She moved down slowly, struggling to fit in all of his length, but managing to get his whole member in after a moment. “Fuck… You're huge…”

Lathe groaned as Spades’ heat completely enveloped him, kissing and licking down her neck, getting frustrated when her shirt got in the way and quickly taking it off of her and dropping it to the floor. He smirked as he went to nip at her breasts, hidden by the matching dark blue fabric. “You know you love it.” He gently ground up and into her, his eyes darkening further as she let out a moan above him. He kissed and licked at her soft skin, his hands going to hold her hips, lifting her up on his length until only the tip remained inside her, bringing her back down and starting a steady rhythm, leaving marks all over her chest. You feel amazing...

Lathe suddenly took on a predatory look, his hands moving from her hips to her back, deftly unclipping her bra before flipping their positions so that he loomed over her on the couch, dipping his head down to suckle on her breast and tease her other bud as he picked up the pace, moaning quietly. You feel really, really good… oh my god...

“F-fuck… Lathe… Mph…” Spades groaned and her legs moved to his waist, pulling him in closer. Holy fuck… This is amazing. “So good…Lathe, don’t stop.” I don’t wanna go to work tomorrow… Spades moved her arms to around his shoulders, keeping him pressed up to her.

Lathe moaned against her chest, littering her smooth tan skin with love bites and suckling at the underside of her breast, switching sides to mark the other as he pounded into her, his eyes lidded as he looked up to watch her expressions. “You look and sound so fucking hot… my god…” He murmured against her chest, his eyes blown wide with love and lust as he pounded into her.

Spades gasped in utter bliss, letting out a ragged sigh. “Lathe… Holy fuck… Ha… So… Ngh… Big….” She moved to hold onto him, pulling him flush to her. “Lathe… I love you…” Spades moved to pull her feet together, hooking them in place as she pulled him closer. Harder... Deeper...
Lathe’s eyes filled with love and adoration, moving to kiss Spades deeply, their tongues immediately tangling, pulling back after a moment to speak against her lips. “I love you so fucking much …” I really really really do. He immediately tangled their tongues together again, pressing flush against her as he rammed into her, his thrusts even faster and harder. Mine.

Spades kissed him back just as feverishly, pulling him close as she started to tighten around him. She pulled back to breathe, her eyes full of lust as she met his gaze, unable to break it as he pounded into her. “Lathe… Lathe… I’m gonna…. Cum with me…. Cum inside…P-please…” Spades began to beg as her fingers scratched across his back. I need you… I need you now… Please .

Lathe’s eyes were nearly completely black, barely any color still there as he refused to break eye contact with Spades, his arms snaking around her to pull her flush against him, arching her off of the couch a bit as he dipped his head down, sucking a large dark mark onto her neck as he felt his own coil snap, moaning loudly into her skin as he released inside of her. Yours.

“Lathe! ” Spades cried out in pure bliss as she came around him, holding him close to her naked body as she felt him fill her to the brink. I can only hope at this point…. She held a soft smile as she turned her head to peck gently at his head and his face, giving him a lot of pampering, keeping him locked in place there with him above her on the couch. I don’t want you to move… Even though I know it’s not gonna happen right away, on the first try… I just… I want you to be happy.

Lathe turned his head to kiss Spades sweetly, blushing as she placed butterfly kisses all over his cheeks. He finally caught her lips, a hand moving to cradle her cheek as they kissed languidly, still hovering over Spades. “I love you.” Lathe broke their kiss to whisper against her jaw, taking his turn to leave small kisses all over her, nuzzling into her shoulder. Really… I really do...

Spades smiled softly and let out a soft sigh, her hands tracing lazy patterns in his back. “Hmm, we should head upstairs soon, I think the boys are occupied… Still.” And I need to make sure that I take those pills, to help. “Shall we, love?” She asked softly, a hand coming up to run through his hair.

Lathe nodded, slowly pulling back and drawing out of her, stepping off of the couch and handing her the clothes he’d more or less flung a decent bit from the couch. He shimmied into his boxers, not even bothering with his jeans and soon pulling Spades upstairs by the waist, shutting the door to their room behind them and gently nipping her neck, his arms lovingly wound around her middle. …I… I just… I just really fucking love you. Lathe let her go after a moment, going to the dresser to find something comfy to sleep in.

Spades walked over in her undergarments to the bathroom connected to their room, turning the light on and reaching for her new pills. Okay... What are the instructions again? Two after? And once daily? But never more than three a day? Or 15 a week… Okay… That works. She took out two more pills and downed them with a sip of water from the sink. Spades set the pills down by the corner of the sink and moved back into the bedroom, getting out pajamas and slipping into bed beside Lathe. I really hope that it’ll help.

Lathe watched her after he donned a tank top, quirking an eyebrow….aren’t those her birth control pills? ...don’t you normally take those in the morning, and not night? Lathe shrugged after a moment, dismissing the thought and slipping into bed, immediately curling around Spades and pulling them flush, letting himself relax, though the thought still stuck in the back of his mind.

Spades nuzzled up to him, smiling in her sleep, what she hadn’t expected was to be roused from her sleep early in the morning. What the fuck? It’s like 5 in the morning? And I’m supposed to be off
today? She reached over blindly for her phone, groaning at the brightness of the screen as she
opened. “Goddamnit… Lathe… I gotta get up, you go back to sleep, alright?” It’s five in the
morning and I need to go and look over another fucking accident…

“...huh?” Lathe blinked, squinting as he was assaulted by the brightness of her phone, his head
dropping back onto the pillow as he finally registered her words. “…I'll try, Hon. And, um….”
Lathe caught her before she got up from the bed, gently tugging her back down to give her a small
peck on the cheek. “…just, stay safe, okay?” His voice was quiet, flushed a bit red at his sudden
overprotective action. …I want you to come home in one piece, please… He let her go after a
moment, tiredly watching her walk to the bathroom and reach again for the pills, his brow
furrowed a bit. …two? As opposed to one last night? …what the hell are those?

Spades finished up what she needed to, getting dressed rather quickly before leaning over the bed
to peck his cheek. “By Love, I’ll call you if anything makes me later than lunchtime.” Definitely
don’t wanna be though.

…I like being called that. Lathe gently smiled, his eyes sparkling a bit. “Okay Hon. And try to stay
warm.” It’s the middle of fucking winter. And to be called out so early, it’s probably something
that’ll involve a lot of standing outside. He lay on his side for a few silent minutes after Spades had
gone, heaving himself to his feet after a minute and padding to the bathroom. I'll try and sleep after I...
...those don't look right. Lathe stopped in his tracks as he saw the small container of pills,
reaching to pick them up from their place on the sink, reading over the label on the back. His eyes
grew wide as he read everything, setting them back down on the sink when he was done. He stared
at the faucet, trying to process it, speaking quietly to the nothingness around him. “…we’re trying.”
...she decided to start trying? …when was she gonna tell me? Lathe was soon enough going back to
bed, laying silent under the covers, warm, his thoughts jumbled. …was she ever gonna tell me? I
would’ve wanted to know, for fuck’s sake… …does she ever tell me anything…? She kept
everything about her operations quiet, and now I wasn’t even aware that she’s trying to conceive…
……are there more things she isn’t telling me? Lathe drifted in and out of sleep, troubled by what
he thought was the answer.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 3

The last thing Casper remembered was falling asleep in front of the fireplace. He’d had a long day,
and was glad he’d had the next day off, drifting to sleep in a small nest, a mug of hot chocolate
abandoned just out of reach. But when he woke up…

Casper tried to blink awake, confused when all he saw was black. ...the fuck? Why can't I see?
Casper moved to try and rub at his eyes, only to realize his hands were bound, as were his ankles,
and when he tried to make a sound of confusion, he finally felt the ball gag in his mouth, snapping
out of his sleepy state. …what. He shifted, feeling wooden flooring underneath his completely bare
form, blushing furiously as he realized he had no clothes on at all. …what the fuck is happening?
He tugged at his restraints, finding he couldn't move his hands or his feet nearly at all, chained,
blind, mute, and completely exposed to everything he couldn't see around him.

Scotty’s heavy footsteps sounded across the wood flooring, drawing closer towards him. “It seems
you’ve finally woken up sleeping beauty.” He moved passed Casper, ignoring the man lying naked
on the floor for now to poke at the fire place and add more wood to it to keep it going. I can
already tell we’re gonna have a lot of fun.

Casper became suddenly aware of the fire crackling next to him, feeling the heat on his side. He
tried to shift towards Scotty, finding he couldn't move much and letting out a sound, muffled by the gag. His mind immediately shifted to overdrive, his imagination beginning to run away from him. ..what are you going to do with me? ... plenty, I hope. Casper arched a small bit from the floor, whining quietly and pleadingly.

Scotty moved to squat down between Casper and the fire, watching over him as he struggled against the restraints. Letting out a dark chuckle at Casper’s whine, he reached forward and grabbed one of his nipples, pinching it tightly before tugging it harshly and doing the same with the other, barely giving him enough time to react. You are mine, and nothing can change that... And I really hope that this doesn’t scare you off like it did everyone else...

Casper whined as Scotty harshly tugged at his perked buds, whimpering and shifting, still straining against the restraints. ...damn tease, at least give me more than a damn second!

Scotty’s eyes darkened at the display moving to unlatch the gag from Casper’s mouth and letting him spit it out. Well, now I can hear him, which’ll probably be much more enjoyable. “First off, you’ll address me as Master, and I’m going to call you whatever the hell I want, got it?” Scotty’s large hand harshly grabbed Casper’s chin and pushed it up and back, leaving his neck exposed, a gentle finger running down his adam’s apple torturously slow.

Casper’s eyes went wide at Scotty’s statement, a violent shudder running through him as Scotty dragged a finger down his throat, feeling overwhelmingly vulnerable- and incredibly turned on. “Y-yes, M-master…. m-master, please, don’t tease me...” Going at this pace the entire time... agony....

“Does my little slave want some relief?” Scotty’s tone was mocking and demeaning as his hands slowly moved down to his chest, flicking at the perk nubs before moving down to his hardening member. “If I get too rough, or do anything that makes you uncomfortable, the safe word is ecosystem.” Hopefully you won’t be needing it... Scotty’s large hand made it’s way towards Casper’s length, gently teasing it for a moment or two before drawing back, getting up and walking out of the room, and venturing elsewhere in the house.

Casper stuttered a response, feeling arousal pulse through him. “Y-yes, Master…” Understood. Casper moaned as suddenly Scotty’s hand was on his length, wanting so badly to buck up into his hand, regretting his decision not to as suddenly the pleasure was gone, hearing Scotty’s footsteps as he wandered the house. “M-Master… where are you…” Get the fuck back here and just do anything and everything you want... please...

Scotty tsked from across the room, his voice a bit hard as he slowly got closer. “A Slave knows how to beg it’s master, come on now, beg properly for what you want…” I wanna hear this... I can only imagine what the hell is going on inside your pretty little mind. And now, I've got all the toys I wanted to play with... Scotty looked down to the cock ring and a few candles he had in hand. This should all work out nicely.

Casper panted, words starting to stream from him, speaking without shame, something afforded by his desperation. “S- M-Master, please, I don't care what it is you do, just please, give me something that lasts more than just a torturous five seconds. Anything, and everything that you want. P-please. Whatever it is, I... I can handle it.” Casper swallowed hard, not knowing exactly what he had just agreed to, though he let his legs spread a bit further apart, turning his legs out to more fully expose his erect member. ...I can. I'm not made of tissue paper.

Scotty’s eyes darkened dangerously before he got a few things and set them down near Casper, setting everything within arms’ reach of himself. Well, this is gonna be really good, I get to see just
Scotty took out two clips, attached by a thin chain and clamping them onto Casper’s outstretched nipples, making sure that when he tugged on the chain it agitates both nipples. **Alright, that chain is all set, now to start with the buttplug.** Scotty had his fingers slicked in almost an instant and started to stretch out Casper, his fingers not bothering to go deep, just getting him used to having the plug in his ass, then once he had it in, he slipped a cock ring on him and say back admiring his work and playing with the chain to elicit a response from him.

Casper whined as his nipples were clipped, gasping as Scotty tugged on the chain, squirming a bit in the binds. He tried to thrust himself down onto Scotty’s fingers as they began to open him up, silently pleading with him to go deeper, letting out a heavy sigh as Scotty inserted the plug into his entrance. He made a sound of surprise as Scotty suddenly moved to put a cock ring on him, feeling it squeezing the base of his hard length, already aching from such little friction. **...this is going to be torture.** Casper gasped as Scotty began to tug at the chain again, his back arching a bit and thrusting his hips up an inch or two on reflex, wanting more stimulation. “M-master, more, please…”

Scotty smirked, his hands hovering with a lit candle over Casper’s chest. “That’s a good boy, you’ll get your reward soon, I promise.” **You can suck me off later, don’t worry.** Scotty let the first drop of hot wax his Casper near the left nipple, watching for his reaction. **I can only do this if you’re interested.**

Casper gasped as the hot wax dripped near his sensitive bud, his hiss soon becoming a shaky moan, taking a deep breath and speaking after a long moment of silence passed. “M-Master… why’d you stop? P-Please, Master, keep going…”

Scotty’s eyes were blown wide as he followed Casper’s begs for more pain. “As you wish…” **His voice was deep and husky as he bent down to get closer to the bud, layering it with more and more hot wax, moving ever so slowly off of it and to the next perk nipple.** **He looks so hot squirming underneath his binds. I can’t wait to see him with me lodged inside,** **fuck that’ll be hot.** Scotty let his left hand fall down lower towards Casper’s hard length, gently teasing it and rubbing all over it as he poured the wax over his body. **Might as well give you something to enjoy.**

Casper gasped and whimpered as the hot wax poured onto his nipples, writhing under him. **Fuck, it hurts... and it feels so good...** Casper gasped as Scotty’s hand suddenly brushed over his length, bucking his hips up a bit and moaning as he teased his member. He whined as the cock ring stayed firmly around the base of his length, keeping him from release. “M-Master… f-feels good…”

Scotty smirked, moving to stop the hot wax from over his nipples. “Is my Slave enjoying his treatment?” **I really hope he is...** Scotty moved his hand to completely wrap around Casper’s length, pumping it slowly and watching his reaction as he bucked up into his hand. **Ah, that’s a great reaction...**

Casper shuddered as Scotty’s hand fully enveloped his length, trying to buck up his hips in time with Scotty’s strokes, trying to speak somewhat clearly. “Y-Yes M-Master, it feels r-really good, m-more please…”

Scotty moved his hand away from Casper’s length, letting it fall against his stomach in all its hardness. “Of course you can have more.” Scotty moved the wax right above his balls, letting it spill slowly and started to move up the base of his long length. **God, I wonder if he’ll say anything, this would normally be where the girls would all leave and never talk to me again...** **Fuck... Should I even be doing this to him?**
Casper gasped, a high-pitched sound of mixed pain and pleasure obvious as he panted heavily, trying to speak. “S-Scotty- Master, I'm sorry, Master, b-be careful, please…” fuck.

Scotty shuddered at Casper’s cry of pain. Shit… Is it too late to…. Fuck.. Scotty took the candle away after blowing it out, moving quickly and grabbing something from the kitchen, his hand holding an ice cube against the hot wax, quickly cooling it down and gently picking it off, trying to cause him the least pain. His brows were furrowed a bit, gently cleaning his body of the wax. Fuck, I shouldn’t have done that… What if he’s too scared to say the fucking safe word? Does he think I’ll be mad at him?

Casper quietly whined as he felt the cold ice against his skin as Scotty cleaned the wax off of him, panting and sighing as the wax was peeled from his skin. He lay rather still, still squirming a bit, his member painfully hard and aching for release. “M-Master… l-let me cum… Please…”

Scotty was moving the wax away from where Casper lay on the floor so that it wouldn’t need to be picked up later. His length instantly hardened to it’s fullest as he heard Casper’s cry. Well, I’ll let you off easy, so I guess I can do that. Scotty came over silently, having already removed his pants long ago, kneeling down straddling his shoulders and moving the tip of his head so it pressed against his lips. “You need to be a good boy to me before I give you any rewards.” I wanna see what you can do to me…

Casper shuddered at Scotty’s words, immediately taking his length into his mouth and swirling his tongue around the tip, licking the slit before flattening his tongue against the underside, sucking on his length as Scotty pushed more into his mouth, trying not to choke as his nose finally pressed against his lips. “Fuck… I love the way you taste…

Scotty smirked and moved to pull out of Casper’s mouth a bit before moving back in a steady rhythm. This feels amazing. Scotty continued to push his length in all the way to the hilt and even a bit farther when he deemed Casper had recovered from his last thrust in. He got a bit rougher a few minutes before pulling out all the way. He moved off of Casper and pulled out the plug without warning, uncapping the lube to lube himself up. He should be stretched enough for me by now.

Casper did his best to not choke on his length, even beginning to bob his head upward and meet Scotty’s thrusts. He choked as Scotty tried to thrust particularly hard, coughing around his length and struggling to breathe, a tear that would’ve streaked down his cheek being caught by the blindfold’s fabric, coughing as Scotty drew out of him, gasping for breath. He jerked in surprise as the plug was suddenly pulled from him, trying to spread his legs wider as he heard the cap of the lube snap open, his back arching and panting with want, his member weeping with precum. “M-Master, please… I want you… I need you… fast, hard, please Master… I want you so fucking bad.

Scotty nodded, moving to thrust right into him, sheathing himself in an instant. Fuck, he feels so fucking good. He rolled his hips to get even further in before starting at a brutal pace. “I wanna hear you scream for me…” I wanna hear all the sounds you make. Scotty reached down and took off the cock ring, pounding into him still and once his hands were unoccupied they grabbed at his hips with bruising force.

Casper let out a loud cry of pleasure, feeling himself quickly approaching the edge. “Haaaa, oh my god Scotty, I-it… so good… Sc… Scotty!” Casper cried out as he came, his entire chest littered with white, feeling bliss wash over him and hit him like a tidal wave, blacking out. When he woke up an hour had passed, feeling sore and tired, moving a bit and finding his hands weren't bound,
and he could see. *It's warm…* Casper shifted a bit and realized he was being carried up the stairs bridal-style, wrapped in a warm blanket and in Scotty’s arms. He brought a hand out from the folds of the blanket, weakly clutching at his shirt. *That… That was wonderful…* He didn't loosen his hold on Scotty as he was set on the bed gently, a thought occurring to him. *...I don’t remember you finishing,… We are not having that.* Casper suddenly felt more awake, tugging Scotty onto the bed and taking advantage of his surprise to roll over, stopping on top of him, smirking faintly and staring into his eyes. “What? Do you expect me to not repay you for everything you did?” He leaned down, his hands running over Scotty’s torso as he began to suck dark marks onto his neck, murmuring into his skin. “That… That was **amazing. I loved it.**”

Scotty groaned as he felt Casper mark his neck, and shifted his head back exposing more skin. His eyes held a hint of surprise though it was quickly changed into lust. “Casper… Aren’t you tired?” *I don’t want you to push yourself… I can deal with being blue balled. My hardon’s already gone down… What are you planning on? Scotty moved to put his elbows under him, and moving to wrap an arm around him to pull him off to get him to lay down.

**Nope.** Casper moved out of Scotty’s hold as he was almost pushed back onto the bed, snatching both of Scotty’s hands and holding them above his head. “No, I'm not. Let me… **repay** you.” Casper suddenly realized how naked he and Scotty were when he suddenly felt their crotches rub against each other as he shifted, himself completely bare and Scotty only having a shirt on. *...well then.* Casper looked up at the bedside table, slightly ajar. He was sure he saw the glint of metal inside, grinning as he remembered what it was. In a second he had Scotty handcuffed to the headboard, kissing down his neck as his hands ran down his chest, tugging at his shirt and pulling it over his head and far onto his arms, all lips and tongue and a bit of teeth all over his torso, his hands holding down his hips as Scotty tried to buck up. “Scotty, please. Let me take good care of you.” **You deserve it.**

Scotty’s eyes were wide as he watched Casper loom over him. *Holy fuck. “C-Casper… You don’t have to… You just… We just… You should be resting, I don’t want you to overexert yourself.”* **And that’s a real concern, especially with what I did...**

Casper huffed a bit in frustration as his mouth wandered over Scotty’s stomach, his one hand splayed across Scotty’s hip to keep him still. “Scotty…” His other hand closed around Scotty’s slowly hardening length, firmly and agonizingly slowly pumping it. “...just **enjoy** it.” *I’ll be fine.*

Scotty nodded, groaning as Casper’s slow ministrations found all the sensitive spots on his length. “F-Fuck… Casper…” Scotty grunted as he curled his toes, bring his knees in a little as he dug his heels into the mattress. *Is this payback for what I did? If you wanted me to stop you could’ve said the word...*

Casper grinned as Scotty swore, his hand still pumping his length as he reached up with the other to the end table again, getting a small bottle of lube out and holding it asit as he went back to loom over Scotty. He kissed down Scotty’s chest, snapping the cap of the tube open and coating his fingers liberally with lube. His hand drifted down to Scotty’s entrance, tracing the pucker with his finger and looking up at Scotty from his place over his chest before pressing past the muscle, feeling up his soft walls. *I want to feel you. I haven't since the first time we had sex…. and that was forever ago...*

Scotty’s eyes filled with lust, blowing wide to only have a thin rim of color around the pupil. *Holy shit… He’s gonna top now...* He let out a loud moan, moving his hips a bit to try and get more of Casper's fingers into him. *I want more… Fuck… But I don't want to push you.*

Casper’s eyes glinted as he saw the lust in Scotty’s own, soon adding a second finger, and then a
third, thrusting in and out steadily and curling, searching for his prostate. He smirked as Scotty let out a cry of pleasure, brushing again over that spot to get the same reaction. **There it is.**

Scotty curled his toes as another wave of pleasure washed over him. “C-Casper… That’s enough…” **I don’t want just your fingers… I want you….**

Casper grinned, withdrawing his hand and going to slick himself up, lining up with Scotty’s entrance and plunging forward, biting his neck and sucking a dark mark at the joint, beginning with a steady pace, quickly going faster as his thrust went deeper and deeper, moaning into his neck. “You're so fucking tight… my God…”

Scotty’s arms tugged against the headboard, pulling on the chain linking the cuffs together. “F...F-Fuck… Casper… It feels good.” His words were low as he moaned between them, trying to get it out in one go as Casper withdrew from him and then went right back to his quickening pace. *Fuck… He’s gonna hit my pros-* Scotty let out a loud yell as Casper finally thrusted to his prostate. “**There! Casper!”**

Casper left dark mark after dark mark up Scotty’s neck and collar as he pounded into him, aiming for his prostate and hitting it dead on. His other hand still stroked his member, quickening his strokes and firmly twisting his hand. He moved up to near Scotty’s ear, murmuring in a low, smooth voice. “I want to hear you **scream.**” **I want to hear you.**

“**Casper! There! Fuck me there!! Please ! I need you! I want you! I want you so much! Casper! Fuck me as hard as you can! Please !**” Scotty started to scream as he felt the coil starting to quickly tighten in his gut. *Fuck… I won’t be able to last much longer, shit.*

...**now that is how to beg for it.** Casper’s eyes became dangerously dark, stroking and twisting Scotty’s length as he rammed into him, pulling up his legs to wrap around his waist and get a better angle, feeling his own orgasm creeping up on him as he abused his prostate. *I need to last as long as you do…*

Scotty continued to moan, his arms tugging against the cuffs with added effort as he tried to break free of his restraints, wanting to be able to feel Casper’s back. He let his long legs wrap around Casper’s waist, opening up his hips for Casper to grab, feeling the sensation of being filled to the brink and being pummeled, the weight of his whole body down as it forced itself to arch off the mattress. His orgasm hit, and it wasn’t long before cum was splattered over their chests and Scotty’s frantic breathing sounded. *Holy. Fucking. Shit.*

Casper saw stars as he hit his own orgasm, watching Scotty fall apart underneath him as he filled him, slowing his motions and drawing out of him, weakly moving to unlock the handcuffs before collapsing next to Scotty, pulling him close to him and tangling their limbs, not wanting to get up or let go. ...**you’re warm… and I’m sleepy…** Casper yawned, slumping into the mattress as he fell asleep.

Scotty let his arms down from above his head, one wrapped around Casper as he looked over him, noticing how red and irritated his skin had become. *Shit… I burned him… I should probably wrap them at least for today… I shouldn’t’ve done that to him in the first place. Fuck, he’s gonna have those marks for a long time.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 4
Spades groaned as she stepped through the door, quietly turning on the light. “It’s so fucking late… I wonder if Lathe’s awake?” Her words were quiet as she leaned over to carefully take off her heals. **What time even is it? It’s past 10 I know that much… But I haven’t really looked at a clock since I left.** Spades picked her head up as she heard the soft music on the piano in the other room. **He’s up?** She dropped her things by the stairs, quietly padding to the piano and leaning on his shoulders as she hugged him from behind. “It’s late Lathe, you could’ve gone to bed.”

Lathe’s hands slowly moved over the keys, graceful and quiet, playing a simple yet moving melody, tilting his head as she hugged him from behind, nuzzling against her ear. “I could’ve…” His hands left the keys, turning and latching his lips to her neck to gently kiss and nip at her tan skin, his hands going to rest on her hips and guide her onto the piano bench, and into his lap. “…but I think this decision was better.”

Spades giggled as she curled up into his lap. “Oh, do you now? What were you expecting from this decision exactly?” **I can only imagine what you would do… I know you love my uniform.** She moved her hands to cup his cheeks and pull his head up to leave soft pecks all over his face. **You are mine, and I’m happy that I still get to say that.**

Lathe reached forward to close the lid of the keys, letting Spades lean back against him facing him in his lap as he let one hand drift lower and lower down her back, his other hand cradling her neck, his eyes lidded a bit, glinting with love and lust. “…why don’t you just let me show you?” His voice was low and smooth, kissing her passionately and tangling their tongues, hot and slow. **Mine.** Lathe let his hand move to Spades’ ass, squeezing and leaning forward, flush against her.

Spades smiled as Lathe leaned her back against the keycover. **Oh wow… This is actually a really nice surprise.** Her hands moved from his face down his front, feeling his abs underneath the shirt he was wearing. She pulled back from the deep kiss to breathe hard a few moments later. “Lathe… baby please… take me already, don’t tease me any longer.” Spades begged for him to pick up his pace as he moved his hands. **I want a good fucking to get me to fall asleep tonight.**

Lathe smirked, his hands wandering to her front and undoing the buttons on her blouse, bringing it off of her shoulders and ducking down to nip at her still-clothed breasts, dropping her blouse and moving to the zipper of her skirt, his hand running up the inside of her leg and thigh as he dragged the zipper down agonizingly slowly, soon pulling it down her legs and similarly dropping it, his eyes raking up her form. He himself moved to tug his own sweater over his head, his tank top not leaving much to the imagination. He dipped back down to nip at her chest, one hand under the small of her back, his other dragging up her leg to her panties, rubbing her through the thin fabric, murmuring against her skin. “You’re already soaked… just for me.” He grinned, nipping a bit rougher where her nipple hid underneath the flesh-colored fabric.

Spades let out a high pitched gasp, her leg slowly coming up to wrap around Lathe’s waist. “Lathe… I’ve been wanting you all day… don’t make me wait any longer, please…” Her voice was sultry as she leaned closer to him, her head dipping down to latch onto Lathe’s collarbone and starting to gently suck. **I want to keep trying with you… I want you so much.**

Lathe nearly stopped his movements as he remembered the pill container sitting neatly on the sink upstairs. **...enjoy this. Ask later.** Lathe let it go for the moment, sighing as Spades sucked a mark onto his collarbone, his hands moving up to play with the hem of her panties. He slid them down her legs, revealing her rosy folds and dragging a finger up her bare warmth, smirking as she gasped. He moved to undo the button on his jeans, shifting to bring them and his boxers off of his hips, kicking them off under the piano bench and pushing the bench back a bit as he stood, Spades’ legs still wrapped around his waist and holding her up to practically lay on top of the piano, grateful for how sturdy it was. He teasingly brushed his head over her slick hole, slowly pressing
forward and sheathing himself completely in her, his head dropping onto her chest, overcome with the initial sensation, moaning quietly. He slowly pulled back until only the tip was still inside of her before thrusting back in, starting at a slower pace. *You probably need to adjust at least a little...*

Spades let out a high pitch cry as Lathe entered her fully in one fluid motion. Her long hands moved to curl up into his shirt, grabbing it as she felt the tears sting her eyes for a few moments. “Fuck you’re huge... Lathe... Mmh...” She moaned as her back arched up off the piano a bit, toes curling in as she started to stretch out around him. “Fuck... L-Lathe...” Her body seemed to move on it's own, her hips rotating until she let out a loud gasp again. “Holy shit... Lathe... H-honey... Right there... Ahh, feels-Ngh- good...” Spades struggled to keep her words coherent, trying to keep her eyes on him as his pace steadied. *Hot fuck... Did you get bigger since the last time?*

Lathe nodded, his eyes glinting as he picked up the pace a bit, one of Spades’ legs thrown over his shoulder as he thrust deeply into her, aiming for that one spot that made her gasp and shudder, moaning his name. “S-Spades... you... f-feel so good... and you look so damn sexy like that...” Their eyes met, the electricity between them tangible as Lathe thrusted harder, his free hand wandering her torso and moving to unclip her bra, not removing it, but making it easier to hold and tease her breasts, pinching the bud between his fingers.

Spades pushed back into each of his thrusts as much as she could manage. “Lathe, fuck me... Please... I want your everything. I want it all.” *It feels so good, I don’t think I’d be able to last a lot longer.* She struggled to keep in her moans as they got louder with each thrust that made her melt. *Fuck...* Spades threw her head back as she felt the familiar wave of pleasure wash over her yet again. “You like that? You like that I’m sexy? And that... That I’m wet for you?” Her voice was feigning innocence as she shifted to pull him closer with the leg wrapped over his shoulder. “I want you to fuck me... *Please.*”

Lathe’s eyes were nearly black, dipping down to suck hard at her neck as he pounded into her, moaning as she spoke. *...holy fuck...* “You're so fucking sexy... and you're dripping... just for me.” Lathe lifted his head a bit, a possessive look in his eyes as he murmured against the shell of her ear. “And I'm going to fuck you until you can’t stand up.” He thrusted hard into her, deep and fast, feeling warmth pooling in his own stomach. *I'm getting close...*

Spades’ whole body shuddered as he almost growled in her ear, she groaned, putting her head down on the top of the piano as she felt her orgasm starting to surface. “Lathe... I... I’m gonna... *Ahh!*” Spades barely had enough time to warn him as she clamped down around him. *You feel so good... Fuck, Lathe!* She curled in on herself, riding out wave after wave of pleasure as Lathe continued to ravage her. She tightened around Lathe’s huge member, making him seem even larger than he already was. “Fuck... Lathe... Ha... That felt... So **good**... No... It was more than good... It was **amazing,**”

Lathe groaned loudly into her shoulder, still thrusting into her as he came, leaving a large dark hickey at the joint of her neck and not caring that it would barely hide under her collar. *Mine.* He slowed his thrusts, his hands going to hold the small of her back as he drew out of her, kissing her chastely, in a way that made Spades blush and her stomach flutter. “I really love you, Spades...” He gently lifted her from where she lay on the piano, sitting her in his lap and reclining her bra, helping her find her clothes strewn about and his own under the piano bench. He patted the top of the instrument before moving with Spades to go upstairs, looking up with a sheepish look for a moment. *...hope you didn’t mind, Carla... sorry... kinda.*

Spades wobbled a bit as she made her way slowly up the stairs, swaying on her feet. *That felt*...
wonderful… But I can no longer walk straight… What the actual hell… Spades had to stop halfway up the stairs, holding onto the wall, almost expecting to fall over if she took another step. Fuck, that did a number… A piano underneath… Not a very suitable bed… She had to wait for Lathe to help her up the rest of the large staircase, walking down the long hallway to their room. Levi and Eren’s door was open, their naked bodies sprawled out against each other. Awe… That’s cute… Spades first went to their bathroom and opened that bottle of pills and took another two pills. Two after sex, one daily.

Lathe shut the door to Eren and Levi’s room silently as they passed it, helping Spades to their room and letting her go into the bathroom, letting her pick up the pills and take the two of them before he padded up behind her, his own hand closing over hers as she still held the pills in their container, his other arm wrapped around her middle. He murmured quietly in her ear, his voice calm and quiet. “Those aren't birth control pills, are they?”

Spades sighed quietly shaking her head. “No… They’re not… Do you want me to go back on them?” I asked… My doctor said it was okay, that I could try… She shifted to look up to meet his eyes, her eyes portraying her uncertainty as she tried to read his expression. “I don’t know what you’re thinking anymore about this…. My doctor said we had to start trying now to ever even have a chance of getting a child in the next five years.

Lathe was expressionless for a moment, before he faintly smiled and shook his head, leaning down to peck her lips gently. “No, not if you don’t want to. I… So much of this is your decision… But I really do want kids, and if it’s hard for you to conceive… Might as well start trying.” Lathe turned Spades around, setting the pill container on the sink as he rested their foreheads together, one hand cradling the back of her neck. “Spades, I really, really love you, and… if you want kids…” Lathe smiled warmly, his eyes bright. “And since I do… I’d love to try.” He patiently waited for her to respond, quiet, a steady presence.

Spades watched his expression turn into one of happiness, relief washing over her whole body in an instant. Oh thank god, he’s not mad at me. “Um… My doctor told me that… Um… Every few days is best to try… But we looked to see how many eggs I have left. And there’s not a lot… Um… If I can’t conceive in… F-five years…. We won’t be able to try again…” I feel horrible bringing this on you right now… But, you were bound to find out eventually.

Lathe nodded, kissing her sweetly, willing her to stay peaceful. “It’s okay, Spades.” He pulled back, smirking faintly and wagging his eyebrow a bit. “We’ll just have to try until then.” But his expression soon softened, brushing a lock of hair out of Spades’ face, his tone morose as he murmured. “…when were you going to tell me any of this?”

Spades paled a bit as she looked down. “I wasn’t gonna tell you originally…. I um… I wanted it to be a surprise, and I was hoping that maybe- and I know this is being really hopeful- but maybe I would take earlier than expected…” I wanted it to be a surprise for you. She moved to put her head against his chest, taking on a deep breath of his scent. “Can we lay down? If we’re gonna talk more? I don’t think I can stay standing much longer.”

Lathe nodded, moving to slip his arm under her knees, lifting her from the floor bridal-style and carrying her to bed, slipping under the covers with her and pulling up the quilt, holding her against him. “Spades… I understand that you’d like it to be a surprise, but with things the way they are… You need to let me know. You need to tell me stuff. I… I don't like not knowing about things so important.. It… It really really means a lot to me… I’ve known I wanted a kid and a family since high school… I… It’s a big decision… Please, when it comes to big things like that…” Lathe gently held her hip, a thumb running over her stomach. “Tell me.” We’re talking about a tiny living human! …I’ve always wanted a tiny human… I'd like to know when we're trying...
Spades nodded, curling up to Lathe’s side. “Okay… We’ve been trying for about a week.” She nuzzled her head into his chest. “I have off tomorrow, we can talk more then okay?” She asked quietly, her eyes already starting to close. *I'm tired.*

Lathe nodded, his nose buried in her hair and taking a deep breath of her scent, relaxing into the bed. *It hasn't been too long…* He sighed quietly, beginning to drift to sleep. …*tiny humans…* He fell into a peaceful sleep, his dreams full of the pitter-patter of tiny feet.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 5

Eren curled up to Levi a little more in the large recliner chair. His legs were tangled with Levi’s, his head buried into the shorter man’s chest as he had lost interest in the movie a long time ago. *Why are we still watching this? Is it because I was talking with Norman?*

Levi was watching the movie with disinterest, not even registering what was on the screen. ...*he was talking to the wall again. He fucking named it Norman. He wasn't even fucking listening to me when I tried to talk to him the first time around! Something with his meds is whack. Should probably tell Lathe. But he'd rather talk to a wall than cuddle with me… murr…. Levi buried his nose in Eren’s long brunette locks, kicking up his feet up and pulling Eren even moreso on top of him, sighing as Eren's full weight rested on him. …*my human…*

Eren watched Levi move him from the where he was sitting before. *What are we doing now? I don't understand? "Levi?"* Eren's voice was quiet as he shifted to look up at Levi's eyes. "Are we still watching the movie?" *It doesn't seem like either of us are interested... I should go talk to Norman again... I didn't get to finish my talk with him. He moved to sit up, inadvertently grinding against Levi's crotch.*

Levi whimpered as Eren ground against him, turning scarlet as he realized how much that small action had turned him on. *Fuck... I want it.* Levi looked into Eren's eyes, his hands reaching out to pull him on top of him again by the hips, letting his left thigh grind up between Eren's legs. *I want to hear your reaction to this.*

Eren's whole body shuddered, his eyes closing as he whimpered in sudden need. He let a small moan escape as he ground back into the raised thigh. *Fuck... The friction feels really good.... "Levi..."* Eren whined as he continued to grind on his thigh, his whole face starting to flush. *Fuck... It feels really good...*

Levi's eyes began to look hooded, shifting to grind up against Eren and please him at the same time. Levi pulled Eren down so their chests were flush, his hands roaming his back before one settled on gripping his hair, the other slipping into the pocket of his jeans as they moved. *Fuck... It feels good...*

Eren let out a soft whimper as his hair was pulled, which he moved his head away from Levi's grip. *Don't pull... Please don't pull...* Eren's grinding stopped as he moved his head away from Levi's hand to the other side of his chest. *No... I don't want you to grab it...* Eren seemed to settle down once Levi's hand was no longer in his hair, and his hips moved down to grind against him again. *I wanna be better about this... But you can't do a lot.*

...*right. Okay. Levi let his hands instead trace patterns all over Eren's back, moaning as Eren ground particularly hard against him. Fuck... I...* Levi switched their positions, sitting on top of Eren's crotch and rolling his hips, shuddering at the delicious friction the new position gave him.
...I. I want it. "E-Eren... C-can I... can I ride you?" Levi blushed crimson as he stuttered out the question, his own want to be taken a bit odd to him himself. I normally always top... But I don't want to this time.

Eren looked up to Levi with surprise, not sure what to say about it at the moment. He wants to bottom? But he never bottoms... Eren looked down at his hands, his voice quiet as he stuttered a bit. "Y-You don't... H-have to... I can r-ride y-y-you..." Eren trailed off, looking away with a blush across his cheeks. Don't you want to top? You always top...

Levi shook his head, his hands running down Eren's chest to play with the hem of his pants, leaning over to murmur in his ear. "Please, Eren... I want to." He ground again onto Eren's clothed half-harden, sealing his lips over Eren's to silence any protests as he began to undo the button on Eren's jeans and pulled them and his boxers down to his knees, soon letting his mouth trail down to his exposed member, kissing his clothed chest as he went. Holding the base in his hand, he breathed over the head before taking the tip into his mouth, looking up to Eren with shaded eyes.

Eren gasped as Levi started to undress him, watching him kiss down his whole body. He's.... He's serious...Eren watched with amazement as Levi took his length into his mouth and started to suck at his head. "F-Fuck... Levi...." He threw his head back against the recliner as he closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling of Levi's mouth around his hardening length. It feels good...

Levi bobbed his head as he took in more of Eren's length, taking in Eren's pleased expression and flattening his tongue against the underside of his length, not able to take in his entire member, his hand pumping the base and what he couldn't take in. I don't exactly do this a lot... I'm probably not that good at it... He hummed on his length, sending vibrations down his member.

Eren groaned, his hands trying to find something to grab onto, finally deciding to grip at the hem of his shirt. ...I.... I don't know... It feels weird... I'm not usually getting this done to me. "L-Levi..." He gripped the hem of his shirt like his life depended on it as he tried to curl in on himself, feeling waves of pleasure already starting to wash over him. Levi.... I'm not used to this...

Levi moved his hands to gently guide Eren back down, slowly coming back up to pull off of Eren's length, now slick with his saliva. That'll have to do. Levi shed his own pants and boxers, pulling his shirt up and off of him, showing off his chiseled torso. He leaned down to lightly kiss at Eren's neck, testing the waters with tiny closed-mouthed pecks as he went to pull Eren's own shirt up and off. He nipped gently at his Adam's apple as he positioned himself over Eren's length, his knees on either side of Eren's hips as he slowly began to sink down on his length, having to stop and adjust every few inches, so unused to the stretching. Soon enough their hips met, Levi panting hard as he was filled, pleasure soon taking place of the pain. Fuck... I really like this.

Eren's eyes were blown with lust, watching Levi sink down on his length and feeling his heat invading him. "L-Levi.... Haa..." He didn't know what to do with his hands, so unsure of where to put them. They first tried to find his shirt to grip on, but it was thrown out of reach, and he had nothing to hold onto on his stomach, inadvertently scratching at himself, trying to find something to hold onto and grab. What do I do? What do I? I don't know what to do! Levi... What's happening...

Levi's eyes widened a bit with worry as Eren scratched at his stomach, taking hold of both his hands and draping them over his own shoulders to grip at his back. "You can touch me all you want. Don't worry or be shy..." Levi ground down, Eren's length going even deeper into him, groaning. "...just feel." Fuck... It feels good... Levi slowly began to draw up on Eren's length and
slip back down, starting a slow and steady pace, becoming particularly vocal, his moans becoming louder and louder. It feels really good...

Eren's face was as red as a tomato, watching Levi start to get a rhythm on him. ... *He's riding me... Levi's actually riding me...* His fingers gripped onto Levi's shoulders, shaking a bit in nervousness. "L-Levi...." It feels... So surreal... Like it's not actually happening... But it is... Eren let out a few soft moans, trying to stifle them knowing that Lathe was upstairs making dinner. *I can hear Dad moving around... Fuck... What happens if we get caught?* Eren's face got even redder from the embarrassment that situation posed. He didn't know what else to do besides silently watch Levi move on him, watching as his muscles contracted under his skin, glistening from a soft sheen of sweat. *He's warm... It feels nice..."

Levi pouted faintly as Eren seemed to clam up, sucking gently at his Adam's apple. "Please, Eren... I want to hear you." Levi began to bounce a bit faster on his length, rolling his hips with every downward thrust. He suddenly gasped as Eren's length hit his prostate, rolling his hips hard so his member firmly brushed it over and over. *Fuck, Eren, it feels too good..."

Eren finally let out a loud moan as Levi sucked at his Adam's apple. "L-Levi... Ha..." He felt Levi tighten only slightly around him and whimpered a bit. It feels so good... "T-tight..." Eren couldn't help but begin to moan in pleasure as Levi increased his pace. He still didn't really know what to do with himself and stayed where he was, still as Levi did all the work. *What am I supposed to be doing?*

Levi dropped his head into the crook of Eren's neck, still licking and suckling at his neck as he spoke, his voice a bit shaky. *"E-Eren... Y-you can... Haaa... Move too..." Please... I want more."

Eren moaned a bit, though when Levi got too rough he pulled his head away from him, his hands nervously trailing down his chest and to his hips and holding them. ...*How am I supposed to move? I don't really remember what I did before... I'm not used to this...* His eyes were shaded as he timidly rolled his hips up, feeling himself penetrate Levi even further. *"What am I supposed to be doing? Is this alright?"* His voice was a bit shaky as he tried to keep rolling his hips on Levi.

Levi moaned as Eren's length brushed harder against his prostate, thrusting downward to meet Eren's thrusts in time. *"E-Eren... Y-Yes, do that, please keep going, it feels really good... H-harder, if you can... J-just don't stop... My god, please, don't stop..."*

Eren wasn't sure what to do with Levi acting the way he was but decided that he was okay. His hands gripped a little harder at Levi's hips, rolling up at the same angle with as much power as he could muster, which was not as much as Levi could put behind a thrust, but harder than him just rolling his hips. His face flushed a bit more when Levi moaned more. *He looks really hot... I kinda like this... Even though it feels really weird...* Eren's eyes were wide open, taking in every moment that Levi was bouncing on him, his toes beginning to curl as the sensations started hurling him towards the edge. He started to clam up, so embarrassed that he was getting close to cumming so soon. *Fuck... This is so much..."

Levi moaned and gasped loudly as Eren's length abused his prostate, bouncing hard on Eren's length and reveling in the bliss as Eren's length managed to pound even deeper into him as Eren thrusted up. He noticed Eren had quieted, leaning down and speaking lowly and smoothly into his ear, feeling his coil just beginning to tighten. *"Why are you so quiet Eren? You know..."* He moved to suck at his Adam's apple, pinching Eren's nipples between his fingers, his legs spreading wider so he could sink further and fully meet Eren's hips, rolling his hips hard. He smirked faintly,
switching tactics. <"-you sound so fucking hot when you scream."> I want to fucking hear you. "I swear, your moans are the sexiest sounds I've ever heard. My god, you turn me on... And your cock feels so good, buried inside of me, I love it... I don't know how you don't know, I'd beg you for it and do anything for you, I'd be your slut and love it. I'm harder than a rock for you, my length is just dripping with want for you. Please... Give me everything... I want everything... I want to make you feel good... I want to hear you."

Eren's eyebrows raised as he listened to everything Levi said. His hold on Levi's hips becoming stronger as he thrust up exceptionally hard, drilling Levi with a few widened thrusts. "L- Levi... I... I can't h-hold..." Eren had to stop thrusting to keep himself from coming too soon. His words... They went straight to my dick. He let out loud whines and whimpers as Levi continued to move on him, struggling to hold it in. I... c-can't...." Eren's body started to curl up on instinct, his toes curling, and bringing his knees up as he buried his face into Levi's chest. All the motions and words brought him over the edge with a shrill cry of pleasure coming from his lips. I'm coming... I'm coming... What if he didn't want me to come inside? Eren swallowed hard, the whines and whimpers dying down, but his head never came up to look Levi in the eye. What if he's mad? That I came so early?

Levi moaned loudly as Eren came, Eren's sound of pleasure driving him over the edge. "E-Eren, my God, please, fill me up..." Levi cried out in bliss as his own coil snapped, grinding down on Eren's length as he decorated both of their chests with white, dropping his head into Eren's shoulder, panting hard and not wanting to lose the blissful sensation of being filled just yet. My god... I like being the bottom.

Eren still stayed curled up to Levi's chest, his head buried in it, his knees brought up almost touching Levi's back. "L-Levi... I... I... It... f-feels really w-weird..." Your really tight and I don't know if I stopped yet... It feels so weird. It's like I'm still cumming... But I can't tell. Eren shuddered as yet another way of bliss ran through his body and he released even more cum than before. "W-what's happening?" Why am I still cumming?

Levi gently tried to ease Eren down, pecking the skin of his neck as his hands lightly ran over his chest, lowly sighing as he was still being filled, adoring the sensation. "It's okay Eren, you don't ever really top so it can feel weird... Mmm... But you're still filling me up... Nnn... I-it feels really good to m-me..." Levi tried to get Eren to calm down, as his legs curling up were nearly trying to force him off. You're still cumming... And im not trying to be selfish, but I don't wanna give this up yet... Levi let his hands go to Eren's thighs, gently pushing them down and coaxing Eren to be more or less flat again, willing him to be calm and pressing butterfly kisses all over his jaw and neck and face as he was filled. "Eren, it's okay. It's normal, what's happening. I swear. Dont worry."

Eren whimpered when Levi pushed his thighs down, feeling his dick move inside of Levi's tightness and another wave of pleasure washing over him yet again. "Fuck... T-t-tight...." Eren whined as he felt Levi's hole clamp around him, as if trying to get him to spill every drop of his being. It feels really weird...Eren moved his head away when Levi tried to kiss at his neck, but laid flat, his eyes still locked on Levi's body.

Levi laid his head on Eren's chest, stilling and just resting for a long moment, beginning to feel worn out. He waited until his breathing had more or less evened before finally shifting up, drawing Eren out of him. He moved a bit so he was curled to Eren's side. I feel sore... Sooooo worth it.

Eren watched Levi come off of him with a squelching pop as he let his length fall. He laid his head back exhaustedly, closing his eyes, his hands beginning to scratch again because he was so unused
to being curled up to. *What am I supposed to be doing? I still don't know...* He felt his body starting to come down from his blissful high, and starting to recognize what happened around him, and just how much cum was all over him. *How are we gonna get upstairs with all this?*

Levi shifted and caught Eren's hands as they scratched, beginning to understand what it meant. "Eren, there's no specific way to do any of this. You could hold onto me with one or both, or just do what feels right. I know you're not used to it... But..." He looked away from him, embarrassed, his voice quiet. "...I'd like to be the bottom a bit more..." Levi tried to ignore his burning cheeks, suddenly realizing how sticky everything felt. "We really made a mess... It's a good thing that Lathe had a shower put in with the bathroom in the art studio just next door. After the painting incidents with you completely covered in paint, he learned it could be useful. And it will be." Levi shifted to move from the couch, feeling very sore and trying to shift his weight around to where it didn't hurt. He offered a hand to Eren, hurling him stand and guiding him to the shower in the next room, bringing their clothes with them. Levi locked the door and started the water, stepping in when it was warm enough and leading Eren in under the spray. Staring at Eren for a moment, he stepped forward a bit and wound his arms around him, resting his forehead against his chest, yearning for closeness. *I don't know what's gotten into me... But I just wanna stand here... *...if you held me, it would be nice... "Eren... I just... ...can you take the lead... Please? Just for right now, at least..." Levi's voice was quiet, letting his hair hide his eyes.

Eren followed Levi along, favoring the warmth that the water brought them. *I... I guess I can do that.* Eren's arms slowly came out to wrap around Levi's back and pull him close. "It's... Um... It's o-okay." He soon began to trace patterns into Levi's skin, soon tracing over his large tattoo, a soft smile on his face as he held them under the warm spray. *This is nice... He fits in my arms nicely.* Eren reached for the soap, starting to wash the two of them, humming softly to calm down his nerves. *What if I do something wrong?*

Levi leaned into Eren's touch, calm and quiet as Eren washed them, listening to Eren's heartbeat and his humming. He sighed as Eren traced over his back, his hold on him gentle, murmuring into his chest, his eyes shutting as he enjoyed his touch. "This is nice..." *I like this...* Eren was softly singing a few songs as he continued to wash him. His hands wandered easily as he watched Levi close his eyes. *Good... He's calming down... I think...* Eren hummed quietly to Levi, gently bringing the wash cloth across his softened length, his hands shaking a bit. *Be gentle, be gentle...* Levi quietly whimpered as Eren washed his nether gently, his hold on his middle tightening just a bit before relaxing as he moved on, nestled into his chest. He listened to his soft voice, not letting go when Eren stopped washing, softly sighing when after a few moments Eren's hands threaded through his hair to shampoo his noir locks, lifting his head a bit so Eren could reach better, his eyes still shut as he enjoyed the feeling of being washed.

Eren leaned against the warm tiles as he took in the scent that the shampoo left of the two of them. He was gentle as quick as he finished washing the two of them off, gently getting the suds out of Levi's hair before working on himself. He shut the water off once they were done. "Levi... Um... Dinner should be ready soon..." He watched Levi nod, taking them out of the warm shower and drying them off. Eren helped Levi get dressed before the two of them walked upstairs to the delicious smelling food.
Day 6

Lathe tapped away at his laptop, filtering through emails. ...today has been a better day than others as of late. Eren isn’t talking to walls today, which is nice. I heard through Levi about that, and put him on a lower dosage of his meds, so it’ll hopefully be a bit better for him. So far so good, I guess. I haven’t caught him having conversations with ‘Norman’ yet today, so it’s a start. Even if it isn’t much past lunchtime yet. It’s progress. We’re getting close to where he needs to be.

Eren was seated in his studio room, softly humming every now and then as he watched Luna and Charlie prance around in the winter snow. His eyes were glued to the window overlooking the backyard, his hand moving ever so slowly as he carefully drew the two horses. I wonder when they’re going to have a foal? Will they get there eventually? I know Charlie’s been staying with Luna a lot more, and always staying around her… I wonder if she already went into heat? Or is she going to be soon? A million questions were floating through his mind as he sat and distractedly drew the beautiful scene in front of him. Eren was in his own little world, completely oblivious to everything except the window and his drawing.

Levi quietly padded to the studio room, lightly knocking on the doorframe and trying not to spook Eren. He chuckled faintly when he saw Eren’s concentrated look to the window, walking up behind him quietly and wrapping his arms gently around his middle, flush with his back as he nestled his nose into his hair. He looked down to the paper in front of him, speaking quietly. “What’re you drawing?”

Eren jumped a bit, gasping as he felt the arms wrap around him, his muscles tensing as he thought of the worst case scenario. He had been so concentrated on drawing, he didn’t hear Levi’s knock. But once Levi’s voice left his lips, Eren relaxed, sinking back into his embrace and feelings his warmth radiating into his back. “T-The ho-horses… Y-Y-You scared me… I d-didn’t hear y-you…” Eren looked up to Levi with wide eyes. Stay calm, stay calm…. It’s just Levi...

Levi gently rubbed Eren’s side with his thumb, his expression a bit sheepish. “I’m sorry… I knocked, but you were concentrating so much on drawing you didn’t hear me. Sorry I snuck up on you.” He gently pecked at the side of Eren’s neck, up to his ear, gently nibbling at it. “T-The ho-horses… Y-Y-You scared me… I d-didn’t hear y-you…” Eren looked up to Levi with wide eyes. Stay calm, stay calm…. It’s just Levi...

Levi gently rubbed Eren’s side with his thumb, his expression a bit sheepish. “I’m sorry… I knocked, but you were concentrating so much on drawing you didn’t hear me. Sorry I snuck up on you.” He gently pecked at the side of Eren’s neck, up to his ear, gently nibbling at it. “It looks really good so far. I like it.” You’ve obviously already spent quite a while on it.

Eren tenses a bit as Levi nibbled at his ear, his breath hitching as he tried to relax. It’s just Levi… He said he doesn’t mind that my ears are like this… Eren swallowed hard, trying not to think about how his ears had come to be as they were, the extra skin cut off around his ear, leaving damaged cartilage behind. He swallowed, his hands beginning to shake as he tried to rid his throat of the
large lump it held. *Shit… “Th-Th-Thanks…”* His voice quiet and timid, trying to hold off his nervousness.

Levi pulled back from his ear, his brow furrowed a bit in worry as Eren’s hands began to shake. *Huh? …is it still your ears?* Levi reached out to catch Eren’s shaking hands, studying his ear for a moment. He noted the small curves of the cartilage where the lobe was missing. His eyes widened. *…how did I never fucking notice they were bitten off?* He twined their fingers, his eyes closing as he gently lapped at his ear. “Eren, you don’t have to worry about how your ears look. It’s okay. I don’t mind anything about them. They’re part of you.” He pressed a loving peck to the spot where the lobe would be, willing Eren to be calm. *They’re fine. Please don’t be so conscious about them… at least with me.*

Eren pulled his head away from Levi, whimpering a little bit. “D-don’t bite…. *Please.*” Eren’s eyes turned a little fearful as his eyes finally met with Levi’s. *I don’t want to be reminded about that… They bit off a lot more than you know… Or have realized…* Eren swallowed hard, his courage to speak out finally failing and his gaze returning to his shaking hands which were in Levi’s hand.

Levi nodded, pulling away from his ear and moving down to the joint of his neck, pressing light kisses to the spot. He gently moved to turn Eren in his stool around, moving to sit facing him in his lap, kissing up his jaw to his lips, his arms slung over his shoulders. *I’m sorry for making you scared all over again…. and I just want a little bit of attention… God, why the hell am I so clingy lately? I’m weirding myself out.*

Eren timidly wrapped his arms around Levi’s waist as his stool was spun to face Levi, still shaking as he gripped his shirt. Eren softly kisses back, still a bit unsure about how everything was going to go. *Thank god, he understands… Hopefully he won’t do it again.* He felt a few tears sting his eyes as they bubbled up. *Thank god… I don’t know what I would’ve done if he didn’t understand.*

Levi let his hands move to Eren’s shoulders, feeling Eren’s face grow warm and letting his eyes flutter open as he pulled back a bit, seeing him on the verge of tears. He gently pecked at the corner of his eyes, his hands lightly trailing down his front, murmuring softly. “It’s okay, Eren, I’ll be really careful about it now. I promise.” His hands wandered to his waist, brushing the hem of his shirt. *I don’t want to do anything if you’re not really up to it… I don’t want to make it ever feel like a chore or anything, like you have to…*

Eren nodded as Levi spoke, sniffling as he let the tears fall over the edge and trail down his cheeks. He looked up a bit to Levi, feeling his hands on the hem of his shirt. “… *Only if I get to draw you naked after…*” *That’s my offer. I don’t mind if you let me draw you all over again. I need to learn your body all over again, because I haven’t drawn it in so long, I can’t draw it without you in front of me…. That scares me…*
Levi immediately stopped, his hands feather-light on his waist as he pulled back to look at him.
“Eren… I only want to if you want to. I don’t want it to feel like you’re being forced to… I’d let
you draw me either way, but we don’t have to…” I’d feel fucking awful if you felt forced at any
point… I don’t want it to be like that...

Eren shook his head, resting it on Levi’s shoulder, his cooler hands coming under the hem of his
shirt and feeling the smooth muscle under his fingers. “I wanna draw you after sex…. I might
need to take a few pictures though.” I can only imagine how hot that would look. “I need
something to keep me company for when you leave again.” He had a soft smirk on his face as he
looked up to meet Levi’s gaze with his own becoming lustful.

Levi was stunned a bit after he spoke, so unused to him speaking like that. After a moment though,
he smirked, his own expression shifting to match Eren’s, shivering a bit as his hands began
wandering over his abs. He rested their foreheads together, his tone smooth and low. “…then what
do you say we take this upstairs?” It’s too bright… and a bed is much better for this.

Eren squinted his eyes as if he were thinking about something. “Hmmm… I dunno, I don’t really
wanna walk… May~be… If you carry me?” Eren asked him, a twinkle in his eyes as his chilly
hands reached up to teasingly tweak a nipple under his shirt.

Levi nearly let out a whimper as Eren teased the hardening nub under his shirt, flushing red. He
stepped off of the stool, Eren’s hands moving from under his shirt and moving to pick him up
bridal style. “Deal.” He smirked, moving to the stairs and wasting no time in taking them to their
bedroom. He kicked the door shut and locked it behind them, the lights dim as he went and laid
Eren on the bed. He clambered on top of him, immediately latching their lips together, though a
want still tugged hard at him from the back of his mind. …fuck, I don’t wanna ask… that’d be too
embarrassing… But… I really wanna be under you for once… please?

Eren felt a heat pooling in his lower abdomen, his hardon starting to form, and soon enough his
courage swelled right along with it. His hands moved to push Levi off of him, and moving on top
of Levi. My turn… I wanna please you some more.

Levi swallowed hard as Eren suddenly loomed over him, becoming hard at the lustful look in
Eren’s eyes, trying to speak. “E-Eren… u-uhm…” Fuck…. Use your fucking words for once! “E-
Eren… I, uhm…” He couldn’t manage to speak, flushing scarlet and looking away, embarrassed. I
want it… but I’m too chicken to tell you… of fucking course.

Eren stopped his motions for a moment. “You what…?” Eren prodded for him to speak up, his
hands making quick work of his shirt and Levi’s, throwing them away before his tongue met
Levi’s chest. He managed to keep eye contact with Levi, trying to coax him to speak still. *Come on, I want to know what’s on your mind...*

Levi opened and shut his mouth, trying hard to speak, and finding it even more difficult as he shuddered under Eren’s skilful tongue. “U-Uhm… I…” He took a deep breath, shutting his eyes and forcing out his words. “I want to be had.” He immediately turned an even deeper red, scared of what Eren would say. *...dammit... you stole all my confidence...*

*... Well, that was unexpected... I was planning on riding you, but I guess I can do that.* Eren nodded and continued with his ministrations, his hips grinding down a bit roughly onto Levi’s crotch. *I want you to feel good too.* Eren groaned at the sweet friction between the two of them, nipping around his chest as his hands wandered down to his pants.

Levi moaned as Eren ground down on his quickly hardening clothed length, his hands about to grip at his hair, though he quickly remembered Eren didn’t like it and instead gripped at his sheets under him. He bucked up his hips a bit, whimpering softly as Eren’s hands brushed over his dark washed jeans. “E-Eren… d-don’t tease me, please...” *Fuck... I want it.*

Eren smirked as he quickly got Levi free of his pants and boxers, leaving him there in his naked glory. “Get the bottle of lube.” His voice was husky as he moved off the bed to step out of his own jeans, taking them off and watching Levi’s muscles ripple as he moved to their nightstand. *He’s so beautiful.* It was only a moment later he fished out his phone and started to take pictures. *I have something to draw now... I’m excited about that...*

Levi nodded, moving to the nightstand and fishing through the drawer, retrieving the small black tube and turning back to Eren, seeing him taking pictures of him. He instinctively drew his legs a little closer to himself, feeling very exposed. He willed himself to unfurl a bit though, trying to relax a bit and splay himself out on the bed. He found it a bit easier as his eyes drifted to Eren’s naked lower half, unable to help from staring from a moment and finding it easier to give the camera a lustful look as he begged Eren to get back on top of him with his eyes.

Eren soon put the phone on the other nightstand, crawling into the bed and resting himself between Levi’s spread legs and simply enjoying the view. His hands moved from the inside of his thigh and down to his hardened length. “Levi, it’s twitching with such a simple touch... Are you excited?” Eren’s voice deepened to a much richer level as his eyes started to burn with satisfaction with the sight before him. He took the bottle from Levi, pulling his hips closer and teasing his hole with his thumb gently circling around it. *It’s so beautiful... He’s beautiful...* Once he had gotten the lube on his fingers he gently poked his first digit into his quivering hole. His other hand, once unoccupied, gently fondled his balls before curling around his length and pumping teasingly slow.

Levi whimpered quietly as Eren teased his entrance, sighing deeply as Eren pushed a finger past in
and felt up his walls, beginning to pant as Eren pumped his length. “E-Eren… m-more, please…” He tried to move his hips against his hand, desperate for more.

Eren grinned, slowly inserting the second finger into him. <“Someone’s eager I see.”> His voice became instantly huskier as he almost growled the words out. His hand kept a steady pace on his length, making sure he was enjoying every second of this, and soon enough he had three fingers, twisting and curling inside of him to try and find his prostate. *Where is it? I want him to fall apart under me… I know I won't be able to last long…*

Levi breathed hard as Eren stretched him, relishing in the waves of pleasure that began to wash over him. <“C-Can you… blame me…?”> He let out a quiet moan, suddenly letting out a loud gasp as Eren finally hit his prostate, brushing firmly over it and making his back arch. <“R-right there, my God Eren, please, there….”> He slumped into the bed, letting Eren move, letting out a loud, long moan. <“I-it feels really good… haaa… p-please, I want you … d-don’t tease…”>

<“Very well then, I think I can manage that.”> Eren moved his hand from Levi’s hole to slick up his own length, moving Levi’s legs over his shoulders putting Levi’s hips rest in the perfect spot for his length to slide between his cheeks for a quick tease before he nudged his tip into the right warmth. *Holy fuck… This is amazing…*

Levi flushed as his legs were slung over Eren’s shoulders, pouting a bit as Eren teased him before his expression shifted as Eren pushed his length past his entrance and sheathed himself fully in him, his head falling back to expose his neck, moaning loudly. <“F-fuck, Eren… please… h-hard… I want you so badly… please, my God move….”> Levi pushed his hips against Eren, already feeling warmth pooling as Eren pushed even deeper into him, his tongue getting looser. <“F-fast, deep… please… I don’t want gentle…. M-make me yours.”>

Eren followed his instructions well, pulling out until only the head was left in before he snapped his hips back into Levi, burying himself even further than before. His pace quickened as he grabbed at Levi’s hips and almost immediately knew that it would leave bruises on his skin. *I wonder if they'll be there by the time I’m ready to draw him?*

Levi gasped and became a moaning mess nearly immediately under Eren, his hands scrabbling for hold on the sheets under him, his heels digging into Eren’s back as he cried out in bliss, relishing in the burning stretch he felt. His back arched, his neck bared to Eren in invitation, yearning to be marked. *I’m going to have marks all over my hips… more.* He didn’t know how to ask for Eren to attack his neck, resigned to quietly whimpering and silently pleading he would get the message.

Eren stopped for a moment when he heard him whimper, fearing that he had gone too roughly. *Shit did I do somethin-* Eren’s eyes lit up like a Christmas tree as he saw Levi’s neck bared, moving to
mark him up leaving large marks all over his neck and collarbone in a matter of a few minutes, his pace coming up full stride all over again. <“You like that Levi? You like me pounding you into oblivion?”> Eren’s deep voice was right by Levi’s ear as he pounded into him, searching for his prostate.

Levi let out a deep sigh as Eren littered his neck with dark marks, his eyes nearly black as Eren growled into his ear, shuddering. <“Y-Y-Yes, my God Eren, please don’t stop, my God, don- HA!”> Levi gasped loudly as Eren pounded straight into his prostate, his back arching and angled so he rammed into it over and over again. <“R-Right there, my God right there, it feels so good, please don’t stop… h- harder, anything, just please, my God, don’t stop…”> Levi turned his legs out a bit, feeling his own release creeping up on him as Eren sank even deeper into him, warmth pooling in his gut. Deeper… please.

Eren continued to pound into that one spot, sucking hard at the joint of Levi’s neck. He groaned, feeling the coil beginning to tighten in his own gut, his thrusts becoming more forceful and sporadic. <“Levi… I want you to cum for me, cum for me.”> He’s getting fucking tight… I want to last longer than him though.

Levi cried out in bliss as Eren pounded deeply into him and hit his prostate head-on, his voice low and predatory in his ear. His orgasm hit him like a tidal wave, Eren’s name a mantra, slipping endlessly from his tongue. He panted hard as he began to slump into the bed, their chests littered with white, still angling his neck up and encouraging Eren to leave dark marks, groaning as he suckled another large one on a sensitive patch of skin, mewling. His hands finally came up to hold his shoulders, his legs angled wide and heels clamping Eren in place as he felt him cum inside of him, pressing him even deeper into him. He breathed hard, his hips moving and grinding against him, not wanting to lose the feeling of being filled so soon, clinging to him like a lifeline.

Eren moaned out loudly as his coil snapped, feeling Levi absolutely milk him for every drop he was worth. <“Holy fuck … Levi…”> Eren moved to steady his hips, trying to get him to stay still, his length overly sensitive from the tight heat and having just cum. <“Don’t move… Please don’t move.”> It’s too sensitive. Eren dipped his head down to rest on Levi’s shoulder, his arm reaching out on the nightstand to grab his phone and flicked it up to open the camera. I want pictures so I have references for drawing.

Levi stilled, a needy sound catching in his throat as Eren dropped his head into his shoulder, feeling his warm breath on his collarbone. …I don’t want to let go…. He looked up as Eren leaned up a bit, seeing the phone camera hovering above him, his eyes still shaded as Eren snapped the photo. He weakly smirked to the camera, knowing he most likely had a necklace of bruises very visible. …at least looking at them you’ll remember who I belong to. He sighed as his head dropped back against the pillows, exhausted. His hands weakly tried to pull Eren back down on top of him, making a small sound as Eren resisted to keep snapping photos. Dammit… as long as I get to cuddle at least a little bit after you take your pictures…
Eren soon moved a bit, setting the phone down as he gently slid out of the other. He moved to get up off the bed, grabbing his phone and taking a bunch of pictures of Levi laying on the bed, completely nude and watching him. Hot damn, I need to draw this… Definitely in charcoal.

Levi whimpered as Eren drew out of him, too tired to do anything besides watch as Eren circled around the bed and snapped picture after picture of him completely exposed, his own release decorating his chest and weakly reaching across the bed for him, wanting to hold onto him.

“Eren… please… I want to hold on to you… please?” I miss you already… damn, what is up with me? All of a sudden I decide I want to bottom instead of top… all of a sudden I turn clingy and you steal all the confidence I ever had. What the hell? …I’m not gonna complain though. …I still need someone to hold onto though… …please...

Eren nodded after a bit, turning to plug his phone in. “We should really go shower Levi.” I want to spoil you, I think I know how to do it… And I wanna draw you… It definitely needs to be charcoal. It’s a good thing Dad got the big sheets for me. Eren moved to scoop Levi up, though had some difficulty actually trying to pick him up due to how unbalanced the weight distribution was. Fuck… He’s heavy… “Levi, come on, we need to shower, and I can’t lift you to save my life.”

Levi pouted a bit, shifting to stand and moving his weight around as he winced. …I’m beginning to understand ‘fuck you until you can’t walk straight.’ Levi swayed a bit as he followed Eren to the shower, his arms wrapping around his middle the second he got the chance as they stood under the warm spray, his face nestled into Eren’s chest, wanting closeness. …fuck it. I want cuddles, and I’m getting my damn cuddles.

Eren gave a soft chuckle, moving to pull him close under the spray, his lips resting on Levi’s temple. “Thank you… For understanding…. I know it’s hard…. That-That you can’t really do anything to me, but… Thank you, for understanding that I can’t handle a lot, and respecting that. It means a lot to me.” He gently started carding his lean fingers through Levi’s undercut and enjoying the warmth they shared together. I kinda like cuddling in water better than the sheets, and I get to wash you.

Levi sighed against his chest, mumbling. “I-I’m just… I’m just glad I have you back somewhat. That we get to do stuff like this again… I’m trying to be careful, but I can actually touch you, and kiss you and love you… I get to hold onto you… and I know I’ve been acting kinda weird and clingy lately… just… thanks for going with it. It… it means a lot to me too.” I love you.

Eren smiled more and leaned down to peck at Levi’s nose. “Why don’t we get you cleaned up?” I know that you need to be cleaned inside too, that was…. I came a lot…. Eren blushed a bit as he reached to grab the soap and the washcloth, letting Levi hold onto him still. I don’t want to let you go, but I know you’ll need to leave soon.
Levi let his hands lightly rest on Eren’s waist, sighing and letting his eyes flutter shut as Eren began to wash him. He leaned into his touch as Eren’s hands washed him, going further down his chest and back, taking a steadying breath as Eren washed his nether. He took in a small breath as Eren’s hand seemed to hover near his entrance, his eyes opening as he felt a prod. Round two? He rested his head against Eren’s chest, standing on tiptoe and burying his nose into his shoulder, making it easier for Eren to reach. If you want, okay… I’m certainly not complaining, and I’m not gonna stop you...

Eren’s touch was gentle, not going that far and making sure that he was stretched out enough to accept two fingers before trying to clean Levi. His free hand came to rest on the back of Levi’s head, pulling him close as he managed to get the first few drops. I don’t want to hurt you. Eren’s breathing stayed even, his fingers gently running over Levi’s scalp in a soothing manner.

Levi quietly whimpered as Eren began to clean him out, it finally clicking what he was doing when his fingers stayed shallow. He panted quietly as the first few drops left him, his hold on his middle tightening. He felt his blood rushing south again, trying to force himself down in vain. He flushed, still very sensitive from earlier and buried his burning face into his neck.

Eren moved his head down to kiss at Levi’s neck, his hand trailing down to Levi’s sides and down to his length. “Need a little help?” Eren was really quiet as he was gentle with him, making sure that he was comfortable as he cleaned him out. I really don’t want to hurt you when I’m doing this.

Levi gasped quietly, his knees shaking a bit under his weight as Eren began to pump his length, clinging to Eren as he felt his tongue lapping at his neck. He whimpered and mewed quietly as Eren cleaned him out, tilting his head back a bit to give Eren room. “Y-yes please…”

Eren smiled more, his grin soft and inviting as he gently stroked his hardening member. “Alright, just let it out, okay? Don’t hold back.” His voice was soft, his hands gentle as he stroked him, his fingers going a little further up into him and curling his fingers to help please him. I can please you too.

Levi breathed heavily, his hips moving down a bit to help Eren’s fingers curling in him, moaning quietly. His hands moved up around Eren’s shoulders, trying to stay on his feet as he felt Eren all over him. “E-Eren… ha… f-feels good…” He gave a needy whine as Eren seemed to keep missing his prostate. “Y-You’re m-missing it…”

Eren nodded, moving to pin Levi against the wall so he wouldn’t move. He was gentle, moving him so that he had a better angle and almost immediately finding his prostate and rubbing it gently. “Did I find it yet?” I really hope I did.
Levi let out a heavy gasp, trying to stay standing as Eren brushed his prostate. “Y-Yes, right there… please, right there… j-just d-don’t stop.” Levi had his arms slung over his shoulders to keep himself up on his feet, moaning as Eren suckled more and more marks onto his porcelain skin. He whimpered as Eren’s hand on his length sped up a bit, tightening.

Eren continued to mark up his skin, his hands working to get Levi to his high. “Hmm… Cum for me Levi, I wanna see you fall apart again.” His voice was husky, his hands slightly rough as he handled him to get him over the edge. I wanna make sure you’re feeling good.

Levi’s eyes widened as Eren spoke, crying out softly in bliss as he came again in Eren’s hand, his knees weak and hanging onto Eren so he didn’t collapse onto the floor of the shower, whimpering as Eren milked every last drop from him. “E-Eren… fuck, I’m tired… t-that felt great, my god…” I’m gonna collapse… fuck...

Eren made sure to keep Levi up. “I want to start drawing you… Is it alright if I take you back to bed?” Eren asked quietly, his lips finding his skin again to kiss him sweetly. I really want to draw those eyes… They were beautiful.

Levi nodded, trying to stand up somewhat as Eren turned the shower off, leaning heavily on him as he was dried off and led back into the bedroom, letting Eren help him tug a pair of boxers onto him before he was splayed out on the bed, tired from his two releases. Levi weakly tried to tug Eren back into the bed with him, wanting something to hold onto while he rested. I need a nap… and I want you to stay...

Eren sighed quietly, leaning over to kiss his head gently. “You’ll be okay Levi… I’m gonna go downstairs to the studio.” He kissed Levi’s forehead again before getting up with his phone and almost racing down the stairs.

Lathe was looking at a list of people with a pen in hand as he paced around the first floor of the house, tapping it with the end of his pen and thinking. I need to think of something to get these people besides gift cards… dammit… ....I wonder how hard it would be to ship Damien a bucket of bullets… He barely even heard Eren as he raced down the stairs, catching Eren and swinging him a bit so neither of them fell over, setting him down, grinning. “Whoa, watch out where you’re going-” Lathe quirked an eye at him, an odd look in his eye. “...is there a reason you’re in only boxers? You’re not the only one who lives here, kid.”

Eren shrugged, “I need to draw something… Oh um… can you go check on Levi? I just.. I’m worried about him.” Eren was gone as quickly as he came, shutting the door to his studio and getting a huge sheet of paper out and putting it on the wall to mount it so he could draw, uploading
the pictures to his computer so he could blow them up. I really need to draw him while I’m this hyped… And my blood’s pumping out of control.

Lathe let Eren run off, standing there confused for a moment. ...huh? Lathe went up the stairs to their bedroom where the door was ajar, knocking on the frame lightly and hearing Levi grunt from inside. He opened the door warily and saw he had managed to drag himself under the sheets, obviously tired. “Uhm, Eren asked me to check on you… so. You okay?” ...it looks like Eren took good care of you this time around. You look worn out is all.

Levi’s nod was slow as he let out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding. “I feel worn out… He’s a Brat…” He’s my Brat, and he’s coming home to me… He’s coming back to me. My Brat… I missed his snarky ass comments about everything, even all the innuendos…. Levi tried not to let emotions get to him as his thoughts trailed all over the different aspects of Eren that he missed.

Lathe chuckled a bit, leaning against the doorway. “Well, you’re not exactly wrong. He nearly plowed me over on his way to the studio. ...he looked really happy.” Happier than he normally is...

“I-He…” Levi struggled not to let the waterworks flow, weakly turning over to face the door and almost whimpering at Lathe, not knowing what else to do that wouldn’t put much strain on his already exhausted body. I need to tell you…. I think he’s really starting to come back...

Lathe’s brow furrowed as he heard the tiny sound, walking in and sitting on the edge of the bed, smiling faintly to him. He didn’t stick around for cuddles. Shame… “What’re you trying to say?” ...I don’t see that expression on you often… what’re you thinking?

Levi struggled to swallow the lump in his throat. “He came back… He… When I went to the studio earlier to see what he was doing… He… He opened up to me a little, telling me what he wasn’t comfortable with anymore… But he also… He was so snarky, and he was making innuendos just like… Just like before everything happened all over again.” Levi had to pause every once in awhile to take a deep breath and calm down. Nope, I don’t want to cry. He moved to put his head in Lathe’s lap, seeking the comfort of another warm body. He didn’t stay though.…. 

Lathe was stunned, moving to card his hand through Levi’s noir locks, his mind kicking into overdrive. ...he’s really coming back. Lathe smiled, blinking back tears of happiness. We’re on the right track… with everything that happened… what we’re doing now to fix it… it’s working. ...I’m going to get my son back. Lathe rubbed at his cheek as a tear fell, nodding. “...I’m so happy we’re getting him back… we’ve come a long way… and after all the worry and effort and everything…. We’re getting him back. You’re getting your boyfriend back… and I’m getting my son back…” He chuckled faintly, trying to stop himself before he started to really cry.
Levi nodded his head weakly, feeling the exhaustion start to really settle in on him. “I’m getting my Brat back.” Levi’s eyes started to close, a small smile gracing his lips as he passed out in Lathe’s lap, his newly formed collar proudly on display.

...he’s out. Lathe quirked an eyebrow at Levi’s collar, just shaking his head and faintly chuckling. Of course. He gently moved out from under Levi and tucked him in, softly ruffling his hair a bit before turning to leave, turning the lights all the way before quietly shutting the door. We’ve come a long, long way...

And it’s been worth it.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 7

Casper stared ahead through their dark bedroom, his arms still wrapped around Scotty’s middle, sighing quietly. Damn insomnia... what the hell… even Scotty is asleep by now. Casper pressed a light kiss to Scotty’s bare shoulder blade, mumbling against his warm skin. “I really love you, you know… but I get the feeling you’re really scared to hurt me… you’re always gentle, and gentle is nice sometimes, but when it’s rough… it’s not rough. You always seem to tone it down the second I’m feeling pain… and I hate that…” He sighed, studying Scotty’s peaceful expression over his shoulder, pressing another light peck to his neck. …I really need to tell you that in the morning… I’m going to. I can’t words but I’m going to do my best when I wake up.

Casper stirred only once during the night, thinking he smelled something weird before he ignored it and passed out again, his sleep deep and dreamless. He blinked awake hours later, his vision blurry, beginning to register that he felt a bit cold, no longer laying down. He tried to move, jolting awake as he realized he was hanging by his wrists in the living room, looking up to see his wrists bound above him and chained to the ceiling above him. He was on his tiptoes on a box, looking ahead of him and swallowing hard as he drifted, the weight temporarily lifted from his chest. I need to really tell you that in the morning… I’m going to. I can’t words but I’m going to do my best when I wake up.
Scotty was practically silent, moving his foot and dragging the box out from under him. “Pleasure for you to finally join me.” His voice was chillingly calm, and once the box was removed Casper’s full weight was on his arms, the chain giving him no help or give. His face was still angry, but he stayed behind him, making sure that Casper could only see his reflection. If you hate me being gentle… Fine, I’ll show you what pain is.

Casper moved his arms a bit, his shoulders feeling a dull ache already from his full weight being on them. …fuck he’s mad. He swayed the smallest bit, though the way his arms were chained, he did not spin. He could only see Scotty in his reflection, a bit scared as Scotty’s expression remained mad. “S-Scotty, if this is about w-what I said… uhm… i-it’s not like I m-meant I didn’t like anything… I-I…” He bowed his head, feeling a bit of shame. “I-I’m sorry…”  

“Shut it.” His words harsh as he turned to get a large leather whip from just out of view of the reflection. Well, maybe he’ll beg for me to stop… And then he’ll know why I don’t go this hard on people… Especially not right away. His hand gripped the soft leather before he turned back, his eyes looking almost cold and heartless in the reflection, his hand coming up and forcefully smacking the first of many lashings across Casper’s back, leaving multiple red lines across his back in a matter of seconds. I don’t care if you scream… Or cry… You’re not getting out of it.

Casper’s eyes widened as he saw the whip in Scotty’s hand and the unforgiving look that accompanied it, tensing and stuttering. “S-Scotty, please…” Hold the fuck up. His words fell on deaf ears as Scotty lashed it against his back, gasping in pain. Fuck it hurts … He moved a bit as he hung, but in vain as the whip lashed across his back again, his head hung and staring at the floor under his feet as he was whipped, though small jolts of something besides pain began to shoot through him every time the leather cracked across his back. …fuck… “S-Scotty… I-I’m sorry… p-please…”

Scotty shook his head. “I’m not about to stop, and you can stop begging for me to stop.” His voice continued to be hard before he put the single whip down and picked up a nine-tail whip, striking him expertly across his already welting skin. Maybe if you’re lucky, I’ll stop before you’re bleeding…. Or maybe I should give you a taste of what Eren went through… But boiling water is a bit extreme, even for me…

Casper cried out in pain, tears starting to well in his eyes as he jerked with every crack of the whip, breathing hard. Fuck… I didn’t think when I told him he’d take it I’d want something as extreme as this… fuck it hurts… but at the same time… Casper whimpered, his length slowly hardening from the small jolts of pleasure that ran through him with every lash. …if you’re going to be this unforgiving… I’m going to take what pleasure I can get… I… what the hell...

Scotty continued his lashings for a long time, finally opening his skin and seeing the warm blood trail down his back in thick lines. Well, he can put up with it. He put the slightly bloodied whip down, where it used to be. “Don’t struggle too much, you’ll dislocate your shoulder and I’m not
gonna let you down for that…” Scotty went off to get more rope for God knows what. *I'm gonna clean your ass out…*

Casper simply made a small pained sound of acknowledgement, wanting to shift but deciding to put up with the ache as he was told. He hung still, turning his head a bit as Scotty left, his thoughts running quickly through his head. *Fuck, now what? What else is he getting?* He heard a tap running in the kitchen, relief running past in his eyes for a second. *Is he gonna clean my back? I know I'm bleeding, but I don't know how badly...* *...no, he's not. He still looked furious with me...* Casper swallowed hard as he saw him return with a coil of rope hanging from one arm, a bag of water in his other arm. *...what the fuck is that for. If you’re gonna try to fucking drown me you're seriously mistaken. *...is it too much of a stretch to hope the safe word is still a thing?*

Scotty put the bag of water down around where the whips were on the coffee table which had been dragged out of the way. He moved to unlatch the chain, letting it clink as he let Casper down to his feet, his arms still taut above him. *Don’t dislocate your own arm, I’m not done with you yet.* Soon enough Scotty had the rope tied around another stable hook in the ceiling before he moved to tie a bar between Casper’s legs, keeping them outstretched, the rope being tied to the bar, and raising it so that his chest faced the floor which he was now parallel to. “If you’re a good boy, this’ll be over quick.”

Casper felt a bit of arousal pulse through him as his legs were tied apart, his eyes widening as he was brought up off the floor again, looking around the floor. “W-what are you…” He made a surprised gasp as something prodded at his entrance, pushing past the muscle. *What the fuck is that? It feels weird... and it’s not going that deep... what the hell...* Casper shuddered as he suddenly felt something cool begin to run into him, Scotty emptying the bag of water through the tube in his ass. *Fuck... it feels weird...* He shivered as Scotty spoke again. “H-How…” *I can’t keep so much in... I can’t...* He winced as the tube was finally removed, fighting the urge to relax and keeping in the water. *Fuck this is gonna be harder than I thought...*

Scotty made sure he was holding it all before going off for multiple minutes and coming back with a bucket in hand. “Alright, you get let it all out now.” *I needed to make sure you were clean before I did anything else to you.* He held the bucket in place, waiting for Casper to decide when he was gonna let it all out.

Casper felt his face burning with shame as he relaxed his muscles, shaking as he felt the water leave his system, wincing as he heard it flow into the bucket. *...this is so fucking embarrassing...* He hung his head as Scotty left with the bucket after it had all left him, speaking quietly as he came back, sounding overwhelmingly defeated, a tear trailing down his cheek. “...now what are you going to do to me?” *...I fucked up... if this is really what I signed up for... ...I want this to be over with already... I didn’t mean this...*

Scotty’s eyes seemed to soften a bit as he hunched over a bit so that they were at eye level with
each other. “That depends, heads or tails?” Scotty showed him a coin, giving him a few seconds to
give him an answer. If you’re lucky I’ll let you go. He nodded, as Casper told him ‘Heads’
throwing the coin up into the air, catching it and putting it on his flat wrist, seeing heads. “Well,
today’s your lucky day.” You’ll probably want me to be gone after this… he moved to slowly put
him down on the floor, removing the bar between his legs. He loosened the chains in his arms so
that he wasn’t forcing them above his head still. He left him chained still but his eyes were softer
now as he came back with a small medkit and a basin of warm water with a wash cloth. He was
gentle as he started to clean up his back and put ointment on his cuts and scrapes, gently wrapping
up his torso before he unchained his hands, half expecting to be punched as he picked him up
carefully to take him back upstairs. You’ll need rest.

Casper rubbed at his shoulder as he was let down, unable to stop more tears from following as he
let Scotty clean his back, grateful that he was being let out of his bounds. He let Scotty wrap his
back and let his wrists out of the cuffs and before he knew it Scotty had picked him up, carrying
him up the stairs. …I want my Scotty back… Casper clung to his shirt, a mix of thoughts and
emotions running through him as he buried his face into his shoulder, not wanting to let go of him
as he inhaled his scent, trying to calm down. …I was getting impatient, and I exaggerated… and
you went too far… I just… I just want what we already had back… I don’t want that to be the new
normal… He opened his eyes as he was laid on the bed, though he didn’t give up his grip on his
shirt, tightening it as Scotty tried to pull away and leave. No you fucking don’t. We need to talk.
Casper pulled Scotty into the bed with him, curling up to his side and burying himself into his
shoulder. “S-S-cotty… w-we n-need to talk… j-just give me a m-minute…” I can’t talk and sob at
the same time… fuck, I can’t stop…

Scotty sighed quietly. “Remember, back in college, when I would date a girl, for like two weeks,
before she would break up with me?” I know this sounds really off topic but it helps explain
everything. “Just answer the question and I’ll explain.”

... it happened all the time… I hated seeing you with so many people… I wondered why it went up
in flames every time… “…it’s b-ecause of this sort of stuff… w-wasn’t it.” Casper sniffled, trying
to speak clearly. “I remember it happened all the time… you’d take someone home, and then it was
over the next day. It was practically guaranteed… we’d figured out something was wrong by
girlfriend twelve…” I hated it…. You were going after so many people…. …none of them me. It was
infuriating...

“Yeah… They never expected me to be a complete sadist, so even the slightest show of rope and
they were gone… Some could manage it… And stay a few days, but when they told me to do what
I want with them, which ended up between what I started with, and what I did today…” He
swallowed, an arm wrapping around Casper and carding through his hair. “They always left….”
Except for you .

Casper shifted so he was more or less on top of him, holding him tightly. “I… I don’t wanna
leave… I just…. I got impatient, I didn’t mean that we could jump to that so quickly… I wasn’t
clear… or realistic… I just meant… I guess I meant you could progress with me just the littlest bit
faster… that when I mewl in pain it doesn’t mean stop… I liked the littler stuff… but it was just too much too fast… I just…” He shook a bit, trying not to cry even more. “...I just want what we already had back… I’ll be able to take it eventually, but… it was too much… ...I don’t want this to be the reason I lose you, though… I’ve loved you and gone after you for too long to give it up without trying to work this out… we can work this out...

“I know, and you can punch me later, but I did it on purpose because I knew it would freak you out.” He took a deep breath and sighed quietly. “I did it to show you what a real Sadist enjoys, to show you what I’m capable of. It hurts when you say that I’m going soft on you, and that you hate it. I’m trying to ease you into this. Because I know you’re not used to this… no one is…” He paused again taking another deep breath to try and calm himself down. “I’ve been…. How do I put this, trying to make sure that I don’t go to fast too quickly with you, and that means taking it really easy for everything at the start. And I know you might not like it that I’m not all rough n’ tumble like you want me to be, but I can’t risk losing someone else. I don’t want to lose another chance at a great relationship.” He held Casper a little bit closer. “I was going easy on you, to remind myself that you’re not used to everything…” Scotty shifted to pull him to his chest more. “I don’t ever wanna do something that would hurt you more than you could handle. Today was my fault but…” Scotty shook his head running his hands through Casper’s purple hair. I was an ass.

Casper shook his head, sighing as Scotty threaded his fingers through his hair. “I was an idiot…. When I said all that I didn’t know what I was signing up for… but now I know. Just…” He shifted up a bit, gently kissing and lapping at his neck. “Thanks… for being so careful with me… I want you to be happy too… we can go back to the progression… I’ll get used to it. I’m sorry…” Casper kept them completely flush, wanting closeness as he suckled a small mark at the joint of his neck. “I love you… thank you… for taking good care of me.” You don’t want me to be hurt more than I can take… thanks… for putting things in perspective.

Scotty nodded and moved his head to peck his forehead. “Thank you for understanding… but it hurts, when you say that you don’t like it… When you hate that I’m trying to be gentle with you for your own sake.” Scotty’s voice sounded hurt as he spoke, moving to bring Casper into his lap, sitting up against the headboard. I don’t want to lose you, but I let the anger get the best of me… I probably should go stay in a hotel for a few days… and let myself calm down so I don’t flare up in anger again. Scotty ran his hands through his hair for a moment. “I’m gonna go soon, okay?” He asked quietly, his voice soft and gentle.

Casper moved into Scotty’s lap, still clinging to him. His eyes widened as he spoke, looking up to him, shaking his head, sounding desperate for him to understand. “N-No, please don’t leave me alone. You don’t have to. Please Scotty, stay. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into when I said all that. I might’ve thought you were going way too slow, but I didn’t know what I really meant. It always felt amazing, everything you did, I always enjoyed it. It’s not like I didn’t like any of it. We can go back to that, but I…” His hands tightened their grip on his shirt, his emerald eyes pleading with him. “...I don’t wanna sleep alone anymore… please… I want you to stay…” I’d honestly break down, probably… I’d end up convincing myself that I’d gotten what I wanted and then fucked everything up… I want you to stay… Please, don’t leave...
Scotty held him close, running a hand through his hair. “Are… Are you sure? You’re not scared of me? You’re not afraid I’ll hurt you?” His voice was quiet and unsure as he held Casper to his chest. “I don’t want to hurt you… I really shouldn’t’ve let my anger get the better of me… but I did, and… fuck.” Scotty swore, moving to put Casper on the bed, getting him to let go as he started pacing the room. I fucked up….

Casper made a small sound of protest as Scotty pried him off of him, getting up after Scotty and trying to catch him as he paced. His eyes flickered with something when Scotty shook him off the second his hand brushed his shirt, marching up to him and spinning him around to face him, pressing them together and pulling him down by the collar, sealing their lips to stop his panicked muttering, his hands roaming his sides, murmuring against his lips. “Scotty, I know you’re going to be careful… I know you’ll take good care of me…. And I know you love me… and I love you, so let’s give ourselves a chance to fix this. Please. It’s okay.” Casper kissed him sweetly, pulling him along to the bed, pulling his shirt off before dumping him on the bed, crawling on top of him and running his hands down his chest, his lips trailing down his jaw and neck. His hands soon were playing with the button of his jeans. “If we make love… I just might forgive you.” At least this once… I still want you, but slow… please… then we can go back to what you like. Promise.

Scotty watched him, letting him push him onto the bed. Make love? I think… I think I can do that. He shifted to be on his elbows, looking up to Casper as he fiddled with his jeans. “I can do that.” Scotty picked his hand up and cupped his cheek with a gentle hand. I’ll make sure that I don’t hurt you. He moved his hand down his neck gently and over the bandages around his torso and down to his hip. “We can do that.” Shifting again, he sat up so Casper was straddling his lap and his hands cupping both of his cheeks. Simply gorgeous. Scotty leaned in to kiss him, his lips soft against Casper’s.

It was a light and loving kiss, the kind that made Casper blush scarlet and his stomach flutter. He melted into it, their lips moving languidly and slowly, in no rush as his hands decided to drift up from his jeans to run over his chest, tracing over his skin familiarly, up his sides and back and pulling their chest flush. His fingers played with the hair at the nape of Scotty’s neck, their tongues tangling, putty in Scotty’s hands as he felt gentle touches all over him. …I like this… just the once… I want gentle…

Scotty closed his eyes as he relaxed, his hands finding Casper’s hips and gently rubbing his thumb against the warm skin. He pulled back a bit, his lips grazing against Casper’s lips. “I’m… I’m so sorry about earlier…. His hand moved down a bit to rub his length gently, trying to arouse him even the slightest. I want you to feel nothing but pleasure. No pain… nothing… even if I’m just pleasing you. Scotty didn’t make a move for his entrance, knowing that he might just be comforting Casper. Honestly, I don’t care if he doesn’t touch me, I’ll be okay with that… I’d probably deserve nothing in return.

Casper gasped quietly, sighing airily as Scotty rubbed his length. “I-It’s o-okay… w-we’ll work t-things out…” His hold on Scotty tightened a bit, his head dipping down to suckle again at his neck and collarbone, leaving small marks as he nibbled his way across his skin. He moved so both of his
hands were on his chest, his lips never leaving him as he gently pushed him to lay down on the bed, his knees on either side of his hips as he started to trail his tongue down Scotty’s chest. He whimpered quietly as his thumb ran over the slit of his length, having to stop and pull up from his chest, breathing hard, his face flushed. “F-feels good…” ...I don’t wanna be on top... Casper moved, taking hold of Scotty and rolling them over so he loomed over him, cupping his cheeks and kissing him lovingly. If you’re gentle... you get to be on top.

Scotty watched him roll them over, kissing him just as gently. He pulled back only a bit before he moved to get off the bed, slowly unbuckling his belt and pulling down his pants all the way. He kicked them off before coming back into the bed with him. Scotty spread Casper’s legs, gently picking them up a bit and kissing the inside of his knee and working his way up towards his inner thigh. He felt a pang of arousal run through him, though pushed it down, knowing only to try and please Casper for right now. Only if he says I can will I....

Casper made a small sound as Scotty got up, though he watched him as he kicked off his jeans, his eyes darkening as he climbed back onto the bed. He swallowed hard as Scotty moved between his legs, easily letting him spread them and trying not to squirm as Scotty began kissing up the sensitive skin. His head dropped against the pillow, watching Scotty and drinking in his entire form, his eyes stopping on his clothed nether. ...are you getting anything out of this? “S-Scotty…” Casper leaned up on his elbows, reaching out and lifting his head closer to his by the chin softly, his eyes holding a flicker of concern. “I don’t want to do this if you’re not enjoying it at all…” Casper leaned forward, his other hand moving to palm at his clothed length. “I want you to feel good too.”

Scotty groaned as Casper started to palm his length. “I thought this was about you?” His voice was soft as he moved his head back down to kiss at his inner thigh. His hand came up to grasp his length gently. “I want you to enjoy at least something today.” I can handle watching.... But if you want me to, I can do more than just pleasure you.

Casper’s protest caught in his throat, leaning back on his hands as Scotty again nibbled at the soft skin, shuddering at the attention he was receiving. “S-Scotty… even w-with what h-happened… nngh… it’s never just about o-one or the other… i-it’s always the both of us or nothing. I don’t want something like this to feel like… like work… t-that you’re obligated t-to do… y-you deserve attention too… even if that all happened. Especially because of it, a-actually… I’m n-not gonna up and l-leave because of things even like that… I still l-love you as much as I always h-have… but y-you expected m-me to want you gone… I guess I don’t t-tell you enough how much I really fucking love you….” I need to fix that...

Scotty smiled softly, nodding before moving to take his boxers off and letting his length spring free. “Okay.” He shifted a bit, spreading his legs, and even his ass cheeks to get a good view of his hole. “I think I can give you a special treat though.” I don’t think I’ve ever rimmed you yet. Scotty buried his face in almost instantly, his tongue prodding at his entrance. You taste wonderful.
Casper’s expression changed to one of confusion as Scotty moved him, his face becoming scarlet as he ducked down. *He’s-* Casper’s head fell back, sliding back down so he was laying on the bed, his hands tangling in Scotty’s hair and back arching to give Scotty better access. **Fuck… it feels weird… but I like it…** “S-Scotty… mm…” He gasped as his tongue started to push past the ring of muscle a bit, trying not to move too much. “D-don’t stop… haa…”

Scotty’s large hands came under him to hold his cheeks apart, giving him better access as he licked him, his wet muscle invading him, gently lubing him up, a finger soon following to help stretch and the wet muscle entering even further. He groaned as Casper’s hole twitched in closed around his finger and tongue. *God that was hot…*

Casper mewed and panted as his tongue invaded him further, his heels digging into the bed. “Haa… f-feels r-really good… mm….” He tried not to tug too hard on his hair as Scotty rimmed him, unable to help from squirming a bit under him, so unused to the feeling. *Damn tease… but it feels really good… but I don’t want to be teased forever… fuck…*

Soon Scotty pulled away from his quivering rim and inserted two fingers into him gently, making sure to stretch him out as he reached into the nightstand for their lube. “Feel okay?” He asked, his voice a bit rough, and his eyes watching his movements, his ears listening to everything coming out of his mouth. *I’m glad you didn’t want me to leave…*

Casper’s expression flickered for an instant, reminded of the rough voice he’d heard nothing but downstairs before it passed, nodding shakily. “F-feels more than okay… r-really good…” He thought he caught a glimmer of a predatory look, swallowing hard but too scared to say anything. Please let it be my imagination…. Please stay gentle for this… Please don’t get carried away…

Scotty nodded, pulling out and adding some more lube to his fingers before slowly inserting three fingers, making sure that he didn’t push him to fast. His eyes watched Casper closely, feeling his body go rigid for a moment, clearing his throat before he spoke, his voice must softer. “Sorry… I didn’t mean…” He swallowed the lump forming in his throat. *Shit… I scared him again…* Scotty looked down and away shamefully, his hands slipping from Casper’s entrance to his length, unsure how Casper would let him continue anymore.

Casper’s expression became a bit worried, smiling faintly and leaning forward, catching Scotty’s face in his hands and softly brushing his lips against his own. “It’s okay… I’m just kinda on edge… your voice started to sound kinda rough and I thought I saw that predatory look again, and I kinda freaked out for a second… it’s okay… j-just…” He pulled back and hung his head a bit, ashamed. “I’m just paranoid, kinda… I know you’re gonna take good care of me… j-just… I can’t deal with anything rough right now… I’m sorry…” I know that that’s exactly the thing you like and want… and I can’t let you have it… fuck…
Scotty nodded, releasing his member and moving down to lay down beside him quietly, wrapping his arms around him and pulling him close in a spoonlike fashion. “I won’t do anything… I promise…” I don’t want you to be scared of me… this is exactly why I went easy on you… I didn’t want to fuck up… but I let myself get angry… Scotty held him close, trying to ignore his hardon poking into Casper’s thigh. If you don’t want to do anything, that’s completely okay, and I would understand.

Casper’s heart sunk as Scotty simply laid down behind him, though his eyes widened a bit as he listened. ...like fuck I don’t want to do anything. He huffed, looking over his shoulder. “You know what, apparently if anything is gonna be done here…” He turned and soon loomed over Scotty, his tongue trailing down his chest. “I’ve just gotta do it myself.” I’m not letting nothing happen. He pressed a kiss to his navel, lifting his head and moving further down, holding Scotty’s hips in place as he licked a long stripe up the underside of his length, breathing over the head teasingly before taking it into his mouth, beginning to bob his head, keeping eye contact with Scotty. I want you to feel good.

Scotty’s eyes widened as he was pushed down. “F-Fuck… Casper… What are you-” He froze as Casper breathed over his length and began to bob up and down on him. [Fuck, Casper… ] He started to whine, knowing not to grab at his hair. Nope, that might scare him off. So instead, Scotty was grabbing the sheets below him as he felt warmth starting to pool in his gut.

Casper moaned onto his length as the French rolled smoothly off of his tongue. Fuck… I like that sound. His tongue was pressed against the underside of his length as he bobbed further and further, trying not to choke and finally meeting the base of his length. He kept his hands firmly on his hips as he hummed, sending vibrations down his length. Feeling good up there?

[Casper… fuck…. Don’t… no… no no… stop, I-I… ] Scotty groaned, his mind trying to make itself up as he had mixed feelings about what Casper was doing to him. He reached out a hand on instinct to grab at his hair, almost getting a handful before he looked away with a blush of shame on his face, instead grabbing again at the sheets under him. I’m afraid that if I touch you you’ll take it the wrong way… fuck… Casper this is torture!

Casper’s eyes widened, immediately drawing up off of him, his hands running soothingly up and down his sides. His expression was one of worry as he spoke, not even noticing he’d reached out to grab his hair. [What? What’s wrong? Did I do something? Fuck, what’d I mess up?] Casper shuffled forward a bit, half-laying next to him, worried. Fuck… what happened?

Scotty reached a timid hand towards Casper’s abdomen, though he didn’t touch him, keeping his hand a few inches away. [Can… Can I touch you?] Scotty’s eyes looked almost thoroughly broken and worried that he would say ‘no’. [Please ?] He almost whimpered out the last word, wanting to be able to have his hands all over him, but completely afraid Casper would take it the wrong way and bury the nail further in their relationship.
Casper’s expression was one nearly of heartbreak as he asked. You look terrified… Casper nodded, taking gentle hold of his hands and placing them on his chest, letting them roam unsure. He leaned forward, his eyes fluttering shut as he hovered not even an inch from Scotty’s lips. [Scotty, it’s okay to touch… you don’t have to be afraid of messing anything up. If you let it get to you so much… it’s not going to get better. It’s okay.] He pressed loving pecks to his lips, his cheeks. [Scotty, you’re forgiven. And believe me… you’d have to be trying really hard to mess up what we have. All relationships need work. We’re not exempt from it. Nobody is.] Casper smiled softly to him, his emerald eyes sparkling a bit. [We’re going to need to learn and be okay with loving each other all over again, aren’t we. …that’s okay. We’ve got time.] He pressed their lips together, cradling his jaw. We’ve got plenty.

Scotty seemed to visibly relax with Casper’s words, his hands moving to Casper’s hips and holding him close. He kissed him a bit roughly, but gentle all the same, his hands moving to cup Casper’s soft globes. Scotty pulled back a bit to breathe, his eyes soft as he looked into Casper’s orbs. [I’ll be gentle, I promise.] He began to message the two globes in his large hands, watching for Casper’s reaction, his erection nesting between his two cheeks.

Casper sighed and seemed to melt at Scotty’s touch, feeling a pulse of arousal as Scotty’s length rubbed up between the two cheeks. [S-Scotty… t-thank you… j-just don’t tease… I… I want you…] His hands planted on Scotty’s chest, he lifted himself up, over Scotty’s length, asking silently for permission. I need you...

Scotty nodded, moving his head to gently kiss Casper’s neck. His hands gently pulled apart his cheeks making sure he would have an easier time to penetrate himself. [Go at your own pace, I can wait until you tell me to.] He sighed quietly in bliss as he felt Casper take his head into his tightness.

Casper gasped as Scotty finally kissed at his neck, baring more of his neck to him as he slowly began to sink onto him, slowly adjusting until their hips met, stopping to get used to being filled for a minute, one hand coming up to hold Scotty’s head to his neck, his voice sounding a bit desperate. [M-my neck, please, t-that feels r-really good…] Casper was painfully hard as he slowly began to slip up and down his length, moaning in bliss as Scotty lapped at his skin. Dammit… you think you’d’ve learned by now anything involving my neck and your mouth I’m a fucking slut for…

Scotty took the command and laid gentle kisses all over his soft skin. No biting, I promised him I’d be gentle with him. I can hold back. He gently moved his hips up to meet Casper’s groaning as he felt himself go even further, his voice a mere whisper against his skin. [Fuck… you’re tight.] It feels wonderful.

Casper felt Scotty sink even further into him, heaving a heavy sigh and rolling his hips,
whimpering as his length came dangerously close to his prostate. He picked up the pace a bit, his voice heightening a bit in pitch. [S-Scotty… fuck… my god.. Nngh….] Casper bounced up and down on his length, his voice getting louder as Scotty began thrusting up in time with him, going deeper and coming close to his prostate. He let his legs spread a bit wider, leaning forward and became a moaning mess as Scotty began pounding into his prostate, panting hard and clinging to him like a lifeline. [S-Scotty… haaa…. I-I don’t know how long I’m gonna last… f-fuck, it feels so good…]

Scotty nodded and moved the two of them, Casper now laying on his back with Scotty looking over him. His thrusts were slow and deep, directed at his prostate, and his head was on the other side of Casper’s neck, filling it with soft kisses and gentle licks. I want to make sure you’re feeling nothing but pleasure. [Don’t hold back… Casper, tell me what feels good.] I wanna hear more of that voice.

Casper moaned quietly, trying to speak, his voice low and quiet. [I-I-It feels r-really good, the pace you’re going at… haaa… a-and I love the attention you’re g-giving my neck… nnngh… y-you can mark me a bit, i-if you want…] His arms wound around Scotty’s back, his fingers splayed across the warm skin, his legs coming up to wrap around his waist. [M-my god, Scotty… haa… t-this feels r- really good… ahh …]

Scotty groaned as he heard Casper’s voice, liking the way that his legs wrapped around his waist. God, you fit around me perfectly…. It’s like you were made for me… As crazy as that sounds. He continued his slow pace, making sure to be aware of everything that was going on with Casper. He was aware of everything, his lips gently locking on his collarbone, listening intently to every sound he made. Hot damn.

Casper sighed deeply as he felt Scotty suckling gently on his neck, one hand drifting up to gently tangle in his hair. Yours. [Scotty… haa… I-I’m not gonna… l-last…] Casper could feel his coil slowly tightening in his gut, his voice shaking a bit as he bared more of his neck. [Y-you feel so good… you’re so big… J-just right for me… haaa…. You know just how to make me feel amazing, my god… d-don’t stop… anything but that… p- please…] Don’t stop. Just don’t stop.

Scotty nodded, gently nipping at the new flesh that he was presented with. [So sweet.] He kept his pace steady knowing that Casper was getting close to his release. That’s it…. [Cum for me.] He could feel his own coil starting to tighten in his abdomen. Fuck it feels good.

Casper gasped and tightened his hold on Scotty, his back arching and crying out quietly as he released, Scotty still thrusting into him and prolonging his orgasm. He breathed hard as he was milked of every last drop, their chests decorated with pearly drops, clamping down around Scotty’s length, his name slipping from his tongue like his life depended on it. He shuddered and moaned in bliss, slumping into the bed and mewling as Scotty still lapped and nipped at his neck. [S-Scotty… oh my god, Scotty…]
Scotty groaned as Casper tightened around him. [Fuck… Casper… ] He watched Casper slump, slowing his pace, his cool just about over the edge but not quite. I can’t do that… Like I’m using him… Scotty groaned as he started to pull out, so close to the edge.

Casper’s expression changed to one of confusion as Scotty drew out from him, still painfully hard. [S-Scotty… why’d you stop…?] …….wait. Casper knew he wasn’t going to get anywhere with him, instead finding the strength to flip them over, again moving down so that his lips hovered over his length. You telling me to stop I don’t think was that you didn’t like it… it was that you were scared or something like that… Casper pressed a kiss to the head of his length, keeping his hips still with his hands as he sealed his lips over the tip, sucking on it and bobbing his head, sucking on his length like a lollipop. I wanna taste you… and you fucking deserve to cum too. Don’t think you need to deprive yourself of it.

Scotty’s eyes widened, throwing his head back as Casper sucked on him like a lollipop. [Fuck … Casper… Ha… I can’t…] He came, filling Casper’s mouth in a matter of seconds, and his loud moan sounded through the master bedroom. [Casper… Ha… So good…] Fuck that felt amazing… He laid back, breathing hard as his body began to resemble jello.

Casper swallowed down every last drop of his large load, coming off of his length with a lewd ‘pop’ and licking his lips as he came up next to Scotty, collapsing next to him and pulling him close. [Scotty… you were amazing… my god, I love you…] Casper moved to kick a sheet further up and pulled it over them, shifting to kiss him languidly. I love you so much...

Scotty smiled softly, kissing him back, helping him pull the sheets up to their shoulders. He moved to wrap his arms around Casper and pull him fully into his chest, not caring how messy they got. I love this… I think this is nice… Maybe we should do this more often… It’s certainly better for him than my sadistic tendencies. He looked to the white bandages around his torso, sighing quietly moving to kiss his neck. [I’m sorry.] His voice was a bit rough before he cleared his throat, a gentle hand running up and down his back.

Casper nestled into his shoulder, flush on top of Scotty and burrowing into his warmth. He found it a bit easier to relax again after Scotty spoke, reminding himself that he wasn’t going to try anything. He mumbled into his shoulder, wading through his post-orgasm glow. [It’s okay… it really is. I forgive you.] He sighed, enjoying the soft touches of his hands running up and down his back. [….I know being so gentle isn’t exactly your thing… but… can we do this a little more often…?] …I’m a total sap… of course I get paired up with the sadist. ….but this is really nice… and we don’t really do it much… I sometimes get the feeling we go too fast with it too often… we need to slow down sometimes...

Scotty nodded letting his head back down against the pillows underneath them. His hands
continued to draw aimless patterns against his back. [I can do that… I can stop, and hold back… If you want me to.] His voice was soft, yet he struggled to swallow the lump in his throat. I don’t want to hurt you like that again… I like to see crying faces… But yours… I don’t think I would want to see that ever again. I’d be giving it up for you, but I think I can do that… I could do that for you, Casper.

Casper shook his head, looking up and seeing Scotty trying to hide a pained emotion. [I don’t mean all the time… what you’d been doing… before today… it was wonderful… I really enjoyed all of it. It was a good kind of pain. I’m not forcing you to give it up in order to keep me, that’d be cruel… just… occasionally, this would be really nice… but certainly not all of the time…] Casper pressed lightly kisses up Scotty’s jaw, trying to comfort him. That would be an awful deal… you get me, minus being happy in an important department… yeah, no. That’s not how it works. Compromise is how it works.

Scotty let Casper kiss his jaw. [No… I can give it up… I don’t want to see your crying face again.] It reminds me… Everyone before was always crying when they left… I… I saw you crying… I don’t want to see you crying again. It hurts too much. [I can deal with it, I promise, I won’t do it again… I won’t go that far.] That would be cruel…

Casper shifted up so he and Scotty met eye-to-eye, resting their foreheads together. [For the time being, not that far… but Scotty, what you were doing before today, going easy on me, I liked that. I want that. That can stay. I’m not making you give it up entirely. I’m not going to make you ‘deal with’ anything. I’m not going to let you be unhappy in this, thinking that you’re not as happy as you could be. I want you to enjoy this too. I really do. …so can we have what was normal back? Please?] His emerald eyes gleamed, pleading with him. I don’t want you to be unhappy. What we had, I thought that made us both happy. It did. …I want that back.

Scotty looked up into Casper’s green orbs, seeing the pleading look in them. [Alright, we can go back… But please, tell me when it hurts, so I don’t push you too far.] He moved to cradle the back of his head, and pulled him down for a kiss. I can do that, what I was doing before. If that’s what you want me to do.

Casper immediately nodded, his eyes sliding shut as Scotty kissed him, their tongues tangling and sliding against the other. Casper felt his heart flutter as Scotty ran his hand through his violet locks, warm and happy. …we’ll make this work. We’ll be okay.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 8
...seventeen. Before lunch. Lathe swept up the shards of yet another broken ornament off the floor, trying to remain level-headed. The cat hasn’t been in an actual house for that long. A stray wouldn't know what does and doesn’t make the homeowners mad. Just chill. They’re just ornaments. It’s stuff you can replace. Lathe finished sweeping up the mess and dumped the thin shards into the trash, deciding to leave the broom out in case of another ornament accident. He made lunch, taking it upstairs and trying to filter through things on Amazon, attempting to figure out what to get the seven people still on his list. He stopped when five hours later he’d only figured out presents for three people, annoyed at life as he traipsed back downstairs to make dinner, fixing mistletoe that had gotten torn down on the way. ....how the hell did the cat get up there? He just decided to ignore the scratch marks on the doorway for the moment, getting a mug from the cabinet first and foremost to make coffee, turning from it for a moment to start the machine. His stomach dropped as he heard a scrape and the sound of ceramic cracking, turning slowly to see Abby glaring at him from the counter, the yellow mug with train schematics on the floor. ....that. Is the only fucking thing I got from my father when he died. You fucking broke it. Fuming, Lathe up the cat, marching out the back door and to the barn, setting her down inside and shutting the door. You’re a barn cat. You’re not allowed in the house anymore. He went back inside and picked up the mug, carefully inspecting it. It’s just a hairline crack, thank god…. they made things really well back then... it can be fixed and used again... He carefully set it back in the cupboard behind the other mugs, turning to the coffeemaker and shutting it off, sighing heavily. ...you know what, people can deal with foraging for leftovers tonight. I need a break… Lathe padded upstairs to change, heading outside soon with a towel for the hot tub. He slowly stepped in, relaxing against the side of it and tipping his head back, his eyes closed as he felt his muscles loosen up. I just need to calm down… everything’ll be fine.

Spades got home a bit late, smelling something amazing as she locked the door behind her. Dinner smells amazing. Lathe must’ve pulled out all the stops. “Lathe… Honey I’m Hom-” She stopped when she saw Eren covered in a black soot-like substance, and in simply boxers. “Eren! What are you covered in?! You left a trail all over the house! And how can you be in just boxers? It’s freezing outside!”

“It’s Charcoal…” Eren replied nonchalantly, stirring at the large pot on the stove. “Dinner’s not gonna be done for a bit… Um, if you're looking for Dad… He’s in the hot tub, he’s been in there for a bit.” I’m making one of Hannes’ favorite. His eyes flashed with a sense of regret and sadness before he shook his head, looking back over to Spades as she nodded. “Welcome home, Mom.”

Spades smiled. “I’m home Eren, but make sure that you clean up your mess, you left a trail from the Studio room to here!” She turned to go upstairs and change into a revealing swimsuit and grab a towel. Might as well join him and relax, today was a long day. Spades was almost silent as she slipped outside and to the hot tub, slipping in beside him and calling softly to him. “Lathe? Are you awake, sugar?”

Lathe’s eyes opened, looking over to her, surprised. “Y-Yeah, I didn’t hear you…” He blushed as he noticed the swimsuit she was wearing, trying not to stare. ....well then. That’s new. “Welcome home, Hon.” He moved a bit closer to her to kiss her sweetly, his red face a bit hidden with the steam curling up around them. He leaned their foreheads together, sighing heavily. “...today’s been
kinda awful, so I'm sorry I didn't cook anything for dinner… it’s foraging for once… I'm honestly really starting to hate having Abby in the house, she broke seventeen more ornaments and cracked my Dad’s mug… she’s in the barn for now. She’s not staying in the house anymore.” And that’s my life right now. Just giving you the update. He looked up to her, his voice a bit brighter, sarcastic. “And how was your day?” Better than mine, most likely.

Spades’ face seemed to darken a bit, before she looked down, sinking in next to him, her face on his shoulder. She was quiet for awhile, trying to formulate a response. “I… I’m glad that… That none of Eren’s attempts worked…” She closed her eyes. “Much worse than yours… And Eren took it upon himself to make dinner, so you’re fine.” She kissed his cheek, moving to sit in his lap and rest her head on his shoulder trying not to cry. We responded to three today…

Lathe’s expression shifted as she spoke, understanding after a moment. …oh. He pulled Spades close, his hands running soothingly over her back as he cradled her to his chest, his cheek lightly resting on her head. “Spades, that’s awful… I’m sorry…” ...I'm so glad Eren didn't end up being one of the many who succeeded… it’s got to be really, really hard, doing what you do… my doing what I do can seem like a cakewalk in comparison to what you’re overseeing… He pressed light kisses to the top of her head, not knowing really how to comfort her. Fuck… please don’t cry...

Spades sniffled a bit, curling into him, her hand coming up to card through the hair at the back of his neck. There was an overdose… A hanging… And another… Stabbed themselves 27 times… “Lathe… All I could see was Eren’s face…” She hiccuped a bit wrapping both her arms around his shoulders. “I’m so glad… That he’s home… And safe… And that he has both of us…”

Lathe’s arms wrapped around her middle and held her close to his chest. He let one hand tangle in her hair, trying himself to ignore the memories of him trying to stitch Eren back together after he nearly overdosed on morphine, of the numerous times he was caught with razors, of seeing him hanging from a rafter in the barn that prodded at him from the back of his mind where he’d shoved them away. He couldn’t help it when a tear streaked down his cheek, his voice a quiet murmur, swallowing down the lump in his throat before he spoke. “…y-you know…. Levi told me two days ago… Eren’s been so much more like himself…. all snark and confidence… so much happier… h-he’s doing so much better… all of that… the attempts… we’re past it. We’re so close to being home free.” Lathe sniffled, moving his head to kiss her temple. “He got out of it all in one piece…. and he’s okay. He’s got me, the most understanding boyfriend…” He kissed her ear lightly, his voice quiet. “And a wonderful mother.” …he’s really lucky… we’re really lucky...

Spades sniffled as Lathe told her that Eren was getting better. “He’s… He’s getting better?” Her face lit up in happiness, a bright smile making it’s way out. “That’s awesome, I’m so proud of him.” She pulled back a bit, cupping his face, her gaze intense. “What do you say we try and add someone else that support group?” She giggled, grinding her ass on his crotch, whimpering a bit to try and entice him. I want to have at least something go right today.
Lathe blushed fiercely, a sound catching in his throat as she ground down against him. Well that escalated quickly. “U-Uhm…” Lathe seemed to back down a bit under her intense gaze, slightly put off by her intensity. ... kinda too quickly... Lathe could still hear the sound of a gunshot faintly playing over and over in the back of his mind, unsure. He couldn’t seem to speak, not sure if and how to say no, not even sure if he wanted to say no. How the hell did you switch from sobbing to so damn eager.... I can't exactly do that...

Spades watched his reaction and gently leaned down to kiss his nose. “Sorry, I don’t want to push anything on you, I know I just got home and unloaded a lot on you.” She moved her head down to his shoulder again, gently kissing his neck. I just wanted a distraction from everything that happened at work. She held him close, slowing down her advances on him. “If you don’t want to do anything, I completely understand.”

“T-that’s okay…” Lathe’s hands came to rest on her waist as she kissed at his neck, sighing quietly. “Just... that dug up a few choice memories I shoved away... Uhm...” He chuckled for an instant, shrugging a shoulder. “Honestly for lack of a better way to say it, just slow the hell down... that just escalated really quickly...” He tried to focus on Spades’ lips on his neck, letting tension slowly drain out of him. “It’s not like I don’t want to... sorry, I can’t words... just...” His thumb gently rubbed her side, baring more of his neck to her, his voice soft and quiet. “…Slow down, okay?” I can't be as enthusiastic as you apparently can when I've got too many memories prodding at me...

Spades made a small noise in acknowledgement, gently kissing the skin bared to her. “I’m sorry, I just wanted a distraction....” She paused to kiss his neck more. “... When I want to forget something, I block it off, I’m sorry, honey.” I want you to enjoy something as well. She was gentle, waiting for him to settle before doing anything else with him.

“It’s okay...” Lathe tried to relax at Spades’ soft touch, the sounds fading from his mind as Spades gently suckled at his neck, shifting to better pull her into his lap after a long moment, straddling his hips and letting one hand drift down from her hair to play with the knot tied neatly at the back of her bikini top. He nudged her a bit, pecking her cheek and meeting her eyes with a soft smirk. “...I think we could use another member of the support group...” His other hand moved lower from her hip, cupping her ass and pulling their hips flush, slowly grinding into her. I can give you quite the distraction.

Spades let out a soft moan as Lathe ground up on her. “Hmm.... I’m glad you ... Aghn... Agree.” She moaned out more feeling his hands roam all over her curves. “Mhm, you like.. The new bikini?” Her voice sultry and soft by his ear, gently nipping at his pale lobe as she ground down to meet his hip. I really want this... I want us to build our family.

“I do. I was wondering why you hadn't given me the pleasure of seeing it yet... although...” He kept their hips flush, feeling himself begin to grow hard as he tugged on the bikini string, slowly
beginning to undo the knot. “I think I'm going to like it even better off.” His voice was low and smooth, undoing the bow and letting both of his hands travel up to cup her large globes, the fabric easily moving from her skin and off her shoulders, his thumbs running teasingly over her pink buds. ...it is nice... and you can see plenty with it on... but I'd prefer everything.

Spades let out a loud mewl as he gently fondled her large breasts. “Mmn, Lathe... That feels really nice...” She ducked her head down, licking at his collarbone, and sucking at the sensitive skin. Spades still kept rolling her hips, making sure that Lathe was getting aroused as much as she was. Fuck... This is gonna be hot, I can tell... You're already stripping me, and we haven't done much foreplay yet, I wonder if he'll let me ride him? I really want to ride you, Lathe.

Lathe shuddered a bit as Spades kept up the friction against his clothed length, quietly whimpering as she suckled at his neck and licked over his collarbone. He moved them a bit, pushing away the dark blue fabric and ducking his head down, keeping her chest above the water and taking one of her buds into his mouth. He traced it with his tongue and lightly nibbled at it, grinding up into her as she arched back, though made sure to keep her head above the water. Hearing aids... those can't get wet... but something else ... The strong hand not supporting her back moved south, dragging agonizingly slowly up the fabric of the bikini hiding her folds. ...most certainly can.

Spades let out a flurry of groans, moans, and whimpers as Lathe attacked all her sensitive areas with utmost care. “Fuck... Lathe, d-don’t tease...” She tried to roll her hips against his fingers, trying to get him to touch her covered folds. I want more, you’re going so slow ... It’s... It’s unbearable. Her hands trailed their way down Lathe’s chiseled chest, happily tracing down his v-line and giggling as her fingers played with the hem of his swim trunks. I want these gone just as much as you do...

Lathe moaned quietly as her hands dragged down his chest, rubbing her through the thin fabric as his tongue trailed to her other breast, giving it the same attention. He suckled harder at the bud before trailing up to her neck, shifting her so she was more in the water and freeing a hand. He smirked as she tugged at his trunks, nipping at her neck as he shifted a bit, slipping them off and kicking them away, shuddering at the odd feeling of the churning water on his exposed length. His hands trailed up her legs to her hips, tugging the bikini bottoms down and soon enough they were gone, grinding against her, his length rubbing her folds and moaning into her neck at the friction. Fuck... it feels good...

Spades’ breath hitched, throwing her head back at the wonderful sensation of flesh on flesh. “Fuck Lathe... I want you... I want you now.” Her voice held an air of urgency, and seduction, wanting him to be drawn to her. I feel hot, everywhere he touches... It feels like it’s on fire ... She tried to quiet herself down knowing that Eren was in the kitchen, and quite possibly Levi as well. Honestly... I really shouldn’t give a fuck at this point...
Lathe smirked, his eyes darkening a bit as he lifted her up over his length, the tip brushing her entrance as he murmured into her ear. “Let me hear you.” He slowly sank into her, his lips latching onto her neck and suckling a dark mark onto her tan skin, groaning as he was slowly sheathed in her heat. Their hips met, Lathe speaking shakily against her skin. “Fuck, Spades… so tight…” I love it. He stayed still, waiting for her to adjust and give a cue to move. “Whenever… whenever you're ready…”

Spades cried out in utter bliss as Lathe sheathed himself into her, her legs shifting up to give him a better angle, and to give herself the ability to lift herself up. Fuck, he’s so big. She stayed still for a few moments before raising herself up and slowly coming back down on him, trying to find a rhythm, her pace progressively getting faster as her hands roamed his sides. I want to feel every bit of you.

Lathe’s hands held her hips firmly and helped her begin a steady pace, moaning as she began moving and moaning in his ear. “You sound so fucking sexy, my God… I love it.” He thrusted deeply into her, matching the pace she’d built up to. He pulled back from her neck, his eyes raking up her form, drinking in her curves greedily as she bounced on his length. Fucking hell… how the hell are you mine?

Spades looked over to him as he was looking over her body, keeping up with her pace as she slid her hands all up and over her body. “Lathe… Do you like what… You see?” Her voice had dropped a bit, trying to sound as seductive as possible as her own hands wandered over her body, as if highlighting specific curves. I wanna hear your answer to that. How do you really think I look? You look like you’re ready to devour me whole… Spades continued to moan, starting to move her hips in a circular motion, gasping and tightening around him when she found her sweet spot.

Lathe grinned as she gasped, steadying her and grinding up into her, aiming for that one spot as he drove deeply into her, tracing the lines of her body with his eyes as he spoke. “I don’t think like is nearly strong enough a word… let me put it this way…” He drew out of her, picking up the pace and aiming for that one spot that made her gasp for air, keeping eye contact. “I love how perfectly your hips fit against mine… I love how your hips and all of your curves feel in my hands and the sounds you make whenever I touch somewhere sensitive… I love your skin’s perfect smooth caramel color, and…” He moved so his mouth was next to her ear, his breath hot against the shell of it. “I love the way you taste.” He nibbled at her earlobe, his voice holding a hint of mischief. “So yes… I like what I see.”

Spades let out a high pitched cry as Lathe picked up on her pleasured state and moved to increase it tenfold. His words were like honey to her ears, rich and full of life against her skin. That was a perfect answer. “Haa… L-Lathe… It feels… It feels really good… Ugh… Right… right there…” She whined as he found her sweet spot all over again, letting his thrusts overtake her movements. It feels so good… I just wanna bask in it forever.
Lathe pounded up into her, hitting the bundle of nerves over and over again as Spades became a moaning mess above him. He could feel his own coil slowly beginning to tighten, his forehead resting in the crook of her neck as he thrusted into her hard. “Y-You feel so good…” Lathe knew he could still last a while, lapping at her neck and leaving small dark marks down her collarbone. Mine.

Spades’ arms wrapped around his back, her nails digging into his skin and leaving long scratches. “Ngh… L-Lathe… Fuck…. Ahh, f-fuck me…. H-harder..” She began to beg for more, struggling to move her hips up and down, trying to get him to go even deeper, and faster. I want it… I really want it. Spades whimpered quietly in his ear, licking it and nipping it, trying to entice him to continue and speed up his pace. “I… I really want you….”

Lathe got the message, his hands on her hips nearly leaving bruises as he rammed up into her, abusing her G-spot and thrusting deeply into her. He moved up to her ear, his voice smooth as he felt warmth pooling in his abdomen. “Cum for me, Spades… I want to hear you scream.” I don’t give a fuck who hears.

Spades groaned, already starting to tighten around his large length. “F-Fuck…. Lathe… !” She screamed out his name tightening around him further as she reach her climax. Holy fuck… That was really good...

Lathe’s hold on her left bruises on her hips as he stilled inside her, grinding deeply into her as he released, moaning into her shoulder. “Fuck, Spades…” So good… He nipped and sucked up and down her neck, switching to the other side as she milked him of every drop. He drew out of her, still pulling her flush against him, his touch becoming more gentle as his mouth wandered back up to her lips, kissing her deeply. ...tiny humans…. ...I really love you...

Spades smiled into the kiss, her eyes closed as she slowly wrapped her arms around him. “I love you…” Her words were soft, and her eyes even softer as she looked over his face. I love you so much… She settled on his lap still, enjoying being flush with him, and wrapped in his arms. Spades closed her eyes, enjoying the silence until the door opened to the house.

Eren poked his head out of the door. “If um… If you’re done…. Um… Dinner’s ready…” He had a huge blush on his face before he hurriedly disappeared back behind the door. The window in the kitchen is open, that’s embarrassing...

Lathe immediately turned scarlet, his eyes wide as he heard Eren speaking. “…well that’s embarrassing…” He chuckled weakly after a moment, pressing another kiss to Spades’ lips. “…he’ll get over it. Now…” He looked around the water. “…where the hell did our stuff float to.” ...we kinda need those things. Especially that swimsuit. I like that one. Spades slipped from his lap,
fishing around in the water for their things, helping her retie her top on (albeit reluctantly) and putting on his own trunks. He stepped from the water first, picking up Spades’ towel and holding it open for her as she stepped out of the hot tub. He grabbed his own and walked with her inside before either of them froze, smiling sheepishly to Eren, who was pointedly trying not to stare at the dark marks up their necks. “Uhm, we’re going to go dry off…” He pulled Spades along with him, calling over his shoulder. “Dinner smells really good!” Thanks for impersonating me and making food. ...and for putting up with our shenanigans. ...not that I’d ever apologize for them. Lathe and Spades went upstairs to dry off and get dressed, not without their fair share of teasing kisses before padding back downstairs, Lathe’s green sweater only somewhat hiding the marks darkening on his neck, the rest hiding behind his long black locks. He had an arm around Spades’ waist, only letting go to take the bowl he was handed, taking a moment to look Eren up and down. “...mind explaining why you’re in nothing but boxers and a stolen sweater?” I’ve been looking for that.

Eren looked at him, a glint in his eyes as he flashed a cheeky grin. “It fits.” He turned back to ladle more soup into some more bowls for Spades, Levi, and himself. Once everyone had food, he sat down with them at the table, making sure that the stove was off but that the soup was warm enough to stay warm. It’ll be okay… I hope everyone likes it.

...there it is. Lathe looked as if he pondered this for a moment, flashing a grin to match his. “Fair point.” He went to sit at the table, immediately tangling his and Spades’ legs as she sat down across from him. Lathe looked at the bowl with a curious expression, taking a small spoonful and eating it, his expression changing quickly. “Eren, this is great! Who taught you to make this?” It wasn’t me. Or Levi, he doesn’t cook. I mean he does, but not soup. Or Spades, she’s not home long enough. You haven’t camped out at Armin’s long enough… so who?

Eren paused, his head down a bit as he resumed his spoon’s path to his mouth, eating the first bite. He swallowed it down, remaining quiet for a moment. Should I tell them about him? I don’t know how well they’ll take it. “Umm…. H-Hannes did.” His voice was quiet as he kept his head down. I don’t… I haven’t seen him in forever.

Lathe’s expression softened as he recognized the name, his voice quiet. “You… when you were out of it, you talked so much about him… always asked about him. ...do you want to talk about him?” He was obviously important to you when you were really young... but I don’t know much about him, for all your babbling about him...

Eren swallowed the lump in his throat, trying to pick up his spoon again. He felt his stomach turn as the words left Lathe’s mouth. I’ve never told anyone about him… I don’t know if I can start. Eren put his spoon back down, putting his hands under the table, already feeling Blake take his hands. Fuck... I don’t know what to do… Grisha never knew that Hannes taught me everything.

Levi moved his chair a bit closer to Eren, wrapping his arms around him and murmuring soothingly to him. “You don't have to talk, Eren… but if you want to, we’d like to hear about him.
You don't have to be real eloquent about it... you can just start talking if you want. But we understand if you'd rather not yet.” *He and your mom and dad were the only ones you knew for more than a week... I'd like to know about him. We all would.*

Eren nodded. “He…” He trailed off, trying to find the right words. “He taught me how to cook, um... He gave me Charlie... And he... He taught me how to shoot a gun, and take care of myself...” Eren closed his eyes starting to relive all those memories from when he was a small child. *I miss him... I miss him a lot. “It was like... Like he was my real father...”*

Lathe’s expression was soft, his eyes warm, his voice quiet. “He’s the one that took care of you for the most part when you were really little? He certainly did a good job.” *You’re a good cook, a great jockey, a perfect shot- he really did.* Lathe smiled softly, the gears in his head turning. *...I wonder if he’s still around...*

“He... He was really nice and kind... But, he hated... Um, he hated my father... And would always take me whenever he got he chance to.” *Not that I ever knew why Hannes hated Grisha...* Eren swallowed the lump in his throat, trying to clear it, his eyes still hadn’t looked up to anyone. “He... He... He taught me a lot, because he didn't have his own son...”

*...before the fire and anything started? I wonder why?* Lathe smiled to him, his eyes tracing over the table, not sure what to say. “He taught you a lot of things really well. Was he the one to teach you how to ride horses?” He watched as Eren faintly nodded. “He really did teach you well. And you’ve got good aim, and you can cook this well...” His voice was low. “You really were lucky to have someone like him to teach you all this stuff.” *He did a damn good job.*

Eren nodded, becoming silent as he ate, not wanting to talk much anymore. *I miss Hannes... I never got to say goodbye, I never thought about going back... Because... That airplane terrified me...* He moved to get seconds on his bowl, still in his own world as his mind reeled at the thought of his substitute father.

*...it really does sound like it.* Levi rested a gentle hand on Eren’s shoulder when he sat down again, giving a small shrug and a reassuring look. He turned back to his own bowl after a moment, looking up across the table as he ate another spoonful. His brow furrowed when he looked at Lathe, practically able to hear the gears in his head turning. *Now what are you thinking?*

The rest of dinner passed relatively quietly, Lathe picking up Eren and Levi’s dishes after Eren padded away, still in LaLaLand, followed by Levi who tried to get his attention. *He really misses him...* Lathe finished cleaning up downstairs and went upstairs after putting the pot of leftovers away, going to a file cabinet in his study and pulling Eren’s files, his laptop open next to him. He waded through websites in German, trying to find the man he was looking for. *Hannes... Hannes...* *...there’s one here.* Lathe scrolled down the page, reading the minimal information. *He’s not that...*
far from his old house… he’d be around the right age, I think… there’s a phone number here. Lathe stared at the screen hard for a moment, deciding it was worth a shot. He checked what the time difference was before going to find Spades as she scrolled through Netflix, leaning over the back of the couch behind her to talk to her. “Hey Spades? You know German. Can you help me with a thing please?”

Spades looked up to see Lathe above her. “Um, sure…” She stretched as she got up and turned the TV off for now. I have no idea what you’re doing… But if it involves German, you better have me with you. “What are you planning Lathe?” I’m curious as to what you’re doing… You usually don’t ask me to help you with German.

Lathe fiddled with the cell phone in his hands. “.I think I found Hannes… I wanted to talk to him a bit… and if it really is him, catch him up on a lot of things… and I know Eren really wants to see him… and ask if maybe he’d like to come to the wedding…. If that’s okay with you too…” I want to at least try to find him…

Well… It’s not a terrible idea. “Sounds like a plan… Is he going to know? Or are we keeping this a surprise?” Her lips pulled back in a lazy smile, thinking about how excited Eren would be to see some semblance of family again. “It would be good for him.” I’m not going to stop you.

“I was thinking surprise… I thought he’d really like to see a familiar, friendly face… he’s important to him. I think it’s worth a shot.” He pecked her cheek, pushing off of the back of the couch. “It’s one in the morning there right now… they’re six hours ahead of us. We’d have to call tomorrow morning… you get up around six, right? Is it okay if we make it four? I know it’s asking a bit but to catch him up on things if it’s really him would take a while and I’m not the greatest at German but we can get to sleep early… please?” ...please?

Spades smiled softly. “Well, I take it you’ve forgotten that I took tomorrow off for my doctor’s appointments… And I was planning on binge watching Netflix with you, but… I think waking up at 4 is okay too… So why don’t we go upstairs to go to bed?” She moved to peck his cheek. I wouldn’t mind going to bed, as long as you’re holding me…

Lathe smiled sheepishly. “Uhm, you’re kinda not wrong… sorry, I got kinda caught up in this… but we can still watch plenty of Netflix, don’t worry.” He grinned as she pecked his cheek, sweeping her upstairs with him. He was curled around her as they slept, antsy and unable to sleep for a bit. Before he knew it it was a bit after four in the morning, a mug of coffee in front of him as his fingers drummed on the desk. His cellphone was on speaker in front of him, Spades sitting next to him, going over what he was going to say in his head over and over. He quickly cleared his throat as the line was picked up and he heard a greeting in german, speaking clearly. <“Hello, may I please speak to Hannes?”>
<“This is Hannes… May I ask who this is?”>

<“My name is Lathe Quo. I have to ask you… do you happen to be the same Hannes that cared for a boy named Eren Yeager more than a decade ago?”>

There was the sound of a breath catching in someone’s throat, and a rough swallow. <“Eren? I haven’t seen him in a long time… Do you know where he is? I haven’t been able to contact him since he was forced to move away twelve years ago.”>

“It’s him! <“Hannes, that might be because… well, he hasn’t been in Germany for twelve years. His father Grisha forced him to move to America with him. He’s in Kansas, one of the states here. I’m his adoptive father. There’s… a lot has happened in twelve years.”> You’ve probably been expecting him to be in Germany, not so far away…

<“Adoptive Father? Did someone finally report Grisha? Please tell me he’s locked away for a long time… How’s Eren? He’s 20 now… He’s been gone for so long…”>

<“Eren’s doing well, there’s a lot more to it, but he’s okay. And not exactly… first and foremost, Grisha’s not alive anymore. I don’t know if you know, but Carla isn’t either… she died in a house fire. But there’s a lot to everything I’m going to tell you… I don’t want to be keeping you if you need to be somewhere, this’ll take a long time to explain…”> You deserve to know what happened.

<“No please, I need to know about Eren, he meant a lot to me, and he still does. My horses are in their pastures, they’ll be fine… The whole town knows about the fire, it was tragic… Please explain what happened… And thank god that filthy son of a bitch is dead.”>

Lathe looked to the phone in surprise. <“I have to agree with you… but, and excuse me for asking, if you didn’t know much of anything about Eren after he came here to America… what exactly makes you say that?”> I thought the abuse started after Carla died… That’s not the beginning of it, in a way, is it.

<“Grisha was a horrible father. He never cared for the boy, he wouldn’t leave money for Carla, bless her soul, she couldn’t feed the both of them, so she sent him to my house. When Grisha found out he would often beat her before leaving Eren in my care for weeks if not months. She never fully healed from her beatings either…”>

Lathe ran a hand through his hair, stunned. ..what the fuck was wrong with him??!!?? <“I’d only
heard Eren mention once that his mother was always ailing… that was what that was. That’s horrible… and to begin, he kept that awful habit when he brought Eren to America. The house fire… if I’m just repeating what you know, bear with me… but Eren was trying to make Mac’n’Cheese and the box tipped onto the gas stove. It started the fire, and when Carla came into the kitchen to get Eren, the kitchen had already begun to collapse. She tossed Eren to safety with Grisha, but she herself couldn’t get out. Grisha… he blamed Eren for Carla’s death. He… he began taking out his frustrations on Eren. He… it’s grotesque and cruel, everything he did… he would beat Eren and lash him with his belt, and it would escalate to stabbing and whipping and burning… he… “Lathe swallowed hard. “He raped him… and he performed multiple operations on him using illegal anaesthetics and drugs, removing a kidney and bits of flesh and recording his reactions, all written, and all of them on tape.”

He took a deep breath to steady himself, continuing. “I didn’t meet Eren until his freshman year of classes at High School, when he was 16. He’d just gotten out of the hospital… He’d been whipped and his entire back burned with boiling water, and a small altercation at school ended up opening a lot of wounds and he needed an ambulance… his arm was broken, and all of his ribs… he’d set his arm himself. He said he was used to doing that sort of stuff… it obviously wasn’t the first time it’s happened. He’d built up a really high pain tolerance by then… Grisha left without a trace while he was in the hospital recovering. I ended up as his substitute chemistry teacher the day he got back to classes after that… I’d been a general surgeon, but I decided teaching was a better way to identify and help kids like him. I held him back after class, because I’d noticed blood stains on his shirt, from cutting… it wasn’t even two weeks before I’d adopted him, started him on meds for things from the pain he was in to his PTSD, and called in the Police Commissioner to start a full-fledged search for him and the other men involved in his abuse…”

“What other men? It wasn’t just that asshole that was hurting him?”

Lathe shook his head, even though Hannes couldn’t see it. “N-No… Grisha would… he’d bring hosts of other men who he apparently knew through his position in the medical world, and they’d all… they’d all help Grisha torture Eren, beating him, and drugging him… r-raping him while he couldn’t fight back…. Grisha’d recorded all of it… he had cameras set up around his operating table in the basement… we’ve found all of them except for one, but we have his portrait. Eren had memorized all of their faces, drew each one of them and gave all the names he could remember… but he’s nameless and hasn’t turned up yet.” We’re really close.

Hannes was silent for a long while. “Is he… Is he okay? He’s… He’s doing well, yes? And getting the proper help?”

“He really is. I pulled a lot of strings near the beginning of all of this… he’s nearly back to his snarky, happy self after so long of struggling with PTSD and depression. He has a service dog, Blake, who’s been a huge help in keeping him calm when he’s about to panic or drawing too far into his memories. A friend of mine, Casper, is a pharmacist, and he and I actually created a completely new PTSD medicine for him while he was in the hospital. The ones he was on weren’t right for his system, and he was on so many other drugs that conflict was inevitable with anything else already in existence. Oh, uhmm… we were still on the lookout for Grisha three years after he disappeared… by that time, Eren had had a boyfriend Levi for a solid three years, and was living in
the apartment Levi still owned so he had a quiet place to do schoolwork while Levi was in college, training to be in the marines. Grisha had broken into the apartment and tied up Blake so he wouldn’t be in the way, stabbing him to keep him under control… he ended up being okay, but Eren… he picked up where he left off. He whipped him and had men over to rape him, and the on the day before Levi was supposed to come home for a break, he planned to have him killed. He’d stabbed Eren seven times and was about to stab him an eighth time when Levi showed up, having come home a day early to surprise him. He was dead before he hit the ground… Levi had shot Grisha through the heart and the head multiple times. Eren was rushed to the hospital, and was out in a coma for more than three weeks… I, Casper, and another friend of mine Scotty, who was a doctor at the hospital, were doing everything we could to figure out how to bring his heart rate up, stimulate him, get him to respond… we wrote up new medicines until we found one that might work, fought tooth and nail to get them past the medical board for the hospital and in two days had it administered to him… it helped with nightmares and seizures he’d been having. He finally woke up after three long weeks, and it took forever for us to get Eren to even look at anyone besides at their feet, be okay with anyone getting close to him, even communicate in the simplest way… the entire ordeal, I don’t think I slept more than four hours at a time.”> He chuckled a bit, his eyes melancholy. < “I always had him in my lap, telling him everything that was happening outside and letting him know what’d happened while he was out and the details of the attack, keeping him calm when new people came into his room in the ICU, when he needed blood drawn or to be fed, to be cleaned up… but he’d been getting all of the help he needed. We… well, we tried getting him to a therapist, but that went downhill when the therapist turned out to be one of the men Eren drew in the hospital….one of the men involved in his abuse. We kinda skipped that then, just focusing on getting him the right balance of medications and helping him open up to us. Oh, when I say us, I mean myself, my fiancée Spades, Eren of course and Levi. We recently moved, had a new house built with a barn in the backyard, full of animals… he named his new horse Charlie. He’s been so happy taking care of all of the animals. He picked up riding again like he never stopped- amazing at riding and jumping. It’s amazing, the progress he’s made. It’s been really hard… he’d been on suicide watch for the longest time… it was heartbreaking when we found out he was cutting again… and… it was horrible… Blake ran up to the house barking, and I found him… hanging himself on a rafter of the barn… I had him cut down the second I could, we talked… we came to a sort of understanding, but… there was also that thought when I heard a gunshot from the backyard, when I didn’t know how the hell he could have possibly gotten to it when it was under lock and key and he didn’t even know about it… that he was shooting something other than a buck he saw in the backyard and just decided to go shoot. But he’s so much better than how he was. He’s a brilliant musician, picked up all of his mother’s instruments and played them like he never stopped. He’s got a real golden throat too, he’d put a couple songs covers up on the internet, gained a massive following and got signed to a record label. He’s a wonderful artist, too. He’s painted entire murals on the walls at the old house, realistic scenes of forests and jungles and safaris… it’s why we made nearly all the walls in the new house white, so he can paint and draw all over them all he wants. As long as he shares some of the space with me, of course.”> He chuckled quietly. <“But his personality is really beginning to show, all sarcasm and bright eyes. He’s gone from severely malnourished to eating us out of house and home, he’s healed from his physical wounds amazingly, and that’s a whole other thing in itself, and mentally he’s gotten so much better. He’s not scared of his own shadow anymore. He’s really pulled through all of this, and he’s got a great support system in place, he’s got a whole bunch of friends… he’s doing so well.”> Lathe was quiet, hearing a quiet sob from the other end. < “…He really misses you. He ended up in charge of dinner last night, made a venison stew that you taught him to make… it was the first time he opened up about you, you could tell it wasn’t easy for him to talk about… but he said it was like you were his first real father. You taught him to ride, to shoot, to cook and take care of himself… you did a wonderful job of it. You really did.”> Lathe stared at his hands, his voice soft. <“Spades and I were wondering, since we’re getting married in June… if you’d like to come to the wedding, see Eren again. We’d love to have you come over and meet you.”>
Hannes struggled to keep in his sobs. <“My boy... He’s all grown up... And without me...”> He paused, collecting himself as he listened to Lathe’s offer. <“May I come earlier? I would like to see my son again... I would love to meet you as well... You sound like you’ve given him the world.”> I wish I could’ve been there for him, and shielded him from all the beatings and brutal treatment.

Lathe smiled. <“That and a kidney… literally. There are a lot of weird gaps in detail, but the short of it is he’s gotten the help he needs, and he’s okay. But of course you can- you’ve done so much for him when he needed someone to act as a father for him, and you’ve been a great role model for him. You’re welcome to come as soon as you can and want to- we’ve plenty of space. We’ll even help you fly here, if you need us to.”> *You and Eren haven’t seen each other in forever. It’s high time we fix that.*

Hannes’ sobs got even louder, now that he knew he was presented the opportunity to see Eren again. <“I’ll need help getting plane tickets... I’ll be free in January, and I can leave my horses with my neighbor, he knows them well. I thank you for your kindness.”> Hannes took in a deep breath, wondering what Lathe would say about it.

Lathe nodded, grinning. <“Of course. I’ll get you tickets- or a ticket, we might not know for a bit how long you’d like to stay. And you can stay with us as long as you wish. It’s the least we can do. ...that is, depending how long your neighbor is willing to put up with your horses.”> Lathe lightly joked, his eyes bright. <“I’ll look into it, see what there is available on such short notice. We’d need to stay in touch about it- email would be easiest. If you gave me your address, I’ll get you a ticket here and let you know the specifics, and we’ll work out details? Does that sound okay?”>

<“That sounds wonderful... My email is LDZ@bavarianwarmbloods.org”>

Lathe’s hand stopped from where it was poised over a post-it, a pen in his grasp. <“...I bought Charlie from you. I had to get the authentication papers through you earlier this month. We’d talked and I hadn’t even realized it was you.”> Lathe chuckled, running a hand through his hair. <“That’s so weird of a coincidence. And my boarder got her horse from you too- she’s the one who gave me your email address in the first place. ...I guess this means I'll get in touch with you again. I'll see what we can do, alright?”> *What the hell! That's weirdly coincidental and cool.*

<“Ah, so you’re the American bidder that bought my stud. You said Eren named him Charlie, yes?”>

<“Well, funny story… after Eren went to the meeting with the therapist who turned out to be his
abuser, he had a really bad seizure… when he woke up, he had the mentality of his five-year-old self. He was so bubbly and happy, asking where his dad and mom were, where you were, if Charlie was okay… it was heartbreaking when he didn't recognize anyone, and when he was showing more of his personality than with all of our effort. We were moving into the new house that week… when he saw the horse in the barn, he just lit up and threw up his arms happily, so happy to see Charlie… it's what he named him. It was a temporary amnesia though… he snapped out of it later that day.”

“I see… That stud… Is actually the ‘real’ Charlie’s son. The two of them are spitting images of each other. Charlie was the only horse I let Eren ride because he was definitely the most docile of the bunch, so I can see why he would name it as such.”

...motherfucker. Lathe was simply stunned to hear this. <“...this is like something out of a movie. I can't believe any of this! It's just so weird… and really cool. But if he’s Charlie’s son, then I can understand why Eren would think he’s not a completely different horse. And he’s like his father too- he’s a wonderful horse for all the riding and jumping Eren does. And for dragging wood around- he set up a whole thing of jumps in the backyard. He really is all that and a bag of chips.”>
Lathe silently hoped he used the last phrase correctly. ...phrases and random figures of speech are hard...

“He certainly is, well, I don’t want to keep you for much longer than I need to, but, keep me updated on how Eren is doing, please?”

“Of course I will. I have plenty of links to send to you; you’ll want to see quite a few things. I’ll be sure to fill your inbox with all sorts of stuff.” Lathe was only half-joking. Thank god I can do random phrases like that. <“Take care, Hannes. We’ll see you soon.”>

“I will, thank you."

“Goodbye.” Lathe pressed the red button to end the call, looking up to Spades, his expression of wonder and disbelief matching hers. “…it's really him. We found him.” … how . Lathe grinned, staring at the silent phone. “Sounds like I’ve got a plane ticket to book. But first…” Lathe stood, guiding Spades to stand. “...we can have our us time.”

Spades quirked an eyebrow. “A) When the fuck did you become fluent in German? B) When is he coming? And C) It’s 5:45 in the fucking morning..” What us time?

“A) I honestly don't know. I think it’s from having to constantly switch between German and English because Eren constantly switches and it got annoying, and real… B) I don't know yet, I
haven't looked up available flights two seconds after hanging up. And C), time is an illusion constructed by the governments of the world, now just say yes so we can go watch Netflix.” Lathe rested their foreheads together, giving her the puppy eyes. Pleeeeease? ...I want to have someone to hold on to...

Spades smiled softly, leaning into his touch. “Alright, let’s go.” She held a gentle hand on her abdomen, smiling softly. I can only hope...
Chapter 54: 12 Days of Fucking Christmas Part 3

Day 9

Levi walked to the barn, his hands stuffed in his pockets as he went in his search for Eren. He knocked on the frame of the barn door, walking over to where Eren was feeding Oliver in the back of the barn and wrapping his arms around him from behind, wanting closeness. “Eeeeee…” I’ve got less than a week… I want to have a little more time just with you...

Eren put the bag of feed down to pry Levi’s arms off of him. “Not right now, Levi… I gotta do chores.” Eren brushed by him to put the bag of feed away, closing up Oliver’s stall. I have to groom the horses and feed everyone.

Levi watched as Eren just walked past him, his expression shifting a bit as he walked up behind him again before he could open the stall for Gill and Jill. His hands moved to his waist, pulling him flush with his front and mumbling into his shoulder. “…please?” I love you… and I’m not gonna be here for much longer...

“Levi… If I neglect to do anything for any of the animals… Their schedules get thrown out of whack…. Yes they have schedules, and will you let go of me? I gotta do shit.” Eren’s voice sounded a bit aggravated as he pulled out a stool and a clean bucket to start milking Gill as she ate. They’ll be uncomfortable if I don’t.

Levi pouted a bit, though he refused to leave Eren completely alone, hovering just behind him, craving attention of any kind. ......you’re kinda cute when you’re mad. Sorry, but I just really want your touch. I don’t know when I turned into such a pansy, but I do.

Eren’s shoulders stiffened again as Levi hovered behind him. “Can you leave? I need to concentrate on this…” He trailed off trying to focus on milking the cows without pulling too hard. I need my undivided attention on them right now.

Levi sighed quietly, not wanting to piss Eren off, but really not wanting to leave. “...do I have to?” I don’t wanna leave… I wanna be around you...

Eren’s eye twitched as his resolve finally snapped. You want attention? Well, you’re gonna have to wait. He stood up without scaring the cows and grabbed Levi’s bicep, pulling him out of the stall and almost threw him into the hay pile. His eyes darted around looking for anything he could use...
before finding a long rope, smirking as the glint in his eye surfaced. *Oh I know what I’m doing...*

Levi stumbled backward, surprised at what Eren was doing, falling a bit onto the hay pile and watching as Eren seemed to suddenly loom over him, rope in his hands. ...*well fuck*. Levi swallowed hard, not trying to get away from him. ...*I think I'm gonna like where this is going.*

Eren’s movements were quick, getting Levi’s wrists bound behind him, and tied to his waist before he tied his ankles together in front of him. He pulled on a section of the rope, smirking when it pulled Levi with it. *That’s better.* “If you want attention you’ll need to wait for it.” Eren tied the rope to the post behind Levi deftly before he got back up and turned away from him, going back to their two heifers.

Levi let Eren roughly tie him up, smirking, his eyes darkening as his hands and feet were bound. His expression immediately shifted to one of surprise when Eren simply turned and left him there, moving as if to follow and stopping when he realised he couldn't get up or untie the rope from the post. “...*dammit*...” He muttered under his breath, not struggling against his binds and instead watching Eren quietly from where he was tied. He lazily smirked, not bothering to hide the fact he was slowly undressing him with his eyes whenever he was visible and not hidden in a stall or behind an animal. *Dammit… when are you gonna be done? I want you over here already… murr...*

Eren completely ignored Levi while he was working with the animals, his hands gentle as he groomed around Luna’s ever sensitive sides, Charlie being as loud and obnoxious as possible. His face lit up, a beautiful smile making its way into view, and it stayed on his face for a majority of the next hour as he took care of and fed all the animals. *Hmm… I wonder how Levi’s doing?* Eren made his way back to where Levi was, a calloused hand grabbing at Levi’s chin and lifting it as he looked into his steely eyes. “Still want that attention?” He practically purred as his voice dropped an octave.

Levi seemed to perk up a bit as Eren finally approached him, a bit stunned that Eren was being so forward, unable to tear his eyes away from Eren’s. “Y-Yes please.” He smirked faintly, suddenly hyperaware of just how much leverage Eren had over him, tied up as he was. ...*this is gonna be interesting.*

Eren smirked, reaching into his back pocket and pulling out a switchblade and opening it with an easy flick of the wrist. *This’ll work.* He slipped the blade between Levi’s wrists before he cut the rope binding them, keeping his hands pinned behind his back, his other hand grabbing his shirt and forcing him to his knees. Eren took the rope and tied his wrists in front of him to the pole near the bottom, forcing Levi on his knees as he tied the knot, unless he would straighten his legs, forcing him to be bent over. *That looks nice.* He had a large grin as he cut the rope tying his ankles together and forced Levi to his feet, his body almost bending in half. “Think you can hold that?”
Levi tried to move his hands up the pole, soon realising he couldn't, staring at his shoes, feeling very vulnerable. “U-Uhm, I guess I can…” He tilted his head down and glanced back at Eren, realising how close his hips were to his ass. ...oh my. This is now a thing.

Eren smirked, his hands grabbing at Levi’s hips and grinding his tightening jeans against his Levi’s jeans. He let out a soft moan at the delicious friction as he rolled his hips. “Fuck Levi… This is tempting…” I just wanna pull you out of your clothes and fuck you now.

Levi gasped quietly as Eren ground against him, feeling Eren hardening in his jeans, his own slowly beginning to grow tighter. His knees locked, taking a bit of a wider stance and grinding back into him, wanting more. He let out a tiny whimper as Eren rolled his hips into him, the hour of waiting making him a bit desperate, his voice nevertheless smooth. “…then give in.” He was glad Eren couldn't see his face clearly, his face flushed a bit from his position and a bit of embarrassment at how badly he wanted to be taken. Fuck… I want it… I really want it...

Eren’s eyes were dark as he swiftly pulled down Levi’s jeans after unbuttoning and unzipping them. He pulled them completely off, picking up Levi by the hips to get them off of him. He got out of his own jeans, moving to play with the elastic on Levi’s boxers. “I dunno… should I? Will you be able to take it?” He leaned over Levi's body, nestling his hard-on between Levi’s still-clothed cheeks. Fuck, he’s perfect...

Levi immediately nodded, moving his hips back against Eren’s length and wanting their boxers gone. “Y-Yes, yes, please, Eren, don't keep me waiting… it’s been an hour, I want you so badly… p- please…” He felt a shiver run through him as Eren bent over his body, feeling his warm breath on his shoulder blade. I want to be made yours... please...

Eren leaned down, nipping at the skin at Levi’s shoulder blade. That’s what I like to hear. He complied, his hands moving down the curve of the raven’s spine, taking in every electric pulse that ran through him from the warm skin under his fingertips. He pulled the boxers down, all the way to the floor, pulling his own down as well, kicking them aside without care. Before he even knew what he was doing, he had already created a large red mark in the shape of a hand on the alabaster skin of Levi’s toned ass. Holy fuck… His eyes darkened with absolute lust, the noise he made was just short of a predatory growl.

Levi shuddered as Eren dragged his own boxers down, tilting his head down and watching without shame as Eren freed his own length, though he let out a surprised sound as Eren smacked his ass hard, wincing a bit at the sting. He felt a shiver run through him as Eren practically growled near his ear. ...fuck… Levi swallowed hard, shifting a bit to better present his ass to Eren, his hard length hanging between his legs. Give me something... please...

Eren’s hands moved to spread Levi’s cheeks apart, his thumb curiously circling his entrance, though he raised an eyebrow as he dipped his thumb in, feeling nothing but slickness. Lube... Levi
lubed himself up…. Holy fuck. He couldn’t stop the growl that left his throat. “You’re really asking for it if you already prepared yourself.” This seems almost too good to be done.

Levi’s legs spread apart even more, at the perfect height to meet Eren’s hips. “I-I don’t want anything more r-right now… I-I… I want you to make me yours… I want it really badly… please…” He tried to push back onto Eren’s finger, making a small sound of protest when it drew out of him. “E-Eren… please, have me…”

Levi’s hips were soon held with a bruising grip as Eren moved directly behind him, poking his leaking erection at his hole. All it took for Eren to sheath himself was a fluid and hard thrust of his hips forward. His hands holding onto Levi so he stayed upright, and his own body leaning over Levi’s to incase him in his heat and sink further in. “F-Fuck… tight…”

Levi gasped loudly as Eren was suddenly buried in him to the hilt, the momentary pain giving way to pleasure, his head dropping down, moaning loudly and pressing his hips back, moaning even more as Eren ground against him and went even deeper inside of him. “F- fuck, Eren… p-please, move… d-don't be gentle about it…” He was grateful for Eren’s hands on his hips, holding him up. Go as fast and hard as you want… I want it. Please.

Eren nodded against his shoulder, leaning his head down and arching his back so that he could position himself better. His teeth sunk into Levi’s white skin, quickly lining his back with bruises as he began to thrust at a frantic pace. Fuck, he wants everything… Hmm, I can handle that. Though I want him to hold me after this… Eren pulled back until only the head of his length left buried in Levi. His hips snapped forward and he repeated the motion, picking up speed to match his original brutal pace. He feels wonderful… Maybe I should do this for him?

Levi groaned as Eren left bitemarks and bruises all over his back, letting out a shuddery cry as Eren nearly completely drew out of him and rammed back inside of him deeply, thrusting his hips back to meet Eren’s merciless thrusts. “M-my God, Eren… s-so good… I-I… haaaa…..” Levi’s momentary train of thought derailed as Eren found his prostate, his relentless thrusts pounding into it. He breathed hard, moaning louder and louder with every breath. My God … there's no way I can last very long like this… it feels too good...

Eren’s grip tightened on Levi’s hips, lifting him up off the ground a few inches, enough that he was able to hold him still as he pounded into him. “L-Levi…. Ngh….” Eren’s eyes fell to the work of art that he left on his back, a small smile forming on his lips. I… I think I can let him mark me again… His breaths were starting to become erratic, moans leaving from his throat, ranging between several different octaves.

Levi couldn't thrust back as he was lifted, his legs turned out so Eren could easily meet his hips, his
toes curling as Eren abused his prostate. He felt a warmth pooling in his abdomen, his length aching from neglect, yearning for friction so close to the edge. “Eren... I-I can't m-much... haaa... longer...” He had no idea how to ask for what he wanted, his moans quieting just a bit, his head hanging as Eren ravaged him. *It feels so amazing... my God... why have I never bottomed? I really like this...*

Eren nodded, not trusting himself to speak any higher, as it was sure to come out a jumbled mess. *Fuck... So good.* His thrusts started to get more erratic and quicker, his nostrils flaring for more air, leaning down a bit to get the best angle into Levi’s warm hole. “Hnhg... Le-agh fuck... Cum... Cum...” Eren’s tone was demanding as he continued to give Levi everything he had. *I wanna be in your arms again.*

Levi cried out as he released at Eren’s words, decorating the wood boards underneath them with white, feeling a deliciously overwhelming heat between his legs as he orgasmed, letting it wash over him. He panted hard as Eren came inside of him, grinding back hard into his hips, wanting to be completely filled. “M-My God, Eren, please, fill me up... I want everything...” *I don't want this to be over yet... just a tiny bit longer, please...*

Eren let out a loud moan as his coil snapped within Levi’s warm heat, another groan leaving him as Levi ground against him. “Fuck, Levi...” He held his hips punishingly tight, keeping him against his hips. “L-Levi?” Eren’s voice was staggered, still trying to catch his breath back. *I really want you to be possessive of me again...*

Levi breathed hard, relishing in the sensation of being filled, sighing deeply as Eren finally drew out of him, tugging at the rope binding his hands. “H-hands...” He struggled a bit to stay on his feet as Eren cut him free, immediately turning as Eren put the knife down and pulled him to the floor with him, pulling Eren into his lap, his hands wandering his chest and sides, going to kiss and nip lightly at his neck, mumbling quietly. “...you wanted to ask me somethin’?” *Anything.*

Eren was taken by surprise as he was pulled down to the floor and into Levi’s arms. His face flushed red with embarrassment, instantly clamping up about what he wanted to ask. *No... I can’t ask you... You seem to like me topping.* He leaned his head down after shaking it a few times, his eyes finding an empty spot on the floor as Eren curled into Levi’s chest, enjoying the strong arms wrapped around him. *I don’t want you to let go though...*

Levi’s expression shifted a bit, his hands tracing patterns over his back, kissing up to Eren’s ear, his voice a quiet murmur. “Eren, you know you can ask me anything... right?” *It's not good if we can’t ask for what we want... which I didn't do just two minutes ago... eh, gotta start somewhere... talk to me. Please.*
Eren seemed to shrink a bit, what was left of his mangled ear as red as a tomato. “I… I um….” Eren stammered, trying to say the right things, but his mind unable to find a way to say anything properly. *Fuck it… I give up… And you're probably gonna ask me to do it again… I don't like it…*

Levi brought up his hands to cup Eren’s cheeks, kissing him sweetly, his eyes fluttering shut as Eren’s lips shakily moved against his. When they broke apart he leaned their foreheads together, his eyes still shut. “It's okay. You can tell me. Whatever it is, I swear I won't get mad or anything like that. I just want you to be completely happy with everything we do.” *If there's anything you want to change- I'm certain we can work with it.*

Eren let out a shaky breath, still trying to catch his breath from the exertion of their previous activities. “I um… I… I d-don’t like….” Eren’s words caught in his throat again, his eyes starting to show how much he was starting to panic. *I can’t tell him… I can’t do it… He likes it… I can’t do that to him…*

Levi opened his eyes, seeing Eren’s beginning panic. *Uh oh.* He kept Eren’s face in his gentle hold, pressing soft kisses all over his cheeks and the corners of his lips, his forehead and nose, his voice quiet as he tried to calm him. “Eren, it’s okay, it’s really okay… you don't **have** to tell me… but if you want to, take all the time you need. It's okay, it’s just me. It's just Levi. It's okay.” He pressed a line of butterfly kisses to his jaw, pecking the spot under his ear before crossing back to his cheeks. “…I love you. I just want you to be happy.” **I really, really, really do.**

Eren turned his head away, looking down in shame. “I… I don’t like being on top…” His voice was barely more than a whisper before he moved out of Levi’s grasp, ruffling through the clothes spread out on the floor and starting to cover himself, feeling completely vulnerable while he was naked. *But now you like being the bottom…. Fuck… I screwed up… I didn’t like doing this from the beginning… It feels so awkward… I don’t like it…* Eren kept his head down as he pulled his clothes on, as if hiding himself. *Will you be mad? That I don’t like it?*

Levi followed Eren up a bit as he moved to dress, pulling on his own clothes alongside him. He caught Eren before he could leave, though, sitting down on the floor and keeping him in his lap, pecking his cheeks softly. “...Eren, please, you don't have to run away every time you need to say something... let’s just talk a bit. I understand it feels really weird topping when you've only been the bottom pretty much for this entire time… we can go back to the way it was, but… is it okay if we maybe try again sometime? I really like being a bottom, not all the time… but we should compromise. We both deserve to be happy. And I really want to make sure that you are enjoying yourself.” **I don’t want to force you into anything. I refuse to.**

Eren was quiet, curled into Levi’s chest. **“N-Not… not now….”** Eren told him quietly. **I don’t want to do that for awhile.** He whimpered a bit, feeling the cold air come into the barn as the door was nudged open, Blake whining and coming into the barn. **Shit… I need to calm down.** Eren struggled not to completely freak out as he thought about topping again. **I don’t want to do it again….”**
Levi immediately nodded, pulling Eren closer to him and shifting to get them closer to the hay pile in an attempt to keep him warm. “No, not now, of course not now… whenever you feel comfortable, no matter how long that might take. It's okay.” Levi gently kissed across Eren’s cheeks, his hold on him gentle yet strong, shifting a bit with even Blake nudging at the hay and helping to pile it up around them, a bit of a help against the cold air coming into the barn. *When you're calm again, we'll go back inside, and I'll make tea and make sure you're warm... I want you to be okay. I just want you to be warm, and happy, and okay.*

Eren nodded, his hands coming to Levi’s shirt and clinging to him. “’M sorry…” He was quiet as he let Blake curl up around his back, feeling the warmth radiating from both of the bodies around him. Warm... His heart was still racing and his body shaking a bit from the after effects of panic.

“It's okay…” Levi mumbled into his hair, staying with Eren in the warmth for a while until he was sure Eren had significantly calmed. “’M going to carry you back to the house, okay? We can have tea and cuddle on the couch if you want.” He smiled faintly as Eren nodded, pecking his lips sweetly before shifting his hold on him, picking Eren up bridal-style and carrying him to the barn door, carefully closing it with his foot after Blake trotted out and bringing him to the house, setting him on the couch and pushing a few pieces of the couch together. He helped Eren settle into a couch corner and build a nest out of blankets and pillows, soon joining him with two mugs of tea. He curled up in the warmth with him, pecking his cheek. “Feeling better?”

Eren nodded, holding the tea close to himself as he leaned his head to Levi’s chest. He calmed down completely as he sipped at the warm drink, feeling the warmth spread through his body. *This is nice... I like this...* Eren finished off his tea before his eyes closed, his breathing starting to even as he fell asleep.

Levi took the mug from Eren’s weakening grasp as he fell asleep, setting it and his mug out of the way and shifting so Eren was laying on top of him, feeling Eren steadily breathing on top of him. Warm... and happy... He felt himself start to drift to sleep, his hands weakly holding Eren’s shirt under the pile of blankets. ...and okay.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 10

Jean sighed as he stared at the boiling water in front of him. *That was a fucking disaster... why did I think that I could make anything more than pasta... and that’s just throwing the shit into the water and letting it boil.* Jean ran a hand through his lighter hair as he sighed again, pouring the pasta into the boiling water. “How did I think I could make anything other than easy shit?” Jean
yelled at nothing in particular, just trying to get his frustrations out of his system. *I don’t have a single fucking clue how to do this romantic shit...* Jean grabbed at his hair, trying to think as he pulled at the short strands. *I still have no idea what to do after thinking about it all day.*

It wasn’t long before a key turned in the lock of the front door, Marco tiredly opening it and shutting it behind him. He kicked off his shoes and dropped his bag next to them, quirking an eyebrow as he smelled something weird. *...did something burn? ...is Jean trying to cook?* Marco padded into the kitchen, seeing Jean looking stressed out and seeming to glare at the pot in front of him. *Oh my. He is trying to cook.* “Hey there, handsome.” Marco walked up behind Jean, resting his chin on his shoulder, his hands resting on his hips. “Things going okay?” *You’re looking at that pot like it just insulted your mother.*

“Hey Babe… um, well I *was* trying to make chicken…. Chicken… what the fuck was it called again? I don’t know but fuck it… I tried to make chicken something… but I ended up burning everything… so I’m sorry but we’re having pasta for dinner.” *I couldn’t even handle a simple chicken dish.* He smiled as he felt Marco’s hands on his hips. “How was work? Is your Dad still working his ass off?” *Old Geezer should retire already and give the shop to Marco…. Then he would have to stay.*

Marco chuckled quietly, burying his nose in Jean’s shoulder, breathing in his scent. “Pasta is just fine- you’re using the ones with the fancy shape. It's forgiven.” He nodded to the box, smiling faintly. “Work was work… Dad is still giving that bakery everything he has. I mean, baking is great, and fun, but doing nothing but that and having to interact with people who sometimes don't even understand that the person behind the counter is a person when they get mad, and with my feet hurting from standing and doing stuff all day… eh, it’s been a long day. But an okay day, I guess. It’s getting better.” Marco moved his hands to wrap completely around Jean’s waist, innocently pulling them flush, watching his movements as he cooked. “...are we having plain noodles and butter or is there going to be tomato sauce involved?” *I don't see sauce out... you probably forgot. You look frazzled enough.*

“With butter… I wasn’t feeling the sauce and I was thinking about adding some garlic oil to it to give it a bit more flavor.” He put the utensil down after stirring the pasta, moving over to grab the bottle of garlic oil that he had gotten forever ago. “I mean… um… if that’s okay with you?” He flushed a bit as he flicked his eyes towards the boiling pot.

Marco smiled, nodding and moving to softly peck his cheek over his shoulder. “That sounds fine to me. You know you’re gonna have to drain it first… right?” *Otherwise that just kinda defeats the purpose.* He chuckled as Jean turned an even darker red, his hands slipping from his waist and going to the pot, picking up a fork from nearby. He stabbed one of the pieces of pasta and popped it into his mouth, nodding and turning off the burner. “It’s done. Let me do this part…” He went to turn on the sink, the water running cold. “If you don’t drain the water out, the oil won’t stay on the pasta.” He grabbed two oven mitts from a drawer, setting the lid on the pot and easily picking it up, going to the sink and resting it on the metal edge as he held the lid firmly in place, straining out the
water, careful of the steam curling up around his arms. He set the pot back down on the cooling, yet still-hot burner, nodding to it. “You can put in as much butter and garlic oil as you want, and just mix it all in. Parmesan cheese, too, if there’s any in the fridge.” He smiled warmly to him, putting things away around the kitchen from the earlier culinary disaster. He stepped on a piece of paper, picking it up. *chicken cacciatore? Tasty… but if you’ve only ever cooked instant ramen, advanced.*

Jean only added a little bit of butter and oil to the fancy pasta, also sprinkling some cheese on top and mixing it thoroughly before getting out two bowls. *I can at least do this much.* “Do you want any wine, Marco?” He turned his head, looking back to the pasta as he scooped it into the white bowls. *I’m going to be having some.*

Marco thought a moment before nodding. “Sure, please.” *You sound like you’re going to have some either way.* He smiled faintly at that thought, taking the bowls from Jean as he finished scooping out pasta, pecking his nose and enjoying his embarrassed look before setting them on the table, going to get silverware. He soon sat down at the kitchen table, thanking Jean as he set a wine glass in front of him, nudging his foot with his toes as he sat down opposite him. “Thank you for making dinner. It looks really good.” He speared one of the noodles with his fork, lifting it to his mouth. He smiled. “And it is really good.” *I’m glad I didn’t have to come home and cook… instead I can just come home, and only sorta micromanage as someone else makes it.*...you really tried. *I appreciate that.*

Jean blushed a bit before shrugging. “It’s just pasta… it’s nothing fancy, I’m sorry it’s not chicken-whatever-the-fuck-its-called…” Jean sighed quietly, running a hand through his hair in frustration yet again. *I can never do anything remotely close to cooking… and I feel like you cook all the time.* He sat down and poked at the pasta, still a bit frustrated with himself.

Marco covered his mouth with the back of his hand as he quietly laughed, tangling their legs under the table and smiling to him. *Chicken cacciatore isn’t something I’d start my culinary career by making… I’ll help teach you and we’ll work our way up. How about tomorrow we learn how to make a proper scrambled egg?” He lightly joked. “But either way, Jean, it does taste good. You did a good job.” He ate another forkful of the pasta, sipping at his wine. *You did. …and we’ll fix your cooking ability in no time.*

Jean felt the corners of his lips turn upward, a small smile forming on his lips as he started to pick at his own food, but mostly nursing the glass of wine that was perpetually in his hand. *I needed a drink… and I don’t feel like getting drunk off the hard stuff.* He ate quietly, his mind still going back to what a few of his coworkers had told him earlier in the day. *All fucking retards, they don’t know shit…*

*There it is.* Marco returned to his food, sipping at his glass occasionally. It didn’t take long for him to notice how quickly Jean was draining his glass of wine. “…how was work today? Things going
Okay? "You look much more interested in the wine than in your actual dinner...

Jean shrugged, staring down at his wine glass, face flushing all the way to his ears. “I work with a bunch of assholes… It was alright I guess…” He picked the fork back up and started to eat a bit more of his food, slowing down on the wine intake, but not by much. He emptied it in only a few more moments, getting up from his seat to pour himself another glass.

... doesn’t sound like it was alright. Marco stood after a few minutes, carrying his empty bowl to get more pasta, his hand lightly brushing Jean’s shoulder as he passed. He picked at his pasta, a small flicker of worry in his eyes when Jean poured himself another full glass of wine. “I really don't want to press… but are you sure everything’s alright at work?” If your co workers have got you trying to get drunk on wine… that's not good.

“Yeah, it's just the usual asshats that are making a fuss over any little detail they find out about your life.” I work with such bigots. Jean sat down with his full glass of wine, picking up his fork to stab angrily at the pasta, still trying to get his frustration out from earlier in the day. I get hounded for being a fag at work, then I come home and try to cook… And I’m fucking useless in the kitchen…. And I can’t take it out on Marco… That’s... That wouldn’t be fair. “I might go to the dojo after dinner.” I can fight off my frustrations there.

Marco’s brow furrowed. “They know about…?” He motioned between the two of them, sighing quietly when he stiffly nodded. Asshats indeed. I understand why that would make life hell... but... don't... “It's kinda late in the day... I'm not gonna stop you, but are you sure you don't just wanna stay home, let me help you chill out?” Pretty sure if you go, you're gonna get your ass handed to you... not unlike every time you go.

Jean shook his head. “No, I should really go to the gym....” I don’t wanna snap at you, I have a feeling that was why Annie left... and I don’t wanna be alone. Jean finished off his food, setting the fork down in the bowl, raising his glass to his lips to take a sip again. I really need to calm down.

Marco silently nodded, setting down his own fork as he finished off his pasta and his wine glass, standing with his dishes. “Okay, just please be careful.” You always come home with plenty of bruises... He went to wash his dishes, going then to the table, pecking Jean on the cheek as he took his empty bowl. I know you need to run off your steam. It's fine.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe shook out his shoulders, stretching his arms a bit more. It's nice to get out of the house. It's
definitely doing Eren some good- and me, too, I've been barely anywhere else if it wasn't for an errand. And it's nice to actually have a good sparring partner for once. Lathe went to pet Blake as he laid guard next to the mat, picking up his water bottle from next to him. He didn't even have to turn around to feel the anger emanating from the person who walked in, Blake coming up a bit from where he was laying, his lip curled back to show his teeth. He looks ready to kill somebody. “Easy, Blake, easy.” Lathe went to catch his collar, turning and seeing Jean storming into the dojo. ...well then. He turned to where Eren was at the other end of the mat, seeing his eyes were locked onto Jean in a cool glare, stretching his leg straight over his head. ...well, he's doing his intimidation stretch… I need to get this on video.

Jean made his way straight to the mat that Eren was stretching at. “Wanna fight, asshat?” I could take you... you can’t be that good. And I need someone to beat. Jean put his bag down by the side of the mat, stepping on the cool surface, stretching his arms.

In two seconds, Lathe was at the edge of the mat recording on his phone, Blake chilling next to him. “Ten bucks on the guy who isn't the idiot.” He held out a hand, Blake instantly giving him his paw, shaking hands. “Wow, he apparently understands human language. And has ten dollars. Sweet.” He grinned, watching Eren immediately get into a ready position, seeing the intense look in his eyes. Jean is about to get whipped.

Eren kept a steady stance, his arms raised in front of him, waiting for Jean to make the first move. He didn't have to wait long; Jean immediately charged at him, aiming a punch for his head. He stepped a bit to the side, catching his arm and flipping him easily onto his back on the mat, jumping back and giving him space, still at the ready. “...that it, Secretariat?” Is that really all you've got? I expected a fight.

Jean groaned a bit as his back hit the mat. Fuck... I chose the wrong person to fight... “Fuck no, you illegitimate bastard.” Yes, I fucking went there. Jean quickly got up to his feet, taking on a ready stance, his arms raised towards his face. What’s your move gonna be? I need to think of everything you could do... I gotta be ready.

Anger flashed in Eren’s eyes, approaching him and deciding to really mess with him, quickly picking him up by the middle and easily backflipping with him in his grasp. He pinned his torso with his shoulder, letting him hit the mat hard, his feet landing neatly on either side of him. He sprung up after a moment, his weight on the balls of his feet. “You gonna get up, you disgrace to the family name?” Yeah. I went there.

“At least I’m not a… Suicidal fuckwad” I almost called him a faggot... But that would make me just as good as any of my bastard coworkers. He struggled to get up on his feet, pain shooting through his back for an instant.
“There's no shame in giving up!” Yes there is. Lathe called to Jean, grinning widely, still filming. “You can just tap out!” Kinda look like you want to.

Jean’s eyes flashed in anger. “Shut the hell up, ya geezer!” He shouted, moving as if to grab Eren from around the waist, but instead grabbed his shirt and lifted Eren with it, coming down hard on the mat with him. At this point a lot of people had gathered around their mat to watch, many of them with their phones out. I can’t lose.

What the hell did you just call Dad? Eren easily rolled with him, taking strong hold of Jean’s arms prying them from his shirt, pinning him face-down on the mat. He held one of his arms twisted behind his back, the other loose, uselessly trying to lift behind him to get Eren off of him, though his knee digging into Jean’s back kept him down. “Just tap out, Jean. You can't win.” Dad taught me too well for that.

Jean grunted and got his free hand under him, struggling to lift both himself and Eren, though once Eren dug his knee into his lower back to keep him in place Jean let his head fall to the mat in defeat. Fuck… I’m not good at this. His tight fist soon loosened and he tapped the mat, closing his eyes as his mind raced. This isn’t helping to clear my head, it’s just giving me other shit to process.

Eren got off of him when he tapped out, releasing his arm and standing. He offered a hand to Jean when he turned on the mat and looked at him. Dad was really adamant about being a good sport when it came to Judo… “That was a good match, Jean.” He gave him a half-smile for an instant. Eh, I don't blame you if you refuse my help. You probably will.

Jean looked to Eren’s outstretched hand, then up to his face, his eyes giving away some of the torment in his mind. “Fuck it…” He muttered under his breath as he took Eren’s hand, pulling himself up and check over the bruises that lined his sides. “Rematch?” God, that sounded hopeful as all fucking hell. Jean pulled his shirt back down, jumping a bit, feeling the strain of his muscles already beginning to set in.

“Can I call in my second? If so, sure.” Eren grinned as Jean nodded confusedly, stretching his arms over his head and stepping off the mat. He took Lathe’s phone as he stood up, high-giving him. “Go get ‘em, Dad.” This is gonna be good. He sat down next to Blake, filming still.

Lathe cracked his neck with an intimidating sound, cracking his ankles as well. “Alright, kid, you and me.” He laughed as Jean just gave him a ‘what the fuck’ look, explaining. “Oh, Eren can call me in to fight you in his stead. We’re the other’s second, so.” He smiled, taking a ready stance. “Whenever you're ready, kid. And don't worry.” He winked, grinning impishly. “I'll go easy on you.” This won't take long.
Jean seemed to go instantly pale before visibly swallowing. *Wait… Didn’t Lathe teach Eren this shit??* Jean stood still, his weight on the balls of his feet as he waited for Lathe to make the first move. *If I move first, it might be to run away.*

Lathe just dropped his arms when he realised Jean wasn't gonna move. “Really? O-kay, I'll go first.” He grinned, an intense look in his eye as he suddenly moved, a blur before he had Jean on his front again, his arm twisted and pinned with one foot, able to keep him down as he stood over him, inspecting his nails, seemingly uninterested in the sparring match. “You gonna keep trying, or…..?” *Probably not.*

Jean let out a low groan, tapping the mat after only a moment of being pinned. *I couldn’t even see him moving… Holy fuck…* He picked his head up once Lathe stepped off of him, his arms shaking as he pushed himself up. *That’ll definitely give me bruises for awhile to think about.*

Lathe sighed, smiling good-naturedly before moving to help Jean up, heaving him to his feet. “Oh, and that reminds me, actually…” He poked his stomach, tilting his head a bit, just quiet enough for the two of them to hear. “You're gonna need your rabies shot next week.” *That's a thing. “And good match, by the way. You really kept trying. I respect that.” His expression shifted a bit to one of worry, easily picking up on the torment swirling in Jean’s eyes. His voice was low and quiet, full of concern as he rested a hand on his shoulder. “Jean, you look **miserable.** Do you need someone to talk to?” *I know you think I have it out for you which I do low-key but you look like you really need to talk to someone. ...did something happen with Marco?*

Jean looked up, trying to mask the uncertainty in his eyes, shaking his head. “No… I’m okay… I’ll be fine, just sore, I’m gonna get going.” *I need to leave… I can’t cry in front of them, that'd really put me below the bar.*

Lathe watched with uncertainty as Jean turned and picked up his bag, slipping on his shoes to leave. ...*no.* Lathe moved off the mat and over to one of the instructors who had gathered around the mat, pushing him forward a bit. “Do me a favour and practice with Eren please Kay thanks!” Lathe stepped into his shoes and grabbed his jacket, going after Jean. He caught him as he was stopping near his car, catching his arm. “Jean, really, I can tell something is seriously off-” He turned him around, stunned as he saw tears streaming down Jean’s face. ...*oh my. “…Jean, what happened?”* He pulled Jean into a hug, his hand running soothingly over his back. *Talk to me.*

Jean shook his head, pushing on Lathe’s chest, his voice shaky as he spoke in tears. “N-no… I’m fine… I-I can deal w-with it…” Jean sniffled as he brought his arm up to rub away his tears roughly. *I’m not good enough… At anything…*

Lathe’s expression became a bit stern. *Yeah. No. “Jean, you are going to talk to me right now or*
I'm gonna call Marco and have him pick your sorry ass up.” You're talking. And not getting out of it.

... He’s not wrong... Wait... “Wait... H-how did you... How did you k-know?” I didn’t think that anyone knew about it... Not even the asshats at work know... Jean sniffled more, trying to collect himself and not cry. I can’t cry... I’ll look so weak in his eyes.

Lathe’s expression softened. “I go to Marco’s dad’s bakery all the time, and we talk a lot. He’s told me all about you two. All good things. ...did something happen between the two of you?” You look so broken up... ...oh my god, don't tell me Marco walked out on you too....

Jean shook his head. “No, it’s really just something stupid I’d rather not talk about... It’s stupid... I’m sorry that you got pulled into this...” Jean straightened himself, reaching for the driver’s side door, his hand shaking. I can’t believe I let it get to me.

Lathe leaned a hand against the door, keeping Jean from opening it. “Jean, I know you think I have it out for you, and I know you don’t want to look weak or vulnerable on any level, but you look so broken up and miserable that I’m not gonna let you leave until you tell me everything. I’m not gonna tell anyone or anything. Hell, Eren doesn't know you two are a thing, and I've known pretty much since day one. You can trust me. Really.” Spill already. You know you'll feel better if you do.

Jean sighed, closing his eyes as he started to recount what happened at work. “Well, I work with all the asshats from school... Basically, and everyone knows that Marco was gay then... And they started talking shit about him, and I couldn’t... I couldn’t say anything back... They called him so many horrible names... And I couldn’t do anything... They also brought up Annie leaving... Leaving me in particular... They ratted on me next... Saying that I was... That I was a sorry excuse for a man... And that I was probably worth as much as a scrap of meat thrown at a dog for dinner. I couldn’t say anything.” I couldn't stand up... For either of us... I can’t be considered good enough for my freckled beauty.... Now could I? Jean’s eyes were filled with sadness, stormy, and lacking any of the usual brightness. It fucking hurts.

Lathe just looked at him, shrugging a shoulder. “Well, karma’s a bitch, isn't it?” He watched as Jean just hung his head, his expression sympathetic. “I’m sorry, Jean, but you can’t let it get to you. They'll find something else to squawk about soon enough, and when it comes to Annie... none of that was your fault. No matter what you might've done, nothing excuses her just walking out like that. You might have been an asshat, but with how you acted on Thanksgiving, trying to be nice and civil with Eren, and with every glowing word Marco has been saying about you, I know that you've become a wonderful young man. I don't want you to question that. Nobody is without imperfections, but you are more than anything the people at work say, and you are more of a man than them themselves. I know it kills you to have to hear what they say and not be able to say anything back, but it'll pass. Be the bigger person here, and don't let them get to you, as hard as they may try. It'll be okay.” He rested his hand on his shoulder, smiling warmly. You'll be fine.
Jean simply shook his head. No It's not going to be…. I'm being harassed… But I guess I deserve it for what I put Eren through. Jean chuckled a little bit at his own thoughts. “Karma certainly is a bitch…. Goodnight, Mr. Quo.” Jean’s voice sounded a even more broken as he pulled his car door open. I don’t know how Marco even likes this broken piece of shit that I am… Or maybe he’s gonna make me think he’ll stay, and then leave just like Annie, and pretend that nothing happened.

“Hold on a second, Jean.” Lathe held the door, keeping Jean from getting in and pulling out Jean’s phone from his pocket. He quickly tapped at the screen, handing it back to him with a new contact. “You dropped your phone. And Jean, please. If you need to talk, call or text me. Whichever you need to. I’m here for you. There are so many people here for you. It'll be okay.” He let Jean take the phone and get into his car, pulling out his phone as he traipsed back into the dojo, texting Marco quickly.

LQ: Marco, we has a sitiation

LQ: Jean kinda came to the dojo where Eren and I were sparring, Eren wiped the floor with him and then I got called in to fight him… he looked so broken up when he left and he’s got a lot troubling him

LQ: His coworkers are being assholes… they were talking smack about him and pestered him about how Annie walked out on him… and then they were talking crap about you…

LQ: He's really broken up that they won't stop talking terribly about you or him and he can't speak up about it…

LQ: He was crying when he left… expect him home soon, in shambles…

LQ: He’s not gonna want to open up about anything…

LQ: But he needs to know someone gives a shit and thinks he's worth something…

MB: ...got it. Thank you Mr. Quo, I’ll see what I can do.

LQ: Good luck, Marco

Jean arrived home a few minutes later, setting his phone on the charger in the kitchen and going towards their bedroom without really realizing that he was home. He was on autopilot as he undressed in the bathroom and stepped into the steaming water he got going. I need to calm down… Marco can’t know that I’m upset… Fuck… I'm horrible… In all fucking aspects of my life.

Marco was quiet as Jean came inside, following him as he went to the bedroom without him noticing. He opened the bathroom door when he heard the water running, leaning against the wall near the shower curtain, his hand moving to nudge at the curtain, smirking a bit as he spoke, his voice echoing a bit off the walls. “...mind if I join you?” Y’know... saving water and all that crap.
Jean jumped a bit, his face flushing in embarrassment as he looked over his shoulder towards Marco. “Uh… Y-yeah, that’s fine… It’s hot though.” His voice was quiet, his eyes hastily turning away from Marco, turning back to face the spray of water. *You’ve never showered with me before.*

Marco smirked, able to hear his embarrassment. He stepped forward a bit to undress, knowing Jean could probably see his silhouette through the curtain, stripping and leaving his clothes on the counter. He moved to pull back the curtain and stepped into the shower behind Jean, adjusting quickly to the very warm spray. He moved behind Jean, his hands drifting to his waist and pulling him back against him, kissing softly across his shoulder blade and up his neck, seeing him turn scarlet as they became flush. “Welcome home, Jean.” His voice was quiet and smooth, lightly nibbling at his neck. *I think I know how to get the point across….*

Jean felt the heat that crossed his cheeks move right up to his ears and down his neck. “I-I… I’m home…” He shifted a bit on his feet as he was pulled back. “M-Marko?” He moaned a bit, a hand coming up to stifle the noise as he let escape as his neck was nibbled at. *Oh my god, that was so embarrassing.*

...*I want to hear that again.* “Hm? What was that, Jean?” Marco moved to suckle the joint of his neck, looking up at him innocently, his hands wandering a bit on his hips, agonisingly slowly brushing a bit closer to his front. His hand came up to move Jean’s hand from his mouth, nibbling and suckling a small mark on his neck.

Jean groaned, feeling a pulse of heat run through his body. “M-Marko… What are you doing?” *Fuck… Does he wanna…? But we’ve never… God dammit.* Jean continued to moan, struggling to stifle his sounds, his other hand going down to his crotch to hide his growing erection. *Fuck… Marco…*

Marco blushed as Jean spoke, trying to find the right words, his hand retreating back to his side. “Uhm… I just think you’re wonderful… and… i-if it’s okay with you, I know this is kinda sudden and I might be going fast, b-but… if you trusted me… would you let me have you?” ...*I just… I want you. And I want you to feel wanted.* He pressed a closed-mouthed kiss to the mark he left, his voice quiet. “You can say no… I understand it's kinda out of the blue…” ...*but everything that happened today just kinda gave me the teeny push I needed to actually be brave and ask…*

Jean’s entire face flushed, his hands dropping down to his crotch still. “If… Um… If you're… If you're gentle…” *I can let you do that… I mean, I’m less than a man as it is, but… Are you gonna leave after this?* Jean kept his eyes away and on the white tile, trying not to give away his uncertainty.
Marco instantly picked up on his uncertainty, lightly kissing across to the other side of his neck, his thumbs running soothingly over his hips. “I don't want this unless you do… and if you do, I promise to be gentle, and we can always stop whenever you say… but if you're not comfortable sharing yourself with me, I really understand. It's an important decision.” *I don't want you to regret this, if you say yes when you don't want to...*

“M-Marco…. I don’t want you to leave after…” Annie always left after. He moved to turn his front towards Marco, his semi-harden in his sight now. He leaned his head against Marco’s shoulder, taking in his scent. “I don’t mind…” He gingerly kissed his shoulder. *I wouldn’t mind fulfilling my destined role in life.*

Marco sighed deeply as he kissed his neck, his hands coming up to lace behind his neck. “Jean, I'm not going anywhere. We'll take things slowly, and if you're uncomfortable, tell me, okay?” He smiled softly as Jean nodded against his shoulder, lifting his head up from his skin and pressing their lips together in a reassuring kiss. *I'll take very good care of you.* “First, however…” He pecked across his jaw, reaching for the soap and a washcloth. “...let’s get you cleaned up.” He rubbed the soap into the soft cloth, pulling back a bit and beginning to clean Jean’s shoulders and chest, admiring his body, being gentle on his sides. “You've got a lot of bruises…” *Eren didn't go easy, did he...*

Jean nodded. “Lathe didn’t go easy on me either…” *I kinda needed that though...* He let Marco touch around his otherwise built body. He blushed as he took a glance at Marco’s length, quickly turning his eyes away. *He's fucking huge... That’s... How's it gonna even fit?*

Marco blushed as he glanced to Jean’s lower half, leaning forward to kiss across his collarbone, his hands gingerly moving to wash his nether. *You're a lot smaller than I am... by a lot...* He suckled gently on his skin as Jean shuddered as he washed him, his hands moving further down, bending over to wash his legs, his cheeks a furious red as he realised how close his head was to Jean’s lower half. He stood straight up after a moment, putting the cloth back and reaching for the shampoo, kissing Jean sweetly before beginning to wash his hair. *...you're so hot.... my god...*

Jean felt himself harden even more as Marco washed his slowly hardening length. *Fuck, Marco...* He kissed Marco back just as gently, groaning as his hands ran through his short hair. He pulled back a bit to breath. “Marco...” He breathed out the other’s name, his lips brushing against Marco’s. *Your hands feel nice.*

“Jean...” Marco sounded just as breathless, smiling as he pressed their lips back together, his fingers threading through Jean’s hair, washing it and playing with the strands at the nape of his neck as they kissed. He broke from him and moved Jean back a bit into the stream of water to rinse his hair, pulling him back to massage conditioner into his hair, their lips locked in a slow kiss. *I really like this... we need to do this more often...*
Jean kissed him back, moving a little closer to him, pressing himself against Marco’s front, wanting some friction. *Fuck, Marco, your hands feel so good, massaging my scalp like that.* He moaned quietly into their kiss, wanting Marco to take the lead. *I have no idea what I’m doing.*

Marco let out a small sound, cupping Jean’s cheeks and walking him back into the stream of water, rinsing Jean and pressing against him, letting out a shuddery moan into their kiss as he felt their lengths rub together. *...I really, really want this...* Marco decided to take the lead as Jean didn’t, tentatively running his tongue over Jean’s lips. He slowly deepened their kiss as he was granted entrance, tilting his head for a better angle, the hot water running over their bodies. He soon enough reached behind Jean and shut off the water without breaking their kiss, trying to guide them from the shower to dry off. *Bedroom.*

Jean followed Marco, getting out of the shower with him, grabbing at the towels in the cabinet near the door. He dried off himself quickly, breaking their kiss as he wrapped Marco up in the towel, blushing as he looked into Marco’s chocolate eyes. *Holy shit... Why didn’t I see him like this sooner?* He felt the blood from his blush rush down to his groin, and causing it to twitch to full erection.

Marco kept his gaze as Jean wrapped him in a towel, drying his hair quickly and drying himself off. He let the towel fall to the floor, uncaring as he walked right up to Jean, walking him back to the bathroom door and opening it. He blushed deeply as he walked him backwards to the bed, one hand cupping his cheek, the other on his waist, eyes full of adoration and lust as he backed him up to the bed. He gently pushed him onto the mattress, letting him shuffle up completely onto it and clambering on top of him, his knees on either side of him. He leaned down to kiss him, their tongues immediately tangling, moving his hips down and rubbing their hard lengths together experimentally. *I want this to feel good. I want you to feel good.*

Jean moaned without restraint, his hand coming up to gently touch Marco’s chest, feeling the muscle under the skin. “M-M-Marco...” His name was a moan off of his tongue. *It feels really good.*

Marco moaned into the kiss, running his tongue against his one more time before breaking their kiss, his hands running down Jean’s chest as he kissed down his neck, his mouth wandering over his chest, nibbling at every spot he found that made Jean squirm and gasp on his way down, kissing gently at his navel, his lips lightly trailing down his stomach to the base of his length, his face scarlet. *I want this... and I want you to know how much you’re wanted.* He nipped lightly at the skin just next to his base, moving his head and licking slowly up the underside of his length, tasting him and beginning to suckle on the tip, his hands on Jean’s hips and daring to look up to his eyes as he slowly bobbed his head.

Jean’s eyes were wide as he propped himself up on his elbows. “F-Fuck... Marco... Shit...” His
hand came down to run through Marco’s short hair. You look amazing… And it feels wonderful. You have so much fucking confidence too… I’d never be able to do this…

Marco moaned onto his length as he felt Jean's hand tug at his hair,发送delicious vibrations down his length as he slowly took in more and more of him. You look like you're enjoying yourself… and you most certainly sound like it. He pulled up from his length for just a moment, sending him a seductive look. “I don't think you know just how damn sexy you sound.” He moved again to take in his length, making his way closer and closer to the base as Jean gasped and moaned, soon nuzzling his nose into the hair at his base. I have no idea how the hell I'm not a stuttering, embarrassed mess… I guess that's Jean’s job. He quietly chuckled on his length, his hands running over his hips, keeping him in place.

Jean moaned even louder with the vibrations going through his throbbing length. Oh my god… “Marco… I… I won’t be able to…. Fuck!” Jean grabbed at his hair more, his toes curling as his coil was starting to tighten. I won’t be able to hold it much longer… It feels too fucking good, and I haven’t had a blow job in so long.

Marco moaned loudly onto his length, a knowing glint in his eye as he sucked on his length even harder, one hand moving to massage his balls. Come on… He moved up on his length, his other hand pumping his shaft as he suckled hard on his tip, keeping his lustful gaze. I wanna taste you. ...and we’ll see if you’re up for round two.

Jean let out a loud cry of bliss, his eyes closing as he threw his head back into the pillow under his head. “Fuck… Marco.” His toes were still curled as he left a massive load in his mouth. Holy shit… His hand loosened it’s grip on Marco’s hair, looking down to him with lust-filled eyes.

Marco struggled to swallow his load, some of his release dripping down his chin as he pumped Jean’s length, lapping up every last drop and popping off of his length, his finger moving to scoop up the white from his chin, licking it clean and crawling back up to him, caught in Jean’s intense gaze. “Enjoying yourself up here?” You sure sound like it. …and you're still really hard. Round two for you it is.

Jean groaned. “Fuck Marco, that felt great…” He sat up fully, his member still hard between his thighs. Shit… I need to take care of this… His face had a blush on it as he looked away. “I um… I should go take care of this…”

Marco placed both of his hands on Jean’s chest, pushing him back onto the bed and smiling softly, his eyes shaded. “Whoever said I wouldn’t?” You look like you're up for more. Marco dipped his head down, suckling a mark on the other side of Jean’s neck, lapping at the spot and nibbling up to his ear, his hands wandering over his toned chest. ...I've done enough snooping to know where you
Marco looked up to Jean, his expression serious and eyes hopeful. “...can I still have you?” I want to make sure you're really okay with it... Jean looked down at Marco, watching his hands as they wandered up his battered chest. “Y-Yeah... Just go easy on me...” I don’t know what being taken feels like... But I should probably get used to it is what I’m guessing. Jean turned, moving a hand to the nightstand and pulling the drawer open, giving Marco another full view of his taut ass cheeks.

Marco let his eyes run without shame over the lines of his lower half, letting one hand slide down to cup his ass, giving it a bit of a squeeze and leaning over to help Jean get a condom and lube, shutting the drawer and shifting back, giving his cheek one last playful squeeze before he moved to kiss Jean, his hands fiddling with the tube of lube in his hand. He snapped the cap open, pouring a generous amount into his hand, putting the tube out of the way and coating his fingers with it. He knelt between Jean's legs, slowly coaxing him to spread them apart for him. He let his hand trail down to his entrance, tracing the pucker and keeping leverage over him with his other hand on the mattress. He kissed across his chest, murmuring. “I'll go slow, and you tell me when to stop if it starts to hurt for me to move, okay? Just relax.” He slowly pressed his first finger past his entrance, feeling his soft walls tense around him. “Just relax, Jean.” I'll go very slow.

Jean closed his eyes, trying to focus only on Marco’s soft words. I need to calm down, I need to relax... It didn’t take him much longer to force himself to calm down, and begin to relax around Marco’s finger. It... It feels weird... Really weird... Jean was silent save for a few ragged intakes, but other than that he showed no discomfort.

Marco took his relaxing and lack of discomfort as a cue to continue, adding a second finger and slowly thrusting in and out of him. His mouth wandered over his chest, his lips latching onto his perk nipple and beginning to suckle on the pink bud. “It's okay to make noise if you want to.” He pecked the bud, flicking over it with his tongue, lavishing him with attention. I wanna hear you make those sounds again...

Jean made a soft whine as one of his nipples was teased. “Ngh... Marco...” He moved his hips a bit in discomfort, trying to ease his tensed muscles as the two fingers thrusted into him. Fuck... It feels really weird... He whimpered a bit as his fingers stretched him out especially far, feeling the subtle burn of being opened up.

Marco slowed his movements as Jean whimpered, thrusting into him carefully, gently beginning to scissor him. His mouth moved to his other nipple, teasing it with his tongue as he patiently thrusted into him, waiting for Jean to adjust. “Jean, I know it burns a bit but it'll go away... trust me, it'll start to feel good. Just stay relaxed.” You're doing just fine- you'll feel good soon.

Jean nodded, shifting a bit under Marco’s fingers. It... It still feels really weird.... His eyes
widened, and a sudden whine escaped his throat as he felt his fingers brush up against something, a large wave of pleasure washing over him from his toes to his fingertips. Holy… “F-Fuck…”

Marco grinned against his skin as he suddenly shuddered with pleasure. There it is. “What? Did something feel nice? Maybe… this?” Marco spoke innocently, brushing firmly over the bundle of nerves deep inside of Jean, smirking as he let out a strangled cry. Thought so. He added his third finger after a moment, thrusting a bit more deeply into him, curling his fingers. I wanna hear everything.

Jean whimpered a bit, spreading his legs further apart. “F-Fuck… Marco… Please… Don’t stop… It feels good.” He whined as Marco abused his prostate, his length dripping at a fast rate, Jean’s moans becoming louder. Fuck it feels really good.

Marco grinned, pulling his hand from him after a long moment. “Don't worry, Jean…” He worked to slick himself up and roll on a condom, his length rock hard and throbbing from neglect. He lined up with Jean’s entrance, nibbling at Jean’s earlobe, his voice smooth. “...I won't stop until you can't walk straight.” He suckled at his ear as Jean shivered in anticipation, very slowly pushing forward and sinking into Jean, shuddering as he was completely sheathed in his tight heat, wanting so desperately to move, but staying still and waiting for Jean to adjust. “...w-when ever you're ready… j-just say…” My god, I haven't even moved and it already feels too good...

Jean’s eyes snapped open, his hands gripping the sheets under him as he tightened around Marco in discomfort. He’s huge… Fuck… It burns… He whimpered, a few tears starting to form in the corner of his eyes. “M-Marc…”

Marco pecked at his cheeks, kissing at his tears and pressing their lips together, trying to distract him from the pain. “It'll stop burning soon, trust me… you'll stretch, and it might take just a bit, but it'll feel good soon. Just give it a bit of time.” You'll think it was worth it soon enough.

Jean nodded, not trusting himself to speak anymore. I don’t want it to hurt this much… Fuck… is it gonna feel like this all the time? He kept his eyes closed, trying not to whimper as he moved only slightly and the pull of his movement causing pain to shoot up through his spine.

Marco let his hands wander over Jean’s body as he adjusted, trying to distract him from the pain. One hand moved and closed around his exposed length, slowly pumping it as they kissed. He waited until Jean had significantly relaxed around him before he even thought of moving, both his hands moving onto the mattress and very slowly pulling out of Jean and thrusting back in to the hilt, starting a steady and slow pace. I hope you know to tell me if I'm way too much...
Jean let out a strangled cry as Marco shifted and started to move. “M-M-Marco… Hngh….” He groaned as Marco created a slow pace and was gentle with him. *It… It feels weird….*

Marco kissed up his neck, whispering near his ear. “You feelin’ okay up there?” *It feels really good to me… I kinda wanna go faster, but I know right now you want slow… you’re still adjusting to this…*

Jean nodded, soft moans starting to fill the room as his hands shifted from gripping the blankets at his sides to wrapping his arms around Marco’s chest, pulling him closer. “Mnn… Marco…” He whined as he shifted his hips a bit, suddenly letting out a loud cry and even louder moans. *Fuck me….*

A strong pulse of arousal ran through Marco, the heat between his legs becoming unbearable as he deeply thrusted into Jean, aiming for that spot that made him cry out louder and louder. *That. My God, you sound so damn hot…* “Haaa… Jean… c-can I… s-should I go f-faster?” He kept his steady pace, his stance on his knees shifting so he could have a better angle to thrust even deeper into him, their hips fully meeting with each movement. *Please say yes… pretty please…*

Jean tried to open his mouth to speak, only to release a loud whine in response, taking a bit, though Jean finally collected himself, his grip stronger against Marco’s broad shoulders. “Y-yeah… Fuck…” He moaned out, his hips moving against Marco’s.

*Thank you.* Marco’s hands drifted to Jean’s hips, holding onto them tightly as he picked up the pace a bit, thrusting more deeply into him and moaning into his chest. *…it feels so good… nnngh… J-Jean… s-so… good…”*

Jean moaned even more, his hands moving back behind his head and grabbing at the pillow, leaving his whole body open for Marco to see. “F-Fuck… Marco… Fuck me… Please…” *It feels really good, right where you are… It feels really good.*

Marco pulled back, his eyes greedily raking up his exposed form, lust settling in his gut. *So much for being gentle.* “I don’t how how you could’ve expected me to be gentle, with you looking like that.” Marco’s hold on his hips tightened a bit, nearly leaving bruises as he lifted him a bit further, beginning to pound into him. “…J-Jean… so… haaaa…. so good…” *Marco has breathing hard, watching hungrily as Jean bounced on his length, a moaning mess under him. … how. Are you mine?*

Jean’s eyes widened as he heard Marco’s sultry tone, his hips rolling more as he continued to move
in him. He felt a warmth beginning to pool in his abdomen, his length, laying painfully hard against his stomach, leaking profusely. *It feels really fucking good… Why have we not done this before?*  

Marco could feel himself nearing the edge, still pounding into Jean and aiming for his prostate as he leaned over him, his mouth ghosting over his neck. One hand moved from his bruising grip on his hips to his length, pumping it agonisingly slowly. “**Jean…**” He paused in his words, smirking as he heard his breath catch in his throat. “*I want to hear you scream.*” *You sound so damn hot … I want to hear you.* 

Jean cried out loudly as his length was finally given the attention he wanted. *Holy shit… I can’t… “Mar…. Marco!”* Jean’s cry became a heady scream as his coil snapped, starting to cover himself in his own pearly white beads of cum. He was breathing hard as Marco still pumped his length, prolonging his release. After a long moment, when Marco began to slow his ministrations, he started to come down from his high. His face was completely flushed, his hair tousled every which way, his body shaking as more bruises bloomed around his hips and around his neck. *I've been thoroughly fucked….* 

Marco let out a shaky cry into his chest, releasing into the condom inside of him, his hand pumping Jean’s length and milking him for everything he was worth. He drew out of him after a long moment, tying off the condom and tossing it to the wastebasket near the bed. He sat back on his heels to admire his work, grinning lazily as he saw Jean in all his unashamed, well-fucked glory, the image burning into his mind. “……Jean…… holy fuck, that was great… you look sexy as all hell…” He leaned down to lap up his release from his chest, hungrily tasting him and licking his lips before nearly collapsing on top of him, suckling dark marks onto his neck possessively. … *mine.* 

Jean let out a soft groan before shifting out from under him. “Let me up… I gotta use the bathroom…” *My ass is sore as all hell, I need to get some pain meds… and I might as well stake a claim on the couch… I don’t wanna wake up to an empty bed again…* Jean swung his legs over the edge of the bed, hissing from the pain in his lower back as he went to his dresser grabbing a pair of boxers before venturing out to the hallway and down to the bathroom, his eyes not looking much higher than the floor as the last thought in his mind tormented him. 

Marco kissed his cheek and let him go, retrieving his own boxers and settling in under the covers, waiting for Jean to come back to bed. When fifteen minutes passed and he didn't, he stood, dragging a blanket with him and venturing for him, easily finding him on the couch, poking his shoulder. “Jean, what are you doing. Come to bed, please. I wanna sleep with someone else. You're warm. ...and it's mean to just make you sleep out here for no reason.” *Please? Why’re you out here, anyway?* 

Jean moved to hide his face and quickly moved his hand to rub away the small tears that had formed. “No… It’s okay… I-I think I’m gonna stay here… Tonight.” *I don’t wanna wake up with*
Marco’s expression shifted, remembering what Jean had said earlier. “...Jean, I'm not going to leave. I wanna stay. ....and I don't wanna sleep alone... or wake up without you next to me... what we just did was really important to me... I really want you to be there with me for the night... please ...” I want you to stay with me...

Jean stayed quiet for a few moments before turning his teary face towards Marco. “You... You’re... You’re gonna stay?” He sniffled a bit, rubbing at his eyes, no longer trying to hide his fearful eyes. I don't wanna be broken again...

Marco immediately nodded, kneeling down next to him, cupping his cheek softly, kissing his cheeks. “I'm gonna stay. I'll always stay.” He kissed his face sweetly as Jean tried to hold back a quiet sob, putting his blanket on top of him and scooping him up along with the blankets he'd buried himself in, cradling him and bringing him back to the bedroom, laying him on the bed and crawling under the warm blankets with him, pulling Jean’s back flush with his own front. His arms wound around his middle, pressing kisses to his shoulder blade. “I promise I'll always stay, Jean. I wouldn’t’ve given you what I did if I wasn't serious about you. I...”...should I say it? I mean.... I know I do.... Uhm... “...I... I l-love you... I'm n-not gonna go anywhere...” Am I going way too fast with this? It's only been a month... crap I messed up didn't I...

Jean shifted in his arms, turning towards Marco’s chest and burying his head into it. His ear pressed against his heart, the steady beating calming him down. He had a soft smile on his face, along with it being flushed to his ears. I can’t say that right now... Not when I’m still hurt but... I appreciate it. Jean wrapped his arm around Marco, keeping his ear above his heart and calming down more. He’s warm.

Marco pulled Jean on top of him, finding his weight grounding. He wrapped an arm loosely around his middle, the other playing with his short hair. It's fuzzy... I like it. He smiled softly as he felt Jean's breathing even, sighing quietly, completely understanding. You take as long as you need to say it.... you've been hurt. It could take some time. He began to drift to sleep, warm and content, overwhelmingly happy. ...I love you.

Day 11

Armin clicked away boredly on the computer, his head resting on his hand as he read through work email after boring memo. ...this has got to be the seventeenth email I've gotten about that damn
‘meeting’ next week. I hate the conference calls; nothing ever gets done and it's in the same monotone every time. He stopped for a moment, looking around for the umpteenth time for a distraction, finding none. ...Erwin is out getting shit, and I've got nothing to do here besides read boring-ass text and twiddle my thumbs. This gets waaaay too repetitive. He huffed, eventually just staring blankly at the screen, his mind wandering.

Erwin came through the garage door soon after holding two large bags of groceries and setting them on the kitchen counter, going back to the car and bringing in the flowers he got. “Armie! I’m home!” His deep voice reverberated against the walls as he put the flowers into a vase before touching any of the food. I finally have all the holiday shopping done. Erwin smiled to himself, putting away the food in the proper drawers and shelves.

Armin snapped out of his trance as he heard Erwin call through the house, a thought occurring to him, smirking. ...I know a good distraction... Armin stood from the computer, putting the monitor to sleep before ambling to the kitchen, leaning against the doorway and watching Erwin putting away the foodstuffs, simply admiring the way he looked for the moment. Tall, strong and handsome... and mine. He smirked, letting the feeling of want in the back of his mind control him, stepping forward as Erwin turned from one of the counters, his hands moving to the counter on either side of him, effectively trapping him there. He looked up to him with a glint in his eyes, one hand moving to his waist, the other going to pull him down by the collar, taking him by surprised as he closed the height difference between them, kissing him heatedly. Be my distraction.

Surprise was the first thing that showed on Erwin’s face before he melted into the kiss with Armin, his arms coming down to rest on his hips and pull him close before he got tired of craning his neck. He lifted Armin up by the ass cheeks and set him on the newly cleared counter and began attack at his mouth again. You are mine... But you usually wait for me to start... Feeling a bit horny are we?

Armin wrapped his legs around Erwin’s waist and ground their hips together without shame, tangling their tongues and running his hands all over Erwin’s chest, feeling every chiselled muscle. He tugged at the hem of his shirt, pulling it over Erwin’s head and throwing it to the floor uncaring, going to attack his neck with nips and harshly sucking marks across his collarbones. Mine. “I really want you...” Ugh, everything else has just been so monotone in a way and I can’t help it when my mind wanders and it wanders to you and all of the things you do to me... damn it, my mind has been in the gutter all day... of course it has been.

Erwin smirked at Armin’s words. “Hmm… I can tell… I think anyone would be able to tell.” He ground against Armin’s crotch, letting himself start to become aroused as he looked to Armin’s eyes, having pulled him back to rid Armin of his clothing as well. He dipped his own head down, sucking roughly at Armin’s collarbone, leaving a heavy bruise on a matter of a few seconds. Everyone will know that you are mine.

Armin immediately tangled his hands in Erwin’s hair, moaning as he was marked, his head tipped
back in a plead for more. “D-don't be smart with me… j-just fuck me already… I'm sorry, I'm not feeling too patient.” *I want you to make me yours.*

Erwin chuckled at what Armin demanded of him. “I guess I could do that.” He helped get Armin out of his pants, leaning over to the sink to lather his fingers in some soap, coming back over to Armin and gently tracing his puckered hole, his hips grinding into Armin’s hand as the other reached to undo his belt and unzip him. *Fuck, you’re so needy… And it’s turning me on.*

Armin began to clumsily undo Erwin’s belt and jeans, tugging them down and rubbing his still-clothed erection. He let out a deep sigh as Erwin plunged a finger inside of him, spreading his legs a bit more for him, lowly moaning for more as Erwin prepared him, soon feeling a second finger opening him up. *I want it… I really want you…*  “E-Erwin… please…” Armin was aching with need, his eyes pleading with the man looming above him. *I need you.*

Erwin caught his gaze, gently scissoring Armin’s entrance. “Easy, Armie, I don't wanna hurt you. Remember what happened last time when you wanted me right away and you weren’t prepared properly?” He leaned down to kiss his forehead. “Should I go get a condom?” he asked. *I know sometimes you would prefer I wear one… But I don’t know if you want me to.* Erwin easily got a third finger into Armin’s tight heat, his clothed length twitching against the fabric, wanting to be freed.

……*it hurt to move …… sooooooo worth it though. I got you to carry me everywhere.* Armin shook his head, tugging at the elastic of his boxers, snapping them against his skin a few times, a playful look to him. “I’d rather you didn't… nnggh…” He panted quietly as Erwin stretched him, looking up to him with lust in his eyes. “I’d much rather you fill me up.” *I want this too much. ...there isn't ever ‘too much,’ is there. ...not to me there's not.*

*Good.* Erwin grinned, pulling out his three digits and using his clean hand to pull off his pants and boxers completely, his erection standing proud and tall in salute to Armin’s glorious body. He reached over for the soap again, lathering his length in it. *You are going to be the end of me with the way you’re looking at me.* Erwin grabbed his hips gently, pulling him close to the edge of the counter and poking at his entrance teasingly. “Tell me what you want Armin.” *I wanna hear that sexy voice again.*

*Fucking tease.* Armin reached up to lace his fingers behind Erwin’s neck, staring into his eyes as he spoke. “Erwin, my God, just fuck me, please. Fuck me until I can't walk straight, fast and hard, until I can't even remember my own name, please. Erwin, stop teasing and just take me already.” He turned his legs out a bit more, giving him easier access to his hole. *I need you so badly… please…*

Erwin let his lips curl up at the corners and leaned down to kiss Armin’s neck as he moved his hips...
forward, burying himself into Armin’s tightness. “Hmm… Armin, you’re as tight as ever.” You’re as tight as the first time I remember having you… Hmm, it’s wonderful. Erwin gripped at Armin’s hips, starting a brutal pace of pounding into him, his lips still taking over the smaller blonde’s neck.

Armin gasped loudly as Erwin suddenly sheathed himself inside of him, any pain from stretching quickly melting into pleasure as he pounded into him. Armin let his head fall back, trying to move his hips and meet Erwin’s thrusts. He moaned without restraint as he was marked up and down his neck, bouncing on Erwin’s length. “E-Erwin… m-my God… haaaa… f-fuck me… p-please fuck me….” Everything.

His large hands traveled down Armin’s sides, down to his hips, lifting him up a bit to better position them so he had better access. His hands stayed on his hips, grunting as Armin’s fingers pulled at his short hair. Erwin continued to snap his hips into the warm delicious heat in front of him that simply sucked him in and latched on, trying to keep him inside. God, his little hole’s so greedy… I love it…

Armin tugged Erwin down to suck hard at his neck and collarbone, littering his skin with hickeys, his hands tugging at his short blonde hair. “E-Erwin… f-feels really good… haaa… AH!” Armin’s back arched as Erwin found his prostate, pounding into it with every thrust. “R-right there, m-my God Erwin, d-don’t stop… please just don’t stop…” He moaned loudly, lapping at his neck and trailing his tongue up to his ear. You barely make any noise when you’re on top… “Erwin… I’d love to hear you too…” You sound so fucking hot when you moan...

Erwin groaned, shuddering as Armin lapped at his ear. “A-Armin… Fuck….” He moaned out his name, moving to kiss his forehead as he tightened his grip on Armin’s hips, continually ramming into him. So good, he’s really tight… And he looks so hot… Erwin looked into Armin’s eyes with his own lustful ones. I’ve always wanted to fuck you on the counter top. He tried to be a bit more vocal to appease Armin as he let go of a hip and ran a hand through his hair, ruffling the bowl-cut.

Armin couldn't break the lustful gaze Erwin had caught him with, seemingly able to read every lustful thought he had, breathing hard as he felt warmth beginning to pool in his belly. “E-Erwin… haaa… c-can't last l-long… f-feels too g-good….” Armin’s moans became higher pitched as he felt himself nearing the edge, gasping as Erwin’s large hand trailed down from his hair and over his chest to his length, pumping it. “M-My God, Erwin… p-please….” Armin let out a loud cry as he came hard, decorating their chests with white pearly drops, Erwin still pounding into him and prolonging his high. Fuck… Erwin...

Erwin watched in awe as Armin cried out his name, his lithe body beginning to shake. You look absolutely wonderful… He continued to thrust, hitting his prostate full force. “Armin… You’re so beautiful…” I don’t know what I would do without you. His coil was tightening at a fast rate. “I can’t… For much longer…” Fuck you got tighter…
Armin let Erwin’s name fall from his tongue like his life depended on it, overly sensitive as Erwin milked him of his cum. His hands ran through Erwin’s hair, staring right at him, his orbs full of love and lust, trying to speak clearly. “T-then cum for me, Erwin. Fill me up, please.” He panted breathlessly, still bouncing on Erwin’s long length, drinking in his expression. *I want to see you fall apart.*

Erwin moaned out Armin’s name like a mantra, his coil finally snapping and his thrusts becoming sporadic as he rode out his orgasm. “Hmm… Armin… You feel wonderful, so warm… So beautiful…” His voice only a bit breathless as he stayed buried balls deep inside of Armin. *I love this… You’re milking me for all I’m worth.* Erwin kept Armin trapped in his large arms, both of them on either side of Armin, planted firmly on the counter. *I wanna stay like this…*

Armin sighed deeply as he felt Erwin’s release filling him, his legs pinning their hips completely flush, relishing in the feeling of being full. His eyes were full of adoration as he dragged Erwin’s head closer to his, kissing him deeply and tangling their tongues. His arms wound around his broad shoulders, feeling the rippling muscle under his fingers. *I love this… I love you… and you’re mine.*

Erwin groaned into the kiss, holding Armin close by the ass cheeks. *Hmm, you feel so good.* He pulled back to breathe, keeping their foreheads pressed together. “What got you all horny, hmm?” His voice was rough as he spoke, his eyes showing mischief, as he watched Armin’s face finally flush.

Armin looked away, feeling his cheeks burn. “U-Uhm… work is a bitch… and boring as hell… and my mind kept wandering… and wandering… and then you came home, and I couldn’t help myself…” He let out a small sound of surprise as Erwin gave his ass a playful squeeze, glaring at him half-heartedly for a moment. *...dammit Erwin...*

Erwin smirked, continuing to massage his bubbly ass. “What, am I not allowed to play?” *I really want to…* He picked up Armin off of the counter, keeping himself sheathed inside of him. *You feel wonderful, I don’t want to leave your heat.* His large hands were cupping Armin's supple cheeks, keeping him well seated on his member.

Armin blushed scarlet, stuttering a bit, letting out a stifled moan as he was shifted on Erwin’s length, his legs still keeping them flush. “...I-I never s-said that…” Armin dropped his head against Erwin’s shoulder, marking across his other, unblemished collarbone. *There's nothing over here... we need to fix that.* He slowly ground his hips further against Erwin’s, wanting more. *I'm up for more if you are...*

Erwin smirked, leaning his head back to let Armin mark him up more. *We could go for another*
round. Erwin got a good grip on Armin’s ass, picking him up and starting to bounce him on his length. “Fuck, you feel great Armin…” His voice was heady with lust.

Armin moaned loudly as Erwin started the pace up again, feeling himself hardening again as Erwin thrusted into his sensitive heat. “Haaaa… my God, Erwin… You're so long and thick… just perfect…” Armin moved to nip at Erwin’s Adam’s apple, lapping at the skin higher-up, though not marking it. You kinda shouldn’t have too-visible hickey’s when you go back… but you’ve got plenty you can hide.

Erwin groaned at Armin’s praises. “And you’re so tight…. And hot… You feel great…” He let out a loud moan, holding Armin close to him and making sure that he had a proper hold on him. “Tell me if it hurts, okay?” I can tell that I’m going deeper...

Armin nodded, breathing hard against his shoulder. Fuck... I love it when I can actually hear you... “I-It doesn't hurt… you're going deeper… a-and… haaaa…. it feels really good… my God, you know how to make me feel good… and you sound so fucking sexy… nnngh…. I love it…” Armin let out a sudden loud cry as Erwin started to hit his prostate, even harder than the first time, letting out moan after breathless moan. “T- there … please, Erwin… d-don’t stop… anything, just don't stop…” It feels too good ...

Erwin nodded, letting his moans become audible to the rest of the quiet house as he continued to thrust up into him. “Hmm, Baby… You feel so good, you can fit… Everything in… Ngh… God, so good for me…” He moaned, feeling warmth run right to his abdomen, the pleasure clouding his mind until he was thinking solely of Armin.

Armin could feel his coil quickly tightening, every sound Erwin made making the heat between his legs more and more overwhelming. His grip on Erwin’s shoulder’s tightened, feeling himself teetering on the edge. “E-Erwin… haaa… I can't last…” He rolled his hips hard against him, gasping as Erwin hit his prostate over and over. Oh my God… Erwin...

Erwin nodded, a few grunts escaping him as he continued his thrusts. “Fuck Armin… I’m gonna… Armin! ” He cried out as his coil finally snapped again as he bounced Armin on his length. That felt absolutely amazing... Total bliss.

Armin’s own coil snapped when he heard Erwin cry out in his ear, his own cry muffled in his shoulder as he came onto their chests, feeling Erwin again filling him, feeling some of his release leak from his hole. “E-Erwin… m-my God… that felt r-really good…” He tried to catch his breath, still clinging to him. Thank god you’re this strong... I dunno if my legs could hold me up right now... He sighed deeply as Erwin drew out of him, still holding him. He nestled further into his shoulder, feeling sleepiness begin to wash over him. “…m’tired…” His eyes fluttered shut,
enjoying the feeling of Erwin’s strong arms still holding him.

Erwin smiled softly, keeping Armin close as he walked upstairs and to the master bedroom. He walked almost silently through the house, turning the water on in the adjoining bathroom and waiting for the large tub to fill. *We haven’t had a bath together in a long time… And you’ll wanna wash off.*

“Hm?” Armin lifted his head up as they passed the bed and entered the bathroom, watching as Erwin turned on the water to fill the bathtub. He smiled, his head going back to rest against his shoulder as they waited for the tub to fill, humming happily, his voice quiet. “A bath together would be nice…” *I approve. …and I’d like to get cleaned up… I’m kinda sticky.* He unwound him legs from Erwin’s waist as the tub filled, stepping in carefully with his help and letting Erwin pull him into his chest as they sat down in the warm water. He lazily wrapped his arms around Erwin’s waist, nestling into his shoulder again, wanting Erwin to take the lead. “…the water feels nice…” *I like this. We need to do this more.*

Erwin smiled more, taking the white washcloth and filling it with soap before starting to caress Armin’s skin gently. “I agree, how much work are you gonna have tomorrow? It’ll be Christmas Eve…” *I hope you don’t have anything to do… Levi asked if we could all go out… Apparently Eren’s been cooped up in the house for a bit and is getting restless.*

Armin shrugged, sighing quietly as Erwin washed him. “Not much, if at all… I’ve been finishing all of my work pretty quickly, getting kinda ahead on stuff. Why? Are there plans?” *Are we doing stuff? I’m up for stuff if it’s not boring myself to death working.* Armin began to lightly kiss and lap at Erwin’s neck, his hold on his waist gentle.

Erwin nodded. “Levi wants to get Eren out of the house… He’s been doing nothing but draw for a bit apparently… Or take the animals riding… He needs to get out.” *We all need to get out.* Erwin’s hand was gentle with the cloth as he rubbed Armin’s skin clean of all the sticky cum splattered on his chest.

Armin nodded, his hands gently running over Erwin’s sides as he nipped at his neck, gently lapping at the marks he’d left. “Yeah, we need to get him out of the house. Even with all the stuff to do there, anybody would go nuts staying in one place all the time.” Armin leaned back so Erwin could more easily clean his chest, letting his hands run over Erwin’s own chest, tracing over the defined muscles, smirking faintly. “…damn are you hot.” He chuckled quietly as Erwin faintly blushed, pecking his cheek. “Just reminding you.” *I’m never gonna stop telling you that. Because damn.*

Erwin’s deep chuckle sounded against the walls. “Levi also told me that he’s trying to find a
ring… And a good time to propose…. They’re… How should I put it, cause Eren’s the one who wants one, and Levi’s asking for help to find a good company…” Erwin trailed off in thought as he gently moved Armin to scrub and his back and his arms. I wonder if you’ll be able to help research too?

…… well, Eren’s not exactly the only one… “I might be able to help with that… but that’s really good to hear, that they both want to tie the knot… I’ll have that in the back of my mind.” Armin’s hold on Erwin tightened, burying his nose into his shoulder, breathing in his scent. ...I wonder if you’ve got any plans like that… I really kinda hope so...

Erwin nodded and gently cleaned off the rest of Armin’s body, a hum of contentment sounding as they basked in the warm water, relaxing. I like this... I like this a lot, and I need to go back with Levi soon... Thank God it’s almost over.

Armin began to nod off, Erwin’s hands washing his hair calming him and helping him drift in and out of sleep. His eyes fluttered open as he was shifted, Erwin having rinsed him off and picking him up from the water, letting him set him on his feet, immediately finding himself wrapped in a fluffy towel. He smiled tiredly as they helped dry the other off, padding with him to the bedroom to change. Armin clung to Erwin’s waist after they were in warm clothes, suddenly embarrassed by how much he just wanted to hold onto him, feeling like he needed to explain himself. I’m really clingy today… well then. “U-Uhm… I just… I just really love you…” He buried his face in his chest, trying to hide his blush.

Erwin leaned down to kiss the top of Armin’s head gently. “I love you too, Armie… Why don’t we go downstairs and I’ll make food, so we can cuddle on the couch?” That sounds like a wonderful plan to me...

Armin nodded, letting go of Erwin, smiling shyly up to him. “That sounds really nice…” More like perfect to me. He blushed as Erwin took his hand to walk with him downstairs, feeling warm, his mind swimming with the idea of tying their own knot.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Day 12

We were out all day… It was nice to see Armin out and about on the town with Erwin as well, it was warm which was nice, so I got to put my hair up into a bun to get it off of my neck. It’s getting long, but I don’t want to get it cut… I’m still very afraid of people with scissors and knives near my face. Dad tried to cut my hair the other day and I panicked almost instantly, Blake wouldn’t let
anyone near me with scissors again for the next few hours... even if they were just wrapping presents... It’s Christmas EVE! That means tomorrow’s CHRISTMAS! I’m so excited! I’m one hundred percent sure that Blake and Maisie tied the knot... literally, she’s so laid back now. I wonder if anyone else will notice? Eren looked at the clock in the studio as he finished up with the picture of the horses out in the field. It’s already this late? I mean, I know we were out on the town for quite a few hours... and then I came back to draw, cause the horses were out... but it’s already past 10... and I didn’t even fucking notice... wow. Eren got up from his stool, stretching as he picked up the picture. Well, I get to go put it upstairs in the attic. Eren’s feet were quiet as he padded through the dark household and towards the stairs, making his way up the first flight before walking past all the rooms and to the staircase down the hall that led to the attic. He opened the door silently, walking into the large area and trying to find where he put the rest of the drawings of their horses, finding them in a little bit of a walk. I’ve been filling this place up with drawings, paintings and everything in between.... The few piles I made need to get organized again... I made at least 8 paintings of the two of them in the field. Eren pulled them apart smiling to himself as he looked over all of them.

Levi sat in bed, scrolling through a website on his phone when he heard Eren coming up the stairs, smirking as the footsteps got closer. Coming up to bed, are we? His expression shifted to one of surprise as Eren walked straight past their bedroom, carrying a painting. Oh come on. I’ve been waiting here forever. Levi’s brow furrowed a bit before he tossed his phone onto the end table, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed to get up and follow him. ...yeah. I’m not waiting any longer. Levi padded out the door and followed him upstairs, hearing Eren moving the next floor up. He clambered up the stairs, seeing Eren a small ways away, looking through the paintings he’d recently made. You’ve been doing a lot of painting... but you can do that whenever you want... Levi knocked on the doorframe, walking up to Eren when he turned to look at him, a bit surprised. I don’t want you freaking out like last time. Levi sauntered right up to Eren, getting him to turn from the pile of paintings leaning against the wall and wrapping his arms around him, one at his waist and the other tangling in his hair, his eyes a bit shaded as they looked into his viridian orbs, his voice low and quiet. “Weren't you planning on coming to bed? I've missed you.” You’ve been giving the damn horses more attention than me while I've been home- and they're always here!

Eren chuckled a bit as he set the painting and drawings down. “We went out earlier today... aren’t you sick of me? I thought you were asleep? The lights were off in our room....” He trailed off as he turned back to organize the drawings, putting them in a few different stacks before putting the stacks on top of each other, seeming content with how they were organized now. I thought you were asleep... it’s past ten... His head turned to look into Levi’s silvery eyes. “Should we go downstairs? And get to bed?” We’re gonna be up all day tomorrow....

Levi looked a bit stunned as Eren remained perfectly oblivious as to what he was insinuating, watching in silence as he went right back to organising his works. ...wow. “I don't think you understand... of course I could never get sick of you...” He pulled Eren back into his chest, flush with his front, murmuring into his ear as one arm wandered his chest, the other brushing low over the waist of his jeans, lightly running over his nether. “But it was dark because I was just waiting for you... I miss you. And although I’d love to take this downstairs...” He gently palmed Eren through his jeans, suckling the spot under his ear. “...I'm not exactly feeling patient.” I've missed having this kind of attention... I'd like us to fix that.
Eren let out a loud and strangled gasp as his eyes widened, a blush streaking across his face. “L-Levi… R-Right now?” He asked, his voice sounding completely innocent. Are you going to…. Right now? Eren wasn’t sure what else to think as he began to harden in Levi’s palm.

Levi smirked, kissing his ear. “...you know, that’s a good idea.” His voice was smooth and deep, palming Eren a little harder and taking advantage of his surprise to guide him to the floor, rolling on top of him, kissing him deeply and letting the hand not teasing Eren’s clothed length wander across his chest. He slipped his tongue into Eren’s cavern, tangling their tongues, a faint pink tinge to his porcelain cheeks. I want you so badly… and I’ve been so damn jealous of the attention you’re giving the horses. And pretty much every animal here. ...we have to fix this.

Eren let out a moan into their heated kiss, still not entirely sure where Levi was going to take this. Is he going to make me top again? He pulled back a bit to breathe, resting his head down on the hard floor, his eyes lidded and full of lust. Hot… He looks sexy as all hell. He let out another soft sound between a whimper and a yelp when Levi found a sensitive spot on his side, his eyes seeming to flare open a bit, his hands going immediately to Levi’s chest as if to push him off. Fuck… I… I did it again… I… Eren’s hands were shaking as he slowly brought them down and away from Levi’s chest. I couldn’t… No, Levi’s nothing like them.

Levi immediately picked up on Eren’s discomfort, stopping his movements and breaking their kiss, looking to Eren worriedly. “I’m sorry, Eren- do you not want to? Am I doing something wrong? ...would you rather not do this on the floor?” If it’s anything like those… or any other reason… I’ll stop. We’re doing this only if you want to.

Eren blinked slowly, trying to take everything in, shaking his head as he propped himself up. “N-No… I just… Slower please… and not too rough….” I don’t want to be reminded about what happened 7 months ago… He swallowed the lump that formed in his throat, looking up to Levi’s concerned eyes, a hand coming up to cup his face. “I want to be held gently…” Eren’s voice was barely above a whisper, his lips barely moving as he became entranced in Levi’s silvery orbs.

Levi nodded, giving him a faint smile. “...I think I can do that.” He slowly leaned forward to press their lips together again, their lips moving languidly, every movement much calmer and much less rushed than before. Levi guided Eren to lay back down, his hands slowly tracing over his chest, running lovingly over his sides as their tongues moved around the other, letting out a quiet sound. ...slowing down. I think we really need to, this time around.

Eren’s rigid body seemed to relax once Levi started to slow down his pace. He’s slow… He doesn’t want to hurt me… He wants to hold me… He started to melt into the soft kiss they shared, his tongue moving lazily, but the same heat carried between the two of them. He was slowly getting harder, shivering whenever Levi’s gentle hands found another sensitive area. He had a lot more now, do to the fact that he was used so much 7 months ago… and that they had brutally tortured his body. I’m so sensitive now…
Levi’s hands drifted to the hem of Eren’s shirt, looking up and asking silently for permission before lifting it over Eren’s head, slowly kissing across his jaw and pressing gentle kisses down his neck. He lapped at his collarbone, slowly beginning to trace every line and curve of Eren’s chest with his tongue, his hands holding his sides gently and lightly nipping at the spots that made Eren squirm, which were many. *He's got so many scars… they're everywhere… but even so. “Eren, you're so beautiful…”* Levi murmured against his skin, pressing a kiss below his navel before slowly making his way back up, worshipping every inch of skin. *You really are.*

Eren blushed across his cheeks, and all the way up to his ears. His fully formed ears… Eren hadn’t noticed them at all, but they now appeared to be in better shape than they were before Levi and Eren met. He whimpered a bit when Levi kissed over a few sensitive scars, but otherwise squirmed from the pure enjoyment of Levi’s soft lips teasing him. *It feels nice…*

Levi chuckled when he saw Eren completely flush, lapping up his chest before a mischievous look sparked in his eye, looking up to Eren as his lips latched onto his nipple, gently sucking on it and teasing the bud with the tip of his tongue. *I need to relearn what is and isn't open territory.*

Eren moaned out more, his breathing hitching as he found the act sending waves of pleasure across his body. “F-feels… Good…” Eren’s words were soft and in between moans. *It feels nice, I like this slow pace…*

Levi smirked, his hands roaming his sides carefully as he teased the bud, taking a small step further and nibbling at it gently, gauging Eren’s reaction. *Tiny steps; I need to know what I can and can't do.*

Eren’s breathing stopped, his body going rigid once again as he shook his head, pleading eyes looking down at Levi. *No… Don’t bite… Please don’t bite… You’ll bite it off… Just like they did…*

Levi lapped the bud in apology, looking up to him and trying to calm him back down, his hands tracing patterns over his sides. “I’m sorry Eren, I’ll be more careful…” His eyes cast back down to his chest, tracing his way to his other bud, noting some of the scars on his chest. *Some look kinda indented… like some skin was taken away… they look familiar… kinda like… bites. He had skin bitten off of him.* Levi lapped in silent apology at every one of those scars he saw on his way to his other bud, gently taking it into his mouth, his tongue tracing around it. *That's horrible… I'll be really careful with you. I just want you to feel good.*

Eren sighed in relief as Levi stopped biting his sensitive flesh. He continued to let out a litany of soft noises, wanting nothing more than to feel the pleasure that was in his system. *It… It feels nice… When he’s gentle…* Eren’s body became slack again after Levi continued his ministrations
for a bit. *I want this… You’ll be careful.*

Levi teased his other bud for a while, his hands on Eren’s hips as he kissed back op his neck, softly kissing his adam’s apple as his thumbs hooked in the waist of his jeans. “…can I?” Levi waited for Eren to nod before tugging them off from his hips, pulling them off and setting them aside. He paused to pull his own shirt over his head, shimmying himself from his sweatpants to even the playing field. He caught Eren in another kiss, straddling Eren at the moment, sitting on top of his hips, agonisingly slowly rolling his hips against Eren’s, his hands wandering Eren’s chest. *I like this… I need to really be careful though…*

Eren let out a soft sigh as Levi moved him around, watching with slight worry as Levi straddled him. *Wait… I’m not topping again am I? I don’t want to.* Eren was about to tell Levi to get off of him, but he let his head tilt back as soon as Levi rolled his hips, rubbing their two erections together. *That feels wonderful…*

Levi kissed up and down Eren’s exposed neck as he rolled their hips together, quietly moaning into his skin from the friction. He very lightly nipped once at the joint of his neck, lapping at the spot before he looked up to Eren, his voice quiet. “Is it okay if I mark you?” *I have to ask so you don’t freak out…*

Eren was lost in thought for a moment before he nodded, moving to show his neck a bit more. *Please don’t bite….* His heavy blush followed down his tan neck and up to his ears. *I don’t want you to bite… I don’t want you to be like them.*

Levi smirked, moving to carefully suck small dark marks at the joint of his neck, up his skin, a ring of small bruises showing around his collar, even marking his adam’s apple, his hands slowly trailing over his chest, teasing his pink buds between his fingers. He quietly moaned into his skin, listening to every whimper and mewl Eren let out as his mouth wandered. “…you sound wonderful…” *I like those sounds…* Levi pulled up from his skin, looking for permission as his hands moved to play with the hem of Eren’s boxers. *Please?*

Eren wiggled his hips, allowing for Levi to grab at the fabric, giving a small nod incase Levi needed more prompting. His bright eyes were watching Levi’s every move, and although they were heavy with lust and want, there was still that inkling of fear in them. *It was just the drugs… He never actually did any of those things to me…*

Levi pulled Eren’s boxers off of his hips, tossing them out of the way before his hands moved to hold his hips, his voice a quiet murmur. “You let me know the second you don’t like something, okay?” Levi began to kiss down Eren’s chest when he nodded in reply, seeing a flicker of worry in his eyes when he reached his navel. “…I’m not making you top, if that’s something you’re thinking. I just want you to feel really good. Tell me if this isn't okay.” Levi took Eren’s quiet nod as a cue to
continue, his hands holding his hips in place as he kissed down to the base of his length, gently nipping the base before licking a thick stripe up the underside, beginning to suck on his head. I want you to trust me, and I want you to feel really good.

Eren tensed up a bit at first, though his worries soon faded as the overwhelming sense of pleasure pulsed through his whole being. He moaned without restraint, letting his back arch up off the wooden floor, his body beginning to feel warm as he was aroused even further. Ngh... fuck... Levi. Eren squirmed a bit as Levi’s tongue ran over a particularly sensitive spot on his length. “L-Levi...”

Levi’s head was bobbing further down his length, pulling off of it for just a moment to speak, smirking as he looked up to him and saw the arousal in his eyes. “Feelin’ good up there?” I hope so. He let his tongue drag over the head of his length, playing with the slit as he kept Eren’s gaze, his own silver orbs shaded.

“Mmhmm...” Eren didn’t trust himself with words at the moment, the heat in his body beginning to pool into his abdomen, a large surge washing over his body as his slit was toyed with. “Ahh... T-There..” Eren whined, his hips moving up to get Levi to take in the rest of his head, enjoying the pleasure as his fingers twitched at his sides. It feels nice... It feels really good... Nothing like what they had ever done...

Levi took in Eren’s head again, paying it particular attention as his hand went to pump the rest of his length, his tongue swirling around the sensitive tip. His other hand remained splayed across his hip, humming on his length, his own hard length beginning to throb a bit from neglect. I wanna taste you... love you... remind you how different this is from everything that’s happened to you in the past...

Eren moans got louder as he got closer and closer to climaxing. Levi... It feels... I’m gonna cum soon... He whined as he felt his coil tightening even more, on the verge of snapping. His elbows coming up under him to prop himself up to get a better look at Levi. He looks so fucking sexy... Fuck... Eren didn’t have enough control over himself, finally allowing the sensations to overtake him. “Levi...” His words were heady, full of lust and adoration.

Levi sucked a bit harder at his tip when Eren spoke, his eyes telling him how much he wanted him as he pumped his member more firmly, wanting to drive Eren over the edge. His tongue toyed mercilessly with his slit, moaning onto his head as Eren cried out, swallowing every drop of cum and licking him clean, slowly coming off of his length, a strand of saliva connecting them for an instant before he came up to kiss Eren, his hands trailing all over his chest. His voice was a seductive murmur against his lips, his smirk audible. “...up for more?” I want to have you... if you’ll let me.
Eren’s eyes were shaded as he stared into Levi’s orbs just a bit away from his own. He opened his mouth slightly, at a loss for words for a few seconds before he pressed himself up to kiss Levi all over again. I want more… I want more of this… this is wonderful.

Levi brought up a hand to cup Eren’s cheek as they kissed deeply. More it is. Levi pulled back from the kiss after a long moment, letting Eren catch his breath a bit before lifting a hand to his lips, his voice quietly demanding. “…suck.” …please.

Eren had a completely fucked-out look on his face as Levi pulled back from the kiss. His actions were immediate, moving his head a bit forward and sucking gingerly on his fingers, letting his tongue run around them in silence. His eyes were closed as he focused on what he was doing, beginning to bob his head on Levi’s outstretched fingers. He felt a shiver run up his spine as he bobbed a bit farther than anticipated, a sudden urge to cough taking over as he gagged on Levi’s fingers. What the hell? I’ve never gagged on… on anything before? Why now? Eren’s eyes were wide as he continued his ministrations.

Levi drank in Eren’s expression as he sucked on his fingers, feeling arousal pulse through him as his tongue swirled around his fingertips. His brow furrowed as Eren’s mouth constricted around them a bit and his eyes showed a bit of fear, pulling them back and out of his cavern, worried as he coughed. “I’m sorry, Eren, I should’ve been more careful.” …but you’ve never gagged on anything before… even when you deepthoated me… you never gagged. And this is just my hand. …huh. Levi pecked his cheek, his now-slicked hand drifting lower, his other moving to spread Eren’s legs apart as he moved between them. This’ll do, though. His finger traced his entrance, looking to him for permission. You might need a second… I dunno, I just really wanna be careful about this…

Eren had finished his coughing fit, and was catching his breath as he spread his legs wide open for Levi, leaning his head into his chest. “Hmmm…” He moaned when he felt his cool finger trace his warm entrance. I want it… Levi’ll be gentle…. But that was weird…. I’ve never gagged on something before… what if I can’t give Levi a blow anymore? Eren fidgeted as he felt a digit enter him, but he soon calmed down and curled into the feeling of being filled, even if it was small.

Levi nudged him a bit, catching his lips with his own and gently coaxing him to lay back down. It’ll feel better if you’re not so curled up, I think. …also, I just wanna kiss you. He pushed a second finger past the ring of muscle after a moment, searching his heat for the bundle of nerves inside of him, curling his fingers and scissoring him to stretch him out. He smirked as Eren suddenly let a loud moan into the kiss, brushing that same spot again with the same result. There it is.

Eren moaned heavily into the kiss as Levi traced over his prostate more than a couple times. He found it… It feels really nice. Eren’s length was slowly getting harder as he got more aroused, his hips following suit and moving against Levi’s fingers to get more of him inside. I want more.
Levi smirked at Eren’s slow eagerness, pushing in his third finger and curling them into his prostate, relishing in the sound of Eren’s moans. He drew his hand from him, running it over his own length to slacken it with his dripping precum before lining up to Eren’s entrance, breaking their kiss and nestling into his neck, wanting to be able to hear every sound. “Don't be afraid to let me hear you…” Levi murmured as he slowly pushed forward, burying himself to the hilt before stilling, waiting for Eren to adjust to the intrusion. “W-Whenever you say…” Levi let out a shuddery moan as Eren shifted under him, the friction feeling amazing after going as long as he did without any. *It feels good… you're always so tight… just perfect.*

Eren groaned loudly as Levi entered him fully. *Shit… it feels really good…* His arms wound around Levi’s broad shoulders after only a second, his nails starting to dig into the cream-colored skin. He let out a soft whimper in protest as he shifted a bit, pain from being stretched again after so long finally catching up to him. *It hurts too… dammit.*

Levi held onto Eren’s hips, still as he lapped at the hickeys on his neck, waiting for Eren to adjust. It was a long moment before he felt Eren shift again with a quiet moan, trying to take in more of his length, taking it as a cue to move. He pulled out until only the tip was still inside of him, thrusting slowly back into him with a shuddering groan as he started a slow, deep pace. “...mmm… you feel really good, Eren…” *I've missed this so much...*

Eren shuddered more at the feeling, his back arching off of the floor in need, a moan ripping from his throat in want. “Levi…. More…” His body was begging for more as it melted under him, his soft touches oh so tempting to him, his body beginning to heat up all over again. Eren’s breathing was in pants as he felt Levi fill him up and leave him over and over again, a soothing feeling starting to overpower any other sense that he held towards the raven above him. *It... It feels like home... I want him...*

Levi picked up the pace, smoothly going faster and deeper into him, small whimpers and moans escaping him. “E-Eren… haahh… f-feels good….” Levi shifted his legs to get a better angle, lifting Eren’s hips a bit from the floor, their hips meeting much more fully. He shifted his angle bit by bit, searching for that spot inside of him. He gasped quietly as Eren suddenly let out a loud moan, shuddering at the delicious sound. “...*I love* hearing you moan like that…” He aimed for that spot, hitting it over and over. *Let’s hear that again.*

Eren’s moans grew steadily louder, his legs spreading as far as they could in his hold. He instinctively tried to wrap himself around Levi’s body, hooking his legs around his back by the ankle and holding them together, pushing Levi in further as they rested on his lower back. Eren’s body arched off of the floor again as Levi found that coveted area, his moans raising in pitch and loudness. *It feels amazing...*

Levi sucked at Eren’s skin, a large dark mark blooming under his lips at the joint of his neck. He took Eren’s hold on him as a cue to give him all he was worth, ravaging his hole, trying not to
bruise his hips as he held onto them, pulling him as he thrusted forward and pounded into him. He could feel heat pooling in his abdomen, groaning into Eren’s neck. “....nngh, Eren… so good…” He kept his lips latched to his skin, one hand moving up from his hips to stroke him, his thumb teasing Eren’s heavily leaking slit. *I need to last longer than you… and I can't last for forever...*

Eren’s cried out in bliss as Levi touched his weeping length. “L-Levi… There… Please… D- don't stop…” His voice was a whine, his nails digging into Levi’s shoulders as he held onto him. *I want it... I want your everything... “I... I’m… Cum… Cumming… Levi !”* Eren cried out as the pleasure finally exceeded what he could take. His whole body shook with bliss, his cum covering their two chests with pearly white. *Holy shit… That felt amazing.*

“E-Eren… h-haaa… **Eren!”** Levi let himself go as Eren cried out, cumming hard deep inside of him, Eren’s legs pinning his hips in place, buried in his heat. He shuddered and breathed hard as he rode out his orgasm, feeling Eren’s walls tighten around him and milk him dry. They stayed like that for a long moment, trying to catch their breaths. *My god… you feel too good…* Levi drew out of Eren finally, his arms winding around him and pulling him into a deep kiss, his voice a whisper, full of emotion. “Eren… I love you… so fucking much.” *I really really really do… I don't wanna be without you… ...going back is gonna suck… eh, I have lackeys to take it out on. ...think about that later, Levi. Right now, you've got someone to hold.* Levi pressed kisses all over his cheeks and his jaw, not knowing how else to tell him that he loved him as much as he did.

Eren giggled a little in satisfied mirth. “I love you too, Levi.” His voice was soft as his hands came up to shakily cup Levi’s cheeks as they kissed. His back was still arched off of the floor, trying not whimper from the strain he was feeling in his legs and back from holding this position. *It felt absolutely amazing ... He's nothing like them.*

Levi could feel Eren shaking a bit as his hands drifted to his waist as they kissed, not breaking their lip lock as he sat back on his heels, bringing Eren with him. He got a foot under himself, standing up with Eren in his arms, helping him stand, embracing him tightly as their tongues tangled. He broke away panting, nestling into his chest, not wanting to let go, his face flushed. “I-I… I just really, **really** love you…” *And I'm working on how to make you mine... for as long as we’re both around...* He felt himself flush scarlet as Eren chuckled at that, finally breaking from him and going for their clothes. “I don't think your parents would appreciate us running around nude.” He handed Eren his boxers, studying for a moment the white drops across his-correction, **their** chests. “...you look a bit messy… want to shower together when we get back downstairs?” Levi smirked to him, openly admiring his body. *You've certainly got plenty of hickeys... and I'm sure you wouldn't mind a little more attention...*

Eren blushed as he slipped on his boxers. “Okay… And um… That sounds nice…” He wobbled on his feet for a bit, though he sank down to his knees, his legs unable to keep him upright anymore. “Fuck… Levi.” He whined as he grabbed out for him, clinging to his boxers almost pulling them down. *I can't stand up… My legs are too shaky.*
Levi immediately turned as Eren grabbed for him, bending over and wrapping his arms around him. *Can't stand up, huh?* He smirked at that thought, his voice smooth and quiet. “Alright, I've got you.” Levi picked Eren up bridal-style, walking him to the stairs and carefully descending them, padding past the other bedrooms before nudging their own door open, kicking it shut behind them. He carried him to the adjoined bathroom, shutting that door as well before gently setting Eren on his feet, letting him sit for a moment as he turned on the water. He waited for it to get warm, shedding his boxers again and helping Eren out of his, a crutch for Eren as they finally stepped under the warm spray. He reached for the cloth and soap, beginning to clean Eren off, his hand not washing his chest freely wandering his sides and playfully squeezing his ass. *I like this. We should do this more... it's warm, and there's plenty to see.*

Eren let out a loud squeak as Levi grabbed at his ass cheek. *Huh? Why are you grabbing me?* His eyes were wide and full of innocence as he shuffled a bit away from him. “W-What are you doing?” He was leaning into the wall in confusion. *My legs are so weak. What are you trying to do?*

Levi was surprised as Eren moved away from him to lean on the wall, his face falling a bit, blushing and looking away. “M'sorry... I'm kinda getting carried away, maybe... I've just... I've kinda missed being intimate with you... I like being able to hold you... and I'm just subconsciously making up for lost time...” He let out a deep sigh, deciding to simply speak his mind. “You've spent a ton of time while I'm here painting and drawing and stuff, holed up in the studio, and you get mad when I try and bug you... and most of the company I've had has either been Netflix or sometimes Lathe but... I missed just being able to be around you... and I want to take advantage of actually being here... because I have to leave again so soon... and I just love you and I wanna be able to hold onto you and touch you because I can't do that while I'm gone... I barely hear your voice while I'm away... and I'm just kinda upset that that hasn't changed much since I've come home this time around...” Levi wanted to just melt into the wall, his head hung as he admitted everything he’d been thinking. *My God, I sound so fucking needy... I miss you more than anything... and that hasn't changed much since I came home for Christmas... you're so busy doing art stuff, and when you shoo me away it hurts... ...and now I can't even try to initiate anything intimate or just be intimate without it seeming weird...* Levi’s face became stony, his cheeks burning with shame as he rubbed roughly at his eyes. *Don't fucking cry, you pansy. It's just intimacy. It's... it's just...*

Eren watched Levi finally speak everything that was plaguing his mind, his shaking legs protesting as he took the small steps to Levi’s smaller frame. His hands were a bit shaky as he moved Levi’s arms away from his face. “I... I’m sorry... I really am... I... Levi, just... I don’t want to make any excuses, but I’ve been thrown for a loop, and I’m trying to get better at it... and I think I finally am... I just... I’m so scared... that anything you do will make me think of what happened... and I don’t want that. I want to know you for you... and I don’t want to think of you as a heartless monster... No. Not anymore... and not again...” Eren’s arms had shakily wrapped around Levi’s shoulders, holding him close to his chest, and leaning on him a bit. His head was buried into Levi’s inky locks, hiding his tears as he choked on his own words. *I was so afraid of being intimate. “I was afraid... and I’m sorry that I tried to push you away because of it... but I didn’t know how to tell you... And I know that I should’ve but... I-I...”* Eren started to sob as he held onto Levi,
Levi tentatively wrapped his arms around Eren as he was pulled into his chest, his ear pressed to his chest, listening to the steady thud of his heartbeat. He traced patterns over his back with a light, gentle touch, trying to soothe Eren as he started crying into his hair, a tear streaking down his own cheek. “I-It's okay… you’ve been through so much, and I knew you’d need time… I just hated that it was taking so long… and I thought… t-that you weren’t ever really going to be as interested in m-me… b-but now I kn-know… it’s o-okay…” His hold on Eren minutely tightened, a few more tears falling. “I just… I want to make the m-most out of the time I’m guaranteed to h-have with you…” If something happens to me when I’m out of college… stationed somewhere… “…I… I really l-love you… and I want to make sure you really kn-know that… and sometimes when I come back h-home from being gone… it’s so h-hard to believe that y-you're actually there… that I actually get to hold onto you again… just… let’s make the m-most of what we’ve got… okay?” I want you to feel loved… but I need someone to make me feel loved too… and there might only be so much time for any of that… I don’t want to waste it.

Eren nodded and moved Levi’s head tilting it up, kissing his nose and kissing his cheeks heavily, his hands still shaking as he cupped his face. “I know it’s hard Levi… But we can make the most of it.” He sniffled as he leaned down to kiss Levi’s lips gently for a second. “I know you’ll come home to me… and I’ll be right here waiting for you to come back to me… and who know? Maybe I’ll have a little one waiting with me…” Eren smiled softly, even though he was still crying heavily. I really want you to be safe when you go away… I want you to come home to...

Levi’s expression changed as Eren spoke, his hands coming up to hold Eren’s on his cheeks, faintly smiling. “Eren… I think I’d love that.” You and me… having kids. My God, since when did we stop being awkward teenagers? Levi stood on tiptoe to kiss Eren’s tears away, soon capturing his lips in a soft kiss, his mind spinning a bit. …if I had a ring and we weren’t in the shower having this conversation, I'd propose right the fuck now. ...but neither is true. So… Levi’s hands moved to cup Eren’s jaw, gently tilting it and deepening their kiss just a bit, pouring all of his emotions into it, all of his reeling thoughts and the fluttering in his chest. I love you so damn much...

Eren simply melted into Levi’s touch, loving the feeling of Levi’s soft lips against his own lips. His hands had drifted down his neck and to around Levi’s shoulders, happy that Levi understood everything. I love you so much… you have no idea how much I was afraid that I’d never be able to do this again.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Christmas
Levi smirked, reaching around Eren and tearing off another piece of cinnamon roll, holding it up to Eren’s mouth, feeding him breakfast. *I so approve of this.* Levi was sitting at the kitchen table with Eren in his lap, a plate of cinnamon rolls in the centre of the table, along with a large plate of chocolate chip pancakes covered by a lid to stay warm. He had a mischievous look in his eye when he saw some icing by the corner of his mouth. “Eren, you’ve got something there…” Levi leaned forward and kissed his lips clean, not giving even half of a shit about the fact Lathe and Spades were at the table. *Eh, Lathe moved his chair so he and Spades are closer together. They probably don’t even notice half this crap.*

He was right- Lathe at least was caught up in eating his pancakes, though he seemed to stop partway through, his head in one hand as he simply watched Spades, a loving look in his eyes. He blushed darkly as she looked up at him with an odd look, returning his attention to his plate, mumbling embarrassedly. “...you're just... r-really pretty…” *Pretty doesn't even begin to cover it… Dammit... what the hell is it about Christmas that makes me such a sap…*

Eren’s face completely flushed up to his ears as Levi kissed his lips right in front of his parents. *Oh my god… He really just did that… Not that I’m complaining though… But…* Eren looked over to Lathe and Spades to see them completely engrossed in each other. *Eh, oh well, I guess I can let him do that.* Eren leaned his head down into Levi’s shoulder, a large smile across his face. He opened his mouth, waiting for Levi to feed him the next piece of cinnamon roll. *I want you to keep feeding me, it’s nice.*

Spades blushed as she bit into her cinnamon roll. “T-thanks…” *She trailed off as she kept her glances directed towards Lathe.* *I can’t wait until tonight, I've got a surprise for you!* She smiled as she locked her gaze with Lathe’s, looking into his moonsong eyes with happiness held within her own emerald orbs. Though, when she remembered the present Lathe still had yet to open, her gaze changed to one of mischief.

*Lathe couldn't help but turn bright red as she caught his gaze, quirking an eyebrow as he saw a familiar spark in her eyes. “What’re you thinking?”...I get the feeling I should maybe be scared. ...suspicious will have to do.*

Spades had a small smirk on her face as she continued to eat her cinnamon roll, ignoring his question for a few moments. *“Hmm.. tonight… that’s what I’m thinking about…” Definitely tonight…*

*Tonight?...did we make plans for tonight? He had a bit of a confused look to him, thinking as he looked down to his plate, then back up to her. “...am I losing my mind, or did we make plans or something?” I don't remember anything like that… Christmas our and Eren and Levi's squad all agreed we’d not try and get together here… just chill with the fam… so there's no big dinner… huh.*
Spades simply smiled. “You’ll just have to find out.” She leaned over to kiss his nose before reaching over the table and getting herself pancakes, buttering them sufficiently. She picked up a forkful and happily ate. *If he asks I’m not telling him and no one else knows… Lolz.*

Lathe looked a bit stunned as she pecked his nose, simply shaking his head a bit and returning his attention to his food, the day passing in a calm blur. *Today was a good day- breakfast was good, and I’ve been able to just have a day off of writing stuff and fussing over housekeeping. One of the presents I got for Eren in the gym- okay, mostly me, but I'm sharing- was a balance beam, and that was fun messing with. ...my first try didn't go so well. Nor the five after that. Eren did a back handspring on it, no trouble, and Levi could manage a cartwheel… but I'm still getting acquainted with it. I'm still convinced my staring it down for fifteen minutes while I was still salty from falling off did the trick. Spades came in to watch after lunchtime- I was mostly doing handstands on it, splits, random stuff… okay, I might've fallen off and hit the mat pretty hard trying to show off, but that’s besides the point… but I still can’t figure out what the hell we’ve got going on tonight! She won’t tell me, and Eren and Levi have no damn idea what plans there are, and it’s bugging me that I don’t know. But other than that, today has been super chill. ...and I appreciate this. Dinner was really nice- I made mussels for the first in forever, and I actually got Eren to try them. ...pretty sure it was because Levi fed it to him, but he liked them! The lamb, too. Everything just tasted better given we some of the ingredients fresh now, too. Lathe was at the kitchen sink after dinner was done, washing a pan before the bits stuck to it dried. *This’ll be a bitch to clean if I leave it for later. And it’s already a bitch to clean.* He put it away after it was finally rinsed and dried, looking around to see if everything was done. *Mussel shells are thrown out, table cleared, roasting pan away… yep, that’s it.* He hung the dish towel over the handle of the oven to dry, turning and seeing Spades ambling up to him. He shifted his weight with one hand on a hip, grinning as he spoke. “**Now** will you tell me what plans for tonight are?” *I need to know! It’s been driving me crazy not knowing what’s going on.*

Spades shook her head, coming up to him to peck his cheek. “Nope, you’ll have to find out.” Her voice was a bit deeper, more seductive as she pulled at his earlobe. She giggled a bit as she walked away from him and towards the stairs, scampering up them quickly. *I wanna see if you’ll come up with me.*

Lathe stared after her as she sauntered away, suddenly blushing crimson as he realised what she meant. ... **oh. She has plans for us. ...apparently me.** Lathe didn't even need to think about it before he was following her up the stairs, swallowing hard as she disappeared into their bedroom, walking up to it and coming in, knowing to shut the door behind him. He leaned back against the door as he saw Spades right in front of him, eyeing him like a tiger would a fresh piece of meat. ...**this is gonna get real, isn’t it.** He stood completely still, not even knowing if he was allowed to move.

Spades smirked a bit as she leaned up to kiss his lips chastely before pulling back and giving him a wrapped box. “**Merry Christmas, Tiger.**” She bit her lip seductively, itching for him to open it. *Come on! I wanna use it on you! PLEASE!*
Lathe looked to the box in his hands, starting to tear at the paper as Spades waited for him to. The paper fluttered to the floor and he turned it over, flushing to the tips of his ears as he realised what it was. ...oh my. You bought a strap-on. Lathe opened his mouth as if to respond, but no sound came out, not knowing what to say, nervously looking up to her. I'm not exactly opposed to the idea... “S-Spades... I hope you know when it comes to this I have no idea what I'm doing, so I hope you do…” ...I just hope you're willing to completely take over...

Spades smirked and nodded as she took the box from him, setting it on the nightstand, coming back to him as she started to pull off her clothing, slowly and making sure that he could see all her curves as she showed them. You will be mine. She went up to him, pressing him to the door as she locked it, making sure that they would be left alone.

Lathe watched as she slowly pulled her shirt over her head and tossed it aside, letting her push him to the door, swallowing hard as he heard the lock click. His hands hovered over her waist, not knowing what to do with himself, a bit intimidated. I've never been a bottom before, so I have no clue how to act... what should I do differently? Do I do much differently? Crap.... He shakily held her waist as she nipped up his neck to catch his lips in a heated kiss, trying to calm himself down. She knows what she's doing... maybe.... calm the hell down!!

Spades noticed his nervousness as they kissed passionately, her feet moving towards the bed, and taking him with her to the bed. She pulled back to breathe as she pushed him back onto the bed, crawling on top of him to straddle him. I'm so excited.

Lathe shuffled back completely onto the large bed, sighing deeply as Spades straddled him, trying to calm himself. ...it's just Spades. Calm the hell down, and whatever goes down, enjoy it! Lathe reached up to pull her down for a kiss, letting himself melt into it, his hands wandering over her curves, cupping her large globes, massaging them gently. He smirked as she made a small sound, a finger drifting up to one of her bra straps, pulling it a bit and giving it a light snap. Y'know what? Just go with it.

Spades let him have his fun, letting out a soft gasp as the strap snapped back at her. Her hands trailed down to his own clothes, teasing the hem before she lifted his shirt up over his head. Her unoccupied hand gently cupped his crotch and felt him harden under her palm. He sounds so wonderful...

Lathe gasped as she teased his clothed member, whimpering quietly as he felt his blood rushing south, instinctively lifting his hips into her hand, wanting more friction. His eyes silently pleaded with her, his hands running over her back, ghosting over the clasps of her bra. He moved to unhook it, managing after two tries, embarrassed a bit as he slid the fabric from her shoulders. He nipped at her neck, his hands moving to shift her further up, cupping her ass as he nipped at one of her large
breasts, beginning to suck on the bud, tracing it with his tongue. *I love the sounds you make... wonderful...*

Spades moaned out as she felt him take in one of her sensitive buds, her free hand making quick work of his pants and tugging them down and off of him. She palmed at his bulge through the loose cloth hiding it. *Damn... He’s really hard...* She palmed his length a little harder, wanting to illicit a response from him. *I wanna hear you too...*

His lips broke their contact from her globe, letting out a deep, breathy moan as she palmed his growing member. “F-Fuck, Spades...haaa....” He lapped at her tan skin, trailing his way to her other nipple, sucking a bit more roughly on it, one hand slipping down from her ass to run over the fabric between her legs. He soon tugged the offending fabric down, leaving her in just her panties, rubbing her through the lace, smirking. “You got all dressed up... and you’re soaked...” *Just for me.*

Spades let out a soft groan as she spread her legs a bit wider, a blush crossing her cheeks as Lathe’s sultry voice graced her ears. “Hmm, I've been waiting all day...” She whined as he rubbed her through her soaked panties. *Fuck his fingers feel great.* She moved around a bit, pulling away from his reach even though her body screamed for her to stay. Her fingers curled around the hem of his boxers, pulling them down to view the sight of his engorged length, dripping in heavy streams. *Hot damn...* Her body acted fluidly as she grabbed for the black tube on the nightstand moving to set herself near his thigh, her nose almost touching his length, her body splayed over his right leg as she coated her fingers with lube. *I want you to feel nothing but pleasure...*

Lathe watched her move to get the lube, tense as he watched her settle between his legs and coat her fingers liberally with the lube. He gripped at the sheets nervously, crimson as he stuttered a bit. “J-just be careful, okay? G-go slow...” *I don't know what to expect...* He willed himself to relax, though it seemed rather futile when she pushed a finger past his entrance, whimpering at the strange feeling. *Fuck... I can't relax...*

Spades had expected Lathe to tense up around her finger, not trying to move it anymore than he would allow. “It’s okay honey, just breathe...” *I got you, don’t worry.* Her lips found their way around his length, gentle as she sucked, trying to get him to calm down and relax. *Come on, Tiger, you can do it... I know you can, I’m going slow for you.*

Lathe gasped as she took his length into her mouth, letting out a deep moan and forcing himself to breathe as her finger slowly felt up his walls. *It's okay. Breathe.* Lathe quietly panted as she sucked on his head, his fingers gripping the sheets, slowly relaxing around her finger.

Spades made sure that Lathe was adequately relaxed before she gently and slowly added a second
finger. She hollowed her cheeks out, sucking on his length with vigor. *You’re doing well so far…*

Lathe whimpered quietly as she bobbed further down his length, feeling a slight burn as she stretched him out, breathing and trying to stay calm. He moaned quietly as she slid up and down his length, her fingers pushing deeper into him. “I-It feels really weird…” Lathe made a quiet sound as she scissored him, suddenly yelping as she brushed over a certain spot inside of him, the sudden feeling odd. “W-what…” He suddenly felt himself immediately relax as she brushed over that spot again, his head falling back as he let out a deep moan, his hips subconsciously thrusting back onto her hand. *...that feels really good….*

Spades’ eyes widened with mischief as she came off of his length with a loud pop. “Hm, you enjoying yourself up there?” She watched him as her fingers graced that bundle of nerves over and over again. *Good, you’re finally feeling it.*

Lathe nodded enthusiastically, his moans getting louder as she ran her fingers over his prostate, his hips moving in time with her strokes, wanting more. “Y-yeah… f-feels really good… haaa…. p-please…” *I want more.* He barely registered the burning of the stretch as she added a third finger, moaning and speaking without shame. “P- please , Spades… I want it… I really want it…” *It feels too good…*

Spades smirked, adding a third finger into his warm heat, curling her fingers and gently stretching him. She let him move his hips back on her fingers, loving every sound he made. “God, Lathe… You are just begging for it…” *I wanna put it on.*

Lathe was panting hard, his length dripping precum in heavy streams, stuttering. “W-would me actually begging… haaa… make y-you stop teasing?” *I want it. I really want it.*

Spades smirked, slowly pulling her fingers out of him and crawling over him to kiss him roughly. “Oh you know it would.” Her voice a bit husky as she reached over for the strap on, starting to slip into the halter around her thighs and adjust to her stature. *I really wanna do this.*

Lathe’s hands immediately went from the sheets to around her back, trailing over her skin, mapping every curve as they kissed heatedly, speaking in between rough kisses. “My God, Spades… it feels so amazing… fuck, do you turn me on… please, f-fuck me… I want to feel everything … d-don’t hold back with it… please, just don’t tease me…” He spread his legs wide for Spades so she could easily access his entrance, looking up to her with love and lust mixed in his eyes.

*...how the hell Eren was tucker ed out from doing absolutely nothing all day I’ll never know. Levi*
padded down the hall, rubbing at his eyes as he traipsed to the attic. *He's asleep already- I don't really remember seeing any of his art that he made of the horses, so I'll actually look at those...* He meandered past Lathe and Spades’ bedroom, stopping dead in his tracks as he heard Lathe’s heady voice, blushing crimson as he heard what he said. *...wait what.* He just shook his head after a moment and picked up the pace, walking to the attic with his red face hidden in his hands. *I don't wanna know, I'm not gonna ask, I never even heard it...*

Spades blushed more, lubing up the toy before getting between Lathe’s legs. She let the tip of the dildo nudge Lathe’s quivering hole, slowly pushing into him. Her eyes were locked on Lathe’s as she pushed fully into him. “Tell me when I can move... Okay?” Her voice was soft as she laid above him, holding still as she waited patiently, watching his features and the sounds that escaped from his throat. *I want you to feel everything... You deserve as much.*

Lathe panted hard, tears pricking at his eyes as he was stretched, feeling the burn as he was filled, the sensation strange. He gripped Spades’ back tightly, his legs coming up on instinct to wrap around her waist. He was still for a long moment before he shifted, whimpering at the pleasure that began to pulse in him. “Y-you can move...” His hold on her tightened a bit as she drew out of him, his hands tangling in her hair as she thrusted back into him, moaning as she started to build a steady pace. ...*fuck ... it feels good...*

Spades grinned softly, her head dipping down to Lathe’s chest, starting to leave bites and hickeys in her wake. She picked up a slow rhythm, waiting for Lathe to get used to the feeling of being filled. *I wanna make sure your feel okay before I do anything else.* She made sure that she was listening for every noise that Lathe made, making sure he was moaning and not in pain.

Lathe sighed deeply as Spades began to mark his chest, slowly growing used to the feeling of being filled as the burning sensation faded. His moans became more and louder, trying to move his hips back against Spades’. “M-More... nnngh... please....” *You can go faster....*

“Of course...” Spades started to improve her pace, getting a bit quicker, as she pulled out about halfway before snapping her hips back and sinking into Lathe’s heat again. She tried to aim where the dildo would hit Lathe. *I hope I can find that spot again. Mmm, you sounded so wonderful.*

Lathe moaned loudly, his hands roaming Spades’ back as she quickened her pace, trying to speak coherently. “H-Haaaa... S-Spades... feels... r- *really* good... f- HA!” Lathe gasped loudly as Spades suddenly hit his prostate, clinging to her tightly as she began hitting it dead on over and over. “R-Right there, *please* right there, my God Spades *don't stop...*” Lathe’s back arched, trying to move his hips to meet Spades’ thrusts more fully, gasping for air. “E-everything... *please ...*”

Spades smiled more as Lathe melted under her. She shifted a bit to give her better access to his
hole, and giving her a better angle to hit his prostate dead on. Holy fuck... You look so hot Lathe...
Spades grabbed at his hips, using them as leverage to really go to town on him, ramming into his prostate. “Fuck… Lathe… Does it feel good? You look so sexy.” She purred close to his ear, nipping at the joint of his neck and shoulder and waited for his response as she went all out on him.

Lathe whimpered as she purred in his ear, tilting his head back and baring his skin to her in invitation. Mark me. Please. “F-feels really good… too good…” Lathe let out a breathless gasp, feeling his own release creeping up on him as she pounded into him. He moaned wantonly, without any shame. “I-I’m not…. haaaa… gonna l-last for much l-longer… nnngh… so good….” I love this.

Spades kept up the solid pace, his hands gripping his hips with brutal strength as she latched onto his neck and his collarbone, marking all around him. “Then cum for me Lathe… Don’t hold back.” I want you to feel like you're on cloud nine... You certainly sound like you are.

Lathe cried out loudly as Spades purred seductively in his ear, his grip on her tightening and his legs hooked around her hips as he came hard, gasping and panting heavily as Spades still pounded into him, his entire chest decorated with pearly white drops. His head dropped back against the bed as he came down from his high, Spades slowing her ministrations before pulling out of him. He tugged her head up to meet his in a fiery kiss, immediately tangling their tongues, his hands roaming her body. “That…. my God.... That felt wonderful…” Thank you.

Spades smiled as she was pulled in close to him, liking the sensation of his strong arms on her body. “I'm glad you enjoyed it, you looked like you were having fun...” She trailed off as she took the strapon off, getting off the bed as her hips swayed side to side as she walked towards the bathroom. I need to wash this off... You probably wanna sleep.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow as she left his hold, stepping from the bed and following her, catching her around the waist. “Whoa whoa whoa…” Lathe smirked, purring into her ear, one hand dipping down to slowly and teasingly run over her clit. “Where do you think you're going?” He nibbled at her neck, walking her back to the bed. “I need to take care of you still…” You deserve to feel really good too.

Spades let out a soft whimper as she felt his hand reach around to her clit. “L-Lathe… Aren’t you tired Hun?” She moaned out loudly as his finger finally found her clit, rubbing it in gentle circles. Fuck… She could already feel herself getting wetter than she already was. If he keeps this up I won’t be able to say no... “You’re tired, Hun, you should really get some rest.” Spades moved to get out of his grasp, her eyes full of worry. “Really, that was for you, because I know you’ve had it rough lately with everything that’s happened, I’ll be okay, just lay down and rest okay?” She asked quietly, stepping up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek.
Lathe wrapped his arms right back around her as she went to kiss his cheek, looking her dead in the eyes, his own shaded. “Maybe I'm not as tired as you think…” His hands moved to cup her ass, pulling her flush with his front, not caring that they were sticky. He leaned his head down, his lips grazing her earlobe as he spoke smoothly. “...and maybe I think you deserve to feel as good as I did.” He pecked at her ear, walking backwards with her to the bed, his strong arms unyielding as she weakly struggled. “...things have been hell… but you've been right there with me this whole time. I never got to properly thank you… consider this part of that. Because I could never, even with all the time in the world…” He picked her up and laid her on the bed, clambering up on top of her, his gaze predatory. “...even begin to give you what you deserve.” He leaned down to kiss her heatedly, soon pecking down her jaw and neck, his tongue trailing south between her mounds, his hands massaging her globes as he kissed below her navel. He smirked as he glanced up to see her completely flushed, returning his attention to her nether, dipping down to drag his tongue up her rosy folds, parting them and beginning to tease her clit with the tip of his tongue. I wanna taste you... and you make the most beautiful sounds when I do this...

“Haaa… Lathe… Oh god… Lathe …” Her words came out as moans, her body arching off of the soft mattress under her. “Fuck… Lathe … oh my god… There … Haa… Right there…” Spades moaned out with no intentions of holding back her voice as his tongue played with her clit and along her folds. Her hands moved down her body, grabbing his wrists, following Lathe’s arms down to his shoulders. Her hands ran across the strong shoulders, moving in to reach his head, her fingers tangling in his hair, tugging as he found all her sensitive areas. Oh my god… It feels so good...

Lathe smirked faintly as she started to writhe in pleasure under him, his lips latching over her clit and sucking gently on it, his tongue nudging it quickly as Spades’ hold on his noir locks tightened, moaning quietly. He lifted his head from her folds for a moment as her legs slung over his shoulders, grinning a bit. “...is there something you want me to do?” Any requests? His tongue dragged back up over her clit, broadly licking it firmly over and over, still looking up to her for an answer. Anything?

... I want you to fuck me... But you're too tired for me to ask that... She whined a bit when he kept his gaze locked on hers. “Ahh… N-no…” Her voice was shaky, giving off the uncertainty she held in her thoughts. I want you ... But...

“...are you sure? You wouldn't want…” Late dipped his head a bit further down, his tongue dipping into her entrance, as far as it could reach before retreating, staring up at her. “...something more?” I'm most certainly up for it if you are.

A loud moan ripped from her throat. Spades flushed instantly, pulling her hands away from his hair, moving them to cover her face. I really... Really want something more... “I... I... I um...” Spades opened and closed her mouth, trying to find the right words but unable to do so. She started to closer her legs up a bit, embarrassment flooding through her body.
Lathe smirked as she moaned as loudly as she did, his hands moving to her thighs, coaxing them to stay open as he shifted to face her properly, his eyes shaded. “May I take that as a yes?” He shifted his hips, his own hard length teasingly brushing over her slick folds, wanting nothing more than for her to accept. Please? I want to... repay you...

Spades moaned out when she felt the hot heat nudge at her entrance. “L-Lathe… Please…” Her cheeks were completely flushed, her entrance completely wet. I really want you... I want it bad. She moved her head back into the pillow under her, his hair splayed out as she felt his large hands on her hips. “Fuck, Lathe … I need you…. Please …”

Lathe’s hold on her hips tightened, leaning down to begin to suck dark marks on her neck as he lined up with her entrance. He slowly pushed forward, sheathing himself into her tight heat, stilling inside of her for a long moment as she adjusted. He pulled out until only the tip remained inside of her, thrusting forward and beginning a decent pace. I want you to feel amazing.

Spades let out a strangled cry as Lathe sheathed himself in her. She felt his warmth filling her, electrifying her body as he started his pace. “Lathe… Oh baby… Fuck… Fuck me… Please …” Her legs wrapped around his waist, pulling him in deeper. I want your everything... Give me everything you can...

Lathe grinned against her caramel skin, picking up the pace until he was soon pounding deeply into her, leaving hickey's all over her collarbones, kissing up her neck and roughly nipping at the sensitive skin he knew he couldn't mark. “Mmmmm… Spades… you’re so tight… and you can take everything… you're perfect for me…. I love it.

Spades was a moaning mess under him as he pounded into her, feeling her insides churn with every thrust of need. It feels so warm... I want it... She shifted her hips, crying out loudly when Lathe finally hit directly on her wonderful bundle of nerves. “Holy shit… Lathe … Right there baby, please…” Spades started to beg, keeping her back arched off the bed to hold her hips in that position. It feels so fucking good… She tilted her head to the side, offering her neck for him to nibble and lick. I need you Lathe...

Lathe lapped at her skin, kissing up and down its sides and completely ravishing her, aiming for that bundle of nerves inside of her and hitting it directly. His hands left bruises on her hips as he pulled her into him with each thrust, feeling himself inching closer and closer to the edge. He nestled next to her ear, his voice smooth. “Feeling good up here, Honey?” He suckled at the spot under her ear, chuckling quietly. “You sure sound like it.”
Spades nodded, her moans still loud as she started to bounce on his length in time with his thrusts. Her arms came up behind his back and gripped at his shoulder blade and behind his neck, pulling his head closer to him as she wrapped her body flush to his.

Lathe lifted her hips a bit, getting a better angle and pounding even deeper into her, moaning lowly into her ear. *I'm not gonna last.* “**Spades**…” Lathe lightly nibbled at her earlobe as he spoke, his eyes dark as she gasped faintly just at the sound of his voice. “I want to hear you **scream.**” *I want to watch you come undone.*

Spades whimpered a bit in bliss, her whole body shaking as the heat overtook her. “**Lathe!**” She held onto his body like her life depended on it, pulling him close to her chest as she closed around him. She felt the surge of pleasure wash over her, screaming out in bliss as she came around him. “Lathe…. ” Her voice was breathless as she clung to him, not wanting him to move from buried deep within her.

Lathe let out a muffled cry into her shoulder, cumming hard inside of her, pinned to her, their hips flush, completely buried in her heat as he rode out his orgasm, pleasure washing over him in waves. “**S- Spades… my God, Spades…**” Lathe moved his head to kiss her passionately, his hands tracing over her curves, worshipping every inch of skin they could reach. *How the hell did I get so lucky? To have someone like you?* Lathe held her close, eventually shifting to draw out of her, his brow furrowed a bit as she clung to him even tighter. *Huh?* “Spades… I don't think I can manage a round three…” *I'm really sticky… and so are you… “Let’s shower, and then get dressed in something warm, okay?” When we’re clean and warm, we can come back and lazily make out until we fall asleep. It sounds great to me, at least.*

Spades shook her head, holding onto him even tighter. “N-No… Not yet… Please…” Her voice was hoarse, and barely more than a whisper in his ear. *I don't want you to leave me… I don't want you to pull out… No… It won’t happen… I can’t… I can’t get pregnant… Her body was shaking a bit as she held onto him, trying not to let the burning tears fall. I don’t want you to be disappointed in me…*

Lathe could instantly tell she was on the verge of tears, a look of worry crossing his face as he looked to her, cupping her cheeks and pressing butterfly kisses to her cheeks, his voice a quiet murmur. “Spades, talk to me. What’s wrong? ...is it about getting pregnant?” He pressed chaste kisses to her lips when he saw her cheeks burn in embarrassment and from wanting to cry, his voice a reassuring murmur. “Spades, Honey, I know it’s going to be hard for you to get pregnant, and I know it’s going to take time. But please, don’t worry yourself too much. Talk to me, please. It'll make you feel better.” *Come on, talk. You look like you really need to.*

Spades nodded, moving a bit to nestle her head in his shoulder. “What happens.. I-if I can’t get pregnant… W-what happens then? You want kids…. I-I ….I can’t deny you that.” *I don’t want us to fall apart because I can’t give you what you’ve wanted since you became a teacher.*
Lathe gently ran his hands through her hair, trying to comfort her. “Spades, listen. I've known I wanted kids since I was in **high school.** I've put plenty of thought into it- and I'd long decided that if I couldn't have my own children, I'd be more than willing to adopt, from anywhere in the world. But Spades, there's still time left. We can try, and maybe we'll get lucky. If not, I'm still going to love you just as much. Nothing could make me stop loving you. It's not as if you're denying me children- we're really trying, and you're taking the pills to help conceive. You're trying so hard to give me what I want- and what I hope **you** really want too- but it's okay if we run out of time before conceiving. If we end up adopting, we raise them as our own. No question about it. I'll call you Mom, and I'll love you as much as I always have. I'll kiss you on the cheek every chance I get, hug you from behind and steal little pecks because I can and not care that any little kid we have running around will blanch at us because they'll know their Daddy loves their Mommy and I'm never going to be ashamed of that.” *You mean too much to me.*

Spades had started to cry around halfway into his talk. “I-I… I’m s-sorry..” She sniffled as she slowly unraveled from him, holding him weakly as she lay under him. “I… I’m just so paranoid… That I’ve done something horrible to you…” *I’ve not given you the proper chance at a family. And I never told you… Even after you proposed to me… I feel absolutely awful.*

Lathe kissed away her tears, quietly reassuring her. “It’s okay Honey, I really do understand.” He kissed her chastely, his hands cradling her jaw as he slowly withdrew from her, laying down next to her and pulling her close. “You're doing what you can to give me what I want- and I love you for that. It's okay.” He held her until she stopped shaking from her quiet sobs, pecking her cheek. “...how about we get cleaned up and get into bed, okay? It's been a long day.” *We need to sleep on things.*

Spades nodded, not necessarily trusting her voice at the moment, though she finally found the courage to speak again as she shifted to sit up. “C-Can you walk o-okay?” *I know having anal for the first time can hurt...* She looked down at her hands as she twiddled with her thumbs, trying to force down the blush on her face.

Lathe nodded, shifting from the bed and standing, smiling faintly as he held out his arms for Spades. His hand slid around her waist as she stood shakily, his voice quiet as he blushed bright red. “‘M fine. ...You took good care of me.” *Thank you for that.* Lathe walked with her to the shower, turning on the hot water and waiting for it to warm up, keeping Spades close as they waited, his hand running lightly over her stomach. ......*I know it can take a while. But hopefully it won't be forever.* He led her into the water when it started to steam, reaching for a cloth and soap to wash her gently off, his hands tracing over every curve with reverence. *You're wonderful. ...and I hope that I get to call you Mommy sometime soon.*

Spades smiled softly as she leaned into his touch, letting him wash her all over. She hummed in approval as he held her from behind under the warm water, his hands gently rubbing her abdomen. *I really hope that it can happen soon. I really want it to happen...*
Chapter 54: Heart Attack

Lathe walked through the living room, picking up shreds of wrapping paper and ribbon, bows scattered around from the present unwrapping that had happened the day before. There hadn't been any time yesterday to pick up... I was... occupied. Lathe picked up a small figurine from where it sat under the tree, turning it over and studying it with a small smile.

“What the fuck is this?”

Lathe felt a cold wind blow through him, his eyes wide as he heard an eerily familiar voice behind him. “W-what...” He slowly turned, meeting the hard moonsong eyes of a teenager, long black hair kept somewhat under control with an old cap, wearing a suit patched over too many times to count. The teen held his gaze, holding out a vase at arm's length, suspending it over the floor by the lip of it.

“I asked you a fucking question.” He shook the vase in his precarious grasp at him, his eyes glinting with anger. “What the fuck is this?! You finally have money and you're spending it on fucking paperweights?!” He threw it onto the floor, shattering it into small pieces. He stepped through the shrapnel, his thin-soled cheap dress shoes crunching over the glass as he took Lathe by the collar and shook him, not caring that tears were streaming down Lathe's face as he barked at him. “For the first time in your fucking life you're living off more than the pennies you find in the street and all the shit you're buying is USELESS!!” He kicked him hard in the shin, looming over him and holding his shirt tightly as Lathe fell to his knees in pain, shouting, a mad and furious look in his eyes. “Did you forget everything you learned?! You're spending like a dipshit on everything and I don't even see the people you're giving your fucking soul to so much as nod in acknowledgement! Does it not bother you that you don't get a fucking 'thank you'!?”

No... ...no........nononononononononononono.............. Lathe sobbed silently, unable to look away, nearly crushing the figure in his grasp. “I-I...” He was cut short as he was backhanded hard across the face, feeling the sharp sting of a rough iron ring cutting his cheek, warm blood dripping from the wound.

“I don't know how the fuck you've done it. But you did. You've gone soft. You've forgotten every last damn thing about how to not end up dead in the gutter. Good fucking job. But unluckily for you...” His face hardened even more, one hand letting go of his shirt. “...I didn't. Rule number One.” He pulled back a fist, his eyes shining with unshed tears. “Only help yourself.”

......I thought you'd be proud of me. I... I thought I'd be proud of me. Lathe screwed his eyes shut as
he watched the fist looming above him, feeling it connect with his temple and feeling something crack before he hit the ground, unconscious. The house around him was deathly silent, the vase shattered, but the room around him empty.

“Trust me. You'll thank me for this.”

Eren grumbled a bit as Charlie wouldn’t stay still in the tethers. “I swear to god Charlie! The quicker you let me do this the quicker you get to go back with Luna!” Eren grunted as Charlie finally gave in. He could hear Levi pouring feed into various bowls through the barn. It’s so much easier with two people doing this...

Levi chuckled, looking up from where he was walking around with a large feed bag to seeing Charlie endlessly fidgeting. “He's really protective of her. Of course he's gonna pretty much ignore anything that isn't her when they're close. He doesn't look like he wants to listen.” Nope. He put the feed bag down, going to a different sack with fruits and vegetables in it, giving one or two apiece to the different animals. This is nice- they're actually starting to recognize me. I'm not out here much.

Eren sighed, getting out his crop and tapping at his sides to get him to straighten. “Well he’s gonna learn to pay attention.” He smirked when Charlie finally stood still and allowed him to groom him. I really like having Levi out here… And Luna seems to like him. He winced a bit as Charlie whinnied loudly right into his ear. “I swear he’s trying to make me deaf.”

Levi quirked an eyebrow at Charlie, setting the veggies back in their place as he was done. “You stop making my boyfriend go deaf.” He’s oblivious to shit enough as it is. He meandered closer over, smiling faintly as Luna turned and tried to nudge him with her head, petting her gently. You sure do like me. ...don't tell the others, but I think you're my favourite. He nodded as Eren motioned for him to open the gate, unlatching it and opening the stall door wide for Charlie. He watched as he walked right in without a problem, nuzzling Luna and staying right at her side. ...that’s pretty cute. “Alright, anything else around here need doing?” Levi stepped up to Eren, pecking his cheek. Charlie and Luna are groomed, Gill and Jill are milked, everyone's been fed, we checked the coops for eggs... I think that's it.

Eren shook his head, blushing as Levi pecked his cheek, leaning over to peck Levi’s as well. “Nope… why don’t we go inside? Then I can start making lunch, and Mom should be home soon…” She said she’d be back before lunch was over.

Levi nodded, his hand slipping around Eren’s middle as they went to the barn door, shutting it before making the short walk to the house. Levi kicked off his boots when they came inside, meandering over to the living room.
Eren had already walked further into the house, calling for Lathe. “Dad?” There was a quiet pause before a loud scream and a bang in the family room across the house. “LEVI!” Eren shouted, his voice sounding overly panicked. “Dad! Dad please! Wake up!” Eren looked down on Lathe’s still form on the floor, surrounded by broken glass. Dad wake up! What happened?

Levi put whatever he had in his hand down on the coffee table before making his way across the house in only a few seconds. He stopped for a moment before rushing over, immediately pulling Eren away from him and looking for a pulse. He’s alive, but it’s irregular... heart attack. Levi looked over the large gash on his cheek that was bleeding. Glass maybe? “Lathe? Can you hear me?” His voice was loud, and even as he went over everything to make sure Lathe’s vitals were in order.

Lathe’s eyes cracked open after a long and tense moment, beginning to mumble incoherently, his hands fidgeting in front of him as if turning something over and over in his grasp. He started to curl in on himself, his eyes unfocused and staring ahead at the floor feet away, not responding to anything Levi or Eren said.

Levi sighed quietly. I don’t want to do this but it looks like I have to. He turned to Eren, his voice even as he made sure Lathe still held a pulse and was breathing at least somewhat normally. “Eren, call Casper, I need to know what medication he’s on, and you need to take these…” He took the keys off of Lathe’s belt loop. “Take these, go grab his medical bag in the closet downstairs… He needs aspirin… run.” Levi watched as Eren pulled out his phone with the keys in his hand. Levi turned to Lathe, smacking him hard across the face. “Lathe! Can you hear me?” Come on… I can’t lose you too.

Lathe was immediately struck with clarity, hyperattentive to everything around him. His eyes snapped to Levi, not recognising him. As if on instinct, his features hardened, his left hand hitting the floor and moving upward, his right fist connecting hard with Levi’s nose with a sickening crack. He rolled over with that same momentum, deftly picking up a large shard of the vase without getting cut and moving backward, on his feet and backing away from Levi, on the defensive and ignoring the pain in his chest. What the fuck was that for?

Levi watched as he recognized what was going on. You’ve gotta be shitting me... “Eren! Tell Casper he’s hostile!” I have no idea why, but you need to be resting... Levi took up a position as well, to come after him. “Lathe… My name’s Levi… I wanna help, you just had a heart attack, and it’s weak right now, I need you to put down the glass and stand down. I don’t want to hurt you.” His voice was calm and he showed open hands, almost in surrender. I need to make sure that you’ll be okay. He ignored the burning sensation in his nose, though he felt the warm blood, roll down his face in heavy streams.

Casper. Lathe ignored the majority of what Levi said, locking onto that one thought. “What the fuck did you do to Casper.” His gaze flicked to his open hands, not buying it for a second. “And
I'm not standing down. I know how this works.” We fight. You give in. I give in. You take me down. I start over with what little I had taken away. Repeat.

Levi’s eyes were calculating as he watched him, he raised his shirt up to his nose, soaking up some of the blood from his lips. “You got a strong punch… should’ve expected that. And I didn’t do anything to Casper… Eren’s calling him right now, to see if you’re taking any medication that could be messing with your heart. You had a **heart attack** Lathe, you need to calm down and stand down, I don’t want to use force, I want to take you to the hospital to get you help. You’ll be with Scotty, it’ll be alright, and we’ll make sure Spades comes and meets us there after she gets out of work.” **Eren I swear to go if you come in now… and he doesn’t recognize you… we’re gonna have a problem.**

Lathe laughed humourlessly, his eyes cold. “As if you'd be able to force me to do jack **shit.** And I'm not going anywhere.” **Do you really think someone like me can afford aspirin, let alone a hospital visit?** “Just stay the **fuck** away from my friends or we’re going to have a **major** problem. Oh, excuse me- you're gonna have a major problem. One question, though- who the fuck is Eren? Another one of your gang?” He looked over as he heard something clatter to the floor, not recognising the brunette. **“You're Eren?”** He chuckled grimly, looking back to Levi. **“Yeah, I feel soooo threatened. You just stay the fuck away from me before I make you.”**

“D-Dad?” Eren’s voice quivered as he stared at Lathe, tears starting to form in his eyes. **“Y-You don’t remember me?”** He felt like his heart had been ripped in two, his face looking so broken.

“Too many people have tried seriously hurting me and my friends. Faces blur together.” It took a second for the first word to click, his expression becoming one of shock, gears turning. **“Wait, what?!” That's not possible!** Before he could speak again Levi had lunged for him, Lathe turning his attention back to him and fighting hard. He lost the piece of glass in the scuffle, though he landed kick after merciless punch every chance he could before Levi finally ceased, Lathe breathing hard but much less hurt than Levi, not wiping at the bleeding cut on his cheek. **Don't touch it. You'll look weak.** He grinned lazily, almost casual as he spoke. **“That really all you can-”** He suddenly turned to the door as he heard a gasp and a clatter, recognising the woman in the doorway, in uniform with her keys on the floor where she'd dropped them. **... Spades.** **“Spades, run.”** Lathe looked deathly serious, keeping an extra close eye on Levi and Eren’s body language, fixing them with a cold glare. **“You two get anywhere near her I swear to god I won't hesitate to kill you.”** **I won't regret it either.**

Eren’s eyes widened as Spades walked through the door, scared of the cold glare that Lathe fixed the two of them with. He had just watched Levi take a beating without trying to hit Lathe back. **“M-Mom…”** Eren’s tears finally fell as he put his head down, moving towards Spades to go and hide behind her as she came fully into the room. What he wasn’t expecting was to be pulled back with an arm around his neck, instant panic beginning to set in and the furious clicks of Blake’s nails against wood coming from the other room. **Mom... Mom what's happening!?**
Lathe looked quickly between Spades, Levi and the dog, his voice a bit frantic. “Spades, what the hell are you doing?! Run!” My God, I know you can be stubborn but get the hell out of here!! He looked to her again as she didn't move, registering the expression on her face as one of horror. “…what?! What’s wrong? Why aren’t you moving?” Don’t just stand there- do something!

Spades eyes darked in horror as she saw Eren’s panicked eyes and Lathe’s hand around his neck. “LATHE ! Let go of your son!” Spades shouted at him as she came up to him and pulled Lathe’s hands off of Eren and watched him run away in complete fear to the far corner, Blake whining frantically. “What the fuck were you thinking? Grabbing your own son by the neck? You could’ve choked him!” She watched Levi stand from his spot of the floor, seeing his bloodied face and battered body. “What the hell happened to Levi!!?”

Lathe looked scared as Spades shouted at him, backing away from her, his hands raised in defence. “I-I… W-what? I don't get it, Spades, since when do I have a son?!” He felt his back hit a wall, shrinking against it, his hands coming up to cover his head, recognising her uniform vaguely, terrified. “N-not you too… d-don't hurt me, please…” I know I couldn't bring myself to fight back...

Spades watched as Lathe cower against the wall, things clicking as she looked down at her uniform. “Levi… get him the aspirin, make sure he’s stable enough to move to the hospital… I’m going to get changed…” I need to get out of this… you’ve forgotten so much... You probably forgot about me too…” She walked upstairs, watching Eren cower in the far corner hugging Blake to his chest. Shaking her head, she changed quickly before coming back downstairs.

Levi sighed quietly, getting up and getting the medical bag and quickly locating the aspirin. “Lathe, I need you to cooperate with me… and your chest won’t hurt anymore, alright?” His nose was still bleeding, but he chose to ignore it as he slowly got closer to Lathe, so tempted to throw him the pills and go comfort Eren’s sobbing form. I let you beat me without throwing a single punch at you… I hope you can at least let me help you get better.

...I can't get in trouble... Mom will literally kill me if she has to get me from the station again... she's been itchin’ for a reason to get rid of me... Lathe silently and reluctantly nodded, holding out a shaky hand as Levi handed him two pills, inspecting them before swallowing them dry. “U-Uhm… I’m sorry… m-maybe I got carried away…”

Please don’t press charges I'll be doomed if you do… He relaxed a bit as Levi tensely nodded before immediately moving to Eren’s side in the far corner. He however began to panic a bit as Spades came back downstairs, looking up to her, his wide eyes full of fear. “D-don't take me to the station, please… Mom will kill me…” He shied away from her, his hands drawn close to his chest. ...I wanna still be able to go home when there are blizzards....
Spades moved down to her knees, opening her arms out to him and pulling him close. “No Lathe… you’re fine, you live here now… with Eren and Levi… You just had a heart attack, we’re going to take you to the hospital, okay? I called Casper to make sure he’ll be waiting at the hospital with us, how are you feeling?” She was so worried about him, completely forgetting that she still had her ring on her hand as she held him close to her. *You forgot about me… You forgot about us…*

Lathe weakly clung to her, trying hard not to cry. “C-confused as hell… I have a s-son now, apparently… w-wait.” He looked to Spades, panicking. “I can't go to the hospital; I don't even have fifty cents on me… I can't go…” He shook his head, suddenly realising she was wearing a ring. “I-I have a son, I live with him and this guy named Levi, and…y-you're married? To who?” *Help me understand what the fuck is going on!!*

Spades looked ready to cry. “I’m married to you… Or at least we’re engaged… We’re getting married in June of next year… and Lathe, you have more than that in your pocket… You even have an insurance card.” She was struggling not to cry as she pulled him close and ran a hand through his black hair. *You… You don’t remember…. Oh my god, this is my fault… I pushed you too hard last night.*

Lathe’s eyes widened, looking down to his own hand, slipping the gold band off of his finger. “W-We’re…” He read the inside inscription, looking to the floor, the gears slowly turning. “…I'm the King of Hearts… and yours is the Queen of Spades… and we had to cancel the wedding w-when… Eren was…” He buried his face in his hands, sobbing. “H-How come there are s-so m-many blanks? I-I'm so sorry, Spades… I-I-love you…” His voice was hoarse, letting out ragged sobs into his hands. *I want to understand... help me understand...*

Spades nodded and kissed his forehead. “Okay, we’re gonna go to the hospital… okay?” She asked quietly as she got up to see that Levi had moved Eren to the floor, and Blake was grounding him. “How is he?” *It doesn’t look good.*

Levi shook his head. “He should go too… I… I hope it didn’t trigger anything too serious, but…” He trailed off as he picked Eren up, moving him to the couch to wrap him in blankets. “Let’s get going, the quicker we get there the faster he can get help… Can you grab his medication?” *He’ll need the PTSD Meds…*

Spades nodded, gathering what they needed, and herding Lathe into the front seat of her large truck as Levi was holding Eren carefully. *He’s normally so tan… and he looks like a sheet of paper… He’s not… He’s not coming out of that anytime soon.*

Lathe kept his head down as they went to the car, staring at the floor of the truck as he was shepherded inside the cabin, drawn in close to himself. He looked up when Levi carried Eren into
the backseat with him, his eyes immediately falling to the floor again, guilt beginning to weigh him down. He cast a look up to the house, finally taking it in. ...that house is huge... I... I live there? He looked out the window silently as they drove, walking into the hospital with Spades’ hand on the small of his back, seeing Casper… talking to Scotty in his stark white uniform. ...what… Lathe’s hands shook, turning his gold ring over and over as they approached them, on the verge of tears. He shied away from Scotty, trying to choke out words. “...w-what’s happening to me?” I want to understand….

Spades kept her hand on the small of his back, turning to him as he almost started to cry. “Lathe, you had a heart attack, you’re 39 years old, and you live with me, your son, Eren, and his boyfriend, Levi. We’re engaged, and Casper is in charge of Eren’s medications, and Scotty is in charge of everything that happens when he comes to the hospital.” Spades started to explain as she saw Levi come in holding Eren in his cocoon of blankets, Casper going right to them and taking Eren’s pill bottle and shuffling them down the hallway towards a room. “Come on Lathe, we need to get you checked out… Okay?” Spades was trying to be strong as she spoke to him, struggling not to cry, but unable to keep the tears back. Her cheeks were glistening with the tears she shed. I did this… This is all my fault… You had a heart attack because of me…

Scotty slowly approached the two of them as he saw Spades turn to explain. “Lathe? It’s me, Scotty, I want you to come with me so we can take a look at your heart, okay?” He asked, trying to look as nonthreatening as possible and pulling it off. We can’t have you panicking if you don’t know anything...

Lathe looking scared as Scotty took a few steps forward, nodding slightly as he spoke. Scotty... you’re a doctor now? Lathe took a shaky breath, trying to calm down a bit. “O-okay… just don’t h-hurt me…” I don’t know if we can afford any of this… Lathe took a tentative step towards Scotty as Spades gently nudged him forward, his head ducked down, latching onto Scotty’s arm. “I want to understand what’s happening to me…” I don’t get it… why is everything so weird? Everything changed… Lathe let Scotty lead him along, looking like a lost puppy as they meandered down the hall to a room with two beds in it. Lathe’s eyes widened as he heard a bed shaking, looking up and seeing Eren seizing on the other hospital bed. Lathe’s eyes widened as he heard a bed shaking, looking up and seeing Eren seizing, beginning to panic, his hold on Scotty tightening. “W-what’s happening to him? What’s wrong?” ...did I make him like that?

Spades watched as Eren seized on the other hospital bed. “Lathe, honey… Sit on the hospital bed, let’s let Scotty do his work…. And remember how you grabbed him by the neck before? Well, Eren’s got PTSD and it’ll give him episodes like that if he’s handled roughly.” She led Lathe to the hospital bed, getting him situated and keeping him calm as Scotty got him on a few monitors, mostly heart monitors that were gauging his heartbeat. Come on Lathe, you can do it… She watched, tuning out everything as Lathe was given an IV. How far back is he? He’s acting like we were back in high school...

Casper had kept an eyes on the clock as him and Levi held Eren down as his body shook violently. 30.... A minute.... A minute 30.... Two... Two 30... Three... He’s not stopping. Casper looked
down at Eren with worry, looking over his shaking features. “Levi, hold him, I’m getting Scotty.” He turned around when Levi nodded, getting Scotty’s attention in less than a second after he put the IV in. “He’s still convulsing…” He felt the tears already starting to form in his eyes. *He’s never gone past 3 minutes before...*

Scotty’s eyes widened and he moved around Casper to get to Eren’s side and take the seizing boy’s vitals. “Casper, watch Lathe… I’ll take care of Eren…” *It’s been at least 2 minutes, Levi’s watching the clock, but I can’t do much until he stops.*

Lathe held his head in his hands, looking distraught as he watched Eren convulsing, Casper and Levi hovering over him in worry. *I did that. ...I did that.* Lathe curled into himself on the bed, his legs tucked close to him. He looked up in terror as Scotty held a needle in one hand, reaching for his arm, unable to fight back as Spades tightened her hold on his other arm, letting Scotty roll up his sleeve and put in the IV, taping it in place. He looked to the clear bag with worry, his other arm hugging his legs close to himself. *What’d you give me? ...I don't wanna die…* He was stuck in his own mind as Casper sat next to him on the bed, letting him wrap his arms around him, letting out a choked sob when he tried to speak. *“W-What’s happening?” I don’t get any of it and I hurt that man and I shouldn’t’ve and I’m sorry and what’s happening to Eren… I did that… they’re giving me drugs… but I don’t wanna die yet....*

Casper held him gently, knowing to be careful of all the machine wires Lathe had attached to him. “Lathe, you had a heart attack, and sometimes if you have a really bad one, you can forget a lot of things… How old do you think you are right now? What year is it?” *I need to know so that I can help you, and try and get you to talk a bit.*

*“...I turned seventeen in the spring… h-how old am I actually?”* Lathe braced for his answer, his mind in overdrive. “It’s winterey out, and that seems about right… isn't it, like… December something? Christmas was supposed to be in a week or two...”

Casper nodded thinking about a few things. “Senior year… Well, Lathe, I hate to break it to you, but we got a lot to catch you up on, your 39 years old…” *You don’t remember much… If you don’t know Eren or Levi… Or that Scotty’s a doctor...*

*...I'm 39 years old. “...bullshit.”* Lathe didn't know how to respond, shaking his head. “There’s no way… I can’t be…” Lathe watched in confusion as Casper dug into his pocket, pulling out something made of metal that lit up. “...the hell is that?” *It looks weird.* His eyes widened as Casper somehow tapped it, making it into a mirror and thrusting it into his hands. He stared back at himself, much older than seventeen, his hand brushing at his long hair. *...I look so much older. There’s not dirt on my face… I’m wearing clothes that don’t have holes.... “...I’m 39. I’m 39, I... had a heart attack… and I don’t remember stuff past senior year of high school…”* He looked over as Spdes suddenly stood and moved to the hall, her hands covering her red face, wanting so much
to follow, though the IV and Casper tethered him in place. “...Spades and I are engaged... I have a
son... and I live in a big house.” ...what the fuck drugs am I on... “Casper, if this is seriously a
thing... if I really am 39, and I've been doing stuff that long that I don't remember... help me
remember.” Spades looked destroyed...

Casper nodded, looking at his phone in Lathe’s hands. “Well, first off, you graduated high school!
Congrats! You got into that college you wanted to go into! Congrats! And you got your bachelors
in Pre-Med, applied for Med school and got in! Congrats!” Casper waved his hands in a jazz hands
type fashion, wondering if small tidbits of information would be better than just laying it on Lathe.
Better let him adjust slowly.

Lathe’s eyes widened, gaping like a fish. Hold on, what. “I-I got into Med School?! Does Mom
know?! Oh my God, she’d have my hide... ugh, it's like I can hear an echo of some rant on how
expensive college is... did I graduate and stuff? ...am I supposed to be taking classes now or
something?”

“You graduated... but... your Mom... She’s been-” Casper paused for a moment trying to think of
how to break it to him. “Your mother’s been dead for as many years as Eren’s been alive... You
were a General Surgeon for a few years before you decided you didn’t like it... and you went back
to college...” Let’s let that sink in for right now...

Lathe stared at the floor, thinking. “...Mom’s gone... I... I know I should feel bad... but I feel more
relieved than... than anything...” He looked back up to Casper. “Why didn't I like it? And did I
really choose surgery?” ...huh.

“It’s okay Lathe we get it... And you really chose Surgery... you were working in a children’s
hospital... but you told us you never felt like you were doing enough for kids that were really
hurting... so you went back to get a masters in teaching and adolescent counseling.” You went to a
lot of colleges... but you found your happy place I guess, and moved back after to continue
teaching.

“...I'm a teacher?” Lathe just looked over to where Scotty pulled a dividing curtain across the room,
glimpsing a limp Eren before he was hidden from view. “...Eren’s my son? So, like... my and
Spades’ kid? But what happened to... what about Viola?” What happened with her? We broke up?

Casper looked down, noticing the feet at the doorway before they shuffled away. Of course he
asked about her.... And right when Spades was gonna come back in too... Fuck... Casper finally
raised his head, a clouded look in his eyes. “Car accident... She died instantly... Right after you
got out of med school... You were going to propose... But... she died before she got to the
restaurant...” I know this is a lot to take in, and this is a lot to tell you.
Spades had finally made it to the door after composing herself, though as soon as she heard Lathe ask about Viola, her heart sank deeper than it’d ever sunk before. She sniffled, looking down at her hand and taking the ring off of her left finger, a obvious tan line from where the ring had stayed on her left ring finger. *I’m sorry… I can’t do this.* She turned away and walked off towards the waiting room, wanting to be left alone at the moment.

Lathe looked at his hands, still turning over the gold band in his fingers. “......I think I vaguely remember hearing someone tell me... because I feel like I've already mourned... I just kinda know now... it sounds kinda terrible to say I'm not broken up, I mean, it's sad... but...” ...*I feel like I've long since moved on.* He turned his head as he heard footsteps, not knowing how he recognised Spades’ footfalls. “I wanna talk to Spades, but... she probably wants to be alone... is Eren our kid?” *We have a family? ...we’d’ve had to have sex for that to be a thing... the kid’s, like, twenty. ...well then.* “Have we really been together for that long? But... that doesn't make sense when it comes to time... she’d’ve had him at, like, twenty... I would've had to cheat...” *I wouldn't do that.*

Casper chuckled a bit, shaking his head. “He’s yours... legally speaking... not biologically... He was born the day your mother died.” *I remember her funeral... we all went, even though you looked so relieved... you looked lost.* “You adopted him when he was sixteen... five years ago now... He was a freshman in high school.”

*...that sounds like something I would do... “...freshmen are sixteen now? Since when?” That's not a thing... at least, not in America...*

“They're not... Eren was 8 when he was introduced to the American schooling system, and he was held back to kindergarten...” Casper explained, trying not to think about what Grisha had done to the boy to get him to move to America. *I can only imagine the sick things in his mind....*

Lathe couldn't make out the hushed voices behind the curtain, leaning into Casper’s reassuring hug. “...this isn't the first time something like this has happened... is it?”

Casper shook his head. “He’s got PTSD... It’s bound to happen more than a few times...” Casper’s tone was hushed, quiet, as it pleading for him to understand so he didn’t need to elaborate. *I can’t tell you with him there... I don’t know if he’s awake...* Casper was running a hand through his hair when Scotty pulled the curtain back and looked worriedly at the two of them.

*“Do you have the WOF104?” He needs a lot of it... It was bad... really bad...*
Casper nodded, letting go of Lathe for a moment before digging out the strange pill bottle with Lathe’s symbol clearly on the side of it. “Here… Is he alright?” His hopeful face fell when he saw Scotty shook his head.

“No… His seizure was well over 5 minutes… I’ll need to admit him… He needs a lot of tests done to look for damage…” This is alarming… Scotty turned back and entered the curtained area to give Eren his pills.

“That-” Lathe’s eyes were fixed on the sharp insignia on the bottle, a blue and gold spark. “…Casper, why is the club’s insignia on the bottle?” The second bit of what Scotty said suddenly clicked, shrinking a bit. “...I can’t believe I put him in a choke hold… I made him freak out that badly… I-I’m sorry… I’ve caused so much trouble and pain…”

Casper looked down a bit, going over to hug Lathe again. “I’m going to warn you, that Eren’s going to most likely be very fearful of you for the next few days… and probably not talk a lot… but you didn’t know… you couldn’t remember.” I just hope he won’t have to stay here long… Levi’s leaving soon.

Lathe hung onto him, sighing quietly. “...I'll try to be careful around him… I really wanna remember everything… I don't know if I'd understand the first thing about functioning in a house. As a sorta husband. ...I hope I'm not the one in charge of cooking…” I can make ramen. ...that's kinda it.

Casper sighed quietly, holding onto Lathe a bit tighter. “You…” Casper tried not to cry himself. You’ve forgotten so much... and you... You want to remember... but everything is so painful... maybe it’s best if you forget? “You’re generally the one in charge of cooking… unless it’s Thanksgiving… then Erwin and Levi are in charge of the big birds…” Casper felt the warm rush of tears stream down his cheeks. You don’t remember all those family dinners... You don’t know Scotty and I are a thing... You don’t remember Hannah and Sharon... You probably don’t even know that Levi’s a marine...

Lathe looked over to him with worry, suddenly finding himself with a kerchief in his hand. ...where did I get this from? ...probably a reflex... Lathe pressed it into Casper’s hand, his hand running soothingly over his back as he began to sob. “Casper, please don't cry… I'm really sorry I don't remember everything right now… I'll get better, though! I'll remember everything soon enough! I-I know it hurts that there's probably a shit ton of really important stuff I don't know that I should… but I get the idea I'll wake up sometime real soon and it'll all just hit me right in the face and I'll know what the hell I've done with my life. This can't be permanent.” ...I've lived a longer life than I think. I just know that. I'll snap out of it.
Casper took the handkerchief and nodded, wiping away at his tears. “Okay… You’re rich by the way… and so is Eren…” *You both have acquired a small fortune.*

“…huh?” *there's no fucking way.* “Casper, the last thing I remember I had fifty cents in my pocket. Money and I are… were… never mentioned in the same sentence except to say I don't have any. What could I possibly have done to get rich?” Okay, **now you're talkin’ crazy.**

Casper nodded and picked up his phone again, getting out earbuds and giving them to Lathe. “Don’t worry I won’t put it on too loud, it’s music…” *I bought the album… and you sang a song with Eren… and it’s really nice… I like it… and maybe you’ll remember it.*

Lathe looked at the things Casper handed him with confusion, letting Casper help him put them in his ears, watching as he pressed a button under a picture. *...is that me?* His eyes widened as the first notes across the keyboard played, seeming to immediately recognize them. “...why do I remember this song…” He listened, his jaw dropping as he recognised his own tenor. “…that's me… and… is that Eren…?” *It sounds really good…* He started humming to the song, silently mouthing the words to the song. *...I know this one… “...Echo of the Rocks… right?” ...something about a myth or whatever…*

Casper nodded. “Yeah, you write almost all of Eren’s music… but he hasn’t sung recently…” His expression fell a bit as he spoke. *He’s got it bad… I wanna tell you, Lathe… but he’s probably awake.*

Lathe didn’t miss his look, his voice even and hushed. “Casper, tell me. What all has happened to Eren? There’s got to be more that's happened to him than this… than what you've told me.” *There's no way there isn't.*

Levi came out from behind the curtain, a weary look in his double black eyes, his nose bandaged as he looked at the two of them. “He’s asleep… you can tell him about Grisha…” Levi kept the curtain drawn, watching as Scotty was paged to the ER. “You can tell him about that monster…” *We had to knock him out…*

“I-I'm sorry about your nose… Mr. Thug Life.” Lathe’s eyes immediately widened, covering his mouth in embarrassment. “I-I'm sorry, I don't know where the hell that came from… I really am sorry…” *...fuck, can't you do anything right?!*

Levi’s eyes widened. “Mr. Quo… 1st period… You were substituting for Hanji’s Chemistry class. Do you remember that?” His voice a bit hard, but not as hard as one would think it would be after that comment. “And I told you I didn’t want to use force, count yourself lucky you don’t look
worse than me… Your fighting style was sloppy.” It wasn’t graceful at all.

“Well, I'm sorry I didn't take lessons. **Forgive** me.” He spoke a bit sarcastically, thinking. “…..I think I do… chemical equations… fire… something about anarchy… …I…” Lathe's eyes suddenly hardened, looking Levi dead in the eye. *I bandaged Eren up.* “**Please.** Tell me someone got Grisha’s ass thrown in jail.” *He was emaciated… torn up, his back in shreds… …I was the one who determined he had PTSD.*

Levi shook his head. “Grisha came back 7 months ago… I killed him when I came back from school… I loaded him with 11 bullets… He was dead before he hit the floor.” Levi was quiet after that, looking to Casper as he watched them. **What else does he know?**... **And you've been crying, so I take it not much.**

...what. “Uhm, I'm glad he's not around to get to Eren anymore, but isn't killing him kinda… very illegal?” *That's kinda called murder. ...I'm missing something.*

Levi shook his head. “I had probable cause… He was about to kill Eren, he had beaten and broken him… raped him, and invited all his sick friends to rape Eren too… The sick bastards are behind bars now.” His arms crossed as he sat at the end of the bed. “Maybe that’ll refresh your memory…” His voice hissed a bit in anger, seething as he kept his eyes burning holes into the wall. “He was in a coma for three weeks… You were gonna pull the plug the next week… because we thought he was brain dead.” Levi got up, his body forcing him to pace, his hands in fists.

“I didn't sleep.” Lathe picked up his head, swallowing hard. “You all had to force me to do anything besides read to him or research anything that could help him. I wasn't eating, and I didn't leave for those weeks… I was **furious** when Spades dragged me to a hotel after I passed out. I… **we,** Casper, Scotty and I… we were working on PTSD meds that worked… because nothing else did.” *...there was a lot of drama between you and Scotty...* Lathe looked over to Casper, thinking hard. “...you and Scotty… are a thing?” *I think I remember hearing something like that.... “You were distraught when you were rejected… but I… I saw you on a date like, a year later or something… right? The date from hell where Eren cut and you had to rush over with IVs on your lunch break?”

Casper nodded, pulling Lathe closer to him. “What else do you remember?” His voice a bit hoarse as he gave him back his kerchief. *I wanna know what else you remember...*  

Levi continued to pace, though soon left the room and went to walk away, towards where Spades had walked off to. *Spades needs to know...*
Lathe chuckled a bit, beginning to ramble. “Lots of things… I had a boarder from Japan for a while… Eren ended up moving in like a week later, his house a logistical wreck… he and Levi were the most adorable thing, he ended up practically living with us too… Spades was making the case against Grisha… went to Germany, getting stuff from the embassy and finding a key to the second basement they didn't know existed… Eren got his instruments back… we got Blake in there somewhere… I Uhm… I remember her leaving me shocked in the doorway after she kissed my cheek… I couldn't think about anything else for a week… I crossed the line when I found out Levi had been going with the crowd and bullying Eren, Eren and Levi were apart for a while… Full Tilt happened, I was so distraught… They got back together after Levi pulled his head out of his ass and admitted he loved him…. lots of music and art happened, Spades and I were dating… I bought the house, Spades found out and we designed everything… brought Eren to see it, with a barn and everything… shit went down really fast… but progress was made… and… and I took Spades out one night for dinner and dancing… and I walked with her through the park, sang, and… I asked her to marry me… and she said yes …” Lathe dropped his head into his hands, trying all over to comprehend the emotions nearly overwhelming him. “I love her so fucking much… and I fucked up a ton of stuff… I made Eren seize, I beat Levi up, I made her cry… I don’t want things to be like that… I love them all to bits… I just want everything to be okay… y-yesterday was Christmas… a fun day off with cookies and good food and just everyone happy… really happy… I want things to just go back to that…” Tears started to stream down his cheeks, burying his face in the cloth Casper handed back to him. “I love them all so much…”

Casper nodded soothingly rubbing his back. “Do you remember Hannah? And Sharon? Maybe Maverick?” My Godson?” Casper was cooing to him gently, rocking them a bit to help calm him. Your heart’s been doing good.

Lathe nodded, smiling. “We board Hannah’s horse, and she’ working on the serum… and my God, delivering Maverick… on a kitchen floor in the dead of winter. That was a thing that happened… a bit of a nightmare… not exactly how you’d prefer to give birth, but y’know, it happens…. apparently.” He looked to Casper, smiling. “Maverick’s your Godkid. You and Scotty have a former bruised potato as a godchild.” He chuckled, feeling some of the tension dissipating.

Casper nodded and smiled, cupping Lathe’s cheeks and leaning his forehead against Lathe’s. “Oh thank God…” He let out a sigh of relief as he started to cry again. He didn’t notice Spades leaning on the doorway, watching them, Levi standing slightly behind her. You remember….

Lathe pulled him into a tight hug, his face buried into his shoulder. “I’m so sorry for scaring you like that… it’s okay…” He opened an eye as he heard someone shift in the doorway, pulling from Casper as he saw Levi and Spades. “…excuse me.” Lathe stood from the bed, pulling the IV from his arm carefully and letting go of it uncaring before walking around the bed, straight up to Spades. He stopped a foot away from her, suddenly not knowing what to say. “S-Spades, I….” He looked to her fidgeting hands, her ring gone. Huh? “Spades, where’s your ring?” He looked up to her eyes, catching her hands in his own, pulling her close to him, leaning their foreheads together. “...I’m so sorry for scaring you… it was temporary… it really was. I remember everything.” He thought a second, smirking as he leaned by her ear to whisper. “I remember last night…” He pecked her ear, chuckling as she turned scarlet. “Thanks for that, by the way. But really, I’m so sorry for losing
it and scaring you like that… I… I love you.” His eyes silently pleaded with her, wanting her to believe him. I’m sorry. I love, and I’m so fucking sorry.

Spades looked down towards the ground, guilt settling heavy on her as he stopped walking towards her. She fidgeted with her now ringless hand, trying not to cry as she felt the tears prickle when he noticed her ring was gone. You asked for Viola… For all I know you still want her… Spades blushed for a moment before paling, and her eyes unable to meet his. “I… I-I’m sorry… I… I’m going to do your paperwork…” She turned away before he could see her cry. I made it happen… What I did caused this… this is all my fault...

Lathe didn't hesitate for an instant to follow her into the hall, catching her not a dozen feet from the door, turning her around to face him. His expression turned to one of worry when he saw her tears, pulling her close and hugging her tightly, his hand running over her back. “Spades, talk to me… please… it's okay. Tell me what's wrong.” All I want is for you and everyone else to be okay and happy. Talk to me. You agreed to marry me, you can talk with me!

Spades started to cry, still unable to look at him. “I’m so sorry Lathe… I shouldn’t’ve pushed you… This is all my fault…” I been pushing you since the beginning... To give up on your first love, Viola… and then last night…. I pushed you too hard… and you had a heart attack... and everything is my fault.

Lathe’s brow furrowed, speaking after a moment. “Spades, none of this is your fault. ...if you're talking about last night, let me assure you I've never heard of something like that making someone have a heart attack. It just happened. I don't know why, but it did. Don't try to apologise… you've been nothing but wonderful to me the entire time we've been together. It's okay.” It really is. I don't blame you for anything.

Spades shook her head and pulled out of his grasp. “No… I pushed you away from her too.”

Spades looked so broken and so distraught as she went back to the desk and asked for his release papers, beginning to fill them out without a problem. Maybe… I was too hopeful… Have you always been thinking about Viola?

...what. Lathe was stunned. He shook his head clear, his determination set as he marched after her. He saw her filling out papers at the front desk, slipping behind her unnoticed and simply winding his arms around her middle, leaning his chin on her shoulder, murmuring into her ear. “Spades, listen to me.” He swallowed, speaking with conviction. “I asked about Viola because I was confused hearing Eren was my son. Relative to time, nothing made sense. I didn't remember anything much at that point. But Spades, when you were working on Eren's case, yeah. I was still hurting a bit. But I’d had a decade to accept that she was gone. It's not like you forced me to chose between the two of you. You helped me do something I needed to do- recognize that I was still a person even without her, and that I should after ten years accept it and live for once. You didn't
force me into a relationship. You didn't make me do anything. I thought you were the most amazing thing with everything you had done for me and for Eren, and I wouldn't have kissed you, let alone asked you to marry me if I didn't want to spend the rest of my life with you. I love you. I trust you. I want you to be happy. Please. Don't doubt that.” You mean so much to me...

Spades had stopped writing, her hand shaking, dropping the pen as she turned in Lathe’s arms to bury her face in his chest. “I... I... I'm so sorry, Lathe... E-... He’s...” This last one was so much worse that any of the ones he’s had before... She started sobbing, so many things affecting her overly hormonal body. The added hormones I'm taking aren't helping this. “I... I believe you...” I was so scared that you would want to call it off...

Lathe tangled a hand in her hair, keeping her close to him. “What about Eren? ...how bad was it?” He quietly cooed to her, his hands gentle as he comforted her. I didn't catch a time...

“Five minutes and fifty four seconds... He’s got a tube down his throat... Scotty had to really knock him out...” He's technically in a medically induced coma right now... but it's not very deep. Spades couldn’t stop her crying as she clung to Lathe’s shirt.

Lathe felt a harsh pang of guilt, cradling her close to him. “Shhh... It’s gonna be okay... he's a tough kid... here, let’s get this stuff filled out, and then we can go back with the others, okay?” He waited a long moment before she nodded, sniffing as they returned to the papers, turning them over soon and walking back to Eren’s room, Lathe keeping an arm around her waist, stopping her just before the door. “Oh, and another thing...” He picked up her left hand, suddenly producing her ring. Sorry, picked your pocket. ...it was necessary. He slid the ring onto her finger, leaning forward and lightly brushing his lips against hers. “I still really want to get married... that certainly hasn't changed.”

Spades blushed as he put her ring back on her finger, sighing a bit in relief at the familiar weight it held there. “Okay...” She waited for Lathe to turn and open the door, gasping when she saw Eren in his clothes, sleeves rolled up, and steam rising from where the needles were imbedded into him, beginning to heal. She saw the instant fear in his eyes, and Eren starting to step back away from them. Shit... He’s afraid of Lathe.

Lathe immediately took a step back when he recognised Eren’s fear, moving behind Spades. “Eren, I'm so sorry about what I did. Please, understand. I had had a heart attack... I couldn't remember anything after when I was seventeen. I didn't remember anything- being a doctor, a teacher, nothing. I felt threatened, and I did what I did on instinct; I thought I was being protective... I was out of my mind. I’m okay now, and I know you're not gonna trust me for a bit, but I’m telling you that you shouldn't be terrified of me. I made a huge mistake, and I'm sorry for that. But Eren, I love you. I would never, in my right mind, want you hurt. It was a huge fluke. Please... forgive me.” He used Spades as a sort of human shield, one arm around her middle, the other extending past her in offering to Eren, palm-up. I'm so fucking sorry.
Eren shook his head, backing up a bit. <“I wanna go home.”> His voice was shaky, laden with fear. He jumped back as Scotty raced in, his pager having gone off, telling him Eren’s heart monitor had flatlined. *What’s Scotty doing here… Where am I? I wanna go home!*

Scotty sighed in relief as he saw Eren up and walking, seemingly okay, aside from the fear in his eyes. *He’s afraid of Lathe… isn’t he?*

Lathe silently nodded, retracting his hand, his eyes glued to the floor. <“E-Eren… I know this probably won’t do anything, but… think of when you had woken up from your coma… you didn’t trust anyone except me, really… you bit everyone else, and even then you did end up biting me… that and this, what happened then and today… they’re very alike. Just… keep that in mind. Please. But we can go home once we know you’re okay. You had a bad seizure… you were nearly at six minutes, I'm told…”> *It wasn't pretty...*

Eren watched them all with skeptical eyes. <“I had a seizure?”>*All I remember was you putting me in a choke hold… And then waking up here… What happened to me?*

Lathe nodded. <“Yeah, you did. This is what I'm talking about. A bad enough heart attack, a bad enough panic attack and seizure, you forget things. But after I put you in that choke hold, Spades pretty much screamed at me to let you go. I did… you ran terrified to a corner, crying. Levi gave me aspirin while I was too scared to do anything- Spades came home in uniform, when I realised it terrified me- and we drove you here. I… you started seizing when you were brought in here, pale as a sheet of paper. You stopped after nearly six minutes, and you were knocked out for a bit… I got my memory back, we left to get me discharged and to talk, came back and here we are.”>* Lathe looked really scared at the idea Eren wouldn't believe him, insisting quietly. <“...I'm so sorry… I was out of my mind. I don't want you to be scared of me… I wouldn't ever hurt you on purpose if I knew what I was doing. I thought I was seventeen… Eren, please believe me… I'm so sorry…”>* Lathe tried to hide in Spades’ shoulder, still looking at his face. *I want you to feel okay around me… I'm so, so sorry...*

Eren watched them, Scotty coming up to him to look over his vitals, making sure Eren didn’t feel threatened. He instinctively let out a hiss as he was touched, though calmed down once Scotty checked for his pulse. *Why’s he touching me… I wanna go home! <“I wanna go home! Daddy! I wanna go home.”>* Eren whined like a spoiled child as he pulled away from Scotty, not liking the physical touch. *I don’t wanna be touched. His steps were a bit shaky as he neared Spades and Lathe, moving to curl into Spades arms, seemingly okay with the proximity to Lathe. I wanna go home… I don’t wanna be poked and prodded.*

Lathe was careful with how close Eren got, acting passive as he slowly untangled himself from behind Spades, pressing a kiss behind her ear as he pulled away, smiling faintly to Eren as the
brunette tugged Spades along. <“We’ll go home, don’t you worry. We’ll fill out paperwork and get you back where you can draw or eat or just do stuff. I know you two probably missed lunch.”>

Eren nodded into Spades chest, keeping Spades in between them. *I trust you with Mom between us... I don’t wanna be touched by anyone else...* Eren picked his head up as he heard the familiar sound of Levi’s voice down the hall, looking to see Casper walking with Levi. *What happened to his nose? Why is it bleeding?*

“-a real bitch of a childhood, that’s for sure, it was all just dormant reflex… but thanks for not beating the legitimate crap out of him, he’d fight ‘til one of you were dead…” Casper had his thumbs hooked in his pockets as they walked, chatting with Levi about what happened. “…he doesn’t like to talk about it. Unless you're really curious and careful, I wouldn't ask.” Casper shrugged, smiling to them and waving when he caught sight of the group of them. “Hey y’all- Eren, you doin’ okay?” Casper took note of the fact Eren seemed withdrawn, stepping kinda near him and walking backward as they went to the front lobby. *You're walking, and Lathe is within five feet and you're not panicking. That's good.*

Eren watched Casper with wide eyes. <“What the fuck does he want?”> He turned his head towards Levi, looking for an explanation as to why Casper was asking if he was okay. *I don't want him to poke and prod at me too.*

Levi quirked an eyebrow, mirroring Casper’s demeanour, though he walked in the proper orientation, looking back to him. <“...Eren, Casper’s your friend and you just had a bad seizure he witnessed. He wants to know you feel okay.”> *...if you forgot Casper so help me...*

Eren looked at Casper, his eyes narrowing, anger visible. <“Is he that asshole that shoved the tube down my throat?”> His words came out in an angered fury, though only his grip was tightening on Spades’ shirt. Eren’s anger was a mask for the fear that he was experiencing from everyone being so close to him. *I wanna go home...*

Levi’s eyes widened, turning on his heel to face Eren. <“Eren, no he’s not. That tube was put in your throat because you were knocked out after your seizure. We wanted to make sure you could breathe. Don’t be mad at him, seriously. It's fine.”> *He didn't do anything.* <“...Eren, do you know what his name is?”> *...probably not.*

<“His name is……”> Eren trailed off, his anger dying down as he realized he didn’t remember, his long hair hiding his eyes as he looked down. *I don’t remember... why am I here again? I had a seizure? Dad was choking me... but he said he didn’t mean too... were we fighting? I think Dad was hitting Levi too... am I not good enough anymore? Does Dad hate Levi?* Eren seemed to shrink as silence fell between the group.
Scotty stepped up, speaking first while filling out a few sheets on his clipboard. “Temporary memory loss, he’ll be fine… He recognizes everyone else that close to him, he’ll be fine… You can take him home, but if he panics again, I suggest sedating him and letting him sleep it off.” *He’s probably gonna pass out as soon as you get him in the car.*

Eren felt nothing but relieved once he was released from the terrifying white that was the hospital Emergency Room and it’s surroundings. When they had gotten home, Eren refused to stay in the same room as Lathe, often hiding in the corner, or not coming into the room at all. He was skittish around him. He had taken over the kitchen, hissing at anyone who got close to him, and if they didn’t leave almost immediately, they received a faceful of flour. Eren had gone about and turned all their flour and fresh eggs into pasta which covered the huge island, he was relaxed for the most part in the silence of the room. His voice was quiet as he muttered to himself in broken english, german and hebrew. Though he had taken over the kitchen to produce the noodles in mass quantities Eren cooked it all, all 7 pounds of pasta. When he didn’t know what to do with it he washed off his hands, and found Spades tugging on her sleeve, and bringing her to the mess of a kitchen where all the noodles were made. That had resulted in many people coming over for dinner that night, including a very certain someone came in babbling and his small arms outstretched down around Lathe. The next two days passed quickly, Erwin coming to pick Levi up to head to the airport yet again for college. Eren was a bit freaked out now that he was left alone in the house with Lathe for a few hours a day if Spades got called in. He stayed away from Lathe really, but he often watched him, sneaking away whenever Lathe called out for him to come into the room. Though soon Eren got comfortable, stepping into the room with him, watching what he was doing over his shoulder. He was basically mute, not even talking to Spades for the next five days before he finally broke his silence, pulling on Lathe’s navy blue sweater and pulling on the hem. A simple word to finally show that he trusted Lathe all over again.

“Have?”

Lathe turned to look at him, immediately understating from where he sat composing. He smiled warmly, tugging the blue sweater over his head leaving him in a dark green button-up and handing it to Eren. “Have.” *You trust me. ...and this is too adorable.*
Chapter 55: Misunderstandings

Lathe walked the length of the airport, looking for the correct gate. *where are you… there!* Lathe stopped at the correct gate, waiting for the plane to taxi close enough and for the passengers to disembark before holding up the sign over his head. ‘Hannes’ was written in looping calligraphic script on the white poster board, skimming the crowd as they ambled from the hall. He saw a tall man with blonde hair walk from the plane, looking around uncertainly before he saw the sign Lathe was holding high, meeting his brown eyes. He started walking over to Lathe, and Lathe set down the sign so it rested against his leg for the moment, extending a hand to him, his expression warm. *<“You’re Hannes? It’s wonderful to meet you.”> You’re at least as tall as me. Huh.*

*<“I am. Thank you.”> His words were short and his voice a bit rough as he ignored the outstretched hand and continued at Lathe, immediately wrapping him in his arms. *<“Thank you so much for letting me come see him.”> It really means a lot to me.*

Lathe was a bit surprised as he ignored his hand, walking straight up to him. *huh? What-* Lathe’s eyes widened a bit as he was met with a tight hug, chuckling a bit and hugging him back. *<“Of course- it’s the least we could’ve done for you. He’s going to be so happy to see you.”> Lathe let go of him after a long moment, guiding him through the airport to the baggage carousel, asking him about his flight and chatting with him as they walked to the car in the parking lot. It wasn’t a very long drive, and Lathe was easily able to keep up with Hannes’ German, his eyes bright as Hannes looked around with curiosity as they drove. He soon pulled up the long driveway to the house, parking in front of the house. *<“This is the new house. The barn is out back, and there’s a lot of neat stuff inside. Eren should be home still.”> Lathe beamed as Hannes nodded, getting out and retrieving his suitcase from the back of the car and walking with him up the shoveled walk to the front porch, unlocking the door and opening it, looking around. *<“Eren! There’s someone here to see you!”> Lathe looked around after he shut the door behind Hannes, looking around the quiet house and setting his case by the stairs. *<“He’s probably out back with the animals. We can check there.”> Lathe started with him to the back door and opened it, his eyes going wide as he saw Charlie out in the field, tacked up and prancing around in the snow without a rider. *Fuck.* “EREN!” Lathe ran down the dug-out path to near Charlie, stopping and scaling a pile of wood near the wall of the barn, looking down at the snow. He saw a large patch where it looked like Eren had fallen off, but thrashed and scuffled before… *Someone dragged him off Charlie.* **He’s been kidnapped.** *Fuck.* Lathe immediately pulled out his phone, a self-written app pinging Eren’s phone and placing a red pin on a map. **He’s not that far. He’s the next town over, a warehouse near the woods.** Lathe came down from the pile and went to bring Charlie into the barn where he was would be warm, Hannes having walked down to the barn to see what the matter was. *<“It’s Eren. He’s been kidnapped and dragged a town over. Here, help me get the tack off of Charlie Jr.”> They quickly got Charlie in his stall, Lathe sending the information of Eren’s location to Spades with an SOS message and looking around outside, holding out a hand for a moment. *…it’s not that cold. But it could take time for the police to get there…* Lathe turned to Hannes, sounding worried. *<“I’m sorry this is your welcome to America- but I need to grab my bag from inside… you up for a ride on an ATV?”> The son of a bitch who took my son is going to pay.* He smiled as Hannes nodded, running back to the house and getting his bag, fastening the clasps on it extra tightly before running back out, getting the ATV from the back of the barn and driving it to the front door of the barn. He closed the door behind them, getting on and waiting for Hannes to get solid footing and hold onto him tightly. He handed Hannes his phone, having him tell him to bear more to the left or right as Lathe started them down one of the many paths through the woods, going at a pace where
he still had plenty of control. It took a while, but they soon were out of the bounds on the property and on the grounds of a swamp, thankfully with sparse trees. Lathe locked onto the silhouette of a warehouse in the near distance after a while of driving, driving them out of the swamp and around the edge of the clearing to the front, his eyes wide as he saw a squad car he recognized. *That’s Dave’s car.* Lathe killed the engine next to it, hopping off and motioning for Hannes to hold back a bit, approaching the warehouse door warily. He immediately dropped his guard and headed for Eren and Dave at a dead sprint as he saw them in the center of the warehouse, Dave trying to coax Eren gently into a more comfortable position, Eren trying hard not to scream in pain. Lathe dropped to his knees next to them, his eyes wide as he studied Eren’s leg, the worst of his injuries. His femur had been broken, the jagged bone sticking out a solid two inches from his flesh at a sharp angle. *FUCK.* “Eren, my god, kid… don’t worry, we’ll get you fixed up as soon as we can.” Lathe ran a hand soothingly through Eren’s locks, looking to the officer next to him. “Dave, how are you the only one here? Where’s the ambulance? He needs one!”

“That’s Dave’s car.” Did they only send you?

“It’s on its way, I was closer, Spades sent me because we didn’t know if the attacker would be a problem to deal with… Eren only said he knocked him out. We didn’t know if he would wake up so I came here first.” He winced hearing Eren starting to scream out in pain. *Fuck… I know it hurts… But I gotta make sure the other guy’s okay… He hasn’t moved.*

Eren screamed bloody murder, holding onto Lathe as he knelt down next to him. He could feel the heat starting to grow around the leg and the burning feeling starting to surface as he cried more. “Dad! Make it stop! It’s starting to heal!” Eren was screaming in panic as bone started to regrow itself, his nose starting to bleed in a heavy stream. “It hurts! It hurts!” It’s growing down… My body can’t tell the other half of the bone is still there! It’s trying to make another one! Eren’s throat continued making that horrific noise as he gripped Lathe’s shirt, feeling the bone begging to solidify bit by bit.

What . Lathe looked to his leg, his eyes wide as the bone slowly began growing downward from inside, healing and seemingly unaware that the other half of the bone was still there. *Not good not good not good….* Lathe went to his bag, knowing he had to at least get some of Eren’s pain under control, handing him two of the strongest morphine tablets he had. He got out a metal case as Eren swallowed the pills, murmuring to him and trying to keep him calm. He reached for his kerchief, folding it over and giving it to Eren, his expression apologetic. “Bite this… I’m sorry kid, but this is going to hurt like a bitch.” Lathe went back to his case, taking a scalpel out and running an alcohol wipe over it’s blade carefully, looking to Eren’s leg, the skin and flesh struggling to cover the protruding bone. “It’ll be over soon, Eren. Stay strong for me- and as still as you can manage.” Lathe quickly made deep incisions in his leg, cutting back the forming flesh and skin to see his bone half-mended, the bone sticking out much longer than what would fit. His stomach dropped as he realized something. …I’ve got no choice. There’s no time to wait for better conditions to do this in. “Eren, shut your eyes. You’re not going to want to watch this.” Lathe swallowed hard, blocking out the rest of the world, his only focus Eren’s leg and the skin and flesh spiderwebbing across the incisions to stitch them back together. He forcibly blocked out Eren’s screams of pain as he cut the entire way down his leg, pulling back flesh with a grimace to reveal his leg bone in place in it’s joint. He set down the scalpel after he cut tendons free, praying to whatever God would listen he would be able to heal from this. He breathed deeply, taking firm hold of Eren’s busted bone with one hand and holding his knee in the other, firmly twisting and pulling the bone free in one movement, setting it down and coaxing the flesh back into place, immediately going to calm Eren and hold onto him as it began to mend, cradling him closely. “Eren, Eren you did such a good job, I’m really proud of you… it’s okay, I did what I absolutely needed to, you’re going to be able to heal properly now. It’s okay, help is on the way… help is coming. You won’t be in so much pain soon enough.” ...

That was the most horrible thing I’ve ever had to do… Lathe took the kerchief from his mouth, wiping up the streams of blood that came from his nose. You’re gonna need a transfusion
Dave watched the scene before him unfold, his eyes wide as he saw Eren’s skin actively trying to heal over the protruding bone and then Lathe take out a scalpel and cut him open even further until the bone was out of his body. His gut wrenched as Eren’s bloodcurdling screams rang in the warehouse, the sirens starting in the distance and getting louder as they got closer. “Lathe… What… What did you just do? You just pulled out half of his bone! What do you think you’re doing?” Dave looked over Eren’s bleeding nose and then back to his leg which was starting to mend itself all over again. I think I’m gonna be sick.

Eren’s screams stopped as soon as Lathe removed the lower half of the broken bone. His nose was still heavily bleeding, his eyes lidded and voice raw. “Dad… It hurts…” He cried as he clung to his pant leg weakly, starting to feel the effects of blood loss. My head hurts, I feel really dizzy. His eyes started to close, struggling to keep his focus on Lathe as he was cradled. His focus broke when the sirens blared from the entrance and two EMTs were running with a stretcher out to the 4 of them, having been pointed in by Hannes. Who are... They? Eren saw a dark shadow in the bright doorway as he looked to the EMTs racing to them. His consciousness was fading quickly, and his breathing was a bit shallow. His leg started to produce steam as it hurriedly tried to mend itself.

“Ay!” Lathe called to the EMTs as they ran in, seeing the recognition on their faces. ...I hang out at the hospital too much. “He needs a blood transfusion, he’s lost a lot and needs it fast. I don't know about any other injuries, but his leg is mending itself. Don't ask, keep it straight and just let it do its thing.” Lathe moved out of their way and let them get Eren onto the stretcher, looking back and unsure of what to do with the broken femur still on the floor. “U-Uhm, what should we…” Lathe just pointed to the bone after a minute and hoping someone had an answer, switching slowly out of doctor mode and realising that was his own son’s fucking leg on the floor.

Dave tried in vain to hold his stomach as the EMTs picked up the bloodied half of Eren’s femur, pitching onto the floor. His mouth held the acidic burn for a while, turning back to the man leaving before him. “When’s the second ambulance gonna be here? He’s breathing on his own again…” I don’t know if he’ll wake up.

The EMTs looked over to Dave, wincing a bit as he hurled the contents of his stomach out. “It’s on it’s way, we need to take him back now. Lathe, come with us, make sure he stays awake. You should be in the back for it, making sure he’s calm. Scotty’s getting an OR ready…” The EMTs rushed Eren into the back of the ambulance, Hannes having a wrecked face as he watched Eren get loaded in, blood everywhere on him.

<“Lathe… What happened to Eren? Why is he so bloodied? And why is his leg smoking? Is he burned? Is he going to be alright?”> Hannes was becoming frantic as Lathe got closer to him. Is he going to be okay?

<“Hannes, I'm going with him, and therefore you need to come with. There’s a lot of stuff that needs to be explained. You up for it? Or do you want to go with Dave, the Police Commissioner?”> It's kinda gruesome...

Hannes thought about Eren covered in blood and shook his head. <“I’ll go with Dave…The policeman.”> He watched as another ambulance came barreling in and the stretcher being taken in, Dave coming out as the EMTs got to the unconscious man’s side. <“Is this Dave?”>

<“Yeah, one second.”> “Dave!” Lathe quickly ran up to him, pulling him away from the other man on the stretcher and over to Hannes, looking to one and then the other. “Dave, this man is Hannes, who cared for Eren a lot when he was much younger.” <“Hannes, this is Dave, the Police
Commissioner of this county and a good friend of mine.’” “Dave, Hannes doesn’t speak much English, it’s mostly German. But he needs to come to the hospital as well, and can’t stand to be in the ambulance. Can he ride with you?” *Just say yes so we can get this show in the road.*

Dave nodded. “Yeah, get in that ambulance and go!” Dave pushed Lathe towards the ambulance and motioned Hannes to come to the cruiser with him. He ushered him into the passenger seat before getting in himself. Once he was in, he got his foot on the gas and got ahead of the ambulances to create an escort for the two of them, making a beeline to the hospital.

Lathe turned and hopped into the ambulance without another thought, moving where the EMTs ushered him and running a hand through Eren’s hair, gently shaking his shoulder. “Eren, come on, stay awake, please. I know it’s hard but you really need to. Here, talk to me. Does anything hurt besides your leg?” *We need to know.*

Eren looked to Lathe, struggling to nod, before giving up. “S...s-side…” He tried to move his left arm, struggling to move to touch his side.

He kicked me really hard…

Lathe nodded, lifting the edge of the shirt to inspect his side, his hand resting over Eren’s to keep him from moving too much. He saw a bruise beginning to bloom. “It’s internal, not a cut of any kind. Anything else hurt, kid? Come on, stay with me here. We need you awake for this right now.” *Stay with us.*

Eren tried shaking his head, his eyes beginning to close. “....n-no….” Soon his eyes were closed yet again, his focus waning.

Lathe snapped loudly in front of his face, trying to catch his attention. “Come on Eren, we can’t have that much further to go. Stay with me, open your eyes, force it if you have to. Please, stay awake.” Lathe shook his shoulder, Eren no longer responding. “He’s out- Crap, not good…” Lathe kept trying to get Eren to wake back up as they raced to the hospital, resigned as the ambulance finally stopped and letting the EMTs take him in on his stretcher, his leg steaming still. Lathe hopped from the ambulance and went to the squad car parked nearby, meeting Dave and Hannes. <“He’s in good hands now- Scotty does his job extremely well. But all we have now to do is wait, which shouldn’t take too long. They need to run scans and stuff, but I’d be surprised if much is going to happen.”>* Scotty knows what the deal is, so I think they’ll just need to run scans and check that his body finished healing, then discharge him. Easy. Lathe walked with him inside, going to sit with him in the waiting room. Hannes picked up a magazine after a bit in curiosity, and they decided to pass the time with Lathe helping teach him the more important words of the English language. His brow furrowed when they hit the three-hour mark, staring up at the clock. *They’re taking an awfully long time… what the hell is going on?* <“I honestly don’t know why they’re taking so long… but it’s past lunch, are you hungry? The cafeteria’s just over there.”>* Lunch and three more hours, and Lathe was slightly panicking, finally going up to the front desk. “Uhm, hi. Is there any word on Eren Yeager? He’s in the OR right now, and it’s been six hours… we don’t know why.” *Someone tell me something or I’m going to march in there and ask Scotty for a status update personally.*

The woman frowned a bit, going to type a few things into her computer. “He’s still in the OR, apparently his surgery has been graded as emergency, so it’ll be updated once he’s stable and out of surgery. I’m sorry, I don’t have much more that at the moment.” Her smile was small as she went back to her desk job.

Hannes was waiting in his chair, watching as Lathe walked back to him. <“Is Eren out of surgery yet?”>* I hope he is, I wanna see him be okay.*

Lathe shook his head, looking defeated. <“No, he’s not… and the woman at the desk can’t tell me
why it’s taking so long… I don't understand. It’s been graded as an emergency surgery… whatever it is, it’s taking awhile, and it's necessary. We just have to be patient.”> Lathe sat down next to him, patting his shoulder and sending him a reassuring look. <“He’ll be okay. He’s been through worse and come out just fine.”> Eventually. ...nah, he’ll be okay. He’s a tough kid.

Scotty came up behind him, running a hand through his hair. “I didn’t realize that you were now fluent in five languages.” Scotty patted his shoulder, looming over him and looking over to Hannes in confusion. “Who’s this?” Scotty was still dressed in scrubs, a mask hanging around his neck. I’ve never seen you before.

Lathe nearly jumped out of his skin as he heard Scotty from right behind him, looking over his shoulder and chuckling, standing with Hannes, looking between the two of them. “Scotty, this is Hannes. He was the man who took care of Eren for much of his early life while he lived in Germany.” <“Hannes, this Dr. Scott Octavian, or just Scotty. He’s an old friend of mine, and the doctor that’s been in charge of most of Eren’s medical procedures.”> Lathe looked back to Scotty, looking to him pointedly. “Now would you care to explain just what the hell was going on for six hours?”

Scotty sighed, nodding and motioning them to follow. “Well, the bone that you so wonderfully pulled out started his body in a frenzy of wanting to eradicate his body of all the metal it had in it… Thank you for making my job a living hell.” He led them to Eren’s room, the boy completely healed, but his body still steaming under multiple ice packs. “The only downside… He’s got a internal body temperature of 126 degrees Fahrenheit.” He should be dead.

“What the actual fuck?!” Lathe swore without even thinking, his eyes wide. “The process of him healing from all of that made him that hot? Oh my God…” I'm surprised he doesn't look well-done by this point. ...and I'm also surprised that he doesn't look more dead. Lathe went up to him, his voice quiet and soft. “Eren, Hon, my god, how are you feeling?”

Eren’s eyes cracked open a little more, looking at the three figures with uncertainty. “Dad?” His voice was a bit hoarse and his eyes opening more as he finally came to. I see… Lathe… Scotty… And is that…? No, I must be imagining things. “When are the drugs gonna wear off?” He reached up to rub his eyes, yawning as if he had just woken up from a deep sleep.

Scotty shook his head, laughing. “You're off the anesthesia, you already woke up.”

Lathe looked over his shoulder to Hannes, and then back to Eren, hiding a bright smile behind his hand as he stood there, watching Eren’s expression. Yep, he’s real. ...but I'll let you figure that out.

Eren’s eyes widened, moving to rip all the IVs and monitors off of himself, not caring if they bled, as they immediately closed up. His first steps were shaky as he got off the bed, before finding his footing and running into Hannes’ arms. “Vatri!” Eren’s excited voice rang through the room as he gripped onto him, his whole body steaming. It’s really you!

Hannes smiled more. “Kleiner Jäger.” He smiled, ruffling Eren’s hair. <“You’ve grown so much since you were last with me.”>

Lathe’s eyes widened as Eren got out of bed, ripping out the IV drips and not caring as he let ice packs fall to the floor. “Eren, my god, chill for a split second. Hate to break up the moment, really, but you need your IV and ice packs so you don’t, y’know, become well-done.” Lathe went and gently tugged on Eren's shoulder, his voice soft. “He’s not going to dissolve into thin air, kid. He’s staying at our place for about two weeks. You have plenty of time for hugs. But right now you need to get better.” Work with me, kid.
Eren looked down at the ice packs littering the floor, feeling the prickle of heat under his skin. “How hot am I?” He watched the steam roll off his arms in fascination, though he complied and moved to sit back down on the hospital bed. It looks so cool.

“Well, I guess it depends on who you ask. Me, I’d say you’re 126 degrees Fahrenheit. But if you asked your fans on Twitter, you’d probably get at least a solid nine out of ten. Levi, perhaps, you’d get a response somewhere along the lines of very.” Lathe responded with a mischievous grin as he piled the ice packs back onto him, carefully reininserting the IVs and taping them down. “Now don’t pull these out, okay? They’re important.” …yeah. That’s not a thing you want to do.

Eren grumbled about something before looking to Lathe. “Were you not home?” You didn’t answer any of my shouts for you… He pulled me off of Charlie with ease.

Lathe shook his head, his look apologetic. “I was picking up Hannes from the airport. I didn’t tell you because I wanted it to be a surprise- and I certainly didn’t expect this to happen…” How the hell could anyone predict this sort of shit?

Eren nodded, looking down at his hands. “Is he dead? He wasn’t breathing when I called Mom.” He looked over to Hannes a smile on his face. <“Daddy, I’m so glad you’re here!”>

Hannes smiled happily, moving to sit down by his side and run a hand through his hair as he used to do forever ago. <“You’re doing so well, I’m… I’m really proud of you, and all your accomplishments.”>

Lathe shook his head, speaking evenly. “The other man isn’t dead- he’s alive. You really did a number on him.” I can’t have Hannes asking what that word I’m using all the time is- but what I really mean is ‘you fucked him up.’ “Did a damn good job of it, too. I’m glad I taught you Judo- and that you were willing to learn. I’m proud. You really held your own.” I really am.

“Aside from letting him kick me in the side and the leg… Hurt like a bitch… Um… Is Mom coming? I called her first… And she sent Dave… And the ambulance…” I’m not really sure if I was screaming on the phone or not. He leaned his head into Hannes’ gentle touch, appreciating the affection he was given.

Scotty looked over to him. “You forgot to mention you called me screaming on the other end… You must’ve broken it pretty bad for your body to ignore it, and make a new one to heal.” You’re lucky your kid is some sort of quickly-healing wizard...

Ouch. “Scotty, his femur was sticking a solid two inches out out and away from his thigh. It was worse than bad; I don’t just go yanking out people’s bones for no good reason. That’s mean. And could get me sued.” Yeah, we don’t want that. “I’ll text Spades, see what’s going on on her end.” Lathe switched the keyboard mode on his phone, typing the French quickly and waiting patiently for a response, reaching for Eren’s hand and lacing their fingers. “…was he the last one from the drawings? I never got a good look at him.” I was kinda occupied. Also his face was covered in blood, so…

Eren nodded, his mood seeming to instantly shift as he pulled his hands back and curled up a bit on himself. “… He… He was gonna do it again…” He started shaking as he tried not to think about what happened, his arms moving to begin to scratch until a weight landed on his bed and Blake came up to bite one of his hands to get him distracted and calmed down. I’m here human…

Spades came into the room not a moment later, smiling as she saw Eren petting Blake to calm himself down. Oh thank god… He’s alright… She let out a sigh of relief, going to wrap her arms around Lathe. [I’m here, I was getting Blake… Sorry, I just got out of work a bit ago.] She kissed
his cheek, a soft smile on her face.

Spades. Lathe stood, smiling and pulling her close, gently nipping her neck as they embraced. *Mine.* He stepped back from her after a moment, looking over to Hannes. <“Hannes, this is my fiancée Spades. And Spades, this is Hannes.”> He kinda got swept up into all of this crayness. *...eh, he agreed to come. Welcome to America.*

Spades turned fully to him and smiled softly. <“It’s nice to finally meet you in person, there’s a lot that you’ll probably be asking the two of us in the next few days… So don’t hesitate to ask us.”> She held her hand out for him to shake and instead was pulled into a warm embrace. *... Okay… This is a thing that is happening…*

You people are wonderful. Hannes pulled her close, happy that he could actually be here and see Eren more often now. <“Thank you for giving me this chance, it means a lot to me.”>

Spades smiled as she returned the hug, moving to pull Eren into it as well. <“Anything for our wonderful son.”> *He’s been through so much, even today… But it should all be in the past behind him.* When Hannes and Eren finally let go of her, she moved back over to Lathe. [Scotty said Eren broke half the guy’s ribs and dislocated both of his shoulders.] *He tried to flip him, multiple times it appears.*

Lathe just stared at her for a second, soon nodding in approval. [...Sweet. He did a real number on him.] Lathe tugged her down to sit in the chair next to him, scooting his own over so he could wrap his arms around her middle, resting his head on her shoulder tiredly. [Eren’s got an internal temperature that’s at 124 degrees Fahrenheit right now… but all his vitals are okay and he’s healing well.] Lathe nodded to the screen showing his pulse and other figures. [...people normally die past 105 degrees.] *It's really weird. And scary. And cool.*

Spades looked over to Eren’s monitors seeing the red 124 number flashing as if trying to warn them of something. [Is that why his body’s steaming?] She watched the red number flash down to 123 and smiled softly. *He’s getting there… That’s good.*

Scotty came into the room not a minute later with two clearly chilled IV bags. “Alright, Kid, time for the liquid coolant.” He set up the IV’s on both of his arms, squeezing the bags a few times to get the liquid to start running into Eren’s system. *This’ll help…* He looked up to the monitor, letting out a sigh of relief as it dropped down to 120 after a minute or so. “As soon as your core temperature is back down to normal, you can go home.”

Eren nodded, looking over to Hannes to start up their conversation again. <“Vatri, can we make dinner together tonight? And then sing? It’s Friday.”> *I haven’t sung with you in awhile.*

Hannes’ smile seemed to grow impossibly wider. <“Of course we can, but you need to get better first before we do anything else, alright?”> Hannes chuckled as Eren nodded with a sparkle in his eyes. *He’ll be okay… He’s a fighter.*

...*hmm?* Lathe watched their conversation, still nestled into Spades’ shoulder, shrugging a bit to himself and letting his eyes slide shut. *They probably have a bunch of customs and stuff we don’t know about. To be expected, really… I need a nap… wait. …Eren hasn’t sung in months. At least, nothing I’ve heard or that he’s recorded, really. …he’s still getting there. Thank god.*

That’s wonderful to hear…. *He hasn’t sung in so long.* Spades gently ran a hand through his hair, coaxing him to sleep. *You get to sleep, I heard Dave didn’t take to well to whatever you had to do to Eren.* She kissed his forehead, being gentle as they waited for a few more hours, Eren’s body temperature finally back down to normal. Spades nudged Lathe awake as Scotty was taking Eren’s
IVs out of his arms and giving him scrubs to go change into since his clothes were filled with blood and thrown out.

Lathe made an annoyed sound as Spades tried to wake him up, trying to nestle further into her shoulder and go back to sleep. He made a louder sound of protest as she slid out from under him, weakly and sleepily glaring at her before standing. He looked to the screen, seeing normal reading and smiling faintly, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. *As soon as he’s changed, we can get going.* Eren soon was changed, all of them bidding Scotty farewell before they could go to the front and have Eren discharged.

Eren had changed into a bit oversized scrubs and a pair of spare sneakers. Once Lathe was done with the paperwork, they all piled into Spades’ truck, and made the short drive home. *“Vatri have you seen Charlie yet? He’s really pretty and he looks just like the Charlie I had before I came here!”* > *He’s so beautiful… and Luna is definitely carrying his progeny… I can tell by the way he acts around her now.*

Hannes chuckled, thinking about the conversation he had with Lathe over the phone. *“I heard that you called him Charlie… but did you know that your first Charlie is actually your horse’s father? They look almost identical, it was amazing that you happened to get him. And I’m glad you’re the one who got him.”*

Lathe smiled as Eren made a happy sound and talked with Hannes, though he made sure he changed from the scrubs before letting them take advantage of the full fridge of ingredients and make dinner. His eyes were wide when they were called to the table, seeing so many different dishes ready for them, none of which he recognised.

...wow. <“Oh my gosh, this all looks amazing.”> ...it looks so good, *I'm not even going to classify it as going overboard. Because I approve.* Lathe sat down next to Hannes, an impressed Spades still opposite him and Eren looking over the table with pride. He had no idea where to begin. *...there’s soup, rolls, some kind of sauerkraut I think… and that might be schnitzel.* Lathe took some of everything as the dishes were passed around the table, his eyes bright as he tried the schnitzel and the sauerkraut. *“Eren, Hannes, this is really good! Thank you for cooking.”*

Eren beamed, taking his own plate and filling it along with a bowl of soup. *“I haven’t made those rolls in forever… I’m sorry if they’re not the best.”* > He sat down, waiting for everyone else to eat before he started picking at his own food. *I haven’t had this food since.... Since... Eren tried to stop his train of thought, hearing Blake’s nails click in a hurried rush against the floor to get to him. No Blake... It’s okay… I’ll be fine.*

Hannes patted him on the back. *“They’ll be fine Eren, you always made wonderful Brotchen.”* > *You really did, and Yahweh have I missed this boy in the kitchen with me.*

Spades picked up the roll that was on her plate, tearing off a piece and popping the fluffy roll into her mouth, smiling. *“Eren, the Brotchen are great! You did a very good job.”* > Spades smiled to him warmly, chuckling quietly as Lathe nodded enthusiastically from across the table, beginning to look like a five-year-old on Christmas morning. *Hannes really did teach you well.*

Eren smiled softly, petting Blake from under the table and eating the rest of his plate. *Dinner was relatively quiet… but I can see why though. Mom and Dad don’t really know Vatri… Eren seemed to be absent minded as he started putting things into containers and into the fridge after labeling and dating them. He was working next on the dishes, barely recognizing the shake in his hands, and was in his own world when Blake started to whine and paw at his pant leg in vain, trying to get his attention.*

Hannes watched Blake with a confused stare. *What is that dog doing? Is it trying to get his
attention? Why is Eren ignoring it? Does it want food? Did it not get fed? His brow furrowed but he thought nothing of it.

Spades stood to help Eren, her brow furrowed as she saw Eren ignoring a concerned Blake, Lathe tapping Hannes’ arm and explaining quietly what a service dog did. She went to the sink and gently took the plate from Eren’s shaking hands, drying his hands and holding them reassuringly, her voice quiet. <“Eren, you're shaking. Is everything okay?”> Talk to me. Eren didn't even seem to acknowledge she existed, and she shook him by the shoulders a bit, getting him to snap out of it and finally look at her. <“Eren, Hon, you're shaking. Talk to me.”>

Eren gasped a bit as he was shook. What... What happened? I’m... I’m not in the warehouse anymore... I’m home.... I’m not there... Eren struggled to swallow the large lump in his throat. <“It was gonna... He was gonna....”> Eren didn’t realize that he had started to cry until his throat tried to release a choked sob. He began crying all over again, starting to think about how that last man had gotten him off of Charlie with a gun forced to his head… I struggled… Why did I struggle? He never got the gun back… He didn't care. He was gonna have his way with me… Eren started to sob harder, sinking down to the floor where Blake could reach him and lick at his face.

Hannes listened to Lathe, starting to understand what Blake was there for and trying to understand what was happening to Eren. He turned his head to Eren, listening to him cry. <“What’s he talking about? What was gonna happen to him?”> Why is Eren crying? Did he injure himself?

<“The man who kidnapped him was one of the men who had.. used him in the past. He was afraid he was gonna do it again.”> Lathe watched with sad eyes as Spades sat on the floor with Eren, cradling him and murmuring in his ear. He rested a hand on Hannes’ arm when he made a move as if to stand, looking to him. <“Hannes, Eren has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. There's a lot you don't know about it that you should.”> Lathe began to describe what PTSD was to Hannes, trying to explain how he had it as best he could to him and what he was going through as he cried in Spades’ lap, petting Blake and trying to control his tears. His voice was soft as Eren’s crying slowed to sniffs, petting Blake who still lapped at his cheek. <“...it’s really hard for him, because the memories are so clear… they just try to drown you, and it’s hard to not get caught in the past… but it’s not as bad as it was before. He’s been getting better, learning to put it behind him for good. It’s slow, but it’s real progress.”> He’s getting there. Lathe gave Eren a small, warm smile when he and Spades stood, getting up and moving next to them, a hand on his arm. <“Today’s been a long day. How about we get you upstairs to sleep?”> You look like you need the rest.

Eren nodded, his sobs having been subsided for now. <“Vatri… We need to sing…”> his voice a bit rough, but he cleared it soon enough, using the arms offered to him to help get him on his shaky feet.

Hannes nodded, coming to help support Eren. <“I know, let's go to your room, we can do it there… Yahweh has no preference, as long as it is done.”> Hannes helped Eren get to the stairs, Blake following quickly behind them, looking back and forth with confusion between Lathe and Hannes. I haven’t sung with you in awhile...

It’s a thing. Okay. Lathe let Eren go, turning to the dishes and waiting until they were out of earshot before looking to Spades. “So what does ‘Vatri’ mean anyway?” Eren’s been using it to refer to Hannes all day.

Spades shifted her weight as she dried the dishes Lathe handed her, looking to him. “...it means ‘Daddy.’” Eren would've called Hannes that all the time as a kid.

…… Lathe was quiet after she spoke, his expression faltering a bit. …of course it does.
Eren had finally managed the stairs with Hannes, showing him the guest room and then his own room where they moved to get Eren in his pajamas and then into bed. Hannes kneeling by the side of his bed. <“Ready Vatri?”>

Hannes nodded, letting Eren start the first few notes before he started to sing right along with him.

“Shamor vezachor bedibur ehad
hishmi’anu el hameyuchad
hashem echad ush’mo ehad
leshem uletif’eret velitehilah

Lechah dodi, likrat kalah
penei shabat nekabelah

Hitoreri, hitoreri,
ki ba orech, kumi uri,
uri, uri, shir daberi,
kevod hashem alaich nig’lah.

Lechah dodi, likrat kalah
penei shabat nekabelah

Boi beshalom ateret ba’alah,
gam besimchah uvetzahalah
toch emunei am segulah,
boi kalah, boi, kalah;
toch emunei am segulah,
boi kalah, shabat malkah.

Lechah dodi, likrat kalah
penei shabat nekabelah

Lechah dodi, likrat kalah
penei shabat nekabelah

Lechah dodi, likrat kalah
penei shabat nekabelah

Lathe was quiet as he heard the singing from upstairs, not really saying anything to Spades even as they finished with the dishes, meandering over to the couch and making a nest of blankets, not even turning on the TV. He simply stared at the floor, not really acknowledging that Spades came over to sit next to him.

...oh my. Spades sat down next to him, not really knowing what to do. She spoke quietly after a moment, trying to get Lathe to respond. “I didn't know Hannes was Jewish.” *Did you know anything about that?*

Lathe simply shrugged, not even looking up. He simply burrowed further into the quilts around him, his eyes melancholy.

Spades sighed quietly. “Alright, why don’t we go upstairs and get some rest? It’s been a long day, even without the hospital visit… I’m sorry Babe, but Eren hasn’t seen Hannes in forever, and I feel like he’s opening up a bit more with him around.” She patted his shoulder, moving to get up from the couch, giving him an arm to lean on.

Lathe slowly nodded, standing and holding onto her arm as they padded upstairs, on autopilot as he
got changed and slipped into bed, thankful that Spades understood somewhat and pulled the quilt up to their chins, wrapping her arms around him from behind. He leaned back into her warmth, his mind still running in circles as he drifted into a black sleep. *of course it does.

Lathe slept fitfully until three AM, jolting awake as Blake pawed at his chest, whining. *what.* He completely forgot about Hannes for the moment, hopping out of bed and following Blake quickly down the hall, his eyes wide as he heard a scream of terror.... *we didn't give Eren his PTSD medicine.* **Fuck.** Lathe slid to a stop in front of Eren’s door, quickly crossing the room and crawling onto the bed as Eren thrashed, gathering him and his blanket into his arms and trying to get him to wake up, running a hand through his hair as he spoke calmly. <“Eren, wake up, it’s just a nightmare. Please Honey, it’s okay, I’m right here, Dad’s right here.”> *It's okay.*

Eren’s eyes snapped open, his body covered in a cold sweat from the nightmare. His breathing was shaky as his head snapped around the room, trying to figure out where he was. “He… He had a gun… He was gonna kill me after…. For putting everyone in jail… He was gonna rape me again… He tried to pull my clothes off… H-He touched me…” Eren started sobbing as he slowly and jerkily turned into Lathe’s arms, his whole body shaking from the ordeal. *I don’t want it to happen again.*

Hannes was at Eren’s door a few moments later, watching Eren cry and curl up to Lathe. <“Is everything alright?”> His voice rough from having just woken up and worry clearly written across his features. *I don’t like that you’re screaming from nightmare… I haven’t seen you this terrified in… In a long time.*

Lathe looked up, his expression neutral as he nodded to him. <“He’ll be okay, he just needs a bit to calm down…”> Lathe’s expression immediately softened when he turned back to Eren, cradling him close to his chest, murmuring softly. “It’s okay Eren, he didn't get very far, we stopped him before anything too awful happened… all of the pain is over, we found everyone. It's all done with, and you won't ever have to worry about that happening ever again. You're okay. I've got you.” *You're gonna be alright.*

Hannes nodded, watching Eren sob a bit more before deeming that Lathe would be able to calm him down without intervention and so went back to sleep. *He'll be okay… He’s a strong kid… And has an unbeatable will.*

Eren shook his head, tears still running down his cheeks. “He tried to choke me… He held me down… And I couldn’t get him out of my mouth… He… He kept doing it and I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t knock him off, or get it out… It was disgusting… I was terrified….” Eren’s voice was broken as he told Lathe what exactly had gone down after he was brought to the warehouse. *I was so scared… I couldn’t knock him off… And he kept thrusting even further in… Even when I couldn’t breathe.*

*things escalated.* Lathe threaded his fingers through his long locks, trying to calm him and murmuring. “Eren… I'm so sorry you had to go through that… we tried to get there as quickly as I could when we thought you'd been taken… Eren Hon, I'm so sorry… but it's okay now. That's the end of it. It really is.” Lathe wished he had some wood to knock on, reaching behind him to lightly rap his knuckles on the wood bed frame. *I really fucking hope so.*

Eren nodded, continuing to sob, his grip weak on Lathe’s shirt. “I don’t wanna… I don’t wanna leave…” His voice was in tatters as he struggled to pull himself together. *I don’t wanna leave… You'll always hold me… Always… I don’t wanna be taken from here…*

Lathe spoke softly into his ear, tracing patterns over his back and coaxing him to just let it out. “You don't have to leave… Eren, you can stay for as long as you want. You don't have to go. I'm
Eren’s cries continued for a long while. “I... I don’t wanna be different anymore... I don’t wanna be some freak that can’t be hurt... I don’t wanna be an abnormality anymore... I don’t wanna be made fun of... I... I... I don’t wanna be a plaything anymore.” Eren cried even more as he let out every insecurity he held within him, finally starting to really open up to Lathe. *I wanna be normal again... I wanna be someone who can live through the day without fear of the past crawling up behind me.*

... *you're really talking to me.* “You're not going to be anymore. With all of them put away, you don't have anyone to be scared of. You won't have to look over your shoulder in fear anymore, and you won't be used like that ever again. You'll learn to be okay again.” *You will. It'll take time. But you will.*

“Why did it have to be *me*?” Eren cried his fists balling up into his shirt. “What's so *wrong* with me that Grisha had to inject me with that fucking serum!” Eren shouted. “Why do I have to do this!? Why does my body hurt so much? Why does my nose bleed a lot... I don’t want this *anymore* ...” *I don’t want to be a science project anymore...*

Lathe let Eren shout in anger, only able to think of how *lucky* he was to have that serum in his system now, but how horrible it was that it made him withstand so much unforgivable abuse. “Eren... all I can say is that out of all of what he did to you, that serum has got to be the best thing. It's horrible he used it so you could live through everything he did to you... but that serum is why you walked up the stairs today. That serum is an incredible thing, and I know it makes the pain seem even worse, but it grew back a kidney and resolidified your ribs and sewed up your cuts and mended your bones and it just might be the key to helping people all over the world whose bodies break before their time mend and *live.* We can extend human life by years with this, potentially. I'm just... it’s something wonderful that came out of all the shit you went through... he was a horrible and inhuman being, Eren, but he was brilliant. And he just gave us something to help stop suffering.” *...how ironic.*

Eren shook his head. “Why am I the only one? Why couldn’t he pick someone else from the hospital he worked at? Why did he have to do it to me? Am I so different?” *I don’t wanna be different... I want to be normal again, I don’t want people to look at me like I’m some sort of freak.* “Dave... He didn’t see my busted hand... They...” He sniffled as he thought about what the man did to him, curling up to Lathe more. “They were broken and bent in so many directions.... They healed before you guys got there... But he was... He was ready to take something out of me too... He wanted whatever was in my system... They know... They know that Grisha put something in me...... I don’t wanna be an experiment...” *I don’t wanna be cut open again.*

Lathe held him against his chest, shifting to lay down with him on top of him, still playing with his hair as they talked. “...You were his son. Grisha blamed you for Carla’s death... and you were always around. ...A ready target. But Eren, we’ve already found the serum from a syringe and isolated it. It's being duplicated, and we already have reports and evidence of its effects. Scotty had filmed your arms when you had cut, of your skin stitching itself back together... and there are bits of where Scotty is removing the metal from your legs, and the flesh is steaming up, but the steam is fanned away so the camera catches the rapidly growing flesh and bone and skin. I signed the paperwork for the videos when we were getting you discharged. It's going on the pile of evidence that this stuff *needs* to be created en masse and put out for the benefit of the world. They're going to start testing on animals later this year, ones with mental or physical abnormalities, see what happens. And if good things happen... who knows how long the people who receive the drugs will go on to live. ...they're also going to test it on animals that have tumours. ...if this turns out to be.
able to cure something as serious as that… Eren, it doesn't reverse all the shit you'd gone through… but…” It would make it more worth it. “It could help so many people. That's what we're hoping.”

Eren nodded and sniffled. “Who’s making it? Are they gonna need to run more tests on me?” Am I gonna be a Guinea pig again?

Lathe shook his head. “They're not going to need more tests from you- they'd just need formal medical reports if you do get injured again, detailing what all happens. But you remember Hannah? Who’s boarding her horse here? She’s working with the serum, reproducing it so that it can be used for testing. She’s the one in charge of all of that work. Casper, Scotty and I are all working on a formal medical journal on the serum and its effects. We’re very serious about all of this. It could do so much good.” It really could… I could only imagine… a world without disease…

Eren nodded. “What if… What if people can’t handle it? What if their bodies give out?” Eren looked a little horrified at his own words, sniffing as he clung to Lathe’s middle. “What am I gonna do? What happens if… If I get hurt again… And the serum doesn’t do anything? What if it never works again?” Eren started to panic as more and more what if’s gathered in his mind, Blake coming to paw at the both of them. I don’t wanna die… But what happens if I cut my finger… And it overreacts? And heats my whole body up? What happens if I die? What happens then?

Lathe gently shook Eren by the shoulders, trying to bring him back to reality. “Eren, that's what clinical trials are for. It could be years before we have enough data to determine if the serum is safe enough for the general public. And if the serum stops working, or works the way it isn't supposed to… then there's normal medical help for you. Either way, we’ll take good care of you, no matter what happens.” He pressed a kiss to his temple, trying to calm him. You'll always be well taken care of. I'll make damn sure of it.

Eren swallowed hard before nodding again, moving to nestle his head into Lathe’s chest, holding onto him still. “Don’t leave… Please.” I don't want you to go.

Lathe shook his head, adjusting the blanket so it better covered them, his voice quiet. “I won't.” He pressed a kiss to the top of his head, one reassuring hand on his back and his other carding gently through his hair, slowly lulling Eren to sleep, letting himself drift after Eren's breath had evened for quite some time. I'm not going anywhere.

Eren slept for the rest of three hours, waking up with a start as Blake pawed at his chest. He realized quickly where he was before releasing Lathe silently from his grasp and without disturbing him. He got dressed and ushered Blake out as he went out into the silent house. I need to relax, I'm fine… I'm fine… It's not gonna happen again…

He took a deep breath, steeling himself as he went outside, getting Charlie tacked up and riding him towards where he had gotten pulled off, finding the lump in the snow in a very recognizable shape.

It's the gun… His body froze as memories of yesterday's events started to flood through his mind. I won’t be able to get away from them forever… They'll meet me eventually. Eren struggled to swallow the building lump in his throat, his hands beginning to shake as he dropped down off of Charlie with a big dust cloud of snow surrounding him before being carried off by the wind. It's still here.. It's really here… He moved to pick it up, though what caught him by surprise was Blake taking the gun and looking at him for only an instant before bolting back into the house with it, faster than Eren could grab for his collar or the gun.

No human! You can’t have it! I’ve seen that look in your eyes before! No! I need to give this to big human! Blake ran through the doggie door, his paws thundering up the stairs, his ears perked, looking for Lathe. Where did big human go? Did he not go back to sleep with other big human?
Lathe stirred a bit as Eren slid off of him, though he didn't wake up, shifting a bit and going back to his sleep. His eyes cracked open, however, as he heard Blake making a racket coming up the stairs and opening the door, sitting up as he trotted in with something snowy in his mouth. ...huh...? His eyes went impossibly wide as Blake looked up to him with a gun in his jaws, slowly moving to take the gun from him and turning the safety on, holding it carefully to not cover it in prints. I need to show Spades. Where the fuck did you get this? ...the guy must've dropped it in the snow. Well shit. Wait...where's Eren. Lathe’s question was answered as Eren suddenly appeared in the doorway, Lathe standing from the bed and holding up a hand. “Eren, it's okay. Is this the gun the man used?” Otherwise... shit.

Eren looked down and nodded, shuffling his feet. Are you gonna be mad at me again? He backed away a little bit, turning to walk back down the stairs to go back outside. I don't want him to be mad at me... What if... What if he gets rid of me because of this? Because he doesn't want to deal with this shit... Eren’s head was down as he made his way back outside, tryiing not to slam the backdoor. He felt the hot sting of tears already starting to bubble. Oh my god... Why am I crying?

Lathe’s eyes were wide as Eren shuffled away, looking miserable. Crap. Lathe walked out after him, looking to the gun in his hand and marching back to his bedroom, shaking Spades’ shoulder and setting the pistol on the dresser in a safe direction. “Spades, this is the gun the guy used to kidnap Eren. He found it outside in the snow. Guard it for me kay thanks.” Lathe spoke quickly enough before going back downstairs, following Eren and hearing the back door shut loudly, slipping on his boots before following Eren outside, who had his face buried in his hands. “Eren, Honey, come back inside, please. It's cold.” Lathe gently took Eren’s arm to lead him back, though he picked him up when he saw he didn't have any shoes on. He let him curl into his chest as he got them back inside, setting him on the couch and pulling blankets up around him before going to get his medicine from upstairs, coming back with his pills and a glass of water. “Eren, these will make you feel better. Take them, please.” Lathe offered him the both of them in turn. You need your meds.

Eren took the pills, swallowing them without hesitation before he drank the whole glass. He moved to curl up into a ball under the blanket, as if trying to hide. “Dad... Why can't I stop crying?” He sniffled, trying to hide away still. This is embarrassing... I can't stop...

Lathe sat down next to him, giving him a bit of space and answering. “You didn't have your meds last night. You were bound to be a bit more emotional than usual. It'll pass. Promise.” Lathe gently patted his shoulder, not sure if Eren wanted closeness or space. It could be either with you... and I don’t wanna overstep anything because then you won't tell me that I am, but you'll ask if I'm not doing enough to help calm you... I dunno...

Eren nodded, staying curled up and hidden under his blanket, feeling a bit more security. “Can... Can I stay here... Please...?” I don't wanna get kicked out... Even though you said you didn’t want me to leave... “I don’t wanna get kicked out...” I don’t wanna be abandoned as some worthless piece of trash...

Fuck it. Lathe moved to climb into the nest with Eren, sharing the quilts and pulling him close, his nose buried in his hair. “Eren, I would never kick you out. I love having you around- Levi too. You both are welcome here for as long as you could possibly want. You're more than welcome.” Stay. Please.

Eren hiccuped, nodding as he turned to curl up into Lathe’s chest, his hands still shaking a bit as he held onto his tank top. I don’t want you to leave... I don’t want anyone to leave anymore... I don’t want... Well... What I don’t want. That’s really a problem isn’t it? What I don’t want to happen always happens... Maybe I should... No. I can’t give up, I promised Dad... And Vatri would be
upset too.

Lathe hugged Eren tightly to his chest, his hand running soothingly over his side as he listened to Eren speaking freely. "Eren, I'm not going anywhere. I can promise you that. I'm not leaving on my own accord. And Eren, please… don't give up. Hannes and I want you to keep trying to get better… we want you to be okay. And sure, nobody ever gets what they want all the time… but things are going to start going in your favour, I just know it. Have a little faith. It'll be okay.”

Really.

... Faith... Something I never believed in... Eren only let out a soft sigh before hiding his swollen, tear-stained face away from the rest of the world, though his body jumped when a solid knock at the front door freaked him out. Who... Who's here?

Spades came down the steps, in shorts and one of Lathe’s shirts which hung off of a shoulder. “Thanks for coming, Dave, I know it’s early, but it’s evidence.” She led him upstairs to get the gun into an evidence bag. *I really want to lock them all up forever... Then Eren will be able to move on.*

Dave grunted and pulled on latex gloves, carefully handling the gun. However, when he opened the magazine to inspect the cartridge his brow furrowed. “There are three rounds missing... Any idea where they would be?” *Generally criminals go around with loaded guns until they shoot.*

Lathe calmed Eren down as he saw who was at the door, smirking a bit as he noted Spades wearing one of his shirts. *...I like them better on her.* Lathe simply held onto Eren, leaning back with him in his lap, letting his eyes fall shut, resting with him there. His eyes opened as he heard Spades thunder down the stairs, pulling the blanket off of him and Eren and searching for something on Eren’s body. “Whoa whoa Spades, what’re you doing?” Lathe asked her, surprised, his first instinct to pull the quilt back around a nervous-looking Eren and stop Spades. *What're you trying to find?*

Spades continued to search Eren’s arms and legs, completely removing him from the quilt and lifting up his shirt. “Where did you shoot yourself Eren?” Spades was frantic trying to find the wounds, carefully looking for healing skin. *He had to have done it today... He didn’t have any bullets yesterday in his body.* She was continually looking over him, no matter how hard Eren tried to push her away he was no match.

... what. Lathe looked between Spades and Eren for a split second, his gaze finally settling... on Spades. *What.* “Spades, what the heck? Calm down, you're freaking him out.” Lathe stood with the quilt on his shoulders still, his hands catching hers and moving them from their hold on Eren’s shirt, letting go to wrap him back up in the warm blanket. His hold was gentle, trying to ease Eren’s obvious nerves as he spoke to Spades, his tone cool. “What in the world makes you think he did that?” *Do you have, I dunno, evidence he did?*

“Lathe, listen to me, there are three rounds missing from that gun, and there were no bullets in his body yesterday! If he found the gun, then the next logical thing to think is that Eren shot himself since it’s got missing ammunition!” Spades’ voice grew as she turned to Eren to get him out of the blanket again. *I need to find where you shot yourself! We can't have you doing this all the time!*

Lathe’s gaze hardened as she went to again inspect Eren for bullet holes, discrepancies in her argument glaring at him. He immediately shifted so Eren was wrapped in the blanket himself, Lathe putting himself between Eren and Spades, holding her gaze. “Spades, excuse me for saying so, but there’s a bit of a problem with your logic there.” Lathe didn’t know what possessed him to, only knowing his tone had become cold. “First of all, the walls in this house are not soundproof. If the gun was shot, because it obviously didn't have a silencer on it, we easily would have heard it,
especially if it was fired multiple times. That being said, the gun would then have to have been shot yesterday, when it was in the possession of the maniac who kidnapped Eren. Secondly, the gun can do this amazing thing—be fired at the ground or sky to scare people, or even better miss. Neither of us were home yesterday when he was kidnapped to hear anything. Thirdly, Eren wouldn’t’ve had enough time to even think about shooting himself because Blake was the one who brought the gun to me in his jaws and I can only imagine he picked it up the second he recognised it. And fourth: If Eren really did shoot himself, then the serum would kick in to heal his wounds. And the side effect that never fails to show when that happens? His nose bleeds. And Spades, his nose isn’t bleeding. And I hate how you look over any other possibility and automatically assume that Eren must’ve tried to off himself again even when he’s been doing so much better and he’s been showing his true personality so much. He knew there was a gun, went to find it, found it, and Blake took it the second he got the chance and gave it to me. That’s when I gave it to you. There’s nothing. Else.” Lathe’s expression didn’t falter, smouldering. “That’s some faith you have in him.”

Good fucking job.

Spades watched him, her eyebrow twitching in anger, her arms crossed against her chest, not stepping down from this argument. “Eren never told us that he shot at him, or tried to scare him! And you know what? I’m fucking scared. I’m scared he’s gonna try it again! He’s already tried three times! For all I know he could still be thinking about the fourth chance that he gets!” She shouted back at him her voice rising even more. “You’re right I have great faith in him. Blake was the one to bring the gun back! I can only imagine that Eren had either shot himself with the three rounds or that he was gonna shoot again! And who knows? Maybe we were too deep in sleep to hear the damn thing!” Her gaze was hard as she brought up a basic fact. Blake brought it back… Not Eren… He was gonna do it again….

Hannes cleared his throat, trying to get their attention as they hadn’t seen Eren move behind him to hide in fear. <“I’m sorry to bother your little disagreement… But you’re scaring Eren.”> He could feel Eren’s hands shaking into the back of his shirt as he hid from the two of them.

Lathe looked over from Spades, the anger immediately disappearing from his expression, slowly stepping over to Hannes and Eren. <“Sorry about that- Eren, I’m sorry, I got mad… please, don’t be scared. We’re not mad at you. It’s okay. …Is it okay if we just talk for a bit?”> We need to know exactly what happened… you were there, so you would know.

Eren looked down, shuffling his feet, unable to lift his head to meet Lathe’s eyes. <“Y-Yeah…”> His voice was timid and he didn’t seem like he was going to move away from Hannes’ protection anytime soon. They don’t believe me… Well, at least Mom doesn’t believe me… But she’s not wrong… The bullets weren’t in at the hospital…

Lathe sighed quietly as Eren made no real move to unlatch from Hannes, feeling a bit guilty for letting… whatever the hell emotion it was get away from him. He looked to Hannes, quietly asking. <“Hannes, he’s scared of Spades and I right now… can you sit with him for this please? You should hear what happened too, anyway.”> You should know.

Hannes thought about it for a second, looking behind him to see Eren shaking before he nodded, turning to pick Eren up and sit down with him on the couch. Well, you’ll want the blanket… Cause you’re cold, and I know you never liked the cold weather back at home. He reached for the blanket in the middle of the couch to wrap Eren in beside him only Eren shifted instantly into his lap. Well… That’ll work I guess.

Eren kept his head down, not meeting anyone’s gaze. He followed Hannes as he was led to the couch, feeling Hannes shift to grab something. I don’t want to be left alone… He crawled up into Hannes’ lap, curling into his chest, his eyes still focused down at his own feet. They’re gonna ask
Spades watched Eren crawl into Hannes’ lap, looking over to Lathe to see his reaction. How are you gonna start this? You certainly believe that he wasn’t trying to do anything with the gun, even when Blake was the one who brought it back to you. She kept her arms folded though the anger had for now disappeared from her demeanor.

Lathe looked over to her, his expression apologetic and reached a careful hand to her arm and bring her with him to sit on the couch, giving Eren two feet of space. He nodded to her arms, defensive and a bit nervous as he quickly signed to her. {Body language.} I don't want him to think either of us are mad at him… Lathe looked back to Eren when she uncrossed her arms, speaking quietly, his tone soft. <“Eren… what was the first thing that happened when the man showed up?”> Did anything happen before he tried to get you off Charlie?

Eren looked over to where their hands were, still not looking up to anyone's face. <“He came looking for you. He asked if I knew where you were… And he got mad, and he pulled the gun out.”> … And he shot me…

<“…Did he end up using the gun?”>

Eren nodded, slowly. <“He shot me.”> That was all Eren said at the moment, looking down at his own hands as he was starting to remember what happened, yet Blake wasn’t tipped off at it, he was sniffing at his feet, as if he could smell something.

Lathe’s eyes widened, his voice still soft, though worried. <“…how many? And there weren’t any bullets in your body while you were at the hospital… were they clean through shots, or did something else happen?”>

Eren was silent for a bit. < “Three… He shot me in the forehead… The abdomen… And my throat…”> and I honestly have no idea what happened to them… All I know is that they were gone… And they didn’t go all the way through… I was choking on my own blood… But it wasn’t going anywhere… I had to stop struggling after that. He was silent for a bit before speaking up. <“I thought about it… Again, taking my own life… But then I realized he shot me…… And it did nothing… I barely bled at all, and I’m forced to wonder at this point if I could even try anymore? Would it ever be successful? He shot me in the gut, I struggled, he shot me in the head, I struggled… Then he shot me in the neck and I had to stop… I was choking on blood, but I think it healed before blood got anywhere…”>

<“Your body could have forced the bullets out… we do that with foreign objects… and honestly, at this point… probably not.”> Lathe said the last part quietly. <“I hope you never seriously try anything like that again… and not just because you don't think it'll work… but because you'd rather live instead.”> Lathe fell silent, looking at his hands in his lap. <“So that’s why he was able to drag you off of Charlie… how did he get you to the warehouse?”>

Eren reached a hand up to run at his neck. <“While I was struggling to breathe… He tied up my hands and dragged me to his car… And then threw me in the trunk… We got to the warehouse and he threw me to the ground and tried to choke me with his dick… And then… He untied me so that he could get my clothes off… And that’s when I tried to fight back…”> Eren was still subconsciously rubbing at his neck as he was talking, his eyes glazed over a bit. It all happened so fast…

<“…You really fought like hell. I'm really proud of you for that. After he was down, what did you do?”> I know you ended up calling people.. but did anything else notable happen?
Eren looked down at his hands. <“I called Mom… Cause I was scared… I didn’t know what to do… And...and-and then I called Scotty, cause my leg was broken… It wasn’t healing for the longest time… I was really scared…”> Eren whimpered as he curled up to Hannes a bit more, feeling his hand run through his hair.

Spades’ face paled a little at the memory. *He was screaming into the phone... As soon as I answered. It was terrifying, I didn’t know what to do except send Dave to go get him help until the ambulance came. He told me he needed to call Scotty, cause he wasn’t healing... He was terrified, and I was stuck in the office.* Spades tried not to cry as the feeling of helplessness washed over her once again, moving to get closer to Lathe. *It felt like I couldn’t do anything to help him... I was scared for him. ....... Shit, I shouldn’t’ve doubted him.*

Lathe sensed Spades’ distress, timidly wrapping his arm around her middle and holding her close to him, grateful that she didn’t move away from him as he did. His thumb ran over her side as he spoke quietly. <“Hannes and I came home from the airport and went looking for you… when we saw Charlie out back without you on him, I panicked and went to find you. You didn't answer when I yelled for you, and I climbed on the wood pile to see if I could see anything… I saw a big patch where it looked like there was a bit of a scuffle and something got dragged away… I immediately pinged your phone and drove with Hannes on the ATV to find you… Dave was already there, obviously. You know the rest...Eren, I'm really sorry… we’re both still so worried about you… it can get away from us... we’re scared, I guess is the way to put it. We just really want you to get better. We’re sorry for yelling.”> Lathe reached out his other arm to him, his palm up, asking for forgiveness.

Eren looked over to the hand that was presented to him, reaching his own timidly to run down his fingers. <“I’m sorry…”> Eren moved out of Hannes’ lap, moving to curl up to the two of them. “I don’t know where the bullets went.” Eren curled up to the two of them, not minding that he barely fit in either of their laps.

Blake whined and pawed at Eren’s feet, smelling the small shells that he had stepped on and not realized stuck to his bare feet when he went outside. *Does that hurt human?*

Spades’ brow furrowed as she looked to where Blake was pawing, gently taking Eren's still frozen feet and pulling a few small and crushed bullets from between his toes and under his arch. *Wait... These are? The same as the ones in the gun... Didn’t Eren say he got shot in the head? Shouldn’t he have died? “Lathe…” She showed the crushed bullets with worry clearly written across her face.*

Hannes watched Eren curl up to the two of them smiling softly. *He seems to have calmed back down again.*

Lathe looked to the bullets she was holding with surprise. <“...Eren came up to the room while Blake was bringing up the gun- he must've gone outside to get it and Blake followed. After I had the gun, Eren wandered back outside for some reason... he must've stepped on them and not realised it...Dave is gonna need those.”> *Yeah. Kinda important.* Lathe looked up to the staircase as he heard footsteps. “Speak of the devil- Dave, we’ve got the bullets that were shot. You probably want those.” He watched as he nodded, getting another small envelope and letting Spades drop them in, sealing it and writing on the front of the envelope. “Thanks…” Lathe didn’t know what else to say, his gaze falling from him and to the floor, overwhelmed with the new information, and suddenly very aware of Spades right next to him. His voice was quiet enough that only she could hear him, sounding nervous. <“U-Uhm… I'm sorry for yelling at you... I didn't mean to sound so cold... I just didn't like that you dismissed every other possibility... that maybe Eren didn't want to... I just got really protective... I'm sorry...”>
Spades smiled softly, rubbing her head against his shoulder, curling up to his side with Eren. <“It’s alright… You did the right thing… I just… Fear got the the better of me.”> She curled up, smiling softly as Eren stayed where he was, comfortable with the two of them around him. At least he’s not terrified of us anymore.

Eren tugged at Lathe’s tank top, his eyes a bit big, though an unrecognizable emotion filled them. “Can we have cinnamon rolls?” I’m getting hungry.

Lathe smiled warmly, nodding. “Of course we can. I’ll go make us all food.” Lathe pressed a kiss to his forehead, also nudging Spades a bit and pressing one to her cheek before shifting out from under Eren, standing and beginning to meander to the kitchen, stopping to look at Hannes. <“Are cinnamon rolls alright for breakfast? Well, actually, a better question. I didn’t know you were Jewish. Is there some specific way I’m supposed to be cooking things so you can eat? I don’t know all of the kosher laws, so…”> I don’t want to only make stuff you can’t eat.

Hannes shook his head, waving his hands a bit. <“Oh no, don’t worry about it, I am only Jewish at heart… I think the prayers are lovely… You don’t have to worry about any food, I only follow normal prayers and when they’ll be sung.”> I’m not really Jewish… I just like the prayers when we sing them...

Dave smiled as the tensions in the room seemed to fade. “Alright, I need to get back to the station, so I’ll be going now.” Dave collected everything he needed before heading for the door. They’ll be alright.

Lathe nodded, understanding. He waved to Dave as he left, speaking after a moment. <“In that case, what would you like- tea, coffee, juice? Something else?”>

<“Do you have orange juice by any chance?”> Hannes moved to get up to help with making breakfast. I can help.

Eren watched Lathe talk with Hannes and smiled, curling up into Spades with a blanket, trying to warm up his cold feet. They’re cold… Why are they cold again? Oh yeah… I forgot shoes...

Lathe nodded, letting him follow to the kitchen. <“Of course- it’s the same all the time for us all, though. I’m obsessed with coffee, Eren’s obsessed with tea, and Spades just drinks water.”> Lathe fished the orange juice jug and the cinnamon roll dough out from the fridge, pouring Hannes a glass before going to start the coffee maker and set the kettle on the stove. <“Could you turn the oven on please? 350 will do it.”> As long as you’re right here, you’re helping. …which I’m pretty sure you signed up for, so.

Hannes nodded, looking at the oven and starting it at 350. I can help out with food, I know Eren probably eats a lot. I wonder if we can go riding today?

Lathe got out a cookie sheet, he and Hannes setting the cinnamon roll dough on it before sliding it into the oven. It wasn’t long before he went to retrieve Eren and Spades, calling them to the kitchen for breakfast. He had set Eren’s mug and Spades’ glass at the table, handing them plates to let them pick which rolls they wanted. He sat next to Spades so Eren could be next to Hannes, sipping from his mug and munching quietly. Food.

Eren loaded his plate with cinnamon rolls, sitting down and looking a bit better than he did this morning, the pills starting to really take effect again. I need to call Levi today… Crap… I don’t know if Hannes would say something about that… He hasn’t seen Levi either… What if he doesn’t approve? Fuck… And we usually talk in German cause not a lot of people know it. Eren contemplated possible options as he ate. Does he even know that I’m gay?
Lathe noticed Eren seemed to be thinking hard about something, speaking after he finished his first cinnamon roll, joking lightly. <“I can hear you thinking from all the way over here. You don’t okay over there?”> ...now that I think of it, Hannes doesn’t know you’re kinda famous. ...should probably explain that later, show him stuff. Is that what’s on your mind? <“Y’know, you still kinda need to explain the whole ‘being famous’ thing. That’s something that needs doing.”> Lathe looked to Hannes, smiling. <“He could probably talk your ear off about all of that. It’s really remarkable.”> I’m really proud of him.

Eren choked a bit on the bite of cinnamon roll that he had just tried to swallow, struggling to cough but finally just reaching for his tea and drinking it down. His whole body shook as he coughed, finally regaining his composure. <“Dad.”> Eren whined as the subject was brought up. <“Vatri doesn’t need to know… I’m just a damn music rat.”> That’s all I’ll ever be… I can’t ever make music for myself... I always copy others. But I can only imagine what he would think about me if I told him I was gay… Yeah no, no thank you… He’s here, I get to see him… I can try and keep Levi under wraps…. Fuck, I still need to call him… Maybe he can deal with my call being a day late? I need to get back to riding with Charlie and doing jumps. Eren continued to eat, trying to drown out the conversation around him at the table.

Hannes sighed looking over to Eren as he looked away. He still thinks about what Grisha always yelled at him. <“How is he famous? I mean… I don’t see him going to school, so has he finished college yet and pursued a degree of some sort which got him famous?”> My guess would be that he followed a musical path in college, is he a pianist? He always loved the piano we got him… And I’m pretty sure that’s it right there. Hannes looked over to the grand piano sitting in the family room, waiting for a response from Lathe.

Lathe gave Eren a sympathetic look, before his gaze turned to Hannes, smiling. <“He’s far from being ‘just a music rat.’ He isn’t going to college, and didn't, so no, it’s not as if he got a degree and what he did with that is what made him famous. Eren has got a real golden throat- he can sing like nothing I’ve ever heard before. He had gone to a local concert where this man Nate Ruess was performing, and for one of the songs, which was a duet, he picked someone from the audience to sing it with him. And that person he picked just so happened to be Eren. The video of them singing went online, and people fell in love with him. They found the covers of songs he had put on the internet, and things just snowballed from there. He also started putting up videos of him playing the piano, and there were a few of him painting beautiful murals on the wall. Those were at the old house, and we don’t have any new ones around yet, so there are just the videos of those. But he put up a bunch of art and songs, some of which I wrote, and he ended up getting signed to a record label after his online popularity just exploded. He’s got two albums out right now, and honestly, he’s a way better singer and musician than I could ever hope to be. He’s met a lot of famous and important people, and… I’m really proud of him.”> It’s been wonderful.

Hannes nodded, understanding Eren’s gift of music. <“Carla tried to teach him everything she knew… She couldn’t often because of her illness, but that never seemed to get him down, and he’s got two albums out? Do you have them? I want to listen to them eventually.”> I would love to listen to them. He turned his head to see Eren still looking away from all of them and thinking hard. <“We’re not going to get him to talk anytime soon are we?”> I also remember that you were a stubborn little child that put up with a lot, and always tried to find the bright side of things.

Lathe shook his head. <“Nope. He’s off in LaLaLand. ...but she taught him extraordinarily well. He picked up every one of the instruments we brought back from the house like it was nothing. That’s her piano-”> Lathe turned and nodded to the instrument in the next room. <“-And the other instruments like the violin and stuff are downstairs. That reminds me…”> Lathe reached across the table and gently nudged Eren’s arm, speaking to him only when their eyes met. <“I’ve been writing more stuff… when I get the draft recordings done maybe you’d like to pick some to do? That’s still
a thing that needs to happen eventually.’” > *You need to keep up your musical endeavours to keep the label… that’s how this works.*

Eren looked back down again after he was finished speaking. “I’ll look at them…. But I’m not promising anything…” Eren mumbled before he went to go put his plate back and walk to the door, intending to go outside, barefoot and without a coat, again for the second time today. “I’m gonna go feed everyone… Oh… and um… Luna’s carrying…” He then turned and walked out the back to the barn, disappearing from all eyes as he entered. *She acted all finicky when I was grooming her… Especially her rear and her stomach… And Charlie was hella pissed at me for touching her too. Sure I get the protective one out of the stallions… fun.*

The last comment didn’t register with Lathe as he stood and went after Eren jumping quickly into his boots before going to catch him and bring him back inside. He just ended up picking him up and setting him back down on the mat. <“Eren, for God’s sake, if you’re gonna go outside at least bundle up so you don’t get hypothermia first.” > He chuckled a bit, helping Eren step into boots and getting a coat on him, ruffling his hair. <“We can’t have you catching cold. Now you can go.”> It finally clicked, Lathe’s expression changing, grinning. <“Luna’s carrying? Oh that’s great! We’ll have to have veterinarian come out to have a look at her soon, make sure everything’s going well. But okay, you go feed everyone. And be careful if Charlie gets protective, okay?”> Lathe smiled as Eren nodded, letting him go to the barn. Lathe came back to the table, clearing away dishes. <“If you’d really like, we can show you some of Eren’s artwork and musical pieces. Eren’s gonna be awhile feeding the animals; I get the feeling he just needs some time to think and clear his head.”>

Spades shooed the two of them out of the kitchen. “Go show him… I’ll take care of the dishes… and um… then we need to talk after you two are done… okay?” She asked, a soft blush tinting her cheeks as she thought about it. *I don’t want to take the test without you there with me…* She had already started cleaning up the dishes, leaving a plate with the rest of the cinnamon rolls on the counter in case Eren came back hungry.

Hannes watched the exchange between the three of them and smiled. *He really does fit in with the two of them here… I’m glad that he’s finally away from that bastard.* <“I’d love to see it, it seems that it’s brought him far, yes?”> *I’d love to listen to the reason why you’re famous.*

Lathe smiled as Spades shooed them away, nodding. <“Of course.”> *I wonder what’s up. “And yeah- his talent has gotten him really far. He’s been selling lots of prints through this one website we found, he did murals in celebrities’ houses while we were in Los Angeles, where he records songs, and his albums hit no. 1-”* > Lathe pushed open the door to the studio where art was hanging on the walls, a computer on a desk against the wall having tabs always open to all of Eren’s social medias. He froze, however, when he saw a new picture tacked to the wall, a huge sheet of good drawing paper with graphite pencils of all sorts of hardnesses scattered on the table. He blushed furiously as he realized who the object of the nude drawing was, tangled up in the sheets, his nether in full view and bruises littering his neck and collar, handprints on his hips. *Fuck.* <“Oh my God Hannes, hold on, please.”> Lathe quickly ran to the other side of the room, unsure what to do with the drawing. *Eren’s going to have a fit if I untack it… but there’s no room above it to hang a cover without piercing other pieces unnecessarily… fuck.* <“Uhm, Hannes- I’m sorry, but Eren’s got a work in progress on the wall that’s a bit… indecent… just warning you… but come in, there are plenty of other drawings and paintings on the walls.”> …*Well then… Eren decided to draw Levi in the nude… post-sex… of course. …..oh fuck. Hannes doesn’t know Eren has a boyfriend. I can’t out Eren for him! That’s not a thing!*

Hannes entered after a few moments, looking around the bright white room that was flooded with natural light and the linoleum floor which made for easy clean up. *Wow… this place is amazing.*
He looked around, surprised at the talent that Eren had hidden within himself for so many years, his eyes finally landing on the naked man in front of him on the wall. <“Lathe… is that Levi?”> I remember you saying something about Eren having a boyfriend… I wonder if he’s completely gay? Or is he bisexual? Hannes stood there, staring at the picture that captured his sensuality. It really is a well done piece.

...me and my big mouth. I already outed him, didn’t I. <“U-uhm, yes it is. That’s Levi.”> Lathe blushed and let his gaze instead wander over the other drawings on the wall. <“He certainly is doing a good job of it- it’s not done, though. He hasn’t signed it yet.”> It feels weird to look at. Considering it’s Levi.

<“It’s almost like you can pull him out, and bring him into the room. He’s so life like… speaking of which, where is he? I remember you saying something about him being in the marines, is he currently stationed anywhere?”> I could understand if Eren didn’t want to talk about him if he was overseas… Maybe that’s why he hasn’t mentioned him at all while I’ve been here? Hannes looked towards the computer, to the countless tabs that were open. <“Oh yeah- Eren needs to stay on top of social media and how well his art and videos are doing. Though a great deal of the time it’s been me hovering over it. I don’t post stuff for him, though. I just do bookkeeping. I have my own websites for that.”> It’s a thing. <“We can pull up even more of his artwork- he’s got a bunch of photographs and digital artwork there. And you can hear him play and sing- even if you might not understand it.”> Lathe followed Hannes’ line of sight to the computer and to the dozen tabs open. <“Levi’s at a military college out on the East Coast, training to be a marine. He’ll be graduating in May. Hopefully he won’t be stationed anywhere before the wedding.”> Lathe watched the video in fascination, completely entranced by Eren singing. Wow… He has such a good voice… and he hasn’t been singing competitively… I know Grisha would’ve had my head if I entered him in any… He sounds so good. Hannes could already feel the tears start to prickle his eyes, starting to become overcome with emotion.

Lathe nodded. <“Nate has had his fair share of songwriting, singing, and bands- he was on tour across the country after deciding to go solo. So yes- he’s one of the professionals.”> Lathe watched the screen, his eyes flicking also to Hannes’ expression. He’s really good.
Hannes took off the headphones once the song was over. "That’s what got him started?"><br>That was beautiful… How are there not more people here… I’m surprised he doesn’t move out and live with other famous people… He sure has it made.

Lathe nodded, smiling. "Yeah- everything snowballed from there. It’s gone from him recording in a spare bedroom at the old house to having a record label and going out to California to record stuff, and being asked to paint celebrity’s houses. It’s gone so far. It’s amazing." Lathe turned as he suddenly heard a loud doorbell ring through the house, standing. "I wonder who that is? You can keep looking at videos or his other websites if you like." Lathe went to the front door, opening it and instantly nearly being tackled to the floor in a bearhug, a mop of red hair obscuring his vision. “What the hell?” It took a second for Lathe to recognize the man hugging him, laughing and his expression changing a bit to disbelief, hugging Mark back. “Hey you crazy- I wasn’t expecting you.” He looked up as Mark finally let him go, seeing Jack just facepalming in the doorway. “Hey Jack! Come on in- are you kidding me.” Lathe went to the front door, opening it and instantly nearly being tackled to the floor in a bearhug, a mop of red hair obscuring his vision. “What the hell?” It took a second for Lathe to recognize the man hugging him, laughing and his expression changing a bit to disbelief, hugging Mark back. “Hey you crazy- I wasn’t expecting you.” He looked up as Mark finally let him go, seeing Jack just facepalming in the doorway. “Hey Jack! Come on in- are you kidding me.” Lathe’s eyes widened as he saw two other figures behind him. “…you just brought the whole squad with you didn’t you.” Lathe stepped forward a bit, inviting the two behind Jack inside and shaking their hands. “It’s nice to meet the two of you- I’m Lathe. Come on in!” He shut the door behind him, rubbing the back of his neck a bit nervously. "I’m still in PJs. Dammit. “Sorry, I didn’t know you all were coming over… what’s the occasion?” Explain.

Mark smiled almost evilly. “We came to abduct your son for the day!”

Jack sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “…What he means to ask is if we can borrow him to play a few games? And do a few vlogs around town?” Do not go and ask people for their son as if we’re kidnapping the boy!

Wade looked around at the large house, a look of awe and amazement overriding his ability to speak and just forcing him to stare.

Lathe’s eyes widened, stuttering just a bit. “M-Mark, that’s not funny… Eren literally was kidnapped yesterday.” … This is what it must’ve felt like when I made that joke with Hannah.

“And uh, I’d have to ask him… but his… well, sorta-father from Germany is here for the week, and I just dunno how apt he’s be to leaving and going around town… he’s fine, just I dunno… he sounded like he really needed a bit to himself when he went to feed the animals.” Yeah… dunno how this is gonna work out.

Bob looked to Lathe with worry, his expression sympathetic. “Oh my god, that’s horrible… I’m really sorry to hear that. But it’s good that he’s still in one piece.” He looked to Mark and just shook his head a bit, sounding exasperated. “Mark, why didn’t you just call ahead like any normal person? It doesn’t sound like this is the best time. How Eren feels and is doing comes first.” He looked back to Lathe. “Sorry about intruding- I thought you knew. We’ll understand if it’s not a good day.” Yeah… dammit, Mark. I thought you were being responsible for once.

Lathe ran a hand through his hair, giving him a grateful look. “Thanks, really. I'll have to go and ask him- he's in the barn, so it'll take a minute. And by the way Mark-” He punched him half heartedly on the arm, tilting his head a bit. “- call if you're gonna come over, okay? We need a heads-up. Shit goes down too much. Oh, and if you see a blonde guy wander out of the studio room, he doesn't speak English. One minute; make yourselves at home.” Lathe went to the back door, stepping into his boots and getting a coat on, trudging out to the barn. He heaved the barn door open, seeing Eren feeding Oliver in the back of the barn. “Hey Eren? I've gotta ask you something.” He tramped to the back of the barn, his expression soft. < “Mark and Jack came over to see if you want to play video games, make vlogs around town. They brought Bob and Wade too. They didn't call ahead, I had no idea they were coming. They want to know if you're up for it; they
totally get it if you're not though, what with everything that’s been going on lately. They understand.”

> It's good that at least one out of the four of them is sane.

Eren looked up and sighed. “Mark’s an idiot sometimes…” He took a deep breath, exhaling after a few moments. “Tell them to meet me out back, and to bring a camera and a sense of humor.” He then moved to pull Charlie out of his stall, tying him up and brushing him to put his saddle on him. “None of them have ridden a horse I don’t think…” And I don’t weigh enough for Charlie to be affected by two riders.

Lathe grinned mischievously at that, nodding. “Yes, indeed he is… I'll pass your message along.” ...now that sounds like Eren. He turned on his heel and went back up to the house, stomping the snow from his boots and hanging up his coat. He shook his head as he saw Mark rifling through a cupboard, Jack embarrassed and trying to stop him. <“Mark, I said ‘make yourself at home,’ not ‘go snoop through my stuff.’”> He missed the confused look he was given for a moment and just removed Mark from the cupboard, closing it before the look registered, his brow furrowing. <“What?”> Why the hell are you looking at me like that?

Jack tilted his head a bit, one eyebrow quirked. “Uhm, Lathe… you're not speaking English. ...is that German?” You said the sorta-dad was from Germany, so I can only assume...

Lathe’s eyes widened, chuckling a bit. “Oh, sorry- I’ve been speaking pretty much nothing but it all day and for a good deal yesterday. It’s automatic at this point. But anyway, Eren wants you all to bundle up and meet him in the back. Bring your camera and your sense of humour, because it’s gonna get real.” This is gonna be fucking hilarious.

Mark’s brow furrowed a bit, but shrugged it off after a bit and motioned for everyone to get their coats and boots back on. “Lathe do you know what your son is planning for us?” Mark asked as he shuffled into his own boots, Wade and Bob following his lead. You actually know the kid, but I have no idea what the hell to expect.

Jack shrugged, giving him a look. “You expect me ta know? I have no idea what we’d be doing unless snow or something was involved. Here, let me put it this way. You asking me is about as useful as me asking Wade. Hey, Wade!” He turned to where he was standing and just staring up and around the house, not tearing his eyes away from anything as he responded with an absent minded ‘wha?’ “What are we doing?”

Wade just looked to him, immediately confused. “...what?” ...I wasn’t part of this conversation. I know nothing. ...besides the fact that this house is huge.

“See?” Jack gestured to him, looking to Bob. “Now let me demonstrate a better way to do this. Lathe. Gracious host who is putting up with us and our asshattery. What could Eren want to do with us in the backyard when it’s currently freezing and snowy?” He asked him, patiently waiting for a response. ...by the way, sorry for the asshattery. ...I need to learn that Mark never plans stuff. ...you'd think I'd know this by now.

Lathe grinned, looking to the door as Mark stepped back inside with a camera. “...let’s just say it involves Mark, a big horse, and snow too high to normally walk through.” Oh he’s gonna learn to plan stuff.
Mark’s eyes widened when he heard his name. “I’m sorry did you say a horse!?” I’ve never ridden a horse before? How would I even be able to ride one? Why does Jack look like he’s about to piss himself from laughing??

Bob’s eyes caught the glint in Lathe’s eyes. Oh... I see, this is gonna be hella fun to watch. “Alright, well let’s get going, we don’t want to keep Eren waiting since he agreed to do this...”

Lathe shook his head, his eyes nearly sparkling. “Yes, I did indeed say your name and ‘horse’ in the same sentence. Now we don't want to keep him waiting- he really wants to see how you'd do.” Lathe let Mark make an excited sound and move to the back door as everyone got their coats and boots. “Have fun!” He waved as the door shut behind them, going back to the studio where Hannes was clicking away at the open tabs.

Eren was waiting already outside the barn and on top of Charlie already, though he wasn’t wearing a helmet. “Come on, you slow-pokes! You guys are taking forever!” Eren whined and moved to walk Charlie to keep him warm. Gotta keep you warm... since we don’t have an indoor arena yet...

Mark’s eyes widen at Eren’s whine. “Eren! How you been buddy!?” He called excitedly, racing down the steps and towards Eren, taking the camera with him.

Is that the horse I’ll be expected to ride on? It’s huge! How does Eren even get on it?

Bob looked at the impressive horse which Eren sat on regally. “He looks like you took him out of a winter magazine... Someone forgot to mention that we were coming to meet someone who rides horses.” His horse is huge! His eyes flickered towards the yard outside the fenced in area, seeing the area cleared out of snow and jumps in place. Can he really ride? That would be interesting to see.

Jack’s eyes widened as he saw the horse, grinning. “I can't believe you haven’t gushed about horse riding before, Eren. And it’s really good to see you! Is horse riding really what we’re doing?” This is gonna be good.

Wade looked to Jack, his eyes wide with surprise and a bit of worry. “Whoa whoa wait- are we expected to get on that!?” Wade pointed to the horse Eren was riding. “...dude. Just... no... that’s a huge animal and I don't know if I wanna mess with that. You know me, I'll do something horrible and it'll all just go downhill very fast.” He just shook his head. Yeah, no.

Eren sighed, swinging his leg over and jumping off of Charlie’s back. “You guys were the ones who came uninvited...” He turned his head giving a pointed glare towards Mark.

“Why are you glaring at me? I didn’t do anything!” Mark cried. Okay... Well maybe I didn’t call earlier.

Eren shook his head. “Bob, take the camera. Mark’s going first.” I don’t give a crap that you didn’t do anything yet, I kinda hope you fall off though. That'll teach you to come over without calling ahead...

Bob nodded, taking the camera from Mark’s clutches and turning it on. This is gonna be good I can already tell, and the horse seems really calm, he hasn’t even raised a hoof at us yet.

Mark’s eyes widened as the camera was suddenly wrangled from his grasp. Bob turning it on him and pressing a button, a red light blinking at him. And they’re recording. Mark chuckled nervously, addressing the camera. “Uh, hi everybody! Markiplier here, along with Bob, Wade, Jack and the awesome Eren Yeager-” His tone suddenly became very nervous, getting a bit louder as Eren suddenly began tugging him over to Charlie. “-who is now forcing me to ride a horse someone
help!” Mark weakly struggled against Eren, looking helplessly to everyone, all of whom were busy watching and trying to control their laughter. “You all are horrible.” Mark turned and kept his eyes on Charlie, scared as he was suddenly right next to him, the animal plenty taller than him. “Oh, um, Eren, I just remembered-” He turned to Eren, patting his pockets and giving him an apologetic look, pretending to look for something that wasn't there. “-I left my helmet at home, so I can't go riding today. Sorry, guess we'll just have to not go riding-” He tried to step away casually, only for Eren to firmly catch him by the arm. ...Fuck. I'm doing this, aren't I.

Eren finally picked him up almost too easily and helped him into the saddle. “Now stay, he won't move, just get used to being on the horse.” He disappeared into the barn for a few seconds, handing a helmet up to Mark. “Alright, have you done anything stupid to Charlie?” I swear if any of you freak him out, I'm gonna have a panicking mare to figure out too...

“W- WHAT?!” Mark began to internally panic as Eren lifted him up and somehow got him on the saddle, staying completely still as the animal under him shifted slightly, his expression one of terror and afraid to even breathe on top of Charlie, who in reality had simply acknowledged his existence and was chill with it. “...I'm on a horse...” Mark looked up from the horse, pleading with his eyes for any of the three to get him down. His eyes ended up wandering to the studio windows, glaring as Lathe and a blonde man looked on with wide grins. ...fuck you, this is terrifying. “Stop laughing, I'm about to die!” Mark looked down as Eren suddenly handed him a helmet, thanking him sarcastically. “Oh thank you very much, O torturer, for the thing that will not prolong my life for anything more than five seconds. And no, I don't think so- wait, did I and that's why you're asking? Fuck what did I do?!” Mark immediately put on the helmet and latched it, making a distressed sound as Charlie shifted under him again. “...it's moving…”

Eren chuckled and rounded Charlie as he shifted on his feet. “He’s getting cold, we gotta move him around.” He nonchalantly hopped up on Charlie, in front of Mark. “And no, you didn’t do anything wrong, Charlie just can’t panic...” I don’t want him freaking out... He took the reins and started to walk Charlie around at a good pace, making sure that Mark was holding onto him. He’s shaking, and it’s shaking the saddle. “Mark... Calm down, ya overgrown pansy.”

Mark was grateful that Eren was now in the saddle as well, letting out a surprised sound as Charlie began to walk, immediately going to cling onto Eren for dear life. He stared at the ground, which began to look a lot further than just a few feet. “...this is how I die...” He tried to glare at Eren as he spoke, unable to really look anything other than scared for his life. “...I'm not a pansy... I'm just...” He nearly lost his train of thought as Eren turned Charlie, making them sway to one side a bit. “...fearing for my life, is all...” Nope nope nope let me down please ...

Eren smirked, taking Charlie over towards where Bob held the camera. “Come on Mark! You gotta smile to the camera... Oh don’t be laughing Wade, cause you’re next!” Eren’s smile brightened towards the camera as they came close. You are all gonna pay for not calling first!

Mark chuckled nervously as a loud ‘WHAT?!’ came from Wade, trying to smile to the camera, though he obviously mouthed ‘help me’ to the lens, Bob grinning as he held the camera steady and simply shook his head. Damn you. “...how much longer is this gonna be?” ... Someone needs to stop this kid...

Eren smirked, moving in the saddle to turn around, smirking at Mark. “Learned your lesson yet?” You gonna come over unannounced again? His arms were crossed as he sat backwards on the saddle. I wonder if I should get Charlie to walk around. His smirk was completely evil, kicking Charlie into gear while he was facing Mark.
Mark nodded immediately, his expression one of serious fear as Charlie started going even faster, any real handhold for him gone. “**YES! I learned my lesson! No coming over completely unannounced! I'll call ahead! I'll make sure it's all planned just my god STEER THE HORSE or better yet MAKE IT STOP!”** Please!!! **Fuck I'm gonna die!!!**

Eren smirked, moving to turn back around, taking the reins and moving Charlie towards the large snow pile, Charlie picking up some speed and getting ready to jump. **This is gonna be fun...**

Mark immediately clung to Eren again, his eyes widening as Charlie picked up speed. “E-**Eren wait-**” He let out a shrill shriek of terror as Charlie jumped into the snow, leaping around in the white flakes and having a ball. He spoke in terror, his words drowning out the nervous cackles behind him. “**EREN PLEASE! MAKE IT STOP! I'M SORRY! I SWEAR I WON'T JUST SHOW UP ANYMORE! I SWEAR !!**” Mark’s eyes were screwed shut, his face buried in Eren’s shoulder. 

**FUCK MAKE IT STOP!!!!**

Eren smirked, settling Charlie down to walking out of the snow. “Alright, you had enough.” **I've had some fun.** He took them over towards where Wade stood almost shaking in his boots. “Alright Wade-y it’s your turn!” Eren halted Charlie, moving to get off before getting Mark off as well. “Did you have fun Mark?” Eren grinned as he leaned over a bit to look at him at eye level. **That'll teach you a lesson.** “Next time call so I don't plan on doing jumps with Charlie before you come...”

Mark immediately nodded, shaking like a leaf before backing up and latching on the closest person, burying himself into Jack’s shoulder, sounding traumatised. “...it was horrible...” His voice was muffled as he spoke into his hoodie. **I'll always make plans now...** His grip was a little tighter as Jack’s arms came around his shoulders, his cheek on his shoulder as he watched Wade being escorted to his doom. **Have fun. Nice knowing you.**

“**Nononononononononono……..**” Wade helplessly pleaded with Eren as he was dragged over to Charlie, being handed the helmet Mark had worn and heaved up onto the saddle. “Eren, please I'm begging you, I'm just a lowly idiot who didn't have any say in the plans... don't make me ride this animal, please, I have a serious new respect for horses, just let me come down, man, I'm sorry! I'll bug Mark and make sure plans are made correctly whenever we all do stuff, just don't make me do this!!” **Noooooo....**

Eren smirked and shook his head. “Don’t worry, Jack’s after you.” Eren got Charlie to start walking around, keeping him out of high snow. “So do you wanna go jumping? Or... Should I make him go faster?” **I could do either right now, pick your poison.**

“**Mark, you're my least favourite person right now!**” Wade held onto Eren as tightly as he could, scared to death of the horse under him. “Oh fuck, this is a decision I have to make? Fuck, uh... f-faster... anything but jumping...” **Yeah, no thank you... “...mercy... my god, you played Undertale, I think you'd understand the concept a little better... please... be like Frisk and have some, will you?!” I don't wanna die...**

Eren’s glorious laughter rang through the cold air, something no one has heard in a long time. **Oh it feels good to have the guys back with me.** “You do realize my favorite part of that game was the genocide run... Right?” Eren chuckled at Wade’s cries at Mark for putting him in this situation. He moved to pick up speed on Charlie, still making sure that they didn’t come close enough to step on anyone as he got fast and moved in a circle.

“**Wait WHAT? You did a genocide run? You're EVIL!!**” Wade was torn between being scared beyond fear and shocked at a Eren, deciding on mostly the former. “Oh my god someone do
Eren finally slowed Charlie to a stop, getting off before helping Wade off. “Alright Jackaboy, you’re up.” His grin was wide, and probably wider than it had ever been since he left the hospital after his coma. *I like having these guys around! I might have to get Bob the stool for Charlie though… I dunno if I’ll be able to lift him.* Eren shrugged, waiting for Jack to come up to him.

Jack nervously extracted himself from Mark, handing him his cap and slowly walking up to the horse, trying to be calm about it. He let Eren help get him up onto the saddle and put on the helmet he was given, hyperattentive about the animal under him. He swallowed hard as Eren mounted in front of him, holding on as they started to move. He looked around, surprisingly quiet. *...this is actually kinda cool...* Jack seemed to actually calm down as time went on, looking around. *...this is okay.*

Eren smiled a bit. “You seem like you’re enjoying it more than one would normally take to riding.” Eren let Charlie pick up from a walk to a slow trot. *I wonder if he’d be up for jumps?* “Wanna do a jump? I got a few out back that are small in the clearing.” Eren pointed towards where he had shoveled all the snow out from around his jumps.

Jack’s hold on Eren tightened a bit, though he moved with Charlie as he trotted along, not as stiff as a board like Mark or Wade. “Uhm… s-sure, why not? This is… this is kinda fun, actually.” Jack’s hold was tight on Eren’s hoodie as they trotted further down the path and to the jumps, bracing for when Charlie jumped and making a small noise of surprise and fear as he leapt over the lower jump with ease, smiling a bit nervously. “T-that was actually pretty cool… this is so weird… I’m riding a horse...” He chuckled airily. *I can’t believe this is happening.*

Eren laughed right along with him, turning Charlie around and doing the small jump again before bringing him back to the others. “I’m actually surprised you enjoyed it. Bob do you wanna get on? Or can I do the jumps with Charlie while he warm?” *I got the bigger jumps to do... And you guys can come watch.*

Bob shook his head as Jack got off of Charlie and handed his helmet back, immediately getting his sweatshirt reclaimed by Mark and wrangling his cap back from him. “No that’s fine, you go ahead and have your fun. I’ll just watch from here on the nice solid ground and record all of this.” He chuckled faintly as Mark whined something about him having a choice in the matter, Jack shushing him as Eren rode off back to the jumps. They all watching in awe as Eren picked up speed, going over the tall jumps with ease. *...he looks like he could be on an Olympic team. He’s amazing.*

Eren kept up the speed as he and Charlie continued to go through the many jumps he had laid out with practiced ease before slowing down to a trot to get into the heated barn. “Come on into the barn so we can talk about recording while I untack Charlie.” *I love riding... It’s awesome.*

“Come on, ya pansy. Charlie’s not gonna kill ya.” Jack kept an arm wound around Mark as they meandered to the barn, smiling as Eren tied Charlie to a post to get the tack off of him. “That really was cool, Eren.” He ignored the dissenting mumbles from next to him, continuing. “So, recording. About that- we’ve got most of our stuff in the hotel room we booked about twenty minutes from here. We were thinkin’ we all go back there and do recording. We’ve got a few games in mind, but the only obvious definite so far is Prop Hunt. Because Bob and Wade. It’s pretty much mandatory we play it at this point.” *Would You Rather* is also probably gonna happen.

Eren groaned a little bit at the suggestions. “Oh my god…” He groaned rubbing his forehead.
“We’re gonna do that drunk… Aren’t we?” I can already see getting grounded for drinking… Fuck... wait, has Lathe grounded me before?

“Hell yeah we are.” Wade turned to Bob as he was punched in the arm, rubbing the spot and listening to him.

“At least the four of us are, for that matter- Eren might end up staying sober. It's his decision of course, but he’s not 21 yet I don't think. If he is it's not by much.” Bob looked to Eren, the camera hanging from his neck on the strap, his hands in his pockets. “You 21 yet Eren? If you're not, there is that law about supervised drinking, which means you could as long as we’re in the general vicinity. But y’know, it's your call when it gets there.” We're not forcing you to.

“If I’m gonna be playing with you guys… Especially Prop Hunt, I’m going to be drinking… I’ve only got two months until I’m legal.” I really don’t care... And I don’t think I can get drunk anymore.. But we’ll see.

Jack looked to him, unsure. “Sorry for sounding like a stick in the mud… but we might want to check with your dad… he might think it’s sketchy or something… I dunno…. I just don't want you getting in trouble with Lathe, is all. Or Mark, for that matter.” He looked over to him, his hand still clutching his hoodie. “…that was apparently traumatising. But it would suck if you got grounded or something.” That's a thing that might happen.

Eren shrugged. “Well, I know we need to take at least Blake… And that… Um… You guys are prepared for anything that might happen…. With my PTSD.” He swallowed the large lump in his throat and lifted the saddle off of Charlie and put it in it’s proper spot. Who knows, maybe a drink would be good for me… Maybe I need it after what happened to me yesterday...

Mark looked back at Eren as Charlie shifted a bit as if to follow him. What’s he doing he’s moving! “Uh, Eren?”

Eren looked up as Charlie moved and looked to where he was going, seeing him try to get closer to Luna. “Charlie… Knock it off! You’ll get back to her in a second!” Eren got a crop and tapped his hind quarters to get him to behave until he was groomed. You can go back to Luna. I guess we need to talk to Dad… He put Charlie back into the large stall with Luna and closed it as they nuzzled each other. That’s nice...

...that’s adorable. Jack smiled as the two horses nuzzled each other, nudging Eren a bit. “What’s the other horses’ name?” She looks a bit like him- same breed, maybe?

“Oh, that’s Luna, she’s Hannah’s horse. ...but you don’t know who Hannah is… But she’s in charge of making sure my blood looks like it’s supposed to…” …Not really sure if I’m even allowed to say what I’m really have going on... I-I’m not sure.

Jack nodded, not pressing at that more sensitive subject. “So she’s boarded here. ...is she carrying Charlie’s foal?” He looks like he’s being protective enough for that to be the case.

Eren nodded. “From what I’m guessing they bred about 10 or 12 days ago…Let’s go inside, shall we?” Gotta explain to Dad why I won't be spending the night. Eren led them all back to the house and took of his jacket and his boots. “Dad! We need to talk!” Eren’s shout was directed towards the rest of the house, not really sure where Lathe was at the moment. I wanna go record with these asshats.

Lathe’s head poked out from the studio, Hannes following him to meet the group, wearing matching grins. “Hey you all! Have fun riding Charlie?” Lathe laughed as Mark and Wade blushed
to their ears while Jack nodded, smiling. “Good to hear. Oh, uhm, everyone, this is Hannes, who took care of Eren while he was really young and still lived in Germany. He gestured to the man behind him. < “And Hannes, this is Mark, Jack, Bob, and Wade. They all make videos and put them on that YouTube website, but they mostly play video games and do funny commentary, or do funny stuff in general. They’re some of Eren’s more famous friends.”> Everyone knows who these are. At least. He looked to Eren as hellos were said, smiling. “What’s up, kid?”

“Can I go record Prop Hunt with them?” Eren’s voice was quiet as he looked down at his hands as he fiddled with his fingers. I really wanna record with them. “I...I’ll bring Blake… And my meds…” I can be alright... and I think you know what Prop Hunt entails.

“Well of course you~” It suddenly clicked, looking over to the group of slightly-guilty-looking YouTubers suspiciously, crossing his arms. “...Prop Hunt is always recorded drunk. Isn’t it.” His mouth was a thin line, looking between them as they nodded a bit and Eren, thinking. ..........technically it's not illegal. On the other hand... you'd all end up seriously drunk. And if something with his PTSD happens... “Eren, I’m not sure how your PTSD would be affected by alcohol… I dunno if it’s a good idea for you to drink…”

Jack spoke up a bit, trying a bit to reason with him. “Lathe, we’d make absolutely sure that Eren takes the medicine he needs to, and he has Blake in case something goes wrong. And he has the four of us there to try and keep him calm. ...he’s been doing much better lately, I can tell just with the half hour in the backyard. I think he’ll be okay. And we’ll try and cut him off if things get excessive. We’ll be careful about all of it. We’d really like to be able to record with him while we’ve got the four of us at the same place at the same time. It doesn't happen too much.” We're all busy really often. It'd be nice to have five of us just chilling and playing hilarious video games.

Lathe looked to Jack, honestly listening to him and looking to the floor, shifting his weight as he pondered this. ...... “Eren, a few things, and I need all of you to hear this too.” He looked to the group behind Eren, and then looked him in the eye, counting off on his fingers. “One: you're taking Blake with. Two: you’re setting at least one phone alarm, properly labelled, to remind you to take your medicine at midnight. Maybe another five minutes later for if you don't see or hear it. Actually, yes. That’s also required. Three: you carefully watch what you're drinking. We can’t have you getting too drunk; it could react with your PTSD unpredictably after a certain point, most likely. And four: if anything, and I mean anything happens that none of you can deal with properly, you call me as soon as you can, and I'll come to help. I want you to be okay. And you have help readily available 24/7; you should know that, what with having the numbers of at least four doctors who you have wrapped around your finger in your phone.” He sighed, smiling. “But if you can do all of that, and have fun... okay. You can.” ...I'm still gonna worry though. He looked to the group, an eye narrowing. “But don’t think I don't still find this slightly suspicerous.” He mispronounced the word on purpose, grinning. “I'm his Dad. It's my job.” To worry. Because of course. Someone has to.

Eren finally picked his head up to meet Lathe’s eyes. “R-Really? I can go?” Eren asked with bright eyes and a huge smile breaking across his face. I can go! I can go!! Blake came up to Eren, his ears pointed towards the two new faces, as if trying to decide if he had to pull out the teeth. Maisie had followed quickly after and jumped up onto Lathe’s side, as if trying to stretch out.

Mark jumped in joy as Lathe said yes. “Awesome! We have two adjoining rooms and four queens so you can sleep with one of us... Or we can call up a cot, but I would get a bag ready so we can go.” Mark said excitedly, moving down to pet Blake as he stepped away from Eren to pet him. You’re still so protective of him.

Wade grinned, his attention immediately getting caught by the two dogs as they trotted in, tapping
Bob’s arm. “Bob, look- **puppies.**” *Omg.*

Bob just shook his head, chuckling. “Wade, those are full-grown dogs. And yes. I see them.” Bob carefully extended a hand as Blake moved from Mark when he decided he was sufficiently pet, gently scratching behind his ear. “So, is this one Blake? I think I remember seeing him in the videos you had uploaded from the hospital.”

Lathe nodded, petting Maisie as Eren scurried off to pack an overnight bag. “Yep, that’s Blake. He’s Eren’s service dog. And this one who’s trying to get up here and have a staring contest with me is Maisie.” He looked at Bob, his expression deadly serious. “And Bob, understand this. It doesn't matter how old or big they get. ...they will **always** be puppies to me. ...and Wade.” He pet down her sides, noticing they she seemed a bit bigger around the stomach. “...wait.” Lathe knelt down on the floor, getting Maisie to stand still and he gently felt her stomach, now noticeably bulging a bit. “...no way. I don't think she can count as a puppy herself… if she’s **full** of teeny puppies.” He grinned, looking over to Blake. “I should've guessed. They've been inseparable since day one.”... **puppies!!!**

Mark’s eyes widened a bit. “Really? She’s gonna have puppies!?” His voice got a bit higher as he kneeled down to pet Maisie gently, as if fearing the protective wrath of the dog that was watching his every move. *Blake’s very protective… Of everything… It appears.*

Eren came racing down the stairs, sliding straight into a wall with a soft thud. “Ow… There’s a fucking wall there...” He whined as he rubbed his side, coming to see what they were congregated around Maisie for. “What’s wrong? Did something happen?” He asked worriedly. *I don't want her having complications...*

Lathe shook his head, nuzzling Maisie for a minute before looking to Eren, brightly smiling. “Maisie’s fine- I just found out she’s carrying Blake’s puppies!” **More teeny puppies! I'm so excited!**

Eren shrugged, looking unexcited. “Oh, okay, got it, yea… She’s gonna have them soon… She went into heat at the beginning of December… And it's towards the end of January now… So… Next week maybe?” Eren trailed off as he moved to put Blake’s vest on him. *I knew… And I thought you would’ve known.*

Lathe just stared at Eren, his expression incredulous. “You knew we were soon gonna be swarmed with teeny tiny adorableness machines and you didn't **tell** me? I've gotta keep a better eye on her now, make sure she looks like she’s doing okay.” He watched as Eren put Blake’s vest on him, remembering something. “Uhm, Eren, are you gonna call Levi still? ...if you are, I think Hannes would like to say hi. ...he knows. I apparently said something over the phone but I don't even remember… I’m sorry. But you shouldn't make Levi worry.” **You really should call...**

Eren froze the instant the words left Lathe’s mouth. **He knows?... He hasn’t come back out of the room... Does he... Does he think I’m a fag?** Eren instantly felt the blood drain from his face as his legs grew numb and he slipped down to the floor, his face buried in his hands as Blake moved to lick at his face to try and calm him down. *He knows... What if he never wants to see me again because of it? Does he want to see Levi just to insult him and then walk away forever.*

...**fuck.** Lathe immediately moved to where Eren sat on the floor, pulling him close and reassuring him, his voice quiet. “Eren Honey, Hannes doesn't think any less of you for it. He really doesn’t. He's so glad to hear that you're happy. He... he saw the picture you were drawing on him, and asked if it was Levi. He was really curious about him. I don't think he’s opposed at all to the fact you've got a boyfriend... Eren, I don't even remember telling him... it must’ve just slipped out as I
told him so much about what happened. It's hard to write that fact out of the story, I suppose. ...but that was seriously uncool of me. I'm really, really sorry… forgive me…” Lathe offered him his palm, looking to the floor. Damn me and my big mouth...

Eren was silent for a bit, unmoving as his mind reeled. Forgive? After giving me a fucking heart attack that I would never see Hannes again? Eren kept his head down, his gaze on the floor, his hand shaking a bit as he gently touched his palm, running his fingers down it. I... I.... Eren looked away from him a bit, his eyes still glued to the floor. “I’ll call Levi tomorrow, I’ll text him that I’m with these four asshats… I’ll call him later…” I don’t wanna tell him what happened yesterday… Not yet...

Lathe nodded, understanding as he pulled Eren close for a hug, his head on his shoulder for a long moment, mumbling. “That’s fine… I really am sorry for scaring you like that. You can wait if you need to.”...dammit me.

Hannes looked between the four of the group fussing over Maisie, and then to Lathe and Eren sitting on the floor and talking quietly. He looked back to the group giving Lathe and Eren a minute, his eyes fixing on Mark. He quirked an eyebrow as Mark looked up, his eyes glinting as he spoke. <“You scream like a girl.”> It’s very amusing.

Lathe and Eren just burst out laughing at that, Lathe adding to his comment. <“He screams like a yandere.”> Eren laughed even harder at that, Hannes giving him an odd look and Mark trying to figure out what they just said. He waved to Hannes. <“It’s a video game reference. I'll show you later.”> He chuckled as Mark looked between the three of them, trying to figure out what they said and only understanding the word ‘yandere.’

Eren could barely contain himself as the conversation continued. Oh my god… This is awesome. He got up and moved away from Lathe, their conversation seemingly forgotten. “Alright… Well, Vatri… That’s certainly one way to put it… Come on guys, let’s get going so we can get setup for recording.” I brought my own camera with me for a face cam…. And my laptop that should be good. I made sure to bring the charger for both too.

Lathe stood as well, grinning widely and looking to Mark, who had a very confused look on his face. “Oh. Hannes said you scream like a girl, and then I said you scream like a yandere. Which you do. It’s a very impressive vocal range.” Lathe nodded as if genuinely impressed while Mark just buried his face in his hands, going ‘noooooooo….’ This is too good. He ruffled Eren’s hair after he picked up his backpack, grinning. “Don't get in too much trouble. And keep an eye on that one. If he starts playing yandere simulator drunk I can only imagine what would go down.” He seems fine now. ….where did all that sadness go? Is it just his personality? ...no, that doesn't seem right… I dunno.

Eren nodded and collected his things, Blake following them out the door. The five of them packed into the large car, letting Blake lay across the laps of the people in the back seat. I can do this, it’ll all be okay. I got everything.

Lathe shut and locked the door behind them, going back into the studio and speaking to Hannes. < “Here- there are a lot of Mark’s videos I think you’ll like. And Eren’s too. Let me just…”> He quickly clicked away at the screen, creating a playlist of about a dozen videos. < “I need to go talk to Spades- something important, apparently. I’ll be back soon. You can watch these if you want, they all have subtitles, or there are so many sketchbooks in here filled with drawings you could take forever flipping through them. Whatever you like.”> Lathe smiled to him as he nodded, going to look for Spades, hearing the hum of the dryer downstairs and going down to where she was putting things into the washing machine, his arms wrapping around her middle, kissing her neck
gently. “What was it you needed to talk to me about?” *Something important.*

Spades smiled softly, turning in his arms to kiss his cheek. *I don’t really know how to tell you though.*... She nodded, taking his wrist and pulling him back up the stairs and towards their bedroom. *Hopefully you’ll know once you see the box.* She pulled out the large box of testers, looking down a bit, a little unsure of his reaction.

Lathe let her pull him upstairs, confused for a moment until he read the label on the box. ...*oh.* Lathe nodded, stepping forward a bit to press a gentle kiss to her cheek. *We can hope.*

Spades smiled softly, taking the box and going into the bathroom for a minute or two before coming back out with the test in her shaking hands. *I don’t know if it’s gonna work… We’ve been trying… And I’ve been taking my pills.*

Lathe stepped up and slid behind her, his arms winding around her waist, nuzzled into her shoulder, his eyes on the test in her hands, trying to ease her nerves. She was pressed flush to his front, silent for an agonisingly long moment until the results finally showed. ...*negative.* Lathe murmured soothingly in Spades’ ear as she began to shake, walking with her to the bed and trying to kiss away her tears, sitting on the bed and letting her curl to him. “It’s okay Spades… it’s okay, we’ve still got time. It’ll happen eventually, it really will. We can hope. Please, don’t cry.” *There is time.*

Spades shook her head, continuing to cry, her whole body shaking. “I’m… I’m s-sorry…” She let him kiss her face as she continued to cry. *I got my hopes up... What if I can never be pregnant? What happens then?*

“It’s okay, Love… we still have time… it’s not going to be easy… but it’ll happen. I know it will. We just need to be patient. It's okay.” Lathe pressed sweet kisses to her cheeks, holding her close to him.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“And I will see all you dudes, in the next video!” Jack grinned widely as he threw up his arms for the outro, picking up the empty bottles next to his laptop. *I'm on six... I need to get more for over here and get rid of these.* Jack walked to the table where the cases of beer were, leaning on it as he set in the empty ones and took out two more, looking to where Eren was set up, his own area littered with bottles. “Want me to take some ‘a those?” Jack stopped short, counting them as he picked one up. ...*there's a lot here... ........................ten?* “Eren, you’ve had a lot. Maybe… knock i’ off for a bit?” Jack placed a bunch of the empty bottles in the cases, clearing away Eren’s space. “Seriously… don' want yer Dad gettin’ mad.” ........*nope. That's bad.*

“...how many?” Bob looked over his shoulder as he heard Jack speaking, studying the bottles Eren had gone through. “....dude, I'm only on six. You drank a *lot.*” ......*those are lots of bottles.*

Wade waved at them, sipping from his bottle before speaking. “Eh, he’ll be fiiiiiine. It’s not like Lathe can ground ‘im or anything.” .........*that's illegal.*

Eren sluggishly looked back over towards Jack and shrugged. “I feel fine… I got a good buzz going right now… It’s really nice…” Eren giggled a bit and moved to get up and go to the bathroom. Blake came over to his seat and sniffed around, as if trying to make sure there wasn’t anything Eren could hurt himself on. *Hmmmm... Human smells fine...*

Mark got up from his chair, stretching. “Alrighty boys… I sugges’ a livestream.....” He moved over to their cooler, picking up another bottle and gingerly sipping at it. “I’m a’ six too…” *But Eren looks fine, he’ll be okay...*
Wade grinned widely and stupidly, raising his bottle in agreeance. “I secon’ that motion. Let’s do ‘dis.” They all ended their current recordings, starting up a live stream and struggling to split the screen into six sections, everyone in their own section with their face cam and screen, the last showing the people watching and also decorated with a fan-sent animated sprite of Mark dabbing infinitely. Mark’s computer surprisingly could handle it, and they began the introductions, trying to go in order and instead stumbling over their words and trying to interrupt other’s intros.

Eren sat down between Jack and Mark, Blake making sure that Eren felt comfortable. “Are we… Still doing PropHunt?” He had a new bottle in his hands, sipping at it every few minutes as they started to play a few rounds. “Bo~b I see you!” Eren was starting to immediately shoot the moving chair, finally getting him with blood splatter everywhere.

Bob groaned. “Aww, nuts… Goddamit Eren… Now let's see where are you Wade?... Wade you're fucked…” He was laughing hysterically not two seconds later following Eren’s takedown of a stuck trash can. That was awesome, we need Eren in on these PropHunts more often.

A new round began, Mark fanning out with Jack and Eren to try and take cover. He immediately became a huge shelf, staying alive for a surprisingly long time before he was discovered. “Oh come on! I had the best spot! Where are you two? Jacks still alive, right?” He switched views, chuckling as he saw what he was hiding as. “Jack, your Irish is showing.” He laughed as he saw the other players run past the lone beer can, though he kept laughing louder as Bob or Wade approached him, nearly giving him away.

“Mark, shut the hell up, you're gonna blow my cover!” Jack was nevertheless grinning as he eventually booked it from his spot when neither Bob nor Wade were looking, trying to get somewhere else. “Eren, I have no damn clue where you are, so if we end up in the same room I'm only sorta sorry. ...actually I'm not sorry. Just deal with it.” He sipped from his beer as he waited to be noticed, his eyes widening as the prop directly next to him got shot, revealing it as Eren. He kept absolutely still, Bob and Wade looking in circles for him, timing out. “Ay! I win! Yay for non-mediocrity!” He grinned as Eren just started talking, making comment after hilarious comment as they played. …...

Eren smirked, more snarky comments rolling off his tongue as they got up to get a few refreshments after a couple rounds of playing. He was flicking through his phone, giggling like a child as he read the comments. “Heh… Guys… They say that I’m better at this game… Than all you asshats…” Eren picked up another bottle as it was handed to him, though the drinks were starting to slow as the guys let their alcohol settle. It’s getting late... What number am I on? I can’t remember… I stopped counting after 8 and that was a long time ago.

Mark grumbled a bit. “Alright you asshat, thanks for… Bringing tha’ up… Now… Rrreeee we gonna keep playing?” I wanna kick this kid’s ass, I don’t know why we don’t add him into the calls when we do this kind of stuff… He’s awesome! He turned his head watching Eren down yet another bottle. “Eren… You’r cu’ off.” Mark moved to take the bottle away from him and was successful in the attempt. Nope, I don’t need Lathe to ground you from the computer…

Jack waved at them, trying to shush them as he called down to room service. “Shut yer faces, I’m trying to order food from th’ nice lady. I don’ trust us ta go anywhere ta get food.” He dialed the number slowly, trying to speak clearly and ordering a list of food the others pointed to on the menu they had in the room. “Y’all need ta give me money for what ya ordered, cause I’m sure as hell not footing this bill.” …it certainly isn’t cheap.

Wade just looked over his shoulder to him, handing him a bill. “When’re my fries gon’ be here…?” He whined as Jack simply said ‘soon,’ grumbling when he didn’t say anything else. …I want fries.
Jack took the money, though he was surprised as Eren placed a black credit card in his hand before moving to grab another beer. “...I guess we’ll just give you the money and put it on this, if tha’s easiest?” He handed him the bills he had rounded up, his brow furrowing as he saw the beer in his hand. “…just how many have ya had?” … lots, obviously. But you’ve drunk more than any of us here.

Eren shrugged, picking the bottle up again. “Um…… I don’…. I don’ know…..” He finished the bottle, putting it down, Blake coming right to his side and whining at him. I’ve had a lot… But the buzz feels really nice, I feel light headed...

Jack’s brow furrowed as Blake whined at Eren, taking away the empty bottle. “Eren, seriously, we’re cutting you off. Ya don’ look too good.” He put away the empty bottle, lightly smacking away Eren’s hand as he tried to reach for another. “Food will be here soon, Eren. If you’re thirsty, there’s water in the mini fridge. Don’t gimme tha’ look.” He stood his ground as Eren pouted at him. “We’re in charge of takin’ care a’ ya. And that entails me becoming mom and cuttin’ ya off when ya had enough.” He even went and got a bottle of water for him, taking the beer he had just tried to open away and putting it in his hand instead. “Come on, it won’ be no fun if yer passed out.” …….mom mode activated.

“Jaaaaack…. I wan’ my fries…..” Wade still whined at Jack, watching his exchange with Eren. ‘I’s tha’ time a’ the night wh’n Ja’ mother-hens ev’ryone… is i’ tha’ late a’ready…?’ Wade looked to the clock on the wall, trying to read the time upside-down. “...wha’ time ‘s i’?”

Bob looked up to the clock, staring at it for a long time before turning to Wade and proudly announcing: “....late.” ...I’m not wrong. “...late enough for me t’ not be able t’ read the clock.”

“Uuuuuuuugh……” Wade made an exaggerated groan of exasperation, spinning a bit in his chair and mumbling about fries. ...foooooooood......

Mark whined as he saw Jack fawning over Eren. Why does Eren always get all of his attention? Why can’t he look at me? Why can’t he look at me? Mark whimpered moving to wrap his arms around Jack’s waist. Whyyyyyyyy? Eren do in’ t nee your help…” Mark whined and clung to Jack’s hoodie, dropping to his knees as he whined incessantly.

‘I want attention.

Jack looked down as Mark clung to him, sighing and rolling his eyes good-naturedly. “Get the ‘ell up here, ya big oaf.” Jack bent down to help heave Mark onto his feet, letting him cling to him and keeping an arm around him, rubbing his back to pacify him. “‘M just makin’ sure nobody ends up in trouble with Lathe is all.” He chuckled a bit as Mark’s head dropped onto his shoulder, his hands tracing over his back as he took up his attention. “Attention-hog. You always get so damn clingy.” He had a smile in his voice as he said it though, going to sit on the edge of one of the beds as Mark leaned heavily on him. “Well, until Mark decides to let go of me I’m kinda out of the game. ...as well as Mark, obviously.” He chuckled a bit nervously as Mark nestled further into his neck. ...dammit...

Eren groaned, returning to his chair in front of his laptop, his stomach growling. Fuck…. I’m starving… what time even is it? Are we being too loud? Fuck… my head’s starting to hurt a little… He shoved off the discomfort and played the game with Bob and Wade, easily finding and killing the two before hiding in the perfect spot as a roll of paper towels on a lower shelf. “You guys are never gonna fucking find me…” Eren put his controls down, pulling out his phone as it blared annoyingly. What the fuck is this? Why is my phone alarming?? He shook his head, turning the annoying alarm off and going to look through the comments page.

‘Eren, the alarm went off. Take the things you’re /supposed/ to this time of night like every other night and cool it with the drinks, okay? I need to make sure you can see this…. #Coffedad’
comments page immediately picked up on it, resending the message and redirecting Eren to the first one. He needs his meds, and my god is he gonna be hungover in the morning...

Eren’s brow furrowed as he tried to think about what he was supposed to be taking. What am I forgetting? What did I do last night? Pray? Well yeah, I guess that’s alright. I have them running around looking for my spot. “Guys… I godda do som’thin’.” Eren got up and moved over away from the camera towards the empty bed that Mark and Jack were not occupying. I can pray here really quickly.

Mark had pulled Jack onto the bed and held onto him, nuzzling his forehead into Jack’s chest. Why do you always pay attention to everyone else… and not me? Mark held him a bit tighter, a pout clearly on his face. “I wa’ addension….” His mumbles were a bit giggly as he heard Bob and Wade actively cursing Eren out, struggling to find out where his hiding spot was. This kid knows everything… damn…

Jack let Mark practically lay on top of him, chuckling a bit at his words and letting one hand card through his red hair, staring up at the ceiling and listening to Bob and Wade’s curses. He soon heard Eren begin to speak at the edge of the bed behind them in Hebrew, praying. …he’s Jewish? Jack patiently waited for Eren to finish his prayers, speaking as he stood. “I didn’t know you were Jewish.” I’ve never noticed anything to point to it before.

Eren shook his head looking towards the computer as he won the round. “No I’m not, are you guys gonna come back? I need some help…” Eren staggered a bit but found his footing after a bit, shaking his head. I drank a lot… fuck… I didn’t even really realize that I was drinking that much. He moved to sit down at his seat, waiting for the new round to start.

“NooooooOOOO!” Wade shouted from the other room. “Don’ help Eren! He don’ nee id!” Wade’s voice was a bit hoarse from shouting as him and Bob found hiding spots. I wanna actually beat him!

Mark finally let go of Jack, moving back to his computer. “Com… on… tim’ fur more!” Mark got to his seat safely, getting his headset on and immediately starting on Eren’s side to try and find Bob and Wade. We need to help Eren Jack… I don’t care what Wade’s complaining about.

Jack watched him, making sure he made it to his chair without incident before sitting up, getting out his phone. “Give me five minutes- I’m going to do a bit of chat room monitoring because we’ve kinda ignored it for the most part.” Not cool. Jack opened the chat and began to scroll, immediately seeing a flood of comments with the same hashtags.

‘#MotherHenSepticeye make sure Eren doesn’t take the L and takes the Ps instead! #theyrephysicalobjects #iwasnntalkingaboutprayers #yesisawthat #doitorhesgrounded’ …my god, think! Use that pickled brain to understand! He needs those meds!

Jack’s brow furrowed, thinking hard. “…I’m a mother hen now. …well they’re not wrong…. what…” ……………he’s supposed to take the pills or he's in trouble. Jack stood, saluting to the camera behind Wade who was closest and going to rifle through Eren’s bag, getting the bottle before going and poking him. “Eren, you need to do a thing.” He quickly read the label, getting Eren to stop playing for a second as he pressed the small white pill into his hand and opened his bottle of water for him. “Come on, your Dad stormed the comments to make sure you do this. Don't make the effort be for naught.” He grinned a bit. Everyone knows who he is on YouTube-otherwise, he would’ve just gotten drowned out. Good thing he didn’t.

Eren looked at the pill with confusion for a few seconds before taking the pills and chugging the whole water bottle down with it. I’m thirsty… hmmm… Eren looked back to the game, finally
finding Bob and killing him off quickly. “Oh Wa~de.” His voice was singsongy as he looked around for Wade. “Where… are youuuuu?” He kept his eyes glued to the screen, though a few people commented on how drunk Eren looked, and how bloodshot his eyes were, and how slow he was to respond to most things. Fuck they’re catching on…. Murr..

Jack looked back to the comments, mentally agreeing with the ones about how Eren looked. He went back to his seat to respond, looking to the camera for a moment and speaking. “Sorry Lathe, you're gonna have to deal with Eren tomorrow. It's not gonna be pretty.” Nope.

“Roasted.” Wade grinned, looking over to Eren before he heard a knock at the door, his arms coming over his head as he cheered. “My snacks!” Food!!

Okay, okay, I'll get yer damn food. Everyone wrap it up, we’re calling it quits after this round.” He left it at that, shrugging at the chorus of ‘awww’s and going to retrieve and pay for all the food, nodding as he was told they needed to keep the volume down a bit more. He set down the snacks, letting everyone do their outros before doing his own. He grinned widely, going to pick his snack from the pile before it got attacked. “Alright now, it's really late. Keep the noise down, people are trying to sleep, okay?” He handed Eren what he'd asked for after everyone collectively nodded, making sure he safely moved to a nearby bed to eat. He plopped down opposite him on the other queen in the room to eat, munching quietly. He does look really drunk… dammit. …when we all end up drunk, we forget how to be functional humans. …eh, but apparently I'm sober enough to mother hen people. …this works.

“Friiiiiies…..” Wade immediately picked up the decent-sized basket, sitting down and happily stuffing his face. Tasty. He looked over the table, trying to sneakily reach for a mozzarella stick that had been left unguarded before his hand was smacked away by Bob, the two of them bickering as to who deserved what snacks.

Eren looked down to his boneless chicken wings, his mouth watering as he sat down cross legged. His fingers instantly became covered in the garlic Parmesan sauce and the mouth watering taste filled his mouth as he quickly made it through his designated snack, wobbling a little bit on his feet as he threw out his trash, barely getting back on the bed before collapsing. I'm tired…

Mark jumped up a bit taking his Onion rings and slowly munching on them, slowly starting to get over a portion of his drunkenness. Well, Eren enjoyed his wings… Wait… “Eren are you asleep?”.... No answer… That’s wonderful …

Jack just looked at Eren, speaking matter-of-factly after he swallowed his bite of pizza log. “He’s out cold. Of course. Well, that means two of us are gonna have to share.” He looked up, watching as Bob and Wade looked at each other before taking their snacks with them to the next room and claiming the other two beds. “…welp. Guess they left me with you. Eh, you don't starfish. That's good.” Jack grinned a bit, nudging his shoulder as Mark’s expression shifted. “I'm joking. It's fine.” Of course it is.

Mark nodded, moving to close the door between their rooms. “I don’ wan them to wake Er…” He then went to go change into a tank top and some shorts. I wanna get some rest too, I probably sleep… I’m gonna have a hangover tomorrow…

Jack nodded, finishing his food before quickly changing into a white tank top and green flannel pajama pants, hopping into bed and stretching before settling under the covers, leaving plenty of room for Mark. I should get to sleep… and I can already tell even though I'm not exactly drunk, I'm not gonna feel too great tomorrow. …eh. That's the price you pay.

Mark curled up under the pillows after shutting off all the lights and saying good night to Bob and
Wade. Hmm… I wanna hold onto something. Soon enough he was scooted over to Jack’s side, pulling him close. I wanna hold onto you.

Jack’s eyes widened a bit as Mark suddenly had him pulled to the middle of the bed, curling up on top of him and burying himself into his shoulder. He chuckled a bit, one hand coming up to card through his hair, looking up to the ceiling as Mark hummed. His voice was a quiet whisper, smirking. “Clingy bastard…” I don’t remember you getting this attached when you’re drunk… eh. His expression shifted as Mark nuzzled into his neck, letting out a tiny sound as he felt his breath on his skin, blushing absolutely scarlet before coughing, trying to play it off as nothing, embarrassed. What the hell, Jack? Calm the fuck down!

Mark grumbled in his tired state, possessively holding onto Jack. “Mmmmmine.” He quickly fell asleep, the buzz from alcohol lulling him into a deep sleep, still clinging onto Jack, though his grip was a little looser now. Mine.

Jack didn't respond, thinking for a long while as he looked up to the ceiling, petting Mark long after he fell asleep. He sighed quietly, his voice barely audible as he drifted to sleep a long while after. “...yours.” He slept lightly, blinking awake whenever Mark shifted on top of him, always helping guide him to resettle on his chest, his fingers still threading through his hair before falling back to sleep himself. It was nearly four in the morning when he woke up to a small sound, Mark laying still on his chest, and his head turned to where it came from. He saw Eren’s silhouette through the dark, shaking like a leaf. He suddenly seemed more awake, the thought clicking. ...he’s having a nightmare. Jack slowly shifted out from under Mark, giving him a pillow to cling to in his absence and padded to the edge of Eren’s bed, facing him and gently shaking his shoulder, trying to wake him. “Ere- oh my god!” Jack snatched his hand back, tender from nearly being burned by his skin. “What the hell?” Jack reached for the nightstand, turning on the lamp and gasping as he saw Eren steaming, trying not to panic. “E-Eren! Eren wake up you're steaming! Eren, come on!” Jack grabbed a pillow and began to hit Eren with it, not wanting to get burned but needing to get him awake.

Eren wasn’t waking up, his mind at the mercy of his PTSD. His eyes were frantically moving around under his eyelids as his memories continued to surface under them. No… I need to get away… I need to get away from him! Eren’s whimpers got louder, his body beginning to thrash and Blake getting on edge, moving to ground his chest, which only made his nightmares worse, seeing the man sit on his chest, struggling to get him to do vile acts. NO! Eren’s arms forced Blake off of his chest, clawing at it, ripping at his loose shirt. I want it off! He needs to get off of me! Eren could barely feel the pillow smacking his head, his whimpers turning into screams as he was finally staring down the barrel of a gun. He launched himself into a sitting position as he finally woke up. His breathing was ragged, hiccup forming as soon as the tears did. I... He was gonna kill me… Eren still hadn’t really noticed that he wasn’t in his own home, though he looked completely sober, his body sweating more than any normal person would, and the steam coming off of him in waves. Fuck… Where am I? Why am I sizzling? Eren watched as the sweat formed, only to disappear as steam a few seconds later. His eyes widened in panic, looking to Jack who stood there staring at him in disbelief. Fuck... He knows... He knows... His eyes looked behind Jack, seeing Mark start to get up, after hearing him scream. No...no no no No NO NO! Blake whined, wanting to get close to him but knowing better than to try and ground him again.

...I'm not prepared for this. “Eren, I'm calling Lathe, I don't know how to help you.” Jack reached for Eren’s phone, quickly finding the list of contacts and scrolling for the right one. You’re steaming and panicking and I can't help… fuck… I didn't know any of this was a thing.

Eren’s eyes instantly widened. “No!” Eren shouted at him, trying to knock the phone out of his hand. “No! Not Dad… Please not him… Don’t call Dad…” No… Dad can’t freak out... He
can’t… He’ll never let me do anything with you guys again… Fuck, what if he never lets me drink again…

Jack held the phone away, nodding. “Alright, alright- but we need to get you help.” He looked through the rest of the contacts, stopping on one with a picture of an adult. This one is an adult person, not just some teen or something… “…what about this Nate guy?” He looks semi-responsible.

“Can’t help…. He’s in LA… Haa Fuck it hurts…. Call Casper….” Eren was struggling to hold back the pain in his voice, the steam starting to get much worse as his body was heating up even more without anything to cool him down. It hurts… Fuck! I need to cool down… I need to cool… Now… Eren struggled to his feet, falling down in exhaustion as he tried to get to the bathroom to get into the shower.

Jack called the contact, putting the phone on speaker and going to grab the blanket from the bed, using it as a sort of oven mitt and helping heave Eren to his feet, helping him stumble to the bathroom when the line was picked up.

Casper rolled over as he heard his phone, begrudgingly breaking away from Scotty’s tender hold behind him to reach his phone, rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he stared at the name on the screen. He answered it, holding the phone to his ear, his voice rough. “…Eren, it’s four in the fucking morning and I have work. What’s going on?” Should I be worried? …Probably.

Jack winced as Eren began to scream from pain, speaking into the phone. “Casper, Eren’s in pain. He’s steaming and woke up from a nightmare- he drank a lot of alcohol last night, that might be the cause of it. We need help- I have no clue what to do. We’re at the Marriott on Trost, room 401. We’re gonna try to cool him down, he’s burning. Please, help!” Please be competent!

Casper just stared ahead hearing this, speaking matter-of-factory after a second. “I’m bringing Scotty. I’ll be right there, Jack.” He hung up before there was any other reply, turning and shaking Scotty. “I’m sorry but when did we become his legal guardians… I didn’t sign up for adopting a kid…” Scotty groaned as he finally got up, stretching a bit and moving to get dressed knowing it was an emergency. What’s up with the freak show?

Casper froze as his feet hit the floor, sighing quietly before going to get dressed as well. ...that conversation is for another time. You've got a job to do now. They were dressed within two minutes, scampering downstairs and grabbing their general medic supplies before going out to the car. It took fifteen minutes before they were walking down the hall to room 401, the door propped open to allow for circulation. Walking in, it was noticeably much warmer, and he smiled a bit to Jack when he spotted him. “Hey, you're Jack, right? I'm Casper, and this here giant is Scotty.”

They shook hands, Scotty doing the same. He nodded to Mark before looking to the bathroom. “Is that where he is?” Casper walked forward and opened the door before he could reply, steam billowing out and immediately warming the room further. “...I'll take that as a yes.” He stepped in, seeing Eren fully clothed and in the tub, cold water continually flowing into the bath and hot water draining out at the same time. “...well shit.” He grabbed a washcloth and held it under the cold water for a moment, draping it over Eren’s forehead. “Jack, is there any ice in that mini Fridge?”

Jack stepped forward a bit, shaking his head from the doorway. “No, there's no freezer in it. Bob and Wade took the cooler to go get ice from the ice machine, though. They'll be back soon, though.”
Casper pondered this, grinning knowingly and speaking again. “Got any water bottles in it?” He watched as he nodded. “Get them over here.” He continually tried to cool the towel over his head, chuckling quietly as Jack made a surprised noise, bringing back completely frozen bottles of water. “Uncap them, and toss them in the bath.”

Jack did as he asked, getting a good dozen bottles in. Unsure of what else to do, he went as if to leave, Casper catching his arm at the last second.

“MotherHenSepticeye,” Casper began, grinning. “Eren likes you. Can do help me and make sure he stays somewhat calm?” He needs the reassurance right now.

Jack nodded, kneeling down next to Eren’s head and starting a cold tap behind him, continually wetting and switching out cold towels on Eren’s head. The two of them stood as they heard heavy footsteps, Wade making a beeping noise as he walked into the room backwards, Bob holding the other end of the cooler, now full of ice. He and Casper motioned for them to dump the whole damn thing, helping pick up the few stray ice cubes.

Casper helped smooth the ice all over Eren’s body, looking up to them, his eyes unapologetic. “Go get another.” He smiled as they made an exaggerated sound of exasperation, still going off to get ice. It's melting too quickly...

Jack took some of the ice and gathered it up into a soaked towel, pressing the impromptu ice pack to Eren’s exposed forehead. “Don't ya worry, Eren, we'll getcha cooled down…” Jack seemed to realise how panicked Eren looked, holding the bag to his head and moving so he was in his line of sight, speaking and trying to calm him down. “Eren, please, don't panic… uh, it's all going to be okay. Casper and Scotty are here and they're helping cool you down, and you're gonna be absolutely fine. It’s okay. Please, believe me.”...it's like he can't even see me... this is bad. This is very very bad.

Eren’s eyes were wide with blatant fear. I don’t... I can’t see…. I feel so hot... Eren tried to lift an arm up out of the ice, but as soon as he did the steam increased tenfold, his head laying on the cool porcelain that was quickly warming with the heat of his face on it. I'm too hot… fuck… it hurts.

Eren was freaking out more, feeling his body begin to shake and start to seize. “F-Fingers… Lock…. His breaths were ragged, he was struggling horribly, his eyes beginning to close, freaking him out more. He could barely hear Blake’s whines as he paced the hotel room and the bathroom which filled with steam, almost like a sauna. Jack.... I can’t calm down... I can’t, it hurts!

Scotty kneeled down by Jack’s side, looking over the quickly melting ice, trying to see how much was left over the steam wafting up from the tub. “Alright Eren… I’m going to do something to take your temperature… and you’re going to hate it right now… but it needs to be done.” He words were loud as he struggled to peel the clothes off of his body, finally managing and taking them out of the tub. He got a thermometer out and sighed quietly as he snapped on some gloves, moving towards Eren’s rear and inserting it as he screamed, the cool instrument foreign in his body and uncomfortable. “Work with me, Kid…” Scotty made sure Eren kept the thermometer in before he looked to the alarming equipment. ....120...140....150... How much hotter? He’s still climbing.... 160... 170...175...183.... 183…. How the fuck is he alive?

Eren groaned struggling to keep his eyes open, his body refusing to cooperate with him. It hurts... I want Dad… I want Lathe... Eren had begun to cry, the tears clouding his vision as his body started to convulse, not approving of his abnormally high temperature. The only problem was that he couldn’t be turned to his side in the tub, the water too high to safely move him, but his head unprotected as he thrashed. It hurts.
Lathe suddenly appeared in the doorway, holding a heavy-looking bag of rock salt, his expression neutral. “I’ve got the stuff. Move.” Lathe brushed respectively past a confused and alarmed Casper and Jack, kneeling by Eren and opening the bag, dumping a few decent handfuls over the melting ice, cooling it further. “Fancy seeing you all here- Eren, Eren Honey, look at me.” Lathe dipped his hand in the ice water for an instant before brushing away Eren’s hair from his face, trying to get him to calm and stop thrashing. “Eren, it's gonna be okay, just stay calm… please, try not to move so much, you'll hurt your head. More ice is on the way, just stay calm for now, please. I'm here. We’re all here. It's gonna be okay.” It should be soon.

Scotty looked over to Lathe as he dumped the salt on top of the ice that was already melting quickly. Salt? Lowers the water temperature… Before freezing… Well shit that works. “He’s still at 182 degrees…. And you’re not supposed to be here I was told…” I believe that was why Casper and I got called. So how did you find out? This steam is getting fucking everywhere.

Eren felt the cool hand against his face for an instant, his body continuing to thrash without his control as he panicked, his head following suit, thrashing against the hard bathtub surface. Dad’s here… Fuck… It’s bad… I can control my arms… They hurt. Eren felt another searing jolt run through his body as he hit his wrist hard enough against the tub. He could barely make out Scotty’s alarmed tone as his head started to feel light. I can’t stay awake… No no no… I can’t fall asleep!

Lathe ignored Scotty’s second statement for the moment, wincing as Eren’s wrist cracked against the ceramic tub. He grabbed for a towel and dunking it into the water, filled it with ice and tied it shut, moving it under Eren’s head quickly as a temporary guard as he thrashed. He reached into the ice water for his other hand, clasping it and speaking to him. “Eren, you can’t fall asleep on us. Please, you need to fight it and stay awake. I know it must really fucking hurt but you have to. We’re trying to cool you down the best we can. Just be strong. Stay strong.” When the hell are they gonna get that ice here?!

Bob and Wade came in a few seconds later another fully loaded cooler of ice coming into the bathroom. The two heaved it over Eren’s still thrashing body. It’s melting still… Holy crap… What’s happening to him? Wade watched in worry as Eren’s eyes rolled into the back of his head, his head tipping back, shoulders and back arching, his body beginning to spasm in a full on seizure brought on by his panic. Oh my god… What the fuck is happening?

Eren couldn’t hear them anymore. All he heard was a high pitched ringing in his ears, so painful he thought he was screaming, but nothing of the sort was leaving his mouth. I can’t see… I can’t hear anything… My body feels like lead… And I’m exhausted. His seizure kept his whole body shaking for a solid minute before his fingers started to lock up, no longer shaking. It hurts. I wanna go to sleep… If I fall asleep… It won’t hurt anymore.

Lathe glanced up to the two of them, calling past them. [Casper! Talk to the four of them, be moral support. We’ve got this.] And it’s not too pretty… they don’t need to see this… “Bob, Wade, one more, please. Then I think he’ll be okay.” He spread the ice over Eren’s body as they nodded and left, dumping more salt on top before dipping his hand in again, doing it multiple times and running his then-cool hand through Eren’s locks, trying to keep him calm. “Eren, please stay with us. You must be tired, but it'll be over very soon. Just stay strong. You're doing great.” You'll be okay. I hope.

Eren’s eyes closed, his lungs still struggling to function with his body being so damn hot. His extremities fell limp at his sides, his wrist making yet another sickening crack as it snapped back in place. His temperature beginning to drop down a bit due to the below-freezing water.
Eren felt the heat beginning to surround his small body, looking at the bright orange flames slowly licking the wooden surfaces and crawling towards him. He heard his mother’s cries to come to him, could hear someone calling for him… But the voice changed, the boy getting more confused as he tried to figure out who was looking for him in the thick smoke. Mom?… No, too rough…

Grisha?… No, too gentle. Eren could feel the heat increase as his eyes looked over to the flames getting even closer to him. They’re gonna burn me. He picked his head up. Another voice, yelling for him, screaming for him… Pleading with him. He could almost feel the distress coming from the voice on the other side of the smoke. Vatri?… Eren opened his mouth to try and let out his response, to tell whoever was trying to find him that was in the kitchen, but his words couldn’t leave his throat. Why can’t I talk? The smaller child was quickly beginning to feel the panic set in, his flight instinct urging him to leave the safety of the kitchen, no longer a safety, and more like a mortal danger. His small wobbly legs carried him out of the smoke filled house, trying to locate the voice, only they were coming from every direction, throwing him off, he didn’t know where to turn, ambling around in a room quickly filling with smoke, his lungs about to choke on the smoke as the burning sensation filled his lungs. I inhaled it… It hurts…

Lathe kept pouring the icy water over his head, his eyes widening as Eren started to mumble. “…he’s dreaming. Shit.”…burning… inhaled something that hurts… Mom and Grisha… he’s dreaming of the burning house. “Scotty, tell me his temperature is dropping at least somewhat.” It better be…

Scotty looked back down to the thermometer, groaning as he saw it. “We’re only down to 180…. He should be dead.” His voice was a bit lower as he said the last bit. His heart should not be beating… His whole body should be cooked…. How is he still alive? Scotty turned his head as another rush of steam emanated from Eren’s limbs. And the steam’s so fucking hot. What is he talking about?

Lathe turned his head, the coils of steam warming him. “If this is what a hangover for Eren is, I don’t think he’s ever going to be drinking again…” He went back to moving ice around, spreading salt on the newly revealed layer. “…and I don’t know how he’s alive. …it’s insane… and I don’t understand a bit of it.” Lathe switched the ice in the towel under Eren’s head, obviously unable to submerge his head. “….he’s dreaming about the house fire… I don’t think this is gonna keep being this easy…” If he starts panicking again… he already had a seizure… I don’t know how much worse this can get...

Scotty looked over, trying to make out Lathe’s face through the heavy steam. “What happens when he normally thinks about it?” It can’t be much worse that this? Can it? He’s already had a seizure, and he’s passed out from his panic attack… Fuck this isn’t good, he’s not cooling down quick enough. “Lathe… I might need to go get some IV’s and run cold liquid in him.” That’s what got his temperature down last time…

Lathe immediately nodded. “Do it. The mini fridge is gonna be a freezer, most likely. If it worked before, it just might work again. My god, I’m never letting him near alcohol again. It’s not worth this shit.” Nope.

Eren’s small and weak body began to choke on the thick cloud of smoke that was quickly filling the inescapable room. His body was forced to the floor, trying to get away from the toxic fumes.
trapped in his lungs. He closed his eyes, his chest no longer feeling weighted by the thick smoke, and he could breathe again. He opened his eyes to blinding white lights placed over his body, trying to move, only to find his body restrained with thick leather straps. No... No please… I don’t want it out… Eren tried to move, struggled to get out of the thick straps. Daddy… No please… I don’t want it out… Please don’t take it out. His begging was frantic until he felt the searing pain shoot through his body, his father having used another useless anesthesia on him. It hurts… Daddy please stop... I promise I’ll be a good boy… I won’t fight back anymore… I’ll let them do anything… Please stop... Tears were streaming down his cheeks to the sides, his restraints continuing to hold him down.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Lathe’s eyes were wide as Eren started screaming with tears running down his face as he cried out loudly. He’s having a nightmare about Grisha. Lathe knew the others were listening in confusion and worry, not knowing what any of his screams meant. I need to get him to stop. He needs to wake up. “Sorry, kid.” Lathe took off his ring and raised his hand, backhanding him hard across the face to snap him from his dream. He immediately brushed away Eren’s hair, apologising profusely as his eyes snapped open, tears still streaming down his cheeks.

Eren’s eyes finally snapped open, finding that he was struggling to breathe in the cold surrounding his extreme heat. Fuck…. What… What happened? Eren whimpered as he felt the right side of his face start to swell up, the blood beginning to rush there to start healing. Fuck it hurts. “Dad… Hurts…”

Lathe’s eyes widened as he saw his cheek swell, though he suddenly realized something, looking over his face. ... he's not bleeding. “Eren, Honey, I'm sorry, I had to wake you up, you were screaming…” He watched in awe as his cheek began to slowly retract, the bruise fading and his cheek taking its time returning to normal. “...I will never understand any of this crap. And why isn't your nose bleeding?” Lathe reached behind him and knocked on the wood cabinet. “Normally that happens when you're mending…. But you're not. ...Huh.” I don't get it. “But we've got a new plan of attack- Scotty’s going to put a chilled IV in you, and that'll hopefully do the trick. It did last time, so we're gonna hope it'll do it again.”

Jack came out of the bathroom as Casper ushered him into the bedroom, his eyes immediately locking onto Mark, a bit angry. “You. You called Lathe, didn't you. Eren asked us not to and yet you did! Why?” You heard him ask us not to! Why? He might never get to hang out with us ever again!

Mark raised his hands in defense, his voice going considerably higher-pitched than it was before. “I didn’t know what to do! None of us knew what to do!” He squeaked at the end, fearing that Jack would smack him across the face. Lathe knows how to deal with this! “You know how much he drank! It’s our fault to begin with!”

Eren groaned, struggling to shift his body to look up to Lathe’s hand. “I'm too hot.” I feel so fucking warm… It’s horrible, I don’t want this to happen again… I’m not drinking that much again ever ...

“Well maybe we didn't know what to do, but the person we called ended up being a doctor and brought another one with him! He would've gotten here so quickly, did you really call while they were already here? They knew what they were doing! Scotty and Casper aren't exactly what you'd call incompetent. They sure look like they knew what was going on a hell of a lot better than us.”

Mark stepped back a bit, looking down at his hands. “He was still screaming… Even when they
got here… And I didn’t… I don’t want him to be hurt! I don’t care if we never get to drink with him again… I don’t want to put him at greater risk for something else happening!” Lathe never told us why Eren was in the hospital in a coma… We never knew until that one news article came out… I know that Eren shut up about everything after that… I didn’t want him to be exposed again… What if he would never crawl back out of his shell? Mark swallowed hard at the thought. “What if he wasn’t… What if they couldn’t do anything? We’re not his legal guardians… We couldn’t make a decision about anything for him…” I would have no idea what hospital to take him to… Or if this was normal… none of us know… And Blake was freaking out just as much as Eren was.

Jack watched him, his voice quieting a bit, trying not to put him so much on the defensive. “I guess you do have a point… Lathe really would know how to best take care of him with something like this happening… I just thought… I don’t know what I thought. I guess this was better than trying to hide it… ‘m sorry for yelling…” Lathe really should know when all this crap is happening… ugh… I dunno…

Casper looked between the two of them, spinning on one of the chairs at the desk, looking at the ceiling and making an exaggerated, exasperated sigh. “My god, will you two lovebirds just kiss and make up already?” He grinned widely to them, the look in his eyes mischievous. I have been blessed with an advanced gaydar… you two are huge blips on the map.

Jack looked to him, his eyes wide and blushing scarlet, stuttering. “W-what? W-we’re not… no, we’re not…” He couldn’t find the words in his embarrassed state, just deciding to stare at the floor, trying to hide his furious blush. …It’s not a thing. ……damn it……

Mark blushed as well, looking away from everyone. Stare at the wall… Don’t blush… don’t blush…. Fuck… Mark couldn’t help but blush anyways as Bob and Wade started laughing from Casper’s comment. Oh god, they’re back…. They’re not gonna let that go are they? “‘S okay.” Mark still wouldn’t look at anyone, trying to calm his face. Fuck… Casper figured it out…

Eren groaned, whimpering as more ice was poured onto him, steam curling up from his limbs. He kept his head against Lathe’s hands, finding comfort in his cold hands. “M sorry… I… I …” Eren’s voice was hoarse from screaming, trying to find the right words to apologize to him. I don’t want you to be mad at them… I can take you being mad at me… I can get an apartment… Or sleep in the barn… I… If you never wanna see me again… Umm…. Eren’s eyes looked at the ice covering his body, unable to meet his gaze. He didn’t pay much mind as Scotty came in and took his arms, putting cold IVs into his arms and hanging them on the curtain rod. It’s cold… It feels nice…

Scotty sighed in relief as he looked down at the thermometer once the liquid had been give to him. “He’s dropping, 180…179………178…. It’s slow… But he’ll make it…” Scotty got up and moved to the mini fridge, throwing 6 extra bags of fluids into the top to chill them. It’s quiet… What happened…

Casper looked to him, his legs swinging as he sat, trying to low-key diffuse some of the tension in the room. “So, I hear he’s gonna be okay?” He watched as Scotty nodded, shrugging a bit. “Alright. We’re gonna have to stay until he’s back to normal, though.” He looked over the four of them, speaking mostly to Bob and Wade. “Eren’s gonna be just fine. Try and get back to sleep- it’s still hella early to be awake. We’ll make sure he’s a-okay before we even think of leaving.” Casper stood as Bob and Wade nodded, leaving for the other room and shutting the door behind them. He walked to the bathroom with Scotty, closing the door behind them to give Jack and Mark a bit of privacy and to quiet their talking from inside. I get the feeling I hit it on the head. …they’re gonna need a bit to figure all that out.
Jack turned away from them, nodding as Wade and Bob left for the next room, thankful that Casper was gone for the moment. “...Eren’s probably not going to be staying the night at this rate... you can have the other bed... you don't have to sleep with me...” ...I want you to... but you won't... you don't swing that way. Jack tried not to sound too miserable as he spoke, but he clammed up at that thought, getting into bed and turning on his side away from Mark, trying to fall asleep. ...it's never gonna happen...

Mark’s gut clenched as he heard Jack’s words.... He... Oh... Okay... Um... Well this is a predicament that I’m not really sure how to... Fuck, you sounded miserable ... Mark swallowed the large lump in his throat before he moved, the bed dipping as he slipped in behind Jack, his arms snaking around his waist. “...I don’t wanna...” I don’t wanna sleep alone...

Jack’s eyes widened as he felt Mark clamber up onto the bed, his blush returning in full force as he was gently pulled back into his chest, feeling Mark tangle their legs together. “...y-you're...” ...you're serious. “U-Uhm... okay...” Jack became incredibly nervous, his arms curled in front of him, his head ducked down a bit, afraid to shift or do anything to disturb Mark and hyper aware that he was right behind him because he wanted to be. ...I don't know how to do this... crap what do I do...

Mark sighed as Jack stayed in his arms. “Jack... Get some sleep, they’ll wake us up when Eren’s better... Then we need to apologize to CoffeeDad.” Mark’s words were mumbled as he nestled closer to Jack, loving the warmth he felt against his front. He’s so warm... I want to keep holding him...

Jack felt a tiny shiver run through him as Mark mumbled into his shoulder, trying to relax, nodding. “...Okay.” That needs doing... Jack took a deep breath, sighing quietly and letting himself simply relax into Mark’s gentle hold, feeling himself drawn to the warmth behind him. ...I like this... He could swear he felt him press a tiny kiss to his clothed shoulder blade, his face flushed, content as he began to drift in and out of sleep, always aware of the calm presence behind him. ...I like this.

Mark slept peacefully, holding onto Jack’s lithe form with strong arms. Mine...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren was starting to become more and more awake by the time his temperature dropped from the 170s down to the 120s. The ice had been refilled twice over the six hours he’d been there, and he had gone through four packs of IVs to cool him down. Dad hasn’t said much to me... He must be so furious with me... Fuck... Eren hadn’t looked up to any of the three men making small talk in the bathroom quietly. They’re all probably mad at me... I fucked up... I fucked up horribly . He didn’t try speaking again over the past six hours, often just left alone to his own thoughts.

Lathe chuckled quietly at one of Casper’s comments, looking over to Eren where he lay still and quiet. “You doin’ okay? You’re very quiet.” He shifted a bit where he sat on the floor, brushing Eren’s drying locks from his eyes. “...you all couldn’t have known that this was how your body reacts to alcohol. It’s not like I’m mad. But I certainly think that you drinking is now a very bad idea, especially so much... but nobody’s in trouble.” It's okay. You all reacted the only way you knew, and did well.

Eren kept his gaze down in submission. You... You keep saying you're not mad... but... He moved his head to the side a bit, letting the hair cover his eyes again. You’ll get mad eventually... And I keep pushing the limits... I don’t wanna be a bad kid. Eren didn’t even pick his head up when Mark came in to check up on him. I fucked up... They probably don't wanna see me ever again after this. He let out a soft sigh, closing his eyes as they grew warm with unshed tears. They must
think I’m a freak.

Mark knocked before opening the door, his voice a bit rough from having just woken up again even though it was 10 in the morning. “Is… Um… Is Eren better?” It’s definitely not a sauna in here… Which is good, I wonder if he’s getting any sleep at all? His head’s down… Maybe he is asleep?

Scotty picked his head up from where he had been resting it on his knee. “He’s at 118… So he’s doing much better, but he’s not out of the woods quite yet.” He could probably use another IV...

Lathe looked up to him, giving him a weak smile. “I just want to let you know that absolutely none of this is your guys’ faults. We didn't know what would happen, and now we do, but you all acted very well to try and fix the problem. The only change is now Eren really shouldn't drink. I'll still let you kidnap him occasionally. That's fine.” He flashed him a mischievous smile. We're cool.

Mark seemed to heave a sigh of relief, simply moving down to sit where Scotty had been once the large man got up to get a new pack of IVs. “Is he awake?” He voice was quiet, hoping he wouldn’t wake him. He needs sleep. I know he does… That nightmare must’ve been horrible. He ran a hand through his red fringe, pushing it out of his face.

Lathe nodded, shifting forward a bit and running a cool hand through Eren’s hair, trying to get his attention, his voice soft. “Eren, Mark’s here to say hi… you feel like talking a bit?” Lathe waited patiently for a response, not entirely surprised when Eren took a long moment before shaking his head slowly, understanding when he didn't look up. He looked back to Mark. “Not really talkative… it’s a thing.” He kept his hand gently running through Eren’s hair, trying to comfort him. ...but even if he's not talking to you… I kinda think he might like to hear something from you. I can only imagine what’s going on in his head… he must think we all think he’s some freak of nature… he needs to hear something reassuring. “...but if you want to talk… I get the idea he’s listening.”

Mark nodded shifting a bit to let Scotty in to change his bags. “Eren… I know you may not want to talk about this with us… But we’re here for you… All of us are. We’re really worried about you.” His voice was soft, full of warmth as he spoke. I want you to open back up to us about things. Did I say the right things?

Lathe smiled warmly to him, nodding. “...it's those kinds of things he needs to hear more of.” He doesn't believe it unless you tell him. “...he’s just not up to being too social right now, understandably… it's okay, though. Really.” I'm sure he appreciates hearing it.

Mark nodded. “We’re gonna head downstairs to the breakfast area… Do you guys want anything to eat? We’re gonna bring it back up.” Jack’s getting dressed now... So yeah... I needed to distract myself with Eren... There are too many people here...

Lathe shrugged a bit. “I'm not really hungry, but if you can find me coffee, that would be really nice… lots of cream and sugar, if it's not too much trouble.” ...coffee.

Casper gave Mark a one-shouldered shrug. “If they have bagels, a plain one with cream cheese would be cool. And thanks.”

Scotty tilted his head a bit, glancing over to Casper. “Well, they're not going to have what I normally eat for breakfast down there, so coffee like Lathe’s would be alright, please and thank you.” ...too many witnesses.
Mark raised an eyebrow before nodding, looking over to Eren. “Eren do you want anything to eat?” He seemed to perk up when Eren picked his head up a bit. That’s it Eren!

Eren looked over to Lathe, not trusting his voice at the moment and struggling to move his own fingers. I need you to go through the alphabet. His eyes were trained on Lathe's hands, trying to get the message across.

Lathe looked to him, seeing him stared intently at his hands. “Hm? What's up? …do you need me to sign for you?” He watched as Eren nodded. “…alphabet? Your fingers look pretty clumsy right now.” He smiled as Eren nodded, slowly going through the alphabet and starting over every time Eren nodded at a letter.

Eren nodded for every letter he needed. E.G.G.S…. A.N.D…. T.O.A.S.T…. T.W.O…. T…. Eren turned his head away once Lathe had everything he wanted. I want food… I’m starving… He flinched a bit, turning his head back quickly, looking to his hands again. I need my Pills…

Lathe looked to Mark, smiling faintly. “Eggs and toast please, and a cup of black tea with two teabags in it… he likes it strong.” He looked back to Eren as he jerked a bit, still petting his hair. “And I have my bag with, so you'll get your morning meds too, don't worry.” I can practically hear you thinking from here.

Eren sighed in relief, letting his head roll to the side and letting out a pained yelp as his head smacked against the porcelain. Fucking that hurt… Eren whined, his limbs struggling to move, completely sluggish as his body cooled down the rest of the way. It’s nice and cold…

Lathe winced as his head hit the porcelain, going to put a dry towel under his head as a sort of pillow, murmuring soothingly to him just trying to coax him from his shell a bit. “Scotty, what are we at?” He doesn't feel too warm anymore…

Scotty looked at the thermometer. “We can take him out of the ice now… I’d go get his clothes first.” Scotty reached in and pulled the thermometer out of his rear, wincing as Eren hissed at him in pain. I know kid, I’m sorry…

Eren hissed, moving to try and scramble out of the cold tub, but his body refused to work. Fucking I can’t move… I need to get up… Eren was still trying to struggle in the ice, his limbs wobbly under him.

Lathe snatched one of the towels behind them, reaching to let the tub begin to drain of the water and melted ice. “Hold up your arms.” He waited until Eren got his arms up, moving the towel around him and lifting him from the water and ice with one strong movement, carefully setting him on his feet and keeping the towel around him. “Well, your clothes are completely soaked still… you kinda ended up in the tub with them, so they're just full of salt water still, haven't had a chance to really dry… Mark, can you find Eren’s bag please? He might, should actually, have pjs to wear.” He kept Eren on his feet, the towel around his chest and covering his hips while Mark fetched the clothes, setting them on the counter. Lathe gave Eren a quick peck on the forehead. “Get dressed-then, we’ll eat and get you home, okay?” He and the three of them left after Eren nodded, leaving him to himself for a bit.

Eren nodded, though he ended up on the floor with his clothes half on struggling to move. Dammit Dad… I can’t move... He managed to crawl to the door, weakly banging on it. I can't feel my legs… Dad!

Lathe opened the door, looking down to where Eren was struggling with boxers on, his pajama pants only halfway up his legs. “Oh my, I've got ya, kid.” Lathe bent down and scooped Eren up,
setting him on his own two feet and letting him lean heavily on his shoulders as he got his pants up to his hips. He sat him down on the toilet seat while he handed him a shirt, glad that he was able to pull it over his head and helping him with socks. “Alright, so you're not gonna be able to walk much, I take it.” He chuckled faintly as Eren shook his head, moving to pick him up bridal-style and carry him to the bedroom, setting him on one of the empty beds. “Well, you're obviously staying up here for food. Are you tired much? How do you feel?” You didn't get too much sleep, I take it.

Eren looked down at his hands, his brow furrowing when he struggled to move his own fingers. His shaky hands took hold of Lathe’s as he signed. {I’m fucking exhausted… and I can’t feel my legs… I.... I’m sorry.} He let go of Lathe’s hands to show him his open palm, his head down in submission again.

Lathe reached slowly, closing Eren’s hand, holding his fist in between his hands. “Eren, you don't have to apologise. Everything that happened couldn't be predicted. It was in no way your fault. And even if it was, which it isn’t, you'd be immediately forgiven. It's okay, really. A: we both know I can and will carry you out of here eventually, and B: I understand the exhaustion and not feeling your legs. It got very real very fast. I understand.” He smiled wearily. “Now when they all get back up here, we have to discuss what happens after breakfast.” I dunno if you're staying for anything afterwards or if I'm carrying you to the car right after.

Eren let those tears finally fall from his eyes, hurriedly shaking his head before taking his hands again. {I… I kept drinking…. I felt myself getting warm…. I didn’t want to stop… Too much shit has happened… I don’t want to lose them too… I’m so sorry!} Eren’s tears fell down his cheeks quickly. I felt so warm when I passed out… I know something was wrong… And I didn’t want to call you. I was so afraid… But now they’ll think I’m a freak.

Lathe pulled Eren into his lap, his hand carding through his damp locks and he murmured quietly to him. “Eren, it's okay… you didn't know how out of hand everything would get… and you're not going to lose them because of this. They were worried, and maybe they don't understand what happened exactly, but that doesn't mean they're going to dismiss you and think you're weird or anything. They care about you a lot. I can understand not wanting to call me because you didn't want to get them in trouble, but you need to take care of you first and foremost. That's all I ask. They're not in any trouble, and you're not in any trouble. It's fine. Really.” He crossed his thumb over his heart. I swear.

Eren sniffled, wiping away the tears for a moment. “But they're…They know now… They know I’m different… People don’t like different, they call it names, they kick it around, they throw it away… They don’t pay attention to it…” He sniffled more, burying his face into Lathe’s shirt. “They’re not gonna call me again… They’ll never wanna do anything with me after this…” I've just lost friends… I... Eren’s tears were fresh again, trying to calm himself down, but failing miserably.

Scotty had made himself comfortable with Casper on the opposite bed, watching the floor, listening to Eren cry. I thought he was getting better... He sounds so insecure, like he's expecting people to turn around and stab him in the back. These guys are his friends, aren't they? He should be able to trust them. “Lathe… We’re gonna have to have him tell us his story…” I need to record this for Hannah, she’ll think it's interesting.

Lathe nodded. “It'll help, instead of having him tell it over and over again. It can be draining…” He looked up as the door clicked, Mark and Jack coming into the room with food, followed by Bob and Wade. “Hey-- after breakfast, we need to do a thing. Just a heads up, we're gonna need borrow your laptop for it.” He nodded to Mark, who gave him a quizzical look before shrugging. He
thanked him as he was handed coffee, sipping from the mug and shifting so Eren could sit and eat in his lap, a cup holder for his mug of tea. ...this has got to take so much out of you. And you're dealing with it alright. Serious respect.

Eren’s movements were slow and weak, eating in utter silence as Mark tried to start up a conversation. They’re all gonna stab me in the back… They don’t wanna come back after this… They’ll all hate me...

Mark sat down with Scotty and Casper along with Jack, Wade and Bob over taking the table. “So what is your relation to Eren? I know that you guys are doctors… But…” I wanna try and know a bit about you guys… I really only know your names...

We should record this. Casper pulled out his phone, starting an audio recording and setting it on the nightstand. “Well, if that ain't a story. See, I was a freshman at my high school when this one was a junior.” He jerked his head to Lathe. “And Scotty was a year behind me. We all ended up in this club thing Lathe put together Junior year, and like the dozen people who attended every single meeting became the squad. We are members of such squad, obviously. But I don't understand why more people didn't ever show up, in retrospect. It was intended to be some art club and all we did was maybe doodle while playing cards or checkers and roasting each other. It was great.” Casper grinned. Quite the fair meme.

“That just really explains why we know Lathe. Because we all ended up going into a medical field, it made it easier to stay in contact because we all went to the same college. Though this one-” He nodded to Lathe himself. “-decided that being a general surgeon wasn't what he wanted to do after two years of actually being one.”

Lathe shrugged, speaking. “I always had this idea that being a doctor meant that you were helping the people who really needed help. It’s true that the people in hospitals obviously need medical help. But I realized two years later that the people who really need help are the people that refuse to seek help- teenagers who are self-harming, at risk of suicide, have a history of abuse or domestic violence in the family. Those were the people I wanted to help. I went to get degrees in teaching, studying as many subjects as possible so I could be an effective substitute teacher. I knew I wanted to do substitutions because I’d always be seeing different faces, not the exact same every day. I met Eren during one of my Chemistry classes. ...he’d been cutting, and I could recognize the blood on the black fabric of his sweatshirt. I went to wrap it, he emotionally unraveled, and the next thing I knew I was cleaning up so much damage from his biological father’s abuse, starting a case against him and trying to keep him in one piece, physically and mentally. ...it only took a week for me to decide to adopt him. Ever since then, I've been doing what I hope is at least an adequate job of impersonating a parent.” He shrugged, smiling. “I think I'm doing maybe okay.”

Eren piped up a bit, sipping from his mug. <“You’re doing better than that asshole ever did.”> He kept his voice quiet, leaning into Lathe’s chest as he sipped at his tea still. It's okay... It's not the same brand Dad gets... But I’ll live.

Lathe chuckled, pecking the top of his head. “Thank god. But then again, when it comes to being a Dad, you can't get any worse than him.” Really tho.

Eren's reply was instant before he quieted down again. <“You’re doing better than Vatri…”> You are... You know me so well, and you accept everything that happens with me...

Lathe smiled, seeming to relax, his cheek resting on Eren’s head. “...I didn't know what it was. But everything was just screaming at me to do anything and everything you can to keep him in one piece. To make sure he stays okay. ...apparently I'm doing a good job at that.” He blinked, glassy-eyed, his gaze going to the floor. I'm really glad I listened.
Eren timidly grabbed at his shirt, tugging on it to get Lathe’s attention. “You… You have my permission… To… To tell them… About what they saw… They’ll probably want to know… You can tell them about… him ….”> Eren’s voice was a bit shaky as he spoke, but collected his bearings after a few moments. They deserve to know how much of a freak they allowed in their company for the last time…

Lathe nodded, setting down his empty cup and shifting to better hold Eren as he spoke, his thumb running over Eren’s side. “…Eren’s biological father, Grisha, was a monster. He would beat his wife Carla on a regular basis, and his destructive front turned to Eren after he tried making mac-n-cheese when he was eight and accidentally set the kitchen on fire, accidentally killing Carla in the process. He forced Eren to come with him to America, and they’d lived in a house on this plot of land that ended up destroyed when we needed a bigger house. But Grisha did horrible things… be beat, whipped, and burned him… he drugged him with illegal drugs that didn't work right… and he’d have groups of men over… to rape him… or he’d perform operations on him and take out organs or flesh… he'd recorded so many of those… but when Eren got sent to the hospital because of his wounds opening during school, Grisha seemingly disappeared. From that incident with his father, Eren’s back had been whipped to a point where the spine was showing, before it was cauterized with boiling water, and Grisha had broken his left arm, and broke all his ribs. Eren was put into drug induced coma, the doctors having to put him under to treat his mangled back, and help his broken ribs heal. The man disappeared without a trace and Eren was finally released from the hospital, I was his substitute teacher the next day, and I kept him after class because I had noticed blood marks on his black sweatshirt, and he just dropped an emotional bombshell on me. I found out about what Grisha had done to him, and I called a friend who is now my Fiancée to lead the investigation against Grisha. It wasn’t a week later that I adopted Eren and started trying to fix him up. He was slowly getting better, and after a month, he got introduced to Nate Ruess… You’ve all seen the video, I’m sure… and it all just snowballed from there. We were asked to go back to LA to get Eren familiar with where he would be recording… We found out he has a horrible fear of planes, so much so that he had multiple panic attacks at both the airports we went to, even leading to his first seizure. I was afraid that after the stress of the first one, that he would have another one, I put him on Anti-convulsants to try and stop them. Due to that he developed a form of juvenile selective osteoporosis… And we didn't know for another year, when Eren had almost drowned in a pool and I had given him CPR. We took him back home to come see Scotty at the hospital here… Scotty, Casper and I were really involved in Eren’s recovery from that, and it was the oddest thing… the scans of his chest when he first got to the hospital was of him having that form of osteoporosis in his ribs, which caused almost all his ribs to break or fracture and show up as very pale in his X-rays. But it wasn't even a month before another scan showed his chest was completely solid, every fractured and broken rib healed and showing up as strong. We were still looking into Grisha’s whereabouts, but we didn't see or hear anything for three years. We thought he was gone or dead, but he came back a while ago… nearly killed Eren as he was studying and holding down the fort in Levi’s apartment. Grisha was there for two weeks before Levi came home from college a day early as a surprise, interrupting Grisha’s stabbing and cutting Eren, shooting him dead in an instant. He was rushed to the hospital… but he fell into a coma. That's what the three-week coma was. A majority of his bones were shattered, which made for a lengthy surgery he should’ve never survived… but his bones mended insanely quickly, and then it was his organs, and then his skin… when he woke up he just pieced himself back together. It wasn't easy being in the hospital… photos got out, and stories of all the crap that happened while he was still really out of it from everything that happened. At the time he’s lost memories, he had sensory and trust issues, and would get extremely defensive… he had seizures, was harassed so badly by a police officer, who's no longer on the force, thank god, for a statement on the attack not even a day after he woke up and when his coordination was still awful and he couldn't even speak… anything that wasn't posted to my tumblr or Twitter didn't have the right context. He wouldn’t talk to anyone, barely looked anyone in the eye either. Even it was me, he still didn’t talk, he also struggled a lot
with the fact that he was on a feeding tube, and couldn’t really move around. He had multiple
seizures over the course of the three weeks he was in the hospital after he woke up. He was on the
suicide watch list at the hospital, leaving anything sharp around him was a no go, and all his
medications had to be injected via IV… That included his pain medications, he kept his IV kinked,
and none of us noticed, thinking that the other was changing out his IV bag, so when Eren
unkinked it… He overdosed from the amount of morphine that was going through his system. He
got better after that, starting to try and talk about what happened to us… He still had a lot of
sensory and trust issues, understandable, but coming home from the hospital… that wasn’t any
cakewalk either. He ended up attempting to commit suicide again, cutting his wrists, all the way up
to the inside of his elbow. He was bleeding horribly, but his body… It began to heat up and his
nose began to bleed, almost as bad as the cuts he had on his arms… I finally got his arms to stop
bleeding, and they began to close up by themselves, the skin and muscle beginning to weave
together… We knew that something was causing it… and we’re still trying to figure it out… but
we knew for sure that his body reacted a bit negatively towards the almost instantaneous healing.
He was exhausted for a few days but agreed to go to psychiatric therapy… He needed it, so Scotty
took him since I was called in to substitute, which went pretty horribly and ended with him having
a seizure when it turned out the therapist was one of the men who’d raped him before… we
obviously got the guy, Eren had spent his free time in the hospital drawing them and writing out
their names and occupations as best he could… but… it wasn’t easy when he woke up after falling
asleep from exhaustion after his seizure, only to not recognize anyone… not even me. He had
reverted to the mind of what we think was his four- or five-year-old self, asking when Grisha,
Carla, or Hannes would be back, and we had to lie and say they were either sick at home or across
the country at a wedding… we were waiting for him to remember who he was. He didn’t until I
took him to the new house here, when he was in the barn. He seemed to immediately recognize the
horse as Charlie, the actual Charlie incidentally being that horse’s sire. I showed him the animals,
showed him how to feed them, and I left him alone for not too long to make lunch, I think… but
his foot got stepped on by Charlie Jr, and he remembered everything, and… Blake came to the
house barking, and I ran out… it’s never going to stop haunting me, the image of Eren hanging
motionless from the rafters, slowly swaying… I cut him down the instant I could, and we talked
for a long time after that… about how it wasn’t worth it, to try and end it… he’s been getting
better… he’s scared me to death, when he somehow got to my Grandfather’s gun and decided to go
hunting without telling me… I ran outside so fast, and I was in complete panic, but he’d shot a
deer…. and to his credit, it was a really nice buck, but it scared me to death. He’d been getting
better with the pills we put him back on… Antidepressants, his PTSD medication… but we tried to
keep him off the sleeping pills… I didn’t want him to get addicted to him, so we cut him off of
them. I hadn’t realized, because he hid it so well from us that he wasn’t sleeping. I didn’t know
about any of this until I found him overdosing on hydrocodone that he got out of my medic bag… I
couldn’t help but feel my gut retch when I thought that he was trying to try killing himself all over
again. But after he woke up and we talked, he finally told us he was having problems going to
sleep and staying asleep, and he’d been using pain meds to knock him out… often he had to resort
to a full bottle, which would normally kill someone, to get the desired effect. He got all the drugs
from my medic bag, which is why that’s now hidden and I don’t keep as much as I did in it, the rest
is under lock and key… which I have on a tether now so I can’t have my pocket picked again.” He
playfully glared at Casper, who raised his hands in defense, trying and failing to look innocent.
“But we didn’t get everyone right away… we didn’t get the last of all of them until about a week
ago. I recognized one of the men Eren drew while I was grocery shopping, and I stalled him until
the police showed up. As cliche as it sounds, he was the twin of one of the men, and could name
pretty much everyone who Eren drew except for the one. That one man…. he was the one who
kidnapped Eren a few days ago. It was bad… he got shot three times, once in the head, abdomen
and neck, dragged off of Charlie Jr. and brought to a warehouse a town over. He tried to do all of
those horrible things again… he nearly succeeded, and did with some of them… but Eren decided
to seriously layeth the smack down on him, using all of the Judo I taught him. The guy was
collapsed on the floor, broken and battered, nearly unable to breathe. Eren… it got very graphic…
his femur, the big bone in your thigh, it was sticking out of his leg by a good two inches, seriously
broken. I could see into his leg where the bone was growing back already on the inside, and I knew
that soon enough his leg would completely heal back, but I needed to do something fast, or it
would grow over the old bone… I had to cut open his leg and… I had to rip it from the socket… it
was the most horrible thing I'd ever had to do, I pray to god I never have to do something like that
again… but then, the bones Scotty had put back together with metal plates tried to grow over the
metal, which is not good. Nor a thing that happens, really. But Scotty also went ahead and removed
the metal plates from everywhere- and the wounds and bones just healed themselves back over
while he moved onto the next one. He… when Eren didn't remember anybody, he was always so
bubbly and chatty, open about everything he was thinking. And right now, he’s all snark and wit
and sarcasm… everything we've done has paid off so much… I'm just… It's been a hell of a time,
but it's been worth it.” Lathe stared at the floor, resting his cheek on Eren’s head, speaking quietly
so only Eren could really hear, mumbling into his hair. “…I'm really proud of you.”

Mark was silent as he listened to Lathe speak for a solid twenty minutes, pausing every time Eren
fidgeted when he got to a touchy topic. He’s such a good Dad… And I can’t believe what just…
Eren’s gone through so much shit… He’s got a full hand of cards… But half of them are horrible
selections.

Scotty reached over to Casper’s phone, ending the recording. “Well, now that we’ve got that
recorded, I’ll make sure to send it to Hannah and yourself too, so you have a copy…” It’s good
Casper let it record… Now it'll be easier to get through things… And tell more people.

Lathe nodded, smiling faintly. “Thanks, and yeah, send it to her. It's a good thing we have that
abridged version of everything, because otherwise I'd have to sift through Eren’s medical file,
which is kinda…” He held a hand up over the floor, at least a solid three feet up, looking a bit
skeptical. “Yeah… that wouldn't exactly be easy.” He shifted, taking Eren’s empty plate from his
hands and setting on the table for right then, adjusting his hold on him and looking to Eren,
noticing his eyes drooping. “Tired, kid? Wanna go home?” Last night would've really taken a lot
out of you.

Scotty sighed quietly. “When I have a day off, we need to go through his files and you need to do
the unabridged version of all of that.” He made a note in his phone, making sure he had the day off
before texting Lathe the day. “Keep Eren awake, I wanna record his statements first.” That needs to
get done.

Mark nodded going to set up the camera for everything that needed to be set up. I can at least
handle that… The other guys look like they’re still trying to process everything.

Lathe nodded, shifting Eren around a bit, talking to him quietly and trying to keep him awake.
“Eren, how about we get this done while we're here and able to, okay? You've got to talk to a
camera and say a bunch of stuff when we ask you questions… but just pretend you're telling me
everything, okay? It needs to be done, and it'll be over before you know it, okay? Then you can
sleep.”

Eren nodded, letting Lathe move him against the headboard on the wall. I wanna sleep… But I
need to tell them everything…

Scotty waited patiently for Mark to set up the camera, moving behind it with Lathe and looking to
Eren, beginning to speak when Mark gave him a thumbs-up that they were recording, looking to
his watch. “It’s January 26th, 11:07 AM right now, just for the record. You were playing video
games and drinking last night, right?” He watched as Eren nodded. “How much did you drink?”
Eren looked at his thumbs. “I was cut off at 16…” I know how much I drank… And I drank too much…. “It wasn’t as much as I’ve had before. When I was forced to drink.”

“What was it that you were drinking?”

“Lite Beer…” I don’t know why I kept drinking it.

“When did you start feeling the effects of all that alcohol?”

Eren rubbed the back of his neck. “I started feeling my body heat up after about 8 beers… But I kept drinking… Cause I wanted the feeling to go away… But it never did.”

“Did it affect your consciousness at all?”

Eren’s brow furrowed. “No… I was able to think so clearly… It was like I hadn’t drank a drop of liquid in my life…” it was so weird. “I felt warm… But I didn’t feel almost any real buzz that you usually get when you drink.”

“…when did you start feeling warm?”

“I think it was around… Around 10:30…” That’s around when I had had at least 8….

“Did you notice anything else that seemed out of the ordinary with your body?”

“I felt… Like I was high almost… it was weird… Everything was clear… Like I understood everything that was going on.” I don’t remember anything else being weird…

“Was your nose bleeding at all?”

Eren shook his head. “No, it wasn’t bleeding at all… And I really don’t know why…” Why wasn’t it bleeding?

“What caused you to wake up from your sleep?”

“Jack woke me up… He kept hitting me with a pillow. I couldn’t feel it at first but after I woke up, I felt like I was on fire… It hurt everywhere, like I was being continually burned with hot coals stuck under my skin.” I tried to move… It hurt so much. “The pain was excruciating… Jack had to help me into the bathroom and into the tub… I was steaming, that’s how hot I was… Jack had to wake me up, cause he knew something was wrong when he touched my skin and he almost burned himself.”

“Can you tell us again, everything that happened?”

Eren nodded again, closing his eyes a bit as he fiddled with his fingers all over again. “I had been drinking with Mark, Jack, Bob and Wade… We were playing video games, and it was getting late so we decided to do a live stream. I was cut off at 16 beers at around 12:30 this morning… I took my PTSD medication and ended the live stream with the guys… I ate some chicken wings for our little midnight / early morning snack… And after that I curled up in bed and fell asleep. The pills didn’t work at all, and I… I… I felt my body heating up subconsciously… And what did my mind immediately go to? The damn fire.” Eren’s shoulders had begun to shake as he sobbed. “I was stuck in the burning building again… I couldn’t get out… No one came to save me… I was whimpering and shifting in my sleep… Blake couldn’t ground me because he would’ve gotten burned…. I woke up because Jack was smacking me with a pillow, I got up… I told him to call Casper… Cause I didn’t want my Dad to come. I felt like my skin was crawling… we managed to get me into the bathroom and get me under cold water… Mark woke up Bob and Wade and they
went to go get ice from the ice machine down the hallway…” Eren paused as he reached a shaking hand up to wipe away the tears that had formed. “The water hurt against my hot skin, it felt like I was being stabbed with needles as ever droplet hit my body… The steam was almost instant, it filled the room, quickly raising the temperature. I was freaking out. It hurt, and it didn’t stop hurting… And the steam was so thick… Billowing off of my body… But nothing was happening besides my body being obscenely hot. Casper and Scotty came, I was laid down, and ice dumped on me until Dad came in, he brought rock salt which cooled down the ice water even further. The steam lessened a bit, but it was still thick in the air, and our room was so warm… It still is…” Eren swallowed hard, his hand coming to scratch at his wrist until Blake jumped up onto the bed, grabbing his hand and making Eren pet him as he spoke. “Scotty left to go get IVs… And when he came back they put one in each arm… I was freaking out, I was starting to seize… My dad was there, I was afraid that he was gonna be so mad at me, and my body couldn’t handle it… I seized, my whole body starting to thrash, giving me no control… I smacked my wrist so hard on the tub, that it snapped… And it snapped me out of my seizure… But I was exhausted and couldn’t keep my eyes open… I was stuck in that burning building yet again… I could just barely hear your voices calling for me to wake up… But I couldn’t, and the smoke around me was building to a point where I was suffocating in my dreams… But that was just my own body, struggling to breathe correctly due to the heat… After the burning building… I was strapped down to a cold metal table, a bright light above me… I was begging… Begging for Grisha to stop… I felt a searing pain in my abdomen… I associated it with a scalpel being dragged across my skin… And forcing it’s way in to take yet another organ out of my body.” Eren’s whole body was shaking, tears quickly running down his cheeks. “Dad smacked me across the face, it woke me up from my horrible nightmares… It… My cheek started to bruise instantly, taking over my right cheek, before it started to swell again, the side of my face growing even hotter than the rest of me… It healed in a matter of seconds before my face went back to the way it originally was…” He paused, taking in a shaking breath. I need to calm down.

I need to take my fucking pills...

Lathe immediately shifted once Mark gave the nod that they had stopped recording, moving forward and gathering Eren up into his arms, his fingers threading through his hair. “You did a really good job… you really did…” He looked up to Mark, his voice quiet. “You’re going to need to send that to Scotty, Casper and myself…” He looked to Scotty gratefully as the taller man moved to give Mark their emails, focusing on comforting Eren, murmuring in his ear. “Now this is on the record… you did a great job staying strong. You really did. It’s okay, it’s over… please, don’t cry, it’s over and done. You're okay.” You held up very well.

I’m so fucking emotional. “I need my pills…” He whimpered as he weakly curled up to Lathe’s chest, happy he still somehow fit into his arms. I... I just wanna lay down... Eren’s eyes were already starting to close from exhaustion.

Lathe nodded, looking up in surprise when suddenly Casper had his bag set down beside him, opening it and getting out the calendar from the top where he’d shoved it in his rush to come help. “The blue and the grey ones.” Lathe held out a hand as Casper picked them from the calendar, stowing it away and going to get a cup of water. He took the paper cup from Casper, thanking him and looking to Eren, shaking him a bit. “Eren, come on Hon, you need your pills. Then you can sleep all you want, m’kay?” He held them out to him, waiting patiently for Eren to take them. You'll be a bit out of whack if you don't get back on them.

Eren nodded weakly, his hands shaking as he took his pills. He struggled to swallow the small
amount of water down, giving the cup back as his vision blurred. I’m exhausted. His body went immediately limp, his head rolling down, and hair covering his face as he blacked out from exhaustion. I’m tired...

Lathe kept a strong hold on Eren with one arm, looping his messenger bag strap over his head with the other and flipping it shut, scooping Eren up and standing, Eren’s head nestled into his neck as he slept. “I’m going to get him home- he obviously needs lots of sleep. Thank you for doing what you could to fix all this… at least now we know what happens when he drinks. You were ten minutes away from doctors always on call for him.” He smiled to Casper and Scotty. “-and I’m grateful for that. And Mark, tell me. Whenever you want to visit- and I hope you do again, and drag people with you- what do you do first?”

“I call ahead or risk being put on a monster with four legs.” Mark’s reply was almost instant, moving to stand behind Jack as if suddenly fearful. Not again please… I don’t think I ever wanna do that again.

Lathe chuckled as Mark went to hide behind Jack, grinning as Jack looked over his shoulder, good-naturedly muttering ‘pansy’ but letting him cling to his sweatshirt. That’s adorable. “That’s right. Call ahead. Just not when it’s likely we’re all dead asleep. …but call ahead.” He nodded, shifting his hold on Eren a bit, his weight not especially burdensome. “I’m going to get this one home. Take care, all of you. And send me those recordings.” He kept a steady hold on Eren as he left, walking to the elevator. Yeah, I’m not doing three flights of stairs carrying a human. You don’t do that.

Casper stretched his arms over his head, yawning. “Ugh, you’d think being awake for seven hours I’d be over wanting to go back to sleep. …but I’m not.” He stood, kicking Scotty’s shoe lightly. “Let’s go home, huh?”

“Oh cry me a river…” Scotty got up, twisting his back a bit and cracking it a bit. Ah, that felt great. “Let’s get going Casper… I’ll drive, I’m not trusting you to drive…” Nope, you’re half asleep as it is...

Casper looked like he was about to argue, though he stopped and simply looked at him, shaking his head a bit. “…I wouldn’t trust me to drive us home either. …thdat’s probably end badly…” Yeah, no. Casper meandered over to pick his bag up from the desk, slinging it over a shoulder. He went to Scotty, immediately taking hold of his arm and weakly pulling him to the door, making a quietly demanding sound. “…murr.” Home. Sleep. …please.

Scotty sighed quietly, shaking his head before following right behind him and taking the keys from him as they walked out and to their car. He watched Lathe put Eren into the passenger seat of his car, before getting Casper into the car. Come on… In the car.

...there’s no way they’re not a thing. …I mean, Casper could tell with me. …I dunno. Is that mean? Maybe it is. …sorry. Jack just shook his head a bit as Casper led Scotty from the hotel room, looking around at all their stuff strewn about. “We should clean up all this crap. …and we’re gonna need more water.” Yeah, those kinda got used.

Mark nodded, moving towards the bath and turning the water on to help get rid of the salt. “Do you wanna take the car? Or… Actually… Bob and Wade went back to sleep next door.” That won’t be an option.

Jack’s brow furrowed. “Yeah, I’m not used to driving on the other side of the road… you’d have to drive. Walking isn’t an option, it’s January … Uhm… I dunno, I can clean up while you go get some more…?” I feel like I’m just pushing it on you instead though…
Mark nodded. “Alright, um… Do we need anything else while I’m at the store?” I can’t think of anything else… Maybe a few bags of chips? I mean I could get sandwich meat and we can all just recoup… And get better after what happened today… And we can all upload what we need to.

Jack looked at the cases for empty bottles stashed under the desk, looking up, thinking. “…why don’t I just come with you?” His cheeks tinged pink, immediately thinking he needed to explain himself. “Y-y’know, help you pick stuff everyone will want, and we can return all these damn beer bottles… if it’s cool with you…”

“That works… Why don’t we do that?” Mark and Jack collected all the bottles that could be returned and got them in the car before going to the grocery store.

Five days. It's been five days. Five completely insane, nerve-wracking, tense days. Lathe walked up the stairs, carrying a warm bowl of soup in his hands. Eren's barely been awake for the past five days, just sleeping and getting his strength back. Whenever he woke up, I'd have to feed him because his limbs are really weak, and then he'd pass out again until the next time he required food. I just add crushed vitamins to his food now, because one meal a day isn't cutting it... but he doesn't have any idea what happened. That video, the one of him explaining everything… I don't know how it got passed over and added to the livestream compilation thing… but it did. It's not like I blame Mark, there was a lot to splice together, it just happened… but it was first the comments on the introductory video of his channel, calling him terrible things… a freak of nature, a psycho… and then the subscriber counts started to drop. I'd look at Twitter, and then I'd go onto tumblr, then when I return to Twitter a thousand followers are gone. There are too many videos us to take down anymore... and the news has picked up on it, so there's no going back... he's been labeled as completely insane… I'm just... I'm really fucking worried about what this all is gonna do to his career… we hadn't gotten anything official published... so there's nothing to back up this stuff... Hannes don't understand what all is going on, and Eren’s oblivious… I've been losing followers too… a bunch of compositional requests from out West were retracted… I'm scared that something is gonna happen to him staying on the record label… Hannes has been teaching me to cook German stuff, which has kept my mind from it a bit… but there's not much that can help right now… I can't help but get the feeling things are only going to go downhill from here. Lathe quietly padded into Eren’s room, gently shaking his shoulder.

“Eren, wake up, please. You need to eat.”

Eren’s eyes cracked open a bit, struggling to try and lift himself up, his eyes watching as Lathe moved to help sit him up. “No... I wanna do it...” His words were weak as he struggled for a few minutes, finally managing to sit up in his bed, a tired expression across his face. I did it... I actually did it! He took in a few deep breaths, looking over to what Lathe had brought him. Mnhmm… Potato soup… With venison… Thank you Jesus.

Lathe smiled widely as Eren heaved himself up to sit. You’re getting your strength back. This is great! Lathe sat down on the edge of the bed, picking up the spoon and scooping up some of the soup, holding it up to Eren’s mouth. You still don’t have the energy to eat by yourself, but small steps is more than fine.

Eren smiled a bit as he ate the soup heartily. “It's really good.... Did Vatri teach you?” Eren asked in between mouthfuls of soup. I really miss eating German food... Vatri always made everything right... Well, he couldn’t bake to save his life, so that was my job.... But everything else he was able to teach me really well.
Lathe nodded, smiling. “Hannes has been showing me all of this stuff in the kitchen, teaching me how to make all sorts of stuff. It's been something different every time, and I've been writing down all of it. I think I'll make them more. We all certainly enjoy them.” *They all turn out really well.*

Eren smiled, his eyes a bit lidded as he took in another rich spoonful. *I can’t wait until I can actually use my arms to feed myself… But sitting up took everything out of me.* He winced a bit as his phone made a shrill tone, then continued to make it as it rang. “Can you get that? It’s been ringing for hours… And I can’t use my arms…” *I don't know who it is…*

Lathe nodded, setting down the bowl and spoon for the moment on the table next to it, picking up the phone and looking at the name. *...it's Jeff. Fuck.* “Eren, let me take care of this.” Lathe went into the hall, shutting the door behind him and walking the length of the hall, answering the phone and holding it to his ear, his voice steady. “Hello?”

“*Eren? Your voice sounds different…*” Jeff's voice was cold as he criticized the boy who wasn’t even aware of him calling.

“I'm not Eren. It's Lathe.” He immediately picked up on his cold tone, trying to keep his even as he spoke, ready for anything. “I'm sure you can tell me anything you needed to tell Eren.”

Jeff sighed quietly. “ *Your son belongs in a mental institution…. I’m not going to accept any of that shit working under my label.*”

Lathe’s eyes became cold, his tone sharp. “And I don't think we’d want to work for someone who thinks that. Feel free to drop us as soon as possible. We’ll send you the journal when we finish with it. Is that everything? Anything else you'd like to say?”

“You are dropped from my label, our contract is retracted from this point forward, all royalties from previous albums will still be distributed as it's still on contract, but I will not be producing anything to do with your freakshow you call a son. It's disgusting… Has he filled your mind into believing all the shit that comes out of his mouth?”

“I wouldn't believe half of this shit if I didn't rip out his leg bone and watch it heal back myself. Just wait for the journals and the files to come out. It was a displeasure working with you. ...asshole.” Lathe hung up, fuming. He needed a long moment to calm down enough to come back into Eren’s room, setting his phone back on the nightstand. “…Eren, there's some stuff you need to know…” He settled back onto the bed, staring at his hands. “The video of you explaining what had happened… it accidentally got edited into the livestream YouTube posting. It was taken down after an hour, but it was too late… people were reposting it, it got to the media… we couldn't stop it… you've lost a lot of followers and subscribers, people have been saying terrible things… Jeff dropped you from the label. That was who was calling. He… he said terrible things. I don’t… I don't know what we can do except work like mad on the journal and publish it as soon as we can. I think that's the only hope we have of fixing this now… more than half of your fans, and of the country, think you're insane…” *This isn't good…*

Eren simply looked down as he tried to take everything in. *.... Everyone thinks I'm insane… That’s fucking wonderful…*

Lathe’s expression shifted to one of sympathy, moving to pull Eren into a hug when the doorbell suddenly rang loudly throughout the house. “...oh great, now what?” *Please don't be the news, please don't be the news…* Lathe went to the door and down the stairs, his eyes wide as he saw three squad cars in the driveway through the window. *fuck.* Lathe opened the front door slowly, seeing Dave standing in front, flanked by five other officers. “...Dave… what's going on?” *Please
Dave sighed quietly. “I really don’t wanna do this, but we have been given probable cause to come detain Eren and bring him to the psych ward in the hospital.”

“I want to see the paperwork.” He took the warrant Dave handed him, his eyes wide as he read everything over. “…that's the seal of the governor… ...you're taking my son away…” Lathe’s eyes became glassy as he shakily handed the paper back too him, his eyes wide as Dave simply brushed past him, following him and the other officers upstairs, leading with him. “D-Dave, please, wait, we need five minutes, he’s barely awake. Please, can't you give us a tiny bit of time?”

Dave shook his head. “I can’t…. Lathe, get him a bag of clothes.” Dave moved to Eren’s room opening the door, finding the boy passed out with tears streaming down his face.

Dave heaved Eren up from the bed, confused and not knowing what was happening. He didn't speak, knowing he would fall apart if he tried to, getting a backpack from the closet and packing converse, jeans and shirts from the closet, dragging his favorite hoodie over his arm. He thought a moment, not hesitating to run back to his room and take down his blue sweater from its hanger, putting it on top and zipping the bag shut. He slung it over a shoulder, following them down the stairs and watching, broken as Eren was ushered into a squad car, Dave coming back up to him and taking the bag and hoodie from him. He tried shakily to speak as they were taken. “…a-and I thought… things c-couldn't get w-worse…”

Lathe walked with him to the door as he nodded, starting the car and following the cars as they turned around and drove to the hospital, rubbing the tears from his eyes to see clearly as they made the short drive there. He parked, getting out and following them as Eren was escorted inside, looking more awake and scared. It wasn't until they were inside the hospital’s psych ward and Eren was finally let go that Lathe was allowed to come up to Eren and hug him tightly. “I'm really sorry… there's nothing I can do… the governor ordered you stay here for a while… but I promise, we’ll get the journals written up and the tests we need to done and everything will go okay and we'll get you out of here, okay?”

Eren was quiet as he was hugged tightly. “I’m being out into a mental ward… Well that’s wonderful… He stayed silent as a nurse came up to them and took Eren away to go get his own room. I’m being forced here…

Lathe followed the two of them like a lost puppy, Hannes at his side as they stepped into a small room without much in it besides a bed, a small table, and a TV in it. It needs color… it's too white… Lathe sat on the edge of the bed with Eren, pulling him to his side, silently holding him. …this can't be really happening… I don't want this to really be happening…

Eren was quiet as he looked at the bracelet that was now attached to his wrist. … Everyone thinks I’m a fucking nut job… He didn’t pick up his eyes, seeing Hannes feet at the edge of the bed, and feeling Lathe's arms wrapped around him. No one understands shit…

Lathe didn't let go for a long time, shifting so that his bags sat on the floor nearby and he and Eren could lay down on the bed. He pulled out his phone, texting the group chat.
LQ: [So……]
LQ: [...The governor ended up seeing the video of Eren describing what happened to him last night…]
LQ: [...they went to a judge and got a warrant…]
LQ: [He’s in the psych ward… and there's nothing I can do about it…]
LQ: [He’s been dropped from his record label, everyone is saying he's a complete psycho… and that I'm psycho too for believing him…]
LQ: [.....and I can't do anything to keep him from staying here for at least a few months until he’s either released by the doctors or the journal gets published……]
LQ: [...just giving you all the update…]
SO: [I’m coming down I'll be there in a minute.]
LQ: […]thank you…]
DR: [I saw the video… it was only up for a hour and already everybody had copies of it]
DR: [I'm really sorry about that, it's /horrible/]
DR: [If there's /anything/ you need, call me]
PB: […if I was physically able to I'd smack the shit out of your record producer guy, and then everyone who posted that video with shit talk in the comments]
PB: [But I can't… and I don't know what to tell you]
DR: [If he acts completely normal from here on out you all could maybe get him released]
DR: [Say that he renounced his ‘madman’ phase and get him out on good behavior]
BF: [Or we could start a riot.]
MF: […]Brooke, we’re not starting a riot.]
BF: [But I'm mad.]
BF: [And we own pitchforks, so]
PB: [I CALL CARRYING A TORCH]
CP: [Wow okay this is all happening]
CP: [Excuse me while I ‘quit’ and go help Hannah in the lab]
CP: [Oh crap real quick]
CP has added HL to the chat “We’re all fucking idiots”
CP: Welcome to the club

CP: I'm gonna be there in like ten mins to help with the serum making

CP: Be scared

CP has added SL to the chat “We’re all fucking idiots”

CP: Hello

SL: ...is this a group chat

SL: I can't do group chats

SL: your texts come up as boxes for every letter

SL: the price I pay for a brick of plastic as a phone

SL: sorry but get me out of this madness

CP: Cool memes

CP has removed SL from the chat “We’re all fucking idiots”

CP is now texting SL

CP: your Bae isn't answering

CP: why

SL: She's either way too into her cultures or is listening to music

SL: Probs both

CP: Oh well then

CP: She's gonna be surprised when I show up later

CP: Eh it's been like a week what could she have done to the place burn it down?

CP: Probably not

SL: I wouldn't put it past her tho

SL: The walls are probs flammable

CP: Tru tho

CP: But we need to make as much of that crap as possible rn

SL: I saw the video

SL: ...I don't have Lathe’s number, or Eren’s
SL: Tell them I'm here for them please

CP: Will do

CP: Gotta go and yell at my lackeys

James had his arms crossed as he stared at Casper texting for more than a few minutes. “Alright, Casper, put the damn phone away! You’re on working time right now! You can look at your phone when you leave for home.” James’ voice was harsh as he moved to take Casper’s phone away. I’ve had enough of your bullshit for today… and it’s not even 1 yet.

Casper held his phone away, grinning mischievously. “Lol, no.” Casper stood up, pocketing his phone and signing out on the clipboard mounted on the wall. “You're closing up tonight. I've gotta get to the lab in the city, work on something big. You're gonna be flying solo here for a while. It could be a while, anyway.” He looked to his angry expression, shaking his head and digging into his pocket for his wallet. “Here, this'll explain everything. About time you knew.” He took a business card from the depths of it, handing it to James. Why not? It's been plenty long.

James stared at Casper in pure shock, looking down at the card he was handed, printed on thick card and embossed with bold black and gold letters. “Casper Pandreivitch… CEO….” His eyes blew impossibly wide. “You own the whole fucking company? And you’ve been letting me yell at you for years!?”

“Yup!” Casper grinned, snapping his finger and pointing to him, his eyes glinting. “...you'll receive your pink slip in the mail tomorrow. See ya!” He waved brightly as he left, leaving James stunned, holding his fancy embossed business card.

James just stood there, watching Casper leave. “What the actual fuck just happened?” I don’t understand him at all. It took a few seconds for Casper’s words to finally catch up to him and click. “WAIT!!! I’m gonna lose my job!?”

Casper cackled as he heard James’ shout from inside the pharmacy, heading for his car and hopping in, making the twenty-minute drive to the labs. He waved to the person at the front desk, heading up the elevator to the fifth floor. His brow furrowed as the small room was suddenly flooded with music, wincing as he stepped out into the hall, seeing someone walking towards him in the hall. He stopped them, speaking loudly and clearly. You're wearing earplugs… how long has this been going on?! “What the fuck is with the music?!"

The laboratory assistant shouted back at him. “The supervisor’s gone completely nuts over the past four weeks! But all the experiments are doing really well! Across the entire floor, it’s weird!” ... wait. “…aren't you my boss?”

Casper nodded. “Yeah, and her boss too. I'll see what's up. Carry on!” Casper patted their shoulder before walking on, his hands over his ears as the noise got louder and louder. He opened the door to the lab at the corner of the building, seeing Hannah hovering in front of something he couldn't see on the counter, an amp in the corner of the room, facing away from the glass. It seemed like the track playing was a loop of the same ten seconds of sound, and Casper marched right up to her, smacking her shoulder. He wasn't prepared when she jumped in surprise, her left hand crushing the plastic syringe in her grasp and causing the other in her opposite hand to go flying up, embedding itself in the ceiling. They both stared up at it, before Casper turned on his heel, looking unsure of what the fuck just happened. “This obviously isn't a good time-" He was immediately snatched up by the back collar of his shirt, pulled back next to Hannah, hearing her voice in his ear.
Hannah’s tone was almost as furious as her eyes looked. “Go grab a fucking ladder and next time don’t scare the shit out of me!” Her words were shouted over the blaring music. *I need to get that fucking syringe….*

Casper immediately nodded, running to the maintenance closet in the hall and coming back with a ladder, prying the syringe out of the ceiling and giving it back to Hannah. “What?” He saw that she had since turned her back and couldn’t hear him, looking over to the amp in the corner. *…you know what.* He marched straight over, unplugging it from the wall and immediately causing blissful silence to fall. “HANNAH!” He snatched the noise-cancelling headphones from her ears. “What the hell is with the music?!” *It’s enough to drive anyone insane!*

“It’s the cultures… The bacteria that we have here are reproducing at a better rate with the vibrations from the music… I finally isolated it, so they’re growing so well… We gotta put it back on… I’m in the middle of making more of the serum!” She moved to grab her headphones back from him. “Everyone else’s cultures are doing wonderfully too!” Hannah’s excitement got her to reach over Casper and grab her headphones. *I need to get back to my cultures too.*

Casper nodded, though he didn’t let go of the headphones, stopping her from continuing with her work just yet. He also noticed a cot set up behind the amp, a pile of sketchbooks and pencils underneath it next to a bag overflowing with unfolded clothes. “…it’s been four weeks! Do you live here now?” *It looks like it.* “…if that’s the case, we need to put better sandwich and soup lunches in the break room.”

“Lunches? I don’t buy lunches… usually Sharon will come every other day and bring me food and stay for a bit so that I can see Maverick.” *He’s getting so big… and he’s only a month old!*

Casper just looked at her, pointing to the amp. “Please tell me you turn that off when the tiny human is here with his tiny fragile ears.” *Don’t make him deaf. That would be bad.*

Hannah shook her head. “No, the security Guard won’t let him upstairs until he’s at least 1, so I go down and get out of the blaring noise for a while… And we eat downstairs… but Sharon’s been upstairs a few times… At that point we turn off the amp…” *Yeah no… she’s deaf as it is… so it’s all good.*

Something occurred to Casper, looking between the cultures taking up every counter space around the room, the small living space set up behind the amp, and Hannah. *You’ve got a newborn kid… your wife is a new mother… and she only sees you for what? An hour every other day? Does she not miss you?* “They were right when they said you went nuts… the cultures are great, but that doesn’t mean you didn’t go completely overboard… and you didn’t take any sort of family leave. We have that here. Are you sure you’d rather be here working, instead of with your new family?” His expression was worried. *I don’t want you to go home after all of this, only to find Maverick grew up too much without you…*

Hannah felt his words sink in, her gut managing to twist into intricate knots in the span of a few seconds. *Fuck… I got so engrossed in work… I put everything on her shoulders… shit… what have I done? What if…* Hannah’s eyes quickly found the floor, her arm no longer reaching for her headphones. “I...” She trailed off, knowing that there wasn’t any excuse for the neglect she had forced onto her new family. *I’m a fucking idiot… I got caught up in work… the cultures were failing to produce any sort of serum at all, and I noticed that the bacteria we used here didn’t accept the serum or they weren’t accepting the other experiments either that needed to be reproduced, I was getting worried… and I left music playing… I accidentally fell asleep with the song on repeat…* Mitch had to come wake me up to tell me he was leaving… and I looked at the cultures… They weren’t failing anymore… And I got so engrossed into trying to figure out how
to make it work that I might be a worse insomniac than you at this point.” *I don’t know if I can sleep even if I tried.* Hannah moved to grab a large black box from a safe, a box generally used to store finished serums, medicines, or anything else that was stored in vials. “... I’ve been replicating it… I finally got it to work....” She held out the full box with slightly shaking hands out to Casper. *All the vials are full... there’s 100 white vials....*

Casper took it from her, opening the lid, shocked as he saw the many full vials. “Hannah, this is **great**... with what you’ve done we can start the trials in no time.” He looked up, noticing the box wasn't refrigerated. “...how long do these last? What's their shelf life? Any idea?”

“They’re still active… no refrigeration needed… The sample I got isolated… It’s still viable… nothing’s happened to it… Even what’s left in the original syringe from almost a year ago....” Hannah explained moving around as the lights flashed twice in the room, alerting her to many cultures in an incubator. “I had to screw with the lights... but I can fix them eventually....” She trailed off as she got out everything she needed to start filling more vials with the serum. *I couldn’t exactly hear the timer over the music... and I’m pretty sure that I’m going deaf... but that’s a thing for another time...*

Casper traipsed over to where she got things ready to deal with the cultures, putting her headphones around his neck and tapping her shoulder, getting her to set the things in her hands down. He set the box back in the safe, looking her in the eyes. “Hannah, listen. You've done absolutely **amazing** things to help with this, you really have gone above and beyond the call of duty.” He kept a hand on her shoulder, sighing quietly. “Which is why I'm going to **demand** that after this specific incubator is dealt with, you pack up and get the fuck home to your wife who probably misses you so much and your son who’s starting to grow up without you. He needs both of his moms there- and your wife needs someone to lean on when she’s only been a mom for a **month**. Got it? Because I'm going to be mad if you show up in less than three weeks, and then give you **another** entire week.” He smiled. “They need you **home**. I'll take good care of the cultures. Promise.”

Hannah looked back at him, her eyes wider than dinner plates. “I’m sorry... did you just say **three weeks**?! That’s all of this year’s vacation time!” Hannah looked ready to begin to panic, but instead tried to focus on getting everything she needed together to harvest the cultures. *Well... I can trust you maybe... and I’ll show you how to harvest the cultures so that they grow back....*

“Hannah, it’s **paid family leave.** You're a **new mom** and need to regroup with your wife back home. I get it. And it’s **different** from vacation time. You still get those three weeks. I get to do that. I'm a **nice** boss.” He grinned, his expression soft. “So for that time, I'll take care of the cultures, and you take care of your family. And if you need more time, don't hesitate to tell me. I'll extend it if you're really needed. You haven't been here for too long, but I know how much you deserve it. You've earned it.” *You really have. Also, you're my favorite, so you get those perks too.*

Hannah heaved a sigh of relief, moving to put everything down and drape her arms around Casper’s waist and pull him into a hug. “Oh my god… thank you...” Her voice wasn’t much higher than a ghost of a whisper. “What am I gonna do about the experiments I had planned?” *I even found a no-kill animal shelter....*

Casper hugged her back tightly, his voice quiet. “I've been thinking about that... the thing is, we need to get this stuff rolling soon. Eren... well, some of his testimony as to what happened yesterday got out... he's been admitted to the psych ward at the hospital. Sharon knows, she'll explain later. It's in the group chat too, which you're now in. But we need to get this going and get the journals published so we get Eren out. It's either that or rely on his ability to get himself discharged for seeming sane. ...which isn't that great a plan. But listen.” He pulled back, his hands
on her shoulders holding her firmly, his expression serious. “We’ve got a new plan. We’re skipping animal testing. We don’t use animal medicines on humans, so why would we do it the other way around? Animals could just get killed! We’re pushing for small tests and trials in the hospital first. Now none of this means that you need to stay. You're going home. But when you come back, and don't rush doing that, it’s going to be lots of testing and writing up reports and recording effects in real time. We’re hoping this will all be published in about six months- hopefully before the wedding, which Eren kinda needs to attend.” That's a thing.

Hannah nodded, starting to think. “We should start with barely anything in the shots though, to see if it’ll heal cuts first… If it can sew together major lacerations….that would be huge… And I’ll show you how to harvest the cultures… But you’re gonna need another box… I filled the three that were in here already…” Yeah, I know, you’ll probably think I’m a fucking freak though...

“You're joking.” Casper moved to where the coolers were, opening the doors and staring at the completely filled space, all of full vials. “...we’re starting trials over the weekend. I need time to get into the rhythm of managing the cultures before I can also help organize the trials and write up the journal. I get the feeling Lathe isn't going to be home much. ...and Scotty living at the hospital is now okay, because I'll be living here. It'll be okay.” He shut the cooler, turning around to face Hannah. “Alright, I'll switch out an empty cooler and put the full one somewhere safe, demanding that nobody fuck with it. Then you can show me what you're doing to harvest this stuff correctly.” He moved to the door, going to snatch a free cooler from one of the other labs. This is going to go okay. He paused, knocking on the wooden frame of a door he passed. We'll get this under control, and he’ll be fine. We'll all be just fine.

Hannah nodded, waiting for Casper to get back into the room with an empty cooler. “Alright, so this is how you take out the serum… And watch closely because the bacteria… When it replicates… It splits away from the serum… So just tilt it to the side… It’s the cloudy liquid.” You only need to syringe it. “You'll need to turn the music back on… They produce the most amount with that music playing… Five cultures makes up half a vial…” That’s all you'll get out of five. “They’re timed to be harvested every 12 hours…” Hannah rattled off all the instructions to Casper. I hope you’re following this...

Casper paid her rapt attention, nodding. “Alright, so harvest all the cultures every twelve hours. Okay. That I can do. And then I'll have plenty of time inbetween to do other necessary shit. Just help me this time around so I get the hang of it and then you can get your ass home.” He picked up a syringe and a vial, and they made their way through every culture in the incubators without incident, Casper refusing to turn the amp back on until she was gone. “Is that it?” Casper looked around as he set the last culture back in the incubator. “That's it. Okay, that wasn't bad. I'll be able to do this. Now. Pack your shit, you're moving out.” He grinned. You don't live here no more. ...for the time being, at least.

“Alright… Um… The lights flash when the timers go off, I have it programmed that way so that you can keep the headphones on while playing the music… Um, the number of flashes is what incubator’s time is going off… And um… I think that’s it… Make sure you record how much you fill though from each incubator… From every harvest, I’ll stay until you’re done to make sure that you do this right… then show you how to record everything.”

Casper nodded, getting the clipboard with the chart printed on it from a shelf on the wall. “Alright, alright. Here, this won't take long at all.” He picked up a pencil, scratching down the number of vials worth of serum harvested, Hannah only having to correct him once while he scratched down the numbers. “And I'm guessing there’s an excel spreadsheet up somewhere for this?” He watched as she nodded, taking down the company laptop from the shelf as well to open the document and input the numbers. “I’ll put those in. Now stop stalling and get your butt moving!” He sat down on
the floor, leaning against a counter and beginning to type in numbers carefully. *Need to get this right.*

Hannah nodded, hugging him again. “Thank you again… I’ll be out in a few minutes… Keep the headphones, they’re wonderful.” *I can always get another pair… The pay grade here is awesome…* Hannah quickly packed up and started towards the door. “Alright Casper I’m leaving! Email me if you screw something up! And plug in the amp!” *I’m going home…*

Casper hugged her back, grinning. He waved as she walked to the door. “Alright, I’ll try not to mess shit up though! Say hi to the Bae for me!” And with that, she was gone, Casper back to plugging the numbers into the extensive table before he plugged in the amp again, settling on the cot to work. *It’s gonna be a long month…*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe waved to the nurses at the front desk as he walked in, carrying a very warm dish in his hands as he padded to the psych ward, coming to visit Eren. He knocked lightly on the door before coming in, Eren still silent on the cot, watching the TV with disinterest. “Hey kid- I brought food. Pasta with sausage and so much cheese Spades would yell at me for trying to give you a heart attack.” He smiled, though he wasn't surprised when Eren simply looked at him and didn't speak. *He still isn't talking… it's been three days, and not a peep…* He set down his bags, sitting on the cot next to him and handing him the covered dish, a fork on top. “I know the food here can suck, and it's never enough… try to eat at least a little bit, okay?” He watched as Eren made no move to take it, simply shaking his head. “Well, I can always reheat it if you'd rather just eat it for dinner?” A shrug was his only reply. “…okay, that's fine. We’ll do that then.” Lathe set it on the side table, shifting so he laid next to Eren, his legs crossed at the ankles. “Y’know, the serum replication is doing insanely well. We’re gonna start trials next week. Small things, like cuts and stuff, but we’ve skipped the entire part about doing animal trials and then trying to prove it should be tried on humans after what would’ve ended up being a disaster anyway. It's human stuff, not animal stuff. Some people don't get that still.” He looked over to Eren, sighing quietly. “You're not going to be stuck here forever. Stay sane, and we’ll see if you get discharged. If not… we’ll get you out by the wedding.” He reached over to knock on the table. “We really will.” *Everything will go okay.*

Eren only nodded, moving to curl up into a small ball against Lathe’s side, closing his eyes until he heard a shrill cry as is a baby was put in new, unfamiliar hands. *What’s going on? Why is a baby in here? Doesn’t the psych ward, like, have things against that?*

Scotty frowned a bit as he held Maverick in his arms. “Now now, Maverick… Is that any way to greet your Godfather?” *Oh my god he’s adorable! And Hannah’s actually with Sharon… That must mean Casper is now taking over everything in the lab.* “That’s it, calm your screaming… I know the floor’s lower than you expect it to be…” A soft smile graced his lips as Maverick was finally calming down and holding onto his lengthy finger.

Sharon beamed, watching as Maverick quickly warmed up to Scotty. “That’s the most adorable thing. He loves you already!” She chuckled as Maverick burbled in Scotty’s arms, walking along the hall with him and Hannah, poking her head into the small room. “Surprise! And we brought company!” She smiled, Hannah traipsing in behind her with an arm around her waist, Scotty carrying in Maverick. *Thought you could use someone to talk to in this boring psych ward.*

Eren’s eyes widened as he looked to Maverick in Scotty’s arms, letting out a soft gasp before moving to get up off his bed and go onto his tiptoes to look at Maverick. *Awe… He’s so cute! He’s still got those Chubby Cheeks… I want to hold him too.* His eyes instantly shot to Sharon, smiling a bit more as Hannah pulled her close. They held a pleading undertone, wanting to hold the child
again. He's bigger than the last time I held him... He's doing well for having been born a few weeks ago instead of two months ago.

Sharon rolled her eyes in mock exasperation, smiling. “If Scotty is willing to share the privilege of holding the tiny hooman, then you can hold the tiny hooman.” She looked over to Scotty pointedly, still smiling, one eyebrow quirked. **Come on- let the kid hold him.**

Scotty sighed quietly. “I want him back eventually… Get on the bed, Kid.” Scotty watched as Eren scrambled onto his bed, sitting up and waiting for Maverick to be handed to him. *This kid is way too excited about this... So his doctor says nothing’s wrong with him... aside from the fact that he’s on suicide watch... he had a guard at his door at all times if someone’s not in the room with him... but Eren’s become mute again... He looks like he loves children... and we’re understaffed in the nursery... I could ask if he could help out. He would probably love that.*

Eren smiled more as Maverick giggled happily in his arms, babbling and waving his fists, his bright blue eyes, shining like ice, his dark brown hair wisping around his whole head. *He’s so cute... and bubbly... He’s a happy baby! I want one still... will I even be allowed to have one after this?* Eren was clearly lost in thought but being mindful of Maverick grabbing his shirt.

*...this is so fucking adorable I can't even.* Lathe quietly took out his phone and snapped a picture, Eren entranced by the baby’s babbling. “He’s so cute...” Lathe smiled to him, gently reaching out a finger to him, Maverick’s attention going from the pattern on Eren’s shirt to the hand offered to him, seeing Lathe’s warm eyes. He latched onto his finger, his grip strong as he giggled. *They're so lucky.* Lathe looked up to the two of them, something clicking. “...haven’t you been living at the lab for the past month?” I thought that was a thing. An unconventional thing given you now have a tiny hooman, but a thing nonetheless.

Hannah perked up a bit, looking over to Lathe in the same bed as Eren. “Oh yeah… Casper took my spot… three days ago… and I’ve been trying to get back on a proper sleep schedule… but this little stinker refuses to sleep the whole night, but it’s okay cause I can’t either… so it works, because Sharon can sleep now… and I get to spend precious time with Maverick… But there are over 300 vials full of the serum… and getting distributed soon I believe…” Hannah smiled a bit and held Sharon tighter to herself and kissed her neck gently.

*...I'm so glad I'm back... I get to sleep with someone in my arms.*

Sharon blushed as Hannah kissed her neck, smiling, her own hold on Hannah tightening. “Casper is literally my favorite person right now.” She looked to Hannah as she immediately glared at herself, speaking again. “Okay, well, he’s seriously up there. I can actually sleep like a normal human being for once; I couldn't take any more sleepless nights, it's just not how I function. Doesn't work. But Maverick gets his Mom back, and I get my wife back, so it's all working out fine for now.” *...I'm so happy it's not just me and him in the house all the time anymore. I have someone to help me with Maverick... and I get to sleep with someone holding onto me. I've been so clingy ever since she came home, yeesh. ...no regrets.*

*...did you just say 300.* “Hannah, I’d say something, but because tiny ears, I'll just say you're crazy enough for them to set you up with your own room here.” He looked over to Scotty, the gears of his mind turning. “And Scotty, you're pretty much living here right now, right?” He watched as he nodded, grinning. “Since we’re pretty much both gonna be here all the time… wanna get a head start on the tests soon?” *The sooner the better.*

Scotty nodded. “Yeah, we can get it through with the ER, and I’ll get transferred into it to start writing the reports and get a journal together.” *I can get transferred... the higher ups know that this is an important case for us to follow.*
Lathe smiled, nodding. “That's good- and Casper is probably using any down time he has to start organizing things. We need our own group chat for this stuff. I'll make one when my fingers aren't monopolized...” He looked back to Maverick, who still held his fingers, tugging on them.

“...Sharon, is it okay if I hold him too?”

Sharon chuckled, her eyes warm. “Would you really think I'm gonna say no when he obviously loves you? Everyone gets to share the holding privileges.” ...that is, if Eren ever wants to hand him over.

Eren finally snapped out of it when he heard the word ‘privileges’. Are my privileges being taken away? They’re always threatening them if I misbehave.

Eren quickly handed the babbling tyke over to Lathe... I wanna be able to walk around.... It'd be too boring otherwise...

Lathe carefully took the small baby, cradling him carefully, beaming as Maverick looked up at him with wide, curious eyes before smiling, his fists waving as he made a happy sound. ...oh my god. Lathe rubbed at his eyes, smiling widely as he offered his hand to him again, Maverick immediately latching onto them again, trying to nibble on his fingertip. He gently pulled his finger away, booping his nose lightly. “You're adorable, you know that?” You should. You're so adorable, this level of adorable should be illegal. He glanced up to Sharon, his voice holding a hint of mischief. “And your Mum thought you looked like a bruised potato. I tend to disagree. I think you're the most handsome potato to ever exist.” He tried to keep from chuckling as Sharon burst out laughing, his eyes twinkling. “...you be nice to your mum and your mom, okay? Let them sleep occasionally. Rumor has it people like sleep.” He gently untangled his fingers from Maverick’s grasp, looking to Eren. “You wanna hold him again, Eren?” You looked like you absolutely adored him.

Eren barely raised his head to look at Lathe as he asked, looking down at his hands in his lap, shaking his head. I... I don’t wanna lose my privileges... They’ll take them away... They won’t let anyone come see me. They'll put me in a straight jacket again.

Lathe quirked his eyebrow. “...you know, it's still a privilege you have. It's not like I took him because you weren't allowed to. So. Do you want to hold him again?” Just say yes. You want to, I can tell.

Eren looked over to Maverick as he reached out to hold onto shirt. He had to force his eyes to look away as he shook his head again. I can do without holding him... I can go without holding the adorable little ball of flesh...

Lathe nodded, looking up to Scotty, standing up. “You want your Godkid back? Seems like he wants you back. He likes your tie.” He smiled as Maverick reached for the colorful fabric, making a grabbing motion with his hand. Such cute. Much adorable. Wow.

Scotty smiled and held Maverick, bouncing him slightly to have him giggling more. “You must really like my tie...” He smiled more as the baby took his tie and gripped it, tugging on it with the little strength he had. God you're adorable.... I'm glad I agreed to be your godfather.

They chatted until dinner time rolled around, Hannah and Sharon bidding them goodnight and taking Maverick home, Lathe reheating the pasta for Eren’s dinner and taking the half-eaten dish home. He ruffled Eren’s hair and pecked his forehead before he left, leaving a blank notebook and a pencil and eraser on the table he got too bored. He arrived early the next morning, a thermos of tea with him as he entered the psych ward just as visiting hours began, stepping back into the room, his expression bright. “‘Mornin’ Eren, I brought tea-” He stopped, staring in shock at the sight of Eren struggling to get out of a straight jacket, sitting on the bed, frustrated. “Oh my God, Eren,
what happened?!” Did something go wrong in the night? “Why’d they put you in a straight jacket?” They never do that unless it’s something bad …

Eren jumped a bit when Lathe spoke as he walked in, trying to stop his struggles for fear that the nurse would threaten his privileges all over again. He opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out, his mouth closing after a moment and eyes trailing down to where his hands would be. They can’t deal with me… They don’t want to deal with me…

Lathe set down his things, moving to his side and gathering him up into his arms, keeping him close to his chest. “Eren, please, talk to me… I can’t take it off, I’ll get in serious trouble… it’s okay, really. Please, tell me and maybe I can fix this.” I find it so hard to believe that you got violent or tried again…

Eren leaned into his touch, sighing a bit as he was held. “N… N-nightm-mares… Th-thrashing…” I couldn’t control my movements… They aren’t giving me the right meds… I want it off…. I don’t need to wear it during the day… Only at night…

Lathe’s eyes widened. “They’re not giving you your proper meds, are they.” He watched as Eren shook his head, nodding, his expression neutral. “Okay. I’ll take care of that. Let’s get you out of this thing, okay?” Lathe shifted Eren a bit, undoing the buckles and straps deftly, hugging him tightly and kissing his temple when it was off. “Here, you stay here and draw while I go talk to the people in charge, m’kay?” He smiled as Eren nodded, ruffling his hair and standing to leave, his expression switching from neutral to stony the instant he stepped out of the door and closed it, holding the offending mess of fabric and metal in his hand. He caught one of the attendants in the hall, evenly asking her where the person in charge of the ward was. He was led right to them, an older woman with a stern expression. “Ma’am, I need to ask you about the care Eren Yeager is receiving here in the psych ward. He has been receiving the wrong medication, either the wrong drug or dose, or not getting it at all, and instead of fixing that he’s been restrained to deal with the thrashing, has he not been?”

“That’s not entirely correct, we’re giving him the medications and the dosages that are on file, so when he is put to sleep we put him in a straight jacket to prevent him from hurting himself while he’s thrashing. We haven’t given the approval to change his dosage or medication…” The woman looked to the jacket in Lathe’s hands. “Did he break it? We knew he was strong… But we made sure to get him into an enforced jacket.” Harder to tear apart from pure strength.

Lathe shook his head. “No, he didn’t. He’d been awake for a bit, and was struggling to get out of it when I walked in to see him. And the thing about the medications- the one he should be taking at night has successfully prevented him from having nightmares with very little exception for months. I find it hard to believe that this exception is persisting for multiple nights in a row. I’d like to know exactly what he’s taking.” A hundred bucks you’re getting it wrong. They probably replaced some meds with generics to save money or some bullshit like that.

“He takes 2 pills of PTSD medication every morning and every night.” The woman replied calmly.

I fucking called it.

“Is there any reason why’ve you’ve come to ask? He’s on the proper regimen that his files give us.” We’re going to be putting him in a straight jacket at night for the remainder of his stay, we might take it off if he shows improvement.

Lathe chuckled grimly, shaking his head. “I don’t know what system of filing you got that from, but that’s very wrong. He can’t have generic PTSD medication- they’ve always made his nightmares worse. That’s kinda why we created WOF104, the ones he’s supposed to be on. He needs those in
the morning and at night, but one and a half pills does the trick. And actually, I've got a better question. I'm his legal guardian, and I've been here every day, all day. How is it that I only hear of this when I find him struggling out of a straight jacket? Was this the only solution you could think of?"

“He got violent…”

“In his sleep. He was asleep, had an extensive history of terrible nightmares which would shock me if it weren't on file, and you didn't try to change the medications that were supposed to help with the nightmares. That's a problem.” I'm so fucking done with everything about Eren's care getting fucked up when it isn't handled by me or Scotty.

“Sir, when this happened the first time, your son got violent. We didn’t want to put him in the straight jacket right away so we started with wrist and ankle restraints to try and keep him subdued, he fought back and we put him in the straight jacket… We’ve changed the medication between the generics but none have worked, as we don’t have the approval to change it to something that the FDA is still deciding on…”

“Do you use paper filing in this ward?” You look like you might run this old-fashioned enough.

“We do, our system is in need of an upgrade but we’re able to properly function without the use of technology for our filing system.”

“You put my son on the worst drugs for him and caused him to need a straight jacket. That's obviously not true. And I can understand why he'd fight restraints; he'd think about his father. That's all I'm going to say. Get his files reprinted. This needs to be fixed.” I need to talk to Scotty later, ask to see what model laptops they bought for the rest of the doctors around here..

The woman nodded. “I'll have his files reprinted and his medication switched, now, if you will kindly excuse me, I have work that needs to be done.” I want you out of my office.

Lathe nodded, turning on his heel and walking from the office. Gladly. Lathe looked up as Scotty walked down the hall, catching him by the arm and cutting off his greeting, his expression serious. “I’m just informing you that I'm going to borrow your office thing upstairs for like ten minutes. Is your laptop up there too?” He watch as he nodded, confused. “Good. Their files were outdated because they use paper, gave Eren the wrong meds, and then put him in a straight jacket because they didn't know what else to do. My god, it's a wonder I don't just sue you guys.” He handed him the mess of fabric, storming off upstairs. "I'm so done. I don't want this happening again to us, or ever to anyone else. You can't function on paper alone! Lathe studied the specs he'd scribbled on a post it as he came back downstairs, smiling to Eren as he doodled on the blank notebook paper. “That won't be going on for much longer, Eren. They'll get you back on your right meds, and you'll be sleeping alright in no time. However…” He sat down next to him, pulling him into his side. “I know it's scary, but they're going to put you in the jacket again for a couple more nights, see if you improve when you're back on your normal medicine. Please, promise me for the next few days you won't fight it. The sooner you become non-violent and sleep easy, the better it'll be and the quicker it'll be over, okay?” It's not an easy decision to make...

Eren looked to Lathe, nodding after a few seconds, taking everything in. I can do that... I think I can sleep with the straight jacket on... I should be able to. Eren’s focus returned to his drawing after a few moments and he returned to his quietness.

Lathe smiled, picking up his laptop and doing a quick search on Amazon. “Scotty, how many people are working in the psych ward on a regular basis? Besides you, of course. Check the rosters
if you don't know off the top of your head; I can't underestimate.” *Overestimate? Maybe.*

Scotty nodded, retreating from Eren’s room and going to get the paper files. He had left Eren and Lathe alone in silence, the only noise the scratch of Eren’s pencil against the paper as he drew beautiful pictures of Maverick. *I want one.*

Lathe looked at the pictures he was drawing, smiling, his voice quiet. “Maverick really is a cutie, isn't he?” He looked up to him, seeming to recognize the look in his eye after a moment. *...that kinda looks like how Spades looks sometimes. And how I look in the mirror sometimes when I'm thinking about kids... “...you maybe thinking about having one someday?” I dunno how you and Levi feel about having your own teeny hooman. Or hoomans.*

Eren nodded. “He… He said we could have one… We’re gonna try… Can get stuff in before he leaves… So that… We can try… But I don’t know how much longer I’ll be in here for.” *I really don’t… And I really hope that this doesn’t affect my chances of being able to have a kid.*

Lathe beamed. “It's great to hear that, Eren. We’ll try to get you out of here the second we can; you've got a life to live.” *You and Levi, having kids running around... I wonder when he’s finally gonna propose? He’d have to ask me, of course- I'm traditional like that. And you're talking, finally. Yay!*

Eren nodded. “We’ve been looking… At a few places that can help… Um… We found one that the both of us like...” *so that the kid will actually be ours.*

Scotty returned after a few minutes, a few sheets of paper in his hand. “A total of 78 nurses, doctors, and assistants work here on the psych ward.” *Why do you need to know?*

“Thank you!” *I'm gonna need the main site for this company to get that many.* Lathe tapped away on the computer, finding the right site and the right kind of computer. *Plenty of memory for a work computer, 128GB is plenty because most of the stuff is shared information over wifi, touchscreen, I'll have to get the nice kind of styluses, the ones with solid tips, the other ones will tear or something way too fast... and for the head of this ward... this is gonna max out all my credit cards... eh. I'll just have to get plenty of money orders from the bank, no big deal. “To... the psych ward... hospital... there!”* Lathe saved the images of his receipts, shutting his laptop. “They'll be here in a couple days. Then this crap won't happen again. Hopefully.” He knocked on the table. *Hopefully they'll actually use them. They won't have to put all the paper stuff on them- if they log into the right programs they'll have it all updating constantly for them. “I hope you people have the recycling people come.” That's a lot of paper.*

Scotty looked up in confusion from the card game he had started with Eren. “What?” *What did you just do? “Why would the recycling company need to come? It’s not the end of the month yet...”* Scotty’s eyebrow was quirked up in confusion.

Eren was staring down at his cards, trying to think of the next move he should make. *I don’t know if I can do anything with the cards that I have...*

“To get rid of all the paper files you've amassed in this ward. You're not gonna need ‘em if everything’s on computers. Can I play with you two next round?” *I love card games.*

“Did you just buy the whole psych ward computers?” *Do you realize how much that’s gonna put you into debt?* Scotty sighed looking over to Eren. “What do you say? Why don’t we let you kick his ass at trash too?” *You’ve won all the games so far.*

Eren shrugged, finally deciding what to do with his queen card and quickly filling up his board. *I
won again… A small smile was on his face as he knocked on the table. *I win!* He made a gesture for Lathe to come sit down as well, taking the cards and shuffling them all. *We can play…*

“Ex **cuse you,** Scotty, but you forget that I am the card game **God.**” Lathe flipped his hair dramatically, grinning as he knelt next to the table, Eren dealing cards for the three of them. “And yes. Yes I did. Because things get updated 24/7 and it’ll make for fewer mistakes. I’ll also save you people so much money on paper and ink.” He then looked back up, his expression a bit incredulous. “And are you telling me that after all those card games in the club you’ve lost your skills? I’m disappointed, Scotty. Dis graceful.” He was still grinning widely as Scotty picked up a card to go first.

Scotty sighed quietly. “This is a game of chance, Lathe…” he quickly switched out a few cards. *Well, Eren’s still quiet… And the head of the nursing staff saw how gentle he was with Maverick.*

Eren slowly took a card, clearing a majority of his board before setting down a Jack, ending his turn. *I wonder when I’ll be able to go outside again.*

“Eh, its chance until you have to pick where to put a Queen.” Lathe picked up a new card, going three cards around his board before finding a Queen. “…this is exactly what I’m talking about, Scotty.” Lathe thought for a moment, setting it where a two would go before continuing around the board, all but the two missing when he placed down a five he already had, ending his turn.

Eren watched in silence, pulling out the last card that he needed. “I win…” His voice was soft, his eyes not looking up from his hands. *It’s… It’s almost time for lunch… I wonder if Mom’s coming for lunch… Or if I get to hold Maverick again?*

Lathe just looked at his completed set of cards, simply stating. “Well then. That just happened.” He chuckled, shuffling his own cards together and pushing them over to Eren. “You’re certainly my son. Oh, the tea in the thermos- that’s yours if you want any. Lunch’ll be soon- I’ll run out and get us all something decent to munch on, if everyone’s hungry?” It’s a bit past eleven right now, so you might want something to eat. They didn’t give you breakfast… I don’t think.

Eren shook his head. *I’m not hungry… I don’t really want any food…* He took the cards that Lathe stacked up and put them back in his deck before he picked up the thermos as well and started to drink the very strong tea from the container. *I don’t really wanna eat… I wanna go home…*

Scotty sighed. “I’ll take whatever you can bring… And I’d bring it for him in case he gets hungry between lunch and dinner… Or if he’s actually hungry by then.” Scotty stood, checking over a few things on his pager, grinning at what he saw. Short handed at the nursery again… Eren gets to hold some children…

Lathe nodded, shrugging a bit and jerking a thumb to the thermos. [I put crushed vitamins in it in case he wasn't hungry; God knows he’d need ‘em if he wasn't eating much. Which he isn't.] He quirked an eyebrow as Scotty grinned at the pager in his hand. “What’s got you all smiley? Now I'm suspicious.”

Scotty smiled more. “I think I found a way to occupy him…” *This could work… I can go with him, I’m approved to supervise him.* Scotty moved back into the room with Eren. “Come with me, Kid…” He waved Eren over to him. *Come on, you’re not in trouble… You look like your waiting for me to hit you.*

Eren got up slowly and followed Scotty as he moved down the hall, he was wary of all the people staring at him in loose clothes, his sleeves rolled up and showing a lot scars and his hospital bracelets. *Where are we going? Where is he taking me?*
Lathe looked a bit confused as Scotty simply led Eren from the room, following them silently a few feet behind. *I need to see this.* His eyebrows shot up as they left the psych ward and began walking along a hallway. *Scotty’s taking Eren to the nursery?

Scotty led Eren to the nursery where a woman was working alone, holding a crying infant. “I brought reinforcements, Sheila.” His voice was soft as he ushered Eren into the room.

Eren’s eyes widened. *We’re with a bunch of Mavericks…* He slowly followed Scotty around so that he was in a scrub shirt, and in a rocking chair, holding a crying infant. *I get to hold it! It’s so cute!* Eren was completely silent, internally ecstatic as he held the small child.

Lathe beamed as he saw Eren holding a small infant in a rocking chair, Scotty finally noticing him and waving, signing. {I'm going to get us lunch. Thank you- he could really be a help, and it's better than watching mediocre television. He loves kids. ...I'll see you two soon.} Lathe turned and left, his hands in his pockets, the sound of Maverick’s giggling still an echo in the back of his mind.

Scotty nodded watching him leave. He was paged down to the ER, to oversee a broken bone, and quickly went to set it. He came back up about a half hour later, coming up behind Lathe as he looked into the glass. “He fell asleep?” His voice was quiet in the almost empty hall. Eren was asleep, laying down on a bed with triplets on his chest, his arms wrapped protectively around them. *He looks so peaceful… Like he's actually getting sleep.*

Lathe nodded, faintly smiling. “Yeah, he did. It's the cutest thing, with the triplets…” He quietly sighed, his expression falling a bit as his thoughts swam. *Spades and I probably won't be so lucky… I don't know if we'll even be lucky enough to conceive in the first place…* His head was bowed, staring down at his feet, his eyes becoming a bit glassy. *I really, really want kids… but… I don't know if it's gonna happen… I really want it to… but… it probably won't...*

Scotty sighed, looking down a bit, patting his back. “It’s alright Lathe, you’ll be able to adopt… Even if you can’t conceive… I mean you’ll get approved, because you took over Eren’s care flawlessly.” *It's amazing what you've done for him…*

Lathe faintly nodded, though his expression seemed to fall even more with his words, brushing at a tear that fell down his cheek. “B-But…. I just really want it to happen… and our chances don't look t-too good… I… it's all I ever think about… and it's probably not gonna h-happen…”

Scotty smiled softly, rubbing his back. “Lathe, you should be glad that you can try… Eren and Levi can’'t do anything natural… hell, even Sharon and Hannah couldn’t do anything natural… have you considered artificially? You could inseminate her with your own sperm… it could help… even if you want to wait until after you're married, I think you two should consider it.” Scotty offered, shifting a bit as one of the three children woke up crying, watching as Eren woke up and quickly lulled the crying child back to sleep. “You could have a baby momma too… That’s not uncommon when two can’t conceive, but both of you still have viable everything.” *Last I heard… Spades still has eggs…*

Lathe nodded. “…I guess I should be grateful that we can actually try… I'll talk to Spades about the first one… if things stay the same for the next few months…” *But I don't think we'd try the second… it wouldn't feel right…* He watched as Eren blinked awake at the crying, easily calming them and getting them back to sleep. “…thanks… I'll make sure we talk later… discuss stuff…” He took a deep breath to settle himself, glancing up, his eyes sort of hidden by his hair as he lifted the bag he was holding. “Lunch?” *I dunno if I'm too hungry anymore though…*

“Yeah, we’ll let him sleep though, why don’t we go to my office and I can help you look through a
few more options.” Scotty suggested and motioned towards the double doors down the hallway. *I know you really want to be a Dad… I wanna help you.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

So… I’ve been stuck here for two months now… Dad’s birthday was last week… and my birthday is coming up in a few days. I’m not even allowed to discharge myself… and trust me I have tried to walk out a few times, but they refuse to let me leave, and keep monitoring my progression. It’s gotten a little better now… I get to go work with the newborns and infants as soon as I wake up… I almost always find Sheila getting ready to hand me a baby as soon as I walk in. Dad usually comes around lunch now and eats with me. I haven’t really talked much, but apparently the serum’s been doing well in the emergency room in the next wing over. Hannah’s been stopping by with Maverick often, to a point where they don’t even have to check in at the front desk anymore, they’re allowed to just walk in, she comes in to talk to Scotty about the journals, and talking about the dosages for different cases. They’ve called the serum TitanX… I can’t think of a more perfect name for it. Mom’s been stopping by a lot too and talking with the staff to try and figure out what privileges I have… and I think she’s finally gotten the go ahead to let me get out of this hell hole for a couple hours. I really wanna get out… I’m tired of wearing mostly scrubs for a long time… Eren gently set the now sleeping child down into it’s crib before he made his way back to his room, finding one of the small boys that had been admitted recently in his room. “Jake… you know you can’t keep coming in here…”

Jake fidgeted on the larger bed, the bruises visible on his arms. “I… I know… but can you please sing for me?” He asked quietly, his voice was small as he looked up to Eren with practiced puppy eyes, which made Eren melt in an instant.

“Allright, fine, what do you want me to sing?” Eren moved to sit down by Jake, one leg hanging off the edge of the bed as he ruffled the boys hair.

“Can you sing to me from home?”

*You just like listening to me sing in German don’t you?* Eren nodded after a bit and opened his arms, letting Jake come crawl into his arms as he had been for the past few days. He ran a hand through the boys dirty blonde hair and sang softly and deeply. *Der Mond Ist Aufgegangen always puts him to sleep… I think he just doesn’t like asking to take his medication so he can sleep.*

Spades faintly knocked on the doorframe, her head poking into the room as she heard Eren singing, smiling as she saw Eren cradling Jake. She silently stepped into the room, waiting for Eren to finish the song, Jake asleep in his arms. Her voice was a soft, quiet whisper. “Hey Honey. Today’s the day.” *I’m so excited!*

Eren looked up, his hand still going through Jake’s soft locks. He nodded, looking down at the boy before seeing the bag that Spades had in hand. “Are those my clothes?” His voice wasn’t more than a whisper as he moved to pick up Jake and hold him to his chest. *I’ve been wearing just scrubs… so I hope it’s clothes…*

Spades nodded, looking to the bag. “Yeah, I’ve got your nice jeans, and I made Lathe hand over his sweater again.” She smiled to him, her eyes warm. *I know you like wearing his sweater; it keeps you calm.*

Eren gave her a soft smile and nodded. “Alright, I’m gonna take Jake back to his room… and then I’ll come and get changed.” *I feel like I’m taking care of people… and they depend on me a lot more…* Eren set the sleeping child in his room, his nurse sighing in relief when she saw him in Eren’s arms. He simply smiled in return before going back to his room and changing in the
bathroom. Now if I remember correctly… Dave has to come with us too… and he’s in charge of signing me out for the few hours we’re gone.

Dave was already signing Eren out, and filling out the necessary paperwork for Eren to go around town for a few hours with him. He had his handcuffs out, letting the nurse inspect them to assure that he would be thoroughly restrained. I can at least do this for Spades… I can’t believe he’s still in here… It’s been two months since I brought him in.

Spades had a melancholy look in her eyes as Eren stepped from the bathroom, for once wearing something other than scrubs. You’ve been helping in the nursery… you haven’t been violent or thrashed in your sleep… you’ve been helping take care of the newer admitted patients… how have you not been discharged yet? She stepped to him and pulled him into a hug, sighing quietly as his arms wrapped around her. They broke apart after a long moment, and she looked up as she heard Dave’s footsteps, her expression shifting as she saw him holding his handcuffs. “Eren, I’m sorry Hon, but we’re required to… but don’t you worry, it’s just Dave.” Don’t fight it… that’ll get you in even more trouble…

Eren nodded, looking down a bit as he held out his wrists for Dave who took them and put the restraints on him. It’s just for a few hours… that’s all it’s for…. He followed the two of them out to the squad car, Dave getting in the driver’s seat while Eren was locked into the back. I’m still seen as a threat to everyone I see… I wonder if we’ll go suit shopping? I need a suit… I got bigger since the last one I had…. His eyes seemed a bit dull as he leaned his head against the cool glass, watching the outside scenery change. I haven’t been out of the hospital in two whole months….

Spades looked over her shoulder through the metal divide, seeing Eren staring blankly out the window. Two months of being cooped up in there… fresh air and a change of scenery will do you some good, I think… She rolled down her window just a crack, letting cool air into the car. “Eren, did you know Maisie had her puppies? Seven of them. It’s the cutest thing, Blake being so protective of all of them and Maisie. He’s chased Abby and Salem off a dozen times” She chuckled faintly. “Lucifer though, they’re cool with him. He’s pretty much become besties with one of the pups, wrestling and tumbling over each other. He’s been teaching them well, getting into a habit of finding stuff that falls on the floor and dragging it to random hiding spots. I dropped my keys the other day in the kitchen, found them under a rug after stepping on them. It’s both adorable and infuriating… not really sure which. It’s cute if it’s a blanket and it only gets halfway under the couch. It’s not when I’m nearly late for work and can’t find the thing that makes my car start.” He’s a sneaky little thing… “We haven’t really named many of them. The one female of the entire litter Lathe named Curly, and one who’s completely blonde with a brown ear King… but we thought you’d want to name most of them.”

“Name the one that drags stuff everywhere Krampus…” Eren’s voice was still quiet, his eyes glued to the outside through the bars that went around the whole car. I don’t know what to call any of the other ones… I don’t know them well…. And I’ve never seen them… I haven’t seen Blake for a long time… and I’ve barely been able to talk to Levi… my phone privileges are limited… and someone knows German here… so they always listen to the phone calls…. I want out… why can’t I be discharged?

Spades chuckled at that. “Certainly seems like a fitting name.” Lucifer has taught him well. It wasn't long before they were at the bridal shop, Spades stepping from the car and going to help Eren from the backseat and lead him inside. “Dave, I hope you understand this is gonna take forever. And it might not even be the only time this happens. And I'm not sorry.” Nope. You arrested my baby. Now you get to suffer amidst lace and silk.

Dave simply sighed, shaking his head. “It’s the least I can do… Anything to get him out of there
while he’s forced to stay…” I don’t want Eren to rot in there… Dave followed them, his hand on Eren’s back, causing the boy to stiffen. He’s still afraid of me… Wow…

Eren stiffened, feeling the hand at the small of his back. He’s touching me… Why’s he touching me? I don’t want him to touch me… He shifted uncomfortably trying to get away from the hand that was on the small of his back while Spades spoke with one of the salespersons.

The salesperson was a nice older lady, working at the counter, her smile warm but when her eyes drifted over to where Eren was handcuffed with Dave in uniform behind him, she seemed shocked. “C-can I help you, deary?” She turned her gaze back to Spades, hoping she could get her mind off the handcuffed man in her store that was followed by a police officer.

Spades smiled warmly, trying to diffuse some of the sales woman’s nerves. “Yes, I’m here looking for a wedding dress. We were thinking along the lines of something strapless, floor-length, and white, maybe a mermaid fit?” I hope I'm not being too specific. Eh. And off-white is a thing, so I kinda need to say that.

Alright, deary, let me get a notepad really quick.” She looked around the large desk finally finding a pen and a pad of paper. She also got a long measuring tape, motioning her to follow. “I know you said strapless, but there are ones with sleeves… Or without, which one deary?” Her voice was sweet and gentle as she motioned her onto an elevated platform. I'll take some measurements and then get some dresses. “Have you thought about lace?”

Spades stepped onto the platform, thinking. “Without sleeves… and we weren't too sure about lace… I'd say without, but keep it in mind as I try on dresses…” She moved as the woman motioned her to so she could take the proper measurements, watching her scribble them down onto the paper.

The woman smiled more once she had everything together. “Alright, any price ranges you were thinking about?” I need to know.

“No restrictions.” Eren suddenly piped up as he was led forward by Dave. I wanna buy Mom her dress.

The woman nodded again before leaving to go around the store, grabbing quite a few dresses as close to the description she was given. Let's see… Sleeveless, strapless, mermaid or trumpet fit… Floor length… White… Alright let's try these first. She brought back four dresses, each having a different bottom, one with ruffles, one was tiered, one with ruching, and one with pleating. “Okay deary, I'm gonna hang these up over here and I want you to help me figure out what you want your bottom to look like.” The woman hung them all up spreading them out so she could look at them properly.

“Are there tiered ruffles?” Eren drew a really amazing sketch of kinda what a nice wedding dress for me would be like… it had tiered ruffles. Spades saw the one the woman motioned to, with the ruffles in front. “That dress looks wonderful- may I try that one on?” It's been all of ten minutes but I like that one.

The woman nodded bringing the dress with the tiered ruffles over to her. “Alright, deary, try this one on if you want, and if you need a bigger size I’ll get that one for you.” That's got a strapless top, but this is a trumpet fit… And it's got a flair at the bottom of it.

Spades nodded, taking the dress to change out of her clothes and into the long dress, stepping back out and onto the platform, gazing at her reflection in the mirror, turning a bit to see it from all sides. It really does look nice… but I dunno if I love it…
Eren started to get up to look more closely at Spades’ dress only for Dave to grab him and pull him back. *But I wanna go look at it... It's not right... but I need to see why.* Eren tried again to get out of Dave’s grasp to go towards Spades, only for Dave to grab at his cuffs and jerk him again. His eyes widened when he heard Dave’s threat to take him back. *I don’t wanna go back.*

Spades turned as she heard Dave threaten Eren quietly, fixing the officer with a cool glare. “Dave, he’s already in handcuffs. Let him come and see the dress better- it's why we brought him out. It’s not like he's gonna hurt me. He's a sweetheart, not a convict.” *My God, calm the hell down.*

Eren finally stepped up once Dave reluctantly let go of him. His eyes were trained on the dress she was wearing. “The waistline’s too high... Do you have a dropped waistline? Or an asymmetric one?” Eren asked the woman who nodded and then walked off into the aisles of dresses, taking the other ones with her to put back. *I want to see those ones first... Before I start looking at the top, it’s not fitted enough yet.*

The woman came back with two more dresses, one with a dropped waistline which would conform around Spades’ hips and an asymmetrical waistline, which fitted only one hip full before leading down to the tiered ruffles. *Let's see which of these is better on her.* “Alright deary... Time to put the next one on.” The woman refused to come near Eren, waiting for him to leave the area before bringing Spades the dresses.

Spades’ expression fell a bit as she realised how wary the woman was of Eren. *Well... he is in handcuffs... but I can't really do anything about it...* Spades took the dresses from her, trying on the dress with the dropped waistline first, she and Eren taking a good look at how the waistline looked before trying on the other, noting the difference. “...I like the dropped waistline better than this kind. Form-fitting through the hips looked nicer I think.” *I appreciate the ruffles. But the form-fit through the hips was better with it.*

Eren nodded, stepping up again to look over the dress, causing the woman helping them to almost back up in fear as he came close to her. *Well she’s scared... No idea why tho...* His eyes was scrutinizing the dress as a whole. “Sweetheart neckline... And um, I don’t like the chapel train… Could you find a court train?” Eren watched the woman nod and leave yet again to come back with another dress.

Spades looked down to Eren, giving him a bit of a grin. “You just know all the right fancy words, don’t you?” *I picked the right person to be helping me.* It wasn't long before the woman was back with yet another dress, Spades changing into it and coming back out to stand on the platform, her eyes wide as she gave a small spin. *It looks beautiful on me... “Eren, what do you think? ...I'm thinking this might be the one...” It certainly makes me look gorgeous... She looked to him, seeing Eren shake his head. “No? What's up with it?”* *I think it looks really good. But you're acting more or less like the expert here, so I wanna hear this.*

Eren looked over to the woman again who seemed to shrink. “Organza fabric… I don’t like how the silk sinks…” He didn't need to watch her leave as the woman came back with yet another dress. It seemed to be the exact same dress, but when Spades would change into it, it would be considerably lighter. “That one should feel better.” *It'd be like the picture...*

Spades nodded, sceptical that there would be much change, going to put it on. *...it feels lighter... a lot lighter, actually.* Spades stepped back out onto the pedestal, smiling as the ruffles seemed to fluff out a bit more, just perfectly, the fabric hugging her curves. “Okay, I take it back. **This** is gorgeous.” She twirled before looking over to Eren, seeking his approval. *I love it! Even if it will metaphorically cost me my leg, I love it!*
Eren smiled as he saw her smile. “I love it…” I actually wanna try it on… I know my hair’s been getting long… Well, it fits Mom great! His eyes held a warm mirth as she twirled, giving an approving nod. I love this one on you… I don’t care how much I’m gonna pay for it… I haven’t been able to buy anything for the past two months… I’m sure my black card is pissed...

Spades beamed, doing small jazz squares on the pedestal. “I think I’ll be able to dance in this alright… God knows Lathe is gonna rope me in for tap at some point.” It wouldn’t be a party if we didn’t make everyone feel bad about their dancing skills. …as mean as that sounds. “I’ll go change out of this, and then try to figure out which of my cards has the highest credit limit.” She shrugged, lightly joking as she stepped from the platform. It's soooo worth it though.

Eren shook his head, grabbing her arm to stop her. “I’m buying it.. And do you wanna look for a tea length dress too?” While we’re here...

Spades immediately turned to look at him, though she barely heard Eren when she saw Dave reaching for his taser. ...you know what. “One second, Honey.” Spade walked straight up to Dave, his gaze even. “I know you have a job to do. I know that Eren being here is a serious privilege and not a right. And I know that it's intimidating that he’s been in the psych ward for as long as he has been and that you're worried about his mentality. But I hope you understand that this is the same exact Eren you've known this entire time, who isn't out yet only because he sometimes is reminded of his father and retreats into his mind. That’s it. They trust him to work with newborns in the nursery at the hospital. Other admitted psych patients look up to him. He's not violent. He’s got no malicious intentions. He’s my son, and he’s been nothing but a wonderful help and has just offered to buy this dress for me, so I suggest you rethink what exactly your impression of him is.” And get your hand off your fucking taser. She turned back to Eren, immediately switching from nearly cold to warm and sweet, laying a gentle hand on his arm. “What was it you suggested, Eren? I didn't catch it.”

I was kinda busy fearing for your safety.

Eren looked down at his feet and away, moving his arm away from her, obviously afraid of the consequences of physical contact. “I… I asked if you wanted to look for a dress for myself to wear… It happened to be the one you have in your arms. Eren still hadn’t looked up to her, his eyes not leaving the floor.

Dave’s face seemed to pale a little bit almost instantly. Well, you’re definitely schizophrenic… and insane to top it all off. His hands moved to hold onto the chain between the cuffs, making sure that
Eren wouldn’t make a break for it.

Spades grinned, an idea suddenly popping into her mind. “Eren, you have to try this dress on. You’re not getting out of it now.” This is so happening. “Dave, politely stop handling Eren like a murderer or rabid animal and let his cuffs off so he can get into this.”

Dave sighed deeply, trying to fight the urge to argue with Spades, knowing that he wouldn’t win anytime soon. “If he does anything to you, I’m kicking the door down.” His voice was hard as he took Eren’s hands roughly. He took out the key and took off the cuffs before pushing him forward a bit. You’re getting them back on the second you misbehave.

Eren swallowed the lump in his throat, rubbing his wrists. His head was still bowed down, not looking up in the slightest. I’ll be a good boy… I promise I’ll behave. He went into the dressing room with Spades, obviously lost in thought as he continued to rub at his sore wrists.

Spades nodded once, shutting the door behind them and hanging up the dress on the hook, first going to hug Eren, her hands comfortingly tracing patterns, murmuring softly into his ear. “Eren Honey, I’m so sorry about Dave, I know it’s awful that he sees you the way he does, but I can only do so much…” She pecked his cheek as she pulled away from him, smiling. “Now. Let’s get you into this dress.” You’re about to look fabulous. She coaxed Eren out of his shoes and jeans, letting him tug his shirt over his head before helping to lift the dress up, gently and carefully tugging it down as he shimmied into it. She opened the door again, helping Eren step onto the platform. “What do you think?” She had an impossibly wide grin, reaching for the phone in her pocket. Pictures are in order.

Eren timidly looked up, his face flushing all he say to his ears. “Oh my god… It fits…” Eren’s voice was a ghost of a whisper as he moved to take his long hair out of his bun. It falls lower than my shoulders… Eren let it down and smiled more at his appearance. I look… I like it… Eren’s semi-curly hair fell below his shoulders and down his back, shining as it was let down. Well… I’m glad I didn’t cut it...

Spades snapped a bunch of photos as she circled Eren, catching one of him smiling, his long hair down as he looked to the mirror in awe. The squad needs to see this. She immediately sent it to the chat, writing a comment underneath it. [Eren has been caught without the man bun and looks damn fine in my dress (AKA If Levi was Straight)] This is so beautiful.

LA: [I’m convinced… Please tell me there is still a dick under there too?]

IQ: [I just helped him into it, pretty sure it's there.]

PB: [I'd be jealous of Levi if I wasn't married to my computer]

DR: [I'd be jealous of Levi if I were straight tbh]

IQ: [Damieeeeeeeeen that's creepy]

DR: [I’m not taking it back I stand by that comment]

PB: [Pretty sure my phone is jealous of Levi rn]

DR: [Really tho]

DR: [Someone needs to send this to Levi right the hell now]
LA: [I’m jealous of Spades because she gets to see that damn fine ass in that dress]

CP: [WHOOOOOOOOOOOOAH]

CP: [That came out of NOWHERE]

CP: [Also DAAAAAAAAAMN]

SO: [What the hell are you all going on about?]

SO: […oh.]

SO: [THAT’s what.]

SO: […Eren looks DAMN fine]

DR: IKR????!!!!!???

LQ: [I’m sending this to Levi]

LA: [I already have it, but thank you.]

IQ: [HERE HAVE MORE]

IQ has uploaded *32* images to the chat “We’re all fucking idiots”

LQ: [That’s a looooooot of damn fine imaging, don’t you agree Levi?]

LA: [Can I come back //now?!// I //really// wanna do things….]

IQ: […I just showed Eren my phone and he’s the color of a tomato right now]

IQ has uploaded *2* images to the chat “We’re all fucking idiots”

LA: [That’s fucking adorable… please tell me he’s wearing a dress to my graduation… and if he ever wanted to be a woman I would go straight for him.]

IQ: <“…I’ll wear a dress if you think it’ll look nice… and ;))>

LA: <“You’re testing my restraint, Brat.”>

IQ: <“Excuse me? Have you ever //seen// yourself in uniform?”>

IQ: <“I swear it’s the hottest damn thing ever”>

CP: [Don’t mind me but GOD BLESS GOOGLE TRANSLATE but please, carry on this conversation that totally isn’t visible to literally the entire squad]

DR: ^^^

IQ: Fuck you all… I’m done

PB: Whoooooowaaaaaa breaking out the English up in this hizzle
DR: Fo’ shizzle my nizzle

LQ: STAHP

LQ: IM IN THE STORE TRYING NOT TO DIE LAUGHING AND EVERYONES STARING AT ME LIKE IM CRAZY

LA: Well I’m in the middle of breaking in new recruits....

CP: Can’t you like... get in trouble for, well, fucking around on your phone or something?

LA: I own literally everything that has to do with these shits... They’re all shitstains...

DR: So it’s an ‘I //AM// the law’ kinda deal?

PB: *medium-key jealous*

PB: *remembers why I never leave the house*

PB: *nvmds the fuck out of that statement*

LQ: *loling at the memes way too fucking hard*

LQ: Spaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaades

LQ: Is my overgrown child okay?

IQ: He’s medium-key pouty right now but we’re about to look at other dresses so that’ll maybe lighten him up

IQ: [I’m switching us back to French]

IQ: [Mainly because I don’t need Dave reading over my shoulder that he’s being a serious dick]

IQ: [He’s been wrangling Eren a bit like a murderer/rabid animal and it fucking sucks]

IQ: [He nearly pulled his //TASER// on him because he grabbed my arm to catch my attention]

BF: [......I was gone for one hour doing a tattoo and then this all transpires]

BF: [A, DAAAAAAMN]

MF: [B, DAAAAAAMN]

BF: [C, I don’t like this Dave guy.]

MF: [I’d probably glare at him if I ever saw him from across the street or something]

BF: [Or tattoo the poop emoji on him if he ever came to the parlor to get something]

MF: [......yeah that]
MF: [But we dunno what he looks like]

BF: [So we’ll settle for hating him in spirit and waiting for karma]

PB: [...I have a suggestion]

LQ: NO RIOTS

IQ: NO RIOTS

SO: NO RIOTS

DR: //YES// RIOTS

PB: //YES// RIOTS

CP: //YES// RIOTS

SO: Casper!

CP: ...what

IQ: [Eren’s trying on another dress and tbh he’d look better if he didn’t look so damn mad about it]

IQ has uploaded *6* images to the chat “We’re all fucking idiots”

LQ: [Good job, Casper, you made him mad]

CP: [You’re welcome Hon <3]

CP: [Legit tho sorry, I was just trying to make it a meme…]

SO: [Dammit Casper]

IQ: [...Eren’s in cuffs again because Dave didn’t like that Eren was getting mad…]

IQ: [And it’s just made him //more// mad…]

IQ: [We’re stopping for cinnamon rolls on the way back he needs cheering up]

LA: [Wait… Why is my Brat in cuffs? And why are they not mine?]

LA: [Would someone care to enlighten me before I take it out on these Shits?]

IQ: [Have we been over the thing at all where Eren’s kinda in the psych ward?]

LA: [HE’S WHERE!?!?!]

IQ: [Lathe explain the thing]

LQ: [So Markiplier and a bunch of his buddies showed up unannounced a few months ago and wanted to steal Eren to play drunk video games, and Eren went with them to their hotel room and they did that. He started steaming up as a result of the serum trying to heal from]
the alcohol and Casper Scotty and I had to show up and try to cool him and keep him calm. He heated to 184 Fahrenheit ish, and after he dropped to normal we recorded his statements about the thing for the records... and it got spliced accidentally into the livestream snippets montage thing... everyone thought he was nuts, he got put in the psych ward at the hospital, and his momentary lapses when he's reminded of his dad and his periodic nightmares are the only things keeping him in there. They let him handle the newborn babies of strangers, yet they’re //sure// he's a dangerous schizophrenic.]

LQ: [Theyre going wedding dress shopping for Spades and he has to be in handcuffs for the majority of the time... and Dave has gone from being a low-key member of the squad to ‘Im not afraid to taze you’ in like no time at all]

LQ: [So yeah, I medium-key am pondering whether or not we should retract his wedding invitation]

LQ: [Like the poor kids an angel, don't act like he’s a serious threat and gonna kill everyone]

LA: [So my Brat is in a psych ward... where they let him run around freely within the walls, but as soon as he walks out, he’s thought of as a killer... I can’t wait until I’m out and can shoot all those people up the ass for fucking with my boyfriend... I’m making them run today... I need to run my frustrations out before I shoot one of them... I’m gonna go now.]
Chapter 56: Graduation

Chapter Summary

Hello, readers, this is Duke, I regret to inform you that I will be unable to continue writing this fan fiction... that being said, someone has messaged me about continuing this on their own so please go check out TNATJ for the rest of their awesome chapters that they can think of! I hope you will forgive me for this... but it's been too much stress lately, and now I will get to read right along side you wonderful readers.

Again that's TNATJ

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aside from the fact that Dave almost refused to let Spades come back to get more dresses... because apparently I'm wearing a dress to Levi's graduation... things have been okay. We went out again, and I have many a sundress for the train ride there. Yes, we booked a train to go to the graduation ceremony, and thank Dad for that but I can't be bothered about that right now. That road trip is two months away... I'm not allowed to go out until then... because Dave pissed me off during our last 'outing' and I may or may not have struggled with the cuffs. But who can blame me? I don't wanna wear them! No one wants to wear them! I hate those fucking silver confinements! I hate them with a burning passion! We found out that Jake, the boy that has asked me to sing him to sleep on multiple occasions, has been diagnosed with schizophrenia... But he has his breaks of reality a lot... As in like once a day a lot, but he's getting better bit by bit with his medications. I'm still not released, and it's my birthday! I'm not allowed to go out today either! Like what the fuck is wrong with these people!? I don't get it... and I'm starting to get pissed... Dad didn't show up for lunch, he texted Scotty and asked if Scotty could eat lunch with me in his place. We finished up a bit ago, and I stormed off... I guess I really shouldn't have stormed off, but the guards are too afraid I'll fight back and win to put me in any restraints... so they're letting me alone in my room for now.

Eren turned his head as he heard bare feet race down the hall towards the locked double doors. His eyes caught sight of dirty blonde hair and thin arms lined with bruises. What is Jake running away from now? He swung his legs over the edge of his bed as he heard more footsteps pounding down the hall and frantic shouting. What the hell is going on? Eren stepped out into the hallway just as Jake ran by his room again. He only had a second to take in Jake's crying figure, armed with a bloodied knife in defense. What the- The whiz of a gun firing shortly after he stopped moving sounded, and an electrifying crackle sounded right along with his scream.

His body fell to the floor only a second after the barbs connected with the back of his neck, sending fifty thousand volts through his body. His muscles locking up, and beginning to spasm out, his body starting to thrash as the barbs held onto the skin, continuing with the electric pulse running through him. Eren was knocked out from the shock, his body beginning to seize, jerking around as
Jake was detained and the barbs start to be removed from his neck.

Scotty came in through the locked double doors, his eyes widened as he saw he guards huddled around Eren’s convulsing body. “Don’t touch him, how long has it been?” Scotty was instantly by his side, taking in all the information he was given and letting out a sigh of relief when the seizure lasted only two minutes. “I’m taking him to the ER and making sure he wakes up there.” Scotty picked him up, carefully holding his almost limp form. *His muscles are so rigid…*

---

Lathe beamed to the woman at the front desk as he walked into the hospital, a decent entourage behind him as he carried a fancifully-decorated cake, light grey with blue detailing all over it. He chuckled as he heard Sharon behind him try to keep Maverick from babbling too loudly and grabbing at the cake, obviously entranced by the swirls all over it. Casper next to him held a box with plates and forks for the cake, and they tried to be quiet walking to his room. Spades went and knocked lightly on the door, pushing it open and looking in, her face expression shifting to one of confusion as she saw it empty. “Not here?” He nodded as she shook her head, the flock of them making their way to the nursery instead. Spades stepped inside, looking around, looking back to the group in confusion. “...he’s not here either?” *Where could he be?* “Text Scotty; he’ll know.”

IQ: [Yo Scotty where’s Eren?]  
IQ: [We have a cake and a small squad here to celebrate his birthday]  
IQ: [Where must we bringeth the party?]  
SO: [Oh you’re not going to like this…]  
SO: [ER room 9-C]

Spades looked up from her phone, her eyes wide. “...emergency room 9-C… wherever that is…” *I dunno how to get there… what happened?!!*

...*what.* Lathe immediately nodded them down the hall, leading them to a different hallway, walking quite a ways. He waited for Spades to open the door, silently following her in. His expression became immensely worried as he saw Eren unconscious on a bed, his temperature reading 102 Fahrenheit and drool dripping from his mouth only to be gently wiped away by Scotty. *Eren.* Lathe set the cake on the table, immediately moving to sit on the edge of the bed, brushing Eren’s hair from his face. “Scotty… what happened?” *It doesn't look good… he had a seizure, he's drooling… but is there more to it?*
Scotty sighed quietly, gently lifting the back of his head off the pillow, along with a majority of his hair. He was slow as he turned Eren to the side, showing the taser burns lining the nape of his neck. “He was tasered.” His tone was dry, and his eyes a bit dull. *I still can’t believe they shot him with a fucking taser.*

Lathe’s eyes were wide, concern written into every line of his face. “W-why? What’d he do to cause someone to taze him?! He’d been acting fine until now.” *I don’t get it… what went wrong?*

“They weren’t aiming for him… He walked out of his room, right in front of the guard who was about to taze Jake.” Scotty explained, “He shouldn’t’ve gotten shot… And he was a bit pissed off after you didn’t show up for lunch… But apparently when Jake was running around from one of his breaks… Eren got in the way… And he got the full brunt of it… Basically from point blank.” Scotty’s hands were gentle as he rolled Eren back down to a sleeping position. “He hasn’t woken up yet though… And it’s been an hour…” *I'm worried about him…*

...well this is just the cherry on top of this shit sundae called psych ward competency. Lathe was impossibly gentle, threading his fingers through Eren’s long locks. ...enough. *Is. Enough.* “...I'm through with all of this.” Lathe was very quiet, Scotty the only one able to hear him properly. “I'll have a civil suit filed in the morning. I'm done. I've been done.” *These people don't know what the fuck they're doing.*

Scotty nodded. “It was an honest mistake Lathe… Eren blocked the shot before the guard could react… But I agree it was uncalled for.” *I don’t get it either.*

Lathe shook his head. “I don’t entirely mean this… I've had a folder on my computer full of files on discrepancies in his care and just plain ignorance on the staff’s behalf. They had three-year-old files on hand because they still used paper, and gave him the wrong meds… they put him in a straight jacket because the meds weren’t working, and didn’t try changing dosage or anything… he’s been in here for two months, and he’s allowed to work with the newborn babies in the nursery, but is considered violent and a ticking time bomb the instant he sets foot outside the ward or the nursery. I'd like to know what the parents of the children he’s worked with would think of that. And he’s only here because of something that has happened literally for years… every once in awhile, he's reminded of Grisha, and can retreat into his mind or freak out a bit. It's not something that can be controlled. He's been a big brother to the other patients in that ward… he's had model behaviour… and he's regarded as insane because of a video that was accidentally uploaded, as part of an ongoing medical investigation which we can't conclude anything from yet because the investigation isn't over! It's like locking up the guy who thought aspirin would help headaches before he could prove it because nobody thought it was a thing that could happen! I'm done. I've been done. I won't have much to do for it. Much is already written. It'll be filed in the morning.” *I'm over this shit.*

Eren’s eyes finally cracked open after his fever broke, coming down from 102 and back at the
normal 98.6. He looked weak and worn out. “Lathe?” His voice was a bit scratchy as he spoke, his hand slowly latching onto his shirt. Please tell me I’m awake… And that I’m not dreaming.

Lathe smiled warmly to him, leaning down to peck his forehead. “It’s me, Eren. Dad’s here. ...Happy Birthday, kid. We brought friends to celebrate with you- and cake. If you're up for it.” Lathe shifted a bit so he could see the group of people, all of them smiling to him and Maverick waving his fist to him, making a happy sound. We’re all happy to see you. Would’ve preferred you’d be in better condition, but it’s your birthday. We all wanted to see you, cheer you up.

Eren looked behind Lathe, finally noticing the people in the room, a smile starting to grow on his face. He started to lift his top half up off the bed, only for an arm to go slack unexpectedly forcing him to lay down again. What the fuck? Why can’t I feel my arm?

Lathe chuckled faintly as Eren made a small ‘Oomph,’ moving to gather pillows under him to sit him up. “A lot of electricity ran through you- your limbs aren't gonna wanna cooperate for a while. It's the way it is.” He smiled warmly to him. “You up for cake?” He watched as Eren immediately shot him an intensely questioning look, sighing in mock exasperation, grinning. “Yes, it’s Black Forest. Yes, there are cherries.”

Cherries! Eren nodded, finding his arms stiff as he moved them to his lap. Wow... Tasers.... Fucking hurt like a bitch.... Wait... “... Wait... Where’s Jake?” Eren asked with complete and utter worry written across his face. Where is he? He looked like he wasn’t there... He had a break... Didn’t he? Was he hurt? He had a knife...

Scotty shook his head. “He’s fine, but he’s in restraints. I'm not his doctor, so I can’t go get him… I’m sorry, Kid.” Otherwise I would go and get Jake from his hellhole of a room.

Lathe rested a hand over one of Eren’s, smiling to him faintly. “He’ll be okay- I'll check up on him later, make sure he's alright. Bring him a piece of cake, if you want me to.” Lathe watched as Eren nodded stiffly, his eyes warm. “He’ll be just fine. I'll make sure they're taking good care of him. I know how much he looks up to you. Now. Before you get any cake-” He looked back to the group of people, a glint in his eye. “We have to sing.” He grinned as there was a mock exasperated groan from the group, though everyone began to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ with smiles on their faces, even Maverick trying to copy everybody and babbling away. That's too damn adorable.

Eren watched them all sing to him with warm eyes, a soft smile on his face. “Thanks… For coming… I thought I’d be left alone today when you didn’t come for lunch.” To be completely honest I was frustrated... And I was about to do something stupid to get you to be called in ‘cause I did something stupid... He was finally able to control all his fingers without feeling the tingling sense he had before. “So what are we waiting for? Let’s eat cake!”
Lathe grinned widely, Casper moving with him to help cut the cake. They made sure Eren’s piece was extra generous, Lathe making sure he could hold it before letting go of the plate. “I was baking this and getting everyone together. I'm sure you can forgive me.” His eyes twinkled, everyone soon having their own piece and happily eating. Scotty was laughing, trying to hide his mirth as Casper looked at him confused as he stared at him, asking him what was wrong, unknowingly having a cherry smudge on his nose. Sharon sat on the edge of the bed with Maverick, her hands too full with him to hold a plate, blushing dark every time Hannah fed her a cherry. Lathe leaned his head on Spades’ shoulder, smiling to her and to Eren as everyone talked. ....this is nice.

Eren popped a few cherries into his mouth with a soft smile on his face. When was the last time I had this?.... I... I don’t remember... Fuck, why can’t I remember? Eren’s brow furrowed more as he continued to eat, starting to get a headache from everything he was trying to remember. When was the last time I had cherries?

Scotty enjoyed the cake, watching Casper trying to figure out what he was chuckling at. You’re completely oblivious to the bit of cherry on your nose... He picked up another forkful, taking a glance at Eren, his brow furrowed as well as Eren stared at the cherry on his fork. What’s up with the kid?

Sharon shifted her hold on Maverick, smiling as he tugged on her hoodie strings. She looked over to Eren who stared hard at his fork. “...you’re looking at that cherry like it just spat on your shoes. Everything okay?” You look frustrated. ...and confused.

Eren whimpered a bit as he ate the cherry on the fork. I... I can’t remember... Who are you guys? He looked confusedly at the small child whom stared quietly back at him. Who’s that? Why is he not in the nursery? No... He’s too big... Eren shook his head trying to clear his thoughts, setting his half-eaten plate down on his lap and holding his head in his open hand. My head feels weird...

Lathe set down his own plate, immediately recognising something was off. “Eren, what’s wrong? Your head hurting?” Lathe watched as he nodded a bit, seeing his confusion. “...memories fuzzy?” Another shaky nod. “It’s normal, should only be temporary if you can’t remember stuff. Don’t freak out too much about it. What don't you remember? We’ll help jog your memory.” You’ll be fine.

Eren looked up a bit, staring at the two strangers sitting at the end of his bed. Who are those two ladies? Why are they here? Is that kid theirs? Why’s it staring at me? Eren whimpered before burying his head in his hands again, his head feeling like it would split in two.

Scotty nodded, getting up from where he was and going out to the ward to get Eren’s medication. I don't need him having a panic attack. Scotty was looking around for Jake too, trying to figure out
how the kid looked and where he was.

Sharon glanced between Hannah and Maverick, then back to Eren. She looked to Lathe. “He doesn't remember us.” It wasn't a question, more simply a statement. ...we didn't really meet until, like, half a year ago, so. I've heard it could be worse- he might not have remembered Lathe for all that could've happened. ...he looks like he’s in pain... oh my. “Eren, Hannah boards her horse Luna at your house in the barn, and she works on the serum that your Dad is helping to study. You rode Charlie to our house four months ago, getting Lathe there to deliver Maverick on the kitchen floor. Han and I are married- Hannah and Sharon Laskowski. Anything sound familiar?” ...you don't look too good.... oh my...

Eren hurriedly shook his head, holding his hands over his ears, curling in on himself until he was in a small ball. My head fucking hurts... I don't remember anything like that... Where’s Mommy? I want Mommy... “Mommy…” Eren whimpered his nose beginning to bleed and the back of his neck steaming, starting to heal the taser burns.

Scotty came back into the room, seeing Eren call for Spades. “Spades, slowly… We don’t know what he remembers… I don’t want to have to put him back in the ward…” I really don’t. He held his medication out for Lathe to take. Wait... He’s steaming again... From the back of his neck.

Lathe took the pills from Scotty, noting where he set a water bottle on the small table as he turned to better face Eren, seeing a bit of steam curling out from his neck under his long locks. ...oh. “Of all places to get hit with a taser…” It had to be the neck. Of course. Lathe mumbled a bit, scooting over a bit closer, gently coaxing Eren to unfurl a bit, handing him his pills. “Eren, these will make you feel better. It's okay, just get these down, alright?” You'll need them. We don't want any panicking or anything of the sort.

Spades gasped when Eren lifted his head, the whole front of his face soaked with blood which was running down to his hospital gown. Oh no... “It’s okay Eren, we’re right here… Mama's right here baby.” She was slow to come up on his other side, sitting right beside his curled up form.

Eren whimpered as he raised his head, the blood dripping down at a high rate as he took the pills, taking them in his mouth, along with a lot of his blood. It’s warm... He almost retched, trying not to as his body shook. Mommy?

Lathe immediately found Casper had pressed a towel into his hand, trying to wipe up the blood from his face and chin before handing Eren the rest of his pills and his bottle of water, having Eren hold it to his nose. “Just keep that pressed to your nose, Eren. Keep it in place and you'll be fine. Just breathe. Easy.” Lathe ran a gentle hand over his back, trying to soothe him. Don’t pitch... you need to keep them down...
Eren whimpered even more, pressing the rough towel against his nose, though it did nothing to help him. *It hurts... Everything hurts...* His tears were starting to fall as he held it smashed against his nose, curling in on himself. *It hurts.* “Where’s Hannes....” Eren whimpered even more as he felt a spike of pain run through his head. *It hurts to think about him.*

Lathe’s face fell a bit. *Think... when could Eren be remembering up to?* “Eren, Hannes went back to Germany after his visit. He's not here right now.” Lathe cooed to him quietly, wishing he could more quickly ease the pain. “I know it hurts Eren, but it won't for long. You'll be okay soon.” *Promise.*

Eren could only nodded. He stayed curled up for an hour before he stopped crying. The steaming finally stopped with his tears, his body going limp from being pulled together so tightly for so long. *My mind’s all fuzzy, it feels so weird... Who are these people?*

Lathe helped guide Eren to lay down, running his hand through Eren’s hair and trying to coax him to sleep. “You look really tired, Eren. Mending takes a lot out of you. Sleep a little, okay? You'll feel better.” *You really need the nap, I think.* He smiled faintly as he drifted to sleep, his hand falling from his long brunette locks, looking up at the room around him, shrugging one shoulder. *...things are what they are... and they're not easy on Eren.*

Sharon smiled reassuringly to him, Maverick asleep in her hold, swaying him a bit as he slept, her voice quiet. “Things are as they are. But it was very good cake- and it’s nice to see him in more or less one piece. ...he’ll remember stuff soon enough. It's alright.” *It's not that I'm offended he doesn't remember us or anything, just a bit worried is all.* She glanced to Hannah, who had remained mostly quiet the entire time. *I know you're not much of a talker, but nothing? Huh.* She gave her a half shrug, giving her a bit of a pointed look. *Say something! Lathe can't read minds, for all we know you're silently brooding over there.*

Hannah sat there looking at her hands until her side hurt from being nudged. *What? What happened?* She looked up to see that Eren had been moved to the sleeping position and Lathe’s lips were moving as he said something. *Wait... What's he saying? I can't hear him.* “It’s okay… We understand…” *I mean, it’s okay that he’s asleep.*

Sharon’s eyebrow quirked up, speaking to her. “Uhm, he asked if you were falling asleep yourself, but okay… and please don’t talk so loud, you'll wake up Mav....” *If he gets woken up he'll start crying and I don't want that happening while Eren’s trying to sleep and looking so worn...*

Hannah raised an eyebrow in confusion, opening her mouth as if to talk but thought better of it and closed it. *What do you mean I was talking loudly? I can barely hear myself ... Let alone you.*
Sharon looked to her helplessly as she shut her mouth, looking to Lathe apologetically. *I dunno what her deal is…* “Sorry… but it's really fine. We had a nice time; it's good to see you all. I don't get out of the house much, it's nice to have someone besides myself or the fam for company. As nice of company as they are.” She looked down to Maverick, smiling fondly as she moved her foot to nudge Hannah’s shoe. *You're so adorable… and you keep me sane. …for the most part. “I've got a conference call at three, Hon… maybe we should get home?”* I’m designing keychains with insignias, we need to discuss their designs before I can finish, colour and print them… When she didn't hear a response, she turned to Hannah again, looking a bit frustrated and nudging her again as she played with her hands. “Hannah, what’s wrong? Can't you hear me?” *My God, it's like you're as deaf as me.*

Hannah looked up in confusion, her eyes watching Sharon’s lips, trying to lip read. *Can... You.... Me?...Huh?* She looked down at her hands again shaking her head in frustration, running a hand up to rub at her ears, her brow furrowed, unable to really hear her hand around her ear. *What the actual fuck?*

Casper watched Hannah closely, his eyes widening as things clicked. *...you... the music. Four weeks nonstop. “...Sharon, she can't hear you. She blasted her ears out with the music that's been making the cultures grow back at the labs. After four straight weeks of it, she can't hear.”* *Fuck. This is bad. Everyone on that floor is in danger of going deaf. But you got the brunt of it, having the amp in the same room as you.* Casper went up to Hannah, pulling out his phone and typing quickly, handing it to her. *Congradamalations, Hannah, after four weeks of living at the lab you made yourself go deaf. My advice- get some professional to check out your ears. It's been more than a month; you might need hearing aids or something to help fix your hearing. Good job.”* *Yeah. That's a thing. ...we’re gonna need to invest in better soundproof headsets.*

Hannah read the text with furrowed eyebrows. “I’m deaf?” Her voice was a bit louder than it should’ve been and sounded weird as she spoke. *I'm... I'm the one who's deaf?? We both thought Sharon would be the one to go deaf first.* She looked down at her hands. {I... I had headphones on though?} Her hands were slow, trying to remember what everything was. *We learned ASL just in case... But it was so long ago...*

{They obviously weren't good enough.} Casper moved his hands slowly and deliberately so they could easily be read. {Blasting music that loud for that long most likely destroyed your ears. Seriously, get that looked at as soon as possible. You need to be able to hear. If you're home alone with Maverick and can't hear him crying… well, that could be a problem.} *You need to be able to hear in case anything goes wrong. [I'm not allowing you to work again until we get our hands on better noise-cancelling equipment. I'll only be going in for the few minutes every time a culture needs to be harvested, but we’re not taking the chance of anyone else getting hurt. It’s a great thing that the music makes the cultures grow, but it’s a serious hazard if four weeks made you solidly deaf.]
Hannah looked down at her hands, trying to take everything in. *It’s been two months since I left… And I haven’t noticed for that long? How many times was I alone with Maverick… And he was crying… But I couldn’t hear him.* She instantly felt the tears start to form at the thought of what might’ve happened from her inability to hear anything around her. *This is a shit ton to take in.*

Spades looked down at Hannah, smiling softly, reassuring as she slowly approached, a gentle hand on her shoulder, waiting for her to look up. *(Hannah, I can take you to my doctors office? He’s really nice, and it’s where I go now for any readjustments I need for my hearing aids.)* *I want to help you, I know what it feels like, being unable to hear anything at all…*

Hannah turned her head over towards Sharon. *What have I done to myself? I… Oh my god… I can’t hear a fucking thing…*

Sharon opened her mouth to speak, though she quickly shut it and looked to her hands, occupied by Maverick, still fast asleep. She looked to Scotty as he meandered over, standing and giving him to him carefully. *“Hold him please.”* She turned back to Hannah, signing. *(I really think you should take Spades up on her offer. Otherwise you're not going to be able to hear anything, whether it be other people, something falling off of a counter, a car horn, or Maverick crying. Which is a problem. I've come home at least three times to him crying and you oblivious; it's why I insist you do the errands now. ...If you can't hear, I'm scared to leave him with you. Having hearing aids can't be that huge of a deal. We both can't barely see, and we wear contacts so we can. I get the idea it’s about the same. You'll learn to cope. It's gonna be okay.)* She leaned forward to gently peck her cheeks, not wanting her to cry. *It'll be just fine. It'll become routine, normal. I still love you.*

Hannah’s eyes widened more, tears finally falling all over again. *Wait… You knew? For six weeks? I’ve been doing groceries for that long…. You knew and you didn’t tell me?* Hannah only nodded and she stood up, keeping her head down as she moved towards Spades. *“I’ll go to the doctors…”* She didn’t realize how broken her voice sounded, and how low it was. *I can't even hear myself…*

Sharon caught Hannah’s arm, turning her right back around and giving her a tight hug, gently petting the fuzzy hair of her undercut, willing her to calm down as she rubbed her back, turning her head a bit to speak lowly into her ear. *I'm an alto two- and right here, maybe you'll hear me.*

*“Hannah, please don't cry. I didn't know what the deal was- I didn't mention it because I didn't know what to make of it. It's gonna be just fine. It's okay. Really.”* She nestled into Hannah’s neck, trying to calm her. *It's okay. It really is.*

Hannah only heard every few words, nodding as Sharon spoke. *Okay… I understand… I'll go get the hearing aids.*
Eren sighed as he pulled on the cuffs around his wrist, wincing as they dug into his skin. *I'm bored... I can't help it...* He picked his head up looking at the green scenery as they passed it. *It's really spring... And we're going to Levi's graduation... It's been a month and a half since I got tased... And it took me a week to figure out who the hell everyone was. Jake has been getting better over the past month, which I’m grateful for... They wouldn’t let me back into the nursery for awhile, but once I was let back in Sheila was very grateful. I saw Maverick every now and then, mostly it was Hannah bringing him whenever Sharon needed the house quiet for a conference call... I noticed she would always pick at her hearing aids, sometimes holding her head as she screwed with them.* Eren perked his head up as he heard his parents talking quietly amongst themselves as the train rocked along. *Wait... Wouldn’t that work?*

Spades shrugged. “I dunno, she’s tried three different kinds of hearing aids and she still messes with them... She even asked me if the serum would do anything, she sounds desperate to get rid of them.” *I hated them at first too, but it was so much better than not being able to hear.*

Lathe thought, his head in his hand. “She was complaining about how they all gave her serious migraines... it seems it's bad enough for her to seriously consider forfeiting hearing in favour of not wearing them and getting migraines... but we've been seeing good results so far with the tests with the serum we’ve done... maybe we should ask to give it a go. If it works, great. If not... the next time she gets a paper cut, she’ll be thankful she doesn't have to deal with it for more than a minute. ...but then she'll complain when she wants to drink. ...oh well, she’ll live. We’ll put that in the paperwork so she can't get mad if she’s taking an ice bath after a glass of wine or something.” *Think of the legalities.*

Spades shrugged, looking over to Eren as he shifted. “You doing okay, honey?” She smiled as he nodded and looked out the window again. “She wants to get rid of them, I know that much, she’s always picking at them... Does Casper let her work anymore? I mean, I know she doesn’t mind taking them out...” *I don’t know if she does work much anymore... But she didn’t go home for a solid month...*

“Yeah, she can. They moved a ton of stuff around, though. The amp is now shut up in what used to be a maintenance closet, and nobody’s allowed to enter. She works every other day, but he didn’t let her until they got her some of the best ear protection they could get their hands on. Anyone and everyone who goes on that floor is required to wear them, and if they don't, the company isn't liable because they have them very available; it was a new bit of paperwork they sent around. It's a big thing; they don't want it happening to anyone else. Most of that floor is now just cultures. All other desk work and stuff has been moved to lower floors, taking advantage of the increase in culture growth. But yeah, and Casper's been making sure she’s home plenty to take care of Maverick and spend time with him and Sharon. He’s really adamant that she be there for the two of them... being by herself really wasn't doing Sharon any good, and neither was it Maverick. Even though it's been so long, Sharon still can't sleep. She wakes up in the middle of the night and can't sleep again until four in the morning because it's what she did for a solid month. It also doesn't help that Hannah can't hear when she gets up because Maverick’s actually crying... they don't
take turns or anything. Sharon just puts up with it. She’s wearing herself thin… I don’t know how she’s dealing with it.” She still looks bright and happy a great deal of the time… but she sounds so tired on the phone… she calls plenty, wanting to talk to someone besides Hannah or Maverick who can’t exactly hold a conversation… she’s going stir crazy and being on 24/7 child duty isn’t helping...

Spades nodded, watching Dave come back with his overly large coffee, a coffee for Lathe, a bottle of water for herself and a hot tea for Eren. Well, you know our drink orders… I was wondering what was taking you so long in the bathroom. She got Eren’s attention, giving him his tea, which he gratefully accepted, sipping immediately, not caring if it was scalding hot. We’ve only got a few hours left, which is good.

Lathe thanked him, waiting a bit for his coffee to cool before sipping it, tapping away on his laptop. …only small changes to the contract would need to be made… just things detailing where the serum will be injected, what it’s supposed to do, yadda yadda yadda… okay. He chatted with Spades a bit, though the group fell into a bit of a bored silence, Lathe not helping but to feel put off by Dave’s presence. …honestly, every time I see you now the only thing I can think is ‘ugh.’ … Ugh. When are we gonna be there...

Eren was caught up in the landscape, mumbling to himself as they finally got closer. His conversations were about his handcuffs, Levi, the pretty flowers, the thought of sleeping in something other than a hospital bed for the first time in a long time. He almost jumped out of his seat when they finally stopped at the station and he saw Levi in his uniform, waiting for them, along with Erwin and Armin. Oh that’s right… Armin came earlier today.

Lathe was eager to put away his laptop and get up from their seats on the train, his bags slung on his shoulder and carrying Eren’s for him. He smiled as Eren tried to move to hug Levi the second he set foot on the platform, Levi amending the situation before Dave could overreact and moving to meet them, hugging Eren tightly. I ship it so hard. You two are actually gonna be able to just have each other around for a while. It’ll do you both good. Lathe nodded to Armin and Erwin, beaming and fistbumping Levi. “It’s good to see you still in one piece, Levi. …Dave, cut it the hell out.” Lathe gave Dave a flat glare as he handled Eren a bit roughly, obviously trying to keep him from approaching Erwin or Armin. “These are his friends, and you’re talking to two marines graduating as the valedictorian and salutatorian of their class. I don’t think he’d get away with anything if he tried, which he won’t.” I’m so proud of the both of them. …and you need to calm the hell down.

Dave nodded “Alright, well, I’m to inform you that he’s supposed to have the cuffs on for any time he’s in public, and he needs to be under surveillance 24/7. Now, here’s the key to the cuffs, and I’m going back home. Good day.” Dave pressed they keys into Levi’s hand, sighing quietly and then walking off to catch a taxi. I can’t deal with this shit right now, I’ve got a plane to catch.
Eren watched him leave, smiling as Levi wrapped his arms around him, finding it awkward to hug him back with the handcuffs. “I missed you…” He sighed in relief as he leaned his head down onto Levi’s shoulder. *You’re wearing your uniform… It looks so nice on you.*

Levi smirked, holding Eren close, his brow furrowing as the cuffs dug into his stomach. He pulled back, looking to the keys in his hand and shrugging, looking to Erwin. “I trust you're not gonna turn me in for this.” When Erwin shook his head, and Armin too, Levi unlocked Eren’s cuffs, stowing them in a pocket with the key before pulling him back in for a proper hug, feeling his arms wind around his back. *It's nice to have you in my arms again.*

Eren held him close, his arms pulling him impossibly closer. *I missed you so much.* He looked down at the bruises he gave himself for pulling on the tight cuffs, sighing in relief that they were finally off. *We get to see you graduate!*

Levi smiled faintly as Eren crushed them in a hug, pecking his neck gently and murmuring into his ear. “It's good to see you, Eren.” He pulled back, smirking as he saw Eren blush red. He held out an arm for Eren to take, leading them away from the platform to flag down two taxis. He saw Dave just as he was being driven away. *Good riddance.*

Lathe helped get their stuff into the trunk of the taxi they waved down, looking about and noticing a few people looking their way, particularly at Eren. *...they recognize him.* It wasn’t long before they were in the cab, Lathe ending up next to Eren in the back with Levi on his far side, moving after they were buckled to mess with Eren’s hair. “People recognize you, Eren. Here, let me fix your hair…” Lathe undid his man bun, letting his hair fall long around his shoulders. “With the dress and your long hair, nobody’ll recognize you. Which is good, because you don't have the cuffs on. Want me to braid it? I know how to do it fanciful if you want.” *All of the littler girls I'd worked with over the years made sure I knew how to braid their hair when we talked; they loved it.*

Eren nodded, shifting a bit. *But I don't have the dress on yet… Oh what the hell, might as well.* He sighed as he felt Lathe’s gentle hands run through his hair, letting it be braided. His eyes were glued to his hands until it was done a couple minutes later. “Does it look okay?” Eren’s voice was quiet as he looked over to Levi, blushing a bit as he smiled, unable to keep from doing so.

...*Wow. If you were a girl, I'd still be head over heels.* “I-It looks really good.” He was serious, his hand moving down the French braid, pulling his long fishtail over Eren’s shoulder. “Where’d you learn to braid hair this well, Lathe?” *It's done very neatly.*

Lathe shrugged, smiling faintly. “A lot of the little girls I worked with in counselling loved braiding hair… they all made sure I knew how to braid their hair and made me do it as we talked. They taught me pretty well, I suppose…” *I can do all sorts of fancy stuffs.* “Eren’s got plenty of hair to work with, so it's a bit easier.”
Levi nodded, letting go of Eren’s braid and moving to gently peck his cheek, letting Eren lean on him. “...I missed you.” Levi held onto Eren as they drove, sneaking many a kiss to his cheeks and forehead, the corner of his lips. ...keeping it PG because of the fam... But Lathe is ignoring us because he knows what’s up and Spades is talking to the driver, so I’m good.

Eren blushed completely, letting Levi kiss around his face, his smile wider than it’d been in months. Should I tell him? Sheila helped me locate a few people who could help... And one of them was Hannah... Eren shifted a bit, the thoughts weighing on his mind as he let out a soft noise of surprise when Levi kissed his neck. Fuck that was loud... His cheeks grew to an even darker shade of red from embarrassment.

Levi smirked as Eren let out a surprised sound, glancing around the cabin to check nobody was paying much attention to them, Spades being a wonderful distraction to their driver and Lathe seeming to nap as he leaned his head against the window. Thank fuck. Levi tugged Eren over as much as the seatbelt would let him, moving Eren’s braid to hide him as he began to gently kiss and nip at Eren’s neck, one hand moving his sweatshirt a bit to the side to better access his skin, the other resting on his thigh. Tonight, you are mine.

Eren couldn’t help but whimper and whine with need as quietly as humanly possible. I need to stay quiet. He could already feel his arousal trying to pulse through his body, looking down to Levi’s hand on his thigh, giving him more access to the skin of his neck. “L-Levi...” His voice was quiet, and sultry. What are you doing to me?

Levi gently nibbled at his earlobe, smirking and whispering into his ear. “Just be forewarned... tonight, you are mine.” He pressed a kiss to the spot under his ear, his eyes sparking. “I can’t wait to have you a~ll to myself.” I want you. ...and you’re gonna have to deal with thinking about it all day. I mean, it's only fair- I’ve been thinking about it alllll five months we’ve been apart.

Eren shuffled a bit, trying to hide the slight bulge he was already starting to sport. Oh fuck... You damn tease... I’m gonna be hard all day... He whimpered a bit, moving impossibly closer to Levi. “Fuckin’ tease.” He whimpered a bit, turning his head closer towards him, giving him more access yet again. I want you now, though...

Levi nibbled at Eren’s neck, lapping at his tanned skin. “Don’t worry... we’re going to the hotel first, before anything. And there’s some time before we have to get to the ceremony... maaaaybe we can convince them to let us have some time to ourselves...” Lathe and Spades can deal with walking around for awhile... we won't be forever... sadly, but hey. I'll take what I can get. We’ll take all the time we want later...
Eren blushed, making small noises every now and then as Levi nipped at his neck. *I wanna be there... I want you alone...* He couldn’t be more relieved when the taxis finally pulled up to the large hotel near Quantico. **Wow! This place is huge! We’re staying here?** He was quiet, taking in the sights as he was tugged along, everyone given keys from the desk and then taking the elevator up towards the top floor. Eren’s hands were shaking with anticipation as he held his hand in the elevator. **I’m excited... and apparently our hotel rooms are right next to each other.** His face flushed even more as Levi opened their large room, letting him walk in and look around the fancy room, the white King-sized bed just calling to him, so what did he do? Fall face first into it and sigh in relief. **It’s an actual bed...**

Levi chuckled as Eren face planted into the bed, immediately making himself comfy. **Well, it'll make what happens in a minute easier.** He looked up as someone nudged his arm, Lathe looking into the bed with a quirked eyebrow and handing Levi Eren’s bag, looking amused. Levi took it, snatching at the shoulder of his sweater for a second and murmuring into his ear quietly. Lathe nodded when he was released, giving him a salute before going off to his own room with Spades. **Thank God he’s so chill.** Levi hung the ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on the door, shutting it and going straight up to Eren, rolling him over so he was sitting on the edge, tilting his chin up with one finger, their lips barely brushing together as he stared into his viridian orbs. **“Now, we’re alone.”**

*Mine.*

Eren leaned into a soft kiss, enjoying their closeness. **“It’s a real bed... It’s so alluring...”** He flopped back down onto the bed, crawling into the center before curling his finger at Levi in a come hither motion. **I want you just as badly... But I get to tease...** Eren’s bright eyes held a seductive gaze with Levi’s as he teasingly bit his lip and hooked one of his thumbs over his pants, tugging them down a bit, revealing a bony hip. **I want you going crazy.**

Levi’s gaze became predatory, climbing up onto the bed with Eren, his gaze raking over his entire lithe form. He leaned down to kiss him, his hands gently beginning to wander his chest and waist. **You’re getting thin... We need to fix that.**

Eren smiled, letting him touch all over his body, relaxing in Levi’s touch. **God, I’m tired... That train ride really took a lot out of me.** He let off a soft sound as Levi’s hands found his skin. **His hands feel really nice, and he’s being gentle.** Before he even realized it, Eren's breathing was even and his eyes closed.

**... he’s asleep.** Levi sighed quietly, smiling faintly and shaking his head a bit in exasperation, climbing off of Eren and instead turning him onto his side. He shed his formal uniform, getting into bed beside him and pulling him flush with his front, spooning him and drifting himself. He woke as there was a quiet knock at the door, glancing to the clock. **He gave us fifteen minutes before we needed to leave. Thank fuck he knows how this works.** Levi stood and knocked back at the door, letting Lathe know he was up and aware of the time before moving to get dressed again, shaking Eren awake by the shoulder. **"Eren, get up. The ceremony is soon; we’ve gotta get going in a few minutes."** He pecked his lips gently, plenty of emotion in the soft kiss. **"Hope you had a nice..."**
nap." I certainly did. "And don't worry... There's plenty of time to get reacquainted later tonight." I can't wait.

Eren blushed, sleepily getting up. His long hair still in a very tight braid, as he yawned, struggling to get the sleepy look out of his eyes. "Okay..." He kept his eyes on the ground, looking around for his bag as Levi started to put his formal uniform back on. He looks really good in that... I can't believe he's mine... He finally spotted it, picking up the black bag and bringing out a golden dress which brought out his eyes and highlighted his golden skin. It was shaped just right for his thin and bony frame, slipping the fabric over his head, the material hugging his hips and his ass. I hope that he likes this... Mom taught me how to wear high heels for this...

Levi couldn't help but stare, buttoning his jacket and taking in Eren's silhouette. Thin... But gorgeous. Levi walked up behind him, his hands resting on his hips as he murmured into his ear. "Do you know how hard it's going to be, keeping my hands off you while you're wearing that?" Impossible.

Eren couldn't help the sharp gasp that came out of his mouth, his smile forming across his lips as he looked at Levi. "You know how hard it is not to rip that uniform off of you?" He moved in Levi's arms, facing him, his hands finding the way to his sharp undercut and ruffling the hair. It's so soft, I don't think I'll ever get over it. He leaned down to kiss Levi's forehead. I missed doing this... I really do... It's nice that I don't need to be restrained out in public too... I hate those fucking handcuffs. His arms hung loosely at Levi's shoulders, his bony hips poking out a bit from the dress but not much.

Levi blushed faintly, his arms holding Eren flush to his front, simply enjoying the closeness for a long moment. He stood up tall to peck Eren's nose before going to fix his hair. "Finish getting ready- we can't be late. I have a speech to give." Fun.

Eren nodded and went off to go do what Spades had taught him, pulling off smokey eyes in a matter of a few minutes. They look good, and maybe I'll get to meet Levi's literal squad? I know he talks about them all the time when we get to talk on the phone. He came out of the bathroom, his chocolate hair in loose curls from his hair being braided, and in high heels. I hope this looks alright... "Um... What do you think?" Eren's voice was quiet and shy as he had finally brought the look together.

... hot damn. ...holy fuck do you look hot." Levi smirked, crossing the room to him, completely put together, hair tamed and shoes shining. He gently brushed a lock of hair back from Eren's face, chuckling quietly as Eren blushed darkly before kissing him deeply, pulling away when another light knock sounded.
"Uhm... I've been told to tell you we need to get going. So, yeah..." I hope you two don't plan on going to the ceremony looking like you just had sex...

Eren jumped a bit at the knock, a deep blush settling over his face. "U-uh... We.. We're c-coming!" Eren called as he moved back to grab a small purse to hold his phone as Levi opened the door. "Okay, let's get going then." He stepped out of the room, his face flushing from the instant stares. "Uhm... Is... Is something on my face?" His voice was quiet and close to panic as he looked over to Levi, he noticed Blake at Lathe's feet and smiled. I actually forgot that we brought him... But that's good I guess, I don't really wanna freak out without him around. His eyes looked at everyone staring at him with their jaws wide open. "Is it the dress?" Does it not look good? Fuck, I should've gone with the blue after all...

Lathe gaped at Eren, not believing what he was seeing. "...Two things. One, you've convinced me I have a daughter and not a son, and two-" He looked to Levi, quirking an eyebrow at him. "Levi, you're gonna have your work cut out for you, fending off other guys." With the way Eren looks, you're gonna have a hell of a time keeping guys away.

Levi nodded in agreement, looking to Eren again. "Oh believe me, I understand why I'm gonna need to fend people off." You're too fucking hot.

Eren blushed more a small giggle escaping him as he tried to hide his mouth with his hand. They were all loaded into a large taxi, Erwin wearing his formal uniform as well, and Armin wearing a very nice baby blue dress shirt and black slacks. Lathe was wearing a deep red dress shirt and black slacks as well as a black tie and a black jacket. I bet Mom put him up to wearing the red... Or maybe he intends on using that to his benefit since we have separate rooms? He shrugged at the thought, looking back over to Spades and the beautiful dress she wore. Not much different than mine... Only hers is a bit tighter around the hips and bust... And hers is silver and not gold. You can definitely tell that we went shopping together. When they arrived Levi and Erwin gave their kisses goodbye before heading off to go get ready for the ceremony. But of course Levi just had to grab my ass too, which left me a blubbering mess as we were led down to the ceremony. Eren's eyes looked around to the many white chairs that were set out, a majority of them were filled, some with families dressed formally, some with military formats of different colors and ages. This... This is so nice, I didn't really expect to be one with the crowd when I was put in the dress... I thought I would definitely be sticking out like a sore thumb. What Eren didn't see where the many heads turning to look at him as he walked by; even the marines in training couldn't help but stop and stare at him in all his glory. Eren was completely oblivious to the stares as their group was ushered to the front of the front row, though now he noticed that the group standing tall behind Erwin and Levi on stage couldn't help but stare either. His cheeks flushed with embarrassment, waiting for the rest of the crowd to find their seats and for the ceremony to start. Goddammit... He's too hot for his own good in that damned uniform.

Levi tried to keep himself from turning scarlet as Eren walked down the long aisle, looking ...sexy as fuck ... Levi, not now. You've got a thing to do. He tried not to stare himself, though he definitely
noticed the heads turning as Eren walked, sending quick glares to anyone he caught looking. Which were plenty . ... God dammit, he's mine ... 

Eren watched as the ceremony finally started, and each of the men and women were called up by names, their ranks given before they walked back towards where they originally stood, only now they separated behind Levi and Erwin, each having their own names called last and their ranks much higher than anyone else's. They were introduced as top of their class and Erwin was given the podium for the first few minutes, which Eren didn't really care for, but what he said was nice, and a lot of the military people sitting behind them seemed to appreciate it. He watched with excitement as Levi was the next up to the podium, though he had to move the microphone way down so that it would be in front of his face, and not above it. Oh my god, that was adorable. Eren had a dreamy look in his eyes and a smile on his face as Levi's deep voice sounded through the speakers, promising that the audience's children had done well and that they were prepared for the next step, and he was proud that he could guide them on their new journeys. He made a few remarks which had the audience chuckling, and all in all made a good speech to wrap up the ceremony as a whole. He did such a good job! If I was up there, I'd be such a wreck! His gaze followed both Erwin and Levi as they went to stand in front of their squads. Another high ranking official finally dismissed everyone and informed them that they were welcome to stay for the after party which would be held in the ballroom a few buildings down. Oh, I wonder if we're gonna go or if Levi's gonna wanna go back to the hotel right away? He was getting up along with others as the marines jumped off the stage in order to get to their loved ones, looking around in confusion, having lost sight of Levi in the rush of people. Where did he go?

Levi moved with the others to get off the stage, hidden by the rush of people and searching for their group in the front row. Damn my short height... Where are you... He finally saw a flash of gold, heading right for Eren, his arm slipping around his waist. "Found you..." He smirked as Eren blushed, standing up on tiptoe to peck his cheek. "This is so unfair- you're already taller than me and you go ahead and wear heels." He had to tilt his head up to really look at him, suddenly turning as he felt a hand on his shoulder, a familiar voice. Oh yeah... Probably gonna have to explain this one.

Reiner stood behind him, his hand still roughly clamped on Levi's shoulder. "So, Sarge, this the lucky girl? In my opinion, if she were available, I'd tap that." Reiner's cheeky grin was obvious and his hulking frame was only second to Erwin's. That girl looks damn fine...

Eren's eyes widened and he blushed all the way up to his ears. Oh thank god we went to the dress with sleeves... They probably would know the scars... They've been posted everywhere. They think I'm a girl. Eren giggled as he saw a few others come closer to them. Are these Levi's squad members? This is great! They don't know it's me! He let out a sharp gasp, his whole body freezing as he felt another pair of arms pull him close, he felt stiff, turning to see red hair and a woman's face. Who is this? Why is she holding me?

"Oh my gosh! I'm so excited to meet you finally! Levi talks about you all the time! But he always does it in German! And I can't understand a word he says! So tell me, tell me, tell me! You're the
mystery girl right!?” Izzy was bouncing off the walls, not even noticing that Blake was trying to force her off of Eren. She only whined when Farlan grabbed her arms, prying her off of him.

"Sorry about that. Izzy gets a bit crazy when she meets new people... Would you pay attention? His service dog was trying to get him off! You can't just hug people willy nilly!" Farlan chastised her, the dirty blonde stood taller than Izzy, though shorter than Reiner, and definitely not as tall as Bert, the tall lanky man coming up to them in his uniform. He seemed shy though, not introducing himself. "Sorry about that again." Farlan held Izzy back so she wouldn't freak Eren out.

Eren swallowed, eyes wide as he looked down at Blake who was circling him protectively. He tried to calm his breathing from the almost panic he had just experienced. *I thought I was getting better? I thought I was doing better...*

Levi immediately re staked his claim on Eren, pulling him into his side and glaring daggers at Reiner. "Reiner, watch it. And only sort of. This-" He glanced up to Eren, smirking. "-is my boyfriend Eren. These are some of the squad members that follow me everywhere. The girl who just glomped you is Izzy, the Izzy-wrangler is Farlan, this creep over here is Reiner, and the Reiner-wrangler who should be over here keeping an eye on him is Bertoldt, but we call him Bert. Just don't call him Bertl; Reiner gets jealous." Levi shot Reiner a cool, knowing look as Bert meandered up next to Reiner, quietly looming over all of them. *I don't give a shit anymore if you all know I'm gay. You'll have to deal. He reached down to pet Blake, who eyed the marines around them warily. "Easy, they're cool. ...mostly."

Eren only nodded and stood watching the four of them interact. "Um... It... It's a pleasure to meet you all." He bowed his head a bit, so unsure of what he was supposed to say or do, or even how to act in front of them. *What am I supposed to do?*

Reiner let out a low whistle. "Damn, didn't know you swing that way... But hey, I'd still tap that." His voice was hearty as he stepped back a bit, Blake having growled at him. "Nice dog you got there, Eren." *It looks like it's ready to bite my face off.*

Eren's face was completely flushed at Reiner's comment. *What is he trying to say? Wait... How's Levi gonna take that?*

Levi's gaze turned cold, smirking faintly and maintaining his composure, glancing down to Blake. "Oh, him? That's Blake. Eren's service dog. ...It'd be too bad if I decided to tell him to take down the creep hitting on my man..." He made no move to keep Blake from standing between Eren and Reiner, teeth bared. "He's very protective... I'm sure you understand."
Neither Levi nor Reiner had a chance to say anything else before Bert elbowed Reiner hard in the side, his eyes flashing dangerously. "Reiner, shut the hell up. It's obviously not appreciated. And did you not see the dog's vest? He's working, and feels threatened. Quit it for once. If you get bit, I'm not helping you." It'd be your own damn fault. His demeanor switched, looking to Eren apologetically, seeming shy again. "I'm sorry about him, really. He's an idiot sometimes. ...well, most times. But he's not trying to mean." If he were, we'd really have a problem.

Eren eyes were impossibly wide as he watched Bert's display of both anger and then shyness. What did I just watch? "Um... I-It's o-okay." Eren stuttered as he looked down and away, moving to sit in a chair, Blake coming up and whining to be pet. I need to calm down, I really need to. He swallowed hard, trying to calm down, take in a deep breath again and again until his hands were no longer shaking and the crowds around him thinning. Don't freak out... Don't freak out...

Izzy picked up on Eren's uneasiness. "Hey Levi, um... Eren looks like he's gonna be sick." Izzy pointed out, everyone's eyes turning from Bert to Eren's noticeably paler skin. Is he alright?

Reiner rubbed at his side, already feeling the soreness from Bert's elbow jabbing him. Okay, I guess I deserved that. But I can't help it! Sarge is so secretive! I honestly can't! We didn't even know he was gay! We've been under his command for two and a half years! And this is how we find out he's gay?

Levi moved to sit next to him, holding Eren close as he petted Blake, his thumb rubbing his side, trying to calm him down. "He's kinda got PTSD. He needs a bit of space; the remarks and the aggression freaked him out a bit." Levi decided to ignore Reiner and the others for the moment once their secondary and tertiary guard dogs came into view. Backup. Thank you.

Lathe and Spades moved a bit closer to them once they noticed Eren looking uneasy, Spades slipping from his gentle hold to sit next to Eren as well, kneeling next to Eren on one knee. "You okay, kid?" He smiled faintly as Eren nodded, feeling a bit of a mood shift as Erwin spoke behind him. It's a different dynamic here. And it's loud. I can understand feeling so off-put. Can't say I don't entirely feel out of place.

Erwin cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. "Alright, so are we gonna stay for dinner? Or are we gonna go out?" This needs to be decided sooner or later, especially if we're gonna call ahead.

Eren looked up from petting Blake. "Um... Can we go out? I don't mind paying." I have my credit card with me... I kinda don't wanna go back where there's a crowd. Blake stopped whining soon enough, signalling that Eren was doing much better and calming down.
Izzy gasped a bit in excitement. "Let's go out!" She was bouncing up and down around Farlan, giggling when he couldn't get a proper hold on her.

Reiner chuckled at the look in Izzy's eyes, knowing it all too well. "I take it we're going out than?" *I certainly don't mind.*

"I don't think even I can catch her and stop her at this point, so I think so." Farlan caught her after he yielded, hugging her from behind and keeping her feet on the ground. "Much hype. Many excitement. Wow." He chuckled as multiple people facepalmed, including Izzy, Lathe nodding in approval.

Bert nodded, simply shaking his head a bit as Farlan spoke, a faint smile on his lips. "Eating out sounds really nice. I don't know anywhere nice and sit-down, though..." *I don't normally eat out all fancy-like... And today calls for fancy-like...*

"To Google!" Armin pulled out his phone, typing away. "What kinda food are we looking for? Steakhouse? Italian?" When everyone shrugged, he looked up with a quirked eyebrow. "Okay, people need to start being picky. Otherwise I'm just gonna swipe the list my phone gave me and we're gonna go wherever my finger lands. Any suggestions at all?" *Anyone?*

Eren finally looked up at Armin having calmed down a lot. "Um... I would... I would prefer... I mean... I would like it... I-if we could go get Italian... I-if t-that's alright?" He couldn't keep eye contact with any of them as he felt Levi's thumb rub his side. "I mean... We don't have to..." He hurriedly tried to fix his previous statement, fearing people would yell at him for suggesting something.

Reiner shrugged. "Italian's fine with me." *I don't really care where we eat. But why is that guy so shy? Is it because he's in a dress? Or maybe it's because of Blake? Or whatever reason he needs Blake? Hmm... Well, I'll ask later.*

Bert nodded, glancing to Reiner. "Yeah, Italian is okay with me..." *Now all I've gotta worry about is not looking like an idiot trying to eat all fancy-like... Dammit, I never do this kinda stuff...*

Izzy nodded in agreement. "I think we can do Italian! Farlan loves spaghetti and meatballs! And I haven't had raviolis in forever!" She was a bubbly mess, made of complete cheeriness, though she stuck her tongue out childishly when Farlan shook his head.
Spades smiled as Eren spoke up, though she knew it wasn't easy for him. *It can't be easy for you... I know you don't necessarily do well meeting new people, and you're really trying.* She looked over to Lathe, wrapping her arms around his waist. "What do you think? Italian sound good?"

"I'm all for it." Erwin's heavy voice sounded, before he scolded Izzy to calm down, which she did after a quick apology, and hid behind Farlan. He rolled his eyes as he turned back to the others, finally landing on Levi's worried face. *You're worried, and Blake still seemed frazzled... Is he having a panic attack? From the new faces?*

Lathe nodded, smiling. "Sounds great to me." *You spoke up- I'm proud of you for that. This whole being around lots of new people thing isn't easy for you, and you're giving it your best. I admire that.* He looked to where Eren was being fussed over by a worried boyfriend and guard dog. ...*you're in good hands. "What about it, Levi? Up for Italian?" ... Lathe, I swear to God, there may be a shit ton of puns to make, but don't you dare... Don't do it... "I think you'd enjoy some Rivailloli." ...that was horrible. ......soooo worth my dignity."

Levi looked up to Lathe, the gears turning before he facepalmed hard, his brow furrowed. "...that was such a terrible pun..." He looked up to catch Lathe explaining it to a confused Farlan, just in time to see him get a grin and a high-five. "...Farlan, don't encourage him. ...and yeah, I'm in." *Please... I don't wanna hear more than three terrible puns per outing...*

"Sorry, Sarge; I appreciate puns." *It was a pretty good one.* He looked over to Armin, who leaned into Erwin's side as he tapped away at his phone. "So, I guess that makes it Italian." *...are Erwin and that blonde a thing too? Erwin doesn't talk at all about him if that's the case...*

Armin nodded, scrolling through a restaurant website and nodding in approval after a moment, looking up to count them all before typing again, hitting enter. "Alright, I sent in a reservation- the ten of us for some place called Murano in about an hour. We're lucky they had the space- it looks pretty upscale, and all the reviews are glowing." *We should like it. It's a bit of a ways, but we can walk if we want to pass the time. It definitely won't take the hour to walk it.*

Eren nodded, not looking up again though. *Nope, I've already spoken... I don't need to do that again.* He tried to fight the urge to scratch, Blake catching on and taking his hand into his mouth. At that point Eren grew even paler. *I don't wanna freak out... What if I have a seizure? What if Levi's friends laugh at me? What happens then?* He was struggling not to shake, but couldn't help it as his hands shook against Blake, struggling to calm down.

The marines shrugged, "We don't mind walking, as long as we're not doing a death run." Farlan winced as Izzy hit him. "What?"
"Sarge isn't supposed to know we call it that!" She hissed at him, before she smiled at everyone else again. "We wouldn't mind walking. It can't be too far!" Good job for opening your mouth, Farlan...

Erwin was catching onto Eren's increasing state of panic. "Armin, call a cab for Eren and Levi, he's not gonna be able to walk like this." His voice was soft but allowed for Armin and Levi to hear it. I can tell by the way he's shaking, walking is not going to happen anytime soon.

Levi looked up gratefully as Armin called a cab, though he looked over to Farlan again after a moment. "Is that what you call them? Death runs? Hmm... Maybe we should have you all run the way..." He smirked faintly as Izzy and Farlan immediately began pleading with him, holding up a hand after a minute. "Alright, it's graduation. I'm mean, but I'm not cruel...for the most part." His arms wrapped again around Eren's middle, trying to calm him. "It's okay, Eren. Nothing's gonna happen. We're gonna get driven over to the restaurant, and we're all just gonna have a good time, okay? They're all very nice people- not that I would ever tell them that- but there are people you can trust your life with. You'll be okay; please don't worry. And if you start to panic about anything, that's okay. They'll understand." They should, at least.

Lathe quietly tapped Levi's shoulder, having read Erwin's lips. "Do you just want it to be just the two of you? We can walk with your squad mates if you want us to."

Levi nodded after a minute. "Could you? Don't worry about being personable and chatty- Izzy'll do that for you. And, uhm... You're the best at explaining PTSD... Can you just tell them a generic thing about it? They probably don't understand..." They're gonna need to, given they're gonna be around him for a bit.

Spades nodded for him. "We'll make sure they understand the gist of it, and make sure he's okay, okay?" Spades' voice was a bit stern as she turned back to the group, smiling as Izzy jumped up to her and started asking multiple questions.

"When are you getting married? Sarge said he was going to a wedding soon... Are Eren and Sarge married? Did he wear a dress? Is Eren an only child? Are you his pare-?" Izzy would've gone on and on and on if not for Farlan closing a hand over her mouth, yet she continued like it wasn't even there.

Farlan rolled his eyes. "I'm sorry about her, she's so curious about everyone she meets, and asks too many questions in my opinion."
Levi just shook his head in exasperation, holding Eren close. We all ended up calling cabs, it was the easiest option. Spades and Lathe explained kinda what PTSD was to the group, and they all kinda understand now what's going on with Eren, which is good. Eren doesn't want to be made an example of while we're out, have the people he's eating with look suspicious of him. We got to the place without much incident, and barely had to wait before we were seated. It was really nice. Like, really nice and fancy, chandeliers, art and stuff everywhere, it was great. We were able to talk freely though, it didn't feel like we had to whisper while we were talking. Eren was okay for the most part, and Blake just chilled behind his chair, out of the way. Lathe kept sneakily giving him carrots from his salad, and then Bert caught him and decided to too. ...I swear, everyone I know is just pairing off neatly. Erwin is obviously gonna propose soon enough to Armin, I know our favorite blonde mastermind is dying waiting for him to ask. Izzy and Farlan are their own thing, because I dunno who else would be able to deal with that much hype all the time. And he just kinda looks at her sometimes and you can tell there's a lot going on in his mind. And Bert and Reiner- Bert was trying really hard all night to eat properly and have good manners. Props to him, he managed well. But every so often he'd just kinda look over to Reiner next to him... and it's the same look Lathe gives Spades when he's in one of his sappy moods. ...how is it that like 90% of my friends aren't straight. ...eh, they may mostly be gay idiots, but they're my gay idiots. Except for Izzy and Farlan. They're just idiots. Everything was absolutely delicious. I did end up getting 'Rivailloli,' much to Lathe and Farlan's amusement, and Eren ordered the same thing Lathe did, some fancy potato pasta things with a name weirdly pronounced. But hey- he loved it. And it's starting to look as if the two of them share a sweet tooth too. Eren agreed to chocolate cake for dessert. I so approve. Eren tried to pay the check after everything, but Lathe insisted, saying as my kinda-Dad he wanted to, proud of what everyone had accomplished. He asked the waitress something just before handing it over...all I know is that when we left, the waitress looked ready to cry, staring at the receipt in shock. ...Eren's lucky that that is his Dad. Bert quietly asked Reiner something as we were leaving, looking nervous, and when Reiner was about to insist everybody join, Bert said something again. Reiner looked stunned a bit, but he looked fine after a second. They're heading out to get drinks I think, and Izzy and Farlan ran off after dinner, not without Izzy bear-hugging Lathe and Spades first... And waving to Eren. ...thank god she gets it. But Eren's parents decided to walk around town a bit, see what there was to do. It's warm out even though it's getting to be evening, they're fine. Erwin and Armin are heading back to the hotel on foot, doing a bit of looking around the city because it's not too far... but as for us, we took a cab... Levi smirked as the elevator took them up to the top floor of the hotel, his arm wound around Eren's waist. We have... Plans. Levi opened the door to their room with a keycard not a moment after the elevator opened, leading Eren inside and making sure the 'Do Not Disturb' sign was still on the handle before closing the door, unleashing Blake before turning to Eren. He closed the distance between them, his eyes shaded. "Now that we're... alone.... Tell me." His hands roamed down over Eren's hips, one hand lightly tracing his front, over where he knew his bulge was hidden. "...what do you want to do?" I want to hear you say it...
Levi tilted his head in thought for a moment, smirking and leaning in to gently nip at his ear. "As much as I like the makeup on you... I think I'd much more like to see just you." Plus, less mess. Levi shepherded Eren into the bathroom, his hands running over his sides from behind as Eren removed the makeup, teasing him and nipping at his neck. I want you...

Eren couldn't help but groan and move against Levi's crotch. His hands were working fast to rid himself of all the makeup, his hips moving of their own accord against Levi's front, wanting him to grab at it. I want you to hold me.

Levi held Eren's hips, grinding against his ass as he impatiently waited for Eren to ditch his makeup. As soon as it was all off Levi turned Eren around to face him, cupping his ass and grinding their clothed, hardening lengths against each other. He moaned quietly, locking their lips as he stumbled with Eren to the bed, pushing him onto the king bed and clambering on top of him, his lips easily trailing down his jaw and his neck, his hands playfully squeezing his ass. Mine.

Eren couldn't help the lewd noises that were escaping his throat without a care in the world. "I want it..." His voice was a loud whine, begging for his body to be let free from the dress that encased it. Eren's body was begging to be held. I want it, I want you... Please...

Levi smiled against his skin, his hands drifting to the low hem of the gold fabric, slowly beginning to push it up and reveal his long legs, his fingers skimming the pale skin, traveling even to the insides of his thighs teasingly. He pulled his lips back from Eren's neck to bring the dress off of him, shrugging off his jacket and tossing it off the bed with a bit of care before latching his lips back onto his collarbone. He sucked dark marks onto his skin as he unbuttoned his dress shirt, tossing that off the bed as well, sighing as Eren ran his hands over his defined muscles. I've really been pushing it hard these past few months... I wanted to give you something to really like...

Eren's length twitched as the inside of his thighs were touched teasingly. "Fuck... L-Levi... Ngh..." He couldn't help but let his hands wander Levi's exposed skin. "Hmm... Levi... You're so fucking hot..." I missed this... I missed this so much. He moved his hands down his v-line, tugging at the hem of his dress pants. His eyes were filled with lust and need, wanting nothing but for Levi to completely ravish him after so long apart.

Levi could feel his own need, the heat between his legs growing as Eren traced his v-line. His gaze raked over Eren's form, hungrily tracing the outline of Eren's bulge through his boxers. ..I want it... But... You'd say no... . Eren's hands tugging at his dress pants, clumsily undoing his belt buckle distracted him, smirking as he sat back on his haunches, undoing the buckle at his leisure and tossing it aside, unbuttoning and unzipping his pants before shimmying from them and his boxers at once, his own hard length freed from the cloth and at attention. He lapped at Eren's neck, one knee between his spread legs, slowly tugging Eren's boxers down, letting his length spring free. His hands teasingly ran up his inner thighs again, touching everywhere around his length, but not giving Eren the friction he desperately wanted. I don't care... You should know how much of a
Eren whined, moving his hips against Levi's hands trying to get some friction. "L-Levi, please, I want it..." You're being such a tease! I want you to take care of me... I've been secluded from everyone in that fucking hospital. Eren felt the tears of emotion start to prickle at his eyes. He whimpered, moving his hands to hide his face as he felt the stress of being torn out of everyone's life start to finally set in. I've been there for three and a half months... And it's only starting to get to me now... Fuck why can't I keep it together? Seeing everyone now... This is just a tease isn't it? Because I have to go back to that fucking hellhole after. Eren visibly swallowed, still trying to hide his tears, struggling to hold in a hiccup as he curled up a bit.

Levi looked up to him with worry as he began to curl up, moving to straddle him for the moment, freeing up his hands and moving Eren's own from his face, concern in his eyes as he saw him on the verge of tears. He took Eren's face in his hands, trying to gently kiss away the tears. "Eren, what's wrong? Talk to me, please. ...do you not want this?" If so, I've gotten horrible at reading your cues...

Eren let out a loud hiccup and a low whine as he cried, a few tears escaping and rolling down his cheeks before Levi's lips found them. "I... I don't... I don't wanna go back... This is just a big tease for me..." He tried again to cover his face, failing, and soon just reaching to grab Levi's wrists as he held him. I don't wanna go back to that hellhole... Where no one is really there, no one stays, they all leave me... They leave me there... He let out a choked sob, trying to calm down so that they could continue. This isn't fair... It's not fair for Levi... He wants to do this... And I can't handle my emotions.

Levi's face fell, kissing his cheeks sweetly and cradling Eren's head gently, coaxing him to lay down and pressing pecks all over his cheeks, the outside corners of his eyes, his forehead. "Eren, Lathe put in a civil suit to get you out of there... And even while you're supposed to be there... I'm allowed to take you out of there now. I'm officially a marine, a Sergeant. You don't have to be there nearly as much anymore. Soon enough you won't have to be there at all. It's gonna be okay." He felt the heat between them dwindling, his touch soft on his jaw, his voice quiet. "We don't have to do this right now if you don't want to, Eren. It's okay if you don't want to." I only want this if you do. I don't care if it means I get blue-balled. What you want is more important.

Eren sniffled and shook his head, his hands moving around Levi and pulling him closer for all he was worth. He let out a few more shuddered sobs as he held onto him. "N-no... I really want to... B-but... I just... I couldn't control it... With you teasing me like that..." Eren whimpered as he held onto him a bit tighter if that was even possible with how skinny he was yet again. I don't want you to tease me... I don't think I can take it anymore...

Levi nodded, rolling their hips together as he ducked his head down to his neck, feeling Eren shudder as their lengths rubbed against each other. "I won't tease, then..." He reached blindly for
the nightstand drawer, knowing what he had stashed inside earlier that day. He drew back from it with a bottle of lube, snapping it open and coating his fingers as he sucked marks across Eren's collarbones. His lubed-up finger traced Eren's pucker, looking up to him for permission. "When you say the word, Eren." I still wanna be careful about this...

Eren nodded after a moment. "Y-You can." A soft mewl escaping his lips as he felt the first finger enter his tightness slowly. I'm really tight... We haven't done this in forever. Eren's hips were still for only a minute or so before he started to rock them, his tears long forgotten, and the pulse of arousal taking over his movements. "L-Levi... Hngh..."

Levi smirked, slowly thrusting into him as he loosened. He added a second finger, his movement becoming more fluid, his hand thrusting deeper into him, searching inside of him. He scissored his fingers, feeling him relaxing gradually around him. "You're so tight..." He pressed closed-mouthed pecks all over his chest, his eyes looking up to his face as Eren suddenly gasped. There.

Eren's face was one of utter bliss, his mouth relaxed as he moaned unabashedly. His eyes were closed, and hair tousled all over the place. It feels really good "Ha... Levi, ngh.... right there." His body arched off the mattress, hoping for him to go a bit further into him to better reach that sweet bundle of nerves. He could feel the heat starting to rise all over his body, arousal spreading from the top of his head down to his curled toes. His heels dug into the bed, his hips spread impossibly wide for Levi to get to him. I... I want everything

Levi's fingers thrust even further into Eren, his lips trailing down Eren's stomach as he brushed over his prostate over and over. He breathed over the head of Eren's length as he added a third finger, his tongue flicking out to run along his slit as he curled his fingers, staring up to Eren with lust-filled silver eyes. I wanna hear you...

"Ha... Fuck..." Eren let out a loud string of moans all over again as Levi continued to abuse his prostate. His hips rolled on Levi's fingers, wanting even more than the three fingers he currently had within him. "Levi... I want you, please... I want you to fill me up... please..." Eren whined, moving a hand to Levi's locks and tugging on them to get him off of his length. If you do that... I'll come without you inside.

Levi lifted his head up from it's merciless brushing of Eren's slit, his fingers drawing out of him and going to quickly lube himself up. He positioned himself at Eren's entrance, his hands running over his skin as he slowly pushed forward, sheathing himself in him, shuddering a bit at the heat. "W-whenever you say..." He ground himself deeper into Eren when he nodded, drawing nearly out before thrusting back in, starting up a decent pace as Eren quickly dissolved into a moaning mess. Fuck, you look hot...

Eren's arms wrapped around Levi's shoulders, pulling him close to his chest. "Levi... I want you, fuck me please... Make me forget about everything... Please." He resorted to begging as his back
arched off of the bed, his hips rolling in rhythm with Levi's thrusts. *I don't wanna remember anything... Nothing at all....*

Levi's eyes darkened, shifting his legs further apart for a better angle, his hands lifting Eren's hips up a bit to slam into him, their hips fully meeting with every movement of his hips. He dragged his tongue up Eren's neck, nipping at his Adam's apple. "... *Gladly.* *You're gonna be sore for a long while....*

Eren's eyes rolled back into his head as Levi finally found his prostate. "Shit... *Levi... there, please... don't stop.*" He could feel Levi's thin fingers gripping into his bony hips and beginning to leave bruises. His arms reached out above him, grabbing onto the sheets above his head. *Fuck, it feels good.* His whole body was stretched out to give Levi full access over everything as his moans ranged between various octaves. "Levi..." His name left Eren's lips like a mantra, over and over again.

Levi's eyes were nearly black, his eyes raking over his lithe body as Eren arched and moaned under him, bruises blooming around his collar. "... *beautiful...and you're all mine...*" Levi purred above him, feeling himself nearing the edge. "Eren... Don't try to be quiet..." Levi took his length in hand, rubbing the slit with quick, firm strokes of his thumb. "...*just let go.* *I wanna hear you scream...*

Eren groaned even more, feeling the heat swelling in his abdomen. "I'm gonna... Haa... Levi... keep going.... I'm gonna cum.... Fuck..." Eren writhed under Levi's strong body. He could feel the muscles ripple with each movement, moaning as Levi teased his slit, struggling to hold it in for a few more seconds and let the sensations build. "L-Levi! I'm.... Fuck.... Cumming!" Eren's scream was loud as he finally let the sensations take over, his toes curling in bliss. His cries were loud, and his body tensed from the sudden rush of feeling overwhelming it. "Fuck!" his body grew limp as he finally came, white spilling across his chest, and continued to do so as Levi pounded into him without stopping.

Levi's breathing was growing heavy as he pounded into Eren, his cries going straight to his cock. *Fuck*. "E-Eren... So... So good... Haaaaa.... I-I'm... H-Ha!" Levi let out a loud moan as his coil finally snapped, his movements a bit jerky as he filled Eren up, slowing inside of him, his head dropping into the crook of his neck. "E-Eren... My God..." He rested on top of Eren for a long moment, his softening length still inside of him. *So good... But... I still want you...* Levi began to feel a deep ache of want, though he forced it down, knowing he wouldn't be sated. *No... Eren won't want that...*

Eren grew limp under Levi, breathing hard, a slow hand coming up to cover his eyes, his whole body shaking from the pressure. "Hmm... Levi, that was great..." He dropped his arm looking up to Levi, knowing that look in his eyes as his body was raked over. *He... He has that look... Like when he wanted me to...* Eren shook his head looking away for a moment before chancing a glance to Levi's eyes. *It's still there...* His body was reacting under Levi's gaze of want, his blood pumping again, and his length hardening once more as Levi loomed over him. *But... Doesn't he want me? I'm obviously the weaker one in our relationship... Shouldn't it be that Levi's always on top? It feels so weird when he's not, almost like it's not right... That a man with such well defined abs, and such a place in society would want to be a bottom in our relationship... Hell, I'm lucky that he's even here right now, especially with all my baggage that's been attached recently. Eren's eyes showed more and more conflict as they locked eyes, neither of them breaking away. He saw Levi's lips move, though he was confused because his words were overtaken by a buzz in his ear. *Wait, what did you just say? Eren's conflict was turned to a look of confusion. *Huh?*

Levi looked down to him with worry, pecking the wrinkle between his furrowed brows gently before he spoke again. "You look uneasy about something... Talk to me, please. What's wrong?"
can maybe help.

Eren swallowed a bit trying to figure out how he would say it. "You want to bottom... I can tell... But why? Wouldn't you rather be on top? You're more dominant... And can definitely overpower me... I just... I don't understand why you would want to be bottoming..." Eren looked to the side a bit, not sure where to look. What if he's mad?... I'm not used to someone bottoming on me... I've always been the one on the bottom, it just... It sounds so unnatural, like it's something that would never happen, and when I think about you... It just... It seems so taboo.

Levi opened his mouth to speak, though he quickly closed it, looking away in embarrassment, trying to think of how to say what he was thinking, deciding to give in and be honest. "Eren, it's not... sex isn't about reminding the people in a relationship who has dominance over the other. It's not about power when it comes to a couple like us... it... It means a lot to me, being able to have you, and for you to have me... I just... I feel filled and completed, in a way, and I love that... and it... when you do top... I feel really loved and wanted... ...when we have sex, it shouldn't be a reminder of who dominates the relationship and who doesn't have that kind of power... Power in a relationship flows. ...You might not know it, but I'm going to be honest when I say you have me completely whipped. I'm wrapped around your finger and you don't know it. I'd do anything you say at the snap of your fingers. Roles switch. ...At least, they can, and... I'd really like it if they did when we had sex a little more..." ...please?

Eren's face flushed as he saw that look in Levi's eyes once again, though his mind was still reeling on everything he had just said. He... He really wants to bottom then? I... I don't know how to... I mean.. "Fuck..." Eren grew completely flustered as he hid his face in his hands, so unsure of what to do, though his mind had a few ideas. All over Christmas break... He had me over him... But I didn't know what I was doing... I was going with the flow... "W-What... Do I... D-do?" Eren asked, spreading his fingers apart a bit to look at Levi. I still really don't understand what being a top means...

"...Let me show you." Levi smirked faintly, his hands gently pulling Eren's own away from his face, pecking his cheeks. "We'll go slow with it, hmm?" Levi ducked his head down to lap at Eren's neck, tracing his lips across Eren's collarbone. "Being a bottom can feel like many things... But it majorly means surrendering to what the top wants and decides to do. It's a special trust- that whatever the top does..." He suckled small marks across his collar, smirking as Eren shuddered. "...is going to feel good. I want the bottom- you- to feel good. And I appreciate being given this privilege. And I myself see it as my duty to worship every inch of skin... Find all of the spots that make you squirm... And learn what it is besides the most obvious things that turn you on." Levi let one hand caress the inside of Eren's thigh, his hands and tongue running over every inch of skin and tracing every line of his body. Absolutely gorgeous ...

Eren took in a sharp breath as Levi's hands gently glided over the skin on his inner thigh, though he let out a soft sigh as his tongue crossed his chest, starting to trace down to his abdomen, going off to one hip, which made Eren squirm a bit under his touch. His eyes were wide as he felt Levi's tongue hit the edge of one of the larger scars, trying not to pull away, struggling to fight his instinct of running from the touch, no matter how gentle it was. It's okay, he's not gonna hurt me... He's not gonna hurt me, Levi's okay. Once his tongue left the area to trace down to his other bony hip, Eren gave a soft whine. "Hmm... Levi..."

"One of the more important things I can do in everything I do..." Levi gently nibbled at a sensitive spot of Eren's hip, pressing a kiss to it as he heard Eren moan quietly, his voice a smooth murmur. "I can listen. Every sound you make lets me know what I can and cannot do. I know what places
to avoid..." Levi traced around a rather large scar on his leg, giving it plenty of room. "...and what places you love for me to touch." Levi nipped to the inside of his leg, drifting up closer to Eren's bare length. He passed it, however, suckling a mark on a spot of Eren's v-line. "Marking... it's important, too... Everything about this is... It means that I want everyone who sees them to know you're taken. That what you've allowed me to have isn't something to be willingly tossed around with others. I don't want to share. I want you to look at yourself in the mirror and see those marks for as long as they last or until I give you new ones and think about how someone exists that loves you, is possessive of you, and wants to show you off. That someone is damn proud to call you theirs." You're all that and more to me.

Eren's breath was hitched, a high pitched cry forcing its way out as Levi marked a rather sensitive spot near his navel. Does... Does he really think that about me? He... He's proud? Of me? Of this brokenness... This tainted mess? Eren visibly swallowed again, trying not to let the new tears fall as he sucked in a breath. I don't want you to stop... Please don't.

Levi glanced up as he heard Eren cry out, another thought occurring to him as he travelled slowly to his length. "...I can watch you." Levi's lips ghosted softly up Eren's length, his eyes taking in every shift of Eren's expression. "I can watch and really see how everything I'm doing makes you feel. I can see whether I get a quiet cue to keep going or to stop. But it serves another purpose..." He nipped carefully at the base, licking up his length. "I get to watch you fall apart and be overwhelmed with bliss... And you get to see just how much you're wanted. How much you're adored and loved." Levi pressed a kiss to Eren's tip, his eyes holding a mix of mischief and love. I don't think I could ever properly tell you how much I want you... love you... Adore you.

Eren let out a strangled whimper as his head was teased with his lips. "L-Levi... D-Don't tease please..." His voice was a bit high, a hand coming up to hide his eyes from Levi, rubbing at them. He... Love?.... Adore?....... Me? Eren shifted a bit as he felt Levi's lips against the tip of his cock again, feeling a sensation starting to pull at his chest. But... Why? You could have any girl you wanted... And yet you chose me? He let out a loud gasp, moaning as Levi's tongue licked his sensitive slit back and forth. He loves me....

Levi nodded, coming up from his length and shifting forward, kissing up Eren's neck, his length prodding at Eren's entrance. "I could tease you... But you just asked me not to. Teasing is playful... it's giving you little things that feel good, holding off the bigger things... it makes the moment and the time we have last... but what you want is more important. And I could have you on your front... But then we can't see each other... And I could have you just like this, your legs around my waist... or..." Levi coaxed Eren's legs up and over his shoulders, his hands gaining him leverage on either side of him, his eyes shaded as Eren blushed. "I could do this... and who knows... it might feel better..." He slowly began to push into Eren again, watching his expression, one of surprise and embarrassment, melt into pleasure. "...And I get to see you." He shivered as their hips fully met, knowing he was deeper in Eren than before. He began a slow, deep pace, wanting to prolong their pleasure and ravish Eren's body with attention, his hands roaming every inch of skin they could reach.

Eren moaned out loudly, his back arching as far as it could before he whined. "Fuck... Levi, ha.... you're even deeper.... L-Levi..." Eren whined as he struggled to move with Levi pinning him down. "You... You like this? Fucking me to oblivion? Hmmm..." I want you to fuck me... I want your seed... Levi please.">

Levi's eyes were a thin ring of silver around black, picking up the pace until he was pounding into Eren, their hips meeting completely and grinding hard into him with every thrust. Their lips locked,
tongue tangling and hands running desperately over the other's body. Levi moaned into their kiss, aiming for the spot that made Eren whimper and writhe as he ravished him. Your words... Holy fuck... He could feel heat pooling inside of him, holding off and wanting Eren to finish first. I want you to feel amazing.

Eren moaned as he was held in place his tongue dancing against Levi's. Oh my god... this is so much... Holy fuck, this is wonderful. He sighed into the kiss, feeling his heat start to build all over his body. I can feel it... I can feel him everywhere... Eren pulled back to breathe, letting out a low mewl, his body bouncing back as much as he could, feeling Levi delve even further within him. "I'm gonna...."

Levi's hands gripped Eren's hips tightly, pulling him into him with every movement of his hips, groaning as his length plunged even deeper into him. "E-Eren... I can't l-last... Haaaaaa.... Eren..." His eyes caught Eren's, gazing at him with lust and adoration. "Eren, cum for me. I want to watch you writhe and fall apart... I want to hear you scream and moan and make every beautiful sound you do... please, cum."

Eren whimpered but soon let out a loud scream of Levi's name as he came all over their chests, loud cries leaving him as Levi ground into his prostate, prolonging his pleasure as streams of pearly white covered them both. He grew limp as Levi held onto him, bruises of his hands growing up and down his sides as they rose up and down rapidly. "L.....Levi..." His breathing was ragged as he took everything in of the man over him. I want your kids... I want to carry them... I want to hold them.... I want your everything...

Levi let out a deep moan as he released inside of Eren, filling him further and slowing his thrusts, taking in Eren's expression of pure bliss. Beautiful. He remained buried in Eren, taking a long moment for the both of them to catch their breaths before drawing from him, dipping his head down and letting Eren's legs fall from his shoulders. He lapped at his chest, tasting Eren's release and cleaning him, licking his lips before resting on top of him, a careful weight as he nibbled at Eren's neck, marking him gently and speaking. "...you okay with maybe topping? You can say no if you don't want to. I only want this if you do." You come first.

Eren looked up to him as he picked up a shaking hand to his face, cupping his cheek. "I... I think I could do that... but... I don't think I can move right now though." I'm thoroughly exhausted, except for my cock... which doesn't seem to want to know that we can barely move. He looked up to Levi with lust filled eyes, his length twitching underneath Levi as his neck was nibbled. I wouldn't mind at this point... But you'll have to do it...

Levi nodded, shifting to straddle Eren, Eren's length rubbing between his cheeks as he reached for the bottle of lube. He snapped it open and poured some onto his fingers, smirking as he tossed it aside and lifted himself up a bit, reaching around him to begin to prepare himself, his own fingers gliding up his walls as he slowly fucked himself on his hand, trying to stretch out a bit. It's been forever since I've had the real thing... I don't want this to hurt too much... He quietly whimpered as he found his own prostate, brushing the spot and shuddering as he stretched himself. ...it's not just this for once... I get to have you...
Eren shuddered as he watched Levi finger himself in front of him. "Oh my god, Levi.... that's fucking hot..." His shaking hands soon found their way to Levi's hips, shakily running down his thick thighs. *He's so muscular... and strong, he can definitely keep going.* Eren shuddered as he felt Levi's fingers brush against his straining length. *Even if it's just a touch... it feels so good.*

Levi smirked wearily, his hand drawing from him, his hands firmly planted on Eren's chest as he positioned himself over Eren's length, his head dropping onto Eren's shoulder as he sunk onto his length. "E-Eren... F-Fuck..." Levi panted heavily as their hips met, shuddering. "Eren... Please..." He started to move his hips up and down, grinding onto his length with every motion. "M-move with me... I want it..." He moaned into his shoulder, feeling tired even as he hardened again, bouncing on Eren's length. He whimpered as Eren could barely move, thrusting himself down harder onto Eren and grinding hard onto him, soon too tired to even use his legs and properly thrust himself down. He ground their hips together, putting all of his energy into having Eren's length brush his prostate firmly over and over. He let out a weak cry as Eren's hand drifted from his hips to his length, teasing it and loosely pumping, feeling the heat growing between his legs as Eren near solely ran his thumb over the slit, his legs spread wide, begging him unashamed to do anything except stop. He gasped and mewled as wave after wave of pleasure washed over him, his voice becoming high-pitched as the heat suddenly became unbearable, his orgasm hitting him like a tidal wave and releasing into Eren's hand. It wasn't long before Eren came inside of him as well, Eren's thumb still rubbing his slit mercilessly and fast. Oversensitive, Levi nearly pushed him away, though a long moment passed with Levi's hardon still weeping with precum as Eren teased it, and Levi couldn't barely move, only able to plead with him to keep going, arched over Eren's chest. He panted hard, whimpering and gasping as his slit was quickly teased, feeling heat pooling again in his abdomen. His breathing was ragged as Eren forced him after a long few minutes to cum hard again, his release decorating Eren's chest before he finally slumped on top of him, completely exhausted, drawing Eren from him. "E-Eren... love you... So m-much..." It wasn't a minute before he passed out, feeling Eren tug the blanket up over his shoulders, his legs splayed on either side of him, embracing Eren lovingly as he slept, his hair mussed and expression peaceful.

Eren moaned as he came inside Levi, feeling him close around him. His hooded eyes had watched Levi cum in his hands twice. *That was hot... Damn... I'm exhausted.* Eren pulled the blanket weakly over him, feeling Levi's arms wrap around him, shifting over the next hour as he found it impossible to close his eyes no matter how heavy they were. *Fuck why can't I sleep?* He shifted out from Levi's arms, sitting up at the edge of the bed, rubbing his face. .... *Where's Jake...?*

Levi cracked his eyes open as Eren peeled away from him, moving to spoon him, but looked up as Eren sat at the edge of the bed, letting himself curl up again as Eren stood. *Probably needs to use the bathroom...* Levi burrowed under the blankets, his nose buried in the pillow that had Eren's scent all over it. *He's only been gone for half a second and I'm already so needy... Eh, he's warm. And wonderful to hold on to. ...he'll be back in a second.* Levi fell back to sleep easily, nestled into the pillow and dreaming it was a mop of brunette hair instead. ...*mine...*

Eren moved to look around the room in confusion when he didn't see Jake. He found his loose sweatpants, which just barely clung to his hips since he'd grown so thin. *Where's Jake... I can't
sleep... Eren walked around the room in confusion, opening the large door to the front and becoming even more confused when the door slammed shut behind him and instantly locked. He started to panic when he couldn't open it, though soon resorted to knocking on the closest door across the hall. "J-Jake?" Eren's voice was hoarse and timid, and when he tried to open the door he panicked again. Why can't I open the door? Where's Jake? Why doesn't his room have a door with a window anymore... why isn't anyone answering? Eren proceeded to knock on various doors around his room, panic setting in even more when he couldn't find his own locked room.

Lathe blinked awake, having just begun to lightly doze with Spades in his arms, nude. What the hell... He wrote it off as his imagination when it was quiet for a moment, dropping his head back down and pecking Spades' shoulder blade, murmuring for her to go back to sleep. He sat up when it happened again a few minutes later, hearing a faint panicked voice. "Eren?" Lathe good from the bed, quickly throwing on sweatpants and a tank top before moving to the door, opening it and seeing Eren wandering the floor and looking around panicked. Crap. "Eren? Eren, what's wrong?" Lathe started down the hallway, some of the other doors beginning to open. Spades following him, Erwin and Armin, Isabel and Farlan, Levi, and soon Bert and Reiner were in the hall, all in various stages of undress, everyone, even those with shirts on, having dark hickies visible on their skin. Bert and Reiner looked especially annoyed, still with their dress pants on, their jackets gone and their shirts unbuttoned near the top. ... it's past midnight. At least we're all communally indecent. This way we can't judge anyone because we're all hot messes. He walked up to Eren, catching him before he could knock on a door that didn't belong to their party. "Eren, why are you panicking? What's wrong?" Did something with Levi happen?

Bert was seething as he came out of the room he and Reiner shared, furious at being interrupted. I have the chance after four years to have what I've never been allowed to even touch and whoever is waking everyone up isn't. Helping. Bert's demeanor switched, however, when he saw Eren wandering confused, his tattoos visible and hair up in a bun. He could see the faint scars that littered his arms and back, hickies dotting his neck and chest, changing colors and fading as they steamed. ... wait. Is that...

Eren looked around in panic as Lathe got closer to him, pulling his arm back and away. "N-no... Where's Jake... I can't f-find him." Eren's eyes were wide, his chest rising and falling at a rapid rate, his breathing starting to falter a bit as he was starting to hyperventilate. I want Jake... I can't sleep... Where's Jake... Eren didn't even realize his hickies were steaming, and his nose beginning to bleed a bit as they healed. Where am I? Why is it so strange? Where's Jake? I wanna sleep with Jake... He'll let me hold him. Eren's breaths were wheezing as he heard Isabel call him dangerous and he backed away even further from the group in the hallway, his panic having completely settled in.

Izzy stepped out wearing a bathrobe that was pulled together tightly to try and avoid any cleavage or other skin from underneath being revealed. She looked to where Eren stood, his body steaming in various places, his eyes full of fear. Wait.... That's... "Eren Yeager.... That's definitely him, that's his tattoo... And those scars..." Izzy's eyes traced over his frightened form, hardening when she realized something. "Lathe, get away from him, he's dangerous... How'd he get out of the mental institution? He's insane." She asked and stepped back a bit behind Farlan who clearly raised his
... what the fuck did you just call him . Bert's eyes flashed dangerously for a completely new reason, stepping between Eren and the two marines, letting his family go to help calm him. He stepped directly in Farlan's path as he moved to stop Lathe from going to Eren's side, letting the man reach Eren, staring him and Izzy down. "I bet you two don't understand why he was put in that mental institution." He watched as they sputtered a bit, holding up a hand and silencing them. "'Because he's insane' is not a good answer. He was put in a psych ward because of a video documenting the effects of a new kind of medicine he has in his system. It's not understood how it works. Nobody understands it. And everyone who heard what it supposedly makes the body do freaked out and was sure he was insane. He was put in that place for no damn good reason, because it wasn't as if he was given any sort of evaluation. A video on YouTube, put up by mistake , of him describing outlandish things happening to him got him put in a hospital . What's worrying isn't him- it's the system that's fucked up and that we should worry about. Eren has been through hell and back- something nobody here can seem to grasp even though he has a PTSD service dog. He has been trying his damndest to be okay with us around who he doesn't know and can obviously hurt him, offered to pay for dinner, and has been nothing but sweet to all of us and you two are so quick to throw your impressions of him out the window because of something the media fed you. You two probably read the newspapers and the tabloids. I've been watching all of his social medias since he started out; his Dad's too. He is not something you two should be scared of so back down and have some fucking respect ." He turned from the two of them, backing down a bit as Lathe looked up to him in shock, speaking quietly and shyly. "I'm sorry for being loud... Is he okay?" I kinda got carried away...

Lathe nodded, his hand rubbing Eren's back as Levi sat on the floor cradling Eren, looking up to Bert with serious respect, his voices soft. "...it means a lot that you just did that. Thank you." Lathe smiled to him, grateful. "...nobody understands anymore. I'm glad you do." It's not easy to explain over and over he's not gonna hurt anyone... Thank you. So much.

Eren watched with wide eyes as Bert yelled at the two who looked ready to fight him. What's happening... Why is he yelling at them? Why are they here? Eren's breathing was becoming erratic, struggling to take a proper breath in, his wheezing was getting worse, his nose still bleeding as his bruises practically steamed off of him. "H-hurts..." His eyes were wide with fear as he looked at Lathe, still trying to wrap his mind about what was happening to him. Where's Jake? He whimpered when he heard Blake barking on the other side of his door, trying to get out of the room. What's that? The noise was beginning to freak him out more.

...too many people . "Listen, please, all of you go back to your rooms, he's confused and panicking." Lathe looked to Levi as he was suddenly handed a key card, going to unlock their room and holding open the door.

Levi cradled Eren, murmuring to him as he lifted him from the floor, holding him to his chest and carrying him to their room. He moved to set him down on the bed, moving to get a wad of toilet
paper and pinch Eren's nose, getting him to hold it in place and soak up the blood. "It'll stop hurting
soon, Eren, just relax. It's okay." Levi held Eren in his lap, his thumb rubbing his side as Eren pet
Blake to calm down. Someone needs to get Bert an award. Serious props to him.

... I like this guy. Armin nodded in approval as Bert put Izzy and Farlan in place, tugging a
concerned-looking Erwin back into their room as everyone dispersed. "He'll be okay, he's good
great people looking after him. Come on, I wanna sleep." I need something to cuddle.

Bert nodded, a faint pink tinge to his cheeks, glaring at Izzy and Farlan as they hesitated to go back
into their room, which made them instantly retreat and shut the door. He nodded to Lathe, going
back across the hall to where Reiner waited, quiet as he looked to the floor, assuming the worst.
"C'mon... We should sleep..." The moment's over... He sounded disappointed, walking into the
room past Reiner.

Eren whimpered as he was held in Levi's arms, gently rocked back and forth, his thin frame easily
able to curl up to the smaller man. His shaking hands were running through Blake's fur, still trying
to calm himself down. "W-Where's Jake...?" Eren whined quietly when he looked around the room,
still not seeing his sleeping buddy. I can't sleep without holding Jake...

Reiner watched Bert walk past him, quickly following him and closing the door after hanging the
'do not disturb' paper on the door handle. His arms wrapped themselves around Bert before he
could get into the large King bed. "I um... I wouldn't mind... uh... starting over, if that's alright with
you?" He dipped his head down to nibble at Bert's neck as the taller man instantly melted into his
touch, guiding them further into the room. I take that as a yes.

Spades came into the room, seeing Eren beginning to cry when he called for Jake, his cries
becoming louder and louder for the child. He really misses Jake... I don't know how we're gonna
handle this... It seems he's panicked himself into forgetting where the hell he is? Or maybe he
thinks this is all a dream? And he's trying to wake up? Spades watched as the small bruises that
lingered faded with wisps of steam trailing behind them. It's localized... The steam is coming off
each and every bruise... It looks weird... but his nose isn't bleeding nearly as much as it has
previously.

Lathe gently carded a hand through Eren's locks, speaking to him quietly. "Eren, Jake is fine.
You're not at the hospital right now; you're at a hotel. But Jake is back at the hospital and he's
doing okay, probably dreaming of sheep and nice things. He's okay, don't you worry about it." He
pecked his temple, signing to Spades. {I need my medic bag. He needs his meds, and maybe
something to help him sleep.} Lathe looked back to Eren as she left, murmuring with Levi to calm
him. He soon enough had his bag on hand, rifling for the pill bottle and handing Eren the correct
dosage, along with a mini bottle of water. "Eren, take these, you'll feel better, m'kay? It'll be easier
to sleep, promise." You need the rest.
Eren shook his head, putting the bottle down on the bed, and giving him the pills back. "I want Jake! I c-can't sleep without him..." Eren whined just like he did if one of the late night nurses found him going to Jake's room. "I don't wanna be here... I don't know you people..." He whimpered when he pulled the tissues away from his face, his nose no longer bleeding. < "Please let me go sleep with him... I can't sleep... They didn't give me the right pills... I can't take more..."> Eren whimpered out valuable information to add to the civil suit to get him out of the hospital. "I want Jake... I can't take more..."

"They're still giving you the wrong pills?" Lathe watched as Eren nodded, reaching for his bag, shooting Levi an apologetic look. "I'm sorry about that, Eren. But I checked three times for you, and these..." He added another pill to the mix, tiny and white, handing them back to Eren. "Are the ones you're supposed to have. And you didn't have them yet today, so it's okay to take them." He gave him back the water as well, his voice softly coaxing Eren to take them. "And once they're down the hatch, we can get you to sleep with Jake, m'kay?" Come on... Take them, please...

Eren looked down at the pills before he nodded, opening up the water bottle with shaky hands before he downed the pills one at a time, finishing off the small bottle of water after. He gave it back, his hands going to shakily pet Blake again. "I wanna go see Jake.... Eren felt his whole body beginning to feel like lead, his arms falling slack against his sides and his head rolling to lean on Levi's shoulder as his eyes closed, sleep taking over him.

"Sedative?" Spades as quietly as she helped Levi maneuver the blankets around so the two of them could get under the covers. What set it off though? Was he fine before? "Levi... Do you know what happened?" I hope it wasn't anything too bad...

Levi shook his head, maneuvering Eren under the blankets. "I don't know... He was fine when we actually went to bed to sleep... he didn't have his meds... uhm..." I doubt having him top did it... "I really dunno what could've set him off... all I know is he got up after like an hour and I assumed it was to go to the bathroom... Obviously not."

"He didn't get his meds... my guess is he didn't sleep. Insomnia acted up... No meds... Jake... it's probably something he does when he gets the wrong meds and can't sleep. He finds Jake, sleeps with him or something. It'd make sense. "That must be it. " And I'm not apologizing for the sedative. He needs the rest, and we can't have him keeping everyone up."

Spades nodded, tucking the two of them in. "Alright, get some rest, we're going to leave at late check out tomorrow to get on the train to head north." I still kinda can't believe my Dad wanted us to stay in Buffalo with him... Even though we're in Virginia, New York is still pretty far north of here.
Eren shifted slightly, his weak arms going to wrap around Levi's torso, a leg drifting over Levi's as he drifted towards his warmth. *Warm... Gimme....*

Levi nodded, blushing faintly as he simply pulled Eren on top of him, his hands lovingly running over his sides. He let his eyes slide shut as the light was turned off, listening to Lathe packing his bag up. He could feel his presence linger next to the bed for a moment as if unsure, soon hearing him move to peck Eren's forehead. *Of course...* What he didn't expect was for Lathe to do the same to him, opening his eyes in surprise and watching Lathe turn away embarrassed, scurrying after Spades to go back to their own room. Levi was a bit confused until a thought hit him, a couple thoughts falling into place, calming considerably. ...*he's gonna be my Father-in-Law someday soon...*

...*and he's always treated me like I'm his son.*

Eren woke up drool running down from his open mouth and onto Levi's bare chest. His eyes were barely managing to stay open and everything looked blurry as he struggled to pull himself from his medicated sleep. *My body feels like a sack of bricks.... I can't move... And I'm drooling... Fuck...* Eren closed his mouth, licking the drool off from his chin and struggling to even move his head a few inches to either side. *Levi's warm... But he's still asleep though, right...?*

Levi looked down as he saw Eren's eyes flutter open, smiling faintly and tilting his head down to peck his forehead. "Good morning, Eren. How're you feeling?" *Lathe knocked you out... You probably don't feel so hot right now...*

Eren hissed a bit as Levi's voice boomed in his ears, his hands struggling to come up and paw at his ears. *You're so loud... That hurt...* Eren's eyes fluttered shut and his head lay slack in a new area on Levi's chest as his own rose and fell. *I can barely move, what the actual hell....*

Levi’s eyes widened a bit with worry, carding a gentle hand through his brunette locks, whispering. “M’sorry… head hurts?” He watched as Eren weakly nodded, carefully shifting out from under him, pressing a loving kiss to his forehead and tucking him back in. “M’gonna get dressed and get something to make you feel better, okay?” He went to quickly throw on a shirt, taking a key card and padding next door, knocking lightly. *Come on, Eren needs meds.*

Lathe opened the door after a moment, in the midst of getting dressed, his hair a mess. “…sup. Now, let me guess… his head’s killing him.” He rolled his eyes good-naturedly as Levi simply nodded, going to get his bag. “I’ve got stuff for that... here. Two of these will do the trick. And he’ll feel better after he eats breakfast, too.” He handed Levi a small white bottle, smiling. *Once we get waffles in him, he’ll do much better.*
Levi studied the bottle in his hand, glancing up to him. “Alright. Thanks, D-Lathe. Thanks Lathe.” Levi ducked his head down, flushing as he quickly moved back to their room. He focused on getting Eren a glass of water, biting the inside of his cheek. *Lathe is Eren’s Dad... not yours...* Levi moved back to the bed, gently coaxing Eren to sit up, helping him to take the pills and drink the water. “Here- this and breakfast will help you feel better.” *You need to eat...*

Eren nodded, taking the pills before crawling back under the blankets. “I wanna sleep.” His voice was quiet and a bit muffled. *It's so loud... And that's just the air conditioning...* He felt Blake hop onto the bed and nudge him from under the covers. *I don’t wanna get up.*

Levi smiled to him faintly, going about getting dressed, putting on black skinny jeans and deciding to simply wear a tank top, looking in the mirror and seeing only one prominent mark on his neck. *Yeah, I don't care anymore.* He rubbed it lightly, smirking as he turned back to Eren, moving to turn him onto his back and pull the blankets from his face, kissing him softly to wake him. He pecked gently across his cheeks, moving to unbury him from the pile of blankets and help him into clothes. “Come on, let’s go get some breakfast in you.” Levi soothed his protests with soft kisses, helping him shimmy into comfy sweatpants and a tee shirt. A thought occurred to him, letting Eren put on his shoes tiredly while he want back to the room next door and knocked lightly, looking at his feet. *Please, let Spades answer the door...* Levi knew he was out of luck when a familiar set of boots came into view, embarrassed as he spoke. “U-Uhm... can Eren have one of your sweaters?”

Lathe quietly nodded, going into the room and coming back with a green sweater, handing it to Levi.

Levi reached to take the sweater from him, mumbling. “Thank you, Lathe...” He tugged at the fabric a bit, looking up confused as Lathe didn't let go. *...you're gonna make us talk about this... aren't you...*

Lathe gave him a weak, reassuring smile, his voice quiet. “...you can call me Dad if you want to. ...I know you’re not going anywhere. ...and you really are like a son to me.” *It's okay.*

Levi tinged pink, looking down to his feet, shuffling a bit, feeling vulnerable. “...okay... t-thanks... Dad...” It felt weird to say, trying desperately to calm himself down. *Crap... I dunno if I can say it...* Levi was stunned as he was suddenly pulled into a crushing hug, simply standing there as he tried to process what was happening. He weakly held onto Lathe’s shirt after a moment of hesitance, his head dropping into his shoulder. *I finally have a Dad...*

Lathe ran a hand soothingly over Levi’s back as he felt him faintly shudder and breathe in shakily, tucking his head under his chin. *I know you didn't really have much family when you were young...*
I hope you’re okay with this… Lathe pressed a kiss to the top of his head when he had calmed down a long minute later, letting Levi go, smiling warmly, his voice quiet. “You get yourselves ready for breakfast- they have waffles.” You two will both feel better after breakfast.

Levi nodded, glancing up to him gratefully. “Okay… thank you…” Levi went back to his room, the door shutting quietly behind him as he padded up to Eren, holding out the sweater. “Here- it’ll keep you warm.” And I know you like wearing Lathe’s stuff...

Eren took the sweater, pulling it over his torso, it was obviously too big for him, and hung loosely around one of his shoulders, letting a bit of scarring show from under both his shirt and the sweater. It’s green… I like it. He pulled the fabric close to his nose, taking in Lathe’s scent and instantly calming down. “Where’s Dad?” He looked up to Levi with large puppy eyes. I’m not really hungry...

“Dad’s still next door right now, getting dressed… we can go down and get food now if you want. I wanna go before they run out of waffle stuff.” The good stuff… everyone else might already be down there… eh, hopefully they left stuff for us.

Eren looked to him for a moment, his mind taking everything in before he nodded. “O-okay.” He got up off the bed, following Levi out of the room and into the strange hallway, jumping as the door next to them swung open to reveal Izzy and Farlan. Wait… Why do I feel so afraid of them? His body moved before he could comprehend it, moving behind Levi and hiding behind him as best as he could. I don’t… Why am I so scared?

Levi eyed the two of them with apprehension, watching them shrink just a bit at his cool gaze. Just walk. Levi kept himself between Eren and the two of them, looking over as Lathe and Spades came out of their room as well, dressed and with hair tamed.

Lathe quietly followed the four of them with his arm around Spades’ waist, stepping into the elevator with them, eyeing Izzy and Farman warily as the two of them fidgeted. I’m not mad. I just don’t know how you two are going to act, especially after Bert pretty much reamed you two. They soon stepped into the lobby, meandering over to where a large table had been monopolised by the rest of Levi’s squad mates, looking up and waving to them to sit with them. We all woke up really late- eh, we were all… occupied. We’ve just accepted the fact we’re all being heathens together. It’s cool.

Erwin waved them over, watching the six of them approach, though he saw Izzy and Farlan shrink as they got closer to the table, his head turning to follow their gaze, seeing Bert glaring at them. That’s almost as frightening as Levi’s death glare. He coughed, clearing his throat. “At ease, Bert.” Calm down, you’re freaking Eren out too.
Eren was still hiding behind Levi as they got closer to the table, his hands shaking as he held onto Levi’s shirt. *He’s glaring at us… Why is he glaring at us?*

Reiner grinned a bit as Bert sat back, his glare softening. “It’s okay Eren, you’ve got another guard dog.” He elbowed Bert, a cheeky grin taking over his features. *I think you look even better when you’re angry.*

Bert’s features immediately softened, his head ducking down a bit, blushing furiously as he glanced to Reiner, then to Eren. “S-Sorry… I wasn't glaring at you …” He shyly picked at his breakfast with his fork, his blush darkening as Reiner nudged his foot under the table, hooking their ankles. *...mine...*

Levi nodded to him, appreciating it before turning to Eren, tugging him along by the sleeve. “Come on, I'll get you something to eat.” Levi moved with him and set him down next to Armin, going to acquire food and bringing back two full plates, setting one with fruit and waffles on it in front of Eren. He sat down, clinging onto Eren’s sleeve as he ate. *Mine.*

Lathe sipped at his cup of coffee and nibbled a bagel, watching as Levi sat down. *Levi is clinging to Eren... who's clinging to Armin... who's clinging to Erwin. ...just another link of the chain. He linked ankles with Spades as they ate, the fifth couple to do so at the table. We’re all heathens. But we’re all happy heathens.*

Eren looked at the waffles with confusion. *Wait… we’re not having oatmeal for breakfast?* Eren looked around in confusion, carefully picking up the waffle, having let go of Armin. His confused eyes spotted Levi, questioning him. “They’re not… We’re not eating plain oatmeal?” *That’s what we usually have for breakfast…. Where’s Jake? I don’t get it…. He always sits with me in the morning.* His voice was quiet as he looked over the waffles once again, he continued to reveal more and more that could be added to his civil suit without really realizing it.

“That’s called a waffle, Eren.” Lathe held up a hand as Reiner opened his mouth to speak, silencing him, focusing on Eren. “What do you normally eat for breakfast? Just plain oatmeal?” *Hmmm.*

Eren nodded. “Y-yeah…. Sometimes if we’re good they’ll give us juice…. Otherwise we get water.” His hand came back off of the waffle, setting it down before curling up in his chair, pulling his knees up to his chest. *It’s weird… Where’s the oatmeal?*

“That must look like a lot for breakfast, then, huh?” Lathe stood, coming around the table and
moving behind Eren, watching him nod, gently rubbing his shoulder. “Is it ever enough to eat? If you ask for more if you're hungry, do they give you any?” This doesn't sound good.

Eren shook his head, flinching a bit as his shoulder was suddenly touched before he leaned back into it. “N-No… They don’t give you more… and they um…. They make you put up with it until you can only eat that much for meals.” That's why everyone’s thin… Weak … And easy to handle…

That's why you lost so much weight. Lathe nodded, his expression stony for a moment before he spoke softly again. “Do you want to try eating some of this? Or do you want me to find you oatmeal, see if they have any? You don't have to finish this- picking at it is better than nothing. It'll taste better than plain oatmeal, I promise you'd like it.” We need to make sure you're well-fed.

Eren looked up at Lathe from where he sat. “O-okay…” His voice a bit shaky as he looked down to the plate with the ‘waffle’ on it. It looks greasy… And it’s hard… What am I supposed to do with it?

Levi watched as Eren stared at his waffle in confusion, looking to Lathe. I got this. He reached over to Eren’s plate as Lathe went back to his seat, cutting up his waffle for him into pieces, the chocolate he drizzled over the top still a bit melty. “Here, it's easier to eat now. It’s warm and fluffy- you'll like it.” …I promised you forever ago, the day after I slept over for the first time, that I'd take you out for waffles… technically I kept my word. I hope these are okay.

Eren shifted in his seat, still having his knees curled to his chest. His hand picked up a fork and timidly stabbed a small piece of fluffy goodness before he took a bite, holding back a small moan. It tastes heavenly. He stabbed another piece and repeated the process quietly, not listening to anything that was happening around him. It's better than oatmeal.

Reiner watched Lathe sit back down, turning to him and speaking quietly as he looked to Eren. “He’s 21… And doesn’t know what a waffle is?” His voice quiet and questioning, knowing that Eren might be upset if he heard him. Don’t wanna set him off...

“He didn't know what coffee or tea tasted like until he was sixteen.” Lathe shrugged, looking into his cup, similarly speaking quietly. “He's not familiar with a lot of the stuff you were as a kid… he didn't really get to be a kid. There's a lot he doesn't know about.” Lathe shrugged again, smiling faintly to Eren, glancing to Reiner. “But we’re making up for lost time as best we can.” He looks like he’s enjoying the waffles… that's good.

Reiner nodded. “Sorry, I didn’t want to seem like an asshole about it.” He whispered back to Lathe
before working on his own food. His eyes glanced over towards Erwin who didn’t seemed concerned about what had just happened in front of them. *Staff Sarge doesn’t seem that concerned about it… and neither does Blondie over there. Does this happen that regularly? His episodes are that regular? And it seems like wherever he’s put right now isn’t doing him any favors.* “Can’t you get deficiencies for eating nothing but oatmeal?” Reiner asked Lathe quietly as his mind started to question a few things. *I’m no medic… but I don’t believe there is any nutritional value to oatmeal unless it's added.

Lathe shook his head faintly. “No, you're not being mean about it. You're curious, and it's fine to ask. But there's not too much nutritional value to oatmeal if it's plain… sure, maybe there's some sugar in it… but if they're not even allowed juice unless their behaviour is stellar… it's no wonder Eren’s lost so much weight being there… I always bring food when I visit him, but he barely picks at it… they've been training those patients not to eat… keeps them thin… drains their energy… they become weak. Easy to handle if they're anything besides calm.” Lathe looked to his bagel, no longer interested in eating it.

Reiner nodded, feeling full himself and putting his napkin on his plate. “Make sure he eats, we’re gonna head up cause we’ve been here a bit and we wanna shower before we check out.” He stood, taking his plate and nodding for Bert to follow him. *I wanna shower with you again. Last night wasn’t enough.*

Lathe nodded, smiling to him and Bert as they stood to throw out their trash and head upstairs. He swirled his coffee in his nearly-empty cup, waiting patiently for Spades and Levi to finish eating, Eren deciding to help Levi with his breakfast and scarfing down the fruit he was given like a starved wolf. *...we need to get some meat on your bones.* He spoke up when Eren had cleared their plates, Spades as well just sipping at a cup of juice. “Let’s go retrieve our stuff so we can check out in time, okay?” He stood when the three of them murmured in assent, walking with them back to the elevator, soon walking with Spades into their room. *...I don't wanna leave any of my stuff behind… I like my stuff… and I’m emotionally attached to my sweaters so I need to make sure I have them all.*

Eren followed Levi into the room with the funny lock, looking around the overly white room. “It’s…. Too w-white.” Eren murmured as he went to curl up into the bed. There was no way in hell that Levi was gonna get him out of this sweater, or any of his other clothes. *I wanna sleep… I’m tired…*

Spades closed the door behind herself and leaned against the door. “.... how did we not put two and two together? Lathe…. He’s lot so much weight because they’ve been holding food from him… How much has he lost? 40 by now? You can see his hips….“ She looked almost ready to cry, struggling to hold in her emotions. *God… Why didn’t I think of that sooner? We could’ve gotten him out on a case of neglect…*
Lathe just shook his head, looking defeated as he turned to her, leaning against her and resting his forehead against her shoulder. “I don't know... it's easily been that much... but this bit of it isn't just some kind of miscommunication. It’s ‘Please give me food, I'm hungry’ and ‘No, you're getting a little bit of food with no real nutritional value that doesn't measure up to normal standards.’ It’s neglect. And I hate that it’s happening to the others in that ward... Jake is receiving the same treatment... this is going in the suit. I'm asking for nutrition information when we get back home. But right now...” Lathe pecked Spades’ cheek, willing her to keep it together. “-he's with us, and he’ll be doing better, eating right. Now we know. He'll be okay.” We’ll fix this.

Spades nodded, moving to wrap her arms around him. “I know this might sound bad, but… that sedative you used on him last night, I want you to give it to him again for the train ride to Buffalo, just so that he’s gotten enough rest when my Dad gets us... and maybe he’ll remember where he is after he wakes up again?” She took in a deep breath, willing herself to calm down along with him. I want him to be okay, and I want him to feel normal again. I want him to be able to act like a kid, and make up for what he missed.

“Spades, that sedative I gave him was strong. As in for safety reasons I don't carry around more than five strong. We’ll see if he can fall asleep within the first hour. If not, I'll give him enough just to help him fall asleep. Giving a full pill of that like last night if anything was a drastic measure. I'll cut it in half if anything. But you're right- he does need plenty of sleep before we get there. And he should- he’s back on the correct meds. He didn't take them earlier last night before bed- it confused him. But he’ll be okay. Promise.” He really will be. He's improving- and I think this getting out of that damn ward will help.

Spades nodded and she tilted her head to the side and kissed his cheek. “Alright, well, let’s get everything together, and you’ll probably want to wear a sweater all day today... Eren’s gonna want to wear them more since he basically drowns in them now.” He looked so skinny with it just hanging off of him like that... and he’s not supposed to be that much smaller than you Lathe.

Lathe nodded, kissing her sweetly before pulling away, starting to pack away their things and changing his top, tugging on a purple sweater. It's a good thing I brought, like, ten. And we’ll fix the fact that he’s so skinny- I'll put vitamins and stuff in the food I bring for as long as he’s still in that ward. I'm not letting him be starved.

Levi had just zipped their suitcases shut, going to pull the covers off of Eren, pecking his cheeks and coaxing him to unfurl. “Come on, let’s get downstairs. When we get on the train you can sleep all you want, m’kay?” You'll need the rest for when we get up there- you don't wanna be passing out when we get to Buffalo.

Eren nodded tiredly and he stood on shaky legs. We’re leaving this place... are we leaving Jake here? “J-Jake?” He asked quietly, tugging on Levi’s sleeve as he was led towards the door. I don’t wanna leave him behind.
Levi didn't know what to do besides shake his head a bit. “Jake can't come with us- he's gotta stay here for now. But he’ll be okay; Lathe made sure they’re taking good care of him.” *I don't know what else to tell you*... Levi let out an internal sigh of relief as Eren faintly nodded, bringing him out into the hall, rolling both their suitcases behind them. He saw Spades and Lathe waiting patiently in the hall, nodding to them and stopping for a minute, untangling Eren from his sleeve for a moment to murmur into Lathe’s ear. “He still thinks he’s at the hospital... he asked for Jake again.” He watched Lathe nod and murmur to Spades as well, grabbing their suitcases by the handles again and rolling them to the elevator, running into Armin and Erwin when they reached the ground floor. They all said their goodbyes before heading out, a taxi waiting for them.

*... He needs sleep.* Lathe loaded their bags into the trunk, a tight fit, though it was manageable. He was quiet for most of the ride, not paying Levi or Eren much attention as they cuddled next to him in the backseat. *... Levi really is like a son to me. ... soon enough, he might actually be my son-in-law...* Lathe blushed as he heard Eren make a tiny happy sound, Levi threading his hand through his long hair.

*... Levi, ask me, hear me say yes, and then marry him.*

Eren gave a soft mewl, liking the feeling of Levi’s fingers against his scalp. *It feels so nice... None of the other watchers are this nice with me...* He was relatively quiet in the car and was easily ushered into their sleeper car. *There’s beds in this one....* His eyes were wide as he he took in the new surroundings. “Do... d-do I get a bed?” Eren asked quietly, looking to Levi with wide and curious eyes. *I wanna go back to sleep.*

Levi nodded, smiling faintly. “Mhm. You get to pick which one you want. It's gonna be a while until we’re there.” Levi let Eren lead them to a bed near the corner, their suitcases easily fitting underneath the bed. Levi gently tugged Eren onto the surprisingly comfortable mattress, pulling the blanket up over them and pulling Eren close. He played with his hair, murmuring. “You get some sleep, okay? We can't have you getting there tired.” *Nope. ... I could go for a nice nap too, I suppose... it’s nice to have you in my arms... I'll take what I can get.*

Lathe stowed his own suitcase underneath a bed, letting Spades do the same before catching her, similarly tugging her down onto the bed. He moved so they were laying down, smiling as his eyes shut. “...mine.” He yawned, his arms strongly wound around her. “...nap with me please?” He looked up to her, giving her the puppy eyes. *Pleeeeeease?*

Spades smiled and giggled at the gesture, moving to curl up to him, her head coming into the crook of his neck. “Hmm, I think we could all use a nap... wait, doesn’t Eren need his pills before he goes to sleep? Did you give them to him this morning?” Her voice was worried as she sat up, shifting a bit as the train started to move. *I don't want him to wake up in a bigger panic because he might have a nightmare.*
“We normally give him his PTSD meds at night because it's a regular time, and so that the dose is strongest in his system when he’s susceptible to nightmares. So no on those, but good call. I do have a morning med for him.” Lathe pecked her cheek, shifting over her and standing, rifling through his bag and soon coming over to Eren and Levi with a pale blue pill and a bottle of water in hand, poking Levi. “I need to give Eren a thing before he sleeps.”

Levi looked up to him, nodding and shifting up, gently shaking Eren awake, pecking away his worry the second he looked anything other than peaceful. “Eren, Lathe needs to give you a thing. You can sleep in a second, okay?” It's important. You need your meds.

Eren picked his head up in confusion, his eyes opening up after a bit, and turning to see Lathe with pills. “Med...cine?” Eren asked childishly as he moved to sit up, his shirt and sweater riding up revealing his thin waist yet again. I'll take my medicine.

Lathe looked to his thin waist for a moment, his brow creasing with worry before he smiled again to Eren, nodding and handing him his pill. “Yep, medicine. You know the drill, Hon.” He handed Eren the water bottle and watched him swallow the pill and a great deal of water obediently, ruffling his hair and smiling to the two of them. “Alright, go back to your nap.” He chuckled when Eren immediately dropped back down onto Levi in response, turning back to Spades and stowing the pill and water bottles away. He clambered back into bed, pulling up the covers, surprised when Spades rolled him over and pulled him flush to her front, spooning him. ...I approve of this. He blushed, nestled into the pillow and drifting in and out of sleep for the next few hours, both couples shifting around as they napped, warm and content with their other in their arms. I love you. Lathe blinked awake tiredly as Spades nudged him to wake him at one point, weakly smacking at her elbow. “Murr… wan’ sleep…” It’s comfy…. and warm… and I have my hooman to hold on to...

Spades sighed quietly, nudging Lathe again, leaning over to kiss his lips. “Lathe we gotta wake up, we’ll be at the Depew station in 15 minutes.” We need to get up. She shifted out of his arms, moving to gently shake Levi. “Levi, wake up… We’ll be at the station soon.” She moved back over to Lathe to nudge him again. “Really Lathe, my Dad’s ready to get us… He even made dinner.”

Lathe reached up to cup her cheek as she kissed him, though when she pulled away too quickly he missed, making a sound of protest as she moved to the other side of the car. He dropped back down, letting his eyes shut, waiting for Spades to come back. He smiled as she spoke, easily shifting to sit up and step onto the floor in one movement, his arm winding around her middle, cradling the back of her neck as he kissed her, feeling the heat of her blush in surprise as he tipped her back a few inches. Because I can. He pulled back after a moment and smirked mischievously. “Okay. I'm up.”

Levi easily blinked awake and nodded to her, looking around for a moment and getting reacquainted with his surroundings. Oh yeah… train car. He looked down to see Eren peacefully sleeping on his chest, his hands gently running over his back. Levi carefully shifted them and
rolled Eren over onto his back, knowing Lathe had Spades occupied at the moment, softly kissing Eren as he slowly blinked awake. “Time to get up, Eren. Sleep okay?” Levi pulled back, sitting up and facing him, inspecting a loose thread on the blanket. *I know I certainly did.*

Eren blinked the sleep away from his eyes, struggling to shift his own body weight up. *I slept fine…. And my body still feels like lead.* He nodded after a few moments, trying once again to put his thin arms under him to push himself up. His attempt was in vain, his body falling back down onto the blankets with a soft whimper. *I can’t even lift myself up anymore… What the fuck….*

Spades’ face was completely flushed when Lathe brought her back up from their tilt. *Wow…. Hot damn… I kinda miss dancing with you, and being able to do that all the time.* She smiled as she got comfortable in his arms, leaning into the touch, her head turning to Eren, seeing him struggle to move. “You didn’t give him the…” Her voice was quiet as she trailed off in concern. *Well…. Now he gave up…*

Lathe shook his head, watching as Levi moved to carefully help Eren up, sitting with Spades on the edge of their bed. “I didn’t…. but he’s so thin… his body is really weak right now… he’s not strong enough to lift his own weight…” *That’s not good. *We’ll just have to make sure he gets plenty of good food in him from now on. We can fix this, don't worry.* *He’ll be okay.*

Spades nodded, leaning her head on Lathe’s shoulder as she watched the two of them interact. *Levi… Why don’t you just ask? You know we’ll say yes… Come on, we need someone who can take care of him to be by his side, and that someone is you.* She grinned stupidly as she remembered how Lathe had proposed to her. *I wonder if he called Marcus before he asked? I never heard Dad talk about it…*

Eren whimpered as he was pulled into the sitting position, clearly too weak to sit up by himself. His sweater and shirt rode up a little higher this time, showing that his sweatpants were just barely staying on his hips. *Everything is so big on me… Are these my clothes? Or Dad’s clothes?* Eren was still struggling to move around a bit though he gave up quickly and stayed right next to Levi, holding his wrists and rubbing them. *They hurt… It hurts a lot…*

Lathe watched as Eren inspected his sweater, seeing him sniff the sleeve and watching his face fall a bit. *Probably doesn't smell much like me anymore.* Lathe stood, meandering over to them, gently nudging Eren. “Want this sweater instead?” He tugged at the cuff of the purple one he was wearing. *I know being able to smell me keeps you calm…*

Eren looked up, his nose still buried into the sleeves of the green sweater he was wearing, still trying to smell him. *He'll give me the one he’s wearing?* He nodded shyly, moving to get the sweater off of himself. It rode up, showing both his hips and pulling up to show his ribs, which you would be able to count. *Come on, it needs to come off…* He finally got it off, pulling down his shirt
and handing the green sweater back to Lathe, waiting for him to get his purple sweater. *I want the sweater...*

...*I can count his ribs...* Lathe snapped out of it after a split second, going to tug his own sweater over his head, giving the soft purple fabric to Eren and taking back the green, donning it. *You would've had to lose at least fifty or sixty pounds for me to be able to count them...* Lathe ruffled Eren’s hair, his face falling a bit as he saw how big the sweater was on him. “Want me to do your hair all fancy? Or no? Either way, it needs to be brushed.” *It needs taming.*

Eren shrugged, after thinking about it for a few moments. “Braid?” His voice was soft, and his eyes wide as he watched him. *No one’s been this gentle with me for awhile... I don't want it to stop.* “You're not leaving... Are you?” *The guards always leave throughout the day, no one stays with me... And they take Jake away too...* Eren curled up, pulling his knees up under the sweater and comfortably holding them to his chest, he didn’t even stretch out the sweater at all.

Lathe nodded, getting a brush from a smaller pouch of Eren’s suitcase. He sat down behind Eren, starting to brush out his very long brunette locks. “Eren, I'm not going anywhere. I'm your Dad- I'm not leaving.” *...wait.* He leaned over a bit, looking to Eren. “You do know I'm your Dad, right?” *Did you forget that tidbit of information?*

Eren looked at Lathe, his brow furrowing a bit. “Um... I-I know you're Dad.... But... Um... I don’t know what that m-means.” He whimpered a bit as the brush hit a knot, tugging at his hair, but he didn’t voice any protest. *What’s a Dad? Is it another type of guard? That stays with you? Like Levi’s staying with me?*

Lathe very carefully picked out the knot, not tugging on the hair and keeping Eren from feeling any pain. His brow furrowed a bit, thinking. *...how to explain being a Dad...* “Eren, I adopted you. Being your Dad means that you’re my son- you’re part of my family. A Dad is someone you can look up to, talk to and ask for help when things aren't going great. Someone who teaches you stuff, and has fun with you. ...you’ve lived with me for more than five years now. You being my son… means that I have someone to dote on and care for. Someone to try and guide through the world because it’s a big world and it can be scary sometimes, because people aren't always very nice. A Dad… is someone you can love and trust. And as my son, I love and trust you. You might not be my flesh and blood… but that doesn't make you my family any less.” *I give too many shits about you. ....and I'm not ever going to regret that.*

Eren was quiet as he let Lathe braid his hair, his brows furrowed, lost in thought for a bit. *I have a Dad... Dad’s gonna stay... Dad will braid my hair... Dad will give me food.* “O-Okay…” He finally spoke up as the train stopped, not noticing until then that Levi and Spades had already pulled out their suitcases. *Where are we going?*
Lathe took a hair tie from the handle of the brush, tying off the end of the French braid. “Okay, that’s your hair. Let’s go, okay? Marcus is waiting for us.” Don’t want to keep him waiting. Lathe helped Eren to his feet, going to get his own suitcase as Levi got Eren’s. He started to the door with Spades, Levi leading Eren along behind them.

Levi shepherded Eren to the door, seeing his confusion at the name. “We’re visiting Spades’ Dad. We’re in Depew right now, about to be in Buffalo. We’re in New York State- really far away from home and from the hospital.” You look like you needed context.

Eren only nodded as he was ushered off of the train, looking around the small station. It's colder here…. It's the middle May…. And it's cold up here… He shivered as he pulled the sweater closer to his body wanting to be warmer. He followed Lathe and Spades, feeling Levi’s hand on the small of his back. Where… He looked up as he heard Spades’ name called, seeing a shorter old man wearing a thick coat and a hat waving to them down. Who’s that?

“Ieva!” Marcus called to them, his white hair spilling out from his hat. “It's great to see all of you!” The cheery man came up to them, instantly hugging Spades as he got to them. I've missed you guys so much! You've been gone for so long.

Spades smiled more, going up to hug Marcus without a second thought. “Papa! I’m so glad we could make it up here, I want you to meet Eren and his boyfriend Levi, and you already know Lathe… It’s been awhile since you’ve last seen each other though.” She motioned for Eren and Levi to step up to them.

Levi walked up to him, giving him a faint smile, his eyes warm. “Hello, it’s very nice to meet you.” He held out a hand, which Marcus took, his other hand still in the small of Eren’s back. He looked over to Eren after a moment, nudging him a bit. “Aren’t you going to say hi?” He sent Marcus a bit of an apologetic look. I'm sorry- he’s really out of it right now. New people don't do well with him. Levi watched as Eren stared at Marcus with wide, childlike eyes before he simply turned to Levi and huddled into his shoulder, trying to hide. He could feel him shiver, his arms pulled into the sweater and pulling the fabric close. He could easily feel how thin he was as his arm stayed around his waist. He looked back to Marcus, trying to explain. “...he’s kinda out of it… and he’s not great with new people…” ...sorry, that's a thing...

Marcus had understanding eyes, a soft smile on his face. “It’s quite alright, don’t worry about it, he’ll warm up to me eventually.” He turned to Lathe, his eyes going bright. “Lathe!” He shouted and stepped towards him, a larger smile on his face. There’s my future Son-in-Law!

Lathe smiled brightly, moving forward to greet him, a hand outstretched to him. “Marcus! It’s so good to see you!” Lathe grinned as Marcus took his hand, but his eyes widened as Marcus then pulled him into a tight hug. He chuckled, hugging him back. It's wonderful to see you. He let him
go after a long moment, grinning to him. “How’re things going for you penguins up here?” It's very cold— I should've worn my coat instead of leaving it in my suitcase. ...we all probably should've.

“It's great to see my favorite son-in-law too, and you do realize you live closer to the penguins right? They’re south… This is just snow country. But welcome nonetheless, and um, I meant to ask earlier but Blake is good with other dogs right?” I still have my sled team...

Spades rolled her eyes at his comment. “He’s your only son-in-law, Dad… And yeah, Blake’s fine with other dogs. Should we get going?” I wonder if anyone else is back home? I haven’t seen my brothers in years.

Lathe smiled and walked along as Marcus began to lead them to a parking lot, something suddenly clicking. “...wait, you have dogs?” Lathe suddenly heard a sound coming from a large SUV, two black huskies poking their heads out of the half-open windows. ...yes. Yes you do. “Huskies? Let me guess, part of the sled team you use when you can’t drive and need to buy milk from the store?” Lathe joked, his expression slowly switching to one of shock as Marcus actually nodded, looking serious. “...there's no way…” Lathe watched as Marcus opened the door, the two huskies jumping down from the car and standing near Marcus, eyeing Blake warily, their metal collar tags gleaming with their names, Milo and Otis.

Levi looked between Blake and the two dogs, watching Blake simply look at them before they all looked up to Eren. Levi’s eyebrows shot up as he saw the stars in Eren’s eyes. He looked to Blake and nodded, and as if a switch flipped the dogs came right over and sniffed at Eren, licking his hands and sniffing Blake, getting acquainted. ...nice. “If you’ve got a team, there must be more than just two of them.” He looked up to Marcus with curiosity, the dogs inspecting him, Spades and Lathe in turn. He's got to have at least, like, eight. ...oh Eren’s gonna have a ball chilling with the dogs.

Eren kneeled down and let the two dogs come up to him and lick his face as he pet them. They’re so pretty! He giggled as Milo knocked him over and they attacked his face even more with licks as he pet them. Wait... They're big.... They're on me... Their nails hurt. Eren’s body tensed at the thought of being underneath the dogs, too close to being forced underneath those horrible men. No....

Blake responded immediately, growling with his teeth showing, his hair on edge, ready to fight off the other two dogs so that he could get Eren free of his panic. Human is panicking, get off my human.

Marcus turned his head from where he was putting the suitcases into the back of the truck. Why is that dog growling at Milo and Otis? What did they do now? “Milo, Otis.” His voice a bit rough,
but he pulled the two dogs away from where Eren laid. *What did you two goofs do?*

Levi dropped down next to where Eren sat on the ground, his arms wrapping around him, soothing him. He murmured quietly into his ear as Eren shakily pet Blake, his voice soft. “It’s okay, Eren, they’re not gonna hurt you. They’re just enthusiastic because you’re a new person to them. It’s okay.” Levi gently moved with Eren, bringing him to his feet. “Come on, let’s get in the car, okay? You’ll be fine, promise.” *You really will be. They’re big dogs, but they don't wanna hurt you.*

Eren was shaking as he was lifted, both from fear and shivering from the cold chill in the air. He nodded, letting Levi move him into the car. *They were really big.* His hands quickly found Blake’s fur again as he jumped in to settle in Eren and Levi’s lap. *I… I’m okay…*

Marcus looked worriedly towards the two of them as they got into the back of the SUV. “Is he okay?” He asked Lathe quietly as he got Milo and Otis into the back of the truck with the suitcases. *I don’t want him to freak out, I know that it really drains him to do that.*

Spades smiled softly at Marcus as he spoke with concern. “I’ll let Lathe tell you this one, I’m gonna hop in the back and help him calm down.” Spades leaned up and pecked Lathe’s cheek before going to the opposite side of the car and getting in to help calm Eren as he sat in the middle of the car. *You’ll be okay…*

Lathe looked to Marcus, blushing a bit at his amusement from when Spades pecked his cheek. ... *mur…* “Uhm, Eren’s… well, the short of it is that there was a huge misunderstanding involving a new drug that’s currently under investigation and is being tested, and he got put in the psych ward in our town because of what he stated the drug could do, the video accidentally getting on the internet. He’s not crazy or anything, believe me. But he’s being seriously mistreated there… he’s lost at least fifty pounds, being so underfed. He’s kinda out of it… he didn’t stay on the right meds consistently for his PTSD, and so he can get confused. He kinda thinks he’s on some sort of hospital excursion. But he’ll be okay soon enough, once we get him back on schedule. I guess he was afraid of getting hurt or probably crushed… it’s just… some of the most unassuming things can set him off. But he should be okay; he’s got Levi and Blake constantly around him. It’s a good support system in place. I’m sure he’ll warm up to you and to the sled team soon enough. Everything’s new to him- you, the dogs, the cold, the three square meals thing- he’s getting used to everything again. I hope you can understand.” Lathe rubbed the back of his neck nervously, his head ducked down a bit. *Not many people do… I wouldn’t be surprised if you were really skeptical too…*

Marcus’ face was stony as he thought about a few things. “So… He’s in a psych ward that he’s not supposed to be in? And they’re starving the patients? That’s mutiny.” His face looked angry, but it wasn’t at Lathe, but instead towards the system that had wrongly imprisoned Eren in his own hell. *That’s not right at all*...
Lathe looked up, surprised he agreed with him. “Yeah, it’s awful… I’ve got a civil suit waiting to be heard, I don't like that it’s happening to Eren and the many other patients in there too, right under our noses… they've done so much wrong… but not many people seem to listen to anything besides the fact he’s in a psych ward. I'm glad you understand. We… we just need to be really patient with him. And be careful, so… yeah… it’s important we try to keep him from freaking out too much. As long as we’re careful introducing him to the sled team, I'm sure he’ll be okay. He likes dogs, believe me, we have another at home, Maisie who just had pups. He hasn't had the chance to see them yet, since he hasn't been home, but he adores the dogs a family friend has too—he loves all those pups too. But I'm hoping this getting out of that ward and actually being around people and somewhere that isn't sterile and white will do some good for him… I-I'm sorry, I'm rambling…” Lathe ducked his head down a bit, embarrassed. “But thank you, really… not many people understand. We've learned to expect people to not understand. Really, thank you. Having us over is very kind of you. We shouldn't be too much trouble…” I don't want to majorly impede on anything...

Marcus nodded. “Of course not, it’s no problem, just me and the dogs now…. I can see why Spades called ahead and asked me to make something and add a ton of vitamins to the meat. Take the front seat, we need to get to Orchard Park.” He got into the truck on the driver’s side, turning the vehicle on and turning down the radio so it was quiet. “Alright, next stop: my house.” This should be interesting...

Lathe nodded gratefully, hopping into the passenger’s seat as he saw Spades in the back placating Eren with Levi’s help. It was about twenty-five minutes before they pulled up to a house, a for sale sign with a sold sign on top of it staked in the yard of the next-door house. “Getting new neighbors?” That's a thing. He looked to the front of the house, seeing a bit of movement in the front windows, hearing a dog inside bark and a new flurry of activity. “They know he's home.”

“Yeah, I was sad to see them go, but one of the wives had a job offer in Kansas. I liked her too, she was always outside with their dogs, either mowing the lawn or snow blowing, and she came over and snow blewed my driveway too. Sweet women those two.” I kinda miss them a lot. He helped them all get out of the car and get their suitcases before he moved to open the door and the other six large and completely black fluff balls raced out of the house and around the yard, some bolting right for Milo and Otis. One sat by Lathe’s feet and stared at him, expecting to be pet. Two ran up to Spades and jumped up on her, whining for pets, another went towards Blake and started to carefully sniff around him. “Well, welcome to my house full of children.” He whistled sharply, all the dogs perking their ears before running back inside to do whatever they were doing before they came home. “Come on in.” He ushered them in, closing the door behind them, making sure the heat was on and the thermostat turned a bit higher to help accommodate Eren.

...that’s… no way. “Uhm, what were their names? Your old neighbors, I mean.” I think we might know them… He pet the dog that sat near his feet before it ran back inside with the others, smiling as they made their way inside with their things. So many woofs… I approve.
Spades smiled as she looked into the large hallway that led directly into the large family room which was connected to the kitchen. “You did a nice job with the place, Dad. It looks really good.” *You did a lot of wood work in the past few years.* She helped Levi and Eren hang their coats up on hooks with a soft smile. *It’s good to be home.*

Eren looked around the house they were introduced to timidly, his hands still clinging to Levi’s shirt, shaking. *Where are we? It... It smells good... Is that food?* Eren sniffed around a bit more, looking for the food, not knowing where it was, but not wanting to let go of Levi’s shirt.

“Oh... Let’s see it started with an L and I could never pronounce it correctly, the other wife I remember was getting along with her pregnancy, I hope she’s okay and had their son alright... He should be about um... Let’s see... he was due around Christmas, so around four and a half months old.” *I hope she wasn’t too stressed with moving.* “The wife that helped out with the snow also had a horse she had to drive down herself, which I guess took a lot of planning to do too. Come in, come in, I got dinner ready for all of us.” *It's burger bombs.*

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up as he recognized what the smell was, smiling widely as the dogs flocked around them, petting the ones around him that jumped up onto him. “Laskowski- Sharon and Hannah. They moved into our town a while ago... and she did have her son Maverick a month early. But it was kinda impossible for an ambulance to get to the house for her in time... I ended up getting called over because I knew how to... well, she delivered on the kitchen floor. But they're okay! They're fine.” Lathe spoke quickly as he saw the surprise and worry on Marcus’ face. He found himself especially chatty as they were handed plates for food, looking up when Spades nudged his foot after they sat down, blushing scarlet and clamming up, grinning sheepishly. “...I'll stop rambling...” *My God, Lathe. Ten minutes and you're already screwing up the meet-your-future-wife's-dad's-standards part of this thing. Crap.*

Levi just shook his head as Lathe chattered on, thanking Marcus as he and Eren were handed plates. *You can tell he’s nervous. He’s got Spades’ Dad to impress- I guess that's nerve-wracking nought to cue the rambling.*

Marcus smiled, a hand coming to land on Lathe’s shoulder, patting it in understanding. “It’s quite alright. I’m glad to hear they’re doing well, all of them, I’ll have to send you guys home with Buffalo favorites, I know Hannah would appreciate the gesture, Sharon as well. And by all means, speak, I don’t mind, I don’t know much about you Lathe, aside from when you were in High School, and Ieva continually forgets to call me to catch up on things.” He gave a pointed look to Spades as she sat down with the boys at the kitchen table to eat. *I don’t mind you talking at all.*

Eren sat down with the singular burger bomb on his plate, and not a few seconds later it was gone and he was staring at his lap, so unsure of what to do since he ate the food given to him. *I’m not allowed more, am I?*
Levi looked over to Eren as Lathe started to talk again, still noticeably shy as he went on about how things were with the house and their neighbors. His brow furrowed as he saw Eren simply stare at his lap, his bomb quickly gone. *...he doesn't know if he can have more. He wasn't allowed to have more, even when he asked for it, at the hospital.* Levi took one of the bombs still on his plate and set it on Eren’s, nudging his foot gently under the table. His voice was soft as Eren looked to him confused and unsure. “It’s yours.” He nudged the plate a bit closer to him. “Eat.” *You need it.*

Eren hurriedly took the bomb and scarfed it down in a matter of seconds, not seeming to care just how hot the food was within the doughy goodness. His eyes grew a bit dull as he curled up again against himself. *I’m not allowed more though, and I’m starving…*

Levi’s eyes widened as he ate the hot bomb in a matter of seconds, standing after a moment and taking Eren’s plate to the stove where the tray of bombs sat. He added four more before coming back and setting it in front of Eren. “Eren, these are yours. We’re not gonna steal it back or anything, it’s not going anywhere besides your stomach. Let them cool so you don't burn your mouth, okay?” *No singed tongues please.*

Eren looked at the bombs now put in front of him, he again grabbed one and scarfed it down, his eyes down on the floor. His whole body was shaking, scared the food would be taken away as he reached for yet another bomb to scarf down. *Don't hit me… Please…*

Lathe looked across the table as he paused in his regaling of life in Kansas to momentarily munch on his own bombs, watching Eren scarf them down in record time, looking scared. *...he thinks we’re gonna take them back.* Lathe set down his bomb, looking over to Spades. “Spades, are you gonna take away Eren’s dinner?”

Spades looked to him incredulously, quirking an eyebrow at the non-sequitur. “...no? No I'm not…” *What are you talking about?*

Levi watched as Lathe turned to him, shaking his head before he was even asked. “I'm not gonna take away his food.” He looked over as Lathe turned to Marcus, an eyebrow quirked in question.

“...I'm not going to take away his dinner, why would I ever do that?” *That's a silly…. ...oh. That's why Eren's scarfing down steaming food.*

Lathe turned back to Eren, nodding to him. “There you go. And I'm most *certainly* not about to take it away- there’s a ton of food still over there! Of course we’re gonna share.” He leaned across the table, nudging Eren’s plate a bit closer to him. “Let the food cool first, but you can have as
much as you want. Just don't burn your mouth, okay?” *Nope, you won’t be happy with a burned mouth. Not enjoyable.*

Eren nodded, picking up the next bomb and biting into it slowly, watching the steam escape from the now opened bomb as he slowed down on his food. *It's hot… But it’s so good…*

Marcus watched with worry as Eren started to eat slowly. [They used to take food from him? In the ward? Is he normally this thin? He looks like he should be around Lathe’s size.] His words were turned to Spades as he bit into his own burger bomb. *I’m worried about him, he looks so weak.*

Spades turned her head towards Marcus and sighed quietly. [We’re starting to learn a lot about what’s happening to him at the ward, he still thinks he’s at the ward right now… Also, everyone except Eren knows French.] *You’re safe for right now.*

[They’ve been giving everyone in the ward minimal amounts of food, apparently… keeps them thin and weak… easier to manage if they aren’t strong if or when they lash out… he is supposed to be about Lathe’s size. He’s lost at least forty pounds… and it was hard getting him to gain all that the first time around… he wasn't exactly in the healthiest shape when we met…] Levi quietly spoke, answering some of what Marcus had asked. *Yeah… he was practically emaciated then…* [But he’s scarfing down food when we give it to him… which is good. It’s not like he doesn't feel able to eat. He just wasn't allowed to.] *We don't have to teach him to eat on a normal schedule again.*

Marcus nodded, taking everything in as he glanced towards Eren eating the burger bomb slowly, taking it bite by bite. [What food will he eat? I can get more vitamins if I need too, to put in the food we make.] *They’re not that hard to find.*

[He’s really picky… it was a nightmare finding stuff he wouldn't refuse to eat. I have a list of stuff we can make if you're up for new dishes, or I can rattle off some you're probably more familiar with later… and we’d need plenty of vitamins, he needs them… I can take over cooking, if it’ll help at all… I’d feel like I'm being really rude if I didn't do something to make us being here easier… I'd really like to, if it’s okay with you.] *Eren and his eating habits can be a handful- and I'm so used to always making food. It's no problem to me.*

Marcus nodded. [That sounds fine, we can go to the store after dinner if that’s alright with you, we can get to Wegmans pretty quickly.] Marcus took another bite of the burger bomb, finishing it off before grabbing his next one. *It's so nice to have people over. [So does Eren sleep with someone? Or does he need his own room?] I don’t know what his sleeping habits are.*
Lathe glanced to Levi, wondering how he would answer, making no move to speak and taking another bite of food. *That one's on you. And I'm assuming Wegmans is the big grocery store thing around here.*

Levi blushed faintly pink, looking down to his plate. *[We normally sleep together… so we can share a room…] ...dammit…*

Eren looked up from his last burger bomb, pushing his plate forward a bit. “Um… Can… Can I have juice?” He asked quietly, his eyes down as he tried to listen on the conversation, though growing bored as he didn’t understand anything.

Marcus nodded, getting up from the table and going to the fridge. “Apple juice? Orange juice? Fruit punch? Grape juice? Pomegranate juice?” He asked quietly as he pulled everything out of the fridge for Eren to inspect. *Which will you pick?*

Eren sauntered over towards the counter where everything was out. “Umm…” He was quiet for a bit before pointing towards the apple juice, watching Marcus pour him a glass and waiting for him to set it down before picking it up. *I… I’m thirsty.* Eren drank the whole glass before going to sit on the floor by Levi’s chair and resting his head on his lap. *Hands… They were nice in my hair before.*

Levi looked down as Eren sat on the floor next to him, not understanding until he nudged his hands with his head. He threaded his fingers through his hair without messing up his braid too much, gently petting Eren and smiling softly as Eren sighed and leaned into his touch. *Tired?* <“Tired?”> *You look like you need rest- even that nap the entire way here wasn't enough for you, was it.*

Eren nodded, letting out a soft mewl of happiness as Levi ran his fingers through his hair, which calmed him down, his eyes closing as he thought about a few things as he heard the familiar click of nails on the floor, two dogs getting close to him before Blake stepped in to stop them. *Are they gonna jump on me again?*

Levi looked up as two dogs approached them, the same ones from earlier. Levi slowly lowered himself to the floor with Eren, one arm around him protectively as he tentatively reached to pet Blake, getting him to stand down. He reached a hand out to the black huskies, and they stepped forward, careful of Blake who still watched them closely, and of Eren. He watched as one sniffed Eren’s foot, stepping close to him, not putting a paw on him as he stood over his lap, sniffing his cheek and licking him. He chuckled as Eren ducked his head away just a bit, seeing a faint smile pulling at his lips. “He likes you.” He suddenly put up an arm in defense as his ear was suddenly licked, turning and getting a face full of dog. *So much doge…* He heard more nails clicking on the floor, finding themselves assaulted by many a husky sniffing them and demanding pets. *So many*
Eren shifted into Levi’s lap when all the dogs came over, not liking that he could easily be pushed down to the ground. *Nope… I don’t wanna be crushed again…* He watched with timid eyes as he gently reached a hand out to pet one of the dogs that came up to him, a soft smile forming on his face as he got more comfortable with the many dogs. *They’re fluffy.*

Levi nestled into Eren’s shoulder as the dogs congregated around them, all eight either inspecting Eren, demanding pets or laying around them, chilling with everyone. *This is nice…* Levi’s arms wound reassuringly around Eren’s waist, leaning back against the chair and subsequently the table, though he stopped when he felt the table skid a bit after a second of doing it. …*Uhm… “Eren, is it okay if we move a bit so we can lay down with them? I can just lean against the wall if you don’t want me to…”* You look happy… *I dunno if you’re that chill with the doge… they seem to have calmed a bunch, they’re chill now that we’ve been here a bit.*

Eren hurriedly shook his head, clinging to Levi’s shirt. *No… No, I don’t wanna be crushed.* His eyes seemed to show instant panic. *No…*

Marcus watched Eren shake his head. “You guys can come into the family room and lay down on the couch.” He offered and motioned for them to follow. *The dogs aren’t allowed on the couch. Blake will be though, but the others know better.*

Levi nodded, shifting a bit and simply carrying Eren with him. *You're so light…* Levi sat on the couch, thanking Marcus quietly before laying down, shifting Eren on top of him as the flock of doge relocated around the couch, only one staying behind in the kitchen as Lathe showered it with pets and attention. …*he loves these dogs as much as the dogs apparently love Eren.* He watched as Eren shakily pet one of the dogs sitting near them, Blake jumping onto the couch and settling near their feet, standing guard and watching over the flock of doge. *He’s very protective. I appreciate this.* Levi also reached out to pet one, though he soon turned to simply pet Eren, his fingers threading through his tight braid best they could. “…want me to take it out of the braid? Make it easier to play with your hair?” *I know you like it when I do…*

Eren nodded, turning his head so that Levi could access his hair. *I like your hands, I don’t want them to stop. It helps me fall asleep.*

Marcus smiled at them and looked over to Lathe. “Do you wanna go to Wegmans?” He asked as he started to clean up stuff around the kitchen, watching Spades nudge Lathe out of their staring match of adoration. *That's too adorable…*
Lathe looked up as Spades nudged him, snapping out of his bit of time with the doge half in his lap, their tail thumping against the table leg. Lathe blushed a bit, smiling sheepishly. “Sorry, Gambit monopolized my attention… what was that?” He looked back to the table as he noticed Marcus starting the dishes, standing and picking up plates. “Oh, let me help.” I need to feel useful… I'm normally the one doing stuff for a whole bunch of people. It'll feel weird if I don't do much for a while…

Marcus smiled. “You wash, I’ll dry?” He asked quietly, moving to get the water started along with showing him where the soap was. This’ll work well… I can tell already. He’s offered to cook, he wants to clean the dishes… He’s handsome, even I can tell that, and he’s got money if anything's to go by, he loves dogs, I assume he’s ready for kids… He called about them before… And they have Eren, so… So far he’s on the good books.

Lathe nodded, beginning to wash the plates and cups in the sink, handing them to Marcus when they were rinsed. He looked over as his elbow was tapped, Spades handing him another plate from the table. “Thanks-” Anything else he was going to says was cut off as she pecked his lips quickly, going scarlet as she turned to move to the living room. ...your Dad is right there… this must be how Eren feels when Levi kisses him in the same room as either of us… He turned back to the sink to keep washing, forcing down his blush, his effort having little effect as he heard Marcus chuckle next to him. Dammit Spades… stahp… Lathe soon handed over the last of the dishes, drying off his hands. “You asked if we would go to this Wegmans of which you speak, yes? Is that the big grocery store around here?” I don't really recognize the name.

Marcus nodded. “We can go there, Tops, Dash’s, Budwey’s, any of them you want to go too, all of them are grocery stores.” He explained as he dried the dishes and put them away quickly. It's easier with two people washing and drying.

Lathe just looked at him. “...you pretty much spoke Greek to me… whichever you think is best?” I have no idea what any of these are like...

“We’ll go to Wegmans, and if you want any nice pieces of meat we’ll hit up Dash’s. They have better cuts.” Marcus dried off his hands, giving Lathe the rag to hang on the oven handle next to him. We can get going and I can ask you Dad questions in the car.

Lathe nodded, hanging the rag up and meandering with him into the living room, past the mob of dogs which had taken to laying on and around Spades, who sat back against the couch on the floor. He smiled warmly to her, his eyes bright as he saw Levi lulling Eren to sleep on his chest. ...my God, is he lucky to have you… “We’re going to head out to get groceries- we now need enough to feed a small army.” He went to retrieve his coat from his bag near the stairs, knowing he’d need it, especially since it was starting to get dark. Yeah, we go through food fast.
Marcus was waiting by the door with his boots and keys in hand, a soft smile was on his face. “It still gets dark pretty early, so we’re good for a few hours, let’s see how much shopping we can get done.” I don’t know how much Eren’s gonna eat.

Lathe nodded, getting on his coat and patting his pockets, making sure he had everything, leaving his medic bag on the floor near the door. In case they need it; Levi knows all the stuff in it. “Alright, we hopefully won’t be forever. You’re gonna have to help me figure out where anything is, though. But I’ve got a good mental list going, we should do okay.” He was already going through all of the dishes he knew how to make, pondering which ones he should make in the coming days. Hmm…. I wonder what Marcus would like too… He waved to Spades and Levi as they left, following Marcus as they walked to the car and hopped into the passenger’s seat. ...crap, conversation. Think of something… Lathe blanked, not knowing what to say. I already talked about everything at dinner. ...crap.

Marcus started the car up with a smile on his face. “So… Any luck with conceiving?” Spades would never tell me until she was showing, so I might as well ask you. “Or are you not trying yet?” I wouldn’t mind either way, I know Spades hasn’t talked about kids until she was with you.

Lathe blushed darkly as Marcus asked, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. ...crap, thus starts the interrogation… “Uhm, we have been trying…. no luck yet though. We know it could take a while before she actually does conceive.” It’ll take time… and plenty of luck.

Marcus nodded. “I would like to see at least one more baby before I go.” Please, all the other grandchildren are around Eren’s age, I miss holding a baby.

Lathe gave him a small unsure smile, letting out a quiet chuckle. “Believe me, I want us to be able to conceive as much as you… I’ve always known I wanted kids…” Lathe studied his boots, not knowing what else to say. He’s just gonna be drilling me at this point… I can deal.

Marcus nodded. “I’m allowed to spoil their little hearts out, right?” I always got pushed away from the others once Ieva’s brothers deemed their kids too old to be spoiled. “I really want to be able to be there for them past a certain age… But I don’t know how long I’ll be around… So actually get married this year.” I know you couldn’t help it, but this stress of an unmarried couple is not good for my heart.

Lathe nodded, smiling. “Oh don’t worry, you can spoil the rotten all you want, if anything we’ll be helping you do it. And we really want to get married- so far everything’s going according to the new plan. It’s going to happen. And hopefully, we’ll be able to have kids soon enough. Don’t worry- you’ll be there to see them.” I know you will. They'd love to have a grandfather like you.
Marcus nodded, biting his lip a little bit. “So… Eren’s a guy? And he’s gay? So when is he getting married to Mr. Hottie?” He asked, turning into the main road, focusing on the road. *I need to know that answer.*

Lathe chuckled, feeling some of the tension diffusing. “Levi hasn't even asked me yet if he can marry Eren- yes and yes, by the way- but we all know it’s gonna happen soon enough. Though I dunno if he wants to do it before he gets stationed for his tour overseas… that might be why he’s dragging his feet… I'd be scared too, leaving behind a fiancé… he might not want to yet if something were to happen. ...and Eren would need to be completely in his right mind again before he asks.” *...it would explain it. He would rather Eren lose a steady boyfriend than a fiancé… a man he was going to marry….*

Marcus nodded, understanding. “Alright, when are they having children? I can tell that Eren’s a motherly type… I can tell by the way he’s gentle with the dogs.” *He’s gonna want kids, he was like my 2nd son, he had kids as soon as possible.*

Lathe shrugged a shoulder. “I don't exactly know when. But I do know Eren really wants a kid… he’s been working in the nursery at the hospital- I know, it makes no sense!- but he adores working there, and he loves it when Sharon and Hannah bring Maverick to visit him. If they've talked, I don't know much- it could be soon. I don't know.” *Eren is quite a motherly type- he wants kids badly, I can tell.*

... *Well, I was right about that. His hair's really long, can’t handle scissors? I wouldn’t be surprised if it had something to do with his PTSD. He quite honestly looks like a woman from behind with how slim he is.” I was fooled for the first couple minutes...*

Lathe shrugged. “He's just growing it really long. He lets me trim it to keep it neat, keep split ends from being a thing. But he really does look like a woman with it down- it’s an eerily good natural disguise.” *It can be weird.. but you get used to it.*

Marcus hummed in assent before turning into the parking lot. “Okay, tough questions now, how are you doing financially?” *I need to know. My daughter is not going to file for bankruptcy… Yeah no, I will deny this marriage before that happens.*

Lathe looked down to his hands in his lap, his expression neutral. “Very well- buying the over 300 acres of land for our new house and then actually designing and building the whole thing didn't put too drastic a dent in savings. Neither did furnishing it. I've had multiple songs that I've composed sold for use in video games and various medias, and I wrote all of Eren’s songs that he sang under a record label. There’s the royalties from those, and currently we’re testing out a new medicine that if approved could seriously increase life expectancies around the world and stop a lot of
unnecessary pain and suffering. That’s sure to generate a ton of revenue if and when it becomes available.” He looked up to him, trying to choose his words carefully. “...Marcus, I’m kind of a millionaire. I’d say we’re pretty secure financially.” ...yeah, that’s a thing...

Marcus parked the car, turning the engine off to look over to meet Lathe’s eyes. “Well, I feel better about that aspect. Are you religious?” He opened his door stepping out into the cold, waiting behind the car for Lathe to do the same. I quite honestly don’t know if you’re religious or anything like that.

Lathe followed him from the car, his hands in his pockets as they walked to the large grocery store. “Not really. My parents weren’t religious people so I didn’t grow up with anything like that, and it’s just hasn’t been too important in my life.” I haven’t given religion much thought. It’s just not really my thing...

He sighed in relief, stepping into the warm grocery store and grabbing a cart before they were ushered into the large produce section ahead of them. “Thank god, I thought maybe you’d be one of those religious freaks… I was worried… And here are the fresh produce, most of it’s from local farms, so take your pick.” I don’t mind filling a few carts, I don’t know what you eat, or what Eren eats. I know I’m gonna need to make pork steaks though.

Lathe shook his head at that, his eyes lighting up as he saw the expanse of produce. ...I like this store already. “Nah, I’m not one of those crazy folk putting Bible verses on restaurant bills instead of giving tips or anything like that. I just try to do my thing and not be mean doing it. It’s worked just fine.” Lathe inspected the many vegetables and fruits, starting to fill their cart with fresh things. Let’s see… asparagus, potatoes, onions, leek, mushrooms, ooh they have fresh spices too! I need plenty of basil if I’m making grilled cheese, God knows Eren’ll want three… Lathe made sure they had a large clamshell package of basil before he got a plastic bag and approached the apples, picking out Granny Smiths. ...I’m making pie one of these days.

Marcus watched him pick out a bunch of produce. “Okay, well after produce we’ll go to the meats, I only get chicken here. If you want beef or pork, we can go to Dash’s after here.” He pushed around the cart, following Lathe through the whole produce section. He’s getting a lot of strawberries- eh, I can’t complain.

Lathe nodded, making his way through the rest of the produce and near cheeses, staring at a small wedge in a case for a moment before picking it up to inspect it, nodding in approval and putting it in the cart along with Italian bread from nearby. ...have I ever made anyone in the house try Brie? It’s really good. ... they will soon enough, I guess! Lathe also picked up a large ball of mozzarella cheese, knowing he would need it. Pasta, grilled cheese… better get two. Lathe moved where Marcus pointed them to the meat, reading over the chicken labels. Hmmm… let’s see… “I’m thinking…. these, definitely…” He picked up a large package of chicken thighs, looking for something else and picking up another, this time with the bones and skin on. “And these too.” He
then nodded to the long aisles, starting to meander down the row ends, reading the overhead signs. He brought Marcus down one of them, picking up a small jar of cocoa powder and a bag of chocolate chips and flour and sugar from the baking aisle, also snatching up some spices as Marcus told him what he didn't have. He snatched things as they passed them walking down the aisles, picking up small packets of yeast, bottles of Italian dressing, three jars of peanut butter and two boxes of Earl Grey, getting a tin of coffee grounds and even grabbing a ravioli stamp. *I left mine at home- this'll make ravioli-making much easier.*

Marcus watched in curiosity at he snatched a bunch of things from the shelves, quirking an eyebrow. “Well I expect pasta now, and you’re taking the peanut butter home with you, I don’t think I’ll ever be able to eat that much, ever.” Marcus joked but followed him around a few more aisles.

“Oh, trust me- Eren’s going to have at least one completely gone within the next three days. It'll happen.” Lathe was completely serious as they continued wandering the aisles, grabbing a bottle of honey and stopping to look at the cart, thinking. “...I think we should be set for now.” *Should be.*

Marcus looked down to the overflowing cart. “You…. Think? Well, I guess we could always come back for more if we need to.” He ushered Lathe towards the register, helping him unload the cart when they found an experienced cashier. *This should work for now.*

“We still need to go to this Dash’s you speak of, apparently. We didn't get much meat or anything- not nearly enough.” He grinned to him, the cashier scanning everything quickly and carefully bagging everything. He let Marcus use his rewards card thing before paying, barely glancing at the total as he swiped his card, accepting the ridiculously long receipt from the cashier. “Thank you!” He turned to Marcus, taking over pushing the heavy cart to the car. “Okay, we go to this Dash’s, and then back home?” *Sounds like a good plan to me.*

Marcus nodded helping Lathe load the groceries in the back of the SUV and then getting in the car. “So… How long have you been dating? I honestly didn’t know you were dating until you called to have her hand.”

*No one ever calls me anymore.* It only took a few moments until they were on the road again.

Lathe looked over to him with an incredulous expression. “It's been three years, a month and some change and nobody told you? Does anyone tell you this sort of stuff?” Lathe watched as Marcus just shook his head, his face falling a bit. “We need to fix that. You didn't even know Spades and I were dating, and then I call you asking for her hand… it makes sense why you sounded so stunned when I asked. We’ll fix that- don't worry.” *I thought Spades was calling you at least occasionally!*

Marcus nodded, a soft smile on his face. “It’d be nice to hear from at least one of my children once
“...nobody calls?” Lathe looked saddened at the thought as Marcus shook his head again, his resolve solid in his mind. We’re fixing that. “Don’t worry- you’ll be hearing from her much more often.” I'm making sure of that.

“That would be… That would be really nice…. Um, I know you want kids, but your not gonna leave her if she can’t have them, are you?” I know it’s kinda rude… But I don’t want people leaving her again because of this, I’ve seen enough of that broken smile when she’s trying to be strong and failing miserably.

Lathe looked to his lap, picking at a loose thread on the seat. “...Spades was scared I’d leave if she told me she would have trouble conceiving. I only knew when you told me. Marcus… I love her. I want kids, sure, but her not being able to give me that doesn't make me love her any less. We can adopt, and with medical advancements… I really, really hope we'll have kids… but if we don't, I'm still going to love her as much as I do now.” I want to keep her- I wouldn't have asked her if I wasn't dead sure I wanted to spend forever with her.

Marcus nodded. “Good, I think I can trust you then, she’s had enough heartbreak because of that.” She doesn't need anyone else leaving her because she can’t have kids, I’ve seen the aftermath of that relationship…. That’s why she moved away from here and down to Kansas.

Lathe looked up, his brow furrowed a bit. She never said anything about any of those relationships... I didn't even know she was in any relationships. And everyone told everyone else everything in the group chat. “...it’s happened that many times? Someone left her because it's hard for her to conceive?” Lathe looked down as Marcus nodded. I can understand that, a bit... I really wanna have kids, and it’d be disappointing and sad if she can't conceive… but it was that much of a deal breaker to her exes? “...Marcus, believe me. I love her too much to let her go, just because she might not be able to give me kids. I've adopted Eren, I'd be open to adopting more kids… but I wouldn’t’ve proposed if I didn't want to be with her exactly the way she is.” ...I love her so fucking much… she was so scared to tell me… she knew what the pattern was. The man wants kids, she tells them it might not happen... and they leave.

The older man sighed quietly as he stopped at a red light. “I’m sorry that you’re finding out about this from me… I... Well, I wasn't the best of fathers, for any of my kids, which may have led to them being pushed away. But.... Spades, she…” He paused trying to think of the right words, coming up a blank for a bit. “She... She’s not great at telling anyone anything, and I’m the reason for that… I’m really sorry that you had no idea until after you had already planned to marry her.” It’s my fault she holds everything in and lies, because she doesn’t want to be hurt anymore. “And I can only imagine what she felt like when you found out, because it can be the deciding factor in filing for a divorce…. She’d… You could’ve gotten one and left her for information being withheld.” She must’ve been a mess.
Lathe shook his head, his eyes downcast. “It’s alright… I’m just glad that I know about this now. But even if I didn’t until when we were married… we would’ve worked it out. At least tried to. It was a real shock to hear… but we still talked through it. …but I hope she can learn to trust me enough not to leave, and learn to tell me stuff… I have to guess and pry a bit when I can tell something’s bothering her… she’s so scared to tell me stuff, and it hurts when she keeps it all to herself because she’s hurting and won’t let me help her with it…” I want her to trust me enough to tell me stuff...

Marcus was quiet until they parked. “Like I said, I’m sorry, I didn’t realize what I was doing… 25 years ago…” And I regret it every second of it. I… I shouldn’t be called a father… I closed in after Darlene died. Marcus got out of the car, waiting for him to follow. It’s really my fault...

...that’s about when… Lathe got out of the car as well, walking with Marcus, resting a hand on his shoulder. “It was hard, what you went through… Spades got hurt… and you lost your wife… I can understand feeling lost after something like that happens, and not being able to guide Spades when you don’t even know what to do with yourself… it’s alright, really. We can work things out when they come up- I’m not about to lose my patience or just let go because things aren’t easy.” I’m in this for the long haul… and it’s okay. I understand. “It’s been a long time, and she’s been through a lot since then… but we can help her now. Better late than never… I don’t know how she and I are going to remain happy all the time if she never tells me anything and I simply have to guess as to when something’s bothering her. But we can help her. It'll be fine.” We can work this out.

Marcus smiled, patting Lathe on the back, a warm smile on my face. “She definitely picked a keeper. Alright, to the meats.” He ushered Lathe towards the open butcher, looking to the side to see what was recently packaged and put out on the chillers. “If I make pork steaks, how much will the kid eat? And Levi? How much will he eat?” I need at least five pounds for me and Spades… How much are you guys gonna eat?

“.....honestly… you're probably gonna want to get fifteen of those steak things just to be safe…” He watched Marcus turn to him with an incredulous look, shrugging. “Eren eats like a starved wolf, and Levi and I eat plenty. Plus you and Spades, so…” Yep. We like food.

Marcus just shrugged, picking up a few packs and making sure he had at least 15 pounds worth of pork steaks. “Alright you get what you want and put it in the cart, I need to get me some spice that they sell here.” He put the packs in the cart and then went off down one of the aisles. I need the Szeged Rib Rub.

Lathe nodded, perusing the different meats, meandering down with the cart and picking up different packages, setting some in the cart. Let’s see what I can get from here before talking to the butcher guy..., this sausage mix thing looks fine for ravioli… or stuffed peppers… or mushrooms…
hmm... focus, Lathe. What else. ...chuck eye for soup, and a few tied together makes a nice roast because they're so small... and lamb too, I feel like spoiling everyone. And Marcus deserves it. Now, I need to ask for ribs. Lathe soon approached the meat counter, talking to the butcher and pointing out the racks he wanted, soon taking the wrapped package and thanking him. *This thing is heavy...* He set it in the cart, grinning as Marcus came back with a jar of spices. “I found some stuff.” *Yeah, some stuff.*

Marcus looked to the cart with wide eyes. “Whatever we don't eat you’re taking with you. Shall we get going?” *It appears as though you have enough now.*

Lathe nodded. “Yeah- and trust me, we’ll be lucky if any leftovers exist at all.” *Really tho.* They went up to the checkout, and soon enough they were loading things into the SUV, making room with the large number of bags already in the back. “I think we have juuuust enough for a bit. It should last us… eh, a week? Ish?” Lathe was only half-joking as he spoke, moving bags around. *

...I'm actually serious. We eat way too much. ....* Eren *eats way too much. ...actually, just a lot. Not too much. Just... a lot.*

Marcus chuckled at his statement. “Well, let's get going home, don’t want to keep everyone waiting for us.” *I haven’t actually heard Eren talk yet either.*

Lathe nodded, getting into the car, feeling much more at ease. *Spades and I should talk later...* It wasn't ten minutes before they were back home, Lathe seeing the flurry of activity through the windows and smiling. *They know we’re home.* Lathe got out of the car when Marcus parked, watching a bit confused as he went straight to open the door, the dogs running out as Lathe opened the back gate. He saw them wait patiently with open mouths, sitting in a perfect line. ....*huh?* He watched confusedly as Marcus picked up a bag by the plastic handles, setting it in the jaws of the first dog. He watched in awe as it immediately stood and walked inside, Spades holding the door open for it. “...that is the coolest damn thing I've ever seen.” ...*wow.*

“Oh yeah, they're pretty obedient if you give them some motivation, they know what’s waiting for good behavior.” Marcus continued to give the dogs bag after bag, the line reforming as the dogs went into the kitchen and dropped off the bags next to the fridge on the floor neatly and without anything breaking. “Done in a few minutes.” *It was well worth the year of training, but once one got it, they all got it.* He closed the back to the SUV and locked it, letting the dogs go back inside. “Okay... Let’s see now, the rawhides are up here.” He pulled up the heavy top to a wooden chest, revealing the horde of large white bones, stacked neatly on top of each other. He smiled as the dogs lined up again, and each got another bone before prancing off. *Still as puppyish as ever...*

Eren had found the bag with the peanut butter and had opened one, destroying the seal to it and looking around in confusion. *I need a spoon...* He completely ignored the dogs moving around the kitchen and setting bags down, simply looking for a spoon he could use.
Lathe padded into the kitchen with Marcus to put away groceries, chuckling as he saw Eren with the peanut butter jar in his hands. “Spoon?” You probably need one of those.

“Spoon.” Eren’s voice was ragged from not having spoken much at all earlier in the day. I want the peanut butter.

Marcus’ eyes widened as he heard Eren’s rough voice. I wouldn’t be surprised if he could sing low … Even with it being a little rough, it sounds like he could pull it off. He nodded himself out of his thought process, getting a spoon out for Eren who hurriedly took it from him and bolted away with it, leaving the top to the jar on the counter. “Um… Did I do something…?” He ran away...

Lathe shook his head, smiling faintly. “Don't take it personally. He’s still getting used to his surroundings- and to you. But he said something, which is good.” He looked to the lid on the counter, nudging it further back so it wouldn't get knocked off. “…I honestly don't know if he's gonna need that.” He'll probably eat everything. “In the meantime, we should try to put all this food away so it doesn't spoil. …let's hope your fridge is big enough.” I kinda made us buy a lot...

“It’s alright, I have a separate fridge and freezer downstairs in the basement, so we’ll have no problem packing everything in.” Marcus started to unpack a majority of the bags, separating them on the counter to fridge, freezer and cabinet sections. This should work out...

Lathe soon picked up on what Marcus’ method was, starting to put the produce that needed to stay cold in the fridge, moving things around a bit to make plenty of room. You don't have much in here to begin with- it’s pretty much just you, so I'm not that surprised… Lathe thanked him as Marcus began to hand him things to put inside, the job going quickly with the two of them working. Lathe carried the heavier bags of potatoes and produce to the pantry, keeping things neat as they were stowed away. Again, not much… He looked down, seeing huge bags of dog food near his feet. …I was wondering how you kept all eight of them fed. They ended up having to put the meats in the downstairs fridge, Lathe insisting that he carry the most of it. Soon enough everything was away, the bags folded up and stashed in the pantry as trash bags for later, and they meandered into the living room, Spades leaning on one arm of the couch, looking tired as she watched the dogs gnawing on their rawhide bones, Levi holding onto Eren at the other end of the couch, gently pecking his neck as he ate his peanut butter by the spoonful. ...good thing it’s got protein in it. Lathe came over to them, his eyebrows raised as he got a better look at the jar. “…Eren, half of that is already gone.” He looked up, a bit concerned. I know you normally eat a lot, but… “Do you want me to make you a sandwich or something? Are you still that hungry?” We did finish all of the bombs from dinner… it wasn't enough?

Eren tensed a bit as he licked the spoon clean again, his eyes didn’t come up to meet Lathe’s or anyone else's. No... You don’t need to. “N-No…. ” He curled up a bit more, getting out another
large spoonful and starting to eat it. *No, you’ll yell at me for having to make more food...*

Lathe sighed quietly, kneeling down in front of him, giving him a bit of space. “Eren, I **offered** to make you food. I'm not going to be mad if you say yes. I'm worried, because you need to get back to eating right. It's important you do. ...I’m gonna make you grilled cheese, okay? When I hand you that sandwich, will you eat it?” *Just say yes already.*

Eren was quiet for a few moments, pondering a few things. “O- okay... Um... Y-yeah...” Eren finished off the spoonful of peanut butter, looking at the small amount remaining in the jar. *I ate a lot....*

Lathe smiled, standing and gently ruffling Eren’s hair. “Alright. I won't be long.” He moved to work in the kitchen, getting out what he needed from the fridge. He turned to Marcus with an inquiring look. “...where do you keep your stuff in here?” *I kinda have no idea where anything is.*

Marcus showed him where all the pans were in the kitchen, then the plates, and cups, and the utensils, bowls and the like. “That everything you need to know...? Is... Is he still hungry?” *He eats more than I've accounted for...*

Lathe nodded. “Yep- which is good, really. We need to get more meat on his bones.” Lathe went about getting a cutting board and knife, a pan with a lid and plate out, beginning to chop up basil, mozzarella, and lastly tomato for the sandwich. He put the extra sandwich mix in a small bowl, covering it with plastic wrap. “Just in case he wants another one- and we definitely make plenty of these sandwiches.” *He always eats them.* Lathe brushed it with extra olive oil, cooking it and soon bringing the plate out to Eren, trading him for the empty peanut butter jar. “Juice?” He watched him shake his head. “Tea? Anything?” *Whatever you want.*

Eren shook his head, taking a bite of the sandwich and letting out a soft moan as he tasted it for the first time in forever. *I miss being able to eat this....* Eren didn’t even realize he was crying until he tasted the extra salt on his lips. *Wait... Why am I crying?* Eren sniffled, trying to rub at his eyes as he ate, continuing to do so as his tears fell.

Levi rubbed his thumb over Eren's side soothingly, looking up as Lathe offered him his kerchief. He took it, nudging Eren gently and getting him to hold off eating for just a moment before drying his tears, kissing his cheek. *I know how much you miss the little things from home.... hopefully you'll have them all back soon.*

Eren whimpered a bit as he was kissed, but leaned into it. His tears subsided as he ate the rest of the sandwich, putting the plate down. *I'm not in the hospital.... “Where are we....?”* His voice was
rough as he leaned his head into Levi’s shoulder, taking in his scent to calm himself down. *We’re not home, this isn’t our couch, but this isn’t the hospital either…*

*Oh thank god he's back.* Levi shifted Eren a bit as Lathe took his plate, cradling him in his lap and pecking his cheeks softly. “We’re at Marcus’ house- Spades’ Dad. ...technically soon to be your Grandfather.” *That's a thing now, apparently. ...it's good to have you back.*

Eren nodded. “I feel full…” His voice was quiet as he spoke, pulling his knees under Lathe's sweater, still unable to stretch the fabric. *It's been awhile since I've felt this full.* “How much did I eat?” He coughed a bit, clearing his throat, and his voice becoming softer, and quiet. *I’m not in the hospital… Thank god.*

“Let’s see… plenty of hamburger bombs…. an entire jar of peanut butter… and a grilled cheese sandwich. And a glass of apple juice.” Lathe smiled to him, moving to sit on the floor, the many doge making room for him. *So much doge-* He suddenly felt a dog nudging his shoulder, another also nudging his other shoulder and he soon found himself coaxed to lay down, dogs spreading out over his legs and chest. “*…so much doge*…” Lathe grinned goofily, turning his head as one licked his cheek, laughing quietly. *They like me!*

Eren looked over to where Lathe was laying on the floor, where six masses of fur surrounded him. *What…. There are dogs here… That aren’t Blake… And there are a lot of them…* He looked around for Blake, panicking when he couldn’t find the dog, only to hear a flap open and a few seconds later watch Blake jump up onto the couch and start to lick his face. He yelped as Blake touched his face with his nose. *It’s cold… He was outside…* His hands wrapped around the dog, pulling him close and petting him to calm himself down. *I actually have Blake now… Thank god.*

Spades came out of the kitchen, looking at the pile of dogs on the floor. “Lathe… Why are you on the floor?” Her brow was raised in question, stepping closer as she watched Eren hug Blake to his chest. *He’s back to himself… That’s great… Now we just need him to eat 3 times a day.*

Lathe looked up to her, smiling brightly. “Because, once they get you…” Lathe reached out and held onto her pant leg, one of the dogs taking the hint and getting up, pawing at her. He grinned as she found herself sitting on the floor, the doge accommodating her and spreading out over her too. “...they don't let you go.” *Yay! Now we're both buried under doge!* 

Spades sighed quietly, just letting it happen as the dogs spread out over the two of them. “Well… It’s not as bad as…” Spades swallowed hard, looking away as she moved to get up, getting the dogs off of her and hurriedly walking off and up the stairs to the room she had taken as their own. *No… No…. Neither of them know about that… None of them need to know about that.*
Lathe watched as she got up, his eyes wide as he caught the torn look in her eyes. He got up to follow her, the dogs shifting out of his way as he went upstairs after her, his foot catching in the door before she could close it. He shut the door behind him, moving to Spades and catching her in a hug, his touch light and loving on her back, murmuring in her ear. “Spades, talk to me. What’s wrong? You know you can tell me anything…” Please, talk. It'll make you feel better.

Spades sighed quietly, leaning her head into his shoulder. “I… I’m sorry, I just… I just thought of something… It’s nothing… Really, I just… I need a few minutes.” Nope, he’s gonna think I have PTSD about it… But I haven’t thought about it in years… And I almost joked about it… What have I turned into… She took in a ragged breath, trying to calm down before the tears spilled.

... no. Lathe shifted a bit to pull from her, cradling her head in his hands, his voice soft. “Spades, this always happens… something in you is making you hurt, and you force down any emotion, and refuse to tell anyone… I know you're scared… because it's happened too much that you tell the person you're dating the truth about what's happened to you… and then they leave…” He pecked away her tears as they began to stream down her cheeks, his eyes warm and worried. “Spades, I'm not like that…. I'm not going to up and leave because something isn't going to be easy or because you've got things weighing you down that you can't handle by yourself… I love you… I want to keep you… and everything you bring with you. But it hurts when you don't believe that… when you don't trust me enough to tell me what's on your mind because you think I'm going to leave you… and I'm not. Spades… please. Tell me. You can always tell me.” I want to make things easier on you, because you won't make them easier on yourself.

Spades only nodded, holding onto his shirt. “I… I don’t want you to think…. That I have PTSD… I haven’t really thought about it… In awhile… I’m sorry.” It shocked me… I don’t want to think about it. It’s not a nice thing to think about.

...you can't stand being buried under the dogs... ...I always see Levi with Eren on top of him, and sometimes I try and do that with you, laying on top of you... but you always either flip us around or move out from under me... ...the car crash... your legs and abdomen crushed... holy fuck, you got crushed. Lathe pulled Spades close to him, his hand threading through her hair, trying to calm her as she started crying into his shoulder. It's a miracle you still get into a car ever... you have PTSD. You must. But you're in denial about it. “Spades… I know you don't like the idea, but I think you really do have PTSD... it's okay, really, it doesn't make you any less of a person or anything, it certainly doesn't for Eren, why would it for you? Just…” He sighed, leading them over to the bed and sitting down, moving back and pulling Spades on top of him, laying down with her. “...when you were in the car crash... did you end up getting crushed?” It would explain stuff...

Spades grew tense in his arms before nodding, burying her face further into his chest. “Y-yeah.... I did... and I... I might be very claustrophobic... and I’m afraid of a lot of things now... and...” Spades couldn’t stop the word vomit that followed her tears. Her hands were shaking horribly as she clung to him, finally letting everything get off her chest after so many years. Please don’t be mad at me… I kept it all in, because no one wanted to deal with all my baggage.
Lathe listened to everything that came out of her mouth, trying to calm her and kissing away her tears when her words dissolved into garbled sounds as she cried. "I hate seeing you like this... you kept everything buried inside of you for so long... He let her ramble on, pecking her cheeks as she finally trailed off, mumbling into her ear. “It’s okay, Spades... I'm right here, I'm not going anywhere. Thank you for telling me this... really... we’ll be more careful with stuff... I love you, so much...” Please don't think I don’t.

Spades’ crying was starting to subside, holding onto him tightly. “I… When you found out that I couldn’t have children…. I thought it was gonna happen all over again. I was terrified ...” I might as well tell you about everything you don’t know.

Lathe nodded, his hand running over her back. “I didn't exactly bring it up in the best way.... I was just hurt that you didn't tell me... and I was really blunt about it... I'm so sorry for scaring you like that... I guess I could've come off like that... it's okay, though, you don't have to be terrified.... It's fine...” It really is. I don't want you to be scared to tell me things... because you need to tell me things.

Spades looked down. “I should... I should tell you... That um... When I was up here, I um... I dated a couple guys and they always left after they found out there would be no kids from our relationship, and I... I was engaged too, until he found out... We got an annulment... And I never saw him again. I couldn’t take it anymore... I’m so sorry... I didn’t know how to tell you, I was so afraid of repeating everything again, and I didn’t want you to leave... I didn’t want to have to moved all over again... Move away from everyone, and never see you guys again... I couldn’t do that...” I hate that you have to find this out like this... I didn't want to tell you in the first place, and I'd rather forget about all of them.

...No way. Lathe felt a hard tug in his chest, his arms tightly wound around her. He buried his face in Spades’ shoulder, breathing in deeply before letting it out shakily, tears beginning to stain her shirt. ...you never told me... “...y-you were already m-married... and you didn't even t-tell me that ...” I would've wanted to know ... Lathe’s chest hurt as he himself began to sob into her shoulder, their legs tangling, wanting to be close to her. ....for a while... ...You were someone else’s....

Spades felt her chest tighten as she heard him cry. “I’m sorry Lathe... I-If... If you-”

“ Don’t !” Lathe shuddered, his hold on her tight as he sobbed into her shoulder, anger and overwhelming sadness tearing at him. “Don't you dare suggest that I should leave- stop thinking that I want to! I don’t ! I... I want to stay ...” Lathe’s anger dissolved as he yelled, his words garbled and broken as he muttered into her shoulder, tears streaming down his cheeks, turning them onto their sides and curling into her. I wanna stay... I don't wanna leave... don't make me leave... don't leave because you think I'd be better off without you... His hands gripped her shirt
tightly, not wanting to let go. I wanna keep you...

Spades listened to Lathe in shock, her eyes wide as he yelled at her. She shut up, not saying anything as she sighed in relief. He’s not gonna leave… He’s really not gonna leave me. She let out a shaky breath as she held him close to her, sniffing as she tried to calm down.

Lathe held onto her for a long time, his breathing soon calming, his voice quiet and rough when he next spoke. “…I wanna sleep…” His hold on her tightened. “…I wanna hold onto you…” I don’t wanna let you go...

Spades nodded. “O-okay… Why don’t we get our PJs on?” She asked quietly to him, her arms still around him, her fists loosening from around his shirt, but still holding onto him. “So we can sleep?” Her voice was shy and quiet as she spoke.

Lathe nodded, finally letting go of her. He shifted them up to get off of the bed, beginning to ditch his clothes, leaving them in a sorta-neat pile on the floor, in nothing but his boxers when he turned to see Spades lifting her shirt over her head, leaving her in a bra and panties. … Lathe walked up behind her just as she began to move to find pajamas in her suitcase, his hands lightly resting on her hips, his forehead on her shoulder blade. “Uhm, Spades… is it okay if we go without PJs for tonight…?” His voice was incredibly small and timid, blushing red to his ears. I don’t want to… y’know, but… I just wanna be able to feel you...

Spades nodded, tilting her head to the side a bit as her arms came behind her and struggled to get to the clasp for her bra with the way he was positioned behind her. I can’t sleep in a bra, that’s too uncomfortable, so bra-less it is...

Lathe blushed as he realized what she was doing, his hands drifting to her back and undoing the clasp, letting the fabric fall from her shoulders. Okay… Lathe looked away as she turned to him, his hand rubbing the back of his neck. Fuck, why do I feel so awkward… calm the hell down...

Spades smiled softly and leaned up on her tiptoes and pecked the corner of his mouth. “Thank you.” Her voice was soft, sweet, before she climbed back into the bed, curling up under the covers. And you’re too much of a gentleman for your own good...

Lathe followed her to the bed, climbing in after her and nestling under the covers. …I wanna hold you… but I want you to hold me too… Lathe was torn between the two as he reached over to turn off the lamp on the nightstand, quiet as he settled back under the covers. His voice was a quiet whisper, expecting Spades to say no. “…Uhm… is it okay if you hold me… please…?” Can I be the little spoon for once…?
Spades was quiet for a few moments, the air between them noticeably tense before she shifted moving over to him, her arms wrapping around his torso under his arms, her ear just above his heart, and her legs starting to tangle alongside his. *I can hold you… I can do this.*

Lathe let out a breath he didn't know he was holding when Spades shifted on top of him, his arms winding around her back, tracing over the warm skin, grateful that he could feel so much of her as their legs tangled. “...thank you.” Lathe felt he could breathe easier with her steady weight, finally letting himself relax into the mattress, wrapped up in her scent. *It's okay… it's okay.*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren shifted in Levi’s arms, looking around the quiet house. *I wonder if Mom and Dad will come back downstairs… They've been up there for awhile.* His hands were still clinging to Levi’s shirt; they had spoken with Marcus for a bit, getting to know a few things about him here and there, and a few things about Spades’ childhood. *So this was the house Mom lived in for awhile? That’s nice.*

Levi listened to the house in general, quiet. *Lathe yelled something earlier… but they're quiet now… I don't think they fought… Spades would've been the one to yell first. Lathe never yells… I think they're okay. It's been awhile. Levi looked to a clock on the wall, seeing it was getting late. It's late… I'm tired… “Eren, what do you say we go upstairs and sleep?”* Levi murmured in his ear, his hold on him still as gentle as ever. *You need all the rest you can get… and I don't wanna let you go just yet…*

Eren nodded. “O~” His jaw practically unhinged as he let out a loud yawn, his eyes closing out of instinct and one of the dogs yawned after watching him yawn. Then the other dogs followed suit in yawning, making adorable little squeaks as they did so. *Well, I guess it’s true… It’s contagious. “Okay, I need my pills though… The right ones.”* He added at the end, moving to get out of Levi’s grasp to go find his pills. *I don’t wanna have another breakdown…*

...*that was so fucking adorable.* Levi smirked as the whole flock of them yawned, finding himself yawning and stretching his arms above his head when Eren left his lap, standing to follow him and rifle through Lathe’s bag. “Here, I know where the stuff you take is.” Levi opened it and took out the top case, handily labeled ‘STUFF EREN TAKES’ in Sharpie. *Of course.* Levi opened the plastic case and took out two of the bottles, knowing which ones he took at night. “Let’s get you a glass of water so you can take these, alright?” It only took a minute for Levi to give Eren the right pills, the PTSD ones all already halved in the bottle. *Makes this easier than fishing for whole and half ones.* Levi stowed the bottles away after making sure Eren drank the entire glass worth of water, one arm around his waist as they walked to the stairs. “Alright, let’s get you upstairs and in bed. We both could use some sleep.”
Eren nodded quietly and followed him, Blake following on the stairs behind them along with a few of the huskies. His footsteps were a bit staggered as he neared the bed, sitting on the edge and starting to slowly strip of the layers of clothing he wore. *I'm tired… But I feel like I've slept all day…*

Levi let Blake and the few huskies that followed into the room, shutting the door and similarly stripping to his boxers, his clothes sort of folded neatly on the dresser. *...do I want PJs…* He looked over to Eren sleepily tugging off his clothes, his eyes softening as he saw his puffed-up puppy expression. *...no.* Levi went to him and took the clothes from him, setting them next to his own before pulling him down onto the bed with him, tugging the blankets up and shifting to spoon Eren, Eren’s back flush to his front. *I like this.* He gently pecked Eren’s shoulder blade, smiling faintly. “Goodnight, Eren.” *I love you.*

“...night…” Eren mumbled sleepily before his eyes closed. *I'm tired… Levi’s warm…* Eren shifted closer to him and his hair ruffled against the pillow as he found a comfortable position. *I can sleep… In a real bed.*

Levi drifted to sleep, grateful for the warmth in his arms. *Warm…* He slowly blinked awake in the morning, the stiffness of his joints telling him how late he’d slept. *...warm… he’s got a lot of hair… ...wait.* Levi shifted up, seeing he had one of the huskies next to him. “...what the hell?” He sputtered as it turned it’s head and licked him, shooing it off the bed and wiping his mouth. “...Good morning, Levi… now where the hell…” *Where’d Eren go?* Levi was suddenly overcome with a sense of dread, throwing on clothes in record time and thundering down the stairs, turning with wide eyes to the living room and kitchen. He heaved a sigh of relief as he saw Eren with Lathe at the kitchen table, covered in flour and making pasta. “Oh thank god…” Levi had a hand over his heart as he walked over, going to hug Eren tightly. “I was worried when I woke up holding a dog and not you.” *That was concerning… the last time that happened…… no, you're okay. It's fine.*

Eren looked down to where Levi stood hugging his waist. “S-sorry… I um… I woke up around 5… And you were asleep, and I didn’t w-want to wake you up…” Eren stumbled over his words as he added the new raviolis to a large pot that they were filling to set in water. *This is a lot… But I’m hungry…*

Levi nodded. “It's okay… I'm just glad you're fine.” He pulled back after a moment, looking down and realizing just how much flour the action got on him. “...well, I look like I fit right in. Might as well join you.” Levi went to the sink to wash his hands, coming back and looking over the table. “What’s happening?”

Lathe grinned, closing the ravioli in front of him with the tines of a fork. “Making rivailloli with the pasta dough Eren made at five in the morning. Eren’s monopolized the pasta stamp- wanna roll out the dough?” *We've still got a ton left.*
Levi shrugged and nodded, moving to pick up the rolling pin and roll out sections of the dough, letting Eren stamp them before re-rolling the scraps with a new lump. *Pasta for breakfast… hey, it looks good. Why not?*

Marcus came downstairs in a pair of jeans and a hoodie, bare feet almost silent on the floor as he made his way to the kitchen. His eyes widened in surprise as he saw the countertops overtaken by pasta making. “Lathe, when I said I expected pasta, I didn’t mean you had to make pasta for breakfast.” Though, whatever you’re making looks pretty good.

*Shit… Is he gonna be mad at me for making pasta?* Eren lowered his head, almost in submission as his actions slowed to a stop, unsure if he should continue or not. *Do I stop? Do I keep making them? What do I do?*

Lathe shrugged, looking over as Eren stopped handing him filled raviolis, gently resting a hand on his shoulder. “Sorry, Marcus- Eren woke up really early and just made a ton of pasta out of nerves. We’re making it into raviolis… Is that okay?” *They’ll dry out if we try to save them…*

Marcus nodded. “Yeah, that’s fine, just make sure there’s enough for all of us.” *Did I say something wrong?* Marcus watched as he sat down at the kitchen island, watching them work silently. *They seem to make a great team…*

Lathe nodded, moving to quietly murmur to Eren. “It’s okay, he didn’t mean anything by it. He just wasn’t expecting this for breakfast. You can keep going.” *It’s fine.* He smiled to him as Eren started making the raviolis again, a large amount in the bowl. Eventually they ran out of filling and had just a lump of dough left, Lathe looking at it. *Hmm… what to do with you…*

Eren nodded quietly, his hands regaining their function as he made the rest of the raviolis. *There’s a lump left….* “Pasta… M-maybe?” He asked timidly as he looked at the dough left over. *I wanna cook it, i’m hungry…*

Lathe nodded, looking up to Levi. “…you haven’t made pasta… have you.” He grinned as Levi shook his head. “Well, roll it out, then. We’ll have you make some.” *Yas.*

Levi nodded, rolling out the dough thin and doing as Lathe instructed him over his shoulder, sprinkling it with some flour and rolling the entire sheet of dough carefully. He picked up a knife Lathe set next to him, cutting the rolled sheet near the end a few times and carefully picking up the edge on the top, holding it above the table and carefully shaking his hand. The noodles unrolled in
his careful hold, setting them on the table and beginning a pile. *That’s cool.* Levi unrolled the rest of it as Lathe told him, instead cutting it into squares and following him along with Eren as Lathe showed them different ways to fold the pasta, a pile of all kinds of shapes growing on top of the long noodles. *This is really nice…*

Eren smiled, though he moved to clean himself up, stripping himself of his flour ridden shirt and holding it to his thin chest, his ribs showing and his hips as well. He froze when he felt Marcus’ eyes on his body, but he was unsure of what to do. *I can’t run… He’ll get mad… I wanna hide… He can see me… What do I do?*

Levi immediately moved behind him when he saw Eren freeze up, an arm wrapping around his waist and covering his back, Eren hiding his front with the shirt in his hands. “Upstairs- we’ll get you in clean clothes. Shower, maybe?” Levi moved Eren from the kitchen to the stairs, getting him away from Marcus. *We’ll clean you up and then when we come back down we can eat.*

Lathe watched as Levi ushered Eren upstairs, speaking to Marcus as he kept folding the pasta that was not yet finished. “…Eren’s… if anything said to him in general could be taken as someone being mad at him, that’s how he’ll take it. He was scared you were mad for us making pasta so early. And… yeah… he’s not doing so great physically right now…” *You saw… he’s just skin and bones.*

Marcus paled a bit, taking in Lathe’s words. “I… I’m sorry, I didn’t realize it, I’ll try not to say anything that would make him freak out.” Marcus assured, getting up to help him clean up the countertops. *I didn't realize that it could be taken as something I would be mad about.*

“Thanks… it can be a struggle, walking on eggshells all the time around him. But if it happens, and he looks scared… just tell him it’s fine, that you're not mad. He needs plenty of reassurance.” Lathe set the last of the pasta in a separate bowl, cleaning the table with Marcus and making sure all the stray flour was wiped up. He looked down to his own clothes, seeing all the flour and pasta shrapnel. “…I’m gonna change before I come back down and cook all this.” *Don't wanna make a bigger mess of the kitchen.* Lathe left to do just that, quietly opening the door to their room and seeing Spades still nestled under the blankets. Lathe shed his shirt and pants, putting them on a pile of dirty laundry in the corner. He went to the bed, moving to kiss Spades awake, his hands resting on her hips. *Good morning….*

Spades blinked awake after a few moments, moving to stretch out, her upper half coming out from under the covers, and she didn’t seem to notice her nudity as she picked herself up to kiss him again. “Good morning.” *I could get used to waking up like that.*

Lathe blushed as her upper half came out from under the covers, kissing her sweetly, his hands
drifting to her sides. They pulled apart after a moment, Lathe keeping his eyes from her chest as he spoke, sounding a bit nervous. “Uhm… Breakfast’ll be soon… we’re having pasta, since Eren woke up early and made a ton out of nerves… yeah…” ...I feel like I'm too dressed...

Spades looked down at herself blushing wildly as she pulled the blanket up to her chin. “Okay… That works, I’ll be down as soon as I get dressed.” She waited under the covers, watching Lathe move around with a dopey smile on her face. He’s really not gonna leave...

Lathe nodded, going to get dressed in a different pair of jeans and pulling on a red sweater, blushing as he moved to peck her cheek before leaving. … she's too damn beautiful for her own good… eh, can't exactly complain. Lathe set a pot on the stove full of water, waiting for it to boil. This'll take a bit. Soon enough Levi and Eren were padding downstairs freshly showered, Spades following, and Lathe dropped the raviolis into the water, letting them cook before bringing them from the water no more than three minutes later and setting them aside, then dumping the miscellaneous noodles into the pot for two minutes. A pot of thin pasta sauce, having simmered on the back burner for awhile, was finally brought to the front, and Lathe stirred it, careful nothing stuck to the bottom. He soon set a bowl of ravioli and pasta miscellany in front of everyone with fresh sauce poured over-top, getting drinks for everyone before sitting down himself. “Dinner for breakfast.” He smiled, immediately giving his food his full attention. Pasta for the win.

Eren sat down at the table, his hands still shaky as he started to eat from his bowl. It tastes good. A small hum came from him as he ate the first forkful. He still kept his head down as they sat in mostly silence. What if he’s still mad at me? I don’t want him to be mad… He heard Blake come up behind him and put a paw in his lap, whining a bit as he wanted him to calm down. I know… I know, I need to calm down.

Levi looked over to Eren, resting a hand on his leg as Blake came up to them, seeing his hand shake. “Eren, it's okay. Everything’s fine. It's fine that we're having pasta for breakfast- really.” Nobody minds- at least, they shouldn't. This is really good.

Eren nodded, though he put his fork down as more silence reigned in the kitchen, and he had a sinking feeling in his gut, his head dropping down even further in submission. I... Fucked up... Why did I need to make pasta... I should’ve made bread... Shit... Eren felt his nerves raising as he moved to curl up into himself on his chair.

Marcus watched Eren put his fork down in concern. Does he not like it? It tastes amazing! He turned to Lathe, worry etched across his features as Eren closed in on himself. What’s happening? Did I do something again?

Lathe looked to Eren worriedly as he heard Blake whine, looking across the table to Marcus. [He's still scared that you're mad... he thinks you didn't like that this is what we’re having as breakfast.]
Lathe looked back to Eren, his smile faint and reassuring. “Eren Hon, it’s alright, we don't mind having this for breakfast. It tastes great- you did a really good job of making it.” You really did.

Marcus nodded, putting his own fork down as he looked over to Eren. “Eren, I’m not mad, I was just surprised, that’s all. You did an excellent job with the pasta; it’s perfect, and the raviolis taste amazing.” He smiled reassuringly at Eren as he picked his head up for a split second before he picked up his bowl and held it in his lap, still curled up as he ate the pasta quietly. Oh thank god, he’s eating again. Marcus heaved a sigh of relief as he picked his own fork back up.

Eren was still shaking as he ate the warm pasta, keeping his eyes down and not looking at anyone at the table with him. Okay… He ate as silently as possible, still holding his food close. I know they’re not gonna take it from me… But it’s habit now…

Levi faintly smiled as Eren continued to eat, soon finishing his own bowl and standing to get a bit more, seeing Eren’s was empty as well. He held out a hand, speaking. “Want me to get you some more… rivailloli?” He glared lightly at Lathe as he chuckled, his eyes sparking a bit with humor. It's not too bad a pun.

Eren shook his head as he handed Levi his bowl. I don’t think I can handle anymore right now… that much was a lot… compared to what we normally get for breakfast, around 3 or 4 servings… He stayed curled up to himself, his knees pulled tightly to his chest, trying to seem as small as possible.

Spades watched quietly as she finished off her bowl. “I’ll have some more Levi.” She held her bowl out for him to take, waiting patiently and trying to think about what would be open on a Tuesday morning. “Dad, is Get Air open still?” She smiled more when he nodded. Oh I think that should be fun for you.

Lathe looked to her with a quirked eyebrow. “…dare I ask, what’s Get Air?” Now I'm suspicious.

“It’s a indoor trampoline park with a foam pit, it’s awesome, and I think Eren might like it…” It’ll definitely tire him out too, and I can only imagine what Levi and even you will do on the trampolines.

Lathe just looked at her, his eyes sparkling. “…I'm in.” This is gonna be fun. He looked over to Eren, resting a careful hand on his shoulder. “What do you say, Eren? Wanna give it a try?” Please say yes so we can go because now I really wanna go.
Eren flinched away from the hand for a second before he realized it was Lathe. He took a deep breath to calm himself down before nodding. “I can take… Blake right?” He asked quietly, picking his head up to meet Lathe’s eyes for a second before looking down again. *I can do it... I can do it...*

“He can't go on the actual trampolines, but he can come with and watch you jumping around. And we’ll all be there in case something happens. ...I also can't imagine who else would really be there, because it's a Tuesday morning in May. School’s in session, and people normally work, so we might end up having the place mostly to ourselves.” *That'd be really nice.*

Levi sat down next to him, nodding. “I think we’ll have fun going. And it's not as if we have to spend the entire day there. If we get tired, we rest, if we’re not having fun, we can leave. Do you want to maybe give it a go?” *It sounds fun.*

Eren was silent for a long time, contemplating everything that they told him. *Well... Um... Jumping... On a trampoline... Doesn't that hurt? “Will it hurt?”* He asked innocently, looking up to Levi and keeping eye contact with him for awhile before looking away.

... *he's actually looking at us.* Levi shook his head. “No, it won't hurt. It'll take a bit of getting used to, but you should be okay. You'd have to be careful that you don't do something weird with your feet and twist an ankle, but that’s the only real concern. If you just follow the rules they tell you, you'll be good.” *It'll be fine.*

Eren nodded after a few moments. “O-okay...” He started to unfurl a bit, not knowing what he would need to change into so that they could go. *Is it gonna get warmer outside? It's still really cold.*

Lathe stood with the dishes, taint the empty bowls and beginning to wash them in the sink. “It’s cold out right now, but you're probably going to be warm in the trampoline place- I’d say wear one of your thin long-sleeves, and you can take your coat off when you get there. That goes pretty much for everyone.” *Sounds about right.*

Eren nodded and slowly passed Marcus cautiously before he scampered off. He was still on edge around the older man and didn’t want to upset him. *He’s Mom’s dad... I don’t want either of them to be mad at me for anything... Cause they’ll put me back in the ward.. And no one will visit.* Eren pulled out a dark green long sleeve and put it on, watching as it sunk down around his thin frame. *It can ride up... What if someone sees my ribs? Or my hips?*

Levi went upstairs after him, seeing Eren looking at his figure critically in the mirror. ...*it sinks in... he's so thin... “...don't want it to come up at all?”* He nodded as Eren shook his head, rifling
through his bag for a pair of dark brown sweatpants, handing them to him. “Here, put these on. And then…” He helped Eren tuck the shirt into the pants, the elastic keeping it in place. “There. Now nobody’ll see anything.” He pecked Eren’s cheek before going to change himself, donning a pair of black sweatpants and a white tank top with an evening skyline on the front, smirking as he saw the one mark on his neck in his reflection, rubbing it a bit and looking over to Eren, pecking his nose. “Yours.” I love you...

Eren blushed as he was kissed, becoming a bumbling mess within a few seconds. What... Why did he kiss my nose? Eren looked down at his feet as he shuffled them, turning towards the door and reaching for the handle to open it. We better get going, I don’t want Dad mad at us for taking so long to get ready.

Levi reached and caught Eren by the waist, pulling him against his front, his hold gentle as he pressed kisses up his neck, smirking as Eren stuttered and blushed. “Dad is just coming up the stairs- we have a few minutes.” Levi walked Eren backwards to the bed, sitting down with Eren in his lap facing him, pressing kisses all over his cheeks and neck, his hands running lightly over his sides. Mine.

Eren blushed completely, so unsure of how he was supposed to take this as he straddled Levi’s thighs. He let out a soft mewl as he felt Levi’s lips on his cheeks. What is he doing? Is he trying to start.... Eren clammed up a bit, but couldn’t stop the soft sounds that escaped his lips. This is so embarrassing.

Levi looked up as Eren seemed to freeze, unsure of what to do with himself. “...Eren, I'm not trying to start anything. It’s not a good time for that.” Levi gently kissed across his collarbone, nipping very lightly at his neck. “…I just wanted to let you know how much… how much I love you… because I feel like I don't tell you too much… and I wanna fix that… but it's not easy for me to say it, so…” He pressed a kiss under Eren’s ear, murmuring. “…it's easiest for me to say it like this…” I'm not great with words.... but you need words... dammit. Levi pulled Eren close, moving to softly kiss him, his eyes fluttering shut. It doesn't mean I don't, though.

Eren moaned quietly as his collarbone and neck were nipped. He watched as Levi leaned up a bit and kissed him sweetly, Levi’s lips soft against his own. Eren slowly leaned into the kiss, his eyes closing as he enjoyed the feeling of Levi’s hands on his hips as he straddled him. I… I like this. He got even more comfortable with Levi, his thin body sinking down into the shorter man’s chest and molding to it. This is really comfortable...

Levi’s hands lightly roamed, his tongue swiping over Eren’s lips before retreating, feeling Eren freeze up a bit. Crap, I’m going too fast… He internally sighed in relief when Eren opened his lips for him a moment later, his tongue slowly making it’s way into Eren’s cool cavern, searching and finding Eren’s tongue, tilting his head as the kiss deepened. I've missed this...
Eren whimpered into the kiss, letting Levi’s hands wander over his thighs and his sides. He pulled back after a few moments, breathing hard, and his lips looking swollen already. “I…” Eren looked away and blushed, his head down. *I’m sorry… I just… What am I supposed to do?*

“Oh?” Levi tilted his head a bit, looking at him with inquisitive eyes. “…y’know, there’s no one way to do this…” Levi let one hand thread through Eren’s hair, leaning forward to lap at his neck, careful to not suck and leave marks. “…you just do what feels right…” *And what the other should enjoy…*

Eren let out a soft moan as Levi licked his neck. “What do I do…? I don’t know what to do… what happens when we go back? I… I’m gonna be stuck in there forever… When you go away… I can’t come out of the hospital… I haven’t seen the puppies, I haven’t seen Charlie or Luna… I… I can’t even see Armin anymore..” Eren started to cry as his shaking arms clung to Levi’s shirt. *I can’t do this… I can’t go back…*

Levi stopped, instead pulling Eren flush to his chest, rubbing his back soothingly as Eren began to cry. “Eren, you might have to go back, but you’re not going to be there forever. Lathe’s suit will get heard soon enough, and we’ll win and you’ll go free. We can take care of this, and you can go back to just living like you always have. We’re gonna get you out of there. It'll be okay. It really will be.” *We have to.*

“You saw… You saw what everyone thinks of me now…” Eren whimpered, his hands coming up to his face to hide it. “I can’t sit there anymore… They’re starving them… They’re starving all of us… Jake’s as thin as me!” He cried and deflated down into Levi’s arms, shaking his head. “I don’t want to ever go back…” His voice rose for a second in anger as he held onto his shirt.

Levi nodded. “Eren, we’re doing everything we can to get you out of that hellhole… we think maybe because there’s such neglect we can get this whole thing sped up and heard faster, because they’re starving you all in there… they can’t let that drag on for months on end. We’re going to get this thing done as quickly as we can, and get you out of there, and get Jake some better, more quality care. He and you deserve it- and we want you out of there as much as you do. Everything’ll soon go back to normal. It'll be okay. It might still take a bit, but everything will turn out fine.” *Lathe has a damn good case- he’s been writing a lot. He can defend his arguments to the bitter end.*

Eren sniffled, another thought crossing his mind. *I… I can’t get pregnant… Just like Mom… They make me feel like I’m some kind of animal… Like I need to be caged, or controlled. “I’m sorry… you probably don’t wanna know…” I should stop crying, I need to pull myself together.*
...he wants to carry? ...he's so feminine... he feels the urge to...? ...I can understand that... sorta...
Levi pecked Eren’s cheek, wiping at his tears. “Eren, I know it’s not easy... but until we get the
case heard cooperating is the best way to go about this... and... I know you really wanna have
kids... maybe we starting looking to adopt while I'm here, before I get stationed? Does that sound
okay?” I wanna have kids... and you do too... and I wanna be a part of this decision before I have
to go away and put things on hold for four years...

Eren nodded hurriedly. “I... Um... I was talking with Hannah... You remember her, right?” His
voice was quiet, holding onto Levi’s shirt. I... I still feel horrible that I can’t give you a child
myself...

Levi nodded. “Of course I do- what about her?” ...where are you going with this?

“Well... She’s been working a lot... With DNA... and... she said she was going to donate her
eggs... She said she can take out her DNA, and put ours in...” Eren’s tears had subsided, and he let
go of his shirt, his thumbs rolling between the two of them. I was hoping we could have our own
kids...

Gears turned in Levi’s head. She’s willing to do that? If it’s successful... and we can find a
surrogate mom... we could have our own kids. As in we. “...she’s willing to do that? ...That’s
amazing. We’d have to find a surrogate, but Eren...” Levi gave Eren a small but very real smile
before pulling him close in a hug. “...we could have kids ...” ...our own teeny hoomans...

Eren nodded, a soft smile on his face as he pulled back a bit, still a bit wary of being crushed.
“Yeah... But it could take a while for her to do it... You... You might not be back by the time it’s
born... But... You’ll sign all the papers? Before you leave? So it’s legally... Ours...?” I wanna
keep you, but you’re not gonna ask me the question... Are you?

Levi immediately nodded. “I know I'm probably not going to be home when they're born, but I
really want this to happen. I'll sign everything... I want us to have the kid together.” ...having a kid
before you're married... and you know you're not intentionally going to leave him... but if
something happens... I'd rather you lose a boyfriend rather than a fiancée or a husband... I really,
really want to... but I can't... not yet... Levi kept showering his cheeks with kisses, a soft smile on
his face. I really love you... but I don't wanna make you hurt too much if something happens to
me...

Eren smiled more, his hands coming to cup his face and lean in to kiss him sweetly. He kissed him
passionately, holding him close. I love you... You said yes.
Levi blushed scarlet as Eren kissed him, feeling himself melt as Eren took over the kiss, his arms slung over his shoulders, his stomach fluttering. *I love you…* He whimpered quietly into the kiss as Eren deepened it, his eyes opening and pulling back with a start as there was a knock at the door.

“Uhm, guys… we’re gonna get going now… put yourselves together and come on downstairs…” Lathe blushed as he scurried downstairs. *why did you two think you had enough time to have sex…*

Eren pulled back instantly and blushed even darker as he scrambled off of Levi and towards the door. “S-sorry.” He whimpered before leaving him and running down the stairs. His hair was a mess from Levi’s hands running through it but he was free of any other marks. His heart was still fluttering in his chest. *He said yes! He’s gonna be bound to me… For at least 21 years… Oh thank god …*

Lathe looked to Eren, pink as he spoke. “Uhm… sure you don't wanna brush out your hair? I can do it in the car on the way there, so it’s not in your way while you're jumping around…” *You could've taken more than an instant to get yourselves back in order… dammit…*

Eren looked up at Lathe, a newfound confidence in himself as he nodded, keeping eye contact. “That… That’d be great.” Eren told him, his voice a bit shaky but not much as he felt happiness swell in his chest. *He said yes …*

Lathe seemed a bit surprised as Eren spoke and looked him right in the eyes, smiling to him. *hmmm…* “Alright- let me go find you a hairbrush, okay?” Lathe smiled to him, patting his shoulder as he walked past him to the stairs, thinking. *Something that wasn't that happened. “Levi, question.”* Lathe waltzed right into their bedroom, looking to him as Levi tried to get his hair to not be a mess in the mirror, startling him a bit. “…Eren looks really happy and actually looked at me when he spoke. He looked at me. …what'd you do…?” Lathe grinned a bit cheekily as he spoke, a hand over his heart. “I mean, I know we would've given you the green light right away, but you could've at least gone through the formality of asking for tradition’s sake… even *I* had to ask…” *…You probably didn’t propose in Marcus’ house. …but come on. Just get our approval so you can actually go ahead and start to plan shit… my God just marry him already!*

Levi’s eyes widened as he listened to Lathe. “I’m sorry, what?” *You think I proposed to him… I couldn’t. No, not yet… “I didn’t propose if that’s what you're thinking.” Oh god now you’re gonna ask… Fuck.*

“Oh I know. A spare room of a guy you don't know too well- not romantic enough.” Lathe shook his head, his eyes sparkling with mischief. “But come on- Eren looks so much like himself. It’s like some switch flipped- what’d you two talk about?” *Tell me!!*
Levi sighed quietly, resting both his hands on the dresser, and looking down. “Let’s see... We agreed on both wanting kids... I suggesting adopting... But...” *Eren came up with a better idea...* Levi turned, leaning against the vanity, his arms crossed over his chest as he looked to Lathe. *You're gonna ask... Aren't you.*

---

You two want tiny hoomans too! “Buuuuut?” Lathe quirked an eyebrow at his defensive stance, holding up his hands. “Hey, Eren looked like a million bucks just now compared to how he’s been doing emotions-wise. You can tell me.” *What other options are there? Eren must've looked into this, then.*

“Hannah’s gonna donate her eggs, and she can fertilize it with our DNA...... We would just need a surrogate to carry the child... And I agreed to signing all the papers for any children we have.” *That’s probably what did it.* Levi shifted on his feet. “...so are we going?”

Lathe had to try very hard not to squeal in excitement, so happy for them. *They're gonna have tiny hoomans! And they're actually gonna be theirs!* Lathe nodded, his eyes sparkling. “Y-Yeah, we’re going. C’mon.” Lathe snatched a hairbrush on their way down, his own mind spinning a bit. ...I wonder... if Spades runs out of eggs... or if it’s just too hard... could we do that too, and have it implanted in Spades? “Alright, we going or what?” Lathe twirled the brush in his hand, grinning to Eren where he sat on the floor with the dogs. *They all adore him.*

Eren looked up as Lathe and Levi came down the stairs, his eyes brightening and a natural smile crossing his lips as he got up to sit on a stool. *I want a braid... And then I wanna go to the bouncy place.*

Lathe moved to sit behind him, starting to brush his hair carefully as Levi and Spades chatted and played with the dogs, braiding it tightly and humming as he worked. *I've got so many new tunes for you to read over- I really like this one motif I've got going... it's my favorite song right now.* Lathe tied the end off tightly and pulled it into a sorta-bun low on his head, just getting it out of the way. “There- that'll keep it out of your face.” He smiled as Eren turned to face him, feeling the braid done up behind him as he did so, going to peck his forehead before standing. “Shall we get going?” *Please?*

Eren nodded hurriedly, getting up and heading towards the door with Blake at his feet. He leaned down and strapped the vest around Blake’s body, petting him behind the ears as he smiled. *I really wanna see what it's like on the bouncy thingy. Mom said it's gonna be fun... and Grandpa's going with us.*

Levi smirked, shrugging on a coat and handing Eren one as well. “You'll need this. It's cold out.”
Levi looked to Marcus, a spark of humor in his eyes. “Perfect for the penguins, but not for us. We tend to freeze.” Yeah- I don’t think I’d like living up here. Way too much cold.

Eren nodded, still quiet as he put it on, he looked over to see everyone else throwing their coats on him. What are we gonna do? How long is it gonna take to get there? His eyes were trained on the door as Marcus opened them, letting the cold air hit their faces. It is fucking cold… Eren followed Levi into the large SUV, sitting in the back with Spades as well.

Lathe went straight for the passenger’s seat again, chatting with Marcus as they drove the short ten minutes to the large warehouse-looking building. They walked in and could see the entire complex from behind the front desk. The empty front desk. Huh? Where are the employees? “Hello…”?
Lathe called out, looking around and suddenly hearing a piercing whistle, looking to a far area of the park and seeing two teams in orange and black uniform shirts beginning a game of dodgeball. …how many people do they have working here?

Marcus walked back a bit into the warehouse to look over the younger employees yell at each other and throw balls, a relatively older man calling people out as they were hit. Is that…? “Darius Zackly… Is that really you?”

The older man turned, blowing the whistle to call the game off. “It sure is, Marcus Spade… It’s been awhile!” His voice was gruff as the employees exited the pit and where smiles all round.
“You here to do some jumping?” Who’s with you? Is this your daughter?

Marcus grinned, holding a hand out to Zackly as he did the same. “It’s nice to see you, and yes we are. This is my daughter, her fiance, and my future grandson.” He introduced them all and watched one of the younger guys get behind the counter and start to get the computer set up to get their payment. Efficient as always.

“You gonna be jumping, Spade?” Darius nodded to the man behind the counter as he got everything together for the five of them to jump. He reached under the cabinet and got them special socks to put on instead of their own.

Marcus is jumping too? …alright. Lathe signed the waiver he was handed and thanked the young man for the socks, going with everyone over to the benches and cubbies to ditch their jackets and tug on the socks. He quirked an eyebrow as Eren studied the socks in confusion, smiling to him.
They’re extra grippy on the bottom so you don’t slide around and get hurt.” He chuckled as Eren nodded, soon standing ready to jump, trying not to bounce too much on his toes, excited. I wanna do the thing can we do the thing yet?

Eren looked to Levi as he went out to one of the large open bounce areas. Where’s he going? He followed with large doe eyes as he took everything in. It’s really big, and looks really cool. They stepped up to be level with the trampolines, watching Levi take off. Woah… His eyes were wide as
he watched Levi as he bounced between the trampolines, a little farther in. *He’s already so far away…*

Lathe watched Levi with sparkling eyes, though he stopped as he approached one of the actual trampolines, carefully stepping onto it and beginning to lightly bounce, trying to get his footing. *...the thing is a bit harder than I thought...* Lathe soon was bouncing a few good feet off of the surface, working up the courage and hopping to another trampoline, beginning to laugh. “Oh my God, I’m doing the thing...” Lathe hopped to the next trampoline, and then the next, picking up pace and height, trying to copy some of the things Levi was doing. *He must’ve done this before...*

Levi concentrated as he moved across the open expanse of trampolines, soon feeling steady enough on his feet to jump at one of the angled trampolines at the side of the building, flipping back over and landing soundly. *Like riding a bike.* He noticed Eren trying to get his footing, Spades helping him, Marcus moving from one to another at a steady pace, and Lathe looking like an excited puppy, moving to copy him and overshotting the flip, landing on his back and flailing like a fish out of water. He chuckled, shaking his head, his tone good-natured. “Easy, you’ll hit your head on something. Landing on your neck isn’t fun.” *Nope, you kinda need your neck. That thing’s important.*

“...Nyeh.” Lathe got to his feet once he stopped bouncing on his back, getting his energy back. “...I like this.” *It's been two minutes and this is already the greatest thing ever!* 

Eren shifted, unsteady as Spades attempted to help him find his footing. *I want to try jumping too...* He sucked in a breath, not realizing that he was holding his breath as Spades let go of him and let him on his own. *Oh shit... She’s not holding me anymore... What do I do? I don’t...* He swallowed hard, his legs shaking a bit as he stared down at the black mesh under him. *What do I do...?*

Blake hopped up to sit at the floor height, watching over Eren, his eyes narrowing as he sensed unease in his human. He whined, getting up and pacing where he could, but not stepping on the trampoline. *Human... You don’t need to freak out... You’re standing fine...* 

Spades turned back towards Eren, watching him carefully as E wobbled on his feet. “Eren, you’re doing fine, you don’t need to worry about it...” *You can stand up...* 

Eren looked up his eyes a bit fearful though when he looked over Spades’ shoulder, seeing Levi jump with complete grace, doing a bunch of flips in the air. *Woah... He looks so cool...* He felt his legs go a bit stiff, looking down at his orange socks, before letting his knees bend and bounce a little, yelping as his knees gave way under him from not knowing how to react. *That feels so weird...*
Spades tried to hide a chuckle as she stepped over to Eren, taking his arms and helping him back to his feet. “Come on, you can do it.” She walked off of his trampoline and turned to watch him successfully land, though not as graceful as Levi. He had to hold his arms out to balance himself, and his eyes wide with fear and enjoyment. She smiled as she watched him slowly progress to bouncing up and down in place, his bounce getting higher. “That’s it Eren!”

Lathe looked over to where Eren was jumping, grinning and calling over to him as he started to jump in place. “You're doing great, Eren!” Do the thing! Lathe turned as Levi landed another jump, going to try and do him one up, not one to be outdone. “Let me show you something, Levi!” Lathe grinned as he felt the other four watching him, jumping straight for the corner trampoline, hitting it hard and bouncing up high, stiff as a board as he spun from it, upside down twice before he landed firmly and sprung up from the one beneath him, laughing. “I didn't think I’d go upside down that much. Practicing that dismount from the balance beam paid off!” That was awesome!

Levi’s eyebrow shot up, impressed. “…that's pretty good. All of that staring down a piece of wood when you were mad actually did something for you.” He smirked as Lathe glared playfully at him, shaking his head and jumping off. I need to step up my game.

Eren watched Lathe with wide eyes, moving to bounce towards the edge until he got unbalanced and fell back on his ass. His eyes were wide with shock as he looked to the unforgiving ground under him. You need to jump over these things… They’re not bouncy… Eren slowly got up and started to bounce around them and go further in towards Levi, Spades and Lathe. I can bounce!

Levi looked back to Eren, faintly smiling as he saw him making his way over, hopping closer to him and jumping one trampoline over. “You're doing a good job- you found your footing pretty fast.” You're doing well.

Spades nodded, coming to jump over to them, going incredibly high in a short amount of time. “You really are Eren.” She smiled as Eren blushed up to his ears, his long braid smacking against his back. He really looks like a girl, with how thin he is now… I’m wondering if this is okay for him to do? Is he gonna break anything while we’re here? Because he’s so weak? Her smile thinned as Eren stumbled, struggling to keep his footing.

Eren grumbled as he got back up, trying to bounce himself again, though he was was getting frustrated as his shaking legs gave out every now and then. Why do I keep falling?

Lathe noticed Eren struggling on the trampoline, bouncing over. “What’s going on?” Lathe watched Eren’s legs shake under him, thinking. “Can't stay up?” His expression was a bit resigned as Eren nodded. “You're really thin; there's not much muscle left in your legs right now, so it's
going to be harder to jump around like this, especially if you're out here for a long time. Just take it easy and be careful going over the divides, okay?" *That's all I can say, really.*

Eren whined as Lathe told him only to jump around over divides. “But I wanna do the tricks too.” He whined as he struggled more on his feet, reducing to give up like that. *No, I wanna do it... I need to...*

“Eren, we probably have one of these parks around where we live. We can always do this again when you're in better physical shape too- but you've been starved for four months. You're not as physically capable as a lot of people right now. Don't try to force anything- just do what you feel confident doing, okay? I know it sucks, but I don't want you hurting yourself.” *I just want you to stay in one piece.*

Eren pouted, raising his lower limp to accentuate his frown. “But I wanna do it like a normal person... I don’t wanna be different.” *I've had enough of being locked up in a cage...* Eren struggled to get bouncing again but once he did he made a beeline towards the inclined wall of trampolines. *I wanna show you that I can do it! I will do it!*

Levi immediately picked up the pace, beating Eren to the trampoline he was headed for and occupying the square before it, forcing Eren to stop. “Eren, I know you're stubborn and you really wanna do it, but we can't let you. Believe me, I want nothing more than for you to be able to do normal stuff, but as of this moment you’re different because you're skin and bones and it’s not something that can be ‘disproven’ or ‘worked around’ instantly. It'll take time for you to gain that weight back, and you're shaking like a leaf whenever you hit the mesh because your legs wanna stop or calm down but your head doesn't want to. Please- I'll jump around with you. But you can't safely do the fancy stuff in the shape you're in. I'm sorry, I really am. But we can still jump- it'll be fun.” Levi stopped bouncing, shifting his weight around as he stood on the mesh. *You need to chill- and I'll chill with you if you want.*

Eren looked at him with contempt. *I'm sick and tired of being told I can't do anything.* He was about to open his mouth when his legs gave out from under him, refusing to work anymore, and shaking too badly for him to stand. *My legs are too shaky...* Eren’s arms struggled to lift up his body weight back from where he was sprawled out on the mesh. *Come on... I can do it! I can show them! I can do it!*

Levi sighed, stepping forward onto the barrier and onto the square where Eren was trying to stand, helping him to his feet easily. *You're so light...* He let Eren weakly smack at his chest, walking him off of the trampolines. “Eren, I think you should take a bit of a break until your limbs cooperate, okay? I’m really sorry, but that’s the way it is. This isn't something we can work around…” *It sucks...* Levi brought Eren to a vacant table, sitting him down and resting a hand on his shoulder. “Want me to get you water or anything?”
Eren looked down at the table and then under it to see his shaking legs. “N-No… I’m good.” He looked up as he heard someone clear their throat, standing a bit away from the table with a pen and a few sheets of paper, in a black and orange uniform. Her hair was dark brown, and her eyes an ice blue like Hannah’s. *Who’s that? She has the same eyes as Hannah….*

Levi looked up to her, seeing the pieces of paper and then pen in hand. “Need something?” His voice wasn’t cold, simply inquisitive as he studied her. *...she looks familiar…* He walked up to her as she hesitantly nodded yes, looking down and seeing the papers in hand, all pictures of Eren singing onstage with Nate Ruess, found on Google and quickly printed. “...you want Eren’s autograph?” Again, she nodded yes. He turned and walked with her up to Eren, lightly tapping his shoulder. “Eren, this young lady wants to know if she can have your autograph?” *She's not much of a talker.*

Eren flinched a bit when he was touched. *Wait… My autograph? She knows who I am?* His eyes looked her up and down, trying to find a trace of malicious intent in her posture, though he couldn’t find any. *She… She either doesn’t think I’m a lunatic… Or she didn’t hear about it…* Eren nodded, holding out his hands for the sheets of paper with his image on them. *These pictures actually look pretty good. He took the sharpie from her hand a soft smile on his face. “Um… Who is this out to?/*

Grace picked her head up, her bangs coming clear of her face, and a hand instinctively coming to tuck a small braid behind her ear. “Uh.. Um, it’s for my sister, Hannah… It’s for her birthday… Um, Hannah Laskowski…” *I think that’s all you need to know, she really enjoys your singing…* “And… Um… Is that L-Lathe Quo? Could.. Uh… Could I get his autograph for her wife… ?” *I remember them calling and ranting about how much they loved their music…*

Levi’s eyebrows shot up. “You’re Hannah’s sister? I didn't know she had a sister.” Levi turned, shouting over to where Lathe was jumping far across the complex. “Yo Lathe! We found Hannah’s sister!” He turned back to her, giving her a warm look to offset her shocked expression. “Hannah and Sharon, yeah? They live not five minutes from us in Kansas. Hannah boards her horse with us, and we all adore their kid, Maverick. Really nice couple.” *They really are.*

“What?” Lathe looked confused, then began to bound over to them, soon slowing down to step onto the platform, walking down the stairs and over to them, immediately seeing the resemblance. “You’re Hannah’s sister?” He smiled as she shyly nodded, holding out a hand. “It’s nice to meet you. I'm Lathe. What’s your name?”

Grace looked up to Lathe, taking in how tall he was. “Uh… I’m uh…. G-Grace.” She stuttered a bit as she shook his hand. “I… They… Uhm… They never told me they met you guys… let alone lived by them.” Grace seemed too shocked for any more words as she turned to see Eren writing
something lengthy on one of the sheets. What is he writing?

Eren smiled as he continued to write all over the first page, continuing on the second page. Let’s see… I’ve already written about Maverick… And Happy Birthday… I asked her if she would like to go riding more often… Um… Well, if we keep the first goal or filly, we can teach it together. Your sister is pretty chill, she asked me to write this… Well she didn’t ask for me to write this, she asked if I could autograph this picture to give for your birthday… Lolz, she didn’t know we know each other… Eren was lost in his own little world as he wrote filling up the next sheet and turning to another.

Spades stopped bouncing, starting to make her way over to the small congregation forming around where Eren was sitting at the table and writing something. From what I understand… We’ve located Hannah’s sister and Eren’s signing pictures of himself on stage…

Levi gave Eren a faint smile as he wrote on to the next pictures, filling the blank space with a long letter. “This your way of catching up with them?” He chuckled as Eren nodded, focused on his scribbling things down. He started to read over his shoulder a bit. “Let’s see… Maverick’s in there of course… oh yeah, her birthday’s soon.” He chuckled as he instantly heard Lathe stop his sentence in the middle to announce to him ‘I’m making cake!’ before turning right back to Grace and continuing his thought. He’s all over the place. “Many words, such ramble, wow.”… oh my god. I’ve been infected with memes.

“It’s odd- she never mentioned she had a sister. They don’t talk about their families much other than ‘Oh my god Hannah drives me nuts’ or ‘Oh my god Sharon’s making me insane’ or ‘Oh my god look at this picture of Maverick being adorable.’ It’s very amusing. But when we get back to Kansas we have to low-key yell at her for not mentioning you! But they live pretty close, and a lot has gone down in the little while we’ve known them. She boards her horse with us, they were over for Thanksgiving… did they mention anything about how Maverick was born?” His eyebrows shot up. “...are you serious?” He glanced to Spades as Grace nodded. “You’d think they’d say something about that insanity. Or about the stuff Sharon and I are doing. Or ramble on about horse breeding or something. Now I don’t need to just yell at you to talk to your fam more often.” He gave Spades a quick pointed look, nodding over to Marcus as he began to come over seeing her cheeks tinged pink a bit. “But I have to yell at at least Hannah too.” Everyone needs to talk to people more!

Grace’s eyes widened as she hurriedly shook her head. “No no no no… Please don’t yell at her… It’s…” Grace sighed quietly. “She hasn’t been in much contact with us since she came back from college… And she hasn’t talked a lot to us, I get to Skype her a few times a year and that’s all I get… Please… I beg you, don’t yell at her.” Grace’s voice was fearful, knowing exactly what would happen if Hannah was subjected to that. They moved away… They don’t talk to us really.

Eren picked his head up, finally finished with his long letter. “Dad… Don’t freak her out.” I can
tell she’s worried about Hannah. I would follow what she says...

Lathe held up his hands in surrender, giving in when he heard her tone. “Alright, I won't yell at her. But make sure you ask her about all that stuff the next time you two get to talk, alright? A lot’s gone down.” He looked over to Eren, seeing the words sprawling over the many pages. “You gonna need another century, Eren?” He joked, seeing all the pages worth of notes. “I'm just saying that’s a lot.” Really tho.

Eren shook his head. “No, but she wanted your picture too… And autograph… For Sharon.” I don’t think you’ll say no… He swung his legs back over the bench and stood, walking over to Grace and setting his hands on her shoulders. “It’ll be okay, really, I think it’s great you asked for this.. When’s her birthday?” She never told me.

Grace sighed in relief, wrapping her arms around Eren’s waist. “Thank you, really thank you so much… And her birthday’s not for awhile, neither is Sharon's, they’re October and September…” Thank you so much for signing this...

Eren’s eyes widened as he was grabbed around the waist, his arms up in the air, so unsure of what to do with them. She’s… She’s hugging me…. His eyes looked over to Lathe with slight fear in them. What do I do??

Lathe held his hands up in a motion for Eren to stay calm, signing. {Eren, it's okay. She's nice-you can hug her if you want.} I can tell she’s not gonna bite. She’s fine.

Eren’s motions were jerky as he slowly wrapped his arms around her, still timid because she could feel just how thin he was. What if she asks? What do I tell her then?

Grace smiled happily before she let go and went to print off another picture and hand the new picture and the pen to Lathe. “Can you sign this for Sharon?” She asked quietly, a small blush tinting her cheeks. I really hope you will.

Lathe smiled brightly to her, taking the paper and pen. “Of course I will.” He moved to the table and sat down himself, studying the picture she’d given him. I remember this one- I'd been playing the piano on a livestream at the old house. ...I got pretty enthusiastic. He started to write in looping script, rambling on topic after topic from Maverick to music to dance and video games and her 3D projects. 'If you ever need a beta tester for that thing you’ve been cooking up, you tell me! With how interesting you've made it sound, I want in on this. ^u^' Soon enough he had two pages to hand back to Grace, returning her pen as well. “I rambled and stuff. She’ll like it, I think.” Yeah, she will. It's full of memes.
Grace smiled more. “Thank you, really… Maybe she’ll call me when she gets this… I really hope she will, I haven’t heard from her in forever. I’m sorry… For keeping you from jumping…” I know you guys were enjoying jumping. She took the papers and set them in a file folder. They won’t get crushed in this…

Lathe shook his head, smiling. “No, it’s fine. We were due a break anyway.” He looked over to Eren, his head tilting a bit. “How’re your legs cooperating, Eren? Wanna go back out or do you need to chill a bit more?” It’s your call.

Eren looked down at his thin legs, his hands traveling down the skin and rubbing a few places, instantly leaving large red marks. “They’re sore… Really sore…” Eren mumbled with defeat as he looked down to see how his feet strained with each movement. I can see my feet again…

Levi looked to the red marks on his legs, his eyes tracing the bones. “…Eren, I’m sorry, but you’re benched. There’s no way you can do this.” Levi stared at Eren as he was met with immediate protests, sitting Eren right back down as he shaking stood up in defiance. “Eren, you’re skin and bones. What little muscle you have is already exhausted just by keeping you upright. We need to take baby steps with this. Please. We can always do this another time.” Please, listen to me.

Eren instantly shook his head. “No, I really wanna jump, it was a lot of fun…” He grumbled as his legs shook enough to force him to sit back down. Fuck… I really wanna do it though...

Lathe rested a hand on his shoulder, giving him a weak smile. “I’m sorry, kid. We’ll make sure you get exercise when you can and build up your muscles, okay? We want you back to normal as soon as possible, believe me. It sucks, but we gotta do it if we want you staying in one piece.” We want you to have fun, but we don’t want you getting hurt.

Eren whimpered a bit, putting his head down in his thin hands. I wanna be able to do shit though…

“Hey, it’s okay. I’ll stay with you over here, we can talk and play around on my phone if you want. I kinda get the notion Lathe’s an overexcited puppy around trampolines, and we need to put that energy somewhere.” Levi sat down next to him, scooting his chair over and wrapping an arm around his middle. “But if you really don’t want to, we can go, I suppose. Find something else around town to do.” Lathe looks torn between staying here with you and bouncing around some more.

Eren grumbled something in inaudible German, reaching into Levi’s pocket and extracting his
phone, pulling up Blossom Blast Saga and scrolling down to the easier levels. *I can’t believe that he’s actually got this app, and he knows how to actually play it… And he’s good at it.* He easily became distracted with the warm colored buds sprouting on the screen.

Marcus watched from the trampolines, jumping still. “Well, are you gonna come back up here… Or…?” *Come on, we just got here… I know you don’t want to leave quite yet.*

Lathe turned and nodded, bouncing on his toes as he scampered back up the stairs to join him, bounding across the open expanse and flipping as he jumped especially high. *This is great!* He laughed as he practiced flips from the angled trampolines, landing them all well. *I like this.* …*the ceiling in the gym is high enough for flips from the parallel bars… what if…*

Eren continued to play the game for a few levels, dying a few times and expressing his frustrations through swearing like a sailor in German. *Fuck it… I’ve died five times on the same level…* Eren put the phone down, a heavy sigh escaping him as he looked around. He finally spotted a deep foam pit, looking where you could jump off at a higher point. *Oh he can throw me in.* Eren slowly got up and away from Levi, making a few shaky steps towards the stairs leading to the raised pit. *He’ll follow me eventually.*

Levi watched Eren with a quirked eyebrow as he slowly meandered to the stairs, getting up and following him. “What’re you-?” He saw where the stairs led to, smirking a bit. *Hm.* He held out his arms as Eren struggled to mount the first stair, offering them to him. “Want me to carry you?” *It’ll be easier on you.*

Eren looked back over to him before nodding and slowly putting his arms over his shoulders, waiting to be picked up. *I wanna be thrown in.* “Can you throw me in?” He asked as they got higher. *I don’t know if I’ll be able to get out but I can try.*

Levi nodded, smirking as they finally reached the top, looking to Eren. “Ready?” He watched Eren nod, gently swinging him as he prepared to throw him. “Alright, on three. One… Three!” Levi suddenly let Eren go, letting him fall into the foam pit with a loud yell. He waited and watched where he landed before walking over a bit, looking to the guard. “Can I go unburying him now?” He watched the man look over the edge to the pit, where Eren was yelling at him German and struggling to push the foam blocks off of him.

The guard looked back up at him, wearing a curious expression. “…are you related to him in any way shape or form?”

Levi just looked at him before pointing to Eren. “I’m gonna marry him soon.” He instantly heard a
squeal worthy of a fangirl, turning to see Lathe at the top of the stairs with his hands covering his mouth, looking more excited than a five-year-old on Christmas. ...he heard that. Levi just stared at him shocked before bailing into the foam pit, making his way to Eren and leaving an ecstatic Lathe behind on the platform. He waded over to where Eren was struggling, watching him throwing blocks off of him. “How’re you doing over here?” He joked, receiving a glare and a foam block to the face. I deserved that. He picked him up from the foam blocks, smirking to him, his eyes sparking. ...I'm gonna marry you.

Eren's glare turned into a grin as the block hit Levi square in the face. <“Get me out of this fucking pit now… I can’t get out!”> He continued to swear at him until he was successfully pulled out of the pit and his arms wrapped around his shoulders. <“…Throw me in again…”> He puffed out his cheeks a bit and stuck his tongue out. Come on, you know you want to… That was fun.

Levi chuckled and nodded, sticking his tongue back out at him and clambering back up, waiting for Lathe to swim out of the foam pit before throwing Eren in again with very little warning. It went on like this for a while, Lathe bounding around the complex like a hyper toddler that just got a puppy for Christmas and Levi jumping with Eren into the foam pit. Spades jumping after Lathe and Marcus doing his own thing. We're definitely doing this again sometime. ...and I can't help but think Lathe isn’t going to leave me alone about marrying Eren until I finally grow a pair and ask.

Spades jumped along with Lathe. “So… Why’d you squeal like a little girl earlier?” I heard you from across the park. She let her hair out to put into a better ponytail, letting the waves fall down her back. Her hand came through her hair, feeling the slickness of sweat within it. We’ve been jumping for a long time… I'm sweating enough that my hairs pretty damp.

Lathe looked to Spades, immediately beginning to fangirl again, his eyes sparkling with excitement. “When I was going up to the foam pit platform Thing Levi threw Eren into the foam pit and asked if he could jump in after him and the guard asked if they were related and Levi told him that he was gonna marry him soon and EEEEE!” Lathe let out another excited sound, bouncing higher with his renewed energy. Levi and Eren are gonna get married !!!!1111111!!!

Spades stopped bouncing instantly, her eyes wide. “Wait… Did you just say…?” She squealed happily, jumping into Lathe and tackling him into a fit of giggles. You said that he was gonna get married! THEY'RE GONNA GET MARRIED !!!

Lathe caught her easily, moving them with their momentum another trampoline over, hugging her tightly and laughing. “Oh my god, they're gonna get married!?” They dissolved into giggles, Lathe losing his footing and falling, Spades on top of him, giggling madly with her as they stilled. “And he knows I know, and if he knows me a bit, I'm not going to stop passive-aggressively pestering him until he asks.” He just needs to do it already! Ask us! We’ll say yes! Lathe cast a look over to where Levi was carrying Eren up the stairs again, catching Levi already staring at them. He chuckled as Levi looked away quickly and turned red, Eren poking his cheek and making him
blush even darker. “Oh he knows.”

Levi simply continued to carry Eren up the stairs, trying to ignore his burning face and the excited sounds from across the complex. ...crap, they're going to low-key hound me about this until I ask, aren't they... fuck, it's just making me more nervous... He swung Eren over the edge and into the pit, soon leaping in after him, buried under the foam blocks for a moment. .......I've gotta ask eventually...... crap, I'm not good at this shit...

Spades smiled more as she turned her head to look back at Lathe. “I think they’ll make a wonderful couple… But we definitely need to hound him about asking us to marry Eren…” She grinned like a madman, leaning up to kiss his cheek, her body relaxed and happy as they laid there on the mesh. Our little boy is all grown up...

Lathe nodded, blushing as she pecked his cheek. “Oh yeah- we need to be as infuriatingly passive-aggressive about it as possible just to mess with him. ...I ship it so damn hard…” Lathe’s eyes were starry as he looked back to Spades, beaming. ...my son is going to get married... Levi is going to come home after those four years and he’s gonna be okay and they're going to get married and it's going to be awesome.

Spades grinned manically. “So... What should we plan on doing to them first?” I can only imagine the things that we can tease him about for it. I wonder if he’ll ask at our wedding? Maybe?

Lathe stroked an imaginary goatee, looking thoughtful. “Hmmm... I'm thinking we channel our inner middle schoolers and be all “Oo~Oo” whenever Levi mentions Eren… ‘absentmindedly’ hum the ‘sitting in a tree’ thing when he’s in the immediate vicinity... and every time he needs to ask us a question interrupt him and say ‘Is it about Eren?!’ and look really excited.” That ought to do it. “...or we could be adults about this and wait for him to grow a pair and ask us... but that’s no fun so I vote the first option.” Yeah, no. That isn't how this works.

Spades grinned, pecking his nose as she got up, reaching a hand down to him. “I’m all in for the first option. I say we rub it in until he asks...” I really wanna see him crack and give in and ask!

“Oh yeah, big time.” Lathe grinned, taking her hand and pecking her on the lips before moving to start jumping with her again, feeling lighter and deciding to show off a bit, doing complex flips and spins. This is gonna be great!
Our time up with the penguins was a lot of fun- at the end of everything Marcus asked me for every recipe I possibly knew, so he has all of those now. We drowned in woofs a few more times, Levi has caught onto the fact we’re being children and impatiently ‘waiting’ for him to ask to marry Eren… I’m so happy about that! They’re just the most adorable couple and omg… I ship it. The train ride back was nice, I was too antsy to nap and instead I was just derping on my laptop because Sharon sent me a link to this free 3D object creator program thing and I'm trying to figure out how it works. ...I'm going to need a 3D printer soon. I've already made like ten sculptures and it needs to statp, I'm never going to get work done anymore. ...Eren got put back into the ward when we got home… he couldn't stay constantly with Levi, which sucks… I was hoping that was a thing, but it isn't… I've been making sure that at least every other day when Levi comes with me to see him that we take him out for a walk. He's slowly starting to gain weight back- about three pounds a week. Medium brunch, snack, and big dinner; I bring him all sorts of stuff and put vitamins in all of it. He’s finding it easier to walk and go long distances, which is good, he needs to regain muscle mass. Lathe walked into the hospital like every other day for weeks, waving to the receptionist and heading right for the psych ward minutes after visiting hours started, a metal lunchbox with his real breakfast in hand along with a big thermos of tea, holding onto the front straps of his medic and laptop bags with the other. He opened the door to Eren’s room, smiling to him. “Good morning, Er- oh no.” Lathe’s expression fell as he saw Eren weakly struggling to get out of a straight jacket, setting down his stuff and going to unbuckle it, his voice soft and calm. “What was it this time, Eren? What happened?” Lathe sighed quietly as Eren looked away silently, undoing the last latch and setting the unrelenting fabric aside, sitting next to him and pulling him close. “Eren, please, talk to me. Why’d they put you in the straight jacket?”

Was it the wrong meds again? Did you get mad at being denied more food? What happened?

Eren looked away and down, his hands pulled close to his body. He was quiet at first before he finally decided to talk. “They wouldn’t let me keep Eli…” They took him away from me… I wanna keep Eli… No one else wants to keep him, his own parents left him here!

Lathe gave him a confused look, realization suddenly dawning on him, feeling his stomach drop. “Eren… who’s Eli?” …don't tell me...

“An orphan… His parents left him, and they took him away from me… I wanna go get Eli back.” Eren got out of his hands, moving to make his way towards the door. I wanna hold him again...

...well fuck that. Lathe stood and immediately caught Eren, bringing him back to the bed and setting him on his lap, ignoring his protests and his weak struggling. “Eren, you can't just take babies from the nursery! Even if they’re orphans! You don't just do that! They need to stay there, where they're warm and safe. And supervised. I know you care about Eli, but you can't go get him. I'm sorry Eren.” ...what the actual fuck? You don't do that!

Eren whimpered and struggled to get out of his arms. “I want him… His own parents gave him up, why can’t I have him? I want one… I want my own…” Eren was quickly reduced to tears as he thought about how he couldn’t have his own. I want my own ...
“oh. “Eren, Honey…”” Lathe pulled Eren fully into his lap, his hand carding soothingly through his long hair, cradling him to his chest. You want kids… and you know that you can't have your own in the sense of carrying them… you want to… but you can't. “…Eren, I'm really sorry…” Lathe didn't know what to do besides hold him and try to calm him, understanding a bit how he felt. It's like how badly I want my own kids… you're feeling the same thing, but a bit differently… you've always been so feminine… and you're treated that way. I get it, kinda.

Eren continued to cry as he curled in on himself. “I want my own… Why can’t I have my own? Why was a born a man? Why can't I…?” He clawed at his stomach, scratching at the fabric on him. “I want Eli… Why can’t I have my o-own…” Why couldn't I be a woman? But then again… What if those men that raped me… What if I had their kids? Eren swallowed hard, trying to remove the lump in his throat as he sobbed.

Lathe opened his mouth as if to speak, but he soon closed it when no sound came out, simply catching Eren’s hands from scratching at himself and holding him close. He tried again to speak, his expression melancholy. “I'm sorry, Eren… things are the way they are… I'm sorry I can't help you fix that…” you could have a sex change if you really wanted to, but... I don't think you'd want one. You'd always been pretty androgynous… I don't think you’d want to change that. I'm not going to suggest it; that'd be something you think of and decide about on your own. I just think your hormones are really messing with you. You really, really want kids… and at this time of life, it’s what a ton of people want. Your body is telling you to carry… and you can't. And that’s got to be infinitely frustrating… Lathe let Eren cry into his chest, murmuring soothingly to him. I just want you to be okay.

Eren whimpered as his hands were held. I wanna scratch, I wanna scratch… I need to scratch… Eren wretched his wrists free of his grasp and tried to claw at his stomach again. “Why… why can’t I?” He was sobbing, his whole body shaking. Why can’t I be a good boy? And give him a child? Why can’t I carry? Why won’t he touch me anymore? Why did that bad man have to defile me? Is that why I can’t have any babies? Is that why? Because I’m defiled?

Lathe caught his hands again, pecking his temple, his forehead, trying to calm him. “…because you were born a boy… and we’re not made to carry kids… it’s the way we are… only girls can have kids… we can only help make them…” We don’t play nearly as big a part in child-creating as women do… for obvious reasons. “It's not like there's anything wrong with you… it’s just the way you are. The way all men are. I'm sorry Eren, I really am…” I don't know what to tell you…

“But why… I don’t feel like it… I don’t feel like a man… It’s so weird… Why am I like this? I wanna be a mom…. And I can’t.” Eren tried to pull his arms back from Lathe’s grip. “I can’t be a good boy… I won’t be able to be a good boy… I can’t give him a child… I can’t make him happy… He’s gonna leave me… and I won’t be able to stop him.” I want Eli back… If I have Eli I can make Levi happy.
Lathe’s face fell, pulling Eren closer to him, tucking his head under his chin. “Eren, that's not true, Levi loves you to pieces… I know you two are planning to adopt a kid. He wants a family, sure, but family doesn't always end up being just blood relatives. ...Eren, you're not related by blood to me, and you mean absolutely everything to me. You're my son. You're not depriving Levi of a family just because you can't be a mom. And it’s okay to feel not entirely like what the world tells you a man is. That's absolutely fine. You're Eren. And you're better at being Eren than anyone else. Between you and Levi, he’s obviously the more masculine of you two. You'd be much more of a motherly figure to the kids you have. ...and there actually is a way you two can have your own biological kids… you wouldn't carry, you’re not made for that… but they’d be both of yours… did Hannah tell you anything about that?” You two are always texting and stuff… I dunno if she mentioned anything...

Eren nodded, his sobs lessening to sniffles. “I wanna carry though… I wanna carry… I don’t wanna be a man… I’m a horrible excuse of one.” Eren whimpered as he curled into Lathe’s chest. I wanna carry them... I wanna carry my own children... I really do. He started to calm down a little bit, but he was keeping his hands close to either his abdomen or his chest, as if protecting himself. I’m sore...

Lathe’s brow furrowed as he held Eren close to himself, thinking. ......you've got one hell of an urge to carry... I know you're feminine, but seriously... it sounds like your hormones have been thrown out of whack by something. Lathe moved to lay down with Eren on top of him, tracing patterns into his back as Eren sniffled and calmed down. “Hon, you're not, believe me. You’re doing a wonderful job of being exactly who you are. You're so strong for getting through everything life has thrown your way, and I’m really proud of you. But I'm sorry Hon, I truly am… I don't know what to tell you....” ...They've got to be mixing up your meds again, giving you something and throwing your system for a loop. ....what if... ...I need to call Scotty down later. We should get blood work done. I wanna know what they're giving you.

Eren let Lathe move around in silence as he curled up to him, keeping his chest from touching anything unnecessarily. He was in his own little world as he heard the door open and watched Scotty walk in. What's he doing here? Is he gonna put me back in the straight jacket? Eren was silent as he came closer, moving impossibly closer to Lathe to try and hide away. Why does he have a needle?

Scotty came in quietly with his needle set, ready to take blood after Lathe texted him. “So I think you heard of the little stunt he pulled today?” He made sure he had everything ready before pulling up a chair and sitting by Eren. “Okay, Eren, I just need a little blood, that’s all I need.” Please don’t make this difficult.

Lathe moved with Eren to sit up, murmuring into his ear calmly as he rolled up Eren’s sleeve. “It's alright Eren, we just wanna do a little check on how you're doing, and we need a teeny bit of blood to figure out, okay? It won't take long, promise.” Lathe kept Eren as calm as he could as Scotty tied
his arm and gave him a small ball to squeeze, helping talk him through everything. “It's alright, squeeze that as tight as you can. Pretend your arm’s spaghetti, it isn't even yours. Noodle arms. Just breathe easy.” He kept Eren distracted as Scotty took a few small vials of blood, pecking his forehead and praising him as it was over, Scotty removing the needle from his arm. “You did a really good job, Eren. Now we can figure out how you’re doing.” Ironically, it helps that the food you ate this morning has little nutritional value, and that you didn't eat the food I brought yet. Makes for more accurate results. Lathe moved his hands up as Eren suddenly swayed forward, his hands on his chest, his eyes widening in surprise as Eren suddenly pulled away from him, his cheeks tinge pink, whimpering. ......what the actual fuck is going on. Your chest is a bit more full than the rest of you... and..... everything is pointing to one thing and I don't like it. “I'm sorry Eren, forgive me…” Lathe gently rested his hand on his shoulder to ease Eren down, the extra mass of his chest noticeable as Eren laid on top of him. His eyes stared unfocused at the ceiling, troubled. ... This isn't good.

Eren whimpered a bit as he curled into Lathe’s chest, wanting to relax and feeling agitated. He heard Scotty say something and then leave but he tuned it out. “I want Levi....” His words were mumbled as he held onto Lathe. I want him to touch me... to hold me... I want to carry his children.

Lathe nodded, getting his phone from his pocket again and texting with one hand. “I'll text him, ask him to come and visit... do you wanna eat the breakfast I brought in the meantime?” You need to gain your weight back.

Eren nodded, shifting to sit up, his legs pulled under him in his oversized gown. I'm hungry... breakfast wasn't enough... He looked over to the metal box he usually ate from and got out the fruit cup. I want my fruit...

It wasn't long before Levi was lightly knocking on the doorframe, looking in at Eren picking at the last of his breakfast pie in Lathe’s lap, smiling fairly to them. “Hey Eren- how’re you doing?” He shut the door behind him and walked up to the bed, sitting next to them and leaning forward to peck his cheek. Lathe told me everything... he’s agreed to call off being passive-aggressive as fuck for a day because of all this crap going down.

Scotty came in not a few seconds later. “Well, this you should find interesting... Eren’s been given supplements to help with pregnancy, as well as hormones used to increase fertility, and a lot others...” But nowhere in his records does it state that he was given any of these... “It doesn’t make any sense whatsoever...”

“...give me that paper.” Lathe snatched the results from him, skimming down the list of things in his blood. ...why do I recognize all of these. “......Scotty, I'm 99% sure these are all the things that...” Lathe looked up to Eren, his eyes widening. “...Eren, these are the medicines that Spades takes.” He watched Eren look away, his mouth a thin line. “...there something you wanna tell me?”
Silence. “I've got all day, Eren. Talk.”

Eren shook his head and tried to pull away from Lathe, his whole face flushed with embarrassment. *I wanted to carry for Levi…. I wanna give him a child myself…. He wouldn’t look up to anyone, not even Levi at this point. I wanna have a kid…. He fiddled with his hands, not sure what to do with them as he instinctively held his abdomen as if to protect it. No… you can’t take it from me…*

*It makes sense now, why Spades ran out of her meds so early these past few months.* Lathe caught his hands, moving until Eren finally looked at him, speaking. “Eren, those meds aren’t for you. They're not going to give you the right parts to become a mom. But they are seriously messing with your system and throwing your hormones out of whack enough for you to steal a child from the nursery and feel a biological urge to carry. You can't be taking them. So just tell me where they are. I'm not mad. I'm just worried about you being okay.” *That's the truth- I just want everyone being okay.*

Eren shook his head, starting to tear up at the newfound revelation. *Why can’t I carry… I'm already taking the medications... So why ?* Eren began to cry as he curled up around his abdomen protectively. *I don’t want you to take the medications away from me, I need to keep taking them.*

Lathe sighed, looking over to Blake who had leapt up onto his hind legs and looked between Lathe and Eren, leaning on his front paws on the edge of the bed. Lathe pointed to his bag, looking over to Scotty, taking it from him and pulling out a random bottle, showing it to Blake. “Find.” Blake sniffed it and immediately seemed to nod. He watched him circle the room, inspecting everything before stopping at the side table, sniffing at a potted plant. He sat down and stared at it before looking to Lathe, whining. *The plant?* Lathe held a Eren close as he sobbed, watching Scotty move to inspect the pot. He watched with wide eyes as Scotty pulled the small plant from the pot and then reached into the pot with the other, pulling out a small plastic baggie with different color pills inside. “…Eren… Eren Honey, you can't do that… you can't take medicine you aren't given. You can't. It can mess with your body if there's nothing there for it to fix. I'm not mad… but I'm disappointed.” Lathe ran his hand over his back, trying to calm his sobbing. *I thought now you'd know better.*

Eren’s body went rigid as he heard Lathe’s words and he seemed to deflate almost instantly. *He’s…. Wow… I fucked up…. He sniffed, still refusing to look at anyone, and curling up as tightly as possible near the foot of his bed. I don’t…. I… I wanted to be able to be the woman I’m always treated like…* Eren soon quieted down, seeming to sober up, his head buried in his hands, not wanting to look at anyone.

Scotty looked over the pills. “These are the ones Spades takes?” He asked as he looked over them and then Eren’s blood work. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s got gynecomastia…. Did you notice if he has anything extra around… Here?” He looked to Lathe, ignoring Levi trying to get Eren to unfurl for the moment and motioning towards his own chest. *That could take a bit to correct if he*
Lathe nodded, looking worried. “Yeah… he swayed forward and I quickly moved to catch him, and he whimpered and pulled away. It’s noticeable… and he’s sensitive. I think he does have it…” This is worrying… He looked to where Eren refused to unfurl, shifting a bit closer. “Eren Honey, I'm sorry… I just… I had hoped you'd know by now not to take meds that don't belong to you… after everything with the problems you had taking the wrong PTSD meds… I just…” He sighed as Eren pulled away from him, looking defeated, staring down at the floor, trying to fight back tears and rubbing at his eyes. “…you just… everything’s been really hard with you being here… and it’s not going to get any easier and you're not going to get out as fast if you don't work with us… I'm giving this everything I've got… and if it’s… if it's not enough… then…” I don't know if you'd ever come home… Lathe buried his face in his hands, trying to calm down. Stop crying, you can't, you need to keep it thefuck together.

Levi moved to pull Eren close to his side, murmuring to him. “Eren, we’re just really worried… we want you to come home, and if you don't listen to us and work with us… it's just not gonna happen as soon as you want it to. We’re really really worried about you as it is… and then this sort of stuff happens, and the few steps forward we taken, we’re set back that and more. Please, listen to us. ...and Eren, you don't have to give me a kid to make me love you. I’d love you to pieces whether or not you gave me a family or not. We have options… and I don't want you to change yourself just because you think it'll make me happy. I love you for who you are. ...I want you to stay as yourself.” He pecked his cheek softly, carding a hand through his hair. Of course I love you anyway. It doesn't matter to me if you're the one carrying or not. They'll be our kids no matter what and we’ll be the best parents and I'll love you til we’re old as hell. ...my God, when did I turn into Lathe…

Eren whimpered as he was pulled close and his chest rubbed against the fabric of his shirt roughly, though he nodded and moved closer toward his side, he was still shaking a bit. “Oh… Okay…” He stayed curled up in Levi’s arms, sniffling as he calmed down a bit. I'll… I'll stop… “I’ll stop taking them….” His voice was quiet as he shifted.

Scotty sighed quietly. “Eren, I need to find out if you have gynecomastia, which makes your breast tissue swell, and it makes you feel sensitive. Now, I can look and see or Levi can do it, because I’d have to touch you…” I don’t want you to freak out because I need to touch.

Eren pressed himself closer to Levi. I don't want him to touch them. “L-Levi…” He said quietly, looking down in shame, knowing exactly what they were going on about. I have them, I don’t want Scotty to see them…

Levi nodded, his cheeks tinted pink as Scotty motioned for Lathe to move from the bed, pulling the curtain down to hide them. Levi helped Eren to unfurl a bit, guiding him to undress, carefully pulling his sweater up and setting it aside, his cheeks crimson as he then removed his shirt.
underneath, revealing Eren’s chest. *this is apparently a thing... he’s definitely got a chest now... they're surprisingly perky... Levi, quit thinking like that and just do the thing Scotty tells you.* Levi tentatively reached forward and began to do as he had been told, very gently feeling his chest for abnormalities. *I guess they feel normal...? They're soft and warm... I don't feel anything much besides that...*

Eren felt a pulse run through him as Levi’s rough hands gently touched his chest, a soft moan leaving his mouth with surprise. *His hands are... They're warm...* He couldn’t help but let out a few mews as Levi’s hands grazed the sensitive skin, a blush taking over his features as he heard Scotty coughing to clear his throat.

*I knew he’d be sensitive, but geez...* “Alright, Levi, you need to tell me what it looks like, and how it feels, I need to make sure it didn’t lead to infection or anything of the sort...” *This is going to be really embarrassing.* [Lathe, you might want to leave... ] Scotty’s face was completely red as he heard Eren mewl again. *Okay Levi, focus here....*

Lathe had his hands over his ears, his cheeks scarlet as he walked right out of the room. [Waaaay ahead of you. I'll be back in an hour.] *Yeah. Bye.*

Levi blushed darkly as Eren began to make small sounds, thinking on how to start speaking. “Uhm... they're warm and soft, I don't feel anything hard or anything... they're, uhm... how exactly do you measure how big they are...?” *I kinda don't know how to do this shit...* Levi didn't know where to look, his eyes going from Eren’s chest, to the obvious tent in the front of his pants, to his pleasured expression as he tried to hold back moans. ... *well then.*

Scotty sighed quietly as he heard Eren moan even more. “Jesus Christ...” He mumbled under his breathe. *We’re gonna do this the easy way...* “Do you remember what they feel like in your hands?” *I know this is fucking embarrassing, but you need to sign him out after this.*

Levi was crimson as his hands shifted, holding Eren’s globes in his hands and registering how they felt. “Y-yeah....” *Where are we going with this...*

Scotty nodded. “Alright, put his shirt on him, then come out and I’ll take you somewhere.” *The implants should roughly give me the right idea of how big they are... And they’re not that noticeable with the scrubs on.*

Levi nodded even though Scotty couldn't see it, his hands falling from Eren’s chest and moving to get Eren back in his loose sweater. He moved from the bed, having to untangle Eren’s hands from his sleeve, seeing the look of want in his eyes. *Fuck...* Levi swallowed hard, pecking Eren’s lips
lightly. “I’ll be back soon, just sit tight.” Levi pulled away from him and moved around the curtain, following Scotty as he was led away, looking anywhere but at the man next to him. *That was so fucking embarrassing…. and it's gonna get worse again...*

Scotty took him into a room that showed a bunch of diagrams for reconstruction for breasts, and how they were put in and where they would sit. He came up to a drawer, pulling out a few different implants and set them on the counter. “Alright, **you** get to tell me what size they are now.” He motioned towards the implants on the counter to Levi. *I know this is embarrassing, but you wouldn’t know how to correctly evaluate him. And he *obviously* doesn’t want me to see it...*

Levi blushed, moving and tentatively feeling the implants, telling him which were off before finding the one closest to Eren’s size. “The others are either too big or too small… but these are about right...” *This is so fucking embarrassing....*

Scotty thanked him quietly before writing the size down and then putting them all away again. “You should sign Eren out for the day, take him home, and um, try not to freak him out too much, they just started to allow him to keep Blake here with him, also they’ll make you take him home in a straight jacket.” *I should give you a warning about that...*

“Am I able to make that a week?” Levi walked back to Eren’s room, his mind drifting. *A week.... a week would be **really** nice... Spades works plenty and Lathe has started to be summoned by Sharon for stuff, and they're keeping their traps shut about it...*

Scotty shrugged, coming in with Levi in almost silence. “You can certainly try… You can go sign him out and I’ll put him back in the straight jacket.” He sighed as he saw Eren freeze at the mention of those few words. *This’ll be fun ...* He watched Levi leave to go sign Eren out before he started to coax Eren into the jacket. *He’s frozen... He doesn't want to be in it...* He sighed as he took Lathe's bags from around the room, Eren's things, and Blake towards the front where Levi was. *He needs to get out of here... He needs to be okay for the wedding in a few weeks.*

Levi was at that point talking with the receptionist politely, already having signed Eren out. He turned as he heard their footsteps, nodding to Scotty as he was handed all of their things. “Thanks-I've got you for the next week, Eren. You’re chilling at home for a while.” *I'm damn lucky they're letting me do that.* He slung the bags over his shoulder, taking Blake’s leash and keeping one hand free to hold onto Eren’s arm. “Alright, let’s get you home. Thanks, Scotty.” He started them out the door, leading him to their car in the parking lot, blushing as he realized Eren still had a noticeable bulge in his pants. *...when we get home, you can take care of him. Right now, just get him home. Just get him home.* Levi opened Eren’s door for him and buckled him in, getting Blake into the backseat with their stuff and beginning the drive home, seeing Lathe’s Thunderbird parked in the driveway as well as they reached the house.
Lathe opened the door for them as they came up to the house, taking everything from Levi as they came inside. “Thanks for getting my stuff—” Lathe stopped talking as Levi tensely nodded and walked quickly off with Eren following, shaking his head as he noticed the pink tint to both of their cheeks. ...I'm not gonna keep them.

Levi brought Eren upstairs and into their bedroom, shutting and locking their door before moving to undo the straps on the straight jacket Eren was in. He let the rough fabric fall from his shoulders and onto the floor, his hands immediately beginning to roam his front, very gentle with his chest as he nipped his neck. I'm not going to make you go without this… I'm not gonna blue-ball you. And anyway... He smirked as Eren mewled at his touch. ...you make wonderful sounds.

Eren moaned sinfully under his touch, his body becoming putty in his hands as he simply wanted more. Is this what it feels like to be a woman? It’s so sensitive. He shifted away a bit, crawling onto their bed, and waiting for Levi. I want you to hold me too...

Levi followed him without hesitation, climbing onto the bed on top of him, pulling off his own shirt and helping to tug Eren’s sweater off of his head again. His hands slowly moved down his sides, his head dipping down to slowly begin kissing and licking across his chest, trailing to one of his new mounds and sucking his bud gently, looking up to see Eren’s reaction to his gentle actions. I want you to feel good… and you’re so damn sensitive....

Eren gave a sharp cry of pleasure as he felt Levi’s lips around his nipple. It feels really good... Oh my god, so good. He let out a loud moan, his body moving along with Levi’s, his cock straining against his pants. “L-Levi…” I want it… I want you ...

Levi’s mouth moved to the other pink bud, his hands moving from their exploring the new territory of his chest to the waist of his pants. He tugged at them, pulling them off of him as well as his boxers. His mouth trailed down his entire abdomen, his hands reclaiming Eren’s soft globes as he kissed down his stomach, his breath warm against his skin. His head lifted a bit, breathing over Eren’s length and kissing the tip lightly before taking it into his mouth, teasing the slit with his tongue as he began bobbing his head. I love the way you sound....

Eren gave out another loud cry as his back arched, his whole body shaking with pleasure as a large pulse ran through him. “It... It feels good, really good...” His voice was high pitched and drawn out as the pleasure he experiencing was far greater than any he’d experienced before. So sensitive, did the pills do this to me?

Levi sucked on his length greedily, his hands moving from his chest to his stomach as his cries of pleasure became very high-pitched and loud, pulling up on his length and slowly swirling his tongue around the tip, slowing them down. Not yet... Levi pulled off of him with a lewd slurp after
a moment, tugging his own jeans and boxers off before moving back over Eren, his length painfully hard as his lips grazed Eren’s neck and earlobe. “...tell me… what do you want me to do…?” *I want to hear you say it.*

Eren’s eyes held nothing but lust and utter want as he watched Levi. “I want y-you…” He whimpered, wiggling his hips a bit to try and entice him. *I want it... I want you...* He moaned when his length brushed up against Levi’s, a shudder running through his whole body. *I want you... Your everything...*

Levi shuddered as their lengths brushed against each other, Eren’s weeping with precum. He reached blindly for the nightstand, opening the drawer and drawing out a small black tube, uncapping it and pouring a decent amount of lube into his hand before tossing it out of the way. He moved his fingers, slicking them and bringing his hand down to Eren’s entrance, tracing the pucker before plunging two fingers past the muscle, feeling up Eren’s walls and stretching him. He lapped at his Adam’s apple, trying to distract him from the low burn. *It's been a while... and I've missed you...*

Eren whimpered a bit at the burning sensation he felt from being stretched, though soon it turned to moans. *Shit... I want it... I really want it...* Eren’s body was reacting on its own, his hips pushing down against Levi’s slim fingers. *I want it...* His whines grew louder as he shifted from his back to his stomach, letting out a strangled cry as Levi’s fingers moved directly onto his prostate from flipping over. *I want it...*

Levi smirked, his eyes darkening as Eren suddenly moaned loudly and flipped his position, his ass presented to him and pushing back onto his hand. *Damn that's hot.* Levi soon added a third finger, his hand curling and searching inside of Eren for his prostate again, brushing over that bundle of nerves mercilessly, loving the sound of Eren mewling and moaning under him, complete putty in his hands. He soon drew from him despite Eren’s whimper of protest, reaching again for the lube and slicking himself up, shivering at the feeling of his hand on his own neglected length. He moved to press his front flush to Eren’s back, curving over him and nipping at his neck, hands on his hips and the tip of his length teasingly brushing his entrance. He smirked, feigning confusion, a look of lust and mischief in his eyes. “...what was it you wanted me to do, again?” *I wanna hear you say it.*

*He’s teasing me...* “L-Levi... Please... I want it... I want your cock, please...” Eren begged, trying to move his hips back and get Levi inside of him. *I really want it... I’m horny... I want your seed...*

“Of course.” Levi pushed into Eren with one fluid motion, his head dropping down onto his shoulder as he felt his soft hot walls clamping down on his length. “F-Fuck, Eren... s-so tight... w-whenever you say...”
Eren let out a loud cry as he came instantly, having already been tiptoeing on the edge for a long time. His breathing was heavy as he pressed back into his length, timid at first though he pressed all the way back to make sure Levi was fully seated in him. *It feels so right... So natural...* “m-m-move... Please...” He begged and he could feel the hot tears beginning to form in his eyes as Levi complied. *My hormones are... They're making me cry... And I have breasts... I want his hands on them again, it felt so good.*

Levi started a steady pace, kissing up Eren’s neck as his hands roamed his body. They soon came back up to reclaim his breasts, teasing the buds with his thumbs as he thrusted deeply into him. *You've already cum... you're so damn sensitive.... But you make the best sounds.*

Eren couldn’t help but let those embarrassingly beautiful noises escape his lips, his arms shaking as the pleasure increased tenfold. “F-Fuck... Levi...” Eren dipped his back down, tilting his head back and up so that he could get Levi to mark him. *I wanna be yours... Please, please make me yours...* 

Levi smirked and took the invitation, suckling the joint of his neck, letting a large mark bloom under his lips as he sucked at his skin, his pace picking up. He switched sides, marking him and teasing his chest as he began to pound into him, moaning into his skin. “...haaa... s-so good... my God, Eren...” He shuddered as waves of pleasure flowed over him. *It feels too good....* 

Eren felt his body simply begin to melt under Levi’s hands. His neck open for being marked, and his back arched down until he felt Levi hit the right spot. “Shit ...” Eren cried out as he came yet again, the tears rolling down his cheeks as he body shook repeatedly. He whimpered in bliss as Levi continued to hit it over and over again. *It feels really good... Why can’t he hold me all the time?* 

Levi hit that spot over and over, feeling his own release creeping up on him as Eren came around him, feeling his walls clamp down onto his length. “...f-fuck.... you're so tight ...h-haaaa....” Levi pounded into him deeply, his hands running over his chest, pinching Eren’s nipples and rolling the buds between his fingers. Heat pooled between his legs, his breath shuddery and heavy. *I'm getting close... and this would make it round three for you already...* 

Eren’s body shook with the waves of pleasure washing over him. “Ngh... L-Levi... So good...” He started to move back against Levi as he was pounded, making sure that Levi was completely within him, and not missing anything. *It feels so good to be full.* “Fill me u-up... I’m gonna C-cum soon...” He stuttered as he was pleased, the stimulations quickly pulling him towards the edge. *It's wonderful.*

Levi groaned into his shoulder blade, his hands running over his chest and stomach, his hold
tightening a bit as he neared the edge. “E-Eren… h-haaaa… I-I'm… nnggh…” Levi could feel the pleasure and arousal painfully pulsing through him, unable to keep himself from becoming a bit louder. “E-Eren, my God, so good … I… I’m… ha!” Levi gasped, his movements becoming erratic as he teetered on the edge, ravaging Eren’s hole as he finally came with a loud, low moan, pulling Eren’s hips flush to his and stilling in him as he came hard, filling Eren and feeling him milk him dry, trying to catch his breath, a glow settling over him. So good ...

Eren let out a shrill cry as he was forced over the edge yet again. He slumped down against the mattress, almost pulling Levi out of him. “Hmmm… Levi…” His voice was a bit rough from crying out and moaning, and he settled down almost to a drunken mirth. I feel warm… Really warm… Eren’s eyes were shaded as he looked behind him to see Levi still holding his hips. “Levi… I’m tired.” His hands weakly swatted at his wrists which still held onto his hips a bit tighter than he would like. Let go, I wanna sleep.

Levi nodded, his hands moving to lightly roam his naked body, shifting to lay them down, avoiding the spot stained with Eren’s release. ...I'll wash that later. Levi moved Eren onto his back, pulling the blanket over them, on his side next to him, a hand resting on his side. “Mmm… you're warm… …and Eren?” He smiled to Eren as he looked over tiredly, leaning up and kissing him softly. “I love you.” I really, really do.

Eren smiled softly, curling up to Levi as he closed his eyes. His nose started to bleed a bit as the steam rose from the few bruises that were left on his skin. He was too far into his sleep to even feel his nose bleeding or the steam coming off of his warm body. Levi loves me....

Levi’s eyes widened as Eren's nose bled, having been simply admiring him as he slept, unable to sleep. Crap. He stood and ran over to the bathroom, grabbing a wad of toilet paper to staunch the bleeding. It wasn't much, though he made a face as he saw the marks disappearing from his skin. He dipped his head down, gently kissing the two fading marks before taking back the wad of toilet paper to throw it away, tugging the blankets back up to his chin. I'm not gonna be able to sleep… I should get cleaned up… Levi traipsed to the bathroom, taking a quick shower and getting dressed in warm clothes before going downstairs to eat something, leaving the door slightly ajar. I'm hungry- didn't eat lunch.

Spades was downstairs, stirring a pot, wiping away at tears. Another fucking negative... She had come home after a scheduled doctor’s appointment. This is getting ridiculous... Her breath was heavy, trying to calm down as she heard footsteps approaching. She was surprised to see Levi coming into the kitchen instead of Lathe. “Oh… Levi… it’s you, um… how’s Eren?” Asleep I assume... since Blake and the little rascals went upstairs... God knows they’re all surrounding Eren as we speak.

Levi stopped short a bit, noticing how red her eyes were. “Eren’s as alright as he can be right now, he's upstairs sleeping… are you alright?” He watched her nod to him in response, glancing to her
arm as it subconsciously moved to cover her stomach protectively. His expression was sympathetic, understanding. “I’m sorry… I hope you two have better luck.” You two really want kids… I know the feeling. He tried to defuse some of the tension, looking to the pot on the stove. “What’re you cooking? It smells good.” ...I'm hungry.

Spades smiled softly, wiping away at the few remaining tears on her cheeks. “It’s um…. It’s a special pasta recipe my Mom taught me how to make…” It was a long time ago… That I learned how to make it. “It’s got a cream sauce, sun dried tomatoes, chicken and plenty of pasta…” She tried to laugh to get her mood up, though failing horribly, a frown persisting on her lip. “It’s done, if you wanna get bowls out for us? Three…. Lathe should be coming soon…” He let me be when I snapped at him… Shit, I need to apologize for that… I got so caught up in… In everything, and I always end up snapping at him, and he doesn’t deserve it in the slightest.

Levi nodded. You're not in a great mood. Understandable. Levi got out bowls, Lathe padding into the kitchen soon enough, thanking Levi quietly as he was handed an empty bowl, eyeing Spades warily, his head tucked down in submission as he meandered near her to get lunch. … …Lathe can tell she's really upset… she might've snapped at him… she does that sometimes…

Lathe tentatively held out the bowl as he stood next to Spades, trying his best to act non-threatening, his voice soft and quiet. “...can I have pasta, please? It looks really good.” I don't want you to have any reason to yell at me again… I just want something to eat… please...

Spades nodded, a small smile forming for a moment before it disappeared. “Y-yeah… I’m sorry…” Her voice was hoarse, and a whisper as she scooped up a large bowl for him and for Levi before making a smaller bowl for herself. I was so hopeful, but I guess the slightest nausea I was feeling was just a stomach bug of some sort... I haven’t felt it in awhile... And I got so excited. She had a look of regret across her face as she quietly sat down at the table, slowly beginning to eat with the two of them.

Lathe sat down across from her, nudging her foot a bit under the table, giving her a faint reassuring smile before even he looked to his bowl with a melancholy expression, slowly beginning to pick at his food. We got so excited that maybe she’d finally conceived... we thought it was morning sickness... ...it wasn’t. It's disappointing, but we’re just gonna keep trying... I don’t really blame you for snapping at me… this whole thing has been especially hard on you… I understand. ...but it still hurts... Lathe didn't feel much like talking, slowly eating, not looking up, thinking.

Spades was relatively quiet as she ate, her mind in inner turmoil as she felt the guilt of her earlier actions weigh her down. It took awhile, but she finally finished her bowl and went to go clean up her dish. I wonder… If you’ll let me lay down with you, I really want to, I like being in your arms… But you probably don’t want me near you now… Shit... She let out a loud sigh as she finished washing her dish, looking down at the sink below her.
Her conflicted, guilty look didn't go unnoticed. Lathe soon followed her to the sink, setting his bowl down on the counter for just a moment before wrapping his arms around her middle, gently pulling them flush and pecking her ear, trying to lighten her mood. “After I finish dishes, is it okay if we just watch a movie or something? Take today off as a chill day? ...I’d honestly just like someone to cuddle with…” You look like you need to be held onto… and I want to hold onto you…

Spades nodded hurriedly. “I… I’d like that…” Her voice was quiet as she leaned into his arms. I need to be in your arms now more than anything. “We can do the dishes later…” She offered with a hopeful look in her eyes as she looked up to him. I just wanna be held.

Eren sneezed as he felt something soft touch his nose. He woke groggily, blinking awake as he saw a tail wagging in his face. Huh? What’s…. Eren boosted himself up and looked at the bed occupied with Blake, Maisie and their 7 puppies which were no longer puppies anymore but a pack is small dogs. Oh my god they are too cute!

Lathe chuckled quietly, pecking her lips sweetly before picking her up bridal-style, smiling as she made a surprised sound and clung to him, carrying her to the theatre room. We won't be bugged down here... Just us, reclining loveseats for cuddling, and all the random cheesy movies we could want.

Levi just shook his head as they went past him to the theatre room, getting up and putting his empty bowl and fork in the sink as well, making sure the stove was off before heading upstairs again. Eren needs to actually eat- He looked with wide eyes into their room, Blake and Maisie looking back to him, Eren too occupied to notice him as he swam in a sea of puppies. Oh. My god. Levi instantly had his phone out, taking pictures before going up to the bed and climbing in next to him, the swarm accommodating him and clambering all over him as he laid down with Eren, chuckling as they climbed over him, one soon draping itself over his leg, looking ready to simply fall asleep there. This is too damn adorable. He looked to where Eren was giggling, a pup nudging his cheek with his nose and licking him. “...I think he maybe likes you.” He watched as Eren sputtered a bit, the pup licking his mouth. “Oi, that's my job. Git.” Levi nudged the pup from his mouth back to his cheek, smirking as Eren blushed. “...hey, I'm not wrong.” Mine.

Eren blushed heavily, a small whine escaping his mouth when the pup pawed at his chest. He picked him up, holding him close and petting him. “He wants to just lick my face…. “ He didn’t wanna stop again as his face was licked over and over again. He doesn’t wanna stop. Eren chuckled as Eren allowed the pup to lick all over his face, giving a quiet yelp in surprise as his cheek was suddenly licked, turning his head and inadvertently coaxing the pup onto his chest, licking his nose and cheeks. He picked up the pup, wiping his mouth on his sleeve, catching a glimpse at the pup’s gold tag on their collar. “...that’s Karma for ya.” Yep. Levi just set Karma
back on his chest, letting them lick his cheeks, staring at the ceiling with a neutral look on his face. “I have accepted my fate.” This is now a thing.

Eren let out a small chuckle, a smile playing across his face. “You look simply redo cultus with a bunch of puppies all over you.” He smiled more as a puppy trotted over towards Eren’s side of the bed, reaching over to the night stand and grabbing his phone. What the hell? “What are you…?” His eyes were wide as the puppy jumped off the bed with his phone and started to walk out of the room. That’s my phone! Eren jumped out of bed as quickly as he could reaching over to throw on something before going to follow him. “He took my phone!” Eren’s shocked words were marred with giggles as he moved to follow the pup who stole his phone.

“Better catch him quick! That little guy can run!” Krampus strikes again. Levi laughed as Eren reached for Krampus only for the pup to bolt the second he got within a foot of him, out the door and down the hall in a heartbeat. “Yeah, he does that. Good luck.” He quirked an eyebrow as Eren looked back with an ‘aren’t-you-gonna-help-me?’ expression, shaking his head. “Eren, I’m swimming in a sea of pup. I’ve got a fate to embrace here.” As if on cue, Blake and Maisie shifted around to lay over his legs, the pups moving further up on his chest, nuzzling and licking him, the one on his leg still asleep. So much pup.

Eren sighed before he took off after Krampus, following him down the hall, leaning down to try and get him. He followed him down the long hallway, back and forth, unable to catch him as he ran with his phone. God dammit! Eren was getting frustrated, almost catching Krampus as he smacked into the large bookshelf. Fuck it, I won’t be able to get it… Eren didn’t even realize that he was about to be under the bookshelf until it toppled on top of him, books falling with a soft thump on the carpet below him as he was forced to the ground in an awkward position, panic quickly setting in. I’m trapped…. No no no no no no……

Krampus just barely missed being part of the bookshelf avalanche. Why did human stop chasing me? Are we not playing anymore? He slowly came up to where Eren’s head was under the heavy bookshelf. Human? He made a soft sound as he saw Eren start to panic… He’s panicking… Why’s he panicking…? He turned his head as he saw Blake come around the corner of the hall. He dropped the phone, letting out what he could, a small bark. Mommy!

Levi looked up as Blake bolted from the bed, Maisie staying with the pups, unable to hear the sound of the bookshelf with the pups around his head. He looked up as Maisie suddenly ran off too, the pups stopping their squirming and all turning to the door, their ears perked, the one asleep on his leg even waking up and turning at attention. Huh? Everything was still for a long moment before he heard Blake begin to bark and thunder down the stairs, the pups all going to get off of the bed and run down the hall, Levi getting up and running after them all, worried. What happened?! He looked down to where Eren was at the end of the hall, under a large, heavy wooden bookshelf with books strewn around him, some of the pups and Maisie nudging at the heavy shelf trying to get it off of him, the other pups trying to get down the stairs after Blake, all of them yelping at the top of their tiny lungs. Fuck. “Eren! Eren, are you okay? I’m here, we’ll get this off of you.” Levi moved to grab the wood shelf, trying hard to lift it. …I can’t. It's too heavy. “LATHE!” Levi
shouted down the stairs, hearing Lathe running along with Blake and the pups to the stairs, sliding to a stop next to them. “Eren, we’ll get this off, don’t worry. Ready?” Levi looked to Lathe as he got a grip on the solid wood, nodding. They heaved the shelf up, straining to get it back up and against the wall, finally succeeding, the dogs clambering over the blanket of fallen books to lick and nudge Eren, making sure he was okay. Levi crouched down to get the heavy books off of him, sitting Eren up and hugging him close, sitting on the floor. “Eren, are you okay? Are you hurt?”

*That bookshelf is fucking heavy.*

Eren was still panicking as he was pulled close. *I got crushed, I got crushed...* Eren’s eyes clouded as he shook in Levi’s arms. *I got crushed...* Eren looked down to his feet, where the vase had fallen and shattered into his skin. “Hurts...” He looked to large shards sticking from his feet. *It hurts a lot... They’re in my feet.*

Lathe had run off to get his medic bag when he saw the glass shards, whistling for Blake and Maisie to follow him downstairs and bring the pups with them in turn. *I need to get the tiny pups away from the broken glass- it's sharp.* He soon came back with gauze and tweezers in hand, dropping down next to them and taking Eren’s foot to pick out the shards. “It's alright Eren, I'm gonna get this out of your foot. Try not to move too much, it'll be over soon. ...I really need to just get rid of this vase. I glue it back together and put it on the shelf, and then it gets broken again. I need to just pitch it.” Lathe picked the glass from his foot, brushing the shards aside and wrapping his feet when he was sure he’d gotten all of it out. “You're lucky there was glue on the edges of the smaller shards to keep them out of your foot- they didn't actually cut you and get buried in your feet, which is good.” Lathe stood after a long moment, smiling to them. “I’m gonna get a thing and clean this all up. Careful where you step- I need to vacuum.” *Yeah, we should be careful.* He ruffled both of their mops of hair before walking downstairs, soon enough yelling at Krampus to drop his wallet. *I need that!*

Eren shook in Levi’s arms. “It hurts... It hurts a lot...” Eren’s voice was high pitched, full of pain as he stared at his feet. He had wide eyes, unable to move from the shock of what just happened. *I got crushed. I got crushed... My foot’s not healing...*

...it's not doing anything. “...your foot isn't healing...” Levi snapped from that train of thought as he realized how hard Eren was shaking, running his hands over his sides and trying to soothe him, pecking his cheeks and willing him to calm down. He looked up to Lathe as he came back with a cordless vacuum, speaking, concerned. “Lathe, Eren’s feet aren't healing. He's not warm or anything.” *Nothing...*

Lathe’s brow furrowed, looking to Eren’s feet, any steam absent. “...let me get all this glass vacuumed up before we panic, alright?” Lathe waited for Levi to pick Eren up and sit down on the loveseat in the nook at the top of the staircase, getting the shards and glue cleaned up before setting the vacuum down and going to sit near Eren’s foot. “Alright. Your foot isn't healing,” Lathe gently unwound the gauze from his foot, seeing the fresh cuts still there, unchanged. “...let's think. The serum in your blood makes you heal, and every time you heal, your nose bleeds... you've gotten multiple blood transfusions... my guess... you're fresh out of serum.” *It'd make sense.* “Now, that
brings about a whole new question which needs to be answered, because it could change the way people as a whole answer it when this serum gets out into the world.” Lathe looked up to him, his expression serious. “...do you want it in your system again? Would you rather normally heal… or get it again and have it heal your system quickly for you? With it, you can't drink. You can't see bruises or marks for more than a few minutes. You’d have a nosebleed, and the blood loss has put you in more mortal danger than the wound itself on a few occasions. …you probably need to think on it, because it’s a serious decision. It's not irreversible… but it’s gonna be stuck with you for a while if you decide you want to. And if you hopefully don't get too hurt in the future… it could be stuck with you for years.” He looked between Eren and Levi. “...I can't make that decision for you. You two should talk about it. But for right now, I'm just going to wrap your foot back up, and you'll try to heal normally for a bit until you know, okay?” His voice was soft, giving them a small, reassuring smile. “If you want, I can call the therapy pups back up, make you feel better.” You still look really shaken. He smiled as Eren nodded, turning and wolf-whistling through the house, Blake and Maisie coming up the stairs, puppies following them and letting out adorably tiny barks, picking them up and setting them up on the loveseat. Levi had Eren on top of him laying down on the small couch, letting the puppies clamber all over them and lick their cheeks, nudging them and making sure they were okay.

Chapter End Notes

Hello, readers, this is Duke, I regret to inform you that I will be unable to continue writing this fan fiction.... that being said, someone has messaged me about continuing this on their own so please go check out TNATJ for the rest of their awesome chapters that they can think of! I hope you will forgive me for this... but it's been too much stress lately, and now I will get to read right along side you wonderful readers.

Again that's TNATJ
Chapter 57: Shenaniganary

Chapter Summary

Well, here ya go....

SO: For the last time, everything is ready, I got the key ring with the right key on it to leave in his room.

LQ: You better make damn sure that there's nothing on that keyring that you'd need immediately

LQ: Remember we’re hoping Eren realizes what the hell is going on within an hour and it’s not guaranteed

CP: Eren may be an oblivious shit but he’s gonna know something’s up

CP: Literally we’re gonna be talking like loud drunks narrating a crime without actually incriminating ourselves

CP: I'm just resigned to this either going great with Eren taking the car and showing up in one piece

CP: Or only figuring it out after someone stole the car because you left the front driver’s side window all the way open and your fucking KEYS ARE IN THE DOOR POCKET

CP: So yeah you'd better be prepared to file a stolen car report if this doesn't go according to plan

LQ: ...I've knocked on every wooden thing in this entire fucking house while ranting about how much I hope this'll go okay

LQ: Because I fucking /like/ that car

LQ: And y’know Eren being at the wedding would be nice too

LQ: But insurance is expensive, man

SO: It’ll be fine, he’ll get it... So get your ass down here so we can go! I’m waiting outside his door!

LQ: Okay okay calm your ass down, I need to check that I have everything and get in the zone of pretending to be so loopy in love that I'm talking at 400% the socially acceptable normal volume

CP: ...sounds good

CP: DO THE THING
Lathe double-checked the list in his hand, stowing it in his wallet when he was sure everything was either on his person or in the car. Right. We've boarded Krampus and Nene... Moblit has three... Marco got first dibs on which of the other two he and Jean would want... Armin has the other... they both absolutely adore them... they're all boarded for a bit because we invited literally everyone we fucking knew to the wedding... I've got someone coming over to take care of all the animals we have out back while we're gone... Casper has all of my shit, it’s already in his car since yesterday... I've got Eren’s bag; Spades had to help with gathering up makeup and stuff... printed directions just in case he can't figure out the GPS, which already has the address to the hotel in it... his phone, what room he’s in is texted to him and is on a post-it on the screen... his wallet with plenty of cash just in case something goes down, and his credit card and ID... I think that’s it. Lathe knocked on the table the second he thought that, hoping it was everything. This has to go perfectly otherwise Eren's not at the wedding and we get in trouble because we've been plotting this... well, there aren’t any text messages to follow. Typing into a Google doc and then deleting it is much cleaner. And we're not being incriminating... and they don't have sound with the security cameras. They're not that great in the psych ward in the way of technology yet. Lathe locked the house up behind him, going to the car and tossing his stuff into the back seat, starting the drive to the hospital.

Scotty was waiting with his arms crossed as his foot tapped on the floor impatiently. Come on... Come on... We need to get this over with... I clocked out already, we need to go like now! He sighed in relief as Scotty spotted Lathe with his bag of belongings at the end of the hallway coming towards them. He handed his keys over to Casper. “Go take his bag to our car, then come back in and help.” We can do this.

Casper nodded, smirking as he saw Lathe, walking to him. “Ayy, Lathe! Here, lemme take your stuff out to the car, alright? Make things easier. I needed to check on something anyway.” Casper accepted the laptop and the medic bag, giving him a fistbump before he walked down the hall and to the parking lot, looking over to Lathe’s car, thinking. The front window is fully down... I can see his bag on the passenger’s seat... so far so good. Casper soon had his stuff stashed in the trunk, recounting the things already there before shutting it and going back to the hospital, making his way to Eren’s room. We've got everything. Okay. ...holy fuck, if we pull this off, I will be so fucking proud...

Lathe feigned being unsure about Casper taking them, arguing just for a moment about the long walk before he handed them over, thanking him and following Scotty. They talked as they walked, and by the time they were at Eren’s room and opening the door, Lathe was fully in character, absolutely swooning. “I can't believe it... just a few days and I'm gonna be married...” He beamed to Eren, coming up to him and giving him a hug. “Hey Eren, how're you holding up?”

Eren shifted away from his hug, hugging his knees to his now flat chest. “Congratulations...” He was clearly brooding from having been told he wouldn't be able to go. “Why don't you guys just
go?” I mean really… Why do you need to rub it in!

Lathe gave him a sympathetic look. “I’m sorry, kid, I really am. Maybe we should just…” Lathe’s hands fell to his sides again, worry dawning on his face as he patted his pockets, looking around on the floor. “Did I really lose my keys? I obviously must’ve had them on the drive here, and it’s not like I’d be dumb enough to leave them in the door or something…” Lathe looked to Scotty and Casper helplessly. “What if I can’t find them? Is it alright if my car stays here and I go with you two?”

Casper nodded, resting a hand on his shoulder, smiling reassuringly. “Yeah, of course you can. I’ve got your laptop anyway right now, and your stuff should be down there already. We’ll just have to hope you didn’t leave a window open; someone might take it if we’re not careful.”

Lathe nodded, smiling gratefully, looking relieved. “Thanks; you’re a lifesaver. Scotty, is everything all set?”

Eren looked up at the two of them, a suspicious expression. What the hell? Dad is never that forgetful… what the fuck is going on? Eren watched to see Scotty play at his pockets, heading a small jingle.

“Uh, yeah I got my keys, so Eren can’t sneak out the window…. So why don’t we get going?” Let’s go… It looks like he caught on… Scotty saw Eren’s line of sight to the small set of keys on the side table. When their eyes met, he smiled and winked at him, ushering the other two out of the room. Come on, let's let him bust himself out of here...

Lathe caught the knowing look in Scotty’s eye, turning and waving to Eren as he was led out of the room. “See you soon, Eren! Love you!” And with that, the door shut, leaving Eren completely alone. Come on. The ball is in your court now. Take the chance.

Eren watched them leave, his eyes widening as he hurriedly got up. Blake whined as he was forced off the bed, Eren pulling the blinds away from the window and seeing Lathe’s Thunderbird. Holy…. Shit…” I CAN FUCKING LEAVE! Eren’s body started pumping adrenaline as he moved to lock his door, knowing the staff would leave him alone if he did so. They won’t find out if I do this… They probably won’t even fucking notice. He grabbed the keys on the side table and Blake’s leash, bringing them to the window, in all his giddiness, he fumbled with the keys, freezing as he heard someone knock at the door, though when silence persisted, he sighed, knowing they’d left him alone. Thank god… Eren fumbled a little bit and struggled to turn the key, swearing quietly as he struggled with the lock. God dammit! Turn the fucking thing! Do it! Come on! He gritted his teeth, finally getting the lock to turn after a few minutes of struggling. “Good.” He sighed as he slowly opened the window just as much as he needed. “Come on, Blake, let’s get
going…” He waited for Blake to jump out of the window before he followed with the key and closing the window as best as he could. As soon as he knew no one was looking around the parking lot he ran to Lathe’s car, finding the driver’s side window completely open. *Oh my god, you really left it open!* He reached into the side door and grabbed the keys, opening the door. *I need to get out of here… now.* “Blake, in…” He made sure Blake was all the way in before he started the car. *I need to get out here…* Eren didn’t take three seconds to start the car and put it into drive after feeling the familiar hum run through the seats. *I’ve missed this…* He pulled out, slowly at first, though as soon as he hit the highway, he took off, a feeling of freedom overtaking every sensation as he seemed to float on the highway, not a car in sight for at least half an hour. *Is that Scotty’s car? Oh please be Scotty’s!*

Lathe was looking out the window as Scotty and Casper went back and forth bantering in the front, the radio playing pop songs quietly. *I wonder when Eren’ll get the courage up and do it…* His eyebrows shot up as his unobstructed view of the trees on the right side was intruded, instantly recognizing the sleek black car driving next to them, grinning widely as he saw the driver, waving and then signing quickly. *(Eyes on the road! Proud of you, kid.) You didn’t hesitate much, did you.*

Scotty looked over as he saw the car next to them. “Is that him already? I’m going 60… so he’s speeding and has been speeding, you’re lucky the future waifu isn’t here…” He shrugged, smiling as Eren kept with his pace all the way to the city before pulling behind him to follow him. “To the hotel we go, this should be interesting… when do you think the ward’s gonna call us?” *I’m taking bets on a few days.*

“…they're probably used to getting the silent treatment from patients… four days. After then they'll check on him to make sure he's not dead from not having any water. That's a whole bunch of paperwork they don't wanna fill out.”

“I kinda wanna say five or six… I changed my voicemail message as a sort of psychological deterrent to prolong their ‘waiting out Eren’s rebellious phase.’”

“Oh my God, I need to hear this!” Casper took out his phone and called Lathe, waiting for it to ring enough times and click to voicemail, the recording playing loud enough for them all to hear.

‘Hey, you've reached Lathe Quo. I kinda can't talk right now, I'm busy getting married after the ceremony got put off for a few years and my son got put in the hospital, so you know, I'm pretty occupied what with catching up with old friends I haven't seen in a decade. But if whatever you've got to say is actually something worth interrupting a Honeymoon, leave a message, I guess. Bye.’

“...Lathe, you're a fucking genius. If I got shot and you were the only person who could help me, I'd feel bad interrupting you. And I'm awful to you. And I'd be hypothetically dying. ….sweet.”
Casper nodded in total approval, stowing his phone back in his pocket. *I need to do that when I don't want people calling me. Except for if it's my work phone. That one has to be all professional and shit. But the other is fair game. ...I appreciate this.*

Scotty rolled his eyes as he pulled into the fancy hotel’s parking lot. “Alright, go get your kid Lathe, and get him in normal clothes instead of scrubs…” *I know how uncomfortable they can be.* He parked the car right next to where Eren parked, making it easier to see his relieved face.

Eren sighed in relief, letting his head sink back into the headrest. *I’m out… I’m really out…* He reached for the door handle, pushing the door open and letting the warm air hit his body with grace. *It’s so warm… It’s nice.* He watched Blake hop out of the car and stretch, looking around the parking lot as well. *I’m really out of there…*

Lathe immediately got out of the car, gathering Eren up in a big hug as soon as Eren was out of the car, beaming. “Now did you **really** think we’d let the wedding go on without you?” *Of course not!* He pulled back, holding Eren at arm’s length, smiling. “Let’s get you inside and in more comfy clothes, m’kay?” He looked over as the door opened, nodding his head toward a short figure waiting there. “And you’ve got the day off to spend with a certain someone.” *He looks happy to see you.*

Eren looked over to see Levi waiting with Spades by the door. He looked to make sure there weren’t any cars coming towards him before he bolted towards them, Blake following after as Eren launched himself at Levi. “Oh thank god, I’m so happy I’m out of there…” Eren had tears in his eyes as he clung to the shorter man. *Don’t let me go please… I’m not crazy… and I hate that place…*

Levi chuckled, catching Eren easily, hugging him tightly and pecking his neck, murmuring. “I’m so glad everything worked out- that you're here now.” He had a faint smile on his face as he ran his hands over Eren’s back, glad to have him in his arms again.

Lathe helped Scotty and Casper, getting his stuff from the trunk and carrying it up to where the three of them were, giving Spades a peck on the lips, looking down at his things. “...if my hands weren’t full you'd be getting a much better greeting than that…” He blushed as Levi and Eren sudden took his stuff from him, freeing his hands and looking to him expectantly. He just looked back to Spades, shrugging after a moment. “Eh.” He grinned, stepping forward, a hand wound around Spades’ middle as he kissed her, another cupping her cheek as he dipped her back a bit, pulling back after a long moment, both of them scarlet, Lathe with a mischievous look. “Hey~” Lathe completely ignored the exasperated looks on Eren and Levi’s faces, not even noticing Casper and Scotty behind them miming gagging at the sight. *It’s nice to see you again. ...even if it’s only been one fucking day.*
Eren giggled as he kept his long limbs wrapped around Levi’s torso, his arms around his neck. “Um… I know we're glad to see each other… But can we go to the room? I wanna get changed…” Eren flushed as he buried his face into Levi’s neck, taking in his musky scent. *He smells so nice…*

Spades blushed as she was leaned back and smiled warmly as she heard Lathe’s horrible attempt at flirting. “You know if you started out like that… It wouldn’t’ve gotten you anywhere.” She teased as she pecked his cheeks again. “Let’s get everything inside and then we can go out for lunch and catch up… How does that sound?” *I know it was only a day… But Eren’s still in the hospital, and I don’t see him nearly as much as I should.*

Lathe pouted a bit at her words, though he smiled as she pecked his cheeks, blushing and keeping an arm around her waist for the moment. “That sounds good to me.” *Very much so.* He pecked her cheek before letting his arm slip from her middle, turning and taking his stuff back from Levi and Eren. “Thanks. Now, you two are required to come with. I'm sure you can suffer for an hour.” He joked, looking over to Casper and Scotty. “You two wanna come with?”

Casper answered before Scotty could even open his mouth. “We acknowledge your offer of free food, and gladly accept.” He looked up as he felt Scotty glaring at him, elbowing him. “Hey, all we ever talk about at the hospital is ‘lawsuit this’ or ‘medicine that.’ You can hold a damn conversation. And I wanna hear about this thing he’s been cooking up with Sharon.” *He looks so damn excited whenever he’s works on it; I want in on this.*

Eren smiled more as he stayed in Levi’s arms, clinging to him with all he had. “Italian… And I wanna pay.” Eren’s voice was strong, unwavering as he felt the warmth between Levi and himself grow. *He’s so warm… I love it…* “I wanna get changed too…” He whined a bit, liking that he could act a little selfish with Levi holding him. *He’s not letting go, I don’t think he wants to.*

Spades nodded, her blush waning from her face as she led them in and towards the elevator. *We booked the whole floor, and the whole top floor... And the floor under it, so everyone can be as loud as they want... At least we won’t disturb other guests.* She ushered them all in, helping Lathe with his things. “How was the drive here?” *How long did it take my son to break out?*

“...It was good- it didn't take Eren long to figure it out. We hadn't been on the highway half an hour before Eren was driving next to us. He could follow us easily enough when we got into the city, right behind us the whole time. *These two didn't shut up for the whole damn time-*” Lathe playfully glared at Casper and Scotty, Casper sticking his tongue out at him. “…but it was good. Amusing.” *Very much so.* They bicker like an old married couple. “Top floor, yeah?” He grinned as Spades nodded, the elevator eventually reaching the top, stepping out onto their floor. “…have fun figuring out which of the key cards is the one for our room.” *You've got at least two for each room- that was probably a nightmare at the front desk, figuring out whose is whose.*
Spades grinned, stepping out of the elevator when it dinged and taking them down the hall to the left only a little ways. “They have to text me when they get here, I only carry my keys, or key now since you’re here, so I lined them up.” She pointed to the large spread out pile of key cards with stickies and names on them. “Everyone should get here within the next 12 hours for dress rehearsal tomorrow.” *Marcus is here, but he’s sleeping currently.*

Lathe nodded, seeing the key cards. “Fair meme.” He read over all of the names, grinning as he went on. “Let’s see… we’re shipping all of Eren and Levi’s friends… we’ve got the couples in rooms together of course…. Casper and Scotty are gonna need these…” He picked up their keycards stowing them absentmindedly in his pocket for the moment. “Damien has a plus one I’m dying to meet, so they've got a room…. PB has her own, she's forever alone, or as she would say, married to her computer, so we’ll let them have their privacy…” He chuckled as Spades just shook her head at him, grinning to her. “What? Don't deter my shipping.” He joked with her, looking over the rest of the keys. “...Mark and Jack should be here later tonight, Bob with Mandy and Wade too… Wade is gonna be a loner as well… I invited some of my old students and kids from counseling, they all went and made a memetastic group chat of their own and are arguing amongst themselves who's rooming with who as we speak… they're all getting doubles…” *I ain't encouraging them too much…* “...Damien needs to just hurry the fuck up and get here so I can meet the girl he's dating! Oh my gosh I need to meet her!” I'm so excited! Lathe chuckled as Spades rolled her eyes and reached for his arm, tugging him along to their room, his eyes widening as the door opened. *It's really nice…* He smirked as they came into the bedroom, the large King bed piled with pillows, looking especially inviting. ...... *really nice.* Lathe set down his stuff, catching Spades before she could put anything away and pulling her back flush to his front, his hands lightly running over her stomach, murmuring into her shoulder. “It’s very nice… I can't wait to break it in...” He nipped her neck softly, smirking as she shivered.

“A- hem .” Levi looked to Lathe and Spades coolly as they jumped apart, both of them blushing scarlet. *Payback’s a bitch.* He was holding Eren up as he clung to his front, his hands cupping his bubbly ass. “We kinda need Scotty and Casper’s room keys.” *So stop initiating sex and just fork them over already.*

Lathe just glared at him, moving to snatch the keys from his pocket where he'd put them and tossing them to Levi. *Just get going. And don't get too cocky.* He waited to hear the sound of the door shutting and locking behind them before turning back to Spades, the smirk creeping back onto his features as he pulled her close and into a deep kiss.

Levi had since shifted his hold on Eren to one hand and caught the keys easily, turning on his heel and leaving. “Thanks.” *You can go back to doing the thing. If we don't hear from either of you about food within the next fifteen or twenty minutes we’re just going out by ourselves.* He walked down the hall, passing Casper and Scotty their keys before moving on to their own room, having dragged their stuff inside first before going to get the keys. He opened the door, shutting it behind them and moving to the bed, his hands squeezing Eren’s bubbly ass before laying him on the bed and leaning over him, still feeling the shapely mounds in his hands as he kissed him deeply, tangling their tongues. *While I've got you...*
Eren’s body fidgeted a bit under his grasp though he melted into the kiss, pressing up a bit to mold the two of them together. He pulled back to breathe for a few seconds, his eyes locking with Levi’s. “So… I busted out… And now I’m here…” He giggled as he moved his arms around Levi’s neck, a soft smile on his face. *I missed this*…

Levi chuckled, shifting so Eren was further on the bed, above him, their fronts flush and molding into one another. He smiled faintly, his eyes a bit dark. “You actually did it… you’re here.” He moved to kiss down his jaw and neck, suckling a small mark at the joint of his neck, tugging the scrubs out of the way. He moved to pull them off of Eren, pulling back and stripping him, leaving him in just his boxers and socks before capturing his lips again, his hands on his cheeks, drawing out the heat. ...*I still want lunch.* “We can continue this later, m’kay?” He murmured against Eren’s lips, smirking cheekily as he went to get Eren clothes. *Hhm… what should we have you wear…*

Eren smirked, letting his head fall back on the soft comforter with a soft thump. He stared at the ceiling until he noticed the heat surrounding his neck, the steam sizzling around his skin and up. *Fuck… Tissues.* He shifted over to the side table grabbing a wad of tissues and pressing them to his nose. *The nosebleeds aren’t so bad anymore… But, still, they’re annoying as all fucking hell.* “Levi, whatever you make me wear make sure I can put a coat on or something if they have air conditioning… I’m used to the unit not working in my room, and the windows don’t open so it’s hot as hell in the psych ward.” *I need to be able to stay warm now that I’m used to it.*

Levi nodded, fishing in Eren’s suitcase for his own favorite skinny jeans and a long-sleeve graphic shirt, tossing them to Eren with a pair of converse. “How about this?” *I like those jeans.*

Eren rolled his eyes as he saw the jeans. “The ass huggers that I haven’t worn in a year… Do you even think they’ll fit?” He grumbled as he pulled the tissues away to see if his nose was still bleeding, which it was since the mark on his neck was still steaming. *There’s not a lot left in my system… It’s taking a long time to heal…*

...*I get the idea this is a rephrasing of the question ‘does this make me look fat?’* Levi smirked faintly, shrugging and ambling up to him, his hands running over his sides as he pecked at the steaming spot on his neck. “Oh I think so… you’re still as perfectly curvy as ever…” Levi’s hands ran over Eren’s hips, looking up to him with a spark of mischief in his eye. *You look damn fine.*

“Levi… You know what I mean… I’m not completely back to the weight I was before everything happened. I don’t know if they’ll stay up… Do you have a belt?” Eren turned his head, seeing the steam slowly starting to fade. *Good it’s almost done healing.*

“I do- let’s see if you need it. You're almost done healing. …I can't believe I don't get to mark you
Levi gave Eren a reassuring look when he noticed his embarrassment, moving to him and wrapping his arms around him, walking him back to the bed. “You know…” He sat him on the edge of the bed, going to sit in his lap, his hands moving his shirt collar out of the way. “...you still look damn fine.” Levi smirked as Eren blushed, going to lick and nip at his neck, tugging it down and leaving a decent-sized mark on his collarbone, a small trail of them across the bone. He watched as they shortly began to steam, getting up from his lap and snatching at the tissue box again, settling in his lap again and giving him a wad of them to staunch the bleeding. He gently lapped at the marks, watching as they faded but didn't entirely go away before they stopped steaming, looking up when Eren pulled the tissues from his face. “…are you out of serum?” That's what it looks like...

Eren nodded looking away a bit in embarrassment before taking the belt and looping it through the jeans to keep them up. He looked a mix of depressed and frustrated as he settled the belt in place, pulling the shirt on over him, his long hair in a bun still. They don't fit... Shit... And Levi really likes these ones too... Fuck. Eren slipped on his shoes, having gotten rid of the tissues since his nose has stopped bleeding. “Y-You... You can try and run the serum out, there’s not much left anymore…”

Eren looked down as the steam cleared and his nose stopped bleeding. “Yeah, was that the point of this? I thought we were gonna go out for lunch...” I'm hungry, I refused breakfast this morning and Dad didn’t bring me anything to eat. Eren’s point was further proven as his stomach growled loudly between the two of them. “And you’re lucky Dad packed the right makeup, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to hide the hickeys you just gave me.” I have a low ride dress to wear down the aisle, which you are walking me down! Did you forget??

“Aww, you wanna hide them? Then what was the point?” Levi jokingly whined, kissing Eren softly before moving from his lap, letting him stand. “Come on- we need to go bug the lovebirds about lunch.” This is a thing now.

Eren shook his head, pulling his shirt back into place and grabbing Blake’s leash and letting him walk in front. I’m gonna have to talk with Moblit soon.... Blake’s getting old. Eren’s lips pressed into a thin line as he clipped the leash on his jacket. “Let’s go.” He pulled out his phone, finding a text that they were waiting for them in the lobby. “They’re downstairs...” He grabbed his wallet off the counter along with a key to the room and slipped them in a back pocket. We can go.

Levi nodded, an arm around Eren’s waist as they went from their room to the elevator, punching the button for the first floor. Soon enough they stepped into the lobby, seeing Lathe waving to them from near the doors. They walked up to them, Levi nodding to them. “Alright, any idea where
we’re going?”

Lathe shrugged one shoulder, looking at his phone. “We found this Italian place not too far of a walk away, it looks really nice, and one of the reviews says they have great gnocchi, so there’s no way we’re getting out of going.” Lathe looked up as the doors opened, his eyes widening as the tall figure came straight up to them, the embodiment of biker culture. “...... **what.** There’s no fucking way. “Damien, you look ready to mug me and **everyone** in this hotel. And then **get away** with it.” He grinned, holding out a hand to him. “How’ve you been doing?”

Damien grinned to him and chuckled, shaking his hand firmly. “Doing alright, things’ve been going pretty well, I’d say. Not running from town to town as much these days, but y’know.” He looked over his shoulder to a short figure behind him, his features softening a bit. “I’ve got my reasons.” He turned as Blake suddenly growled at him, his eyebrows shooting up. “...did I say something?” **Looks ready to kill me. ...or try to.**

Levi was trying to coax Eren from behind him, getting him to unbury himself from in his shoulder. “Eren, come on, he's not gonna hurt you. He's a friend. It's Damien Rose.” **Come on, we both know he’s a nice guy. He's in the group chat- he's always been nice.**

Iroh poked his head out from behind Damien’s hulking figure, a shaky hand coming to fidget with his glasses which made his eyes look much larger than they actually were. “D-Damien… I-I thought you said the dog was nice…?” His one hand was clutching onto Damien’s leather jacket as he looked to the growling K9. **It looks protective and scary...**

Damien turned to him, a hand resting protectively on his shoulder. “He’s just doing what he’s supposed to, Eren’s scared of me is all…” Damien watched as Levi did his best to calm Eren down, Lathe moving to pet Blake and get him to stand down. **He's doing his job- I've heard plenty about Blake. He's working.**

Lathe pet Blake, getting him to stop growling and sit. “Blake, Eren, this is Damien. As in the one in the group chats. He looks scary, but he’s fine. Really. He's a good friend.” Lathe looked up, his expression changing as he saw Iroh, standing up and studying him. ....oh. “...Damien, is this…?”

Damien nodded, gently nudging Iroh forward a small step, keeping his hand on his shoulder as a reassuring presence. “Yeah, he is. Uhm, Iroh, this is Lathe and his fiancée Spades, they’re some of my high school friends, and this is Eren, Lathe’s adopted son and his boyfriend Levi. Eren’s service dog is Blake.”

Iroh fidgeted under Lathe’s calculating gaze. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I’m Iroh
Yanai, and I’m Damien’s plus one.” I’m not necessarily sure what I would be considered… And I’m not necessarily sure if we’re socially acceptable… I mean I know Damien talks about Eren, but I always thought this Eren was a girl… Iroh’s hands were shaky as his thumbs moved in circles around each other in a nervous tick. Did I do okay?

...oh my god. Lathe grinned warmly to him, extending a friendly hand to him. “It's very nice to meet you, Iroh.” He politely shook Iroh’s hand, looking to Damien. “You didn't tell me you had a boyfriend. Much less one that's such a cinnamon roll.” He has a white bow tie- and he looks as if normally he’d run away at the idea of you. ...you've got some explaining to do.

Damien shrugged a shoulder, rubbing the back of his neck. “I never saw a way to just put it in the group chat, and I’d’ve much rather introduced him in person to everyone.” He glanced to Iroh, seeing him look at him quizzically. “...take the cinnamon roll comment as a compliment. That's what one from him generically looks like.” Yeah, coming from an otaku, what else would you expect?

Iroh’s confusion only increased. “The compliment or the cinnamon roll?” I’m confused, your friends are strange. But at least you have friends. It must be nice. He shied behind Damien a bit, almost shrieking when Blake came up to sniff the two of them and circle them, looking for any intent to injure or maim Eren. What's the dog doing? Why is he sniffing me? Iroh yelped, his face completely flushed as Blake nosed his leg and then moved to Damien and did the same thing before going to sit by Eren’s side.

“His compliments are weird. As a rule of thumb, if he says it while looking happy, it's a compliment.” He held onto Iroh as Blake sniffed them, his thumb rubbing his arm. “Blake’s just saying hi, getting acquainted with us now that he knows we’re not gonna pull anything.” Yeah, I'm not gonna try anything. And Iroh certainly isn't.

Lathe smiled to the two of them warmly, seeing how protective Damien was of him. “Do you two want to join us for lunch? We were just about to head out for Italian, if you'd like to come. I'd like to get to know you better.” Lathe nodded to Iroh, trying his best to seem friendly and non-threatening. You're nervous, obviously. Can't have you freaking out around us the entire time- we promise we don't bite.

Damien nodded. “I’m okay with that.” He looked down to Iroh, tilting his head a bit, his voice quieter and considerably warmer. “What about you? Wanna go out for lunch?” It's up to you- I don't want you to be uncomfortable the entire time.

Iroh looked up at him before looking around to the small group with them. “O-okay…” I think I can handle lunch with them. He was still holding onto Damien’s leather jacket with a shaking hand, his other coming up to pull his dark hair behind his ear. It framed his face, though it was
shorter than Armin’s bowl cut, almost making it look like a pixie cut. His hand then moved to his thick-rimmed glasses and pushed them back up on the bridge of his nose. His skin was light, a blush clearly visible across his cheeks, which intensified the sight of his large doe like eyes. They looked almost black, to be a very dark brown when exposed to sunlight. *Are we going to be walking? Or in a car?*

Damien smiled as he nodded, looking up to Lathe again. “Alright, our stuff can wait for a bit. What’s the plan?”

“*Italian.*” Eren spoke up, now standing next to Levi, having been calmed down enough to do so. “They have good gnocchi apparently…” He held onto Blake’s leash a little tighter as Casper and Scotty finally joined them downstairs, the elevator doors surprising him as they opened behind him. *Now we have everyone…*

Scotty looked up as he spotted a large figure in front of the group, a smaller man beside him. *Wow, that guy’s gotta be smaller than Armin … wait… “Damien, my man, what’s happening? I haven’t seen you in like what? 15 years? God it’s been forever.*

...since when do you talk like that? At least for the first half of that. Casper grinned at Damien, his hands in his pockets. “Hey Damien- you took the ‘I’m-a-bounty-hunter-and-eat-nails-for-breakfast’ thing to a whole new level. If I didn't know better I’d be terrified and calling the cops. ...or yelling for Spades. Either.” He saw a much shorter man next to him, tilting his head and studying the man curiously. “...is that your plus one?” ...dude, I thought you were straight. ...apparently not. *Introduce us! He looks a bit too nervous to say hi.*

Iroh watched the other people show up from the elevator, a tall man exiting along with a shorter man with striking purple hair. He blushed as he heard them speak to Damien. *Ah, it’s more of his friends, that’s good… Wait, I get the feeling they weren’t expecting me at all. Should I not have asked to come? I mean, I’ve wanted to meet them, but did Damien not want me to come because of this? “U-Um… I’m I-Iroh… Iroh Yanai…”* He trailed off, his eyes finding the floor very interesting in a matter of a few seconds.

Casper smiled warmly to him, deciding to give him his space and waving. “Nice to meet you Iroh. I’m Casper Pandreivitch, and this giant here is Scott Octavian, but we just call him Scotty.” He noticed how out-of-place Iroh seemed to be feeling, giving him a casual grin. “You two joining us for lunch? You'd better be.” He looked to Damien as he nodded, beaming. “Awesome. The more the merrier. And it's been forever since we saw you, what with running off out west and stuff. And it’d be nice to get to know you.” He nodded to Iroh, trying to make him feel welcomed in their circle of friends. *Yeah, we’re a strange bunch. But you’re very welcome in it.*
Iroh nodded sheepishly and smiled a bit as they all followed Lathe down the street towards the more populated areas. This is a nice city, it’s very clean, and stylish… He thoughts were interrupted as he heard the giant’s words to Damien. I think his name is Scotty… I think… I’m horrible with names, dammit, but did he really just say that?

“… How do you not break him? He’s so tiny… Seriously Damien, is that even safe for him?……. I didn't think you would be a gentle one…. Yes, even in bed……” Scotty’s words were only slightly muted by a random car horn here and there. His arm was around Damien's shoulders, a concerned look on his face. I’m worried about the kid… How old is he even? “Have you become a cradle robber? What you're doing can’t be legal!”

Damien’s brow furrowed as he felt Iroh’s hold on his sleeve loosen, seeing him with his arms wrapped around himself, scarlet and staring at the ground embarrassed and looking saddened as they walked. His eyes hardened as Scotty kept talking, his tone even. “Scotty, do you have no filter? He might not be as tall or as big as some of us, and sure, we’ve got quite a few years between us in age, but it doesn't mean he can't be my boyfriend. Calm the hell down.” My God, he's got a bad enough idea of himself as it is…. and what you're going on about isn't helping.

Scotty held his hands up in surrender. “Okay, okay, okay, I get it… I’m just concerned about his health as a medical professional. And I don't want you getting in trouble with the law with your profession.” Just a little bit of teasing, no harm done, geez. No need to get angry over it.

“Just shut your trap about it, alright? That’s the hundredth time this year we’ve heard something like that.” Damien glared at Scotty for a moment and crossed his arms, glancing to Iroh before looking back to Scotty, his cheeks tincting pink, his voice quiet enough just for him to hear. “And I am careful, okay? I don't want him getting hurt. And Scotty, he’s legal. He’s in grad school right now. I know that sounds really young but just don’t press about it, alright?” I don't want him getting hurt.... physically, obviously, and he’s already got too much going on in his mind about himself and us… I don’t want to make that worse. Damien nodded as Scotty finally relented, reaching over and bringing Iroh back over to the group, his arm around his shoulders, rubbing his arm with his thumb, trying to coax him back out of his shell. “Scotty doesn't know when to shut it. M’sorry about that…” Come on, please don’t draw in… they all want to get to know you.

Iroh looked up to Damien once, before he looked down, his arms crossed submissively over his chest. Well, he wasn’t wrong… A lot of people think like that. I know I’m small, and you always have to hold back… I wish you never had to… He clammed up, not speaking as they waited a few minutes for the table at the very modern restaurant and finally sat down. They probably all think along the same lines...

Casper ended up sitting opposite Iroh, nudging Scotty’s foot and giving the man next to him a warning look when he noticed Iroh glance up to Scotty and then immediately look away, scared and melancholy. You have no filter. And in this case, it's got a worse effect than it usually does.
Casper smiled over to the two of them after they were given menus and gave their drink orders, one eyebrow quirked. “I haven't heard much about you- how did you two end up meeting? I'd find it hard to believe you came across each other in Damien’s line of work.” You're obviously very different.

“Um… actually… I u-uh…. I w-worked at…” Iroh struggled to clear the lump in his throat that quickly formed, a blush crossing his face in an instant. His eyes which had held Casper’s gaze now found themselves interested in his shaking hands in his lap. I can’t do this… I… crap, I wasn’t expecting many questions directed at me… Damien said they wouldn’t pry much… But I feel like they’ve done nothing but pry, and I still look like a child to them. “I was working at a coffee shop, and um… my boss was apparently… he um… he, um…” Iroh’s wide eyes looked up to Damien, his own full of fear, so unsure about what he was supposed to do to salvage this situation. I’m horrible with socializing… what am I supposed to do? I don’t know what to do...

Damien reached over and took hold of Iroh’s hand, running his thumb over the knuckles and looking over to Casper, elaborating for him. “Iroh was working at a coffeeshop in California and I would always go there, trying to catch a time when his boss was around, because there was a warrant for his arrest back in Oregon. He always called out the drinks when they were done, and because I ordered the same thing every time he eventually began to recognize me, and we started chatting a bit, and I eventually got him to give me his number, and we’ve been dating ever since, really.” He looked over to Lathe, recognizing the look in his eyes. “Yeah yeah, coffeeshop cliche, I know. But there's something to it, I swear.” He gave Iroh’s hand a small reassuring squeeze, glancing to him and smiling warmly. There's gotta be.

Iroh nodded as Damien spoke, though after he finished and squeezed his hand, he pulled his shaking hands away from Damien’s, reaching for the menu, so unsure of what to get. I’m not really a fan of pasta… I’m sure there’s salad I can get... He pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose out of habit. They must think it’s pathetic… to be so cliche.... Why did I ask to come? I knew better than that… I could’ve stayed home and let him actually enjoy being around his friends without having to worry about me. He seemed to deflate until his name was called again.

“Uh… Iroh. I know that Damien said that you were a grad student, but what are you studying?” Scotty’s voice was soft, gentle, trying to make up for what he’d said before. Don’t want you to hate me for the rest of your life…. Nor Damien, he’s scary when he’s mad.

“Um… I’m studying m-mechanical e-engineering...I-I’m on the Masters T-Track...:” I’ll be done soon, and I’ve gotten plenty of job offers, which Damien is excited about. I guess that’s good. if he’s excited about that kind of stuff. Iroh clammed up again, trying to look as small as possible, which wasn’t that hard to do.

Eren tugged on Levi’s shirt, leaning over and whispering in his ear. “He’s really uncomfortable… he’s scratching too…” He had to hold Blake back as he whined, wanting to help. No, it’ll freak him
out more, he might even panic if I let you go Blake.

Lathe quirked an eyebrow as he read Eren’s lips, speaking quietly. [Is he really?] He glanced over to Iroh who was occupied with studying the menu, seeing his hand scratching one clothed forearm incessantly. He caught Damien’s eye as he looked over at the sound of Blake whining, speaking with a bit of worry. [Damien, he's scratching. Blake wants to help, but we think he’d freak out…] Do something!

Damien’s eyes widened, looking over and seeing he was indeed scratching at his wrist, going to gently catch his hand, his voice quiet. “Iroh, you’re scratching again. It’s okay, really. Don’t worry yourself, okay?” He gave him a soft smile, leaning forward and giving him a small peck on the temple before letting him go back to reading the menu. Please don’t- I thought we got rid of that habit...

Iroh grew pale as he heard Damien’s words in his ear, nodding silently. He moved his free hand to under his leg as he often would before, when he had tried to stop his scratching habit. “I… I’m sorry…” His soft voice was barely audible. He sighed in relief when the waiter came to take their orders, his own being a rather small salad and a glass of water. I hope they don’t think I’m weird… what if they think badly about Damien because of me… No, I don’t think I would be able to handle it if his friends never talked to him because of me. Iroh barely noticed that he had brought his hand back to his wrist until he felt Blake’s teeth around his hand, seeing him under the table, his head sticking out from under him, and forcing it into his lap. It’s biting me… why’s it biting me? Iroh instinctively tried to pull his hand back only to hear Blake growl at him which stilled his movements instantly.

Damien looked over as he heard Blake growl, not even having noticed he had moved near Iroh until he saw him with Iroh’s hand in his jaws, his boyfriend trying hard not to panic. Crap. “Iroh, it’s okay, you were scratching, it’s what he’s trained to do. He’s a service dog, he does this stuff all the time. It’s okay, he’s not gonna hurt you. It’s alright.” He had a hand on the small of Iroh’s back, murmuring to him and helping him calm down, Blake finally letting go of his hand and jumping up a bit so his paws were on the edge of his chair, nudging Iroh gently, whining quietly for attention. “You can pet him; he wants you to.” He's trying to get your mind away from whatever it is that's bothering you so much.

Iroh shifted a bit as Blake eased himself up. He’s not gonna hurt me? At all? Iroh nodded before timidly reaching out to pet Blake, letting his nerves leave him as Blake wagged his tail and stood still while he was pet. It was a good distraction for Iroh as he calmed down, petting Blake, and forgetting about the others in the room. Maybe…. Maybe I should get a dog too…

Eren watched with a smile as he saw Iroh finally calm down with Blake. <“Dad… you should give them Moblit’s number to see if he has any dogs…. I can tell Iroh needs it…”> It can only help… He looks so much more comfortable… and he’s smiling now too! Eren smiled as he saw Blake lean
up and lick Iroh’s face, obviously happy that Iroh had calmed down.

Lathe nodded, smiling at the sight. <“I think that’s a good idea. I'll text Damien the number and info later. But for this moment at least, Iroh’s gonna be borrowing Blake. I'm sure you don't mind sharing his attention.”> **He actually looks something other than nervous or terrified right now. A dog might do him some real good.** They all decided not to press Iroh too much, letting Blake monopolize his attention as they all caught up.

Casper set down his glass, looking across the table. “Damien, question. You've been doing this hunting people down thing for a long time. What is the dumbest thing some of the people you've gone after have done?”

Damien tapped the table in thought, sifting through his thoughts. “…I'd say some of the dumbest things you can do are use credit cards either you own or that we know you stole… keep the same phone or phone number… just really basic, traceable stuff. And it's not all ‘come-out-with-your-hands-up,’ ‘barge-into-the-house-and-catch-them-asleep.’ People on the run, the not-so-smart ones, think it is and do just really dumb stuff like that, or try to speed on highways going at least eighty to outrun a cop car or me when they realize what I am, and it just all goes downhill from there… but really, these people on the run speed and get pulled over, and then get arrested when the warrant pops up in the system. It happens all the time; people just ask to get caught. It's very amusing.” He looked up as waiters began to come over to their party with trays of food, grinning. “Food’s here.” He gently tapped Iroh’s arm to get his attention as they began to set down plates and bowls. “Blake’ll probably chill right there while you’re eating; he's not going anywhere, I don't think.” **Nope- Eren’s doing fine and you certainly have taken a liking to him.**

Iroh looked up in surprise, though he noticed Blake shift to go under the table so that only his nose was visible on his lap, sitting down in front of his feet. **So he’s really well trained… That’s good…** He thanked his waiter as his small salad was brought with a ranch dressing on the side. I can eat now… I wonder if Blake likes carrots…

Eren watched Blake sit on the floor, looking down to his large bowl of pasta in front of him. **Oh this looks magnificent, and I haven’t even tried it yet… It’s wonderful!** He shifted a bit closer to Levi as he picked up his first forkful of Shrimp Scampi, simply groaning at the taste. **It really is good…**

Damien watched with amusement as Lathe started to eat his gnocchi looking like a kid on Christmas morning, digging into his own plate of ravioli. He glanced to Iroh every so often, making sure he was doing okay, their table mostly quiet except for the clink of silverware on plates. He smiled as he noticed Iroh feeding Blake his carrots, his salad for the most part eaten. **…one would do him good.** Lunch passed quickly, and soon enough they were ready to leave, standing and pushing in their chairs. Damien tapped Iroh’s arm, getting his attention and getting him to stand as well, following everyone to the door, Blake still trotting along next to him,
nuzzling his leg affectionately. He suddenly felt his phone buzz, pulling it from his pocket and seeing a text from Lathe, reading it. ...service dogs... like Blake.... When they came out onto the sidewalk, he had made up his mind, his hand on Iroh’s shoulder.

Iroh flinched a bit until he realized whose hand it was. “So um... Are-Are we... Um, g-going to the hotel...” Iroh’s voice was small as he shuffled around on his feet. He was still trying to act small and invisible since Eren had come to take Blake back from him as they started walking back to the hotel. You probably wanna stay with your friends, so I can go back by myself if I need too.

Damien shook his head, smiling. “Nope. We’ve got a sort-of errand to run. You seem to have really warmed up to Blake.... do you want to go get a dog?” I really think it'll do you good. And it's been like eight fucking years and every time I asked you said no. “They'll be trained like Blake is, if you want.”

Iroh’s eyes widened as he pulled his arms around himself. Can... Can we really? But I don’t have any problems with me... I can function normally without one.... Do I really need it? Iron seemed to shrink down even more, his eyes still on his shoes, but he froze where he was. Are we going?

Damien ran his hand softly over his back, his voice quiet and warm. “Can I take that as a yes?” Please?

Iroh nodded minutely before he shrunk down even more. We can get a dog... If he’ll be okay in the house... And getting transported on the plane... I guess we can.

Damien beamed, leaning down to kiss his cheek. “Thanks, Iroh. I really think you'll like having one around, if how happy you were with Blake is anything to go by.” It'll be a bit of a deal getting him onto the plane- we'd have to get a third seat, I think... doable.

A blush overtook Iroh’s face as Damien pecked his cheek. What is he doing? What if we're not socially acceptable? And I think his friends don't like seeing him like this... do they not like that he changed from what they remember? Because of me? Iroh was starting to shake a bit in fear as he looked to the group of them, all eyes on them, scared of the attention. Oh no... they don't approve... they're never gonna talk to him again... I didn't want to ruin anything... but I did anyway...

Lathe looked to Iroh as he seemed seconds away from a nervous breakdown, Blake even straining against Eren’s hold to ground him, when it clicked. ...Oh. “Iroh, it's okay. It's not like you and Damien being a thing is ‘shameful’ to us or anything. Not including you two, I know at least five other gay couples we invited to the wedding. It's okay. Really. And we approve.” He smiled
Iroh looked at him stunned for a long moment, glancing over as Levi and Scotty both possessively wrapped an arm around Eren and Casper respectively, the latter two waving to him. ...they're... oh. I thought we weren't... I didn't know it was... okay... for us to be like we are... “O-Oh… I-I didn't th-think… Uhm… th-thank you…” Iroh looked to his feet, nodding in silence as Damien said goodbye to everyone before he followed the larger man back to the car and then waited in further silence as he drove. What's the dog gonna be like? He swallowed hard, his body beginning to shake when they parked, getting anxious as they entered the house-like building. What... Um… Okay, well we're here... What do I do now? He absentmindedly started to scratch his clothed wrist, looking around in slight fear as he heard a loud bark from upstairs.

Damien caught Iroh’s hand, giving him a reassuring look as they walked further into the building, looking around. “Uhm, excuse me? Anybody here?” He looked to the stairs as he heard another bark, the skittering of nails on wood floors.

“Comin’!” Moblit soon came down the stairs, his boots thudding on the steps, looking over to the desk and seeing Damien behind it in all of his biker glory. Well then. “What can I do for you?”

“Uhm, so a friend of mine texted me to come to you... the thing is, my boyfriend is kind of a nervous wreck literally all the time... help.” He looked down and a bit behind him as Iroh peeked out from behind him, immediately shuffling back out of sight when he saw Moblit. ...yeah, this is a thing...

Moblit gave the man peeking out behind him a warm look, a bit surprised at how much of a difference there was between them. He looks so tiny and nervous... you two are like complete opposites. “Yeah, Lathe texted me and told me you’d be coming. He likes Blake, right?”

Damien nodded. “Yeah, Blake was able to keep him from scratching at the restaurant we were all at for lunch. He really took to him, made him stop worrying and smile.” His smiles are rare these days... I want him to be that happy a whole hell of a lot more.

Moblit smiled, nodding. “I think I know who he’d like. Follow me, please.” Moblit led them down a short hallway and into a small room, motioning for them to sit. “I'll be right back with someone I think you'll like, okay? Sit tight.” He left, leaving the door open as he went back upstairs, searching for a specific dog. Where are you...

Damien had his arm around Iroh, murmuring to him quietly to get him to stop shaking so much, kissing his cheek softly. “It's gonna be alright, we’ll find one you like. I'm right here, and this guy
looks like he knows what he's doing.” You'll be fine. Damien looked up as he heard Moblit coming
back, a set of paws thumping quietly on the floor with him. Moblit walked in leading a dog that
looked just like Blake, but bigger, looking to him and then fixing his eyes onto Iroh, pulling just a
bit on his leash as he saw the man shaking in his chair.

Felix took careful steps towards Iroh, making sure he didn’t freak out as he stepped up to him,
resting his head on Iroh’s lap. Human is nervous, I can smell it… He whined softly, his ears perked
and focused on Iroh, his tail beginning to wag when the smaller man started to pet him. Good, he
takes well to the petting… His smile is large.

Iroh had a small smile on his face as he timidly pet the large dog sitting in front of him. He’s
huge… What if he accidentally crushes me? I’m not all that strong… He heard the dog start to
whine as he got nervous all over again. Well, he knows when I’m nervous… Which is good… I
think. He let his shoulders slump freely instead of being pinned back in nervousness. I… I think I
can do this...

Damien smiled as Iroh relaxed, his hand slipping from his back as he got more comfortable with
the dog in his lap. He chuckled as the dog moved so his paws were on the edge of the chair, careful
not to hurt Iroh as he licked his cheek, causing the man to sputter a bit and turn his head, seeing
him smile. He's smiling!

Moblit gave the man a friendly smile, going to gently bring Felix off of him after a moment.
“Okay, so there are some things he’s trained to do that we have to go over, just so that when he
does them, you don't get even more nervous, okay? If he sees you scratching, he's gonna take your
hand into his mouth to get you to stop. He’s not gonna hurt you, it's careful and just firm enough to
stop you, okay? Can you pretend to scratch at your wrist? Just let him do it when he tries to,
okay?” We need to make sure you know what's going on when he acts like he’s trained to.

Iroh nodded, moving to scratch at his wrist, only to find his hand encased in Felix’s jaws. He tried
not to make a sound, though his mouth let out a soft squeak. It’s okay, I’m okay…. I'll be fine...
Iroh soon found the nerves to pet the large dog and get his hand released. He’s okay… I can do
this.

Moblit nodded, smiling. “Good job. He needs to make sure he has your attention before letting go,
so petting him will get him to let you go. Now, we need to practice grounding, just in case it needs
to happen. If ever you're beginning to have a panic attack, curled up into yourself somewhere or
standing up, Felix will guide you down to the ground and lay you flat, laying on top of you to
ground you, trying to get your attention and calm you down. He looks heavy, but he's not going to
 crush you, if that's what you're worried about. Can we practice that?” He nodded as Iroh shakily
nodded. “Alright, I'll hold onto him until you're ready. All you have to do is go over into that corner
and curl up, okay? Then Felix will come over to ground you. And remember- in order to get him
off, you just need to tell him to rise. Whenever you're ready.” He'll be careful with you- he knows
Iroh took in a shaky breath, trying to cool his nerves as he went to the corner of the room, curling up on himself. He finally nodded to let Moblit let go of Felix, watching him come close before he let the dog slowly pull him out towards a clear area of the floor. He started to freak out as he was nudged to lay down, his heart rate rising as fear was quickly set in. He’s huge…. He’s too big… Iroh’s eyes grew large behind the thick glasses, a yelp escaping his lips as Felix started to slowly press weight on his chest.

Moblit watched as Iroh began to freak out even more as Felix got more onto him, watching the dog look up to him every other moment in confusion. Something’s wrong. “Felix, rise.” Moblit reached for him and pulled Felix away from Iroh, Damien moving to sit on the floor next to him and pull him close, trying to calm him down. “Iroh, what’s wrong?”

Iroh hurriedly shook his head, his hand instantly going to pull at his medical alert bracelet which glinted in the lights. He tugged at it out of habit, struggling to calm down, though he started to check his chest, checking for broken bones. “N-nothing… Nothing’s wrong…” No… I didn’t feel anything snap… But…

Damien looked to his bracelet, watching him begin to feel his chest. “…Iroh, I’ve never really pried about what that bracelet is for, but now I wanna know. Why do you wear it?”

Iroh paled as much as his already pale complexion would allow for. “It’s…. It’s um…” His voice was shaking just as badly as he was. Should I tell him? Probably… He’s gonna get angry at me… “I um… I have osteoporosis…. But my bones… They don’t break…. They um… They splinter… And shatter… It’s easy to get hospitalized if they get broken.” I didn’t want a broken rib, I’m always afraid they’re gonna snap.

Damien’s expression shifted to one of worry, deciding to simply move Iroh into his lap, his arms wound around his middle. “Why didn’t you tell me? I’d think it’s important for me to know… is that why it took forever for your arm to heal when you fell down the stairs?” Damien nuzzled into Iroh’s shoulder, his thumb running gently over his stomach, pressing a light kiss to his shoulder blade, willing him to calm down. I'm always really gentle with you... because I never would want to hurt you... but I didn't know that if I ever got too rough with you... really bad stuff could happen...

Iroh nodded, looking over to Moblit, a blush across his cheeks from embarrassment. “Does he… Um… Does he need to be completely on me?” I don’t think I could handle that weight… He’s really heavy… Really really heavy. Iroh started to calm down as Damien held him gently. I was afraid that you were gonna leave when you realized you couldn’t do everything you wanted.
Moblit shook his head. “No, he doesn’t have to. Here, let’s see if something else will work. Uhm, could you let him lay down?” Moblit waited for Damien to shift out from under Iroh and help him lay down, guiding Felix forward. He guided Felix down so his arms were resting on Iroh’s chest, sitting on the floor, able to reach with his head to lick Iroh’s cheek. “Half okay?” That should work better for you. And you’re small enough that just his arms has the right effect.

Iroh was nervous, shaking as he was put under the dog, though he soon started to calm down. “Y-Yeah… That’s… That’s okay…” He’s not crushing me… This, this is okay… Iroh seemed to calm down and gently started to pet the dog again, calming down when he knew he wouldn’t be crushed. I can do this…

Damien smiled as Iroh calmed down again, seeing Felix nudging him with his nose and licking him all over his cheeks. “It looks like he really likes you.” He reached down to run a hand through his pitch-black hair, brushing a lock behind his ear. “What do you think?” You wanna take him home?

Iroh looked up to Damien, a blush forming across his pale features as he smiled softly. “C-Can we take him home?” I don’t know if we’re allowed to do that…. Would you be okay with it? It’s technically your house…. And you don’t let me pay for anything.

Damien smiled brightly, nodding. “Of course we can. And I’ll make sure we can get him home on the plane.” Damien let Iroh command Felix to rise, helping him to his feet and looking to Moblit, grinning as he reached down to pet Felix. “I think we’ll keep him.” He’s going to be really good for Iroh.

Moblit nodded, smiling. “Alright, let’s go up front and we’ll get the papers in order.” Moblit led them back up to the front desk, letting Iroh take the leash from him and walk Felix next to him. He went into a small back room, coming back out with paperwork, looking to Damien. “Alright, I’ve got medical records on him, vaccinations and all that, some stuff on his parents, and then the bill for him. I need signatures in a few places, and we can take any card, but prefer checks. If you want, while he’s doing that, we can find him a vest and some patches for it.” He smiled kindly to Iroh, noticing how he did seem more at ease with the dog next to him.

Iroh nodded before he realized something. “Ah, Um… Who do I make the check out to?” I need to be able to pay for him, thank god I have my checkbook in my jacket. He shifted on his feet, clearly still nervous around others. He started to reach into his jacket to pull his checkbook out from the inner pocket. I can pay for him…

Damien reached out a hand to stop him. “Iroh, let me.” He shook his head as Iroh opened his
mouth to protest. “Hey, I was the one to suggest getting one of your own. I want to. Please.” *Come on, let me spoil you.*

Iroh’s expression fell a little bit. … *You never make me pay for anything … I don’t get it… Why do you always pay for everything, even though I’m capable for paying, you always insist. It’s… Do you not trust that I can pay for something…* He sighed quietly, deciding not to fight him before he turned over towards Moblit and nodded. “Y-You said p-patches for him…” *For Felix…*

Moblit nodded, his expression warm. “Yeah, I’ve got a box of them you can pick some from, and a few vests that’ll fit him. You can pick the ones you like.” Moblit motioned for him to follow, patient as Iroh nervously walked behind him into the room to sort through the patches. It didn’t take too long before Iroh had picked a few he liked, putting them neatly onto the vest and fitting it onto Felix. “Let’s see, I need to print you and him ID cards saying you’re his owner, and that you can take him places…” Moblit typed into his computer, Iroh helping him spell his name before two cards printed, putting them both in the pocket of the vest. “As long as he has those two cards on him, you and he will be allowed pretty much anywhere.”

Iroh nodded, a small thank you leaving his mouth as he bowed towards him a little out of habit. *Thank you for this, you helped a lot.* He pushed his glasses up and pushed his hair behind his ear. *Are we gonna get going now?*

Damien smiled to him as Iroh walked from the back room, a vested Felix walking with him, handing Moblit the right signed papers and a check, taking the ones he needed. Damien thanked him, his hand on the small of Iroh’s back as they left, walking back to the car to go back to the hotel. He pecked his cheek again, smiling. “I’m sorry, I was the one to ask about getting one. And I wanted to spoil you. Let's go get stuff for him, okay? He needs food and a bed and stuff. I had a dog when I was a kid; I know what he needs.” *We'll take good care of him.*

Iroh nodded, bringing his knees up with him on the passenger seat. “O-okay.” He put his head on his knees, looking out the window as they went by. *I still don’t understand why you like me so much… Even after all these years, I’m just a grad student… And you just smile at me all the time…*
Chapter 58: The Wedding

Eren was fixing his makeup in the mirror right alongside quite a few women in the same dress as himself. “Mom… Did you bring the razor with you?” I really need to cut this off after.

Spades was looking into a mirror, her makeup done, wanting to mess with her hair and Phoebe swatting her hands away from it. She had a wide, relaxed smile on her face, suddenly looking over to him. “Hm? Oh, for your hair later?” She nodded when Eren did. “I've got it with, don't worry. After the dance you'll certainly look sharp.” She looked back to her reflection, worrying for the hundredth time if she looked alright. ...I'm getting married...

Eren sighed a bit in relief but he made sure that none of his numerous hickeys were showing around his neck or his chest since the dress was rather low in the front. “Phoebe, can you see if there’s any hickeys that you can see? I wanna make sure they’re covered…” It would be really embarrassing if you can see one of them...

Phoebe looked over to him, brushing a light blue lock from her face, studying him. “I don't see any… wait, scratch that. I can see faint outlines. ...you're just using concealer? Hon, this is why I brought my makeup. You can tell you're wearing concealer. Here.” Phoebe took a makeup wipe and carefully swiped it over the spots to get rid of the concealer, picking up a small tube and swiping some of the contents over the marks, making them instantly vanish. “Professional stuff. Absolutely wonderful.” She looked over her shoulder as someone asked for it, handing it over. “You literally need next to nothing for most stuff. Don't use all of it; it's expensive.” I knew I'd need the good stuff. Backup plans for days. “Stop fussing with your hair, Spades, or so help me…” You're gonna mess it up!

Spades finally put her hands down, struggling not to fuss with her makeup. “I'm sorry, I can't help it… I want to look absolutely perfect… oh my god, I'm getting married…” I can't believe it.

Phoebe rolled her eyes good-naturedly, grinning widely and setting down the hairbrush she was holding. “That's your fifth revelation and counting, Hon. As long as you don't tug at your hair or start to cry and then wipe at your eyes you'll look stunning enough to have Lathe mistake you for a Goddess, believe me.” Your hair took forever to do- I'm not letting my work be for nothing!

“I second that notion!” Eren called as he finished concealing up the last of his large hickeys. For such a tiny guy he makes up for it in marking me. Eren gave Phoebe back her professional concealer before he looked over himself once again, all the way down to where the dress reached his ankles. The heels aren't too bad, and I guess I look good in Navy… Eren let Phoebe take over his long hair, letting her put it into a nice updo before things got into motion. Okay, now I get to see Levi in his uniform again, and he’s walking me down the aisle! He picked his head up as Marcus
knocked at the door, a soft smile on his face. “It’s time, Mom, let’s get going…” He watched Phoebe get in front of them to walk Lathe down the aisle. Phoebe’s being his ‘Mom’ right now... and I get to dance with him later which will be nice... He watched the doors close again and the ushers get Casper and Scotty together to walk down the aisle next. Casper’s wearing a dress too, and his purple hair honestly looks really good with the navy dress. He was next ushered out, a blush forming on his face as he saw Levi in his formal uniform. He looks so good... His hands were shaking as Blake followed at his heel like he was trained to do, Levi taking his arm as he led him down the aisle. This is so nerve wracking... and it’s not even my wedding! “What if I trip?” Eren’s words were quiet, a soft smile on his lips a second later.

“Then I’d catch you.” You're not gonna trip. Levi’s voice was as quiet as Eren’s, smirking to him faintly, finding himself a bit distracted by his soft smile. ...he looks amazing... He looked back to the aisle as they walked, glancing around to the people in the pews, some of whom he didn't recognize. I know Lathe invited a mob of old students... that flock over there must be them. Our squad is here, the YouTubers have their circle, Nate actually came, which was nice... I don't think Phoebe actually did it... she said her plus one was her computer, and threatened to bring it and set in a pew with a bow tie on the front... if she did it I missed it.

Eren was quiet as they finally made it down the long aisle, stopping at the end with him and leaning down a bit as Levi pecked his lips quickly, going to their respective sides before turning to look back as Spades came out in her dress in all her glory. Mom looks absolutely stunning.

Lathe was trying hard to force down his nerves, trying not to fidget as he stood at the altar, watching the procession up the aisle. ...oh my god, this is actually happening... He looked up as he caught a glimpse of white, his eyes widening as he saw Marcus beginning to walk Spades down the aisle, every thought but one vanishing. ...she’s gorgeous. ...and I get to marry her. He felt like he had fallen in love all over again, blushing as she soon joined him where he stood, looking completely love-struck.

Marcus was near tears as he handed Spades over to Lathe. “You take care of her for me... She deserves it...” His words were soft as he swelled with emotion, hugging Lathe briskly before returning to his seat. They look so perfect together... my daughter is finally getting married.

Lathe nodded, hugging Marcus back. “Of course I will.” He beamed as they pulled apart, giving Spades a loving look before turning with her to the priest presiding.

Spades gave him a soft nervous smile, her nervousness quickly leaving her as she joined hands with Lathe beside her. It’s.... This is so nice, and I never thought I’d be able to do this ever... She smiled more as they went through the ceremony relatively quickly, and before she knew it, they were saying their ‘I do’s, their rings placed on their fingers, glinting in the light, and a wide smile on her face.
“I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

Finally. Spades’ hands came up to cup his face as she leaned up to kiss him happily. We’re finally married… I’m actually your wife now. She blushed as Lathe dipped her back a bit, their kiss long, the cheering and cat-calls behind them egging them on. Everyone’s so happy… I hope you’re happy too…

Lathe kissed her passionately, his arms wound around her, and when they broke apart Lathe looked to her, his eyes bright and full of love and joy. …you’re my wife. He pulled her into a tight hug, beaming. Oh my god, you’re mine.

Ieva’s eyes were just as bright, a small smile on her face. “You’ll need to think about calling me by my first name from now on.” She smiled brightly, pecking his nose. You’re all mine, and I’m all yours.

Lathe thought a moment. That’s right- you’re not a Spade anymore. “…Ieva Velanova Quo.” He smirked, studying her expression. “…I think I like the way that sounds. …it’s still gonna feel really weird calling you Ieva after years of calling you Spades, though. So if I slip up,” He pecked her nose right back, smiling. “…forgive me.” I’m sure you’ll let it slide.

Ieva nodded, twining their fingers as she ushered him off the alter. “You get to walk me down the aisle now.” I’m all yours… Completely yours.

Lathe’s eyes shone, an arm wrapping around her waist as they began to walk. “That I do…” Lathe squeezed her hand with his free hand, beaming and feeling like a million bucks as people cheered, walking with her back down the aisle. …you’re actually, completely mine now… and I like the sound of that.

They stayed in the church as the crowd slowly dispersed, everyone coming up to them and congratulating them, bear hugs coming from every direction. It's so nice to see everyone again in one place- a reunion for us was waaaay overdue. They stayed until the last people filtered out, just the four of them left as the photographer came in to take photos of them. The next two hours dragged on, each of them getting bored as time went. Eren lost interest first out of the four of them, having to be entertained with Blossom Saga on each of their phones so he didn't lose his mind. Lathe dropped his pose with exaggerated relief when the photographer last told him he was done with that set. They were glad when it was over and they weren’t forced to stand stock-still for endless minutes as the camera flashed at them. Thank god… freedom! They left the church, Lathe with an arm tightly wound around Spades’- Ieva’s- waist, Levi similarly with a hand on Eren’s
Ieva sighed as she sat down on their made bed, rubbing her bare arms. “Hmm, how much longer do I need to be in the dress? I know it’s light, but it feels heavy…” She smiled as she looked at Lathe loosening his tie in the mirror. “Mm… I really want him but we don’t have time… I think we might have an hour before we need to go downstairs. “You look handsome.” I will never forget about tonight.

Lathe smirked, his cheeks pink, turning back to her and letting his eyes wander over her frame. “Hmm, a while still… but believe me, I’m fine with you staying in it awhile…” Lathe traipsed back over to the bed, moving to sit next to her and pull her into his lap, pecking her neck lightly and teasingly. “…even if it would look much better on the floor… but there’s no time for that, sadly…” We need to wait before we can have our fun…

Ieva’s face instantly flushed, leaning her head up to peck his cheek. “Hmm… You’re certainly right about that, no matter how much I wanna, we need to look presentable at our reception… How long of a speech do you think Levi and Eren have written? I know Eren was upset that he couldn’t come…” She sighed softly closing her eyes as she leaned her head onto his shoulder, her arms wrapping around his waist. “I remember he tore up what he had been writing and threw it in the trash before he curled up and wouldn’t talk to me for awhile… He’s gotta be ecstatic that he’s here.” She smiled softly, kissing his jaw between her sentences her hand cupping the other side of face. *He looked so happy in that dress today*… *He looked beautiful*.

“I’m honestly thinking Eren has a whole rant written out, and he’s gonna jabber on for a bit. Levi… I dunno. I don’t think he’ll talk much, honestly. I have no idea what he’d say. He’s around all the damn time and I have no clue what to expect.” Lathe chuckled, sighing as he felt her breath on his neck. “Casper’s most likely gonna roast the two of us and make dumb jokes for a while… Scotty’ll mostly talk about what a pain in the ass I am… as for the others, Desce and Phoebe, Desce mostly, I dunno what they’d say. We never talked to Desce much, and Phoebe mostly just lurks. Marcus is definitely gonna get emotional and make everyone cry… but all I really know is it’s gonna be a rollercoaster of emotion. A rollercoaster where everyone is saying dumb puns, and a few people are crying the entire time. And by a few people I mean Marcus and Eren.” *Oh yeah, they’ll cry. “...and probably me.”...yeah, not gonna lie.*

“You’re probably right… And you know you can’t keep it together at all…” She giggled, poking at his nose, her eyes bright with mischief. “Eren’s sitting on the other side of you, so make sure he doesn’t, you know… Freak out… With anything anybody might say… I can only imagine what is going to be said…. Holy shit… We’re *married*!” Ieva finally finished babbling, looking at her finger in awe at the revelation. *I still can't believe it!*

Lathe chuckled, leaning down to brush their lips. “Yep- you're all mine.” Lathe kissed her languidly, holding her close as they made out. He broke away from her, shaking his head for a
second and chuckling. “...I'm never gonna get used to calling you Ieva... as pretty as the name is...” Lathe blushed as she giggled, pecking his cheek. “...shut up.” He kissed her again as it only made her giggle louder, their kisses full of smiles, holding the other tenderly close. ...I get to keep you now... like... forever.

Ieva smiled even more as she pressed her forehead against Lathe’s. “You’re gonna have to get used to it.” She moved to kiss his jaw down to his ear, kissing the shell as his hands ran up and down her sides and her back. I love this, I could stay like this forever. The hour they had to themselves was up before they knew it, heading down to the large ballroom which held all their guests. Dad should be doing the greetings for the ceremony right about now... She smiled as she heard his voice on one of the microphones, her hand gripping onto Lathe's as they waited to be announced into the room.

Lathe beamed as they were announced, walking into the ballroom as the people around them at the many tables cheered. He looked to Spades as the first few notes of a waltz played, stepping back and bowing to her, offering her his hand. “May I have this dance?” Please?

Ieva smiled softly, taking his hand and coming close to him as she let him take lead. She put her hand up on his shoulder, feeling his large hand on her waist. This is perfect. Her eyes closed as they went through the well practiced steps together, leaning close to him, her head on his shoulder as she smiled. I really liked this. Ieva sighed a bit as the music turned low, the two of them splitting apart after kissing each other sweetly to go dance with their other partner. She picked her dress up a bit to help her walk as she went up to Marcus who took the lead again. I hope Eren remembers how to do this dance...

Lathe kissed her sweetly before turning to Eren, walking over and again offering his hand. He smiled faintly as Eren and he began moving across the floor, studying him for a moment with a quirked eyebrow. “...y’know, I didn't know that I adopted a daughter. I could've sworn I had a son...” He beamed as Eren giggled, glancing over to Levi. “Pretty sure Levi’s getting jelly already. I wonder if that makes him straight...?” Lathe watched Eren blush, his features softening, quiet for a moment. “I'm really proud of you, you know. You've done so much for all of us, and you've held up under all sorts of hell…. I admire that.”

Eren smiled, his whole face heating up in embarrassment. “I’m proud of you too...” His voice was soft, a smile on his face as he thought about what was about to happen. I still can’t believe Mom asked if I could sing that song! He let his feet carry him around the dance floor to the beat of the music. This is really nice.

Lathe smiled as Eren rested his forehead on his shoulder, his cheek on his head as they moved smoothly. He let Eren go as the music ended, watching him and Spades scurry off with matching grins. They're both going? Probably changing to shorter dresses, the both of them. Lathe looked over as Damien came over to herd him to a table with the club, a group of them catching him in
conversation for a few minutes while they waited for Eren and Spades. He looked up as Scotty and Casper seemed to notice something and grin madly, only realising what was happening a second too late, both of them grabbing one of his arms and dragging him onto the dance floor in the very middle, kicking his feet out from under him and setting him into a chair, holding him in place. **What.** “Nonononono lemme go, you jerks!” Lathe was already flushing in embarrassment as they held him at the centre of everyone’s attention, the DJ glancing to a side door expectantly, his hand poised over a button. **Oh crap, something’s about to happen… oh my God, what have they orchestrated…** Lathe glanced around nervously as people formed a circle around him, Scotty and Casper still keeping him in his seat. **...oh no…**

Eren stepped out from the side door, clad in a metallic suit, a sharp black tie a good contrast on his white undershirt. His hair was cut short, still a messy mop of brown on his head, though it was the same hairstyle that he wore throughout high school. **Oh I am so ready for this…** He hid behind the crowd forming around Lathe, though not well, still clearly visible. **Oh fuck it, so he’ll see a few seconds earlier, who cares?**

Lathe looked around him at the many people in a tight circle, glaring daggers at them. “You're all traitors is what you are.” Lathe blushed as they all just laughed with bright eyes, looking around and seeing where a small window opened between a few people, his eyes widening as he saw a flash of silver. **...what… was that Eren?** Lathe was confused as he looked up as there was new movement, all of his guy friends donning sailor hats that came out of nowhere. **...what the actual fuck is going on.** Lathe buried his face in his hands, looking at everyone between his fingers. **...I hate you all.**

Eren smirked as he saw everyone start to put sailor hats on, a grin taking over his face as he reached the DJ. **“Is everything ready?”** When he received a nod and a microphone he turned it on and tapped it to make sure it worked. **“Alright, how’s everybody doing tonight?”** He got a collective ‘Good’ from the crowd, seeming satisfied as he came close into the circle that had surrounded Lathe. **“That’s good, and I’m sure that most of you know me… either you know me because of my singing, or you actually know me, or you actually know my amazing father, ahem, AKA coffeegodsAutonomous on twitter…”** He faked a cough as he drew in everyone’s attention to the center of the dance floor as he got closer to where Lathe was actually sitting. **“Well anyways, I’m absolutely sure that you’re all confused as to what’s going on exactly, and I’ll keep it short for right now because… It’s a surprise.”** Eren had a huge smile on his face as he turned finally to Lathe, facing him as he saw Ieva actually sneak in through the same door as he did to get a mic from the DJ as well. **That’s it, just a little longer, good no one saw you…. Awesome.** **“So, Dad do you have any words before we get this show on the road?”** **Come on, you obviously think something is going on, and wait until you see what’s actually going down. OH MY GOD IT SHALL BE AWESOME !!!**

Lathe just looked at him with a mix of shock, embarrassment, and resignation, just shaking his head at him. **…Eren Yeager, you're gonna be the death of me…”** **...what the actual hell is going on...**
Eren smirked evilly. “For some reason, I knew you were gonna say that, anyways, is everyone ready for some entertainment?” He paused hearing the shouts and wolf whistles from around the room as well as some cheering. “Alright well, this song right here marks the return of Eren Yeager.” He turned on his heels pointing at the DJ. “Hit it!”

The music started instantly along with Lathe’s friends starting right along with it.

_Tarzan and Jane were swingin’ on a vine_

Ieva started singing as she made her way to the dance floor from the DJ booth.

_Candy man, candy man_

_Sippin’ from a bottle of vodka double wine_

_Sweet, sugar, candy man_

Eren picked up right alongside Ieva.

_I met him out for dinner on a Friday night_

_He really got me working up an appetite_

_He had tattoos up and down his arm_

_There's nothing more dangerous than a boy with charm_

_He's a one stop shop, makes the panties drop_

_He's a sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man_

_A sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man_

_He took me to the Spider club on Hollywood and Vine_

_We drank champagne, and we danced all night_

_We shook the paparazzi for a big surprise (a big surprise)_

_The gossip tonight will be tommorow's headlines_

_He's a one stop shop, makes my cherry pop_

_He's a sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man (oh yeah)
A sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man

He's a one stop shop, makes my cherry pop

He's a sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man (oh)

A sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man

Well, by now I'm getting all bothered and hot

When he kissed my mouth, he really hit the spot

He had lips like sugar cane, (oh)

Good things come for boys who wait

(Tarzan and Jane were swingin’ on a vine)

Candy man, candy man

(Sippin' from a bottle of vodka double wine)

Candy man, candy man

(Sweet, sugar, candy man)

He's a one stop, gotcha hot, makin' all the panties drop

(Sweet, sugar, candy man)

He's a one stop, got me hot, makin' my (uh) pop

(Sweet, sugar, candy man)

He's a one stop, get it while it's hot, baby, don't stop

(Sweet, sugar)

He got those lips like sugar cane

Good things come for boys who wait

He's a one stop shop with a real big (uh)

He's a sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man

(Say what) a sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man

(Say) a sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man, woo

A sweet talkin' sugar coated candy man

Candy man, candy man

Candy man, candy man
Candy man, candy man

(Tarzan and Jane were swingin' on a vine

Tarzan and Jane were swingin' on a vine

Sippin' from a bottle of vodka double wine

Sippin' from a bottle of vodka double wine

Jane lost her grip and down she fell

Jane lost her grip and down she fell

Squared herself away as she let out a yell

Squared herself away as she let out a yell)

Oh my fucking god. Lathe was crimson as he recognised the song instantly, watching with wide eyes as Spades and Eren circled him in the ring of people, not knowing how to react. ...the fact that Eren’s singing this makes it even worse … oh my god… ...the song is pretty uncanny, the way it fits for Ieva and I, though… practically the whole damn thing is true… ...Ieva sounds amazing … ...but everyone in those damn sailor hats… my God, I’ll kill them all . Lathe’s cheeks were on fire when the song ended, watching with wide eyes as Ieva came up to him and pried his hands from his face, leaning down to kiss him. ...that was the most embarrassing thing I’ve ever had happen to me… when everyone else gets married, I can just take it out on them and make them feel even more embarrassed. ...the perfect plan. Lathe looked to her as she broke away, chuckling airily for a moment before speaking in disbelief. “...that just happened.” He watched her laugh, beaming as she tugged him to his feet to properly hug-tackle him.

Spades couldn’t help but laugh as everyone cheered from their performance, a huge smile on her face. “It did… Did you like that?” I really hope you did, because I thought that song was completely perfect for us. “Don’t worry, I have plans for Eren’s wedding too.” She couldn’t help the grin that resulted from those words, her arms still tightly wrapped around Lathe’s middle.

“Loved it.” Lathe cupped her cheeks, pecking her nose. “And thank god- I'm so gonna embarrass the hell out of him now.” He deserves it, pulling that little stunt. He chuckled as she kissed him again, still smiling widely.

...well fuck. I knew about the song… but I didn't know about that . Levi traced Eren’s silver-clad figure up and down, pulling off his sailor hat and marching straight up to him. He watched as Eren turned to greet him, cutting off any words by tugging him by his tie into a fierce kiss, tangling their tongues and threading a hand through his now-short hair, not giving a single fuck about the cheers and wolf-whistles he heard behind him. That’s the Eren Yeager I know .
Ieva smirked as she took him to their table, sitting down in their seats as the DJ told them the first round of food would be out shortly. *I wanna eat all the food, I remember it was all delicious.* “Don’t be too hard on him, I asked if we could do the song, because he can actually hit the high notes….” She had a dopey smile on her face as the food was brought out before them, watching as everyone settled down to begin eating. *That definitely kicked off the good party.* Her eyes followed Levi and Eren as the two of them came to sit at the long table, on Lathe’s side as Marcus came to sit on her side, her eyes widening when she saw just who Marcus was holding. “Dad! Why do you have Maverick?” Oh my god! Did you just steal a baby? “Relax, I’m letting his mothers have some alone time, and this little guy enjoys the new attention.” He chuckled as Maverick babbled at him, holding onto his shirt with one hand and grabbing at his goatee with the other. *This little stinker is after my heart, and I’m not even related to him.* “Let me spoil him, I like being able to hold a baby again.” He had a soft smile across his lips, ignoring the food on his plate as he fed Maverick the food he needed to eat. *He’s getting big, and he’s only seven months.*

Eren sat down next to Lathe, a little weary of what he was going to say about him singing the song with Ieva. He still held a blush from Levi kissing him just a few moments ago. *Oh my god, they’re sitting next to me on both sides.* His face flushed as his food was set in front of him, swallowing as he unraveled his silverware, expecting to be chewed out by Lathe. *I hope he’s not mad.*

Lathe just looked over to Eren, shaking his head. “That was quite the stunt you pulled. ...but I literally would try to pull the same damn thing if I were you, so it’s kinda okay.” Lathe grinned like a madman, looking to his hair. “And two things- first, you'd better have had your hair cut while in a pony so you can donate it, and second, have you decided on being my son again? I was kinda enjoying having a daughter…” Lathe joked, smiling as Eren giggled a bit and dug into his food, glancing over to Marcus. “...how on Earth did you convince Sharon to unhand her kid? She's so protective of him.” *She's a new mom, with her first kid. ...not to say Maverick himself is complaining, but still.* He glanced to Sharon at one of the tables, seeing her cast a worried glance to the table every couple seconds. *Huh.*

“Trust me, I didn’t receive him from her, I asked Hannah if I can hold him and she handed him over with his food, so I will take over responsibility for the babbling baby for dinner.” His voice was soft, Maverick watching him as he was fed more food, making soft noises every few bites. *This is really too cute, I miss having kids.*

“Well if Maverick ends up crying or looking distressed for any reason, don't be surprised when Sharon steals him right back. She looks worried.” *Yeah, it's understandable though, really.* Lathe went back to his food, shooting Ieva loving glances and blushing whenever she caught him. *You're so pretty....* 

Marcus nodded. “Lathe, I had five of my own kids, I think I can handle a baby, and let the new
mother have a break for a little bit.” He made sure to keep Maverick entertained as he ate smiling as the small child laughed happily as he pulled at the hair on his face. *Kids always liked the facial hair to pull.*

*That’s too cute…* Eren looked back to his food from watching Maverick play with Marcus’s facial hair and suit. He ate some more of the delicious chicken picking at his mashed potatoes. *The food’s really good, and I think that speeches are going to start soon.* He glanced over to Levi, watching the man eat carefully to avoid getting any food on his dress blues. *He looks really hot in that uniform... I wonder if Mom told him about what I was gonna do with my hair? Is he mad that I didn't tell him?* He almost seemed to shrink, Blake nudging his foot from under the table, whining. “I’m fine, buddy, I’m fine.” He whispered as he reached his hand down to pet Blake between the ears. *Don’t give me away, I’m doing good right now… And honestly I just started shaking from doing that now. Holy fuck… I can't believe I actually did that.*

Levi glanced over to a Eren, an eyebrow quirked, looking a bit worried as he rested a hand on his knee under the table. “You doing okay?” He smirked a bit when Eren nodded, thinking. “Everything that just happened catching up to you?” He chuckled quietly as Eren nodded, gently rubbing his knee with a thumb. “Figures. And I kinda like this haircut better- it's not always, ahem, in the way.” Levi drew his hand away as Eren blushed, going back to his own food with a satisfied smirk. *I love riling you up. But I'm not lying- I always either ended up tugging on it, laying on it, or getting it in my mouth. ...it wasn't always fun. ...For either party.* Dinner was delicious, everyone thoroughly enjoying the food, even Sharon soon able to relax and have fun with everyone away from Maverick for once, animated conversations popping up across the room. *You can tell she can definitely use the bit of time not in complete Mom Mode.* He took his time to look over everyone in the hall, studying everyone. *All of the squad has paired off rather nicely…* He glanced down to Phoebe, her phone with a fancy bowtie case on the table next to her. *...I guess that counts too… huh.* He looked around, noting all of the smiles and pink-tinted cheeks. *...I don't think anyone ever said the rule was to marry your best friend, but... ...why don't people do that more? It'd make everything so much easier. You both know what the worst of each other looks like. You can criticise each other and not feel bad about telling them what they need to hear.* He watched as Felix jumped onto his hind legs, nudging a nervous-looking Iroh. Damien leaned over and murmured quietly to him, patting his leg and pecking his cheek. Iroh dissolved into blushing mumbles, a small smile on his face as he returned to his food, a bit less nervous as he tried to join the conversation. *...and we already know how to make them feel better.* He glanced over to the round table where most of their friends from school sat, Jean trying to make amicable conversation with Connie next to him. *...even Jean doesn't look like someone pissed in his cereal this morning. And it’s Jean. He watched as Jean suddenly seemed to turn pink and look over to Marco with a stutter, Marco glancing back to him innocently as he ate his salad. ...yep. Love does that to you, I guess. It's weird. I never would've guessed the person who'd put up with such an asshole would be the sweetest guy we know. You'd think Jean would go after some blonde ditz or something. But nope. He really lucked out. ...and Marco's lucky that Jean's not impossible to civilise.* He glanced over to Bert and Reiner, both of the, rather quiet as they ate, sneaking glances to the other. *...still wouldn't've guessed. Everyone liked Reiner, of course, he's a good guy. Bert’s pretty quiet, but he’s scary when he's mad, which isn't often… but one outburst was enough for most people to walk on eggshells around him all the time. ...except Reiner, actually. He acted the exact same way he always did. ...I dunno. All I know is they were seemingly attached at the hip the entire time. I just thought Bert liked having someone to talk to who wasn't triple-filtering their every word and movement. ...he probably liked that too. But there's obviously more to it. He looked over to the two blondes at the table, Armin smiling as
Jean talked, Erwin keeping a bit of a careful eye on Jean. ...ah, yes. Eyebrows and our favorite mastermind. Again, they came completely out of nowhere ...I guess you never really know who’s going to end up falling in love. But when it happens, that’s when you see why. ...it’s the deal with everyone here, I guess. He looked around, even studying Lathe and Spades for a moment. You don’t really ponder it until it starts happening. And then, things get rolling, and it either doesn't work out, or you get married. ...huh. It never occurred to me that that's how all relationships really end. Break up, or get married. ...kinda a big idea to tussle with. I understand a bit more what Lathe was freaking out about forever ago... right before Spades came over for dinner and they weren’t even really a thing yet. Break up or marry. ...you can't let that freak you out too much, though. If he did, he’d’ve cancelled on Spades, and he wouldn’t be married to her right now. Speaking of marriage... He glanced back to Erwin, catching his eye and quirked an eyebrow for a moment, smirking. ...isn't it about time you finally give Armin what he wants? Not right now, obviously. But close enough. Levi chuckled quietly as Erwin seemed to read his thoughts, looking away and pointedly turning his attention to his food. Of course it is. He looked up as Marcus stood, Maverick looking happy to be up so high in his one arm, a microphone in the other hand. ...are we doing the speeches now? Already? Yeesh, I've been thinking too much.

Marcus made sure that Maverick was stable in his arm, smiling as he babbled and looked around with wide eyes. Little guy has never been up this high before... hmm, well Hannah was pretty short... and Sharon wasn’t that much taller, so I must seem like a giant to him. Oh well, kids get over the ‘holy shit you're huge’ factor pretty quickly. He cleared his throat, not wanting to sound too rough as he picked the mic up to his face. “Excuse me, can I have everyone’s attention?” He cleared his throat again, waiting as the hall quieted down from the chatter of conversations. “Ah, Thank you, first off I’d like to congratulate the two of you, Ieva you finally found someone we both could approve of, and Lathe, I must say you are my favorite son-in-law.” He chuckled right along with the rest of the crowd. You’re my only... so I would hope you’re the favorite out of the option of one singular person. “And as most of you know, or have picked up from my last statement, I’m Ieva’s father. I live in Buffalo, NY, which yes it’s very far away, at least a 4 hour flight or a 17 hour drive. You might ask why I live up there, alone, and so far away from the rest of my family.... Well, I’ve replaced them all with Siberian Huskies... 8 of them, replacing 4 children and 4 son and daughters-in-law.” He shook his head at the loud gasps that sounded around him. “I’m joking, I’m joking don’t worry....” He turned to look at Ieva. “I couldn’t replace you with anything or anyone in the world. I-” Marcus swallowed hard as he could already starting to feel the emotion clogging his throat and the water welling in his eyes. “I know that I’ve been a horrible father to you after everything that happened 25 years ago, but-” Marcus head to wipe at his eyes. “Sorry, I’m not used to talking about it like this...” He took a few moments to try and calm himself down, Maverick quieting as he watched a few tears run down Marcus’s cheeks. “In that car crash I lost my wife, I lost my sanity, and I thought I had lost your trust... forever.” He had to stop talking again, and take a few deep breaths, struggling to not break down. I can’t do this, I promised Ieva I wouldn’t do this on her wedding day. “But being in that accident never put you down, you took it in stride... and you were stronger than I could’ve asked for, because you got over it, you grew up... You grew up... Into a fine young woman who I couldn’t be more proud of...” He paused again to rub at his eyes shifting Maverick in his hold, a sad smile on his face as he turned to Lathe. “And my favorite son-in-law... I met you 24 years ago, on a cold winter night and knew you were a good guy right away. I’m glad that you were the one that Ieva’s chosen to spend the rest of her life with. You couldn’t have chosen better, you two are so well suited for the other. You’ve raised Eren for the past 5 years, and I think you’ve both left a great impression on him, and I hope you will be able to have your own children someday. I wish your marriage well, and I’m letting you know that I’m going to spoil them all rotten.” He smiled softly, Maverick giggling in his arms as he spoke, turning to walk to where Levi was, handing him the microphone before going over to Ieva.
and Lathe to go hug them.

*It's my turn, isn't it.* Levi nervously swallowed before he stood, taking the microphone from Marcus and smiling softly to him before turning to the hall. “Of course, congratulations to the both of you. If you didn't know, I'm Levi, Eren’s boyfriend.” He was quiet for a moment, glancing over to Lathe a bit nervously. “I uh... I never really talked about it, but I never had much family growing up... sure, I had my uncle making sure I stayed fed and sheltered, but that was really it... Lathe, when you came into the picture and adopted Eren as your own son so easily... you adopted me too. You didn't even know us for more than a week and you were already bending over backwards for the both of us, getting things in order and trying to make us feel welcome and safe in your home... and you did such an amazing job of it. I'm... I'm really happy that I get to have a Dad again... and a mother too of course.” Levi smiled faintly as Spades playfully glared at him for a second before smiling again. “I just... you both have done so much for me and have really made me feel like family... you've never questioned where I came from or tried to keep me from doing the things I loved... You've been a great support system and...” Levi somehow kept his face stoic as he spoke, his voice shaking for just an instant and stopping, brushing a single tear from his cheek. *Don't break down... don't do it... “...I'm so, so grateful for that...”* Levi looked up as Lathe stood, coming over to hug him to his chest tightly, his arms winding around his back. Levi invisibly shook, his face buried in his chest, quiet, only Lathe able to hear him. “...I love you guys so much...” *Thank you...*

Lathe smiled as Levi pulled him into a tight hug, rubbing his back gently. “We love you too, Levi. We really do.” *You really are family.*

Levi needed a moment before he could let go without fearing he was going to sob, smiling weakly to him and handing off the microphone to Eren. *I'm gonna cry if I keep talking...*

Eren looked to the microphone and pulled out the many folded up pieces of paper which appeared to have been torn apart and taped back together again. “Let’s see here.... Um, what was I gonna say?.... Oh yeah, hi, again, I’m Eren Yeager.” He looked down to the paper making a few sounds as he skimmed it. “Yeah... Tell Dad he’s awesome.... Hmm, joke about his casino bans.... Yadda yadda yadda.... He picked me up from school.... Someone should probably alert the police... Oh yeah, mom’s a cop... Eh... Let’s see where was I again?” He continued to speak to himself as he flipped through the multitudes of paper, before making an exasperated sound and throwing the papers up in the air and let them flutter to the ground a big grin on his face. *Well, I bet they all think I’m crazy now, but fuck it.* “Oh wow, it got quiet in here.... And I was talking to myself again wasn’t I...?” He sighed as a few people nodded, turning and pointing to Lathe. “It’s that man’s fault! I’m turning into him! I swear it!”

Lathe had a wide grin on his face, his eyebrows raised as he dramatically placed a hand over his heart, joking with him. “You say that like it's a bad thing! You wound me.” *Oh my god, this is gonna be good.*
“Hey! Who knows? It might be a bad thing impersonating a millionaire. You never know!” Eren’s smile took over his face. “But I’m pretty sure that you were impersonating me first, I believe I acquired the million before you did. Ha. Sucker.” Eren shrugged, walking around the scattered papers as if he were going to start to talk to the crowd all over again, completely ignoring Lathe and Ieva for the time being. “I want to start this whole rant that you are about to hear off with a little bit of a back story… You see Lathe here used to be a substitute teacher… I know, shocking right? The man who loves kids wished to be surrounded by them so much that he decided to teach them! Incredible!” He paused, dashing over to the table and grabbing his large glass of water and took it with him, sipping it for a few moments. “Sorry, need to stay hydrated for later tonight, anyways, Lathe was substituting my first period chem class, it was a lab day that ended with flashes of things burning, oh yeah he set everything he possibly could on fire! And another surprise: no one got hurt.”

“Hey, I was being careful! I wore the safety goggles and everything!” Lathe looked over to Ieva as she gave him an incredulous look, trying to defend himself. “There was a fire extinguisher two feet away! And it wasn’t as if I was burning huge objects or something! It's not like I'd let them all get hurt!” I was being careful, but in a reckless manner. ...but still careful.

Eren looked back over his shoulder to Lathe at his little outburst. “I swear, this guy just wants to interrupt me.” He shook his head as everyone around laughed, waiting for them to quiet down, putting his free hand in his pocket. “Dad… He got me out of a bad place, not many people know, well, maybe more people than I think know, but I was being abused by my biological father: mentally, physically, and sexually….” Silence blanketed the large ballroom, everyone looking at Eren from a new perspective. “I was, as Jean would put it, a suicidal bastard. I felt like everyone just threw me away even though they knew nothing about me, and I was definitely ostracized for being a sixteen-year-old freshman. It hurt, it hurt a lot, and I bet a lot of you probably knew what my mentality was like, cause I’m sure everyone in this room at some point has felt like they were nothing in the eyes of others.” Eren nodded, his voice beginning to shake a bit. “That man, that man who we all love and adore, opened up his arms so quickly it made my head spin, and whenever I felt like that again, like the whole world was against me, he opened my eyes all over again and helped me see that small silver lining in life. That man right there, he adopted me within a week after he became aware of my existence.”

Lathe was on his feet again, coming up to Eren and giving him a hug, feeling him shudder hard in his arms. ...it didn't take even a week for me to know you needed someone to help you... and to know that that person had to be me. I couldn't let you go through a foster system that's so wholly broken... I couldn't risk you getting hurt more, or getting put in the hands of someone unwilling to do more than help you barely survive. I wanted to help you mend... I wanted you to be happy.

Eren tried in vain to stop his shaking, snagging the handkerchief from Lathe’s side pocket and shooing him away from the center of the floor as he wiped at his face with the light blue fabric. “Thanks, Dad…” He cleared his throat looking at the fabric in his grasp. “You all see this fabric? Most of you know that this handkerchief, if you pulled it out of Dad’s pocket any time before I was
put in a 3-week long coma, it would be red. But you see now, that it’s a light blue color. Most don’t
really think about why he suddenly switched colors, I mean who would even think that that’s
important? Some of you might think it got too worn to use again and he had to buy another and
they only had light blue, far fetched yes, and no, not true. Dad, as I’ve found out from Mom has
had a red handkerchief on him since he was my age, I’m 21…. So it’s been at least 17 years since
he started carrying one, and it’s always been red. So why the change? Well, this wonderful man,
that sits before you, who married the love of his life today, changed for the kid he adopted. I’m not
even his, but when I came out of my three week long coma, we found out that I had even more
trauma than I had originally…. Which led to me not being able to have that red handkerchief near
my face at all. Mom told me as soon as we got home from the hospital, he went out and got rid of
all his red ones and replaced them with light blue ones. It really shows how much he’ll try and
make someone’s life better by helping with the small details that he finds need fixing. He changed
a habit, selflessly, he offered up a home, selflessly, and he opened his arms, willing and wanting.”
He turned to Lathe, holding onto the handkerchief still. “I couldn’t have asked for more from you,
really…. Actually one thing, I kinda want some siblings! I want a little brother!” Eren grinned
wildly coming up to Lathe and giving him a big hug as he stood only a few inches shorter than
Lathe, his head nuzzled into Lathe’s chest.

I hope I did okay… I really don’t know if I can say
anything more without crying hysterically… because oh my god… my Dad got married … does
that make Mom my step-mom?

Casper chuckled, standing as he was handed the mic, smiling warmly as Eren bear-hugged Lathe.
“Trust me Eren, I'm sure they'll get right on that.” He watched Lathe and Ieva turn bright red,
Lathe glaring at him as someone in the hall whistled. “Come on, it’s my job to embarrass you.” He
ambled out onto the floor, his grin lopsided. “So for those of you who don't know, I'm Casper
Pandreivitch, and I'm about to tell you all about the antics of one Lathe Autonomous Quo during
high school. And don't interrupt me, you asked for this.” He pointed to Lathe, who looked
frustrated as he shut his mouth, already embarrassed. “So. About twenty trillion years ago this guy
was young and went to high school, decided he wanted something entertaining to do after classes,
and started The Club. The Club didn’t have a name, we didn't have bake sales, and we only had a
page in the yearbook during his senior year. It was just The Club. And it was lit.” He chuckled,
running a hand through his hair as his thoughts ran. “I swear, everyone in that club had at some
point owed Lathe a huge favor because he saved them from getting their face punched in or from
losing their minds. I was a freshman when he was a senior, and he kept me from being beat to shit
on my first day because even then, I had my hair dyed. He defended Phoebe who had a really posh
British accent and still does. He was the only person who would talk to Damien when he was in
that four-year goth-punk phase that medium-key creeped you out until he showed up one day and
just started doodling everywhere. He helped Marc pull his head out of his ass on Valentine’s Day
and give a rose to Brooke, who are now very happily married. ...he helped a lot of us out of some
dark places. Sometimes instead of playing cards or whatever we all would just talk for two solid
hours about whatever it was, parenthood or sexuality or whatever it was. We all had serious talks
then, and we needed them. He opened good dialogue for us… and by his sophomore year everyone
knew he would literally fight to the death to protect one of us. He broke his wrist for one of us. He
mother-henned all of us when we were in college, when we drank too much and were an emotional
wreck, like when I fell for that formerly homophobic goon over there.” He jerked a thumb to
Scotty, who had the grace to look a bit embarrassed. “He gave everything that he had to make sure
the people around him were okay when he was the one with nothing left to lose. He's been so
selfless for as long as I've known him and… and we all want to say thank you… for dealing with
all of our bullshit and keeping us from getting ourselves killed.” He grinned wearily, marching up
to Lathe and sighing, him and Ieva able to hear him. “You're a crazy motherfucker, and we love
you.” He pulled Lathe into a crushing hug, grinning madly as he broke away and handed the mic
over to Scotty. “You're up, love.” *Let's see what you* wrote.

Scotty silently cursed to himself as he pulled out his folded piece of paper and took the microphone, clearing his throat as he stepped up towards the center of the floor. “Okay, well, for starters…. My name is Scott Octavian, and every calls me Scotty, I’m a doctor, I’m still trying to go back to get my specialization in bones and all that good stuff, but right now I’m listed as an ER surgeon.” He shuffled a bit on his feet. “Well, I can say that out of our friend group, I probably knew Lathe the least when we were growing up. I transferred in halfway through Freshman year, I was somehow much much shorter than I am now, and Casper was apparently always staring at me from behind my back.” He smiled as the crowd laughed, a small sigh escaping him. *Good, I’m at least somewhat funny… “I knew Lathe for like half a year, maybe a little less, then he went off to college, and I thought I’d seen the last of his crazy ass, but was I very wrong…. I picked the same college he went to, because you know, at some point we were all doctors… Except for Casper, he was following me around just to stare at my ass some more….But it was good, Lathe helped me with some family issues that went on while I was in college, and he helped formulate a plan which would hopefully get me through med school, and what do ya know? It did. So I got through med school, at about the same time Lathe should’ve been finishing up his residency. I picked a hospital that I thought would be far enough away from him to get away from his crazy…. But I swear this guy is like a moth drawn to light! He transferred into my residency! How am I supplied to get away from him if we’re in the same hospital!? On the same floor no less? Then- Of course - Mr. Crazy always had to eat lunch with me. EVERY. SINGLE… DAY! So I was doing good with attempting to deal with Lathe, then what do you know! Casper finishes up Pharmacy School! And where does he end up? Our hospital…. I swear, I can’t get away from either of them! Like at all! Anyways, the moral of this story is that Lathe’s a psychotic stalker, good luck with that Ieva…. And Casper was so persistent that it eventually worked. So Casper, come back out here.” *You’re probably only half the way gonna kill me for this… He watched Casper confusedly get up from his seat and join him on the dance floor. Okay, well he came out here…*

Casper walked out to join him, quirking an eyebrow. “What’re you gonna make me do? I’m very suspicious.” *I was not informed of this.*

“Well, here, hold this.” He gave him his folded sheet of paper and the microphone and then rifled with his free hand through one of his inside pockets, pulling out a ring case and slowly getting down on one knee. *You’re gonna kill me…*

Casper took the things with a quirked eyebrow, looking to Scotty as he went through his pocket. His eyes widened as he saw the small box, flushing as Scotty dropped to one knee. *Oh my god…..*

“Casper…. Will you do me the honor of marrying me?” *Please say Yes….*

*Oh my god…. Casper had a hand over his mouth in shock, beaming, looking ready to cry in*
Scotty smirked as he was pulled up, kissing him deeply, wrapping his arms around Casper’s waist, keeping his head bent for him. Oh thank god… I honestly wouldn’t’ve known what to do if you hadn’t said yes… He picked his head up, a huge smile on his face. “I love you, you know that?”

Casper tilted his head, his eyes bright. “I dunno, you may have said it once… or twice… or twenty times…” Casper leaned up again to peck his lips. “I love you too, babe.” He then dragged him off the floor so they could go sit. He handed the microphone off down the table, sitting down with him, gripping his hand tightly. Mine.

Phoebe whistled as Casper tugged Scotty into a bruising kiss, waiting for them to break apart. She took the microphone as it was passed down to her, watching them sit close together, Scotty’s arms wound around Casper’s middle, suddenly tugging the violet-haired man into his lap, both of them blushing furiously. She smiled as she walked to the floor, her accent sweet and strong. “‘Ello! I’m that British person Casper mentioned, Phoebe Britannica, and I might as well just give up now because there’s no way anyone here could top that. First off, congratulations you two.” She looked pointedly to Scotty, grinning as he just leaned down to kiss Casper’s cheek in response. “And congratulations you two!” She looked to Lathe and Ieva, beaming as Lathe moved to kiss her cheek. She looked back to the hall, pacing as she talked. “So yeah, I’m Phoebe. Hello, hi, I like your tie!” She pointed to Jean’s tie as she ambled around the floor, flicking her finger up to hit his nose as he looked down, surprising him. “Made you look.” She grinned as Jean stared at her with a deer-in-the-headlights expression, her demeanor casual, everyone in the room torn between amusement and shock, Marco trying to hide a grin. “So yeah. I was told to ramble, so I will. I came to America from the U.K. when I was fourteen, and my accent nearly got my nose broken my first day in high school. Yes, I’ve been in London. No, I’ve never met the Queen. But I write funny and say words really weird because I can. I married my computer and I do the thing where you tell it how to do stuff, which can be hard because apparently if you don't spell things in American English, stuff kinda…. doesn’t work.” She smiled sheepishly, hearing chuckles around her. Yay, I'm doing the funny! Sorta. “I dunno, when I came to America- and yes, it was by myself, surprisingly enough- I obviously knew nobody. To be honest, I don't even remember why I originally gravitated towards Kansas anyway. It was probably because of the Wizard of Oz or something. Anyway, I had to pick, so I came here. I was on the school grounds for a good hour and by that time people had decided that because I had an accent I was apparently conceited and then avoided me like the plague, I almost got beaten up, I was saved from being beaten up, and then saw the person who defended me get fussed over by someone who became one of my first really good friends.” She nodded to Ieva. “You two and that Club were the best things to ever happen to me. I had someone as a friend who would defend me in battle,” She looked to Lathe, her voice joking lightly. “-And then I could turn around and complain about whatever I wanted and you wouldn’t zone out or anything. It was great!” She smiled, waving off her own comment. “But honestly, I'm really glad that you two didn't take the lead the rest of the school had and decided talking to me wasn't gonna be the end of the world. I actually ended up with friends… more than I had even in the U.K… and that was a lot more than I could've asked for…” She smiled, shrugging one shoulder. “I guess my story has a moral- as long as Lathe keeps his will to fight to the death, Ieva will have plenty to fuss over. It probably hasn't been the last time. Try not to drive each other insane, okay? And Hon, everytime I look at you I think you've been set on fire. If you change it I'll
be sad.” She drew a tear down her cheek with one finger, laughing a bit as she came back off the
group.

I did a thing!

Armin was listening to the conversation, only vaguely interested as Erwin spoke, Marco and Jean
still sitting next to them. I get that you’re not much of a dancer, but we were only out for one song,
really… I wanna dance even if we look like idiots… half the people do anyway. …no offense, but
really. Armin picked his head up when he heard the crowd quiet down, seeing people coupling up
on the dance floor, perking up.

A slow dance.

“Erwin, I don’t care if you have two left feet. Dance
floor.” Armin turned to him, not caring that he cut him off, standing. “Please? I wanna dance at
least a little bit…”

Erwin looked surprised at the sudden action, his brow furrowing a bit, glancing away with nerves.
“I, Uhm…”

Armin looked over as Marco murmured in Jean’s ear, whatever he said enough to get Jean up and
out to the floor. “C’mon, if Marco can get Jean to dance, you can get out there too.” Armin held
out his hand, looking to him expectantly. C’mon, I wanna dance… it gives me an excuse to cling to
you...

Erwin patted his pocket, making sure he still felt the box. Well I guess now is as good a time as
ever… He nodded, taking Armin’s hand and letting the smaller blonde drag him onto the dance
floor. He smiled a bit as they managed to make their way towards the middle where Levi and Eren
were waltzing around without a care in the world. Well I guess it’s not that bad… He held onto
Armin’s waist as he pulled him close, gently swaying with him to the music. What do I tell him
though? I know I’ve been planning this out for forever… but… Fuck what am I supposed to say?
We’ve already had one proposal tonight...

Armin reached up, his hands winding around the back of his neck, leaning his head on his chest,
listening to him. I can hear your heartbeat… …this is nice… They swayed together, trying not to
step on the other’s toes. If I do, I’m sorry.

Erwin shifted as Armin did, not bothering to mention anything if Armin stepped on his feet. He
pecked the top of his head as the slow song continued, almost content with watching Levi and Eren
continue their dance around them. “Armin?” His voice was soft as he held him a little closer. I can
do this… I can get down on one knee and ask you...

Armin pressed himself a bit closer to him, his eyes shut, humming a bit. “Mm? Yeah, Erwin?” I
“You know that I love you, right?” I need to make sure, I know it sounds really silly, but I want to make sure before I ask…

Armin looked up to him, smiling faintly. “Of course I know. You tell me all the time. I love you too, you know.” I really do…

“Good, because I have something important to ask you.” Before I leave, I needed to ask…

Armin looked confused for a moment, before a thought occurred to him, his eyes widening. You don’t mean… “….are you….?” …are you gonna ask me…?

“Armin, I’ve loved you since the day I met you, and I want to be by your side as long as humanly possible.” He got out a silver box, getting down on one knee and opening it, a large diamond sitting on top of the silvery band. “Will you marry me?” Oh please say yes! I know you’ve wanted me to ask…

Armin flushed, his hands coming to his face in shock. Oh my god….. “Erwin…. yes …..” He nearly started crying as Erwin slid the ring onto his finger, his hands coming to cup his jaw as he stood, Erwin pulling him into a sweet kiss. I love you….

Erwin smiled happily, cupping Armin’s cheeks as he kissed him happily. God, I love you… I love you so much… “I love you, Baby….”

“I love you too…” So much… Armin smiled into their kiss, and for that moment, on the dance floor, it was just the two of them.
Chapter 59: Lathe Night Additions

Lathe blinked awake at an oddly familiar sound, trying in his sleepiness to place it. ...*it's not a good sound... but why do I know it so much... it reminds me of the hospital... *wait. Ieva. Lathe sat up as he heard her retching in the bathroom, feeling the other side of the bed for a moment. *Cold. It's been awhile.* He threw on boxers quickly and padded to the door, wincing as he saw her hunched over the porcelain, emptying her stomach of its acid. *That doesn't look good.* “Ieva, are you okay? How long has it been?” He hovered in the doorway, not sure if she’d want him so close while she was so sick. *What could it be? Stomach flu doesn't crop up so quickly and severely, from what I know... it's too early. ...hangover? No, she doesn't drink... was it something she ate? ...but we all had the same thing, pretty much... if it’s just her... ...God, I hope it's not food poisoning...*

Ieva grimaced as she retched again, finally feeling her stomach settle once again, enough where she could lean back and flush the toilet of the acrid smell. “An hour at least...” She wiped off the drool that slipped from her lips, a disgusted look on her face. “Most likely longer, maybe two? I don’t know how much acid there is to throw up anymore.” *I would feel fine and try to wash my mouth out before coming right back to throw up again... Fuck if I ate something I am going to kill the catering service.* She sat back against the wall, looking at Lathe with exhaustion. She was wearing one of his shirts and panties, her long hair tied up to try and keep it out of the porcelain bowl. “Too long in my opinion.”

...two hours?! “Waaaay too long in a doctor’s opinion, too. If it's really been that long, I don't think it can be much else.” He moved next to her, gently feeling her forehead and taking her pulse. “...you don't really have a fever. You're warm, but with that much nausea, you'd have to be burning. I think you ate something bad. Really bad. ...we should probably get that checked out. Can you stand?” He held out his hands in offering. *Can you move and not pitch again?*

Ieva looked between the toilet she had been cradling and Lathe’s hand before taking it and slowly standing up. “We should probably hurry before I feel sick again.” *I don’t even wanna try and clean my mouth out, it’ll just make me throw up all over again.* She was shaky on her legs as Lathe helped her out to the rest of the room to sit on the edge of the bed as he got clothes for the two of them.

Lathe brought Ieva clothes and quickly dressed, helping her into her clothes and tying her shoes for her. He kept one hand gently around her waist as he guided her to the door, leaning heavily on him as they walked to the elevator. He hit the button for the ground floor, keeping her steady as the elevator lurched. His eyes widened as they walked to the lobby, the windows showing how dark it still was outside. *Fuck, it's so early... what time is it?* He glanced to the clock above the front desk, the person at the computer looking tired. *It's four thirty... “I didn't realise how early it was...”* Lathe led her to their car, helping her inside before hopping in himself, trying to keep the drive smooth as they headed to the hospital. *Wichita General is closest, I think...*

Ieva closed her eyes as the headlights from oncoming traffic made her nausea return. *Keep it together... Keep it together, you’ll be okay... “Lathe...”* Her voice was apprehensive as she
reached out to grab at his arm, his fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt. *I feel sick again… Shit.*

Lathe glanced over with worry, still keeping most of his attention on the road. “It'll be just a few more minutes, Hon, just hang on for a bit.” He slowed for a red light, grateful that the car was still for that short time, passing her sunglasses as she murmured about the lights. “These'll help. Just take deep breaths through your nose. Just focus on breathing, okay? It won't be long.” *We’ll get this sorted out soon.*

Ieva nodded slowly, trying not to really turn her head at all in fear that she’d lose to the nausea. *I do not want to throw up in Lathe’s car.* She let him put her sunglasses on and waited for them to pull up to the hospital. It wasn’t very busy for being so early on a Sunday morning. *Fuck, I don’t think I can walk.* “Lathe… I-I don’t think I can walk…” *I hope I can be seen right away, I don’t know if I can wait to be seen…*

Lathe nodded, getting out and moving to her side of the car, easing her out of the seat and into his arms. He hip-checked the door shut before walking smoothly to the front doors, looking to the woman at the front desk, his voice a bit worried. “Uhm, hi, we think my wife has food poisoning. …help?” *She's really not doing okay…*

The lady at the desk nodded and got up from the seat, motioning for Lathe to follow her as she opened two large swinging doors with the push of a button for them. *First get her on a bed, then start asking questions.* She hiked up the front of a bed a bit so she wasn’t laying completely flat. “Can you lay her down?” She grabbed a clipboard as she paged a doctor to come down to the front to get her and get her into a room. “Okay, honey, I’m going to ask you a few questions, so you need to answer me to the best of your ability.” She smiled when Ieva nodded subtly, getting her pen out of her hair and poising to write. “What’s your name?”

“Ieva Quo, but I just got married so all my documents are under Ieva Spades.”

The nurse nodded and scribbled it down. “Can you tell me why you’re here?”

“I woke up around two hours ago, and started throwing up almost non-stop.”

*Poor dear.* “Can you tell me if you take any medications?”

“None.”
“Any alcohol in the past 24 hours?”

“I don’t drink… So no.”

“Okay, any smoking?”

“No.”

“Are you pregnant or breastfeeding?”

“No.”

“When was your last period?”

“Four weeks ago.” I’m supposed to get mine starting tomorrow. God if this is from that…. So help me...

The woman made a soft noise as she nodded. “Tomorrow?” When she received a nod from Ieva she nodded. “Anything else bothering you besides throwing up?”

“No.”

“Is vomiting like this normal around this time of the month?”

“No I’ve never been nauseous before now.”

The nurse hummed as she wrote everything down before handing the clipboard off to the woman who was dressed in scrubs, covered with a white jacket. “Hi, Ieva, I’m Dr. McCarthy, let’s go get you in a room okay?” She smiled as Ieva nodded, the small woman unlocking the bed stand and rolling her towards an empty room.
...I know your face. “...Anna? Is that you?” Lathe looked to the woman curiously as he spoke, seeing her look up to him, realisation dawning on both their faces. “Sina High, Honors English?” I remember that’s the first damn class I ever taught...

“Ho~ly shit…. Well if it isn’t Mr. Quo. You turned out pretty great, I mean, you haven’t aged at all… What’s it been? 12 years? You still teaching at Trost?” I remember Senior English, you let us get away with everything ! She wheeled Ieva into the room and set her up with a few monitors before getting the curtain up and getting a gown ready for her. “I’ll help you get changed, don’t worry.” She told Ieva quietly as she started to remove her clothes.

Ieva was relieved with the help she got and was soon out of her clothes and into the hospital gown. I feel like I’m gonna be sick again. “Lathe…” Her voice was full of fear as she looked over to him panicked, feeling the wave of nausea hit her like a ton of bricks.

Lathe immediately snatched at a bin, handing it to her and running a hand soothingly over her back as she hunched over it, trying not to puke. He looked up to Anna, holding off on answering her questions. “No, haven’t for a few years, but that’s not important for the moment.” Just give her the rundown. “Ieva woke up two hours ago with nausea, vomiting practically nonstop. She doesn't have a fever high enough for it to be from the flu or anything like that, and her pulse is about normal, so I think it’s food poisoning from the catering last night. I don't know what else it could be…” Nothing else immediately comes to mind...

Anna nodded, going and tapping a few things on the heart monitor. “Okay, Ieva, I’m gonna let Lathe take care of your vomit, since you feel comfortable with him by your side, I’m going to get a catheter so you won’t need to get up.” She went off quickly to go get the supplies she needed.

“You know her?” Ieva asked quietly as she looked over to Lathe as he took care of her vomit. I hate being like this, it makes me feel so weak. She closed her eyes as Lathe came back and threaded his fingers through her hair. Your hands feel really nice.

Lathe nodded. “Yeah, she was a Senior the first year I started teaching. The English teacher was out for medical reasons for about half the year, they needed someone to take over the class. Cue me, who somehow actually managed to both be the chilliest teacher there and help them get ready for their exam at the same time. It was pretty easy after you announced no homework. Then they actually paid some attention.” They all actually listened. It was great. “I'm pretty sure that giant study thing I made for the exam is still floating around in that school… it wasn't exactly the best time for a teacher to get hurt.” Having a long-term sub while you're in exam mode isn't always great. Unless that sub is me.
Ieva nodded, leaning her head against his hand. “I’m sorry that we’re in a hospital right now… I didn’t really mean to get sick…” And it’s all my fault we’re here...

“Honey, it’s not your fault. I swear to God, I’m sending in a complaint if it really was the food. Getting my bride sick…” He gently pecked her cheek, looking around and trying to lighten the mood a bit as he spoke. “And I’ve spent plenty of time in hospitals. It’s not like I mind it. We’re here to get you better, and this is like my natural habitat anyway. It’s fine.” He smiled, pecking her temple as he saw her faintly smile. Yay, you’re smiling!

Ieva chuckled a bit, watching as Anna came back with the catheter, asking if she was ready, which she nodded, and soon Anna left once again with a urine sample. She closed her eyes when the need to vomit settled down and she could actually sleep more than a few moments. I’m really tired.

Anna came back an hour later, the urine sample tests in her hands, a smile playing across her face. “Oh good, she’s asleep. That means the morning sickness wore off…” Congratulations…

Lathe looked at her in confusion as she spoke, his voice quizzical. “…what do you mean, ‘morning sickness?’” She’s not pregnant. ...she… she’s not… is she…?

“Congrats… The tests I ran came back positive.” She gave him the sheet of paper and then the three pregnancy tests she did were in a bag, all with positives. “She’ll be happy that it’s nothing serious…” Just the first time with wicked morning sickness…

Lathe took the papers from her with wide eyes, staring hard at the tests. ...she’s... oh my god. “...she’s pregnant. Oh my god…” Lathe looked to Ieva, gently nudging her awake. “Ieva, wake up, you should know something-” He jumped as his phone suddenly rang loudly, recognising Eren’s ringtone. Oh my. He quickly answered it, worried as he spoke. “Eren? What’s wrong?” He listened as Eren babbled worriedly on the other end, scolding him for leaving without telling him. “Yeah yeah, okay, I’m sorry, I had to take Spades to the hospital. She was really sick this morning, and we thought something was wrong with what she ate. …but that’s not what was wrong.”

“ Oh god, Dad… Where are you? I’m coming…” Levi’s tired mumbles of ‘why are you up so early’ were drowned out by Eren putting the phone on speaker and quickly running around to get dressed. I need to go to them… I can’t lose another parent…
“Eren, will you calm the hell down please? Ieva’s fine. She really is. Nothing bad happened. I can only say it’s very good. Now get here so we can explain things, okay? And try not to wake everyone on the floor up. They’d all like to sleep, most likely.” That’s a thing people do.

Eren was still continuing to freak out. “Dad don’t fucking candy coat things, just tell me what the fuck happened!” His voice carried a hint of dread, like Lathe was lying to him just for his sake.

“It’s five in the goddamn morning... ugh, I’m up, stop hitting me with the damn pillow!” Levi could be heard grumbling as Eren got him up, obviously much more chill about the situation. Lathe heard him snap up the phone and take it off speaker, his voice much clearer after a moment. “Where are you two exactly? We’re coming to find you.”

“Witchita General- the closest hospital to the hotel. Room 12A. And please, get Eren to calm the hell down if you can. It’s a good thing, promise. Now get the hell over here.” Come on, Eren won’t actually stop panicking until he gets here and hears it for himself.

“Can do. Eren, you're gonna fucking break something, calm the hell down.” Levi could be heard talking to Eren before the line cut, Lathe hanging up as well and stowing away his phone. He turned to Ieva who looked at him tiredly, pecking her cheeks. “So, the kids are coming to make sure you’re okay… and you are. ...you both are.” He smiled, holding out his hand with the paper and tests in it as she looked at him confusedly. “Ieva… you’re pregnant.” You’re finally pregnant… He tugged her gently close, one hand softly drifting to her side, his thumb running over her stomach. You have a teeny human in you...

Ieva’s eyes widened. “W-what…? B-but, I-I… I can’t be… H-How?” Her eyes were the size of dinner plates, a hand coming to cover her mouth in disbelief as she took the tests from his hands. Oh my god… Oh my god… I’m pregnant ...

Lathe held her close, smiling widely and pressing loving kisses all across her cheeks when he heard a commotion down the hall. He looked up as Eren slid into the room, seeing them on the bed, Ieva crying as she clutched the test. Oh my. “Eren, Hon, calm down and let me explain-”

Eren’s eyes widened even more as he saw Ieva crying in Lathe’s hands. “Dad really? You weren’t gonna tell me anything over the fucking phone? Mom’s in tears … and you tell me it’s good news? I told you not to fucking sugar coat it! I don’t know if you know or not but I can’t do that right now! I can’t be told something’s perfectly okay when it’s not! The last time someone told me that my mother died!” He shouted, tears already starting to spill, shaking his head. “I don’t wanna lose another parent.” I don’t think my heart could handle it...
Lathe looked to Eren with worry, grateful as Levi hugged him from behind, trying to comfort him. He noted the knowing look in Levi’s eye as he glanced to Ieva’s hands, smiling and reaching for one of the three tests. “Eren, Hon, it really is good news. Nobody’s dying. Quite the opposite, actually.” He showed them the positive test. “Someone new is growing.”

“Eren, Hon, it really is good news. Nobody’s dying. Quite the opposite, actually.” He showed them the positive test. “Someone new is growing.”

Teeny human…

my teeny human…

our teeny human…

Eren snatched the test from Lathe, a worried look on his face soon melting into relief and a smile on his face as the tears continued to fall but for a better reason. “Oh my god… Mom, you’re pregnant.” Oh my god! This is wonderful!

I so called it. “That’s amazing news, congratulations!” Levi smiled to them, still holding onto Eren from behind. “Are you going to be okay?” He looked to Ieva, stopping himself before he could let another word slip. ...I don't really know how you'd react to me calling you Mom… I mean… I kinda did in the speech last night, but… I dunno...

Ieva nodded, smiling happily. “I’m going to be fine, me and the baby.” She smiled softly, her eyes soft. “You can call me Mom, Levi, you know that right?” I wouldn’t be mad with you if you did.

Levi looked to his feet, quiet. “Okay… Mom…” ...I actually get to have both parents again… I actually do… He used Eren as a bit of a shield, hiding a bit behind him. “Are you feeling okay enough to go back to the hotel?”

“If you need me to, I can carry you again.” Lathe looked to her, still gently rubbing her stomach. ...this is actually happening ...

Spades nodded, a small smile on her face when she felt Lathe’s hand on her abdomen. “I think that’ll work out, why don’t we go and get some sleep?” Even I’m still exhausted. I wonder how Eren knew we were gone? And why did he get up this early?

Eren nodded as he let them pull up the curtain so that they could get Ieva dressed again. “I’m gonna wait outside.” I need to calm down. He stepped outside of the room to see a familiar head of dusty blond hair. Huh? “J-Jake?” Eren called out to see the small boy being led by a large man in a uniform turn towards him. Oh my god! It’s really him. He dropped to his knees as Jake broke away from the man and ran to him, wrapping his small arms around Eren’s shoulders. “Jake, what are you doing here?” He asked, holding him close to his chest as the boy began to sob. Why are you here? Shouldn’t you be back home?

“I don’t wanna go away… I wanna stay with y-you.” Jake hiccuped as he clung to Eren, his face
red and blotchy from crying for a majority of the night. *I don’t wanna be taken away again.*

“What’s going on?” Levi came out of the room right after him, seeing Jake. *Huh? What…* He saw the man in uniform coming towards them to get Jake from Eren, reading the insignia on his jacket, his eyes widening. *Oh.* “He’s orphaned?” Levi looked to the man, resting a hand on Eren’s shoulder as the man came up to them.

Eren looked up to the man as he got within a few feet of them, seeing him sigh a bit as Jake clung to Eren. *He’s orphaned…* *Oh god no, I can’t let him through the system, absolutely not.* “It’s okay, Jake, I’m right here, it’s okay to be scared.”

The man looked down to Jake clinging to Eren without looking like he was going to back away from him. “Come on Jake, we need to go get you to a foster home today…” *But you seem to want to stay with these people.*

“No… I don’t w-wanna go… I wanna st-stay with Eren…” Jake whined as he clung to Eren tighter, crawling into his lap. *I don’t want him to leave me again.* He sniffled as he looked back at the man he had been with. “I wanna stay…”

Eren held him tighter as Jake moved into his lap, gently rocking him to try and get him to calm down. “Shhh…. Jake, it’s okay. It’s okay, you don’t have to go just yet… Are you okay? Why are you here and not back in the psych ward? What happened, honey?” He gently cooed to the younger boy, smiling as he calmed down, holding him in the middle of the large hallway, but the hospital wasn’t busy so no one way yell at them yet. He carded a hand through the dirty blonde locks gently, looking up to the man with pleading eyes who nodded and walked off towards another room, seemingly to get a coffee.

Jake whimpered as he was held, sniffling as he tried to calm down. “They took us all away… The officer brought me here with a lot of the other people who stayed with us… they brought us here and the doctors gave us food, and then told them who needed to leave…. They’re all gone… I don’t wanna be alone…” He whimpered as he clung onto Eren’s shirt, burying his face into his shoulder, taking in his scent to calm down. “You cut your hair…” He whispered quietly his small hands loosening from Eren’s shirt to feel his hair cut.

“He did.” Lathe stepped into the hall, Ieva secure in his arms. “Are you okay, Hon? Have you been eating okay?” He looked over Jake’s still-thin frame. *He really could use more meat on his bones…* He looked up as the officer came back with a cup of coffee, reading his jacket and understanding, his stomach dropping. *What. Oh god, no, we can’t let you go through the system.* “Jake, you have to go through foster care?” Lathe looked to him with worry. *We can’t let you…*
The man sipped at his coffee as he watched Jake begin to panic, resting a gentle hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Come on Jake, let go, we need to go find you a home.” *Come on, I don’t want you to stay here any longer than you have to.*

Jake immediately started crying hysterically. “No! I don’t wanna!” His voice was loud as Eren tried to calm him down again, quietly cooing to him before looking up at Lathe. *What do we do?*

“**We’ll** take him.” Lathe spoke before he had even a second to think about it. Something seemed to click after a second, looking to him in confusion. “Wait, why are you here in Wichita? You were in Trost just a few days ago. What happened?”

The man looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “The psych ward was closed due to a civil suit finally going through, the care deemed unacceptable, and everyone in the facility was transferred here, all orphans and psych patients… Have you ever fostered? Or adopted before?” *You seem a bit young for that, no offense or anything.*

Lathe nodded, everyone pointing to Eren. “I adopted him five and a half years ago.” *...oh my god, it's been a lot longer than it seems...*

“You do realize foster care is a lot more strenuous than adoption, correct?” *You’re aware of the more paperwork? Constant house visits? Kids finding new homes?*

“I’ve read a lot about it… we were thinking about doing that.” Lathe glanced to Ieva, blushing a bit. “...well, at least I was thinking about it.” But he looked up to the man again, nodding. “But I am aware that’s it’s a lot more taxing, and we’d be up to it.” *We’ve got the room, and the money to care for them. They can stay as long as they need to until they find a permanent home.*

The man nodded, looking over to Ieva. “Do you consent to this as well?” He watched her nod, and he pulled out his phone. “Okay, I’ll need your address and your contact information, you’ll need to come to the foster center with me but I need to go pick up another orphan really quick.” *I can get the baby.*

“Who is it?” *Maybe I’ll know them.*

“3 month old, named Eli.”
Lathe’s eyes widened, looking to Eren as he looked to him with pleading eyes. “Tiny human?” He watched Eren nod. The tiny human Eren tried to steal. He looked to the man again. “We’ll take him too.” Eren loves that kid… “We’ll come and fill out all the paperwork we need to.” Anything to make sure these kids have a good place to stay.

The man nodded. “You can take Jake, give me your phone number and I will text you the address, meet us there within two hours if you can.” That takes care of me trying to wrangle him. He handed his phone off to Lathe, a small smile on his face.

Lathe nodded, smiling as Ieva took the phone for him and typed in their number and address, making sure it was typed in with the correct spelling. “Within two hours is easy enough. We’ll go back to the hotel and regroup before heading back out, okay?” He looked around as they all nodded, smiling warmly to Jake. “We’ll take good care of you, don’t you worry, Hon.” You’ll be just fine. But after I get all that paperwork sorted out we need to get you stuff, anything let over from your house, clothes, and my god, the baby is gonna be a handful with zero warning… I need to google what type of formula is best because he’s still young enough to be suckling, and in case there’s anything we might forget I need a list… Eren’ll come along for that, he loves that kid. He can help pick out stuff. We need to get a nursery set up, and Jake needs a bedroom. Lathe nodded for Eren to stand. ...maybe I should get that minivan I was thinking we were gonna need… probably should. He was patient as Eren coaxed Jake along, letting him cling to his middle. That’s adorable. And it looks like Eren’s getting two brothers already. ...maybe even three. We don’t know yet, but maybe.

Eren continued to gently run his fingers through Jake’s hair. I want you to stay... “It’s gonna be okay, you’re staying with us now.” You’ll get to spend tonight in the hotel with us, and calm down, you’ll get to meet the puppies, and my kitten... And the horses... You’ll get to draw all you want, eat everything in the house with me. He smiled as he held him close, waiting for Lathe to sign Ieva out of the hospital, Levi having taken over holding her while Lathe needed to use his hands.

Lathe quickly signed the papers to discharge her, moving to take his wife back from Levi. “Alright, let’s get going, okay?” He took a moment before taking Ieva back to gently ruffle Jake’s hair. “We’ll take good care of you, Honey. Promise.” He scooped up Ieva and ambled to the parking lot, smiling to Eren, Levi and Jake as they went to their own car. He gently set Ieva in the passenger’s seat of the Thunderbird, going to start the car and drive them back to the hotel, the other car following after a minute. He glanced in the rear view mirror, seeing Levi driving, Eren in the back cooing to a nervous Jake. He needs someone who’s willing to bend over backwards to make him feel comfortable. And Eren’s just that. He carried Ieva inside once they were at the hotel, everyone converging in their master bedroom. “All right, family meeting.” He gently set Ieva on the bed, sitting next to her. “So. We have two new additions to the family, and one of them is a tiny human. That being said.” He smiled, looking around to them all. “Today I’m going to go wherever it is that foster centre is and go through the ton of paperwork they have for me. Then, when we have acquired the tiny human, I will come and retrieve Eren…” He smiled as Eren’s face lit up. “...so that he can help pick out baby stuff for Eli. I get the idea you’re pretty much gonna be all over him a bunch of the time.” He watched Eren enthusiastically nod, chuckling. “All right, then I’ll put you
in charge of researching the best kinds of formula and stuff for him since he’s young enough to still be suckling and stuff, and make a list of stuff we need to get him. Y’know, what formula is the best, he needs diapers, a crib, teeny adorable clothes, etcetera.” Yeah, he needs stuff. “But I'm making you and I go together so I can supervise.” He smirked as Eren blushed a bit. Yeah, you'd go nuts if nobody was there to keep you in check.

Ieva poked his side gently, a smirk playing at her lips. “Hey, you've gotta take me with you. We’re kinda sorta married now, so you can't just go do stuff by yourself anymore.” Nope. You now have to ask me before you do anything.

Lathe looked to her, then to the ceiling, a hand over his heart dramatically. “Goodbye, my freedom…” …Eh, I'll still find ways to be sorta reckless and unsupervised in some of my cray plans. Honestly, when we get home, I’ll just go and buy the minivan for the many humans I have a feeling I’m going to end up carting around. And for the huge grocery shopping trips. And the trips to IKEA.
Chapter 60: The Truth Comes Out

It took forever to get through the hallway. After I came up to get Eren and hand off Eli, everyone on the floor was all over him! There were so many pictures! And Iroh apparently loves kids. ...if Damien doesn't propose soon, I'm gonna smack some sense into him. ...I'm also surprised he isn't hungover at all. He got pretty drunk last night with Hannah, they drank pretty much all the sake the bar had on hand... huh. But Eren holding Eli is so adorable! I love it! We need to get to the store soon so we have formula and all sorts of stuff on hand before he gets fussy or anything gets out of hand. Lathe let Eren walk ahead of him out of the elevator into the lobby, Eli staring around with wide eyes and happily babbling as Eren cradled him close. So damn adorable.

Eren was looking down at Eli before a loud smack sounded and the pain rushed into his face. What? He looked at Armin who had a slightly furious face. “A-Armin? What the hell? I’m holding a child here!” Why the hell did you hit me!?

“What the hell, Eren?! Why didn't you tell me you were adopting a kid? I wanted to be the Godfather, damnit!” Armin looked a bit mad as he scolded Eren, obviously annoyed with him. “If neither me nor Erwin, who?” He pointed back to the breakfast table. “Don't tell me you picked Jean.” He heard an offended garble from Jean, who spoke with a mouth full of toast.

Lathe just watched the display of anger in surprise, slowly raising his hand. “...Uhm, technically he’s mine… but he’s a foster kid. We didn't adopt him, so he doesn't have Godparents yet.” That's what he gets when he's adopted.

Armin looked from Eli to Lathe, flushing red as he registered what he said, stuttering and covering his mouth in shock. “O-Oh, I'm so sorry, Eren, I didn't mean... Uhm....” Crap...

Eren looked at Armin, sighing quietly. “It’s alright, I guess, here… say hi.” He handed Eli to Armin before he could protest, crossing his arms so he couldn't take him back.

Armin stuttered in shock as he suddenly found himself with Eli in his arms, looking to the baby with wide eyes, curious brown eyes staring back at him. “...tiny human.” His voice was tiny and a bit scared. I'm holding a baby. Oh god, I'm gonna do something and kill it someone help.

Eren smirked, his voice a bit snarky. “Yeah, he’s just about half your size.”
Armin just looked up to him with surprise before hanging his head a bit. “...I deserved that.” He made a tiny noise of surprise as Eli hit his chest with his tiny fists, smiling widely up at the blonde. ...he likes me...?

“Yes. Yes you did.” Erwin ambled up behind Armin, leaning his elbow on his shoulder and looking down to the toddler in Armin’s arms. “Whatcha got there?” He suddenly looked surprised, a bit of mock fear in his voice. “It's not mine, is it?”

Armin glared at him, pouting a bit. “I didn't know two pasty white people could make a tanned baby.” Yeah. Not yours.

Eren shrugged. “Once you go black, you never go back.” Hahaha, you're gonna kill me now.

Jean picked his head up as he heard the comment. “Does that make Marco black?”

Marco nearly choked on his juice, covering his mouth, his face flushing completely red. He smacked Jean upside the head, glaring at him. Oh my god, shut up! He looked up as everyone around them laughed, many of them with blushes, looking to his plate, scarlet. Dammit, Jean. ...even if I am that good to you, no.

“What was that for?” Jean whined as he rubbed the back of his head. Why’d you hit me? “It’s not like I’m wrong, the statement is completely legit.”

Marco just moved to clamp a hand over Jean’s mouth, flushed all the way up his ears and down his neck. “...Jean… just shut up and eat your toast.” Marco was about to let him go when he let out a surprised ‘Eeep!,’ snatching his hand away. “You licked my hand!” Not cool!

“And you licked my di-”

Marco didn’t know what else to do to get him to shut up besides grab his collar and smash their lips together, his tongue forcibly tangling with Jean’s for a long moment, barely hearing the whistles behind him. He felt Jean shiver before he shoved him back, Jean a stuttering, flushed mess, his hands falling from midway in the air on their way to tangle in Marco’s hair, catching the dark flicker of want in his eyes. I love you, but you're a damn idiot with no mute button sometimes. And just be patient for a little bit longer. I'll ravish you - again, today- later when we
go upstairs again.

Armin watched the display with wide eyes, just shaking his head as Marco left Jean blushing and sputtering, obviously torn between being embarrassed that everyone saw that and being mad at him for stopping. ...I didn't expect Marco to wear the pants in the relationship. He has Jean whipped. Impressive. Keeps him out of our hair for the most part. He looked over as he felt someone tap his elbow, turning to see Bert looking at the kid in his arms, his voice quiet.

“...Uhm... is it okay if I maybe hold him?” He watched Armin look to Eren and Lathe for permission, carefully taking him as Armin held him up. The two of them had a bit of a staring contest for a bit before Eli looked away, making a happy sound as he realised how much higher up he was. Bert smiled faintly, hiking him further up, chuckling quietly as Eli giggled happily. He's really cute...

...I knew Marco was an expert Jean-wrangler, but this is ridiculous. Lathe just shook his head, looking up as more people congregated around Bert as he held Eli. “Everyone loves a tiny happy human.” And he looks like he loves the attention. He chuckled as Eli latched onto Reiner’s finger, trying to get it to his mouth and pouting when he couldn't. He looked about to cry when Bert caught his attention again, spinning him around slowly, making him laugh again easily. That's so cute ... Lathe low-key started taking pictures, smiling all the while.

Eren smiled softly as he watched everyone surround the bubbly child. I don’t understand how someone could give up their child, I really don’t.... How could you just abandon them? And not want to know a single thing about them? How? He eyes seemed to cloud as Eli giggled with everyone around him. I don’t know how... I don’t understand.... Why? If you don’t love your own child... Grisha lost his for me as soon as Carla died. Eren’s brows furrowed as he lost himself to his thoughts, not noticing that Iroh had joined the group around Eli. His own mother abandoned him at birth ...

Iroh was waiting for the doors to open up to the lobby, stretching. I wanna get some breakfast.... His eyes widened as he saw a giggling baby being fawned over. Oh my god! It's another baby!!! AHHHH! Iroh raced up to Bert, a hopeful look in his eyes. “Can I hold him, please, please, please, please ?” I will beg to hold him, and I will not feel a single ounce of shame.

Bert looked to the man he could only remember being made of nervousness, catching the glinting light in his eyes. ...yeah, I'm not about to get between him and the tiny human. I can share the child-holding privilege. Bert handed Eli over without question, smiling softly as Iroh immediately took to cooing to the child, smiling widely and talking to him happily. He really likes him...

“Where’d he go in two seconds ?” Damien looked around after Iroh immediately bolted off of the
elevator, seeing the mob of people and seeing them converged around Iroh. Oh no… It took a second before he heard the high sound of a happy baby, seeing Iroh with the tan child in his arms, looking up as he approached Lathe, hanging back from the crowd. “…someone gave him a baby. …This explains everything, actually.”

“What? His running off or his newfound social skills?”

“Both. …and shut up.” Damien glared at him for a moment before lightly punching Lathe’s arm, smiling faintly as he laughed, watching Iroh interact with Eli. ...*whose kid even is it?*

Eren snapped out of his thought process in as Iroh practically raced up to the child to hold him. *Wait…* “Wasn’t he drunk last night? Is he really okay holding the baby?” Eren turned his head to ask Damien, his voice full of concern and his eyes showing just how worried he was. *I don’t want him to be hung over and drop my brother….*

Damien nodded. “Yeah, he’s fine. He doesn’t do too well with normal American liquor, but he does this weird thing where if he drinks only sake, he's completely fine in the morning. He won't hurt the kid.” *Otherwise, the hangovers aren’t too pretty. ...I always make sure we have plenty of sake in the house. *Whose is it, anyway?” I don’t think any of these teens milling around have kids… none of them are married, at least.* He glanced over to Erwin, a protective arm around Armin. ...or at least yet, anyway.

“He’s my brother…” Eren answered before Lathe could really explain anything. *My cute little 3 month old brother.* He watched as Iroh kept giggling. *He’s really good with kids, I guess that’s good, he seems to feel more comfortable than when he was drunk and speaking fluent Japanese with Hannah.*

Damien looked to Lathe in shock. “...no way…” *That’s not a thing… “You didn't tell us you and Spades already had a kid?!”*

“It's not one that she had!” Lathe held up his hand in defence. “We haven't had one yet! We just went down to the foster centre today and signed up to be a foster family. Jake is upstairs with Ieva, and Eli right there was an orphan. The hospital couldn't keep them anymore. But we should be having one of our own running around soon.” He grinned, looking back to the group.

“Wait, you were at the hospital today? Why? Is that why Eren was making that panicked ruckus this morning and freaked everyone out?”
“Eren, I told you to be chill and not wake anyone up.” Lathe gave Eren a bit of a pointed look, watching him try to excuse it for his panic. “You didn’t have to panic, you know. I was being legit when I said nothing was wrong. We just got worried.” He looked to Damien, grinning. “It was a good thing.” ...let’s see you figure that out.

Damien just looked at him, confused. ...what are you... a good thing...? ....... wait . “Are you and Spades gonna have a kid soon?” Damien looked to him in surprise, hearing the people in the room quiet as Lathe nodded, blushing a bit, going to tackle him with a hug. “That's amazing news, I'm so happy for you!” I know you two really really wanted kids. That's great!

Eren smiled softly before he looked over at the clock. “We need to go…” He muttered to himself as he walked over towards Iroh and Eli. “Can I have Eli back? We need to go shopping for him.” I don’t want to rip him out of your hands but...

Iroh looked down at the baby before realizing that he had pretty much monopolized the babbling child in his arms. “Y-Yeah, you can have him back now.” His voice got quiet as he gave Eli up, seemingly shrinking as he noticed the crowd that had formed. Oh....fuck... I should go... There are a lot of people here... He swallowed hard, looking down in submission as he slipped away from everyone and went to go hide away from everyone’s eyes. Fuck, I did it again... I... He was just about to scratch when Felix left Damien’s side to rush to Iroh, grabbing his hand. Shit ....

Damien immediately went to Iroh, enveloping him in a gentle hug from behind, leaning over to murmur to him quietly. “Hey, it's okay, you did fine. Everyone just wanted to say hi to Eli, you did okay. It's okay.” Damien softly pecked his cheek, smiling as Iroh blushed darkly, calming down in his arms. “Come on, let’s go get you some breakfast, okay?” Damien shepherded Iroh over to where all the plates and food was, keeping a protective hand on his waist, trying to keep him calm. You were fine, really. He looked over as Iroh tugged on his sleeve as they were waiting for the waffle maker, blushing as Iroh himself stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. ...I love it when you're the one doing random stuff like that... it's nice... Damien turned over the iron when the timer beeped, taking the waffle out and onto a plate, handing it to Iroh. “You can put stuff on your waffle and go sit down if you want.” Damien was quiet, smiling faintly to him, nodding to the table with syrup and powdered sugar on it. Baby steps, come on. You can chill a few minutes without me. Marco’s very nice.

Iroh’s eyes widened as Damien suggested him to go sit without him….. He’s never asked me to go sit without him before... Shit I must’ve pissed him off. “O-Okay… I’ll go sit d-down...” He stuttered as he turned to go sit down after grabbing a fork. He scurried towards an empty table that was somewhat near the group, his head down as he tried eating. I shouldn’t’ve come... I probably caused more trouble than it was worth.

Damien forced himself not to glance up and check on him every two seconds, patiently waiting for his waffle to finish cooking. He’ll be okay... two minutes... he’ll be fine. Soon enough he had a
waffle on his plate, taking a cup of juice for himself and another for Iroh, coming to sit with him. *He seemed so nervous he scurried off without it.* “Orange juice okay?” He set the cup in front of him, sitting next to him and smiling warmly to him. *You did okay.* His brow furrowed as Iroh seemed to curl up into himself a bit at his voice, a gentle hand on the small of his back. “Iroh Honey, you okay? It's okay, you did just fine, and I’m right here. It's okay.” *Come on, don't close up on me...*

Iroh shook his head, shying away from his touch. “I-I-I... I-I’m s-s-sorry.” His voice was tiny, his head down in submission as he curled up to himself, bringing his feet up onto his chair. Felix whining for him to calm down. *I fucked up... Everything I do I fuck up...*

Damien turned to him, gently pulling him close, murmuring softly into his ear. “Iroh, you don't have to be sorry for anything. It's okay, Hon, really. Please, don't close up...” He gently pecked Iroh’s cheek, nuzzling his neck a bit, coaxing him to uncurl. “It’s very fine, love. Everyone was happy there was a small human around, and you got to hold him. That's very okay. Everyone’s doin’ just fine. You didn't do anything wrong. Nobody’s mad at you. Believe me.” He pecked his neck, his hand still a steady presence on his back for the moment. “Let’s eat, okay? You’ll feel better.” *Please? I thought this would be good for you, being around other nice people.*

Iroh shook his head. “I-I’m not hungry...” *I feel nauseous.... Fuck I’m gonna have an attack... Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck...* His eyes widened as he scrambled to get out of Damien’s arms and speed walk to the elevator, hurriedly clicking at the button as Felix scrambled after him. *I can’t... I can’t stay here...* His breathing worsened, a horrible sense of dread washing over him. *Fuck, Damien doesn’t need to see this, he’s never seen one before... He doesn’t know I have them all the fucking time.*

Damien immediately moved after him, seeing Iroh clutching his chest, panic obvious in his features. *...is he gonna have a panic attack? He followed Iroh into the elevator, hitting the button for their floor and the ‘close door’ button as well, immediately pulling Iroh to his chest, easing him to the floor of the elevator as it began moving. “Iroh honey, please, don't panic.. it's okay, I'm right here. Damien’s got you. It's gonna be okay. The others aren't here now, you're safe. Promise.” Damien gently kissed his neck, pressing kisses all over his cheeks. “Iroh, please, believe me. You're okay. It's all okay. I've got you...Honey, I love you. Please, don't panic. Just stay with me, Hon.” Damien’s hands slowly roamed Iroh’s back, holding him protectively to his chest.

Iroh’s eyes were wide in shock, shaking his head, his panic attack starting to come in full swing. “Let go, let go, let go of me.” His voice was strained as he got free of his grasp, running out of the door when it chimed open. Iroh made a dash to their room, Felix right on his heels, his grip tightening on his shirt as he struggled with the keycard in the door. *You don't need to see this, it gets worse.*

Damien ran after him, catching him and pulling him flush to his front. His hand moved to take the
keycard, opening the door and ushering Iroh inside. He shut the door behind them, bringing him to
the bed and trying to calm his shaking, laying down with him and carding a hand through his hair.
“Iroh Honey, it's okay. We’re alone, it's okay. You don't have anything to be scared of. I'm right
here with you. I'm right here.” Damien gently cradled Iroh to his chest, trying to calm his shaking.
He pressed kisses to his cheeks, trying to calm him with soft murmurs. .....he's still shaking...

“L-let go… P-please…” I can’t… You shouldn’t be here… You don’t need to be bothered by this...
Iroh barely registered Felix jumping on the bed with them and starting to rest his paws on his chest
in his attempt to ground him. You shouldn’t be here… I fucked up...

...I don't know what I'm doing... Damien rifled for his phone, quickly tapping it before holding it to
his ear, still cooing quietly to Iroh. He breathed a sigh of relief when Lathe picked up. “Lathe, I
know you're going to do shopping stuff, but Iroh is having a panic attack and I don't know what to
do. He's never had one before.” He heard a surprised noise on the other end before the line went
dead, tossing aside the phone and turning his full attention back to him, not knowing really how to
act. He shifted until he was pressed against Iroh’s side, gently carding a hand through his hair,
lightly kissing him, trying to reassure him. “Honey, don't worry, Lathe’s coming. We'll make you
feel better. It's okay, love. It's okay.”

Iroh’s eyes widened even more. “N-no… Not him…” Don’t bring someone else into this… Fuck,
and after I just stole his kid away from everyone else, he probably hates me. Fuck… No… Please
no .

Lathe knocked on the door after just a few minutes, rushing in as Damien opened the door. He
looked around, not seeing Iroh. ...where’d he go?

“Crap, he hid again.” Damien and he looked around for a second before they heard Felix whine,
staring up at them in front of the closet. My human is hiding in the closet.

Lathe held up a hand, stopping Damien. He slowly opened the closet door, seeing Iroh hiding,
curled up to himself, shaking as he stared at Lathe wide, scared eyes. Lathe sat down outside the
door on the floor, looking down to the carpet, picking at some of the fuzz. “...Iroh? Do you wanna
talk about whatever’s scaring you?” Lathe glanced up to him, trying his best to remain neutral and
unthreatening. He watched him simply stare at him, his side pressed against the wall. “...what’s
scaring you that we can help with? I won't tell anyone else why you're scared.” I wouldn't do that.
I'm a doctor, dammit, not a gossip machine.

Iroh looked between Lathe and Damien before shaking his head and curling even tighter around
himself. I-I can’t tell him, it’ll make me look so weak… He won’t want me, I fucked up too much...
And I can’t let him see that. Iroh felt the tears beginning to burn as he looked down at his shaking
hands.
Lathe slowly moved to kneel, gently pressing his blue kerchief and his phone into his shaking hands. “If you don't think you can say it… and would rather just type it down so it sounds the way it should… you can do that. Wanna give it a try?” Lathe’s voice was soft, watching Iroh bury his face in the fabric after a moment, hearing him quietly sob before looking again to the phone. 

...please? “...it might feel better to talk about it, tell us. You don't have to show me. You can just show Damien if you want. Whichever you like. That's your decision.” He gave a small warm smile to him as he glanced up, still obviously nervous, scared. Please. You'll feel better. And if you tell us, we can fix that.

Iroh swallowed hard, typing a few things out before simply gripping the handkerchief.

*I fucked up. I always fuck up... Don’t show him, he doesn’t know... This isn’t the first time... I just need time.*

Lathe took the phone that was offered to him, reading it with melancholy eyes. He typed underneath it.

*Iroh, have you been having these attacks the entire time you've been together?*

Lathe handed off the phone with that, sighing quietly as he read the response.

...yeah... every week...

...*Iroh, Honey, I think eight years is enough... He should know... he wants to keep you. And if he doesn't know how to help you in these... what good will keeping it a secret have been? You don't have to be scared of him. You don't have to be scared of how he’ll look at you knowing that you have these attacks. He loves you to bits... I think you should let him in.*

... but ... I'm scared... I'm scared that he's gonna open his eyes to what a broken piece of shit I am and leave... and I don't want him to leave... he's the only one I can really trust... and even then it's hard sometimes...

*Iroh, I know there's a lot going on in your mind, but you aren't broken beyond repair. We- Damien, Damien can help you learn to trust people. And to trust yourself.*
........have you ever even looked at us? He's a huge biker-type man, and I'm this puny little ball of shit and nerves. How can we belong together? I want us to... but I'm afraid it's just all gonna blow up in my face... ...I'm so scared... every time we... every time I trust him to have me... half the time I'm afraid he's going to break me... he could hurt me so easily... and with my osteoporosis... it just makes it worse... I... I do love him... but... I don't want to keep him from finding someone he could love better, who could love him better, because my gosh, he deserves it... I don't... I don't want him to realise I'm not worth it... because I'm not...

...Iroh, have you ever hurt yourself?

......what do you mean......

...do you cut?

...

...how recently, Hon? Damien doesn't have to know every detail...

This morning... When I took my shower... I couldn't help it...

Iroh, I know it feels like it helps... but it doesn't. It doesn't deal with what's making you feel so horrible. I want to help you find everything that's making you hurt so we can make you feel better. Is there something else you don't like about your relationship you want to talk about?

He... He doesn't... let me do anything. I'm not allowed to pay for anything. He wouldn't let me pay for Felix, he won't let me pay for date night, he doesn't let me pay rent... I can't try and do anything nice before he steps in to take over... I can't... He’s so controlling... And I know he’s trying to help but I don’t need help, I’m not paying for my tuition... I’ve tried to tell him but he just shoots it down every damn time... I don’t know what to do anymore... I don’t normally stay in the same room as him, and last night was... I thought he was gonna crush me... And I was scared and I didn’t know what the hell I was supposed to do...

...Iroh, Hon, Damien needs to know all of this. I'm not saying you need to say it all to his face... but if you want me to show him everything you've written... or need me to drag him outside and tell him only what he needs to know to fix this all... we can do that. But nothing is going to change if you keep him in the dark. I know it's scary... but it'll make change happen. And you really need change.
I don’t want to make him change… I couldn’t do that to him… But… I don’t think I can tell him about this… Take him outside, I need to wrap my thighs… They still hurt… Iroh sniffled as he handed the phone back, moving away from the both of them, grabbing a bag from his suitcase before starting to move almost automatically towards the bathroom so he could lock himself in.

Lathe caught Damien by the arm as he moved to catch Iroh in a hug, shaking his head. “Hallway.” He pulled Damien with him, stopping him outside the room, turning to him with a serious expression. “Damien, there's a lot of stuff going on that Iroh’s been too scared to tell you. He loves you to bits and he knows you do too, but he's scared of anything changing. He doesn't want to do that to you, but it needs to happen.” Lathe took a deep breath, his tone serious, looking at him. “First off, you need to stop paying for absolutely everything. You might think you're doing him a favour, but you're making him completely dependent on you, which isn't any good. He wants to be able to spoil you sometimes, or at least contribute to rent and stuff because those are supposed to be mutual responsibilities. My god, at least let him pay his own tuition!”

“... I can do that… But Lathe, I don’t pay his tuition…. I’ll lay off on putting money in his pocket for dates and stuff though… But I feel bad, he’s in college, he should be saving…” Damien held a conflicted look on his face.

“Damien, I know you want to make sure he’s set up for the future, but think about it. That future of his? If I'm not mistaken, you both are hoping to spend it with each other. You're not doing much besides just making him feel guilty about it at this point. Let his hard work pay off for him, okay? ...and if you're not paying his tuition, he must have a scholarship or something. I dunno. That's a thing I don't need to worry about right now. But, second point. Still very important. Damien, you're a big guy. You're tall, and not exactly light. Iroh? He's tiny and resembles a twig. A twig with osteoporosis. He's so scared every time you two are intimate that you're going to crush him. He really needs you to be careful with him, or work something out where he's not under your weight. You two can figure that out. But be gentle with him. And thirdly.” Lathe looked away, pinching the bridge of his nose. “...Iroh’s got worse self-esteem than Eren did when I first found him. That's literally how bad it is. He cuts, and he's depressed, thinking that soon enough you're gonna realise that he as a ball of nerves and ‘shit’ in his own words, not to mention as breakable as he is, is not worth the trouble of loving. He's scared that you're gonna get tired of dealing with all the baggage he's dragging around and leave him. He needs you to let him somehow know that you are going to help him, and that you're in this for the long haul. I’m saying all of this assuming you are, but tell me. Are you? Even with all the crap you didn't know about? Even now knowing he’s had these attacks weekly and didn't tell you because he was scared you'd give up on him? It's been eight years, Damien. Can you do more?” It's not easy to take care of someone like him. I know. And I won't blame you if you at least sorta question whether it's worth it. This is a lot of news for you.

Damien’s eyes were wide as he listened to Lathe say everything. He… He’s never told me any of this... He closed his eyes as he leaned against the wall, sliding down to the floor, his head in his hands as he quietly tried to process everything. “He… He’s cutting? And he’s scared of me in bed?... This isn’t the first time he’s had an attack like that?” Why doesn’t he tell me?
Lathe sighed quietly, breaking from his firm front and sitting next to him, his tone soft. “I know it's a lot to take in. But this has been going on for a while and Iroh’s been too scared to ask for anything else. He really needs the change. He needs someone gentle, someone who can help keep him calm, and someone who can make him feel loved and comfortable in his own skin. Someone who lets him contribute to the relationship. He needs that. Do you think you can give him that?” He gently patted Damien’s shoulder, unused to seeing him so distraught. “I've only seen you this upset once… he really needs you… I hope you can be there for him.

“Holy fuck… Lathe what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed help him when he doesn’t tell me anything? I want to help him, I thought we were doing better with it because he wasn’t cutting anymore… And he had stopped scratching, but I guess I was just blind to how he really was… Fuck.” Damien ran a hand through his hair, trying to think. What do I do now?

“I think a good place to start…” Lathe moved to help him to his feet. “…is with a conversation between you two. If we have to, you two can exchange honest texts. But you need to open this dialogue between you two up, or else it'll just stay closed. Opening it is the hard part. Keeping it open becomes habit, soon enough. Okay?” He watched Damien shakily nod, letting him open the door to the room again. He gently knocked on the bathroom door, still closed. “Iroh, are you done in there? You okay?”

Iroh was silent for a few seconds. “N-no…” Came his shaking reply as he held a cloth pressed to the inside of his thigh. It's bleeding again… He came towards the door, unlocking it and slowly opening it. I don’t want him to freak out...

Lathe didn't look mad at all, simply saddened as he saw him still trying to wrap his legs. His voice was soft and quiet as he spoke. “Do you need any help, Hon? You can take all the time you need to finish up, if you don't want me to.” I understand… but I just don't want you getting even more hurt if you don’t wrap them right.

“U-Uhm… C-can… Y-You h-h-help?” I can’t get it to stop bleeding, I did it so much deeper… He looked down in shame when his eyes met Damien’s. I should probably leave… I’ll have to find an apartment… He probably wants me to leave right away…

“Of course I can.” Lathe entered the bathroom, shutting the door behind him and having Iroh sit on the toilet lid. He fetched extra gauze and wraps from his bag on his hip, kneeling down next to him. “Iroh, move your hand, okay? Let me see.” Lathe’s tone was gentle, patient as Iroh hesitated before slowly peeling the fabric away, long cuts up his thighs, some lines faded, one in particular fresh and open. “Oh my…” Lathe gently pressed the fresh gauze to it. “Hold that there, okay? Gentle pressure.” He got another bit of gauze damp, wiping up the fresh and dry blood from his thigh. “Okay, I'm going to wrap up your leg now, alright?” He watched Iroh shakily nod, adding
more gauze over the cuts before starting to wrap his thigh, being careful the gauze didn't shift. He
soon pinned it in place, looking to his other leg, the lines starting to scab over. “...Honey, did you
cut that last one just a minute ago?” Lathe looked up to him, watching him look away with shame.
“It's okay, it's okay... I'll get you fixed up... but you can't keep doing this... you're not just hurting
yourself...” He spoke as he padded and wrapped his other leg. “You're hurting Damien by doing
that... he can't stand that you're hurting yourself... he wants you to be okay. He doesn't want you to
get hurt. He just wants things to be okay. And that's not just on him; it's on both of you. No matter
what you may think of it, your body deserves respect. Even if you think it's worth less than dirt…”
Lathe pinned the last wrap in place. “There is no excuse for hurting it. You've only got the one for
the rest of your life. Treat it well. And I made Damien promise that he'll treat it well too.” He
watched Iroh blush, smiling faintly. “He loves you. He wants you to know that.” He handed him
the jeans he's had on earlier. “Now put these on. You and he need to have a bit of a talk, okay?
Through texts if that's more comfortable for you.” You both need to.

“I-I um... I think I can talk...” Iroh told him nervously as he slipped on his jeans, hissing as the
fabric rubbed on the wraps. “My... My brother used to wrap them when I was younger... Mom and
Dad never noticed.” He mumbled quietly. Why am I telling you this?

Lathe rested a gentle hand on his shoulder. “I know it's not going to be an easy habit to break... to
get rid of something that you think has helped for so long... but you need to really try... okay? It
was really hard when Eren did it... but I think you can do it too. I really do.” He smiled as Iroh
looked to him with uncertainty. “You'll get through all this okay. Promise. Just take care of
yourself, and all else will follow.” You need to put you first.

Iroh nodded before he moved to open the door, going to sit on the bed, holding his hand out to stop
Damien as he came over to hug him. “Please don’t... I’m still... M-mental... And I can’t do touch
during an attack.” He couldn’t look him in the eye. I probably hurt you worse than I can imagine,
and I deserve for you to break every bone in my body and leave me for dead.

Damien looked heartbroken at that, but he sat down next to him, giving him space of a few feet,
Lathe moving to hover outside their room. thank you... “...Iroh...” He choked on his words,
having to stop for a moment, getting his composure back. “...I-I'll try and be better about paying
for everything... I won't take everything over anymore. You... you're your own person, and you're
capable of contributing. I just... I just got worried because I thought you should be saving your
money instead, because you're still just in college... b-but... it's no favour to you. And I'll... I
never wanted to hurt you... I love you, and when I try to show you that, I guess... I just keep
forgetting how careful I need to be... I'll do better, I really will... and... a-and I just...” Damien
stared hard at the floor, his eyes a bit glassy. “I just want you to know how much I think of you... how
much I think that you're amazing, and insanely smart, and how you deserve everything that
the world has for you... b-because you still th-think you're not worth it... that y-your body is worth
the same with scars as it is without... but... you don't deserve to think that... I just want you to
look at yourself in the mirror for once and be okay with what you see and I just want you to stop
hurting yourself because it hurts like hell when I just think about it... and every time I caught you
with new cuts I just... I... I just want you to be okay... I just want you to not hurt yourself for
being worthless, because I think you're worth everything the world can give and more and I just
want you to be happy…” Damien just let himself let everything out, his breath caught in his throat. Please… don't hurt yourself… don't…

Iroh listened to everything that Damien said, his eyes slowly coming up to look at the larger man’s face. You... You were only trying to help. “Um… My parents... They pay for college tuition… Well… They um, they actually don’t, my brother does, after he inherited the family fortune…” My parents have been dead for years... But my grandparents are still around, which is good I guess… “My parents died in a car crash when I was six… I was in the back seat, when a truck lost its trailer over the edge of the highway above us… It crushed the car instantly killing my parents and breaking almost everything in my body…” He paused to take in a breath, trying to calm himself down. I should tell him everything… Everything my brother managed to pull me through before he shipped me off across the world to get rid of me when he couldn’t take it…

Damien’s eyes widened, looking to him. ... What ??...you never told me any of this… He tentatively held out his arms for a moment, though he didn't move toward him just yet. “…Iroh, is it okay if I give you a hug?” He sounded hopeful, craving touch. I need someone to hold onto… or someone to hold onto me sounds more accurate...

“N-no sudden movements… S-slowly… o-okay?” I think I can handle that much. He slowly shifted so that he was further up the bed, so they could sit comfortably.

Damien slowly wrapped his arms around his middle, holding him close, his head resting on his shoulder. He stared at the ground, wanting Iroh to hug him back, but knowing he wouldn't when he was still so on edge. “...I just… I just really really love you… and I'm so sorry that that happened… that's horrible, losing both your parents out of nowhere like that… I'm so sorry…” Damien quietly sniffled, trying not to cry. Don't do it. I know things aren't that great right now but don't. You have to keep being strong. You have to...

“You can cry you know… My brother cried the first time he found out I was cutting… I was 8… I... I got diagnosed with claustrophobia when I was 7 because of the accident and so everyone tried to give me my space… Which was hell, it was like they didn’t even realize I was there until my brother saw the blood in the sink from me cutting my wrists and not bothering to clean up. They didn’t acknowledge me other than leave the room for a whole year… To me… It was a sign to get people to realize I was there… That I wanted them there… they flooded right back in once they knew I was cutting…” I kept cutting because it meant that I was going to have people stay, and try and help, they weren’t gonna leave me alone and ignore me...

Damien let a few tears fall, nestling his head into the crook of Iroh’s neck, finding comfort in the cool skin against his forehead. “That's… that's horrible… but Iroh, you don't have to do that to get people’s attention here. I'm not going to stop paying you my attention… I'll give you space if you want it, and if you said the word you'd have me right back next to you… here… all you have to do is ask, and you’re given an open set of ears. A friend. I just… it's not the way to get the attention
you need…” I don't want you to cut… I want you to be happy and feel okay with yourself because when you feel okay you’re… you don’t run away… you come find me instead…

Iroh nodded, leaning into Damien’s arms the slightest bit. “I kept cutting, I was put on depression medication at the age of 9, and when I was 11, 5 years after the crash, I tried to commit suicide… My brother found me in time and got me to the hospital… They sent me to a therapist… But he was just after my family's fortune, and never really helped… I started middle school, half the size of my classmates because of the accident messing with my growth plates… I was bullied, so much that I was pushed down the stairs when I was 13 and shattered my whole arm from my wrist to my shoulder… I was diagnosed with Osteoporosis, and everyone looked at me differently… No one wanted to be friends with the kid who could break at any second.” It was horrible… And I kept cutting, trying to get people to realize I needed someone again, and I got nothing …

That’s horrible …. Damien slowly shifted to bring Iroh into his lap, his face still buried in his shoulder. He deeply breathed in his scent, trying to keep calm, wanting his thin arms to wrap around him too, but too scared to ask. I can't be a damn emotional pansy right now… I'm not supposed to be… I'm supposed to be tough for the both of us… but… I don't wanna right now… is it okay to not be…?

Iroh tensed for the moment that he was moved before he settled into his large arms, his own much thinner ones holding onto him. “I was alone, ostracized… I couldn’t take it… I tried 4 more times… And you know that scar… The big one in my midsection?” You should know… I should tell you, should tell you everything.... I can’t believe I tried to do that… It go so serious… That I was shipped away…

Damien shakily nodded, melting into Iroh’s touch as he was hugged back. “…Iroh… w-what did you do…” His voice was quiet and full of worry, tears falling down his cheeks. I don't wanna lose you… I wanna keep you… please…

“In Japan… There’s a tradition when one brings shame to his honor… Or his family… That the person should perform Seppuku…….” He grew quiet, trying to see what Damien would make of it. Will you figure it out?

Damien’s hold on Iroh was still careful, though he held him closer, shuddering. No…nonononono… “Y-You…” He kept his face buried in Iroh’s neck, trying to calm down. “B-But… but…” His voice was small, scared. “...but I don't want you to die… y-you have to stay… y-you have to…” I love you too much… you can't… “...s-stay… p- please stay…” I really really want you to…

Iroh nodded, curling into his strong arms. “I was in surgery for 19 hours and 34 minutes… They had to realign my entire digestive system… My brother couldn’t put up with it… I’d brought the
family shame in failing the seppuku… So I was shipped overseas to San Francisco, where I was in the hospital before I was entered into College… And I met you once I got off my colon bags… Believe it or not.”

...you could've died... and I wouldn't have you to hold on to... “...d-don't...” He swallowed hard, trying to speak clearly. “N-never try anything like that again… I…. I don't want you to leave me… I wanna keep you…” I want someone who'll actually hold me... and who will let me hold them... I don't wanna give that up when I already have it... “D-Don't panic, I'm just laying us down, okay?”

He very slowly shifted them, stopping when Iroh whimpered in worry, taking his time until Iroh was laying on top of him, Damien trying to stay calm, clutching his shirt for dear life. I don't wanna let go...

Iroh shifted a bit, moving his arms to sneak under his neck and settle his face near Damien’s ear. “I always had a fear that you would find out that I was suicidal… So I tried to hide it… I always think people will find out… And it always makes me anxious, because they looked at me like your average human being…” I wanted to keep that...

Damien quietly sighed as he felt Iroh’s warm breath on his neck, enjoying the closeness. “Iroh, just because you're suicidal doesn't mean you're any less than your average human… America is a lot different than Japan culturally. You can just do stuff that normally would be unthinkable and nobody bats an eye. Like us being a thing- completely normal in America. At least, it's starting to become that way. But I know too many people who've cut or contemplated suicide at one point… and I'm not saying I've never seriously thought about it… it was years ago, but still… yet it didn't make any of them less than human. They got out of their dark places and even when they were still there people looked them in the eyes and talked to them completely normally. People can't look at someone and think ‘oh they're suicidal and a disgrace’ and disrespect you. They don't have a certain look. You just… all you have to do to be accepted as a normal human being is to be kind and polite and not be openly racist. Add good manners and you're golden. But it doesn't take much to be respected at least as a human here.” It doesn’t… it's harder for me to get people to treat me normally, because I look really intimidating, but as long as you're polite people warm up to you quickly.

“So… It’s okay… To be gay here?” In the states? It’s really okay?

“You're always going to have your pockets of people against gays, that's no doubt… but yes, it is. Here there’s a lot of places where us being gay is okay. It should be okay everywhere.” He moved to lightly peck Iroh’s shoulder. “But some countries are a bit behind the times.”...if you do something shameful, why the hell is the only solution death? ...just... why ....

Iroh nodded, holding onto him tighter. “I… I-I love you…. Y-you know that?” He asked timidly as his lips brushed the shell of his ear, gently. His body let go of all it’s tension and melted into Damien’s chest, loving his arms wrapped around him. I... I think I can finally calm down now....
...you're always so scared to say it... Damien shivered a bit as Iroh’s lips brushed his ear, tilting his head a bit subconsciously. “...I l-love you too... s-so much...” He let out a small gasp as he felt his lips timidly brush his neck, relaxing into the bed as Iroh kissed at his neck lightly. ...you never initiate anything... are you... do you...?

Iroh's hands moved to cup Damien’s jaw as he shifted to start kissing his ears, gently brushing his lips all over his ears and moving to his temple. I want to make sure you know that... I don’t know how to show it...

Damien sighed quietly, letting Iroh tilt his head and kiss where he wanted, his hands roaming gently over his back. He felt emotion kick at him, craving touch, though he made no move to flip their positions. ...I... I love this... “I-Iroh...” .....whatever you're doing... don't stop... He chuckled as Iroh seemed lost as to what to do, his voice quiet and breathless. “K-Kiss my neck... please... it feels really good when you do that...”

Iroh’s face flushed as Damien spoke, his hands shifting from his jaw to his hair, gently tangling his fingers in his locks and turning his head so that he had better access to his neck. His movements were slow and jerky, peppering every bit of skin with kisses, licking the soft skin for only a moment before returning to his soft kisses. What else am I supposed to do? Damien... Help.... He mentally pleaded with him, so unsure of how to ask for guidance. You always do the foreplay...

Damien gave him plenty of room, letting out an airy moan as Iroh gently licked his skin. “Mmm... y-you can lick if you want... you can nip too... mark me, if you want... it's okay... feels... feels good...” Damien was melting into a puddle as Iroh kissed his neck up and down, his eyes betraying his want. ...I want this... I really want this...

Iroh nodded, shifting a bit, his legs moving to practically straddle his chest. He let his tongue drag across Damien’s skin, licking long stripes across his skin. His skin tastes salty... Soon enough he let his teeth gently graze down his neck, timidly, as if expecting Damien to push him off after he did something. I don’t know what I’m doing still.

Damien let out quiet moans as Iroh lapped at his neck, sighing deeply as Iroh straddled him. His hands still roamed his back, one hand drifting to his waist, the other tangling in Iroh’s hair. “Nngh... more... please... you can be rougher with it... you don't have to be scared to... I love it...” He gasped as Iroh nipped at his neck, his hand gently keeping him in place at his neck, feeling himself slowly harden. I want you... please...

Iroh gently nipped at the skin, looking at the bright red marks he created before licking the spots, an idea crossing his mind. He moved lower towards where it would be more easily hidden before
taking a large patch of skin and biting down harder than he ever had before. *It should leave a mark*…

Damien gasped loudly as he bit down on the sensitive skin, feeling pleasure with a twinge of pain. “I-Iroh… nngh…” He moaned as Iroh bit down again on another patch of skin, feeling his canines dig into his skin. “Careful, please… sh-sharp teeth…” He groaned as Iroh roughly sealed his lips over his skin, sucking hard and causing a dark mark to bloom on his neck. “Haa… f-feels **really** good…” *I want it... I really want it*… He felt Iroh bite across his shoulder, soon leaving a ring of marks around his neck. *More… I want more…*

Iroh lapped at the skin he abused with his teeth, leaning up to look at his work. *I don’t have any more room.* “I-I’m s-sorry… I got carried away….” He seemed to shrink a bit, pushing down into his chest, as he gently touched his bruising skin. *It’s… It’s blooming in dark reds.*

“I-Don’t be sorry…” Damien smiled weakly, leaning on one elbow and cupping Iroh’s cheek. “That felt really good…” He gently pulled him into a sweet kiss, tilting his head and slowly moving his lips against Iroh’s trembling ones. He swiped his tongue over his lips tentatively, soon coaxing Iroh’s tongue into his mouth, wanting to taste him. *I love this...*

Iroh shook a bit in his arms before he calmed down, noticing that Damien wasn’t being rough like he always was. *He’s... He’s being gentle now...* He let his lips part, feeling Damien coax his tongue into his mouth. *He’s being really gentle.* His shaking hands gently ran through his locks, so unsure of where this would eventually end up as he was shifted off of Damien’s chest and into his lap as he sat up. *I fit in his lap so easily.*

Damien slowly ran his hands all over Iroh’s back, holding him close as they kissed languidly. He whimpered quietly as Iroh shifted on his lap, his face flushed red as he sat up. His hands moved to rest on Iroh’s hips, trailing lightly over his lower half, close to his clothed nether. He broke their kiss, moving to kiss down his jaw to his ear, his voice a low, soft murmur. “You can say no, Iroh, but… if I’m really gentle… can I have you?” *Please? I don’t want you to be scared of being intimate... I want you to feel good… not terrified...*

Iroh let out a soft whine as Damien’s lips moved down his jaw. *He’s been gentle so far.... I think I can trust him.* He nodded subtly before finding his voice. “Y-yeah… You can… If you’re g-gentle.” He blushed, feeling Damien’s hard length through his clothes, his own length starting to harden in response. *I don’t want to be scared.*

“I promise I will be.” Damien kissed slowly down his neck, sucking gently on the skin at the joint of his neck, lapping at the small marks in apology before marking another sensitive spot. He moaned quietly into his neck as Iroh let out a quiet moan, hearing his breath hitch as he gently
marked him. *I want to do this right... I want to love you right...* His hands moved to his collar, slowly starting to unbutton his shirt, looking up to him for permission and stopping when he seemed to tremble at his touch. “Is this okay?” *I can slow down...*

Iroh looked at him with a flushed face, his hair tousled from Damien’s fingers. “Y-yeah... Just... Don’t panic...” *I did my stomach this morning too, so it’s wrapped.* He swallowed hard as he watched Damien’s fingers slowly go down the shirt, and pause as he spotted the wraps across his stomach. *Shit ... Maybe he won’t want to...*

Damien nodded, leaning up and letting their lips lightly brush as he unbuttoned the rest of his shirt, pushing the fabric off of his shoulders. He pulled back to look at him, his face falling as he saw the bandages wrapped around his stomach. “...Iroh...” Damien looked back up to him, his hands careful on his back. “Don’t freak out, Honey, okay?” He slowly shifted them, Iroh on his back as Damien loomed over him, careful to prop himself up well above him. He leaned down to lap at his neck, slowly kissing down his chest. He paused as he reached the bandages, pressing a feather-light kiss to the middle of his stomach. “Please... never do that to yourself again...” He was very careful of the wraps as he moved over him, beginning to kiss and lick across every sensitive spot he knew on his chest, marking him in the spots that made him shiver. *I want you on cloud nine... you deserve it...*

Iroh looked down at Damien as he started to relax his body. His breath was hitched, letting himself make small pants and noises as he was lavished by Damien’s tongue. *It feels really nice, he’s being gentle, really gentle. I like this, I like it a lot.* He let out a loud moan as he found an overly sensitive spot on his chest. *He remembers where all of them are...*

Damien gently sucked on that spot that made Iroh moan, smiling faintly as Iroh squirmed a bit under him, gently holding his hips in place as he lavished his body with attention. He left a smattering of small marks, his hands drifting to the waist of his jeans and playing with the hem for a moment. *Even the playing field first.* He sat back for a moment, shrugging off his jacket and tugging his tee over his head, showing off his defined muscles. *I always make sure I’m in really good shape... I thought you’d like it if I had lots of muscle...* He looked up to Iroh, gently going to nip at his neck, his hands going to catch Iroh’s wrists, placing them on his shoulders, murmuring quietly. “It’s okay to touch. Wherever you want.”

Iroh’s shaded eyes followed his movement as he got rid of his jacket and his t-shirt. *He’s really hot... Damn, his body is great ...* He watched him, tensing when his wrists were caught before he relaxed again, letting his thumbs gently rub over the ring of large hickeys he gave him just a few minutes ago. *I want to do it again...* His eyes flared with want and need as he squirmed under his touch, unsure of how to ask him if he could. *What do I do? I wanna do it...*

Damien pulled back after a moment, catching his look of want, seeing it on his neck. “...hm? The marks?” He watched him nod, smirking after a moment. “If you wanna add more, be my guest.”
He gasped as Iroh immediately moved up, clinging to him as he attacked his neck. He moaned loudly, trying not to melt on top of him as he worked. *I love it...* He rolled them over again when he stopped trusting himself not to melt, his hands coming up to tangle in Iroh’s hair as he worked his way down his chest. He gasped as Iroh took a nipple into his mouth, teasing the nub with his teeth and making him moan loudly. *More... my God, more, please ...*

Iroh’s face resembled that of a tomato as he continued to tease Damien’s nipple, his hands roaming the rest of him, near his abdomen and the hem of his pants, but not daring to go lower. He moved his head over to his other nipple, opening his jaw as wide as it would go before biting around it hard, to a point where he drew blood from one of his canines. He pulled off of him, lapping at the wound with remorse. *I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bite that hard.*

Damien gasped as he drew blood, squirming a bit under him. “P-Please, be careful... your teeth are sh-sharp...” He looked down at him, watching him pull up and away from him, moving to gently catch the back of his neck, not wanting him to shift off of him. “N-No, Iroh, please, it’s okay... it’s okay, really...” Damien smiled to him softly, leaning up to kiss him again, barely tasting a bit of blood as their tongues danced around each other, waiting for Iroh to relax again into his arms before he spoke. “Can we flip over?” He smiled as Iroh nodded, switching them again and gently sucking at his collarbone. He felt hands trailing all over his chest, going to fiddle with the button of Iroh’s jeans, looking up and quietly asking for permission. *May I...?*

Iroh watched him with a slight look of fear. “G-gently?” He asked quietly. *I honestly don’t think that I could take it any longer if you were rough with me at this moment in time.* His hands shook a little as he pulled them away from Damien’s body, looking a little flustered. *I really don’t want you to be rough... I don’t wanna be scared...*

Damien nodded, his eyes hooded as he moved to kiss him. “Gently.” They kissed softly, Damien’s hands being careful as they unbuttoned his jeans, slipping them from his legs without tugging at the wraps, tenderly holding Iroh’s waist. *I won’t be rough... you can’t take rough... lovemaking is what you need. What you deserve.* Damien shimmied from his own jeans, breaking their soft kisses to gently nudge Iroh down onto the mattress, kissing down his chest, skipping over his stomach and pressing feather-light kisses around the bulge in his boxers. He held his hips with care, slowly pulling the boxers down and letting his hard length free, gently kissing from his hip to his base, lightly nipping at the skin around it. He held Iroh’s hips down as his lips moved to press a kiss to his tip, closing around the hot organ and slowly beginning to suck, bobbing his head, mindful of his teeth. *I want this to feel really good for you... you deserve so much better than what I’ve given you...*

Iroh’s eyes were wide as Damien took his length into his mouth. *He’s... He’s actually giving me a blow...* He gasped in shock as he began to suck, the sensation completely new to him, his hands gravitating up to his face to hide his own mouth. He tried to mute his high gasps and whimpers with his hands, his eyes glued to Damien’s face as he sucked. *Oh my god... He’s really... Holy shit, he’s never done this before... “H-Haa... D-D-Damien... Haaaaa...”* He closed his eyes as he let
out a loud groan, his whole body shaking from the overload of sensations. *It feels really good…* Iroh barely notice his glasses fogging up near his cheeks from his attention being completely drawn to Damien and his actions.

Damien watched with dark eyes as Iroh quaked under him, his tongue teasingly swirling around his head. He thought he saw Iroh’s glasses clouded a bit, pausing just a moment, coming off his length and gently taking Iroh’s glasses off of him, seeing his red eyes. *…you’re crying… but you don’t look sad…* “You okay?” He watched Iroh fervently nod, smirking. “Alright then…” *This is a lot for you… I guess it can be overwhelming a bit… such a change of pace… and what you’ve wanted the entire time…* “I might as well continue, hm?” Damien chuckled quietly as he nodded again, his eyes silently begging him to keep going. He set the glasses on the side table and moved down the bed, licking a long stripe up his length, staring right at him and breathing over his head. “But only if you let me hear you~” He grinned before starting to suck on him again, his hands teasingly moving over the skin near his base, keeping him from bucking up. *I love your voice… you normally aren’t too vocal, but now, god damn…*

Iroh’s eyes followed his movements, his body seemingly following his words without much thought. He didn’t even realize that he had moved them away from his mouth until he let out a particularly loud cry, gasping and moving to cover his face with his hands. *Shit, shit…* “D-Damien…” His voice was muffled from coming behind his hands. “D-Don’t tease…” He whined, tears falling down but hidden behind his hands. *I don’t think I can take much more… It feels so weird…*

Damien slowly pulled off of him, dragging his tongue over his slit as he came up, kissing his tip. “Of course…” Damien moved up so he could rifle in the nightstand for a moment, soon enough coming back with a condom and a tube of lube. He gently lapped at Iroh’s neck as he slicked his fingers, still kissing his neck as a finger traced his pucker. “Whenever you’re ready, love.” *I want to take this slow… make sure you feel okay… not hurt…*

Iroh nodded, shifting his neck so that Damien would be able to lick his neck with ease. He shivered as he felt a cool finger dip into his warmth, still considerably loose from the pounding Damien had given him the night before. *I’m still so loose…* His brow furrowed a bit as he started to remember how roughly last night had gone. *Fuck…. Did he tear something? I don’t remember feeling anything tear… But he was so rough, it’s a possibility.* He swallowed thickly, trying not to freak out as he felt Damien’s finger entered him further, reaching deeper. Iroh’s body shuddered, his breath catching as he closed his eyes to try and calm down.

Damien stilled as he felt Iroh shudder, going to lightly kiss him. “Iroh, please, don’t be scared… I’m going to take good care of you. I really will. You tell me the second anything hurts, okay? Tell me if you want me to stop.” He waited for Iroh to nod and breathe out a ‘yes’ before starting to loosen him again, going to lap at the other side of his neck. He was careful as he added more fingers, going slow as he thrusted four in and out of his slick hole, soon withdrawing from him. He still sucked at his collarbone, leaving small marks as he rolled on the condom and slicked up his
length. His hands moved to tenderly hold Iroh’s waist, looking up for permission as his tip gently nudged his entrance. *Whenever you say. This is about you- you tell me what you do and don’t want this time.*

Iroh had kept his eyes closed to keep him calm, feeling him withdraw his large fingers, letting out a soft whimper. He opened his eyes as he felt his thick length poking at his entrance. *Holy shit…* Iroh’s eyes widened as unmistakable fear took over his eyes as he looked down at where Damien was, the situation reminding him too much of last night. *I…. I don’t want you to crush me…* He shook his head, moving away as he pulled his arms up, curled into his chest. *Fuck, why can’t I get over this? This is cruel for him…*

Damien pulled back a bit, thinking. *You don't want me to crush you… ...hmm… ...I never thought you'd want to, and it's gonna make you feel a bit exposed, but...* He smirked after a second, kissing his cheek. “Don't worry, love, I've got an idea…” He still had his hold on Iroh’s hips as he rolled them over, Iroh straddling his hips, his length nestled in his asscheeks as he got situated. “This okay? If we do it like this?” He lifted Iroh an inch from him, just to help give him the idea. *I can't crush you like this… but I can certainly help you along...*

Iroh opened his eyes, blushing as he saw that he was face to face with Damien, a small squeak sounding as he was lifted up a bit. “I-I um…. I uh…..” He grew quiet when he couldn’t find the words to express himself, looking away with a full on blush. *This is fucking embarrassing… But… He can’t crush me…* His body seemed to calm down as the thought made it through his mind. *But if he’s gentle…. Will he be able to get off? He’s always so rough when he cums… It’d be cruel to make him just get me off…* He felt his lip quiver a bit as so many emotions fought to take over in his head, so unsure of what he should be thinking.

Damien watched as Iroh struggled in his mind, leaning up on an elbow and cupping his cheek with a hand, his thumb gently brushing his jaw. “We don't have to do this if you don't want… if you liked what I was doing before for you, that's all we have to do. I only want this if you do. I only want what you want. What you like . That's all this has to be.” He watched as Iroh brought a hand up to keep his hand on his cheek, looking away unsure from him as he thought. *...this is hard for you... because you're trying to figure out what's okay and what isn't... after so long of just taking what I gave you...*

Iroh’s eyes slowly came up to meet his. “B-but… We don’t do gentle…. What if it’s not enough? What i-if I’m not e-enough?” He didn’t really realize he was still speaking as he rubbed his thumb on Damien’s hand, enjoying the stable presence. “It’s cruel… Just because I want it, that you have to settle for that…..I-It’s cruel to you….” *I should know...*

Damien looked at him with saddened eyes, his tone soft. “Iroh, that's exactly the thing I'm guilty of… I made you take what I gave without any wiggle room… that was cruel of me. I guess… I made you feel that anything besides my way… that your way… it just wouldn't do… and I'm so
Iroh shook his head. “It’s not f-fair to you… You can’t do what you like with me…” You’d break me in half if you did… “I don’t want to keep you from that… If you can’t enjoy yourself… I understand… You could tell me…” I wouldn’t be surprised if you wanted to back out...

“And I haven’t let you have what you like. It’s not just about me, Iroh. It’s about you just as much. Even more so… you’ve trusted me enough to take control of pretty much every time we have sex… I’m not doing a good job of loving you if I don’t let you like it… and… I’ve never had anything besides it rough… but who knows? Maybe I’ll like taking it slow. It’s been long enough, the same pace for years. A change would be nice. …and… maybe eventually… a change in who tops…” He shook his head when Iroh seemed to look scared at that. “Not now, it doesn’t have to be now, or even soon… just a thought, maybe sometime… baby steps… you can start by being the one to kiss me first. That would be an achievement.” You never just do stuff on your own… it’s always me starting everything. His expression softened from his playful expression, looking over his features, carefully picking his words. “I want this… because you’ll like it… love it… and it’ll feel good for me too… maybe I’ll like it better… and no matter what, I owe you what you want. This is… this is important…. and I want you to like it… and think it was worthwhile.” I want you to want this kind of love… not be scared of it, but want it… maybe one day start it… and maybe even finish it...

Iroh listened to him, his eyes glued to his as they shifted around and different emotions flitted in front of them. “C-can you s-sit up?” I want you to hold me… I won’t feel so insecure. “P-Please?” He asked, moving to lay down on his stomach, to become flush with Damien, shifting and gasping as he had shifted back slightly and impaled himself with Damien’s length, a loud sigh coming from him as he was drilled, the head of his thick prick nestled within him. “F-Fuck…D-Damien…” He whimpered, so unsure of what he wanted to do, either to sit up, or lay down with their chests flush. Just the tip’s in… And I’m… Fuck ...

Damien shivered as he suddenly found his tip encased in warmth, arousal pulsing again through him as he heard Iroh swear. He shifted, coming out of him for the moment as he moved to lean back against the pillows near the headboard. He had Iroh in his lap, holding him close and lifting his hips. He gave him a sweet kiss before he slowly eased him onto his length, Iroh slipping down his member until their hips met, groaning at the feeling. “Nngh… so tight…” He kept his eyes on Iroh’s face, drinking in his pleasured look. “W-Whenever you say…” He kept his hold on Iroh’s hips, not moving until he said so. I want you to love this...

Iroh looked back at Damien, his eyes full of lust and want as he wrapped his arms around his wide shoulders, humming gently. “W-Will you h-help?” I can move, but it won’t be comfortable if I do all the work. I feel full, it feels good.
Damien pulled him closer for better leverage, lifting his hips up until just the tip was still inside of him. “I can definitely help…” You're so light, this works perfectly… Damien moaned as Iroh slipped back down his length, starting a gentle, slower pace for them, cupping Iroh’s ass. I... I like this… it's a different kind of intimate… and I like that...

Iroh’s gasps and moans were quiet at first, though soon started to grow in loudness. “D-Damien… Mmmm, it feels so good…” He leaned his forehead against his, looking into his eyes as Damien easily lifted him up and down. This... This feels nice, I don’t feel like he’s going to tear me apart... And he’s being really gentle... Iroh dipped his head down to bite his neck, taking a large patch of skin, but not breaking it.

Damien was lost in Iroh’s eyes, both of them saying so much with every emotion there to be easily read. He felt vulnerable, but he wasn’t scared...you aren't going to hurt me, leave me... you're not... I can give you this... and I won't ever regret it. He made a small sound of dissent when Iroh broke their deep gaze, though it soon dissolved into a deep sigh and quiet moans as Iroh bit his neck again. “Nngh… careful… m-mark me up… please…” I want you to... I always leave marks on you... but you never really did for me... I want some...

Iroh nodded, his chocolate eyes looking over the mark he made. “O-okay… Keep doing t-that…” The pace we’re doing...is really good. It’s comfortable . He dipped his head back down, sucking on his skin in multiple places. He let out a loud cry as Damien found his prostate, his grip around his shoulders tightening as he rolled his hips, feeling Damien’s length hit it dead on. “Fuck …”

Damien moaned as Iroh rolled his hips and ground further down on him, aiming for that same spot as he kept their pace. He thrusted up a bit as he let Iroh fall on his length, thrusting deeply into him and onto that spot. He let out quiet moans as Iroh panted and swore, his head tipping back as Iroh moved to suck more marks onto his skin, giving him all the room he wanted. I want you to mark me... please...

Iroh took the skin with greed as he moaned in between marking Damien. “Damien, fuck, it feels good...d-don’t stop…” God please don’t stop... He whimpered, feeling the tears beginning to well from the relief he felt. This feels so good, so much better than anything we’ve ever done... Iroh could already feel the heat pooling in his abdomen. It’s really good, I’m gonna cum soon… “Shit.”

Damien groaned as he was marked, his heels digging into the bed as he moved Iroh on his member. Fuck... it feels really good... and he's actually marking me... Damien moved his head, bringing Iroh’s head up from his neck and leaning their foreheads together. He kissed at the corners of Iroh’s eyes, seeing the tears welling up. They both made quiet sounds as they stared into the other’s eyes, their pleasure there for the other to see. “I-Iroh… I…” I won't last much longer... Damien whimpered quietly, wanting release. I wanna cum...
Iroh let out a loud cry as Damien gripped his hips “D-Damien…. Haaaaa..” He whimpered, feeling the warmth pooling in his abdomen. It feels so good… He squeezed his insides, wondering how Damien would feel with the added pressure. I hope it feels okay… Iroh threw his head back as he rolled his hips down onto Damien’s, grinding himself down on him. It feels sooo good…

Damien let out a strangled cry as Iroh squeezed around him, feeling the heat between his legs grow. It burns… “Haaa… I-Iroh… nngh….” Damen’s hold on his hips tightened a bit, watching as Iroh bounced on his length. “You looks so hot…” I love it… His expression changed, his voice airy as he panted. “I-Iroh… c-close…” I’m gonna cum… He whimpered, grinding up into Iroh every time their hips met.

Iroh nodded and continued to let out breathy moans as he was bounced on his length. “I’m g-gonna…. Cum….” He closed his eyes as the sensations threatened to throw him over the edge. “C-Can I c-cum?” Iroh whimpered, hoping that Damien would let him. I want him to… I won’t be able to hold back…

Damien smirked, dipping his head down to suck a mark on his neck, murmuring smoothly in his ear. “You may…” He let on hand move from his hips, still bouncing him as his hand closed around his length, slowly pumping him. “...but only if you let me hear you.” I wanna hear you fall apart...

Iroh blushed all the way down to his neck, his breath hitched as Damien closed his hand around him. “Fuck…. I’m gonna…. Damien !” He shouted when he felt himself being pushed over the edge, tightening around him even more as he splashed their chests with white. Holy shit… He could feel the warm glow take over his whole body, moans leaving his throat roughly as Damien continued.

Damien gasped as Iroh cried out, squeezing his insides around his length. Fuck… “F-Fuck… I-Iroh… I… haaaa… Iroh …” Damien let out a low cry as he finally came, his motions a bit jerky as he rode out his orgasm. He stopped his motions, still buried in Iroh to the hilt, both of them panting as they came down from their highs. They kissed deeply, breaking for breaths before tangling their tongues again. “Mm… you felt so good …” I love it...

“That…. That was… That was perfect .” Iroh looked at him with pure adoration and love. “T-thank you…. It means a lot… I-I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you before…” He swallowed the lump in his throat, or at least tried too, looking away in embarrassment. “I uh… I should go wash up…..” He moved to get up off of Damien, unable to look into his eyes. He’s probably mad at me that I haven’t cleaned up already…. Iroh almost seemed to shrink at the thought, looking down to the mess he had made between them in shame. “I’m sorry.”
“My God, I love you…” ...I love that look... I only sometimes see it... “W-Wait.” Damien caught him as he shifted to get off of him, gently cupping his cheek, studying him. “D-Don't be sorry... that was wonderful. And... it's okay that you couldn't tell me before. I'm glad I know now.” He gently brought him in for a sweet kiss, the look in his own eyes dreamy when they broke apart. “...want me to clean up with you? Maybe.... share a shower?” I'd like that... “You know... saving water, and all that...” That's totally the reason... He looked over Iroh’s chest, lifting him off of his length and onto his back on the bed. He knelt next to him, dipping his head down to gently lap at his chest, cleaning him of his release. I love you...

Iroh’s eyes widened a bit as he was moved around, his gaze going to his wraps before looking away. He’d see them.... He’d see how bad they are... “I um... I d-don’t.... I... O-okay...” He gave in thinking about what Damien would want. I don’t.... I don’t want to make him mad...

“Nevermind, then. We don't have to.” Damien easily conceded. “I know you don't want to, so we won't.” He smiled as Iroh looked to him with surprise, smirking a bit. “I know, it's so easy. You don't want it, we don't do it.” He kissed across his chest. “Simple.” All you ever have to do is say the word. “If you'd rather shower by yourself, go ahead.” It's cool. Really. We can take small steps. We should.

“O-Okay...” He stuttered and moved off of the bed, he didn’t know that the wrap around his stomach on his hips was starting to turn red, he hadn’t even noticed. I don’t want him to see how much I did this morning....

Damien’s eyes widened as he saw four distinct red spots on each hip, staining his wraps. Fuck. “Iroh, you're bleeding.” Damien moved off of the bed, discarding the condom before moving to his side, his hands hovering over his love handles and Iroh looked for the blood. “Honey, are you gonna be okay?” I'm worried... “Do you need help rewapping those?”

Iroh’s eyes widened as he heard Damien’s words. I’m bleeding? What?.... I don’t feel it... He looked down to see the patches of red seeping through the wrappings. Fuck there are a lot of them open... Maybe sex wasn’t the greatest option.... He looked down, moving away as he pulled his thin arms into his chest. “C-Can I have my g-glasses...”

Damien nodded, handing them to him and catching his jaw with his hands after he put them on, tenderly holding his gaze as his hands cupped his face. “Iroh, please don't be scared of me knowing... you don't have to show me what you did, but just know I'm not mad.” He pecked the corner of his lips, watching Iroh blush down his neck at the small gesture. “You can go ahead and clean your cuts up... but tell me if you need help, okay?” I don't want you to be scared to ask when you need it.
“You're not mad?”

“I couldn't ever be mad at you.” Damien smiled warmly to him, his eyes soft. I love you too much to be mad.

“C-Can you help?” He asked quietly, looking down at his shaking hands as he reached for Damien's. I don’t want to be scared anymore...

Damien twined their fingers, pressing a kiss to his temple. “Okay, I can help you.” He let Iroh pull him along to the bathroom, watching him retrieve fresh wraps and gauze from under the sink. Lathe must've left you these... or you still had them... either... “Okay... here.” Damien carefully unpinned the wraps around his middle, Iroh holding the ends. “It's okay, Iroh. As slow as you need.” I don't want you to be too scared.

Iroh swallowed thickly before he slowly began to reveal the many gashes that were bleeding on his abdomen and hips. “I’m sorry... I couldn’t stop...” He leaned into Damien’s shoulder, slowly. He moved to get gauze and hold it to his side to try and stop the bleeding. “You need to put pressure on it... Otherwise It won’t stop.” His voice was quiet as he spoke, his eyes downcast.

Damien nodded, his face falling as he saw all of the parallel cuts on his skin. “Honey...” You can't be doing this... He took the gauze and pressed it firmly to the cuts, not moving it around and holding the other sheet in place with his other hand. He waited for Iroh to finish cleaning the other scabbing cuts before checking if they had stopped bleeding, his touch feather-light as he cleaned them up. “Iroh, I don't think you can shower without them bleeding again...” They've just barely stopped... and there are so many of them... “...isn't there any way to shower with wraps on, and then just change them after? So they don't get opened up more?” I don't want this to be more painful than it has to be...

“They’ll open up with wet bandages too... Just stop the bleeding for right now and I’ll be fine in the shower.” He murmured, setting down the gauze when he had stopped the bleeding on his right hip. I’ll be fine.You don’t need to worry about me...

Damien nodded, gently peeling the gauze away. “Okay... do you want me to help you wash? Or do you want it to be just you?” I don't know what you want... I want you to be comfortable.

“Y-You can shower with me... I don’t mind... Y-You saw them...” He murmured, moving to unwrap his thighs as well, which had completely scabbed over. At least these ones might not open...
Damien watched sadly as Iroh finished unwrapping himself, watching him drop the wraps into the trash. He went to turn the shower on, waiting for the water to heat up. He reached for Iroh, his hands cupping his jaw, gently pressing kisses all over his cheeks and lips as the water warmed. He stepped into the stream of water when it wasn’t cold anymore, Iroh carefully stepping in after him, out of the direct spray of water, the steam keeping him warm. Damien reached for the washcloth, rubbing soap into it yet hesitating, scared to try to wash Iroh. \textit{I don’t wanna try to wash your cuts, and then open them and make you hurt...}

Iroh looked up to Damien as he hesitated. “W-What’s wrong? I-If you’re mad at me, I completely understand…. A lot of other people would be mad too.” His shoulders slumped as he looked away in shame. \textit{I know most people don’t take well to this kind of thing.}

“No, it's not that… I just… I'm scared to hurt you… soap in your cuts isn't gonna feel nice…” \textit{Nope… “I’ll be really careful, but… I just really don't wanna hurt you… t-tell me if I'm being too rough… okay?”} He waited for Iroh to nod before he gently pressed the cloth to his wounds, very carefully beginning to clean him up. \textit{I really really just want you to be okay...}

“I’m not afraid if you open them up… I-I n-normally open them up t-to clean them out…” \textit{That’s how I make sure they're clean.} His large doe eyes looked up to Damien with innocence as he was washed. \textit{I’ll be okay… You don’t need to be scared, that's my job.}

Damien shakily nodded, still extra careful as he ghosted over the cuts, wincing and apologising profusely with every cut that opened and bled. \textit{I'm sorry… I don't want you hurting even more…} He let Iroh take the cloth from him when he was done, his eyes apologetic. He watched Iroh rub more soap into the cloth, letting his eyes slide shut as he began to wash him. He shivered a bit as the cloth swept over his sensitive marks, leaning into his touch. His hands moved as if to hold his waist before they stopped, instead lacing behind his neck as his chest was washed. \textit{I like this… and how did I almost forget? I have to be careful now…} He quietly whimpered as he felt Iroh’s lips on his collarbone, gently sucking dark marks onto his skin, leaning into him, his hands moving from his neck and threading through his hair, gently keeping him in place at his neck. \textit{Please...}

Iroh let Damien thread his hands through his hair, not really bothered with his touch, his lips still running over his collarbone, now leaving soft pecks on his skin. His hands gently rubbed the cloth lower, cleaning him up before he moved to reach lower, gently placing kisses on his hips as he washed Damien’s strong legs. \textit{He’s got so much muscle… He’s so much bigger than me… I still don’t know how this will work out, and I’m surprised that I’ve been able to at least somewhat keep myself together for the past eight years…. In those years......... He kept me a secret from his friends. They didn’t even know he was gay… Should I tell him that I’m planning on going back soon? That I probably won’t be…. Be coming back? \textit{Fuck...}
Damien watched with shaded eyes as Iroh washed his legs, his hand still gently threaded in his hair, though he didn't try to push Iroh to do more than gently kiss his hips. *My God, I love you.* Damien gave Iroh a loving look as he stood, both of his hands gently cupping his cheeks as he leaned down to tenderly kiss him, holding it for a long moment before pecking his nose, smiling warmly and taking back the cloth. He set it aside, reaching for the shampoo. He squeezed a bit into his hand, moving to gently wash Iroh’s hair, his fingers gently working into his locks. He watched his expression, soon seeing a worried look flitting across his features as he thought. *...Huh? “You okay, Iroh? You look worried…”* You shouldn’t be… What’s wrong?

*I should tell him*... He looked down and away as he shuffled closer to Damien. “D-Do you promise…. Not to be mad?” I don’t think I can take you being mad at me. His fingers moved to hold onto Damien’s hand, swallowing thickly as he waited for his response. *That I’m not going to be here past graduation*....

Damien nodded, gently pecking Iroh’s forehead, looking worried. “I won't be mad, Iroh. You can tell me anything.” I can't be mad at you. It's okay.

“I-I… I’m leaving … After graduation……” *How is he gonna take this?*

Damien blinked once, then twice. “W-Wait… what?” "...you're leaving? “W-What do you mean?”...leaving… as in… for a month? ...for a year…? ....for forever....?*

“A-An…. Uhm…. Aniki…. He wants me to move back to Japan…” I can’t say no... He’s paying for my education, I owe everything to him... He swallowed hard, looking down at his feet as he shuffled on them.

Damien just stared at him, thinking. *Your older brother… wants you back in Japan…? Well, it's not surprising, but… “......you don't have to……”* He watched Iroh solemnly shake his head, his face falling. “......did you tell him you would? ...do you even want to?” He swallowed hard, looking away as he twined their fingers. “...would you be just… leaving me here… alone?” I don't wanna lose you… I wanted to keep you… like... forever… I love you...

Iroh swallowed hard, pulling his hand away as he curled in on himself. “I…. You make it sound so much worse…” *Worse for you … Do you think I actually want to leave? “I don’t want to… B- But… I can’t not go back… He’s been paying for everything, my medical bills, my education…. Literally everything that really needs to be paid… I can’t tell him no…. I have to go…. He already booked a flight home for me… I have to call him, and get a thing for Felix…."* I’ll need to tell him I’m a major fuck up… Iroh could feel his chest clench, sadness taking over his whole being, though he tried to hide it. *You’ll want me to stay.*
Damien shook his head slowly, in disbelief. *I can't... you can't just... why would you want to go back... to the pressures that made you try to kill yourself... why... I... I don't want you to leave me alone... I wanted to keep you forever... but...* “Iroh... you don't have to listen to him and move to Japan if you don't want. We can take over paying for stuff if you don't want him to anymore, we’ve got the money saved up. You can call him and cancel the flight, you don't have to move back... he can't make you...” Damien pulled Iroh close, his mind completely rejecting the idea of Iroh leaving. *No.... nonononono you can't leave...*

Iroh started to completely break down in Damien’s arms. “He’s.... He doesn’t know about you, I was so afraid to tell him about us....” He’ll cut off his ties with me, and if he does that I can never go back to see mother and father’s graves. “I... I don’t know what to do.... I haven’t been.... I want to be able to see Mom and Dad again...” His arms slowly wrapped around Damien’s middle. *I don’t want to leave without you.*

Damien wrapped Iroh up in a warm embrace, gently playing with his hair. “...you don't have to completely move... stay for a month or something, perhaps... but come home... please...” *I don't want you to stay there forever... I don't wanna have to be without you... not for so long... after I've had you to hold on to for so many years...*

“Will... Will you come with me? Please.... Please ? I don’t wanna go alone, he’ll keep me there, and I don’t want to stay there...” He’ll lend me out as a fucking whore. I don’t want to do that, god no..... “Aniki... He’ll do horrible things...” His lithe body began to shake as the thoughts of other men touching him came across his mind.

“Of course I'll come.” Damien cooed to him quietly as he began to shake, reaching over to stop the hot water, gently guiding him from the shower. *We need to get you wrapped up and dressed... then we can just chill for a while, talk, make out or whatever it is you need to make you feel better about this. And like hell I'll let your brother keep you away from me. You're mine .* He gently patted him with a fluffy towel, gently pressing kisses to his cheeks as he shivered from fear and the cold. *It's okay, Iroh. I've got you.*

Iroh seemed to calm down further as he was wrapped with a towel, though most of his wounds had begun to bleed all over again from the shower. *At least they’re clean now.* “Um.... Bandages… Gauze....” He mumbled before he shifted on shaking legs to get to the extensive kit he had on the counter. *I hope I have enough... I really do, I don’t want to have to make a trip to the medical supply place in the city...*

Damien nodded, gently drying him off fully before reaching for the gauze to staunch the bleeding starting on his middle, wrapping him with Iroh’s help over the layer of gauze. He winced as he took in just how badly Iroh’s thighs were cut, gently dabbing at the cuts and helping him wrap those
securely too. Once they were no longer bleeding and wrapped up well, he gently pulled Iroh flush to him, gently kissing his lips. I wanna keep you… and I just want you to get better about everything… I don’t want you so scared of me all the time… I don’t want you treating yourself like crap… please, just… Damien gently pulled Iroh into the bedroom, wanting to get them dressed, helping Iroh carefully shimmy into loose, comfortable clothes before moving with him back to the bed, wanting to at least hold onto him, Iroh settled on his chest. …I just want you to be okay. “We can just chill for a while if you want… we can go back downstairs whenever you want, or we can just stay here and make out or just nap… whatever you want.” He played with his damp locks, his voice soft.

Iroh blushed as Damien helped to settle him down and get everything wrapped along with drying off. I’ll be okay… I will be okay… He’ll come with me… Maybe I can call Aniki? Tell him I’ll book a flight? “I um… S-Should I call Aniki?” Before it gets too late… He shifted around, getting comfortable against his chest, a soft sigh leaving him as he got comfortable.

I kinda just wanna lay here and make out because we have a year to get that flight changed… But then again, you sound so damn sexy when you speak Japanese… Fuck… “Later. Let’s just chill for a while.” He gently ran his hand over Iroh’s back. You don’t need the extra stress. And besides, I’m comfy.

Iroh nodded, curling up into the safety of his arms. “Th-Thank you for understanding…. I’m sorry you have to put up with this…” You won’t like meeting him… Aniki just wants me to run his ‘business’ while he gets all the fucking credit for it… He’ll keep me locked away from the outside world, and he’ll let everyone in the fucking organization use me…

“It’s very okay, Iroh. It’s not your fault.” He kept him wrapped up in his tender hold, gently brushing his lips to his cheek, smiling faintly as Iroh blushed darkly. Hmmmm… I wonder if he’d be up to a bit of making out? I want to… Damien let their lips lightly brush, relaxing further into the bed as Iroh tentatively kissed him back. My God, I love you… “I love you so much…” His voice was a quiet whisper on his lips, his eyes sparkling a bit. I really do.
Chapter 61: The Trouble of Being a Foster Parent

All’s been well, we’re back home… well, at least Levi, Jake, Eli and I are… Dad never told me where the hell they were going for their honeymoon…. I probably won’t know for a long time…. Eh, I’ll get over it. Eli’s starting to teeth, which is only sort of a nightmare. He’s adorable as all hell, which is why I take pictures of him constantly, and post them on twitter, tumblr, and I’ve taken a few videos of him and posted them on YouTube…. Oh yeah, I have all my followers back finally, and even more since the studies came out about the serum, no one thinks that I’m a lunatic anymore, and a few people have seen the videos and have already contacted the foster agency to try and get a day to come look at him. That’s the real nightmare aspect to all of this, the constant calls about the adorable teething baby. I can’t do anything though, I’m not legally responsible for Eli, and people are freaking out because some still don’t really trust me to care for a child… the first few times we had to get Scotty and Casper involved since Lathe listed them as emergency contacts for the Agency, and all I can say is that Eli hasn’t left my arms much, unless I’m asleep and Levi’s putting him in the crib, or feeding him for me. Jake’s been pretty chill, but he’s a bit of a handful, wanting to ride the horses, but I won’t let him ride Luna, and Charlie doesn’t necessarily understand that he can’t run around with Jake on him… He’ll learn eventually, and I can’t help but want to be holding Eli all the time now. Krampus and Nene are back along with Lucifer, they all simply adore the two new additions we’ve got. Most of the time they’ll be in the spare room right next to my room, which is now practically Jake’s room……. I’ve repainted it…. A few times, he found paint when he had a break from reality, which I think was triggered from all the stress of moving around and everyone making sure that he was well cared for. It… It was a huge shock to see him like that, freaking out and rambling on about the randomest things, I’m just thankful he couldn’t hurt himself. He was alone for far too long before Levi found him and grabbed him, and of course that freaked him out even more until I had to put Eli down and then went to find both of them covered in fresh paint, Jake trying to claw his way out of Levi’s arms. He was crying, and starting to scream, and I didn’t know what to do… Blake was standing right behind me, along with Maisie… I got his attention once Levi let him go and he just crumbled into my arms after that. To say that I felt horrible would be an understatement. I didn’t let him leave my sight for the days following that, which were quiet to say the least. Once Dad got home… People started coming to the house left and right to try and see if they could adopt Eli, or at least meet with him. Jake was there too, and every time someone asked about him, their voices grew hushed… The state is required to state the reasons that his parents put him in foster care, which… isn’t a good one, to say the least. He’s schizophrenic, and will be on constant medications, just like me. Most people don’t like that, they don’t want to deal with the possibility of Jake’s mentality becoming worse than it is… but they’re willing to take care of a baby. If I was in Jake’s shoes… the way the people look at him after they know… I think I would hate myself more if I knew that that’s why I couldn’t find a home, and why my own parents abandoned me. More than 10 couples came in the first week, none of them were prepared for the full evaluation Dad gave them, and the worker couldn’t be more pleased, and actually asked if we were willing to take on more children, though we can only take on two more I guess, with all the restrictions… I don’t want them to leave though, Eli’s been…. Already… and it’s only been a week. Eren paused as he looked at the painting he was working on, a picture of Eli happily teething. He could already feel the tears falling down his cheeks as he tried to calm himself down, the doorbell had rung a few minutes ago, the new parents downstairs getting everything for Eli together from Lathe. I can’t do this… I can’t… One last look at the painting he had been doing was all it took before the sobbing started. He dropped the brush he was holding, his paint-covered hands coming to cover his face as he finally let it out, slowly finding his way to the floor as he cried, curling up to himself, Blake starting to panic on the other side of the door. He’s going to either get Dad or Levi… and then they’re gonna freak out, the people taking Eli away will think we’re fucking psychos… Fuck… I need to calm down… or you need to leave me alone….
“...so that’s all of his things, let me get his birth certificate-” Lathe turned as he heard a loud whine, watching Blake come scampering over, pawing at his leg. He turned back to the couple, worried and apologetic. “Excuse me a moment.” He followed Blake as he led him to the art studio, opening the door and seeing the unfinished painting on the table first, and then hearing Eren’s soft sobbing from the corner. Oh no... I knew he'd be like this... “Eren, Honey...” Lathe moved to where Eren had curled up, going to kneel next to him, pulling him close into a hug. “Eren, I know it’s sad that he’s going to go with another family, but he’ll be taken good care of. It’s okay...” He gently pecked his temple, his voice soft. “Do you maybe want to come say goodbye...? Or have you already said what you wanted to?” You've been with him all week... you knew this was coming... you looked so miserable last night...

Eren clung to Lathe as soon as he knelt down, beginning to sob into his shirt. “I... I already told him... Y-You should go... They'll get the wrong impression if you're gone for too long...” He sniffled as he tried to calm down, letting go of Lathe as Blake came up to him, licking his face with fervor. I just don't want him to leave... “W-What if he can’t fall asleep? What happens then? I don't want him to leave... He got used to being in my arms... He’s used to sleeping in his crib in our room...” New tears fell and quickly replaced the old ones, Blake struggling to calm him down and lick them away, his voice broken and awkward. I can't calm down, not anymore.

Lathe nodded, giving him a weary smile, gently pecking his cheek. “He'll be okay, Hon. He will.” He rested a gentle hand on his shoulder for a moment before standing, untangling them and heading back into the kitchen, grabbing the papers in the plastic paper protector from the kitchen table. He smiled warmly to the couple again, handing them the sheet. “Sorry about that- but here are his papers. Birth certificate, and his medical records, immunisations and all that. That's about it, then.” He watched as Eli looked to him, reaching a hand out in a grabbing motion for his green tie. He reached out a finger, Eli happily latching on, making Lathe smile. “You be good for your parents, ya hear? Try not to drive them too crazy.” He gently drew his hand back from his grasp, ushering the couple to the door, wishing them well and shutting the door behind them. They'll be wonderful parents. He meandered back to the kitchen to straighten up the table, catching a glance of them in the driveway, both looking impossibly happy. They really will be.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren's a fucking mess.

He won't eat, he legitimately can't sleep, and all he wants is for Eli to come home again. He's inconsolable... I don't know what to do. I guess he thought we would keep him for a lot longer than a week... but Eli was all over the Internet, and he just got snatched right up... I dunno... he was adorable, of course, but there are people who want kids and can't have them. It's what we signed up for. Lathe put the mortar and pestle back into the cupboard, washed thoroughly, going back to the mug on the counter. I don't know how else to get him to sleep... he wants tea, and he refuses to take the sleeping pills he needs, so... in order that he doesn't end up killing himself over this... Lathe stirred the powder into the hot water, soon bringing the mug to Eren in the living room, on the couch with Levi. He handed Eren the mug, making sure he had a firm grip on it
before letting go. He gave a quick wink to Levi, who winked back. *I had to tell Levi, so he wouldn't panic when Eren went out for twelve hours.* He traipsed back to the kitchen, cleaning up from dinner. He looked up as not ten minutes later Levi was carrying Eren up the stairs, lax in his hold, his eyes finally shut in dreamless sleep. They shared a sympathetic look before Levi disappeared up the steps, Lathe returning to his cleaning the kitchen. Soon enough the counters were clear, Lathe going with his mug of warm coffee to the couch, nestling in the empty nest to watch TV quietly, tired. He was half asleep when he heard a quiet creak, looking over to see Jake standing near the stairs, looking down with his blanket wrapped around him, clutching the warm fabric close. “What's the matter, Jake?” Lathe's voice was soft, shifting to stand, coming over with his empty mug. *Everything okay?*

“I… I don't think Levi likes me very much…” Jake mumbled as he walked closer to Lathe, leaning his head against the taller man’s chest, closing his eyes as he tried to relax. “He locked the door…” *Even though he’s been letting me sleep with him since Eren won’t sleep with me… Does he really not like it that much?*

*Dammit, Levi… you know Jake needs someone around…* “I'm sorry about that. I think he does like you. He probably just needed to be by himself with Eren for once. He misses their alone time, I suppose. Eren hasn't been sleeping much lately. I'm sure everything will be fine.” *They need that… but then again, Eren's knocked out…* Lathe hugged Jake close, ruffling his hair gently. *You need to learn to sleep on your own… you can't sleep with someone forever…* “Tell you what, Hon… let me rinse out my mug, and we can go upstairs. You can sleep with Ieva and I if you want, or just me if you like. Whichever you're more comfortable with.” *I'm always around, and Ieva isn't… you're definitely more chill with me.*

Jake nodded, his hand coming out of the blanket and holding onto Lathe's shirt. “C-Can I sleep with both of you?” He asked quietly, as if he would say no. *I don’t wanna sleep alone.*

Lathe nodded, smiling warmly to him, gently pecking the top of his head. “Of course you can. Here, let's go for a little walk.” He led Jake into the kitchen so he could rinse out his mug, turning off the TV before leading him up the stairs to their bedroom. He quietly opened the door, smiling faintly as he saw Ieva nestled under the covers, bringing Jake inside. “Alright kid, up you go.” He helped him onto the bed, gently prying his hand from his shirt. “Don't worry, I'm just going to get into pajamas.” He coaxed Jake to let him go, moving to grab clothes and change in the bathroom, soon returning, seeing Jake sitting on the edge of the bed, nervous to move. “Come on Hon, move over.” Lathe gently moved Jake in between him and Ieva, pulling the blanket up over them and wrapping his arms around Jake as he clung to him.

Jake shook in nervousness as he held onto Lathe’s tank top with a white-knuckle grip. *What if I… What if I do something wrong… I don’t want to be taken away. *“Y-You won't m-make me leave…. L-Like Eli?” He asked quietly.
Lathe’s face fell, his hand carding through his hair. “Jake, Honey… we didn't adopt you… we’re your foster family for right now. Eli was our foster kid too. He was adopted by a very nice family who wanted a kid… It wasn’t as if he did something bad… he was adopted into a permanent home. And I'm sorry Jake, but if someone wants to adopt you, they can… we’re not going to keep you forever.” His eyes widened as Jake started to shake harder, tugging him on top of him, holding him close. “I'm so, so sorry Honey… but we can't hold onto you forever… I’d love to… but there are families out there who would love to have you and don't have other ways to have kids… I'm sorry Jake…”

Jake seemed to sniffle as he curled up a bit, a thought crossing his mind. “W-Who would even want me?” I’m a problem child… even my own parents got rid of me… Why would other people want me?

“Lots of people would… there's no way we’re the only family that knows how good of a kid you are.” Someone will come along that will just fall in love and take you home… take good care of you… you’re a bit of a handful sometimes, but you’re very much so worth the patience and the effort. Lathe pressed a kiss to his forehead, keeping him close to his chest.

Jake could only nod as he sniffled and started to calm down. I need to calm down… I really do… He became silent as he shifted to get comfortable again, the tears still coming as he continued to think about a few things. I don’t want to leave here…. I don’t want to leave Eren… Or Lathe…. They understand me.

Lathe reached to the nightstand as Jake still shook with quiet sobs, gently dabbing at his cheeks with the soft blue fabric in his hand. “Don't cry, Jake… I know it’s a hard thing to think about… but it'll be okay. You'll find a family who loves you, I promise. And if it doesn't work out if you're adopted… you can always come back here, give finding a home another go.” Some family who adopts you might not entirely understand what they're getting themselves into… they might not be prepared to deal with one of your episodes… it could happen… it's why every time someone asks about you and they learn you’re schizophrenic they seem to shut down at the idea of taking you home...

... I can come back? I don’t have to stay with the people who take me away? Jake seemed to sigh in relief as he heard those words, his body melting into Lathe's touch as he slowly started to stop shaking. I can stay….
Chapter 62: Broken Hearts

It’s already September… where the hell has the time gone…? Lathe looked around the kitchen as six of them ate at the kitchen table, Levi and Eren smiling to each other across the table, one of their two new additions- Tucker- sitting quietly across from Jake as he ate, Sammie, their new three-year-old addition, sitting next to Lathe and eating, letting Lathe wipe her mouth when her food missed her mouth. Two more, and Jake’s still around… we haven’t found a new home for him yet. And we’re not going to be seeing them all the time soon- they start school tomorrow. Sammie gets to stay home though- but I’m going to see if I can work with her on the alphabet, maybe figure out small numbers. I bought a big set of blocks with letters and numbers on them so she can build all she wants. Some have neat shapes too, they’re not all cubes. We’ve already gotten the other shopping for school done, they have what they need, and they’re enrolled, of course… I hope they adjust well enough… He smiled as Sammie looked to her small dish with a pout, getting up to get her more when she looked at him, imperiously waving her arm and demanding food with small words. It sounded like she said ‘food’- so she gets food. He sat down again soon, sipping from his mug, studying the empty seat across from him with worry as dinner soon ended. She's not home… She would’ve called… He took the dishes to the sink, letting Sammie down from the high chair to run off to the living room where her toys were still set up as she left them, starting to clean up. He had placed the last dish in the dishwasher when he became very worried, no sign of his pregnant wife. She’s alright… …right? …I need to call… Lathe reached for his cellphone, dialing her number quickly and holding it to his ear, waiting as it rung and rung before it picked up, speaking. “Ieva, Honey, are you alright? You missed dinner and you didn't call, I'm worried…” Is everything cool?

There was a loud commotion on the other end of the line, a rough voice, certainly not Ieva’s, on the other end. Whoever it was cleared their throat before speaking. “Excuse me… But are you Mr. Quo? This is Dr. Angret at Trost Medical….” Please tell me you're finally on your way…. Your wife is distraught…

Lathe’s stomach dropped, his eyes wide, voice weighted with worry. “…oh my god, is Ieva okay? What happened?!” Lathe immediate went to the door, sliding into his boots and grabbing his wallet. Whatever the fuck it is, I need to get there now. “Please, tell me she's okay…”

The doctor swallowed. “Your wife is fine; however, our condolences go to your family… She’s very distraught, you should hurry and bring her home, she’s been in here far too long.” She needs to move on…

...what… oh god… what happened… is… the baby… are they… oh god… no … “I-I’m coming…” Lathe hung up, hopping into his car and rushing to the hospital, impatient as the woman at the front desk directed him to where he needed to go, walking quickly down the hall and not bothering to knock before he entered the correct hospital room. He froze as he saw Leva sobbing, cradling a too-tiny bare form to her chest. Lathe’s stomach dropped, tears starting to form in his eyes. …is… but… “I-Ieva…” He slowly stepped forward, seeing the broken look in her eyes, finally getting a look at the face of the small baby she held, peaceful, unmoving. ……but…… they’re not… …not....
Ieva blinked away the tears as she let out a shuddery breath. “Her name’s Elina Rose… Born September 7th at 2:23pm…. Deceased on September 7th 2:25pm…. Her heart was beating… she was beautiful…” She smiled sadly, gently touching their child’s skin. “She weighs eight ounces… and she’s five and a half inches…” She began to cry all over again as she gently touched her baby. “They couldn’t do anything…. She was too premature…” *I wish there could’ve been something.*

...it's been hours... and... Lathe barely noticed the tears streaking down his cheeks as he stepped close, studying Elina’s reddened face. .....why... *I thought... we were going to be okay... and that we could keep whatever children we were given... but... we have to bury her instead... “...she's beautiful… but, Ieva… Honey…”* He gently reached out, his touch feather-light on Elina’s skin, knowing they would never see her smile, or hear her laugh, or guide her steps. “...we have to let her go…” *You can't stay here forever... just staring...*

Ieva shook her head, fresh tears forming in her eyes. “I…” Her voice was broken, a shocked sob leaving her throat as she saw Lathe gently touch her small body. “I can’t leave her… This is my fault… I can’t leave her… I- I can’t…” She started to ramble off as she sobbed, the two barely noticed Eren coming in with a worried look until he dropped the keys to his car, the clatter forcing her to look up. “E-Eren…”

Eren’s eyes almost instantly watered as he walked forward to come closer, though pausing to see if he was even allowed to be close. *It’s.... My sibling.... Or what should’ve been... What’s their name? I want to know....* He barely noticed the hiccup that left his lips as he tried not to cry.

Lathe turned as he heard the keys fall, tears still falling down his cheeks as he looked back to the tiny baby. His fingers ghosted over her cheek as he spoke, his voice shaky. “...y-you had a little sister.... Elina... for two minutes... but… they couldn't do anything… she was too premature…” *She's so small... “...she's five and a half inches... weighs eight ounces... she's so small...” ...but we can't keep you...* Lathe looked up as Eren moved to the other side of the bed, a hand over his mouth as he studied his sister. *...I'm sorry...*

Eren was struggling not to let out a loud sob. *Oh my god.... I just saw you leave.... And I followed you, but when you came here, I wasn’t expecting this....* He watched as Lathe’s finger gently caressed the small figure, looking at it with sorrow. *This... This isn’t right.... “I-I… I-I’m s-sorry.”* His voice was barely above a whisper, tears continually rolling down his cheeks as he tried to calm down. *I... I wanna hold her... But I’m afraid to ask, I don’t want to rip her away from Mom.*

...*I want to hold my daughter...* Lathe shook a bit as he held out his hands, his voice quiet and shaky. “C-Can I hold her?” *I really want to...* He was patient as Ieva took a long minute to
convince herself to slowly bring Elina from her chest, Lathe holding her with utmost care, bringing her close. ...I wonder what color your eyes were going to be… ...I wonder what your voice would've sounded like… ...I wonder… if you would've let me teach you how to play the piano… how to cook… how to make a snow angel… how to spell your name… Lathe could barely hear Eren as he started softly singing, though he didn't take his eyes from Elina’s face as he and Ieva sang. ...I wonder how old you would have been when you made me stop tucking you in at night… I wonder what color your hair was going to be… what your favorite color would have been… ...what your first words would’ve been… ....we don't get to know now..... we just.... we don't.....

I pray you'll be our eyes, and watch us where we go.
And help us to be wise in times when we don't know
Let this be our prayer, when we lose our way
Lead us to a place, guide us with your grace
To a place where we'll be safe

**La luce che tu hai**
I pray we'll find your light

**nel cuore restera**
and hold it in our hearts.

**a ricordarci che**
When stars go out each night,

**eterna stella sei**

**Nella mia preghiera**
Let this be our prayer

**quanta fede c'e**
when shadows fill our day

**Lead us to the place**, guide us with your grace

*Give us faith so we'll be safe*

*Sognavo un mondo senza piu violenza*

*un mondo di giustizia e di speranza*
Lathe was shaking as the song finished, unable to stop from crying, not wanting to let go of his daughter. *I don't wanna let go… b-but… I h-have to…* Lathe looked up as Eren came up to him, seeing the quietly inquiring look in his eyes. He looked back to Elina, gently brushing his lips to her forehead before carefully handing her to Eren, burying his face in his hands, letting out a shuddery sob. *I don't wanna have to bury her… I don't wanna… why are you making m-me do it…*

Ieva seemed to have calmed down for a moment as she saw Eren gently cradling Elina closely, her hands going over to Lathe to tug at his sleeve to bring him to sit on the edge of the bed with her. *I need you to hold me… I… I can’t believe this happened… I… “I…. I’m…..”* She choked on her words as she struggled to apologize to him. *Can I even still have kids? I can’t believe I did this to
him… I can’t believe I did this to her… I… I feel absolutely horrible. Her sobbing continued as she clung to the hem of his shirt, slowly leaning her head towards his shoulder. Her tears were for a completely different reason. I can’t do this again…. Not to him, not to another one of our would-be children. I can’t.

Eren held Elina close to his chest, as if he was afraid to drop her. “I love you, Elina.” His voice was soft, broken as tears fell. “I love you, and Mom and Dad do too, don’t you worry about it.” He whispered quietly, his lips pressed gently against her forehead. “I’ll love you forever, no matter if you’re here or not.

Lathe moved onto the bed next to Ieva, immediately wrapping her up in his arms and letting her bury her face into his chest, both of them shaking like leaves. “I-I’m… Honey, I’m so sorry….”

...you were here for so long without me… why didn’t someone call me? I… I would’ve wanted to be here… to help you in this… to see Elina live, if just for those two minutes… so maybe… she could've known what my touch felt like… so I could've given her a kiss and said goodbye while she was still here...

Ieva shook her head almost immediately as she held onto him. “M-My fault…. I-I’m s-so sorry…” Her words broken and choppy as struggled to speak correctly to him, hiccups and sobs marring her voice. I’m so sorry that this happened, this is all my fault, I should’ve been more careful… I…. I can’t believe I did this to you, that I lost Elina… I’m so sorry…. She buried her face into his shirt, feeling her chest tighten in guilt as his arms wrapped around her in a strong embrace. I don’t deserve these arms anymore….

Lathe gently rocked them, hearing Ieva begin to sob into his shirt, holding her closer. He gently ran a hand over her back, trying to give her what comfort he could in her grief. He watched with teary eyes as Eren held Elina, watching him quietly murmur to her, unable to make out any of his words. He felt like he had been holding Ieva for an eternity when Eren was next to him again, offering him the tiny baby. He and Ieva reached for her, holding her close to them. “...Elina… we love you…” “...I don’t wanna have to give you up… I don’t wanna…” He looked up as the Doctor came again in the doorway, gently knocking at the frame. “...you’re here for her… because we can’t take her home… because she’s not…...she’s not alive… “...I hope you’re in a good place, Elina. ...we’ll see you… sometime.” He gently kissed her forehead, looking over as Ieva shook harder, still gently holding Elina to her chest. "I don’t know how we’re going to convince you to…...to let go..."

Ieva shook her head, holding her small body close to her chest, quiet sobs racking through her body. I… I can’t do this again, I don’t want to go through the pain like this ever again. “I-I’m so sorry…. Elina, I’m so sorry…” I didn’t want this to happen to you. The nauseous feeling once again returned as she saw the doctor come closer to her with his gloves and a mask around his face. I can’t… I can’t give you up like this, absolutely not. “N-No….” I don’t want to let you go. I’m a horrible mother… This must be the world telling me I’m not a suitable mother to raise a child…. I’m sorry Lathe. “Y-You’ve married a horrible excuse for a woman….�” Her words were a ghost of a whisper as she almost tried to hide Elina from the doctor as he got closer to the side of the
hospital bed.

Lathe’s face fell, his words quiet in her ear. “Ieva, this isn't your fault… it's not something you could've controlled… it just… it just happened. It doesn't make you any less of a person… I'm so sorry you had to deal with this for so long alone… I… I love you, Ieva… and I love Elina too…” He rested a gentle hand on her shoulder, his expression apologetic and sad, his eyes glassy with unshed tears. “…but we have to let her go. We can't hold onto her for longer… and it's unfair and cruel and I hate it… but… we can't keep her. She’s somewhere nice, I'd like to think… and we’ll see her again sometime… but, for now… we have to let her go.” …I don't want to… but we have to. He gently pressed a kiss to Ieva’s cheek, his gaze on Elina’s tiny features as the doctor held out a hand for her. “…I'm sorry, Honey… but we have to.” …we’ll give her all the respect of a proper funeral that we can… but…. there's nothing more for us to do now...

Ieva’s eyes seemed to glaze over as she slowly handed over her small child to the doctor, tears falling from her eyes, looking absolutely broken. I’m so sorry. She let out a loud sob as the doctor took her away, and out of the room. Her hands were shaking as she pulled her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around them and sobbing. “I-I… I'm so sorry, L-Lathe…” How could you keep loving me when I did this to you? How can I even love myself? I’m a disgrace, I should’ve denied him…. this… Everything is my fault… I’m not good enough to be a mom.

Lathe gently rocked them on the bed, barely able to tear his eyes away from the face of his daughter, the last he would see of her. …it looks like she’s sleeping… His voice was a barely audible murmur, but Ieva was inconsolable, and soon the two of them were crying into each other’s shoulders, shaking with grief and sorrow. ….I'm so so sorry that I wasn't here… I left you alone when you needed me most… I’m so…. so sorry...

Ieva continued to sob into his shoulder for a long time, her sobs falling silent as she tried to calm down. “I-I'm sorry… Um… Can you… Can you let go? I-I wanna go home….” I don't want to stay here any longer. She pushed a little at his shoulders, her eyes downcast and glazed over. I don’t deserve your comfort… I deserved to be alone for that...

Lathe nodded, sniffling and wiping the tears from his cheeks. He climbed down from the bed, looking over to where her clothes were, in a bag next to the bed. He picked them up, looking to her. “….d-do you need help, or can you manage?” I don't know if you can get dressed okay or not… I don’t know how much pain you might still be in… if you can move okay...

“I um…. C-Can you help?” I can’t reach my toes, my body is…. It doesn’t feel like my own, and labor is exhausting. “I’m exhausted from the four hour labour…” It wasn’t nice…. She sniffled, reaching her hands up to wipe away her tears. I can’t believe that this happened, I’m horrible… She shifted, moving to get rid of the blankets over her legs. The nurse came to clean me up after a few hours after she was born… She got me some new clothes too…
Lathe gently rested a hand on her shoulder, helping her sit on the edge of the bed. He helped her slowly dress into loose clothes, putting her socks and shoes on for her. He didn't let her step from the bed though, looking around for a moment. A wheelchair would probably be best… I don’t know if you'd be comfortable if I tried carrying you...

Ieva kept her eyes glued to the floor as she waited patiently, and without another word. I wanna get out of here, I wanna go home, lay in my bed and try and forget about it…. But that’s not going to happen is it? She felt the tears start up once again, slowly trailing their way down her cheeks. I’m pathetic.

“Eren, grab that wheelchair behind you please.” He turned as he heard a small sound, seeing Ieva beginning to cry again. He reached gently to her, tipping her head up a bit to look at him. “Honey, I'm so, so sorry… I'm so sorry I wasn't here for you… four hours and I wasn't here at all… not even after… I should be the one apologizing… I left you to deal with this all by yourself… I feel awful about that... but please, don't blame yourself for this. It's not your fault. It's awful, what happened… but it's not your fault. I don't blame you.” He kissed her cheek, his features soft. “We’ll get you home, Hon.” He looked over as Eren moved the wheelchair close to the bed, carefully moving Ieva from the bed to the chair. I'm sorry… fuck… I had one job… and I fucked that up...

Ieva was silent as he moved her, her eyes looking right through him. I hate this… Why does he think that it’s not my fault.. when it is ? It is my fault, you should be yelling at me.... You should be furious with me, I deserved to be alone, especially after what I put our daughter through... I didn’t even give her a chance. She shook her head as more tears fell down her cheeks, her hands in her lap the only thing she would look at.

Lathe pushed her from the room, Eren following them like a lost puppy as they walked through the halls to the front lobby to get her discharged, and out the front door to the car, Eren going to his own as Lathe eased Ieva into the passenger’s seat. He saw the faraway look in her eyes, understanding. ...you're not going to be yourself for a long while... ...I don't think I will either... ...I wonder if you'll ever want to try again… maybe you'll be too scared this will happen again…...you probably will.... ...I don't think you'll want to try anymore... ...you probably won't.... ...I'm going to need to come to terms with that... Lathe was quiet the short drive home, thinking. He helped Ieva from the car, her eyes still focused on everything and nothing, getting her and the chair up the steps to the porch and through the door with Eren’s help. His voice was soft as they came inside. “Do you want to sit on the couch?” He watched her shake her head, not looking away from a spot on the floor. “....bed upstairs?” He watched her nod slowly, moving to pick her up. “I need to carry you… stairs.” He cradled her carefully, ascending the steps and going to their room, the door kicked shut behind them. He laid her on the bed, climbing in next to her and wrapping her up in his arms. He was silent, tears falling down his cheeks as his thoughts ran in circles. ...you're never going to want to try again.... I just know it.... ...but... but I wanted us to have our own kids... but... b-but...

Ieva squirmed in Lathe’s arms. Why are you still here? “Y-You’re not gonna leave?” Her voice
was broken, scratchy as she sniffled, not feeling comfortable in the arms of someone who should hate her.

Lathe looked up to her, his voice timid and quiet. “...d-did you want m-me to?” He watched her nod, swallowing hard as he forced himself to let go of her, wanting more than anything to latch back onto her. ...but I don't wanna let go... “...I'll be downstairs... ...I l-love you...” So much... Lathe turned to leave, the door closing quietly behind him as he padded down the stairs. He went to the couch in the living room, dragging the blankets and pillows into a pile and burying himself inside, feeling incredibly lonely without Ieva next to him. He seemed shut down, just staring ahead at his feet, his eyes glassy though tears refused to fall. ...I'm sorry... I'm so, so, so sorry...

Eren watched Lathe walk down the stairs, a sad look on his face. That's not right... He shouldn't look like that. He made his way into the kitchen, brewing a fresh pot of coffee and making a cup just the way Lathe liked it, slowly padding up to him, offering him the coffee mug. “I made it for you, just the way you like it...” His voice was soft, trying to coax him to drink it.

Lathe saw him out of the corner of his eye, his voice quiet, seeming to draw even further into himself, a blanket pulled over his head like a hood. “...n-no, thank you...” I don't want coffee... I just want to be alone... but I want Ieva too... ...and I want Elina... and to not be sad... but I don't get Ieva because she wants to be alone... and I don't get to have Elina because I don't know why... she had to go home months before she even got to live... and I'm sad... and I don't know how to fix any of it...

Eren sighed quietly, putting the coffee mug down, sniffling a bit. “Can... Um...” He swallowed as he wiped away the tears that formed. I'm trying to be strong here and it's not working. “I... Never mind... Don't worry about it.” I can deal on my own... “I'm gonna bring the horses in for the night.” He hurriedly wiped away at the tears that tried to fall from his eyes. I can be strong.... I'll be strong for the both of them.

Lathe looked up to him, weakly reaching out to catch his sleeve. “I-It's fine... what is it?” ...if I don't even even know how to help myself... I should at least try to help you... you lost a sister... His face fell as he saw Eren cry, his heart breaking further. No... you're not supposed to cry... He gently tugged Eren closer, having him sit next to him on the couch, reaching out to weakly hug him. He felt his head fall onto his shoulder, Eren beginning to shake. ...don't be sad... you're not supposed to be sad...

I'm... I'm sorry... “I’m supposed to be strong for you.... I-I’m sorry....” He sniffled, trying to smile and brush it off. I only got to hold her for a few minutes.... She was so small ... His head stayed on Lathe's shoulder, sniffling. “Y-You should be with Mom, she’s probably worse off than me....” She’s a most likely a wreck, especially if I’m like this...
Lathe's voice was shaky, his voice catching in his throat. “S-She… she didn't want m-me to stay… b-but I wanted to…” She doesn’t want me around… but I need her… Lathe gently ran a hand over Eren’s back, keeping him close as he sniffled. “I’m sorry…. b-but thank you… for trying to be s-strong…” I can't be strong enough for myself right now… much less myself and Ieva… and I can't ignore you either… I'm supposed to be strong in this… and I can't do it…

“You should still be with her… I was talking with her nurse in the hall, she has Postpartum Depression Dad…. You remember when I was depressed, and you wouldn’t let me be alone… Mom probably feels awful about herself… Can you go be with her please? And promise me you won’t let her do anything she’ll regret?” Can you be strong for us? He turned his head as Sammie came up to them, a small worried look on her face. I should go put the kids to bed… He shifted up, a small smile on his face as he bent down to pick her up. “Why don’t we get you to bed?” He struggled to smile through the tears for her. I have to be strong….

It makes sense that she's depressed… but… “...she wanted me to leave… and I don't know if… if I can be strong for anyone… I can't even be strong for myself right now… I can't think straight… I can't really think at all about anything… I just…” He looked back to his feet, quiet. “...I think I just... need to sit here… and mourn…” I was gonna have a daughter… she was so small... but… we can't keep her… why couldn't we keep her… she deserved to live...

“Okay… But you should at least go up and make sure Mom eats something, and try and talk to her, please?” I know it's hard on you guys, but…. It’s hard on everyone too, and we need some sort of functioning adult around here, Levi's leaving in less than a month… He smiled softly as Sammie babbled in his arms, taking her up to go to bed in her bedroom, tucking her in with a kiss goodnight, going to get Tucker and Jake out of the game room in the basement and upstairs to go to bed since they were starting school in the morning. They're leaving me too... This isn’t fair, everyone’s leaving me…. My sister.... We didn't get to bring her home.... We didn’t get to dance together... We didn’t get to ride together on Charlie... He slumped down against the door with a silent sob as the weight once again hunched his shoulders over. I... I'm not strong enough to do this...

Lathe silently nodded, though it felt like hours passed where he didn't move, unable to bring himself to. He stared ahead, sometimes glancing over to the mug of coffee where it sat on the wood tray in the center of the couches, having gone cold. ...why can't I fall asleep... I don't wanna think... I just wanna sleep... He stayed nestled in the blankets for a long while, long after the kids had been put to bed, long after the room became too dark to see in. I don't wanna think… ....I want things to be better…. ....I wanna feel better...... ...but I don't know how to fix it... I can't fix anything... It's my job to fix things like this and I can't fix it because I don't know how... someone make it stop hurting... I don't wanna hurt... my chest hurts a lot... I don't want it to... I want leva to be okay... I don't want her to be hurting... I wanna hold onto her... but she doesn't want me to.... ...someone help... please... I don't wanna be alone... Lathe glanced up as a dim light turned on by the stairs, seeing Levi moving from the floor lamp next to the stairs to the kitchen. ...he probably just wants a snack or something. Lathe kept staring ahead until he heard the tell-tale clink of glass, seeing him coming over to the couch with a bottle of Crown, the seal unbroken with two glasses in hand. “...you know alcohol makes me an emotional wreck. I think I'm enough of one as it is.”
“I know…” He sighed quietly as he got up to get a bucket of ice before coming back over and filling both glasses. “I know, but sometimes men need to cry even if they don’t want to.” Levi offered Lathe the glass, settling down next to him. *I’m gonna need to drink for this…*

Lathe took the glass from him, staring down into the amber liquid. “…it’s not like I don’t want to… but… I don’t think I can…” ……*this might fix it…* Lathe glanced up again, shrinking back at the deadpan glare Levi had fixed him with. *D-Don’t… I can never tell when you’re mad at me or not when you’re glaring like that...*

“Just drink it, you’ll feel better. Trust me, you’re holding back your tears and it’s not good for you. You need to cry and this shit helps.” *You’ll be able to cry all you need to…* Levi tipped his glass back, his gaze softening as he relaxed into the couch. *We have a long night ahead of us…*

Lathe looked back to the glass. ……*it’ll fix it…* Lathe tipped the glass back, gulping it down, ignoring the burn in his throat. ……*I want it fixed.....* He stared at the now-empty glass for a long moment before he held it out to Levi in a quiet demand for more. *Gimme.*

Levi sighed quietly before filling the glass and sitting back to sip at his own. “If you don’t want to talk at first, that’s fine, but once you let it out you’ll feel much better… Remember about three years ago… I had to drink with you, because I had one of my officers die in my arms…. And how we talked about it, I needed that, and I think you might too, so I’m giving you an open ear.” *I really hope you’ll be okay, I know it’s hard, especially with someone who wasn’t even given a chance....*

Lathe stared at the glass he was holding, slowly nodding his head. He reached over to pat the space next to him, waiting for Levi to shuffle a bit closer before leaning his head over on his shoulder, not able to find words until he started feeling the effects of the alcohol, sipping at the end of his second glass. “...I just…” He sniffled, finally feeling tears threaten to spill over, not in any hurry to stop them. “...I’m so scared that she’s never going to want to try again… what happened was awful… and I couldn't be there for her… not in her labor… not in the few minutes Elina was alive… not in the hours she held her tiny body…. I wasn't there… I'm…” He faintly shuddered, tears trickling down his face. “...I'm just… I'm so upset that even if she wasn't going to stay long… even though Elina had to go back home so soon… that I couldn't at least be there to kiss her head and… and tell her I loved her… at least let her hear my voice… even if she didn't know who I was… or what I said… I... I only got to say it... when she wasn't there to hear... kiss her when she couldn't feel... hold her when she wasn't there to hold... b-but... it’s not like it’s Ieva’s fault… it’s not like she planned it... I don’t know what went wrong... I don’t think we’ll ever know... b-but I’m scared... she won’t... want to try to have kids anymore... and I really, really want kids... I’ve known forever... but... I just... she won't... she blames herself... and I don't know how to fix that... because telling her it’s not her fault won’t work... I just... I... I... I don't know how to fix any of this... if anything can be fixed... and a big part of me just wants to give up and be sad for a really long time... because I don't know what else to do now... Ieva doesn't want me holding her... she probably doesn't want me in the same bed as her, so I'm here on the couch... and I know
it probably sounds really shitty and selfish of me but I really just want to sit here and ignore everything else and mourn because I don't get to have a kid anymore and probably never will…” I can’t fix this… just… let me mourn… please… I don't wanna be responsible and strong… I just wanna sit here and cry and be really sad and not have to be strong but be okay with being weak… and learn to be okay with not having more kids and not having the one I thought we were going to be given to hold onto and teach the alphabet and piano to and spoil rotten and love like we should've been...

“You have Eren….” Levi’s voice was quiet as he listened to him speak, closing his eyes for a moment. “You have me too… And you’ll have all the foster kids that we all know are gonna end up here… We’ll… We’ll get through it…… As a family…. “We have a support group… A very large one at that… We’ll be okay, we’ll get through it, we’ll help you get through it. “I wouldn't have been surprised if you wanted to mourn, though I will give you a bit of advice if you’ll take it…” If you don’t want it, you don’t need to hear it, I won’t make you.

Lathe sniffled, shaking a bit as he sipped from his glass. “…w-what…?” I don't know where to start to deal with any of this..... ...help...

“Talking helps… Even if you can just say a few words, it helps…. And if you’re really worried about not having kids, you should talk to Mom, she’s not gonna know what you're thinking until you say something, and you’ll never know how she feels about it until you guys talk…. Mom’s mourning too, and mourning isn’t easy when you're alone…” It hurts, it hurts so much… I’ve already lost too many of my shitstains that they call Marines...

“B-But she didn't w-want me there…” Lathe shuddered a bit harder, gripping his glass tightly. “I-I tried to h-hold her and sh-she didn't know w-why I w-was still th-there… she's so uncomfortable with m-me being there… I really really w-wanna hold her and h-help and have her help m-me too… b-but… she won't wanna… t-talk…” Lathe started to dissolve into hiccups and tears, shuddering harder when Levi moved the quilt over him a bit and wrapped an arm around him, leaning into the touch. “I-I'm… I-it h-hurts… I… I want h-her back…. ” I just want my wife…. I want Ieva… even if we don't talk for a while.... I just wanna hold her... and for her to hold me too...

“She’s probably in shock Dad…. I remember when I was in shock I started smoking…. Let alone, most of it might have been weed, but we all deal with it differently… Eren goes into physical shock…. You’re reacting differently too…. But once the shock of what just happened to her wears off, I’m sure that she’ll never want to let you go for awhile…” I really hope that that will be the case. His touch was light as he gently rubbed his shoulder to comfort him.

“...that was weed?” Lathe looked to him with surprise, glaring at him and weakly smacking at his shoulder. “Bad Levi. No.” Lathe finally let his hand drop, his head on his shoulder. “No drugs. Drugs bad. Hurt liver.” Lathe stared at his hand, glancing up when Levi shook a tiny bit, glancing
up and seeing him wanting to laugh and desperately trying to hide it. “...shut up, you gave me liquor.” He stared at his hand again, his tiny smile fading back into a saddened expression. “...I just… I want her… I need her to hold onto…. so… should I just…. see if she doesn't kick me out when I go upstairs?” He pondered the glass he held, lifting it and knocking the whole thing back, looking to the bottle on the table, not sure if moving to get more was worth it. …more... please...

Levi sighed quietly and pulled his glass away. “Slowly, or I’ll put the bottle back, got it?” He grumbled as he pushed it farther away, trying to keep it out of reach.

Lathe muttered quietly, sipping at the glass and resisting the urge to swallow it in one go. He leaned heavily onto Levi, needing the quiet company as they both drank, the night stretching on as Levi finished off his fifth glass, Lathe on his seventh. He was a tearful- if silent- mess, crying until he didn't have any tears left, clutching Levi’s shirt with both hands after Levi finally succeeded in prying the glass from his hands, his breath heavy, hiccuping once in a while. My chest feels better... I'm sad... but it doesn't hurt.... and this person is warm...

Levi gently held Lathe close. “Do you feel at least a little bit better now?” I can’t believe I’m still coherent, but it wasn’t that much compared to what he drank. He murmured softly into Lathe’s ear as he rubbed his back to calm him down. Please don’t cry anymore...

“...I still wanna cry… but… my chest… doesn't h-hurt anymore...” Lathe clung to him even tighter as Levi shifted, not wanting him to leave. “No, d-don't go… I don't w-wanna be alone… s-stay… I...” His vision blurred a bit, his gaze going from the floor to the stairs, his voice quiet. “...I wan’ lev… wan’ her… to h-hold....” He let his eyes slip shut, Levi keeping him from swaying forward as he passed out. Warm...

Levi groaned. “Now I need to take care of his drunken ass now...” Slowly the two of them made their way upstairs- well, Levi did, carrying Lathe- and he put the older man back in bed with Ieva, who instantly curled up to his warm body. Good.... Just as it’s supposed to be.

Lathe occasionally tried to move in the night, but Ieva’s weight grounded him, and he reached out on instinct as she shifted, pulling her further on top of him, surrounded by her warmth and scent. He cracked his eyes open the next morning, bleary, taking a moment to register his pounding headache, groaning in discomfort. He tried to reach a hand up to rub at his eyes to find them trapped by Ieva, smiling wearily as she still slept. ...I love you.... His expression fell as the day before came back to him, worry twisting his stomach. ...we need to talk... sometime... He slowly extracted a hand from under her, gently petting her head, staring at the ceiling as time dragged on, drifting. ...I'm sorry... He drifted back into consciousness as he heard a sound, turning his head to see Eren setting a tray of food on the side table, his voice hoarse. “...what… what time is it?” Soup... is that soup? It looks like soup... I want soup...
“It’s noon, so wake up Mom, Levi and I are going to go get the kids from school, and then we’re gonna start with riding lessons.” He slipped out of the room and started his way down the stairs. *Time to go get the kids, I’m so excited, I get to practice with picking kids up from school! Yay!*

“...You be damn careful w’ th’ horse…” *Careful with the riding lessons... “Sammie can’t ride yet, Eren, she's too small...”* But Eren was out the door by the time he spoke, and he sighed, turning his head back to Ieva, her long furiously red mane splayed out on the bed. He gently ran a hand through her locks, carefully shifting so he could duck his head down, lightly brushing their lips, kissing her awake. *I don't want you to think I'm mad at you... and I don't want you to feel alone in this... “Good afternoon, Hon… Eren brought us lunch.” His voice was soft as she blinked awake, seeing for a few precious seconds a content look before he saw the memory of the day before hit her, unsure of how to deal with the thoughts. “It's okay love, it's alright, don't worry...”* Lathe gently brushed a stray lock of hair from her face as she seemed ready to cry all over again, wrapping her back up in a warm embrace as she started to shut down again, clinging to his rumpled shirt tightly. *oh no... please don’t cry... I'll start crying too...*

Ieva let a tear fall without even meaning to do it, a small choked sob escaping her. “I-I’m so.... So s-sorry... I... I didn’t mean... I didn’t want....” She shouldn’t even make out a sentence as she started to sob. *You probably don’t want to hold me... I need to forget about it... I want to move on... but I can’t... You probably hate that it happened, that I can’t give you what you want... I’m so sorry.*

Lathe quietly cooed to her, gently pulling her on top of him, trying to comfort her with his touch. “Ieva, Honey.... I'm not mad... it's awful, what happened... but I could never blame you for this... we didn't want this, it's not like you did anything on purpose... I don't blame you... I... I love you... and I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you when you needed me... you deserved support at a critical time... and you got nothing... I'm so, so sorry for that...” He held her as she shuddered, feeling his own chest tighten as tears threatened to spill. *If anyone fucked up, it was me... and I'm so, so sorry for that...*

Ieva shook her head as she began to full-out sob, her cries loudly filling the room as she clung to his shirt. “I-I....” She could barely get a word out as she choked on her own words, beginning to hiccup already. *You weren't listed for my emergency contact.... And my phone died.... I couldn’t call you, it was my own damn fault...* She shook her head as her grip got strong on his shirt, her head resting on his chest. “W-w-why?” *Why did this have to happen to me?*

“I don't know... I don't know why... but... she had to go home... and hopefully she’s happy where she is... she couldn't stay.... so let's hope she's okay wherever she has to.” He gently rubbed her back as she cried, tears starting to fall down his own cheeks, sniffling. *If you can't stay with us... stay somewhere nice... and be happy...*

Ieva whimpered a bit as his ring tangled in her hair for a moment, but otherwise melted on top of
him. “I’m so sorry…. I-I know you wanted to see her so bad….” She sobbed more as her shoulders shook even harder. You wanted to have a kid even more than me... And I did that.

Lathe gently untangled his hand from her hair, taking off the rough ring and setting it on the table nearby before going back to petting her hair, his voice quiet. “...she only had two minutes… Even if she wasn't there while I gave her a kiss, and held her... I'm glad I got to see her at all... I just hope she's somewhere nice... happy...” I'll get to see her sometime... maybe not soon... but sometime... I hope she's okay... makes friends.... knows that we love her...

Ieva simply nodded as she continued to sob loudly, clinging to him. “I... I killed her… I’m... I’m so sorry Lathe.... I didn’t mean to…” I hate this.... I hate that I did that... I hate myself because I killed her.... She tried to quiet down as her grip slowly loosened on his shirt, trying to control herself.

Lathe gently rubbed circles into her back, trying to coax her to let it all out. I... I need to be the strong one here... I need to be... “Honey, you didn't kill her... it wasn't like you decided she shouldn't stay... it was a freak accident of nature... and nature can be cruel... I'm sorry I wasn't there for you... but please... you can't blame yourself... you need to take your time to understand that you couldn't help what happened... and we need to learn to move on... I know you didn't mean this to happen, but it did. ...we can learn to be okay again.” He murmured sweetly into her ear as she shivered in his hold, his quiet voice helping her to let out all the ragged sobs she had left bottled up inside until her eyes were dry, having run out of tears. We both needed to just let everything out... before we can start to come to terms with this... He waited until her cries turned to sniffles, his voice endlessly patient and gentle. “How about we sit up, Honey? Eren brought us soup. We should both eat, before it gets cold.” We’ll learn to be okay again.

Ieva sniffled as she picked her head up to look at the large bowls of soup on the nightstand, a lost look in her eyes. “I-I... I don’t know... I-If I can e-eat...” She slowly moved to sit up, getting off of Lathe’s chest as she gently rubbed at her eyes. I'm not hungry... I don’t know if I'll ever be hungry for anything ever again.....

“It's alright Honey, let’s at least try, okay?” He sat her up with him, untangling them and stepping from the bed to move the tray over Ieva’s lap, carefully settling back next to her. He handed her one of the two spoons on the tray, picking up his own. “You can take small spoonfuls if you're not sure if you can eat, but please try, okay? You've gone a long while without eating... I have too. We could use a warm meal.” It might make us feel better... Lathe took a small spoon of his soup, waiting for Ieva to shaking take one as well before they both tried the soup. It took a moment before the flavor registered, Lathe feeling dormant hunger begin to gnaw at him as he remembered what soup it was. ...venison..... I'm hungry... and it's really good... He started to eat normally, still moving a bit slowly, not wanting to unnerve Ieva and wolf his bowl down.

Ieva had her head down most of the time, her eyes glazed over as her thoughts consumed her, the
spoon slowly circling around the bowl. I killed her... I killed our only child.... What if.... What if I can’t have anymore? What am I supposed to do? What if I can’t conceive ever again? She swallowed hard, a soft whimper escaping her lips as she looked away, putting the spoon down and pushing it away from herself. “I-I can’t...” Her words were almost silent as she got up off the bed, moving to their bathroom that was joined to their room. I can’t do this... Not with him here... I can’t stay here... You're acting like nothing happened... Why aren’t you mad at me? Mad at me... Because I can’t give you what you want? She shook her head as she slowly padded into the dark room, nausea quickly rising in her stomach as she slid down against the door which was still open. I don’t know what to do anymore.

Lathe moved the tray carefully back to the table before following her, gently knocking on the unlocked door. “Ieva, love, please... can we please talk a bit? I promise I'm not mad at you. I want to be here for you.” We both need all the help we can get...

“Why?” Her reply came out in a choked sob. “W-Why aren’t you mad? Y-You should be furious with me...” Her voice was full of confusion as she moved away from the door to sit on the toilet, the lid closed, burying her face in her hands. I killed your daughter... You could get a divorce for all I know and end it with me.... I’m so scared that you’re... You’re just gonna leave me... She looked up as she heard the knob turn, the door creaking as it slowly opened. “Why? You should be mad at me...” I don’t... I don’t want you to be... But why aren’t you? Isn’t it common to place the blame on the mother who can’t even be a mother anymore?

“Love, I could never be mad at you for something like this...” Lathe padded up to her, holding his hands out for her, wrapping her up in a warm embrace when she stood. “It's not your fault, what happened. It wasn't something you tried to do... it just... happened. There's no other way to say it. It happened, and it was awful, but you didn't do it on purpose... and I'm not going to let you take all the blame for it because that’s just awful....you tried so hard to give me what I wanted... and I love you for that... but losing Elina isn't about to make me stop loving you...it's going to take awhile, and if you ever want to try again- and I'm not saying you have to, it’s your body and health- we’ll talk about the terms. But you and your health always comes first. And if that means you don't want to try again... I understand. But please, just don't blame yourself for this... I love you, and Elina does too... I'm so sure she does. You did what you could, and at the end of it, you couldn't save her... but you gave her what love you could... and that's what mattered. Someone held her and loved her in what time she was alive... and I'm sure that she loves you so much for that.” I'm so sorry you went through that alone... I'm so, so sorry...

Ieva sniffled as he pulled her close. “B-But why? Why can’t I blame myself? Shouldn’t I? Because what if I can’t give you what you want ever again? What if we can’t have kids anymore? Then it’d be all my fault!” She cried into his chest all over again. I don’t want to lose another child like that ever again.... But what if that’s all my body’s good for? “I don’t wanna go through that again... I don’t wanna lose another one...” She whimpered as she started to calm down from her semi-shouting episode. I need to calm down, he doesn’t deserve to get yelled at...
“Honey, what I want is not everything.” Lathe’s voice was a bit firmer, one hand slipping up to thread through the hair at the nape of her neck, cradling her close. “Your job in life is not to give me what I want. That's not the most important thing. It would be nice to have our own kids, yes. But I don't want them if you're too scared to try to carry again. And I don't want us to try if there's a big chance you'll get hurt. You're the one who this affects the most, and if you're not okay with it and if it's more likely than not you'll get hurt, we won't. ….We just won't try again. I'd love us to, but that is not your responsibility. All you need to worry about now… just worry about recovering… and moving on. Because we need to learn to move on, or nothing will get better…” We have to… or else we’ll stay stuck in sadness and if you never stop blaming yourself there's no chance you'll want to try to conceive again...

Ieva looked up to him, sniffling, tears in her eyes as he brushed them away with his thumbs. He’s being really gentle… but I’m a murderer… I can’t… She closed her eyes, scrunching her face as the thought caused her chest to clench. I can’t believe you actually love me still… “I-I…. I’m s- sorry....” She hiccuped as she took in a deep breath, attempting to calm down once again, trying to distract herself, putting her forehead against his chest.

“It's okay Honey… it's alright…” He gently rubbed circles into her back, coaxing a few quiet sobs from her before she calmed down and her tears became snifflers. He chuckled quietly as he heard her stomach growl loudly, gently brushing his lips to her forehead. You still need to eat… and I'm still really hungry. We haven't eaten in like, twenty-four hours… “I think we both need to try to eat again, okay? It's been a long time since we last ate. We’ll both feel a little bit better.” His hands were soft on her waist, guiding her back into the bedroom where the warm soup still sat, waiting for them.

“But….” She trailed off as he stomach growled again, nodding as they sat down. Her hands were shaking as she picked up her spoon, slowly beginning to eat a bit more. Wait…. The kids.... “D-Don’t you need to pick up the kids?” I forgot about what day it was...

“Levi and Eren went to retrieve them, I think. At least, Eren did. If Eren didn't make Levi stay home to make sure Sammy had someone to watch her I’d be very mad.” He hesitated a moment, standing. “I should probably go check- it's very quiet.” He left her with a quick kiss, moving from their room and leaning over the banister to look into the living room, sighing in relief as he saw Levi with Sammie in his lap, reading her one of the many Biscuit books they had lying around nowadays. Good, someone’s watching her. He gave Levi a weak smile when he glanced up to him, Levi giving him a small nod before looking back to Sammy as she pointed to a small bird on one of the pages. Lathe let them be, going back to his and Ieva’s bedroom. “Levi’s downstairs, reading with her. They’re fine. But I do know Eren’s retrieving Tucker and Jake. He was going to take them riding a bit when they got home.” I just hope he makes sure they don't get trampled. Or mentally scarred. ...Charlie likes running away with Jake... It couldn't have been worse timing to hear a loud whinny, Lathe immediately jumping again to his feet. Crap, it's happening again, isn't it. He went to their window, pulling back the shade with worry, Ieva behind him. They both let out a collective sigh when they saw Jake on Charlie, Eren right behind him in the saddle as they walked around a circular path in the grass, Tucker watching from near the barn door hesitantly. “Thank god, they're fine.” Lathe had a hand over his heart, smiling faintly as Jake let out a happy, if surprised sound
when Charlie shook his head for a moment. \textit{They're fine... they're fine.}

Ieva smiled softly, looking to Tucker, still standing near the door of the barn, ready to bolt. “Is it just me… Or does Tucker seem like he’s drawn in on himself? I mean, I know he’s been here for over a month, but you don’t think that he’s given up have you? Sammie gets more visitors than he does….” Her voice was quiet as she curled up to Lathe’s warm body. \textit{He’s in his room most of the time, and doesn’t really talk to Jake I’ve heard.}

Lathe furrowed his brow, thinking as he turned to pull Ieva into a warm embrace. “…I don’t think so. Then again, I’m not that good at reading him just yet. He always looks ready to run off, and I was told to watch for that. Hopefully he’ll warm up to us all, but I’ll be keeping an eye on him.”

Yeah, he’s the wildcard here. I’m not sure if he’s gonna want to stay put much longer, since he doesn’t seem to like it much here anyway...

Ieva nodded, smiling as Eren helped Jake with the reins on the horse. \textit{We’ll make sure we watch him....} She groaned as her stomach growled, loudly at that, alerting her that she should be eating. “Fo~od” Ieva went towards the bowls of soup again to sit down and eat. \textit{They’ll be fine... He’ll get along...}
...what am I even doing here. Tucker looked to Jake and Eren with only vague interest, leaning against the barn door. I don't see what the big deal is with the horse, anyway. It doesn't look like it'd be that hard to ride him. Ugh, I just wanna go back inside. Or just leave. ...that last one sounds better. But we're a bit of a ways from town, it'd take a while to walk, and I can't run the whole way... I'd get spotted too quickly. Tucker tried to blend in with the wall, meandering into the barn after a while, studying the walls. Ugh, it smells awful in here. He turned as he heard Eren and Jake get closer with Charlie, watching out of sight as Eren tied him to a post and left, seeming to forget he was there. ...he must think I went inside. Tucker looked from the door where Eren had just left, then to Charlie as he looked to him, still in his tack, tilting his head at him. An idea clicked. ...I could probably manage... I could get decently far and then ditch him somewhere... he'll be fine... and I'll be free... Tucker slowly approached Charlie, reaching a hand out slowly to pet his neck, determination settling in his mind. I'm getting the hell out of here. He moved to the door of the barn, pushing it open and going back to untie Charlie. He put one foot in the stirrup like he had seen Eren and Jake do, struggling to heavy himself up into the saddle, finally managing to get his other leg over him. Okay. Now what. He eyed the lead warily as it dangled near Charlie’s legs, reaching forward a far way to unclip it, letting it fall to the floor. He took the reins in hand, careful as he pulled on the left side. Charlie began to turn around to face the door, and Tucker was still for a long moment, not sure how to get the animal under him to move forward. “...Uhm... giddyup?” He doubted it would work, swaying his feet and hitting his heels still in the stirrups against Charlie’s sides, jerking in shock as Charlie suddenly moved, trotting out of the barn. He tried to steer him left, going down the beaten path from the barn to the front lawn and driveway, passing the driveway and getting Charlie to turn left onto the street, going along the left shoulder of the street. He had wide eyes, beginning to panic a bit as Charlie picked up speed, not sure how to get him to stop. Fuck, I didn't think this through. How do you make him stop?! Tucker looked around for some sort of help, seeing nothing but woods to his left and an open field to his right. Fuck. Fuckfuckfuck what do I do?! Tucker looked around as they came upon the first house on their left, letting out a shocked sound as Charlie suddenly moved, trotting out of the barn. He tried to steer him left, going down the beaten path from the barn to the front lawn and driveway, passing the driveway and getting Charlie to turn left onto the street, going along the left shoulder of the street. He had wide eyes, beginning to panic a bit as Charlie picked up speed, not sure how to get him to stop. Fuck, I didn't think this through. How do you make him stop?! Tucker looked around for some sort of help, seeing nothing but woods to his left and an open field to his right. Fuck. Fuckfuckfuck what do I do?! Tucker looked around as they came upon the first house on their left, letting out a shocked sound as Charlie seemed to suddenly stop listening to him and disregarded the tugs on the reins, going to search the grass, sniffing. “W-What are you doing? This is someone’s yard!” Tucker didn't know what to do, hearing a crunch after a minute, seeing Charlie chewing something, orange crumbled below him. “W-what is that? ...is that a carrot? Why the fuck are there carrots in this person’s yard?” He looked up as he thought he saw a swish of curtains from the front window, panic setting in. I'm gonna get spotted and taken away again. “C-Charlie, come on.” He tugged on the reins, Charlie however resisting, whinnying loudly in protest. ...fuck, he's not listening. He tried to bail, trying to get his feet from the stirrups and get off of him, and he would have, if his foot hadn't gotten stuck. “Crap, crap, crap my foot...” Tucker looked up as someone came from the front door of the house, looking like a deer caught in headlights as a short blonde approached him. Fuck... fuckfuckfuck what do I say ?!

Armin made his way down the porch steps, pulling his jacket around his lithe body. “What are you doing?” He asked quietly, watching as Charlie made a soft noise, jerking forward to eat another one of the carrots on the ground, causing Tucker to lose balance and fall on the ground, his leg still tangled up in the stirrups, Charlie dragging him around to get more food. This is interesting... I have Eren’s horse in my yard... And one of the kids who obviously doesn’t know how to ride a horse...
“H-Help me! My leg is stuck! It's gonna break off! I'm gonna get stepped on!” Tucker panicked, his arms coming up to protect his head as he was dragged on the ground, Charlie disregarding him and munching happily on the carrots scattered on the lawn. He looked back to the blonde on the lawn as they pulled out a cell phone, his face draining of color when he heard him start speaking. 

...how the fuck does he know who my foster family is?! Is it the horse? Who the fuck is this?! “My God, stop talking and get me out of this thing so I can go!” He immediately shut his mouth, paling. 

_Fuck, I wasn't supposed to say that. Now you'll know I'm running away. And you'll tell him and I'll have to go back and he'll hit me... fuck ...

Armin sighed quietly. “Yeah, he is... Hold on a second... Charlie, stehenbleiben!” He sighed as he watched the large horse pick his head up before standing perfectly still. _Does this kid not know anything about Charlie? And tried to ride him?_ He turned his attention back to the phone. “Make sure you bring Eren, he tried to ride Charlie... Yes I'll get him out of the stirrup and make sure he doesn’t run.” Armin hung up the phone coming over to where Tucker was struggling on the ground. “Lathe and Eren are coming, they’ll be here soon, so you might want to try and figure out what your gonna tell them.” He went to Charlie first and gave him a carrot while he stood perfectly still. _That’s a good boy._ He watched Tucker struggle a bit more. _I'm only gonna help you if you ask..._ 

_Fuck._ “Can you please get me out of this thing? I'd like to not get either trampled or have a leg broken.” Tucker pleaded with him, though his eyes remained shape, on the blonde’s every move. _The second I'm out of this thing, I'm getting the fuck out of here._

Armin couldn’t help but laugh a bit. “Charlie’s not gonna move unless I tell him to, so your fine. Wanna tell me why you're still trying to run? I know Lathe’s a little on the eccentric side... But he’s a good guy, and I assume that Eren tacked Charlie to put you through a riding lesson? Did you just take the horse and go?” Armin’s words were sharp as he raised an eyebrow, taking hold of Charlie’s reins, not at all attempting to help Tucker at the moment. _Nope, he’s learning a lesson first._

“What the fuck do you care? Just get me the fuck out of this thing! Let me the fuck go!” He struggled to untangle his foot, trying to reach the stirrup. “So what if I want to leave? It's not like this shit matters anyway. I don't need any of these fuckers trying to ‘help’ me. I wish someone could just learn to leave me the fuck alone.” Tucker looked up as the door opened again, seeing another blonde come out onto the lawn, eyeing him and Charlie with a glimmer of amusement in his eyes. “And who’s this fucker? Are you gonna turn me in too? I swear to god I'll knock your teeth out if you try to keep me here, just someone get me the fuck off this horse.” _I'm so fucking done with this._

Erwin chuckled, ambling over and studying Tucker’s predicament. “I dunno... I have a feeling you're not gonna stay put otherwise. And this ‘ fucker’ happens to both be this one’s boyfriend and a Staff Sergeant, so I'd really like to see you try. It'd be amusing.” _This is already very amusing._
“Oh Jesus fucking Christ not you two…” Fucking disgusting. “I can't fucking stand it. Eren and Levi have a perfectly good bedroom to do all their mushy crap in and they're always downstairs cuddling on the couch and hogging the TV or just somewhere and they're always kissing or touching and it's so fucking gross.” He didn't even care that Armin was trying to hide a hurt look and Erwin looked wary of him as he kept struggling to get his foot out of the stirrup. He only stopped when they seemed to look at something behind him, hearing a car door shut. He paled again when he flopped onto the grass again and looked up, seeing Lathe looming above him, looking less than pleased. “U-Uhm…” Fuck… don't hit me…

“I'm sorry about him, you guys. Come on, let's get you free.” Lathe easily heaved him up, Eren coming up behind him to free his foot. Lathe set him down, keeping a firm hold on his arm. “You, are coming with me.” Lathe dragged Tucker to the car, letting Eren deal with riding Charlie home. He watched as Tucker silently got into the passenger seat, locking the doors and turning the car around, glancing to him. “Mind telling me what that little outburst was about?” Oh, I heard everything. But I want you to register what you said yourself.

Eren looked down as he took the reins from Armin. “I’m sorry you had to deal with that, I didn’t think that he would actually try and ride him… And I thought he went inside to hide away… But I guess this is all really my fault as it is.” I can’t help it though. Levi’s leaving in three weeks, with Erwin. He sighed rubbing his neck as he spoke softly to Charlie, letting him lean his head down to continue eating the carrots on the ground. “I’ll get you more carrots Armin…” My horse ate practically all of them.

Armin shook his head, giving him a weak smile. “That’s okay, Charlie’s the only animal who got interested today so far. And the pictures of Tucker freaking out were kinda funny. That’s the escapee you were telling me about?” He watched Eren nod. “Figures. ...I wonder how he hasn't shouted at you and Levi already about being gay… you two looked shocked.” He felt Erwin wrap a protective arm around his middle, leaning into the touch gratefully. “…I get the feeling Lathe’s about to lecture him though, so don't you yell at him too. That'd be overkill.” Yeah, Lathe didn't look too happy.

“You have pictures? How long was he dangling?” I can only imagine what Charlie did to him, for all I know he was running and then came to a sudden stop. He could have a broken jaw, neck, ribs, arms… Eren shook his head trying to rid himself of the images. “I was careless…Leaving him out like that…”

“About ten minutes, but he only fell off after Charlie was at a full stop. He tried to get off, foot got stuck, etcetera. He looked fine. Oh!” Armin took out his phone, scrolling through the pictures. He smiled when they came across a few shots of Tucker looking terrified, one of him in midair as he fell without much grace.
“You're afraid that if you're around Eren and Levi enough, you'll turn gay like them.” ...that's so fucking ridiculous. “Is that really how it works? Do you not feel stable enough in your ‘manliness’ that being around two gay guys is enough to turn you gay? In that case, you need to get your shit together and figure out what the hell you are if you can be so easily swayed.” Lathe glanced over to Tucker, seeing him angrily glaring at him, though he was gaping like a fish, unable to find words. “I assure you. Being around gays doesn't turn you gay. Hell, the majority of people I've ever had as friends were gay, and I'm pretty damn sure Ieva isn't a man. So let’s get one thing damn straight.” Lathe parked the car in the driveway, and turned to look at Tucker, his face stony. “You need to understand that your happiness doesn't matter more than anyone else’s, and nobody else’s happiness matters more than yours. That means that if you don't want anyone harassing you for liking the people you do, you have no right to harass who others love. I can't tell you how many times I've seen fights break out because someone decided the only way to ‘fix the gay’ was with their fists because they wouldn't listen to them. They get called every name in the book, and I could have ten people here within the next ten minutes to tell you everything they've ever had thrown at them, metaphorically and literally. I'm sure that you don't want that.” He watched Tucker slowly shake his head. “Then stop harassing my family and my friends. I don't care if you're homophobic. I'm just letting you know that kind of harassment can get you in serious trouble around here, and it could get you punched when you're older.” Lathe finally stopped ranting, turning to the house. “Let’s get you inside. One more stunt like that and you're grounded for a week. It'll only get worse after that. ...y’know, I have a question.” He turned to Tucker, looking incredulous. “Besides Levi and Eren, why the hell would you want to leave? You've got everything under the sun at your disposal here to keep you occupied, you're well fed, we got you new clothes, and I gave you a brand new laptop for starting high school. I work my ass off to cook good meals for all of us, painted your room when you said you hated the color, and tried everything to get you to open up just a bit. What do you hate so much about this?” I don't fucking get it… I've done everything!

“I hate that nobody fucking wants me!” Tucker shouted out right away. “I hate that I'm in fucking foster care! Do you know what the chances of me being adopted are? I'm 13! No one wants to adopt a fucking teenager! I'm too old for anyone to want! My own mother didn’t even fucking want me! The kids at school won’t talk to me either! They yell at me that I’m gay because I live with that fucking fag you call a son!” Tucker shouted and opened the car door, slamming it shut before running towards the street at the end of the driveway. “I don’t wanna stay here dammit!” He shouted, continuing to run before he saw Eren coming at him while riding Charlie, coming to a stop in front of them.

“I know you don't like it, but you’re going to have to deal with staying here, or so help me I will
make sure Maisie never leaves your side so I know where you are all the fucking time.” Eren looked at him with narrowed eyes, his lips a thin line. You hate me being gay that much, well, sucks for you, I’ll stay away from you if you want. “Get in the house.” His voice hard as he watched Tucker nod, tears in his eyes as he walked towards the door with his head down, and shoulders slumped. Eren sighed as he looked at Lathe with his head in his hands, a sad look on his face. “Um…. Armin offered his spare room to us…. We can leave for a little bit, if it’d be easier while Levi’s still home… That is…” I can come and take care of the horses while they’re at school. He looked down as he hopped down off of Charlie, talking him out back towards the barn.

Lathe watched Tucker go into the house with his tail tucked between his legs, sighing and running a hand through his wild hair. “All month?” He watched Eren nod, sighing. “...I guess you two can if you'd want to give him space… that's very kind of them… I think it'll ease the tension a bit… but that doesn't mean you two get to skip the dinner two days before they leave. I'm spoiling you four before I have to wait four years to do it again.” And that's not an if. That's a when . Lathe gave him a weary smile, ambling with Eren towards the barn. “If you all just want to chill and be around each other in peace, go ahead. But make sure I at least see you sometime. It'd be weird to go from bugging you two with breakfast to the house being a hell of a lot quieter all of a sudden.” ...my God, I wonder what would've happened if I ended up with a kid who would've wanted to leave home and start their own life like all other young adults do… I'd do terrible with an empty nest.

“It’s only for three weeks, Dad… I’ll be back soon enough… You’ll have to get Tucker and Jake into a morning routine, then pick them up from school… They’ll forget that I’m supposed to be there anyways…” He smiled softly as he got Charlie into the tethers, untacking him with a solemn look on his face. Who knows, he’ll probably try and avoid me anyways, I doubt we’ll be seeing much of each other anymore. “I’ll tell Levi to get packed when I get inside… I’ll come and take care of everyone after the boys go to school.” His hands were beginning to shake as he started to brush Charlie, the horse wouldn’t stand still, trying to move away from him as he got more emotional. He can tell that I’m not holding it together… I guess I’m just… I wasn’t prepared to be hated so much all over again… It’s like Highschool all over again...

Lathe rested a gentle hand on Eren’s shoulder, trying to help him calm down. “I'm sorry… but don't worry too much. The kid’s thirteen and has had it really rough. I'm certain he's not going to be like this forever. He needs a bit. He's barely lived yet.” Lathe gave him a small smile, his hand slipping from his shoulder when Eren had calmed a bit. “I'm going to head back inside, alright? Make sure the barn door is shut before you head up to the house. Lathe waited for Eren to nod before he turned, ambling back to the house. One thing after another… there's too much crap to deal with… murr....

Eren took only a few minutes to finish up brushing Charlie and bringing him back into his stall before going to the house, going right upstairs and looking away from Tucker as he went down the stairs. He went right to their room, pulling out a few drawers and starting to pick out clothes quietly. Lathe’ll call them down for dinner soon, and I’ll pack.... Maybe eat after them, relieve some of the tension in the room, and then we can go to Armin’s place… He sighed quietly as he packed for the both of them in a large suitcase.
It wasn't fifteen minutes before Levi appeared in the doorway, knocking at the frame. “Eren, dinner’s been ready for-” He stared at the suitcase full of his and Eren’s clothes. “...huh? ‘...what crime did you commit and what state are we fleeing to?’” Levi deadpanned, looking at him curiously.

“Loving you… We’re moving to Armin’s until you and Erwin leave....” Eren replied without so much as turning to face Levi. You’ll laugh... And I’m being completely serious... “I’ll eat after I’m done packing... Tucker won’t eat while I’m there anyways...”

Levi didn't laugh. He was stunned, studying Eren as he packed their clothes, clearly upset. “What happened with him? Something bad besides him running must've happened...” Levi moved to his side, his arms wrapping around his middle, pulling him close, wanting to calm him and make him feel better. Talk, because this only kinda makes sense.

“Levi... Just not now... I just wanna be alone right now, please just let go.” It’s things like this that got us his hatred.... “Go eat... Is there anything you want packed?” Now that you’re here I can ask... His hands pushed down on his arms, trying to free himself.

Levi let Eren go, stepping back a bit, wanting to hold him but knowing he should try to give him space. Crap... not good... “Uhm, nothing too particular... just make sure I have plenty of boxers and socks, I guess... thanks.” This is now a thing... Levi let him be, going back downstairs to the kitchen. He shot Tucker and Lathe in turn a questioning look, earning him a scared and slightly hateful glare from one and an apologetic look from the other. ...fuck... I need to know what's going on... it's been one fucking day... things need to not go wrong all at once. Not cool.

Eren came down as they were cleaning up dinner, a sad look on his face as Lathe was cleaning dishes, taking one of the plates and reheating the pasta everyone else had for dinner. “Is mom putting the kids to bed tonight?” His voice broken and quiet as he spoke. I know that I can’t put them in bed ever again, not with how much I’m hated... Maybe he’ll get Jake to hate me in time too...

Lathe nodded, looking up for a moment. “Yeah, she is. Tucker is going to be a handful... but I think Jake would want to say goodnight before you and Levi leave. He looks up to you, and even if it's not that long a time you two are gone, it's going to seem like forever to him.” Lathe dried his hands, going to give Eren a hug. “I think you should eat, then the two of you should maybe say goodnight, and then you can leave. At least you.” He loves you. And you should at least say goodbye.

Eren nodded, going to sit down and eat his plate, his eyes looking dull as he could no longer find
the stomach to eat from his plate anymore. *I’m not hungry.* He cleaned up after himself quietly, making his way upstairs where Jake was fighting against Ieva to be put in his room. *He doesn’t want her to put him to bed.* “Jake…” He called for the small boy and watched as he stopped fighting, and ran over to his side.

“I don’t wanna go to bed!” Jake whined, clinging onto Eren, his face showing his confusion as Eren moved a bit, so that they were at eye level with each other. “Eren..?” *What are you doing?*

“You need to be good for Mom, okay? I’m not gonna be here anymore to put you to sleep, okay?”

Jake’s face instantly paled to one of horror. “No! You can’t leave! **You can’t leave!** *You can’t leave me! You promised you wouldn’t!*

“It’s only for a little while Jake, then I’ll be back home, you need to be a big boy for me.” Eren had a sad smile on his face as Jake nodded, hugging him tightly to his chest.

Jake shook his head, holding onto him. “I don’t want you to leave.” His voice was a soft whisper as he clung onto Eren. *You promise me you wouldn’t leave,* He looked towards the stairs as Levi started to come upstairs, tears forming in his eyes. *He’s really leaving….*

Levi hesitated for a moment as he saw Jake clinging to Eren, his eyes softening after a moment, padding up to them. “Hey Jake.” He opened his arms as he got close, Jake moving to latch onto him instead. He crouched down, holding him close and rubbing his back. “We’re going away for a little bit, but we’re not going to be gone forever. Three weeks, kid. It’s okay.” He pulled back, wiping away Jake’s tears. “Don’t cry, it’s okay. It’s nothing you did. And we’ll see you again soon enough, okay? You’ve gotta be good for Mom and Dad while we’re gone, okay?”

“O-Okay…” He sniffled as he wiped at his eyes, the tears slowly starting to subside as he started to calm down. *I need to be a good kid…* He had his head down as he was ushered into his room and tucked into bed without much of a fight. He smiled as Eren and Levi came in to kiss his forehead before they left.

Eren closed the door behind him and looked down, taking in a deep breath. His eyes finally looked up to meet silvery ones. “Shall we get going?” *We could leave now, and settle in for the night.*

Levi sighed quietly, nodding. “Yeah, we probably should. I hope Jake holds up okay without us around- and I hope Tucker doesn’t act up too much while we’re gone.” *We can only hope, really…*
Levi reached out slowly to gently cup Eren’s cheeks, pulling him in for a soft kiss, their lips barely brushing, trying to comfort the other. “They’ll be fine. ...Let’s go.” Levi had a hand on the small of Eren’s back as they walked to their room, getting their suitcase and heading downstairs. He looked up as he saw Lathe and Ieva on the couch, Lathe having pulled Ieva into his nest, the two of them talking quietly. ...so much has happened in two days... it's not right... “We’re going to get going now… we’ll be back during the day to take care of the animals and stuff, so we won't be gone all day, but…” It’ll feel a bit weird, I guess. Especially since Lathe is so damn clingy- he’s probably going to go nuts within the first five days.

“But it's still going to be for a majority of the time.” He watched them nod, sighing. “I don't know what else there is to do… I don't think he’s going to budge at all… I'm so sorry about that.. but it is what it is. We’ll all live.” He smiled wearily, standing with Ieva and holding out his arms. “Now get over here and give us our mandatory hugs goodbye, dammit.” Yes. They’re mandatory.

Levi chuckled quietly, giving his mom a soft hug and returning Lathe’s tighter one, pretending to roll his eyes in exasperation when his forehead was kissed. “My gosh, we’re going to be down the street. We’re not going to, I don't know, Malaysia for a year.”

“Levi.”

“What.”

“Just deal with it.” We all know you're just a big softie. Just go with it.

Eren smiled softly, walking right up to the two of them and hugging them tightly. “Thank you for letting us do this… I really appreciate it…” His words were soft as he felt their arms wrap around him tightly. I’m so glad you guys are my parents.

Lathe rubbed circles into his back, pressing a loving kiss to his cheek. “Of course- anything to keep you two sane. We’ll try to manage.” He smiled, him and Ieva bringing them to the door. “And try not to get on too many of Armin and Erwin’s nerves, alright?” They waved as the two of them walked to the driveway, closing the door behind them. It's just three weeks. What's the worst that could happen?

Lathe suddenly stopped, reaching back to rap his knuckles on the wood door frame. A lot, that’s what.
Chapter 64: Things Have Changed

It wasn't an hour before their stuff was stowed upstairs, the four of them sprawled out over the couch downstairs, watching some sappy movie Eren had found on one of their shelves and insisted they watch. Neither couple was paying much attention, though- Eren and Levi were admittedly getting handsy and Armin had decided it was a perfect time to make out with Erwin. *Mine*.

Levi couldn't help but feel a bit awkward, Eren kissing his neck and making him want to moan loudly with Armin and Erwin two feet away. *Fuck... I kinda want you... but it'd be so awkward if I just drag you upstairs... then again, Erwin and Armin apparently don't give a shit... god, I can't think straight like this with you kissing me like that...* Levi let out a quiet groan against his will, his hands on Eren’s waist as he lapped at his neck. *He's playing dirty... god, I want him...*

Eren smirked, pulling Levi into his lap, as if to hide his hardon that was starting to strain against his pants. *God, he sounds wonderful...* He continued to lap at his neck, taking his teeth and biting down hard at the joint of his neck, leaving a larger mark. “I want you...” His voice was sultry, right in Levi’s ear, his hand roaming over his abdomen down to his crotch and hooking his thumbs into Levi’s pants. *I want them off, Armin and Erwin won’t care.*

Levi clung to Eren for dear life, panting heavily as he was kissed. He shuddered as hands roamed his front, tensing as Eren tugged a bit at his pants. “H-Here?” *B-But... Armin and Erwin are right there... “U-Upstairs...?”* He let out a sinful whine as Eren attacked the other side of his neck; if the other two weren't aware of what they were up to, they surely were now. *Fuck... I want it...* He tentatively ground down on Eren’s crotch, feeling the hardness hidden there. *My God, I really want it...*

Eren groaned as Levi ground down into his crotch. “Hmmm, here...” *I don’t want to move you upstairs. “Right here...”* His murmured, leaning up to bite his neck again as he heard shuffling around them. He opened his eyes, looking to Armin as he got closer to them.

Armin couldn't help but let his eyes wander over them, studying Levi’s fit form with a bit of muted want. *We’ve switched once before... maybe... “…mind if I join you two?”* Armin’s voice was soft, tentative but laced with want, his cheeks flushed. *I’d love to...*

Eren looked up to Levi’s flushed cheeks for a reaction. *Well, it’s really up to you... How about you Levi?”* His eyes grazed over his strong body, licking his lips in want. *I want him.... I really want Levi...*

Levi’s hold on Eren tightened subconsciously, a possessive feeling flooding him for a moment. *Mine*. He relaxed, though, at Eren’s response, looking over Armin for a moment. *I dunno... I mean, you're a good friend, but... I dunno if I'd want to be the one taking care of you...*
...if I'm not the one making the first move... Armin, think. Something. Anything. Armin stood, moving until he was behind Levi, gently pressing against his back as the shorter man still straddled Eren’s waist. He felt him tense as he rested his hands on his arms, letting his lips meet the unmarked side of his neck. He felt Levi slowly allow himself to melt, and a particularly rough nip earned him a deep moan, letting his teeth scrape his skin. So that's how he likes that...

Levi tilted his head to give Armin more room, a hand moving on its own behind him, holding Armin in place to kiss his neck. Feels good... He looked up with dark eyes as Erwin moved, watching him move behind the couch to where Eren was. He watched his fingers ghost over Eren’s jaw, tilting his head back to seal their lips together, watching as it quickly became heated, their tongues tangling easily after a moment. Fuck, that's hot... Levi let Armin guide him from Eren’s lap- though he only let go of him begrudgingly- soon settled in Armin’s own lap, hands wandering as his neck was attacked. Fuck...

Armin’s hands came down to unclip Levi’s belt, his fingers working quickly. I want you out of your clothes. His hands worked their way across his body, helping him out of his shirt and his pants, moving them to lay down on the couch cushion, his lips finding his collarbone. “Levi…” His voice husky as he reached down to rub Levi’s length gingerly. I really wanna do this... And Erwin agreed earlier.

Erwin hummed into Eren’s mouth, heat settled in his stomach as Eren reached up, twining his fingers behind his neck, wanting the other closer. Erwin broke away from him for just a moment, coming around to the other side of the couch and slipping his hands under Eren’s thighs. He lifted him, turning to fall onto the cushions, settling with Eren in his lap as their tongues met again, heatedly making out as their hands moved to rid the other of their clothes. Erwin tugged at Eren’s sweatshirt, pulling it and the graphic shirt underneath off before immediately moving to latch his lips to a perky nipple, feeling Eren arch into his touch and grip his hair, teasing the bud. You sound so hot...

Levi’s hands moved desperately to get rid of the fabric between them, craving touch and shivering when those soft lips met his collarbone again, his movements stuttering, finding it hard to focus on anything other than the sensation. Fuck... “O-Off…” He pulled at Armin’s shirt, Armin helping him undress him, both of them soon in nothing but their boxers, Levi bucking into Armin’s touch, wanting more friction. Fuck... feels good... more... He palmed Armin through his underwear, gasping as Armin’s hand slipped past his waistband and took hold of his length, groaning low and long as he began to stroke him. Fuck...

Armin’s face twisted into a smirk as he fondled Levi’s whole length. “You like this? Or do you want more?” His hand drifted lower in his boxers, teasing his entrance gingerly. I wanna do more to you, because Erwin never lets me do more to him.
Eren let out a loud moan as he became putty in Erwin’s arms, feeling his large hands leave hot trails all over his body. “Er-Erwin… Ha…. Fuck…” His voice was loud as his moans got closer together. This feels great, what you’re doing. “Hmm… M-more…” I want you undressed too, this isn’t fair… He whined as he tried to unbutton Erwin’s shirt, struggling with it. It’s not fair… You’re so much bigger than Levi...

“God, m-more…” I want it… Levi let Armin tug his boxers off the rest of the way, all of their clothes thrown haphazardly away from the couch. He gasped when their bare lengths touched, his hold on the blonde tightening as a hand drifted to grip his ass. He watched as the other hand was soon presented to him, fingers gently brushing his lips. His eyes lit in recognition, taking them into his mouth, sucking on the digits and coating them with saliva. He released them when he decided he had teased Armin enough, letting them free, leaning further into his chest as the hand moved behind him, his legs spread wide for him as he straddled his lap. He quietly whimpered as the fingers traced his pucker, panting as the first finger entered him, feeling up his soft walls. More… please, more …

“Of course.” Erwin’s voice was smooth, smirking as he unbuttoned his shirt, letting Eren push it off his shoulders, leaving him in a tank top that left little to the imagination, and soon that was gone too, watching as Eren nearly drooled at the sight of his defined muscles. “Hmm… you like what you see?” He chuckled as Eren responded by reaching out to run his hands over every line of muscle, dipping his head down again to kiss him roughly, a hand moving to palm Eren through his jeans. He grinned as Eren let out a sound and broke their kiss, his sinful whine filling the room. Damn … making sounds like that, no wonder Levi’s so crazy about you...

Eren whimpered as Erwin’s hands almost seemed to grab his skin and hold onto it tight enough to leave indents for a few moments. His eyes were full of lust as Erwin kissed his collarbone, letting out lewd noises almost every second, his hands still running over the definition of his abdominals, enjoying the feel of having strong hands roam him and being able to openly do that to another. I haven’t had sex in so long… we didn’t really get a chance ever since Jake comes into our room most nights… He closed his eyes relaxing into his touch, a soft groan escaping his lips, leaning his head down to nuzzle into Erwin’s shoulder, breathing in his heady musk as he took in everything he was feeling. More conscious of his body, he could feel how fast his heart was beating, and how warm he felt along with the dribble of precum that was slowly leaking from his erect length. I want him to touch me more.

... Holy fuck… Levi can suck, and really well too. Armin’s eyes were wide as he watched Levi tease him with his tongue around his fingers. His other hand wrapped around his waist to pull his ass cheeks apart to give himself more room as he inserted a finger, gently at first, probing the area to make sure it wouldn’t cause him pain or discomfort. “Tell me if it hurts, okay?” He whispered into Levi’s ear as he nipped at it, tugging on the shell for a moment before returning his focus to his finger inside Levi. He wiggled it, a smirk on his lips as he heard a heavy moan and felt the body above him shudder. Holy shit… that sound, you sound amazing… I can only imagine what it would be like to watch Eren fuck your brains out… let alone Erwin.
“O-Okay…” Levi rested his forehead against Armin’s shoulder, panting and moaning as he was stretched. He whimpered quietly as he felt another finger slip into him, feeling the slight burn of the stretch. He let out a quiet cry when the fingers curled up inside him, brushing that spot inside him. “...th-there...” Levi’s voice was quiet, his hands roaming Armin’s lithe form as he slowly moved his hips back against the hand pushing far into him. It’s been so long since Eren and I have had time to be intimate... Jake’s always sleeping with us... Levi looked over as he heard Eren moaning loudly next to them, unable to keep from taking his eyes over his and Erwin’s forms. ...god, I wonder if we could switch after this... I’d love to ravish either of them...

Erwin took his sweet time undoing the button of Eren’s jeans and slipping them down his legs as he lapped at his neck, biting across his collarbone. He smirked as Eren shuddered, moaning above him. He sounds amazing... He glanced over as he heard a cry from next to them, his eyes darkening further as he saw Levi melting with Armin’s ministrations. ...then again... Erwin returned his attention to Eren as the man shuddered when he wrapped a hand around his length, slowly pumping him and lifting a hand to his mouth, a small mischievous spark in his eyes for a moment. “Suck.” ...but for now, I get to take care of you.

Eren instantly took Erwin’s fingers into his mouth, his tongue circling around them slowly and languidly, knowing that Erwin was enjoying the show he was giving him. His hands... They feel so fucking good on me... He bobbed his head on Erwin’s large fingers, even gagging when they went too far, his eyes watering in only a moment. Fuck, I went too far... He whimpered as he pulled his fingers back, coughing for a moment as he tried to collect himself, though now Erwin’s digits were lathered in his saliva. Eren rested his head on his Erwin’s shoulder, lifting his hips in offering. Do it... I want it... you’re so big... I can feel your hardon through your boxers. His fingers made their way to Erwin’s pants, tugging on them, wanting to see him in his naked glory.

Armin looked over as well when Eren started to cough. Is he okay? I don't remember him ever having a gag reflex before. “Hmm... You must like hearing that sound? Eren choking on something thick? Just wait until he’s choking on something a bit bigger than fingers...” Armin’s voice was low and sultry as he slowly eased in a third finger, making sure to stretch Levi out adequately. Need to make sure I go get the lube for everyone....

Levi let out a strangled sound as a third finger slipped inside of him, the friction becoming too much as they slid in and out of him with increasing resistance. “...A-Armin... lube...” It'll make it feel much better... Nevertheless, he still whimpered in protest when Armin’s fingers drew out from him, letting him shift him onto the couch. A rough nip to his neck finally convinced him to let the blonde go, watching him walk to the stairs before he disappeared, letting himself watch the pair next to him with hungry eyes. He felt a pulse of arousal as Eren loudly moaned, watching Erwin’s first finger slip into his hole. God, that's hot...

Eren whined as only the tip of Erwin’s finger entered him. “I want more... P-please...” He begged as he rolled his hips down onto his finger, a loud moan escaping him as he clawed at Erwin’s back. Holy fuck... Shit... It feels so good to be filled again... “O-Oh god... more please...” He spread his legs further, his eyes drifting over to look at Levi, his cheeks flushed and his eyes watching his
every movement. I wanna fuck you too… but Erwin has other plans I think…

Watching Eren spread himself wide so easily for Erwin, hearing and seeing his immediate pleasured reaction, Levi couldn't help but feel instantly possessive, moving a bit subconsciously towards them. Mine. He barely caught himself after a moment, though he saw Erwin return his look with a knowing one, Eren too swallowed by pleasure to have noticed. ...but then again… Armin had me completely at his mercy in minutes… how is this any different? It's not. Levi looked up as he watched Armin coming back down the stairs, a black tube and small package in his hands. He watched him toss the package on the coffee table, already breathing hard as Armin coated his fingers in the slick liquid from the tube. His hands reached for him as the blonde moved over him, his legs spreading open in anticipation as those fingers again brushed his entrance, whining as they pushed past the muscle again. ...you know what? Just stop being jealous and enjoy it. ...hopefully we get to switch again.

Erwin sucked at Eren’s neck, though he was careful not to leave marks as he slipped a second finger inside of Eren. He chuckled as he caught the possessive look in Levi’s eyes, his own fluttering shut as he worked to make Eren writhe under him. Jealous, are we? Question is, are you jealous of me … or him ? He curled his fingers inside of Eren’s warmth, kissing up and down the soft skin of his neck as he yelped, shudders running through him. He nibbled at his earlobe, his voice low and quiet. “Hmm… where should I tease you? …. there ?” He brushed against the spot that had made Eren gasp, earning him a strangled cry, feeling him tremble at the stimulation. Jackpot.

Armin had moved Levi to his knees, bent over the couch, his fingers teasing at the man’s entrance before pushing into it gently, wiggling his first finger in to stretch him out once again. I want to make sure that you’re okay with having something in you before anything happens with me. He shuddered as he heard Eren’s piercing cry fill the whole room, completely drowning out the noise of the movie in the background. I’m so glad I asked… We haven’t done this in forever, and the last time we did this, it was a complete mistake, years ago.

Eren couldn’t even help the lewd noises that were coming from his throat, a groan leaving him as Erwin stopped moving his fingers for a moment. “F-Fuck…” He whined, his hips moving on their own, though not exactly against his will. “Er-Erwin… Fuck…” He moaned loudly, even ranging a few octaves as his prostate was thoroughly abused. Fuck it feels amazing… I want it… I really want it… Does Erwin want it too?

Levi whimpered his head dropped as Armin stretched him again, groaning in relief as it quickly became two fingers. He sighed as a third entered him, the slight burn fading after a while, moving his hips with every thrust of his hand. God, it feels so good… fuck… His length was painfully hard, neglected between his legs, his knees far apart on the cushions to give Armin as much access as he wanted. He didn't hear the quiet crinkle of foil, only glancing up as he heard a moment of stuttering, followed by a sharp gasp. His eyes widened as he saw Eren clinging to Erwin for dear life as he slowly slipped into his heat, burying himself to the hilt inside of him as he sucked at his
...wait. **What**. “H-Huh…?” His eyes widened as he felt something brush his own hole, Armin’s hands on his hips. ..*we’re... all the way...?* Levi forgot to even ponder objecting when lips found the nape of his neck, Armin easily sliding into him, relaxing around his length. ......*I'm certainly not about to object...* One more glance to his right. ...*as long as Eren decides to share...*

*He's so tight...* Erwin went slow, his hands roaming Eren’s front as he waited for him to adjust around him. “...you’re really okay with this?” He looked a bit worried for a moment, and that seemed to uncloud Eren’s eyes a bit for a moment, nuzzling back into the crook of his neck when he nodded. **Good. Hopefully Levi won't pitch a fit.** He glanced over, meeting Levi’s eyes just as Armin slid into him, the look in them sending a pulse of arousal through him. **Damn ... he doesn’t look like he's about to complain.** He waited a long moment before he carefully ground further into him, eliciting a low moan from the man below him. “...Can I move?” **I want to move so badly... it already feels too good...**

Eren whimpered for a moment as he adjusted to the size of Erwin’s length. “F-Fuck you’re huge…” His words a hiss behind clenched teeth as he took in a breath to ease the pain. **It’s a decent stretch, but it’s bearable.** He nodded after a few moments, having finally gotten used to him, his breathing heavy as he leaned his head on Erwin’s shoulder, letting him take over the movements. **I want you to take over... Levi hasn’t taken control in a long time... and I wanna submit...**

Armin grinned as Levi relaxed into putty under him, bottoming out in a moment as his hands were gentle over Levi’s skin. **He’s tight, but he looks like he’ll loosen right up... Eren sounds like he’s having a worse time adjusting.** His head dipped down to nibble on Levi’s ear gently, his voice soft in his ear but as deep as he could get it. “Tell me when you’re ready… I’ll ravish you…” **I’ve been wanting this for so long, it won’t be difficult.**

“God, move… I want you to…” **I like bottoming way more than I like topping as of late... and Eren doesn't always want to top... I could use being ravished...** Levi sighed deeply as Armin nearly pulled out before thrusting back in, his head dropping onto the couch cushion, gripping it loosely as he started a decent pace, his voice breathless as he felt hands all over him, lips nipping and sucking at his shoulder blades. **God... I really like this....**

Erwin’s hands cupped Eren’s ass, lifting him up his length before bringing him back down, both of them moaning at the sensation, though he detected a note of pain in Eren’s voice. He dipped his head down to suck at his neck and distract him, Eren gasping and rolling his hips subconsciously as he began to attack his Adam’s apple, surprising him for a moment. Soon though, his expression melted into a smirk, diving right back in to mercilessly lap at that same spot. **Hmm...** He soon had a steady pace going, his eyes darkening as Eren murmured into his shoulder. **More? Alright...** At Eren’s demand, it wasn't long before Erwin flipped their positions, his feet firmly planted on the floor as he began to pound into Eren, his gaze raking over the writhing man beneath him. **Beautiful...**
Eren let out a shuddered breath, watching Erwin’s muscles ripple as they switched positions, his heavily scarred back presented to him as he kneeled on the couch, leaning over the back. "He’s so fucking big. I… I want it…” His cries got louder as Erwin instantly picked up the pace. "He’s so deep, I can feel him everywhere… Holy shit, this is so fucking nice…" "F-Fuck me… please… Master… please…” "Fucking use me to your own pleasure." His head tilted to the side to watch Armin as he started to absolutely drill Levi. "Fuck, it looks like they’re having a good time… I soooo wanna screw Armin… fuck, he’s next on the list…" He put his head down, exposing the back of his neck to Erwin, in hopes that he got the point across to him.

Armin continued his ministrations, a hand coming up to tug on Levi’s locks, pulling his head to the side so that he could kiss his neck, his other hand gripping onto his muscled hip. "He feels so good… and he’s so fucking responsive…" He let his teeth bite into the skin on Levi’s neck, making sure it would still be able to be hidden, though only leaving a small mark. "Can’t leave too many of those… Especially if we’ll be out on the town a lot…"

Levi moved his head willingly when Armin tugged it back, gasping as he was bitten, leaning into every touch and bite. "God, I love this…" His length began to ache even more, feeling a sensation he so much had missed. "...nngh… I-I’m… h-haah… God, I want it… I really want it…” Levi arched his back more as Armin somehow sank even further into him on each thrust, his voice heightening in pitch. "...God… so good…"

Erwin’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, and it took a moment for the thought to register. "Master, huh? ‘Fuck you, hm?’" Erwin smirked, slowing his thrusts and reaching a hand to stroke Eren firmly, a note of amusement in his voice. "...would you like that?” "It sure as hell sounds like you would… but I’d like to hear that again .

“M-M-Master… P-Please…” He stuttered as his length was touched for the first time since he was penetrated, though he whined when the pace was slowed. "Please… I’ve been a bad boy…. I need to be punished…” "He whimpered, turning his head to look back at Erwin, trying to push back onto his length. "I want it… and you’re being a fucking tease now…"

Armin moved to grab onto both of Levi’s hips, pulling him back onto his length with each hard thrust. "Y-You feel so good….. Fuck , Levi…” He snapped his hips as he increased the pace even more, clinging to Levi’s hips even harder, leaving small red marks since he wasn’t strong enough to bruise. "Now… if I remember correctly, his prostate should be …. Right about….

“HA!” Levi cried out in surprise as Armin suddenly found his prostate, gasping for breath as he was pounded into the cushions. “A-Armin… I-I… w-won’t l-last…” "I can’t- not like this …" Levi tried to hold on longer, involuntarily squeezing around Armin, though the moan next to his ear forced him to relax, letting himself get closer to the edge. He arched his back as the pace grew more erratic, finally, letting out a sound of bliss as he came, Armin’s thrusts still going, prolonging his release. He could hear another cry, knowing as his thrusts stuttered in their pattern that Armin’s...
coiled had snapped. He slumped into the cushions, trying to catch his breath. “F-Fuck, Armin…” Levi turned when Armin drew out of him, moving to suck at a spot on Armin’s neck in thanks, pulling him into his lap. That was wonderful. He kissed up under his jaw, both of them tangled in the other, catching their breaths for the moment. Levi looked over, watching Eren and Erwin.

Erwin grinned, his eyes dark as he reached a hand to Eren's hair to pull his head back, his lips ghosting over Eren’s neck. “.....well…. since you asked so nicely.” Erwin ground into Eren, beginning his hard and fast pace all over again, hand stroking Eren in time. He bit Eren’s shoulder as the man shuddered and begged him to keep going. He could hear it in Eren’s voice that he wasn't going to last, nibbling up his neck to murmur in his ear. “Eren?” He glanced up, Eren looking to him, ready to obey any order he gave him, his mouth open in a silent moan. “Cum for me.”

Eren’s eyes dilated as he whined. “M-Master…” His gasps were strangled as he struggled to keep his body from shaking from the pleasure overload he was experiencing. It feels… It’s so good… He could feel his coil already starting to tighten in his abdomen. I feel really warm… Eren’s eyes closed as he let his arms give out under him, leaning completely on the couch and letting Erwin fuck him senseless as the sensation built. “M- Master… I’m… I’m cumming….” He whined, his mind going blank as he finally came, his high pitched moans filling the room as Erwin continued, prolonging his own orgasm as his prostate was repeatedly abused.

Erwin’s pace grew erratic, his pace thrown off as he tipped over the edge when Eren's warmth squeezed his length. He groaned into his shoulder, pumping Eren and milking him of his cum. He drew out of him after a long moment, moving and pulling Eren into his lap, kissing up under his jaw. So good… Erwin and Eren panted, trying to fix their breathing as Erwin glanced over, his breath catching for a moment as he saw Levi eyeing him like a piece of meat. He smirked, his eyes running over Levi's form, his voice low. "...mind trading?"

Eren groaned as Erwin pulled out of his heat. I want it back... It felt so good... He put his head on the larger man’s shoulder, looking over to Levi and Armin. Those two looked really hot.... Hmm, but Erwin's nice and warm, I don't want him to let go. Eren also seemed to melt in his hold, relaxing even more than he had in Levi’s arms months ago.

Armin watched as Eren curled into Erwin’s body like it was the most natural thing in the world. What? Why are you getting so comfortable with him? Armin had to catch himself before he let his anger boil over the edge. “Let’s switch…” His voice a little harsh as his gaze was directed towards Erwin, his jealousy obvious. Let go of Eren. You are mine, not his.

“Gladly.” Erwin shifted Eren off of him, Armin tugging him away from him, but he didn't have a moment to ponder it before Levi was in his lap, staring him down with lust in his eyes. He chuckled, his hands drifting up his sides, going to murmur in his ear. “Eager, are we?”
“Is that a fucking problem?” Erwin answered him by roughly nipping at his neck, instantly melting Levi into his hold. ...obviously not... Levi greedily ran his hands over Erwin’s defined muscles, teasingly tracing down his v-line towards his already hardening length. His head tilted in submission as Erwin kissed up his neck, letting him kiss wherever he wanted. Eren isn't always the kind to take control... and I want someone to take control... I really want that...

Eren whimpered when he was pulled away from Erwin’s strong arms. “Armin...” Eren whined, moving into Armin’s body, his own lanky one draping over him. I need to collect myself... Erwin was rough... “What do you wanna do?” He mumbled, his hips starting to thrust a bit, rubbing his length on Armin’s waist as he got hard from the slight friction. Eren’s eyes widened as his head was grabbed and he was shoved off of the couch and his face pressed down to Armin’s crotch. Huh? What’s going on? Why is he grabbing me like that? Why’s he throwing me like that? He flinched as Armin smacked his cheek, looking up to him, a sliver of fear in his eyes as he looked up to him.

Armin’s hand stung a little from smacking his cheek. His eyes look wonderful... I wonder what would happen if I pull on his hair? He heard Eren whimper like a hurt puppy, a twisted smirk playing on his lips. “I want you to suck me off, and if you choke I don’t care...” His words were hard as he pulled Eren’s head towards his length, feeling his heart beat rapidly from the excitement this was bringing him. I am such a sadist...

Levi was thoroughly occupied with Erwin, gasping when their bare lengths rubbed together, holding Erwin in place as he sucked hard at his nipples. Fuck, feels good... He was already a panting mess, but his attention for a moment switched as he heard a pained, scared whimper, looking over where Eren was sucking Armin obediently, a red mark on his cheek. What the fuck...? “A-Armin, d-don’t... don’t freak him out...” Levi managed between breaths, worried. He can’t take that kind of rough... reminds him too much of... things...

“He’ll be fine...” Armin’s voice was still a bit harsh though now he was holding onto Eren’s head by his hair on the back of his head. He’ll be fine, don’t worry. “I’ll break him in for you, he’s pretty docile for a hothead like him...” I wonder if he’s ever fought back before? He seems to be taking it pretty well. And his red cheek looks amazing, I should make his other cheek look like that... Erwin never gives in to this sh*t, so I can’t do it often... He brought his hand down to Eren’s cheek, taking it in his fingers and pinching the skin, eliciting a beautiful whimper from the boy. That’s amazing...

Eren whimpered as he struggled to pull his head away from Armin’s grasp, wanting to get away from this even for just a moment to try and see the panic that he felt was starting. It’s happening again... I don’t want it to happen again... His eyes widened as Armin seemed to let him get up but before he could get off of his length, his head was pushed down almost all the way to deep throat him. Fuck... He could already feel his gag reflex kicking in, struggling to breathe.
Levi had to force himself off of Erwin, shoving him away before moving to stop what was happening next to them. No, you'll panic... you'll panic you can't panic... Levi gave Armin a dangerous look, shoving his hands from Eren's head as letting Eren pull off with a gasp, coughing harshly for air. He hugged him tightly to his chest, Eren curling right into his hold. He recognised the look in his eyes all too well. He's so scared... “Armin, that kind of rough control he can't do. It terrifies him.” Yeah, don't.

Armin watched as Eren coughed, a flicker of worry in his eyes as he saw Eren curl up to Levi. “I... I didn't realize, I thought he would be okay, he was fine when Erwin was being rough with him…” Fuck... I should've done that with Levi instead of fucking his tight ass... He looked over to Erwin. “How come you were allowed to be rough?” Why can't I be rough too? I want you to feel a bit of pain... You were holding onto Erwin a bit longer than I liked.

“If he was going to protest, he could've said something. And he asked. It wasn't all my idea.” Erwin looked to Armin, his expression neutral. “It's not all about just one or the other.” We know this. Don't kill him out of jealousy, please. That'd kill him, and the mood.

Armin grumbled something before moving closer to Erwin. “But you're mine... And he should know that.” I want him to realize Erwin is not up for grabs, no matter how hard he tries... He looked at Eren as he started to calm down in Levi’s lap. “I didn’t mean to freak him out, I thought he could take it...” I was obviously wrong... Shit.

Eren was still shaking in Levi’s arms, his face buried in Levi’s neck, breathing in his scent. I need to calm down... Levi probably wants to get back with Erwin... I wanna watch... And then maybe Levi will take care of me? “W-W-Will...” He trailed off as his voice died, his fingers fidgeting around Levi’s pale skin.

Levi gently kissed up his jaw, holding him close. “Hm? ...want me to take care of you?” Levi tried not to sound disappointed. ...fuck, and I was looking forward to having Erwin fuck me...

Eren shook his head as he was kissed, calmed down about as well as he could be after what he went through. “N-N-No.... It’s... I-I... I’m f-fine…” He stuttered as he started to pull back away from him. I’m okay, I’ll be okay... I’ll be fine... He stopped, he won’t do it again....

Levi nodded slowly, letting Eren untangle them. ...I don't know if you'll want Armin to touch you... He suddenly felt hands rest on his hips, gently tugging him backwards into Erwin’s lap, lips trailing over his neck. He smirked as he saw a flicker of lust in Eren’s eye, trying to speak clearly. “...y-you're welcome to w-watch...” God, I want him... He shivered as he felt his length slip
between his asscheeks, hands beginning to roam his front. *I want it... so badly...*

Erwin chuckled as Levi melted into him, his hands teasingly running up and down the inside of Levi’s thighs, the smaller man spreading his legs further open for him. Erwin kissed down his shoulder, sucking at a patch of skin that had Levi shivering, leaving a red mark and kissing the spot. He paid their audience no attention as he wrapped a hand around Levi’s length, slowly stroking him. He smirked as the motion earned him a sweet moan, purring into Levi’s ear. “Feeling good, hm?” *You sure as hell sound like it.*

“**God**, yes...” Levi shuddered, a hand reaching back to hold Erwin in place at his neck, aching deeply. “M-More... please...” *I want it... you're so big, you'll feel amazing... I want it...*

Erwin smirked as he felt Levi’s hand behind his head, keeping him pressed to his alabaster skin. *You're so handsome while you're like this...* His large hand traveled up to Levi’s mouth hooking his fingers into his lips as his other hand gently came down to stroke Levi’s long length. His motions were slow, his thumb teasing his slit to elicit a response. *I want you to want it...*

Levi immediately moved to suck on the digits brushing his lips, swirling his tongue around them and teasing them, pressing kisses to their tips. He whimpered as his thumb brushed his slit, gasping quietly. “Hah... Erwin...” Levi looked over his shoulder to him, wanting to turn around. *I wanna see you...* Levi shifted himself around, grateful that Erwin’s hand returned to his length. He clung to him as the hand drifted from his mouth down south, spreading his legs wide for him. “...God... I w-want it... please...” He whimpered as the first finger slid inside of him, grateful when Erwin leaned down to roughly kiss him, tangling their tongues. *More.*

Erwin’s lips moved fluidly against Levi’s, his fingers opening him up bit by bit, easily sliding into him since he had already been opened up by Armin. *He’s loose, it shouldn’t be too hard...* He soon had three fingers inside of Levi, his teeth capturing Levi’s lower lip. *He’s hot ....*

Levi whimpered into their kiss, trying to relax around Erwin’s fingers. *It burns a little... but it’s a good burn...* Levi whimpered as Erwin slipped in his pinky finger as well, needing a long moment before he was loose enough around him. He whined as suddenly the hand was gone, though he gasped when two hands cupped his ass, lifting him up and over his impressive length, shivering in anticipation. Erwin caught and kept his gaze, his mouth open in a silent moan as he slowly sheathed himself in Levi, moaning when their hips met, Erwin grinding up into him. “F-Fuck... you're huge ...” Levi tried to push his hips further down, stuttering. “M-Move... please, move ...” *I want it so badly...*

Erwin chuckled quietly before picking up Levi’s thighs and bringing them up a bit as he lifted him almost off of his length before pushing him back down and thrusting up into him, getting even
deeper than his initial thrust. “God, you’re so fucking tight…” You’ve never taken anything this big in before, have you? Erwin watched Levi pant as he start to pick the pace up, lifting him and pushing him down, and thrusting into him all the same.

Levi was breathing heavily, gasping for air as Erwin picked up the pace. “God… f-feels so good…” I love it… Levi was aching for more, letting out a surprised sound as suddenly Erwin moved, laying him on his back on the couch, looming above him. He gasped as Erwin started thrusting even harder, his hands reaching up to tangle in his hair, mussing his normally immaculately-combed hair. His hands roamed his shoulders, his back, both of them unable to tear their eyes from the others face, drinking in their expressions. Fuck, he’s too goddamn handsome when he’s falling apart like that...

Erwin groaned as he got his hands behind Levi’s knees pulling his legs up towards his chest and sinking deeper into him than he thought was possible. He’s so warm, and he feels so soft… “Levi … I wanna hear you.” He grunted, thrusting into him with a brutal pace, already feeling the coil tightening in him. I won’t last long… And I wanna be able to take care of Armin too…

“H-Hah… E-Erwin… nnngh….” Levi let himself moan freely when Erwin lifted his legs, shaking with pleasure. So good… Levi whimpered as Erwin gripped his hips tight enough to bruise, gasping loudly when Erwin dipped his head down to suck a dark mark on his collarbone. Fuck… “E-Erwin… I’m gonna… hng…” Levi tried to keep himself from letting go so soon, pleasure building in his abdomen. “…E-Erwin, I wanna cum… m-make me cum… p-please…” Levi begged him, craving touch.

Erwin smirked, his hand drifting to Levi’s length, gently pumping it for a moment before firmly grabbing it. “I want you, to cum for me.” His voice was husky against Levi’s ear, his hands roughly handling him as he pounded him into oblivion. The noises you’re making are wonderful...

Levi clung to Erwin for dear life, crying out loudly as he was stroked and pounded over the edge, decorating their chests with cum, drowning in bliss. He heard Erwin moan into his neck as the man above him came, his thrusts carrying him through his orgasm. Soon, Erwin was nearly collapsed on top of Levi, both of them trying to catch their breaths. Levi pulled him down for a kiss anyway, their tongues tangling languidly for a long moment. Thank you.

Erwin’s lips were gently moving on Levi’s lips, pulling back after a short while to breathe, slipping down to lay beside Levi on the couch. That was awesome, I didn’t think you would sound that wonderful… But I can definitely see why you wanted Eren over anyone else… “Damn, you’re a great fuck….” His words were husky from his throat being irritated from moaning for so long, his hands gently caressing Levi’s chest, a glimmer of adoration in his eyes until he heard a quiet whimper towards where their two others were. Huh? What…? His eyes were wide with shock as he saw Eren sucking off of Armin again, Armin’s hands gripping his hair and pushing his head down farther. Shit… Armin, you’re still fucking trying?
Eren whimpered as his head was pushed down farther on Armin’s length. Why? I thought you stopped? Why are you grabbing my hair like that again? He struggled to breathe through his nose as his head was pushed even further. I can’t… I don’t wanna do it!

“Look who’s talking… God, that was wonderful…” Levi rested with Erwin on the couch, their limbs tangled lazily, sharing his adoring look before nestling into his neck. He would have been fine to fall asleep like that, warm and sated, when he and Erwin lifted their heads at a distressed whimper, looking over his shoulder to where Armin was trying to get Eren to suck him off again, roughly forcing him to deepthroat him. “Armin, what the hell?” Levi didn’t want to leave Erwin’s gentle hold, opting to turn over and grab for the nearest object- a stray sneaker- and throw it at his back, hitting him hard enough to make him jump and let go, Eren immediately pulling off and away from him, moving closer to the couch. Levi reached for him where Eren sat scared on the floor, softly pecking his temple before glaring at Armin. “We told you, don’t fucking force Eren to do something if he doesn’t want to do it! It’s not that fucking hard. I can get that you want to be rough and control, but when Eren doesn’t playfully resist and instead is legitimately scared, you need to step off. Being forced to do something uncomfortable would freak anyone out, but we all know why it’s even worse for Eren.” Levi felt his anger flare, but a heavy hand on his side, running up and down to calm him, steadied his mind, taking a deep breath. “...I’m sorry for getting so angry. But please, get it in your head that if both people aren’t into it, it’s not gonna happen.” Yeah, no. If Eren wants to deepthroat you, he’ll let you know some way or the other. And if you're being too rough, he'll let you know then, too. But it does jack shit if you don't listen to his words or his cues. Levi felt Erwin shift to press flush against his back, holding him as Levi murmured quietly in Eren’s ear to stop his shaking. “It’s alright, it’s just a miscommunication… it can be fixed, don’t worry…” Armin damn well better fix it.

Eren had tears prickling in the corners of his eyes, though he did not let the tears fall, sniffing instead as he rubbed at his face, pressing his side into the couch, his head down, almost flinching when Levi reached out to touch his head. I want to be alright… I don’t want him to do that… I thought he would be gentle… but he kept getting rougher… He whimpered as he curled up to the couch, wanting to be held, but not sure how to ask since Levi was comfortable with Erwin wrapped around him. Does.... Does he not want to? I.... I… He probably doesn’t…. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea.... What if I just opened the door to break both of our hearts?

“...Erwin, move your ass over.” Levi made Erwin scoot further back on the couch, reaching for Eren. “Now get your ass up here.” Levi coaxed Eren from the floor, his arms wrapping around him and hugging him close, feeling Eren cling to him in turn. The three of them were warm on the couch, Levi sandwiched between feather-light kisses up his neck, and faint shaking and glassy eyes. He gently pressed kisses to Eren’s cheeks, murmuring to him, trying to soothe him. You’re fine. It’s all okay. I promise.

Eren’s shaking soon stopped, though his eyes remained glassy as his mind ran away from him. He probably really likes Erwin… I wonder if they’ll do this while they’re away? I don’t know if I could ever do this with Armin… He was really nice at first, but then he wanted to control everything, and
I can’t handle that. He closed his eyes, curling his legs up to his chest as he huddled close to Levi’s arms. He’s only doing this because I’ll freak out... Maybe I should go upstairs... and let them have their fun... Eren let out a soft sigh, shifting away from the two of them on the couch and standing slowly, starting to grab for his clothes which were strewn all over the room. I’ll let them be. He jumped a bit as Armin moved across the room and back over to the couch to lay with Erwin and Levi. It’s probably better that I just go....

Levi couldn't stand it, watching Eren pick up his clothes and forlornly turn for the stairs. No... this isn't right... Erwin’s hands fell easily from his hips as he shifted to stand, catching Eren’s arm, turning him to face him, pulling him into a hug. “Eren, I'm so sorry about this... do you want me to come upstairs with you too?” He gently kissed his earlobe. “...If you want me to, I can take care of you...” You kinda got the short end of the stick, as it is... I can fix that. “...but don't just leave...” I wanna stay here, but I want you to stay here too... let me hold you... please?

Eren flinched as he was pulled into a hug, though once he realized who was holding him, his shaking beginning all over again. “I-I… I’m sorry… I’m probably ruining your fun...” he mumbled dejectedly, his head down and eyes glued to the floor. Just go back... I know you probably want to... I’ll be okay on my own, I need to get used to it anyways...

“You're not ruining anything, you know that.” He kissed him softly, their lips barely brushing before he pulled away, studying Eren’s face for a moment. “...I think we both could do with some sleep...” He turned his head as he heard tired mumbling, looking back to the couch. “You say something, Eyebrows?” You sound tired as hell.

“What do you say we drag some blankets down here and we all sleep together?” Erwin yawned as he stretched his arms around Armin, pulling the small blonde closer to him. I wouldn’t mind doing that, and I’m sure sleep would make us all feel better.

Eren looked down and away as he blushed from Levi kissing his lips for only a moment. I ruin everything, so don’t lie to me... He was silent, waiting for Levi’s response, shifting in unease. His body had begun to shake again, his hands barely holding onto the clothes he held in his arms. I might still have a panic attack... I need to go take my pills, and maybe go hide in a corner for awhile...

“I like that idea... you'll have to give us a little bit, though. Eren needs to calm down, and we’ll reassess what's happening, okay?” His eyes showed relief as Erwin nodded in understanding, glancing down and moving to pick up a pair of jeans next to his feet. How the hell did they get so far away from the couch? ...eh, who cares. It was worth it, dammit. Levi felt a bit odd, being nude as he ushered Eren upstairs to the guest room. He got him a glass of water from the bathroom when he saw Eren fumble with his pill bottles, making sure he swallowed the whole thing down. He slid into a clean pair of boxers, letting Eren do the same before pulling him close, sitting on the edge of the bed with him, threading a hand through his hair. “It's alright... I'm sorry Armin was being so
rough with you… he just got carried away, I suppose. But he knows better now, I guess. You're fine. It's okay.” I'm not letting any of that shit happen again. If Armin tried to force you again, I'd probably entertain the idea of murder.

Eren nodded, his hands shaking as he held the glass of water. He still kept his head down as Levi curled up to him. “I… I… I’m sorry… for suggesting that… Armin got jealous… And um…” So am I… because you looked so much more comfortable with Erwin than you ever are with me… He kept his eyes down on the ground still as he tried not to cry. “I-I… I didn’t mean for things to escalate like that… I’m really sorry…” You probably think I’m a fucking whore… Which I am, I have been for a long time… how could I forget?

...oh. “…with me and Erwin like that… and with you and Erwin tangled up… I can get that Armin was jealous…” He gently rubbed circles into Eren's back. “…I'm sorry if I made you jealous too… you know how clingy I get, and apparently Erwin does too a bit… I'm sorry… but you know I could only really love you, right? And Armin and Erwin are fucking engaged, so there's that. One of us even threatening to step in the way of that is pretty much forfeiting one of your limbs. It wouldn't end well.” Armin and Erwin are great, duh, and they're each other’s, also duh, but you… you're mine.

“Y-You…” He started off strong though his sentence trailed off to broken mumbles. You were comfortable with him… And you’re not with me… I noticed that… Eren shook his head pushing Levi away from him a little bit, feeling the fresh burn of tears start. I can’t give you what you want… You won’t even make it official… Even I’m starting to have doubts if you’re really going to stay or not…

Levi looked hurt as Eren weakly pushed at him, though he kept his hold tight on his middle. “Eren, I'm sorry… I really am… but I was tired because I'd just gotten my brains fucked out of me twice in half an hour and I'm always too fucking clingy after sex whenever I'm in the mood where I want to bottom, and Erwin was right fucking on top of me and he was warm and I was sleepy. I just…” I should tell the truth… “…it's been awhile since we’ve had the chance to be intimate, but even when we had all the time we wanted, you never liked topping… you always did it just to do it, to barely sate me, and you always acted awkward when I wanted nothing but to just cling to you all morning and keep you wrapped up in bed with me… it happens sometimes, and you always seem to just want to get it over with…. tonight was a nice change for once, and I… I’d love it if we could be more like that… if we could put more into being intimate… I'd love that… because I owe it to you… and I miss the attention…” I do… I could use a thorough fucking more often….

Eren’s head hung on his neck limply, the feeling of knives digging into him with Levi’s words. I... I didn't realize that I'm that horrible of a lover… He sniffled, bring his hands up to quickly wipe away at his tears. “I… I’m sorry… I didn’t realize you h-hated that…” I try my best.... And I'm a nervous wreck whenever I try, but here I am.... Knowing that... That Erwin can satisfy you better than I can… It hurts… “Probably…. hurts…” he muttered to himself, his hands shaking even worse now that his feeling of panic started to rise again. You’ll wanna leave me, and stay with them...
Because I'm a useless whore… that no one wants to keep… Not even you… He didn’t realize that he had been mumbling all his words, his eyes slowly closing as he tried to calm down again, his hands shakily pushing on Levi again.

Levi’s eyes widened as he heard everything Eren was mumbling, shaking his head. “Nonono Eren, none of that is true. I’m not about to leave you over this; I really, really want to keep you. And please, you’re no whore. You’re not. And…” Levi sighed, resting his cheek on Eren’s shoulder. “…I just thought I should tell you. Because intimacy is really important in a relationship and I just wanted you to know… because I’m sure there are things you want me to be doing that I’m not.” He looked up to Eren, his voice quiet. “Eren, be honest. Is there any way I can make our intimacy better? Anything.” I don't want sex to become boring… I don't want you to lose interest…

Eren picked his head up, his questioning eyes met Levi’s pondering ones. Should I? But it’s not really going to help is it? Because I can’t do it that rough…. I’ll start to panic and I almost panicked when Erwin took over, but I was okay, I did that…. I told him he could, I told him I would submit…. But you like to submit far more than you used to… Eren was muttering nonsense under his breath as he shook his head, his eyes gluing back to the floor. I don’t wanna tell you… You’ll get mad at me… I don’t want you to leave when you’re mad at me…

Levi gently reached out a hand, coaxing Eren to look back up at him, his features softening as he saw the conflict and fear in them. “Eren, it’s alright. You can tell me anything. I promise I won't get mad.” He softly kissed his cheek. “I just want you to like what we do when we’re intimate. That's it. That's all I want.” It's important that you like what we do. It's never just about one or the other. It's always about us.

Eren whimpered shaking his head again. “I don’t… I don’t like it…..” You're gentle with me, and you probably think you're doing a good job with trying to help me cope… But it's not helping… He sighed quietly, turning away from him. “It doesn’t help…” I…. I can’t do that anymore...

Levi looked worried, trying to understand. “W-What isn't helping? I don't understand.” Explain it to me. Let me fix this.

“Y-You're gentle…. It doesn’t help…” His voice was shaky as he started to curl up to him. “I…. I can’t get over it…” That week… It’s replaying in my mind…Over and over again… I remember everything …

Levi pulled him closer, not sure what to say. “I… I'm sorry… I just… I thought it would help… but if it's not, I won't… at least not as much as I often am… just…” Levi nestled into Eren’s shoulder, murmuring. “I'm still sorta learning how to love you, because after everything that happened trying to love you is a bit like walking on eggshells… if you want me to love you a certain way, you can
tell me. Even in the middle of things, if you don't like something. Okay? I'll try to do better…” I just want you to like what we do...

Eren sniffled, but nodded as he curled up into Levi’s arms. “You’re not…. You’re not rough enough…” I’m so used to having memories replaced with other ones, I need you to be rough, to get rid of that horrible week…. He let a single tear fall down his cheek, burying his head into Levi’s chest. I want to be able to get rid of them...

Levi nodded, kissing the side of his neck. “Okay. I'll try to be better.” He waited a moment for Eren to stop shaking, his voice quiet. “What do you say we get dressed and head downstairs to sleep? Is that okay? We can stay here if you want, I'd just tell them we’re sleeping on our own.” It's no big deal.

“N-No…. We can G-go…” He murmured quietly, slowly getting up to get dressed into his pajamas. I wanna be okay... I wanna be able to be comfortable .... His hands had almost stopped their shaking when he pulled on his tank top. “L-Let’s go d-downstairs…..”

Levi nodded, having pulled on a black pair of sweatpants and a light grey tank top. He tugged on socks too before moving to catch Eren in a light kiss, pulling him along to the stairs. They padded to the living room, chuckling quietly as they saw Erwin and Armin tangled up in a huge nest, looking warm and sleepy. Levi nudged Erwin with his toe, though his voice held no venom as he spoke. “Move your butt, Erwin. Leave some room for the rest of us.” He moved to settle next to him, Armin on Erwin’s far side and Eren still next to him, reaching for the blanket. “You'd better not starfish, Smith.” As long as I don't wake up with your foot digging into my spleen, we’re good.

Erwin, smirked, cracking open one eye. “Is that an order, Ackerman? You know I'm higher in rank than you.”

“Shut it and obey anyway.”

Erwin chuckled, reaching over and tugging Levi- and in turn, Eren- closer, wrapping an arm around him. “Whatever you say.” I don't starfish, don't worry.

Levi mumbled something indignantly, turning when Eren moved him onto his side, facing Erwin, though he was confused for a second. “What're you…” He understood when Eren wrapped his arms around Levi’s middle and pressed flush to his back, Erwin coaxing him to nestle into his shoulder, Armin occupying the other and dragging a blanket over the four of them. Levi let an arm drape over Erwin's middle, letting his eyes slide shut, feeling the gentle huff of Eren’s breath on his neck and the slow movement of Erwin’s chest as he breathed. ...it's warm, and I'm sure as hell not
about to complain.

Eren fell asleep silently, though he woke with a start, looking around to the surrounding darkness, hearing the soft snores of everyone else. *It must be early morning…* *Fuck… And I’m awake now, I’m not gonna be able to sleep anymore.* He grumbled quietly, moving to let go of Levi and slipping out of the blankets, moving to cover Levi back up since he had moved them off of him. *I should let them sleep… What if I went to take Charlie for a ride? Clear my head…*

Erwin cracked open an eye as Levi shifted off of being on top of him, still asleep. He looked up, seeing Eren stretch, about to get up. He reached out a hand, brushing his wrist. “Leaving so soon?” His voice was rough from having just woken up, smirking faintly. *You can't leave just yet… we all had… plans…*

Eren looked up, his eyes full of fear before he put the face and the voice together. *Oh thank god… It’s just Erwin…* “I um… I was gonna go ride Charlie… Since it’s so early… Sorry for waking you.” He whispered pulling his arm away, and shifting to get up and make his way towards the kitchen.

Erwin carefully caught his wrist in a gentle hold, his voice apologetic as he saw the flickers of fear in Eren’s eyes, even as he forced them down. “I’m sorry for scaring you, Eren, I really am… but wouldn’t you rather stay a while? It's warm, and if my internal clock is correct…” He tilted his head back, making out the numbers on the cable box. “...it's barely five thirty.” He gently tugged Eren back into the nest with them, shifting the covers back over him. “Try to sleep more?” *It's too early to get up, much less go riding when it's cold and pitch black outside and you could be sleeping instead. …or doing other things. But I don't think you’d want to right now.*

Eren shook his head, starting to move against Erwin’s grip, letting out a soft whimper as he was pulled back into the nest. “N-No… I-I’m gonna go riding…” He started to move again, panic setting in when Erwin wouldn’t let go of his wrist. *I wanna go… Master doesn’t want me to leave… But I can’t sleep, and riding will calm me down.*

Erwin let him go when he heard Eren say ‘No,’ pulling his hand back. “Eren, it’s too early… it’s still too dark out to see and it’s going to be freezing… please, at least wait for dawn.” *If you can't see shit, there's no way I can just let you go riding; Levi would have my head when he found out.*

Eren hurriedly shook his head, curling up into a ball within a few seconds. “I wanna go riding… Charlie knows his way around… we’ll be fine…” His words were quiet, and his head tucked into his knees made him hard to understand. *I’m acting like a child… but why won’t he let me go?*
Erwin couldn't make out his mumbling, sitting up, Armin shifting off from his shoulder. He rested a hand on Eren’s back, sounding worried. “Eren, I'm really sorry... you can go if you want, I guess... I can't really stop you... but just be careful, okay? It's still hard to see. And you're probably going to want a coat.” Dammit, I'm being overprotective again. Ugh, I always do this... “And I'm sorry for sounding like a damn mother hen, but I just don't want Levi to wake up and get pissy that you went riding while freezing your ass off. He'd kill me for that.” ...he probably would actually ponder it, too.

“'Maim' is probably a better word.” Levi blearily reached for Eren, sitting up and practically draping himself over him, nuzzling into the nape of his neck. “It's balls O’clock and you're thinking of riding? Eren, listen.” They were silent for a moment, waiting for Levi to continue, but were confused when he didn't say anything else. But he didn't have to- they soon heard a tell-tale pitter-patter on the roof. “...on top of that, it's fucking raining.” Levi looked to Eren, turning his rare puppy-eyes on low. “Stay? It's warm... mur...

Eren lifted his head, his heart beating a mile a minute, his breathing a bit shaky. Stay? They want me to stay?

... b-b-but... I-I... can’t sl-sleep...” He murmured before he pulled his knees in further to his chest, hugging them tightly to himself; he was self conscious about what had happened the previous night, and from what had woken him up. I don't want to fall asleep... not now... Not while I'm still thinking of it...

He needs to relax, he looks like he's about to shatter from nerves... Levi risked a glance to Erwin when an idea came to him, the two of them having a silent conversation for a few seconds before turning back to Eren. Levi let his hands go to Eren’s hips, his voice soft in his ear. “...you don't have to stay if you stay, you know...” I'd be okay with it... if you are.

Eren’s cheeks instantly flushed at his words, thinking back to what had happened last night. “I don’t wanna be a whore...” His mumbles were next to silent before he let go of his knees and let them down, laying back into Levi’s arms a bit. But I’m so used to being shared... I... Okay...

Levi’s brow furrowed, lightly kissing his neck. “...none of this has meant that you are... you're not. Not at all.” Never. He glanced to Erwin who looked a bit confused, murmuring to Eren again. “...we don't have to do this here. You don't have to share anymore if you don't want to. We can go upstairs... be alone, if you want.” If that's what you need, that's okay. Anything.

Eren clammed up, silent as he moved to curl up to Levi’s chest, burying his head into his loose tank top. I’m used to being passed around... I guess it’s only natural to keep doing it... once a whore, always a whore... He shrugged, letting out a soft sigh as he glanced over to Armin’s sleeping form. He’s still asleep....

Levi scooped Eren up without another thought, moving to get his feet under him and lift him up.
He sent Erwin a look, who nodded in understanding. *We need our own time… Eren needs to come to terms with what we did last night… I think he might regret it… or it stirred thoughts up… mostly the latter, but… I dunno….* Levi padded up the stairs and to their room, hip-checking the door shut and moving to lay Eren on the bed. He climbed on top of him, hands on his slim waist as he looked up to him. “…are you sure this is okay?” *I don't want you to feel forced…*

Eren looked up to him with slightly teary eyes. “I… I-I’m sorry… I didn’t mean… I… I didn’t want… I uh… Uhm…” He trailed off once again the words stuck in his throat. *I promised you… I promised you I wouldn’t do that again… and I broke that promise… I agreed with you right there in front me… Why would you want something that can’t keep a promise… I’m a whore… I shared myself… you should be mad.* Eren rolled over as he continued to ramble, his head to the side as he laid on his stomach, a lot of his scars still visible from where his sweatpants hung low and his tank top was pulled down.

Levi looked worried as Eren dissolved into fearful rambling, moving to lay behind him, arms winding around his middle. “Eren, Honey, it's okay… don't be scared… tell me, what's wrong? Let me fix it.”

Eren was silent for a moment, his teeth biting into his shaking hands to keep him from talking though he soon let go to start mumbling again. “I… I broke it…. You’ll be mad…” *You’ll be fucking furious with me… Even though you watched… I wasn’t just yours… I slept with Erwin too…*

“Broke what? I don't understand…” *I don't get it…*

“P-promise…” *I promised you… I promised you I wouldn’t… “I…. I slept with him… And… And I liked it… I’m sorry… I broke it…”* He whimpered, curling up a bit further, hiccups forming his his throat, his whole body shaking as he realized exactly what he had done. *I’m sorry… I’m so sorry…*

It clicked. A promise, made years ago after Armin and Eren confessed to being less than innocent with each other while they were away. “Eren… Nono Eren, it's okay, you didn't break your promise…” He moved to Eren’s other side, gently kissing his cheeks, trying to soothe him. “Eren, I was right there the whole time. And I let Armin and Erwin have me too. If anything, I'm the one who should be apologizing. But we knew, and we were okay with it. It's not a bad thing you enjoyed it; I'd be shocked if you didn't. But it's okay, Eren. You didn't break your promise. It's okay with me that you shared yourself; we all decided to share. And that's okay sometimes. You need to know that. Just because you shared doesn't make you anything less to me.” *I'm still completely smitten and I still love you, if that's what you think.*
Eren looked to Levi with large eyes, watching his lips move with every word. *Huh?* His confusion reached his face in only a moment. “You… You're not mad?” *He’s not mad at me? For anything? Not even mad at me for *enjoying* it?* Eren bit his lip, waiting for Levi’s words of confirmation, not wanting to be too disappointed if he was misunderstanding him. *You’ll still want to touch me? And love me?*

Levi shook his head. “I’m not mad. I couldn't be.” Levi dipped his head down to nip at Eren’s neck, shifting to straddle him, hands on his chest. “You looked like you were very okay with going all the way, and I got into it too. And of course it felt good. That’s the point.” He smirked, sucking a mark at the joint of his neck. “I’m not going to be mad because you liked it. I liked it. Armin and Eyebrows started the whole thing, and they're engaged.” He looked up to Eren, a mischievous look in his eye for a moment. “…we’ll say that community sexcapades are an exception to your promise. But for right now….?” He bit his soft flesh, earning him a high-pitched gasp. “...I don't wanna share.” *Mine.*

Eren gasped, his eyes wide as he watched Levi move him around. *Huh? What? He doesn’t wanna share? So he wants me to…. Okay.* He lifted a shaking hand to Levi’s hip, his thumb hooking into Levi’s sweatpants and tugging them down a bit. *I guess I can do that for you…*

Levi reached down, gently swatting Eren’s hand away. “That’s *my* job, Eren.” He chuckled as he saw the flicker of confusion in his eyes, kissing the spot under his ear. “I want to take care of *you*.” *You asked me to, last night, when I asked how I could fix our intimacy.* He moved to tug Eren’s tank top up and off, his lips and tongue trailing down his chest to his nipples, teasing them, scraping them with his teeth. *Let me fix this. I want you to feel really good.*

Eren let a loud moan out of his mouth, his body shuddering as Levi held him tightly. *He’s… He’s completely serious… He doesn’t want me to have him.* “L-Levi…. A-Are you s-sure?” *You don't normally top much anymore…* His words were stuttered as he watched Levi’s lips latch all over his chest, unsure of what to think.

Levi looked up from where his lips drifted over his chest, smirking when Eren cried out as he gently bit his pink bud. “I’m *very* sure.” *You look so hot like this…* He lapped at the bud in apology, kissing it before moving to the other, abusing that one and teasing the other with his fingers. His hand rested on his stomach, his fingers splaying out and trailing closer to the hem of his sweatpants. He hooked a finger in the hem, tugging them down agonizingly slowly.

Eren’s eyes closed as he felt his breathing hitch, the cool air of the room causing him to shiver. *It’s cool in here… His hands are really warm.* He whimpered as Levi pulled his pants down, but left his boxers on his hips. *I want them off.* There was already a damp spot from where his length was leaking, the excitement finally settling into him, his body fully responding.
Levi’s hands moved to Eren’s waist, leaving a trail of marks down his stomach before kissing the outline of the bulge in his boxers, smirking. “...is someone... excited?” He chuckled when Eren swore under his breath at him, catching the hem of his boxers in his teeth and pulling them down, tossing them off the bed. He sat back on his haunches for a moment, tugging his own tank top over and off his head, eyeing Eren spread before him and flushed down his neck hungrily. *I missed this.* He reached for his length, teasingly running a fingertip up the underside of Eren’s length, watching Eren shiver under him. He watched a bead of precum drip from his slit, his eyes shaded. “God, that’s hot. You’re so slick…” He wrapped a hand around his length, his hold firm as he stroked Eren. “...just for me.”

*Oh my god….* Eren’s eyes widened, his hands gripping into the sheets below him from the pleasure of just being grabbed. *I’m sensitive... It feels so good.* “Levi… M-more…” His voice was weak as he tried to speak, failing horribly, flushing all the way down his neck from the tip of his ears. *It feels... It feels really good and he’s not even doing anything much more than barely touching me… I want him to do some more to me. I want him to control me.* Eren shift under his gaze, his eyes locking with Levi’s as he reached out to playfully shove at his shoulder, trying to get Levi to get a bit more physical with him. *I want you to take over completely.*

Levi let Eren playfully shove him, quirking an eyebrow, a mischievous look in his eyes before it melting into being cool, collected. “Hm, being…” He shifted forward, catching Eren’s hands and lifting them over his head, pinning them against the bed as he murmured in his ear. “... **naughty,** are we?” He dragged his tongue up Eren’s neck, reaching for Eren’s tank top. He kept him distracted, kissing at his Adam’s apple as he tied his hands through a slat in the headboard, keeping him there. An idea came to him, reaching for his own tank top. He pressed a soft kiss to Eren’s cheek before he covered his eyes with the fabric, loosely tying it in place so it wouldn’t slip. “Can you see anything?” He smirked as Eren stuttered out a ‘No,’ his hands roaming his front. “Good.” His hand dragged up the inside of his thigh, looking over his lithe form hungrily. “That’s **just** what we want…” *I want you to feel really good...*

Eren let out a sharp breath, his back arching off the bed as his thighs were touched, opening them further for him. *It feels good... “T-Touch me more...”* Eren begged quietly, his body shivering in anticipation of being completely exposed and defenseless. *I want to erase the memories... Erase them for me, please.*

“Only if you're good...” Levi’s voice was smooth in his ear, his hands roaming all over him, though they traced around where Eren wanted to be touched the most. He finally decided to have mercy, his left hand wrapping around his throbbing member, the other brushing his lips. “Suck.” *I don't want this to hurt too much.*

Eren lifted his head up to take Levi’s fingers in his mouth, gently sucking on them, his tongue wrapping around them to coat their saliva. He shifted so his heels were on the bed, helping give him leverage as he tried to take in his fingers further. *I wanna be good for you, you haven’t done this since... Since before the accident...*
Levi watched with hooded eyes as Eren sucked on his fingers, pulling them from his lips when they were thoroughly slick with saliva. He soon replaced them with his lips, kissing Eren deeply, murmuring praise against his lips as his hand drifted to his entrance. He gently pushed a finger past the ring of muscle there, finding him still decently loose from the night before, soon able to push a second in. He brushed his fingers around the soft flesh deep inside him, looking for that spot.

Eren whimpered for only a moment when he felt the intrusion, though slowly got comfortable with it, his mouth opening in loud moans. He hasn’t found it… Does he remember where it is? He shifted his head to the side, producing his neck to him and whimpering for him to do more. Take control, dominate me… Please … I need you to.

Fuck, where is it? Levi’s eyes lit up as he saw the new skin bared to him, diving in to claim it. He sucked harshly at the soft, smooth skin, leaving him with many marks, not caring to try and hide them. Mine. Levi chuckled as he felt Eren arch into his touch finally, gasping for air as he brushed a certain spot over and over. There it is. Levi eased another finger into him, stretching him further. “…you sound wonderful…” Beautiful.

Eren writhed under his touch, letting out a shuddery breath as his fingers flexed against the restraint. I want him… It feels really good, and I feel really warm… He let out a high pitched cry as Levi marked a sensitive spot while abusing his prostate. “F-Fuck…” Eren tried to move his hips down to try and get more of his fingers in, desperately wanting more. I want to be had, I want to be yours.

Levi quietly moaned against his skin, Eren’s pleasureed cry in his ears. He slid his hand from him after a long moment, kissing up his neck as Eren whined at the loss, one hand spreading his own slick precum over his length. “It won't be long…” God, I can't wait anymore… Levi moved, lifting Eren’s legs up over his shoulders, lining up with his entrance. His dripping head brushed his quivering hole, pushing past it steadily as Eren whined and bit back sounds until their hips met, pressed flush. “Say when.” I hope you're ready when you tell me… I'm not going to want to be gentle…

Eren struggled against his tank top, trying to pull out of it, and getting some burns on his wrist for his troubles. I wanna be able to hold onto you… His breathing was ragged as he adjusted to Levi’s wide girth, still feeling the slight burn of being stretched. I want him to be rough… I like this… This is a lot better. Eren opened his eyes to see nothing but darkness, his mind immediately recalling images of the countless times he was tortured with a bag over his head, panic setting in until he convinced himself he wasn’t in danger, and that he’d be alright. I’ll be fine, Levi’s not like the others… “G-Go ahead…” His voice a bit shaky, trying his best to hide the slight fear in his words.

Levi nodded even though Eren couldn't see him, grinding further into him, both of them moaning
as Levi went deeper. He drew nearly completely out of him before thrusting back in, starting a
decent pace. He groaned at the friction, picking up speed when a Eren started to cry for more,
roughly fucking him into the mattress. Mine.

Eren let out strings of moans, saying Levi’s name over and over again like a mantra. He was still
tugging at his wrists, trying to free himself, getting brush burns all over both of his wrists. He’s so
big… It feels so good… He still wants me…

No he doesn’t.

Huh?

You’re just saying that to make yourself feel better, I bet that he hates that you let Erwin fuck your
toilet ass.

Eren’s eyes widened, panic filling them as he struggled against the restraints more. No… No no no
no… His heart rate skyrocketing as Levi’s hands grabbed his hips, pulling him onto his thick prick,
and his mind mucking up more images. But… He’s not like that.

He will be, he can’t love a man. Be real here, he wants a family, not to have to deal with your sorry
ass.

I wanna see him… Levi reached up, pushing the blindfold off of Eren’s eyes, kissing his cheek,
still pounding him mercilessly. “So good…” His eyes were full of love and want, though they
flickered with concern as he saw the fear in Eren’s eyes. “Are you okay?” He slowed a bit, not sure
if Eren wanted him to keep going. We can stop if you don’t want this… if you’re having second
thoughts.

Eren looked up towards where his hands were tied up. Take them out, take them out, I don’t wanna
be tied up… They always tied me up… He struggled still with the tank top, trying to make his way
out of it with brute strength. I can’t… I can’t have them tied… Let me go…

Levi let Eren’s legs fall from his shoulders, reaching to untie him, his lips brushing over his.
“Okay, okay. Hands.” Levi untied his hands, tossing the offending fabric away, gently holding his
red wrists. “M’sorry about that.” He moved to cup Eren’s cheeks, their lips brushing. “…tell me
what you need.” Help me make you feel wonderful.

“D-Don’t tie me up…” He whimpered, moving his wrists from his hold to tightly wrapped around
his shoulders. “Th-They always tied m-me up…” I can’t do that… You can’t do that to me…

“Okay.” Levi kissed him deeply, starting to move his hips again, steadily thrusting into his heat,
Eren’s moans muffled by the lips sealed over his. Anything. Levi whimpered quietly into their kiss,
the bed creaking the smallest bit under them as Levi ravaged him. I want you screaming in
pleasure...

Eren’s arms clung to Levi’s shoulders, pulling his body down against him, his hands clutching Levi’s hair in a white knuckle grip. *It feels really good*... Soon Eren’s voice was loud in Levi’s ear, his legs wrapped around the smaller man’s waist. “L-Levi… Levi… Fuck me, please.” He begged between moans, his body pressed flush against Levi’s strong body.

“Gladly.” Levi pounded Eren into the sheets, his teeth sinking into the soft flesh of his neck before sucking hard at the spots, leaving mark after bruising mark up the tender flesh. He smirked as he saw them, peppering the smooth skin, many *very* visible. He groaned into his neck, his hands holding Eren’s hips tight enough to bruise. “...Eren… I'm not gonna last…” *So good*… “God, you're so tight… feels really good…” *I love this*...

“L-Levi…” He groaned out the other’s name, feeling his coil starting to tighten. “I'm gonna… Can… Can I cum?” Eren words were rushed, and full of pleasure as he arched his whole body, a loud scream leaving him as Levi thoroughly abused his prostate. *I can’t hold it*… *Let me cum*…

Levi mouthed at his neck, dragging his tongue over the warm skin. “You never have to ask.” He murmured in his ear, feeling an overwhelming heat growing in his abdomen, his hips moving somehow faster, roughly fucking him. “...Just let go. God, I wanna see you cum.” Levi pulled back, drinking in Eren’s expressions as it morphed into one of bliss, feeling him tighten around him. *Fuck, so handsome*…

“*Levi*!” Eren screamed as he tightened around him, his eyes almost rolling back in his skull from the pure pleasure. His vision blurred as he came in between them, his hold still tight around Levi. *That felt amazing* …

Levi moaned into Eren’s mouth as his hips stuttered, cumming hard inside him. He pulled out, collapsing on top of Eren, wrapping him up in a warm embrace. “So good… I love you, so good for me… perfect...” He murmured praises into his ear, kissing him deeply before nestling into his neck. “Sleep? Warm...” *I wanna sleep... you're so warm*... Levi drifted with Eren in his arms, not noticing when Eren slipped from his arms half an hour later. He blinked awake, cold and his arms empty.
Chapter 65: Regret

_Huh?_ Levi looked around, his head dropping back onto the bed with a huff. _He went riding, didn't he... murr... well, he's probably at the house, then._ He heaved himself from the bed, moving to get dressed. _I'll go say hi- it should be just Lathe and Sammie around now._ He meandered down the stairs, waving to Erwin and Armin as they cuddled in the nest, empty mugs nearby. “I’m just heading over to the house for a while.” He shut the door behind him after they bid him goodbye, their car gone from the driveway. Levi jogged down the street, the rain having tampered down to a light mist, noticing how small the shoulder of the road was as a single car passed him. He turned up the driveway, knocking on the door.

He heard a small sound from inside, Lathe soon opening the door with Sammie in his arms, smiling. “Sup.” He let Levi in, shutting the door behind him. “I saw I was missing a horse this morning when I went out to feed the animals, kinda thought you'd be with Eren. He was too far out to be seen, though.”

“Yeah, Eren woke up wanting to ride, and that woke me up. I kinda fell asleep again, and he'd left. I dunno, just wanted to say hi.”

“Of course- you literally live here.” He chuckled as Sammie reached out, grabbing one of Levi’s hoodie strings. “She appreciates the company.”

“Mm. Misses the better story-teller.” Levi smirked as Lathe made a mock indignant sound, a hand over his heart.

“You wound me.” Lathe went about fixing an omelette the way Levi liked them, a kettle on the stove for tea. “You've still got the ‘Oh God Child' face. Every time. ‘Want me to make you something to eat? I didn't hear you mention breakfast anywhere in your spiel.”

“Please, and thank you. I'm starving.” Levi sat at the table, smiling faintly to the toddler in his arms. He studied her blue dress, playing with the hem and inspecting the the tag idly for a minute before his eyes widened, looking up. “Lathe?” He showed him the tag near the bottom, a familiar spark insignia embroidered on it. “Been busy?”

“Ma~ybe.” Lathe went about fixing an omelette the way Levi liked them, a kettle on the stove for tea. “Is that a problem?”
“No. You did a really good job of it, though. She certainly looks happy with it.” He smiled as she giggled happily, babbling about something and tugging at Levi’s collar.

“Thanks! I dropped a lot of money on that machine I’ve got. It’s the greatest thing. You see all those designs around the neck and shoulders, the fish and stuff?” He watched Levi nod. “I picked where I wanted the different images on the fabric, and the machine just did it automatically for me.”

“...that's the coolest damn thing.”

“I know! Oh, and don't tell Jake, it’s supposed to be a secret for his birthday, but he’s getting a big quilt. It's why nobody’s allowed in the sewing room for the week.”

“That explains the huge pile of colorful fabric you dragged home.”

“That'd be it.”

“Hm.” Levi hummed as Lathe set an omelette and mug of tea in front of him, Sammie in his lap as he picked up his fork to eat. “He’ll like it- if you're the one making it, it's gonna be awesome.

Lathe’s cheeks tinted pink for a moment, washing the dishes. “Thanks.” His brow furrowed, setting the pan in the drying rack. “...Jake came into our room in the middle of the night last night. He got scared because you two weren't in the house. He was worried, wanted to know you two were okay.” He rinsed off the cutting board, setting it aside. “He really loves you two… I don't know what's going to happen when he gets adopted. The first time he slept with Ieva and I, right after Eli was adopted… he sounded terrified at the idea of leaving. He doesn't want to lose us. I don't know what to do…” Part of me wants to keep him here, but at the same time there are lots of families out there who would love to have him….

Levi nodded, swallowing before speaking. “Yeah, I know…. he’s so attached to us… on one hand, there are families who could give him a nice home that isn't as busy as ours, but on the other… he admires Eren so much. And he's so used to him being around.” He looked to Lathe, seeing the thoughtful look in his eyes. “...what are you thinking?” It was simply an inquiring tone, wanting to know what was making the gears in his head turn.

“...we should keep him, shouldn't we.” He's old enough to know what's going on, to grow attached. And he's schizophrenic; God knows half the people in this household are more than qualified to
deal with an episode. And if we had to make him leave, my god, all hell would break loose... “...his birthday is in a week. I'll ask on his birthday if he wants to stay for good; he'd probably be ecstatic that he doesn't have to worry anymore about being forced to leave. Right now, it's just hanging over his head. He doesn't want that.” He'll have a very good home here, guaranteed. “Tucker, though…” He watched Levi shake his head. “Yeah, I know. Too many gays. He'd probably be much happier if some super-religious anti-gay couple picked him up or something. It's whatever. He doesn't like any of us, and I'm not saying I hate the kid, but it's just another thing to deal with. It's just... mutual distaste?” Lathe shrugged, leaning against the counter. “I'm just scared about what his future is going to be like, so openly against gays.” He chuckled, looking faraway for a moment. “Reminds me of Scotty when he was a freshie, actually. He'd blanch every time he saw two guys stand too close together or brush hands or hug too long to just be deemed friendly. It wasn't super common where I went to high school, but you had your smattering of couples, of course. It was inevitable. But he never seemed to notice the girls if they were being more than friendly. I dunno, they were always just kinda like that. It was just normal for them to always be messing with each other's hair or giving big hugs or practically napping on someone's shoulder when they were tired. It's just how it was. But I remember a lot in college particularly where he got a lot and I mean a lot of nasty looks for shit he said in a bar or walking around campus. Personally, there were length of instances where I would've gladly punched out his damn teeth. It was bad...” He sighed, his arms crossed over his chest. “He doesn't have to go through the whole 'me being gay is okay' enlightenment bullshit Scotty went through. I just wish he'd shut the hell up about it being unnatural and gross. He came downstairs after you’d gone and asked where you'd run off to, and he just looked relieved and my god he was so dumb…” Lathe facepalmed, his forehead in his hand. “He literally started talking under his breath as he went onto his phone, and he said ‘Thank God I don't have to see those gay fuckers for a month.’ He's grounded for a week at this rate, his escape attempt and the comments. He know that he earns a day in his room without electronics for every slur now. I can put up with a lot, but hate speech I refuse to.” Lathe shook his head, looking up after a minute, blushing in embarrassment as he saw Levi was finished, listening with Sammie still hanging onto him, quiet and looking around with patient eyes. “I'm sorry, I rambled…” He picked up the dishes, turning back to wash his plate. “Do you want more tea? The water’s still hot.”

“Sure, thank you. And it’s fine, really.” Levi gladly accepted the mug, a curious look in his eyes as he spoke. “You never talk much about being in high school or anything, it's not something I'd heard too much about already. It's always pretty vaguely described.” You don't like talking about it- I always listen a bit closer when you do talk about it. I know it was rough for you, but that's most of what I know.

Lathe shrugged, rubbing the back of his neck. “Yeah… I dunno, really talking about what it was like as a kid just seems… daunting. There's a lot of memories I'd sift through, and I just... it wasn't fun. And Eren would probably want to hear about it. Ieva too… and I don't know if I'd want to tell it all twice…” I don't wanna tell it all to just one person, because Eren would want to hear the whole story too and Ieva wants to know a bit more even if she doesn't ask... she knows it'd be hard for me... it's not nice to think about.... “...and with everything I'm not in the mood for telling the whole story…” No thank you...

Levi nodded, understanding. “That's fine. I kinda had the idea it would be a bit of a tear-fest. ...and that we'd probably have to get you a bit drunk before you talked.”
“Probably. It's a long-ass story.” Lathe looked over to the huge window that overlooked the backyard, everything still as it was earlier that morning. “Eren’s been gone a long while.”

“Yeah, he has been.” Levi trailed off, his brow furrowed a bit. I'm kinda worried…

“Hey, Uhm, Lathe…?”

“Ping his phone?” He chuckled as Levi embarrassedly nodded, pulling out his phone. “Alright, I'll ping it. And I'll make it scream this time so he knows to check it and come the hell home.” He swiped on the screen, soon hitting the button. He jumped as he suddenly heard a loud alarm noise, Levi nearly jumping out of his skin as something in his pocket made a very loud noise. He reached into his pocket, shutting off the alarm on Eren’s phone hurriedly. “Crap, I didn't know I had his phone on me!” He tossed it onto the table, soon looking to Sammie, who looked at him with wide eyes, her face growing red, eyes glassy with tears. “Oh nonono Sammie, it’s okay Honey, don't cry.” He cradled her close as she cried for a moment, gently rocking her back and forth, reaching for a napkin to wipe her nose as it ran, dabbing at her tears. “It's okay Honey, it's okay. I'm sorry for the loud noise.” He waited for her to calm down and for her cries to die down into sniffles, softly pecking her cheek, looking back to Lathe who frowned at the phone. “....so what do we do?”

Lathe shrugged, staring at the phone, then back out the window. “...we wait. But he's a strong kid, and every last one of them is put away for good. He'll be okay. Let's just hope he doesn't come home with hypothermia.” He'll be fine. “...want to see what I've got going for the quilt?”

“Sure.” It’s probably really cool, knowing you. Levi stood, following him with Sammie in his arms.

Levi was still in the house when the boys came home from school, Tucker going straight to his room, not around long enough to do more than give Levi a look of distaste before Lathe glared at him, sending him scurrying up the stairs with his tail between his legs. The two of them were worried as time wore on with no sign of Eren or Charlie, dark storm clouds looming threateningly in the sky. “It's going to rain soon.” Levi looked out the window, having resorted to pacing the first floor as Lathe cooked dinner, Sammie copying him and running around with a soft stuffed rabbit in her hands (which Levi was sure Lathe had sewn for her). She squealed as thunder sounded overhead loudly, toppling onto the floor and clutching her bunny close when the lightning flashed. She looked ready to cry before Levi scooped her up, carrying her over to the window as it started to rain. He reached out a hand to the window, touching it as she seemed to recoil. “See? Safe.” He murmured to her quietly as thunder crashed, trying to soothe her.

It took a long few minutes, but soon Sammie reached out a tentative hand, touching the glass with her fingers, sounding nervous. “...s-safe?”
“Mhm. We're safe inside. It's okay. The rain can't hurt you. It's water.”

“Wah?”


“Wah-tah?”

“Watah.”

“Watah.” She smiled as Levi nodded, throwing up her hands. “Watah! Watah!”

“Thanks for giving her a Brooklyn accent, Levi.” Lathe cast him a teasingly deadpan look, smiling. “It's good what you're doing- if she grows up scared of the rain it'll be a problem.” He looked over as he heard the game room door open, Jake scurrying over looking scared, burying his head in Lathe’s stomach before he could speak. “Jake, what’s wrong?”

“L-Loud…” It's loud... make it stop...

“It's just a bad thunderstorm, Jake, it's okay. It's going to be loud for a while but it'll pass. Don't worry, we're inside. We're safe. At worst, the power will go out and you'll have to stop playing Minecraft. It's alright.” Lathe carded a hand through Jake’s hair, though he nearly jumped out of his skin as he heard a loud ‘Bang!’ He looked up to see the back door had been thrown open hard enough to dent the wall, Eren standing in the doorway drenched with his clothes covered in mud and what was unmistakably blood. “Oh my God, Eren.” Lathe let go of Jake, running to him. “Eren, you're covered in blood! Are you okay? What happened to Charlie? Is he okay? Oh my, get in here, you're soaked.” Lathe ran to the nearby closet, getting out a towel and starting to dry Eren off. “Eren, you're freezing! What happened? You scared us half to death!” What happened?!

Eren lifted his shirt in the front, looking at where a wound was struggling to heal. “I don’t have enough... I think I might need stitches.” He muttered before he took the shirt completely off, not bothering to hide his bites and hickeys in different shapes from both Erwin and Levi. “He got me pretty good, wasn’t expecting it…” He grumbled, pulling his bloodied knife out of his back pocket and dropping it in the sink. Hurt like a fucker getting his horns out...
Lathe was frantic as he tried to stop Eren from moving, shutting off the stove and turning his full attention to Eren. *Right now, fuck dinner.* “Eren, stop moving so I can dry you off and get you dry clothes so you can at least be half-comfortable while I stitch up what look like *stab wounds* so tell me right the *fuck* now what happened?!” Lathe smacked Eren upside the head, drying off his hair quickly before moving over his chest, pressing it against the wounds there. “Hold that there firmly. I'm going to go get my medic bag, some clothes for you, and lots of towels.” Lathe ran off quickly, soon coming back with his bag over one shoulder, and clothes and towels draped over his arms.

“Eren, on the couch. **Now.**” Lathe spread out towels, getting Eren to lay down before washing his hands, starting to set up to clean his wounds and stitch them. “Alright, **talk.**” *What. The* *fuck.*

**Happened.**

*Holy shit.... He’s fucking furious... “Can you agree not to be mad at me if I tell you it was in self defense? I need to go patch up Charlie after this...” I need to make sure he’s okay too. “Levi... Can you go outside to the barn and start to untack him, I can take care of his wounds after Dad finishes with me...”* He groaned, wincing for a moment as he watched Lathe start stitching him up. *I hate stitches... * *Fuck ...*

“Eren, take a good look at Levi right now.” Lathe’s tone was bordering icy, looking over to where Levi was desperately trying to calm Jake who shivered violently, looking terrified. Sammie in his arms had wide eyes, looking ready to cry. “Levi, take them upstairs, okay? Try to calm them down. It’ll be fine, Jake, just go with Levi. I need to patch Eren up.” He waited until they were gone up the stairs to speak again, his face stony. “A couple of things. First off, you must be dense as all hell if you think I'm going to let you go take care of Charlie when you’re freshly stitched up like that. I'll take care of it. And second, what the *fuck* were you *thinking?*!” Lathe was nearly shouting, looking furious. “You went riding for hours and hours on end without telling anyone where you were going, not even taking your damn phone, and you come into the house drenched and bloody and you expect us not to be mad or at least a bit worried?! You sure as hell didn't take any food with you, you had just a fucking t-shirt when it’s barely *sixty* out... did you even *think?*!” Lathe seemed ready to break down, tears threatening to spill. “I just lost my fucking daughter and Tucker ran off with Charlie yesterday and we were both so damn terrified that something had happened to you on top of it... don't *fucking* do that!” Lathe buried his face in a hand, shuddering as he began to sob, everything catching up with him. “S-Stop fucking *scaring* me like that for once...” *I was so scared... and you come in looking like you just got stabbed... I... Don't *do* that... *please*..."

Eren watched with wide eyes as Lathe shouted at him, taking a deep breath to try and calm himself as he felt panic clutching at his chest. *I can’t... I don’t wanna be yelled at.* “I didn’t leave without warm clothes... They got torn to shreds... The buck charged us... I had to get Charlie away from him but that meant putting me between him and the buck... He charged again, and got his antler around me and into Charlie’s side, it’s not deep, but they need to be cleaned... I got the worst of it, when I tried to get back on Charlie... He charged at us again, and his antlers went through my side... I had to grab my knife and cut out a chunk of it’s throat... I wasn’t expecting it since they were docile almost all day while we were watching...” Eren winced, grabbing at his side as he shifted to sit up. *I need to go take care of Charlie...* He was trying to stay calm, knowing that Lathe could very well expect him to lay on the couch to rest.
“Lie the fuck back down, I'm halfway through a stitch.” Lathe had lost his filter, too done with being collected to think about what he was saying anymore. He went back to work when Eren immediately obeyed, his eyes dark with muted anger, grief, and misery. “...m'sorry for yelling... I just... I just kind'a shoved everything into a corner of my mind... but... I'm just not okay... my daughter is dead, Tucker is a ticking time bomb and just too much stress, and then you come home bloodied and soaked after being attacked by either a very territorial or rabid deer... I just...” Lathe tied off the last stitch, starting to pad them with gauze before wrapping everything up. “...I'm sorry for yelling... I...” Everything seemed to click with Lathe when he started packing things up, watching Eren sit up with a pained expression. He looked horrified, flushing with shame. “...my God, I screamed at you... I'm so sorry... I... I'm sorry...” Fresh tears dripped down his cheeks, burying his face in his hands, breathing hard. I fucked up...

Eren looked at Lathe with worry as he started to cry, gently reaching a hand out to pull him close and into a hug. “I-It's okay... It's really okay... We need to go take care of Charlie, then you can be mad at me all you want.”

“N-No, it's okay... I'm not mad... just... worried and scared...” He looked up as Eren shifted to hug him, moving to gently push him back onto the couch. “You shouldn't be crouching and stuff with the stitches where they are. H-Here.” Lathe shoved his clothes into his hands, standing to lead Eren to the bathroom. “Change, okay? You're still wet, and you're freezing. I'll make you tea, then I'll go untack and patch Charlie up, okay?” Lathe didn't leave room for protest as he ushered Eren into the bathroom, going to make tea. He looked up as he heard the front door open, seeing Ieva kicking off her shoes and hanging up her coat. ...crap, dinner is barely started...

...I've come up to him, hesitating to give her her kiss, stuttering and looking to the floor. “I-I'm sorry, but dinner is barely started... Eren went out riding this morning and he didn't tell anyone where he was going and he didn't have his phone and he got attacked by a deer and he's soaked and I had to give him stitches and Charlie still needs to be patched up and I had to ignore dinner and I'm sorry-” Lathe stopped when Ieva cupped his cheeks, his eyes still red from crying, shaking a bit as she looked at him. “...I-I'm sorry...” ...... Don't hurt me... I'm sorry... I tried to make dinner......

Ieva’s eyes widened as she gently cupped his cheeks, holding him close. “It’s okay, Lathe, it’s okay, you don’t need to cry, really, you don’t need to cry...” Her arms wrapped around him for a few moments, calming him down. “Slow down, you said something about Eren going riding, is he okay? And I can worry about dinner, you don’t need to worry about anything, just breathe and slow down before you speak. Now, do you wanna try again?” I want you to calm down a little, you’re still crying, and I can’t help you if you're crying. She gently thumbed the tears away from his face, a gentle smile on her lips and warmth in her eyes. I’m not mad at you, you couldn’t have planned for Eren to stay out that long.

Eren all but jumped into the bathroom once Lathe shooed him into it. I need to get changed, I need to go out and get to Charlie.

Lathe breathed deeply for a moment, his hand coming up to hold her hand on his cheek, leaning into the touch. Thank you... for understanding... “E-Eren went out riding this morning, he told
Levi but didn't say where, and he was gone when I went out this morning. He didn't have his phone, and we didn't think he had a jacket or food. He was gone until half an hour or an hour ago, because he and Charlie got attacked by a deer. ...that reminds me, he needs a rabies shot… probably… but anyway, I stitched him up, and he's changing while I'm making tea because he's still freezing, then I'm going to go patch up Charlie and see what I can do about any wounds for him. ...I'm sorry… Jake was scared by the thunder and then Eren crashing inside scared the hell out of him and I screamed at Eren because it's been so stressful and I just was so scared… I probably freaked him out…” I'm sorry… I need to be strong, and it's not working...

Ieva pulled him into a hug, holding him close as they both took a few deep breaths. You need to calm down, we’ll be okay… We can do this together. “Okay, I can go make sure Jake's not freaking out… And I can handle dinner or we can get take out, haven’t had pizza in awhile…” She murmured reassuringly. “You wanna go get Eren that tea and then why don’t you take him down to see Charlie?” The horse has got to be freaking out...

Lathe clung to her for a long moment, sniffling. “Pizza is okay, I guess… but Eren needs to lay down and rest, drink tea and warm up… he just got stitches, I don't want him overexerting himself… I can take care of Charlie…” He needs to relax… he can't be up and about for a bit...

“You expect him to stay away from his horse when he’s injured?” She asked as they heard the back door open and close in quick succession. “And there he goes… You wanna go after him? He’s not gonna stay away, so I think you should just let him stay okay? I can bring his tea down to the barn. He’s probably trying to calm down Charlie.” She sighed quietly, pulling away to look to the backdoor seeing that Eren’s boots were gone along with his rain coat, the bathroom door open and showing an empty room. He really just went outside… Wonderful...

Lathe sighed, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve. “I…” He swallowed, shaking his head. “...I'm just going to pack my medic stuff up and then take care of his soaked clothes and all the towels…” Lathe cast his eyes to the floor when Ieva kissed his cheek again, letting her hand fall from his cheek as he went to start cleaning things up. ...I don't deserve that kiss…. I screamed at Eren... I can't believe I screamed a him like that... what the fuck is wrong with me?

Ieva watched him leave with a worried look on her face before she looked at the window, towards the barn, seeing a silhouette enter through the barn doors. Oh my god, Eren… Should I go out and try to help him? But I think Lathe’s going out... She shook her head, taking the menu for the pizza place they had in the drawer and making her way upstairs towards where she heard the whimper of quite a few children, looking at the nook at the top of the stairs and seeing Sammie, Jake and even Tucker clinging to Levi as thunder cracked around the house after a bright flash. Are they all that scared of thunder? Well, Tucker seems to be doing okay with Levi right there… I don’t know what got to him before though… She stepped up, sitting down near where they were, opening up the menu, pulling her phone out. “Okay, who likes pizza?” We’ll need to figure this all out.
Eren had limped outside and into the barn, getting inside before anyone had spotted him, or so he thought. **Charlie…** His eyes were drawn to the multiple flesh wounds on the stud’s sides, bleeding quite heavily, though Eren knew they were okay as long as he was bandaged and the bleeding stopped. **Okay, tack off first…** He struggled to unclip the saddle with his shaking hands, finally getting the saddle off and dragging it away with the strength he still had. He could hear Charlie’s hooves clicking on the ground as he moved around, antsy from his injuries. **Bridle next…** His hands continued to fumble with the fastened equipment, Charlie not cooperating in the least to make it easy. **I need help… I need Dad to help me…**

Charlie straightened a bit as a riding crop tapped his hindquarters, Lathe’s voice weary. “Stop fidgeting, Charlie. Things will get done faster this way.” Lathe moved up near Charlie’s head, moving to unclip the bridle, slipping it over his ears and handing it to Eren. “Mom’s ordering pizza for everyone… they're all terrified of the thunderstorm. All three of them practically piled on top of Levi upstairs…” **...and I know you won't leave Charlie until he's okay, so I'm not going to make you leave…** Lathe looked away after a moment, moving to inspect the wounds in Charlie’s side. **They're not too deep… as long as we stop the bleeding and clean them out, get them bandaged up… he'll be fine. “...I'm sorry for yelling at you. I really am.” I don't want you to hate me because I lost my temper… Lathe dug in his medic bag, looking for things to disinfect his wounds. We'll get you fixed right up…**

Eren looked over to Lathe as he put the bridle away, and heaved the saddle up onto the stand they had in the tack room. **Why are you sorry?** “You, you don’t have to be sorry y’know…” He looked at Charlie, slowly coming up to him with shaking hands and petting his nose gently, trying to calm him down further. **This might hurt for you, but we’re gonna try and do this well.**

“...what do you mean, I don't have to be sorry? I lost my temper and screamed at you like I hated your guts. And I don't. I was frustrated and scared, but that got away from me. And I'm sorry for that. ...I'm supposed to be strong while all this is happening… but it's not going too great…” **Obviously.** Lathe had to pick up the crop again, tapping Charlie’s hindquarters when he started to move, obviously not liking the sharp sting of the wipe in Lathe’s hand on his wound. He reached over, handing Eren the crop. “Keep him still for me; I know he's in pain but we can't have him going and getting infected.” **No, that's not good… that would be very bad...**

Eren nodded and tapped Charlie a little harder on his hind legs. **“Stehen Bleiben.”** He watched as Charlie straightened instantly and only moved to pin his ears back when Lathe cleaned out his cuts. **He doesn't like it, but he follows commands to the T.** “You don’t have to apologize, I deserved it…. I should’ve known better than to take Charlie through a herd like that close to mating season…” His words were a bit sad, his eyes fixed on a point on the floor. **“You don’t need to be strong… I mean I know it helps everyone else… But it’s okay to rant if you want…”** **You probably hate me for going out like that anyways…**

“...I just think… I think I couldn't outright say it… but I said it twice… and I'm just… I'm just tired… I'm not mad… and I'm out of words for now… but, just…” Lathe looked up to him, his mouth open to keep speaking when a loud crack sounded nearby, the lights going out above them.
“...fuck, lightning must've hit close by... power’s out.” He looked up to the rafters, Abby’s eyes a barely noticeable gleam in the dark, the animals making louder sounds around them. “The backup generator in the garage is good for lights and the sump pump, but that’s it... so we’ll hook that up when we get back to the house. Until then...” Lathe moved to a wall, fetching an electric lantern and turning it on, hanging it on a nearby post. “I'll finish cleaning him up, and bandage him up.” Lathe went back to work, remembering after a minute that he had been in the middle of saying something. “...oh, right. Eren, a word of advice.” He grinned, looking over to Eren wearily. “Stop scaring the crap out of me, okay? It'll extend my life by a few decades if you stop giving me as many heart attacks as you do.” Really, tho.

Eren instantly put his head down further, his chest full of anxiety as he held onto Charlie’s halter. I know, I’m a bad kid... I know I’m a whore... No one loves to be involved with me... He swallowed thickly, his hand coming up to cup Charlie's large jaw to keep him calm. He remained silent, nodding in the darkness and keeping his face away from the light so Lathe couldn’t see him almost on the brink of tears. He doesn’t need to worry about me, I'm a useless whore...

Lathe finished within a few minutes, running his hand down Charlie’s neck. “Good job staying still, Charlie. You did well. Come on, let's get you back in your stall.” Lathe led him over to where Luna was waiting for him, immediately nuzzling close when they were in the large stall together. “Alright, Eren. Let’s-” Lathe stopped as he held the lantern at his side so the glare wouldn't blind them, seeing the glint of Eren’s glassy eyes. “Eren, what's wrong?” Lathe moved to hug him tightly, feeling Eren resist for a moment before slumping into his hold. “Eren, I'm sorry... it's okay, please, don't cry...” Don’t be sad...

You’re not the one who’s supposed to be apologizing! I was the one who was trying to run away from everything! He gasped as he felt Lathe’s arms stiffen around him, his eyes wide, trying to pull away, only for Lathe to hold onto him tight. “L-Let go.... I’m-I’m sorry...” I said it out loud... Fuck, now Dad knows... Shit. “Le-Le-Let g-go...” He whimpered, tears freely falling down his cheeks. I didn’t want you know...

Lathe moved to kiss Eren’s cheek, pulling away from him and giving him a small smile. “Eren, it's like you said. It's okay to not be strong sometimes. ...but don't lose yourself in it, okay? You're fine. It's all going to be fine.” Lathe kissed his forehead, trying to get Eren to believe him, at least somewhat. It really will be okay. He chuckled quietly as Eren snatched his kerchief from his pocket, wiping at his eyes. “Let’s get you in the house, okay?”

“Will it really be okay? Even when I was the one who broke our promise?... And became the useless whore my Father wanted me to be?” He took the kerchief, holding it tightly in his hand as he walked towards the door, Blake barking on the other side of the door, Krampus at his side and trying his best to bark as well. I broke it, I don’t even deserve to be his lover...

Lathe frowned at that, a bit confused. “Eren, you're not a whore. You never were. You were forced
into doing all those things; it's not like you chose-

“I chose last night damn it!” Eren shouted, not really at anyone in particular, but he just broke down after the words were out. He slumped down to the floor and curled up into a ball as he cried, enough to cause himself to hiccup. I chose to be one…

Lathe’s eyes widened, the bruises all over his chest flickering in his mind. Last night? ……?

“Eren…” Lathe sank down to the floor just inside the house with him, wrapping his arms around him as Eren shook. “Talk to me, Eren. Tell me what happened.” Did Levi not know? Or…

Eren picked his head up to look at Lathe with teary eyes, shaking his head as he struggled to form words. “I… I’m sorry… I didn’t… I didn’t think we’d t-take it th-that far…” He continued to hiccup, curling into Lathe’s chest a little bit. I didn’t want to break the promise… But I did …

Lathe’s eyes flickered with vague understanding, trying not to sound accusing. “…did Levi know what was going on?” He watched Eren nod. “…did he switch too?” Another nod. “You're weren't… forced, were you?” Eren immediately shook his head, and Lathe carded a hand through his hair. ...I've got no place to judge what you four do. If Erwin and Armin wanted to even while they're engaged, well... I've got nothing to yell at you for, do I? “It sounds like it should have been okay… but are you regretting it?” This time, Eren was quiet, staring at his hands. “…it's okay that you shared yourself. Even if you went all the way… your body is yours to give. And Levi certainly didn't seem like he held anything against you for it. These are your decisions to make.” I'm pretty damn sure he still loves you to bits.

Eren was quiet as he cried into Lathe’s chest. I didn’t want to… But I agreed… “I didn’t want to… I-I-I agreed… L-like I was on autopilot…” He sniffled and kept his head down, looking at his hands as they began to shake, Blake coming up and taking one of his hands into his mouth. I felt like I said yes… Just to say yes… “H-He trained me… To be a-a whore…… L-Levi w-wasn’t even upset… But… Sh-shouldn't he b-be?” Eren hiccuped as he looked up to Lathe with tears glittering his eyes. Does he even love me still? He wasn't possessive of me, he didn’t even try to get Erwin to stop...

Lathe rubbed circles into Eren’s back, holding him close. “I'm sorry, Eren… I know it feels like it's habit now, to agree to that sort of thing… but I'm just telling you that if it ever happens again, and you want to stop, you could say no even in the middle of everything, cut it off. But as for Levi…” Lathe shrugged for a moment, thinking. “…maybe he just wanted a change of pace for once, and didn't mind it… didn't mind that someone had you, if someone had him… maybe you two are still trying to find what works for you two… I don't know. That's not something you need to tell me… but that reflex is ingrained in you, to submit, to agree to whatever is asked of you in that sense… but it doesn't make you a whore. At the end of the day, you are a person who didn't choose to do the things they've done on their own. But you need to know it's okay to try and take better control of who you're intimate with, and how… it's important. I'm sorry if you regret it… but you can't let
it eat at you. It happened, and Levi seems okay with it. I think you two should talk later. ...and I think you still need to make peace with the fact that some things are still left behind from what happened to you, things you can't change. Make peace with yourself. It'll be okay.” *You're a strong kid... you'll get through this. Talk with Levi, really talk. It'll do you some good, I think. For both of you.*

*What if he’s grown bored with me.* “He looked so comfortable with Erwin…” He sniffled reaching a shaking hand to pet Blake. “I can’t satisfy him in the bedroom, our relationship is rocky at best, and he’s leaving soon… Going overseas to be with the person who can satisfy him the most… And I’ll be here, alone, forgotten, and hated.” His words were a little clear as he started to calm down, the weight in his chest seeming to increase with every syllable. *Tucker still hates me, and he’ll teach Jake to hate me too…*

“You’re a strong kid… you'll get through this. Talk with Levi, really talk. It'll do you some good, I think. For both of you.

“Eren… you and Levi need to have a serious talk about this… it won't do any good to run away from it and hope it'll be better when you get back… and Erwin’s known Levi longer than you have… he might've just read him really well, or guessed what he wanted and got it right… or he just felt spent and collapsed onto him. Whatever the case is, you two need to know what the other wants and needs and if you two are butting heads about what you want… there needs to be some kind of compromise… or things could go sour… but Eren, don't think that Levi is going to forget all about you and cheat on you while he's gone. It's one thing for it to be consensual, with the other person right there, knowing what's happening… but it's something entirely different to do it without knowing… especially if it's going all the way. He's not going to forget about you, he could never. He's so smitten it’s unbelievable. He *loves* you. ...and I think you need to hold on for a while longer. ...My guess is that he wouldn't want you to lose a fiancé… that maybe him still being your ‘boyfriend’ might make it easier. But I know he’s going to fight tooth and nail to come home to you, and he needs you to wait for him. This is important to him, what he's going to do. He really needs your support. But don't think you’re not enough for him. He thinks you're worth going to hell and back for. Give him a chance to prove it.” *He needs time, still… be patient with him. He's probably been ring shopping for a year at this rate… but I think he's hella nervous, too. It's a big thing to ask. He wants it done right.*

Eren sniffled, letting out ragged breath. *A boyfriend… That’s all I am to him, nothing more… He has no ties to me… I haven’t gotten him to sign any adoption papers yet, and he hasn’t proposed, or even mentioned proposing… I guess I’m not the one he wants…* Eren’s eyes were downcast as he shifted to his feet, his voice cracking. “I’m sorry that you had to sit through all that… I’m gonna go…….” *Can’t go upstairs… Levi’s there… “Paint….”* He whispered after a moment, walking off in the direction of the hall…

But an arm on his hand caught him, and a voice that definitely wasn't Lathe’s filled his ears. “Eren?” Levi turned him, his arms wrapping up around him as he felt Eren shake, his voice soft. “Eren, let's go sit, okay?” He gently pulled him along to the living room, everyone else still upstairs as the storm went on. He pulled him onto the couch, having Eren in his lap, leaning back against his chest. He gently ran his thumb over his stomach, thoughtful. “...Eren, I heard all of that… and…” ….I don’t know how else to make you think I wanna keep you… and because I haven’t proposed, you think I'm not going to stay… ...but... I wanna propose right… but... you
won't believe me otherwise. “...Eren, I don't know what I could possibly say to make you believe me... but... you're the one I want to spend forever with. Please.... wait for me. And I'll wait for you. Wait so that I can come home and marry you like I want to. I don't have a ring yet, and I don't know how I want to ask you... but for right now... please... hang on for me... because I'm going to come home. I'm not going to let them take me away from you. I'm going to come home and marry you so hard your head will spin. I just... I need the time. And I'm so sorry for making you wait forever, making you think there wasn't a light at the end of the tunnel. No matter what word we use to describe each other and what we as ‘us’ are, it'll still hurt the same if I don't... if I don't come home. But I'm going to. I know that every day I'm going to wake up and think that all I have to do is be okay at the end of the day, and then I'll be one day closer to spending forever with you. **You're** the one I wanna spend it with. Not anyone else. Nobody else could make me want that. ...
can you wait for me? Please?” ...am I proposing? I think I'm proposing. During a power outage in a huge ass thunderstorm on the couch after you got stabbed by a fucking deer. ...well, at least life isn't ever dull around here... but I was going for something a bit more... romantic. Less terrorized children, more... I dunno, peace? You know what, stop worrying about it and just worry that he'll fucking say yes, God Damn It because I wanna marry you!

Eren was quiet for a few moments, trying to figure out what exactly he was supposed to say to that, and so unsure of what to make of it. He... Did he just do what I think he just did? “I um... I... I think I... Yes...” I'll say yes... Eren smiled, the dopey grin taking over his face as he slowly shifted and wrapped his arms around Levi’s shoulders. “I will ... I'll wait.”

Levi found himself beaming, moving Eren to kiss him deeply, going to straddle him on the couch, their hands wandering the other as they made out heatedly. **Mine. All mine. My god, he said yes**... Levi didn't hear the quiet sound of a motor starting off in the garage, only breaking from him as lights flickered on, diving back in kiss him. “...wanna... go upstairs with this...?” Levi smirked, his hands on Eren’s hips.

Eren’s eyes widened, though he slowly shook his head, his hands going to hold onto Levi’s, bringing them off of his hips and holding them for a moment before he pulled them up to his mouth, kissing his rough fingers for a moment. “Not... Not right now... I still need to calm down... and I’ve got stitches...” He whispered, kissing his knuckles. “I think Lathe would have your head if I tore them...” Eren moved to lift his shirt to show him the many stitches on his stomach. **It's still pretty sore.**

“Yeah, I just might.” Lathe chuckled as the two nearly jumped out of their skin, shaking his head, a big box in hand. He looked pointedly to Levi, quirking an eyebrow. “I get he’s tempting, but you'll just have to chill for a bit. Now, I'm going to deliver these candles around the house, so please, don't mind me. Carry on doing not too strenuous things.” Lathe disappeared up the steps, grinning as Levi and Eren flushed. **They're too easy to rile. And they asked for it, making out on the living room couch. Eren certainly looked happy. ...I'll ask about that later.**

Levi sighed, shaking his head. “I'm so done with that guy...” Levi looked back to Eren, his hands
cupping his cheeks. “But that's fine, I can wait.” Levi smirked, his eyes soft. “We've got time, still. ...but can we go upstairs anyway? I don't want to make out in plain sight.” Because I wanna make out, dammit! You technically just said you'd marry me and I'm clingy so please deal.

Eren looked away, a sad smile on his face. “I um… I don’t know if it’s a good idea to go upstairs…” He shifted to get his elbows under him, boosting him up. Tucker’s up there… I don’t really wanna be near him right now… I don’t think I can even deal with being looked at the wrong way. “We should go make sure that Armin and Erwin are okay…” I don’t wanna stay here.

Levi nodded, gently pecking Eren’s lips. “Yeah, it would be a bit problematic getting you up those stairs… and the company up there isn’t the best at the moment…” Tucker’s gotten a free pass to roam around since the power’s at a minimum. It's a huge house, we’re focusing on keeping the lights on, I guess. “But yeah, we should see how they're holding up out there. Their power probably got cut too. I think lightning hit really close, got a tree or something.” He pecked his cheeks, still not able to keep his lips from him for long. “Y’know, we ordered a ton of food earlier. Wanna invite them over, and then we’ll head back over for the night?” There's a literal feast on it’s way… and Erwin and Armin are dealing with us for a month, we can at least feed them for one night.

Eren nodded, shifting out from under Levi and sitting up. “I’ll go and pick them up… You stay here…” He murmured, leaning over to peck his cheeks before getting up off the couch and heading towards the front door to get his shoes and coat. I need to get out and calm down.

“But, your stitches-” Levi caught himself as he protested, taking a deep breath before letting his hand fall from where it reached to catch Eren. ... You need time to yourself. You just told me you needed to calm down. He gave Eren a reassuring look, moving to kiss him goodbye. “Just be careful not to strain them, okay? Please.” I want you home in one piece. Levi bid him farewell, if just for half an hour, turning and looking around the still house, everyone having gravitated towards the upstairs. He could barely hear Lathe’s quiet tenor, and he smiled as he heard a collective gasp from the kids upstairs. He's got to be telling them some tale... he's good at making them up, or remembering them if he read them once. But he might be reading one. I wonder which… Levi found himself wandering upstairs, leaning against the banister and watching as Lathe distracted Jake and Tucker with Homer’s The Odyssey, the two of them buried in a nest of blankets and pillows near the couch, the heavy epic poem open in Lathe’s lap. ...he really is great at this... ...this whole ‘being a parent’ thing... ...it's awful that Elina doesn't get to have this... that Lathe doesn't get to do this with her... ......Eren’d mentioned wanting children... maybe... maybe we should... I mean, I've been on board the whole time, but... what if we got the kid while I was gone? ...would that work? Would we wait for me to come home? I don't know anything about where to start for this...... I swear, I'm going to need legit help to be a dad... Sammie doesn't cry every time I hold her, so that's good... but... god, I can't care for a kid... how do you do it? I have no damn clue how Lathe manages... He watched as Sammie let out a sound of protest at just sitting next to Lathe, not understanding the story. She's so small to know any of this sort of thing... Levi watched with wide eyes as Lathe picked her up and set her on one leg, the book on the other. He managed to keep the book in place as he rocked her back and forth as if they were on Odysseus’ nameless ship, gesturing widely as he described the home of the Cyclops, Sammie drinking in his expression and
motions. ...he's so good at this... I could never be like that...
Eren took the car down the mile long section of road need to get to Armin’s house. He parked the car, carefully holding his side as he got out and then used the spare key Armin gave him to get in the side door. “Alright! Stop fucking and put your clothes on! We’re going to dinner at my house.” Eren shouted into the quiet home, hearing footsteps scatter around upstairs. Ah, so they fuck in the bedroom and not just the other rooms of the house. He waited a few minutes before Armin came down in sweatpants and a loose hoodie. “Eyebrows coming?”

“Yes, and how did you know we were… You know…” Fucking? Armin’s whole face flushed as he slipped some shoes on.

“Armin, is that even a question? When are you ever not fucking?”

“He has a point.” Erwin appeared next in a plaid shirt with faded blue jeans. I wonder what we’re doing for dinner. “Where have you guys been all day? Levi left without eating this morning… And no one ever saw you leave…” He trailed off as he saw Eren simply lift up his shirt and show off a large gash and many stitches. “What does the other guy look like?” I can only imagine what Levi did…

Eren shook his head. “I was out on Charlie and we got to close to a herd of deer, it’d almost mating season, so a buck charged us… Now are you guys coming over to dinner or not?” There lights are on, and I can hear their generator running, so it’ll be fine for now.

“Well shit. And yeah, we’re coming. You think we’re about to turn down free food?” Erwin chuckled, his top under the open flannel not covering every mark that had been left on his neck. “Did your Dad cook?”

“Nah, we ordered out after he abandoned cooking to deal with my chest and Charlie’s wounds. ...it's kinda been more or less hell at our house for the past two days. But we’re dealing.” Not much else to do, is there. “But I imagine Levi wasn't exaggerating when he said there's a literal ton of food headed to our house. Hope you're in the mood for pizza.

“...Eren, it's free food. We’re in.” Erwin slid into his boots, reaching for a rain jacket.

“Good. Let's go then, before the pizza beats us to the house and everyone eats without us.” Eren smiled, leading them to the car. He didn't much mind when the two of them curled up into the
backseat for the short drive, letting them hold the other while he drove. He shut the car off in the driveway, the house still mostly dark. “Oh, and… please, just don't… Tucker's been hell for the past two days, obviously. Just… I dunno, don't act gay.” Eren couldn't help but smile as the two of them snickered, fighting the grin. “I'm serious!”

“What, is it obvious? Do I walk in a gay fashion or something? Is gay an accent now?”

“Shut up! My god, you're horrible!” Eren waved them off, getting out of the car laughing. “If Tucker tries to kill you I'm not stopping him!”

“Yeah yeah, we know.” Erwin leaned down, planting a firm kiss on Armin’s lips that left the blonde obviously wanting another when Erwin pulled away. “That'll have to tide us over, then.” Good enough. He meandered behind Eren as they went up to the house, wiping off his feet and kicking off his boots when they came inside. ...Tucker is going to probably flip his shit when he sees all four of us in one place.

Eren sighed quietly as he saw the headlights come into the driveway as he kicked his shoes off. “Dinner's here!” He called loudly into the open house. We get to eat in a few seconds... So everyone come down...

Tucker practically catapulted off of Lathe’s lap, racing down the stairs in a few seconds though he stopped dead in his tracks, seeing the two blondes in the house. Why the fuck are there more gays here? I don’t get it... why did we invite them over?

“Company!” Lathe happily exclaimed as he came down the stairs, walking over with Sammie in one arm.

“Mmy!” Sammie threw up her hands as she tried to copy Lathe, happily reaching for Levi as she was handed over.

“I need to pay the guy for however the hell much you all ordered, so you get the child.” His eyes widened as he saw how much the man was bringing to the door. “...that's not even all of it, is it.”

“Nope.” Levi shook his head, smiling faintly as Sammie played with his hoodie strings. You're too adorable.
Eren took the first few boxes of pizza that the delivery guy had, the man pulling out the receipt for Lathe and going back to get more boxes, giving the man a chance to sign and Eren the chance to get back to the front door to take more boxes inside. *I can make a plate quick and then go hide I guess, I know Tucker doesn’t want me at the dinner table with him anymore…*

Lathe signed the long receipt with a sigh, shaking his head. “…you all are lucky I love you.” *My God, children are expensive.* Lathe took the next boxes he was handed, setting them on the counter. He looked up as he saw Eren start to fill a plate, catching his elbow. “Hey, wait for the rest of us. We don't even have the last of it in yet.” He watched as Eren shook his head, his brow furrowing. He looked from Eren to the plate, then something clicked and he glanced to Tucker, eyeing the whole scene with distaste. “…Eren, no. You are not about to let Tucker decide what goes in this house. You and everyone else are going to sit at the table and we’re going to eat as the dysfunctional sort-of family we are. If he doesn't like it, he can go upstairs without dinner. I'm not letting his opinion ruin your happiness.” *No way.*

Eren was quiet before setting his plate at his usual spot at the table, following Lathe out to go help with the rest of the food. *I’ll be good, and I guess I’ll leave it up to Armin and Erwin, and if they don’t wanna stay we won’t.* He glanced over at Armin, holding Sammie in his arms as she played with his hoodie strings. *That’s adorable…*

Lathe carried over the last boxes, tipping the delivery guy before thanking him as he left, going to rearrange the boxes on the counter, cutting the tape that held them closed. “Alright, because there's so many of us, the only rule is don't take half a pizza as your first serving. Cool?” He grinned as everyone nodded, going to take Sammie from Armin as they lined up to grab plates and fill them with pizza and wings, everything Levi and Ieva had ordered. “Sorry kiddo, we've got to find you something else to eat. You're still growing: you need good food.” Lathe poked her belly, smiling as she giggled. He set her down as he went to fix her oatmeal with fruit, all he could think of to make that didn't need too much to be done. *Hot water, oatmeal, cut up apple pieces… she likes Cheerios… and the juice with the vegetables in it too.* Lathe scooped her up, setting her at the table with her food before going to fix a plate for himself. *Let's just hope Tucker doesn't act up…*

Tucker had grabbed a plate and sat himself down next to Jake, over shadowing him almost as he quietly started to eat. *I swear to god if one of the fags sits next to me, I’m gonna fucking say something…* He watched, an evil grin forming on his face as he saw Eren sit beside him. *He’s really asking for it.* “Fag.” He muttered under his breath, low enough so only Eren could hear it.

Eren faultered a little as he heard Tucker’s harsh word. *Maybe if I act tough… No, he knows his words get to me, because I’ve been sheltered, I’ve forgotten all about those hateful words.* His gaze flitted down to his piece, silence growing over the whole table as everyone else sat down to eat as well.

Sammie happily munched on her Cheerios, picking up her spoon with one hand, trying to get a
spoonful of oatmeal to her mouth when she dropped it back into her bowl, pointing to Erwin who sat near her. “Huh?” She had a worried look on her face, reaching over and tugging on Erwin’s collar, pointing to a purple patch on his neck. “O-Oh… Kay? Is mister okay? Is mister hurt?

Erwin reached a hand up to his neck, realizing from the sensitivity he must have a hickey there. His cheeks tinged pink, smiling to her and brushing her hair from her face. “I'm okay, don't worry. ...you'll understand when you're older. Eat your oatmeal, okay?” He nodded to her bowl, Sammie’s attention bouncing back to her food, chuckling as she went right back to concentrating on getting it in her mouth without missing. That's adorable.

Tucker’s eyebrow twitched, dropping his piece of pizza and standing up to look at the table. “I’ve had enough of this! I’m calling the foster agency! How can you go around letting these perverts walk around the house so freely? And then let Sammie, who is three , look at a hickey and try and figure out what the fuck it was? That fag doesn’t even have the decency to cover up! Why the fuck are you allowing them in your home to taint the minds of Sammie and Jake!?” Tucker shouted, seething as his glare focused finally on Eren. I’ll get you out of this house if it’s the last thing I do!

The entire table was silent in shock as Lathe stood, looking deathly calm. He looked up, staring Tucker down, looking him dead in the eye as he spoke. “I wonder what the foster agency would say to a homophobic thirteen-year-old cussing out his foster family and insulting everyone who’s tried to make this work. I wonder if they'd be mad we try to teach acceptance here, make sure that you don't grow up hating a fair share of people for no legitimate reason. And I wonder what they'd say if they knew you came into this house, trying to drive my own sons out of here just to make it more convenient for you.” Lathe didn't waver, watching Tucker shrink. “I don't have to keep you here. I didn't have to sign up to foster kids. I've tried everything to make you at least sort of content with being here, and nothing has worked. And I'm sure nothing will until my family is out of the picture. And if you think you come before my own sons, you really need to pull your head out of your ass and figure out how this house works.” A pause. “You can take your food with, but you need to go upstairs. I didn't think you'd want to sit at the same table as some dirty faggots.” Lathe’s tone was cold, something very rarely heard. I'm done with you. I'm not letting you get in the way of my family’s happiness.

Tucker glared back at Lathe, grabbing his plate. “Fine! I’m going upstairs!” He shouted back and went up the stairs, stomping the whole way and slamming his door shut behind him. I don’t wanna be there anyways.

“......well shit.” Levi was the first to break the silence, watching as Lathe sank back into his chair, his head in his hand. “...that was a long time coming.”

“Yeah, it was.” Lathe shook his head, looking at the now empty space. “I know you can't force someone to change their opinions… but my god, if ever I would have wanted to…” Lathe shook his head, his eyes on his plate. “M'sorry about that… but it all needed to be said.” Yeah... I can't let
him get away with this sort of shit...

Jake looked around the table, glancing over to Erwin for a second before looking back to his plate, his voice timid. “.........what's a hickey…?” I don't know that word...

Eren seemed to pale as he looked over to Jake. What am I supposed to tell him? “Uhm… Well you see, when you're older, and you find someone you like very much, you might feel a bit possessive over them, and if you are, sometimes you'll leave a mark on their skin, it’s called a hickey, but you're not allowed to do it, or have one until you're much older, understand?” Eren asked, looking over to Jake to see if he understood any of what he said. Please don’t make me explain again...

Jake looked to him with wide eyes, looking back over the table between Armin and Erwin, speaking after a moment. “......so…. do I have to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend first?” Is that how it works?

Eren sighed quietly, looking down at his food. “It doesn’t matter, you can pick whoever you want, but you need to be older, understand?” He asked without looking at Jake again. Maybe I am a bad influence on you… I’ll have to make sure that I stop that… I know I’m showing that it’s alright to be gay… But I’m not sure if I’m doing it the wrong way and my body language is forcing you to be gay… He put his head down, defeated as the words crossed his mind, standing after a moment and taking his plate back into the kitchen without another word. I don’t think I can eat anymore...

“Okay, I know. Dad told me I can't date anyone ‘till I'm thirty.” Everyone at the table stifled a laugh, Lathe’s cheeks tinted pink for a moment. That's a long time. Jake watched Eren stand forlornly, reaching out to grab at his sleeve, stopping him. I know that look… you look sad, and then you leave and hide... “......Come back, o-okay?” Don't run away, please...

Eren looked back at Jake, his sad look seeming to fall a bit more. You're so attuned to me now… “I’ll be back, don’t worry…” He gently messed with the boy's hair, going to the kitchen, setting his plate on the kitchen counter before retreating to the bathroom and locking the door behind him. I'm gonna throw up, I feel like shit . He slowly kneeled down in front of the toilet, feeling the familiar clench in his gut as he threw up what little he had eaten. Fuck… I didn’t think I would ever need those pills ever again... Now I might need them to eat anything...

About ten minutes had passed before there was quiet knocking at the door, a worried voice coming from the other side. “Eren? Are you okay?” Levi’s brow furrowed when there was no answer. “...we’re worried about you, Eren. Are you okay?” Talk to me.

Eren looked over towards where the door was locked before he reached to flush the toilet, standing
up and turning the sink on to wash out his mouth, still pretty quiet as he opened the door, his eyes
dull. “I… I can’t eat.” He murmured, leaning his head down into Levi’s shoulder, sighing quietly
in disappointment. *I thought I was better…*

Levi gathered Eren up into his arms, gently rubbing his back. “I’m sorry… I’m really sorry about
him… he doesn’t get it yet… hopefully he will. But we can’t let him get to us so easily… it’ll be
okay.” Levi shepherded Eren from the bathroom, Jake coming up to tug on Levi’s sleeve.

“I-Is Eren okay?” He looked worriedly between Levi and Eren, his eyes wide when Levi shook his
head a bit. He immediately moved to glomp onto Eren’s waist, burying his face in his chest.
“Nooo… Eren needs to feel better… Tucker’s just a big meanie. Don't feel bad.” *I don't like seeing
you sad… “Don't be sad…”*

Eren smiled softly and ruffled Jake’s hair. “It’s okay, I’ll be fine Jake… Tucker’s words just made
me think of something that happened a long time ago, but you don’t need to worry, I’m fine now.”
He smiled softly, though it didn’t completely make it to his eyes, but only Lathe and Levi would be
able to tell. *I’ll need to see if I can get the nausea pills from Casper again…*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren parked the car a little ways away from the pharmacy, his hands fisting his hair as he thought
about what was about to happen. *I need to get nausea pills, which I haven’t used in almost a year…
Holy shit…* He found the courage to get out of his car and walk to the pharmacy, taking a deep
breath before walking in and going towards the counter looking worse for wear.

James looked up from the computer, his eyes flickering with recognition. “Oh, it’s you, Eren. You
didn't drag your psycho of a Dad with you, did you?” He looked past him, not seeing him. *Thank
god, he drives me nuts.*

“No… I didn’t, and could we maybe keep my visit between us? I don’t want my Dad to find out.”
*He doesn’t need to know…. He doesn't need to worry about me… “I came to look for Casper
actually…”* He took a quick look around, noticing the purple-haired man was nowhere to be found.

“Sure, I guess. And Casper isn't around anymore. On his last day he just gave me his business card,
told me I'd get my pink slip in the mail and left! That fucker’s the owner of this goddamn
company! How the hell was I supposed to know that? He spent all his time here texting and
counting pills, it's a wonder we haven't gone under without proper management.” *He's literally
insane…*
“That’s Casper for you… wait… Are you telling me you got fired?”

“Well, I thought I was getting fired. I was freaking out for the next day and a half until I get a letter from the company, first-class and official and shit and I thought I had to clean out this desk, fix up my resume and find a new job… but instead, because Casper is a little shit…” James pointed to the framed sheet of pink paper on the wall. “He sent me that pink slip of paper:

Dear James,

This is your very own slip of pink paper.

You still have a job, even if you are an insufferable human being sometimes.

Thank you for putting up with my crap for the past ten years,

-Casper Pandreivitch, your secret boss.

PS: Lol u thought u got fired ;P

...and that is why I fear for everyone who buys shit from his company.” James shook his head, looking back to Eren. “So, whatcha need, kid?”

His words were quiet, laced with sadness as he looked down to his thumbs. “Do you remember the pills I was prescribed that helped with the nausea?” I know Casper was the one who managed my pills and all but they gotta be on file or something if you don’t know...

“I remember Mr. Crazy send that script over forever ago…” James tapped away on his keyboard. “...but I forget the name, so let's see what we gave you… ah, those. Got it.” James stood, going in back and looking over the shelves of stuff. “Casper hasn't got anyone else back here with me, though. I think they've got someone starting next week. I'll be glad when they do; you need two people back here to fill prescriptions and answer phones and just all the crap you need to do.” James set the bottle on the counter, scanning it and typing into his computer. “That's the one. We’ve got smaller or bigger bottles, if you think that's too much or too little.” He shrugged. Whatever you need, kid. We shouldn't waste perfectly good medicine.

“I… I um… I think this is okay. I’ll pay for it, because I really don’t want Dad to find out.” Eren iterated again as he pulled out his black credit card, his hands still shaking as he held it out for James. I don’t want Dad to know… At all.

James slowly nodded, taking the card and swiping it through. “Alright… I'm not going to pry too
much, but…” James handed the car back, looking serious for a moment. “Even being as much of
an ass as he is sometimes, your Dad is a very qualified doctor. It doesn't matter to me that you're
trying to hide this because they're not major pain killers or anything, but if whatever’s going on
stays the way it is for too long, you should probably talk with him.” He had you on a whole
cocktail of stuff when you first came in… he knew what he was doing. And he obviously still does-
he hasn't killed you yet. ...but still... they're just nausea pills... why are you trying to hide these?
They're just... they're nausea pills. It's no big deal.

Eren looked down at the card as he put it back in his wallet. “I know that I should tell him, but… I
just, I don’t want to lay more on him when he’s already got so much to deal with…” I don’t want
to add more stress onto him. “Thanks for these though.” He smiled softly, a hint of sadness in his
eyes as he took the bag James had on the counter. “Tell Casper I said ‘hi’ when you see him.”

James watched him leave, curiosity getting the best of him as he dialed Casper’s number, waiting
for the purple-haired man to pick up the phone. I wanna know why he’s trying to hide something
like nausea pills... And he was looking for you, you must know something!

Casper had his feet up on his desk, his pen running quickly over test result forms when his phone
rang, picking up. “This is Casper Pandreivitch, CEO of Parsec Pharmaceuticals. What can I do ya
for?” Huh, I don't get too many calls till around five...

“You can get me another co-worker, asshole.” James chuckled into the phone. “Working in a big
office is not your job… Anyways, Eren was looking for you today, you forgot to tell him you
moved to the main office.” Seriously, how could you forget?

Casper grinned, tossing the clipboard onto the desk for the moment, gazing up at the ceiling. Thank
god, a break from paperwork. “I'm surprised this is the first time you've called to complain. I
expected at least twenty by now, James, how disappointing.” He chuckled. “We’re working on it,
someone new starts Monday. Try not to kill them; it’s their first job in the field. And I thought Eren
knew I was working around here a bunch now; he knows how big of a project we’ve got going on.”
You'd think he'd remember. “What was he doin’ at the pharmacy, anyway? Lathe send him in with
a pile of scripts again, running his errands for him? I told him not to do that.” He did that once. I
sent Lathe such a passive-aggressive text rant he didn’t do it again.

“No, I make no promises... And Eren came in alone…. He actually didn’t want Lathe to know that
he came, are they having an argument or something? He came in looking for nausea pills, you
know why he needs them?” I’m really curious...

Casper’s brow furrowed. “More nausea pills? Why the hell would he care if Lathe knew? ...but he
needed them the first time around ‘cause he wasn't used to eating…” ......he might not want Lathe
to know what’s going on because so much stressful shit has gone down in the past three or so
days… ...maybe stress is getting to him, making him feel sick? ......that would make sense. If I
remember correctly, Lathe told me a bit about Tucker being seriously homophobic… he’s much
less than civil around Eren or Levi… it could be getting to him. “...I think he’s getting sick from a
lot of stress they’ve all been under as of late. Just a lot of crap happening at once, and they’re trying
to deal… I’ll talk to Lathe anyway. And if Eren gets mad that you told me and therefore by
extension let Lathe know, that’s your own damn fault. But thanks for telling me. Eren doesn't like
to admit when stuff is getting to be too much.” Lathe should know anyway. Even if he doesn’t do
much about it… even if there's not much he can do. He should know.

James sighed. “It’s your fault if he finds out! I was just curious… Oh! When is Levi leaving?” I
know he’s getting deployed soon…

“I think in about three weeks… it's not long until then… and then he’ll be gone for four straight
years. That’s a long-ass time… I’m sure that isn't helping stress levels either… Lathe is going to
have one son in a war zone, and Eren is going to be a lot more alone for four years…” I know he’s
got to be worried about Levi waiting for him… because he hasn't proposed yet… “And it’s going to
be the same for Armin. Do you remember that blonde Eren came in with last year with that pile of
scripts? His boyfriend is leaving at the same time for a tour. They're both going to be missing
boyfriends. And they just got engaged, so it's going to hurt a lot for the both of them. I expect there
to be a lot of moping for the first solid month.” Yeah, there will be many a tear.

James nodded even though Casper couldn’t see him. “He seemed really on edge, he didn't have
Blake with him either… I’m worried about him, he didn’t look happy at all, especially when he
found out you weren’t here… I thought he was gonna leave… I think you should talk to Lathe… I
don’t want him to be snooping around and overdosing…” I’m worried about him, really worried.
“Alright well, I gotta go, a customer walked in, bye.” James hung up the phone as the door chimed,
a heavy sense of dread consuming his body. I don’t remember the last time I was this worried.

“Bye…” Casper hung up, staring at the ceiling blankly for a moment. ...if Eren is stressed enough
to not be able to eat… he could be stressed enough for his old symptoms to come around… Casper
immediately pulled out his cell, Lathe being one of the many speed-dial options on the keypad. It
didn't take long before Lathe picked up, Casper cutting him off before he could say a word. “Lathe,
I'm worried about Eren.”

...the fuck? Lathe took his foot off the pedal of the sewing machine, his brow furrowed. “...o-
kaaaay….. why? Did something happen?” Do I not know about something?

“Well… I just got off the phone with James, and he told me that Eren came into the pharmacy
today, and he picked up some nausea pills… But he didn’t want you to find out… Do you know
anything about that?” Casper’s voice was questioning as he tapped his fingers on his large desk.
“You also forgot to tell him that I don’t work there anymore too! What gives?” I’ve not worked
there in like... A couple months...

Lathe’s eyes widened, thinking. “Nausea pills? Why would he care about those?” *They're just... nausea pills... but...* “I dunno, he was feeling sick last night... after... ...after Tucker had an outburst when Eren and Levi and Erwin and Armin were at the table. Sammie saw a mark on Erwin’s neck, he brushed it off well enough for her when she got worried, and Tucker just screamed at me before looking like he was going to tear Eren’s throat out. ...it's got to be that... the stress of everything and then a seriously hostile-feeling home right now has to be really getting to him.” *That makes sense...*

Casper nodded even though Lathe couldn’t see him. “Well, we were worried, because he didn't want you to find out, and I was thinking that maybe his old symptoms are starting to pop up... Because Levi’s leaving...” *I know it’s at least a touchy subject with Eren at best...*

Lathe listened to Casper’s careful words, slowly nodding. “...I'll keep an eye out. I was hoping we wouldn't have to worry too much about him... I mean, I knew that there was at least going to be a lot of tears and moping involved-” He heard Casper hum in agreement. “...but I hope he doesn't... I hope he doesn't start cutting again or... or trying to overdose...” *I really hope he doesn't try that shit again... if I lost him...*

Casper sighed quietly. “I'll make sure James is on the lookout too, in case he comes in looking for painkillers... But if James could tell he looked depressed, I can only imagine what he would look like in front of anyone who really knew him.” *I can only imagine what he looked like... Maybe a drowned rat?*

Lathe nodded, his brow furrowed. “Okay, thank you for telling me... I'll have to text Levi, ask him to keep a closer eye on him... they're not in the house much, you know this. I hope he doesn't pick up those habits again... he must really look out of it if James could be worried enough to call you.” *Crap... this isn't good...*

“I think he was more so curious as to why he didn’t want you to know... But it was enough to warrant a call... Oh, he didn’t have Blake with him either.” *That was another thing that had me worried...*

“He keeps forgetting to bring Blake places with him... we all just keep forgetting, he's mostly just a pet these days, but he really should have him at Armin’s in case any-” Lathe looked up as he heard a muffled barking downstairs, Blake’s, soon followed by the yelps of many a small dog. *Oh my. Blake just started barking- I think Eren’s over to take care of the animals. I need to go talk to him.”*
“I didn’t tell you anything! Tell him I say ‘Hi’!” Casper called back to him as he heard the line go
dead. *I really hope Eren’s okay…*

“Then how the hell—” Lathe stopped talking when Casper hung up, stowing his phone in his pocket.
...well, if I say Casper said hi, he’ll know. *But whatever, it’s Casper’s fault.* Lathe stood, quickly
walking to the stairs and descending them, running out the back door to the barn. He heard the
sounds of whining grow louder as he came inside, Maisie and Blake both pawing at his legs as he
tried to feed Charlie and Luna, even Krampus and Nene trotting around his legs in a circle, yelping
at him. *He’s not okay.* “Eren Honey? Are you—” Lathe stopped when he turned Eren to look at him,
the look in his eyes shattered. “Eren, come here…” Lathe wrapped him up in a hug, resting his
head on his shoulder. “Talk to me, please. I know you haven't been feeling well.” *Tell me what’s
wrong.*

“I’m—I’m fine…” He stuttered, his arms slowly and shakily wrapping around Lathe’s waist. “I’m
fine… I’ll be fine… You don’t have to worry…” *I can get better on my own…*

“I’m your Dad. It’s my job to worry. And I’m worried that all this stress has been getting to
you lately.” He rubbed circles into Eren’s back, his voice quiet. “Do you wanna talk about any of
it?” *It might make you feel better.*

Eren shook his head. “No… I’m gonna take Charlie for a ride… Um, i’ll-I’ll try and be home soon,
I need to go….” He mumbled, looking away from Lathe, sniffling a little and trying to hide his
tears. *I’m fine, I’ll be fine, I can take it…* “I’ll be fine… You really don’t need to worry about me, I
can handle being alone…” Eren gasped quietly as he realized he said that out loud. *Fuck*.

Lathe shook his head as he heard Eren’s voice, pulling away from him and looking him in the eyes.
“Eren, after what happened yesterday, where you got stabbed by a *territorial deer*, I’m not
letting you go riding that far out there. Absolutely not. Now come on, let’s feed the rest of the
animals and then get you inside, okay? I’ll make you some lunch.”

“No buts, Eren. Please. I’m not letting you run away from this.” *We need to deal with it before
things get worse.* Lathe pecked his forehead, his eyes melancholy. “I’m sorry, kid, but I’m worried.
And you’ve barely begun healing. You need to be careful.” He nodded to his stomach. *You just got
stitches… you need to take it easy.*

Eren…. *He’s right.* “I’m sorry, it’s just, I needed to get out of that house, I swear, all Erwin thinks
about right now is getting laid… And I just… I can’t deal with that right now…” *I keep thinking*
about how Levi and Erwin are just gonna be fucking like rabbits while they’re gone… And I can’t stand it….

Lathe nodded in understanding, moving with him to help feed the rest of the animals. “They're leaving so soon… I think Erwin just… we’re all just people, Eren. And they’re going to be gone for four years. I think he just wants to make up for lost time… because he's really going to miss Armin. They're engaged… and if he's trying to get you and Levi involved too… I think he just needs touch… because he's going to go so long without it. He's trying to cope with losing that aspect of life while abroad.” He's going to miss Armin like hell… and Levi is going to miss you too… a lot ...

“But he keeps trying to get at Levi’s ass… And it’s really starting to piss me off, but I can’t say anything about it!” Eren gasped as he shouted at Lathe, clamming back up again. I wasn’t supposed to tell him, at all. Or anyone!

“Then tell him it pisses you off! Here, let me fix up your rant for you.” Lathe turned to him, wearing a well-schooled bitchface. “Erwin Smith, I get that you might really like having a piece of Levi, but he’s mine and it's really pissing me off. Just cool it with him for a while, alright? I think Armin would want to have you to himself for a while, anyway.” Lathe grinned to him, cocking his head. “How was that?” That'll probably do the trick.

“But I don’t want him to get angry at me… And Armin… I don’t want him to get mad at me either… And and… And Levi is enjoying it… I can’t please him like Erwin can.” He murmured, fresh tears forming on his cheeks as his shaking hands held onto Lathe’s shirt. I can't take something he enjoys away from him.

“But Eren, it's not just about Levi. And it’s not just about Erwin. It's about all of you. You need to understand that, man up, and go be a pissy overprotective boyfriend to get Erwin to step off.” Lathe held him close, carding a hand through his hair. “I get that a change of pace is something Levi can get really into… and it's not that it’s bad for him to enjoy it… but if Erwin is keeping Levi all to himself, we have a problem. It shouldn't make them mad that you're getting possessive; you think that it's stepping over a very important boundary. It'd be better to tell them than to brood. Nobody would want that.” He gently swayed them, trying to calm Eren down. “You need to let them know that even though sharing is okay, it's okay to an extent. There's a limit. And they should respect that.” They're good friends; they'll respect it. Most likely.

“But what if they don’t? Erwin’s probably going to be doing this the whole time they’re overseas!” Fuck, I'm acting like a motherfucking child.

“If you're that worried, you need to tell them. You're scared Levi might be tempted to cheat on you- and your fear isn't too unreasonable. They've gone all the way before, they enjoy each other,
it's going to be a long four years… it seems like it might happen. But I think you literally need to
tell the both of them, or at least Levi, tell him what you told me. You're scared he's going to need
relief during those four years, and he is. But he shouldn't cheat on you over there. Erwin would be
cheating on Armin, too.” You two need to talk...

Eren sniffled, nodding as he kept his head against Lathe’s chest, enjoying his comfort. “Can we…
Can we feed the animals now?” His hands were still shaking heavily, clinging to Lathe’s shirt. I
don’t know how I can tell Erwin… Let alone Levi.

Lathe nodded, pecking his cheek gently. “Alright, let's feed them. Then we’ll get you fed; that'll
make you feel a bit better I think.” The fed the animals together in comfortable quiet, and soon all
the eggs were gathered from the henhouse and Gill and Jill were milked. They walked back up to
the house, Lathe putting away the eggs and studying the egg drawer. We've got a lot… “What do
you want for lunch, Eren? I'll make you anything you want.” Your pick.

Eren looked at him, fiddling with his thumbs and biting his lip… “Um… Omelettes… But I need
to g-go to my c-car really quick…” I need to take nausea pills, and you don’t know about those...
He stood up from the island, starting towards the hallway to get to the front door.

Lathe moved to catch Eren’s arm, taking a deep breath when Eren turned to look to him, his voice
wary. “…I know about the nausea pills. …James called Casper, and Casper called me. …we’re
worried that the stress of everything is getting to be too much. It's not something you have to hide.
I understand. I really do. …it's been a very stressful week, we’re all feeling the pressure.” Lathe
gave Eren a hug, soon letting him go. “You come right back, okay? I'll have your food fixed for
you in no time.” You need to eat.

Eren’s eyes widened as he heard Lathe speak. He… Fuck you Casper! I'm going to fucking murder
you later… He nodded silently before slipping outside and into his car, trying to decide if he
should leave or if he should go back inside. Dad knows now… He pulled out his phone, fury taking
over his mind as he texted Casper.

EY: You son of a bitch! How could you tell him? I thought I could fucking trust you!

CP: Eren, it's not like I thought I had a choice!

CP: James called me and was //worried// about you!

CP: James!

CP: //Worried!!/

CP: I thought I should tell Lathe because A: he's your DAD, B: he's a doctor and should
know this shit, and C: we’re worried as hell that everything from the week might be getting to be too much...

CP: ...we don't want anything bad happening to you.

CP: I'm sorry but that's what it is...

EY: I still hate you, I hope you realize that. Asshole.

CP: Yeah yeah, sure, Casper’s an asshole, blah blah we know this

CP: Even if you think I'm bullshitting you I actually do care so

CP: Just deal with it.

CP: You're stressed out, and we want to help.

CP: What the hell is the problem.

EY: Alright! Fine! IM STRESSING THE FUCK OUT! Alright! THERE I FUCKING SAID IT!

EY: and i’d rather not tell you because you might end up hating that person, and I’d rather see them alive...

CP: I already hate Tucker, Eren

CP: Lathe told me aaaaaaalll about him

EY: It’s not about Tucker… I can take the hate… What do you think I did before Lathe picked me up?

CP: I'm not going to answer that question which I'm half-sure is rhetorical

CP: ...look, if you're not going to tell me why you're stressed out and pissed off, fine.

CP: That's not my business.

CP: But we’re worried about you, and if you wanna talk, fine.

CP: We can't force you to do shit.

CP: So I'm fucking sorry, okay?

EY: ....Do you //really// wanna know?

CP: It's likely that you're not gonna shock me, even if it's really bad- go for it if you want

EY: Erwin’s fucking Levi and apparently out of the four of us, I am the only one who is not okay with it...

CP: ......wait

CP: so like was this
CP: ...a gangbang situation at some point

CP: Because if it's going too far

CP: ...that’s a thing that’s happened before with people I sorta knew

EY: Well, it was a gangbang the first time... But then I guess it happened again while I was out... Armin told me...

EY: And I don’t know how the fuck I’m supposed to tell Levi that I don’t want him to do that!

EY: I can’t satisfy him in the least! He’s so fucking comfortable with Erwin! It’s like I don’t even //exist!//

CP: ...first off, I'm going to say that step one is probably to go talk to Levi

CP: ......and now please put up with this line of questioning

CP: This Armin and Erwin couple, they're engaged, yeah?

EY: yeah… um… They were the ones that got engaged at Lathe’s wedding... The other ones, not you shits...

CP: I know but just go with me here

CP: whose idea was the gangbang?

CP: like did someone in particular like.. idk ‘lead’ it or set the tone idk

EY: Armin and Erwin, and I agreed because I thought we weren’t gonna go all the way, like we did forever ago when we were in HS… But… Erwin wanted to go farther… And I couldn’t say ‘no’

EY: I’m a fucking whore too, which is just the best image I want the guy that I love to see… Oh yeah, just fucking **wonderful**

CP: Eren, what you did doesn't make you a whore

CP: I get the feeling you've probably told others this and heard the same fucking response

CP: But it doesn't make you a whore if Levi was doing it too

CP: If it was all consensual and you were cool with it at the time just to have fun, that's fine

EY: I didn’t want to! That's the problem! I agreed on fucking autopilot! I just responded like my asshole of a father practically trained me to do... And I hate myself for that...

CP: but that doesn't make you a whore

CP: Sure, now you regret it. Understandable.

CP: Things can seem like a good idea in the moment and then smack you in the face with how
bad of a decision it might have been

CP: Not all the time

CP: But sometimes.

CP: But because Erwin pretty much decided for the group how far you all would go, would you say he pretty much led the whole thing?

EY: Yeah...

CP: okay…. and you and Armin would've paired off for a bit, yes…?

EY: … Well, we didn't go that far, I couldn't handle him... I barely got out of a panic attack...

CP: ...so would saying he was really rough with you be an understatement…?

EY: Yeah… I didn’t want him to be and it freaked me out...

CP: ………okay so promise you won't get even madder at me for this

CP: but just how possessive of Erwin would you say Armin is…?

EY: …. A good bit… Armin went right back to Erwin as soon as he was done with Levi basically...

CP: ………Eren I'm sorry if I turn out to be wrong and accidentally talked shit about your friend for no reason

CP: ...but do you //know// Erwin and Levi had sex again?

CP: ….I mean....

CP: Armin might be highkey jealous....

CP: ………and he might have lied

CP: PLEASE don't kill me for saying it but just think about it

CP: It kinda makes sense...

CP: And Levi wouldn't just cheat on you when he still //has// you

EY: ………… Holy fuck.... What do I do if you’re right tho?

CP: Honestly I’m kinda in the mood to go find my old baseball bat from where I hid it under the bed but y’know

CP: laws are a thing

CP: So honestly I’d ask him if Levi and Erwin seriously cheated and if he says yeah then suggest you all call a house meeting and confront them
CP: That would be the point where he starts to sweat and admits he was lying

CP: or you all have a legit house meeting about boundaries and shit

CP: Either way it would work kinda okay

CP: oh and btw Lathe wants you to get the hell inside with your pills before your omelette gets cold

CP: Oh, and stop smacking the steering wheel so hard

EY: what the actual hell, alright fine… I think I might just talk to Levi though, then rat Armin out.

CP: Eh, that works

CP: At least you two can have a serious conversation

CP: If you talk to Armin right away, that might go sour right off the bat if he sees you’re suspicious

CP: Idk just don't do anything to get engagement called off or whatever

CP: Even assholes deserve love

CP: Apparently

Eren sighed, reaching into the passenger seat and grabbed the bottle of pills he needed out of the bag, opening the car door to step out. He made it inside a dark look on his face as he came into the kitchen to sit and eat. *I'm gonna fucking kill Armin if he was lying.* Eren sat in front of his plate, which was still warm, his hand going back into his pocket to pull out his phone and started a new text conversation.

EY: Get your ass over here within the next 5 minutes, or I swear to god you will never be allowed to come home.

EY: Time starts now.

LA: Well fuck okay

LA: Goddamit you took the car

LA: Ah well, Erwin wasn't using his bike anyway

LA: Am I in trouble or some shit? What'd I do?

EY: That depends… Get your ass in this house or so help me god you will be skinned on the spot…

LA: Fuck I'm coming!
It wasn't four minutes later that the doorbell rang, Levi catching his breath on the front steps as he waited for them to open the door. He swallowed hard as Eren answered it, his cool glare settling on him. *fuck. “…is everything okay…?”* Levi stepped inside and kicked off his shoes, looking worried.

Eren grumbled something that sounded like a mockery of his words as he stalked back over to the kitchen. *You are going to sit and eat with me.* His eyes almost seemed to glow in anger as he forked another piece of omelette in his mouth. *You'll figure it out soon enough…*

Levi followed Eren back to the otherwise empty kitchen, shocked at the furious glare he was fixed with. *…you're never angry… what happened?* “Uhm…” Levi tentatively sat across from Eren, not knowing what to say as Eren simply stared at him, judging. “…is this… Uhm… about what happened two nights ago? I just…” He tried not to shrink back as Eren seemed to scoff at him, looking away. “…I don't know what’s gotten you so mad …” *…what'd I do ?

“Is it true? Did you let Erwin fuck you yesterday while I was gone ?” Eren’s worked were hostile as he stabbed his fork into his omelette, eating the piece with brows furrowed in rage. *I need to calm down, and I can only imagine what the hell you two fucking did.

Levi’s eyes widened, shaking his head after it clicked what he asked. “W- What ? No! Why the hell would I do that? Just because we all had a gangbang two days ago doesn't mean I threw all sense of boundaries out the fucking window! Who the hell told you that?” *What the hell? I've already got you! At that's fucking cheating . I'm not about to cheat on you.*

“ Armin !” Eren shouted back at him as Levi rose his voice. “Armin fucking told me! Which is why I left this morning without saying a word to you! I couldn’t stand that you felt more comfortable with him than you ever were with me!” Eren had started to cry, all of his bottled up emotions starting to let loose. *I'm sorry… I didn’t want to yell… He put his head in his hands as he started to cry, his whole body shaking on the kitchen stool across from the shorter man. I'm so sorry…*

Levi’s eyes were wide, his mind running into overdrive. “But why would Armin…” ..........he's fucking jealous . “Eren…” Levi moved around the table, wrapping Eren up in a strong embrace. “Eren, Armin saw what you saw and must’ve gotten jealous… but I couldn't be more comfortable with him than you… at the time, he and I both had just gone two rounds… I was tired, he was warm, I just kinda collapsed into him… it's not that I like him better… Eren, I love you… I wouldn't just do something like that. I'm so sorry…” Levi rested his cheek on Eren’s shoulder, holding him close as Eren shuddered. *Armin, I'm going to fucking kill you.*
Eren leaned into his hold. “Y-You didn’t? A-Armin was l-lying?” He asked again, making sure that he was understanding Levi’s words correctly. *I wanna make sure.*

“I think he was really jealous of how boneless I became after round two… it wasn't like I was extra comfortable with him for reasons other than ‘I was tired, and he was right there and warm.’ I think Armin lied because he was so jealous… and he wanted to make you jealous too… of how comfy I looked with him…. …we need to talk to them later… than can't be happening…” *That's awful... I get that he's jealous, but to lie about that? What the hell?!!*

Eren nodded, curling up to Levi’s strong chest. “I'm… I’m sorry I believed him… I should’ve doubted it… I should’ve thought that you were different, but I… I couldn’t…” He whimpered quietly as his hands continued to shake. *I'm sorry... I'm so sorry, I should've trusted that you wouldn't cheat. “I’m sorry…”* His eyes were full of tears as they fell.

Levi guided Eren from the chair, sweeping him from his feet carefully and moving them to the living room, knowing Eren wasn't going to stop crying for a bit. He murmured soothingly to him, soon laying down with Eren on his chest, his words reassuring and sweet in his ear. “It's okay Eren, you were worried about something like this happening… it's only reasonable that you doubted me… I'm not mad at you, just at Armin… it's alright, we’ll get this sorted out, promise. I'd never do that to you. I'll behave for you. I really will.” *I'm going to wanna come home after my four years and take a few weeks off of doing anything else and just ravish you… if you're willing to wait for me, I damn well better keep my promise and wait for you.*

Eren could only nod.
Chapter 67: Stitches

It took a solid hour before Eren calmed down, slowly taking in deep breaths as Levi played with his soft hair. “Can we go on Charlie?” I wanna go riding… “Dad doesn’t want me to go alone…” His hands still held onto Levi’s shirt, not wanting to let go.

Levi nodded. “I guess… but at the first sign of deer we’re changing direction. I don’t want anything bad happening again. And we’re bringing cellphones too.” Levi shifted them both to sit up, softly kissing Eren’s cheek before helping him stand. He gently brushed their lips, bringing Eren over to where their boots and coats were. He glanced to the table, seeing Eren’s half-finished omelette. “You sure you’re not hungry or anything?”

Eren shook his head. “N-No, I’m not, I just wanna go riding…” I’m not sure I could eat anymore even with the nausea pills. He kneeled down, starting to tie his boots, his messy hair covering his eyes. I should’ve had faith in Levi… It was stupid for me to think that he cheated…

Levi nodded, slipping into his own boots and lacing them up. He helped Eren into his jacket, grabbing his own windbreaker and walking out to the barn. Levi helped Eren bring Charlie out of his stall, heaving his saddle up onto his back and helping to tack him up. He handed Eren a helmet when he untied Charlie, strapping his own on. “You’ll need this.” You forgot it last time.

Eren smiled softly, taking it and clipping it onto his head, pulling the bridle over Charlie’s head and helping himself up onto the saddle. “Why don’t we get going?” He had a small smile on his face as he reached his hand out to help Levi up. I wanna go out and get fresh air, cause I need to calm down, and I want you to hold me.

Levi smiled softly, stepping up to swing his leg over Charlie. He wrapped his arms around Eren’s stomach, resting his head on Eren’s back. He looked around as they started to move, Eren bringing them down a path through the forest. It was quiet, the light speckling the ground, the leaves on the trees turning different colors. This is nice… Levi’s brow furrowed when he felt something warm on his hand, pulling it back to look at it, gasping as he saw red all over his palms. “Eren, my god, you’re bleeding!” Fuck, your stitches!

Eren looked down at his waist where the red was beginning to seep into his shirt and jacket. Well fuck… “Eh, I’m fine…” He murmured, urging Charlie on, not wanting to deal with it. I can deal, I’m not bleeding that badly…

Levi reached forward, getting hold of Eren’s hands over the reins and tugging, trying to get Eren to stop. “Eren, please, turn around. One of your stitches could be tearing at your skin. Please.” Stop
so we can go back home and get you fixed up again!

Eren sighed quietly. “Well, if you're going to complain about me bleeding, then put some fucking pressure on it…” I couldn’t even tell that I was bleeding… Holy shit… He moved the reins to turn Charlie back around to the house, which was still in eye shot. “You might as well call Dad so he can meet us at the barn.” I can only imagine how freaked out he’d gonna be… But this has probably been bleeding for a long time...

“Got it.” Levi pulled out his phone, one hand staying firmly pressed to his stomach as he pressed the button to call Lathe, holding the phone against his shoulder with an ear as he waited for him to pick up. He didn't have to wait more than one ring for him to pick up, obviously worried as he spoke on the other end. “Dad, can you meet us at the barn with your medic kit? Eren’s stitches started bleeding again, I think from the strain…” A moment. “…got it.” He hung up, wincing as he slipped the now bloody phone back into his pocket. “We’re riding up to the house- Dad will get you inside and fix you up while I get Charlie back into the barn.” Yeah, your health comes first.

Eren nodded, getting Charlie to go towards the back of the house, barely noticing just how tightly Levi was holding onto his stomach. They got to the house rather quickly, Lathe racing out to meet them, only then did he look down to see how much red was on everything. “Fuck… I didn’t think it was that bad… Dad… You have to call Casper… I need another shot of the serum…” This'll heal as soon as that happens, I need it… He could feel his chest tightening as he reached his shaking hand down to hold onto Levi’s bloody one. Fuck, I’m losing blood… I’m actually… Fuck this isn’t good..

“Yeah, no shit.” Lathe reached out to help Eren off the horse, picking him up and kicking open the back door. He set him on the kitchen counter, cleaned off and under lights for him to properly see what he was doing. “Okay, shirt. Off.” Lathe ran to get a thick towel, coming back and pressing it against his chest, having Eren hold it in place. He picked up the bloodied shirt to toss it in the sink and out of the way, noticing something as he saw his fingers easily become covered in red. …your blood… it's so thin … Lathe didn't spare it much thought at the moment, washing his hands and pulling out his phone. He dialed Casper’s number and tossed it onto the counter on speaker, getting things from his bag as he waited for him to pick up. He cut him off before he could speak, his voice stern yet worried. “Casper, I need you to get me a vial of the serum now. Eren’s bleeding badly, and he got stitches yesterday, but he’s still not healing well. Hurry, please- I'll let you take notes.” Just get the hell over here.

Casper’s eyes widened as he quickly got off of his chair, heading towards the elevator. “How badly are we talking here? Am I gonna need to meet you at the hospital?” How badly is he bleeding? I can tell you're not doing too well with it, you have me on speaker for one, and I can hear your panic… He tapped his foot in impatience as he waited for the elevator to finally take him up to the top floor, hitting the lights until Hannah looked up, pulling the phone away from his ear for a second. “Get like 10 vials and needles, we need to hurry!” He shouted across the open space which was now attributed to reproducing the serum. Come on Lathe, talk to me. He turned to call for the
elevator again, listening to Hannah shift around the room to get everything he asked for ready.

“I don't think you need to to meet me at the hospital, it can be managed. I need to run and get him an IV bag from upstairs, but besides that I think we’ll be fine for a little bit. Just don't dawdle, okay?” Lathe ended the call, running to the stairs. “I need that IV bag now…” Your blood is so damn thin …. and you've lost plenty over the past two days, I think...

Casper shook his head as Lathe hung up on him, turning as Hannah finished packing up the supplies, a thought coming to him. “Get your computer, Lathe said you can take notes… We have a new case.”

Hannah nodded quickly unplugging the charged electronic before she put it in it’s case and briskly walked over to him. “Who is it?”

“Eren, which is probably why he was worried, apparently he got stitches and he’s bleeding through them.” Casper let Hannah step into the elevator first, following her. I don’t get why his blood would be thin...

“Blood thinners?”

Huh? Did I say that out loud?

“Yeah, you said that out loud too, you tend to do that when you're thinking about something.” Hannah shrugged watching the number on the elevator switch ever so slowly.

“Anyways, no he’s not… Any other ideas?”

“Disease?”

“No, you know his file inside and out too, don’t be pulling that crap now…”

“Stress?”
“Fuck… We need to hurry.” Casper’s words were rushed as the doors finally opened and the two of them made their way to Hannah’s truck which was parked closer to the door. “Promise not to kill me?”

“I make no such promises…”

Eren groaned as he held a towel to his stitches. *Fuck... It’d starting to hurt... “D… D-Dad?”* Eren called out as he heard feet thunder down the stairs. *It hurts... I’m getting dizzy... I’m scared...* He could feel his chest tighten up as he tried to take in another breath, finding it almost impossible. *Fuck... No no no no no!*

Lathe was immediately next to him, brushing the hair from his face. “I'm right here, Eren, don't worry. I know it feels hard to breathe but you need to just stay cool for me, okay? We’ll get you all fixed up in no time. Promise.” Lathe pecked his forehead, moving to get an IV going. “I really need to just steal one of those stands...” Lathe reached for a few twist-ties, securing the IV bag to the light fixture hanging over the table. “That'll work for right now. Come on, stay awake for me kid.” Lathe rested a gentle hand on his arm, the other carding through his hair. “You’ll be fine, just hang on until Casper gets here with the serum. Then you'll be just fine, okay? Just focus on breathing for now.” You'll be okay. ...at least, you damn well better be.

Eren’s eyes were wide, his pupils dilated to a point where his Irises were only a thin rim around black. “It... It... It hurts...” He whimpered, his breathing ragged and his chest tightening further as he started to wheeze, which was freaking him out more. “I don’t... I don’t wanna die...” Eren cried out, his hands shaking as he felt the towel in his hand soak up more of his blood, his stitches not holding the thin blood. *I’m scared... I’m really scared... where’s Levi?*

Lathe gave him a small smile, knowing he couldn't start to panic too. *I need to be strong here. This time, it's not an option.* “Eren, Honey, look at me.” He coaxed Eren to focus on him, maintaining a calm look. “You’re going to be just fine. Help is on the way. We’re not going to let this get any worse, okay? I know it's scary, but you just need to stay calm and breathe. I'm right here. We’ll fix that pain as soon as we can, Hon. Just breathe, okay? Here, with me. Try to breathe in.” He sucked in a breath as Eren tried to, watching as he shakily inhaled. “And let it out.” They both did so, Lathe trying to soothe Eren’s nerves and keep him breathing. *Just don't stop breathing on us... that's your job, the rest will follow.*

Eren struggled to keep up with Lathe as he focused on breathing. “W-Where’s... Where’s... L-Levi?” He asked, starting to hiccup and wince everytime he hiccuped. *Fuck that hurts...* He whimpered hearing a door slam open, so unsure of where in the house it came from. *Who’s here?
His eyes were full of tears, which quickly ran down his cheeks. I’m scared…

Levi didn't even bother to kick off his boots, running over to Eren’s side. “How's he doing?” He moved a hand to his arm, the other brushing away his hair, on Eren’s side opposite Lathe. You don't look so good...

Eren’s eyes widened as he looked up to Levi. “I’m… I’m…. I’m sc-scared…” His words were barely audible, his eyes starting to close as he got even dizzier. My head hurts… I can’t feel my toes… Not good. “T-toes…” He hiccuped weakly, wincing as his whole body jumped. It hurts...

Levi was at a loss for words, not knowing what to do or say....he's losing so much blood... but he's already got an IV in… I don't know what we could do… besides wait... “Eren, we’ll make sure you come out of this okay. You'll be fine. You really will be.” ...you'd better be... “...what was it with your toes?”

“Blood loss. Can you feel them?” Lathe moved to tug his shoes off, throwing them over towards the backdoor uncaring. “Try and wiggle them for me, Hon.” Come on, anything?

Eren struggled, barely able to move them at all. I can’t feel them… His vision started to blur, his head moving to the side as his eyes closed further. He heard another door open quickly and slam in the background. Huh? ........Who’s that? Eren couldn't keep his eyes open any longer, darkness overwhelming him.

Hannah came right over, her eyes widening at the bloody scene in front of her. She set the box with the vials and syringes a safe distance away from the blood, opening it and putting on gloves. Who knows what’s sterile anymore… “What’s his blood pressure?” This is bad, he’s bleeding too much… I don’t get it.... What’s wrong with him?

Lathe immediately dug into his bags getting a blood pressure clip. “I completely forgot, I have one of these now…” He clipped the monitor onto Eren’s index finger, waiting for the reading, paling as he saw the reading. “...165 over 105 mmHg. Stage two of hypertension. ...fuck…” Lathe felt fear set in, that his own son was dying on the table in front of him. Fuck… we need to fix you… “Get the serum ready, note how much is in the syringe at a time, okay? We need to take good notes on how much serum heals different wounds.” He soon was wielding a pair of silver scissors, cutting the wraps down the sides of his chest. “We’re going to do what we need to, Eren. Just hang on.” Lathe moved to reveal the first of his stitched on his stomach, pressing the rest of the towel and wraps over the rest of his chest. Come on, let's do this.

Hannah nodded and started to get one the syringes set for the serum, flicking the syringe to make
sure she had the right amount in it. “Okay, Levi, grab a sterile wipe and clean up his arm, Lathe, keep up the pressure, and do not take out the stitches, where did he get the injury and how deep is it?” Hannah was rattling everything off as she prepared three syringes, one for his stomach, one for his chest and one for his arm. *I really hope we can do this in time… His breathing is getting shallow.* She turned her head to Casper. “Call Scotty, get two transfusions, he’s not making platelets… Or he’s used too many of them…” *I don’t know which it is right now, but his blood is not thick enough to be considered normal.*

“On it.” Casper pulled out his phone, Scotty on speed dial. He held the phone to his ear, waiting tensely for him to answer. “Pick up pick up pick up… Scotty!” He cut Scotty off halfway through his greeting. “Look, can you drop whatever you're doing and run two blood transfusions over? Eren’s kinda in crap shape right now and we can't really get him to the hospital at this point. He **needs** blood, **please**.” *Get your ass the fuck over here!*

Scotty eyes widened, giving his clipboard to a nurse nearby, thinking for a few seconds. “Alright, I’m on it, I’ll be over in a few minutes.” He hung up and started to run down the hall, signing out two transfusion bags from the bank, going out to his car with his scrubs still on. *If Casper’s asking for two... It’s bad…*

Eren’s breathing grew shallower, his eyes closing even more as he completely lost consciousness. *I’m scared…*

“Eren! Eren come on, wake up!” Lathe snapped in front of his face, his face falling when Eren’s eyes wouldn't open. “He's out.” He looked back up to Hannah, trying to remain cool and collected. “Multiple stab wounds to the chest, about 21 from a buck’s antlers twice… they're not too deep, about a half inch to an inch.” Lathe swallowed, looking back up to her. “Whenever you're ready, I guess…” *Scotty won't be more than ten minutes.*

Hannah nodded, looking over to Levi and the panic on his face before grabbing the first needle. “We should wait for a blood transfusion…. But I think a nosebleed is less serious than what his body's doing now. 50 cc’s in his abdomen… Her hands didn’t shake at all as she got the needle just over Eren’s navel, putting it in and injecting it completely into his system before grabbing the next with her now bloodied glove, moving it to over his heart and administering it there. “Get a heart monitor on him, or someone better be reading his pulse.” *I need to see how this works or not! Why isn’t he steaming yet? I don’t understand! Don’t tell me we already lost him? That can't be possible….*

Lathe looked to the clip on his finger, reading the small screen. “His heart is beating, but it's very faint… keep going.” *We can’t let this get worse. Where the fuck is Scotty?!*
Levi moved out of Hannah’s way, trying not to panic. Eren’s barely still alive… no… he has to stay alive… he… he has to… Levi felt an arm around him, Lathe pulling him to the other side of the table, letting him play with his chocolate hair. ... I want you to be okay…

Hannah shook her head, picking up the last of the vials, inserting it into his arm, emptying it. “Make sure he’s still breathing…” His chest isn’t moving much… “Come on, Eren, you can do it, you can pull through…” She immediately started to set up another vial when Eren’s body didn’t start to steam. This isn’t good… Does he have any blood left in him? She gasped as the door slammed open, hearing hurried footsteps come towards them. Oh thank god!

“I’m here! Move!” Scotty moved Lathe aside for the moment, quickly switching the solution bag to a blood transfusion, the red liquid starting to flow into his veins. “How’s he holding up?”

“He’s not steaming yet, or healing visibly. I don’t…” Lathe stopped as he saw a tiny curl of steam come from the uncovered wound, the flesh struggling to weave together and patch itself up. “It’s working, once he gets that blood he should start healing a lot faster. Scotty, my bag, use the swabs and get a sample of his thin blood from the table. We need results from that for later.” We need to figure out what part of the blood is responsible for moving that serum around to the right places. Lathe watched as Casper readied a fourth shot, Hannah having set up her laptop and taking furious notes. “Note that barely ten seconds after the transfusion began, the effects of the serum began to take place.” Yeah, we need all of this on the record. “Start a timer while you’re at it, so we can see at what stages what happens.”

Hannah nodded, typing quickly. “Check the stitches, are they being forced out? Or is the skin growing over it?” I need to know, it tried to grow over the metal in his body. She looked up as she heard a sizzle come from Eren’s body. What was that?

Eren’s body was steaming from every injury possible now, the skin starting to grow and start to weave together. His heart rate started to pick up, and the blood that still continued to bleed got thicker with the new blood transfusion. I feel warm… Already he was starting to gain consciousness. I feel really warm… His eyes cracked open, looking around as the steam picked up as he finally gained consciousness, looking around the blurred mess that was in front of him. What… What happened…

“Eren?” Levi breathed a sigh of relief when Eren weakly tried to crane his neck to look at him, brushing his lips over his forehead. “Thank god, you’re okay. We’ve gotten you more serum, you’re having a transfusion, and you’re healing okay. You’ll be fine soon, promise. You will be.” You damn well better be.

Eren smiled softly before he turned to look back as he winced, a large cloud of steam taking over
the area over him. “F-fuck…” *It hurts…* He whimpered, his body forcing a row of stitches out of his body, and weaving right over the flesh. *It’s warm…*

Casper was watching Eren’s face. “Pain spikes are synonymous to plumes of steam…” He watched as Hannah instantly started to type, looking over to Scotty. “Go get the thermometer from your car, I know you still have it in there…” *We need to know how hot he is…*

Scotty nodded, running from the room. It took a minute before a car door slammed, running back in with the thermometer. He went to put on gloves, grabbing a towel to hide Eren’s front. “Sorry kid, we need to take your temperature.” He sent a look to Levi, watching as he started to murmur soothingly to Eren, trying to keep him calm. Scotty carefully tugged Eren’s jeans down and off, pulling his boxers down as well and inserting the thermometer, reading the small monitor’s screen as the number climbed. “...we’re at 127.7° Fahrenheit.” *Crap, it’s climbing…* “It’s climbing… after ten seconds, we’ve risen to 129.1° Fahrenheit.” *Crap….* “Are you getting times with all this?” He looked up, watching Hannah nod. He noticed Eren’s body beginning to tremor, Levi and Lathe both murmuring in his ears, trying to keep him calm. “You’re doing very well, Eren. Very well, just hang on, you’ll be fine soon…” He studied the stab wounds, fanning some of the steam away. “Five wounds completely healed, more on their way. Stitches are in the process of being forced out, a couple are free of their wounds.” He picked up a pair of tweezers, lifting the freed stitches and dropping them into a small envelope.

“A couple of wounds are confused, in a way- they’re trying to grow over the stitches, but then they decide to force them out.” Casper watched intently as webs of skin prodded at a stitch, figuring out what it was before moving to shove it from his skin. *That's so weird… and cool.*

Eren winced as his skin slowly started to heal together. *I hate this… I hate having to do this… I hate it so much…* He whimpered, tears spilling over his eyes quickly as he struggled to move. “O-out…” *I want you to take them out…*

Hannah watched, pulling her phone out and giving it to Casper. “Start recording this, we need video to see how it reacts to foreign bodies.” *This is interesting as it is…* She made sure to take even more notes, adding temperature and heart rate and blood pressure. His blood pressure was slowly returning to normal, along with his heart rate as he got more blood into his system.

“We need to let them do their thing this time around, Eren. I’m sorry, but we have to know how the serum acts like this. It won’t be much longer. Just hold on.” Levi reached for a softer towel to wipe the blood from Eren’s face as his nose bled, pinching his nose. “You’re doing great, Eren… you’re doing fine…” Levi kissed his forehead, cradling his head.

Eren laid still, hissing in pain as the wounds continued to heal, barely noticing when the blood bag
had been drained and he was given the second along with another IV. *My head feels really fuzzy… I feel really warm.* He was almost oblivious to the conversations going around him as data was collected off of him. *I’m a test subject…* **Fuck** … After hours of sitting and watching, taking notes and recording, Eren’s body finally stopped steaming. He lifted his head up from the pillow it was resting on, looking down to his almost flawless skin. *It’s funny that the scars get healed back into place too…* Well, I guess I’ll have them for a while…

Levi carefully wiped the last of the blood from his face, gently cleaning him of blood as things were washed and put away. “You did well, Eren… you’re fine now. I know it took forever, but it’s over. You were out for a lot of it.” *… should I tell him now… or…?* “…Jake and Tucker came home while you were pretty much asleep… Jake has a black eye… but he wouldn’t tell Lathe who hurt him…” **Poor kid… I don’t know who would punch a third-grader at all… let alone that hard. In the face.** Levi gently pet his hair, his voice a bit worried. “Lathe had to set his nose… that wasn’t fun…” *…and I don’t think I should tell you… but Tucker didn’t look the least bit worried about him…*

Eren’s eyes widened, his eyes filling with rage. “Where is he? I wanna see him… Is he okay? How badly was his nose broken?” *I wanna know who the fuck would hurt my precious Jake! They will pay.* He moved to sit up, struggling a bit as Levi tried to hold him down to the counter still. “Let go! I wanna see Jake.” *I need to know who the fuck did that!*

Levi held down Eren and didn’t budge, but he did look up to where Casper was flitting through everything Hannah had typed down, sounding a bit worried. “Casper, can you go upstairs and see if Jake can come down? They’ve been upstairs for a bit, and Eren wants to see Jake.” *Jake didn’t want to play minecraft… he tugged Lathe upstairs with him after his nose was set to hide… he’s really upset…* He watched him nod and jog to the stairs, turning back to Eren and gently pressing pecks all over his cheeks. *He’s coming, just relax, okay?”* **If he’s up for it, he’ll come downstairs. I think he’d like to see you and talk with you.**

A few minutes passed in quiet, the only sounds that of typing and the floor shifting under people’s weight. A heavy set of feet padded into the kitchen, and soon a smaller pair was set onto the floor, Jake walking up to the counter, wrapped up in a soft blanket. “E-Eren?” Jake whimpered as he sniffled, the pain in his nose still very noticeable. “Hurts….” He looked ready to cry as he saw some of the blood that had dried on his skin and the counter, not sure if he could reach for him. “A-Are you o-okay?” *You got hurt… you were steaming… did you get burned? Are you okay…?*

Eren smiled softly as he turned his head. “I’m okay Jake, you don’t need to worry about me, I’m all fixed up, Casper got me all better… Do you wanna talk about what happened?” He asked quietly, shifting to look at Jake fully. *What happened to my little brother? I wanna know…*

Jake looked away, though he seemed to relax a bit when Eren reached out to gently card a hand through his hair, moving forward and leaning into his touch. He opened his eyes though, looking to
the floor when he look Eren in the eyes, mumbling. “...but... I'll get in trouble...” *I don't want him to hurt me more... he'll know if I tell you... and then he'll make me hurt more...*

Eren shook his head. “No, why would you get in trouble? No one would be mad at you. We want you to be safe while you're at school... Do I need to come talk to your teachers? Maybe change your room?” Eren offered Jake the chance to speak up, his hand still going through the dirty blonde locks. *You'll be okay, I'll make sure of it.* He barely noticed that Lathe and Levi started to clean him off until they got wet sponges and started to sponge off the blood. *Fuck that’s wet... Oh... It's just a sponge, they're cleaning me off... Oh thank god, it's over with.*

Jake looked from Levi, to Lathe, then back to Eren, but he still shook his head, ducking his head down. “...n-no... it's okay... they're not in my class anyway... th-that wouldn't h-help... I'll be f-fine...” *He'll hurt me again if I tell... he'll know right away if I tell... I can't tell on him... he'll get mad...*

Eren’s brow furrowed when Jake spoke. *The person who’s hurting you, isn’t in your class?* “Are they older than you?” He asked quietly, finally sitting up when Levi let go of him and bringing Jake into his chest, holding him close. *I want you to feel safe here... I want you to know that we can help.*

Jake nodded after a moment, his arms wrapping around him immediately, burying his face in his chest but whimpering when he jostled his nose, turning his head. “H-He's older... a lot... I-I can't tell... he’ll know when I tell... and he’ll get m-mad and h-hurt me again...” *I don't want him to hurt me anymore... I can't tell...*

“No Jake, we’ll protect you, I promise, you’ll be okay, please tell me, I don’t want you to get hurt anymore...” Eren gently rubbed his back, trying to get him to calm down and to tell him. *I want you to be okay.* “I promise you won’t get hurt, you only have to tell me if you want...” *I know that might be better.*

Jake seemed to hesitate for a long moment, taking in a shaky breath and letting it out. “......I-it... it w-was...” He heard faint footsteps on the second floor approaching the stairs, clamming up and huddling closer to Eren, trying to hide. “N-No... h-hurt m-m-me...” *He's coming... he'll know... help me hide... keep me safe... please...*

Eren wrapped his arms around Jake even tighter now. “It’s okay Jake, you don’t need to be scared to tell me.” His words were whispered in Jake’s ear, holding him close as he slowly slipped off the counter, pulling Jake into his lap as he sat down on the floor with him. *I want you to be okay, please don’t be scared.*
Jake was shaking in his arms, looking over near the stairs with wide eyes. “...b-but... h-he’ll...” He'll come and hurt me... but... but Eren won't let him.... right? ....and Dad won't... and Levi won’t... and Dad’s friends won’t... right? ...can I tell him? Jake reached up, pulling Eren closer, whispering in his ear, terrified. “...T-Tucker d-did... h-he.... he was m-mad... th-that... that I'm o-okay w-with... y-you and your f-friends...” He doesn't like you... and he doesn't like that I like you... “He got m-mad...” He curled up as he heard footsteps approaching, clinging to Eren, his eyes full of terror. “Don't let him hurt m-me... I'll be good.... I promise...”

Eren’s eyes instantly hardened as he pulled Jake even closer. ....What? It was Tucker? That shit’s dead! He looked over to Tucker as he came down the stairs towards where everyone was congregated, glare directed at him as his rage boiled. “Dad... Get that ungrateful son of a bitch out of this fucking house. I don’t give a shit where the fuck you take him, but get him out. I don’t wanna see him ever again.” Eren’s words were sharp and icy with unchecked anger. I want to beat your face in, but I can’t do that right now... I wanna hold Jake, keep him safe.

What? Wait... Lathe looked to where Tucker was, seeing him pale as Eren cradled Jake close, his eyes full of anger. “Are you telling me Tucker did that?” He pointed to Jake, and his eyes grew furious as Eren nodded, moving and snapping the back of Tucker’s jacket as he tried to flee. “No you fucking don’t.” Lathe grabbed hold of his arms, dragging him into the living room as he struggled, trying to get free to no avail. “You're seriously fucking dumb if you think I'm going to let this of all things slide.” Lathe pushed Tucker onto the couch, and the boy immediately found himself flanked on all sides by six adults and two dogs, all of them furious and staring him down. Lathe crossed his arms, watching Tucker shrink as he was surrounded. “...you punched a eight-year-old in the face and broke his nose because he isn't homophobic. You're thirteen. You're not exactly some three-year-old who doesn't know what they're doing is clearly wrong. You live in the same house as the county Police Commissioner. How stupid can you be?” He shook his head, looking away. “You really are an ungrateful son of a bitch. You've bounced from foster home to foster home because you've been an ungrateful son of a bitch and I decided to take you in because I thought maybe you needed a better environment. I've tried everything in the book to make this work and you seem hell-bent on destroying our family just because you're a fucking bigot. I can't fucking believe it.” He looked to Tucker again, expectant. “Well? You got anything to say in your defence? I'd love to hear it.” Lathes tone was cold, glaring at him. What the hell are you going to say now?

Tucker was completely pale, struggling to swallow the large lump in his throat. What? I thought I beat him enough to keep him quiet! “I... I...” He trailed off, looking down in shame. What are they going to do?

Lathe shook his head, biting the inside of his cheek, looking away, thinking. “I need to call the foster agency about this. They need to know exactly what's been happening. But the real question...” He looked back to him, studying him. “...is what the hell we’re going to do about this.” He tapped his foot, his eyes narrowing. “While on one hand, you've been one motherfucker of a houseguest.... I don't think I want anyone else to have to deal with your bullshit. I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy.” You're fucking terrible. “For right now, you're going to sit right
there and just stay put. I need to find the number for the foster agency and we’re going to call them
together, okay?” You don't get to run away from this.

“O-Okay…” Tucker’s words were shaky, bring his knees up to his chest. Why the fuck did I do
that? I screwed myself over… Fuck..

Lathe came back with a business card, his cell phone in one hand, dialling the number and setting it
on the coffee table on speaker. He sat on the couch near Tucker, Levi and Eren sitting as well,
though the others filtered back into the kitchen to pack up and go over notes, still listening. Lathe
waited for someone on the other end to pick up, pressing a button to redirect the call when it came
through, waiting as they were put on hold for a few minutes. He looked up as he noticed Tucker
shaking in his seat, quirking an eyebrow. “Oh, so now it matters? I guess you never expected to
face any sort of repercussion.” He shook his head. “They need to know this in case someone comes
around who wants to adopt you. This isn't getting brushed under the carpet.” You did this to
yourself. “Your chances were already low enough, because you're so old. But now? ... why did
you think it was a good idea?” You're a fucking idiot.

..... I'm never gonna be adopted, am I? Tucker felt the tears rush to his eyes, quickly brushing
them away, putting his head down. “I-I… I let my anger get the best of me…” I’ll be stuck here...
With people that hate me… Fuck … What have I done?

Lathe sighed, reaching over and pressing a soft blue cloth into his hand. “...I'm sorry about that.”
Fuck, I always go soft when tears get involved. “-But you need to understand that what you do now
is going to stay with you. You're getting older- you just started high school. You need to own up to
what you do. And you need to learn to control your temper. Quiet disdain is one thing, but abuse is
another. I don't know how much we can trust you now.” Not much for a while, at least. “...I hope
you know this means you're not going to have the same freedom you did for a while now.” We
can't pretend everything's fine, even if you truly apologise.

Tucker just slowly nodded, taking the blue cloth from Lathe’s hands and gently holding it to his
face. I just sealed the deal to my own loneliness… And all it took was one flare up… Now I know
why Mom gave me up… The only words she told the nurse was that she didn’t want a monster like
my father… He sniffled, feeling a sinking feeling in his chest, knowing that he’d probably be
forever alone in his room for the rest of his stay here. I’ll be there… And allowed nowhere else.

Lathe gave him a weary, sympathetic look as he tried to get his tears under control, turning back to
the phone when it picked up.

And that was it. I talked to the people at the foster agency with Tucker sniffling and looking scared
the entire time. He looked terrified when they asked if we wanted them to put him somewhere else-
I said no, of course. We still want to try and help him. But I don't think he wants to have to start over again… but he's still going to have to work to earn back any trust. Lathe reached over and ended the call, looking back to Tucker. “We need new rules for the time being. I think it’s obvious that you're going to be grounded for a while. We’ll say the next four weeks.” He held up a hand when Tucker looked ready to weakly protest, speaking. “We can make it three if you're well-behaved. But while you're up there, you can't have your phone, your laptop, anything. If you need your laptop to do homework, you can come downstairs and work in the kitchen. And unless I specifically say otherwise, your new curfew is nine o’clock. Absolutely no later than that, or there'll be trouble.” He watched Tucker nod, standing. “Okay. Fork over your technology, and head upstairs. We’ll call you down for dinner. We do still expect you to be able to eat at the table. You need to learn to at least be civil, okay?” He rested a hand on Tucker’s shoulder when he stood, trying to calm him when he flinched. “I'm not about to hurt you, Tucker. But you need to learn from this.” *This is your life in jeopardy if we don't do anything about it.*

Tucker simply nodded quietly and averted his gaze from Lathe’s eyes, slowly backing away before going off to get his electronics and all his cords and bring them downstairs, not looking anyone in the eye anymore, and he especially stayed away from Eren and Jake. *I fucked up…. I did… I'm not getting adopted am I?*

Lathe got out a basket for his things, setting it on a side table in the kitchen for Tucker’s stuff. He caught his arm for a moment, turning him, his voice soft. “I really am sorry about what I said, about you not getting adopted… but either way, for while you're here, you're stuck with us as a family. I hope we can make it work. We don't all hate you. We might be mad, but we don't hate you. ...this can work if you let it.” *Give it a shot, okay?* Lathe let him go, curling the wires up neatly. “Dinner won't be long, okay?” *We still need to feed you. I never did like the idea of making someone skip dinner… I hated that as a kid… it wasn't fun. That's just mean.*

“Y-You’re p-probably right though…” He murmured before he nodded and slinked off with his tail between his legs to go upstairs. *I guess I have a long time to think about how I’m a Monster just like my father… No one wants to adopt a monster, Lathe’s right…* He looked to his door, swallowing thickly as he slowly opened his door, closing it behind him and going to sit at his desk and stare at his homework he was still doing. *I don’t know what I’m doing anymore… I don’t know…*

Lathe sighed as Tucker scurried away, turning back to the mess of their kitchen. “...oh my…” He saw the things still strewn over the counter, including missed drops of dry blood. “Can someone clean that up, please? I need to start cooking dinner...” *I forgot about that... “...Uhm...”* He looked to Scotty and Casper, Hannah behind them as they hovered over the laptop. “...you all can stay if you want...” *...I guess you can...*

“Can I bring a horde of people and puppies over?” Hannah instantly piped up as she looked at the counter, moving to clean up all that she had brought. *The others can clean up the blood. Yeah, no, I'm good.*
Lathe chuckled quietly, looking to her. “Of course you can. Go ahead.” He turned back to the fridge, counting eggs and setting them out, going to fetch flour. He waited for the counter to be well cleaned before he set up, ignoring everything around him as he worked. He had a pile of ravioli sheets stamped out soon enough, and went to work on the filling and sauce. He was mindless as he worked, his thoughts everywhere and nowhere. *...what are we going to do...*

Hannah had gone home and picked up Sharon, their three dogs and the litter of puppies. The puppies were contained in a small corral, with Jake in the middle with Eren, letting them crawl all over their legs and feet. Levi was helping to set the table with Ieva as she got Sammie ready to eat.

Tucker was still quietly set in his room, struggling over his homework, but now having no way of asking for help. *I can’t ask Eren…. He’ll kill me if I even talk to him…* He picked his head up a bit as he heard the noise increase downstairs, the sinking feeling in his chest returning. *God... I hate being alone... And I’ve sentenced myself to a life of it...*

Lathe drained the water from the ravioli, turning off the heat on the stove. “I’m going to go get Tucker for dinner, see how he’s holding up.” *He didn’t look too good...* Lathe went upstairs, padding to his room. He gently knocked on the door, opening the door a crack. “Tucker? Dinner’s ready. You doing okay?” He sounded a bit concerned, looking and seeing Tucker sitting with barely started homework, his pencil hovering over the page but never moving to make a mark. “...everything alright?” He padded up behind him as Tucker glanced over his shoulder, looking over the worksheet. “Algebra I?” He looked over the sheet, seeing only three questions were answered, a few others set up, but left unsolved. “...how’s your work going?” *Doesn't look like it's going too well.*

“O-Okay… I guess, I’ll come down w-when I finish....” *I can do this on my own...* He shifted a bit away from Lathe, keeping his head down, returning his focus to the paper. *I hate math... I’m not good at it...*

Lathe’s brow furrowed, letting his hand fall from his shoulder. “Please, Tucker, dinner’s still hot. We’d like you to eat with us. You can come back to this after. ...and if you need help with it, I used to teach nearly everything. You can ask.” *Come on, please? “There are puppies downstairs.” You can play with the puppies for a bit if you want.*

Tucker paused for a moment, thinking about it. *Puppies... Okay, I can come downstairs for puppies...* He slowly put the pencil down and stood up. *Okay...*

Lathe smiled faintly, ushering him downstairs. “Are you hungry at all?” He watched him hesitate, shaking his head after a moment. “...puppies?” A small nod. Lathe chuckled, bringing him into the
living room. He nudged Tucker to the floor, whistling into the house. There was the jingling of
tags, a dozen dogs and puppies swarming them in a minute. Lathe stepped out of the mess, though
Tucker got the brunt of it, dogs and puppies clambering over him, licking his face. So much pup.

Tucker’s eyes widened to the size of dinner plates as he got trampled by all the dogs. “Holy shit!” I
was not expecting a stampede! He could barely stay sitting as all the dogs licked all over him the
puppies climbing all over him and Krampus trying to steal his shirt… He looked up to see Lathe
had gone to sit with everyone at the dinner table. I’m alone again… well… I guess I’ll go back
upstairs after a few minutes.

Lathe sat down at the table, smiling to everyone. He glanced up as he heard the puppies whine in
the other room, seeing Tucker standing and ambling back to the stairs with his head down, Nene
trailing after him and yapping, wanting her pillow back. “Tucker, come have dinner Hon.” Lathe
called to him, standing to retrieve him. There's no spot on the table that isn't next to or in front of
someone gay, but you're going to sit next to me and deal. ...please.

Tucker looked over to the table shaking his head. “I’m gonna go back upstairs… I have a lot of
homework.” Homework that I can’t do for classes that I’m probably already failing… He turned
his back to them, moving to continue up the stairs before he felt a hand on his wrist pulling him
back, turning to see Lathe holding onto him. “Huh? W-What are you doing?”

Lathe tugged him along to the table, setting him in the seat next to his own place. “You're going to
sit at the table and eat dinner and be civil.” Lathe didn't give him time to object, and soon had a hot
bowl of ravioli in front of him, pushing his chair in. “Okay?” He handed him a fork, sitting next to
him. Deal, and eat your tasty food.

Tucker looked up around the table to see two new faces who he hadn’t seen before. Who are those
two? I don’t know who they are… He looked between them to the small child in the high chair,
watching them both fussing over the child as he struggled to eat with a small spoon. Wait… Are
those two… Fuck, they didn’t even know me but probably hate me now… He looked away from
them to see Eren glaring at him, which caused him to put his head down in shame and barely pick
at his food. I’m not hungry…

“Eren, be nice.” Or at least civil. Lathe gave him a look that left no room for discussion, though he
could tell Eren wanted to argue. If we're just openly hostile, nothing will get fixed. Lathe gently
nudged Tucker, getting him to glance up a bit, his voice quiet. “If you finish everything, you can
have ice cream while we work on your math.” I know you probably need help with it. It's the first
days- you're going to need help for a bit until you get your feet under you.

Tucker looked at his eyes for a moment, nodding before returning to his pickings. I’m not really
hungry... I don’t feel that great anyways… “I-I… I can do it on my own…” He murmured quietly
in between bites. *I don’t need help… I can do it, I’m older… You said so yourself…*

Lathe nodded. “Okay, if you think you can. Just have me check it when you’re done, okay? And if it’s not done by eight, I’m coming to help you. You need to get it done and still get a good night’s sleep.” *We’re going to do this right. If you don’t understand the basic stuff, god help you when it comes to the more complicated things later on.*

Tucker nodded and slowly finished the bowl he was given, standing quietly and going to put it in the sink. *I can do it…. Maybe …* He walked off, leaving the rest of the table in their cheerful banter. *I can do it…*

Lathe let him go, chatting with the rest of the people at the table happily, getting to hold Maverick and chuckling as he tugged at his tie. *You’re growing up… and you’re so goddamn adorable…*
Two weeks until he had to leave.

Levi pondered the idea, Eren wrapped up in his arms early on a Tuesday morning, playing with his brunette locks. ...you thought I'd cheated... well, Armin told you, and you wouldn't think he'd lie, but still… ...I just… I wanna prove it to you. Prove that I'm in this for the long haul, but... I can't just propose... people don't just propose, I don't have a ring or ideas, and I don't want to leave you as a fiancée... I... what would work, then... that I'd be around for a long time...? A long while passed as he thought, content just to lay with Eren’s warm form as a sort of blanket, his scent all over the sheets. ......we had talked about a family... having one of our own... but we'd have to adopt... ........if I signed adoption papers, we'd be stuck with each other for years ... ...that's it. But... I wouldn't be around for the kid when they're that little......they might not even remember much... or... Eren wouldn't be by himself, what am I thinking? There’s Lathe and Ieva, duh... oh my god, they'd be grandparents. Holy fuck... that's a weird thing to think about... but... it's a kind of commitment Eren wants us to have... and the kid won't exactly be growing up with just one person raising it... well, them. ...maybe I should do that.... Levi was jarred from his thoughts when Eren shifted on top of him, nuzzling further into his chest with a tired grumble about being hungry. Levi chuckled, shifting to roll them over, kissing his cheeks and going to stand and dress. “I'll make you breakfast, don't worry.” That I certainly can do. ...and I can do the rest later today.

Eren opened his eyes a crack, rolling over to watch Levi get dressed. “Hmm... Come back here.... I want you...” He grumbled, reaching an arm out to try and lazily grab him even though he was feet away. Fuck, you were warm...

Levi smirked, turning back to him. “I'm just that impossible to resist, aren't I?” Levi ambled back over to the bed, quirking an eyebrow when Eren dragged him back by a belt loop and pulled him back onto the bed, soon with Eren back on top of him. “...why do you do this. I was going to make you food. Are you not hungry?” Levi’s voice was lightly joking, gently poking Eren’s stomach. “I guess I can just let you starve if you don't want me to make pancakes.” Fine by me. I just won't share.

“Hmm... As tempting as that is... Dad will make me breakfast... But I wanna eat some sausage first.” He smiled, his eyes still having a slightly tired look in them as he reached to unzip Levi’s pants, a grin forming on his lips as he looked up to him. I haven’t given you a morning blow in a while.

“Oh really?” Levi sounded slightly breathless, still a bit playful even as Eren moved to straddle him. “What kind? Beef, turkey...?” Any light joke died in his throat when Eren pecked down his stomach to where his slowly hardening length hid, his hands running over Eren’s shoulders, gently threading through his hair.
Eren smirked, leaning into Levi’s touch. “I think you know what kind…” He bit his lip seductively, crawling down as he pulled at Levi’s shorts, looking down at the bulge in his boxers. “It’s really hard to get… Maybe you could help?” He asked seductively, his fingers trailing down his clothed member. *I want you squirming…*

Levi watched him as he teased his hard clothed length, shivering as his fingers ghosted over the fabric. *Damn tease.* “…hm? Help you get rid of this?” He ran a finger along the hem of the boxers, watching Eren nod faintly. “Hm, maybe…” He hooked two fingers in the elastic, slowly pulling them down over his hips. He stopped for a moment when Eren could see the coarse black hair around his base, pretending to think. “Then again, are you sure you wouldn't rather have something else…?” Levi chuckled faintly as Eren swatted at his hand, tugging the grey boxers past his hips, his length free. He watched with blown eyes as Eren’s lips hovered over his length, anxious and already leaking.

Eren licked his lips, his eyes full of lust as he leaned down, licking a stripe across the head of Levi’s thick prick. *I want it… It’s so big…* He slowly eased his jaw open to help him get more into his mouth. Eren had to stop when he was barely halfway down his length, choking a bit on him before pulling back to breath. *I can’t deepthroat him without gagging…* fuck ...

Levi whimpered quietly when Eren started to slip down his length, though his look turned to one of worry when Eren choked, making a small sound as he came off of him. He reached down to brush at his hair, his voice quiet. “Don't choke yourself on me…” *I won’t make you do that.*

Eren looked up to him with hungry eyes before nodding, moving his head down. His lips slipped around Levi’s length, getting as far down as he could and sucking him hard, his ass moving up in the air, getting into a better position to try and bob his head. Eren’s right hand came to stroke whatever he couldn’t reach, his eyes going to focus on Levi’s to see how he was doing. *God, I love that expression on his face…*

Levi’s lips fell open in a silent moan, his hands roaming Eren’s shoulders, not wanting to grip his hair and scare him. “Ngh… f-feels good…” Levi tried not to buck up into Eren’s warm mouth, his heels digging into the bed. *God, it feels really good…*

Eren shivered as Levi’s hands ran over his shoulders. *Fuck… His hands… I want them all over me…* He picked his head up after a few minutes, coming off with Levi’s length with a lewd pop, a line of saliva connecting them for a moment. Eren’s hand slowly stroking him and spreading the slickness around him. His eyes were hazy as he looked up to Levi’s face to see his reaction. *He looks so hot… My god…* He tilted his head, licking a stripe up Levi’s engorged length, his ass wiggling in the air.
Levi’s eyes darkened as he saw Eren lewdly pick a strip up his hard length, feeling precum drop down his member. *Fuck… I want it… “Damn tease… c’mer.”* Levi moved a hand under Eren’s chin, gently pulling him up from his length. He moved to roll them over, his hands wandering Eren’s still-clothed chest, dipping down to suck marks over his neck, still littered with bruises, both new and fading. “…I want you…” His hands ghosted south, brushing over the hem of his boxers, his words murmurs. “...I really want you…”

Eren whimpered as he was flipped over, not expecting it at all. He groaned when Levi’s mouth ran over his soft skin, his hands down to his soft boxers. *Fuck, his hands… They feel so good… “Hmmm…. I want it too…” I really want it… Especially since I know you’re mine…* He thrusted his hips up into Levi’s hands as he was touched. *I want it…*

Levi chuckled against his skin, his fingers hooking in the waistband of his boxers. He slowly slipped them down his legs, his head moving to the other side of his neck as he grasped Eren’s length, slowly pumping him. *I want you feeling really good… and we can take all the time we want. “…mm… feeling good up there?” I wanna hear exactly how you feel… “Haa… Fuck Levi… Don’t stop, please don’t tease me… I want you to have me, I want you to make me yours.” I wanna be for certain that I’m yours…* He whined as Levi thumbed over a rather sensitive spot on his length, his body leaning into the pleasure. *I want…*

Levi smirked, kissing up his neck. “I’d love to.” Levi sat back on his haunches for a moment, going to tug his shirt up and off, tossing it off the bed without much care. He lips immediately reclaimed Eren’s chest, making their way south. He pecked Eren’s hip, though he purposely avoided Eren’s throbbing organ. He instead moved even lower, soon faced with Eren’s entrance. His hands roamed Eren’s legs and sides, moving to lap at the ring of muscle, teasing it with the tip of his tongue. *I haven’t done this to you in forever…*

Eren let out a high pitched gasp, his whole body shaking as Levi continued to assault him with his tongue, his back arching off the mattress. *Oh my god! “Le-Levi!”* He shouted as he grabbed at the sheets under him. *Oh my god… It feels so good! Eren’s toes were curled, his heels digging into the mattress, feeling Levi’s large hands cup his asscheeks. It feels so good …. The door wasn’t locked- the both of them had forgotten to lock it the night before, collapsing in a tangle of limbs. It was silent as someone opened it a tiny crack, dark brown hair for once not obscuring a wide green eye. It watched, conflicted and drawn in by the scene in front of it, the sounds coming from the room making him feel strange, trying to lure him in. He couldn't help but watch them for a solid five minutes, a throb in his jeans snapping him from his trance. He quietly shut the door again, quickly scurrying to his room and locking the door behind him, collapsing onto his bed, so unsure of what to make of the sounds echoing in his head and how they made his nether ache. …b-but… but I’m not… I’m not gay… …but… I-if I am… I couldn’t ever tell them, I’d
look like such a fucking asshole ... but... I don't.... I don't know... ...it could make sense... I mean... I've been tripping over myself every time I'm in the same room as Devon... but... I mean... am I... am I really...? Tucker took in a shaky breath, his hands moving to take care of himself, and when a whimper caught in his throat, he was thinking of a head of shaggy blonde hair.

Levi was wearing a shit eating grin as he gazed up to Eren, the tip of his tongue prodding at his muscled rim. I love watching you when you're like this... Levi decided to have mercy, kissing up to his length, licking up the underside of it and gently sucking his tip for a moment, kissing the spot where precum dribbled out. “...God, that's hot...” Levi reached to the nightstand, grabbing a small tube of lube. I don't want this to hurt much. Levi poured some over his fingers, rubbing the slickness over his digits. His hand moved to trace his pucker, nipping at his neck as one pushed past his entrance, feeling up the soft flesh. You deserve to feel amazing...

Eren’s hands had a white knuckled grip on the sheets below him as Levi slipped a finger inside of him. Oh fuck... Yes! Eren let Levi move him around in a hazy blur, his shouts and moans filling the room for the next hour as they made sweet love to each other. Eren collapsed under him exhausted, his eyes almost immediately closing, his body aching from the pure bliss. That felt amazing ...

Levi only rolled off of him when Eren’s neck was thoroughly marked up, feeling possessive of him. Mine. He stretched his arms over his head, tucking Eren back in before moving to actually get dressed this time, padding downstairs and meandering over to the kitchen, not much caring that a mark or two were probably visible on his neck. He gave Lathe an odd look, the older man at the table with a mug of coffee, an eyebrow quirked at him.

“Just so you know, you two were loud as all hell. It's a wonder I don't just soundproof your rooms.” Lathe chuckled as Levi turned scarlet, sipping from his mug. “Finally come down for breakfast?”

“Yeah, m’starving. Eren’s passed out, though, but he'll be hungry when he gets his ass up.”

“Figures. Jake and Sammie are around in the living room, but they just had a snack, really. Could do with proper breakfast. Haven't seen Tucker yet, though. Probably upstairs having a heart attack.” He watched Levi laugh, moving to open a drawer at the table, pulling out a thick cookbook. “Think pancakes would make a good peace offering?”

“If not, sucks for him.” Levi smirked as Lathe laughed, tossing his apron at him. “C’mon, old man, you’d better help.” It wasn’t an hour before the kids were herded to the table, Tucker fetched and Eren woken from his post-sex nap, munching on pancakes with chocolate melting on top while Lathe tried to keep up with demand, cooking the rest of the batter. Levi helped with dishes when the kids scampered off, full, drying the rest of the plates. “Alright, I'll finish this and then I've got a
few errands to run.” Levi stowed the rest back in the cupboard, and didn't even think about it when he pecked Lathe’s cheek before running off upstairs. The action only occurred to him when he fished a different pair of shoes from the closet, thinking. ...I don’t really do that, do I. ...huh. Well, he can deal. He’s Dad. I'm sure I just activated hovering, overbearing and caring Dad Mode or something. Levi soon traipsed back downstairs, and pretended to roll his eyes when Lathe gave him a hug goodbye and kissed the top of his head. Yep, we're cool. It was a short drive to the police station, looking around a bit warily when he came in, looking to the officer at the front desk. “Uhm, is there any way I can talk to Commissioner Quo?”

The man at the front desk looked up with a raised eyebrow. “Do you have an appointment, son?” Who the hell are you…?

Levi sighed, reaching for his back pocket. I have to fight to talk to her, I guess. He pulled out the small wallet that held his military ID, showing it to the officer. “Sergeant Ackerman. And no, I don't. But can you please tell her I'm here to talk to her?”

The man raised his eyebrow even more as he picked up the card, reading it quickly. “And just what do you need to speak with her about, Sergeant?” Why are you here? On what business?

Levi sighed, taking back the card when it was handed back. “Look, I'm her son. Can you please just let me talk to her? Call her, tell her I'm here. We need to talk.” It's important.

The man looked at him once again with a confused expression before picking up his phone and dialing a few numbers, waiting for her to pick up. “Hi, it’s the front desk… There’s Sergeant Ackerman who wishes to speak with you… And he claims he’s your son…” He waited for a moment before nodding. “Of course, I’ll send him do-... Oh, okay I’ll tell him, thanks.” He hung up, looking over to Levi. “Well, Sergeant, it appears as though the commissioner is coming to greet you, go sit and wait in the lobby.”

Levi nodded, putting his smaller wallet away and going to wait, studying the lobby of the station. It was only a few minutes before Ieva came out for him, standing and giving her a faint smile. “Hey Mom… I uh, I need to talk to you about stuff…” He shifted a bit awkwardly, glancing to the person at the front desk who was trying not to make their eavesdropping obvious, “...but not in the lobby of the station, please...

Ieva was surprised to actually see Levi at the station when she came into the lobby, smiling as he smiled at her. “Of course, you can come to my office.” She waved for him to follow. “Sean, get back to work.” Her words were harsh as the man at the desk straightened immediately and went back to whatever he was doing before. She sighed shaking her head and motioning for Levi to follow her through the throng of offices and people, finally getting to her quieter office and ushering him to sit. “So… What brings you here?” Didn’t know that you were coming...
Levi rubbed the back of his neck, looking at his feet as he spoke. “Uhm, well… Eren and I had talked a lot about… about having a family, and I’d, uhm, I’d like to go through with it before I leave with adoption paperwork…” Eren wants that commitment… and I’d most likely be home when they really start to get big and remember stuff… I’d want to be home for that… for when they start school and stuff…

Ieva put her pen she had picked up down, and looked up to Levi with a bit of shock. “So is this like a mock-engagement?” I know you haven’t proposed yet, and I need to ask, since Lathe said that you said you would marry Eren eventually earlier this year…

Levi looked to his hands, his cheeks burning. “…I asked him to wait for me… because I just… I don’t have a ring or any damn idea how to propose… and … I know it wouldn’t help much with the pain… but, if I didn't come back… I’d rather I just be his boyfriend, and not leave a fiancée…”

Levi looked up as Ieva moved, stunned as she smacked him hard across the face, sputtering, holding a hand to his stinging cheek. “W-What was that for?! What the fuck did I do?

Ieva’s eyes were burning with tears she refused to let fall. “Don’t you dare! Don’t you dare say something like that! Like you won’t come back! Don’t you fucking dare! You are coming back or so help me god! You need to have faith that you’re going to come back!” I don’t want to think about what Eren would do if you didn’t come back home… I don’t wanna imagine it…

Levi looked to the floor, his voice quiet. “I want to come back. I'm going to fight tooth and nail to come home after my tour…. but…” There's a chance I'll die. And that scares me. “…I just want to give Eren what I can… if I sign the papers, we'll be stuck with each other for years and years. ...and he's dying for some sort of commitment. ...and this is the commitment I can give him right now…”

Ieva nodded. “If you’re going to try for parenting your own children… like I’ve heard Eren’s been talking with Hannah about, you only need to sign joint custody papers.” Less than the adoption process… That’s for sure… still not sure how Lathe flew us through the system, everything changed after Eren got adopted… So maybe they think we’ve gone through all the training videos… And the classes… And all the other paperwork… She smiled softly looking at Levi. “We can go down to the courthouse and do that now if you want, and I can call Eren to meet us there.” She started to pull out her phone from her pocket.

Levi stopped her, reaching out when she took out her phone. “Nonono wait-” He shrunk back when she looked at him in surprise, looking away again. “It's supposed to be a surprise.” I wanna go home and tell him it's done, that he has me for years and years...
“You do realize he’s gotta sign it… Right? And someone needs to notarize… Oh fuck it, let’s just get
the papers and I can notarize it at the house.” I don’t give a damn anymore, I’m not doing
anything but paperwork anyways… She got up, motioning him to follow her to the door and down
the hallway the other way, towards large double doors. Let’s get what we can done.

Levi nodded, following her down the hall. I need to do this for Eren… and having a family with
him… that’d be wonderful. It took a few hours for them to get what paperwork they could done,
Levi signing the papers where he needed to. All that was left was for Eren to sign them, and Levi
found himself overbearingly nervous. …I hope I’m doing the right thing… Levi found himself
knocking on the door to the art studio, traipsing inside where Eren was painting. “Hey, Eren? Can
we talk?” Please?

Eren held up one finger as he focused on adding a detail to the picture of Charlie in all his glory.
“One minute…” He murmured and finished up the small piece he was working on before he put
the paintbrush down along with his paints and turned on his stool. “If it’s about this morning… I
know I was really loud… So I’m sorry if Dad embarrassed you…” I can only imagine what he
said… let alone if Tucker said anything…

Levi nervously chuckled, shaking his head. “No, that’s fine, Dad bugged me only a little before we
moved on to breakfast… but Uhm, I actually wanted to talk about us having a… a family.” Levi sat
down on a stool next to Eren, not caring Eren’s hands still had wet paint on them as he reached out
to take hold of them. He gently ran his thumbs over the back of them, his voice tentative. “…I went
down to the police station today. I… I signed joint custody papers. If you sign them too, and then
we donate our sperm… we’ll be stuck with each other for all that time. We’d have a kid. …and I
really want that. …is that okay?” Levi looked up to him, nervous. …is it okay that I just went and
did all that?

Eren’s eyes were full of disbelief as their eyes met, blinking to try and comprehend just what
exactly was going on. Oh my god… Did he just… Did he… Oh my god! His eyes almost instantly
had tears in them as he jumped, pulling Levi down to the floor with his arms wrapped around him
and kissing him deeply, without a care in the world. You’ll be mine …

Levi was stunned as Eren shoved him to the floor, though he couldn't help but return his
enthusiasm as a hot tongue forced its way into his mouth. They were a heap of limbs on the floor
tangling, curling the other closer. Levi forced himself to break the kiss before they could get too
carried away, sure that with enough time Eren would get ideas and roughly fuck him into the floor
with the door wide open. “Mom’s got the papers… she can notarized it, you just need to sign
them… you're… you're really okay with this?” …really? As in… you're happy to keep me for 21
years? … Me ?!

Eren’s eyes widened at his statement. “Why wouldn’t I be? Levi, this is amazing, do you realize
what this means to me?” He asked, the shorter man, who he was now straddling, his hands holding
onto Levi’s shirt, a huge smile on his face. “It means that I know you’ll be mine… For a long time…” We don’t have to be married… Even if this is all you want from me, a family, and not to get married… I can deal with that…

Levi stared as Eren beamed, wanting so much to commit the image to memory. He reached up a hand, gently cradling Eren’s cheek, his voice soft. “...I’ve never seen you look so happy … I… I want to keep you…” Levi smiled softly, his eyes shining as Eren reached up to hold his hand in place over his cheek. “...we get to keep each other for a long, long time… I love that.” Levi reached his other hand up, gently bringing Eren down for a deep kiss, this one much slower as their tongues tangled languidly, heat smoldering between them. He breathed against his lips before diving back in. “I love you so much…” So much ...

Eren kept his arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders as he was pulled down. Little did they know they had an audience, a young and easily influenced one at that, but before anyone could realize it, the green-eyed teen left to go hide up in his room, the throbbing in his pants too great to ignore. Eren lifted his head up to breath, a huge smile on his face as he kissed Levi’s nose and cheeks, holding his jaw with both hands. “Levi… I love you… I wanna go sign those papers…” Please… Can I?

Levi smiled, blushing as Eren pecked all over his cheeks. “Okay, okay. I’ll let you.” He tugged him back down, though, when he shifted to move, murmuring in his ear. “And I hope you didn’t plan on walking much for the next couple of days…” You deserve everything I can give you. Everything you want.

Eren’s eyes narrowed. “Damn tease.” He muttered, shifting off of him anyways and dragging him to the kitchen where Ieva and Lathe stood with huge smiles on their faces. He had to take a deep breath to try and calm down as he picked up a pen. Oh my god… I can do it… I can really do it… He had tears forming in his eyes as he smiled, his bright teeth taking over his entire face.

Lathe and Ieva looked like the proudest parents ever when Eren signed the papers, tackling him and Levi with a hug before letting them run off, letting the occasional shouts from upstairs slide.
Chapter 69: Worrisome Findings

Levi and Erwin left last week. Eren’s been holding up kinda okay… but he misses him a lot already… it’s so obvious. Armin too. Eren’s back on the nausea and sleeping pills full-time now. He’s been really quiet, and he’s been riding Charlie a hell of a lot more now… oh yeah, Luna had her filly! Her official name is Fleet Feet, but we just call her Arya. She’s just adorable. Lathe went about baking cookies, his way of keeping sweets in the house. Sammie’s still around, so she just runs around the house and asks questions like it's her job. She's a big ball of energy, and it's all I can do to keep this house running and keep her entertained at the same time. She wanted to help bake cookies, so I let her press the button to turn on the oven, and right now she’s running around in an apron and a chef hat. Blake is trying to keep up with her, but he’s had to take a few breaks. She’s tired him out a bit. ...he’s getting kinda old. And Eren still needs a PTSD service dog… I need to call Moblit one of these days.

“Wha’s dat?”

Lathe looked to what Sammie was pointing at, tapping the instrument in his hand. “It's called a sieve. You put the flour through here and it makes it all nice and floofy because then the flour doesn't stick in little clumps.” He watched her nod, satisfied with that answer before returning to her circles around the kitchen, Blake trying to stop her and lick her. So she takes up a ton of time these days… and Jake is officially my son! He immediately said yes when I asked if he wanted us to adopt him, and everything was official the next day. And he tugs his new quilt everywhere with him, he loves that it shows the day on one side and the night on the other. He's been so happy… Tucker isn't grounded anymore, he got out of that on good behaviour three weeks in, so two days ago. But he still hides up in his room most of the day, doing homework. He's really been working at it; he should be doing well. I think they send report cards home soon. Lathe looked up as the phone loudly rang, setting down the sieve and wiping his hands off on his apron. He look to the wall phone, his brow furrowing. The school? Something up? Eh, probably an automated thing about progress reports or something. The first one is always the time to schedule a thing to meet their teachers. He leaned against the wall as he answered it, smiling faintly. “Y’ello?”

“Hi Lathe, it’s Mike… Do you have a couple minutes?”

Lathe’s eyes widened, straightening up a bit subconsciously. “Uh, yeah, I do. What’s wrong? Did something happen?” …did Tucker get himself in trouble?

“It’s about Tucker… So, I need to ask… You’re a teacher, so why is he flunking every class?”

Lathe’s eyes widened, gapng like a fish. “Y-You're joking.”
“I'm not, Lathe. He's failing every class he's taking.”

“H-He’s what?! How the hell...?! “I didn't have any idea he was doing poorly. He was always working on homework, and he never seemed to be really struggling... he never asked for help, even when I offered to, and I never had time to check the online grade book, I didn't think I needed to... is he... really? Every class?” What the actual fuck?!

“Not every class...The academic classes are the ones he's failing. He’s got an A in PE, and a B in the engineering elective... But everything else is either a D- or an F.”

...so he’s okay with PE, where you just need to move around and pay attention to the rules of the game... everything else except for Engineering is terrible... “...can you remind me what they do in that engineering class?”...hm....

“They go through the architecture of buildings and make models using balsa wood... Why?”

“...I'm going to look at his grades and papers the second he comes home... I don't think it’s that he’s not paying attention, and he's definitely trying at least, he spends hours at the kitchen table on homework every night... I think maybe he's just not being taught in the way that's most effective for him... a bunch of the stuff in engineering would be hands-on, and his grade in that class is a clear outlier... everything else, you really can only teach it visually. I'm going to talk to him when he comes home, but I think that’s it. Have you heard any teachers complain that he's not paying attention, any notes on his grade book entries or anything?”

The phone was silent for a moment. “No, not that I’ve heard of, let me pull up his grades again...” Another pause. “Yeah, German was the one class he doesn’t pay attention to... And there is another comment to stop disrupting class...”

German... “...I think he might have a bias about learning German already, he's heard Eren speak it in the house a bit... and he and Eren are barely civil, so... I'll make sure he stops disrupting class. ...those progress reports come home today, right?” I think they do... it's Friday.

“They do... Your kids should be home soon, the buses left a while ago.”

“Yeah, it'd be another ten minutes at most. I'll make the most of this weekend, get Tucker caught up as much as I can. I at least hope Jake is doing better than D’s. Then again, it's second grade. He should be fine.” He's a smart kid.
“Jake’s doing fine, though his teacher came to me when he came in with a black eye… And I had a bit of a talk with him, but he said the problem was resolved, did you know about that?”

Lathe hesitated for a minute. “Yes, I did. His nose had been broken. I had to set it… we figured out what the problem was, and everything is fixed at the moment. It's been dealt with appropriately.” I think things are going to more or less be alright.

“Alright, well, I’ll leave you to it then, and I think maybe you should come in and teach sometime, I’m still looking for substitutes… I liked when you worked…”

Lathe smiled, looking down as Sammie came up to him with Blake at her heels, clinging to his leg.

“Wan’ cookie!”

“They'll be done soon Honey, I need to talk to the principal for a bit still.” He sighed as she pouted, leading her over to the kitchen table, the cordless phone tucked against his shoulder. “I dunno if I have the time anymore, Mike. It was fun teaching, but now I've got a whole flock of kids to look after and I'm going to be getting more sometime… and I practically take care of every friend I ever made that still lives around here. Maybe I could sign up to tutor sometimes, but for right now, I've got too big a household to run to substitute.” Lathe got out a small spoon, picking up a small spoonful of cookie dough and handing it to Sammie. She studied it with wide eyes, taking a nibble before giggling. “And it's not helping that Sammie’s at the ‘question everything nonstop’ stage.” She's got more energy than me. And I live off coffee!

“Ah, kids, they grow up too quickly, I remember when Eren came in as a freshman… He was the second recorded person to be taken off school property on a stretcher…”

Lathe’s brow furrowed. “…who was the first?” … why should I remember this…?

“… I can’t tell if you’re joking or not… It was you, getting under a textbook avalanche, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree I guess.”

Lathe chuckled, shaking his head. “I can't believe I forgot about that; Olivia knocked that whole shelf over in the library on accident. Getting cut by that plant pot wasn't fun. I guess it doesn't-” Lathe looked up as a key turned in the lock of the front door, Jake coming in, followed by Tucker. “The two troublemakers have arrived. I'll talk to you later, Mike. Try not to stretch your teachers
too thin taking over classes.” Lathe hung up after a moment, taking Sammie’s cleaned-off spoon and dropping it in the sink. “Alright you two- Tucker, Jake.” He made sure he had their attention, petting Blake for a moment. “I'm going to finish up baking before I go over any grades, okay? It'll be a bit more than an hour.” *I need to focus on one thing at a time here.* Lathe gently nudged Sammie forward, and she beelined for Jake, clinging to his leg.

“Minecraf’!” *I wanna watch!*

Tucker watched Jake smile brightly, taking Sammie’s hand and leading her to the living room. *Still doesn’t warm up to me… always goes to Jake… doesn’t even bother with my existence…* He swallowed thickly as he felt another pang in his chest, guilt returning to him. *I'm screwed… Aren’t I? Lathe’ll make me sleep in the barn…* He sighed, putting his head down and going upstairs, slowly opening his door and going over to his bed and sitting down. *What if he thinks I’m hopeless and he calls the agency again? I’ll never get adopted… and at least I’m not in an orphanage here… I’ll be here until I’m kicked out when I’m 18… No one will adopt a thirteen year old… What am I thinking… No one will want a monster like me… Mom didn’t even want me… and now I’ve screwed myself over even worse.* He barely noticed the time that flew by as he stayed curled up to one of his pillows, quiet in self-loathing.

Lathe quietly knocked at Tucker’s door more than an hour later, opening the door, a small plate of cookies in hand. “Tucker? I brought you a snack. And we need to have a talk, Hon.” He shut the door quietly behind him, watching Tucker shy away from him, obviously scared. “You're not in trouble, and I'm not mad. It's gonna be fine. Here.” Lathe held out the plate, waiting until Tucker tentatively took it. Lathe pulled the chair over from his desk, sitting down across from him. “I got a call from your principal just before you came home. Mike told me about how your grades are.” Lathe tilted his head a bit. “What do you think the problem is? Do you just not understand the material? Or is it something else?” I want to fix this. I don't want to yell or anything. I can see you think I'd be mad.

Tucker swallowed hard, looking down to the plate of cookies in his hand before putting the plate down on his nightstand. *I can’t eat those… “I’m sorry…” I’ll try harder… I promise…”* Tucker looked down at his hands, trying not to cry as he felt the guilt wash over his body, keeping his head down. *I fucked up… and you're probably yelling at me in your head. “I-I’ll leave my computer d-downstairs…” “I’m grounded again… I know…*

Lathe moved his chair forward a bit, pressing the blue kerchief into his hand, resting a hand on his arm. “Tucker, I'm not mad at you. You're not grounded. None of that.” Lathe watched as he looked up to him with disbelief, giving him a small smile. “I don't think the problem is your effort, which isn't lacking. I've seen you working at the kitchen table; you really do try. The problem, I think, is that you're not a visual learner. Everything is visual in your normal academic classes, but in engineering, you do a lot of modelling. It's hands-on. I think that's what you need. I could help you get caught up with everything over the weekend and throughout the year so you can keep going with your class’ pace when you need the help. What do you think?” *Accept the help. You need it.*
Tucker looked down at his hands. “I um… I can figure it out… o-on my own…” I can do it… you don’t want to bother yourself with it anyways… “C-Can I go do my homework now?” He stood, though kept his eyes on the door, just wanting to get out of the room, the air thick with tension. I wanna go downstairs...

Lathe stood with him, looking matter-of-fact. “How about we go and do your homework? Tucker, I've got a Master’s in teaching and substituted nearly every class in the school you go to for six years. We’ll go through it together. I think your GPA would appreciate it.” He picked up the plate, moving out of Tucker’s way. “And I spent hours on these- they're for you when you want one.” But you're probably not hungry right now. “I'll bring them downstairs. We’ll get out the whiteboard and everything.” We’ll deal with all this.

Tucker nodded in silence, going down to the kitchen, freezing as he saw Eren by the sink. Shit… what do I do…

Lathe had grabbed Tucker’s bag from his room, slung over his shoulder. He was too distracted to even get his actual work… “Hey Eren? You used the whiteboard last. Where’d you put it?” We need that.

“The big one?” He turned, sipping from his glass of water, looking between the two of them.

“Yeah, the one with the wheels and the tray for markers. Where’d you shove it? We need to do math.” And lots of it.

“Funny, it’s covered in math… I was teaching Jake… It’s in the studio, the expo markers are in there too.” Teaching him integrals was a lot of fun…

Lathe grinned, nodding. “Gotcha. C’mon, Tucker, we’re relocating.” Lathe ambled to the studio, his jaw dropping as he saw the predominant symbol on the whiteboard. “...you taught a third-grader integrals?!” What the hell?!

“And derivatives!” Eren’s shout came from the kitchen down the hall to the studio. He enjoyed it… Middle school will be a breeze…

Lathe was stunned, dropping Tucker’s bag and studying the numbers, some of them undeniably in Jake’s writing. Lathe reached out to erase the board, writing a long equation on the board with
fractions and terms with two variables. “One second, Tucker.” Lathe walked to the theater room, Jake curled up on a seat with Sammie, building a big mansion and letting her help him decorate it. “Hey Jake? Can you come here for a second, please?” I wanna see if you retained anything...

Jake looked up with his big doe eyes, nodding and following Lathe into the studio. “D-Dad?” He stopped at the door seeing Tucker was in the room as well. I don’t wanna go in there... He’ll get mad at me...

Tucker saw the fear in Jake’s eyes, the guilt rising up in his chest once again. He think’s I’m gonna hurt him... and I’ve tried to apologize to him... but all he does is run away from me... He sighed, looking down at his hands in defeat. The monster Mom never wanted is all that he ever sees.

Lathe held out a hand, leading Jake into the room when he took it. “I just want to see if you could help me with something. I need to derive this.” Lathe pointed to the big equation on the board, holding out a black expo marker to him. “Do you think you could help me?” I want to see what you know. “I’m right here, Jake. Just do your thing. Tucker isn’t going to be mean anymore. Promise.”

Jake looked between Tucker as he backed away from the whiteboard, the marker, Lathe and the equation on the board. He studied it for a moment before he uncapped the marker and started to write everything out flawlessly. This is easy.... It only took him a few moments before he was done. “Done!” Jake announced proudly, a smile on his face.

Lathe stared in awe at his work. ...oh my god. “...it couldn't have been, what, an hour at most, that you learned all that in? ...my God, kid.” Lathe grinned. “You're going places.” We’ll see how many grades you skip. Lathe ruffled his hair, taking back the marker. He glanced up as he heard a quiet sound, seeing Tucker with his face buried in his hands on a stool, looking broken. He looked back to Jake, shooing him along. “You can go play minecraft, Jake. We’ll let you two know when dinner is here. Pizza sound good?” He watched him nod with a smile. “Okay. Go play.” Jake soon scampered back into the theatre room, Lathe turning back to Tucker, going up to him and gently prying his hands from his face. He looked worried as he saw tears staining his cheeks, reaching out with the same soft blue fabric to wipe them away. “Tucker, Honey, I’m sorry-” He wasn’t surprised when Tucker tried to shove him away, his voice laced with concern. “Tucker, it's not the end of the world. We’ll get you caught up and where you need to be. Just because Jake learned what he did so fast doesn't mean you can't get to where he is.”

“Yes it does…” He whimpered, looking down at his hands again, tears being wiped away with the blue fabric, though this time he didn’t try to shove Lathe away. “I’m stupid… just like all the kids say I am... they say I’m a stupid fag... Because I can’t get higher than a 50 on anything…” High School sucks... and it was bad enough in eighth grade... I barely passed... “I don’t wanna repeat a grade again…” His hands turned into fists, clenching and unclenching in his attempts to get rid of the need to punch something. If I’m not a monster... maybe Mom will come find me? He didn’t notice he had spoken out loud, beginning to hiccup from sobbing.
Lathe’s face fell as he heard him speak, sitting next to him and hugging him with one arm, gently wiping at his tears. “Honey, I'm sorry… I'm so sorry about your mom… and I'm sorry that you've been having to deal with this… you're definitely not stupid, believe me. We'll make sure you pass this year with flying colours, okay? We're not even through the first quarter of your first year yet. There's time to fix things. ...and you're not some monster. You're an intelligent human being and you're learning how to deal with emotions in a way different than what you've made habit. Things will work out.” Lathe hugged him close, letting Tucker bury his face into his shoulder and cling to his sweater, sobbing. He gently rubbed his back, coaxing him to let it out. It'll be okay… He murmured in his ear, trying to soothe him.

“Jake always runs away too…. And I feel horrible…” Tucker cried as he clung to him. I hate this… I’m all alone all the time… and I’m stupid… who knows… maybe I’m a fag too… then the world really is just trying to throw everything bad at me all at once...

Lathe carded a hand through his hair, his voice contemplative. “…have you tried apologising? Like, actually apologising and asking for forgiveness? Because he doesn't think you're sorry… he doesn't think you're not going to do it again. You broke his nose…”

“I’ve tried… and he always just runs away, or he’ll ignore me when I try to talk to him… I hate it… but I guess I did this to myself… didn’t I?” Tucker asked sniffling as he tried to reign in his emotions. I did this to myself... the monster inside fucked everything up.

Lathe shook his head. “Honey, you did some bad things, but you need to stop blaming yourself and move past it. You're trying to put it behind you, so let it stay there. But we need to let Jake hear that you're sorry. Otherwise he's going to be terrified of you for a long time. Want me to go get him? Apologize and get that off your chest?” It could do you some good.

Tucker nodded, his eyes downcast. “I just don’t want him to run away… that’s all anyone ever does… they leave me somewhere and run away…” Jake does it all the time… No one likes to talk to me at school, they all run whenever I try and talk to anyone… I’m all alone most of the time… Eren hates me and refuses to be in the same room as me without glaring at me……………… Mom ran away too…..

Lathe nodded, kissing his forehead. “I’m sorry, Hon. I'll be right back with him.” Lathe gently untangled Tucker’s hands from his sweater, padding back to the theatre room. “Jake, can you come here again please? It's important.” Lathe reached for his hand when he paused the game and came up to him again, leading him back into the studio. His firm hold kept him at his side as they approached Tucker, who was trying to calm his sobbing. “Jake, Tucker has something really important to tell you.” Listen to him and don’t just run this time.
Jake looked up at Lathe as he was pulled into the Studio room once again. *Am I doing more math? Wait... Tucker’s crying... Why’s he crying?* He looked concerned for a split second before backing away a bit when he saw Tucker clench and unclench his fists. *What’s he doing...*

“J-Jake... I um... I’ve been wanting to say t-this for a-while... But...” He paused, struggling to swallow the lump in his throat. “I-I’m really sorry... About everything... W-what I said to you... The way I acted, h-how I hurt you... I’m really sorry, and I’ve been trying to tell you for weeks...” *And all you ever did was run away... I couldn’t help but blame myself... “W-Will... Will you forgive me?” You’ll probably hate me still for the rest of your life...* I broke your nose for god’s sake... Tucker’s eyes showed a look of utter defeat as Jake stayed silent for a long while. He won’t... 

...does he mean it? ...I don't think he wants to hurt me anymore... Jake let go of Lathe’s hand, taking a small step forward before he suddenly moved fast to hug Tucker, colliding with his legs, the side of his face nestled into his stomach. “S’okay.” You won’t hurt me. He tensed a bit when Tucker hugged him back weakly, though he relaxed after a moment. He pulled back after a bit, looking up to see Tucker’s cheeks still wet with tears. “You don’t have to cry... I forgive you. That makes it better.” Don’t be sad. He poked Tucker’s stomach lightly, his eyes doe-like. “Don’t be sad. We get pizza later. Everyone likes pizza.” At least don’t cry... Jake shuffled, looking down to his feet. “...if you wanna... will video games make it better?” I don’t know how else to fix it... but I wanna fix it...

Tucker chuckled a bit, reaching up to wipe away at his eyes. “I’m sorry, Jake... B-But I have work to do...” I’m sorry, but I’ll have to be alone for a bit longer... He smiled softly as he watched Jake move around. He won’t run from me anymore...that’s good... “Why don’t you go back and play minecraft? Okay?” His words were soft as he leaned down to kiss Jake’s forehead, looking down to the floor again, guilt still in his eyes. That helped... But I still feel really guilty about it...

Jake nodded, giving him a toothy smile as his forehead was kissed. He poked him gently again, sounding content. “When you need a break, come say hi, okay?” He waited for Tucker to nod before he turned back to Lathe, getting a kiss from him before scampering back to the theatre room before Sammie got took antsy.

Lathe smiled, looking to Tucker. “That help?” Do you feel much better?

Tucker looked to the floor, shrugging a shoulder. “Yeah... but I still feel really guilty...” I was an asshole to him... I broke his nose...

Lathe gave him a sympathetic look. “I understand. But Jake is a sweetheart. He forgave you, tried
to make you happy, and then invited you to play minecraft in the span of thirty seconds. Sometimes forgiving is that easy. I don't think he'll hold it against you much.” Jake will have completely moved on from this incident in no time. Lathe reached out and Tucker went to give him an actual hug, standing there for a long moment in understanding. When they broke, Lathe grinned. “Alright. What subject do you wanna catch up in first?” We’ve got our work cut out for us.

Tucker seemed to instantly pale once again. “I uh… I don’t understand math… Like at all…” I really don’t and it’s really embarrassing when I get yelled at because my homework's not done...

“Alright, math to start.” Lathe erased the board, speaking over his shoulder. “Alright Hon, could you get out all your math papers for me? I want to see what it is you're supposed to be learning and we’ll go through examples.” He waited for Tucker to pull out his binder, taking the pile of papers in the math section. He flicked through them for a moment, his brow furrowed as he saw the angry red letters at the top of the pages. “Alright, so how about we start with the basics- fractions. Okay? So, when you have a number like this-” He drew ½ on the board, turning to him as Tucker sat down to listen and watch. “Where one of them is over another and separated by a line, we have a fraction. That means that the number isn’t a whole number, meaning instead of being 6 or 7 for example, it's in between. We all know what numbers ½ is in between, right?”

“....Uhm… one and two?”

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up. “...no. One half.”

Tucker shifted uncomfortably. “......Uhm….” I don't know…

...I need to break out examples. “Here, you know what, we’re going to need the fruit example. Come on.” Lathe pulled the whiteboard out the door and into the kitchen, setting it near the kitchen table, seeing Eren busy decorating some of the roll cookies he had made. “Sorry, Eren, we’re borrowing part of the kitchen table.” Lathe went to grab a cutting board, an apple and a knife, setting them all down. “First off.” Lathe took the marker again as Tucker sat at the table, drawing arrows to the top and bottom parts of the fraction. “These two bits have names- the top is the numerator, and the bottom of the denominator. You can remember because denominator starts with D as in ‘down.’ Now, the bottom tells you how many pieces a number gets cut into. And the top tells you how many of those pieces you are using. So, if we have one half…” Lathe pointed to the denominator. “We cut the number into two pieces. It's like cutting this apple into two pieces, right down in the middle because the pieces are all equal…” Lathe cut the apple, holding up one of the hemispheres. “And the one on top tells you how many pieces of it you use, so we use one of the pieces.” He showed it to Tucker. “And that is one half. So, if we have less than one apple, but more than zero apples, what numbers is one-half between?”

Tucker stared hard at the apple, thinking. “...one, and… zero?” His eyes lit up when Lathe nodded
“That’s right. Now, what if…” Lathe reached out to change the denominator to four. “We had this fraction? How should we cut up the number, or our apple here, so that we have four equal pieces?”

“…y-you could… cut each piece… in half….?” He watched Lathe nod, relieved that he was getting some things right.

“Yep!” Lathe did just that. “Now we have four equal pieces, and if we only wanted one fourth, how many pieces would we need?”

“…j-just one?”

“Yes, because the numerator tells us we only want one piece. Now…” He reached out and changed the numerator to four. “Now, can you tell me what number that is?” He watched Tucker hesitate. He was about to speak when Eren interjected.

“If you cut the number one completely apart and then put all the pieces back together, what would you have?”

“…the number one, … OH.” Tucker looked between the apple and the board, understanding flickering in his eyes. …so that's how it works…

“Mhm! But oh no, look-” Lathe changed the numerator again- this time to a five. “The numerator is bigger than the denominator. That means that we have more than one full number. But it isn't big enough to be twice the denominator, so it can't be more than two. Following?” He watched him hesitate. “The numerator is five. Think of it this way- isn't this, the same as this?” He wrote out 4/4 + ¼ on the board, watching Tucker hesitate again. “Because the denominators are the same, we can add the numerators. The denominators tell us what size pieces we have, and the numerators tell us how many we have. The denominators only tell us size, so they need to be the same to add the tops. But the size stays 4. So if I add ¼ and ¼…” He pushed two quarters of the apple together. “Now I have two ¼-size pieces of apple. That fraction is 2/4. But, think. Doesn't two go into four evenly?”

“…yeah… twice…”
“Right! So, if I divide four by two, we get two. And if I divide two by two, we get one. That’s the simplified version of the fraction. Simplifying fractions is almost like taking away the cuts we made in the apple. We have the same amount of apple, but now it’s all in one piece. Get it?” He watched him nod with wide eyes, grinning. “So. Can we say that four quarters and one quarter make five quarters?” A nod. “But what is this the same as?” He pointed to the four fourths.

“…one?”

“Say it with a bit more conviction- you know the answer.”

“One!”

“Yep! So then we have…” He drew a new number, a one next to ¼. One and one fourth. What numbers is this between?”

“One and two.”

“Yes!” Lathe grinned, setting down the marker. “Now, what if…” He wrote out ¼ + ½. “What do you think we should do?” He watched him hesitate. “…the pieces need to have the same denominator to add them. They need to have the same size pieces.”

“U-Uhm… we could… make… the one half… t-two fourths?” He watched as Lathe nodded, rewriting the numbers. “And then it’s three fourths?” He pushed the pieces of apple together on the table in front of him, studying it. So that’s how it works...

“Very good! Now, another one-” He put up one fifth and three twenty-fifths. “Any ideas?”

“…u-Uhm… does the one fifth become… uh…” He counted on his fingers, thinking. “…Five twenty-fifths…? And then it’s eight twenty-fifths?”

“Wonderful! Does that simplify?”

“U-Um… n-no..?”
“Correct.”

“Crap… wait, really?”

“Yeah! You're right.” Lathe grinned, writing the answer down. “Now, multiplication. This one is easy because you just multiply the two numbers together. So if we have ten twelfths and two sixths, what will they multiply to? We just multiply too by top and bottom by bottom.”

“ Twenty…” Tucker moved to grab his paper and pencil, scratching down twelve times six. “…seventy-seconds?”

“You're getting it! Now, last but not least, division.” He wrote a fraction divided by a fraction. “Now, we use keep-change-flip for these. So what we do, is we keep the top number… change division to multiplication… and then flip the bottom fraction so that it’s upside down. Then we just multiply. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“But if we divide a fraction by a whole number… wouldn't we say that three is the same as three over one?”

“You?”

“So if we just flip that …”

“Oh my god it makes sense.” What the shit! This is great! I kinda get it!
“That's good! So, you see that worksheet there that has all the fractions problems on it? Erase your old work and redo it all, okay? We need to make sure you've got this down before we try to move on. I'll order us all pizza while you're doing that, any you can take a break when you're done. At most we'll do one more lesson after dinner.”

“Okay. ...can I eat the apple?”

“Yes you can. Here, let me core it.” Lathe soon had a bowl of cut-up apple for Tucker to snack on as he worked, leaving the notes on the board in case he needed them while he called for pizza. We'll get him back on track.

Eren watched over Tucker, helping him and pointing out small mistakes when it came to multiplying the numbers, making sure he stayed on track. He's doing well with this now, I didn't know he needed help… I could've helped him a long time ago.

Lathe ambled downstairs a while later, putting the menu back in a drawer. He watched with surprise as Eren hovered with Tucker over his math sheet, pointing out small errors and helping him multiply the bigger numbers together. Eren likes helping him? Better observation- Eren isn't hissing at Tucker’s very presence ?!

“Alright, is there a back to the sheet? Or did we finish?” Eren asked watching Tucker flip it over and groan about the work on the other side, this time using variables. Oh no, he’s not sure how this works…. “Alright Tucker, time to do a crash course in variables.” He went up to the whiteboard, writing a few letters. “Any letter in math is called a variable, meaning that the number they represent varies… So let's say X equals 2.” He wrote 3X on the board looking to Tucker. “What’s this?”

“...if they're next to each other… does that mean they multiply?” He watched Eren nod, looking back to it. “So…. if X is two… six?”

“Good.” He erased the 3 in front of the X and wrote a 2 in the top right corner. “Do you know what this symbol means?” How much do you understand?

“U-Uhm… that’s a… uh… an… e-ex… something…”

“Do you know what it does to the variable?” Try something a little easier…
“U-Uhm… it multiplies it… by… something…”

“Okay, so this is what it means…” He wrote out two X’s separated by parentheses, right next to each other, turning back to Tucker. “What is this?” Please say you know that they multiply still. His eyes looked behind him as he saw Lathe cross his arms. “Oh… Sorry, um I took over….” Fuck….

Lathe just waved on for him to continue. “Oh no, don't mind me. Just supervising my student teacher. Just make sure he knows the right words- exponents and parentheses.” You didn't correct him when he said ex-something.

Tucker looked back to Eren, his cheeks pink a bit as he felt he was being closely critiqued. “U-Uhm… those are parentheses… they… that means they multiply together… being next to each other…” I understood that...

Eren nodded, pointing to the 2 above the X. “This symbol means the same of this the one with the parentheses… Okay?”

“......u-Uhm… b-but…” I don't get it… “Why does it… I-I don't…”

“Mind if I interject?” Lathe stepped forward, taking the marker when Eren handed it to him. “You have this term right here. It could end up being a number, a variable, or a bunch of numbers in parentheses, but you have this term you want to multiply. What you do, is that you want to multiply it by itself. The exponent just tells you how many times you write that term down. So, x^2 means X x X. X^3 means X x X x X. All numbers have a one exponent implied. So X^1 is just X. And any number is implied to have a 1 exponent unless they write otherwise.” Lathe handed the marker back. “That make better sense?”

“I-I think so… so, the big number is the one you multiply over again… and the exponent thing tells you how many times to do it? So… would, like… two with an exponent of three be… four and then two, so eight?”

“Yeah, very good!” You're catching on. Lathe looked up to Eren, giving him a small shrug. You need to make sure you're really explaining things. You started teaching that like a new piece of information, when it'd only be true in certain cases. They were equal; but the parentheses didn't do that by themselves.
“Maybe you should be teaching him... I’ll just help out with homework... How’s that?” I’m not really suited for teaching...

“Well, he needs a lot of remedial help, so you can help with what I’ve already taught for right now, but you can maybe end up taking over at some point if you want.” But right now, leave the new stuff to me. “You doing alright, Tucker? Do you think you can keep going?”

“Y-Yeah, I’m okay for right now.... I’ll do okay for right now.” I think so...

“Okay.” Lathe ruffled his hair gently, going to clean up the living room from Sammie’s stray toys. She left the little trains everywhere... we’re missing a few... there were a few more... I think... three more? He looked under the couches first, under the table, and was about to go check in the Theatre room before he heard a tiny pitter-patter of feet, shaking his head. “Krampus.” He soon caught sight of the small dog, which was-of course- carrying a small green wooden train with wheels in its mouth. It took a long five minutes to catch him, imploring him to drop the train, finally getting him to let it go mad drop it onto the ground covered in slobber. “Bad dog, no.” Lathe picked up the train, scolding Krampus as he tried to get it back. He went back downstairs to wash it off and dry it, putting it back in the bin and closing the lid on it well. This is why we can't have nice things...

Krampus whined, following him and watching him clean it off and snap the lid on it. No! I wanted the play thing! Sammie wanted to play! He whined, pawing at Lathe’s leg before he heard something hit the floor, his eyes instantly going to the expo marker quietly rolling on the floor, forgotten. His perked ears turned as he moved over to the marker, sniffing it and picking it up and scurrying off, starting to chew on the marker, easily breaking it in half and beginning to eat it. It tastes weird... There’s water inside...

Lathe moved through the house, everything a blur as Tucker worked on his math, as pizza arrived and people were herded into the kitchen to eat. Lathe welcomed Ieva home with a kiss and after food everyone was shepherded into the theatre room for a movie night, everyone laughing like crazy at Monty Python and the Holy Grail, big bowls of popcorn passed around. Lathe quirked an eyebrow as he heard a sound in the background, immediately looking for Eren when Blake began to bark. He was confused as Eren looked back to him, confused himself. What the hell..? “He probably spotted someone in the yard. I’ll check it out.” Lathe stood, going upstairs to the kitchen. He looked to the stairs, padding up curiously as Blake kept barking. ...what’s up here that’s freaking you out? His eyes widened as he saw Blake sitting next to Krampus, the small pup curled up in the corner, whimpering. A mostly-eaten expo marker was in front of his paws, his jaw red from the dye. Fuck. Lathe knelt next to him, gently petting Krampus and looking to his eyes, seeing pain as he whined for help. ...we need to get you to the vet. Now . Lathe ran back downstairs to grab a sheet of cardboard, poking his head into the theatre room. “I need to take Krampus to the vet. He ate an expo marker and he's pretty sick. He should be fine soon, don't worry.” He smiled to Jake, who immediately looked to Eren in worry. Lathe left them as Eren tried to calm Jake and smooth over his worries, going to grab a plush dog bed from it’s spot upstairs. He soon knelt next to Krampus, very gently lifting him into the bed and tucking a small blanket around him. “We’ll go
get you fixed right up, Krampus. Don't you worry.” Lathe picked him up, carrying him to the car and locking the front door behind him. He set him in the backseat, driving as smoothly as he could, any jerks or harder stops causing the pup to whimper in discomfort. Soon he was carrying the dog into the veterinary hospital, speaking to the receptionist, worried. “Uh, hi, my dog here ate an expo marker and he's been really sick. He might have eaten other things from around the house- he's got us worried.” *Something could be really wrong...*

The woman nodded, picking up a phone and dialing a few numbers. “Doctor Zoe… We could have an emergency surgery case… Yeah, out front…uh, no, not yet…” She held the phone to her shoulder to muffle her talking. “What’s your dog’s name? And is this their regular vet office?” She looked at Lathe expectantly, looking to the small dog with worry. *He’s whimpering in pain everytime he moves.*

“His name is Krampus, and yes, we come to see Hanji for all of our pets. The name is Lathe Quo- she knows who I am. We were colleagues.” *It was awhile ago, but she’s like me- even if I dyed my hair red, got an accent and moved out of state, she’d know me if she saw me.*

The woman nodded and relayed the information, having to pull the phone away from her ear when Hanji screamed on the other end. “She’ll be out soon, don’t wor-” she was cut off by the door to the back slamming open and Hanji scrambling out to see Krampus.

“What’d he eat now?” *I know he likes to run away with shit...*

“ Majority of an expo marker, possibly a small wooden toy train, other things that've gone missing. Probably some change in there.” *Most likely.*

Hanji sighed quietly. “How much of the marker was gone? Am I dealing with small pieces of plastic or large pieces?” *The marker won’t poison him, it’s completely fine… It’s the chewed up plastics which are sharp ...*

“Ninety percent of it was gone… probably larger pieces…” Lathe looked worriedly between Krampus and Hanji. *Is he gonna be okay...?*

“Crap, okay, we need to get him in surgery. That plastic is **bad** news for his stomach. It could cut up his insides.” Hanji carefully took him, bed and all, from Lathe, taking him into the back. “You might want to sit down, Lathe- this could be a while.” Hanji had him prepped for the surgery in no time, his belly shaved and cleaned before putting him under, starting the procedure. A few hours had passed before she finished stitching his stomach back up, looking over to the tray next to the dog. *...that’s a ton of shit...* Hanji came back out to the front room after a bit, ambling up to where
Lathe was, kicking his shoe to wake him up from his light doze. “So, Krampus is fine. It's surprising, given we had to remove the plastic marker from his stomach, along with a small wooden train, a spare house key, a twenty-sided die, a leather tag, three marbles, sixty-seven cents in spare change, and a **cell phone**. Thankfully, the battery in the phone was completely fine - the backing was on so tight, it couldn't even digest past the initial plastic casing. The damn thing still **works**.” ...*what even, man*... “I'm going to suggest that you keep a cone on Krampus for a while so that he's not able to just grab anything in his mouth and eat it. **He needs** to stop that - otherwise, he's going to be in a hell of a lot of pain again at some point.” *Yeah, not good.*

Lathe’s eyes widened in shock, nodding immediately. “Yeah, we need to take care of that problem. It's gone from him hiding things around the house to hiding them **inside** him. ...but... a cell phone? I don't remember any of us losing a cell phone...” ...*but... Sharon lost hers in the house...* “Was it an old brick of plastic?”

“That's one way of putting it. Digested, it still **worked**.” *I'm surprised. And impressed.*

“...Sharon bought an iPhone after that incident... said it was a sign she finally had to get one. Oh my god, the house key... and that train wasn't small, either... my God, we need to get him to stop...” *It's legitimately gone too far...*

“Well, it looked like the train he worked on for awhile, it was in sizable chunks for him to swallow, but I’m going to send him home tomorrow, I want to keep him overnight and make sure he comes off the anesthesia okay, then he’ll have a cone around his head and his belly will be sensitive for awhile so I want him on a soft food diet for a few weeks...” *That should help him get reacquainted with food...*

Lathe nodded, wearily smiling. “Okay, sounds fine. We need to get him used to eating the right kind of food again.” He stood, shaking Hanji’s hand. “So, I should come and get him tomorrow before lunch?” *Will he be free to go then?*

Hanji shook her head. “I’ll bring him over tomorrow, I need to do all Arya’s shots since she’s been suckling for a couple days. What time do you want me to come over?” *I can be over pretty much anytime...*

Lathe nodded. “Would about ten in the morning work okay?” *We’ll be in the barn anyway feeding the animals and stuff around then.*

Hanji pulled out her phone looking at her schedule. “I’ll be there around 10:30 if that works?”
“Yeah, that's fine. We don't have much going on tomorrow.” Lathe smiled. “So can I expect to see you then?”

“Yeah, you’ll see me and probably my husband, he works specially with dogs… So he can help you out with getting him not to eat everything in reaching distance.” *Moblit should be able to help him…*

“Okay.” A pause, Lathe’s eyes widening. “Wait, you're married? Since when?” And why wasn't I invited?

“I’ve been married since before I started teaching but… We were separated for awhile, and he came back and we’ve been back together since I quit teaching…” *I don’t think I knew you when we got married… I didn't wear my ring at work, which is probably why you never knew…*

Lathe smiled, lightly punching her arm. “Glad to hear things are working out. What’s his name? Tell me about him, anything.” *I wanna know who the lucky guy is.*

“Well, his name is Moblit, he works out in the city and he matches service dog with their owners… He’s really sweet and gentle, he’s a good guy, you’ll like him.” *You’ll get along right away…*

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up, shaking his head slowly. “Hanji, Moblit was the one who got us Blake and helped us with having a service dog around. He's great! I approve. But now the next time I see him I have to threaten him with death if he makes you upset.” *That's now a thing that needs doing.*

Hanji smiled softly, chuckling a bit, shaking her head. “I think he figured it out after we were separated for 10 years… The first 7 weren’t that great for the both of us… But it's better now… And I have my Moblit back… I didn’t know Blake was one of the dogs he trained…” She smiled sheepishly, looking down. *20 years…* “We’ve been back together for 3 years now…” Hanji showed him her left hand, letting him see her ring. *He got a new one for me, when he came back… It was a nice thought…*

Lathe smiled warmly, his eyes crinkling a bit at the corners. “That's really good to hear, Hanji. I'm glad he makes you happy. I'm still going to threaten him with murder, though. You can't stop me.” *Nope, I don't care if it's Moblit. I'll kill him if he makes you cry.*
Hanji smiled softly, shaking her head a bit. “Alright, alright, I’ll bring the hubby with me to deliver your pooch and give your filly shots.” *I can do that…*

Lathe chuckled, nodding. “Sounds like a plan. I'll see you tomorrow, Hanji. And thank you.”
Chapter 70: Rape

It was six weeks after the first quarter progress reports came home. Lathe had baked cookies earlier in the day- he decided to make it ritual, and everyone liked them, so he thought why not- and waited for Jake and Tucker to come home. He looked up when the lock turned, smiling and ushering them over to the kitchen table. “Welcome home! Come on over, moment of truth you two. Let's see the report cards.” He took the envelope Jake handed him, the eight-year-old looking the tiniest bit nervous, but rather happy. Lathe undid the small metal hook, unfolding the paper inside and reading over the column of letters. He grinned, ruffling Jake’s hair. “Very good, Jake! All A's and one or two B’s. You keep up that good work, Honey.” He kept the paper from inside, signing the label on the front of the envelope and handing it back. “Remember to give that to your teacher on Monday so she knows I saw it, okay?” He smiled as Jake nodded, letting him scamper off with two stolen cookies to the game room. “Alright, Tucker. Let's see how you've improved.” Lathe took the envelope Tucker shakily extended to him, unhooking the metal and reading over the paper inside, nodding his head in approval. “All B’s. Very very good! That's a major improvement from earlier this year. You keep up the good work, and maybe next quarter you'll do even better.” Lathe gave him a small smile, standing to give him a tight hug. “I'll sign your card. Grab yourself a few cookies; you deserve it for all your effort.” You've tried so hard to do well. It's paid off already.

Tucker smiled, hugging Lathe back slowly, letting out a sigh of relief. I thought it might've still been all F’s and D’s… When Lathe let go he meandered over to the cookies, picking up a few. He looked over when the backdoor opened, seeing Eren walking in and kicking off his shoes. His eyes widened and he flushed to his ears, dropping the cookies back on a plate as he ran off to go hide in his room, taking his school bag upstairs with him. No no no no… Not again… It… I can’t be gay… I'll be such an asshole to them, they can’t know...

Lathe watched the exchange with confusion, quirking an eyebrow. “...what the hell was that?” ...that's such a weird exchange… wait… .....hmmm… His eyes widened as he heard a door slam shut upstairs, looking back to Eren, thinking. .....he's acting like he has a crush on Eren.... but, he doesn't..... ................does he...? Lathe looked to Eren who shrugged, leaving to follow Tucker upstairs. He gently knocked at the door, his voice gentle. “Tucker, Honey, can I come in?” He heard a quiet sound of assent after a moment of silence, stepping inside and shutting the door quietly behind him. He saw Tucker curled up on his bed, sitting up against the wall and hugging a pillow, the look in his eyes conflicted, sad. Lathe moved to sit on the bed next to him, his voice soft. “You acted a little strangely when Eren came in just a moment ago. ...is there something you want to talk about?” I'm here to help you with whatever is going on.

Tucker immediately shook his head, hurriedly burying his head into the pillow. “N-no! I’m fine! Really! Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine…. just leave me alone… Please !” He mumbled into his pillow as he held onto it tighter. You don’t need to know, you’ll hate me if I tell you… but I’m not sure.... and I really like Devon... what do I say ? Eren would probably laugh at me if I told him I was gay....
Lathe didn't move for a moment, thinking. "you're thirteen... you're just getting to the point when stuff with your body begins to happen... you could just be confused about what you are... confused about feeling attracted to other people at school..." Lathe’s voice was as gentle as ever, picking his words carefully. "...Tucker, you're at the point where the way your body reacts to different things is changing... if you're worried or confused about anything... you can talk to me. It'll stay between us... I'll always be open to talk with you, but if you need more time to just think by yourself, that's okay too. Whatever you need.” 

"You can kick me out or we can talk. It's okay either way.

You were quiet for a moment, looking down at his hands as they shook. “I um... I think I might be... a um... I think I might be a f-fag...” His words came out in a whimper as he looked down to his feet. 

I think I like Devon...

Lathe shifted a bit closer, pulling Tucker into his side as he saw his eyes start to grow glassy. “Hey, it's okay, don't be upset. And you don't have to call yourself that.” He gently rubbed his arm, his voice soft. “Everything you're feeling is going to be new to you for a while. You don't have to put any labels on yourself right now because you don't know what you are. It's hard for anyone to know exactly what they are, especially since you're so young. ...is there someone you have a crush on?” That'd be how you started thinking you might be gay...

Tucker nervously nodded, twiddling his thumbs, trying to think if he should tell Lathe who it was. 

but he’s older than me.... What if Lathe thinks that’s weird?

Lathe watched him nod, though didn't push too hard when he hesitated to speak. “You don't have to tell me much about him if you don't want. Is he in your class?” 

It's okay to tell me stuff. I'm not gonna judge you.

Tucker shook his head again. “N-No... H-He’s a senior...” And he’s built like the gods created him... He’s really muscular, and his face is just perfect...

Ah. Well, I'm not too surprised... but you probably won't get a chance to know him. “What's his name? Have you talked much?” Casper and Scotty are almost three full years apart, but they knew each other well enough from being in the club for two years together... and then a bunch of college... well, special circumstances.

“His name is... D-Devon.... And he um... He’s in my engineering class... But that’s it...” I only get to see him once a day... And he’s gorgeous ... “It’s not gonna work ever... I-is it?” Tucker looked up to Lathe, a look of sadness etched across his face.

Lathe shrugged one shoulder, giving him a faint smile. “If you really wanna give it a shot, you've
got a lot of work cut out for you. Relationships aren't a piece of cake. He's going to go to college next year, and that could be really far away. He could be gay and have no interest, or he could be straight and that's it. Maybe give it a try if you want. But you need to be prepared if he turns you down or just laughs at you. He could think as a freshman and senior couple, it couldn't work. There aren't many. Just start out being friends with him, okay? See if you get anywhere with that. You don't wanna just shove your feelings in his face; that'd scare him off.” Yeah. Don't do that.

“M-Mr. C-Clarke put us together for a project… And I-I don’t know what to do… He wants me to come after school to his house… B-but I can’t though…. Because we’ll work on it for awhile… And I won’t be able to bike home before nine… And we won't be able to get work done because I can’t talk at all when I’m in the same room as him… I don't know what to do.” Tucker sniffled as he hugged his pillow impossibly closer to his chest. Devon thinks I’m weird as it is…

Lathe nodded, resting his cheek on his head. “Yeesh, you're crushing hard … y'know, I think that if you let me know when you're heading over, and you just need to text me, as long as you text me when you leave his house to come home you can stay out later than nine. And I can come pick you up when it gets too dark if you need me to. But not just because you have a crush- you've got a project with work to do. That's important too.” Lathe pecked the top of his head. “Because you're stuck together on this project, if things go sour you'll still be stuck for the project and that could get awkward… just don't come off too strong, okay? Try to be his friend, first and foremost. If that doesn't work, nothing past that will. At least, nothing that'll last…” You can only go so far with mutual tolerance.

“I-I’m s-sorry… B-but I'm g-gonna stay upstairs…” He murmured, turning his head away from Lathe. I can contemplate how I'm too much of a coward to say anything in front of him…

Lathe nodded, softly pecking his temple. “Don't be sorry, Hon. Everything will be kinda tough for a bit, but you'll figure things out. We can talk whenever you want.” Lathe stood, letting Tucker cling to his pillow, looking back to him when he opened the door. “Oh, and another thing-” Lathe winked, giving him a small supportive smile. “Good luck.” He quietly shut the door, making his way downstairs. Honestly… I don't think any luck will help. You'd really need a lot of it.

A week later, Tucker texted Lathe he was biking to Devon’s house to finish up the project the two of them were working on, and it was nearly 11 at night when Tucker finally texted, saying he could come home.

Lathe had been worried sick for the past two hours, not knowing why a sense of dread was washing over him. He’s fine, he’s fine. They just wanted to finish up what they could all at once instead of having it drag out another day. They’re fine. It’s all fine. Lathe quickly moved to the car, driving to the address Tucker had given him, watching as Tucker wheeled his bike to the car to put it in the trunk, looking miserable and disheveled. He had the back doors locked, motioning Tucker up to sit in the passenger’s seat. He smiled faintly when Tucker clambered inside. “You get
your project done, Hon?” He watched him simply nod, staring at his shoes as he buckled up. Something told him not to leave just yet, and he looked over Tucker, studying him. He looked hastily put-together, his hair barely under control, and he had an empty look in his eyes, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. He looks like he just ran a marathon… “…Tucker… are you... okay? Did something happen?” ………no……..they wouldn't've…. You're too young… .

Tucker shook his head, biting his lip as he looked towards the house he was just in, his heart racing as his hollow eyes filled with tears. “N-No… C-can we G-go home…?” Please? I don’t want to be here anymore…

Lathe didn’t nod, but he put the car in drive, starting to drive away from the home. “…Tucker, did he hurt you?” He was headed for the hospital, but he didn’t let on. I don’t want you to freak out… but we have to take care of you. He can’t just get away with this shit.

“I-It h-hurt…. So much…. A-and h-he w-wouldn't st-stop..” Tucker whimpered as he wrapped his shaking arms around himself, trying to calm down. I get to sleep when I get home… Sleep it all away…

Lathe looked heartbroken to hear that, careful as he drove them to the hospital. “Tucker, love, it’s okay, you don’t have to worry about him anymore right now. It’s all over, I’m right here. We can’t go home just yet, Honey, we need to take care of you first. I’m sorry, but we need to fix this, and then we can go home and you can sleep all you want. It’s okay.” We’ll do what we can to help you...

Tucker immediately protested. “N-no… I wanna go home… P-please… I just wanna go h-home…” Tucker's broken eyes looked over to Lathe’s as he pulled into the hospital parking lot, shaking even more as they parked. N-No… I don’t wanna go, they won’t help me… They’ll call me a fag too!

“Please, Tucker, these are good people here. They wouldn’t be working here if they didn’t want to help. We need to take care of you, and I know you don’t wanna do this but it’s for the better. We’ll let you go home and rest soon enough, okay?” Lathe got out of the car, moving to the other side when Tucker shut the door, his legs and his whole body shaking like a leaf. Lathe scooped him up into his arms and Tucker barely protested, carrying him into the hospital with care, murmuring soothing words into his hair. He looked to the worried receptionist. They know too well that when I come in, it’s bad… “Uhm, hi…” He didn't notice Scotty just about to leave, circles under his eyes. “…my son here needs a rape kit done...” I can’t believe I just had to say that...

The receptionist looked even more worried before she noticed Scotty. “Scotty, one last case for tonight and then you can leave.” I know Lathe knows you well, the kid should be more comfortable
Scotty groaned as he stopped walking and turned, rubbing his eyes. “Martha, do you have any idea what time it is? I’m exhausted, and why the hell do I need to-” He paused as he looked up hearing a soft sob, looking up to see Tucker crying in Lathe’s arms. What? What the fuck?

Lathe looked up from trying to calm Tucker to Scotty, looking weary himself. “I just picked him up from what was supposed to be him working on a project with a fellow classmate. ...Scotty, he’s just been raped. Please help.” Then you can leave and we can all go rest...

Scotty’s eyes widened as he heard Lathe speak. Raped? He was raped? But he’s so young ... Who in their right mind would do that? He nodded, motioning Lathe to follow and bringing him to a quieter wing on the first floor. “Take his clothes off, I’ll go get a kit…” No one deserves something like that... Not even Tucker...

Tucker was crying horribly in Lathe’s arms, not wanting to let go. “I-I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have done it....” I said it... And it made everything worse.

Lathe set him gently on the hospital bed, cooing to him quietly. “Tucker, it’s not your fault.... I’m so sorry Honey, but you need to know that what you said and did wasn’t why he did this. None of this was your fault. He did something awful, and we can’t just let him get away with it. We’re not gonna. Okay?” He watched Tucker shakily nod, letting him keep his fists firmly on his sweater. “Tucker, we need to get you in a hospital gown, okay? I’m sorry, but we need to get you undressed. We won’t let anything bad happen anymore. I promise.” He gently tried to pry his hands from his sweater, softly pecking his temple. “You’ll be okay.” Swear it.

Tucker slowly let go of Lathe’s sweater, his hands shaking as he let Lathe take off his shirt which had hidden countless hickeys, fist marks, and bruises in the shapes of hands. He did so much... He didn’t care that it hurt... It felt like he was ripping me in two....

Lathe looked over his battered chest with sad eyes, taking the shirt and taking his shoes and jeans off, a few bruises on his thighs. He gave him the thin gown, turning away. “You can put this on, okay?” He waited for the rustling to stop, Tucker tapping his arm and handing him his stained boxers for his pile of clothes. Lathe sat next to him on the bed, letting Tucker curl close and bury his face in his chest. He waited patiently for Scotty to come back, trying to calm Tucker when he started crying even harder. You’ll be okay now. We’ve got you.

Scotty let Lathe try and calm Tucker down as he carefully packed away all of his clothes in a large brown paper bag, marking them appropriately. He’s gotta calm down, because he’s not gonna want
me to do what I need to do next… He slipped on a pair of latex gloves, getting a vial out of the large bag that held everything he needed.

Tucker’s eyes widened as he saw Scotty get rubber gloves on right away. *What’s he doing? Why is he putting those on?* He eyes were wide in shock as Scotty got closer to him, shying away as he came close. *I… I don’t wanna be touched…*

Lathe cradled Tucker close, trying to keep him calm. “Tucker, it’s okay. Scotty needs to take samples of fluid from you… it’s not a nice thought but you need to let him do his job, okay? It’ll be over soon, Honey. I’m right here. He won’t do anything bad.” *Don’t worry about him. Just stay calm, okay? Please?*

Tucker struggled not to jerk away when Scotty moved him around gently, barely hearing him explain what he was doing to him. He felt the rubber gloves near his hole, freaking out when he felt something nudge his entrance, clinging to Lathe for dear life. *I don’t wanna be touched…*

Lathe held Tucker tight as he whimpered and cried quietly, letting Scotty do his job. He held him solidly against his chest, murmuring quiet praise in his ear when Scotty had filled his test tube, trying to stop his shaking. “You did fine, Honey, just fine…” *We can help you now.*

Tucker was a mess as Lathe held onto him, freaking out as Scotty took his hands. That was until he realized he was only trying to clean out under his fingers, trying to get as much DNA as possible. *What did he say?*

“How old are you Tucker?”

“I’m th-thirteen…”

“How long ago were you raped?”

“Ah… Uhm… An hour, I…. I think….”

Scotty nodded finishing up taking up all the DNA he needed and putting it where it needed to go. “I’ll go get you some scrubs… If you need to talk to Lathe you can close the door…” *I’ll leave you guys alone for a bit… Because I need to get the camera to take pictures…*
Lathe looked to Tucker, watching him nod when Scotty left. He let him go for just a moment to close the door quietly, coming back and bringing him into his lap, cradling him close. “Talk to me, Honey. Tell me what happened.” *Talking might help... instead of bottling it up.*

Tucker sniffled as he was cradled close to Lathe’s chest. “We... We finished our project... And it was late, so he told me to stay for dinner... He made us some waffles...” Tucker has to stop talking as he clung to Lathe. “And I don’t know how it came up, but I said that I liked him... And he at first laughed it off and s-said that I didn’t.... And I told him that I really liked him... That’s when he got mad.... And he snapped at me...” *He got so angry, so quickly...*

Lathe held him close, gently rubbing his back. “It's okay Hon, you didn't do anything wrong... if he wanted to tell you he wasn't interested, he could've done anything *besides* what he did...” Lathe gently pet his hair, thoughtful. “...I don’t want you to think that every time you try to start a relationship with someone you like that this sort of thing is going to happen. This, or humiliation... not every time. Crushes come and go... and I hope you know that it isn't always like that. ...painful, I mean. You'll understand better when you're older... but you should know that this doesn't mean giving that part of yourself to someone else is any less important. You still have a lot of growing up to do before you ever get there... but you should know that.” *I don't want you to settle into the mindset of 'I'm ruined, I'm ruined and nobody should have me, nobody will want me...'* because you always need to understand you deserve respect, *especially when it comes to that... you need to understand that. I don't want to give you enough time to start to think otherwise.*

“I... I-I don’t w-want it to happen again.... Is-is it because I hated people like me before? Is this my punishment?” *My punishment.... For being the monster like my father, that my mother never wanted, that no one ever wants... “I’m never gonna get adopted.... Am I?”* His eyes were full of pain, looking to him with brokenness. *No one will.*

Lathe gently kissed his cheeks, his words soft, trying desperately to help ease his mind. “Tucker, nothing you could've ever done would warrant this... it was nothing you did, and everything Devon did. It's not your fault.” He held Tucker close, gently rocking them back and forth. “Honey, back at the front desk, I called you my son. You staying with us might not be a temporary thing. You could end up staying until you're eighteen. Maybe longer. But you have a home with us now. I don't want you to think that getting adopted is the only way you'll find a home. We’d love to have you in ours. You're more than welcome to stay.” *You've changed a lot... and after this, I'm not about to abandon you. You need the support more than ever now.*

“I was given up 3 minutes after I was born... My mom never came to look for me, and my Dad probably never even knew about me.... I was adopted twice... And brought back because of my temperament both times not even a year later... I was 3 the first time, and 8 the second.... I didn’t understand at first but when I was 8... And I was brought back... I knew no one wanted me. I’ve been relocated, time and time again... None of the foster families want me, they just take me because the program pays them to house me... I just... I want someone to take me home, who’s
brought me home because they’ve wanted me… But no one’s ever done that… I’m sorry Lathe… But am I ever going to be adopted, be perfectly honest with me… Am I ever gonna be adopted?”

I’m not am I? No one actually wants me… And this… This just pushed things to a whole new level of being thrown away.

Lathe was silent for a long moment, his words careful. “…Tucker, a lot of things happened when you came to our home. You stole a horse and tried to run away with it, you tried to drive Eren and Levi apart because they’re gay, and you punched Jake for supporting them and their gay friends, and mine too. You even came home with straight F’s on your progress report. And we kept you in all of that. I don't think you've stayed adopted or will be, not because you're some awful human being and you're certainly not… but because nobody knew what to do with you. It's hard to think you'll like someone when they have a tendency to run, to shout, to fight back. It's not easy to think that. But I kept thinking, “Maybe it's not him that's the problem. It's the people that take him in and where they put him.” Lathe gently rocked them, staring at his shoes. “With stealing the horse and running away so many times before, maybe he's not running from a place or a person but an idea, the idea of being ready to go home to a nice family and not having one really want him. With trying to drive Levi and Eren apart, fine, he's homophobic. But that's no reason to shove him somewhere else and make someone else deal with him. With punching Jake, everyone gets angry. But he doesn't know what to do with that emotion, maybe he was never taught where to go with it. With the failing grades, he tries so hard, but maybe he's not learning it right. Maybe he doesn't learn the way the teachers teach. They're all things that can be fixed or at least helped. And I thought if anyone could help, it could be us. But I didn't just keep you around to mess with you and punish you. And it wasn't like I couldn't get rid of you, we had opportunities, especially when Jake came home with a broken nose. We kept you because I thought you could still turn out to be a good kid. I had a gut feeling and I gave a whole ton of shits about helping you get where you needed to be and when you came home with good grades and you’d been on good terms with Jake and Eren and Levi lately and you actually smiled I was so proud of you… and you should know that we care about you so much. We want what's best for you. And if nobody else wants to come and love you like their own son, god damn it I'll do it for them twice over. We love you, Tucker. Just because we might not be permanent doesn't mean you can't make our house a home. We'd love it if you did.” …we love you. Even Eren and Levi, although Levi is getting kinda hard to read. But I'm sure he does. And Jake adores you too- he always asks you if you want to play a game with him and Sammie. Ieva and I love you. You've got a family and you barely even know it.

“But…. You didn't choose me…. That's all I want…. Is for someone to choose me…. To want me, and keep me longer than a year…. I know the patterns… I’ll be taken away soon…They move me around every few months…. ” I won't be able to keep my grades up… And I won't be able to get cookies for B’s…. I might even get raped again…. I won't be able to talk to them…

Lathe gently kissed his cheek, holding him closer. “...Tucker, the day you leave the house, I'm going to cry my eyes out… we’d miss you so much… we were asked if we could take you specifically… and we said yes. And we chose to keep you, too, even with everything that happened. If you get taken again, it won't be because we can't keep you or don't want you anymore. It'll be because you're adopted, or you're old enough to want to move out and live your own life. But until then, we want to keep you. We really, really do.” Lathe sniffled, rubbing his eye. Fuck, I'm going to cry anyway just thinking about it... we don't want to give you up because
we choose to. But we'll give you to whomever will adopt you and love you. And that will be okay, because you deserve to be loved by someone.

Tucker shut himself up, simply nodding and holding onto Lathe as the door opened, Scotty holding out scrubs for him. *Are those for me?* He held out his hands, taking the blue clothes from him.

“You should get dressed… The police would like to speak with you… Oh um… If you're comfortable with Lathe... someone needs to take pictures of all the marks on your body.” *I was required to call them whenever someone has to use a Rape Kit…*

Lathe nodded, taking the camera Scotty handed him. “Alright, thanks Scotty.” Lathe looked to Tucker, shifting out from under him. “This won't take too long, Tucker. Can you let me take the pictures the police need?” He watched Tucker nod, helping him move to take off part of the gown, hiding his nether as he took pictures of his bruised torso, the marks on his back, the scratches on his thighs. He apologized over and over as he had to take a picture of his entrance, an angry red with a small tear. *He really hurt you…* Lathe helped Tucker into the scrubs, letting go of him to open the door. *I just want to fork over this camera, let the cops talk to him and get him home so he can sleep until noon and I can make him whatever he wants for lunch and try to make him feel better…*

Scotty took the camera first, taking a look at all the pictures, swallowing hard as he saw all the bruises and scratches and the angry red tear at his entrance. *That’s horrible… God….* He let the two cops look at the pictures. “He’s not stable at the moment… So just basic questions please.” Scotty led them to the room, letting the two men enter with him. *Please don't ask hard questions to him….*

The shorter man spoke first, trying to seem as non-threatening as possible. “Hi… My name is Officer Brandy…. But you can call me Mike if you want… Can you tell me what your name is?” His voice was soft as he crouched on the floor, trying to make himself appear small as possible to help Tucker feel safer. *Ted can take notes… It's easier that way.*

Tucker eyes the man warily, curling in on himself into a small ball on the hospital bed. “U-Uhm… my name’s Tucker…” *Why are you crouching like that…? It looks weird…* Tucker felt oddly vulnerable without Lathe next to him like he had been for the past hour, looking to him with pleading eyes. *Come back… please…* He soon got his wish, visibly relaxing a bit when Lathe sat on the bed and pulled him close again.

“Tucker, huh? I like that name… You seem like a smart kid… Can you tell me this guy’s name? And how he relates to you?” *Easy questions, you can do it, not about the topic at all, ease him in…* The man pointed to Lathe as he sat down with Tucker. *Pretty sure that’s Lathe.*
Tucker glanced up to Lathe, easily shifting until he was in his lap, his fist tightening on his sweater. “U-Uhm… t-this is my foster parent…. h-his name is L-Lathe…” That's all he'll ever be… isn't it...

“Okay, Tucker. You're doing great… Do you think you could remember your birthday for me? And tell me how old you are?” How old are you? I know we were called in because it was a minor that got raped, but we need to be sure...

“Uhm… December 24th… 20XX… I-I'm thirteen…” He wanted to hide, not wanting to be asked questions. I don't wanna think… I wanna go home and forget and sleep… I wanna go home...

“Okay Tucker, just a few more questions and they’re getting a bit harder… Do you know what happened to you?" I know this is a lot to ask, but I need to.

Tucker nodded, looking down at his feet. “......I got raped…” He looked to the officer, the look in his eyes one of defeat. “...is this the part where I tell you everything I know that happened…?” I don't wanna… but if I have to… I can try… maybe...

“No, you don't have to tell us everything… But can you tell us who did it… And where maybe? If you can remember… You’re being really brave.” I want you to know that.

“I-It was my engineering class project partner… Devon Bracknell… I was at his house to work on our project… 182 Maple Court… ...he forced me from the kitchen to…. to the couch in the living room…” He hurt me… hit me and got mad when I tried to get away… he wouldn't stop… even when I screamed and cried in pain...

Mike nodded. “That's all you need to tell us, you’re very brave… I think we have all we need, can you think of anything you want to tell us?” I want to make sure we’re not missing something that only you know.

Tucker was quiet for a moment, but his voice was even when he spoke again, staring at a tile on the floor. “...he had me down, raping me for three hours… it was barely eight when we went to eat dinner and he dragged me to the living room… and he finally stopped at eleven… I finally got to text Lathe to come get me then…” He finally let me go... Tucker burrowed his head into Lathe’s chest, desperately wanting to get away. “H-Home…” Lemme sleep… please...

Mike nodded to Lathe. “We have everything we need, as long as he’s cleared from the hospital,
you can go. Drive safe…” I can’t necessarily tell you to have a nice night, when your son was raped... The two men then exited the room, going to get the box of evidence that Scotty had collected.

Lathe scooped Tucker up, cradling him close and walking from the hospital room. He felt Tucker’s head fall onto his shoulder, close to falling asleep as he set him in the passenger’s seat of the car and shut the door. It was a short drive home, bringing the tired teen into the house quietly. He brought him upstairs, getting his shoes off and helping him sleepily change into loose, warm pajamas. He tucked him, about to kiss him goodnight when his hand reached up tiredly, his eyes pleading with him.

“S-Stay?” I don't wanna be alone...

Lathe smiled wearily, kicking off the boots he hadn't bothered ditching at the door. “Let me go get changed so my tie doesn't kill me in my sleep?” He watched Tucker nod, the ghost of a smile on the boys lips before it disappeared. It didn't take long for him to change into pajamas, traipsing back into his bedroom. He chuckled when Tucker immediately moved to make room for him before burrowing into his chest, pulling the blankets up to their chins, his arms wrapped solidly around him. He pecked his mop of hair, letting his eyes slip shut. “Goodnight, Honey.” You'll be okay. I won't let anyone hurt you anymore.
Chapter 71: The Skype Call

Finally, I’ve got time to call him. Levi sat down at one of the tables in what was a sort of a commons area on base, for once not running around on some assignment like the dozens of people around him. He set up his computer, putting an earbud in his ear so he would actually hear Eren speak, his boot tapping the dusty ground underfoot. His skin was already beginning to tan, a product of the hot, dry, and sunny climate. Levi clicked the call button, waiting for the image to pop up onscreen. He smirked when Eren finally came on screen, his voice not having any bite in it, lightly playful. <“Hey Eren. The house falling apart without me around yet?”> It's nice to see you again. I already miss you.

<“The house might not be… But I am, that’s for damn sure… Holy shit, you’re so tan! What the hell, you’re going to be darker than me at this rate.”> And that is hard to accomplish…. Eren took his computer down to the kitchen counter to plug it in. <“I take it you have some free time since you’re calling me?”> He had a sad smile on his face looking at Levi, knowing he could be whisked away any minute to go back on the clock. I miss just being able to talk to you…. You’ve been gone almost two months and I’ve talked to you like twice …

Levi smirked, running a hand through his hair before inspecting the golden back of it. <“It’s been nothing but work in the sun this whole time, I barely have a spare second to breathe. I haven’t been able to call as much as I’d like to.”> His look was a bit wistful. <“I miss you. But I think I’ll manage okay. I have been, more or less. How are things back home? Sammie still around? Tucker still more-or-less reformed? Or do I have to yell at him?”> I’d rather not, but y’know. He doesn’t get to make Eren upset. Nobody does. I even smacked Lathe the one time for scaring the crap out of Eren. Lathe!

The smile on Eren’s face disappeared. <“Um… They’re okay… I guess, Sammie’s gonna be leaving soon, there’s a family that’s showing interest… And Um…. Tucker was raped last week, so he’s been staying home… It was one of the upperclassmen in an elective he had… He’s coping… or at least trying to.”> His words were soft as he looked down at the keyboard trying to think how Levi would react to that. What will you think about that?

Levi had to purposefully try to keep his jaw from hitting the floor, his eyes full of sympathy. <“Oh my God, that’s terrible … is he at least kinda doing okay?”> It'd be awful if he fell into a bad mentality about it… if he shut off to everyone… he needs to get better.

<“A bit.”> Lathe poked his head onscreen from behind Eren, waving to Levi, a sad smile on his face. <“He spends a lot of the day sleeping or just chilling upstairs, but he comes downstairs to do the work he’s been missing. I’m trying to coax him back out of his shell, but it’s not going too well just yet. But I think he’ll be okay. He’s a tough kid.”> He really is.
Levi chuckled when Eren jumped at Lathe’s sudden appearance, looking thoughtful. He smirked as Lathe’s cheeks tinted pink, looking between them. If Sammie’s going to have a new home soon, can I say hi to her? While I know I still can? She’s adorable...

“I’ll go fetch the tiny humans to say hi- then I’ll let you two have your ‘alone time.’” Lathe laughed when Eren stuck his tongue out at him, going to gather up the two kids from the living room where they played with colorful building blocks. “C’mon, Levi wants to say hi.” Lathe scooped up Sammie and balanced her on one hip, Jake following like an excited puppy and immediately waving when he saw Levi on the screen.

“Hi Levi!” He grinned wider when Sammie tried to say the same, giggling. “We miss you.” It’s weird that you’re not here anymore… but you said you’ll come back, so I guess we just wait now. But we still get to talk to you!

Levi chuckled, waving. “Hey Jake. Hi Sammie.” He looked to Sammie, his eyes softening for once. “You be good for your new family, okay? I hear someone wants to keep you. I’m sure they’ll take good care of you, so behave. …sometimes.” He smirked when the other laughed, Sammie making a grabby motion at the screen. I’m sure you’ll be fine. You’ll like your new family.

“You heard him, Sammie. Cause just enough trouble to keep your parents on their toes.” Lathe pecked her cheek, sighing when she started to squirm in his arms. “Okay, okay, you can go back to playtime if you wanna. Say bye-bye to Levi, Honey.” Lathe pointed to the screen, waving.

“Bye-Bye Levi.” She managed to make the ‘v’ sound, something she accomplished when simply tugging on his sleeve to get him to give her juice or read her a book didn’t always work. She waved, giggling when he waved back. She moved to tug on Jake’s arm when she was put down, wanting to go back to playing. Wanna build stuff!

Levi watched his a melancholy smile as Sammie and Jake disappeared from the screen, thoughtful. She’s gotten so big already… you give her a kiss for me, okay? I’ll miss her. But we won’t be without another little ball of energy for long… I don’t think, at least. Levi watched as Lathe waved him goodbye, leaving them alone. Did you find someone to carry for us…? I wanna know when we do… I wanna know when the due date is...

Eren nodded, watching the two kids go off and play. It’s… It’s a process, Hannah’s trying to get an egg to accept my sperm… And once she can do it… We start looking for someone… I know it’s gonna be a long time, but… We’re really going to try, and Your sperm is frozen for now, and Hannah’s using mine so that we won’t run out of yours anytime soon.” He twiddled with his thumbs, watching them before he looked up to Levi. I’m sorry, I know we don’t know...
everything yet, but as soon as we know who it is, I’ll tell you, and I’ll tell you as soon as Hannah can get an egg to take my sperm.” Eren’s face was twisted between a smile and a frown as he looked over the monitor to see Tucker downstairs. “Tucker, do you wanna say ‘hi’ to Levi? ...Why are you looking at me like that?” He raised an eyebrow as Tucker slowly came over.

“Why are you speaking in German?” Tucker’s eyes were large as he slowly came up to Eren, looking at Levi, waving quietly. *Levi looks tan…*

Eren smiled softly, reaching over to rub Tucker’s back, pulling him close. “I make sure that he keeps up with German, it was one of my promises that he has to keep while he’s away…. You wanna try? Levi should be able to know what your saying, and I can help you.” *Come on, let’s see if you’ll open up with us.*

Tucker warily nodded, looking to Levi, thinking hard as he spoke. <“...Good Afternoon, Levi… um…”> Tucker thought, a tiny mischievous flicker in his eye as he thought of one of Lathe’s trick sentences from a German tutoring lesson. He carefully pronounced the words, but made it sound casual. <“On a scale of one to lamp, what flavor is the sky?”> *I wanna see if you understood that.* He heard Eren snicker next to him, trying not to make it obvious it was a joke. *I wonder what your answer is.*

<“........what?”> *Am I going deaf, or is the connection bad…?*

<“I said …”> Tucker and Eren had to fight to get their giggling under control. <“O-On a scale of one t-to l- lamp …”> Tears pricked at his eyes from laughing. <“W-What flavor is the s-sky?“> He couldn’t stand Levi’s perplexed expression looking away, a hand holding his stomach. <“W-We really want to know!”>

Levi just stared at them, slowly repeating their question. <“...On a scale of one, to lamp … the flavor of the sky ?”> *He’s fucking with me.* He looked up at the sky, seeming to ponder the question. <“I’d say giraffe. Medium-rare.”> *Just about.*

Eren struggled to hold in his laughter as Tucker look to the screen with confusion. *He doesn’t know what those words are…* He couldn’t help but let his laughter slip, trying to cover his mouth. *Oh my god this is great …*

Tucker smacked Eren’s arm, wanting him to translate. “What’d he say?! Tell me! Stop laughing and tell me!” *I don't know those words!*
Eren continued to laugh harder when Tucker switched to English, struggling to calm down and tell him without laughing. “Levi said Giraffe… Medium-rare.” His bit his lower lip as he chuckled, looking behind Tucker to see Lathe staring at them with wide eyes. Well… Tucker hasn’t really laughed since he moved here… Let alone spoken much after the accident…

Tucker cracked up harder at that, his eyes for once glimmering with mirth as he looked to Levi again. “A-Are you sure you don’t detect a h-hint of-of zebra in there? M-Maybe elephant?” He watched as Levi was obviously trying not to bust out laughing, glancing up as he caught sight of Lathe leaning on the banister, trying himself not to fall over with laughter. This is great!

Levi needed a minute, speaking when he was sure he wouldn't immediately start laughing when he did. <“Oh my God, he's turning into a mini Lathe.”> ….come to think of it, everyone starts to turn into Lathe when they’re around him too much. …well, not too much… a lot. And I haven't seen him so happy the entire time we've had him.

Lathe was stunned that Tucker looked as happy as he did, relieved that Tucker seemed to be doing very well compared to the rest of the week. I haven't seen him so happy… I'm so glad he's enjoying himself for right now. Let him forget about being sad or worried- he could use good humor.

Eren smiled softly and rubbed at Tucker’s back. “You hungry? We can make you something to eat, and you can talk to Levi if you want?” You’re smiling… You're really smiling…<“How much time do you think you have Levi?”> His words were soft as Tucker nodded, moving to sit next to Eren, looking to the screen expectantly.

<“Who knows? Probably half an hour, ish, at least. I don't think they'll snatch me up to do anything else for a bit.”> He looked to Tucker, who had a confused expression. <“Plenty.”> His face lit in understanding at that, smirking. “And I'm in the Middle East, not Africa. If anything, the air tastes like camel.” Levi glanced up as someone at a nearby table chuckled, giving him an amused look. <“I'll try to make my sentences simple.”> …he still looks confused. <“Me words simply. Okay?”>

Oooookkkaaayy. <“Okay!”> Tucker nodded, looking to Eren, leaning his head on his shoulder for a moment. “Can I have a grilled cheese please? You make them the best. …don’t tell Dad I said that.” No, I can hear him thinking ‘Gee, thanks.’ already.

Lathe was stunned, he and Eren sharing a shocked look. …did he just… he did, didn't he. Finally. Lathe grinned, ambling over and faking a disapproving tone, ruffling Tucker’s hair. “So I make terrible grilled cheese, do I?”

Tucker grinned sheepishly, batting away Lathe’s hand. “I didn't say that…”
“Really? Because it sounded like you totally just insulted my cooking skillz.” The ‘z’ in ‘skillz’ was audible as he hugged him from behind. “I oughta tickle you for that.” Tucker struggled in his hold at the threat, tickling his ribs only for a moment before letting him go. “Okay, fine, I'll just go take me and my awful cooking skills elsewhere.”

Tucker reached out and snatched Lathe’s waist, tugging him back for a hug. “Your cooking skills are not awful. ...much.” He laughed as Lathe nearly got his ribs again, playfully shoving him back. “Stop trying to tickle me!”

“Mur.” Lathe stuck his tongue out at him, and Tucker did right back, causing Lathe to chuckle and amble off, letting them alone again. He called me Dad...

“...Tucker, you're literally turning into Lathe and it's awesome.” This is very amusing.

<“Where… Are you? East… Center?”> Tucker struggled to try and remember how he was supposed to say everything, unsure since Levi had said everything in English. But where in the Middle East is he? He looked over to Eren as the brunette got out stuff for grilled cheese. How do you say grilled cheese?

<“Where in the Middle East?”> He watched Tucker nod after a second, making sure to speak clearly. <“I'm in Iraq right now. I can't say where exactly, but that’s the country. It's hot and dry as hell, just know that. It's all desert around here.”> At this rate I'll have skin cancer by next Thursday.

Tucker looked to Levi with a completely lost look. Why can he speak so fluently? I don’t get it. “Eren… What did Levi say?” He whined, turning his head to the taller man. “He talks too fast… And he’s using words I don’t know.”

Eren sighed shaking his head a bit. “He said he’s in Iraq, but he can’t tell you where, and that he’s really hot outside… Knowing him he’s complaining about it being hot because his soldiers are probably dropping left and right from overheating.” He finished up making Tucker’s sandwich, handing it off and making himself one. <“How many passed out today Levi?”>

<“Three that I know of, they've been dropping like flies… it's not as bad as when we first got here, but still, you'd think they'd be doing a bit better coping with the heat.”> Levi watched Tucker dig into his sandwich, a flicker of jealousy in his eye. <“...I would kill for a grilled cheese right now.”> Tasty...
Eren snorted from where he stood. <“Well, you’ve got something to look forward to coming home to at least.”> Yes, you only care about your food… <“Not even wanting to see me, just wants my food… Ugh… So painful.”> He dramatically fainted behind Tucker so that Levi could see. What’s gonna be your response?

<“Well Eren, we do know your sausage is to die for.”> Levi was wearing a shit-eating grin, listening as Eren made noises akin to that of a dying whale while trying to hold in his laughter. <“I know what my first meal is going to be, coming home…”> You.

Eren grew completely crimson as Tucker turned in his chair and asked what Levi had said. <“It’s better for me to know and for you to not…”> He sighed when Tucker gave him another look. “Alright, English, I’m sorry, I’m in the habit of speaking my mother tongue…. Anyways, Levi’s saying adult things….” He slipped Levi the bird while Tucker’s back was turned. <“Think of the children, will you!? My heart cannot take promises for that long… And you’ll forget about it probably, so it’ll just get my hopes up for nothing…”>

<“Maybe.”> Levi chuckled as Tucker evenly glared at him for a moment before turning back to his sandwich, no real malice in his look. <“Have you been causing Dad much trouble?”> It was a test question, and Tucker seemed to think hard for a moment before nodding. Levi smirked. <“Good. Just checking.”> These things are important. <“Studying going okay?”> Has Dad tutoring you helped your learning by yourself in the classroom?

Tucker shrugged, his eyes seeming to dull as he thought about school. <“I… Not want to go back….”> I really don’t not after what he did to me. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, flinching a bit when Eren sat next to him. It’s just Eren…

Levi considered him for a moment, careful so he could understand better. <“Even if you don’t… you have to. Not everyone is so mean. And you need to learn from your teachers. Dad has to keep the house from falling apart. You should try to go back soon. Promise me you will.”> You can’t stay home forever… I know what happened was seriously traumatic, but not everyone is like that… you need to try to go back. You can’t stay home forever.

Tucker was quiet for a moment, nodding after a long pause. <“I… I can try…”> I don’t wanna go back… Devon’s still there, he doesn’t have his court date yet… And I’ll have to go in for that…. I don’t wanna see him…. Tucker squirmed in his chair, trying not to think about what happened as Eren pulled Tucker into his lap, his hand carding through his hair.

Tucker was facing away from the camera as Eren pulled him flush. You’re trying not to cry, but it’s okay if you do… His hand gentle as it slowly made it’s way through Tucker’s dark brown locks.
“It’s okay.” He whispered quietly to the boy as he felt him shudder in his arms. You were trying not to panic…. He gently rocked Tucker to try and calm him more, feeling him begin to relax. <“His rapist doesn’t have a court date yet, but as soon as he does, Tucker will be brought in to testify on that day…. Devon’s still allowed at the school, I’m not sure they know what’s going on really, Dad’s been letting Tucker stay home.”> Let’s hope that that explanation helps a bit, so you can understand what’s going on around here.

Levi’s eyes widened. <“Are you serious? They need to know what’s going on with their student, because when all of a sudden he’s put away for life they’re going to be shocked. ….and if Tucker wants to go to school and feel safe… but they let Devon go to school and scare Tucker every time they’re in the same room… I think that’s against Title IX or something. Remember when we watched that movie in class?”> I think that's a thing… <“Look, tell Dad that he and Zacharias need to talk about what Devon did. He shouldn't be in the same classes as Tucker anymore, because it's keeping him home, which means he’s missing classwork and falling even more behind because Dad can't be a teacher for eight hours a day anymore with so many people to take care of.”> He's a miracle worker, but he's not a time lord. There's a difference.

<“I know… But his parents are trying to cover it up as best as they can, it hasn’t even made the news around here yet. I could only imagine what it would be like if the national news came and did a story on it…”> Eren kept running his fingers through Tucker’s hair, watching as Lathe came to get him. He’ll be okay, he’s getting better at least...

“C’mon, kid, up we go.” Lathes voice was soft as he scooped Tucker from Eren’s arms, looking to Levi onscreen. <“...I do need to tell them. I've been dragging my feet about it, but it should be done. I'll call him today if I can.”> I have a house to run, and Tucker has classes to attend. Lathe gently kissed the top of Tucker’s head, meandering with him to the living room, quietly asking if he wanted to play cards. Anything to help you feel better.

Eren watched them go off out of sight with a sigh. <“Oh, um, let's put that topic aside for right now… Hannah’s horse had her filly. She’s gorgeous….”> A wide grin had settled on Levi’s features, a happy smile, his hands supporting his head as he watched the screen and people move around behind Levi. So many people are there...

Levi smirked, his chin in his hand. <“When did Luna have her? Is she still struggling to get her hooves under her?”> If she's still at the point where her legs are like ‘lol what’s walking’ I’d love to see it.

< “No, Arya’s not struggling anymore, she’s about three and a half weeks old, she’s a really good runner already, we have to watch her because she can slip through the fence, and she’s done that once already… I had to go get Charlie and go out and find her, she didn’t get far though, which was good.”> She’s a little escape artist… We’re gonna have to lock her door with a lock and key when she gets older.
Levi chuckled. “Arya? Nice name. But I thought they had to be given, like, an official name or something?” 

“I dunno, a thing because she’s a pure Bavarian Warmblood.”

“Arya’s her barn name… Her registered name is Fleet Feet, and as soon as we registered her I’ve been getting emails about how much people are willing to pay for her… The highest I’ve gotten so far was $150k from a man in Idaho… She’s got the bloodlines for competitive jumping…”

“I almost wanna keep her just to see what she can do…"

“Wow, that’s a lot of money. And it’s a fitting name for a filly that seems to want to run away.” Levi chuckled, running a hand through his hair. “But we need to remember too that Hannah owns her too; so she’s, like, a joint-custody filly. But that’s great!” That’s a ton of money to pay for one horse…"

“Yeah, it is great, and I guess I can get used to the joint-custody now before I have to deal with you and my kids… That’s just gonna be a nightmare, I can see it already!” Eren joked as he sipped from the glass he had gotten forever ago. “I don’t really know what to do though… I don’t have a schedule I need to keep anymore since Jeff dropped me. I know Dad said he would produce my music for me… But, I just… I don’t know what to sing anymore. I guess I’m kinda lost… It’s even worse now that I don’t have you right by my side now. What am I supposed to do?” Eren’s voice started to get a bit shaky towards the end of his spiel. I don’t know what to do anymore.

Levi looked to his hand, not knowing what to say. “...I’m sorry you have to go on by yourself for a while… but you’re not alone. You have everyone back home to support you… but… you have a lot of time now and nothing to do with it. I….” Levi didn't know what to do besides shrug, looking up, his face falling as he saw the torn look in his eyes. “Eren, please don't cry…” Fuck, I can't hug him or kiss away his tears or anything…. "Maybe you should look around for some kind of job, have something to do during the day if you don't know what to do with yourself… it'll help keep your mind busy…” I don't know what you'd do… but… anything might do you good…"

“Yeah, the uneducated pop star is going to get a job…. That makes total sense, Levi…” Eren wiped away the tears that started to form in his eyes, sniffing a bit. I hate this… I just go out and ride all the time… and Charlie just puts up with it… I haven’t taken him to any competitions either… maybe I could do that? “Maybe I could take Charlie to a competition?” What do you think about that suggestion?

Levi nodded at that, smiling faintly. “That’s definitely an idea. You’re a very good rider, and Charlie certainly seems able to do whatever you want him to. I think you should.” You’ll have fun. “It seems like a better idea than bagging groceries somewhere… and now I can't stop thinking of celebrities doing that.” Yeah, that's a ridiculous idea. You yourself could do so much better.
It is a ridiculous idea, thank god you realize that…. Maybe I could leave for a little bit, go and stay with Hannes for a bit? I mean Dad’s got his hands full with the kids as it is… Maybe I could set up something in Germany, maybe a concert… I’m not sure how many people listen to my music anymore though… But Youtube keeps sending me checks, and I get royalties through Jeff still… So maybe there is an audience out there… wait… can I get there on a boat? I am not flying there, no way… nope, I’m never getting on one of those metal death traps ever again…”>

He shook his head, his chocolate locks moving everywhere. Absolutely not. I hate flying… I will never do that ever again!

“Well, even if you did sail there, you’d spend a bit on a train getting into Europe to Germany. It’s not exactly on the edge of the sea. But that’s quite the idea. You and Hannes get to spend time with each other- we all know how me he’s missed you- and you could do stuff there. I dunno, see the horses he tends, visit where your home used to be, set up a concert even if you wanted. It could do you some good. …but wait awhile until Tucker’s a bit more stable, okay? I can tell he’s been a lot more clingy to you and Lathe than usual because of what happened. He needs the support.”

And he’s been doing so well… I can’t believe something like that happened to him… < “…I’m sorry to bring the topic back… but, Uhm… how did it happen…? Do you know much?”>

“I can’t help but be curious as to how this guy got the opportunity and took it…

“Well, Tucker I guess talked to Dad last week, saying that he had a crush on Devon, and that he was really confused as to what he was… Devon’s a senior… They were in the same engineering class, and apparently they were paired up for a project… So they wanted to finish it up on Friday night so they didn’t have to meet over the weekend to finish it by Monday… I guess Tucker said something about liking him, and at first Devon laughed at him, and Tucker told him he really did… This was all over dinner that Devon had fixed them ’cause he was staying late as it was…. Devon grabbed him and took him to the couch in the living room and overpowered him… You know Tucker, he’s not a big kid… And Devon is twice his size…. I’m just worried about how he’s gonna see his crushes from now on… And he slept with me the other night when Mom came home late… I’m worried about him, he seems like he’s getting better, but I don’t want him to end up like I did.”

I really don’t… He covered his mouth, as if feeling sick by the words he spoke. I don’t want him to go through what I went through.

Levi was worried when Eren covered his mouth, the brunette looking a bit sick. <“I’m sure he’s going to be just fine, Eren. But he’s going to need some time. Plenty of it, given this was his first crush on a guy. He’s young and confused about what he is, and it’s not surprising really that he’s flipped the switch from being homophobic to maybe being gay or bi or whatever since he’s at that age. We both know what it was like.”>

He watched Eren nod, shrugging. <“He’s got to make plenty of amends with himself after this, but hopefully he’ll be his old self again soon. He’ll be okay. He’s tough, and he’s got you and Lathe to talk to if he needs to.”>

He’s got a good support system in place; he’ll be okay soon.

“I’m still worried… Tucker keeps everything bottled up, and tries to handle it himself… Remember how he was failing earlier this year? Well, he never told us, he just struggled with his homework in silence, and I’m so worried that there’s so much he’s not telling us…”>

Eren had to cover his mouth again as he felt nausea run through him once again. I… Fuck I think I’m gonna be
sick… I feel horrible about this… I should’ve gone over there to get him, but Dad said he would text when he needed a ride… <“I um… I need to go… Hold on…”> Eren hurriedly got up and went to the bathroom that wasn’t too far away from the kitchen, closing the door and locking it as he became acquainted with the porcelain bowl once again. *Fuck I couldn’t keep it down…*

Levi waited in tense silence as Eren ran off, looking green. *He's throwing up… fuck… *he must blame himself for this, at least a little bit… *he's so worried*… It was a long fifteen minutes before Eren appeared back on screen, looking worn out. <“Eren, you're literally worrying yourself sick. You can't; that'll make things worse. …you need to trust that he'll come out of this okay. He'd been so scared to tell you about his grades; he was fearful that he'd get yelled at, punished. But after all this? Even when he talks to Lathe about maybe being gay, even when he's raped and feels sick and disgusting, all that you and Lathe wanted was to help him and to take care of him. I think he's beginning to understand just how many shits you two give about him. I think he's going to be a bit more open, but keep a careful eye on him, okay? Try to have small conversations about stuff if you think he's hiding something specific. But don't push him too hard, okay? He'll get defensive.”> *He's in the fragile spot of being vulnerable and unsure of whether to trust you two at the same time. Careful.*

Eren nodded, thinking of a few things that popped into his head. <“Is it okay if we switch topics? I feel like I’m gonna get sick again if we keep talking about it….”> Eren didn’t wait for a reply before he nodded, running his shaking hands through his hair. <“Can we think about names?”> Please, I wanna switch topics…

<“Tiny human names?”> He smirked when Eren nodded, looking down at the table, thinking. <“Ugh, names are going to be the hardest part of all of this…. and we need middle names, and if it's a boy or a girl…. …if it's a girl, Lilian might be a nice name… and a boy…. hm… anything that isn't Michael.”> *Yeah, no Michaels. Sorry not sorry. There are too many of them already.*

<“Not Lilian, I got harassed in middle school by a girl named Lily, she shoved me in a locker and everyone forgot about me… I was in there for almost a whole day… Lilian is a no go.”> *My daughter will not be named Lilian or Lily or any other variation of that fucking name!*

< “Well then, okay. And now I'm out of ideas. I had literally one idea, and now it's gone. ...but I'm still thinking…”> *Why do people ever think this is easy?* <“...Rhododendron.”> *It's not nothing… but pretty close to nothing.*

<“Levi, if I could threaten abstinence you wouldn’t be gettin’ any…. I am not naming my daughter after a goddamn bush …. Now, try again, before I make my way to Iraq and skin you for suggesting it.”> Eren narrowed his eyes, straightening himself in his seat. *No… No bushes…*
I have no damn idea how to name a fucking child. Delilah sounds pretty, so there.

And now we’re onto either song lyrics or flowers… I can’t tell which but either way, I don’t want her to be stuck with people randomly blurt out “Hey there” and then expecting her to continue the song, nope, also not happening. I refuse… And I’m making a list of names our daughter/son shall not be named… Hahaha, Voldemort. I’m making a list called ‘The Children who shall not be named’. Voldemort used his powers against me… I’ve turned to the dark side… They have Daniel Radcliffe… And all of his fine ass.

Are you saying you prefer Daniel Radcliffe over me? I'm insulted, Eren. That hurts. And last I checked, he was one of the good guys. Yeah, Harry Potter doesn't bring an evil image to mind.

I never said he was evil… I just said the dark side has him… As in like a possession… That can be lost or traded… And yes, A) he’s a fucking movie star, B) He’s Harry fucking Potter, C) I could hear what Harry would moan like! It would be awesome!

I legitimately can't tell if you're fucking with me or not right now.

I couldn’t possibly be fucking with you, we’re on a Skype call half way across the world from each other… How does that constitute as fucking with you?

Levi smirked, leveling Eren with a cool look. “I know it’s a stretch, but hey, maybe I'm just desperate. A man can dream, can't he?” I wish … Ugh, the things I'd do just to get a kiss...

….. Desperate…….. Eren smiled softly, trying to hide his unease. I know what he said… I need to try and believe that he’ll wait too … “I guess he can… He can also try and imagine names for our future child.”

Levi dropped his head onto his arm, groaning. “...Eren, can we just accept I'm useless for names at the moment? Gimme time and I'll probably have a suggestion in, like, a month. ...tops.” I can't names...

Eren watched him drop his head, a frown flitting across his lips for a moment before disappearing. “Can we just accept that-...” His eyes widened as he looked up. “Jake… Put the knife down…”
It’s one of his mental breaks... And to think that he was fine a little bit ago... Eren looked between Levi on the screen and Jake before silencing the computer completely. “Jake… Can you hear me?” His words soft as he slowly got up, slowly getting closer to Jake. He could see the younger boy shaking as he weakly held the knife in his hand, watching Eren come closer with wide eyes. You need to calm down Hun... But first I need to get the knife away from you....

Wait, what. Levi picked his head up and watched with wide eyes as Eren moved off the screen, paling the slightest bit. Jake’s having one of his breaks? What?! Fuck ... I can’t see what’s happening... Levi heard the quiet hush of Eren’s soft voice, the tremor of Jake’s. Jake, don’t get violent and hurt Eren... please don’t...

Eren slowly came up to Jake, watching him as he watched back, the two of them almost analyzing each other. What are you doing Jake? Where are you... I know you can here me... But what memory are you in? “Jake, the bad man’s not here anymore, okay? I’m gonna come close to you… Don’t freak out, it’s just me.” His words were gentle as he stepped ever so close to Jake, quickly grabbing his wrist that held the knife and bringing Jake into his body after the knife clattered to the ground, letting out a heavy sigh and burying his nose in Jake’s hair. Oh thank god, you’re okay for now... Dad... Where’s Dad? Dad needs to come help...

Lathe’s head poked out from behind a corner a few moments after the knife loudly clattered onto the floor. “What was that-” He gasped when he saw the large knife on the floor, Jake trying to relax in Eren’s hold. “Eren, did he...?” He saw him nod, coming over slowly, trying not to seem threatening. “Jake, Honey… are you okay?” He reached out, a hand gently carding through his hair. Don’t be scared of me... please.

Jake flinched for a moment before he turned a teary eye to Lathe to see him. Dad? “I... I-Is... B... bad man.... Gone?” He whispered quietly, looking around in worry in the kitchen, as if terrified of a force unseen. I... I can’t see him...

Lathe nodded, moving to hold onto him with Eren, the two of them calming him and cooing to him quietly. “The bad man is gone, Jake, we’re all safe. You’re safe. It’s okay, Honey. Don’t cry.” Lathe gently wiped away his tears, tracing small patterns into his shoulder as Jake sniffled, his red face smushed against Eren’s chest. It’s okay... Lathe looked up to Eren from where he’d knelt on one knee, his words soft. <“Do you want me to take care of him, or...?”> I know Levi is probably still on the line... and Jake is kinda okay... this wasn't a bad one, I don't think...

<“I think that would work… Take him upstairs…”> He murmured quietly slowly starting to release Jake, watching his head pop up in confusion. Don’t freak out.

Leaving? Are you leaving? Jake’s eyes were wide as he watched Eren kiss his forehead, his hands
beginning to shake. *Why are you leaving?*

“Jake, Dad’s gonna take you back upstairs… Okay?” *Levi’s still on skype…*

The smaller boy looked over to Lathe, who was on his knees now, nodding and slowly slipping his hands from Eren’s shirt to Lathe’s. *Okay… I can go with Daddy….* His shaking hands gripped onto Lathe’s shirt as the man stood up and lifted him, his head nestling into his shoulder. “B-bed?” His voice was small as he held onto Lathe, still a bit shaky.

“Okay Hon. We’ll get you upstairs for a nap.” *I know how these breaks really wear you out…* Lathe cradled him close, bringing him upstairs to get him in pajamas and tuck him in. *He’ll be out like a light… probably until dinner…*

Eren sighed as he watched him walk away with Jake in his arms. *Okay… He’s okay… Good.* He made his way over to the computer, unmuting it. <“We’re all good now…”> *I swear every time you call crazy things happen…* <“Anything crazy happen where you are?”> His eyes looked hopeful. *I don’t think I could leave Jake alone… Let alone Tucker right now…*

Levi just slowly shook his head, his expression still one of worry. <“No… another person just dropped like a sack of potatoes from the heat again… but we just expect that now.”> *Nothing unusual by our standards…* <“I’m sorry so much is happening when I can’t be there…”> *You two have a lot on your plate…. and I can’t help…*

<“Well, we might be getting a few more kids after Sammie’s gone… The foster agency is thinking about giving us a group of boys… Brothers that wanna stay together, and they range from Tucker’s age to Sammie’s age… They don’t wanna be split up.”> *I can only imagine what some of these kids have been through, and I know what Tucker’s been through, which is probably why he’s gonna ask to sleep with me again tonight.* <“Some of these kids…. The horror stories I hear… Especially from Tucker, about what other kids have been through, it’s heart breaking…”> *I wish we could take more, we have the means and the space, but I’m not married, so I can’t take any… I don’t live in a separate location either…*

<“I can’t believe how broken the system is… I’m really glad Dad signed up to do this as quickly as he did. The kids that go through the system- Tucker, Jake, Sammie- and everyone else… they need a place to support them until they find permanent homes… you’re doing such a good job of it…”> *And knowing Lathe, he would be just fine with plenty more than six foster kids at once. He could do a dozen… he’s so patient.*

<“Thanks… Let’s see is there anything I’ve forgotten to mention…. Oh, the school is thinking of
allowing Jake to go to the high school for math classes…. I kinda taught him all the way up to Calc AB….”>

Eren rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment from the shocked look Levi have him. *What… He’s got an exceptional brain… He should use it…*

< “…I struggled so hard through that class for a lousy B and Jake just knows all that? What were you thinking, teaching derivatives to a third-grader?! I’m not saying I’m not impressed, but my god, man…”> Levi just shook his head, smiling faintly. <“If he thinks he can do it, let him. …and see if he can learn the other grades’ worth of stuff just as quickly. Maybe he can end up skipping a grade or two. If he retains history and science at this rate along with everything else, probably.”> *That’d be amazing…*

< “Well, did you see the guy that made ‘history of Japan’… That video I made you watch a bunch of times? Well he made a video called ‘history of everything, I guess’ and I showed it to Jake a few times, and he remembers the whole damn thing… I’m starting to think he’s got a photographic memory.”> *He very well could have it… <“He knows how to integrate too… And do all the volumes and areas on the graphs….***”>

< “If he understands integration, I’m not sure anything else could explain it. Lathe so needs to talk to Zacharias and see if he can test into a different grade; he could probably do it if Lathe helps him study. He still has copies of what the different grades’ classes are supposed to know. I remember he has this binder full of exam outlines and shit.”> *He needed them when he subbed near the end of the year; if you got him as a sub in May, the class was in for a review of the course. <“It sounds like he could test into the high school grades, at least for math. He should so have him take the AP exam in May, just to see how he’d do.”> *Probably, he’d do well.*

< “Yeah, I guess, I know in Math he should be able to take the exam… but I would wait until he goes through a class, that’s an easy A for him now…What am I missing… Oh yeah, um, Krampus finally got back to solid food again… Remember when Sharon lost her phone in our house? The one she called a plastic brick?”> *Most likely, we tried to look for it… It was in his stomach for as long as you’ve been gone… <“Well, um, we found it, in his stomach, along with an expo market he tried to eat.”>*

<“...Krampus ate Sharon’s cell phone. And an expo marker.”> Levi shook his head when Eren nodded. <“My god, that dog’s gonna get himself killed… let me guess, someone had to take him to the vet after the expo marker got eaten?”> *That'd explain how you found the phone… and the fact that he's apparently been off of solid food for a while…*

< “Yeah, Dad took him, they also found one of those wooden trains Sammie’s got and it looked like he chewed that to pieces… and some change… And the spare set of keys we couldn’t find….”> *He’s getting almost as big as Blake… And Blake’s getting old… I’m gonna need to look for a new dog soon…*
"Honestly, I’d probably just have a cone on his head for the rest of eternity so he couldn't get crap off the floor. ...that, or I'd probably drive everyone nuts making them clean shit off the ground so he can't go gobbling it up. But he really chewed up one of the wooden trains in half? Those were legit solid trains, they're made for the abuse of toddlers… but apparently not for the aggressive chewing of the wild doge.”> Apparently not. "And unless you clean those keys in boiling water first I wouldn't use them.”> I myself wouldn't want to use half-digested keys, no thank you. I'd break in first.

"Well, Dad had since gotten a new set of keys, and you should see him…”> Eren rose his fingers to his mouth and whistled loudly, hearing the click of nails against the floor as a small flock of dogs got close. “Krampus, come here…” He got off the stool to pick up the smaller dog from the pack, his cone still on his head and his stomach still decently shaved. "This is Krampus now... A lot thinner than he was before… And he’s got a scar running down his stomach.”> Eren carefully lifted the whining dog to show Levi the huge scar, setting him down in his lap after to gently pet him. "He’s not allowed to take the cone off for awhile…. Hanji’s orders… Oh and we found out that Hanji’s married to Moblit, the guy that paired me with Blake, and right now he’s looking for another dog for me…”> He knows Blake’s too old to go around with me anymore...

Levi’s eyebrows shot up at the sight of the scar running straight down his belly. "Ouch. Well, at least he won't be eating up anything that isn't food anytime soon. ......and Hanji got married? Huh. I took them as the type to be already too married to their work to have any time for a relationship.”> His voice lost some of it’s playful tone, sounding a bit more serious. "And Blake is getting kinda old… it's been a long time since you got him.”> He's done so much for you...

"Yeah, apparently they’ve been married since before we had her as a teacher, can you believe that? Blake doesn’t leave the house much anymore, and mostly concerns himself with entertaining Sammie and walking around the house with her. Nene’s getting a lot bigger, she's harder to push off of you once she’s asleep, and she just sleeps all the time. She’s in Tucker's room a lot more now, since he’s been sleeping at home a lot more, they’ve been besties for the past week and a half.”> They’ve looked really cute together. I should really start painting pictures of them.

"Huh, she always had us call her Ms. Hanji if you used the ‘Ms.’, but I know we mostly just called her Hanji, so… I dunno. But that's weird to think of- she never mentioned him before. Blake’s got his work cut out for him; Sammie’s got enough energy for three adults. And that sounds like Nene- always napping and able to convince you to let her sleep on the bed.”> You can't ever say no to her... she just wants to sleep. We empathize too much, so he always wins.

"Well, I guess they’d been separated, and Moblit finally asked to marry her again… I guess they’ve been married for about as long as we’ve been alive… But she never wore her ring because they weren’t together… Yeah, Blake has to take some breaks every once in awhile…”> Eren looked up as Lathe came in. "What are we making for dinner? And is Jake okay?”> I really hope he is... Eren shifted in his seat, shifting the computer so that Levi could see the both of them.
"Jake’s just fine, I have him in bed for a nap. He needs some rest and should be fine when he wakes up. Tucker too- he’s asleep, couldn't last for more than one game of Follow the Queens. It's a tiring day, and it's barely two.”> Lathe plopped down next to Eren, running a hand through his shaggy hair, looking tired. <“I’ll think of something to make for dinner. I might take the easy way out and let everyone make sandwiches and eat what they want. There are leftovers too… it's a foraging night.”> Lathe put his head on his arms on the table, sighing. <“Ugh, I could use a nap myself…”> I could use some sleep… I've been up really late and waking up really early… I'm worse than Ieva at this point...

<“Why don’t you go nap then? I can take care of dinner and set out a sorta-buffet of leftovers and such, shouldn't be much of a problem, go nap… You look like you need it Dad.”> You’ve gotta be so stressed out lately… Especially with everything going on, I know you and Mom aren't necessarily on the best of nightly terms at the moment… Nothing has come out of your room in two months… Eren gave him a reassuring pat on the arm. “Go sleep.”

Lathe looked up, giving him a weary look and standing. <“I think some rest will do me good… thanks, Eren.”> He tiredly waved to Levi, flashing him a small grin. <“I'll see you soon Levi. Take care of yourself.”> Lathe let his arm drop as Levi bid him goodnight, ambling off tiredly for upstairs. It didn't take long for him to change, his clothes folded neatly as always before he collapsed into bed, immediately knocked out. Ugh… I ache everywhere....

Levi looked back to Eren when he was sure Lathe wouldn't hear, his voice soft, brows furrowed a bit with worry. <“...do you know how he and Mom are doing, since…”> The unspoken word hung in the air, heavy. I know it's been hard on them… but I don't know if things have mended much since then… Dad had been distant at best a lot of the time when I was still home...

<“Not good… They haven't had any relations since then… Mom’s a lot more… How do I put this? Quiet, I guess? She sometimes just clings to Dad and starts crying… Though it’s mostly once the kids are asleep… She’s not been sleeping well… And neither has Dad really.”> Eren sighed, looking around the quiet house, Sammie quietly playing with blocks while Blake was laying by her. I wish I could do more… And help them try and get back together again...

Levi looked sympathetic, the quiet in the house behind Eren feeling out of place. <“...they lost a kid… it's going to take some time, but…”> It's been a while already.... <“I hope things work out in time…”> They’ll learn to move on… <“Dad seems really worn out… if anything, he needs a break…..”> And probably a good lay. But that’s hard to fix.

<“Yeah, I think the two of them just need a good bang to get it all out… Anyways… I think I might make some brotchen with Sammie… Keep her occupied….”> it would help out with sandwiches… If people decided they wanted them.
“That'd probably fix a lot of their problems, it's got to be driving both of them nuts. And good luck trying to get Sammie to focus on anything for two seconds. You'll need it.”

“I think I can manage it, especially if I tell her that I’m teaching her…” Eren turned his head. “Sammie…” He smiled when he got her to look at him. “Do you wanna learn how to make some special rolls with me?” *Come on, I’m sure you’ll want to…*

“....m-me… make stuff? ...learn?” Sammie looked to him with curious eyes, lighting up when he nodded. “Me learn!” She immediately scampered over, colliding with his legs and holding tight. *I wanna learn to make the thing!*

Eren smiled, picking her up and resting her on his hip. “See that Levi, she wants to learn. And then she can help anytime she wants to learn, isn’t that right Sammie?” *I knew it, you'll stay entertained…*

Sammie beamed toothily, sounding happy. “M- Me help Eren! Learn stuff!” She looked over and saw Levi on the screen, her eyes going wide, waving at him. “L-Levi!” *Miss you! Haven't been home…*

Levi smiled, waving to her. “Hey again Sammie. You be good for Eren, okay? Don't get too much dough in his hair. Just enough to get him annoyed.” *You've got the skill. Don't let us down.*

Eren chuckled quietly, setting her on the counter. “Alright Levi, I think this is goodbye for now… Say bye bye Sammie.” He had a gentle smile on his face, boosting her up a little bit. *You can say bye.*

Sammie smiled, waving her small hand at Levi. “Bye bye!”

Levi waved to her, smiling faintly. “Bye, Sammie.” <*>And I love you, Eren.”* Levi winked to him, smirking. *I'll see you soon.*
Chapter 72: Illness is a Bitch

Ieva was long gone to work by the time the kids were supposed to get up for school. Lathe stirred from sleep when he heard the sounds of the house waking up, the sheets on the floor, kicked off sometime during the night. He barely registered the sounds outside the door as dull thuds of footsteps and muffled voices, all of them sending muted pain through his skull. His limbs felt heavy, breathing was a chore, and he radiated heat like a furnace. Guh… Lathe heaved an arm over to the nightstand, fumbling blindly for his phone. He struggled to unlock it and type out a short message, dropping it when he was sure it sent.

LQ: Eren help

Eren felt his phone buzzing in his pocket, a small sigh escaping his lips as he set a pancake on Tucker’s plate, setting the pan down when he made sure that all the kids were eating properly. What is it? His eyes widened at the text message and he looked to Tucker. “Make sure that Sammie finishes up her plate…” He watched the older boy nod before scampering off to the stairs, bounding up them two at a time. What’s wrong? He went right to Lathe’s door, coming and closing the door, taking in the sight of Lathe sprawled over the whole bed, the sheets on the floor along with his cellphone. “Dad?” His voice was timid and quiet as he slowly came up to the man, feeling his forehead and realizing just how hot he was.

Fuck, he’s sick… Of course he is…

“I’m gonna go get the fever medication, okay? Do you want me to bring you anything else? I got the kids up and eating right now, then I’ll get them dressed and get them to school… You just stay in bed and rest.” Eren had knelt down beside the bed, letting his fingers glide through Lathe’s black hair. He’s pale… Paler than he normally is…

Lathe blearily blinked at him, barely able to nod, his eyes sliding shut after a second. “...bright…” He barely mumbled, trying weakly to burrow into the bed, wanting to get away from the light and the sound. Hurts…. “...okay… water… please… can't move….h-hurts…” I feel awful… everything hurts… He felt a dull thud in his head, and the lump in his throat kept him from whimpering in pain. Head hurts… hurts to think… guh…

Eren nodded, getting up and pulling the curtains together and then turning the light off, darkening the whole room. “I’ll be back, do you want me to make you something for breakfast?” I can make oatmeal, if you think you can eat it? His voice was full of concern as Lathe buried himself into his bed. He’s never sick, I can only imagine what it’s like for him…

Lathe tried to shake his head, the idea of food making him feel sick. “...n-not hungry… th-thank you…” I wanna sleep… make it stop hurting… He didn't have to wait long, having stayed absolutely still, trying to minimize his pain when Eren came back with medicine and a glass of cool water. He moved his hands next to him, weakly trying to force himself to sit up. Even with Eren helping it was a struggle, and he swayed to the side as his head spun. He leaned back against the headboard, trying to focus on the new task at hand. Water… pills… take…. Lathe held out a
shaky hand for the pills, trying to keep a solid grip on the glass to wash the pills down. Lathe didn't have the energy to be embarrassed when Eren had to held him hold the glass to his lips, his coordination thrown off. He struggled for a long minute to swallow down the whole glass, grateful when he was allowed to slump back onto the bed. “...thank you...” I wanna feel better...

Eren smiled softly and leaned down to peck Lathe’s forehead. “Okay, I’m going to push Jake on the bus to school, and dress Sammie and Tucker, I called Casper so he’s gonna come over and take care of Sammie to make sure she’s entertained while I talk to Mike about Devon still being in school. If you need anything, Casper will be here, or I’ll be home by then, okay?” Eren’s voice was soft, his hand running through Lathe’s hair, not bothered by the sweat that made his hair damp. He’s covered in sweat. “You want me to get you a new pair of boxers? So you can change? You’re covered in sweat...” I don’t want you to be uncomfortable...

Lathe could feel his hair sticking at the back of his neck, finally registering that his hair was plastered to his forehead too. “......no thanks... didn't even notice... won't help....” I'll need new ones after two minutes... “...and if you need to... say we could make a Title IX complaint...” That's a thing...

“That's what I’m going in to school for, and I have one of the cops that helped with that coming too... To escort him home...” Eren leaned down to kiss his forehead and gently tuck him in. Tucker should go back to classes, but I’m not letting him in the same building as Devon. “I’ll come back up before I leave to tell you Casper’s here, okay?” He had a soft smile on his face, his hands gently running through Lathe’s hair, gently touching his scalp.

Lathe smiled weakly, nodding a bit. He leaned into his gentle touch, chuckling for a moment. “...that sounds like what I’d do. Even better, really. Thank you, Hon. Tucker needs to get back to classes.” He sighed as Eren tucked the sheet back around him, feeling very warm but resisting the urge to kick it off. “Okay, make sure you tell me so I know who to text in case I need someone to wait on me, okay?” Lathe quietly joked, letting his eyes slip back shut with a small smile as it earned him a small chuckle. You'll do just fine.... After all, Mike has to listen. ...it's the law we're talking about.

Eren smiled, going back downstairs to make sure Jake made it to the bus, Sammie on his hip the whole time, Tucker getting all his work together to go back to class. He waited patiently for Casper to make his way over, handing Sammie over to her. He made a quick dash upstairs to tell Lathe that Casper was there if he needed anything before he ran back downstairs to get the keys to the car, ushering Tucker down the steps and locking the door behind him. “You okay?” You look like you're regretting this a little.

“Will... Devon w-won’t be there... W-will he?” Tucker’s voice was shaky as they backed out of the driveway. We’re really doing this.... I’m really gonna go back...
Eren sighed quietly, focusing on the road as they began the short drive. “Devon is going to be there for just a little bit... he's not going to be there for long, though. A police officer is going to meet us there and Devon will be called to the principal’s office. We need to all talk about the pending charge against him, and how him being there is keeping you from your education. It's a Title IX violation, so Mr. Zacharias will have to send him home. But once that's done, he can't be on school grounds while you are. And you're most likely going to win the case, so he won't be coming back. I know it sounds complicated, but he's not going to be coming back to school and making you or anyone else feel unsafe. I don't even know if the school knows about the charges at all. They need to; it could happen to someone else. And we can't have that.” Eren soon had the car parked, seeing a squad car near the front door of the school. “That's our backup. Literally.” Eren reached over to pat Tucker’s shoulder, giving him a reassuring look. “It'll be okay. We’ll take care of this, and then you can go back to class and focus on learning.” This'll work out. Eren got out of the car, waiting patiently as Tucker stared through the windshield at the school. Give him a minute. He needs to get up his nerves... this is a big thing for him.

Tucker looked with wide eyes as Eren got out, looking back to the huge building before them. He swallowed thickly, looking down at his hands as they shook, starting to shake himself. This is it... I... I get to go back to school... Tucker barely realized he had gotten out of the car until he felt Eren’s arm wrap around his shoulder. I’m okay... we can do this... I can do this. His eyes made a beeline to the squad car as the door opened, producing Officer Brandy from the previous week. It’s the strange officer... the one who asked me all the questions. Tucker kept his head down as Eren and Officer Brandy led him into the school, feeling the silence of the hallways try to consume him as they made their way to the office. Oh no... it's really happening... Tucker started to shake even more as the secretary called for Mike to come out of his office.

Mike stepped out of his office a few moments after Nanaba got off the intercom. “What’s this?” Mike’s eyes instantly drifted to the scene in front of the desk. I can smell the nervousness coming off of Tucker... “What’s your business here Eren? Do you have an explanation as to why there’s an officer here too?” What is going on.... ?

Eren nodded, his arm around Tucker reassuring. “Yes, Mr. Zacharias. There's something you need to know about one of the students here; and an explanation as to why Tucker’s missed more than a week of classes. Would you rather we all talk in your office, or...?” Anyone can kinda walk in and hear this... yeah, not the best option...

Mike looked between Tucker, Eren and the officer before nodding. “Come in, let’s get this over with.” What is with your crazy family? Tucker was failing at first, now he’s not.... And he’s missed the past week of school.... He watched the three of them file into his office, Tucker silently shuffling into a seat as he made his way to sit at his desk. “Alright, start talking.”

Eren nodded, standing next to Tucker, a hand on his shoulder. “Mr. Zacharias, Tucker has a classmate in engineering, a senior named Devon Bracknell. They were assigned a project, and as
such, met at Devon’s to work on it outside of school.” ...I can see you’re already thinking I’m crazy.
...and I don't know how to explain shit without outing Tucker... “...things escalated the last night
when they tried to finish the last of it. When Lathe went to pick him up that night… he could tell
quickly things had gone very wrong. There's currently a criminal case, aggravated rape of a child,
pending against him, and a date is still to be set. His parents have tried very hard to brush things
under the rug.” He explained, Mike looking completely shocked. “Tucker has been out of sorts…
terrified of coming back to face him in school. It's why he’s missed so many class days. But he
deserves an education. ...which is why we’ve asked Officer Brandy to come with us today.” Eren
nodded to the Officer at his left. “Because of the circumstances, it is a Title IX violation for Tucker
to be forced to come to classes with Devon still present. We also are concerned that something else
of this nature could happen again.” ...you're a good principal... just, please go with this... Devon
can’t stay around other students while he has these charges against him... and Tucker can’t miss
any more school...

Mike looked between Eren and Tucker’s shaking form, swallowing a bit as he looked up to Officer
Brandy. “He doesn’t have a court date?” Well, I know he’s 18... He’ll be charged with an adult
sentence.... Which is life... He sighed quietly, reaching to the intercom and pressing a button.
“Nanaba?”

“Yes, Sir?”

“Call Devon Bracknell’s parents, now, I want them both in my office in an hour, their son will no
longer be attending classes within our facilities, call him to the office too, he’s not allowed to leave
the building unless it’s in the back of Officer Brandy’s cruiser...Understood?”

“Of course, Sir, I’ll call him down first then call his parents.”

“Thank you Nanaba.” Mike looked up to Eren. “Thank you for telling me, he’ll be expelled by the
end of the day…” His eyes looked softer than some people thought possible. “Tucker, once he’s in
the office, you’re allowed to go back to classes, and you won’t have to worry about him anymore.”

Tucker’s eyes were wide as he watched Mike look at him with soft eyes. Devon’s coming here?
Then... Then he’s not gonna bother me ever again? He’ll.... He’ll be gone?

Eren sighed quietly in relief, his weak smile grateful. “ Thank you, Mr. Zacharias.” I'm glad you
understand how awful this is... He ran a soothing hand over Tucker’s shoulder, though his brow
furrowed when Tucker still seemed to shake with nerves. “Tucker, it's okay. You might see him
once leaving this office, but then you're home free.” It's okay.
Tucker nodded clinging to Eren’s shirt still. “C-Can you… Can you take me t-to class?” *I don’t wanna go alone…*

Mike smiled, looking at Tucker as he held onto Eren. *He certainly is a big brother…* “You can take him, and then you can go, I’ll take care of the rest of this.” *You won’t want to see me rip into the parents or Devon for that matter."

Eren nodded, guiding Tucker to stand, slinging his backpack on his shoulder. “Thank you sir. Really.” He waved to the principal as they left before turning his attention back to Tucker, his hand on his back a reassuring presence. “You don’t have to worry about him, Tucker. We’ll do what we have to to make sure you don’t feel scared.” *Anything.* They turned down a hall to bring them to the high school, the classes mostly empty since classes had already started. Eren suddenly became hyper aware of another pair of footsteps in the halls, Tucker’s hold tightening on his shirt as they approached from an adjacent hallway. “…it’s okay, I’m right here.” Eren murmured to him, and Tucker pulled him down to where his classes were, turning into the hall. Eren kept Tucker from freezing up as Devon walked their way, his bag on his shoulder. He just tried to usher Tucker past him and down the hall, not wanting to make things worse. *…don’t be scared. I’m right here.*

The blonde looked up as the pair rounded the corner, seeing Eren escorting Tucker down the hall, and everything clicked. “You. You fucking snitch.” He dropped his bag, uncaring as he lunged for Tucker, fury in his eyes as he lashed out, aiming a punch for his face. His fist met flesh, but he realized what he had hit a second too late. Eren had shoved Tucker back and away from him, catching the fist and quickly had him slammed to the cold ground, pinning him as he fought and shouted angrily, desperately trying to get free. “I’m gonna go to fucking jail because of you! For *years*! If I can't kick your sorry ass now I'll do it when I get out!”

Eren’s eyes widened as he twisted his arm a bit more. “Shut it.” His voice was hard as he watched Devon squirm under him. “Tucker, go to the office and get Officer Brandy…” He watched as Tucker nodded and hurriedly ran off. “You miscalculated asshole, I hope you fucking realize what you did to my brother. You’re lucky I don’t knock you out right now.” *I could kill you if I fucking wanted to…*

“What the fuck are you talking about, asshole? The hell did I ‘miscalculate?’” *What the fuck do you mean?*

“You think you're so smart … That the Romeo and Juliet Law will help save your fucking ass but it won’t, you raped him! You raped a child! You go to prison for life, fuckwad, maybe you’ll be treated there the same way you treated my brother.” He shoved Devon’s head down to the floor to keep him in place. *Fuck you and trying to keep this all under wraps, you stupid ass. You deserve every second you’re put away!*
“He’s not a fucking child! And it wasn’t fucking rape! Get the fuck off of me!” He made an angry, pained sound as Eren twisted his arm up, still struggling to no avail. Fuck...

“Tucker’s 13. A child in the state’s eyes, fuckwad, and you overpowered him, your DNA is all under his fingernails! He was struggling! You raped him! He said ‘No!’ He didn’t want you to do that to him!” He growled out, a deathly aura emanating from his entire being. You’re sick.

Devon’s eyes widened, everything he had reassured himself with thrown out the window. …He’s thirteen. The Romeo and Juliet laws don’t apply anymore. Fuck. “…that’s bullshit… he’s not thirteen…” Devon heard footsteps quickly approaching, his struggling becoming increasingly desperate. I can’t go away for my whole life… “Let me go! Get off of me! GET OFF!” Devon struggled still as Officer Brandy cuffed him and heaved him to his feet, his eyes filling with terror and dread. He still struggled as he was dragged to the main office, his last look back at Tucker and Eren pleading. …I can’t go to prison...

Eren’s look was unforgiving, not showing any sympathy as Devon was hauled off. He instead turned to Tucker, moving to envelop him in a hug, letting him cling to him tightly. He ran a hand through his hair, murmuring to him quietly. “…you’re so tense… you won’t be able to think in your classes. “…one more day off of classes? So we can get you home and help you chill awhile?” He smiled weakly as Tucker nodded, kissing his forehead and going to pick up his bag again, bringing him back to the main office. He let him stay outside as he signed him out, not wanting him to be near Devon, as far from worry as he could manage. He brought him back to the car, both of them heading home. I need to get Sammie back from Casper, and we can make food, and maybe put on a movie. …and make sure Dad isn’t dying. “Want me to make soup for lunch?” His voice was gentle as they walked to the house, Tucker sticking to his side, looking forlorn. I’m sorry that had to happen...

Tucker nodded, looking up to him. “H-He was gonna h-hit me… T-Thank you…” He wrapped his arms around Eren’s waist once they got inside the door, burying his face into his side. I wasn’t gonna ask you to come with me… I’m glad I did...

Eren smiled softly, ruffling Tucker’s hair as he pulled him close. “Why don’t you go pick out a movie and I’ll go see what Sammie and Casper are doing today?” It can’t be too bad a mess in the playroom yet... Could it be?

“Are people home?” Casper called from the playroom, waiting and sitting completely still as Eren traipsed over. He suppressed a grin as Eren gazed at him, sitting on the floor while Sammie clumsily painted his cheeks and hair with finger paint, a brush laying forgotten on a sheet of paper. “…she wanted to paint. I've just accepted my fate by this point. She's happy, and it’s Crayola or whatever. It'll wash out. And if not, I didn't even really like this shirt too much.” Eh, it's a dress
“Don’t worry, it’ll wash out… Sammie, paint is for the paper, not people…” How many times do I need to tell you that? “How about we clean you guys up? Tucker’s getting a movie to watch… And I’ll make popcorn if we can wash up fast.” Use food to your advantage…

Casper gave him a thumbs up. “Got it. Hey Sammie-” Casper reached over, taking her hands gently. He watched with dismay as she looked ready to cry when he wouldn't let her touch his hair again, thinking. Something. No tears. Anything. Casper let her put her hands on his cheeks one more time, handprints in bold blue on his skin which made her giggle. He grinned, his voice quiet and playful. “Let's get you washed up, ‘kay? I know art is fun, but we can have popcorn and a movie instead. A half hour is enough for now.” He lifted her up, balancing her on one hip and bringing her to the bathroom. He winked to Eren, smirking. “I don't care about my dressy shirts, anyway. Professionalism is for boring people.” And I ain't about to become boring, so. “What about Mr. Dying-of-Dysentery upstairs? He hasn't texted or yelled, and he should probably eat something.” He could probably use food.

Eren nodded, following them to the bathroom as they washed up. “I’m gonna make popcorn and then bring up a bowl of soup to him, think you can handle them with a movie?” Knowing Tucker it’s How To Train Your Dragon…. Sammie will be able to watch it and keep interest…

“I can handle a toddler and a teen with a movie. Popcorn and not-work is involved; I've got an incentive to behave.” He smirked, gently washing Sammie’s hands and arms of the paint, getting off the specks from her cheeks and nose. “Let’s just hope Lathe gets better soon- if it turns out to be the two-weeks-of-death, I get the feeling you're taking over his job.” If that happens, be scared.

“I can only hope.” Eren gave a brief smile before meandering to the kitchen, starting to warm Lathe’s soup as well as get popcorn all set up for the ‘theater goers.’ A giant bowl should be plenty for them popcorn wise and I can make sure that Dad’s okay and comfortable.

You’d better hope- he hasn't had a spell like that in years. He's due a few weeks of hell. Damn him and his immune system…. “Alright Sammie, let’s get settled in, okay?” Casper carried her to the movie room, helping Tucker set up camp in the theatre room and drag all the blankets and pillows to two loveseats near the middle. Today's been a rough day, huh? You were supposed to go back to classes… but with what I know was supposed to happen, and if things went sour…. you deserve one more day off.

Eren ran downstairs once the popcorn was finished, helping to situate them all into Tucker’s makeshift nest. “Alright, I’ll put the movie in, and then I’m gonna go upstairs to check on Dad.” He turned to the DVD player, getting the disc in and making sure that Casper had all the remotes
needed to operate the whole setup. “Alright, I'm going up.”

“Okay, we should be all set.” Casper was half-joking, buried under blankets with Sammie in his lap, Tucker curled up to his side with a huge bowl of popcorn and three remotes to operate the system. “Try not to kill him, will you? I'm pretty sure he still owes me money from something.” Can't pay me back if he's dead.

Eren rolled his eyes as he made his way up the stairs grabbing the soup in the kitchen which was now in a large bowl and made his way upstairs to Lathe’s room. He slowly opened and closed the door, setting down the bowl of soup on the nightstand before sitting down on the side of the bed, his hands gently running through Lathe’s hair as he felt for his temperature. Well, he’d not as warm as this morning, but still warm… Slow and steady… “Dad… I brought food, you think you can eat something?”

Lathe hadn’t moved the entire time Eren was gone, drifting back to wakefulness from his light sleep. He sighed quietly, leaning into the soft touch. Feels nice… “Mm…” Lathe looked up, blinking to clear his vision, seeing the bowl on the nightstand. “…food…?” He watched Eren nod. “Food.” He got his arms under him but still struggled to lift his own weight, Eren still having to help him sit up against the headboard. He accepted the bowl gratefully, his hand a bit shaky as he started to eat. “Thank you…” He looked up, remembering something. “…did the school thing go okay? What happened?” Is Devon taken care of?

“Devon thought he wasn’t going away for a long time…. He called Tucker a snitch when we were walking to his class and Devon was called to the office, he tried to hit Tucker, but I caught his fist, and then pinned him to the ground… He’s not gonna get out of it for a long time… He’ll be given a life sentence because Tucker’s 13… I brought him home, so he could calm down before going back… Devon’s being expelled and I can only imagine how much Mike’s gonna lay into him and his parents, he was in cuffs the last I saw him.” I can only imagine, Mike scares me still. And I graduated years ago! Okay well not years … But two…

Lathe whistled low, looking up to him, worried. “My god, an angry Mike is a terrifying Mike. I'm just glad nobody else at that school is going to need to worry about him. ...he's going away for life.” Lathe sounded disbelieving for a moment, setting his spoon down, thinking. “…it's hard to understand how quickly he just threw his future away. He's not going to get to do what he wanted… not that he entirely deserves it, from what I'm thinking, but… his whole fucking life. He's barely an adult…” Lathe shook his head, looking back to his soup. “…but thank you. For protecting Tucker.” He looks up to you. “Is he downstairs with Sammie? Or is Casper still watching over everything?” It's a good thing you could get ahold of him on such short notice… we’ve all been buried under paperwork as of late… then again, for a CEO, he always balanced work and doing what he wants pretty well…

“Casper’s there, and I have enough time to start making a huge dinner, I’ll bribe Casper with food
to keep the kids out of my hair while I do chores… That should work.” Eren smiled as he ran his hand through Lathe’s hair again. “You’re still warm, do you want me to get a towel out of the freezer?” I put them in this morning, they should be cold, maybe make you feel better. He watched Lathe eat carefully, thankful that he was at least eating something, looking over to the clock on the nightstand. It’s almost noon… well, the kids are eating popcorn, and I’ll give them sandwiches after the movie to make sure they actually ate something…

Lathe shook his head, the idea making him shiver. “No thanks… I’m okay… but thank you… what were you thinking of making for everyone?” I don't wanna freeze… I prefer being warm… “Remember to actually feed the animals… not the kids, the animals in the barn. They need taking care of too…” There’s a lot to do…

“I get up at four to do that every morning… they’re fed and out grazing right now, don’t worry, they’ll be fine, they’ve got their jackets on.” They won’t freeze, and I’ll pull them in once things are in the oven. “My food… They’re gonna get a taste of german food now, and they won’t be able to say jack shit about it. I’ll make some stew for you, it’s easy on the stomach, and I’ll invite Scotty over since Casper’s here… I’m sure they’ll understand if you decided to stay up here instead of come down to eat… do you remember if we have any bills that need to be paid?” I know you handle all that stuff, so I should probably ask before you pass out again and before I forget to ask.

“...Uhm… yeah, lemme think….” Lathe wracked his brain, trying to think of what had needed doing. “They're all on my desk… the envelopes have the dates they're due on them in pencil… it's late in the month, so they were today’s job for me… sorting out the credit card bills…” He tried to think of how to explain it, his eyes closed as he thought of the setup. “There's an accordion folder next to the desk, on the littler table, it has a bunch of receipts in it from the year organized by month. Just make sure everything got charged correctly, and I can write checks later.” You can't write them for me… that's not a thing that's legal, I think… it's not that hard… “...and, Uhm… I don't wanna get anyone sick… and I might pass out right after I eat, so I think I'll stay here… but thank you… really… I'm sorry you're stuck doing all the work…” I'm used to doing all of it… You're not, really… I mean, you help a lot, but most of it's on me...

Eren smiled softly as he nodded. I’ll do those after, then let the horses back in and feed them again. “I’ll get them done tonight, I’ll wait until you’re done, so if you think of anything that needs to be done, just tell me, and I can always write the checks to pay off the bills, I have enough money Dad.” You don’t need to worry about that… really you shouldn’t be worrying about it. Eren kept his fingers running through Lathe’s hair, trying to make him feel at least a little bit better. I know you’ve been wearing yourself thin, I need to step it up.

Lathe shook his head, looking down as he tried to eat. “You don't have to pay the House stuff though…. you don't have to foot the gas or electric or anything… I'll take care of all that… please, just worry about your credit card, okay?” You don't have to pay those bills… you've still got a lot of life left… let me take care of my family. He looked back up to him, a mischievous flicker in his eyes. “I'll find out if you do, and I'll sneak the money back into your wallet and glue it there.” He couldn't help but lean into the soft touch, eating the warm soup contentedly. Feels nice… tasty…
warm… Lathe sighed, his eyes closing, his soup mostly gone. Feels nice… I miss stuff like this… nobody's home anymore… Lathe looked to the sheets, his cheeks growing red as he thought. ...I miss everyone… I miss Ieva… she won’t hold onto me anymore at night… and she doesn't want me holding her either… His cheeks grew hot, a tear falling down his sickly grey skin, more following after it silently. ...I'm sorry…

Eren felt Lathe shake slightly, trying to figure out how to make him stop crying. Fuck... What do I do? He decided to pull him close, running a hand through his hair. “I’m sorry… for all I’ve put you through, I’m really sorry…”

Lathe let him pry the bowl from his hands and move it to the side table, react to cling to Eren, sobbing into his shoulder. ....everything’s been shitty.... And work distracts me... but now I have nothing to do but think... ‘I don't wanna think about things... but now I have nothing else to do... besides think… and be sad…” I don't wanna... “I-it's nothing you did... it's not your fault…. just…” …but... I don't wanna burden you with all my worries... “...I'm sorry... I've been lonely a lot lately… and there's no one to cling to… even Ieva won't let me hold her anymore…” Lathe held onto him with a tighter grip, shaking in terror. “I don't wanna drive everyone away… am I making everyone leave…? I don't wanna be alone anymore… but... you've got a life to live… and I don't wanna make you spend it here… you don't have to…” I wanna be selfish... but... I don't wanna, either...

Eren watched him cry, letting him cling, gently running his hands through his hair. “Don’t worry, I’m not going anywhere, and neither is Mom, you don’t have to worry about anything, really, I’ll be right here… And um, I wanted to ask you who your contractor was… I wanted to buy the lot across the street, and build a house...” Not even really a big one... Just a few rooms, not the monstrosity that this place is... Eren was quiet as he held Lathe closer to his chest, letting him cry on his shoulder. You’ve been bottling this all up, you’re getting sick because of it... You can’t be doing this.

...but... you won't be here... ..........but I can't be selfish... I shouldn't... “...I'll... I'll give you their business card later...... but... why just across the street... i-if…” If you could just stay here...
...but.... I shouldn't baby you forever... you wanna start a family... I should be glad it's just across the street... “…n-never mind…” I can't keep you here forever...

Eren smiled softly. “Well, I was talking with the adoption agency, and they said that if I moved out of the house with Levi, you could get more foster kids, now that you’ve adopted Jake… I thought maybe you would like that, but I need to talk with Levi, and he likes it here, so we might not, it was just a thought.” He murmured softly as he held Lathe still. I don’t wanna let you go but I should go let the horses in. “Do you need anything else before I go? You can always text me if you need something.”

“N-No... I just... you scared me…” Lathe sniffled, rubbing at his eyes. “If you have a house built
and stuff… I mean, taking on more kids would be nice… but… you just damn well better be over here for dinner 99% of the time…” I still want you to be around… Lathe needed a moment to convince himself to let go of Eren, his arms coming back from around his middle, knowing he had things to do. “…even if you put the house there and don’t even really use it… I know it sounds so pretentious, to put a house somewhere and not use it…” Lathe chuckled quietly for a moment at the absurdity of the statement. “…but whatever you end up doing is okay. I can’t baby you and Levi forever. I can’t keep any of you forever. …I need to understand that.” I don’t wanna… but I have to.

“You do bring up a wonderful idea though: having a house to go fuck as loudly as we want in… That might actually be a good idea.” That might be a really good idea… A fuck house… Hahaha! Eren slowly slipped off the bed, helping Lathe lay back down. I think that might work…

Lathe turned completely red, shaking his head. “It might save Tucker and Jake from a lifetime of mental scarring, so sure. Whatever you and Bae want. Just don’t ask me to recommend what ‘amenities’ should go in the bedroom.” Yeah, no. Not my business. He nestled into the pillow as he laid back down, splayed out over the sheets, humming as Eren pecked his cheek. “Y’know, I’m gonna get you sick at this rate.” Lathe weakly shooed him with his hand, smirking faintly. “Go. Go and be healthy and not deathy like me. There are children to feed, and I’m not just talking about Sammie and Tucker.” I’m talking about the guy with the purple rat on his head that he won’t take off for some reason.

Eren smirked, nodding. “Alright, text me if you need anything, or can think of anything I need to do.” He picked up the bowl of soup to take downstairs to wash. Alright, horses first… Eren was running around the house for the next hour and a half, bringing in the horses and feeding them as well as starting the food. He got the rolls into the oven, along with some brazen meat. Thank god we still had venison left. I know the kids will eat it, and Casper will pretty much eat anything I put in front of him. He sighed, pulling his phone out to make sure Lathe hadn’t texted him. He’s still asleep probably… Let’s see, I should call Scotty to come over for dinner. He dialed his number waiting for Scotty to pick up. Come on…

Scotty had just collapsed into the chair at his desk in the hospital when his phone rang, sighing exaggeratedly before fishing it from his pocket. His eyes widened when he saw Eren’s name on the display, answering quickly. “Eren, is everything okay? Did someone get hurt?” I need to assume something’s gone horribly wrong- most of the time when you call me, something has.

Eren smiled softly. “No, everyone’s fine. …well, Dad’s sick in bed, so Casper’s here watching the kids, we’re having German cuisine for dinner, you’re invited.” I think that covers everything I wanted to cover?

Scotty’s eyebrows shot up, quiet for a moment. “….so… no emergency surgery?”
“Nope.”

“No life-or-death situations? Not counting Lathe, he's invincible.”

“Not that I'm aware of.”

“I need to write this down on the calendar. The first damn time you called me and something tragic wasn't happening.” He chuckled, hearing Eren laugh on the other end. “Okay, I'm in of course. When should I be over?”

Eren smiled. “Well whenever you can come over I guess, though you'll be given child supervision duties…” The only downside to being invited to dinner.

“Eh, that's cool. We’ve babysat Maverick enough at this point to know somewhat how to wrangle children. I'll be over around five thirty, six at the latest. Tell Casper I love him, will you?” Tiny favor. I left before he woke up and didn't get to say it this morning like I normally do.

“Ah, yeah, I will when he comes up. Bye.” Eren hung up after a moment, continuing his duties as chef. He picked his head up when he heard soft feet pad up the stairs, coming into view as the lot of them came into the kitchen. “Hi guys, I’m in the process of making dinner, lunch is sandwiches of you’re still hungry?” Tho it’s like two in the afternoon right now. “Oh, Casper, Scotty said to tell you that he loves you.” Eren smiled as Casper blushed heavily, going to help the kids make sandwiches. I’m glad he’s here. He continued to work about in the kitchen, shooing Jake and Tucker out when they came to snitch. Those two rascals are going to eat dinner before it’s even on their plates…. Eren was almost oblivious as Ieva came home, and a few minutes later Scotty came in. It’ll take about another hour to finish up baking everything, then everyone can dig in. He continued to stir various pots and pans, getting out serving dishes and putting them on the large island opposite the stove. It will be a feast tonight!

Casper came into the kitchen for a moment as he heard Scotty come in, happily accepting a sweet kiss from him, pouting a bit when he pulled away. It earned him a tiny nip to the neck, soon smirking. “Glad you decided to help wrangle the kids they've got running around.” It's lowkey a struggle to stay sane with the three of them crawling all over you and trying to explain minecraft. He looked over as Ieva looked around the kitchen questioningly, wrapping an arm around Scotty’s middle and speaking. “Hey Ieva. What’s up? You look confused.”

“Yeah, a bit. Where’s Lathe?”
It clicked, Casper nodding his head to the stairs. “Oh, I don't know if you know, but he woke up really sick this morning with a hell of a fever. Eren’s been acting in his place today, it's why I came over to babysit the kids and make sure they didn't get themselves in trouble. He's been upstairs in bed all day, as far as I know.”
Ieva’s eyes widened before she went off and made her way towards the stairs, slowly opening the door to their room when she got there. *Is he still sick? And how sick? Does he just have a fever or is he throwing up too?* She looked to their bed, a soft sigh escaping her when she saw that he was sleeping still, and that he wasn’t surrounded in vomit. *Okay, well at least he’s still asleep, I wonder if he’ll be able to eat anything for dinner, the whole house smells amazing.* She slowly made her way to the edge of the bed, sitting down and starting to reach to touch his face, though thinking better of it and swallowing hard as she pulled her hand away. *No. I can’t wake him up… I’m not sure he’ll even want me in the room.*

Lathe blinked as the bed shifted under him a bit, looking up and recognising who it was. *Ieva.* He reached out, taking gentle hold of her hand and bringing it to his lips, gently kissing her knuckles. “Welcome home, Honey. I’m kinda sick, so kissing you probably isn’t the best idea.” His tone was quiet but light, looking up to her with a loving look. *I missed you…* He nearly purred as a hand ran through his hair, leaning into the touch. *If me being sick gets me pets, I need to get sick more often.*

Ieva smiled as Lathe leaned into her hand. “I’m sorry for waking you up, I was going to let you sleep, you still look really pale… Have you eaten anything today? Do you need any more medicine?” She shifted further into the bed, getting closer to him as she ran her fingers through his damp hair. *Your hair is soaked with sweat… Holy fuck…*

Lathe relaxed as her hands moved through his hair. “Mm, I could probably use more medicine, the stuff in the little orange bottle… but it's fine, I've been napping all day. Eren made sure I ate soup, and he's making stew for me that won't upset my stomach…” Lathe felt hair sticking to the back of his neck, shifting uncomfortably when he became aware of how damp the sheets were. “...sorry, I need a shower… and I need to change the sheets…” *Mur…*

“I can change the sheets if you wanna go take a shower before Eren’s done making your stew… The house smells amazing, can you smell it at all? Or are you going to have him make this all over again when you can smell the house?” *It smells like a bakery, but also like the best food in the world.*

Lathe shook his head, pouting a bit. “My nose is plugged… I can't smell anything… but given how well Eren cooks, I was probably going to make him cook everything again soon anyway. And that sounds good… thank you.” Lathe managed to sit up, his legs shaky a bit as he stood, though he grew steady after a moment. A light peck to his neck gave him a dreamy look for a moment, ambling to the bathroom to take a shower. He had the water turned up very hot, washing the sweat away and letting the steam unplug his nose, rubbing at it while it ran. *At least I'll be able to smell for the first five minutes out of the shower…* Soon he came back into the bedroom with damp- but this time clean- hair and a towel around his waist, going to fetch clothes. He smiled softly when he finally smelled the feast cooking downstairs, changing into comfortable clothes. “God, it smells awesome… too bad I won't be able to enjoy it for more than ten minutes before I can’t smell anymore again.” *Shame… it smells awesome … god, I'm hungry…*
Ieva looked over as she unbuttoned her dress shirt in their walk in closet, the only thing on her besides a matching bra and panty. Huh? Oh, yeah, that’s a thing. “Well that’s good, maybe I should have Eren bring you a spoonful of horseradish to knock everything out of your system.” That gross shit works...

Lathe blanched, slipping on a tank top. “Gross, I don't even vaguely like horseradish. A whole spoonful? No thank you.” Lathe moved to the bed to start putting cases on the pillows, swallowing when he noticed Ieva changing in the walk-in closet, hanging up her uniform jacket, tracing over her red lace-clad curves. ...fuck... she’s wearing the red lace... Lathe couldn't help himself, forgetting about finishing dressing the bed and ambling up behind her. His lips softly met her neck, his hands gently pulling her back against him at her hips. “Are you trying to tempt me?” We haven't had sex in so long... we've barely touched... I don't give a damn if I'm sick. I want you...

Ieva gasped in surprise as she felt his lips on her neck. “Y-You... Still want me?” Even after what I put you through with Elina? I thought you'd never wanna touch me again, and I was so afraid to let you hold me... I don't want you to leave me... Her eyes looked up to Lathe’s, slowly turning so they were looking each other directly in the eyes. Do you really mean it?

Lathe wrapped his arms around her middle, leaning their foreheads together. “Of course I still want you... I could never stop loving you... but you seemed like you didn't want me to barely touch you... and I thought you didn't want me anymore... I'm sorry...” He moved to nuzzle into her neck, drinking in her scent. I miss you... “...I've missed you... being close...” I just want things to be okay again...

Ieva’s eyes widened, feeling the tears begin to form in her eyes as she leaned into his hold. “I-I’m sorry... I didn’t want you to... I didn’t want you to leave... I’m so sorry, Lathe... I...” She choked on her words as her hands gripped onto his skin. Fuck... I fucked this up again... I’m fucking horrible with relationships.

Lathe held her close, pecking her cheeks, trying to calm her. “Nonono Ieva, Honey, it's okay... I love you so much... I'd be lost without you... I wouldn't know what to do with myself... I've been going insane for the past two months, we've been so distant... I love you... and... I want you to know that...” Lathe held her close, his head dipping down after a moment to nibble her neck gently, his voice a quiet murmur. “......would you let me make it up to you?” I want you to know how much I love you... I don't want you to doubt that... and I miss you. A lot....

Ieva nodded hurriedly, clinging to him tighter. “P-Please, I want you to hold me...” I want to know that you’ll hold me still, that we can do this together...
Lathe smirked, picking her up easily, holding her close as he carried her to the bed. “Don’t worry… we’ll do much more than that.” Lathe laid her on the fresh sheets, climbing over her and diving in for a deep kiss, not caring that he was sick. Their hands moved in desperation, stripping the other of what little clothes they had, reaching for familiar, hot skin, craving touch. It wasn’t long before Ieva was moaning wantonly under him, Lathe groaning into her neck, grasping tight enough to bruise on the other as they drowned in bliss and each other. *I missed you… and I love you.* Lathe pulled Ieva close, eyeing the particularly dark mark on the left side of her neck, sated for the moment. *Beautiful.* “My God, I love you… you’re wonderful…” He gently pecked her neck. “Too good for me…."

Ieva chuckled softly, laying her head on Lathe’s chest, slowly running her finger up and down his abs. “No…I think just right for you…” *I’m not too good, and I’m good enough… So just perfect*… She leaned her head down to peck at his chest. *Should… Should I ask him*

Lathe smiled softly, a hand moving to run through her hair. “Just perfect for me. …I can’t believe I got so lucky… strong-willed, smart…” He let his hand drift to the small of her back. “**Beautiful….**” *You’re perfect… if anything, better than perfect*

Ieva had to take a deep breath before she shifted, flipping so that his hand lay now on her stomach and her head turned towards Lathe’s. “I um… I wanna ask you something… I-If that’s okay…?” *I want to…*

Lathe nodded, his thumb running soothingly over her stomach. “Of course. You can ask me anything, Hon.” *What is it? I promise I won’t be mad, whatever it is.*

“I um… Y-You can say no, if you want… But… C-can….?” *Fuck, how the hell am I supposed to ask this?* Ieva clammed up, her whole face blushing as she looked down to her hands, trying to keep from covering her face. *I can’t… Fuck… But I want to…*

Lathe looked worried, his voice soft in her ear. “It’s okay, Hon, you know you can ask me whatever you want. I won’t get mad, I won’t judge. Anything.” He pecked her temple, his look reassuring. “Anything.”

Ieva nodded, her voice quiet as she spoke. “Can we… Can we try again?” *I know that you hated it when we couldn’t have Elina… And I don’t know if you’ll even let me try again… I just… I want to, I want to try…*

Lathe’s eyes shone, looking hopeful. “You… you really want to?” He watched her tentatively nod,
shifting her off of him so he could kiss her better, his hold on her middle loving. “I'd love to… And I hope you wouldn't mind starting tonight…” ...I know that's not how it works, but fuck it. I love you and I want you. Excuse the logic.

Ieva’s eyes widened as he shifted to hold her closer, a smile quickly playing on her face as she reached up to bush a stray hair behind his ear. “I’d love-”

“God dammit, put some clothes on, the both of you, I thought you were sick Dad… don’t go making Mom sick either!” Eren brought up a huge pot with hot pads and two bowls. “It’s stew, and it’s been stewing since noon so the veggies are all mush, you’ll be able to keep them down… Please eat something before you try and do any more of that.” Eren waved his arms toward the bed where the two of them lay pressed together, his eyes shut tightly once he put the food and bowls and spoons down. I’m out… That’s just gross, I walked in on them fucking, ugh, God why !?

Lathe flushed, immediately tugging a sheet up to cover them, grateful when Eren left and shut the door. “You could knock!” Lathe called after him, embarrassed. Fuck, there goes the mood… Lathe looked back to Ieva, giving her a sheepish grin. “...I'm sorry if I make you sick.” He leaned down to kiss at her neck one last time. “But at the same time I don't care.” He grinned as she whimpered when he roughly nipped her skin, moving off of on top of her. “Mm, so.” He stretched his arms over his head, looking back to her. “Hungry?” I hope so, because sex will have to wait until I've eaten.

Ieva nodded, shifting her legs over the bed and getting up to put her panties on, shuffling around to grab his shirt he had worn for only a minute out of the shower and putting it on, covering herself. “Yeah, food would be great.” She smiled with a blush on her face as she watched Lathe get up off the bed to put his boxers on and then move to the large bowl of steaming soup. It smells sooo good.

Lathe’s cheeks were pink as he saw Ieva in his tank top, finishing spooning out stew for the both of them. “Here.” He handed her one with a spoon, sitting on the bed next to her. They leaned on each other as they ate, quietly enjoying the stew. “Eren’s a good cook. I should make him make dinner more often.” I really should.

Ieva nodded, finishing her spoonful. “I think we should designate a day of the week when Eren cooks… Every week.” That would be fantastic… I really wanna do that now. “What about Saturdays?” That should work with all of our schedules right? She hurriedly spooned another mouthful, groaning in bliss. It’s so good.

Lathe blushed as Ieva quietly moaned, his cheeks growing red. “That sounds like a good idea.” Food. Lathe was quiet as he finished, not feeling hungry enough for another bowl, as good as it
was. Lathe was quiet when Ieva set her bowl down, moving to gently tug her back into his lap. “So… Anything you want to do?” Anything… particular you have in mind?

Ieva gasped as she was pulled into his lap, a soft giggle escaping her lips. “I um… I wanna go for another round, i-if that’s okay?” She looked hopeful as her hand slowly came up to cup his cheek, leaning back into his chest. I want you, I really want you.

Lathe smirked, leaning into the touch. “Hm… I wonder if I would mind…” Lathe moved them back onto the bed, Ieva splayed out under him as he leaned down to kiss her neck. Things slowed way down from their desperation earlier, Lathe worshipping every inch of her tanned skin as he slowly undressed her again, teasing her breasts with his tongue and rubbing her clit in slow circles. I want you to feel amazing… He soon found himself without his boxers, kissing down her chest to her stomach, even further south to her nether, licking up her rosy folds, tasting her as he teased her. His hands roamed her front as her heels dug into his back, driving her close to the edge before stopping, lapping at her skin in apology as he kissed back up her body, nestling into the crook of her neck, his hands resting at her hips. The tip of his length brushed her entrance, murmuring quietly into her ear. “Whenever you say, Hon…” I want you to feel wonderful...

Ieva blushed fully as he completely took control. God, I’ve wanted this for so damn long…. Please, Lathe, I need you. “I need you, please Lathe, I want your everything, I want you to make love to me.” She took in a sharp gasp, her back arching off the mattress in bliss as she felt Lathe sheath himself to the fullest. “Mhm, you’re so big… So good, so good to me… I love you, Lathe. I really do, I want you to keep me, please.” Ieva wrapped herself around him, her heels pulling him closer in and a soft moan leaving her lips before she sucked in a sharp breath as Lathe began to move slowly. So good...

Lathe blushed scarlet as Ieva spoke, his voice smooth and low in her ear. “My God, I love you… I'll always keep you…” Lathe sucked possessive marks all over her soft skin, his hands roaming her curves. “So beautiful… you're perfect for me…” He moaned quietly as she gasped in his ear, his hips moving at a steady pace, slow, taking in every feeling. “So good for me…” I love this... I missed you....

Ieva whimpered quietly as he thrusted particularly deep inside of her. Fuck, he's deep... “L-Lathe… Haaa, you’re so deep.” She moaned as he pulled out and thrusted right back in again, feeling her insides clench every so often. It feels really good, I missed this. She could feel the heat that was already starting to take over her body once again. Her nails dug into Lathe’s shoulders, starting to leave trails of scratches across his back. I love you so much.

Lathe let out quiet sounds when she clenched around him, his body growing warm, loving the feeling of her clinging to him for more. I wanna take care of you... and I promise I always will. “...mm… so good...” Lathe nibbled at her neck, pride flaring in his eyes as he saw the red marks littering her neck. “All mine...” Lathe kissed every mark, lapping at the skin. “You sound...
wonderful… you're gorgeous when you're open for me like this, slick and moaning… just for me.” His hands held her hips, his thrusts still slow and sensual, though he pushed deeper into her, listening to her gasps with dark eyes. “You're so good to me…. how could I ever have deserved you…” I don't know how you ever could have thought I was worth it… you're…. you're just perfect … and I love you so much…

Ieva groaned as she pulled Lathe close, a hand ruffling through his hair, gripping it and holding his head to her neck. Oh my god, you feel so good … She whimpered as she felt his lips lock onto her neck, her heels digging into his back further. “Ahh! L-Lathe! Please… Fuck right there!” Ieva let out a loud gasp as she arched her back up, shaking from the pure intensity. Fuck, he found it! Ha! Shit!

Lathe picked up the pace as Ieva began to tremble in his arms from pleasure, whimpering into her neck as she tightened around him. “Ieva… hnn… f-feels really good…” He began to roughly suck at her neck, beginning to steadily pound into her, trying to aim for that one spot that made her moan and shake, feeling heat pooling in his abdomen. I can't last… but I want you on cloud nine...

Ieva let out another loud gasp as Lathe continued with his actions. “L-Lathe, oh my god… Please… Feels… Feels good… I… I can’t…” Not anymore… I can’t hold it. She could already feel herself tipping over the edge, already beginning to close around him. Fuck… It feels so good… “L-Lathe!” Holy shit! Her eyes blew wide as he thrusted directly onto her sweet spot, taking in a sharp breath.

Lathe whimpered into her neck as she tightened around him, his pace becoming erratic, his coil snapping as he pounded deeply into her, crying out into her neck. His chest heaved for breath as his thrusts slowed, stilling inside of her. He needed a moment before he moved to kiss her deeply, his arms winding around her and pulling her flush against him, not wanting to let go. Perfect for me… mine… only mine… no one else's…. “I love you so damn much…” Lathe rolled them over so she was on top of him, wanting her steady weight on top of him. My god, do I...

Ieva cried out loudly as Lathe made her finally go over the edge, getting impossibly tight around him. Holy shit, that felt so damn good. “L-Lathe… my god…” She whimpered as she was shifted on top of him, feeling him go deep within her, groaning. Ieva bit her lip as she lifted her body up a bit, her hips going down on him. Would you be up for more?

A whimper caught in Lathe’s threat, his eyes still coloured with love and want as he settled her in his lap. The room for the first time in months was full of quiet- and sometimes not so quiet- sounds, low and quiet moans, the smack of lips on skin and the motions of lovemaking. They were exhausted by the time they fell asleep, and even more so when they woke up, Lathe still with a fever and Ieva burning up, calling the station on her cellphone. Lathe curled up next to her, clinging to her bare middle. “M’sorry I got you sick…” We kinda got very carried away… He
looked up as his cellphone suddenly started ringing, a tone playing he didn't hear often anymore. “...why is the school calling at dead-O’clock? It's too early for this…” He reached over for the phone, Ieva wrapping him up in a hug as he answered, his voice rough and raspy. “...hello? Mike?”

*What do you want.*

*“Hey, can you come in? The AP German teacher collapsed yesterday, and there aren’t any substitutes who are anywhere near fluent…”*

“...Mike, I just so happen to be in the middle of dying.” He chuckled as Ieva lightly elbowed him at that comment, returning his attention to the phone. “I would, but right now I’m kinda very sick, and I’ve got too much going on in general. But, I would recommend you ask the perfect candidate, imported from Germany and possessing too much free time as of late.”

“...*what*?”

“I'm talking about Eren, Mike. My son. Is it cool if I pass the message on and blackmail him into going to teach?”

*“Will he be able to handle a class? He’s never taught before, and if I remember correctly he didn’t even go to college!”*

“He taught our third-grader foster-kid-now-son math at such a level he could probably pass the AP Calculus AB exam with a solid four. He taught an eight year old integrals, and the kid understood. And he's completely fluent in German, so that's also a thing.”

*“Alright, fine, blackmail him then, I need him in class by 8 and he’ll have decent pay.”*

“Fair meme.” Another elbow in the ribs. Lathe tried to stop Ieva, grinning. “Okay Mike, I'll do that. I promise he won't do horribly. I think he’ll be just fine, and the students won't be mistaught anything.” He should know how to teach his own mother tongue if given a set of guides on what to cover. Simple. How does anyone think you teach *English*? Lathe hung up, immediately texting Eren.

**LQ: Sup homeslice**

**LQ: So Zacharias has this proposal thing for you**
LQ: If you show up at the high school by 8 AM and teach a bunch of AP German students all day

LQ: He'll give you money

LQ: And if you don't I'll cry :'(

EY: … It’s five o'clock in the fucking morning, why are you up?

LQ: Because Zacharias is a principal and his job is to freak out over finding someone to substitute AP German and called me to ask if I could sub

LQ: and I can't, for multiple reasons, some of which are obvious

LQ: just tell me so I can give him an answer and make him go bug someone else or go back to sleep

EY: what the hell am I supposed to do with Sammie? I can’t leave her here with you!

EY: and if I went how will I know that you two won’t starve from fucking like rabbits last night?

EY: …. Waiting

LQ: We need to think of someone as a sitter for Sammie because we can't infect her too

LQ: As for food, I think we’re more than capable of operating a phone to order takeout.

LQ: Jk there's a shit ton of leftover stew

LQ: That shit was epic btw

EY: I thought your nose was plugged? And do not eat anything that has tape over the container lid, it's spicy and you two *will* get sick from it.

LQ: The shower I had last night unplugged my nose and it didn't stuff up again surprisingly

LQ: and thank you for that warning

EY: Good that means you’re getting better, all the credit card stuff is organized in your office and the checks just need to be signed, also on your desk by the bills if you can make your way down there… Don’t fuck like animals all day, I’ll call Hannah, she’s up by now, or she hasn’t gone to bed, to see if they can take Sammie...

EY: God that was a fucking long one

LQ: no comment

LQ: Also I guess that's a good idea for a sitter, I hope Sharon won't mind too much since she's the one who's home like all the time

LQ: ...and now that I say that I wonder since Hannah does the errands if she ever leaves the house
LQ: Probably not

EY: They came over for dinner last night while you two were going at it like fucking rabbits…

LQ: …don't tell me you all had to listen to us while you ate

EY: No, I heard you last night because our rooms are next to each other, and you couldn’t even tell that I knocked on the door when I brought your soup up, so I know you were fucking…

LQ: …I'm not sorry

LQ: But don’t think we hadn't ever heard you and Levi fucking before

LQ: So let's just call it even

EY: No I know, we can call it even, and it’s good, your room’s been quiet for way too long...

EY: I texted Hannah, she said she’s off today, so to bring Sammie over before 8

EY: you can text the dog to tell him I’ll be there by 8…

EY: what the fuck am I supposed to wear to this shit?

LQ: Oh, Blake has a cellphone now? I didn't know

LQ: Jk don't come in here and murder me

LQ: I'll tell Mike

LQ: And thanks

LQ: …and yes, it has been.

LQ: And think dress-shirt-and-tie sort of stuff

Lathe smiled faintly, sending a message to Mike, telling him Eren would be there on time. He then tossed his phone back onto the side table, turning over to Ieva who held his middle gently, giving him puppy eyes. “...turn over.” She did, and Lathe moved behind her, his hands pulling their hips flush. His arms wound around her, gently cupping each breast and nestling into her thoroughly bruised neck. “Much better.” He kissed her shoulder blade sweetly, feeling warm. “Sleep. We've got all day, and I'm exhausted.” Yes we do. And for once, there won't be any kids in the house. ...one of the few times I'd prefer it that way.

Eren was running around for the better part of the morning, making sure that everyone was dressed and ready to go to wherever they were going. He had eventually found a suit and tie and some nice shoes from his closet. When the hell…. Oh, I think Jack sent this with the prom one as a gift, I haven’t worn it…. oh well, it’ll work. Eren made sure Jake and Tucker had a lunch as well as Sammie before sending the two older boys on the bus and getting Sammie into her car seat. It only
took him a few minutes before he had Sammie dropped off with all her things, the car seat, her lunch and a few of her toys which would keep her occupied. He thanked Hannah for taking her and smiled softly, kissing Sammie’s forehead before driving to the school. So I’m teaching AP German? I think that’s a class where everything is in German....

The class was buzzing with chatter by the time Eren walked in, some of the kids grinning when they realised he was a sub. A noirette shushed his friends behind him, whispering to them with a smirk. “Let me do this.”

“Uhm, Dave, I don't think he'll buy anything you tell him… I think he graduated from here like a year ago or something…”

“Come on, he'll buy it.” He turned around before the boys could protest, shutting them up when he raised his hand. “Excuse me, sir?” He waited patiently for the man to call on him, speaking with an innocent expression. “Mr. Schultz lets us have our phones out during class as long as we still take notes and pay good attention.” Come on, I need to check Twitter... and then tweet everyone how dumb the sub is for buying this bullshit.

<“Nice try, I was his student not that long ago, Dave, and this class is to be spoken entirely in German, so would you like to ask the question again?”> Eren raised an eyebrow, clearly unamused with the question. I believe I’m allowed to take their phones away if I see them.

Dave turned a bit red with embarrassment as he felt the whole class look at him, looking to his desk as he deciphered what Eren said. <“N-No, sir… sorry.”> Fuck.

Eren smirked, moving to the chalkboard and picking up a piece of chalk to write his name. <“My name is Mr. Yeager, yes, I am the singer if any of you ask, and no, I will not sing and waste time in class.”> He wrote a few more things down, various vocabulary words getting increasingly difficult. <“Dave, since you so humbly fooled yourself in front of class, take a crack at it. Write the word in English under it.”> He sat down on top of the desk, holding out the chalk for Dave to take. You won’t be able to answer half, but I’m expecting that to see where Mr. Schultz left off.

Dave stood, swallowing as Eren handed him the chalk. He stared up at the board, panicking. I barely know half of these. “Uhm…” Dave reached out, writing some of the words out, skipping only one near the top and nearly every word near the bottom. He hesitated as he stared at the other words, not recognising them. <“Uhm, Mr. Yeager, I don't think we ever learned these words…”> I would at least recognise them if we did...

<“Thank you, so you guys just finished Chapter 3 in the textbook then.”> Eren hopped off of the
stool and erased the work that they’d both done. <“You can take your seat, Dave…”> He continued to write a list of words on the board, a long vocabulary list. <“The next section is about culture. I hope you’re all prepared, and maybe if you’re good I’ll bring in some traditional German food along the line.”>

They all perked up at the mention of food, getting out their notebooks and hurriedly scribbling down the long list of vocabulary and their translations. The class payed very good attention after those first few minutes, taking detailed notes as Eren went on to describe different facets of German culture. Time whizzed by until the bell rang with Eren mid-sentence, all of them jumping as they realised how long it had been.

<“Alright, class dismissed, have a nice day!”> Eren told them hopping down off the desk and adjusting his tie before looking at his watch. Well, this should be a piece of cake, and I wouldn’t mind bringing in food for them, though I’d have to do it for all the classes… Eh, I can do it. That reminds me, I need to go shopping for food at the grocery store. I can see if Hannah and Sharon need anything too.

EY: Do you need any groceries?

EY: I’m stopping at the store before I get Sammie.

EY: Also do you wanna come over for dinner again? I have to cook again, and I always make way too much.

SW: Thank you so much! Here, have a list

SW: It's not much but I have plans

*SW has uploaded an image to the chat*

SW: Also dinner would be really nice, thank you

SW: But I'm bringing apple pie and ice cream and you can't stop me

EY: Okay, and do you have anything against Venison?

EY: We have a lot of it in the freezer and it makes for a good meat in soup…

SW: That sounds amazing actually

SW: Wonderful!

Eren put his phone down as he saw the kids coming into the room, a quiet hush as students looked
at him in awe. So they recognize that I’m a singer... well, doesn’t really surprise me. “Which level is this? German...” He trailed off as he grabbed the sheet of paper that had all the class info on it. “Ah, German I, that means you're all freshman.” Okay, let them settle down and let the bell ring before we introduce ourselves.

One of the girls near the back stared at him with wide eyes for a long moment, suddenly digging into her bag for something. Come on, come on... aha! She soon produced a blank sheet of computer paper and a pen, standing and shyly coming up to the front of the room, barely able to glance up at Eren. “U-Uhm, Mr. Yeager?” She tinged pink as Eren nodded, holding the paper and pen out. “I-I’m a big fan of yours... is it okay if I have your autograph? Please?”

Eren chuckled a bit, nodding and reaching for the paper and giving her his autograph. “Alright, go sit down now.” He smiled as she scampered off excitedly, almost squealing to her friends. Well, that went better than expected... He closed the door as the bell rang before pulling his stool out in front of the class. “Okay, so I’m Eren Yeager, you can call me Mr. Yeager, and I am the singer, no I will not sing, but you’re more than welcome to ask anything you want about what it was like in Germany, I am fluent, and I’m here to teach instead of Mr. Schultz, and if you’re good, I’ll bring in traditional German food along the line...” I don’t know how long I’ll be teaching for. He got off the stool and started to write down simple words within the German language, trying to see just where everyone was at. It’s November, none of the classes are too far yet.

Everyone in the class watched as he wrote the words down, knowing a majority of the words and recognising the ones they didn't remember. It was a simple enough class, and the first part of class went with translating simple sentences before it ended up being Eren talking all about his life back in Germany. They all reluctantly packed up when the bell rang, having been completely drawn into Eren’s stories.

Eren watched the students leave, getting acclimated with teaching quickly, though he realized how repetitive it was for teachers to teach multiple classes the same thing. God, I can see how people go crazy. He sighed quietly as the day finished and his ninth period class ran out of the classroom, picking up his things and about to leave the room when he heard the loud speaker.

“Mr. Yeager, please report to the office, Mr. Yeager, please report to the office.”

God dammit, and I was just about to leave. He sighed as he made his way to the office, being ushered into Mike’s office right away. Oh god, what does the Dog want now?

“So how was your first day?” Mike took in a deep breath, looking over him with calculating eyes.
God, he reminds me of Erwin… “It went well, the students are easily bribed with food and cultural stories, which is good I guess. I didn’t let them use their phones, and I think I did really well at least, they understood what was being taught. I wanted to ask you how long I’d be teaching them for?”

“Well, I was gonna talk to you about that… How about the rest of the year? Mr. Schultz won’t be able to return to teaching.” You remember how old he was… He had a stroke, he won’t be able to come back.

“I-I’m sorry did you just say the rest of the year?”

“Yes, Yes I did.”

“I mean… um, I guess I can, does that mean I get supplies for my room?” Like more chalk? I used a lot today…

“Yes, they’re in the office, you just need to come down and ask for them, that’ll be your room for the rest of the year, and I’ve heard nothing but good things from the AP students, so you’re doing quite well.”

Eren gave him a toothy grin as he stood up. “Awesome, so can I go now? I need to go shopping, pick up the little one, and make dinner.”

Mike chuckled softly nodding and motioning towards the door. “You can go, I’ll have your contract ready for tomorrow morning.”

Eren thanked him and went to his car, pulling his phone out and calling Lathe’s cellphone. Come on, pick up, I need you to do stuff so I can make soup when I get home. He put the phone on speaker, tapping his fingers across the wheel, waiting as the phone rang. He pulled out of the lot, making sure not to hit anyone, making his way towards the grocery store. I need to get our list and Sharon’s list and keep them separate, and also get whatever I need for soup. I can see if Scotty and Casper wanna come over again.

Lathe huffed a bit in annoyance when Eren’s tone quietly played on his phone, tangled up with Ieva on the couch downstairs, cuddling as they watched TV. He reached over for the phone, answering with a bit of a rough voice. “Eren? What's up?” Mur.
“What are you doing right now?” I need things to get done, you don’t have to do much... so don’t complain about it.

Lathe looked to the ceiling, then to Ieva on his chest, tracing his abs with a light finger, then back to the ceiling. “Cuddling with the waifu, only sorta watching TV. Why? If it's errands, no. You have a car. And non-contagious ailments.” I wouldn't trust myself in places where there are lots of people.

Eren shook his head. “No, I just need you to go to the freezer and pull out the bag of venison shoulder and start to thaw it in hot water, as well as make sure all your nasty toys are away... whatever you used all day, the kids will be home soon. I’m going to the store, so send me a picture of the list on the fridge..... OH! I also got a job for the rest of the school year.” He pulled into the parking lot of the grocery store, taking his phone and putting it against his ear as he got out of the car. I should be able to get everything I need. I might need him to take a look in the cabinet too... just to see what we have.

Lathe groaned exaggeratedly, moving to sweetly kiss Ieva as he shifted out from under her, ambling towards the kitchen. “Making me get up and do stuff... and everything’s away, don't worry. We’re too smart to not clean up. Here, have a picture.” Lathe took a picture of the list, sending it to Eren. “And I'm surprised you didn't accidentally burn the place down today. You were sane enough to warrant the rest of the year? To Zacharias?! I'm impressed.”

“Hey, he hired you too, ya'know. And apparently bribing them with food really helps out.” They paid attention all day...

“Of course it does! Teenagers do nothing besides eat, rebel against their parent’s wishes, and do just enough work to pass their classes. Also I think I bugged Zacharias about the job to the point where he accepted just to get me to stop leaving messages on his answering machine. He probably thought I'd get myself hospitalised after the first chem Lab and fix the problem.” Most likely. ...I honestly have no idea why he didn't fire me after the first time he heard I burned the class instructions. I got away with that shit like twenty times before they finally stopped giving me those. ...it was great.

“Why does that not surprise me? Oh and put clothes on, I’ve invited people over for dinner... make sure you have the bag that’s labeled shoulder too... I don’t want any other cut.” The shoulder will be perfect to cut up and tenderize and then put into a big pot... Oh I should have you do that too... “Can you get the big pot on the stove top and fill it with water to get it going?” He entered the store, getting a cart and starting to go through the first aisle.

Lathe nodded, setting his phone down. “Kay, I've got you on speaker. And don't worry, we have clothes on. But dammit, you're making me do person stuff... I could be cat napping right now...”
Lathe got out the meat he wanted him to, getting a metal bowl in the sink full of hot water, dousing the airtight plastic bag in it until the water went cold, refilling it and doing it again. “I'm thawing the right cut of meat, yes, the shoulder, and the pot is on the heat. What else?” If there are lots of people coming over, I guess I can human...

“How’s Mom feeling? Is she up to a full house? Or just the standard table we usually have?” And by that I mean Casper, Scotty, Hannah, Sharon, Maverick and the doges... How much better is Mom feeling?

“One moment.” Lathe meandered over to the living room, smiling as Ieva held the pillow he had been laying on close. “Honey? We’re apparently having people over for dinner. Is it okay if we just have the usual ‘neighbors’ come over? Or are you up for a full house?” If anything, we’re both of just generally lethargic by this point...

Ieva opened her eye as she cuddled closer to the pillow, taking in Lathe’s scent. “Hmm… I think I’ll be okay with a full house, it was practically full last night, I can do it, I can always go upstairs after we eat if I need to rest some more.” Though we’ve been napping, then fucking, then napping, then fucking some more all day... Which I needed desperately. “Who else are we inviting that wasn’t here last night?”

“I dunno, probably Armin, and some more of Eren’s high school friends. I'm making him invite Marco and Jean now that I think of it. But I dunno who else he had in mind. But okay, thanks. And we can head upstairs if you don't feel well, of course.” He gently pecked her cheek, slipping back to the kitchen. “We’re clear for a full house. Who were you thinking? I'm making you invite Armin, Jean, and Marco now, by the way.” That's now a thing that's happening.

“Well, you've answered your own question... Can you see if we have Bay Leaves? I can’t remember how many are left... Oh and check the Dill, Thyme, White Pepper, and Parsley please.” That should be all the spices that aren’t really sold in bulk that I need...

“I know for a fact we have fresh parsley and plenty of it... we have a bunch of bay leaves still, at least seven... we’ve got a ton of thyme... we don’t have much dill... and our white pepper is just dust. We need more of that definitely.” Yep, that's a thing. “It's a wonder I don't just buy this crap in bulk. Or grow it.” ....actually, I don't think thyme is that hard to grow... or parsley...... or dill... come to think of it, we use a ton of rosemary too... and basil... but I already have a basil plant... .... Lathe looked over to where the plant sat in the windowsill. ....but it looks lonely.... Lathe shook himself from his thoughts, looking back to the phone as he heard a buzzing. “Sorry, what was that last bit?” I'm off in LaLaLand again.

“What’s the veggie situation, I know we’re out of potatoes, and we’re just about out of carrots, how does the celery look? And the onions...” How much did I use? This is my problem... Trying to
Remember...

Lathe inspected the fridge, then the pantry. “We need celery, and we don't have too many onions. Get a sack of them, and get a few of the big sweet onions, will you? Six should be fine.” We need those. “Oh! And make sure to get a thing of heavy cream and salted butter. Not the kind you always end up buying- the kind I like to get.” Just do it.

Eren sighed quietly, shaking his head as he thought about a few things. “Alright, I’ll get you your damn heavy cream… How much sugar do we have?” I know I’m asking a lot, but you’re in the kitchen so I don’t care.

Lathe went back to the counter, unlatching the sugar jar and peering inside. “A lot. And we have a half-empty bag in the pantry, so.” Yeah, plenty. “Oh, and make sure to get a lot of little red potatoes too while you're there.” I like those. They're easy. And tasty.

Okay, anything else you can think of while I’m here?” I feel like I’m just taking everything and shoving it into my cart.

“A leek… hmm, I need to think… we also need to think about what we can make that doesn't involve meat, since Marco’s vegetarian…” Lathe tapped his foot, thinking. “What were you planning to make? You’ve got me in the cooking mood now.” I wanna help! I haven’t been able to do shit yesterday and most of today. I wanna do stuff.

“Beef stew, you can make a veggie stew if you want? I’m also going to be baking Brotchen when I get home too, be prepared for that.” Everyone loves my rolls. “Oh and Sharon insists on bringing over an apple pie and ice cream for dessert, so that's accounted for unless you wanna do something else too.” That’d be a lot of dessert… But there are a fair amount of people coming.

Hmm….” Lathe tapped his foot, thinking. “I know she bought an ice cream machine, so she'd be making it… she babbled all about cooking when I went over once and didn't know what it was… but a single pie probably won't account for what, twelve people? ...y’know, my chocolate stash has gotten kinda excessive…” Lathe looked to the stack of bars, many unopened. “...I think I'll make a bunch of chocolate chip cookies… with different flavours, of course.” That sounds good to me… but I might be crazy, so. “Does that sound okay? And I'll make collard greens, I remember Marco likes those.” He can eat those. I still have the recipe on my phone somewhere...

“Sure, just make sure we have olive oil before you start anything.” He looked down at the quickly filling cart, shrugging as he made his way over to the produce and began to pick out multiple things. I need… you… you ……... you.... You and you. His eyes examined every inch of everything
he picked up and only took the best of the best. *This should work for potatoes… to the onions.*

“I always make sure we have, like, a gallon on hand. I barely use anything else, honestly.” *Olive oil for the win.* “Oh, also add a lemon to the list… and I think I know what to do with our surplus of eggs… Uhm… what else… fresh asparagus, about two bunches… I can't think of anything else. Tonight, we shall **feast**! *This is going to be great.* “And Casper and Scotty are probably going to bring alcohol again, so we've got drinks covered. ...I'm joking, we've got stuff to properly hydrate everyone.”

Eren rolled his eyes, looking over to the asparagus display. “You're actually going to make me touch those horrid green spikes?” *Those things are fucking disgusting! How could you even like them!?* He shuddered remembering the time when he forced himself to eat them when Lathe put them in front of him so long ago. *God they're gross.*

“Yes, I am, because asparagus is the shit and I'm sure people at the table will appreciate it. Also they're still Ieva’s favourite vegetable so deal with it and get me some that looks less disgusting than the rest.” *Anything to get myself some decent asparagus. It's just a fucking vegetable. ...except for broccoli. That's just a pile of crap masquerading as nutrition.*

“Ugh... I don’t wanna… you can’t make me!” *I won’t do it... I won’t touch it...*

“You forget how quickly I'm able to change every lock in the damn house. And how easy it is to leave a door open late at night...” *Nobody wants to hear that, do they.*

“So... You’re k-kicking me out?” *Damn... didn’t think he would go straight for the jugular...*

Lathe stopped, staring at the phone when he heard Eren's tone waver. “Nonononono Eren, I didn't mean it like that, I meant you'd be stuck outside with a bunch of groceries and a key that doesn't fit. I just imagined you'd be confused as hell as I laughed from a window for five minutes before letting you in. I'm not gonna kick you out over some fucking asparagus, that’s dumb. I'm sorry, bad joke. I didn't think.” *I know how scared you are that I'm going to kick you out... I'm so sorry...*

Eren had to collect himself for a moment. *It was just a joke... He's not... He's not gonna kick me out... It was just a joke.* He had to close his eyes, taking in a shaky breath as he forced himself not to cry. “O-Okay… I’ll be home soon then, bye.” He hung up hurriedly, going over to the display case and picking up two bunches of asparagus and silently meandering through the rest of the store to get the food they needed. *I need to calm down... It was just a joke...*
Lathe looked forlornly to the phone as the connection cut, pocketing it after a moment. “M’sorry, Eren…” Lathe shook himself from his mind again, washing his hands and donning an apron. He heard a mumble from the next room, coming back to Ieva on the couch, kneeling next to her. “What’s up?” He watched her eye his apron with distaste, chuckling. “We’ve got a bunch of people coming over, and I haven’t done anything in two days. I wanna help.” She pouted, and Lathe rolled his eyes for a moment, leaning in to give her a deep kiss, his hand cupping her cheek for a long moment. They broke apart when they heard a key in the front door, looking up as Tucker and Jake came in, the former dropping his bag by the door and grumbling about a snack, the latter immediately scampering to the kitchen and trying to reach for the snack shelf of the cupboards. Oh no. “The tornadoes are home.” Lathe grinned, pecking her cheek one last time before going to get them a snack and shooed them from the kitchen, getting set up to work. There’s cooking to do. Lathe had the mixer going on one of many cookie dough batches when the door opened again, Eren bringing in an armful of grocery and an armful of toddler. “Eren, careful, you’ll drop that.” Lathe ran over, taking the grocery bag. He stopped as Eren gave him a weird look, realising what he just did. “I guess it says a lot when I'm apparently more worried you'll drop the groceries than drop the kid.”

Eren sighed quietly, shaking his head, putting Sammie down and watching her run towards the theater room where Jake was probably hiding out. “I guess… Get back to your kitchen, I’ll bring in the rest.”

“Okay…” Lathe set the bag down for the moment, moving to envelop Eren in a warm hug, his face in his shoulder. “M’sorry about what I said… I didn't think, and I certainly didn't mean it. You can stay forever if you want.” Of course you can.

Eren was stiff for a moment before wrapping his arms around Lathe’s waist. “No, it’s okay, you don’t need to apologize, I need to learn when to take a joke, it’s fine really, I need to get the rest of the groceries.” He mumbled trying to pull away from Lathe’s grasp. I should get the rest of it in, you’ll wanna cook…

Lathe sighed, moving to kiss his cheek before letting him go, giving him a weary smile. “So I make sure you know- You and Levi and your family staying here is always going to be more than fine with us.” He crossed his thumb over his heart. “Swear it.” There, I swore on it. That might make it a bit better.

Eren watched the small action, a bright smile forming on his face as he almost seemed to skip out the door and down the steps to the car. I can get this done quick. It barely took Eren any time at all to grab all the groceries and start to pull out what he needed for his soup. Bay leaves first, and then the other spices.

Lathe sighed in relief as Eren seemed to brighten right up, turning back to the kitchen just in time to see Tucker snatch an entire bar of orange chocolate. “Thief!” Lathe chased Tucker out of the
kitchen, sighing and turning back to the island. “At least I have like three of those.” He got all the dough mixed, having a wide enough variety of chocolate to make six kinds of chocolate cookies. *That should be plenty.* Lathe had taken over a large stretch of counter with his cookie production, many cooking racks set out with cookies on them, labelled so he knew which kind was which. *I’ll need to get coloured plates or something to keep these straight… I think we might have some somewhere…*

Eren had taken over the actual counter space by the fridge, his whole area covered in flour as he started to knot the dough for the rolls. *It should be good like that.*

Lathe set another pot on the stove, filled with water and more than a dozen eggs. He chuckled as he saw Eren working with the dough, a smear of flour on his cheek. “Eren, you've kinda got something on your face.” He reached out, getting a pinch of flour and flicking it, dusting Eren’s face. “Fixed it.” *Much better.*

Eren barely had enough time to close his eyes as his face was covered. “Oh fun… Are you done with the oven yet?” *I need it…*

“I have two more batches, so half an hour at most while the ones inside finish baking. Then it’s all yours.” *We've got some time, though.* Lathe moved to rifle for plates, stunned when he found himself dusted with flour, looking back to see Eren grinning mischievously, chuckling at the white powder dusting his hair. “Aw, I was hoping I wouldn't go grey *that* fast.” *Nooo, my youth…*

.........*Shit, Dad’s getting old… Well I mean only sorta, he’s still kinda young. I mean, 39 is young……… Right?* Eren couldn't help but laugh as Lathe shook his head, which dusted his shoulders as well. “It’ll just sneak up on you, and take over!”

“Oh it's happening all right. Even without flour I keep finding grey hairs.” Lathe just chuckled, shaking his head a bit as the flour dusted over himself. “Eh, it's why then invented hair dye.” *I'd like to keep my hair black for a while longer, thank you.* Lathe caught an odd, sad look in Eren’s eyes, sighing and moving to peck his cheek. “Hey, c’mon, I’ve still got a good fifty years left in me. That's plenty of time. And who knows? Maybe it's *just* enough time to finally drive you mad.” *I've got time. Plenty of it.*

Eren sighed, shaking his head and getting out a bunch of veggies and starting to chop up everything to go into the stew. He’s already cut the meat in in very small cubes. *I can finish up the soup while I’m waiting to put the Brotchen in the oven.*

They both went back to cooking after that, Lathe having to go fetch a damp towel and get the flour
out of his hair before he could continue. *Can't have flour on everything.* Lathe had all the cookies on coloured plates moments before the eggs were done boiling, getting to work making devilled eggs, piping the filling in and sprinkling paprika over them as potatoes boiled for mashed potatoes. Tucker and Jake were enlisted to set the table, putting out plates and silverware neatly after they figured out whether the fork or the knife went closer to the plate. Lathe was just putting the eggs on a plate when the doorbell rang, suddenly becoming aware of what he was wearing. “Crap, I'm still in pajamas.” Lathe quickly put the rest on the plate before running off upstairs. “I'll be half a minute!” *I should probably look somewhat presentable. Probably.*

Eren shook his head, going to open the door, smiling as he saw Armin. “Hey, Armin, come on in, dinner should be ready soon.” *I hope at least…* He looked back to the kitchen as a timer went off, quickly going to pull out the Brotchen from the oven and putting them in a large bowl with a towel over it to keep in the warmth. *Well, Brotchen’s done, now we just need everyone else to come…*

Lathe quickly made his way to his room, shutting the door behind him before noticing Ieva in their walk-in closet again, changing. He smirked, ambling up behind her and resting a hand on her hip, pointing to something near her with the other. “Mind handing me that red flannel, honey?” *Red it is.*

Ieva gasped a bit when she felt his hand on her hip, having not heard him walk in. She smiled at him, reaching for the flannel and turning to kiss his nose as she gave it to him. “Hmm, wanna help me pick something out?” *I can’t decide!*

Lathe looked at the many shirts they had hanging in the closet, studying her half. “Hmm… you look wonderful in *everything* …” He reached out, plucking a dark blue shirt from its hanger and handing it to her, pecking her cheek. “But I like this shirt best.” *You look good in blue.*

Ieva blushed, taking the shirt and slipping it on, grabbing a pair of black pants as well and slipping those on. *I think this'll work.* “Who’s coming over?” *Will I know everyone?*

“A lot of people- Casper and Scotty, duh, Hannah and Sharon, Armin, and then Marco and Jean. And we're apparently required to feed the kids, so they'll be there too. Of course.” *Everyone gets to feast today.*

“Ah, okay, I know them all well enough. And we’re having stew?” *I can smell it, kinda... My nose is pretty stuffed...*

“Stew is the main course, yes… but there's also mashed ‘tatoes, deviled eggs, brotchen, collard greens, asparagus …” He watched her eyes light up at that. “And Sharon's bringing apple pie and
ice cream, and we have a ton of chocolate cookies, all kinds of flavours for dessert. I also had shrimp thawed. It's a right feast.” *I keep using that word—*but it fits. Lathe slipped from her side, going to find a pair of jeans and changing out of his sweatpants. *Open flannel with white tank top, jeans, socks… I think I'm good.*

Ieva watched him get changed, biting her lip and forcing herself to look away. *Nope, keep you head out of the gutter…* She slipped out the door, coming down the stairs as the doorbell rang, opening it to be greeted by Casper and Scotty holding cases of beer and other assorted liquor. “Did you clean out the house to come over here?” *I can only imagine…* A soft smile was on her face as she let them in, watching Casper instantly scamper to the kitchen. “There goes the hooligan…”

Casper set the liquor on the counter near the glass doors of the liquor cabinet, looking over the counter where everything was in various stages of being cooked and finished. “Oooh, deviled eggs…” Casper reached for one, only for Eren to smack his hand away. “But fooood….” Casper pouted, hanging his head dejectedly when Eren shooed him from the kitchen. “Mur.” *But I'm hungry … eh, food soon.*

Lathe chuckled, watching as Casper perked back up when Scotty kissed his cheek. He sighed when he saw the case of beer in Scotty’s hands, shaking his head. “Of course you decide to pay us back in alcohol.” *Of course.*

“If you didn't expect it, I don't think you know us anymore.” Casper joked, quirking an eyebrow at him. “Up and walking- glad to see you're not still suffering from the plague.”

“I'm only slightly dying right now, actually. But thanks. I already infected Ieva though, so watch out.” He laughed as Casper jumped, mockingly looking at Ieva in fear of being ‘infected.’ *I missed having everyone around.*

“Your door's open. That actually makes this easier.” Sharon poked her head inside, looking at the unfolding scene, a pie covered with tin foil in her hands, protected with oven mitts. “It's still too warm to just tote around, so we should probably use a cutting board…” *Yeah, don't wanna burn anything.* She looked up gratefully as Eren ushered her and Hannah inside, going to set the pie down as the bowl of ice cream Hannah carried was stored in the freezer, her other arm full with Maverick. She looked to the huge assortment of cookies, her eyebrows shooting up. “......wow. That's a very impressive assortment.” *Can we have dessert first?* Please?

Hannah shifted her hold on Maverick, looking over to the food that was being put into large bowls. *Holy shit... So much food! “Who are all coming over? You made so much food....” We could feed an army at this rate.*
“Well, Jean eats about as much as a fucking horse so….” Eren snickered as he continued to dish out the sides and put them on the extended table. *When’s Horseface gonna get here anyways?*

“I’m not entirely sure one guy justifies the sheer amount of food here.” Sharon looked over the rest of the food. She looked over the congregation, catching sight of a certain blonde. “Blondie’s here too… I’m awful with names… What’s his name again?”

“That’s Armin.”

“Oh yeah, Armin. And if Jean’s coming, Marco’s coming. Then there’s us, the crazies, Eren and his parents, the kids…” She watched as Tucker and Jake lurked with Sammie near the theatre room door, checking if it was time to eat yet. “…I understand now.” *Yeah, there’s a lot of us.*

Eren snorted, continuing to dish out things before taking bowls and filling them, putting them on plates on the table. *Leave one for Marco, cause he gets Dad’s stew.* He barely noticed that Casper was trying to ask him a question as he continued with his work.

Ieva watched Casper try and get Eren’s drink order, shaking her head. “Casper, leave him be, he’s concentrating. You can get his drink when he’s done.” *You’re not gonna be able to get it right now.*

Hannah went up behind Casper, having handed Maverick to Scotty. “Can I have a glass of berry vodka?” *I am getting hampered today, I am not gonna care at all, I have off the rest of the week*…

Casper quirked an eyebrow, nodding anyway. “Oh-Kay… I really hope you don’t have work tomorrow.” Casper moved back to the liquor cabinet, pouring her the drink and handing it over. *At this rate, Sharon doesn’t get a drink. Which is good, because she doesn’t drink anyway.*

“You do realize that you make my schedule…. Right? And that you are the one that can’t drink because you have work?” Hannah sipped at the drink, a huge smile on your face. *Hope you remembered that tidbit… I have off the rest of the week.*

Casper groaned, putting bottle of scotch right back down from almost pouring a glass. “Crap, I forgot… Dammit…” He sighed, going to pester Lathe and tempt all the guests with alcohol.
“Casper, I don't want whiskey, thanks but no thanks.” Lathe shooed Casper off of him as the doorbell rang again, going to the door. “I wonder who that could be…” He smiled as he opened the door for Marco and Jean, the former having a hand on the waist of the latter. “Hey you two! C’mon in, we’re just about to eat. Watch out for Casper, he’s trying to get everyone drunk.”

“Note taken. I'll be driving then.” Marco nudged Jean as they walked inside. “You can drink if you want.” I wouldn't want more than a glass of wine anyway. I don't drink much. “Thank you for inviting us, by the way. Dinner smells wonderful.” Marco smiled faintly, looking over the small crowd of people. There's a lot of people over. Is today some special occasion? I don't think so...

Jean looked at Marco with disbelief. He never tells me that I get to drink! Hell yeah! “Casper, I want a glass of Beam with a shot of fireball!” My go-to drink, I get to drink!

Eren finally came back into the kitchen, setting down the large pot, and covering it. “Okay, Dinner’s ready, the bowl without stew is for Marco, everyone else sit wherever!” His voice carried over the squealing children as they raced to take their seats. So freaking adorable… Eren had set the table for 12, even though there were 13 people in attendance. I’m not gonna sit, I’m in charge of keeping the food continuous. Once everyone was seated Eren brought out the sides, giving Marco his vegetarian stew as well as his vegetarian collard greens. Okay, that should be everything…. That goes out on the table for right now… He shifted on his feet looking over the full table as everyone ate to make sure he wasn’t forgetting something. I feel like I am… I feel like I’m forgetting something…

Lathe sat near the head of the table, looking over the table full of people, watching Eren look over the table and shuffle a bit awkwardly. …wait… “Eren, we’re missing a chair. You get to eat dinner too, you know.” Lathe joked lightly, standing. “Alright, everyone on this side of the table, shuffle a bit more towards this end.” Ieva, Armin, Marco and Jean all immediately made room for Eren at the end, Lathe going to get a table setting. He rested a hand on Eren’s shoulder as he passed him. Go downstairs and grab another chair, Hon. I'm getting you silverware and stuff.” You deserve dinner. You cooked half of it, so why not?

“I-I’m fine, I need to help refill stuff when people run out, I’m fine really, and I’m not really that hungry anyways.” Eren had followed Lathe into the kitchen as he started to get a plate from the cabinet. I'm fine, really, I'll be okay, and I would just sit there… I'm not hungry at all… “Really Dad, don’t worry about it.” Eren pleaded with him, grabbing his arm to pull it away from the shelf. I can't eat…

Lathe turned back to him, catching the desperation in his plea, his brow furrowed. “Eren, Honey, are you alright? Is something the matter?” Lathe rested a hand on his arm, his voice soft and quiet so the others didn't hear and worry. What's wrong? “And don't bullshit me and say it's nothing. Please, talk.”
Eren’s brow furrowed as he tried to think of how he would actually say it. “Um… The last time, we were all together like this… Was when Levi was still home…. “I lost any appetite I had when I thought about that…."

Lathe’s face fell, looking sympathetic and pulling him into a hug. “I’m sorry, Honey… are you sure you still wouldn’t want to sit with us? Even if you just talk and stuff? You don’t have to eat anything. It’s okay.” I understand how much you miss him… we all miss him.

Eren shook his head. “N-No, I’m gonna go bring the horses in, I forgot… You guys eat, I’ll be back to help refill stuff eventually…” I was occupied with making food that I didn’t feed them either… Fuck…

Lathe nodded, kissing his cheek. “You go do that, then. It's okay, Hon.” Lathe let Eren scurry off, sighing and returning to the table. “You can un-squish, Eren’s not eating.” Lathe just shrugged when they gave him inquiring looks, thankful they simply accepted the silent answer and moved back into place. Lathe sat back at the table, the room filled mostly with the clink of silverware on plates and some quiet chatter as they ate. I hope the next time this happens Eren will want to eat… we worked so hard to make everything, it seems like a bit of a waste if he doesn't get to enjoy it with us. But there are going to be leftovers, most likely. There’s a lot of everything.

Eren sighed quietly as he got out of the house, making his way to the barn and whistling for the horses who made their way to the gate to get back in the barn. He kept his head down as he got them all in their stalls and he fed them all. Just me and you guys… I hate this… I hate that he’s not here… I hate it… I hate it all… Eren could feel the tears forming in his eyes. “I hate this… I hate this so much… Because I’m all alone…. And no one seems to realize that I’m not okay, they don’t… I hate that I’m all alone… I hate that I agreed to this! I hate it! I hate it!! ” Eren shouted loudly, crying as he punched at the wall. I hate it. He gritted his teeth and grabbed Charlie’s gear, leading him out of his stall. I need to get out of here.

Jean looked to Lathe as they started to clean up. “So what’s the bastard’s problem?” He legitimately just left! ...Wait, is that him? “Where’s he going?” Why’s he on a horse??

“Jean, language.” Marco lightly scolded him, elbowing him in the ribs.

“Sorry…” Jean ducked his head down a bit at that, though he quickly looked back to the window. “But seriously, where the hell is he going?” He’s legit just booking it out of here.
“He’s supposed to be bringing in the horses, but if he’s still getting them inside it’s taking a while—”

Lathe looked out the window, seeing Eren with Charlie fully tacked, riding off into the field. “Oh hell no. The last time he pulled this shit he came back after eight hours and a deer attack.” Lathe threw the dish towel onto the counter, ditching his apron and running out the back door, shouting for him. “EREN! Come back!” I’m not letting you do this shit again. I know it’s hard not having Levi around but I’m not letting you run away again and let yourself get killed.

Eren looked back as he heard a shout in the distance, unable to make it out as he urged Charlie faster. I wanna ride, really ride… I wanna get out of here… He could feel the warm tears slipping down his cheeks as Charlie started to get closer to the trees. I wanna get away for a little bit…

Lathe looked relieved when Eren turned to look back, but huffed in irritation as he looked back and rode into the woods. I know you heard me. At least my voice... I can’t ride after you, that’s a death wish. I’ve never ridden alone before... He looked back as he saw a few figures lingering in the window, looking worried. ...but I know someone who definitely has. “Hannah!” Lathe ran back up to the house, coming inside and immediately looking to her. “Eren rode off into the woods, and given what happened last time, he'd be gone for literally the entire night unless we go out to get him. Up for a ride?”

Hannah looked up, setting her drink down on the table. “Well, problem one, Luna can’t carry two of us… Problem two, I assume you’ve never ridden her before. Problem three, why would he be out the entire night? Can’t you just call him?” I mean, I could ride, but by the time I get Luna tacked… He could be at least a mile out… Charlie’s fast!

“Calling won't do him any good, he'll ignore any calls I make. Last time this happened he was out for eight hours and got attacked by a deer, and didn't even bother coming straight home after he was bleeding from it. Badly.” Lathe looked back outside, starting to grow nervous. I already can't see him... and tacking another horse would take a while... too long. “...forget it. There might be an easier way to solve this.” Lathe dug out his phone, quickly tapping away at it. “....aaaaaand… thank fuck, he has his phone on him.... whoa he's going fast. That's one of the longer trails.” Lathe looked to the back door, making up his mind and moving to jump into his boots, grabbing a heavier jacket. “I'm taking the ATV. I need to catch up to him, and that means making good time of it. Hopefully I'll be back soon. I'm not letting him get himself killed. Again.” Yeah, no. Fuck that noise.

Hannah looked at him, nodding. “Which trail? I’ll tack Luna and then take the other side of it and meet him…” That should work, right? She stood, following him to the backdoor after grabbing her shoes and jacket. What’s going through his head right now?

“I haven’t found any time to mark trails or put up posts; nothing has a name yet. And Eren’s moving really fast, and he could even go off the trails if he wanted to. And it’s not up to me whether he even stays on the damn property. I think it’s best if it’s just me; he wouldn't want to be
swarmed the way he is right now anyway. And yes, two people counts as a swarm to him right now.” Lathe shook his head. “I have my phone so if I need backup, I'll call the house. But I'll head out by myself for now. Thanks, really.” It's for the best. Right now, he needs someone he might actually listen to out there quick.

Eren could hear Charlie’s hooves thundering under them as they rode along the side of the nearly-abandoned road. We've been riding for at least an hour… He started to slow Charlie down, the large horse panting and sweaty under him, but otherwise fine from the exertion. He pulled out his phone, grimacing at the sight. 15 missed calls from Mom, 10 missed calls from Dad… Jake and Tucker texted me… Everyone… Except for one … Eren didn’t even register that he was crying again until his vision was blurry, putting his phone away and leaning down into Charlie’s withers, trying to calm himself down. He urged him on at a slow trot. Come on, let’s keep going for a little longer before we head back.

Lathe didn't take more than five minutes before he was moving quickly to the small road, the fifteen-foot dirt border of the property. He could see the small blip on the map in the distance, picking up speed. Come on, don't run off on me. Don't do it. He glanced every few seconds to the phone latched securely in front of him, seeing Eren riding nearer the road. Good. Maybe he hasn't heard me yet. He kept an eye out in front of him, sighing in relief as he saw a small speck move out of the trees and onto the dirt road. That's him. He kept an eye out in front of him, sighing in relief as he saw a small speck move out of the trees and onto the dirt road. That's him. Lathe kept an eye on the gas gauge as he followed him, not getting any closer to Eren as he chased him. He's going so fast…

Eren had picked up the walk to a steady trot down the road, gripping his reins tightly. I hate this… I hate all of it… He picked his head up when he heard the roar of a motor in the distance. Huh? Someone actually uses this road? He turned to look at the ATV hurtling towards them. What the fuck? Is that Dad!?

Lathe slowed as he got close, riding alongside them with a few feet between him and Charlie. “This is the police! Pull over!” Lathe spoke loudly over the sound of hooves on dirt and the sound of the engine. He tried to joke, but his eyes were desperate, pleading with Eren under the old-fashioned goggles. Come on, just stop. Charlie looks tired, you look miserable, and I was terrified for you the entire ride here and need to give you a hug. And then smack you. And then give you more hugs.

Eren shook his head, though pulled Charlie back into a slow walk, watching Lathe slow down to match them. “You’d only be the police if you were Mom, and since you aren’t I’m going to continue. Good day to you, sir.”

“Well, then take my advice as your equal, a fellow citizen. Pull out your phone there, good sir.” He watched Eren fish it from his pocket. “Open up your texts, please. I do believe your Mother, AKA the police, have contacted you many a time to cease these horse-riding activities, have they not?
I'm simply doing my duty as a law-abiding citizen to make sure you obey the law.” Please stop? Pretty please?

“You know I came out to ride so that I could clear my head after an hour or two and then come back… You thought I’d try and do something stupid which was the only reason you came… Because you can’t trust me.” Eren’s voice was emotionless as he turned Charlie around, starting to head back to the house at a walk. You all can’t trust me to be fine by myself… Probably the only reason you haven’t kicked me out yet…

Lathe felt like he’d been punched in the gut, stopping the ATV as Eren turned around. He took hold of the goggles, tugging them off and turning to look at Eren, shaking as he stared at his back. He couldn’t help himself as he shouted, his voice full of anger and terror. “I came out here because the last time you pulled this shit you came home after eight fucking hours and a deer attack! I had to give you stitches on the kitchen table and you nearly fucking died so excuse me when I’m fucking scared shitless the second time you do it! I don’t wanna fucking lose you!” Lathe trembled, his voice catching in his throat, burying his head in his hands. “I can't fucking lose you…”

Eren had stopped Charlie, hopping off of him and walking along side him. “I’m going home.” His words were quiet as he leaned into Charlie’s side. You can yell all you want on the way back, go on, I can take it… Maybe it won’t drive the nail in… But it’ll help keep up the cracks. “Got anything else to yell at me about while we’re at it?”

Lathe was stunned, not even realising he was crying, not knowing what to say at Eren’s complete lack of emotion. …..I don’t know how the fuck he got so far gone so quickly… but… be careful. Lathe dropped his hands, staring at the ground. “……I know Levi being gone is seriously hard to deal with. I know I won't be able to understand that as much as you. …….but don't make it seem like both of my sons aren't home anymore these days…” You're not acting like yourself… I don't want you to talk to me like we're only mildly tolerating each other. I don't want to lose both of you at once. You're gonna kill me if it feels like we’re nothing more than enemies for the next four fucking years.

Eren kept walking, contemplating if he was going to respond, though he found no words for himself until his mouth spoke before his mind could stop him. “He’s not your son. That’d be weird, especially since we’ve had sex, that’s like… Committing incest… Isn’t it?” His tone was a little softer as he looked over his shoulder at Lathe. “Are you not coming home… Or are you gonna come too…” You’re just sitting there…

Lathe didn't even bother looking up, tears silently falling down his cheeks. To me, he's my son. As much as you are. “……I don’t know. I get the feeling I wouldn't feel at all welcome in my own home.” If you're gonna keep talking like nothing matters anymore, I'll just sit here awhile. At least the trees won’t make me feel like a fucking failure.
“You came out here to bring me back home, so bring me back home… Dad, if I’m not allowed to come out and cry then neither are you… Come on, let’s go home, Mom’s probably worried about you.” I could always text her to come pick you up…

Lathe’s hands were balled up in fists, clenching and uncle Ching as he blankly stared at the ground. “Did you not hear me?” Lathe looked up at Eren, emotion draining out of his face, his eyes glassy. “You’d be allowed to come out here whenever you want if the first time you didn’t come home needing emergency stitches and blood transfusions. Me? I actually respond to texts when I receive them and don’t stay outside for more than an hour or two, much less eight. You can go home. You should. But I’m going to stay right here… I’d rather not dwell on the fact I apparently made an enemy out of you. I didn't know I was a terrible father.” He shrugged, looking back to the ground. “Apparently, now you don't even plan on marrying Levi when he comes home. If him being my son-in-law turns you off so much to the idea, I don't know why you entertained the idea as much as you have.” I thought you wanted to marry him. ...I guess not.

Eren stopped in his tracks, Charlie’s nickers trying to get him to continue, though he wasn’t having any of it. “What the fuck did you just say? That I wouldn’t marry Levi? Do you even know who I fucking am ? I’d say yes in a heartbeat!” He dropped Charlie’s reins turning around and making a beeline for Lathe with clenched fists and gritted teeth. “That’s not what I said! I said don’t refer to him as your son dammit! Because he’s not! He’s not your son in law!” I’m scared he never will be!

Lathe looked up as Eren started for him, standing, his hands raised in front of him in surrender, looking a bit scared. “Eren, it's like you said he's not family! Have you heard him lately when he refers to me? He's been calling me Dad since Ieva and I got married, and he calls her Mom! He's like a son to us, but that doesn’t mean anything about your relationship changing. What's the deal with it?” I don't understand... why the hell are you trying to say he can't be like a son to me?

“What’s the deal with it? What’s the deal with it? Well I’ll fucking tell you what the ‘ deal’ is!” He came up to Lathe, grabbing him, his anger turning to sadness. “Because everyday he’s gone I’m afraid! I’m afraid he’ll only be considered like a son to you! And that he’ll never actually be your son… He hasn’t proposed… He hasn’t said a single word about engagement to me! How can I not be upset when you think about him as a son and all he thinks about me is just some person … That he won’t tie the knot with? Yeah we’re trying to have kids… But you don’t need to married to have kids! I’m afraid that he’s not really mine , dammit! That’s why!” Eren’s whole body was shaking as he let it all out. Fuck... I wasn’t supposed to tell you... He let his knees buckle out from under him, tears running down his face quickly. “I’m sorry… I’m sorry I yelled, I just… I just…” He struggled to take in a shaking breath. I hate this so much... This worry that's continually making me sick , and so self conscious....

Lathe’s eyes screwed shut as Eren grabbed his collar, waiting for a punch that never came. He finally looked up when Eren stopped shouting, his own eyes matching the sadness and worry in
Eren’s. …fuck… “Eren…” Lathe’s voice was quiet, catching Eren when he stumbled and slowly lowering them to the ground as he began sobbing. Lathe wrapped him up in a hug, keeping him in his lap and gently running a hand through his hair as tears streaked down his own cheeks. ……I’m so sorry…… “…..Eren….. I know he wants to marry you.” Levi, I’m telling him this and I’m not gonna be sorry. “I remember hearing from him sometime… that he’d rather go overseas and leave behind a boyfriend, and not a fiancée… that maybe then, if he hadn’t already promised to marry you… if he didn’t come back… it wouldn't hurt as much. ……but I think he was just hoping as much as he could that it would be true… because we all know it wouldn't help at all. ……and when we went up north, visited Marcus… when we went to the trampoline place… I remember hearing him ask to jump in after you into the foam pit, and the guy manning it asked if you two were related… …Levi just pointed at you, and he said like this, ‘I’m gonna marry him.’” He cooed quietly to Eren as he shook harder, trying to calm him. “He wants to keep you… I know he does… he loves you so much…. and he wants to come home. He'll come home for you, and I'll personally beat the crap out of him if he doesn't propose within a month of getting back here.” Otherwise he'd be taking waaaaaaaay too damn long.

Eren had calmed down immensely when he listened to Lathe speak quietly in his ear. Charlie walked over to them and sniffed at his hair, breathing down Eren’s neck in his attempt to calm the young man. He chuckled a bit at his last statement, nodding… “I-I’m sorry , I guess, today was just bad because… Um… Levi tried to call me on skype during work… And I had to decline the call and then mute the next time he tried to call… And I feel horrible about it, but I don’t know what to do anymore…” Work helps to take my mind off of things… But… It only helps so much… “I didn’t mean to yell, I’m sorry, I don’t hate you… Please come home, I don’t want you to be gone too…” Eren clung to Lathe’s shirt, feeling hot tears roll down his cheeks at just the thought. Not you too… I promise I won’t bottle it in anymore...

Lathe nodded, holding him close. “I'm sorry for yelling too… you scared me when we noticed you running off like that, I could only think the worst… I let my anger get the best of me… we can go home. After all, we’ve got a job to do.” He watched Eren look up to him curiously, weakly smirking. “Drown our sorrows in pie and cookies.” He smiled as Eren just shook his head and chuckled, kissing his nose. “C’mon, everyone’s probably worried. And we can't let them eat all the dessert by themselves.” Lathe helped Eren stand, rubbing at his eyes. Guh, I could use something sweet… and a really long nap… and a few more hugs...

Eren smiled softly, looking at him. “I um… I know this isn’t the best of times… But Sammie’s new parents are coming to pick her up tomorrow… Will you be able to take care of that?” I hope you'll be feeling up for it… I need to go to work...

Lathe nodded, rubbing the back of his neck. “Yeah, I guess so… I don't wanna have to let her go yet, but this is what we signed up for, isn't it?” She gets extra kisses goodnight and her favourite breakfast tomorrow. Lathe retrieved his goggles, hanging them around his neck. “I'll miss her.” She’s such a good kid… I hope her new family will take care of her.
Eren nodded and he turned to Charlie, pulling his bridle off. <“Follow me.”> He gently pet Charlie as he nickered, a soft smile forming on his face as he put the bridle in his lap, sitting down behind Lathe and wrapping his arms around the older man tightly. *I can’t ride… My legs feel so weak…*

Lathe smiled, turning the ATV around and making their way down the road at a pace Charlie could comfortably keep up with, cutting through the woods to the path and soon parking in the barn, Charlie behind them. He felt Eren’s hands slip from his middle, hopping off the ATV and helping Eren bring Charlie back into the stall with Luna and their filly. Lathe had an arm around Eren’s shoulders as they walked back to the house, smiling weakly when Ieva opened the door, looking worriedly between the two of them. “We’re okay, don’t worry. Things got sorted out.” *We’re kinda okay now. Kinda sorta.*

Eren nodded, though when he saw people in the background, mostly Jean, he kept his head down to hide his face. *I won’t run anymore… Why is he still here?* “Um… C-Can I go up to my room?” I wanna hide… I don’t want people to see my like this, my face is all red and blotchy still, I can feel it. Eren’s hand was still clinging to Lathe’s shirt in the back, his legs feeling a little more stable as they walked, though still shaking under him. *I actually might need your help getting up them… god damn stairs!*

“Yeah, you can. Wanna take something sweet with you?” He watched Eren shake his head. “Okay. C’mon, let’s go.” Lathe brought him to the stairs, helping him as he took shaky steps up to the second floor, patient as he struggled. He walked with him to his room, letting go of him at the door. “You can just chill here, then. But we’re making sure you eat something tomorrow morning.” Lathe pecked his cheek. *You can hide, and I’ll let it slide that you skipped dinner. But you need to eat something so you can function tomorrow.*

Eren nodded, going to his bed and slipping out of his clothes. *I wanna sleep, sleep is good… Really good…* He got out of his pants, leaving his shirt on and just flipping back down on the pillow, sighing as he let his body sink into the mattress. *Sleep….* He was out long before anyone left, his body curled up above the covers.
“Mr. Yeager please call the office, Mr. Yeager please call the office.”

Eren picked his head up, putting his marking pen down. *What do they want now? I finally got into the zone with correcting these tests…* He got up, making his way across the empty classroom to pick up the phone attached to the wall and dialing the office extension.

“Hello?” The office receptionist answered the phone quickly.

“This is Eren, do I need to come down?”

“Oh no, Eren, are you in your room?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“Okay, you’re guest will be down in a minute.”

Eren’s brow furrowed as he thanked her, hanging up. *Guest? What the hell?* He shrugged it off, sitting back at his desk and continuing to grade the pile of tests he had. *Who the fuck would it be? The students know that I’m in my room until 4:30 after school.*

Footsteps quietly patterned down the hall, a freckled face poking into the classroom. Marco smiled when he saw Eren, stepping inside. “Hey Eren. I thought I’d find you here. My dad and I made you something for your birthday, since we didn't hear about anything going on for it. Happy Birthday.” He set the box in his hands on the desk, a cake box from the bakery. *I hope he likes it when he gets to eat it later…*

Eren looked up in shock. “Huh?” He looked down at the box on his desk, instantly recognizing the shape of it. “But Marco… It’s not my birthday?” *I mean… I don’t think it is?* His brow furrowed in confusion as he looked up to Marco.

Marco tilted his head a bit, glancing at the box. “It’s March 31st…. right? Your birthday? That was yesterday… and we didn't hear if you had a party or something, so we made you this. ….did I get
the date wrong?” I was so sure it was yesterday...

Eren’s eyes were wide as he listened to Marco. “Oh wow, we all must’ve forgotten. Geez, where the fuck are the days going… Thank you Marco.” I didn’t realize… And no one in my house remembered either… That’s impressive… No call from Levi either… I’ve been concentrating on AP work lately. “Well I guess I’ll take the rest of the night off and take the cake home, thank you, really.” I appreciate it.

Marco’s eyebrows shot up, surprised. “Everyone forgot? Geez, that’s something. I’d’ve imagined at least one of you would remember. At least you.” Marco eyed the stack of half-graded papers. “Then again, you seem to be swimming in work yourself…” The kids probably don’t know when your birthday is. And now there’s six kids running around, so we all know Lathe has barely got time to breathe … “You’re very welcome. Anything for you.” Marco smiled, nudging Eren’s arm. You’re a good friend. The least I can do is give you cake.

“I wouldn’t put it past me, I almost completely forgot about Dad’s birthday earlier… The boys’ll be happy that we have cake for dessert… It’s probably pizza night since it’s Friday…” I’ll get home and ask the boys what they want for dinner. He gathered his things and grabbed the cake with a soft smile on his face, walking out of the high school with Marco chatting with him. I need a break, I’ve been stressing out about everything… Levi’s not skyped me at all…. I really really hope he’s okay… The last message was that he’d be off base for a bit… But it’s been 4 whole months since then… He got the cake into his car, slowly driving to the store to pick up ice cream. If I know Marco, he made me a huge Ultimate Chocolate Cake… Freckles and his obsession with chocolate… It took him only an extra ten minutes than normal to get home, getting in and setting the cake on the island counter, hurrying the ice cream into the freezer. “BOYS!!” Eren shouted into the house, hearing feet thunder into the kitchen, bright eyes and huge smiles. “What’s today?”

“Friday!” All of them said in unison.

“Yes it is, so what kind of pizza are we getting?” I know you guys can all mostly agree.

Philip, the youngest at 5 years of age, came up to him, a curious look on his face as he tugged on Eren’s fingers. “Can we haff b-bacon?” Pweease!!

Eren smiled ruffling his black hair, looking to the older boys. “Philip requested cheese and bacon, what we think about that?”

“That’s good with me.”
“Yup, me too!”

“I can eat that.”

“Alright I guess that settles that then, does anyone want wings too?” He watched as Tucker nodded. “Tucker you want the usual?” He watched Tucker nod before he said the boys could go. Alright, I’ll write this down for Dad to order… Where the heck is he anyways? Well, the boys are good with watching each other… He jotted down the pizza order and left it on the counter for Lathe to see before going up to his room to change. He pulled his phone out of his pocket, opening up the skype app to see if Levi had called. Still nothing… What if he’s hurt? Is he okay? He didn’t call today… Or yesterday… Did he forget too? I mean, for us, it was a normal day… Dad didn’t make Black Forest Cake. I can say that I’m at least grateful that it wasn’t like any other birthday I had when Grisha was still around… He shuddered as his mind brought up a few choice images, shaking his head to try and rid himself of the horrid thoughts. Eren sighed quietly, getting out of his dress clothes and into his riding clothes. “Boys I’m going out to ride Charlie! Watch Philip while I’m out! Dad and Mom aren’t home yet! Be good!” He shouted into the house, knowing that they’d be fine and going out of the back door and towards the barn to get Charlie’s tack, dragging it over his shoulder and going out to the pasture to tack him. It’s getting warmer out… That’s good…

Lathe traipsed down the stairs a few minutes later, having finally reached a breaking point in the paperwork upstairs. He smiled as he saw Lucas tucked into a corner of the couch reading, smiling warmly. “Lucas, I take it Eren came home?” He watched him nod and silently point to the kitchen, meandering over to the table. He picked up the note on the table, chuckling. “I guess we all know what’s for dinner, yeah?” He smiled as he heard Lucas laugh for a moment before quieting down again, his eyes never straying from the pages of his novel. A real bookworm. “I’ll call that in in a little bit. It’s still kinda early to eat, given how quickly they’ll have it out here.” Lathe tucked the order in his pocket, looking over the kitchen and noting the distinguishable box in the counter. Oooh, something from the bakery. I hope it's muffins. Lathe walked over, lifting the lid of it. He froze as he read the cursive writing in black frosting on the brown chocolate cake. ...Happy Birthday Eren. .......we fucking forgot his birthday. Shit! I've been so damn busy with the kids I forgot all about it! I owe him a cake... and an apology hug. “Any idea where Eren is?” Lathe called out to the living room again.

“Uh, he's in the….” Lucas stubbornly kept reading, a hand gesturing to the back of the house as he searched for the word in the back of his mind. “......the horses... stable, barn, thing…” Lucas didn't even register Lathe’s chuckling at him, too engrossed in True Grit to notice.

“Much specific, very vocabulary, wow.” Lathe grinned, moving to the backdoor and stepping into his boots. “Hopefully I can catch him before he goes off riding again.” I know he'd be back in a rather timely manner, but I wanna catch him soon if I can. Lathe was out the door in a moment, walking over towards the field near the barn where Eren had set up jumps, watching Eren for a
moment before catching his eye, waving to him. “Yo Eren, can we talk a bit?”

Eren slowed Charlie to a walk, coming close to Lathe before hopping off. What’s this about? “Did Jared steal the dinner order again?” He asked, wiping his brow on his sleeve as Charlie nickered at Lathe, his ears perked towards the tall man. “It should be on the island counter…”

“No, I’ve got that. It’s Friday, and the orders the same as last week’s. And the week before that, and the week before that.” Lathe chuckled, shaking his head. “Actually, I saw the box on the counter. The one with the birthday cake. Eren, I’m really sorry we forgot about your birthday. Now we’ve got six boys hanging off of us twenty-four seven and I’ve been too buried in work to think of anything. I nearly forgot my own birthday even was a thing. But I’m sorry.” Lathe held out his arms. “Can I have a hug and not be scared you'll slap me?” A mischievous light flickered in his eye. I don't think you will slap me. But I have to make sure.

“It’s alright, Dad, really. I forgot about it too… Until Marco came in…. Levi hasn’t even called once …” Eren sighed quietly at his words, a small flicker of sorrow in his eyes. I'm fine… I'll be fine… He smiled softly and leaned into Lathe’s open arms. I can live with it...

Lathe pulled him into a warm hug, gently rubbing his back. “M’sorry you haven't heard from him… I’m sure he's fine. He's probably up to his eyes in work, but I know he'd love to have a few hours to talk.” ...I might message him and see if he responds, see if something’s up. I dunno, just a ‘Hey you've been quiet for a while, everything going okay? We'd all like to talk and stuff’ or something. I'm allowed to miss him too.

“ I’m up to my eyes in work…” Eren chuckled quietly, wrapping his arms around Lathe’s middle. “You wanna go riding?” It might make me feel a bit better… “I’ll have to go back to the school to get the rest of the tests I need to grade.”

Lathe paused a moment, blinked. “...are out suggesting you take me with you on Charlie to the school to get a stack of tests?” I probably heard that wrong...

“You know… That wouldn’t be a bad idea, wanna go? We’ll walk the whole way…” Charlie will be faster than us actually walking... Eren smiled cheekily. “You can see how I decorated the room.”

Lathe sighed, shaking his head with a smile. “You're insane. Then again, so am I. I'm in.” Lathe let go of Eren, letting him hop back up, taking the hand offered to him and heaving himself up behind him, holding onto his middle. “Okay kid, just try not to get us killed on this thing.” This ‘ride the horse’ thing is still a weird idea to me... I can't get used to it.
Eren smiled more, gently urging Charlie on and up the driveway to go up the road. “Can I ask you a question?” I feel like my students aren’t prepared, they’re done with the material, we’re in review mode now… And I don’t know what to do.

“I'm not giving you money, you have enough of that.” Lathe grinned. “Yeah, go ahead. What’s up?” You sound a bit nervous about something.

“What do I do with the AP students… I feel like they’re not prepared… And we’re done with the material… What do I do?” I really don’t know what to do with them anymore… ”I want them to be able to do really well… And I’m afraid I’m not giving them enough to do that.”

Lathe pondered the question for a moment. “...there are a couple things to do. As for vocabulary and stuff, you could make a huge-ass Quizlet with all the vocabulary they need to know and the ones that might be tricky… and when it comes to culture and stuff, I'd say make a Kahoot. You know what those are, right? The multiple-choice games on the internet? Just let them use their phones during class for it. But something easy would be to look over some of the old released AP exam questions, do some of those in class together. As for speaking, just start having really weird, intricate conversations. If you can get them to have full normal conversations with each other, they'd be in pretty good shape right at that. But something easy would be to look over some of the old released AP exam questions, do some of those in class together. As for speaking, just start having really weird, intricate conversations. If you can get them to have full normal conversations with each other, they'd be in pretty good shape right at that. I dunno, have them pretend to order pizza from another student or have them try to give ‘tech support’ to one another, or have someone explain, for example, what a penguin is without using certain words and make them get creative. Anything to keep them using all the words in their vocabulary and put them together correctly.” Lathe looked at Eren’s expression. “I can just hear you cringing at how much work that sounds like. I'll help you. But remember- if you keep teaching, and you just might, you'll have all this crap already done for next year, or for the next teacher and their set of students.” That's the good thing. “I think I have a list of the tricky vocabulary words still tucked away somewhere in an old binder, a thing I jotted down one day when the students just kept telling me all these words they kept forgetting or messing up. You should probably have that.” There were trouble spots for the entire class- they should probably be accounted for. They're bound to strike again.

Eren nodded, urging Charlie forward still until they got to the school, about a half hour later. He pulled out his keys from his pocket, and he clambered off of Charlie, tying him to the post near the door. “You’ll stay here and munch on the long grass…. We’ll go inside.”

Lathe chuckled, following him to his classroom. His eyes widened as Eren ushered him inside, looking around in shock. The desks were gone, and in their place rugs were spread across the floor, large pillows strewn around in their stead. Two bookshelves were shoved against the back wall, and where they weren't stuffed with German textbooks they were full of small trinkets and healthy potted plants. The only other furniture in the room was Eren’s desk, littered from edge to edge with papers, some in the middle of being graded, some precariously perched in stacks, threatening to flutter to the floor. “......how well did you say your kids were doing, again?”
“Top grades…” Eren murmured without a second thought and moved around the pillows carefully to get to his desk. “Try not to step on the pillows…” The freshman think it’s weird still… They’ll get used to it...

...... “This is a scientific study waiting to happen.” ......now I want in on that. Lathe carefully stepped over them, looking over the many papers on the desk. “You've got a ton of papers here. How much homework do you give?” Hopefully not a two-page packet every night... god, one of the teachers here used to do that and the kids wouldn't stop complaining... they stopped caring really fast...

“They get journals every night, they need to write one full page, front and back, I won’t let them type it… And it’s about whatever they want to rant about, they find it fun, and I find it fun to read. We have quizzes every other week on Thursdays, and Tests every three weeks on a Tuesday… And once a month they do a research paper, which is three pages front and back about a part of German culture they learned about in class… The AP students take well to it, and are better speaking than I thought they would ever be.” It’s worked out well, and none of the kids really complain about it...

“......you definitely inherited my teaching skillz.” You could hear the ‘z’ on the end of the word. Lathe grinned, looking over one of the papers. “They've been doing so well, and you've really gotten running this class down to a science. They're learning their culture thoroughly, they're speaking well, keeping up their vocabulary and expanding it and getting used to normal syntax and grammar with writing these journals… I'm impressed. You picked up teaching really easily. You didn't google ‘how to teach?’” Lathe quirked an eyebrow at him, smiling.

“No, I didn’t google it. They weren’t pleased when the first homework assignments came back to them, covered in red from corrections of simple errors… And we basically watch videos in class or we have a discussion, or I tell stories of my childhood that are relevant… I also asked Mike about getting a grant to go back to Germany for a little while over the summer… To see how much the culture has changed and to better prepare the students next year…” I still feel like I'm missing something though....

“That all sounds amazing, Eren! Really. Have you started drafting a final exam at all yet? At this point in time, just outlining one would be more than enough. But what I did one year, when I was running Trig for a bit, I made up a few practice exams, let the kids stay after or come in on the weekend and take them, see about what they’d get on the real thing. You could ponder doing one for this class, see where everyone is.” It might help you figure out where to go from here.

“You mean I can give them the exams that are on the AP website?” That’s a thing I can do!?
“No, they put them there for teachers to stare at and forlornly think about how badly their class is going to fail. **Yes**! My god, print out a bunch and give it to them! You can **do** that! It'd save you time from having to write one yourself yet. There are a few up, so you can mix up questions you think they need to go over, or even do a few questions in class **as** a class and walk through them. Whatever works. The exams are there for you to use. But I really would recommend giving them a full-length exam to tell where they are. You can give it in parts during classes over a few days. But you should figure out where to go for review before you blindly start going.” **That'd probably be a good idea.**

“But what do I do about the speaking portion of the exam?” **How the hell do I do that?** Eren continued shuffling through papers and making a few neater stacks. **I can get this done this weekend...**

“Hmm... what if you made them play charades in German? Someone gets a word, they have to describe what it is to the class in German, and have students guess what it is? If it's random enough, it could work...” **I dunno, I never got the AP kids. I got the ones a year below them, but not AP really. Except like one day in the middle of the year. It wasn't much.**

“But it’s like a DBQ almost... It’s weird... It’s more writing after listening to audio tracks... And then I think we have to record something too and send it in...” **I’m so thoroughly confused...**

“OH! It's transcription and pronunciation! I did the same exact thing in high school for French! You listen to a tape in French, or in this case German, and write down what was said in French, checking spelling and if you understood where words began and ended, just making sure you heard it right-”

“No... It’s um... You have some audio tracks... And it’s like statements that are like documents... And you write a persuasive essay... For the first part... And the second part, I think it’s listening to directions and then giving audio responses...” **I think... I might be confusing shit... And I fucking **took** this course and I can’t remember it... Wait, why can’t I remember it? “W-why...?”** Eren’s face grew pale as he struggled to figure out why there was a blank space in his memories... **I don’t remember... At all...**

Lathe watched Eren pale, a hand moving to his shoulder. “Eren, are you okay? We can just check online later, it's no big deal...” He watched Eren shake his head, moving to sit Eren down in his chair. “Eren what's wrong?” **Something’s very wrong...**

“I can’t remember it... At all... I can’t remember what we did during senior year... Why can’t I remember?” **I don’t remember taking the AP classes... Or any other classes...**
Lathe thought, wracking his brain for a good reason. ...think, what happened around that time that could've made you forget that and could be logical and not-too-concerning... well, you were in a coma for a good chunk of time. That's a thing. “You were in a coma for a good chunk of time after your exams... you might have memory loss. Totally normal, Hon, don't panic.” Lathe tried to placate Eren as he looked more and more scared. ...think of something, maybe we can jog your memory just a little bit... humm... “Do you remember what happened when you first woke up? Do you remember waking up at all? I'd been reading Harry Potter to you…” Can you fill in any blanks? Something simple to start, something you should remember.

Eren’s brow furrowed as he struggled to remember. “I um... It... It was bright... Really bright.... And everything was white and black....” I don’t remember any colors...

“Okay, the hospital room was mostly white, and any shadows were black because it was the middle of the damn night... do you remember what I was reading to you? Or the series? I was about halfway through the series when you woke up.” Did you hear much of it...?

Eren shook his head, moving to stand and grab the stack of papers he wanted. “C-Can we go? I have everything now... And I need to make sure that we order pizza... “W-We need to order pizza.” Change the subject... Change the subject... Eren moved away from his desk and carefully towards the door, holding the large stack of papers. I can’t! I don't wanna think about it!

He doesn't want to think about the big gaps.... I can understand it. You're supposed to have memories there... but they're not there. It's scary. “Yeah, we can get going. And I still have the pizza order, I might have to call it in from my cell phone since the ride takes a while back to the house. But that's not a hint to make him gallop the whole way Eren, don't give me that look.” He glared at Eren for a moment as he caught the evil look in his eyes, both of them just laughing after a moment. “I'll call it in, they're used to this crap by now. It won't be much more than, what, 45 minutes? With the drive, an hour. That's fine.” The kids shouldn't be too antsy by then.

“Can you get Garlic wings for me too?” I want something more than just pizza tonight, even though we have cake. He ushered Lathe out of the room locking the door behind him and then ushering the two of them outside where Charlie waited patiently munching on the grass by the door. Good horse... Eren smirked, coming up to Charlie and getting him untangled. Alright buddy... Time to go home...

“Course. I wonder if they'll be able to see us walking down the street on a horse as I'm calling in the order.” Lathe hopped up behind Eren on the horse, dialling the pizza number from memory and holding the cell phone to his ear, looking at the order in his hand as they made their way down Trost. He glanced over to the bakery just in time to see Marco facepalm from behind the counter, trying hard not to laugh as someone picked up. “Uh, hi, I'm calling from the horse outside your
store to place an order for delivery.” He looked into the pizza place as they passed it, the woman at the front desk looking stunned as they meandered down the street on Charlie. “Hi! So, can I have….” Lathe casually read off the order as if what was happening was totally normal. *Totally.* After a moment he hung up, stowing his phone back in his pocket. He made sure to wave to James behind the counter of the pharmacy, the man in question just catching sight of them and looking like he'd seen a ghost. “Honestly, by this point you'd think people would be used to us doing shit like this.” *They need to understand this is normal.*

Eren shrugged. “I don’t think many people saw Charlie the first time we took him down this road.” His words were still a bit quiet, his voice wavering a bit. *I need to calm down…* He took in a deep breath as they finally cleared the busy street and head towards home. “D-Do you think Levi forgot too?” *I mean, it’s reasonable that we all forgot with everything that’s going on around here... But would Levi forget?*

“...I don't think so. I'm sure he'd remember. Here, let me do this. I'd been meaning to since yesterday.” Lathe pulled out his phone, opening Skype. “I'll message him, see what's up.”

LQ: Yo Levi you have a minute or ten

LQ: We haven't heard from you in a while and we're worried

LA: I've been trying to call Eren, believe me!

LA: But my calls won't go through and he won't respond to my messages

LQ: Kk I'll see what's up

“Eren, excuse me for a sec.” Lathe picked Eren’s pocket easily, soon opening his phone and scrolling to Skype, opening it and going through it. He opened Levi’s contact, his brow furrowing. “No messages… looks like everything is in order though…” He hovered over the small bubble near Levi’s name, realising something. “You've got to be kidding me.” Lathe clicked a button, and soon enough a call from Levi was incoming. Lathe answered it, putting it on speaker. <“Levi, Eren accidentally had you on mute from a while ago when he was hella busy.”>


Eren’s eyes were wide. *I did what.... I did that? I made it so Levi wasn't messaging me?* <“I-I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to block you really, I didn’t realize that what I did made it so you couldn’t contact me… We’ll be home soon, so you can see the boys.”> *You haven’t met Philip, Jared, Lucas or Mark yet.* <“We started looking for someone to carry for us… Hannah got an egg fertilized…”> *Well, that should be news, because Lathe doesn’t know yet either....*
Levi’s eyebrows shot up, a bright look in his eyes, his voice warm. <“Oh my god, that’s amazing to hear! You let me know the second someone volunteers to carry for us, okay?”> We’ll actually have a kid… they’ll be ours … <“Oh yeah, I remember you saying something about getting some more kids after Sammie gets adopted. Anyone new around just yet?”>

<“Try four .”>

<“Are you telling me you have six boys running around the house and you haven't had a heart attack yet? I'm impressed.”> Yeesh, Lathe, your hair will be snow white by the time you turn forty. <“And its fine, Eren. An honest mistake. Just as long as you don't do it again; I missed your voice.”> Levi winked, smirking. I missed hearing from you. A lot .

<“You really have no idea… I’ve missed being able to speak German with someone other than my students and Dad…”> I’m still correcting my students, especially in the younger grades… <“Are you alright? Like, really okay?”> I want to make sure you're okay.... He smiled as they got into the driveway, going to the barn and hopping off of Charlie, helping Lathe down. Charlie’s had a good exercise... He can go back in the field.

<“Yeah, I'm okay. I'm just waiting on getting a new helmet, I need a new one after the one I got like a month or two ago.”>

<“Why? There something wrong with your old one?”>

<“Well… all I'm saying is that it did it’s job spectacularly… but it’s kinda… I'll just show you, that'll explain it better.”> Levi reached over, picking up his helmet and holding it up to the camera. It was absolutely riddled with bullet holes, no square inch having gone untouched. He winced a bit internally as Eren and Lathe went dead silent on the other end, putting it down at looking at their shocked faces. <“...yeah… I need a new one.”> ...they aim for the head. Nothing I can do besides wear my helmet and pray.

Eren felt the nausea start to come to his stomach. Oh my god… He... He could’ve died… He... Oh my god … His face was pale as he walked away in silence, untacking Charlie and putting him in his stall. The gravity of the situation Levi was in finally started to hit him. He... He might not come home.... No ... He was still quiet as he walked past Lathe to go towards the house, Blake standing at the top of the stairs whining with his tail wagging slowly as he got closer. Blake won’t come down the stairs anymore… I’m gonna need to take him to work on Monday… Fuck… His whole body was shaking, leaving Lathe to hold the phone with Levi on the other end. I... I can’t …
Lathe had a hand over his mouth, silent as he processed the new information. …you're working so close to death… Lathe watched Eren walk past him, a blank look in his eyes as he walked up the stairs. Lathe moved to sit at the kitchen table, searching for words. <“......we both knew that you were risking your life, doing what you're doing out there… ...but seeing that just made it real.”>

Eren's not going to be himself for a while… he was already so scared of you not coming home… and then there's that …

Eren just barely made it to his room before he slumped down against the wall, Blake moving to sit in his lap and try and calm him down. He could feel something warm on his face, not registering the tears that fell. His hands shaking horribly enough that he couldn’t grab onto Blake, his eyes blown wide as he felt the bile rush to his mouth, spitting out the acidic taste that remained after he expelled it from his system. His eyes were wide as he struggled to take in a breath. I'm having an attack… Levi's not here… Levi might not come back… He might…. Die …. His breathing was labored as he was dragged into the center of his room, Blake’s weight barely registering as he began to sob. No… He has to come home! He can’t die! He can’t! He can’t!

Lathe looked up as he heard a quiet thump upstairs, looking back to Levi, thinking. <“...he's going to need to process it… I know we all haven't talked in a while, but I think we should talk when Eren’s not so… Uhm…”>

<“Distraught.”> Levi sighed as Lathe nodded, noting the weariness in the older man’s eyes. <“I'm sorry to have had to say it like that… to say how close to death I am all the time in that way… they aim for the head. It's what it is. But if the equipment does its job, and I do what I'm supposed to properly, I'll come out of this more or less okay.”>

<“...just… try your damndest to come home to us alive and in one piece, okay?”>

<“That's all I've been doing, Dad. You should probably go make sure he's okay.”>

<“I will. Good luck, Levi.”>

<“Thanks. And good luck with the kids. You sound like you'll need it.”>

Lathe chuckled. <“I will. Bye.”> Lathe hung up as Levi waved, stowing his phone in his pocket and making his way up the stairs. He saw Mark hovering near the door with a worried look on his face, going to rest a hand on his shoulder. “You okay, Mark?”
Mark looked up to Lathe as he heard him, his eyes betraying his worry. “He… He’s not okay…. He was throwing up… And he’s crying… But um, is it bad? If Blake went with him?” *I don’t know what to do, this never happened before!* Mark kneeled down to pick up Nene, holding the small dog to his chest and petting him. *They’re all just staring at the door…*

Lathe looked to him with sympathy, looking at the small flock of dogs congregating around the door. *They all know something’s wrong with Eren…* “We told you about Levi, right? How he’s in Iraq?” He watched him nod for a moment. “We’re all just really worried about him, we finally got to talk to him again today for a bit… but everything he’s going through got a lot more real to us. He's worried sick, literally.” His voice softened, gently guiding Mark to the stairs. “Here, how about this. You know where the pizza money is, right?” He watched him nod. “I need to make sure he’s not panicking too badly… but you're old enough that you don't have to stay in the dark about all of this. You're getting old enough, and could be here for a while.

Mark nodded heading down the first few steps before he stopped and turned to look at Lathe again. “Will… Will Eren be okay?” *I want to make sure he’s okay… He’s not been eating much lately, but I thought everyone else noticed that too…*

Lathe hesitated, sighing quietly. “Four years is a long time, and it's not exactly safe, where Levi is… I don't think Eren’s going to be himself for a while… it's hard just to understand the fact he's going to be gone for that long… and it's another to come to terms with the idea he might not come home. I don't think he'll entirely be himself until Levi comes home. But he’ll be okay. We all need to be there for him. I’ll do what I can for right now. But things will be okay once we start talking to him more again- Levi, I mean. He accidentally got blocked on Skype. You all can finally see him soon, say hi. It worried us, going silent for so long. …but I'll stop rambling. He'll be okay soon. Promise.”

Mark nodded, going down the stairs, followed by a sleepy Nene and the soft hum of chatter downstairs.

Eren’s sobs reached through to the other side of the door, though he sounded choked, like he was being strangled. He lay close to motionless except for gasps for air from his constricting airways. *It hurts… It hurts… He’s not gonna come home!* He could feel Blake’s weight settling in on his skinny frame, trying to pull him out, but he was too far gone at that point. *I don’t want him to die…*

Lathe immediately moved to the bedroom once Mark was walking down the stairs, opening the door and wincing at the puddle of vomit on the ground. He moved around it quickly to Eren’s side, kneeling next to him and murmuring into his ear, a hand brushing through his hair gently. <“Eren,
Honey, come back to me, just stay calm. It's okay. Levi’s just fine, and he's going to be able to come out of this okay and come home to you. It'll be okay, Honey, believe me. He's going to come home to you.”> *Come on, even if I myself am struggling to believe me, you have to!*

Eren’s gasps were sharp, running out of oxygen as his chest continued to tighten, his eyes severely glazed over and his fingers starting to spasm and jerk. *I can’t hear… The ringing’s too loud… It hurts… I want Dad! I want Levi! Levi come home please!* He was struggling to get in a breath, barely able to do so.

Lathe struggled to find words, laying next to him and pulling him into a hug, hands running over his back as he tugged him on top of his chest, Blake getting off of him and letting him. ....*think… he wants Levi… what would remind him of Levi? …uh….. he's acting like he can't hear me, so audio won't do much… I doubt we still have any of his stuff that still smells like him or something… ….actually…..* Lathe thought hard, shifting Eren gently back to the floor before quickly moving to the dresser, opening the bottom drawer. *...this is all Levi’s stuff… this is probably a dumb idea, but it’s an idea...* Lathe fished out one of the hoodies buried near the bottom of a stack, a simple dark grey. Lathe moved back to Eren, putting the hoodie in his hands, insisting he take it. He moved so Eren rested his head on part of it like a pillow, hoping for the best. *Come on, work …*

Eren’s fingers continued to spasm as he struggled to hold the fabric, turning his head to try and move away from it though his body went shock still as he picked up a scent from it. *L-Levi…. Levi's here?* Tears threatened to spill over as his breathing slowed down, getting better to a point, but he was still panicking. *Where’s Levi? I want Levi!* His eyes seemed to be getting less clouded as he buried his nose into the hoodie, his stiff body starting to go lax and his hands actually became able to grab the shirt. *Levi….*

Lathe laid down next to him, relieved as tension slowly began to drain from Eren as he drank in Levi’s scent. *He misses him so much… He's so scared for him….* Lathe gently threaded a hand through his hair, gently petting him. *“Levi’s going to be okay, Hon. He's going to come home to us, and he's going to be okay. Promise.”*> He damn well better….

Eren's hands clenched and unclenched around the hoodie, his eyes closing as he tried to take a deep breath, starting to cough as he found his throat was still a bit constricted. His eyes were starting to slowly uncloud, and his body turn to the side, his head nuzzling into the hoodie as he relaxed more, the rest of the tension in his body leaving him when he could take in an easy breaths. Eren finally moved his head, clutching Levi’s hoodie as his tears began to dry a half hour after Lathe had knelt beside him. *Fuck… That was bad … My chest is tight… Really tight … It hurts…*

Lathe soothingly murmured to him as they lay on the floor, trying to help coax Eren to relax. *That was bad … you haven't had a panic attack like that in a long time… “……Eren, how are you feeling?” You look like you've calmed down enough to talk a bit… more or less…*
“C-Chest…” *Fuck, my voice is hoarse... Don’t tell me I was screaming? I can’t remember it at all.* He struggled to swallow, trying to calm down as he held onto Levi’s hoodie. *I don’t want to let go... Did the boys see? Do they think I’m weird? “B-b-boys?”* Eren still struggled to get a few words out, his chest extremely tight, like someone was choking him.

“They're downstairs, Mark was put in charge of them and making sure they eat. They're fine. ...Marks the only one who noticed anything, but it's fine, really.” Lathe gently nudged Eren onto his back, letting Blake move to the other side to lay down, licking Eren’s cheek. “Just focus on breathing for now, okay? It'll come to you. Just take it easy.” *You'll be okay more or less in a little bit.*

Eren nodded, slowly taking in a few breaths, trying to relax and even out his breathing. “I couldn’t... Take it... Seeing that... I hated it...” *I hate that I can’t be there with him... I hate it...* His eyes glanced over to Blake as the dog weakly sat down. “You need... to text... M-Moblit...” *I need a new dog... Blake doesn’t come with me anymore.*

Lathe looked up to Blake, sighing quietly as the dog wearily looked between Eren and Lathe, quietly whimpering. *He's getting old... he can't come with you and properly help you anymore... “...okay. I will. You need another dog.”* Lathe reached out to gently pet Blake, whose whimpers quieted, still looking to Eren with worried eyes. Blake reached out a leg, pawing at Eren’s arm. *He wants to help...*

Eren slowly reached an arm up to pet Blake behind the ears, a soft smile on his face. “I smell pizza... I-Is food here?” *It probably is... I was panicking for a long time... “I think I threw up...”* He mumbled as he let Blake lick his face, a soft smile coming across his lips. *I missed you bud...*

“Food is probably here, I think they went ahead and started eating. Which is okay.” Lathe looked over near the door, the puddle of vomit still sitting on the floor. “....and yeah, you did throw up. I need to clean that up.” *We can't just let it sit there.* Lathe chuckled as Blake moved to make himself right at home on Eren’s chest, licking his cheeks as Eren pet him. *That's adorable... “Here, I'll clean up the mess and you stay put for the moment, just chill a minute longer. Then we’ll go eat. Are you hungry much?” You might just wanna sleep. “You can go to bed or something if you want to, though. That's your call.”

“N-No, I wanna eat with the boys... M-Maybe we can call Levi a-again... So he can meet them all and say ‘hi’. *Not sure if the boys really know he exists... Eren let his eyes close as he relaxed, catching his breath again. I haven’t panicked that badly in a long time...*"

Lathe nodded, leaving him for the moment to get a bucket, mopping up the mess from the
hardwood near the door. After he washed his hands three times he came back to get Eren, Blake reluctantly leaving his claim on his chest to let him stand. Lathe helped Eren to his feet, walking with him to the stairs. They all made their way downstairs, Blake slowly following along with the flock of doge, all of them piling around the kitchen table as the boys ate. A few of the dogs sat next to the chairs, waiting patiently for someone to drop something. Nene nudged Mark’s foot with his nose, quietly whining. The dog lit up when Mark offered him a piece of pepperoni, his tail wagging as he ate the small piece of meat and licked his hand before going to lay down with the others. Lathe let Eren help himself from the counter as he retrieved a laptop from the theatre room, opening up Skype. He set the laptop on the table near the head of it, facing everyone. “Whenever you're ready, Eren.” *Once you sit down, you can call him.*

Eren nodded and sat down at his seat, Blake sitting behind him incase he had another attack. “You can call him.” *I've calmed down, I can deal with this...* He picked up his pizza barely taking a bite before Levi answered the skype call. <"Well that was quick.”> Didn’t think you’d answer that quickly...

<"I don't have much to do at the moment… and I'm worried. ...I'm sorry for scaring you with that… are you doing okay?"> You look a little worse for wear… <"...is that my hoodie?> He chuckled when Eren blushed. <"I'm just surprised it took you this long to start wearing all my stuff.”> I expected it around day four, not month four.

<“Yeah, it’s your hoodie, your clothes are still small tho…”> This only fits because I haven’t been eating much anymore… But oh well. <“I’ll be fine, just don’t show me things like that ever again…”> He looked to see the boys looking between the screen and him as they spoke. *Oh right… “Boys, this is Levi, Levi this is Jared, Lucas, Mark and Philip.”* He pointed as each of the boys waved at Levi, smiles across their faces.

Levi waved to each of them, his eyes wide. “Wow, there’s a lot of you. Hi!” Levi managed a small smile, looking between them. “All of you, do me a favour and try not to drive Eren or Lathe insane, ‘Kay?” *They need their sanities. Especially since Lathe now has six fucking children to take care of.*

“We will, don’t worry.” Mark’s deep voice resonated throughout the kitchen before he picked up a wing on his plate and eating. *So are you considered my brother? Or…? All I really know is that you exist and everyone cares about you.*

Philip looked over, his large brown eyes looking at Levi with curiosity. “Daddy… Why is big brother in a box?” *Why is a he in the computer?*

Eren sighed silently, giving a sad smile on his face towards Levi for a split second before he hid
his face with his food. They think of you as a brother… So Dad hasn’t told them, and neither has Tucker… So what do I do about this? How do I tell them he’s my boyfriend? Would they understand the concept? Would they be repulsed? I don’t think I could go through that all over again. His eyes flickered over to Tucker, who had his earbuds in, connected to his phone. Well, I think he said ‘Hi’ to Levi at least… Blake whined as he shifted to Eren’s side, struggling to get up on his back paws to put his paws on his lap. You're getting old, Bud. He let his hand come down to Blake’s soft fur, rubbing his ears to let his nerves settle. I’m getting a new dog… Maybe I’ll get a new one tomorrow…

Lathe chuckled, ruffling Philip’s hair. “Levi’s picture is on the computer, but he's on it himself. He's really far away but he has a camera, and that picture is what the camera sees.” He smiled as Philip made an ‘ooohhh’ expression, waving to Levi with a toothy smile.

Big brother? ……oh, yeah… they don’t know. At least, Philip doesn't. Levi glanced to Mark, who seemed to return his questioning look. I don’t know if you know, and you don’t know if I am technically your brother… which I’m not. But you might not know that.

Lathe watched Levi and Mark’s silent exchange before Mark’s look was directed to him, mouthing ‘later’ to him. You're perceptive, I'll give you that. Besides the fact that he and I both have black hair, he doesn't exactly look like Ieva and my kid. ...neither does Eren. Eren being adopted explains it, but Levi isn’t exactly adopted. ...eh, you were bound to find out if you stuck around long enough. I think you'll be fine… but I dunno if Eren would appreciate me outing him... especially with how that went with Tucker. Even if he isn’t as suckish as he once was, and Mark is pretty chill... idk.

Levi looked around a bit as he heard a quiet yap, watching with an amused expression as Nene hopped up onto the vacant chair next to Mark, her paws on the table and looking to the teen with her best puppy eyes, quietly whining as he ate a chicken wing. She wants food… “I hope you're not going to make her just watch you eat those wings by yourself Mark. Just look at that face.” As if on cue, she whimpered loudly. Just give her food. She's no troublemaker, she can eat people food.

Mark looked back at Nene a soft smile on his face as he pulled off some of the chicken from his plain wings, making sure there was no bone in it and letting her lick it off his finger. “I swear, all you ever do is sleep and eat…” And she’s getting big too… They’re a year old now, so they’re about Maisie’s size, but still have that puppy body with the oversized head… Quite adorable.

Nene happily ate up the chicken and yapped in agreement, leaning up to lick Mark’s cheek, making him sputter before hopping off of the chair, trotting back to the small dog pile, laying down to nap again. Tasty…
“Mark, you have dog all over your hand.” Lathe pointed to the sink, flatly glaring at him as Mark casually went back to eating his chicken wing, staring challengingly at Lathe as he chewed.

“...when you get dysentery, don't come crying to me.” Lathe sat down, sighing exasperatedly when he was immediately pestered by Krampus for food, looking to the whining dog with raised eyebrows. “Really? No, your stomach is still healing. Shoo, go nap.” Lathe shooed him away, and turned back to his plate when Maisie interrupted him before he could take a single bite of anything, just shaking his head in exasperation. “My god, it's like I've got eleven mouths to feed.” Lathe tore of a piece of chicken wing, checking for bone before letting Maisie lap it up from his hand, satisfied. “And now, because I don't want to die of dysentery ..” Lathe looked pointedly to Mark, going to walk his hand from dog saliva. “- I'm going to wash my hands.” And not end up like literally everybody in my party on Oregon Trail.

Krampus watched Lathe get up from his chair, struggling to get to the top of the tall chair, getting his front two paws on the seat, his head barely reaching the high counter as he turned his head to try and get to Lathe’s plate. I want food! I can’t eat anything! And you guys always take stuff away from me! I hate it! He whimpered as he struggled more to try and get it before he stretched his body out too far, yelping in pain from his stomach before dropping down to the ground without food. No… It hurts, I can’t reach it... I want the food though!

Lucas picked his head up from his book, looking to Krampus as he whined and whimpered on the floor. “Yeah…. Real effective Krampus…” Is he okay though? He’s whining… But it’s probably just because he can’t reach the food.

Huh? “Oh crap, what'd he do?” Lathe came over after he dried off his hands, gently petting the whimpering dog. “You don't get people food, Krampus. You know you've eaten too many bad things and your stomach is still healing. We can't make it worse and let you eat a chicken bone or anything. It's still soft food for you.” Lathe nudged Krampus to stand, the dog doing so after a moment, dejectedly going back to the small dog pile. Sorry. But it's for your own good. Lathe sat down one more time, finally able to start eating. I just want to eat something! Is that too much to ask?

“There's never a dull moment with all you heathens, is there.” Levi just shook his head at their antics, smirking. Probably not. There's too many of you for that.

“I’m home!” Ieva called out from the door as she closed it behind her, locking it. Maisie came up to greet her for a moment before returning to the kitchen to wait for food to be dropped. “Did you guys start eating yet?” She called as she started to pull off her high heels. I'm off tomorrow, I get to relax... Thank god ...

“The waifu is home! And yes!” Lathe beamed, reaching an arm out for her as she calm up to the table, kissing her cheek. “We finally got ahold of Levi after someone accidentally muted him.” Lathe sent Eren a pointed look for just a split second, soon grinning again.
“Hey Mom!” Levi waved, smiling faintly. *It's good to see everyone again. I missed you all a lot.*

“Levi! It’s so good to see you! I’m glad you’re doing well, keeping your soldiers on their toes, I hope?” Ieva asked as she moved around the counter to get a plate started for herself. *Did Eren actually mute Levi? Wow… I didn't think that was possible… well, now we know.*

“Trust me, they don't need me to do that for them.” *We’re on our toes enough already. Even in our sleep. ‘I've been doing okay, pretty much. Everyone’s learning to take care not to pass out from the heat, which is quite the improvement. I'm glad to see you all too.’* He looked around to all of them, finally able to see everyone in the family. *Jeez, there's a lot of you. I have a feeling they're all keeping Dad on his toes nearly as much as we've been.*

Eren smiled as the boys asked various questions about Levi, letting them talk to him since it was their first time. *They like talking to him… That’s good, I really hope that they won’t mind that he’ll be like this for awhile…. In the constraints of a laptop screen....* Eren swallowed thickly, pushing his barely touched plate away from him for a moment. *I’ll let them talk… If I leave they won’t notice, just like how no one noticed that it was my birthday…

*Don’t be upset…*

*Why can’t I be upset? They forgot about me.*

*They didn’t forget…*

*Yeah they did, Mom and Dad both did…*

*But you can’t leave, you need to eat!*

*I’m not hungry.*

*Listen to yourself! You’ve been losing weight left and right! You need to stop! It’s not healthy!*

*What do you know about being healthy?*

Eren kept his blank gaze focused on his almost full plate, not really aware of his surroundings. *I want him to come home…*

Jared, who sat next to Eren and in between him and Mark, looked over to Eren, seeming to stare at him for a long while. He reached over and tugged at his sleeve, his words worried. “Wh-Why aren't you eating? A-Are you being sad again?” *Don't be sad! Stop it! Be happy! The person is in the box!*

Eren snapped out of his daze as Jared pulled on his sleeve, taking in a sharp gasp of surprise, panic flooding through him until he realized where he was and what he was doing. His breathing slowed
down, his eyes closing for a moment as he tried to collect his bearings. “What is it Jared? Do you need more food?” *I didn’t hear what you asked…*

Jared’s brow furrowed, shaking his head after a moment. He sounded more insistent when he spoke again, tugging harder on his sleeve. “N-No, stop being sad! Y-You don’t eat when you’re sad!” He pointed to the laptop, sounding matter-of-fact. “Person is in the box. Be happy!” *Why aren’t you happy to see person? He’s been gone a long time. Didn’t you miss him?*

Eren smiled softly, pulling his sleeve away from him as he ruffled his hair. “Don’t you worry about me Jared, I’m all grown up, you need to eat so that you can grow to be big like Mark, okay?” *I like that you’re trying to ease the depression… But it won’t work… Don’t let Dad see though. He’ll find out if you make a big deal out of it.*

“I-But, but you still get to grow n’ stuff! Don’ skip dinner no more!” *You need to eat! I-I always eat my dinner! An’ I get seconds lots! B-But you don’ finish!” Jared watched as Eren tried to shush him, shrinking a bit as he saw the many pairs of eyes glancing to them, quieting. “…promise you’ll finish. …please?”

Eren was at a loss for words, pulling his hands away from Jared’s and putting them in his lap. *I can’t promise you that…* “Jared… I can’t… I’m sorry, but I can’t…” Eren’s voice was barely above a whisper as he turned away from the small boy, trying not to look him in the eyes, guilt washing over his entire being. *I can’t… Really…*

Jared watched his entire demeanour change, a bit confused as he whispered. He reached out and poked his arm, his wide eyes innocent. “N-No cry… Uhm… eat pepperoni?” Jared pointed to the few pieces on Eren’s pizza. “Th-Then you can go do stuff?” *If you won’t finish, eat part of it!*

Eren shook his head again, pulling his knees up to his chest, underneath the hoodie and holding them close as he be me a small ball. *I can’t…. I really can’t… Dad’s gonna notice…. F**k.*

Jared huffed, scooting his chair back to stand, going over to where Lathe was and tugging on his sleeve, his voice worried. “D-Dad, Eren won't eat again.” *Fix it!*

Lathe looked up, wiping off his hands and nodding, patting Jared’s shoulder. “Okay Hon, thank you for telling me. But you should know that Eren has reasons to sometimes not eat. He sometimes doesn’t feel well enough to eat, and he doesn't want to get sick. It's okay, you don't have to worry about him. Go sit down again, okay? You, on the other hand-” Lathe poked his tummy, smiling as Jared giggled. “-you need to eat so you grow up as big as Mark, ‘kay?” He smiled as Jared nodded, scampering back to his chair with a mission. *He’s such a sweet kid… he only means well.*
Eren kept his head in his knees, not really participating in the skype call. The boys wanna talk to him…. Which is more important than me… I wonder how much more I would lose if I stopped eating. Would I survive even? Eren shuffled closer into himself, liking that he could fit inside of Levi’s hoodie. I like this… It smells like him…

Levi gave the boys a soft smile as they asked him numerous questions, studying Eren as they quieted down. ...it looks like he's drowning in that hoodie… And he can pull his knees up in it…? <“Eren, have you been eating much?”> You're so much smaller...

Eren froze, silent with fear and guilt striking through him in a second, a soft whimper escaping his throat. You’re gonna be mad... And then Dad’s gonna be mad too... He kept curled up in the hoodie, not daring to move. He could feel the eyes of everyone in the room boring into his body. They’re mad… They’re mad...

Lathe stood, quietly going over to Eren. <“Wanna take the laptop upstairs and talk alone with him?”> I know you don't want to be down here… But you miss Levi.

<“N-No… L-Let the boys talk with him.”> Eren’s words were quiet as he moved slowly out of the chair, his head down and submissive before he scurried away. The boys can talk with him. He went to go hide in the vault downstairs, know that he’d be able to stay in there for awhile and not be disturbed. The boys don’t know this place...

Lathe watched with worried eyes, looking down as Blake lifted his head from where he lay, whining as Eren scurried away, but not getting up. He can't follow Eren when he runs away like he used to... he can't run too much anymore. Lathe was distracted again when a small hand tugged at his sleeve, looking to Jared.

“Can, Can I have his pizza? He didn’ touch it.” It doesn't have germs.

Lathe was distracted by the boys for the next hour, making sure they all had enough to eat before giving them all a piece of cake, promising they could tell Eren Happy Birthday later, but that right now he needed his own time. They bombarded Levi with questions, and he was endlessly grateful Levi was patient with them, especially Jared and Philip, when the latter piped up. They all seem to adore him already. Lathe picked up a sleepy-looking Philip after he had eaten his piece of cake, the boy tiredly resting his head on Lathe’s shoulder. “Bedtime, kid.” Lathe smiled as Philip just yawned, weakly holding onto his purple sweater. So damn adorable… Lathe went upstairs with Philip in his arms, going to help him into pajamas, making sure he brushed his teeth before tucking him into bed, pecking his forehead.
“D-Dad..?” Philip’s voice was quiet and tired, but held a quiet note of fear.

“Mhm?”

“...c-can you check the bed f-for monsters?”

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Okay.” Lathe moved to the bed, kneeling down and moving the blanket, looking around. “Nope, no monsters under here.”

“....but w-what about the closet?”

Lathe moved to the closet, sliding the door open and looking around. “Nope, none here either.”

“S-Sure?”

“I'm sure, Hon.” Lathe moved back to the bed, brushing Philip’s hair from his eyes, a thought coming to him. You've asked me a few times to check for monsters... you came into the bedroom once, scared there was something under the bed. “Would you feel better with a nightlight?” I think we have one...

“W-Wha’s a nightlight?”

“It's a tiny light that plugs into the wall so you can see when it’s dark. It’ll keep all the monsters away, too. Monsters don't like the light.”

“Th-They won't come if I h-have one?”

“If you have one, we’ll be doubly-sure they won't come.”

“Y-Yes please.”
Lathe smiled, leaving him for just a moment to fetch a small light from under the sink in his bathroom, having bought many to put in the bathrooms. He made sure it had a new lightbulb in it before going to plug it in and turn it on, the room soon lit with a faint gold glow, enough to see where you were going in the middle of the night. “That better?” He smiled when Philip nodded, going to peck his cheek. “Okay, Honey. Sweet dreams.” Lathe moved to hand him a small stuffed dog from near the foot of the bed, his eyes sparkling when Philip sleepily clung to it. He quietly closed the bedroom door behind him, turning to the stairs. He was surprised to see Mark hovering near the nook, looking a bit awkward. “Mark? Something up?”

...is this about Levi? It's about Levi. Well then.

Mark shuffled on his feet. “Is um... Levi really your son? I-Is that why Eren ran off?” Does he worry that much about his brother? Where did he go? The horses are all in the barn still... And he's not in his room, or the studio... “Where did Eren go?” His voice was full of worry as he stood there in the nook, his thumbs twirling around each other.

Lathe sighed quietly, moving over to him. “Here, c'mon, I've got explanations to give.” Lathe brought Mark over to the small couch in the nook, sitting next to him. “Mark, first off, you're fifteen. You're the oldest of the six of you. I expect you to be the most understanding of this, okay? I don't think some of your brothers are old enough to understand all that’s going on yet, okay?” He watched Mark nod, resting a hand on his arm when he looked even more concerned. “You don't need to worry too badly, it's okay. If Eren’s still in the house, he’s probably in the studio or his closet. Either way, I wouldn't bother him. He needs to just be away and out of sight sometimes. ...he's always had trouble with stress and anxiety, and he sometimes has panic attacks. They mostly happened years ago, they've been very rare lately... but with the stress of Levi being in so much danger, he's got a lot more reason to be stressed out. Now, a quick thing...” Lathe pondered how to say what he wanted to. “...Eren isn't my biological son. I adopted him a long while back, when I was a substitute teacher for his chemistry class. He was in a dark place, but it took me a week to decide to adopt him and make sure he grew up better than he had been. Levi... Levi was Eren’s assigned lab partner during chemistry that first year. He's not our son either; we’re not related at all. Around the same time I adopted Eren, when he was I think seventeen or something, so it’s been about... I wanna say five or six years... but around then-” Lathe studied Mark’s face, waiting for a reaction as he continued. “...they started dating, and they've been going steady for quite a while. He's practically lived with us the entire time, and I know Eren is worried about Levi coming home in one piece, and he’s upset and scared that he hasn't proposed yet.” ...Don't freak out. Whatever you do, don't do that.

Mark just listened. “Oh...” He was quiet, expecting Lathe to continue into something even worse. “T-That’s it? That’s the reason? I could see that.... It’s understandable.” Okay, so he’s not our brother... That’s fine.

Lathe stared at him for a long moment, honestly surprised. ....nothing. “......Mark, you're my favourite.” Lathe just shook his head for a moment when Mark gave him an incredulous look, explaining. “It’s just... my god, when Tucker found out Eren and Levi were a thing he freaked the hell out. He changed a lot, which is good, and rather obvious at this point, he isn't as mean as he
was… but I was just expecting the same thing by default. Sorry. And thank you.” *For not freaking out that a ‘faggot’ touched you or some shit like that.*

Mark shrugged. “Who am I to judge? Oh, can I have a friend over tomorrow? She wants to learn how to ride…” *Please please please!*  He had a huge blush across his face as he looked Lathe in the eyes. *I really want her to come over… She actually said yes!*

Lathe chuckled as Mark immediately became a blushing, embarrassed mess, grinning. “Only if you tell me what the lady’s name is.” *Yes you can, you doof.*

“Her name is Claire, she’s really sweet, and she likes horses, but she can’t get one… So can we go riding?” *I hope we can, I really want to go riding with her...*

“Hmm, that depends. How well do you know how to ride? Remind me.” *If you can't feel confident riding by yourself, either I or Eren is going to have to be outside with you two.*

“Eren let me do jumps on Luna while he was on Charlie… They were small jumps… And I’ve ridden on Charlie before…” Mark mumbled, a happy smile on his face as he twiddled his thumbs more, his cheeks flushed with embarrassment. “Can she come for lunch and dinner?”

“Now remember, tomorrow’s Saturday. It'll be a full house for dinner, and it’s mostly if not all German cooking. As long as she’s okay with that, of course. You might want to ask and make sure, though. It’ll be a lot of people she won’t know.” *Just double-check. Or at least give fair warning.*

Mark nodded, rubbing the back of his neck. “Um… I’ll go call her… When can, um, when can she come over?” *When can she come over at the earliest? Her Grandma wants to drop her off.*

“I'm fine with her coming over anytime later than eight or nine, but maybe 11:30 would be best. She’s here for lunch and dinner, but she doesn't get caught up in the aftermath of breakfast. And there’ll be plenty of time for going riding, and whatever else you two decide to do.” Lathe shrugged one shoulder, quirking an eyebrow as Mark blushed harder at that. “Your call, Mark. Better let her know the plans, hm?” *Lathe nudged his arm.*

Mark nodded, a smile across his face. “Th-Thanks Dad.” He ran off to his room, pulling out his phone and quickly dialing a number, putting the phone to his ear. He finished talking with Claire after about a half and hour, his heart thumping wildly. *She said her Grandmother makes German food too… She’s perfect! I can’t wait at all!*
Chapter 75: Sudden Guests

Mark could barely sleep as he thought about the next day, his alarm not coming soon enough for him to get up to go out and take his 10 mile run in the morning. He got out at his usual time at 4:30 in the morning, a little surprised that he hadn’t heard Eren move or go outside at all. Where is he? Is he alright? He looked out the window to see that the horses were still in the barn. Well, they should be out by the time I get back. He started his run, his body feeling like he was walking on air because he was done before he knew it. It’s only 5:40.... What the actual hell? I’m usually not home for another 20 minutes…. Mark shrugged going to the kitchen to get a glass of water, looking out the window and seeing that the horse still weren’t outside. What? Why aren’t they out yet? “Eren?” Mark called out softly, knowing the older man was usually awake by now. “Eren… Are you okay?” He was quiet as he searched the rooms quickly though he got even more confused when his search became futile. His car’s out front…. Maybe he’s still asleep. Matt’s eyes portrayed his worry as he opened Eren’s door to see his bed still made from yesterday. He never came in here… Where the fuck is he?

Lathe was up a few minutes before six, hearing a creaking outside their bedroom. Someone's up… probably Mark or Eren… Lathe just shifted closer to Ieva, nestling further into her shoulder until he heard Mark calling for Eren, sounding like he was searching for him. Lathe silently slipped from the bed after a moment, coming out of their bedroom and looking to Mark, rubbing the sand from his eyes. “Mark, what’s wrong? Is everything okay?” Guh, and I was hoping to get another hour of sleep... I still might tho…. ....maybe...

Mark looked over to Lathe, worry clearly evident in both his eyes and his voice. “Where’s Eren? He’s not anywhere in the house… His car’s still here… and the horses aren’t out yet… and he usually has all the barn chores done by now… I’m worried about him… He just disappeared!” Oh no... This is not happening. I am not losing a brother!

Lathe listened, staying calm and reaching a hand out to him. “Okay Mark, we’ll figure this out. He can’t be that far away, and I'm sure he's okay. Here, one sec.” Lathe went back to get his phone, pinging Eren’s phone when he came back outside. They looked up as they heard the sound, finding the phone sitting on his dresser. “...I can't say I'm too surprised. He probably wouldn't want to be bothered. Here, let's see if we can get one of the dogs to help us, okay? They'll make this easier.” Maisie might be best- Blake is getting old, Krampus gets distracted easily, and Nene will refuse to do anything at this hour besides sleep. Lathe led him downstairs to where the dog pile was, petting Maisie and waking her up. “Hey girl, I'm sorry it's early, but we need some help. Can you find Eren?” He waited for her to get up, repeating the instruction. “Find Eren.” He moved to the coat rack when she just looked at him, getting Eren’s jacket and letting her sniff it. “Eren.” She seemed to understand the notion, trotting off.

Mark watched her first go up the stairs though after a few minutes come back downstairs and go towards the studio and recording room. Where is he? He’s not upstairs...
Lathe and Mark headed for the studio rooms when they heard whining, Maisie sitting in front of the chalkboard in Lathe’s studio room, staring at the seam in the boards with drooping ears. “Well shit. I knew I was forgetting something when we had the new doors installed.”

“The what? What is she looking at?”

“The storage room.” Lathe turned, going over to the computer and snatching a card from under the keyboard. “It’s sort of a storage thing slash hideout slash bunker. Excuse me.” Lathe moved Maisie out of the way, sliding the metal card down part of the seam. It moved an inch from the wall, Lathe able to slide it out of the way like a huge sliding door. Maisie immediately trotted in and nosed at a pile on the floor, Eren tangled up in his Grandfather’s old wool blanket. “Eren, Hon? You okay?”

“It’s fucking cold in here… And apparently very sound proof… Did none of you hear me?” His voice was hoarse and his eyes looked glassy, drool dribbling down his chin. I had a seizure… Because I was panicking so much… I was trapped! I don’t like being in cages… And that’s what it fucking felt like…

Lathe immediately moved to his side, pulling him close. “We didn't hear you, no… my god, you're freezing…” He noticed the line of drool on his chin, his eyes widening. “Eren… did you have a seizure?” You don't drool in your sleep… and you only drool when you have seizures.

Eren nodded, slowly leaning into his touch. “Probably from the 10 panic attacks when I found out I couldn't get out…” I was freaking out… I hate this… I hate being in a cage… “Can you carry me? My legs…” I have pins and needles… It's not fun...

Lathe nodded, getting his arms under him and heaving Eren up, steadying his footing. He looked back to Mark, giving him an unsure smile. “Mark, you'd better be taking notes. If you ever build anything that functions like a door for people, make sure it can open from either side. Close that, could you?” He watched Mark nod, making sure he didn't trap Maisie inside on accident as he carried Eren upstairs. “I’m going to engage doctor mode for a little bit, but I should be down to make breakfast soon.” Don't worry, I'll feed you all. Lathe soon had Eren in his proper bed with the blanket still around his thin frame, brushing the hair from his face. “I'm so sorry, Eren, I didn't think to have it open from the other side just in case… I'll fix that, promise. Can I get you anything?” Lathe wiped the drool from his mouth with a tissue, looking worried.

“Barn chores… Oh is Claire coming over today? And will you help me go shopping for dinner after breakfast?” I want to make sure we have enough... The hooligans are coming over along with Jean and Marco... And Armin... And apparently Tove has another litter so those pups are coming too. He winced as he flexed his toes… “Can you get Blake? Or Nene… Actually get Nene, she’ll
just sleep on my chest…” *That’ll help calm me down…*

“Claire is coming over, yes. Mark asked me last night, their kinda-date is a go for lunch through dinner. I'll have Mark take care of the barn chores, give him something to do besides freak out over Claire coming over. And I'll go with you shopping, of course. We need a lot of food to feed as many people as we have tonight. Don't we get puppies too?” He smiled when Eren nodded. “Sweet, puppies are always nice… and I'll get you Nene. She'll appreciate some attention.” Lathe went downstairs, plucking the small dog from the dog pile and carrying the sleepy pup upstairs. She acknowledged Eren when she was set on his chest, immediately making herself at home as he pet her, shuffling a bit and slowly wagging her tail in contentment. *Happy pup.* “I'm going to go make sure the animals get taken care of, and also make sure we all don't starve.” *That's probably a good idea.*

“Do we have stuff for French toast?” *I want some of your French toast… I haven’t had that in forever… “Sorry you had to wake up so soon…”* He murmured quietly, drool dribbling down his chin. *I’m still drooling… *Fuck …*

“It's okay, Eren. It's more than okay. You needed to be found; and we found you. That's what matters; that we make sure you're okay.” He handed Eren a fistful of tissues, letting him wipe his chin up as he drooled. “I think we do; we always have a ton of bread on hand. French Toast?” He smiled when Eren nodded with pleading puppy eyes. “Okay, okay. French Toast it is. Now, you rest while I take care of stuff, ‘kay?” He smiled, pecking Eren’s forehead and leaving the door open as he padded downstairs. “Mark?” He found him in the living room easily enough, flicking through a few channels to see what was on that early besides cartoons. “Could you please take care of the animals out in the barn? I know Eren or I have shown you how to do everything at some point or another. I need to make breakfast and get stuff ready for today.” I need to make a shopping list, feed an army, then do the actual shopping with Eren, get home and make lunch for everyone… it's going to be another long day.

Mark nodded getting up after turning the TV off. “Um… Why was Eren drooling?” He asked quietly as he looked at Lathe, worry across his features. *Is he in pain? Has he been drooling and I haven’t noticed?*

“...Eren was panicking a lot when he got locked in the storage room…. with so much panicking… he ended up having a seizure. It's one of the aftereffects. He's okay right now, it doesn't seem like it was a bad once, but it happened, and that’s the telltale sign of it.” *He's okay, though, “Eren’s been through a lot of tough stuff. There's a lot he has to deal with because of that, but it's nowhere near as bad as it used to be. This is a bad spell because of what we saw yesterday. I shouldn't say… but we’re scared for him. And this whole episode with the storage room made it worse. But he'll be okay with a bit of rest and some breakfast. Okay?”* He watched him tentatively nod. “Okay. Now go make sure the animals don't get too fussy.” He watched Mark scamper off, going to the kitchen to start working. *Breakfast first...*
Mark made his way out the back door and to the barn. He got out the leads for each of the horses, bringing them all outside, watching as Charlie instantly trotted out into the field to look around for Eren. It’s weird… Charlie looks for him in the field… I know that the tree in the middle of the field has leaves, so it’s good for shade, and Charlie will stand there with us… “I think Claire will like riding, I really hope so.”

The first one up after them was Lucas, who only came downstairs because he’d left his book on the coffee table, immediately setting up camp in the living room to read. Ugh, I wanna go back up to my warm bed… but that would mean stairs… and I have the couch… ...eh, I’m good here. Predictably, he was dead asleep after a few more minutes, woken up by Tucker nearly tumbling down the entire flight of stairs. He nearly chucked his book at him for waking him up, opting for throwing the nearest pillow he wasn't using. Thus began a practical war in the living room, waking up nearly the rest of the house when Lucas fought to get away from Tucker as he tried to tickle him.

... this is totally a normal morning for people. Lathe just buried his face in his hands as they fought playfully, shaking his head. .........I'm going to need a year-long nap at this rate. With everyone up at once, Lathe moved quickly to start breakfast, the flock of children (including Eren, tailed by an eternally-sleepy Nene) and dogs moving to the breakfast table, including Ieva. He pecked her cheek before his attention was instantly monopolised again, sending Lucas to get Mark inside for food. He needs to eat too.

Mark came in from the back door not even a second later. “God it smells amazing… Is Eren downstairs yet?” He came into the kitchen, seeing that everyone was downstairs already. “Um… if I take Claire-”

“Take Charlie, and use the big saddle, it will fit you both…” I know I know, you’re crush is coming over…. He smiled softly, drool dribbling down his chin and the wetness reminding him to grab a tissue and wipe himself up. I probably look like a child to them all… Great, that’s wonderful…

Soon enough, by some miracle, the kids were fed and shooed upstairs to get dressed (more out-of-pajamas than anything) while Lathe did dishes, grateful like he always was for their dishwasher. He was just finishing putting the groceries away when the doorbell rang, moving to the front door. “Comin’!” Lathe opened the door, looking down to their guest. “Claire?” He smiled when she nodded, hiding his surprise. You’re literally half Mark’s size! “Hello! And you must be her grandmother?” He nodded to the weathered woman behind her, who stood only a few inches taller than Claire.

“Hello, Mr. Quo…” Claire’s voice was small and quiet as she smiled sweetly at him her white teeth in a perfect line, a soft hint of blush on her face. She looked up to her Grandmother and looked a bit worried. <“This is Mark’s Dad… He says hello.”>
The old woman smiled at him, leaning on her cane a bit as she shifted. “H’llo.” Her voice was lathered in a thick accent, her hand shaking a bit as she put her hand on Claire’s back. <“When should I come back to pick you up?”> *This man looks nice… He’s very tall. It was very nice of this Mark to offer you to come over but I barely know what he’s said and it’s been all of 8 words…*

Claire turned back to face Lathe, a worried look on her face. “Um-” *How should I put this? Grandma doesn’t really speak English… And refuses to learn…*

Lathe looked to the woman, to Claire, then back to her grandmother. <“Is German better, ma’am?”> *German works.*

<“Ah! Sweet boy you are! I’m sorry, I was under the impression you didn’t speak German. This is Claire, she’s quite shy… Is this Mark around? I’d like to meet him if I could…”> Her eyes seemed to light up as she had to tilt her head up to look Lathe in the eye, carefully keeping her balance on her cane. *This helps, he can speak with me…*

Lathe smiled, nodding. <“My son- well, one of them, the oldest- he’s from Germany, and it came up so much I found it very useful to know. And come in, please. Mark shouldn’t be far away, at least you'd think since he’s expecting you.”> Lathe ushered them inside, sweeping the front room with his eyes, looking outside through the large back window. <“Oh, he’s still out back with the horses. I'll get him. Make yourselves at home, I won't be a minute.”> Lathe smiled warmly before moving to the back door, stepping onto the back porch. He wolf-whistled out to the field, effectively getting Mark’s attention. “They’re here, Mark!” *Now get your ass up here to meet the fam!*

Mark's eyes went wide and he bolted towards the door, though when he got to it he hesitated to turn the knob and go inside. *What if this ends up being a horrible date? What if she doesn’t even like me? She could very well just be here for the horses.* Mark barely had time to register what was happening before the door was opened and Lathe pushed him in, hearing Eren swearing at one of the cans on the counter, and quite loudly at that. *What is he doing now? His face completely blushed when he saw Claire standing beside her grandmother where she sat. Oh my god she’s gorgeous…*

“Eren, stop swearing! We need to at least *seem* like civilised people.” He grinned when it got a laugh out of Claire, going to nudge him. “What’d that can of peas ever do to you?” *What, spit on your shoes? Insult your imaginary friend’s hat?*

<“No, it broke the fucking can opener!”> Eren shouted as he showed him the once working can opener, which we now in two pieces. <“I have more cans to open! I need to get the soup going
especially with how much I’m making.” He paused when he realized something. *There are other people here?* “Is that Claire?” His voice quieted as he looked to the petite girl. *She’s half of Mark….*

<“That is she. Now, Eren, before you go swearing up a storm, know that both of them understand us right now…”> He gave him a pointed look when Eren blushed in embarrassment. <“But also-”> He gestured to one of the devices on the kitchen counter. <“You *could* just use the electric one, which is perfectly functional.”> *I would know, because I’m apparently the only one who ever uses it.* He sighed as Eren just blinked at him, taking the can. <“Here, watch.”> Lathe showed Eren how to get the lip of the can in the right spot, pressing the small lever and holding the can up so it wouldn’t spill when the lid came off. <“Think you can handle that?”> *It’s easy.*

<“That’s fucking sorcery!”> He chuckled as he heard a soft laugh behind them and this time it was Claire’s grandma. He smiled, looking over to Mark and his awkwardness. <“Go embarrass him Dad… I dare you.”> *This’ll be interesting….*

Lathe looked over Mark, who was awkwardly shuffling his feet, not sure what to say or how to say it to Claire. “Mark, I think you might want to fix your jaw, it looks like it’s come loose. You look like a fish.” Lathe grinned when Mark turned bright red, shutting his mouth embarrassedly when Claire laughed. Lathe turned to translate what he’d said to her. She too chuckled, all of them watching the awkward attempt at teenage interaction. *He looks like he never saw her before, but only saw pictures. This is very amusing.*

Mark looked to Claire, their eyes meeting as she smiled at him. *Oh shit… She’s so cute.* “Uhm… W-Would you like to get a drink… F-For lunch?” *We can let Dad and your grandma embarrass the crap out of me.* He seemed to get a slap to the face as he realized something. *You could very well never want to talk to me ever again after this.*

“Oh shit…. She’s so cute. “Uhm… W-Would you like to get a drink… F-For lunch?” *We can let Dad and your grandma embarrass the crap out of me.* He seemed to get a slap to the face as he realized something. *You could very well never want to talk to me ever again after this.*

“Sure, I’d love to.” Claire’s voice was small as she followed him into the kitchen where Eren greeted her and informed her that grilled cheese would be made for lunch and traditional German cuisine would be up for dinner. *Wow… He’s making everything by hand… Not even grandma does that anymore…*

Lathe looked over to Claire’s grandmother, something registering. <“I’m sorry ma’am, I never got your name.”> *It’d be weird to just call you Claire’s grandmother the whole time.*

<“Ah well you see… My name never translates well, it’s a flower that’s incredibly hard to pronounce, so you can call me Rose or Rosie is fine. I see your Eldest is making German food, he starts early from scratch then?”> Rose was very observant for her age, a small smile across her face as she took in the bright house. *It’s very large…*
Lathe nodded. <“Yes- Saturday is his day to do the cooking. He starts early, makes enough food to
feed an army, and we have a lot of friends over for dinner. We just started doing that sort of thing a
few months ago- it's always fun. You should join us!”> I think you'd like it.

Rose scoffed, looking down a bit. <“I couldn’t possibly intrude, it’d be rude… Not only that I
assume not many would know my language, it would be awkward at best. Thank you for the offer
though, I know Claire will be in good hands today.”> I should get going, Claire doesn’t want me to
embarrass her.

Lathe gave her a sympathetic look for a moment, shrugging one shoulder. <“You wouldn't be
intruding, believe me. But alright. And we’ll take care of her, don't worry.”> Lathe winced as Eren
swore behind him, hearing a small clatter. <“…..or maybe worry just a little.”> I'd be at least
slightly concerned. <“But I'll make sure to embarrass her for the both of us.”> That got a chuckle
out of Rose and Claire seemed to blush darker at that. That's right kid, be forewarned. Lathe held
out a hand when Rose moved to stand, helping her to her feet. He walked her to the door, his smile
warm. <“She can be picked up around eight or eight-thirty, any time after that is just fine.”> We
wouldn't mind having her over for a while after dinner. She'd have to continue to be sociable, but
we ourselves? We're good.

Rose thanked him, slowly making her way down the porch and to her old car, a happy aura around
her as she left. He’s a nice boy in a nice family….

Mark had practically made a fool out of himself during lunch, though he didn’t mind, as long as
Claire had a smile on her face and her beautiful fits of angelic laughter. God she’s beautiful… And
she’s so shy it's so sweet… He helped gather all the dishes before going to Claire’s side, taking her
hand and tugging her out the door and to the barn. “Come on, you can see the horses…”

Claire’s cheeks were pink as Mark took her hand, letting him pull her to the backyard. She smiled,
Mark slowing them down to a walk as they went to the barn, though she gently squeezed his hand,
a small cue that he didn’t have to let go. I keep forgetting that he's so tall… …and cute… They soon
walked into the barn, Claire’s eyes going wide as she saw Charlie and Luna in their stall, nuzzling
the other. Oh my gosh horses. “Hello…” Claire came up with Mark to the stall door, reaching a
hand out as Charlie looked up to inspect her. She waited, completely still as Charlie sniffed her
before going to gently pet his neck, her touch very light. “What are their names…?” They're both in
one big stall.

“This big guy right here is Charlie, Luna is his mare, she’s the black one behind him, he’s very
protective, and the filly is Arya… She like to sleep next to the door though and Charlie is probably
blocking your view of her.” She likes to try and escape when you open the door… That's why she
hides there… Mark had a happy grin on his face as he held Claire’s hand gently, his heart
thrumming in his chest. *I hope she can't hear it... Ah!*

“They have a filly?!” Claire looked excited, standing on tiptoe to see over the stall door, struggling to get a good look. “I can’t see her, I’m too short... can we open the door? I-If that’s okay?” She quickly caught herself when she became excited, blushing and quieting down, glancing away. *I can’t help being excited! Ah!*

Mark blushed as well before he let go of Claire’s hand for a moment, going to close the barn doors on both sides. “Arya’s a little escape artist.... So I wanna make sure she stays inside...” He came back and opened the door just a crack, not enough for Charlie to get any ideas about the door but enough that it disturbed Arya who quickly got to her feet and squeezed herself out, looking around for a way out. He closed the door behind her as she walked around them, whinnying loudly at the two of them. “This is Arya.” *She’s solid black like Luna, but she’s got her tall white socks like Charlie does.* “She’s about.... 3 months old now... actually closer to 4 months, she was born only a few days after Levi left.... And you have no idea who that is... He’s one of my older brothers, he’s out in the Middle East right now, on a tour.” Mark babbled, blushing furiously. *Oh she probably didn’t want to know all that...*

“Oh, he’s in the military?” She watched him nod, smiling faintly and turning her attention back to the small horse as it circled them, whinnying and looking for somewhere to go. “Hello Arya.” Claire reached a hand out, catching Arya’s attention for long enough to have her stand still and let Claire pet her neck before going back to searching for an escape route. “She’s so cute! And you said escape artist- has she tried to run away before?” *I don’t know how far those legs could get her before someone noticed.*

“Yeah, we have to watch her every time we put her out in the field, otherwise Eren ties her and Luna together... She fits through the fence....” Mark watched as Claire stroked Arya’s neck. “Arya.” He whistled for her when she strayed off again and she bounded back over towards them with a soft whinny, looking ready to play. *She’s such a goofball.* “I’m gonna bring Charlie out... you might wanna stand over there....” He watched Claire nod and move a bit away as he opened the stall door again, getting Charlie’s halter and bringing him to the ties, he clipped him to the wall and he went to where Arya was, picking her up and bringing her to the stall with Luna. *Please be good for your mother Arya.*

Claire laughed quietly as Mark just picked Arya up to get her back in the stall. “It’s so funny how you can just move her around like that.” She looked over when she felt something brush her cheek, standing completely still when she realised Charlie was sniffing her hair. “Uhm... hi...?” Claire stepped away from him, and Charlie settled for more petting. “I'm half-certain he was going to eat my hair.” *I dunno. Maybe brown hair looks tasty.*

“He nibbles a bit, especially on Eren’s hair... Maybe it’s because your hair is the same color...” Mark moved around, getting Charlie all tacked up and making sure everything was tight. “So you
get to choose if you’d like to sit in front of me, or behind me on the saddle.” *I’ll be able to lift you up, then hop up.* He unclipped Charlie, leading him outside and getting him to stand still so he could lift Claire up. *I want you to feel safe.*

“Uhm… could I sit in front of you?” *I’ll be able to see better that way…* Claire made a sound of surprise as Mark took careful hold of her waist, lifting her up so she could get up on Charlie. She finally got her leg over the other side, moving up in the saddle so Mark could vault up behind her. She looked down, seeing how high up they were, feeling a bit strange as Charlie moved under her. She tightly held onto the front of the saddle when they started to slowly walk, nervously smiling. “…I'm riding a horse…” *This is so cool…*

Mark smirked as he had to wrap his arms around her to hold onto the reins. “You are riding a horse, and it’s gonna seem weird at first, but Eren taught me to go with the rhythm of the horse. Move your whole body how Charlie is, and it won’t strain you as much.” *That’s how I was taught at least, to move with the horse…* Mark blushed as he felt Claire move back in the saddle a little to get more comfortable. *Oh my god, she’s so close…. I can smell her strawberry shampoo… It’s amazing …*

Claire blushed as she moved a bit further back in the saddle, feeling most comfortable when she was pressed against Mark’s chest. *…this is cool… and Mark’s warm…* Claire let herself move freely as Charlie walked, getting accustomed to the gentle sway. She was very aware of his arms, wrapped securely around her. *I like this…*

Mark was mostly quiet, letting Claire enjoy the ride, and enjoy the beauty of the outside. *I can take her through the forest… Maybe we’ll see deer? “Wanna go through the forest a bit?”* His voice was soft as he leaned to the side to look for her reaction a bit better. *I like this, it’s nice. We should do this more often…*

Claire’s cheeks tinged pink when she realised Mark’s face was so close to hers, glancing away and nodding. “S-Sure..” She let Mark steer Charlie towards one of the forest paths, looking around them with wide eyes. *It’s so pretty…*

“We might see some deer, so keep your eyes peeled.” He deflated a bit when she glanced away from him. *Did I do something wrong? Maybe she didn’t like that I was that close to her? But she’s leaning against my chest too… And she’s pressed against my nether…. Fuck… There are so many ways this can go wrong…* Mark willed himself to calm down as he walked Charlie through the forest, the trees giving adequate coverage from the sun and making it easier to see. *The deer should be coming up soon…*

Claire looked through the woods as they walked on, her eyes soon catching the flick of a tail, nearly having missed the first doe a few yards away. “Mark, look.” She was quiet, pointing over to
where the doe was, watching them warily and curiously. She didn't get any kind of acknowledgement, looking over her shoulder to see Mark with a morose look, tilting her head. “Mark, are you okay?” You seem out of it.

Mark nodded, looking towards the deer. “Y-Yeah, I’m fine…. There should be more, the fawns aren’t that big yet you should be able to see a few.” He whispered to her, loosening his grip from around her waist a bit. Maybe she’s uncomfortable with me holding her like this? “You need to be quiet though…. They spook easily.” His words were soft as he watched the deer, shifting back in the saddle for only a moment. I need to stop thinking about it... If anything happens... It’ll be because I couldn’t control myself... Popping a boner is a shitty way to get a one way ticket to single-land.

Claire nodded, through her face fell a bit when Mark’s gentle hold on her waist loosened. Noooo, don’t let go. She nervously moved to rest a hand over Mark’s on her stomach, still looking for more deer and trying not to stare back at Mark, unsure how he would react. I don’t know if you’re cool with this or not... what if he’s not? Crap...

Mark felt her hand shake a bit on top of his. Oh... Does she want me to let go of her? Well, I mean, I need to hold onto the bridle... So... I guess she’ll have to put up with it. “Um... There’s a lake back a ways in the forest and there’s a grassy patch where we can sit and watch the wildlife, if you want.” His words were whispers as he let his arms stay loose around her.

She’s shaking... Is she not comfortable on the horse? I can get off if she wants to sit on the saddle alone...

“That’d be really nice.” Claire gave him a small smile, her eyes warm. You sound kinda nervous... then again, I wouldn’t be surprised if I did... She looked back to the woods around them, her expression peaceful. “It’s such a perfect day for this.” She gently ran her thumb over the back of Mark’s hand, comfortable with his hold on her. This is really nice...

Mark blushed as he felt Claire rub his hand. Does she not want me to hold her? His thoughts were conflicted as he picked up Charlie’s pace a bit and led them through the forest and towards the small lake that was almost entirely clear. “We can sit if you want? The stones on the water are easy to get to... I-If you’re up for that...” That’s what I mean... We could go back home if you wanted to...

Claire nodded, smiling as the small lake came into sight, the surface still and sparkling. “It's really nice...” Claire waited patiently as Mark stopped Charlie by a tree, hopping down before she swung her leg over Charlie again, grateful that Mark helped her jump down. She looked around for a moment, reaching for Mark’s hand and tugging him over to a picnic table, one of a few that looked to have been there for quite a while. She made Mark sit next to her on the bench, looking out at the lake. It really is a beautiful day. And it’s such a nice spot out here.
Mark blushed as Claire jumped down into his arms and was even more surprised as she pulled him
towards the picnic table. He sat down next to her, though gave her at least a foot of space to make
sure that she was comfortable, taking his hand back and watching over the peaceful scene. The
turkeys are at the edge on the other side… There’s a lot of them over there… The movement had
caught his eye, drawing his attention as the flock milled around in the grasses.

The movement caught Claire’s eyes too, pointing with bright eyes. “Look at all the turkeys. There’s
lots of them over there.” She didn’t want to be too loud and scare anything around them, a hand
moving to Mark’s arm to get his attention. There’s so many of them… I’ve never seen so many in
one spot. She looked to him when Mark seemed to jump a bit at the touch, tilting her head a bit
quizzically. “You sure you’re okay?” You’re pretty jumpy…

“Oh, y-yeah, I’m fine really…” He looked down a bit, knowing he didn’t sound very reassuring,
his arm coming up to rub the back of his neck in embarrassment. Shit… I’m acting weird, she’s
noticing how nervous I am… “I’m fine… I wonder if we’ll see anything else soon…” Mark kept
his focus off of Claire, seeming to edge away from her for a second. “Who knows, we might be
eating those this year…” We could be… I heard Dad made it in the oven last Thanksgiving.

Claire pouted the tiniest bit when Mark seemed to scoot away from her a bit, moving a bit closer to
him. She watched him do it again, moving close again. No running. She gave him a Cheshire smile
when Mark looked over, trapped and unable to move further without getting up or falling off.
“Nowhere to go.” She triumphantly moved her head to his shoulder, sighing quietly and looking
back over the lake. ……if you shove me away or something… I’d probably deserve it. But please
don’t. You're cute and comfortable.

Matt watched her move, getting close to him until he had nowhere to move to. “Claire… You don’t
have to push yourself to do anything… If you’re not comfortable, you don’t have to push… I’ll be
fine really.” His arm wrapped timidly behind her back, resting on her waist. I said it… I don’t want
you to be like this because you think you have too…

Claire picked her head up, giving him an even look. “It’s not like I have to force to do this, Mark. I
just wanna rest my head on your shoulder and watch some turkeys wander around.” She put her
head back, smiling faintly. “Though the arm around me is an added bonus.” I can appreciate this.
“As long as you’re okay with this?” You've been acting weirdly nervous, so...

Mark seemed to sigh in relief, and lean into Claire’s side, scooting closer to her. I like that you’re
straightforward… I can never say what’s on my mind at all. “What should we do while we watch
the turkeys run around…??” I've never really had a date before… Wait, is this even considered a
date? Are we dating? Or are we just friends ? I hope it's the first option…
“Well, we could do a few things. We can talk, or stay completely silent and laugh whenever one of them trips over their own feet. Or, because I really like you and you're cute, there's option three, where we go over to that tree and make out. **You** can pick, or I'll pick for you.” She looked up to him, smirking when his brain seemed to shut off. *This is very amusing.* “Anything?” She chuckled when he just gasped at her like a fish, leaning up to peck his cheek. “That's what I thought.” She tugged on his arm, standing and pulling him over to a shady tree, pulling him down to sit next to her on the ground. She moved instead, making herself comfortable in his lap. *I really hope you don't mind me being so blunt. I can't not be when I know what I want.* “...you're looking at me like I just grew a second head. Relax, I just wanna make out. That's it. So don't freak out, ‘kay?” She watched him still struggle for words, her features relaxing a bit from their mischievous look. “You can say no if you don't want to. M'sorry if I'm being way too forward for you...” *I have no way to tell if how forward I'm being is normal... I dunno. I just don't see the point in dancing around it or being subtle. Takes too damn long.*

“N-No....” His eyes widened when Claire moved back a bit, his hands instantly going to grab her wrists. “T-That's not what I meant... I mean... You’re fine... I like that about you... That you’re blunt about everything... And I... I’d really like option 3.” He murmured, pulling her down into his lap and close to his body. *I feel a bit better now that I know how far you wanna take this... Be warned tho... I’m not gonna be a great kisser...” I’ve never dated anyone before...
Claire quietly hummed into their kiss, her tongue beginning to map out Mark’s mouth, searching. She felt her lips turn up at the corners when their tongues met and Mark noticeably shivered under her. She quirked an eyebrow for a moment when Mark slipped his fingers into her back pockets. *Now we’re getting somewhere. It feels nice...* They were like that for a while, tongues moving around the other, until Claire got a bit impatient. *I don’t wanna do more... but...* Claire pulled back from his lips, pecking the corner of his reddened lips and softly kissing down his jaw, going to gently kiss and lick at his neck, searching for any sensitive spots. She smirked when Mark quietly whimpered, her breath huffing against his skin in quiet laughter, mouthing at the sensitive skin. *Hmm... do you like this?*

Mark felt Claire shift down on him, her mouth felt like fire on his skin and when she found a spot near where his neck met his shoulder, he felt a pulse run through his whole body. His eyes went wide as a whimper of delight left his lips, his hands still situated in her back pockets, gently grabbing at the supple flesh. *Shit this is bad... She’s on my crotch again... Fuck... This feels really good....* Mark knew he had to stop her from continuing on his neck if he was going to save face in front of her. “C-Claire...” His words were close to a whine as she attacked the spot she’d found, sending yet another strong pulse through his body. *Fuck... There goes that plan... I can’t control it....* Mark could feel his pants beginning to tighten. *Shit shit shit shit shit! She’s gonna think that I’m a greedy dog that just wants her body....* 

Claire smirked, thoroughly enjoying every sound that left Mark’s lips. *Dammit, I’m going to hurt my neck again.* Claire shifted down again so she could more easily nibble and suck at his skin, soon feeling Mark’s hardness under her hips. She just shook her head, smirking. “*Someone’s excited...*” She just went right back to tossing his neck, letting her teeth scrape his skin, though she tried not to shift back fully onto his hips. She lifted her own hips up a bit when Mark’s hands left her pockets to better cup her ass, a quiet sound leaving her lips as he massaged her globes. *You make such nice sounds... ...but I don’t think I wanna help you with your little ‘problem’...I mean, I like you, but don’t expect me to suck you off or give you a handjob on the first date.*

Mark groaned when Claire moved back onto his crotch, though he was grateful that she lifted her hips, giving him better access to her rear. “Ngh... Claire... W-We should sto-**Ha!**” He let out a high pitched cry as Claire grazed her teeth over the skin behind his ear. *Oh fuck...* His pants tightened even more, creating an extremely uncomfortable situation for him. *Fuck... I need to do something about that...* Mark pulled his hands from her globes, moving them to her shoulders to gently push her up and off of his neck. *We need to stop... I’m completely hard and it’s very uncomfortable right now. Jeans were not a good idea.* “Claire please... Stop...” He whined, trying to push her off but not wanting to hurt her feelings at all. *I don’t want to do that to you... I don’t want to make it seem like I don’t want this... I do, but I’m hard and this is very embarrassing...*

Claire didn’t push it, nodding and leaning down just to peck his lips one last time. “Sorry, I’ll stop.” She shifted off of him, laying down on the grass next to him, slinging an arm over his stomach. She couldn’t help but look to his clothed crotch, her eyes widening when she saw his bulge. *holy hell, he’s huge...* She gently ran her hand over Mark’s stomach, both of them resting in the grass, waiting for Mark to calm down. *Sorry, but I ain’t going any further.* “M’sorry...” Claire pecked his cheek after quite some time had passed, Mark’s bulge all but gone.
Mark shook his head. “It’s fine… I should’ve been able to control myself … Do you wanna start heading back? Or…. Are we gonna stay here? I’ve calmed down after that embarrassment…. God, how foolish can I be? He shifted to sit up before standing and going around the large tree to shift his pants around. She’s never gonna want to come over again… I fucked this all up… Mark looked at the ground dejectedly for a moment before taking a deep breath and going to lean against the tree, looking down on Claire. “I think we could help Eren out with dinner, if that’s okay with you? Or you can help me do barn chores if you want…” Will you even talk to me anymore after this?”

“We can head back, that's cool.” She winked to him before standing up, standing up on her tiptoes. “Couldn't keep my hands to myself.” She softly pecked his ear, taking his hand and tugging him back over to Charlie. “If I say yes to chores, does that mean I get to feed animals and stuff? If so, yes.” I like animals. …duh.

Mark shook his head at her enthusiasm. “I’m starting to think you came for the horses…” And not for me…. His words were stuck in his throat as he looked down at where Charlie was eating grass from. “Up you go.” He took a gentle hold of Claire’s hips and boosted her up on top of the saddle, though he didn’t get up behind her instead taking Charlie’s reins and walking beside him. I’m not completely in control, and me being behind her would not work out at all...

Claire blushed as she was lifted onto Charlie, though she pouted when Mark walked next to them, leading Charlie instead of riding with her. She poked his shoulder, her voice lightly teasing. “I didn’t just come for the horses, you doof. And you could ride in front of me if that'd be better for you.” Well, for Mark Jr. it might be. Dunno.

Mark paused for a moment before shaking his head. “No, I should probably stay here… I don’t think I could handle it either way…” Better to be honest… I don’t think I could handle it if she put her arms around me… Mini me would be happy. Mark flushed as he walked beside Charlie, his eyes gravitating towards movement that was his brothers were outside playing with bubbles by the house. Of course they are...

Claire blushed at that. “Whatever you say.” I'd probably get too handsy for my own good. She was content to watch their surroundings as they rode, soon out of the forest and heading to the barn, the boys waving from the backyard near the porch, many bottles of bubbles on the wood steps. She waved back to them with Mark, watching as Maisie trotted over and circled them, studying her as she sat on the horse. “Mark, what’s their name?” She waved to the dog trotting alongside them. They look friendly.

“That’s Maisie, she’s really well behaved, though she does like to jump up onto Charlie, so I’d be mindful of that.” Mark stated and led them towards the barn, getting Charlie into the ties, reaching
his arms up for Claire to jump into them, watching as Maisie vaulted herself up onto Charlie’s rear, sniffing at Claire’s hair, moving to lick at her face as she stood gracefully on Charlie’s rump. 

*Called it… I knew she was gonna do it once she came down to us.*

Claire giggled, trying to hold off Maisie from licking her face. She turned, jumping off into Mark’s arms and giving him a quick peck on the lips. *I like that I get to just do that now.* “Hello.” She reached a hand out to pet Maisie as the dog still stood on Charlie, managing to scratch behind her ear when she ducked her head down to sniff her hand. *She’s very well-behaved indeed.* She smiled when Mark’s hands rested on her hips, pulling her close for a moment. They simply leaned against each other for a moment, until Arya whinnied loudly enough to break the spell. “I think someone’s getting impatient.”

“Yeah, she knows we’re in here, and she’s not happy she doesn’t have access to the rest of the barn.” *She just wants out.* He let go of Claire’s waist, going to close the barn door before opening the stall door and letting Arya run around, whinnying loudly once again. He shook his head as he got the saddle off of Charlie, going to set it in the tack room. Maisie jumped off of Charlie and trotted around, chasing Arya around the barn and into the stall again, sitting by the entrance to keep her in. *Herding dogs are the best.*

Claire watched Maisie herd Arya with an amused expression, petting Charlie absentmindedly. “She sure must come in handy, keeping Arya somewhat out of trouble.” *She sure looks like she knows how to wrangle her.*

Mark nodded, finishing up with Charlie’s tack and then leading him into the large stall. “In ya go big guy.” Maisie got out of the way and let Charlie get into the stall, going to circle around Claire, Mark’s eyes looking around the barn. “Tucker must’ve come in to do the chores, everyone’s got food.” He shrugged, going back to Claire and leaning down to kiss her deeply, his arms wrapping around her waist. *I love this…*

Claire smiled faintly, standing on her tiptoes, her arms winding around his shoulders, one hand going to play with his hair. She made a quiet sound as their tongues tangled again, soon finding herself backed up against the door of an empty stall. *I really like this…* She nearly whined in annoyance when Mark’s lips left hers, but the sound caught in her throat when Mark kissed down her jaw, her hold on him tightening when he started to lap at her neck. “...mm… feels nice…” *I love this…*

Mark shuffled, getting his grip on her and lifting her up a few feet into the air and pinning her to the wall so he didn’t have to bend over to kiss her neck, his lips trailing all over her neck, the world around them simply shut out of his mind, his full attention directed on Claire and all the noises she was making. *You’re so beautiful.*
Claire clung to him tightly, her legs instinctively wrapping around his middle, a hand tugging at Mark’s hair, keeping him in place at her neck. *Don’t stop… “…ngh… M-Mark…”* She quietly whimpered, the sound insistently coming from her as Mark teased her skin, gasping as he got a bit rougher. *Feels good… god, it feels good…*

Mark led Claire back into the house about an hour later. His hair was a little messed up and his lips were redder than they’d ever been before. *My lips hurt… But I don’t care at all… Nope… That was the best way to get my lips to hurt.* “I’m gonna get water, do you want some too?”

“Yes, please.” *My throat’s really dry…* Claire was easily distracted by the dogs that had set up camp in the kitchen, all deciding as one to swarm and investigate the new human.

*Newest human?* Blake walked over, sniffing Claire’s hand and legs. *Newest human smells like big new human. That one. Blake looked up as Mark handed Claire a glass of water, nudging Mark’s leg. Big new human has a human. Yay! But she's a small human. But my human has a small human too, so it's okay.*

“I feel like I'm being judged by the family.” Claire giggled, the dogs nosing her legs. “What’re their names?”

“Blake is the one that’s got white all over his face… He’s old… Then Nene’s asleep on your foot and Krampus is trying to see if you have food on you.” Mark took a sip from his water looking over to Lathe as he came down to help Eren in the kitchen. *Hmm… They're making a lot… It must really be everyone all over again.*

“She's asleep on my foot? Already?” Claire reached down to pet the dog, the said pup looking up to her sleepily before going right back to her nap. *Human is comfortable. I sleep here.*

“Don't be surprised- all she does is eat and sleep. Just don't let Krampus get at anything in your pockets- he'll try to eat it.” Lathe smiled to the two of them, Mark’s red lips and mussed hair not going unnoticed. ...*hm. You're at least at first base then. Or at least partway to second. Or you're there already. I dunno, I never understood the baseball metaphor thing. You're somewhere.*

“Eren’s called in reinforcements, so I'll be helping cook. I trust Mark told you there are seventeen other guests at the table, not including you or the many puppies that’ll be attending?”

“Yes, he told me- that's a lot of people.”
“It is, but nine of them are us and the kids out back. But don't worry- even if more than half of them low-key judge you, they're good people. They'll like you.” Lathe smiled warmly, trying to put her at ease. He looked up when the phone rang, moving to it. “You two go do whatever it is teenagers do. Eren and I can manage cooking, Mark, so don't try to drag our guest into cooking.” I know you like to help, but not today. Lathe plucked the phone from the wall, leaning back. “H’yello?”

“Hey Lathe! It’s Mark!”

“...Mark? As in Markiplier?” Lathe grinned. “Good to hear from you! How are things going?”

“Actually pretty good, but I have a question.”

“Oh? And what might that be? You can't steal Eren, it's his night to make dinner.”

“No, actually we were wondering if we could stay over the night? Our flight was delayed in Wichita... And we don’t really wanna stay in a hotel if that's okay with you?”

“First, question. Who is this ‘we’ of which you speak? You and Jack, or is it the whole four of you?”

“It’s just Jack and I…”

“Yeah, we’ve still got room, surprisingly. I dunno if you know, but we’ve got six foster kids right now. There’s space, of course, but if you wanna stay for dinner you’d have to be okay with eighteen other guests. It’s everyone-come-to-the-house-for-a-feast night, Saturdays. German cooking.”

“Six foster kids! That’s great, Lathe! Damn, I can only imagine how much he’s making, but can you squeeze two more at the table? We can be there in two hours.”

Lathe looked to the clock. “Of course, that’s fine. Dinner might take another hour after you're here, but you're very welcome to chill. Anything to keep you out of an airport terminal longer than you need to be there. And trust me, there'll be plenty for everyone. Come hungry!”
“Good! We’ll see you in two hours then! Thank you!” Mark hung up to go get their rental car for the day with Jack. We’ll be leaving tomorrow at around 6pm… Great, at least we won’t have to wake up early.

Mark looked to Claire, a blush on his face. “Wanna go watch a movie in the theater room?” I think that would be a good place to go next…

Claire nodded, leaning into his touch when his arm drifted around her. “That sounds good.” I get to cuddle with you… sweet! She followed him to the theatre room, intent of curling up to him the second she got the chance.

Mark set up the large screen, bringing the remote back to his seat when he got Netflix up and running. “Okay, we have Netflix at our disposal, as well as YouTube.” We can watch whatever you want to.

Claire shrugged, leaning into his side when he sat down. “Hmm, what's a good movie to watch… have you ever seen Zombieland?” I love that movie… I dunno, if you expected me to pick some kind of chick flick, ya, no.

“Yeah, have you seen World War Z?” I’d rather watch that… It’s a better Zombie movie. He wrapped his arm around her side, a smile on his face. You are perfect.

“I wanted to, never have. …yet.” She smiled when she saw the look on Mark’s face, seeing him immediately go to pull it up. “Wow, no weird comment about me liking zombies? Impressive.” I like you. She sipped from her water glass, going to set the plastic cup on the floor, out of the way where she wouldn't kick it. Her now-free hand wound around Mark's middle, happy when he shifted to let them be closer.

“Why should there be a weird comment about you liking zombies? A lot of people like Zombies.” I wouldn’t say somethings that was rude to you… Like ever …

“I dunno. I kinda automatically expect people to like anything but undead, flesh-eating beings at this point. It's not a personal thing.” Claire pecked his cheek, her thumb rubbing his side as she shrugged. “Sorry. Just don't ever expect me to rope you into watching some dumb chick-flick or Twilight or something. I just think a bunch of it’s crap.” You don't have to worry about that, believe me.
“Marvel or DC?” That’s gonna sound random, but whichever you say is what I’m going to movie marathon with you. He tilted his head to rest on hers, enjoying the warmth her small body held. She’d fit in my lap... Oh my god, I just realized that. His face flushed as he pulled her closer to his side, enjoying the closeness.

“...hmm… Marvel.” I'm not a die-hard fan, but to me, if I had to pick, it's obvious enough. ......I wanna be closer... “Watch out, Mark.” Claire shifted, moving into his lap and making herself right at home, enjoying the feeling of Mark’s arms winding around her, resting her head back on his shoulder. “...mm, you're comfy.” She sighed when Mark gently nipped at her neck, groaning when his phone vibrated. Ugh, interruptions. Mur.

LQ: I don't wanna be killed by intruding if I don't need to
LQ: Do you two want popcorn or nah

“Dad wants to know if we want popcorn or not… And he makes some really good popcorn… He didn’t want to intrude…” Well that’s good… I mean, I'll take popcorn. His arms wrapped around her waist showing her his texts, kissing her neck gently.

Claire quietly chuckled, leaning her head to the side and giving Mark more room. “Popcorn sounds good… tell him plenty of butter and we’re good. But not much salt if he can help it.” No thank you.

MB: Claire requests lots of butter and not too much salt please!

Mark wrapped his arms back around Claire’s waist, a smile on his face as they watched the first few minutes of the movie in comfortable silence.

It wasn't long before there was a quiet knock on the doorframe, Lathe with a big metal bowl of popcorn in hand. “Here you two go.” Lathe handed Claire the bowl, chuckling as she immediately began to stuff her face. “Just don't spoil your appetite.” Lathe left before Mark could complain he was being too much of a dad to Claire, vanishing back to the kitchen. They can be alone.

Claire was glad Lathe didn't take her request with a grain of salt. “I love your Dad. He makes good popcorn.” She looked over her shoulder, smiling cheekily. “Don't worry- I'll save some for you.” Maybe.

Mark chuckled, holding her closer to his chest. “Maybe you could feed it to me?” His voice sultry
in her ear, licking her soft skin teasingly. Will you actually?

Claire quirked an eyebrow at him, smirking at his tone. I like the way you sound like that. “...hmm, maybe....” Claire relaxed further into his arms as he softly nibbled the skin behind her ear, taking a piece of popcorn and holding it to Mark’s lips. She watched Mark take the piece from her, letting his tongue slip against the tips of her fingers. She fed him another piece, and a third, Mark deciding on the last piece her fingers were too coated in butter to let slide, boldly keeping her gaze. God dammit, that's hot. It was too tempting. When Mark finally released her fingers she set aside the bowl of popcorn and turned in his lap, straddling him again and going in for a kiss, grateful as it quickly became heated. You're too tempting.

Mark’s lips met with Claire’s in a heated kiss, his tongue quickly slipping into Claire’s warm cavern and mapping out every inch that he could, tasting the butter and popcorn from the snack. It’s nice… I like this… Even if my lips hurt after this. His hands made their way to cup Claire’s ass to keep her up and to keep from craning either of their necks. Her tongue dancing against his sent yet another pulse of arousal through him. I’m gonna get hard again...

Claire made a small sound as Mark gripped her ass, breaking their kiss and trailing kisses back down his neck, her fingers tugging his tee shirt out of the way as she dove into lap at the soft skin, teasing every spot she could reach. I hope you like this... you sure sound like it. Her hips comfortably rested on Mark’s, though she tried not to move too much. ........if you get hard again, I honestly don't know what to do about it... I'm sorry, but I want you to feel nice, but at the same time it feels like a kinda crappy move. ......I have no idea.

Mark felt himself slowly getting aroused once again. Fuck, this is so embarrassing… His cheeks tinted red as he let out a soft moan every now and then, his hands still gripping Claire’s ass. Mark’s large hands were able to massage them thoroughly as she found spots all over his skin. Damn it… I’m hard again . He could feel that his pants were once again tight against his body, his long length wanting to be released from it’s denim confines. Dammit ...

Claire could feel Mark harden under her, keeping from grinding down on him, lifting her hips a bit in mercy. She kissed up his neck, hesitating, her hands on Mark’s shoulders. She rested her forehead in the crook of Mark’s neck, her voice soft and quiet. “...I don't want to go much further. But I feel bad that I'm working you up and then giving you nothing.” She didn't know what else to say, waiting for Mark to respond. ...I dunno what to do... help?

Mark shook his head. “You don’t have to do anything about it, I can go take care of it, it’s fine…” He murmured softly into her ear, gently letting go of her ass and shifting a bit so she wasn’t directly on his hard length. “You don’t have to worry about it at all, it’s my fault really… I’m sorry.” I have no control over my body... We’ve found that out today… His hands gently rested on her hips, moving her head so that he could look her in the eyes and show her that he wasn’t angry or anything. I want you to understand, I expect nothing from you... This is technically our first
She smiled faintly, her hands drifting up to the back of his neck. “Hey, I'm the one who can't keep their hands to themselves.” She pecked his cheek, soon grinning. “Also, I’m seriously hot. It’s understandable.” She moved to roughly nip at Mark’s neck, letting him go only after he let out a needy whine. *Nope.* She shifted off of him, letting him go.

Mark almost let out a soft whimper as she shifted off of him, though the discomfort in his pants outweighed the want to stay. *I need to take care of this.* He walked from the main section of the basement and into the bathroom, closing the door behind him and locking it before he unclipped his belt and unzipped his pants, pulling them and his boxers down to let his long length free. *God... That feels so much better.* He moved towards the toilet, beginning to stroke himself to alleviate his situation.

Claire settled back into the couch, munching on popcorn absently as she tried to get back into the movie. A good ten minutes had passed and she sighed, glancing over in the direction Mark had gone. *He's taking forever... but, that's a good sign... right?* It was another five minutes before Mark came back and sat down next to her, immediately curling back up to him. “Feeling better?” She smirked, watching him blush. *You're so damn cute when you blush.*

Mark’s whole face flushed as she spoke. “Y-Yeah, I do...” He pulled her closer, settling into the couch and relaxing as they watched the zombies take over. *This movie’s pretty good, I’ll have to find more that we can binge next time... Wait, will there be?* “Do you wanna come over next week? If that’s okay? And maybe you can sleep over? I have a track meet the next day... I-If you wanna go to that?” *It’s the first of the season... And I’ve been doing well for a sophomore...*

“Mark, if it involves doing chill stuff like this, food, and you, hell yes.” Claire buried her face into his shoulder, clinging to him. *You're very comfy.......... I could legit just sleep here right now... ...that's a tempting thought... I must be channeling my inner Nene.* “I’d like to see you compete at your track meet. You’ll leave them all in the dust, I’m sure of it.” *You're so enthusiastic about running, it's insane. You'll do great.*

Mark smiled more, his teeth bright in the dark room. “Maybe I can see if Eren can bring us home after school on Friday... If you wanna stay over Friday night too... And maybe make it a fun weekend?” *I dunno if you’d wanna do that or not... I’d love to have you over over a lot more now.*

Claire gave him a Cheshire grin. “I'm beginning to think you just want me allll for yourself.” She kissed him sweetly. “I'd love to.” *I'm so in.*
It was about five-thirty when a car first pulled up the driveway, Lathe answering the door for Mark and Jack. “Hey you two! Come on in. Dinner’s getting there, but it’ll be a half hour still.” Lathe ushered them inside, letting them ditch their shoes. He groaned when a timer beeped. “Ugh, that one's mine. Sorry, it's a production. Make yourselves at home!” Lathe ran off to the kitchen, checking that the potatoes weren't boiling over and that nothing was burning.

“Thank you so much for having us, Lathe. And don't worry- I'm not about to complain that you're busy cooking for us.” Jack placed his shoes neatly on the large front mat, sighing when Mark plunked his down haphazardly. ...well, the six other small pairs of shoes look pretty haphazard, so he fits right in.

Mark went off before Jack could stop him, snooping around in the front living room, looking around at the magazines, books, coloring books and all the other reading and coloring materials scattered all over the place. He found Nene asleep on her dog bed, his instant reaction to take out his phone and start to take countless pictures. Ahh! She’s so cute!

“Mark, what are you- oh my god puppy!” Jack quieted to whispers when he caught of sight of the sleeping dog, kneeling next to her quietly. He watched her wake up from her doze and look over to him, quietly judging the man with the green hair before yawning. So cute! Jack reached out to pet her, and Nene just stared off into space, having come to terms with the two pairs of hands petting her. Many human. Much affection. Wow. “...Nay nay?” Jack read her name tag, quirking an eyebrow. “That's probably not how you say it.”

“It’s Neh-Nay!”

“That makes more sense. Thanks.” Jack called over his shoulder to the kitchen, not wanting to yell so close to the sleepy pup. I don't wanna scare them. ...her? Him? I dunno, them. Nene. “How many pictures are you taking?”

“I’m at least at like … a hundred by now.” Mark continued to snap photo after photo, not realizing the other small dog come up to his side and instantly grabbed at his phone, take it from his hand and then bolting off. Huh? Hey! “My phone!” Mark started off running after Krampus, leaving Jack to pet Nene. I want my phone back! You little thief!

“Did he just steal your phone?” Jack laughed as Mark ran off after the small dog, accusing it of being a thief. That's the greatest!

“Did a different dog steal your phone?” Lathe watched Mark chase after Krampus, his eyes widening. “Don't let him get away, Mark! He has a habit of eating literally anything! Catch him!”
Lathe set down the fork he was holding, going the other way around the house, hopefully to trap Krampus. *He can't snitch anything he wants anymore.*

“**He what!**” Mark shouted as he chased after Krampus with even more vigor. *Holy fuck! He better not eat my phone!* He watched as Krampus paused for only a moment when he saw Lathe, quickly skirting around him, only to be caught by Mark as he came up the stairs with Claire.

“What did he steal now?” He kneeled down, grabbing the phone from Krampus’s mouth atmad looking it over. “It doesn’t look like it’s cracked… It’s just covered in slobber—” Mark froze when he looked up, meeting Mark in the eyes. *Oh my god… It’s Markiplier. “Am I dreaming… Please tell me this isn’t a dream.”* **OH MY GOD!**

Claire stared, completely shocked as she tried to absorb this new information….**what.** Claire reached over to her Mark, smacking his arm. “…Are you seeing the same thing I am?” …**no way. Just, no.**

“What’s going on?” Jack poked his head out from around a corner, Nene trailing after him, eternally sleepy. He smirked when he saw the very-familiar expressions on the teens’ faces. “…ooohhhh, they’re in denial. Give it a minute.” He grinned, watching them look to him with even more distinct shock. *That look is always the greatest.*

Mark looked between Mark and Jack before down to Krampus and Nene, looking to the phone in his hand and slowly wiping it off on his pants. *This is Markiplier’s phone! Ahh! I’m actually touching it! I’m in his presence! ’I um… Sorry, Krampus will steal everything if you’re not careful.”* He shakily handed back the phone watching as Mark looked over it. Mark looked back to Claire to see her still looking at the two of them in shock. *This is… Is actually happening… Wait… Are these guys Eren’s **friends**? I mean I know he’s on YouTube… But I’ve never watched his videos… maybe I should.*

Claire looked between the two of them, an odd thought hitting her. *…wait. She turned to Mark,* looking very confused. “…why are there famous people in your house?” She turned back as the two of them laughed loudly, Lathe and Eren snickering in the kitchen.

“Hmm, let’s see…” Jack turned to Eren and Lathe, pointing to each of them in turn. “Eren Yeager, famous pop star… Lathe Quo, famous in the medical world for that ‘immortality serum’ stuff you’ve probably read about somewhere… Jacksepticeye and Markiplier, YouTube let’s-players and personalities.” Jack grinned, watching Claire absorb all of that. “A good chunk of this family is famous for some reason or another. And they tend to know famous people. Well, some.” **Kinda.**
Claire looked between all of them, her shoulders slumping after a moment. “...wow. I feel really inadequate now.” She waved them off when they made dissenting sounds, grinning. “I'm kidding, yeesh.” She smacked Mark's arm, glaring at him lightly. “You didn't tell me your older brother was a pop star who got adopted by a **magician** and knows famous gamers!” *What the hell, man? I wanna **know** this stuff!*

“Um… Well, he’s your German teacher… I thought you would’ve known by now… I mean, Eren brings me home from school most days… I thought you were aware of that sorry, and I really don’t know who he hangs out with except for Armin… He’s pretty chill…” Mark rubbed his arm after he was smacked. **Sorry that I didn’t know that you didn’t know... Yeesh!**

Eren rolled his eyes. “Come in the kitchen guys! I’ll let you snitch while we wait for the hooligans and the rest of the gamers!” *Hannah and Sharon will be very happy to see you guys!*

“Oh no, **more** famous people?” Claire mockingly groaned in exasperation, though they all scurried to the kitchen to snitch what they could. *Everything looks so **tasty** … It wasn't long before the doorbell rang again, Lathe going to answer it again.*

“I didn't bring pie. I brought **cookies** .” Sharon smiled brightly, carrying a heavy-looking tray of cookies covered with a clean dish towel. “Tell me where to put them.” She grinned as Lathe showed her where to set them on the counter, stopping halfway there when she saw two very distinct figures in the kitchen. “...I'm carrying things, I need to set things down before I freak out…” She set the cookies down, turning to Jack ad Mark and staring at them for a moment as Hannah brought in the bed of puppies, attempting to process this new information. “......I get the feeling I died on the way here and am having the greatest dream ever before I go off to hell where I belong.”” She grinned as they all laughed in disbelief, bouncing on her toes. **I don't wanna pounce on them with hugs because they might be like 'what the hell are you doing’ but I want hugs!!** “Can I have a hug pretty please?” She grinned widely as they nodded. **Hugs!!**

Mark instantly opened his arms. “It’s hugging time!” He shouted and bounded right up to Sharon and hugged her happily, he barely noticed that Hannah had brought in a box full of puppies along with three large dogs. **I love hugs!**

Hannah set up a small play area to protect the small pups from the other dogs, letting Tove come close to her new litter and letting them suckle. **They’re only two weeks old, so we can’t leave them at home… Their eyes are starting to open for the first time. So adorable!**

Sharon laughed as Mark got her into a crushing hug, smacking his arm weakly. “Lungs… collapsing… hug… too strong…” She gasped for air when she was let go, only to roll her eyes when Jack then tugged her into a hug. **What is life anymore.** She laughed when they let her go,
looking back over to her wife. “Hannah, look up!” You haven’t seen them yet, have you. I wanna see your reaction, then I need to go fetch Maverick.

Hannah looked up and over towards where Sharon was after making sure Tove was settled with the puppies. Her eyes widened as she clambered over the fence, a huge smile on her face. “Oh my gosh… Um, Hi… I’m Dr. Laskowski.” She held out a shaking hand as she watched them both with wide eyes. This is actually happening! Holy shit!

Jack looked to Hannah’s outstretched hand, then back up to her face. “…you can ask for hugs, we just crushed your wife to death, or did you miss that?” He chuckled as she blushed, pulling her into a hug when she tentatively held out her arms. “And so formal! Can I just call you Hannah? Is that cool?” I’m gonna go nuts if I call you Dr, Laskowski for the rest of forever.

Hannah nodded, brushing her hair back behind her ear as she looked down. “I apologize, I’m hard of hearing as of late… And yes, you may call me that… I’m just used to being professional because I’ve been in meetings for the past two weeks with Casper… The Doctor with the purple hair, you guys know him, he’s not formal at all…” It doesn’t help at all… She smiled warmly at Jack before going to hug Mark as well, smiling widely that she got to do that. I love this!

“I thought it was a purple rat someone pinned to my head?” Casper poked his head through the door, Maverick on his hip. “You left your car door and front door open.” He strode right in, kicking off his shoes. I give zero shits that I just baby-napped Maverick.

“Well, it's that too.”

“You're not supposed to agree, Lathe! Whose side are you on?”

“I'm on my side.”

“I'd swear, but I'm holding a baby.”

“Yeah, please don't. They don't need any help growing up to swear like a sailor.” Hannah and I will do plenty for that ourselves.

Hannah sighed, taking Maverick from Casper’s arms, holding him close to her chest. Getting big still… I swear he’s heavier every time I pick him up. “Um, guys, Mark and Jack are here…”
Apparently.” She spoke up quietly as she ran her hand through Maverick’s hair, smoothing it out. *His hair’s getting thick too…*

Eren scampered off into the kitchen once the timer beeped loudly, signifying that everything in the oven was ready to be taken out. “Alright everyone take your seats! Dad, call Horseface! Find out where those two are, and call Armin too!” *Those guys aren’t here yet.* “**BOYS**!” Eren shouted up the stairs, hearing the familiar sound of doors opening and closing and rushing feet. *This will be fun…*

“Gotcha!” Lathe dialled Jean’s number on his phone, waiting for someone to pick up as he watched the familiar sight of the five boys stampeding downstairs to get a place at the long table. He grinned when someone picked up, hearing Marco's voice instead. “Yo, you two on your way yet?”

“Give us two more minutes, Mr. Quo. Jean’s driving and we’re just down the road.” *It won't be long.*

“Cool- make sure he doesn't crash the thing.”

“He won't- he's got precious cargo to take care of.”

“...your dog?”

“Yeah, him too. But I meant me.”

Lathe laughed, Jean telling Marco to shut up embarrassedly in the background. *Too damn adorable.* “Okay, two minutes. I'm counting.” He ended the call, dialling Armin’s number.

“I'm in your driveway, what do you want? Oh, can you open the door? I have a cake and I need both hands to carry it.”

“Cake? I like cake. Okay.” Lathe hung up, going to the front door and seeing Armin ambling up the driveway with a decently-sized cake. Lathe grinned. “That’s a lot of cake.”
“Isn’t there like an **army** here?” Armin glanced over his shoulder as he heard Jean’s truck roll into the driveway. “So is everyone here now?” I **think** it is… **Wait? Who else is here?** There’s another **car**? “Who else is here? Are we celebrating Eren’s birthday today?” I **hope we are,** that’s what I made the cake for…

“You brought a birthday cake, so apparently yes. And famous people are here.” Lathe held the door open for him, going to clear a spot on the counter for him to put the cake. “And thank you so much, Armin.”

“No problem, it kept me and Marco occupied today, he came over to help… It was nice to have someone else in the house.” I’m all alone, at least Eren’s got a job that gets him out of the house, I **finish all my work by noon,** and then I have nothing to do all day…

Lathe smiled faintly to him, though he didn’t know what to say to the last part. …I **know it must be hard,** especially since you’re alone in that big house… “Well you two certainly did a beautiful job of decorating it.” He’ll love it. “I need to find candles for this thing; I’m not letting Eren get out of it now.” Lathe grinned when Armin just shook his head, rifling through a nearby cupboard for a moment, setting the candles next to the cake on the counter for the moment. He looked up, seeing most of the guests weren’t at the table, but around the couch, which had been pushed together completely to make a sort of pen for Tove and her pups. Everyone wants to see the puppies. “The puppies will be there when dinner is over, people. Are we going to eat or what?” He started to herd everyone to the table, getting them all to sit down.

Eren started to make his rounds, bring dish after dish to the table for people to eat. “Marco, there’s sauerkraut and veggie stew the German way, or I have collard greens, what do you wanna start with first?” Always cater to your veggie friends… and I made you a lot of your favorites… He was setting down the large basket of brotchen in the middle of the table, watching as Mark took a bite of the food curiously before moving it into his mouth. Oh that’s right, Mark and Jack have never had my cooking before… Well, this’ll be a shock for them!

“Vegetable stew, please. And thank you so much, really.” You’ve been amazing in accommodating that I don’t eat meat. I appreciate that. Marco took a roll, passing the basket to his right, and it went around the table. Everything he makes is the best, really. Marco watched with everyone else as Mark and Jack curiously tried the food before Mark proceeded to shovel it into his mouth, Jack eating much more neatly, but with visible restraint. I think that’s a pretty good sign.

A not-so-small pack of dogs was alternating between circling the table and inspecting the pups, though at that point most of them were on their hind legs with their paws on chairs or the table, wanting to get a nibble of something. There were clear favourites- Krampus was shooed away while Nene was given a small piece of meat for sitting next to Lathe quietly for two seconds. The nine dogs eventually decided to leave the humans alone to their feasting, piling in the couch pen around the tiny pups, napping or watching Tove lick and nose at any pups that squeaked and
squirmed, calming them.

Eren smiled as he sat down beside Lathe, enjoying the sweet silence as everyone stuffed their faces. He got up to make sure that food bowls and plates were refilled so that no one went hungry, the schnitzel being everyone’s favorite and the first thing to be completely consumed. *Good thing I made enough.* Eren watched as people slowly began to pick at their food, having started to get full. His head turned when he heard a soft knock at the door. *Huh? Who’s here now?* “Do you want me to get it?” He started to get up from his chair looking at Lathe to see if he wanted him to go or not. *I know you have your thing with answering the door…*

Lathe patted his arm, standing instead. “No, I’ll get it. You eat.” Lathe pushed in his chair and made his way to the door, opening it. He smiled when he saw Rose on the front stoop, holding a platter of German sweets. <“Hello Rose-”> He was surprised when she held the platter out to him, taking it after a moment. <“Ma’am, thank you, you really didn't have to…”> He ushered her inside, his smile warm.

<“Oh no, deary, really. I had the house to myself today, it was the least I could do to thank you for letting Claire stay over today.”> *She needs to be getting out of the house more…* Rose slowly followed Lathe into the house, immediately greeted by Eren and Mark, Claire following suit a moment later. <“Oh no, please sit and keep eating, I just came to bring some dessert, I hope I made enough with the number of people here.”> Her voice was soft and cheery as Lathe returned with a chair for her. <“Ah, Thank you.”>

<“We were very happy to have her today. These look wonderful, thank you.”> Lathe pulled up another chair for Rose at the table, one side of the table immediately making room for her. <“At this rate, we need an even bigger table.”> Lathe motioned for her to sit, picking up his own empty plate when he saw a few people were finished. He and Eren cleared the table, making sure everyone stayed put. First and foremost, they made sure everyone had another plate for dessert, and Lathe made Eren sit back at the table. “Armin and Marco made something for Eren’s birthday a few days ago…” Lathe carried in the cake with three lit candles on it, setting it in front of Eren. “But first, we have to sing.” He grinned as some of the people at the table groaned in exasperation, though they all sang Happy Birthday with a smile of their faces.

Eren wasn’t expecting a cake to be put in front of him. “Oh my god, guys, this is too much, really…” He blew out his candles when they had finished singing, a large smile on his face. “So you made me make dinner for my own party?” He chuckled as everyone laughed. *It’s good to have people around again, I really like this…* “Well come on, I’m not gonna eat it all.” He waved them all closer, starting to cut the cake up and hand out pieces to everyone, the cookies and German pastries set out along with ice cream, everyone digging in happily. *Wow, this is a pretty good party, I like that everyone’s enjoying themselves… I wish I could call Levi…*

The rest of the night passed rather quickly, everyone enjoying the desserts, especially Rose’s
sweets. After lots of time playing with the flock of dogs and chattering on, everyone left for home, Lathe going through the mountain of dishes methodically, grateful- as he always was- for having enough foresight to get a second dishwasher. *There are too many of us. We need it.*

Mark ambled over after helping get Mark and Jack situated in the guest bedroom upstairs. *Everyone else is practically asleep by now...* “Um... Dad?” I wanna ask if Claire can come over so she can ask Mrs. Rose... Mark moved to Lathe’s side, helping with the dishes and loading them into the dish washers. *I can help...* Maybe that’ll help get a good answer on whether she can come over or not...

“Hm? What’s up, Mark?” Lathe smiled as Mark fell into place in the line, handing him dishes as he rinsed them and letting him arrange them in the dishwashers. *Either you’re being helpful as usual, or you want something and are trying to make me want to say yes before you even ask. ...probably the latter.*

“Can Um... Can Claire sleep over on Friday after school and Saturday so that we can go to my track meet on Sunday?” *I really want her to be able to come over. I really like her... And that’s not my crotch talking...* He continued to put the dishes in the dishwasher, his shoulders slumped, as if expecting Lathe to say no. *I mean he could... None of the other foster parents ever let me bring friends over, or any girls for that matter... And we are at that age that we’d be thinking about stuff like that, so I guess he’s got every right to deny it... It was stupid to ask.* Mark started to shake his head. “S-Sorry... I um... sorry, I shouldn’t have asked... Thank you for letting me have her over today.” *It was nice... And I’m surprised she’ll even talk to me still, especially with what happened.*

Lathe quietly thought about it, but he was surprised when Mark seemed to accept defeat before he’d even spoken. “Hey, I’m just thinking. I wasn't about to just flat-out deny you. Let me ponder this.” Lathe nudged him, glad that Mark perked up a bit more, looking hopeful as Lathe kept washing. *They’re obviously involved enough to be boyfriend and girlfriend. And she’ll be sleeping over with him two nights in a row... and if they’re in the same bed... they are at that age... “......I’m going to say yes. But...”* Lathe held up a finger before Mark could get too excited. “We still need to talk, so brace yourself. I’m just going to get the speech out of the way. Try not to break a plate while I do this.” Lathe handed him another plate, watching Mark pale a bit when he seemed to realise what he was about to go on about. “Both you and Claire are young adults. And I know you two are very close- don’t think your messed up hair and swollen lips went unnoticed.” Lathe glanced over to him, watching him completely flush with embarrassment. “But I’m not here to judge you.” Lathe looked back to what he was doing, his expression mostly neutral. “You’re your own person and all my job is is to make sure you don't get yourself killed or in a mess you really don't wanna be in. That being said- I'm not saying this because you're expected to be at this point already, or that you need to hurry up and get there- but if and when you two become sexually involved, you need to stay safe and protected, without going into too much detail. I'm sure you understand what I mean.” He glanced over, watching him nod, his face buried in his hands. *It's my job to look after you. And to embarrass the crap out of you. It's obligatory.* Lathe passed on the last dish, watching Mark pale them both and start them. “One more thing- come with me.” Lathe nodded to the stairs, walking upstairs with Mark following, dragging his feet. *He can probably feel the impending doom. “One moment.”* Lathe disappeared into his room, coming back out after a
moment. “It’s not because I’m trying to embarrass you, it’s because the last thing you need right now is a kid. And after doing this with Eren, it's obligatory.” Lathe shoved the small package into Mark’s hand before he could protest, smirking when he saw him flush an even darker shade of crimson. It's pretty much mandatory for all my kids now when they start dating. Welcome to the family.

Mark’s face flushed completely, though he looked down to the box in his hands, reading the measurements on the bottom of the box. Shit… I’m gonna have to tell him. “U-Um… I-I appreciate the thought… B-But these won’t fit me…” They’re too small…

Lathe tilted his head a bit, thinking. “…I think we have smaller ones…” We probably do….

“Um… It’s not that Dad… They’re… They’re not long enough…” God this is so embarrassing… “C-Can I go to my room now?” His face was completely red. Oh my god, why!?

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up, taking the box back from him. “One second, and then you can go run away and ask the universe why you got stuck with me.” Lathe disappeared back inside, handing Mark a different box and letting him run off to his room immediately. I'm not sorry. ……but if those ones are correct… when the actual hell did you go through puberty? Those are the same size I use… …I'm not going to question this. Lathe just shook his head, going back into his room, shutting and locking the door.
Chapter 76: Wacky Weekend Part 1

I’ve been having the best week at practice with the track team, and right now I’m in the long distance running… I still get up to do my morning 10 mile run… Only I’ve been doing it in like an hour and a handful of minutes… Maybe I should ask Dad about that… I’ve been so excited since Monday, Claire said it was a go to come over on Friday night and stay the weekend! AHHHH! I’m going home with her soon! We don’t have practice today because we have the meet in two days… Coach told us to Carbo Load tomorrow night too… I wonder if Eren can make me some sort of pasta dish. Mark’s breath caught in his lungs as he saw Claire waiting by his locker with a bag, ready to leave to go home with him. “Hi Claire.” His cheeks were pink as he spoke to her, a happy smile on his face as he put the books he didn’t need in his locker, his stomach feeling as if it’d been taken over by butterflies. Oh god… I hope I put the condoms away… I’ll have to make sure when we get home… I don’t need her thinking I expect sex…

Claire smiled, her own cheeks tinted pink. “Hey Mark. Doin’ okay?” She quirked an eyebrow at him and nudged his elbow, chuckling as he blushed. “I just like poking at you. I understand- I get you all to myself this weekend. It’s a great thought. Claire reached for his hand when he was finished putting his books away, tugging him towards the door nearest the parking lot.

Mark blushed more as he let her tug him along, very few students lingering in the halls at this time. “Eren should be by the car.” “I wonder if we’ll go riding right when we get home? “What do you wanna do when we get home?”“ I could suggest a few things, but only if you can’t think of anything.

“Well, I’m leaving all my homework for late Sunday and study halls… what do you say we go riding again? I really liked that spot by the lake…” Claire smirked, slowing her pace a bit so they were walking side-by-side, fingers laced. Honestly, I just wanna make out in peace. Though the grass did kinda stab my knees and arms, and it probably wasn't nice to your back… “We should bring a blanket or something though, something that'll feel nicer than stabby grass.” I'd happily kiss you senseless on one of the picnic tables, but those probably would be less comfortable.

“Yeah, I can pack a blanket on Charlie’s saddle pack… Maybe we can take a few snacks with us…” He led her to Eren’s car helping get her stuff in and greeting Eren. Once they were in the car, Eren drove them home, opening the front door for them and welcoming Claire to the house once again. “Dad… Can you make us some snacks to take out riding with us?” Mark asked as they came inside, going to the kitchen where he knew everyone was getting Lathe to make snacks. You make really good ones…

“You two are order number six, but I'll see what I can do.” Lathe had his hands full with the other kids hanging off of him, but he nodded to them, managing to keep the kids placated and finishing the couple’s pile of snacks first. “You'll need something to carry them in. You could fetch the picnic basket from the pantry and make a thing out of it if you want.” It's got literally everything except food already in it. “If you wanted something to drink, you'll have to get that yourselves-
sorry, but everyone’s getting antsy.” Antsier than they already were.

Mark nodded, taking his advice and getting the picnic basket, finding that it had a blanket in it already. I’ll still pack one... We might want two. He turned to Claire, a blush on his face. “Sorry, um... I never really asked where you wanted to sleep tonight?” His voice quiet as he stood close to her. *Wherever you want, I won’t push you to sleep with me.*

Claire shrugged one shoulder, her cheeks dusted with pink. “I kinda assumed I’d sleep in the same bed as you... I'm okay with it, but if you're not, that's okay, we can figure out something else...” ...I was kinda looking forward to it tho... dammit...

“No that’s fine, if you wanna go out your stuff in my room, it’s the third on the left.” You can go put your stuff in my room while I get us drinks. “I’ll go get us drinks for the trip.” He went off towards the basement to get at the large water bottle supply they had.

Claire nodded, heading upstairs with her backpack and clothes bag, traipsing inside and dumping her stuff by the foot of the bed. She looked around, inspecting the room. Sparse, tidy... there’s no way his room always looks like this, though. She ran her finger over a shelf, seeing no dust. Aw, he cleaned everything for me. Now. To snoop or not to snoop... I’m snooping. Claire smirked, quietly opening the drawer of his nightstand, just wanting to poke around a little before he got suspicious. Her eyebrows shot up as she saw the box on top of the clutter inside, flushing red. …...what the hell does he have Trojan Magnums for? What, does he expect sex...? And there’s no way he’s that big. It's obvious enough from last week he's big, but... no way. Claire wasn't gonna let him get away with it, snatching two of the foil wrappers and stashing them in her pocket, intent on questioning him later. *If all he wants is sex I'm gonna kill him, dump him in the lake, and steal Charlie.*

Soon enough everything was packed up for the ride, Charlie tacked up, and they were off, the ride through the woods comfortably quiet. Mark’s breath gently huffed against her neck, his arms wound securely around Claire’s waist the entire time. ...okay, this is nice. He is adorable and sweet, but again. Kill him, dump the body, steal the horse. Claire let Mark hop off Charlie first when they reached the lake, jumping into his arms again, the action becoming familiar. She set up camp under the same tree as the week before while Mark tied Charlie to a tree, setting down both blankets. She smiled when Mark sat down next to her and kissed her cheek, both of them immediately rifling through the basket for something to eat. They were quiet as they ate, looking over the calm water, seeming to simply want to enjoy the other’s presence for the moment. At least, Mark was. Claire was formulating a line of questioning, setting down her water bottle. “Hey Mark? I've got a question. A few, really.” Claire moved, sitting down in Mark’s lap again on his thighs, a bit of room between them. I wanna see how quick you catch on. “...is there a specific… reason, you wanted me over for such a long time this weekend, with two overnights?” She crossed her arms, unable to help looking a bit mad. I wanna like you. But I need to question this too.

“Well I had planned to ask you if you wanted to come to the first track meet we had but then I
found out last week that it started really early so I thought it’d be easier for you to stay over to go… And then to stay tonight so we can watch horror movies tomorrow, because I can’t watch them with my brothers and I’ve been dying to watch them with someone.” His voice was steady as he gave her his reasons. *Was I being selfish? If you didn’t want to stay... You didn’t have to agree... I wouldn’t have been upset...*

“...okay, but are you sure those are your only reasons? It didn't have anything to do with you and me, sleeping in the same bed...?" She flatly glared at him after a moment, her expression done when he looked embarrassed and confused. “Mark, I'm only kinda sorry for snooping, but I found your condoms. I wanna know whether you legitimately wanted this to be a chill weekend or if you thought you had me in a vulnerable enough position to get me to agree to let you fuck me.” *There. I said it.*

“*What*? Why would you think I would ever think like that?" His voice sounded hurt as he listened to her. *You went looking through my stuff?* “I asked Dad if I could have you over... He gave me a fucking sex talk after agreeing and he made me take the condoms. I've tried to put them back into his room, I have no intention of using them at all... God no... I... He kept putting them in my room until I just hid them... It was embarrassing enough to go through that with him. If you're that pissed about it I’ll sleep on the couch.” Mark’s voice couldn’t shake the hurt he felt, like he’d been stabbed in the back. *She doesn’t trust me... I should’ve figured that...* He shook his head, moving her off of his lap and onto the blanket next to him, his eyes not coming up to meet hers. *That hurts...*

*I really messed up... “Mark, wait, I'm sorry.”* Claire wanting to hug him tight and bury her face in his neck, but only managed to look him in the face, wanting him to look up. “I'm sorry, I was nosy and poked around a bit, but I saw the big pack of condoms and I freaked out a bit... I didn't think otherwise you'd just want that but I couldn't help but be a little wary when I saw them... I'm not mad, I just got really worried... ...please don't be mad at me...” Claire drew up into herself, internally beginning to panic. *I just screwed myself over... crap, I didn't wanna mess this up... I really like you.... nonono...*

Mark looked over to Claire, shaking his head. “Just forget about it, I'll sleep on the fucking couch tonight.” He could already feel the anger flooding his body start to calm, taking in a deep breath and closing his eyes to calm down. *Don’t snap at her... It’s your own fault for just wanting to be around her... Selfish prick....* He rubbed at his face, trying to think of what to say. “I'm sorry I snapped...” *You probably wanna go home... Great... This worked out so fucking well...*

Claire felt her cheeks flush with shame, tears pricking at her eyes. *Don't cry. Don't do it. You deserve to be yelled at for that. What the hell were you thinking, snooping around and then blatantly accusing him like that?! “...I'm really sorry for accusing you like that... I didn't wanna believe anything I was saying... I was hoping I was wrong...”* Claire wanting to cling to him, but instead just curled up to herself on the blanket, pulling her legs to her chest. *Can we just start this entire exchange over and pretend everything's okay...*
Mark looked over to Claire, his chest clenching as she curled into herself. *No, this isn’t right.* Mark reached out, pulling her into his lap again, his arms wrapping around her waist. “Don’t cry, Claire, it’s okay, I forgive you, just don’t think I’m just looking to fuck you the second I get the chance… I mean yeah, it would be nice, but I’m **not** that kind of person… And because I guess it’s a family tradition, Dad made sure I had condoms… Since he thinks we’re dating… Which I think we are…” *To be honest I’m not really sure what our relationship is labeled as…*

“...is giving someone condoms the second they have someone to potentially fuck a **tradition** in your family?” *Did I hear that correctly?* Her eyes widened in disbelief when Mark nodded, sighing heavily and slumping into his hold, going to cling to him. “I can understand the appeal, but my god, your Dad needs to chill. …...and **are** we dating?” Claire looked up to Mark, a tiny bit scared. “I’d kinda like us to be.” *I wanna date you…. **please** ?*

“*If you want to, that’s perfectly fine with me.*” He murmured softly in her ear before dipping his head down to kiss at her neck. *We came here to make out I believe… It should help us forget about what just happened.* His hands were gentle as they pulled Claire closer to his broad chest. *I just kinda wanna hold you and try and control myself this time around.*

Claire gasped quietly when Mark’s lips met her neck, letting him pull her back into his lap and against his chest. “I’d love to…” *...that means you’re my boyfriend now. I like the sound of that.* Claire clung to Mark’s broad shoulders, letting out tiny whimpers as he kissed and sucked at her neck, letting him take over. *I really like this…* “Uh, o-one question though…” She ran a hand up to his hair when he didn't stop kissing her neck, only humming a bit in acknowledgement. “...w-were the condoms the right size?” *...I wanna know if you’re really that big…*

Mark stopped kissing her neck for only a moment. “*Curious… Are we?*” He nipped at her ear gently, his hands resting on her hips lightly. *They are, but let’s see how long it’ll take her to realize that….*

“M-**Maybe**…” Claire let her hands wander over Mark’s chest, wishing that he wouldn't handle her so gently. Her hands splayed over his chest, running down south, dangerously close to the hem of his jeans. *I really wanna know…. ...and I kinda want to get acquainted…* “Too damn gentle…” She barely mumbled in his ear, though she was immediately rewarded with a rough nip to her neck, his touches becoming much more insistent. *Better.* She let out a small sound of surprise when Mark flipped their positions, Mark looming over her as she rested on her back, wanting him closer. *More… get the hell down here.*

Mark used his larger body to his advantage, caging her under him with his limbs, making sure she had no escape. His mouth soon connected with her skin again, his fingers having moved her shirt to the side so that he could mark her somewhere hidden. *Dad would kill me….*
Claire felt him tug at her shirt, whimpering as he roughly sucked at her flesh. *That's going to bruise... I kinda really want it to... “M-Mark... I can... I can lose the shirt... I-if you want me to...” I'd love it if you wanted to keep exploring....*

Mark looked between her and her shirt, a seductive look overtaking him. “Would you be comfortable with that?” *I don't wanna push you, but that would be great...* His length was already starting to outline itself in his pants, and he could feel his jeans getting tighter, but at the moment he didn’t care. Mark’s focus was directed at Claire, and every little noise she made. *I want to do this right...*

Claire slowly nodded, reaching down to grab the hem of her shirt, pulling it up over her head and tossing it aside. She blushed as Mark drank in the sight of her, feeling very exposed. She was a bit nervous as Mark dipped his head down, though her hands soon came up to thread through his hair, whimpers coming from her throat incessantly without her permission as he started to kiss and nip at her chest, teasing her breast. “...f-feels good...” *More...*

Mark’s eyes looked down her olive skin, his hands coming to tease at her bra, as if wanting to get under it, but not going as far as that until she said it was okay. *I want you to feel in control of this. *His mouth let mark after mark as he trailed down her front, soon leaving open mouth kisses when he got to her abdomen, his sultry eyes looking up to meet hers. *God I love this... I love the noises you’re making... You sound wonderful.*

Claire felt him tug a bit at her bra, and she thought for a moment....*his lips on me there... it'd feel wonderful... “M-Mark... I-I can... I'm okay without m-my bra...” I can lose it... I kinda want to... “...but only if you ditch your shirt too.” There are abs under there. I want them.*

Mark seemed to smirk, pulling back to sit back on his haunches. His hands went to the hem of his shirt and pulled it up over his head slowly, giving her a show. His abs were solid, not as defined as Levi’s, but definitely there. Mark let his eyes wander down to Claire’s awed face. “Like what you see?” *I hope you do...*

“A lot...” Claire reached a hand for him, wanting him back on top of her. She dropped her hand when he didn't move, sitting up a bit. *Oh yeah... Bra first.* Claire reached around her back, unclipping the clothing, slowly and tentatively letting it slip from her chest. She looked away from Mark, her cheeks burning. *I hope you don't think I look weird or something... I just want you to like this...*

Mark shifted down to trap Claire once again, his eyes hungrily looking over her whole front. *They’re small, like the rest of her... That's perfect.* His left hand came up her stomach gently,
slowly cupping her supple flesh. Her skin is so soft. His fingers gently grazed over her mound, gently grabbing it. Mark leaned down to gently kiss around her other breast, his lips soon latching onto a perky nipple and gently kissing it. I want you to feel good too and I really hope I’m doing this right.

Claire’s hands roamed his back, her legs instinctively wrapping around his waist as he sucked on her breast. “Mark… Feels good… m-more…” She whined as he lapped at her chest, gripping his shoulders. More...

But how much more? I’m not really sure what I should be doing here… Mark decided to keep his pace and continue to kiss and suck on her breasts, leaving small marks over the flawless skin. He was lost in his own thoughts as he shifted, his hand claiming her other breast and his mouth beginning to tease her other nipple. I want you to feel really good… And I hope you know what feels good for you...

Claire mewled as he shifted attention to her other breast, her hands buried in his hair. Feels really good… Her hands moved back down his shoulders, wanting desperately to explore him. She let out a sinfully loud sound as Mark carefully scraped his teeth over her nipple, blushing darkly when she realized how much she was reacting to the stimulation. Fuck, I keep forgetting how damn loud I get… She moved her hands to his shoulders, pushing and rolling them over, so that she was on top of him. She moved when Mark’s lips let her go, going to suck marks of her own down his chest. She nearly immediately realized how hard he was as she straddled his crotch. She smirked, dragging her tongue over a patch of sensitive skin, lightly grinding on his clothed hard-on. .... someone's excited… She traced a finger down a small patch of dark brown hair under his navel, a finger brushing the hem of his jeans for a moment. I don't know how far you wanna take this… I still don't want sex. Duh. But there's other stuff too… I dunno. That's your call.

“If you want… I can lose the pants too.” His words were cheeky as he put his arms behind his head to prevent from craning his neck as he watched her. I can tell you really wanna know how big I am… You can go ahead and look, I don’t mind…

Claire rolled her eyes, smirking. Her fingers went to unbutton his jeans, kissing down from his navel as she did. She tugged his jeans down his hips, her eyes widening and growing dark as she saw just how big he was. …fuck, he really is huge… She completely tugged off his jeans, tossing them out of the way before laying on her stomach between his legs, Mark flushing as she hovered over his length, still mostly hidden in his boxers. A finger reached out, tugging at the hem of them. “…would you mind losing these, too?” Please? I have ideas...

Mark looked a little wary, thinking on how she thought he was only after sex, making sure he thought out his next words carefully. “I’m fine with whatever you wanna do… Just don’t push yourself because you think you have to.” I could always just go take care of myself again… And that would be fine… He held his neck up as he watched her between his legs, shifting them apart
so she had more room, and better access.

“I'm not about to ride you or something, relax.” She kissed the outline in his boxers, enjoying the sight of him shivering. “I'm doing what I want because I want to. And I think you'll like it.” She slowly tugged his boxers down, setting the out of the way before she was faced with his bare organ, standing stiffly. “Mm, you really are that big…” She leaned down, nipping gently at the base, watching Mark as she did. You already look like you're about to lose it. She dragged a finger up the underside, watching a drop of precum drip down his impressive length. “Damn, that's hot.” She leaned forward to lick it away before Mark could respond, her hands coaxing his hips to stay in place. She closed her lips over his tip, carefully sucking him, watching for his reaction.

... Did she just say- ....................... Mark’s mind went blank as Claire licked the bead of precum off of his head, a shudder running through his whole body as he felt something pulse through him, which increased the second he felt her lips on his length. That's fucking hot... He couldn’t help but let out a loud whine as she began to bob her head slowly. Oh my god... She’s giving me a blowjob ...

Claire propped herself up on her knees, bobbing her head a bit farther down his length, mindful of her teeth. He's too big... I can't get much of him in... She came off of him, instead opting to lick stripes up and down his length, mouthing at his shaft, her hands running soothingly over his thighs as he shuddered. You sound wonderful...

“Hmm... C-Claire...” he moaned out her name as he struggled to keep his hips from jerking into her hand and mouth. Her lips feel so good... And I’m trying not to do anything wrong... Mark whimpered when she popped off him, her saliva connecting them for a moment before she went back to his length. “Claire...” His words were husky as he enjoyed her mouth all over him. It feels so good, much better than my hand.

“Hm?” Claire looked up to him, dragging her tongue over his slit before stopping to kiss down his shaft. She faked a hurt look, nuzzling near his base. “Oh, is it too much? I guess I can stop...” I just wanna hear you beg.

Mark let out a loud moan as Claire licked his sensitive head, his eyes widening as she stopped. “N-no... Claire, please don’t stop... It feels really good... Please don’t...” But I guess if you don’t want to... I can get up and go take care of myself... Not that I want to do that at all... Mark's shoulders slumped, starting to push himself up off the blanket, expecting to be denied. Shouldn’t’ve gotten my hopes up... just like everything else...

Claire’s hands on his abdomen stopped him, sucking at the underside of his base, effectively stopping him in his tracks. “I'm not gonna stop, Mark. And besides.” She sucked his tip for a
moment, smirking around him as he whined. “You make the most beautiful sounds.” *Yours are my favorite.* She slowly bobbed on him, her hand stroking what she couldn't reach. *So big…*

Mark slid back down to lay on the blanket, closing his eyes as he felt her mouth return to his aching hardness. *Oh my god… She's so good at this… Wait, could that mean that she’s had sex before? She asked about the condoms… And if they fit… That must mean she knew what size they were?* He groaned from the pleasure though, and let out a loud cry as she found a very sensitive spot on his cock, his eyes going wide in an instant and his hands moving to grip the blanket below him. *Oh my god…* He felt his coil beginning to tighten, a sense of dread filling him for a moment… *How are we gonna clean that up? We don’t have anything to put it in…*

Claire noticed when Mark seemed to be quickly nearing the edge, the way he began to shake under her. She didn't stop her ministrations, her lips stopping at his tip, sucking very hard on the reddened flesh as she stroked him firmly. *I wanna watch you cum… and I'm okay with swallowing. I don’t mind it.*

Mark closed his eyes, scrunching his toes to try and keep from going over the edge. “C-Claire… There… There’s gonna be too much…* Ngh, *Fuck!*” He shouted as his coil snapped, his hands slowly beginning to let go of the blanket. The cum that Claire couldn’t handle now stripped across her face as even down her torso. *Oh my god… That was fucking wonderful…* His breathing was already regulated as he was used to running under such conditions. Mark picked his head up to see the scene in front of him. “Oh shit… Claire I’m sorry…” *That’s been built up for a very long time… That had to have been a lot to try and swallow… And I can tell by how much is on you that it was a lot.*

Claire struggled to swallow his load, not managing well, her eyes shut as he came on her face, feeling some hit her chest. *Crap. …probably should've expected that. And he did try to warn me, so… “S’okay.”* Claire licked her lips, though she reached over to the picnic basket for some of the packed napkins, wiping herself off. She smirked at Mark as she did. “You sounded really sexy.” She chuckled when he still flushed, pecking at his cheek. “Just informing you.” *Because seriously. Damn.* She made a small sound of surprise when Mark tugged her back into his lap for a kiss, her eyes slipping shut when their tongues met, kissing languidly. *Mine.* She could feel that Mark was still hard, breaking their kiss and sighing. “Are you insatiable?” She teased him, a hand going to wrap around his thick length. *You're still really hard…*

Mark groaned as he felt her hand grab his length. “Claire… you’ll make it worse… It’ll go away eventually… I want to make you feel good again….“ His hands drifted to her jeans, teasing the hem. “That is… If you're willing to take this off…” *I really hope you are… I want you to enjoy it… You made me enjoy mine… God that was awesome… My body feels like it’s on cloud nine.*

Claire smiled faintly, her head falling into the crook of his neck. “Okay.” She shifted, letting go of his length and moving to unbutton her jeans, tugging them off and out of the way. Her breath
caught in her throats when suddenly Mark’s hands were all over her, one hand brushing down theront of her panties and slipping down to run over the fabric covering her folds, the fabric completely soaked. She shifted on her knees to give him better access, clinging to his broad shoulders. I really want you to take control of this… please….

Mark’s fingers were covered in slick within a few seconds, his voice heady and rough as he spoke. “I see that someone else is excited.” You’re wet… It feels weird… But eh. “You’re gonna have to tell me what to do… I don’t know the first thing in helping you.” Mark admitted honestly, his breath in her ear as he bit her earlobe. I love seeing you shudder when I talk in your ear…

Claire judged her head forward a bit, grateful when he began to nibble behind her ear, the spot sensitive for her. “O-Okay… I’ll help…” Claire shifted them, laying down underneath Mark. “U-Uhm…” She shivered with anticipation as Mark’s hands rested at her hips, slowly dragging her panties down and out of the way. She lay completely exposed to him, wanting him back on top of her. She thought as his hands came back up to her hips, looking to her expectantly for some kind of guidance. “Uhm… s-so, like with you… you can use your fingers or your mouth… be mindful of your teeth, and Uhm… j-just… just go ahead and I’ll tell you what feels good… I don’t know how to explain this to you…” If you understand how sex works in the slightest, you’ll get a decent part of it down.

Mark nodded, slipping down between Claire’s legs, pulling them over his shoulders as he ducked his head down to timidly lick at her rosy folds. I hope I’m doing okay… She tastes sweet… And her slick is kinda thick… His tongue was gentle as he licked a long stripe up her entrance, his nose buried in her pubes as he looked up to meet her eyes. Am I doing this right?

Claire whimpered, her heels pressing into his back. “Y-You… Use your tongue… my clit is really sensitive… so is my entrance…” She whimpered as Mark tentatively nudged the small nub of her clit with the tip of his tongue, shuddering as he began to repeatedly tease it. “Th-that feels really good…” More…

Mark continued his ministrations with her clit, getting a bit ballsy and trying to suck on it gently as his fingers slid up to her entrance, coating themselves again in her slick. He slid a finger into her heat. God she’s so wet… All wet… All for me…

Claire gasped as he sucked gently on her clit, groaning as he slid a finger into her heat. She tried to push her hips down when he did, wanting him deeper. Fuck, feels good… “Y-Yes, like that… god, feels good… m-more…” She was rewarded with another finger, grateful that he slowly began to thrust them in and out, rubbing her deeply as she rocked her hips, in rhythm with his motions. “God, just like that…” Feels good… you caught on so damn quick… thank fuck…

Mark soon had four of his fingers thrusting in and out of her entrance, curling his fingers to try and
massage her insides. God, she’s soft on the inside… I would love it… If I could ever have it… Probably won’t tho… She’ll find some reason to hate me and we’ll break up… And I’ll be depressed for a bit… His shoulders slumped as he thought about things turning out like that, and his actions slowed as he looked away from her eyes. I don’t want it to be like that…

Claire looked down to him with hazy eyes, her voice sounding breathless. “…M-Mark? What’s wrong?” You slowed down… don’t slow down… “P-Please, keep going…” …but. “…did you change your mind? W-We can stop…” Fuck, do you regret doing this? I really fucking hope not...

Mark shook his head, quietly apologizing to her before resuming his ministrations in silence. No don’t be worried about it, it’s just me… You don’t have to worry about anything … His fingers curled around, trying to make her forget about his mind lapse. I’m sorry for stopping… He was mumbling quietly, licking her clit when he wasn’t.

Claire didn’t have much time to be worried, gasping for breath deeply when his fingers curled, rocking her hips insistently. “God, Mark, there… feels so good… please, right there…” His strokes became more firm, her heels digging into his back in an effort to keep still. More… feels good...

Mark continued to pleasure her, his hands more assertive and controlling when he heard her moan. She sounds sexy… Like she’s enjoying it… That’s good, right?

Claire moaned loudly, her breaths coming in deep gasps as Mark pleasured her, panting as he rubbed firmly against her g-spot. “T-that spo, Mark, right there, my God it feels so good there… don’t stop… please… d-don’t stop…” Fuck… She felt incredibly warm, heat slowly pooling in her abdomen. “…w-wanna cum…” Make me cum, please ....

Mark continued his ministrations, his lips claiming her clit, sucking on it with vigor. She wants it like this… He kept his fingers rubbing down on the spot within her that was making her go wild. I love hearing you like this… And I really hope it’ll stay like this...

Claire’s breaths came in pants, her legs shaking as she felt herself creeping towards the edge. “M-Mark… I-I’m gonna… Gonna cum… Nngh…” Claire’s heels dug into his back, unable to hold in a sharp cry of bliss as she felt bliss wash over her, her juices leaking over Mark’s lips and hand. Fuck… so good… ...my god, with just his hands… he feels better than any dick I’ve ever taken… ...fuck… Claire fought for breath, sighing as Mark’s fingers left her, her hips jerking a bit as he licked her clean. She didn't notice him wiping his hand on the blanket as she reached down, pulling him close for a kiss, content with his weight on top of her, wanting the steady presence. “…that was wonderful… thank you…”
Mark was in his own little world as he tried to clean up, surprised as letting out a soft squeak as he kissed her for a moment, his lips feeling numb against hers. I don’t want this to end... But I feel like you’ll find a reason... For all I know you’ll still hold the condom thing against me. He closed his eyes, pulling off of her only a few seconds later. He sat up, looking around for clothes. How long have we been gone? Dad probably thinks we had sex... **Fuck** ... I’ll probably be teased... Who knows, he might even be mad at me. His eyes were sullen as he pulled his boxers on, his long length completely flaccid.

Claire pouted when he broke their kiss early, sitting up and reaching for him. **I want cuddles tho...** *why do you look so sad...?* “Mark...” Claire reached around his middle, her head resting on his shoulder. “...you look upset. You don’t... you don’t regret this... do you...?” Her voice was small, almost afraid to hear his response. **Please don’t regret it... I don’t want this to have ended us if we rushed into being so intimate too fast...**

“No... It’s not you, I promise... It’s just....” He trailed off, his voice small as he lifted his hips up to put his boxers on, covering himself. Mark stood, grabbing his jeans and starting to put them on. **We should get dressed, Dad’ll have dinner ready soon.** “We always get it delivered at the same time...”

Claire nodded just for the moment, dressing and grabbing hold of Mark’s wrist the second they were done, tugging him back down to the blanket. **Yeah, we're not going just yet.** Claire shifted them so Mark’s head rested on her chest, half-sprawled over her as she carded a hand through his hair. “.....Mark, can you please tell me what's wrong? Something’s bothering you all of a sudden and I'm worried.” *I'm worried that what we did isn't sitting well with you and we need to fix something.* “And dinner can wait, please don't just say that we need to get going for that.”

Mark just grimaced, turning his head. “You don’t need to worry about it really... I just... I’ve had a shitty past five years and I just...” **I don’t want you to leave too...** And **I don’t want something to fuck it up...** _But I can’t say that... “I just wanna go home.”_ He mumbled quietly, moving to sit up once again, keeping his eyes away from her. **I’ll do something wrong...** Mark got up after untangling himself from her hold, getting up to get Charlie ready, his mind in a fog.

Claire let him get up, going to pack the picnic basket back up, keeping an eye on Mark, who looked completely out of it. **You look so... what's the word... h... hollow.** Claire set the packed basket on the ground, hugging Mark from behind as he finished getting Charlie ready. “...I wanna keep you.” She quietly mumbled, her cheek pressed to his back. **I wanna keep you... I don't wanna have to give you up... “...I'm sorry for being shitty to you earlier... and I'm sorry about whatever it is that's happened to you... I wanna be here for you.”** _I don’t like seeing you so sad..._

Mark tensed as soon as she wrapped her arms around him. “Claire... I just, if you don’t want it to end.... That’s all I need to know... And that’s all I’ll ever need from you.” **Not many people know about my issues... I don’t want to load them off onto anyone else... Even my Dad doesn’t know...**
“D-Did you pack the blankets?” I wanna go home…

Claire’s hold on him tightened, her thumb running over his stomach soothingly. “...Mark, I don't want this to end. I wanna hold onto you for a very long time if I can. I really do hope we work out.” ...it's kinda a weird thought, when you realize every relationship either ends with marriage or with a breakup. But for right now, I'm keeping you. “Yeah, I packed them… they should probably get washed when we get back.” I'm sure that would be appreciated, even if they don't know what they would appreciate by it. They don't have to know.

Mark nodded, turning to Claire and lifting her up on the saddle. I'll be able to hold you until we get back. He vaulted up behind her, his arms immediately wrapping around her waist, burying his face into her shoulder, taking a deep breath before letting Charlie walk back to the barn. He never lifted his head from the crook of her neck, not saying a word. I feel so drained…

Claire leaned into his touch, able to keep Charlie going in the correct direction as they headed back to the house. He's being clingy all of a sudden... is he scared I'm going to just ditch him? ...well, I was a bit of a bitch earlier... but it was a misunderstanding... that can't still be the problem.... She looked over to the house when it came into sight and they came out of the forest, swallowing hard when she saw Lathe on the back porch, looking up from his book seemingly expectantly from a distance. ...well shit. Claire didn't know whether to just keep going towards the barn or steer for the house, though Lathe answered that for her when he whistled loudly, getting Charlie’s attention when he called for them. Fuck. Charlie declined for the porch, still ambling along, though he obediently stopped just before stepping on the freshly-planted garden, Lathe coming down from the steps.

Lathe studied Mark warily for a moment, seeing the vacant look in his eyes. ...something isn't going well. “Dinner’s been here for quite awhile... why don't you two go inside and eat, okay?” Lathe looked between the two of them, taking Charlie’s lead and heading for the barn after they jumped off. I can't make their decisions for them. But they need to not get carried away with what freedom I'm letting them have as they chill here and make dumb ones.

Mark’s throat was dry as he struggled to swallow, looking at Claire with hollow eyes. “U-Um… Let’s go in and eat.” He led her up the stairs, holding open the door with his head down. I fucked up... She’ll think I’m weird... She knows I have baggage... He tried to clear the many thoughts swirling around his head, getting out plates for the pizza that was left over. I hope she’s okay with pizza... That's what we usually get on Fridays... Oh, I need to tell Dad and Eren that I need to eat carbs tomorrow. “Um... There’s probably some wings in the fridge if you want some of them?” There’s always leftovers…

Claire felt like Lathe could read what they had done easily, her head ducked down in embarrassment. Fuck... there's no way he doesn't have some idea of what we were doing… Claire ambled inside, going over to the kitchen table where things were cleaned up, turning when Mark
got out a plate of leftover wings, another of pizza. ...oh, right, it was pizza night... “Thanks...” She trailed off, holding herself a bit awkwardly while they microwaved themselves leftovers. She felt her cheeks burn with shame as the back door opened again, Lathe coming inside and kicking off his boots. Claire looked up when Mark said he was going to the bathroom, watching him leave helplessly, alone with Lathe whose presence scared her. *Fuck...*

Lathe set down his half-full mug and the scribbled-over printout of medical journals on the table, coming over to Claire. His voice and look weren't judgemental: they were worried. “Claire, do you know what's gotten to Mark? He looks very... vacant. Is everything okay?” He was genuinely concerned, his brow furrowed the slightest bit. *I wanna make sure you two are okay.*

Claire was quiet, trying to think of what to say to the man towering over her. *Well... He's not mad at least... That's a good thing, right...? And he gave Mark condoms... So... Should I tell him? Or should I just gloss over what we did? “Um... I-I'm not sure... He was like that for the whole ride back... Um... I think it might be my fault...”* Her head hung as she heard the microwave beep, not even moving to get their pizza out. *He'll probably wanna take me home...*

Claire was quiet, trying to think of what to say to the man towering over her. *Well... He's not mad at least... That's a good thing, right...? And he gave Mark condoms... So... Should I tell him? Or should I just gloss over what we did? “Um... I-I'm not sure... He was like that for the whole ride back... Um... I think it might be my fault...”* Her head hung as she heard the microwave beep, not even moving to get their pizza out. *He'll probably wanna take me home...*

Lathe looked very worried when she spoke. “Why do you say that? It's okay for you to tell me.” *If whatever you two did you think caused this, it's fine to tell me. I won't be mad, whatever it is.*

Claire’s face flushed in complete embarrassment. “I um... I went snooping in his room... And I found the condoms in his nightstand and I thought he was gonna try and get me to have sex with him... I jumped to conclusions and he got mad at me for thinking he was like them... Then we did a few... Um... Things... And he just seemed really out of it after... And I think I might’ve pushed him too far too quickly...” Claire could feel the trademark sting in her eyes as Lathe looked down on her. *Oh great... I told him... I really told him...*

Lathe looked sympathetic as he heard her sniffle, his eyes softening as he guided her to the island a few feet away, sitting on a stool across from her so that he didn't tower over her. “I'm sorry, I might've caused a bit of this mess... I knew that you two were getting involved at least somewhat the last time you were over... I made sure to tell him it was for whenever you got to that point... it was better than nothing. It's not like he just wants that from you. He really likes you. And as for why he's acting like he is because of what you did...” Lathe looked to his hands, thinking. “...I'm not sure. It could be a lot of things- thinking about what all of this means, maybe. It could be different. It probably is. But whatever it is, I don't think it's your fault.” Lathe rested a hand on your arm. “If he's having some sort of internal crisis because of this, it still isn't your fault. Doing stuff like that isn't some small deal; it can be difficult to manage sometimes. I'm sure he'll be okay with some time. But if you haven't already, try to talk to him. He might open up to you, and if not... I'll smack him upside the head and tell him to quit moping. No, I won't really do that.” He shook his head when she looked up to him in shock. “But I'll try to set this straight if he doesn't want to talk. A moody boyfriend isn't any fun.” He smiled reassuringly to her. *Things will sort themselves out, either way. It'll be okay for the two of you.*
Claire looked up to him, a small tear running down her face. “I-I… I really like him… And I don’t wanna give him up because he regrets something…” Claire folded her arms on the counter, putting her head down as she tried to calm herself down. *I really hope we can be okay…* She picked her head up when she heard a plate sliding towards her, Lathe having gotten her pizza from the microwave and giving it to her, along with a heap of napkins. “T-Thanks…” Claire sniffled softly as she started to eat, her actions weighing heavily on her mind in the silence of the kitchen. *Where did Mark go?*

Mark stood under the stream of hot water running down his whole body, his eyes closed in contemplation, his fists clenching and unclenching. *I fucked up… She’ll leave… She’s probably asking Dad if she can go home… Maybe it was a bad idea that we did that…* He sighed, his shoulders slumping and his head coming to rest on the cool tiles. *Maybe she won’t leave? If she’s still down there when I get out… Maybe I’ll still have a chance to make this right… Get rid of the condoms… And take it back a couple steps.* He shifted to turn so his back took up a majority of the spray, staring at the white tile across from him in the shower.

Lathe set out another plate for Mark, his brow furrowing when more time passed. “Where *is* he?” Lathe moved to the stairs, walking up and seeing Lucas in the nook with a book. “Lucas, did you see where Mark went?” *We're concerned.*

“Yes… Did Claire leave?” He asked quietly. *He looked like a wreck…* Lucas’s eyes went back to his book. *You’re gonna wanna know why he was upset, but I can’t tell you.* He flipped the page, waiting for Lathe to respond.

“No, she didn’t. She's still downstairs, eating. ...do you know what's wrong with Mark?” Lathe watched Lucas immediately shake his head, though his brow furrowed. *You barely even thought of what the problem would be with Mark.* “I know you know.” *You're not great at hiding it.*

Lucas sighed as he set his book down. “I'm not allowed to tell you.” *Nope, I've been sworn into secrecy.* “Mark doesn’t want anyone else to know.”

Lathe sighed, crossing his arms and studying Lucas. “I will allow you a Barnes & Noble shopping spree with no restrictions if and only if you tell me what Mark’s deal is and you share the books.” *Ieva's saving that bribe for a point when I direly needed it. Now is that time.*

Lucas was quiet as he thought about it. *He really doesn’t want anyone to know... But he just offered no restrictions.* “Okay, fine, I’ll tell you, but you can’t tell him I told you.” His eyes looked to Lathe to make sure he was serious about knowing.
Lathe nodded. “I won't snitch. Just please, tell me. It's important.” If it's bad enough he swore you to secrecy, we really need to know.

“He has separation anxiety.”

...that actually makes perfect sense. He was so adamant that his brothers stuck together, and jumping from home to home... this whole ‘foster care’ thing must've really been hard... I know they bounced around a few homes before coming here... it was all too much effort, four boys at once, and Jared needs more attention and help sometimes because he’s autistic... and Philip might be too, so... oh. I've always gotten the idea he really tries to do stuff and make this easier for us, having so many kinds in the house, but I thought he just wanted to be nice... but he's doing his best to make it easy enough that they don't have to leave another home again. And he's scared Claire's going to leave him. They had their first real sexual encounter, and if Claire got mad because of the condom thing and they made up... he's still scared. He doesn't want to lose her, and he's terrified he will anyway. “…Thank you, Lucas. It makes sense. Books next Sunday? Not tomorrow, though. You can write up a list of the stuff you really want. But of course, knowing you, you're going to get ten more books for each you write down so I'm expecting to be there for a very long time.” He grinned when Lucas nodded happily. You and your books. It makes sense that your Lit grade was the highest on your report card.

“Yeah… He’s had it since CPS found us…” After Mom died... And then Dad just up and left us. “He doesn’t like when people know… So just… Give him time, please… He’ll bounce back, especially if Claire stays, he’ll be fine. He doesn’t want you to worry, which is why we keep it a secret now…” Lucas nodded at the date, trying to think of a few books, and making a mental note to make a very large list. I get all the books I want ... Lucas looked to his book and then back to Lathe. “Did they ever tell you how they found us?” It was horrible ... We lost one sibling to it... Maybe more...

Lathe shook his head, sitting next to him on the couch. “I'll give him time with it, okay. ...and they never did tell me how they found you all... what happened?” It doesn't sound like it was good...

“Mom died... Of a Heroin overdose...Dad never wanted us to begin with….” He paused as he tried to figure out how to and where to start. I'm not sure where to start? Do I start with Mark’s treatment as a child? Or mine?

I knew your Mom died... and that your Dad just up and left... but I don’t know the details of it... “...you don't have to tell me everything now if you don't want to...” If you wanna tell just bits and pieces that's okay... and we don't have to talk about it now... but eventually, I'd like to know what all happened...
“Well, Dad tried to drown Mark when he was an infant… So he was in the hospital a lot… CPS was at the house a lot… Dad was put in jail but got out on good behavior… He started to shoot up with Heroin all over again… Mark went through it a couple times… Then they had me, and Dad really went off the handle… he dropped me a lot, to try and get me to die, cause he didn’t want another kid, he beat Mom a lot too…” Lucas swallowed thickly as he thought about the horrible things his father did and got away with. **He was a sick man. And Mom couldn’t do anything about it…**

Lathe moved over, reaching for Lucas and letting him shuffled closer into a hug, running a soothing hand over his back. “I'm so sorry… that's horrible …” **But we’re never going to be like that. We’re going to take really good care of you four. We give so many shits about you all. …but to imagine that your own father wouldn’t even allow his own children to just live … that's… I can't understand it. “…what happened when Jared was born?” If he flipped his shit when he had two kids… I wonder what happened when he found out he had three …

“Well…. We were gonna have a sibling before Jared… My dad was furious… He beat Mom and then made her almost overdose… She lost the baby at the hospital… He beat Mark a lot more after that… And when Mom had Jared, he just got high all the time… He would slip drugs into Jared’s food, he’s got autism because of that really.” **He was absolutely horrible …**

Lathe looked pained to hear that, holding Lucas closer when he sniffled. **You would've had another sibling... maybe not a brother, maybe a sister... but they weren't allowed to live.... that's..........** “M' so sorry… that’s got to be really hard to know…” They were quiet a little while, Lathe murmuring quietly to Lucas as he tried to control his breaths, the boy shuddering in Lathe’s arms for a bit. Lathe rested his cheek on his head, Lucas having shifted so he was practically in Lathe’s lap. “...and Philip?”

Lucas rested his head on Lathe’s chest. “Dad got even higher… Mom couldn’t take it and overdosed… She couldn’t take it anymore…. She was **gone** … But Mark **found** her… He was **10** … Our father ripped him away from Mom’s body… She did it at home, and died with the needle still in her arm…” **Mark was screaming ... Dad told me to take Jared and Philip downstairs.... I was 8 when it happened... We were all skin and bones, and we didn’t want to get whipped with his belt so we followed his directions.**

Lathe gently rocked them when Lucas’ hands gripped his sweater, feeling his cheeks growing hotter. ……that’s.... **fuck** …. “Nobody ever deserves that… your Mom didn’t deserve that abuse… neither did all of you… and I can’t… I can't understand what it must’ve felt like… to see that…” **I knew something bad had happened... but I didn't know it was... so fucking awful ...** Lathe held him a bit tighter. **I'm not gonna let you be hurt like that again. I'm going to take good care of you four and make sure you don't get split apart. You're staying together.**
Lucas sniffled as he held onto Lathe still. “Dad beat Mark before throwing him at Mom’s body. He left, taking his keys and driving off…. I remember Mark screaming at Mom to wake up…. And to open her eyes, and he wouldn’t leave her body… We didn’t have a way to get to school, or feed Jared, we were all skin and bones…. CPS got called… And they came in and took us… They had to pull Mark from Mom’s body…it was starting to decompose and really stink… We weren’t found for a whole week.” I was picking in people’s trash to find food for us… Mark lost so much weight…

It hurt, an image in Lathe’s mind of the four children’s faces gaunt, jaws and cheekbones sharp, eyes sunken and dark, not knowing what to do besides stick together. …….. “……I can’t say I’m sorry enough…” Lathe carded a hand through his hair. “…..you all don’t have to worry about something that horrible happening again… if I can help it, I’m going to do what I can to keep things much better for you…” I just want you to be happy…. and stay that way...

“They took us to separate hospitals… Mark started to freak out that we weren’t together there first… We’d been split up to try and get adopted quicker… Especially me… Philip and Jared… They thought Mark would be a lost cause after 10 years of abuse… His scars are mostly faded now… But… His back is laced with small silver lines… You can’t see them unless you look for them… They put Mark in a home across town from us… And he ran away to the orphanage we were in just to see us before the agents came and ripped him away from us once again. I was told he had a massive breakdown after… And I knew that he had separation anxiety before the program took him to get a mental health exam…” He was so drawn in...

He really, really wanted to hang onto his brothers… I can’t imagine anyone who wouldn’t be torn up if their brothers were suddenly gone… “He would've been pretty old to be adopted… but he went all the way across town on foot…” Lathe smiled faintly, rubbing his back.

“Barefoot…. His feet were all cut open and bleeding, and he didn’t care.” I remember looking at his bloody feet as he walked in…. They were raw ...

“He cared so much about you three. He didn’t want to have to let his family go… or what was left of it.” …that would've been hell, having to run across town barefoot to see your siblings just to be dragged off moments later…. “…how did they let you all stay together?” They would've fought hard before giving in…. a pair of siblings I would understand keeping together, but four of you as one unit? The chances would've been minuscule of you all getting adopted or cared for properly...

“Mark’s mental health… It continued to get worse until the doctors had to step in, because he wasn’t eating or sleeping and he would pace at night because he couldn’t sleep… We were used to sleeping together on the couch, bodies on bodies… And to go to having your own bed, even if it was small… Was a lot to handle.” I should really just start writing this into a book… Maybe someone would read it? And maybe the system can change? Maybe kids won’t need to go through what I went through?
“How were you others holding up? It sounds like it hit Mark very hard, but what about you?” If he was reacting that badly... it must've certainly affected you and the others at least somewhat. Something clicked, in Lathe’s mind. ...sometimes you four will be running around the house stirring up hell, or you act like you're each other’s worst enemy, and then ten minutes later I just find all four of you in a pile on the couch. ...you four really care about each other.

“Well, we deal with it as best as we can.... Jared still doesn’t understand what happened or why we don’t have a Mom or a Dad like any other person… And Philip has known nothing outside of the foster system…. I think it hit Mark worse because he grew up with it longer than anyone… And he was really attached to Mom which is what I think really set it off.” He’s taking an awfully long shower… Lucas lifted his head as he heard the stairs creak, seeing Claire timidly come upstairs.

“So she still is here…” Claire’s words were soft, her cheeks flushing in embarrassment as she remembered what she’d told Lathe only minutes ago. He knows we did something… He was chill about it… But it looks like Lucas has been crying… Should I ask to go home? I mean it’s late but I know where the spare key is… “Sh-Should I call my grandmother to get me?” I'd completely understand… You probably don’t want your son having sex or anything of that nature. Claire’s hands were trembling right along with her whole body.

Lathe looked up when Claire spoke, not having noticed her walk up the stairs. “Claire, you don't have to leave. He's most likely just taking a shower. ...are you okay?” He could see her trying not to shake like a leaf, reaching with his other arm, the one not holding Lucas to his chest, patting the spot next to him. “You can chill with us if you want.” He watched her hesitate, knowing she wouldn’t want to be rude, but also didn't want to intrude on whatever his and Lucas’ conversation was. “You don't have to. It's fine. ...but I think he really wants you to stay. We all do- you're wonderful company. And after what happened earlier, I don't think walking out on each other is what you two need.” I'm sure that if you left, based on what Lucas told me Mark would probably have a breakdown… and I can tell you want to stay. You two can cuddle and make up later tonight, and it'll be okay. “You can check his room, see if he’s there- I never got past the guard dog.” Lathe nodded to Lucas, smiling faintly as the boy chuckled quietly on his arms for a moment. One thing at a time.

Claire nodded and she slowly crept past the two of them. Lucas was crying? Why was Lucas crying.... She made her way to Mark’s room, opening the door quietly and her eyes widening as she saw him in his naked glory going through his dresser to get boxers. Her eyes widened and she yelled in embarrassment as she turned quickly and closed the door with a soft slam. Oh my god... He was naked... Her breathing was in pants as she slumped down to the ground with her back against the door. FUCK!

Mark’s head whipped to the side as he heard the door opening, his face flushing as Claire yelped
and closed the door as she retreated to the hallways. *I think she saw me...* **Fuck** ... He put his boxers on and he put a pair of sweatpants on before heading to the door and opening it for her, watching as Claire gracelessly flopped down on the ground between his feet. “Uh… Hi…” He blushed as she scrambled to her feet, her hands still shaking minutely but he didn’t notice. “Did you eat?” *I hope you did...*

Claire flushed, looking away. “Y-Yeah, I did… we were kinda worried when you didn't come downstairs again to eat... your food got cold... again. Did you um... take a shower or something? Your hair looks wet.” *You probably did... a warning would've been nice so I wouldn't worry so damn much.*

“Oh, yeah... Sorry... I just needed to clear my head... Do you wanna go back downstairs? I know everyone else is probably watching Netflix in the theater room... I’ll go warm my food up again.” He stepped out of his room, fully prepared to go downstairs, not even really acknowledging that he had hickeys all over his chest. *I’ll go eat, if you wanna come down with me...*

Claire reached for him, stopping him. **Fuck, Lathe can't see you like that** . “Uhm, Mark... you might want a shirt.” She ran her thumb over one of the marks, tugging him back to the room. **Shirt. ...sadly. I'd love to stare at your abs all day, but I don't wanna explain the hickeys to a bunch of kids while they're still innocent.**

Mark was confused that he was dragged back into his room. “Huh?” He looked down, flushing in embarrassment as he saw he had multiple hickeys across his chest and abdomen. “Oh... I didn’t even realize...” **Thank you for saving me from embarrassment.** “Thanks...” He went into a different drawer and pulled out a t-shirt, putting it on, a blush on his cheeks as he led them out towards the stairs, only to stop when he saw Lucas crying in Lathe’s arms. Huh... *I swear if someone hurt him...* Mark saw red for a moment, clenching his fists. “What **happened** ?” Mark’s voice was both angry and worried. *What happened!?*

Lathe looked up, clutching Lucas closer when the sound seemed to set him off even more, sobbing into his shoulder. “Mark, it's okay, nobody hurt him... he’ll be fine. Promise.” He looked from mad and worried Mark to Claire, his voice soft. “You two should go downstairs, eat and chill, okay? I've got him.” **He'll be okay. Swear it. .....it's just that this isn't easy to talk about.**

Mark calmed down when he knew that it wasn't something that he could beat someone up over. “ Alright... We’ll go downstairs...” *I'll talk to him later...* He took Claire downstairs and to the kitchen to reheat his food. “Um... I'm sorry I just kinda up and left... I needed to clear my head.” **Please understand I didn’t try to leave you.**

“I-It's okay...” Claire wrapped her arms around his middle as he stood near the microwave,
burying her face in his warm neck. He smells nice... “......I'm sorry I keep asking, but... you... you really don't regret this...?” I can't be sure... you said you didn't... but you're acting so weird... that worries me...

Mark paused, turning his head to her. “No, I don’t... I really enjoyed it, thank you.” His eyes were softer than they were a few moments before. “It was nice... And I’d love to do it again with you... But...” How do I tell you without you wanting to leave?

Claire felt relieved when he spoke, though she sounded wary when Mark trailed off. “...but...?” I loved what we did... and I really like you... but what has to change? I can change, what we do can change, that's fine... I just wanna know what it is... because I might not be able to do what you're about to ask me to. I need to stop worrying, he hasn't even asked yet...

“But I have baggage... And not a lot of people know about it, Dad doesn’t even know...” Fuck... How do I tell you that I have separation anxiety .... Or that I have abandonment issues?

Claire’s hands ran over his back gently, still resting her head on his chest. She relaxed a bit when his hands wrapped around her waist, the two of them standing there comfortably. “...everyone’s got their issues... ...if you don't want to tell me right away, it's okay... we can go at whatever pace you need if that's what you mean... I don't mind.” Every new relationship, or even old ones, I've heard, need work... you tell me whenever you want.

Mark nodded, leaning down to kiss her forehead. “Thank you... I just, it’s really embarrassing, and not a lot of people take it well, and I just don’t want that to happen all over again.” I’ve had too many people leave me...

...is it really that bad? “I'm sure it’s not that bad. But it’s okay. Whenever you tell me, I won't judge. For right now, we’re cool.” Claire stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek, smiling when Mark pecked her lips. “Now someone needs to stop stalling and eat dinner, dammit.” Baggage, later. Food, now.

Mark made an exasperated noise as he flung his arms in the air, putting his plate in the microwave and eating it up. Well, maybe I’ll be okay with this... Hopefully... but I don’t want her to get really close if she’s not gonna stay...

Claire smiled when Mark exasperatedly sighed, standing up tall and giving his neck a rough nip before letting him go, enjoying the scandalized look on his face before going over to the table. The rest of the night was rather uneventful, the two of them monopolizing the living room TV before going to sleep late, cuddling close. ...he's really warm... Claire enjoyed the arms wound strongly
behind her, laying on top of his chest, his heartbeat in her ear. The steady sound lulled her to sleep, waking up in the early afternoon. Mark’s hands still a steady presence in the small of her back. She shifted her head a bit to look up to his face, looking particularly handsome in the dim, light, hair mussed and lips slightly parted in sleep. *Fuck, he’s hot… I’m so fucked. Hm… he hasn't woken up yet…* Claire carefully shifted, making sure she didn't wake him up as she moved lower under the covers, nudging them back a bit. *It's late enough in the day to be sleeping… and I wanna do this, so.* Claire tugged his sweatpants over his hips, doing the same for his boxers. She brushed her hair out of her face, ducking her head down and kissing a line down from his navel to his base, lifting his flaccid length with one hand and wrapping her lips around the tip, gently sucking. She lightly stroked him as he began to harden, her eyes never leaving his face. *hm… I wonder when he’ll wake up…* Claire didn't stop her ministrations, glancing up every time Mark made a quiet sound, or his breath huffed, but he was still solidly asleep even when he was cumming, Claire swallowing what she could and licking up the mess from his chest. She looked back up to his face, her eyebrow quirking when his eyes were still shut. She shifted further up to kiss at his neck, sucking more marks onto his skin as her hand turned to his length, still painfully hard even after his orgasm. *Come on, wake up. I wanna hear you moan, dammit, it sounds hot….*

Mark shifted from Claire’s mouth, his head turning the other way as he started to wake up. His whole body feeling like he was going through an adrenaline rush, though when he cracked open his eyes he found himself hard as a rock and his reddened length in Claire’s hand. He let out a soft groan as he started to fully wake up. *Damn… She’s giving me a hand job to wake me up?* “C-Claire?” His voice was rough and deep as he turned his head back to see her. *What are you doing?*

“You didn't wake up when I blew you… and you're still hard…” She grinned cheekily to him, lapping at a new, reddening mark in apology. “Good morning, babe.” Her thumb brushed over the slit of his cock, mouthing at the joint of his neck. *Good morning indeed.*

Mark groaned, tilting his head to give her more room. “Hmm… You already blew me? Fuck…. That’s hot…” *What time is it?* His eyes searches he room looking for his clock his eyes widening as he saw the clock said 1pm. *Holy shit… “Did Dad come up here yet?”* He whimpered as her thumb brushed his slit once again. *He’ll want us awake soon…*

“Nope, haven't heard a thing from him.” She buried her nose into his neck of a moment, breathing in his scent. “Though I know someone I'd love to hear a lot more from…” *You sound so hot when you moan…* She nibbled the spot behind his ear, her teeth scraping his skin. *Please?*

Mark’s throat betrayed him as he let out a loud moan, his hand immediately coming up to cover his mouth. He tried willing his hardon to go away, but with her hand working him like that, he couldn’t help but shudder. “C-Claire… Ngh… We’ll get caught…” *That’ll embarrass the both of us…*

“Then try to stay quiet. But the door’s locked, and your Dad probably has child-wrangling to do.” *...and he seemed so chill with the fact we got sexual yesterday. I told him and he just seemed to*
take it in stride. ...he probably expects us to either sleep in or grope each other, or both. And I can live with that.

Mark groaned as he slowly let his hand fall from his mouth. It feels good... Really good. “I-I... Fuck... Slept t-through you b-blowing me?” He moaned in between his words, hissing when she pressed hard on a sensitive area on his length. Mark felt a pulse run through his body, warming up and his toes beginning to flex from the pleasure.

“You did. A shame, too. My lips are too sore to do it while you're awake.” Claire grinned when Mark glared at her, his look not very convincing when his pleasure was obvious. She slid back down his body, releasing his length from her grasp and lavishing him with attention from her tongue, her hands running over his strong thighs. He's got muscles... and a voice, shit... I don't think anyone's sounded as wonderful as you. And that's me being serious.

Holy shit…” Mark’s eyes widened as he propped himself up on his elbow, the other hand going to run through Claire’s long hair. “I’d love to wake up like this from now on.” His voice was still husky as he watched her with shaded eyes. It feels so fucking good. Moans filled the room as he felt his coil beginning to tighten. I want more... But you’ll leave if I ask for that...

“Holy shit…’’ Mark’s eyes widened as he propped himself up on his elbow, the other hand going to run through Claire’s long hair. “I’d love to wake up like this from now on.’’ His voice was still husky as he watched her with shaded eyes. It feels so fucking good. Moans filled the room as he felt his coil beginning to tighten. I want more... But you’ll leave if I ask for that...

“If you keep making sounds like that... I'd be more than happy to oblige.” Claire locked up his shaft, her lips sealing once again over his tip and sucking hard, firmly pumping him when he whined and whimpered, knowing he was close. He was trembling when he came again, Claire swallowing down his slightly smaller load, her other hand running up and down his thigh, feeling the shaking muscle. She came off of him when he finally began to soften, her hands roaming him as she leaned up to peck the corner of his lips, Mark catching her off guard when he suddenly pounced, getting her under him and kissing her deeply. She smirked, leaning up into his touch. I'd be very happy to do this all the time...

Mark slowly leaned his body down to press her down into the mattress, happy that he was much taller than her and much stronger so he could appropriately cage her. He broke the kiss, a large smirk on his face. “Hmm, so, how long do you wanna stay in bed?” He asked quietly, his hand going down to his pants to pull them back over his hips. I wanna know, we get to go watch movies while Dad and Eren cook dinner all day today.

Claire sighed as she felt his weight on her, her arms wrapping around his back, pulling him closer. “Hmm, a while...” One of her legs hiked up a bit, her hips rising an inch from the bed, as much as she could with him pressed against her. “...if you want to help me with something...” Fuck, I want your hands on me again...

“Hmm... Should I?” His voice was still rough from waking up minutes ago, and his eyes still dark
as he nuzzled his head into her shoulder. What does she want help with? If I do what I did last night everyone in the house will know what the fuck we’re doing. His hands were gently reaching under her head, tangling in her hair and moving her slowly to give him more room by her neck. Mark arched his back, his hardon still slowly going down, but his bulge against her crotch now. Hmm, I wonder if you would let me?

Claire moved her head to give him more room at her neck, unable to help from grinding up to him a bit when she felt him press his hips down. “...p-please do... I’d... ah- appreciate it... Mark for fuck’s sake…” Claire felt impatient, though she immediately shut up when Mark’s hands firmly grasped her ass, instantly putty in his hands. …god, your hands... I want them everywhere...

Mark let his knees spread out wider to get better balance over her, his hands reaching down to curl her ass and pull her against himself. Hmm... You fit right up next to me... His hands moved around to the hem of his night shirt, slowly pulling it up to reveal her perky nipples. Shit that’s so hot... His mouth dove right in, sucking on a decadent bud without a second thought while he ground against her, slowly getting harder. Hmm... I wonder if you’d let me take our clothes off...

Claire whined as Mark sucked on her breast, trying to move her hips back against Mark’s, feeling him harden against her nether. Fuck... “O-Off...” Claire managed to move her arms, tugging her nightshirt off of her and tossing it out of the way, moving to Mark’s top, wanting that off too. Fuck it, I want these clothes gone.

Mark froze the instant the stuttered words left her lips. D-Did I do something wrong? His eyes were full of concern and slight panic before he saw her tugging her shirt off. Oh... She means the clothes... Mark pulled back to sit on his ankles, pulling his shirt over his head and pulling it off and away. What else do you want off? His eyes followed her movement, wanting to follow her instructions to a ‘T’. I want you to be comfortable... What are we doing?

Claire sat up, following him up and resting her hands on his waist, trailing back down to his sweatpants hem. She leaned her forehead against his chest, staring down at his abs and the growing bulge underneath them. “...u-Uhm... c-can we... can we get rid of everything?” I wanna feel you again... please...

Mark nodded, his hands coming to her shoulders to gently push her back down onto his bed, his hands then trailing down her body to pull at her pants. He let his fingers hook into both her pants and her underwear, dragging them both down in an instant. I hope you’ll be able to keep it in... He started to situate his head between her thighs. Is this what you want? I can do this.

Claire flushed when his head dipped down to her nether, though she reached out, stopping him, drawing a bit closer into herself for just a moment before relaxing again. “N-No... you too.
Mark’s eyes seemed to grow dark as he shifted away from Claire, slipping off the mattress to pull off his sweatpants and leave them on the floor. He picked his way to the nightstand, opening the top drawer and pulling out a condom. I don’t know what the hell she wants to do… So just get this in case… He set it aside for now, slipping back under the covers with her, his eyes drinking in her naked form with utmost reverence. She’s beautiful...

Claire flushed as she watched him strip, eyeing his sculpted ass without shame. God, he’s gorgeous… She watched him go through the nightstand, her eyes widening when he pulled out a condom and placed it on top, letting him slip back into bed and on top of her. “...d-did you… uh…” Claire looked away, picking her words carefully, reassured a bit when Mark’s hands rested on her hips. “I-I know how mad I got yesterday… a-about those… I-I'm not mad anymore, and… and I'd trust you… I-if you really...if you really wanted to…” ......I don't think I wanna go there yet though…. but… if you wanted to… I don't doubt it'd feel wonderful… but… I don't... I'm not sure...

Mark shook his head, laying down against her, looking into her eyes. “We don’t have to unless you're completely sure you want it… It’s just there in case you decide you're ready… that’s all it is, I can wait.” He murmured, softly in her ear, feeling his length throb between his thighs. I’m hard… Hmm, well we could do something else without going all the way… Mark arched his back, which put his warm length on top of her heat, letting it rest there, taking up heat. She’s so freaking warm...

“I-I don't want to… not now… t-too soon…” It's only been a week since we fucking kissed, I need more time than that. Claire felt Mark’s length brush over her folds, feeling it perfectly curve and sit in her folds, slick and hot. ......fuck, I'm beginning to regret that decision… Claire whimpered, one hand moving to keep his hips in place, the other tugging him down for a hot kiss, feeling his tongue invade her mouth. ....it's so soon…. fuck, I kinda want it… but... fuck, I don't know...

Mark’s tongue wrapped around Claire’s though he pulled back seeing the confusion in her eyes. “Do you want me to stop?” He asked quietly, kissing her cheeks, shifting back, which rubbed himself against her clit. Fuck that felt good… I’m hard again ...

“N-No, I'm okay… I just…” I can't decide whether I want you to fuck me into the mattress or not…. ....fuck, I really kinda want you to... but you probably don’t… fuck… She whimpered loudly when he shifted, her hands gripping his hips tightly to stop him, grinding back against him, her mouth open in a silent moan as he slid against her folds and her clit, the slickness overwhelming. “....f-fuck that feels good…” Get the fuck back down here. She let Mark reclaim her lips, moaning into his mouth as they ground against each other, their nethers slipping against the other. Claire’s nether began to ache, knowing how close they were. ....I could reach the condom if I wanted to… fuck ... I don't know what to do ... I... I want him... I really fucking want him... Claire reached blindly for the nightstand, picking up the foil wrapper. She broke their kiss for a moment, her eyes
pleading with him as she showed him the wrapper. “...M-Mark… I really want you… I-if it's okay…” God, please say yes...

Mark’s eyes were blown wide with lust as he slowly reached to take the wrapper from her, pulling his thick length away from her heat, using his teeth to open the condom and put it on his length, slowly rolling it down to his base and making sure it didn’t slip. It fits… He put his hands over her shoulders, staring down at her as his tip nudge her entrance. “Are you sure?” I will, I’ll do whatever you want...

“I-I really want you… b-but…” Claire tried to shove aside the ache in her nether for a moment, looking to Mark’s eyes. “A-Are you okay with this?” I want it… but if you don't… we won't. I won’t make you do that just for me...

“Promise me you'll stay?” He asked quietly as he reached his head down to kiss her nose, his eyes looking into hers for her answer. I don’t want you to leave after we finish… I don’t think I can take that...

“I'll stay.” She immediately promised him, her legs slipping up to hook behind his back. “I wanna stay. It's not like I would want to leave after this. I promise. Really.” She tried to sound genuine even as she sounded rushed, swallowing hard and trying to compose herself, finding it hard with Mark poised to enter her. “......I want to stay with you after this. This isn't the end of us. This isn't all I'm here for. I'll stay.” She reached up to cup his cheeks, fingers playing with the hair at the nape of his neck, her eyes tracing his features. …...

She’ll stay… She’s not gonna leave after this. He smiled softly, leaning down to kiss her for a moment before slowly pushing his head into her tight entrance. I don’t know how much of this you'll be able to take, we'll go slow. Mark groaned as his hands moved to rest on her hip, ready to pull her back onto his length. Only my head’s in…. She feels so freaking warm...

Claire whined as he entered her, panting as she realized how thick he was. ...fuck, he's so big... “...B-Big… ngh…” She pushed at Mark’s hips with her feet a little, slowly coaxing him into her until they were flush, the sensation of being completely full perfect to her. He hasn't even moved yet… and he feels wonderful already… “Y-You… you can move… but... start gentle… please…” Don’t worry, you’ll get to pound me in a little while. She was practically drooling at the idea of it, moaning deeply when Mark ground into her a bit before moving to thrust. Fuck...

Mark slowly pulled out almost to the tip before slowly thrusting back in. She’s gotta get used to how big I am.... He gently pulled her hips closer to his as he thrusted, his fingers kneading into her side and trying to get her to relax around him. She’s so tight, it feels so good... “hmm… Claire, you’re beautiful …”
She could only imagine what she’d looked like, desperate for him to fuck her and moaning freely as he started his rhythm. She tried to smirk but could only manage a faint smile, reaching for his cheek. “You're so handsome…. it hurts…” She kissed away the worry at the corner of his eye at that. “I… h-hah… m-meant that… in a good way…” It's a compliment…. …fuck, it feels so good…. “I-I… f-feels good… feels really good…” Her moans filled the room, getting used to Mark’s size, grateful when he built up to a decent pace, her breath coming in deep pants. “M-Mark… so good… so good to me…” …I love this...

Mark groaned loudly, his hips pulling out and then snapping back into her, his hands easily leaving bruises on her hips as he used them for leverage. Oh my god… It feels sooo good… “Hmm… C-Claire… Y-you're so tight …” He could feel his body growing warm as he started to quicken his pace, and really start to pound her into the mattress. “Shit…” This is amazing …. Mark didn’t notice anything around them at that point, completely focused on Claire and how she writhed under him. God that’s so hot.

Claire’s back arched, whimpering as Mark started to really pound into her, her hands scrabbling for purchase on his broad shoulders. “F-Fuck, Mark… haaa…” She felt very warm, heat slowly growing between her legs. “Feels good… oh god it feels good… hah…” Whimpers came incessantly from her throat, Her eyes raking over Mark’s form above her. God… he's amazing….

Mark’s eyes were locked on her’s, watching everything that made her moan and shudder, taking note of it. Holy shit… But I haven't found your spot yet…. He shifted his thrusts as he pounded into her, trying to look for the spot that made her go wild. Where is it? Mark felt her shake in his arms, hopeful that he wasn’t hurting her as he continued to pound into her. “C-Claire…” He curled his toes as he felt the heat around his whole body build, knowing that he would be able to feel himself coming to the edge soon. Hmm, I hope I can get her to cum before I do…

Claire whimpered as he shifted around inside her, her mouth falling open in a silent moan as he reached an angle that felt perfect , her hands moving to grab his hips, keeping him at that angle. “M-Mark…. right there… that feels great… s-so good…” Her hands moved back to his shoulders, her voice breathless as he relentlessly pounded into her, feeling a strong heat pooling, beginning to ache for release. “I-I'm close… fuck, Mark, so good…” I'm gonna cum...

Mark smirked as he found that spot for her, continuing to thrust as deeply as possible for her. I love this... I love this so much... “Cum for me….” His voice deep as he moved his hand so his thumb rested on her clit to rub it and help her get there. I hope this’ll make it more pleasurable... Mark could feel the warmth beginning to build in his abdomen, starting to pant as his grip tightened on her hip. I want you to feel good...

Claire gasped, letting out a shuddery moan as his thumb rubbed her clit. “F-Fuck… Mark… I.....”
She gasped loudly, her breath in short pants, letting out a strangled cry as she felt herself cum hard, tightening around Mark. *Fuck... I love this...*

Mark let out a loud cry as he felt Claire tightening around him. *Fuck... Tight...* He could barely get himself to continue to thrust, his pleasure coming in a wave and forcing him over the edge.

Claire pulled Mark close as she felt him pulse inside of her, feeling bliss wash over her, both of them soon basking in a hazy glow. “Mark… that was wonderful…” Claire felt him slip out of her heat, going to throw out the condom before coming back to the bed. She reached out and pulled him close, lazily kissing each other as they relaxed on the bed, tangled up in the others warmth. Soon she shifted them, resting her head on his chest, content. They laid there for a while, before Claire spoke some minutes later. “......I'm hungry, and there's a problem.” She felt Mark tilt his head down to look at her. “...I don't wanna get up.” She grinned as Mark sighed in exasperation. *I'm being legit, here. Food.*

Mark rolled his eyes as he got up out of the bed. “I’ll see what I can get from the kitchen…” He looked for his boxers, and slipped on his sweatpants and shirt on, when he heard a knock at the door. He made sure to give Claire her clothes and make sure she was covered in the blanket first before opening it. He had a huge blush on his face when he saw Eren on the other side of the door.

“I uh.....” *I don't know what to tell you.*

Eren shook his head. “Well... A) You both are really loud so it’s a good thing that everyone else is outside in the backyard... B) Get dressed and come eat, we made pasta for lunch since you both missed breakfast. C) Dad hopes you used a condom, and D) Good job! But make sure you take care of your lady.” Eren smirked and slapped his shoulder before scampering off. *Hahahahaha, I've been wanting to say that to someone! Well now I have some brothers I can tease...*

Mark just stood there in shock, unsure of what to think. “Um... Claire, I believe we’re expected downstairs together.” He murmured quietly, seeming to have his tail tucked between his legs. *I don't wanna go alone either...*

“...that was the last interaction between you and Eren I ever expected.” *...and now we have to go downstairs where your Dad and brother are, who know we had sex. Fuck...* Claire got dressed, tugging on her jeans and a tee shirt, making sure no Mark's were visible on the other’s neck. She brushed out her hair so it wasn't wild, putting it in a bun before she turned back to Mark. “...well, let’s go see what happens...” *I'm not sure I wanna anymore.* “...we could just go out through the window...” She tried to make light of it, but Mark still looked like he was dreading it as much as she was. “...fuck it, let's just go, I guess.” She wanted to drag him out by the arm, so she did. *...after my one real interaction with Lathe... ...I don't think he could be that mad about it...*
Lathe glanced up when Eren traipsed down the stairs again, tilting his head. “And?”

“They’re coming, don’t worry.”

“Good.” Lathe kept peeling apples, piles of vegetables and fruits next to him that needed peeling and chopping. *Hopefully they know I’m not about to tear their heads off.* He looked up when two other pairs of footsteps sounded down the stairs, seeing Mark and Claire waking down with each other, as if they had heard the world was ending and they couldn’t do anything about it. “You two can stop moping now.” Lathe chuckled when they looked at him in shock, waving a hand to the table. “Eat your pasta before it gets cold. All I’m going to say about you two is that if I see either one of you crying, I’m on a manhunt for the other. You used protection?” He watched them both flush, seeing them nod. “Good. That’s all I’ve got to say.” Lathe shrugged one shoulder, going back to his peeling. *It should go without saying that you two need to take good care of each other. And I’m not about to scream at you for making that decision on your own. It’s not mine to make. As long as you two aren’t dumb about this, we’re fine.*

Mark seemed to sigh in relief as Lathe took what they had done in stride. *Well that went better than expected.* “Um… Y-You're not mad at us?” His voice was a little shaky as he sat down with Claire. *Someone needs to ask, I need to be sure… I don’t want you to be secretly mad at me….*

“Nope. I’m not mad about this. You two get to make your own decisions. My job is just to remind you to not do something dumb and smack you upside the head when you do, then help you fix your mistakes. It’s not to be mad that I can’t live your lives for you or something. Don’t worry about it. And I like you, so it’s okay.” Lathe nodded to Claire, smirking and going back to peeling. *You’ve got my approval. Just don’t do anything dumb and we’re fine.*

Mark nodded after a few moments, slowly picking up his fork and taking a bite of his pasta. “What’s on the menu for dinner?” He scoffed when he got ‘food’ as the answer from Lathe, turning to Eren.

“**Good** food.”

“You guys are **impossible** …” *I hope that you guys remembered I need to eat Carbs today…* He continued to eat his pasta with vigor, appreciating the smells filling the house. *Good food is a valid statement I guess.*

Claire chuckled quietly, picking through her pasta, noticing that many of the pieces had different shapes. “What kind of pasta is this?” *There are tons of shapes in here…*
“Well, we make our own pasta, and the kids all wanted to watch, so I showed them all kinds of
different shapes you could make with pasta noodles. You've both got quite a jumble there. But it
should taste all the same.” *As in good.*

“It’s very good, thank you.” She smiled faintly, eating a small pillow-shaped piece. *You make your
own? It’s very good… oh, that’s the pasta roller.* She noted the small metal piece of equipment on
the edge of the counter. *How did I not notice earlier? Grandma has one.*

“And I assume I’m getting some kind of German pasta tonight?” *I hope so, that’d be weird if I had
something that isn’t German on Saturday…* His eyes looked over to Claire as she had a soft smile
on her face while eating the pasta, a smile on his own face. *Well, I feel much better about us now
that you’ve stayed the night…*

“I know, I know, load up on Carbs, track meet tomorrow, my son is a crazy person who runs every
morning at four AM, we’re aware.” Lathe grinned to him cheekily. *You’ll get your carbs, chill.*

“Four AM?” Claire looked over to Mark in shock. *“How do you manage?” I can’t get up earlier
than seven… what the actual hell?*

“Well… Um, I didn’t go running today, but I usually wake up at around the same time Eren does…
He goes out to take care of the horses and I go out for a 10 mile run… Though last week I did 20
miles…” *Because I was on cloud nine that you were over… That and I love running… “Why, do
you think that’s weird?”* Mark swallowed his next forkful, looking over to Claire curiously. *Please
don’t think I’m weirder than a I already am…*

“All I know is I’d pass out after the first thirty yards, and I normally refuse to get out of bed if it’s
earlier than seven. I admire that more than anything. Functioning at 4 in the morning? A miracle.”
She grinned as she heard a quiet chuckle from the kitchen, moving to peck Mark’s cheek. *I knew
you love running, but man, that’s insane.*

Mark blushed to his ears, a soft sigh leaving his lips as he smiled like a lovesick fool. Once they
finished up their plates, Mark took them to the sink to wash them and put them in the dishwasher,
being quickly ushered out of the room and told to go watch the kids outside. “Um… you wanna get
dressed into real clothes to go outside and watch the kids?” *Mom must’ve been called into work.*

“But I am in real clothes. Unless these are imaginary.” She grinned as Mark just shook his head,
pulling him back to the stairs. “Sure, you probably don’t want to be in the sun with black
sweatpants on.” *Nope, that wouldn’t be too comfortable.* “I need to grab some shoes anyway.” *I think I left them somewhere in your room... somewhere... I dunno, I’ll find them.*

Mark nodded and led her up the stairs, and started to get changed into some shorts and a t-shirt that showed off his arms and clung to his body. *Hmm, I wonder if she’ll like this?*

Claire tied her shoes, unable to help herself as she glanced up as Mark got changed, tracing his fit form. *Dammit...* She just shook her head at his choice of shirt, meandering up behind him and wrapping her arms around his waist. “Are you **trying** to make me jump you?” *Because if you are, you’re doing a damn good job.* “The shirt is **very** much appreciated.”

Mark’s ears felt like they were on fire. *Well that's good...* “Alright, shall we go see what the boys are up to?” He reached his hand down to take hers. *I want you to be okay with being around my brothers...* He squeezed her hand and smiled softly, kissing her knuckles, and the rest of her hand as he bent down to do so.

Claire blushed as he kissed all over her hand, smiling. “Yeah... we should make sure they don't get themselves killed.” *That would be bad.* She laced their fingers, bringing him downstairs with her to the back porch, a spot on the back set up, shade cast over a table, a cooler with random drinks and juice boxes in it and boxes of snacks on the table abandoned in favour of blowing bubbles and watching the dogs go nuts trying to catch them. Even Nene was awake and involved, sitting in front of Lucas as he blew bubbles around her, just looking at the bubbles with a completely shocked expression, jumping a bit when she hit one with her paw and it popped. *That's adorable.* “I think the dogs are confused as to the nature of bubbles.” *That's very amusing.*

“It’s amusing that they haven’t figured it out from the days upon days that the boys play with bubbles with them... Pretty sure Eren’s gone out and gotten more bubbles for basically everyone like five times in the past month.... My brothers are addicted to bubbles.” *Which I guess is okay, at least it’s not drugs anymore...* *That was brutal... I remember when I was drugged to a point where I was addicted to Heroin almost as much as my father... That was scary... Especially for a seven year old...* He sighed in relief as the thoughts crossed his mind. *They’re so much better now...*

Claire smiled, watching Philip run around with a small container of bubbles, Krampus trotting after him and poking his nose at the bubbles, trying to taste them. He made a face when he finally got one, shaking his head and following the boy again, though he didn't try to catch more in his mouth. “Heh, Krampus doesn't like the way they taste.” *That's adorable.* She looked over the large field behind them, Gill and Jill contentedly grazing, Arya in the field tied to Luna to keep from escaping, Charlie not far away. Her eyes wandered over to the chicken coop, only now just noting its existence. “You people have chickens too?” She shook her head when Mark nodded, grinning. “You're running a legit farm here. Next thing I know a greenhouse will pop up into existence and your dad will ride by on a tractor.” *How am I just noticing this? It's legit right next to the barn. It's right there.*
“Well, Eren was thinking about a garden… So that he can grow spices that he uses a lot to cook… It might be coming eventually, and he wants to get a better area for Charlie to ride… He wants to start competing soon, and the trailer for Charlie’s coming in soon. I know that much…” *I also heard Eren’s trying to arrange a trip to Germany over the summer… But that was when I was eavesdropping… So I dunno what to make of that.*

“...you people must never sleep.” Claire chuckled, watching the boys run around. *There certainly seems like there’s always something that needs doing.* “And you’ve got nine mouths to feed, and once a week it’s like thirty, so it seems like it’d make sense you use a ton of spices all the time.” *You people are crazy.* “Eren rides a lot?” Claire looked over to him. *I haven't seen him ride yet. Do you mean compete like random local or state stuff, or like serious competitions?*

“Yeah, he rides Charlie when he gets home if I’m not on him…. And all the jumps and stuff in the Arena over there… He made those… I guess he’s a jumper… So I dunno.”

Claire looked over to the jumps, both low and tall, her eyebrows raising as she eyed some of the taller ones. “That's pretty cool. I need to see that sometime.” *It'd probably be really fun to watch.* Claire leaned her head on Mark’s shoulder, smiling when his hand found her waist. *I like this.* After a while of running the boys were laying in the grass, tired, the dogs chilling with them, enjoying the sun. It was only when Lucas came up to the table and rifled through the cooler for a drink did the other two remember it was there, scampering up for something to drink, snatching snacks and sitting at the table with them. Krampus was trying to convince Lucas to give him some granola, Nene and Blake both happy to go to a shady part of the patio, a small section having their water bowls next to a small area of rugs, getting a drink before laying down for a nap. *They're so cute.* Claire reached down, giving Krampus pets instead of food as he made his rounds, the pup finally giving up and trudging over to the rugs.

“I swear, that dog never learns that he can’t have food….” Mark watched Krampus lay down dejectedly. *He’s almost as big as Blake… They’re just a bit over 1 year old and they’re already so big… Nene’s a bit smaller but I’m chalking that up to being that she’s a female.* “Do you have any pets Claire?” *I never thought to ask you.* He looked to her, intrigued as he sipped from a juice box.

“No, not now… I used to have a few goldfish, but that was a long time ago. I never had any pets like you guys do.” Claire sipped from her own juice box, shrugging a shoulder. “We never really had the money to get a pet and take care of it….” *Another mouth to feed… I dunno, it's not all that… but still…*

“Ah, we never had a pet growing up either… Unless you count Philip as a pet.” He smirked as the frown on his brother’s face formed. *Here we go.*
“I’m naw a peh!” Philip shouted at him, an angry look on his face. *No! I’m not a doggie!*

Claire elbowed Mark in the ribs, and he had the decency to look slightly guilty, of just for a moment. She couldn't help grinning though, shaking her head. “Are you sure? You're not a dog? Maybe a cat?” *We have to check and make sure.*

Philip’s eyes widened in horror, hurriedly shaking his head and then getting up to run to the door and inside. He went right to the kitchen, clinging to Lathe’s pants and starting to cry. “Im naw a peh!” *I don't wanna be a pet!* His small body shook as he clung to Lathe.

Lathe immediately set his peeler down when Philip ran inside, towelling off his hands and going to hoist Philip up, hugging him close. *...he’s not… a pet?*  

“No, Philip, it's okay, you're not a pet. It was a joke, don't worry.” *They sometimes like to tease Philip... but the problem is that he can never tell it's a joke...* Lathe rubbed his back, letting him cry into his shoulder. He walked him back to the patio, Mark going to open the door for him when he saw him with his arms occupied. Lathe set Philip down on the patio again, pecking his forehead. “It's okay, Honey. You'll be okay?”

He watched him nod, sniffling and wiping at his cheek with his fist. “Okay. Go finish your snack, ‘kay? Dinner won't be for a while, still.” Lathe shooed him back to the table gently, looking to Mark and Claire. “Why did I think I could trust you two to adult out here…” He just shook his head, grinning and disappearing back inside. *Mark at least should know Philip can't take a joke. He knows he literally cannot tell...*

Mark felt his heart sink. *Fuck...* He swallowed hard, looking over to Claire. “Sorry…” He mumbled quietly, his eyes a bit downcast. *I knew that I shouldn’t’ve done it... And yet I did...*

Philip soon started to eat his snack, his tears forgotten quickly. *I’m not a pet! Even Daddy said so!* He had a cheeky smile as he munched, looking to Jared and poking him, which led to a poking fest between the two boys. “Jareh…” He whined when Jared poked at his shoulders and pushed him a little.

Jared grinned as he pushed his brother, a slow smile on his face. He watched as Philip tried to stop him and couldn’t, which led to him poking the boys stomach. *He can’t stop me!* He giggled, seemingly happily with his dominance over his younger brother.

Philip giggled when he poked his stomach, struggling to fend off Jared’s attack when he started to target his stomach. “N-No! Ickles!” He giggled, weakly smacking at his hands, finally catching his hands, trying to catch his breath. “S-Sahp!” *No more tickles!*

Mark soon had to step in and get the two brothers away from each other, to make sure that Philip
didn’t pee himself which he tended to do when he was tickled too much. He made sure that Lucas and Jake were okay with their books as they huddled on the patio chairs in the shade. Mark then went to go find Tucker to make sure he was alright. He found the younger teen in the garage cutting wood. What's he making? “Tucker!” He shouted over the loud machinery, trying to get his attention, seeing that he was wearing safety glasses, and large ear pieces to block out the flying wood and loud noise. He’s cutting up the big tree trunks on the table saw? What’s he doing with it?

Tucker finished the cut he was making when he noticed the movement next to him, releasing the trigger on the hand saw and turning to him when it stopped spinning. He moved an ear piece back, quirking an eyebrow at him. “What?” I'm in the zone. What's up?

“What are you making? I wanted to make sure you haven’t killed yourself… I mean you are working with power tools.” I'm curious… What's with all the wood? He moved carefully around to see the long pieces of wood on the floor most the same length, and all the same width. Huh… Trying to get as uniform as possible I see…

Tucker looked up to the plans pinned to the wall in front of the table, tapping them. “I’m making an elevated garden thing for Eren. You know how he wants to grow his own spices and stuff? I'm making a thing for them, there’s a really good spot on the porch for it. It'll line the one railing, plenty of sunshine there. I would've made it sooner if I'd know when the hell Eren’s birthday was, but we didn't, so I'm making it now. He'd better like it. And if you tell him any of this, I'll smack you. Eren’s banned from the garage for the next week, and I don't need you acting suspicious.” Nope. That's my job. Something clicked, and Tucker looked around for a moment. “...don't you have a girlfriend to dreamily stare at?”  He grinned as Mark flushed. I had to. And I'm not sorry.

Mark’s eyes narrowed, throwing back his own retort. “You’re just jealous because you haven't asked Dad if Henry can come over yet.” He watched Tucker freeze and pale. “What? You know you could just ask… Dad would be fine with it, I mean Levi lived here before we got here…”

Tucker was shocked, not understanding a few things, blushing furiously, red threatening to creep down his neck. “H-How did you know about Henry?” Who the fuck told you? Another thing clicked. “A-And how did you know about Levi? That he and Eren are a thing?” If you knew Levi lived here as a boyfriend, you knew it must've been Eren’s. Did Lathe tell you about that? But he couldn't've told you about Henry, he doesn't know anything about him….

“Well it’s obvious with how much you ogle him at school that you like him, just ask him to come over or something… Like a homework date… It doesn’t even need to be a date… Though I must say, Henry is a looker.” He grinned as he teased him, putting his head in his hands, his elbows resting on the table as he watched Tucker panic. This is too cute… “You don’t have to freak out, I knew you were gay…”
Tucker stopped, hiding his face in his hands, peering between his fingers at Mark. “H-How the hell did you know that? Fuck, you can't tell Dad I have a crush on someone! Please don't tell anyone!” Fuck, I'll never hear the end of it... can't I just stare at wonderful eye candy in peace? “I-It's not even a crush, if you tell Dad then he'll invite the kid over himself for dinner or something and I just don't really care, I don't care about having him over…” If he comes over and we end up alone at all... ...I don't want it to happen again...

Mark rolled his eyes. “That’s your reason? You know you can just call him a friend and have him over for homework… And I know you’re gay because you were jacking off to gay porn in your room… you don’t close your door…” You’ve got a bad habit of doing that… I hope you realize that...

I don't close the door? ...fuck! “That’s how you came to the conclusion I was gay? Pretty solid reasoning there.” Tucker was blatantly sarcastic, glaring at Mark.

“You kept crying out for Henry…” He smirked, starting to mock Tucker in his fit of ecstasy. “Henry… Henry! Oh Henry! I love messing with you, but honestly I couldn’t care less if you were gay or not...

Tucker was a mix of angry, embarrassed and upset, shoving at him. “Shut the fuck up! I don't want Dad hearing this shit!” He turned away from him, want to just get back to work and not have to deal with Mark. “If you say a fucking word to Dad I'll rip your throat out. Go... just go ogle Claire or something, I don't really care.” I don't wanna talk about this. And I'm not inviting him over. We all know where being alone with a crush got me before...

Mark gasped as he was pushed away. “Geez! Why are you so goddamn defensive about this? You don't have to ask him over, but did you ever think maybe he wants to come over? I mean you've been friends since he transferred in. Isn’t he like the only one who talks to you? Why is that?” How come everyone avoids you at school? I noticed that when we got transferred in...

Tucker threw down his earpieces, knowing Mark wasn't about to go away. “He's the only one who talks to me and I still won't invite him over because a ton of fucked-up shit happened and I don't want to talk about it! So can you just fuck off now and leave me the hell alone?!” Tucker glared at him, looking more mad than anything. He watched him just drag over a stool, sitting at the table, looking to him intently. “I don't wanna fucking tell you.” Tucker looked away from him, picking a pencil up to mark a piece of wood to be cut. Just go the fuck away...

“I’m sure it can’t be as bad as what I went through… Please enlighten me, you know you won't be
able to get me to leave Tucker.” Mark pressed on, resting his head in his hands again. I wanna hear this. “I’ll tell you what happened to me after… I went through a ton of fucked-up shit.”

“...I keep forgetting that all of us are fucked-up in some way or the other. I just keep assuming it's just me.” Tucker sighed, dragging a stool over, sitting down and looking up to the carefully drawn plans. “I was at school for the entire year this year, since fall. I took engineering, and there was this one guy in it, a senior named Devon Bracknell. ...he was my first crush, and I'd just sorta realised I might be gay. I had a thing for him.” He swallowed. “But later in the year we were paired for this dumb project, I barely even remember what it was, something about a bridge. But we were working on it at his house sometimes, and mostly during classes, but I'd told Dad he Uhm… he wanted me to stay late one day so we could finish it all in one go… and I ended up telling him how I might be gay for Devon… so he knew I wanted to tell him about having a crush on him…. and he let me go, but when he picked me up, he knew that… when I told Devon after we'd finished the project, and he’d asked me if I wanted something to eat, I told him I had a crush on him… he laughed, but he just… when I told him I was serious, he he got really mad… and he was… he just was so strong… and he grabbed me and dragged me over to the couch… and...he raped me for about two hours.... but Dad knew when he saw me that something had gone really wrong… he took me to the hospital… and… we ended up pressing charges… he's away in prison for life… so… nobody wants to talk to me… and Henry is the only one who doesn't know… and I don't think anyone wants to talk about it… so they must not have told him…” He won't want to be my friend anymore if he knows I got raped... and I don't want to be alone with him… I'm just... I don't want it to happen again.

“You’re afraid it’s gonna happen again… aren’t you?” Mark’s tone was serious and quiet as he watched Tucker squirm in his seat. Hit the nail on the head… Didn’t I? “You’re afraid that Henry’s gonna end up being just like that scum… That whenever you're alone, it could happen? So you aren’t gonna ask him over… That’s a dick move if you're the only one he talks to… Don’t you think? Or are you not his only friend? I only see him around you .”

“I'm fucking sorry for being traumatised! And he's got friends! He talks to people in his classes, he's got to have someone that qualifies as a friend besides me.” ......right? He doesn't talk about anyone else, really... ...shit, does he not have other friends? ...maybe people don't wanna talk to him because he only really talks to me? Fuck , I screwed him over friends-wise... “...I'm scared something's gonna fucking happen. You'd think since I know him better and have reason to think he wouldn't do something like that, it would help. But it doesn't. I'm still scared as fuck. There, I fucking said it.”

“Yeah, you fucking said it, good job... Now you can go tell Dad, and then invite Henry over because if he knows you're scared he won’t leave you two alone… You legitimately just need to ask, and stop being the stubborn little fuck you always are.” Mark’s tone was completely serious as he looked Tucker over. You're only a year younger than me... Though I can see how a senior would’ve been able to easily overpower you... You're not that strong, but by the looks of it you're either been training with Dad or Eren, or both, there’s a little bit of muscle...
Tucker looked ready to panic, shaking his head. “I-I can't! I don't want to!” He stepped away when Mark stood, herding him to the door to the house. “N-No, Mark please …” He was helpless as Mark got him inside, shoving him into the kitchen. He tried to run off, but he knew he couldn't bail when Lathe called for him, reluctantly trailing into the kitchen, his head ducked down a bit.

Lathe watched with amusement as Tucker suddenly was shoved into existence in the house, the shover quick to get away. Must be Mark’s doing. “Tucker? Get over here, will you?” He studied the boy as he dragged his feet over, glancing up to see Mark peeking from around a corner, watching. What’re they up to?

Tucker nervously played with his hands, looking down. “Uhm… so… you know how we always have a bunch of people over for dinner and stuff…” He glanced up when Lathee was quiet, though it was simply a sign for him to continue. “Uhm… c-could we uh… add one more… please?” He’ll be here while a lot of other people are here too… I’ll be okay with that...

“….what's his name?”

“Henry. Wait.” Tucker looked up, realising that he has practically given it all away when Lathe’s eyes lit up. “Nonono please don't go into hyper dad mode! Don't act weird or anything while he’s here, if he decides to come… just…”

“I know, I know. Don't freak out about the kids’ crushes. You people tell me like every time there's the barest hint of a crush among you all. I won't be weirder than normal, don't worry.” Lathe ruffled his hair, grinning cheekily. “Now go call and invite him so he has time to tell family and whatnot. And make sure you tell him there’ll be lots of people, and lots of weird food we promise he'll like. But there'll be normal food too.” Sharon graciously forked over her apple pie recipe, and all it took was me finally agreeing to her style of character development. ...I will probably come to regret that decision later for reasons I will not dwell upon. But it means I can make apple pie whenever I want! “Oh, and some of the usual crazies will not be present. Casper, Sharon, and Hannah are all gone out to Wichita for some meeting thing. Dunno why Hannah dragged her with though, since Scotty has Maverick and is still coming anyway.” I dunno. Reasons.

“O-Okay.” Tucker nodded, running off upstairs. ...I have to call him now. I can pretend to and say he can't come… but... I want him to come... he can meet the weird-ass family I'm always telling him about… Tucker stopped in his room, rifling through his pocket for his phone, sitting on the edge of the bed. Just call him. Just do it! ...or you can text him. That'd be easier…. Tucker’s thumbs hovered over the keys, finally tapping out a message.

TQ: Hey Henry
TQ: My family always has really big invite-like-everybody-we-know dinners on Saturdays.

TQ: If you'd be okay chilling with my crazy family and their weird friends who are low-key actually kinda cool.

TQ: You can come.

TQ: ...please.

HP: What time? I'll see if my brother can drop me off?

HP: I'd love to get out of the house... Oh and do you have the notes from Mr. Yeager’s class?

HP: Remember I had the bloody nose and had to go to the nurse?

TQ: If you're here by six you're good but you can really come whenever you want if you wanna just chill or something.

TQ: And yeah, I have Eren’s Notes...

TQ: Oh uh that's a thing...

TQ: Eren’s kinda my brother, so...

HP: ...... What.

TQ: Dad adopted him a while ago, and he got me not even a year ago from foster care, so...

TQ: my kinda-sorta pretty much yeah I guess brother.

HP: DUDE! THAT’S SOOOO COOL!

HP: Why didn’t you tell me?

HP: Tucker he’s our teacher! How does that even work!? And he’s a famous YouTuber! Ah! Oh my god! This is gonna be awesome! You think he’ll play MarioKart with us!?

HP: Or does he not play without other YouTubers?

HP: I would totally understand if he doesn't want to...

HP: .... Sorry that was a lot...

TQ: that got very real very fast.

TQ: But I'll try to answer in order-

TQ: He exists in the same house as I do, helps me with homework and yells at me in the morning to wake the hell up.

TQ: I know for a fact he thinks MarioKart is the shit but he wildly fluctuates between kicking ass and seriously sucking.

TQ: Also he's the one mostly in charge of food for tonight and we have to feed a small army.
so maybe either after dinner or some other time idk

TQ: And he’d play without putting it on YouTube, he doesn’t really do let's plays too much

TQ: The last one that went up is like a year old so idk

TQ: It's a sporadic thing really

TQ: I heard that Eren will do them if and only if Mark and Jack show up and steal him for a day, possibly with others

TQ: Otherwise nah man

HP: HOLY SHIT!?!? You met Mark and Jack!? The //legends//!?

TQ: Dude they just kinda showed up to dinner last week because their flight got delayed in Wichita or something

TQ: They just sometimes end up in our house

TQ: We stopped asking them to leave after a while because they don't listen

TQ: Idk this crap just happens

TQ: Lookit the dinner table last week

*image sent*

HP: I think I just died a little that you didn’t invite me last week…

HP: it’s probably better this week, so I don’t embarrass myself in front of them…

HP: That would be embarrassing…

HP: So my brother can bring me over at 5 will that be okay?

HP: I’m struggling with my German workbook… Will you be able to help?

TQ: A) I didn't even know they were gonna be there until like five solid minutes into dinner

TQ: B) Ya five is fine to come over

TQ: C) Yeah I can help, I already did the work so I know what the deal is

HP: Okay thanks Tucker! See you then!

Tucker stared at the message, his mind in overdrive. ...if it’s three now… two hours until Henry gets here. ...fuckfuckfuck what do I do?! Tucker put his phone back in his pocket, going back downstairs. “He’ll be here at five, Dad!” Tucker made sure he heard him before escaping back into the garage, sitting at the table and putting his head in his hands, internally freaking out. Two hours… fuck ….
Mark had a Cheshire grin on his face as she watched Tucker come into the garage with a soft sigh of relief. “So… When’s he coming over?” I promised you I’d tell you how fucked up I was… So if you wanna ask go ahead and ask…

“Five… I’ve got two solid hours to freak out internally…” Tucker leaned his head in one hand, looking over to Mark. “…so. What’s your deal?” I’m curious.

“Well, let’s start out with the fact that my actual father never wanted kids to begin with. He was a Heroin, crack, cocaine, meth, and Marijuana addict…. I was the first one born between my two parents…. Alive at least… He hated that we had another mouth to feed because it took away money from spending it on his oh so precious drugs…” My father was a dick with no regard for my life, or anyone else’s. “He tried to drown me when I was 6 months old…” Did some serious damage for awhile...

Tucker stared at him, trying to process this. “…well shit.” He didn't know what else to say, running a hand through his hair. Fuck… that's horrible … how could someone try to kill their own son? He was quiet, waiting for him to continue.

“I was a fucked up child… I lost too much oxygen to the brain…. And the doctors had thought I’d gone brain dead…. Dad went to jail, and believe it or not got out on good behavior a few years later… But before he left he had enough time to knock my Mom up again, and while he was away out came Lucas… He was furious when he came home to another mouth to feed. Dad got me addicted to Heroin at the ripe old age of three … and whenever he held Lucas he’d drop him… To try and get him to die too…” Mark’s words were a little shaky as he remembered the sting of the needles entering his arms before feeling like he was on cloud nine. That addiction ruined my life… I really hope that I never get the chance to get the stuff ever again… I’d go downhill too quickly...

….oh my god… I just… I can't understand it… why the fuck would anyone…. to a fucking toddler … “….what happened with… with Jared and Philip?” With Jared, if your Dad was around long enough to figure out he had autism… fuck...

“Well, when he got out, he knocked my Mom up again, and 16 months later out came Jared… He beat Mom and me and Lucas… I was 7 so I started to figure out why Dad was beating us so often… Mom lost the first child she got knocked up with… Then she got pregnant again…. Dad went off the handle as started to just pump us with drugs and keep us locked in the basement, he’d refuse us food …. We were growing skinny, he’d refuse us education … CPS never came to help us again…. When Philip was born, he beat my mom almost to a point of death… Though she decided she couldn’t take it and OD on Heroin… I was the one that found her cold body on the
couch… And I wouldn’t leave her.” I remember that her eyes were open and glazed over… She looked like she a wax figure…. She was so cold too… Her body was so pale … “My Dad’s the reason he’s got autism… Pumping him with Heroin until he started getting learning disabilities and speech impediments…”

Tucker had his head in his hands, attempting to comprehend what the four of them had gone through. “......Mark, I'm so sorry....” That's.... that's fucked up. “....what happened… since you didn't have parents around to take care of you…?” They let you all stay together… someone would've had to fight tooth and nail for that...

“Well, when I refused to leave Mom’s side, Dad pulled me off and beat me, and he drugged me with Heroin again, at this point I was an addict, through and through. I crawled back to Mom’s body after he left… Dad never came back, and we’re not entirely sure where he went. We were in the house alone for a week without food… Lucas went through our neighbor’s trash to find food for us… We almost lost Philip, because we didn’t have formula to give him…. And we were all starting to get withdrawal symptoms from not having Heroin or anything else in our systems…” It was bad… I remember holding Mom one minute and then throwing up the next…. The house reeked so bad after that Week…. It didn’t help that Mom’s body was decomposing either....

“Nobody found you for a week? Couldn't they tell something was wrong if you all didn't show up for school?” It’s legally required for you to go to school... at least until you're eighteen... “...it took that long ...” I can’t imagine what that week must've been like... and having your mother’s corpse on the couch there the entire time... fuck ..... 

“We never really went to school, so I guess it was normal for us to miss an entire week’s worth of school…. The reason they found us was because he neighbor called the cops.... He was concerned that the same kid had been picking out of his trash for the past few days … The cops that came and got us were horrified of our condition…. We were all sick and weak, and complete addicts , I kept asking for drugs… We were taken to the hospital separately… I didn’t even notice because I was still drugged after a week …” Mark pulled up his shirt, showing where there were faint scars on his abdomen in small circles. “Needles always left a scar on me…” Mark proceeded to show Tucker where all the scars were on his body. There are a lot... But I’m just glad I can’t get at is anymore.

“I know that if I ever got ahold of Heroin ever again… I’d be going downhill so fast they wouldn’t be able to stop it…”

Tucker stared at the silvery scars, shaking his head. “…I don't know what to say… that's fucked up… that all that happened to you… and they let you stay together…? How'd you manage that? All the kids I knew that went through the system lost track of their siblings after a while…” Some of the real little kids even forgot about them... it was awful...

“Well, Philip almost got adopted out… But due to my trauma of being dragged away from them
and then separated... I had panic attacks that we weren’t together... I walked barefoot across the
city to go and see them.... I cut up my feet horribly, and I was hospitalized after I was ripped away
by CPS again... I wouldn’t eat... I wouldn’t sleep... I couldn’t calm down without my brothers...
The doctors finally had to step in and say that we had to be together... For my sanity... They’d
already listed me as a lost cause so it was a last resort.” Mark gave him a sad smile, reaching over
to rub his shoulder. “Eh, enough about me... Let’s talk about Henry shall we?” He seemed to cheer
right up from the solemn look in his eyes just seconds ago. I wanna make you smile, you’re too
serious...

Tucker looked surprised at the sudden change of tone, blushing again and looking away, rubbing
the back of his neck. “I already told you, I texted him and he's coming over in two hours... ish...what else do you wanna know? Don't answer that.” Tucker just glared at Mark when he opened
his mouth again to speak. “Go ogle Claire, and for God’s sake don't tell me you left her with the
kids.” If that's the case, you need to go rescue her right the fuck now.

“No, I left her and Lucas with the kids.” Lucas can deal with the two kids when they get into
squabbles... He chuckled as he stood, putting his stool back where it was. “I guess you're right
though... I should probably go back.”

“And stare at Claire like a lovesick fool? Yes, that's exactly what you should do.” Tucker
deadpanned, though he nodded as if in all seriousness. “And would it kill you to bring me a juice
box and a granola bar or something? The snacks are far away and I'm in the middle of shit.” He
gestured to the random wood planks strewn about. Snacks.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll get you your damned snacks! Just shut up and make your damn veggie boxes.”
Mark joked, going out of the garage the way he came to get to the backyard seeing that the boys
had picked up the bubbles again and ran around the yard, this time with Maisie following after
them. That's cute, and it appears as though Lucas and Jake are still reading and Claire has
migrated from the picnic table to the couch under the awning, playing on her phone. He shrugged
as he went to the coolers to grab another juice box and then a granola bar from the snacks. This is
for Tucker...

Claire looked up when Mark ambled back over, smiling until she realised he turned right back
around to leave again. “How dare you abandon me.” She threw a crumpled wrapper at him and hit
his shoulder, smirking mischievously. She saw him turn back, looking very worried all of a sudden.
...huh...? “...Mark, just get over here for a second.” She reached for his wrist when he got close
enough, tugging him down to peck his cheek. “I know you're not abandoning me. I'm right here,
and you're right there. I'm guessing you're acting as snack delivery? We are missing one of the
six....” I think his name is Tucker...? I'm trying to keep all the names straight. I think that's
his name. ...Pretty sure.

“Yeah, Tucker’s in the garage... So he requested snacks... Oh um, his friend Henry, you know
Henry the guy who transferred in with his older brother a while back?" I think you talked with his older brother before? I'm not really sure... Mark waited patiently for a response. “I think his name is Greg... I know their last name is Portman...”

“...Greg and Henry Portman?” ...fuck, of course. She smiled a bit sheepishly, rubbing the back of her neck. “Yeah, I know them. Henry’s pretty cool. But I only really know him because I dated his brother a while ago...” The guy only wanted sex. I swear... out of the three guys I dated before you, two of them turned out to just be after my body. What the actual hell. “But what about him?”

What's up?

“Greg is bringing Henry over for dinner in about an hour and a half... And you two dated before? I didn't know that..." I knew you dated before but I didn’t know you dated older guys... Probably why you knew everything for sex....

Claire pinched the bridge of her nose, her eyes shutting. “I dated him for like three months, I dumped him because he was just chasing after my ass. Wasn't hard to figure out after a while. He was awful at being subtle.” She shrugged a shoulder and looked up. “Don’t worry. He isn't any kind of competition. And that's cool. Did you invite him, or was it someone else’s idea? Just curious.” I haven't heard you talk about them before, so idk. I kinda assumed you didn't know either of them.

“Tucker invited him... Well Henry at least... But hopefully Greg won't do anything stupid...” I've heard he's got a hot head... And he’s one of the football players at school, who always think they’re so much better than every other athlete... He shrugged, shaking his head a bit to rid the thought. “I'm gonna go deliver this to Tucker now.” He smiled softly, leaning down to peck her cheek before heading off to the garage again. I'll just have to see, I mean, he’s got strength over me, but I’m pretty sure that I could run away from him without breaking a sweat.

“I wouldn't put it past him to try something dumb.” Claire smiled as he pecked her cheek, blushing when Lucas and Jake made gagging sounds from where they sat reading. “...shut up.” Just read yer damn novels.

Mark came back into garage with Tucker’s requested snacks coming up to him and tapping his shoulder. “I got you a snack... and a juice box...”

Tucker turned again, grinning and taking the offered food. “Thank you, peasant. You are dismissed.” Tucker wore a shit-eating grin, looking to Mark challengingly. Hm, O could get used to a snack-delivery service...
Mark held a hand over his heart, wounded. “Uh! Fight me, Bitch!” Mark shouted back playfully. “Get back to work, you have an hour and a half until Henry gets over here and you’ll probably wanna take a shower, then search through your closet for ‘something decent to wear.’ Actually you should probably just go now… Give yourself time to jerk it off in the shower…” Mark had a smug grin on his face now. And you thought you were slick.

Tucker glared at him, trying to force down the red staining his cheeks. “I will literally get Dad to come out here and kick your ass for me.” ...if anything, he'd probably just smack you upside the head then grumble at you for a second before going back inside. ...yeah, that. Ugh, he needs to teach me some Judo or Karate or whatever the hell it is he knows so I can properly kick ass. Tucker went to put stuff away, glaring at Mark as the older teen ambled away to the backyard again. ……Henry probably wouldn't appreciate it if I smelled like sweat and sawdust. I should shower… …….and only maybe.

Mark had a huge grin on his face as he walked over toward Claire to sit down on the couch next to her. “I see the boys are still playing with the bubbles, and none of them are crying… which is a good sign.” Thanks for dealing with the kids while I embarrassed the crap out of Tucker.

“Oh, there were almost tears. Philip got Maisie a bit too excited and she accidentally knocked him over. He was gonna cry but Maisie just started licking his face and it turned into giggles really fast, especially when Jared started to tickle him a bit to cheer him up. More happened in the past two minutes than the last half hour.” I thought Philip was gonna have a crying fit and I'd either have to intervene or get Lucas and Jake involved, or even Lathe.

“Well, good thing dogs can sense when we need them… I know Blake could for Eren… I wonder when we're getting another one soon? Blake’s too old to follow Eren around anymore… He mostly just stays in the house.” He really is gonna need a new dog soon… He turned his head as he watched Philip run away from Maisie yet again to be chased, but this time holding one of her toys. Oh this is not gonna end well, I can tell… Mark prepared himself to have to go and comfort his brother, though the tears never really came, Maisie having learned to be gentle with Philip and instead of yanking the toy from his grasp she followed him with her tail wagging.

“…I think she's learning the small child doesn't like to be yanked or knocked around.” She's being much more gentle with him. Dogs really are very perceptive. “Blake follows Eren around?” Claire looked to Mark and tilted her head, confused a bit at his vague statement. Eren needs a new dog to follow him around?

“Yeah, Blake is Eren’s service dog… He’s got PTSD…” I dunno if I’m allowed to keep going... I know he had an episode a while back because Levi hadn’t called in awhile.
Oh... “Okay, I didn't know.” I wonder what had happened... it's not really for me to know. I might be curious, but that doesn't make it my business. “How old is Blake? He isn't joining around with any of the kids’ antics, and you said yesterday he was pretty old...”

“Let’s see… Eren got Blake when he was 16… At the age of 5, and Eren’s 22 as of last week Friday… And Dad hit 40 two weeks before that…. So Blake’s 11 so he’s hitting the age range where they start to die… But Blake’s given back to the people who raised him…. For each of the litters that him and Maisie had, his trainer got two… So he’s got 8 of Blake’s kin in training… And maybe one of the first two will be Eren’s dog… They’d be about 3 now…” But I’m not sure, I know Hannah gave Moblit two of Tove’s pups too…. Mark spoke softly as he moved to curl up to Claire’s side, though soon just opting to bring her into his lap and cling to her. This is comfortable... I like this.

Claire blushed furiously when Mark dragged her into his lap, glaring as Jake and Lucas snickered at her surprise and embarrassment. She forgot to be mad when she felt a pair of soft lips peck at her neck, hidden by her hair. ...dammit. “I'm literally going to kill you....” Claire nevertheless relaxed into his hold, her head back on his shoulder. ...I want a better angle... Claire shifted a bit in his lap, sitting sideways with her feet stretched out a bit, arms around Mark’s shoulders and nose buried in his neck, not giving a damn about the mocking chittering from the two boys reading nearby. You decided to cuddle, so we're going to cuddle dammit.

Mark held Claire close to his chest, looking over her shoulder to glare at the boys, giving them both the middle finger. “Hmm.... Claire, we’ve still got an audience, we gotta keep in PG.” I want to keep a hold on you... You’re mine, and I’m sure Greg’s gonna say something. His large hands splayed over Claire’s back, taking in a deep breath and smelling her shampoo. She smells like flowers... I hope she’ll stay after this weekend... And hopefully she’ll be okay with waking up early tomorrow since we start at 8 tomorrow morning, and I need to be there at 7 at least...

Claire nuzzled into his neck, nodding. “Okay...” ...but since my back is to the kids... and I have tons of hair... they won't notice... Claire tilted her head a bit, her lips softly brushing over his neck, gently kissing and lapping at the flesh up and down, lightly nipping the joint of his neck with her teeth. I'll be careful to not excite you too much... but you're right here, and I wanna, so.

Mark groaned as he felt Claire’s lips and teeth on his skin. Oh fuck.... Claire ... “Claire... Oh my god...” his words were a gentle hiss in her ear as she nipped at him. He struggled to keep his pulse of arousal down, whimpering softly. Claire.... Oh my god, please no more. “Hmm... You gotta stop...”

Claire pouted, leaving one last gentle peck on his neck before nestling back into her new favourite spot, breathing in his scent. He smells nice... Claire let her eyes slip shut, catnapping on Mark’s chest when the door opened some time later, cracking an eye open to see Lathe ambling down the porch steps to where the boys and the dogs were. They were flopped in the grass, trying to catch
their breath, though Lathe walked over to Philip, picking him up easily, a small stuffed animal for the dogs slipping from the boy's hand.

“C’mon, Hon.” Philip was leaning sleepily against Lathe’s shoulder as he spoke softly, tired from all the running around. You really wore yourself out. You could use a nap. Lathe carried him into the house, nodding to Mark and Claire, sticking his tongue out at Jake and Lucas, who stuck their tongues out back at him. We’re all ridiculous. Lathe couldn't help but smile fondly, Philip sound asleep in his arms by the time he made it to the door. He smiled to Eren as he went to the stairs with the napping child, his son silently chuckling before going back to peeling potatoes. I love you all.

Mark had ushered everyone inside within the hour, and let them all play in the living room as the delicious smells filled the house. It was a half an hour after that that the doorbell rang and Mark got up to answer it, seeing Henry and coming face to face with Greg. “Thanks for bringing Henry over….” I’m not sure what else to say to you….

Claire got up after a moment of hesitation, following Mark to the door. Eh, it's Greg. No big deal, really. She stood a bit behind Mark as he opened the door, waving to Henry when he saw her. “Hey Henry.” She looked up, seeing Greg look between the two of them in confusion for a moment. Hm. She moved to the side a bit when Mark opened the door fully to usher Henry in, her arm casually slipping around Mark’s waist. She glanced over to Greg again, and saw the moment it clicked followed by an angry look. Fuck, here we go.

“Are you fucking serious, Claire? You dumped me for this piece of shit?” Greg’s voice was full of anger as he pointed at Mark. Really? I'm so much better than him!

“Greg, we’ve been over this. You were only after my ass and then got way too angry when I called you out on it. I'm not dealing with that.” Yeah, no. I deserved better.

Greg’s hands turned into fists as he grabbed at Mark’s shirt, his eyes narrowing as he saw a hickey from where he’d pulled the shirt. “Like this fuck is any better, I bet you whored yourself out to him, didn’t you?” You already fucked him? So why’s he so much better than me?

Mark glared back at Greg, his hands coming up to try and pull on Greg’s wrist to get him off. Why the hell did I even think of answering the door! I should’ve had Dad get it! He’s furious! What the actual fuck!?

“Ex cuse me.” Lathe walked straight up to them the second Greg grabbed Mark’s shirt, watching Mark struggle to get him off. “You need to let go of my son and leave before something bad
happens.” I'm not gonna let you punch Mark for doing nothing wrong. You're Claire's ex, I've deduced that much. But you don't need to be so damn furious about it. Lathe stood at his full height, having a good six inches on Greg, staring down at him with a dark look.

Greg’s eyes widened a bit as he held his grip on Mark’s shirt. “Well, your ‘son’ is dating a whore.” Greg growled before letting go of Mark’s short with a shove, turning and jogging down the stairs. A whore who can’t keep her legs closed...

Mark had to step back a few feet to keep from falling down, his eyes wide. What’s he talking about? That Claire's a whore? His face showed his confusion, his gaze going to Claire as if to ask what the hell Greg was talking about. What?

Claire just shook her head, looking to him apologetically. “I'm sorry about him…. he gets really angry when he doesn't get what he wants. One of the reasons I left him. Gets what he wants with his fists.” Not good. Claire gently tugged his arm, looking gratefully to Lathe as he closed the door, looking to them worriedly. “Thanks for that…” She looked to Mark, tugging him back over to the couch. I just wanna hold onto you after that...

Mark looked at Claire as he was tugged along. “What was he talking about?” He murmured softly as she pushed him on couch and her coming to crawl into his lap. What was Greg talking about. “He called you a whore…. Why?” His tone was serious as he watched her move. Why would he call you that? That's horrible!

Claire leaned her forehead to his neck, murmuring near his ear, quiet enough for just him to hear. “…promise you won't be mad or something…?” She waited for him to murmur ‘Promise’ before she sighed against his skin, her voice small. “...so, I guess you could kinda tell before last night and stuff that you weren't exactly my first…” Mark was quiet, and she took that as a cue to continue. “…he called me a whore because I slept around a lot freshman year… with a bunch of juniors and seniors and stuff… it was so dumb… the relationships all lasted for like three or four weeks max… they all acted so nice to me… but after they finally convinced me to have sex with them they stopped caring so much… you think I’d’ve learned by boyfriend number five in six months that something was wrong… I was so fucking dumb. “I don't want to make that same mistake again. I hope to God I'm not with you.” I like you… I don't want this to follow that same pattern.

Mark was quiet for a moment, holding her close. “So am I a better fuck then Greg?” I wanna know, I kinda wanna rub it in his face later… Get back at him for grabbing me by my shirt. His voice sounded genuinely curious and not the slightest bit angry. I can't judge you about decisions you made in the past…. I just wanted to know why he called you that without any warning...

Claire paused, pulling away and looking to him with a slightly stunned expression. “…did you
legitimately not hear a word I just said?” *How the fuck are you not furious or something? Not even a little mad?*

“No, I heard you, and I just don’t know why you expect me to judge you for it? You even said so yourself it was a dumb decision…. Why would I be mad at you?” *I can’t judge you on something you did in the past.* Mark’s hands gently ran up and down her back, trying to calm her down as she perched in his lap. *I couldn’t stay mad at you…*

Claire stared at him for a moment before she dropped her head back into the crook of his neck, softly kissing his neck. “…thanks… and yes. Yes you are.” *A much better one.*

Mark smirked and pulled her flush against his body. “Good… Now we’ve got at least an hour and a half for dinner I believe, wanna just lay on the couch?”

Claire nodded, shifting with Mark to lay down, on top of him on his chest, enjoying the smells of dinner mingling with Mark’s own scent. “Hm, you're warm. If I fall asleep I'm not sorry.” *I wouldn't mind a nap… I'm comfy, so.*

Lathe meandered over to the stairs when things settled down a bit, taking his sweet time. *Tucker will want to know Henry’s here. ...but I want to see this spectacle, and everyone else might, so.* Lathe looked up the stairs, his hands cupped around his mouth as he shouted. “TUCKER! PERSON IS HERE!” *Come and entertain him, dammit! Nobody else here besides Claire knows him, and she’s sleeping on Mark or something.* He chuckled as he heard something fall onto the floor, hearing a pause before Tucker shouted back.

“O-Okay! One second!” *Fuck, just pick a fucking shirt! It doesn't even fucking matter! Just pick one!* Tucker looked between the options quickly before grabbing one at random, an emerald green plaid flannel, throwing a black tank on under it so he could leave it unbuttoned. He looked over himself one last time, eyeing the hair that wouldn't be tamed with exasperation, nervously shuffling for a moment. *...you know what, fuck it. Good enough. ... hopefully.* Tucker left his room, pushing down his nerves when he approached the stairs, smiling when he saw Henry. “Hey Henry. What's up?” *Fuck, he looks even cuter than usual today...* Tucker was hoping to death he wasn't blushing, walking over to him with socked feet.

When his foot slid out from under him, landing him flat on his ass. *Fuck. He blushed furiously as the people around him laughed or tried to hide it, seeing Henry struggling not to laugh, though it was obvious. Great job, Tucker. He scrambled to his feet, trying to save face. Guh. “...god dammit.”* Tucker held his face in his hands for a moment, feeling humiliated. *Fuck.*
Henry couldn’t help but snicker as he watched Tucker get up. Wow, that was embarrassing. “Hi, Tucker…. So um, what do you wanna do first?” He had a huge smile on his face, his bright teeth shining brightly. Henry’s hair was slicked into the usual spiked bangs, the sandy blond hair not covering an inch of his flawless skin as he looked directly at Tucker. He wore ripped black jeans and a dark grey band shirt, which also had multiple holes in it all over, his black and dark grey plaid backpack slung lazily across his shoulder. “You also didn’t tell me that you lived in a fucking mansion.” This place is fucking huge! No wonder you guys have so many people come over for dinner...

Tucker couldn’t help but glance over to Lathe when Henry swore, the man quirking an eyebrow at him, glancing to Henry and back. ....oh. “Well, it is pretty big, I just never thought to mention it…” Tucker rubbed the back of his neck, looking around as he thought of what they could do. The kids already took over the TV out here… we can't exactly get them involved if we start a game of cards against humanity, and they'll want to play if they see it... but.....nothing will happen. And if something does and I scream loud enough, there are lots of people to come running. “We’ve got the Xbox hooked up to the big screen in the theatre room, if you want to play or watch something, that's an option.” Tucker shrugged one shoulder. Just chill, Tucker. Chill. Don't act weird and make this awkward.

“Do you have COD?”

“Yeah, a few of them, I haven't played too much… I've mostly been playing GTA if I get the big screen.” It's the best.

“Dude, let’s go steal some fucking Camaros!”

Tucker grinned at his enthusiasm, but the two of them looked over when Lathe cleared his threat, looking to Henry.

“Sorry to be a bit of a killjoy, but that's a vocabulary word I don't think some of the kids need to know.” Lathe nodded over to where the kids were huddled around the coffee table, all playing with the huge bins of legos. Philip in particular had looked up as Henry had spoken, his eyes wide, drinking in the scene. He doesn't exactly need to know that word.

Henry instantly flushed in embarrassment. “Ah… Sorry…. I’ll try and keep my mouth shut…” My brothers don’t necessarily care if I swear… It just doesn't really come up as a problem. Henry didn’t know where to look, shrinking in Lathe’s presence. He’s fucking huge.

“It's fine, just not around the kids. I'll make sure they don't wander in on you two playing GTA.
Then you can swear all you want.” Lathe shrugged one shoulder, going back to cooking as if nothing happened. *It's cool. But I don't want the kids swearing until they're old enough for me to explain what the words mean and for them to understand.*

Tucker sighed, reaching for Henry's arm. He tugged him along, bailing him out from the awkward situation. He let go of him as soon as they turned the corner, speaking as they stepped down to the theatre room. “Yeah, there are little kids around. You and Dad are cool though, don't worry. You looked terrified, and yeah he's huge and intimidating sometimes, but he's a goddamned pushover, so it's whatever.” *Yeah, he doesn't really care much about that kind of stuff.* Tucker walked up to the back of the theatre room to the small flat area, a grid of shelves of consoles all with their own spot, the wiring behind them complicated but neat. Tucker hit the button to switch to the Xbox One, going to the second shelving unit and quickly finding GTA V. “Pick a seat wherever, it'll only be a second.” *Now where the hell did the controllers go... right next to the console, of course.* Soon Tucker walked back where Henry was, plopping next to him and handing him a controller as the screen loaded. “So, whatcha think?” *You look amazed at all this.*

Henry’s eyes were wide as he took in the area. “I can’t believe you live here… I would kill to have this place in my basement! This is fucking awesome!” Henry’s excitement was clearly written across his face as he took a controller, thanking Tucker. *This place is massive! It’s so cool!* “Did you ask your brother if we can play video games after dinner?” He was completely forgetting that he needed to do his homework as well. *I wanna play video games with you! This is the first time you invited me over and this place is video game heaven!*

“We probably can, but dude, weren't we going to do homework? You said you needed help with German or something.” *We need to work too...* “When’s your brother coming to get you anyway? Just like as a frame of reference, I'm not counting the minutes ‘til you leave.” Tucker dismissed that notion easily. ..........*I wonder if we ask Lathe if he’ll let you stay the night... we can just chill and play video games and stuff...*

Henry shrugged. “I told him I didn’t know when dinner was… So he said to text the group chat and one of my brothers would come pick me up… Apparently Brett is gonna be home for some reason, I dunno, but if it’s late Brett will probably pick me up.” *Honestly, I was just planning on staying until I was kicked out...*

“...so, idea. What if I asked Dad about you staying overnight, and we do German and stuff now so we can play whatever we want after dinner until like three in the morning?” *Sounds good to me... but I dunno if you'll want to... fuck, I already asked. Just wait for the damn answer.*

Henry stuck his tongue out of his mouth slightly as he started to think. “Do you have a spare toothbrush?” *My brothers wouldn’t really care, and staying up until 3 sounds fucking awesome!* “I won’t be able to promise staying up until 3 though…. I can promise at least 1.” *I’m not used to staying up late.*
Tucker couldn't help but glance to where his tongue peeked out from his lips, snapping out of it after a second. “I-I was exaggerating anyway, and yeah, we’ve got tons stashed upstairs. I’ll go ask Dad, alright?” He watched Henry nod, ditching his controller and starting out of the room. He stopped, pointing to his backpack. “Homework.” He grinned when Henry groaned exaggeratedly, leaving. He walked to the kitchen, poking Lathe’s elbow from where he fussed over the stove. He swallowed when he turned to look at him, his nerves returning. 

“...I keep forgetting how big you can make yourself look...” 

“...Uhm... can Henry stay the night... and can we have the theatre room after dinner please?” We wanna play video games... and stay up late and eat junk food and try to steal planes and blow shit up....

Lathe pretended to ponder this, stroking an imaginary goatee. “Hm, should I let Tucker chill with his bf all night or not...”

“He's not my boyfriend!” Tucker immediately shut up, hiding his face in his hands as he turned crimson, hoping to God Henry didn't hear. *Fuck, I don't want this to get awkward for any of us...* 

“...j-just... can he please stay over?” Please don't push it... I love you, but don't.

“...as long as you both have your work done and it's okay with his parents or guardians or whatnot, it's okay. You two can end up sleeping anywhere except the living room- I think Mark and Claire have those couches called at least for a while.” They'll probably migrate upstairs, but they called the TV for movies. They asked, like, two seconds ago. “...Tucker, I have to ask...”

“...yeah, I have a crush on him.” I knew you were gonna ask...

Lathe was surprised he answered the question before he asked it, smiling softly, ruffle his hair as his hands fell from his face. “Don't you hesitate to come get me or anyone else if something goes sour, okay? And good luck. You don't have to go too fast about this, you know.”

“...I know... but... fuck...” Tucker was quiet, staring at the floor. Goddamn it. He's just too fucking cute for his own good and I just really fucking want him to kiss me, god damn it. “...I'll be careful.”

“Okay.” Lathe smiled, shooing him back from the kitchen. “Now go, dinner isn't for another hour. Now might be a good time for homework if it needs to get done.” Then you don't have to worry about it.

Tucker nodded, going back to the theatre room, glad the darkness hid his blush rather well. He sat
down next to Henry who had his German workbook open in his lap, already started on the page.
“You're about half-finished. What needs work?” I already did the whole thing, so I know all the answers. Eren checked it.

“I don’t remember how we’re supposed to do the bottom section, I know he told us in class and I can’t remember for shit.” Henry flipped the book over to show him the last section on the page he was working on. “Are we translating? Or are we fixing the grammar? Or are we doing both?” I don’t remember… Ugh! This is so frustrating! I hate that this is our review... Even if it is easy, I can never remember what we’re supposed to do!

“Well, the English under them are what the translations are supposed to be, they're not different questions to translate into German. It’s like ‘This German sentence is supposed to translate into that in English. Make it do that.’ So you need to fix grammar here.” Easy enough.

“Oooooohhhhhh…. See that makes so much more sense now, thanks.” He murmured quietly, quickly able to fix what he was supposed to. “Is there anymore? And am I staying over? I'll need to text my brothers.” They’ll freak out if I forget.

“Yes, you're cleared for tonight. Get this done and the entire video game collection is open for use.” Legit anything you can think of is back there. You'll go nuts. And then probably make us play GTA anyway. And that’s awesome, actually. “So you've got it, then, what you're doing?”

Henry nodded, pulling out his phone and handing it to Tucker. “Can you text the Group chat called ‘Fuckwads’ that I’m staying over tonight?” I don’t have a passcode, so you should be able to do it… His attention went right back to the homework to begin to finish it.

Tucker nodded, opening the phone, smiling faintly as he noticed the COD Black Ops background. Of course. Tucker opened the messaging app, typing into the group chat.

HP: This is Tucker

HP: Henry’s staying overnight, so don't worry about picking him up until tomorrow

BP: I called it! He’s gay!

KP: … Will you grow up?

BP: Nope!

KP: Thank you Tucker, can you tell your Dad to text me? So I have his number in case something pops up and no one’s at the house tomorrow?
HP: Yeah, I will
HP: Thanks

BP: HE’S GAY AND YOU'RE ALLOWING HIM TO STAY OVER!?
KP: We don’t //know// if he’s gay or not! Stop freaking Tucker out!
BP: But he’s never asked to stay at anyone else’s house!
KP: And your point?
BP: .... True he doesn’t have any friends!
BP: He’s a loser! HA!
HP: He's not some loser, chill man
HP: I know you're his brother and have some excuse to be like this but legit
HP: Chill
BP: Dude! His boyfriend is backing him up! I fucking knew it!
KP: I //will// kick you from this group chat!
HP: I'm not his boyfriend!
HP: And //please// kick him from the chat?
BP: No! I’ll be good!
KP: Tucker can you just give your father my number? Before Brett gets out of hand?
HP: If this doesn't count as ‘out-of-hand,’ I'll run

“One sec.” Tucker ran off with Henry’s phone, going into the kitchen and tapping Lathe’s arm again. “I've been told to give you Henry’s responsible brother’s number.” Tucker smiled when Lathe immediately forked over the phone, quickly typing in the name and handing it back.

HP: Kay Dad has your number
HP: I'm gonna go make sure Henry doesn't fail German now
BP: It’s too late for that, but good luck!
KP: Thank you, Tucker, tell your father to call me when he’s got time before 1 am
HP: First, my brother is the German teacher at our school, so.
HP: And I will, I'll make sure he calls
KP: Thank you, and I might be sending Henry home with you for tutoring from your brother! Thank you.

HP: That’d be cool, Eren pretty much does that with me anyway, and Dad and Mom are both fluent too

HP: And it's no problem!

Tucker tossed the phone back to Henry when he was back in the theatre room, watching him jump when it landed on the page right in front of him suddenly. He grinned. “One more sec. You almost done?” He looked over the sheet, seeing only a few more unfilled spaces. Cool. He ran off to the kitchen again, Lathe turning this time before he leaned on his elbow to see what he had to do now.

“What now, kid?”

“Henry’s brother wants you to call that number I gave you sometime before one AM. He wants to talk or something.”

“Cool.”

And that was that. Tucker went back to the theatre room, collapsing onto the loveseat. “You done yet? It’s been all of fifteen seconds, you should be done.” Tucker was grinning, obviously messing with him.

Henry waved his arm at him glaring. “Yeah yeah, I’m on the last one, dumbass…” I want to make sure I do this last one right. He was done within the minute and packing away his workbook again. “Alright, what do you have hidden away from me?” I wanna know what you mean by ‘collection’.

Tucker grinned evilly, tugging him up by the arm and leading him up the steps between the loveseats, to the area at the top where the projector room would be. A projector was set up on a table, but the room was open, the far wall covered with a huge grid like shelving unit, organised by console and then alphabetical by title of nearly every game worth hearing about. Dad kinda went all-out… he even dug out all his old consoles and then got the games he never got around to trying out… “Take your pick. The console choices are all behind you.” He nodded to the small wall separating the small area from the rest of the theatre, the waist-high shelf holding the entire collection of consoles, the switchboard neatly labelled on top with arcade buttons to pick the one you wanted and small lights to show which was selected. Dad did a really good job rigging this whole thing...
“Did I die?” I think I’m really in heaven! Henry had a complete look of awe, almost looking like he was ready to drool a bit. His eyes instantly wandered to the Xbox One games, looking over the various titles. He’s got everything! Watch Dogs, Modern Warfare, CoD, and a lot more first person shooters…. I’m in heaven!

“Nope, it’s all very real. You gonna pick something, or are you gonna stare at them and drool all day while I just pick Skyrim and force you to just sit there and watch?” If that’s what it takes to make you decide… “And I literally give zero shits what we’re playing, as long as I can play with you. Anything multiplayer is cool, any console.” Your pick. “And this isn't the last time you're coming over, so you don't have to kiss the wall of games goodbye forever tomorrow.” You legit look like you're ready to wine and dine that fucking shelving unit. …and god dammit, shelving unit, I called him first!

“Can we play Call of Duty? The multiplayer rounds on the mini maps are always fun.” Especially when I can kill my brothers when we play against each other… He pulled out the Black Ops disc for Xbox One. “That good?” He asked as he looked into Tucker’s eyes. His eyes are really green… Almost like his shirt color…. Hmm.

“Sure-” Tucker couldn’t help but blush a bit when Henry seemed to study his eyes, not able to look a way, stuttering a bit and hoping to death it wasn’t noticeable. The yellow light that lit the game titles had little mercy, his pink cheeks more noticeable. “As long as you let us play a round of zombies now and then… I-I’m better at those.” …I don’t suck as much… ……...fuck, just kiss me already, fucking hell...

Henry nodded. “Yeah, we can do that.” I don’t really like the zombie ones, always scare the crap out of me… They look too fucking real. “Let’s get a round or five in before dinner shall we?” He grinned excitedly, scampering back out towards his controller. I get to play video games! Woo!!!

Tucker nodded, watching him grin widely before he disappeared back down the steps and hopped over the back of the couch, landing comfortably with a flop. …fuck… I’m sooooo fucking tired. Tucker went after him, hopping over the back of the couch as well. “Move over or I’ll sit on you.” Tucker couldn’t help but feel a bit disappointed when he moved, settling next to him. …crap… and I wouldn’t’ve minded sitting in his lap… Tucker tried to ignore the thoughts, CoD distracting him well with how terribly he was doing in every lobby they joined while Henry went on to dominate the maps. It was about half an hour and fifty deaths later that Tucker threw up his hands. “Dude, I fucking suck ass at multiplayer. After this round is over, we’re playing the Alcatraz map on zombies.” It's happening.

“Alright, fine, we’ll play the fucking zombie game!” He glanced over to Tucker with a cheeky grin plastered over his ever white teeth. “What?”
Tucker couldn't help but ignore the game in favour of staring at Henry as he spoke, studying his handsome features. He snapped out of it when he looked at him oddly, rubbing at his eyes. “Nothin’, nevermind it. Now just bail on the round so we can play zombies and laugh when you die ten seconds in.”

“You can’t die ten seconds in, jackass! The game is modeled so that you’ll survive at least a fucking minute!” Henry growled at him as he got head shot after head shot. *These guys are mine!*

Tucker was confused, looking at him warily at his tone. *...he could just be way too into the zone, but I'm like thirty percent sure he's mad at me for some damn reason... “....Henry, you okay?”...you're weirding me out.*

Henry held up one finger to quiet him as he pulled out a knife and killed someone from behind, effectively ending the game with the final kill. “I’m not *that* bad at the zombie game you know.” He rolled his eyes as he lounged back, waiting for the game to show off stats. *I got the final kill.... And the most kills...*

“I was just joking, yeesh. With a kill-death ratio like that, you'll outlive me by twice the rounds I survive.” *You'll do way better than I can.* Tucker went to select the game he wanted when he could, shrugging one shoulder. “Just don't sound like you're about to kill me again and we’re cool.” *That was legit concerning.*

“Huh? Oh sorry, when my brothers and I play, things get heated... We’ve wrestled over it a bunch, to see who’s better.” *It's like a sport at my house, I didn't mean to make it sound like I was gonna hurt you.* “Sorry...” He mumbled quietly, looking to the display. *I don't get to pick weapons or anything, which sucks.*

.........fuck, I wouldn't mind wrestling with you... just as long as you pin me... fuck, Tucker, get your head out of the fucking gutter! Just start the damn game! Tucker hit the button to launch the game, waiting for the moment they could set off running, immediately going to board up windows and quickly gain points. *I need points for the Olympia still... it works well for me...*

Henry followed suit, obviously a little off set by the new game situation. *I hate zombie mode.... I don’t like that I just can’t run around shooting people’s heads off.... I need to stay put, like a sitting chicken! He kept his eyes on the screen, getting a bit panicky as the boards started to get hit. They’re coming.... Oh fuck.*

“Dude, do something! Stab them through the boards, it gets you more points. Also we can't exactly use up all of the ammo we have just yet, and it'll work for the first few rounds.” Tucker glanced
over when Henry started to tentatively move in to kill some of the zombies, quirking an eyebrow. “If you don't kill enough and get the points you need, you'll never be able to afford a better weapon.” C’mon, I'm doing all the work. “Legit, it's the first round. If you down I'm not saving you.” Nope, not my problem.

Henry seemed to find that, without the use of his pistol to save ammo, he mostly got up close to the boards and started to knife the zombies through the slats, keeping them at bay while Tucker moved around. Is this all I'm doing?

Tucker sighed as he saw a mob of them break through a window, going on his way to unlock a door. “Henry, get those and then let’s get a move on. We should probably make it to the first area the mystery box could be, it's not too far. Do you have enough points for a better weapon yet or no? Buy one off the wall, I'd recommend the semi-automatic for you, but I'm a shotgun person.” You should. I have enough for the door and for the Olympia, and we've barely started wave two. ...are you even doing anything?

“Uh... Yeah, hold please.” Henry went off and went to the wall, getting an semi-automatic, and a grin on his face once he knew how much ammo he had. “Alright I’m good for 60 zombies… Where is the most effective place to shoot them?” It is a head shot, right? Henry maneuvered his player towards where Tucker’s was. He’s played this before, and is good at it.

“Headshots are best, but you need to conserve as much ammo as you possibly can, because that gun is going to resemble a useless piece of plastic by round ten and you need to rack up as many points as possible for doors and better weapons. Shoot in the head, and don't waste any ammo. Sometimes there are ammo drops when you shoot zombies, just run over the gold floating things they leave behind. But don't run over the nuke drops.”

“Don't ?”

“No, don't. They become very useful in later rounds, but while the killing is this easy, we just want the points. You see a nuke, and unless we’re at the end of a wave, leave it. It's all about biding time.” Tucker ran down a hallway, opening another door and easily knifeing any zombie that came in his way. “I don't want to hear a single gunshot until round four.” Nope. “Cover for me, will you?” Tucker didn't give Henry a moment to object before he ran to a spot and electrocuted himself. Spooky ghostly mode engaged. Tucker quickly worked to restore power and open a door, electrocuting the zombies that herded around them in the meantime, Henry holding them off well enough while he interacted with his body, able to help him. “Cool, so that door’s open…” Tucker disappeared down the stairs without hesitation, and they made good time, getting to the first spot by round four. “Yes, the box is here! You take a go at it first, I still need points.” The walls need boarding up again...
Henry just watched in shock as Tucker took the lead with this. What the fuck is going on!? He got up to the crate opening it and watching the various guns spin around and watching the teddy bear fly by. “Um…. What’s good for this since you refuse to let me even use my gun at the moment?” I feel so out of place on this thing, like what the actual hell.

“Well, your pistol is about to be obsolete, so you can just run a round and let the zombies trail you for a bit, empty your ammo in them, get points while you still don't have to worry much. But that box gets you the good stuff, but since ammo is so limited, we’re keeping from using it all while we can help it.” Tucker ran around in a circle, a mob of zombies trailing him in a neat group. He emptied his pistol into them, only a few managing to fall before he got out his knife, taking them down one by one with a few good stabs, careful not to get too scratched up. “What weapon do you have? Replace your pistol, there's no point in keeping it. …dude, switch to your pistol. …now take the fucking gun before the box shuts!” He watched him quickly follow the order, holding a futuristic gun. “Aw man, you got a ray gun on your first try? Lucky. Those things are great. As in the alpha gun. Shoot a round or two at this mob, will you? Near the feet.” Come on, you can manage. “Have you ever played this game mode for more than two minutes?” It doesn't seem like it.

“Nope… I can’t do zombies.” He murmured back as his hands shook a bit, holding onto the control as he let the ray gun shoot towards the horde’s feet, watching them all fall quickly to the ground. “What the fuck, this thing is awesome!” He continued to run around in circles, getting a large horde around him and starting to unload his pistol first before knifing them and then letting the large crowd come in closer, which warranted the ray gun. This thing is fucking awesome!

“What do you mean, you can't do zombies? It's easier than a bunch of real-life players shooting at you constantly. These guys are at least predictable. C’mon, we need to go find the ethereal wolf head and feed him some corpses or something.” That's a thing we need to do. Tucker quickly took his spin at the mystery box while Henry held off the horde, sighing when he simply got a better pistol, switching out the ammo-less starter pistol. “Better than nothing, I guess. I’ve got to save points for the doors and stuff…” Whatever. I can get galva knuckles sooner if I just go with it. “C’mon, stairs.” Tucker led them up a flight of stairs, running through a few adjacent rooms before they met a few more zombies, shooting them and watching the wolf head into existence on the wall, the corpses sucked over to it, watching it chew them up. “Kill them close enough so the wolf can have them.” It's a thing, don't ask.

“What I mean is that I fucking hate zombies….. What the fuck is that thing !?” Henry shouted and almost jumped as he saw something ghost across the screen. He froze for a few seconds before going back to killing zombies. I don’t like this… What the hell! What the fuck is going on!?

Tucker laughed as Henry jumped out of his skin at the sight of him as a ghost, having mercy and pausing the game. “Dude, we can just go back to multiplayer or something, it's fine. I didn't know a bunch of animated zombies and an electric ghost was enough to make you shit your pants.” Tucker wore a shit-eating grin, looking over to him. Lol.
Henry shook his head. “N-No… I-I’m fine… Um, I’m gonna go get a glass of water.” He murmured and jetted out of the room like it was the last place he wanted to be. I fucking hate zombies…. I hate them, I really hate them…. Because they always look so real . I seriously hope he’s not secretly one of those slasher movie lovers…. I’d never be able to even think about a relationship…. A relationship? He’s invited me over once , to play video games and I’m already jumping it to relationship status? Fuck ! He finally made it up the stairs, entering the kitchen after only a moment and gaping at the number of people that had arrived while they were playing video games. When he said a lot…. I didn’t think he meant this many people.

Lathe and Eren were still fussing over the stove, in high gear cooking mode. The older man glanced up, chuckling as Henry seemed to sneak to the open kitchen, wanting to avoid the mass of people. He spoke up over the heightened sound in the room, many people talking, dogs and puppies yapping, and kids playing. “Yeah, Saturdays are a production. Whatcha need?” It's lots of people, yeah.

“U-uh… J-just a glass of water please.” I hope the fucking stutter goes away, it’ll be hella embarrassing if it doesn’t. Henry blushed in embarrassment looking over to see Eren just a few feet away and freezing. Oh my god… It really is him… I mean I should feel better around him knowing he’s my teacher but…. Oh my god it’s him!

Lathe nodded, getting a glass for him and nodding to the fridge door. “Water and ice right there.” He looked from Henry to Eren and back again when he didn't make any move to get his drink. “...you're either in shock because that's your teacher, or because of his songs and stuff.” Most of which I wrote, by the way. Humble brag. But legit I can't tell why you're not moving right now.

“You have a celebrity living in your house…."

“Eren has a golden throat, apparently I can science and my wife can order the police in this county around however she wants. ...welcome to the Quo household.” Lathe just shrugged, giving him a small grin. “Oh, did you hear the one where Markiplier and Jacksepticeye came over for dinner last week because their flight in Wichita got cancelled?” It's a very good one where there's no punchline or BS. Very amusing.

“Yeah, I did hear about that… That’s awesome…. Oh… Um, I think Kevin wanted to talk to you when you got the chance....” He murmured pulling out his phone to read through the texts. Fuck! Brett you asshole! How could you even tell him I was anywhere near gay! Fuck! He invited me over too, now he’ll think I'm weird.

Ieva made her way into the kitchen, looking over Lathe and Eren working as well as a teen she’d
never seen before. “I’m home… And just who might you be?” You’re new here… And you look like you’ve seen a ghost. Am I that scary in my uniform?

Lathe looked over, smiling when he saw Ieva. “Hey Honey.” He blushed faintly when she ambled over and kissed his cheek, glancing over to Henry. Well, now he knows my wife is a cop. There you go.

“U-Uhm…” Henry snapped out of it when Lathe gave him a pointed look, looking back to the woman in uniform. “Hi, Mrs. Quo. I’m Henry, Tucker’s friend… he invited me over to stay the night…” Henry rubbed the back of his neck, shuffling his feet a bit. Fuck, I’m no good at this shit... and I can't help but be intimidated by the fact that you're a fucking cop...

Ieva smiled, her hands slipping down to her sides. “Well it’s nice to meet you Henry, now if you’ll excuse me, I should go get changed.” She had a huge smile on her face as she walked towards the large hallway before turning back. “Oh and tell Eren to stop worrying about the schnitzel, it smells like it’s done.” It smells so good in this house and I love it.

Lathe swatted Eren’s hand away from the platter that had the schnitzel on it, covered with foil to keep hot. “Eren, stop it, it's fine. We took the temperature and everything, nobody will die of malaria from eating it.” It's fine. Lathe looked over the counter, many things already in serving bowls, ready to be moved to the table. “...are we ready to eat?”

“We're ready to eat.”

“Sweet! Henry, fetch Tucker, will you? We need to herd people to the table-” He looked over as the doorbell rang. “...or at least, Eren does. I'll get that.”
Chapter 77: Wacky Weekend Part 2

Lathe hung the towel over his shoulder back on the handle of the oven, asking over to the door. *If it's Girl Scout cookies I want ten boxes of each.* He opened the door, stunned instead to see a teenager on the stoop, someone he didn't recognise. “...yes? Can I help you?” *you don't look very good...* He was worried when they gave him a solemn look, lost for words, looking lost altogether. “...are you okay?” *What's wrong?*

The boy struggled to clear his throat, coughing into his sleeve for a moment. “D-do… Do you h-have any scraps? That I could take?” *I just need a little more food for today, and maybe if I get enough for tomorrow...* His eyes were bloodshot from his coughing fit a few moments after, a sunken look to them. “I-I’m s-sorry to disturb you....”

Lathe looked them up and down, something clicking. *...he's a runaway.* “Here, come inside, you look in pretty bad shape...” Lathe motioned for him to come in, the door clicking shut behind him. “It's fine, don't worry, you can eat with us if you like. Can you tell me what's happened to you?” *Why are you running away?*

The boy shook his head quickly, though regretted the motion instantly, stumbling a bit on his own two feet. “I-I shouldn’t stay…. T-Thank you f-for your time...” *I can’t stay... They’ll ask questions... There’s a lot of people here... I picked the wrong house to come to....* He moved towards the door behind him, a hand reaching out to grab the knob. *I need to get out...*

Lathe’s eyes widened as the kid nearly crumpled to the floor, desperate to get out. Lathe reached for their shoulder to steady them, the boy finally looking up, meeting his gaze with scared eyes. *..........he reminds me so much of myself..... he's terrified.* “Hey, don't panic, it’s alright, I can't make you stay inside. You can go outside if you want. But can you at least let me bring you some stuff? I'll get you hot dinner, something to drink, a blanket, I can tell you're freez... you can stay for a shower and rest for the night in an actual bed if you want to, we’ll give you breakfast. I can give you money for a hotel room for the night. Anything so you don't have to sleep on the streets.” Lathe quietly pled with him. *It'd break my heart if I let you leave, knowing you were going to sleep in a ditch somewhere...*

He looked at him, before looking beyond him, at the eyes that looked out to him from the table where everyone was sitting. *Shit... So many people have seen me...* “I-I… I’m g-gonna s-stay outside...” He murmured quietly, putting his head down in shame as he looked away from the small children. *They probably have no idea.... Better keep it that way... “T-Thank you, s-sir....”* He quickly got out of Lathe’s hands and he got outside, shivering a bit at the cold blast of air before sitting on the front steps. *I shouldn’t’ve bothered him...*
Lathe watched him flee to the porch, looking back to the table, making up his mind. He went to the kitchen, getting out a plate. “You guys can all eat without me, I've got stuff to take care of.”

Something bad must've happened... I don't want him suffering any more than he already has been... who knows how far he’s gone on foot... Lathe soon nudged the front door open, a thick blanket draped over his arm, holding a plate piled with hot food and a bottle of water. He gave the teen a weary smile. “You can sit at the table we have out here, you know. You can do that. It'll make eating easier.” Lathe set the plate at the table, motioning for the kid to come over, trying to seem nonthreatening.

"I don't wanna hurt you. I just really wanna help.

The teen slowly got up off of the porch step, stumbling a bit as he got up and to the table. “T-Thank you really… You're too kind.” 

You don't even know me... Not like you ever will... But... He thanked him again as he was handed the blanket, wrapping it around himself. It's so unseasonably cold at night now.... Whenever the sun starts to set it just gets colder than it should...

Lathe smiled to him. “Of course. It's the least I can do.”

I've adopted two kids and foster five. It's nothing. “...do you need someone to vent to, or should I just let you be?” Lathe’s voice was gentle, not wanting to scare the teen any more.

The boy shook his head, picking up the fork with a shaking hand. “N-No, thank you for the meal.... You're really kind...” His voice was rough, and broken, like the boy’d seen all horrific things in life. I just needed food... So maybe I came to a good place to get food? He gave me a whole plate... And it looks good... But it looks really rich too... The teen had a sad smile on his face as he lifted it to his mouth, knowing he wouldn’t be able to eat much of it. It is rich....

“I've adopted two kids and I'm fostering five more right now... it's in my job description.” Lathe smiled, the teen looking up to him with surprise. “You eat as much as you want or can, and the other offers still stand. But don't just run off when you're done, okay? I'll at least give you some stuff for the road.”

You look like you'll need it...

The teen nodded, slowly returning to his food. “T-Thank you.” His voice was barely a whisper as he picked up his fork again to eat, pulling the warm blanket closer to his body to keep in warmth. It's actual food... It's not garbage anymore... He heard the soft click of the front door closing behind the generous man as he returned to his family. I'm all alone again, it's what I’ve been reduced to... He couldn’t help as he started to sniffle, tears threatening to spill from his bloodshot eyes. He’ll let me take a shower here? The teen barely got through half the plate before he knew he needed to stop. I can't eat anymore of this... He picked up his silverware, setting it on the plate before he got up to neatly fold the blanket before picking up everything neatly, trying to man up and knock on the door again. It's probably locked... they wouldn’t want a stranger just being able to come into their house.

Lathe had been glancing up from his plate to the window every few seconds at the table, unable to help from checking on him. ...he was so bony when I grabbed his shoulder... he's got to be
seriously underweight… I wonder how long he's been walking… what has he been eating…? Probably not much, if anything… he asked for scraps… he sounded like he would've been grateful to dig through the garbage… that's awful… Lathe watched as the boy stood some time later, seeing him straighten up and move to the door, though a knock didn't sound for a bit. …he's got to be nervous… if he knocks, I'll let him in. Lathe was patient, smiling and setting his mug down when he picked up the soft sound of knocking. There he is. “I'll get that.” Lathe stood, going back to the door and grabbing another bag set on the kitchen table on the way, packed with snacks, water bottles, toiletries, a folded up poncho, anything he could think of if the boy just wanted to leave. He opened the door with the bag hanging off his arm, smiling to the teen. “You finished?” He watched the boy nod, his voice soft. “Would you like to stay the night? We have plenty of room for you, we'd love to have you.” Breakfast, a bed, and a hot shower are all involved. ...please?

“U-Uh….W-Would I be able to t-take a shower? A-And use y-your first aid kit?” I really need to clean out all the cuts on my feet before they get infected… He swallowed hard, fear obvious in the boy's eyes as he waited for Lathe’s answer, shaking in his torn up boots.

“Of course you can shower. And I used to be a general surgeon- you can use the kit we have, and I can help you if you need it.” I don't know how hurt you are or where... “Come in, it’s freezing.” Lathe motioned him inside, taking the half-eaten plate from him, covering it and stowing it in the fridge quickly. If he leaves tomorrow, he’s taking the leftovers and then some. “Here, c'mon upstairs with me, okay? We’ll get you set up in one of the rooms. Do you want me to wash your clothes for you? We’ve certainly got some you could borrow for after you shower.” We’ve got to have something comfortable for you to sleep in... I didn't take those boxes of older clothes down to the mission yet... we’ve probably got your size in there, most of them are Eren’s old clothes… and you could use new shoes....

The boy looked both surprised and fearful as he took a few steps on the hardwood floor only to get to a carpeted stairway. “U-Uh.... S-Sir… Sh-should I t-take my boots o-off?” I don’t want to get the carpet dirty... But if I take my shoes off he’ll see my feet...

“You can if you want to, but it doesn’t matter if you get the carpet dirty. ...what shoe size are you?” ...you'll need new ones definitely...

“I-I’m not really sure… I got them a-at a s-store for b-beggars.... T-they don't h-have a size.....” The boy stuttered as he followed Lathe closely up the stairs, still quite timid around him. This place is so big... This guy must be rich... I'm still scared.... He's being nice... Almost too nice...

“We’ll find you a new pair, those ones have obviously seen better days…” Lathe went to one of the first unoccupied rooms, one he knew had an adjoining bathroom. “Here, you can sleep in here for the night. I'll go find you a change of clothes before you get in the shower, okay? Make yourself at home. ...do you want to tell me your name? It's okay if you don't.” I can understand wanting to remain anonymous... but it's likely we'll never meet again after this, so it won't matter much.
Shit… He’s asking questions again… I can give him a fake name… “Y-You can call me T-Tim….” That’s what I tell everyone who asks… And that’s all they’ll ever get. He slowly took off his first jacket. Lathe would’ve been able to see the large holes in the fabric as he laid it out on the bed. Everything’s got holes… I’m surprised I don’t have holes.

“Okay, Hun. You can call me Lathe or Mr. Quo, whatever you want, really. I’ll be right back.” Lathe slipped away, going down to the basement to fish the boxes of clothes out of the storage space, cutting them open and sifting through them. Let’s see… underwear, socks, sweatpants, tee shirt, hoodie, all clean. And as for shoes… Lathe went up to the hall closet, going to dig into the back, pulling out one of the three pairs of his metal-toe boots, the smallest pair. He might fit these… neither I nor Eren can fit them. He took them all upstairs, going to quietly knock at the doorframe, though he caught himself for a moment, seeing the teen with most of his layers shed. He was in a tattered tank top, a ripped up pair of jeans, and he’d tugged the ruined boots off of bruised, battered, scratched-to-hell feet. “Oh my god, your feet …” They look horrible … Lathe set the clothes on the table close to the door, coming over to him. “Sit down on the bed, okay? I need to see your feet, make sure nothing’s infected.” That’d make this worse...

Tim shook his head, again regretting the decision immediately as he slumped on the bed, struggling to clamber away from Lathe as he came over. “I-I’m fine, it’s okay…. I can get to them later, I just n-need the first aid kit…..” The boy’s eyes were full of fear as he slowly pulled his feet up close to his body, trying to hide them with just as badly bruised, and cut hands. I can get it myself....

Lathe stopped, nodding and not moving to him, understanding the look in his eyes. *This is all a new environment, new people. He won't trust me much yet. ...but I have to try...* “Honey, you’re malnourished, dehydrated, sleep deprived if the bags under your eyes say anything, probably sick from being out in the cold and rain for so long, and you’re battered and bruised. You nearly pass out when you shake your head. I know you wouldn't want to go to a hospital or something, but I have half a mind to drive you to one and admit you. You're not in great shape. Can we make a deal? You can go and take as long and hot of a shower as you want, sleep as late as you feel like sleeping, and then take whatever food you want tomorrow morning, but after you shower, come to me fix up your feet, because you can't walk like that if they're not properly wrapped. You shouldn't walk at all with them trying to heal, but it’s what I can do for you. You can even keep the clothes if you want. ...does that sound okay?” I just don't want you in so bad of shape...

Tim was quiet for a minute, his eyes looking over his body. “I-I can't repay you for this…” It's why I asked for scraps....

“I don't care about you repaying me. You don't have to worry about a thing here besides yourself. It's okay, really. ...do we have a deal?” Say yes, please.
Tim was quiet for a few more minutes before nodding. “O-okay.” That’s fine I guess, my clothes won’t be soaking wet or smell anymore, which is good I guess… “C-Can you show me h-how the shower works?”

Lathe nodded, smiling. “Okay.” Lathe brought him to the bathroom, showing him how to use the shower, where the shampoo and conditioner were, getting him a towel and washcloth, a toothbrush with toothpaste, a razor to shave, everything. “I’ll wash the clothes you’ve got out now, and you can give me the rest later, okay? Take your time.” Lathe gathered up his coats, taking them downstairs, leaving Tim by himself. I’ll wash these, throw them in the dryer, and see if I can’t fix some of the holes in them… Lathe washed them all on a delicate cycle to not beat them up too much more, getting out a small sewing kit and starting to patch the windbreaker when it was dry. This one’s most important… it has a few big tears, but the rest is on the seams… I can use the machine for that… Lathe worked quickly, patching the clothes as they came out of the dryer. He even replaced the broken zippers and snaps on them, tying the ends of the threads off neatly. It was about two hours later when he came upstairs with the jackets and hoodies, his torn pants still waiting to be patched. “Hon, I’ve got your jackets and stuff clean and fixed up…”

Tim looked at the clothes, tears starting to form in his eyes. “Oh my god… He fixed all the holes…” He leaned slowly towards where the jackets were on the stand. Tim picked them up, slowly examining them, his eyes threatening even more to shed tears. They’re all fixed. Who is this man? He’s a saint. I’ll have to pay him back somehow. He waited patiently for Lathe to return. “T-thank you really. You’re so kind.” It’s almost a little scary how much thought you put into this...

Lathe just smiled, setting his bag on the bed. “I was in the same place as you when I was a teen… practically lived under a bridge for a few years. I understand how hard it is.” It’s difficult… and terrifying… and just horrid. ...coping isn’t easy, and every little bit of help was a huge relief if it meant not worrying for just a moment. “Hop up, Hun. Let’s get you cleaned up.” I hope they aren't infected. Lathe was patient as Tim sat back down on the bed, moving his foot was in his lap, inspecting the angry red cuts. ...well shit… “Hate to break it to you, but they’re infected… how long have you been walking in those boots?” They didn't do even a mediocre job of protecting you… they did a horrible one.

Tim was quiet for a moment before he wiped at his face with a thin wrist. “T-Two years…” His voice was broken as he kept his eyes away from Lathe. God only knows what you’ll say, you’ll probably yell at me. “They… they’ve probably been i-infected for quite awhile…” I’m probably running a fever too… but I just feel cold...
“...mine were dress shoes.” Lathe inspected the other foot, thinking. “Paper thin, they were being thrown out... I had to constantly have my feet wrapped... no arches, nothing... if I stepped in a puddle, I just resigned myself to it... drying them off never helped much anyway, skin would just peel off anyway...” It just happened... a part of existing, I dunno. “I have new boots for you.”

Lathe nodded to the pair sitting next to the bed. “If you fit them, you can keep them. They have arches in them, and they'll keep your feet dry and protected. I have others if that's not your size.”

Lathe reached for alcohol wipes, needing to clean out the cuts. “I'm really sorry, but I need to clean these out. It's gonna hurt, but you'll be okay.” You can do this. You'll get better this way. Lathe started to clean the cuts on the bottom of his feet, surprised when Tim didn't even flinch. ...huh.

Lathe worked up to his ankle, stopping there. “Hun, do me a favour and tell me the moment when you feel me touch the bottom of your foot with my finger, okay?” Lathe let his finger hover out of sight under his foot, waiting a moment before tapping his foot. He didn't register anything, the teen quiet. Another tap. Nothing. He pressed his finger into his foot, only then getting a response. “...oh my... you only noticed when I dug my finger into your foot...” Lathe sighed, moving on to his other foot with the alcohol wipes. “I wouldn't be surprised if you have flat feet after all this time... and you've got some nerve damage...” Well shit... Lathe moved to gently wipe a cream over his feet, thinking. ...should I offer... no, I shouldn't... he'd lose blood, and he won't want an IV. Lathe did what he could, starting to wrap up his feet. “When I'm done, try the boots on, and I can get you a bigger pair if you need them.”

We'll get you set up for tomorrow...

Tim thanked him quietly, his voice a little softer now that he was able to clear his throat a bit better. “I um... What time do you usually make breakfast... I don't really want to bother you anymore that much, especially with all you've done for me already.” I couldn't possibly ask to stay until I felt better... that would be wrong, and he's already been nice enough to me.

“With how tired you look, I wouldn't be surprised if you woke up around when we normally eat lunch. My son- one of them- has a track meet tomorrow, but I'll make Eren drive him. What do you say I wake you up at around six thirty, seven? I'll make breakfast then, everyone else would be up. And you don't have to worry about getting in the way at all. You're very welcome to stay as long as you like- until you feel well, at least. You don't look too good.” Lathe reached out, feeling his forehead with the back of his hand. “Yeah, you're burning up. I suspected as much. Here, take these. Two of them, okay?” Lathe handed him a small orange bottle and a bottle of water from the depths of his bag, finishing one foot and starting on the other. Anything to get your systems back on track as soon as possible... you could leave anytime you want... you might bail in the dead of night, who knows. But for now, I'm going to help you feel better.

Tim thanked him again, taking the pills he was given and handing them back. He drained the bottle of water without even thinking about it and watching him finish up wrapping his feet. Okay, I'll try the shoes on and then I'll see if I can sleep... I should be able to... I think I still have my knife... he didn't take it away did he? Tim glanced over towards the small object on the other nightstand. It's still there... He seemed to let out a sigh of relief as he slowly pulled the boots to the bed, sitting down to tug them on over his feet. They're a bit big... but that means if I could eat enough to grow I'd still fit in them... “They... they fit, thank you, M-Mr. Quo.” What do I do now?

Lathe smiled, standing from the bed, packing back up. “I'm glad. I'll get the rest of your clothes
cleaned and mended, okay? You should get as much sleep as you can. You'll feel better.” Lathe hesitated to leave, resting a gentle hand on Tim’s shoulder. “I know what you're going through is really hard, and that you've been away from your home for a while and that it's hard to accept help… but I think you should really consider staying a short while. I'm not going to make you leave, but I'm also no forcing you to stay. Your feet need to mend, you're fighting a cold and you barely have any meat on your bones. I’m not making you make this decision now, think about it. And you can change your mind whenever you want. You’re free to leave and come back if you change your mind. I'm just making sure you know the offer is there. I know it’s hell. And if you ever want to talk or just want a snack, come talk to me, okay?” *It's hell. And nobody deserves it.*

Tim nodded after a few moments, slowly starting to get up onto the bed. “Thank you, but I’ll be leaving tomorrow…” *I don’t stay in one place for more than a night…* He shifted so that he could get under the comforter, and slip between the soft sheets. *I’ll definitely be able to sleep here for the night.*

Lathe nodded solemnly, going to take the rest of his dirty clothes. “Okay, Hon. Sleep well.” Lathe was gone after that, turning out the light for him, going to finish cleaning and patching his clothes, working late on them with an expert hand. *He won't mind if I add a pocket or two to this jacket… I've got the same material as a scrap… I'll line them nice, too… along with some snacks… and maybe some money…* Lathe came upstairs past midnight with the finished stack of clothes, the jeans having been torn apart and patched up to look new, the seams even sturdier than when they were new. Lathe was silent as he set them in a neat pile on the large desk against the far wall, leaving for his own bed. *I hope he feels better in the morning…*

Eren was the first to wake up in the house, at the crack of dawn. He knocked on Mark’s door to get them to wake up. “Rise and shine **love birds**, we’re leaving in an hour, so get up and get dressed.” Eren made sure that there was movement before he scampered down the stairs and outside to let the animals out and to feed them their morning meals. *Okay, what to make for breakfast? Mark will want a smoothie… so I can make smoothies for all of us… and maybe some cereal for myself? I wonder what Claire’ll want?*

Mark groaned as he heard Eren at the door. *And I just finished falling back asleep from getting up an hour ago…. Fuck…* He raised his head, leaning over towards Claire, kissing all over her face, waiting for her to get up. *Come on, time to open up your eyes. I have a big day today! I’m so excited that you get to come and watch!* He had the feeling of butterflies in his stomach as he thought about the track meet which started at the ungodly hour of seven in the morning. *But then I think we’re done after noon.*

Claire blinked awake slowly, smiling softly as he kissed all across her cheeks, a hand coming up to catch his chin, bringing him in for a slow kiss, tugging him on top of her. Her hands lightly wandered for a moment, both of them just basking in the others presence for a minute or two. She reached down and gave his ass a playful squeeze, grinning and breaking their kiss. “Today’s the day you do the running thing.” She pecked his nose, her eyes warm. *I get to see you run and leave the others in the dust! I also get to see that lovely ass and those long legs in action…*
“It is, shall we get up? Get dressed, so I’m not tempted to make yesterday morning happen all over again.” He giggled quietly and he slowly got up from where he was, his body completely naked. *As much as I would like a repeat of yesterday morning, I've got to run...*

“...but what if I don't wanna?” Claire leaned up to hug his middle, she herself also completely bare. “Tell you what. If after the meet we have enough alone time before I get picked up, if you do well enough in the meet I just might ride you.” Claire nipped his neck, feeling him shiver. *I'd love to...*

“Damn… That’s a tempting offer…. And I think I might be inclined to do even better now.” He murmured and he stood, letting his length hang between his legs, though it started to perk with the usual morning hardness. *Hmm, I'll need to get rid of that...*

Claire slowly stretched, getting out of bed and going to slip into a change of clothes when she noticed Mark’s slowly hardening length, unable to keep her eyes off of him as he started to change. *Hm...* Claire sidled up to him, turning him from the armoire and pecking his lips, her hands wandering down his sides. “...would you like me to... help you, with that?” *Please?*

“Hmm… Claire, that’s too tempting...” *God, that's gotta happen now.* “Please.” He murmured breathlessly, his fingers running through Claire’s hair gently, and lovingly. *I’d love for you to do that...*

Claire smirked, kissing him again before moving to her knees, kissing up his hip, her hands running up and down his strong thighs. *Fuck... he's got muscle... he's perfect...* Claire kissed to his base, nipping it before moving to take his tip into her mouth, slowly beginning to bob her head. *So thick... he's wonderful...*

Mark groaned as he watched her take as much as she could in. “F-fuck… Claire …” *It feels so good, and the sight... Oh my god I will not be able to hold it... It’s too early...* He groaned, his eyes full of adoration as she continued her ministrations.

Claire moved one hand over his side, gently massaging his balls as she sucked on his long length, sucking harder as he let out choked moans. *Come on, I wanna taste you.* She moved back to suck at his tip, her other hand coming up to stroke his shaft as she lapped at his tip, nudging the slit merclessly. *You sound so wonderful when you cum... I wanna hear you moan...*

Mark let out a whine as he felt his coil tighten uncontrollably. “C-Claire… f- fuck …” He couldn’t control himself as he came into her mouth and all over her face. *Fuck... I feel warm...*
Claire struggled to swallow his load, unable to and letting him cum on her cheeks so she didn't choke. She pumped him firmly through his orgasm, letting him ride it out, lapping his release from his tip. She licked her lips, standing and taking the tissue Mark offered her, wiping off her cheeks before she was immediately pulled in for a hot kiss, melting into it. *Fuck...* She whimpered quietly when their tongues tangled, whimpering into his mouth. She pouted when he broke the kiss, reluctantly letting go of him. *Dammit... I want him... I'll get him later... dammit...*

“Let’s get dressed... Eren will not wait for us, and he will barge in, he knows where the key for the door is.” *He’s not as nice as Dad.* He went over to the adjoined bathroom, quickly cleaning himself up before he got into his speedo underwear. *Gotta wear this with the uniform...*

Claire started to change, clipping on her bra and stepping into panties before tugging on leggings and a nice top. *I hope he likes these leggings... I brought them specifically so he can see whatever he likes...* She meandered to the bathroom to wash up, smirking as she saw him in just a speedo. “Jesus, Mark, put that thing away before I spontaneously combust.” Claire fanned herself with her hand, her gaze raking over him. *He’s so toned... fuck, he’s hot and he’s in a goddamn speedo... I’m not gonna be able to think of anything else.*

“What?” He turned around giving her full sight of his abs and his bulge, a smirk on his face. “Like what you see?” *I hope you do.... I fucking hate trying to cramp everything into my speedo...*

“Fuck yes...” She grinned as he blushed, still unused to her being so blunt. “God, the only things I’ll be able to do at that meet is ogle you and think about you wearing that speedo. It should be illegal to be that attractive.” She moved to peck his lips, nipping his neck lightly. “Well, with any luck we’ll have enough time after to get you out of it... now move so I can wash my face.” *I’m seriously turned on right now, but I low-key feel gross, so.*

Mark smirked and pecked her forehead before heading out of the bathroom, and back to his room to slip into his tight uniform. *Good thing my hair doesn’t grow that fast, my legs and pits are shaved... Oh right, I need deodorant.* He rose his arm to apply it generously, turning back to see Claire. His eyes raked over her appearance. *Damn.... She’s fine... As fine as fine can be.*

Claire washed her face once she had control of the sink, brushing her teeth and then trying to untangle her long hair. *It never gets easier.* Soon enough she was throwing her hair up into a long ponytail, her wavy hair still making it far down her back. She dragged her stuff out of the bathroom, smirking as she saw him in his tight uniform. “...and I thought I would be able to keep my hands off you...” *I really wanna just strip you right the fuck now but I can’t.... dammit...*
tea in his hand along with the morning paper.

“Big day today, your smoothie is in the fridge Mark, Claire what would you like in yours? We have bananas, apples, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, oranges, lemons, limes, peaches, star fruit, pomegranates, and dragon fruit.” *There’s a lot of choices just in the berry section...*

Claire stared at him in shock. “...that’s a lot, Uhm… orange, lemon, raspberry and pomegranate please… if that's okay....” *Why do you people own so much fruit?*

Eren nodded and got out the selected fruits and started to expertly chop them up and put them in the blender. “Okay, regular yogurt or greek yogurt?”

“Greek.”

“Strawberry or plain vanilla?”

“Umm… Vanilla.”

“Milk or OJ?”

“Geez how many more choices do I have?”

“Milk or OJ?”

“Um… OJ.”

“Alright, protein powder? Vitamins? Anything?”

“Um, no thanks, just the smoothie.”

“Alright, you can go look in the pantry to see if we have any cereal you like or I can make eggs and
toast really quickly.” Eren set off to make her smoothie, making sure that he did it quickly to prevent from waking up the kids. I got my tea, I’ll be all set, I’m good with just a granola bar, then maybe I won’t need to take my nausea pill... He set out Claire’s smoothie once it was done, on the counter, grabbing her a bowl when she had selected her choice of cereal. Mark getting his green smoothie from the fridge, and already half way through a protein bar. Mark’s going through food like there’s no tomorrow, and he’s not gaining any weight. He’s muscular... but he doesn’t have muscles like Levi does, that’s for sure. Eren watched them as they both ate quietly, getting himself a large travel mug and making a tea to go. “Mark make sure you have enough water, I’m packing a big snack kit with protein bars and I froze a few of your smoothies, so that they’ll thaw and you can drink them if you want… while you’re on break or something… and Claire I’m bringing waters for us too. Get whatever you two want packed and we’ll get going.” He watched them nod as he put the dishes in the sink and rinsed them out, setting them aside to dry and going to pack a cooler of waters and Mark’s smoothies. He then packed a bag full of snacks for him and Claire as well as extra protein bars for Mark. I dunno if they’ll get hungry or not... this is the first track meet we’ve ever gone to. After both of them had everything in the car and themselves he got into the driver’s seat and started towards the track meet at Sina public High school, a good half hour away from their house.

Mark’s knee continued to bounce for the entire ride as he looked out the window. The match will go fine… It’s us against Sina… it should only be about 4 hours.... And I think Claire is staying until dinner… maybe we can go riding after? Out to the Lake? His mind went completely blank as he watched out the window as the houses went by. We’ll be to Sina soon.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Lathe was quiet when he ascended the stairs, the muffled sounds of the kids eating breakfast following him. A few of them are up… I made smoothies and pancakes with all the fixings... Lathe poked his head in to Tim’s room at seven on the dot, having wanted to let him sleep as long as he had said. He could really use more rest... but I told him I’d wake him up. Lathe moved to his side, reaching out and gently shaking his shoulder. “Hun, it’s Lathe, Mr. Quo. Wake up, breakfast is waiting-”

Tim was asleep soundly until he felt someone touch his shoulder, his hand immediately closing around his knife as he brought it out towards whoever was touching him. I don’t have money… Get off of me! His eyes were wide with panic as he held the knife with shaking hands.

Lathe watched with shock as Tim immediately raised the knife to him, quickly and effectively disarming him on instinct, soon having the knife in his own hand. He moved to set it on the far desk, turning back to him. “Hun, I'm not about to kill you, chill the hell out! It's fine.” Lathe held his hands up in surrender from across the room, giving him space to get his bearings. Well shit...

Tim’s eyes were wide with shock as he looked around his surroundings in confusion. Where am I?
Was I drugged again? What happened to me? He looked over his body barely remembering what had happened the previous day until he saw the bandages that he’d poorly wrapped around himself last night after locating some bandages. Oh... I... I’m okay... fuck... I pulled a knife on him...

“I...” Tim’s mouth was dry with guilt as he looked down and away. I should leave... I was disrespectful... “I... I-I’m sorry...” He started to shake, curling up to himself. “I... I didn’t mean...” He trailed off, the sunken look in his eyes that much worse as he started to really wake up and realize what he’d done. I bit the hand that fed me...

Lathe’s expression soon shifted to one of sympathy, coming over to the bed. “It's okay, Hun, you did it on reflex, I understand. I was the same way for a long time.” It still happens once in a blue moon... I remember I nearly blindly tackled Levi once forever ago when he smacked me awake.... Lathe sat down next to him, wanting to help him as he shook from fear. ...when Eren gets this scared, he needs hugs a lot of the time... but you probably won't want a hug.... ...but at the same time, I don't know when the last time you've had friendly human contact was... you could be lonely for all I know. I have no idea. “Are you okay, Hun? ...do you need a hug, or do you just want space?” I'm fine with either. You won all my sympathy the second you showed up, really...

Tim shook his head, slowly to try and keep himself from blacking out. “I-I’m sorry....” He mumbled quietly, feeling the first tear fall down his cheek, the next few following not even seconds later. “I-I’ll get dressed... And... And get going....” I’m staying here too long as it is...

Lathe shifted a bit closer to him, pressing a soft blue cloth into his hand, his other hand on his arm. “Hey, it's okay Hun, you don't have to cry. It's okay, really, it is. You can get dressed, but please, stay for breakfast? I'll make you pancakes and a smoothie, any kind you want. It's okay.” Lathe wanted to pull the teen into a hug, but he didn't, trying not to crowd him. Please don't cry...

Tim looked down to the cloth, using it to wipe at his face, his eyes still retaining their bloodshot look. “O-Okay.... A-A smoothie... s-sounds fine...” His voice was weak as he sniffled, looking away from Lathe as he slowly handed back the cloth. My head’s pounding... I need to quit crying...

Lathe shook his head a bit, letting him hang onto the cloth for another moment. “It’s fine, Hun. And don't worry- we'll send you off with more food for the road when you do go. How are you feeling?” Lathe raised a hand to his forehead, his brow furrowed. “Hun, you're burning up even worse... I really don't think you should even be getting up... you can rest awhile longer and I'll bring your food up here if you like, you must be exhausted.” Lathe tried desperately to persuade him, not able in good conscience to make this sick teen walk around or leave. You're really sick... you must be around 102 or 103 by this point... which is bad...

Tim looked down at his feet. “N-No… I’m gonna get dressed and I-I’ll eat…… T-Then I need to go...” His voice was a little harder as he slowly shifted to get up, his legs wobbling weakly as he made his way over to his clothes. “W-where do you want me to put the clothes I borrowed?” They’ll probably need to be washed...
“You had room in your backpack, right? If not, they go in your new bag of supplies there.” Lathe motioned to the bag, sitting innocently next to his backpack. “If the ones you already had weren’t enough to keep you warm… and we’ve got more spares, if you want them…” Whatever you need. ...and if you have to go, I’ll let you. You’ve gotten this far...

“I-I couldn’t possibly take more from you, you’ve already given me a new pair of boots… And fixed all my clothes… And let me shower and sleep more than I ever have in a long time.” That was the best I’ve slept probably since I was still living with Mom...

“And the fact that it’s been so long is exactly why I’m doing this. You’ve been away from home a long time, you deserve a bit of peace and care once in awhile. They’re yours, Hun.” Lathe smiled. I know it’s a hard thing to accept, but I want to give it.

“T-Thank you…” He murmured quietly and got everything ready to get dressed, watching as Lathe left the room. He quickly packed away his new clothes before putting his layers on, slowly and delicately. He laced up his new boots and picked up his bags. Hmm… My wallet… Where’s my wallet? He checked his pockets, thankful that he’d taken his ID out and put it in his own bag when he opened the wallet up to see multiple twenties in there that were not there before. What? Why…. I can’t take this....

Lathe went to where the kids were finishing up breakfast, clearing the table a bit from finished plates, cleaning up a bit until Tim came downstairs. He smiled to him, pausing when he set the small stack of twenties on the counter. ...okay, so he noticed the money. Play dumb about it, Lathe. Not that though, the other thing. Be meek, I dunno! “...I just don’t want you starve or freeze out there… you don't deserve that.” Because you will. You’re malnourished and I have no fucking clue how you’re not dead yet.

Tim shook his head slightly, looking torn. “I can’t take this… You’ve already done too much.” His voice cracked as he looked down at the stack. I can’t take all that, I’ll get fucking robbed if I have so much on me...

Lathe nodded quietly, taking back all but two of them. “At least keep that. Enough to get you sandwich stuff for a little while…”

Tim looked torn as he looked down at the money Lathe left. “I don’t deserve it… You’ve already done too much for me… And I can’t pay you back for anything.” Tim tried to push the two twenties towards Lathe again. I really can’t take this from you...
Lathe sighed, taking one and leaving just one on the counter. “You also don't deserve to starve, and look around you. I don't give a damn if you can't repay me, you don't have to. I know you can't repay me for it. But I know you know what hell feels like and I want to make it at least the tiniest bit better for you for a week or however long your food lasts and forever long your clothes keep you warm because I just remember being ecstatic over finding a damn quarter on the sidewalk and being banned from every store in my county for petty theft because I wanted to eat and nobody deserves that. Now take it so I can make you pancakes and get you a smoothie and let you relax for a bit.” You deserve a moment of peace and a good meal for once, and to worry a little less.

Tim nodded without fighting back, putting the bill into his wallet which now held his ID, but Lathe wouldn’t have been able to see it as he quickly put it into one of the inner pockets of his jacket. “Just the smoothie please… I won’t be able to stomach pancakes… D-Do you have any to-go cups?” I know I might be asking a lot… But I don’t want to stay here and bother you any more than I already am…

“...I'm not gonna make you stay if you don't want to, so I can get you a thermos, it'll hold plenty. But you can stay and skim the paper if you want, I don't know how in touch you are with things going on…” How long has it been since you heard any news?

Tim shook his head. “N-no thank you… I don’t even really know what day it is anymore.” They all just blend together, and I can never tell what day of the week it is… “A-And a thermos would… Would be plenty.” I shouldn't fight him anymore… If he wants to give me a thermos I can wash it out at a gas station in town maybe…

“...Hun, it’s April 10th. It’s a Sunday.” Lathe looked over his shoulder to Tim, seeing him look at him as if he were crazy. “...what?” Realisation dawned on him. “...when do you last remember hearing the date?” If you've been gone at least two years… what do you last remember…?

“Christmas… I think… Because everything was closed… And I remember getting frostbite…” I stepped in a puddle without realizing it… That was the day when I thought I’d be a goner… It’s already been three years, then… That I’ve been gone… Tim looked down at his hands as they shook. “I didn’t realize it was already this late in the y-year.” I’m 17...

Lathe couldn't help but faintly and ruefully smile. You and me both… “It's already April, but it's been so unseasonably cold… that's probably why you didn't realise it.” Lathe motioned him over, gesturing to the row of fruit on the counter. “Pick what you want in your smoothie, Hun. I'll get you a thermos.” Lathe made his way to the steps, disappearing down to the basement to rifle through the camping gear for a decent thermos. He returned with a nice stainless steel one with a ring to clip it onto his backpack, seeing him with a small pile of fruit next to him. “What'd you pick?”
“Um… Strawberries… Raspberries… A banana… an Orange… And the um… Dragonfruit, please.” I haven’t had a smoothie in a really long time. “Why… W-why do you keep calling me Hun?” He sat down on one of the stools, slouching a bit as he put his hands on the counter, watching his hands horribly shake.

“Because I know your name isn’t Tim. I know you don’t want to get attached to anything and you don’t want anyone to get attached to you, but it won’t make it hurt any less. And in the first three seconds I saw you, you managed to make me give a shit about you, so you’ve earned the title.” Lathe spoke lightly for the latter half of his words, working to make his smoothie, making sure to add extra vitamins to it. “I’m making executive decisions as to yogurt and whatnot because you need vitamins, dammit.” Lathe added Greek yogurt and milk, blending the smoothie up and pouring it into the cleaned thermos, handing it to him with a melancholy look. He watched him stand on shaky feet, walking with him to the door. He opened the door for him, turning him and giving him a quick, gentle hug before letting him go. “You be careful, okay? Take good care of yourself, or at least try to.” Please change your mind and stay… The words Lathe didn't say but wanted to were obvious in his voice.

Tim slowly stepped out of the house and onto the porch holding the metal thermos with both hands in his weak and shaky grasp. “Thank you… I brought this upon myself… but thank you for letting me sleep here, and I apologize for the inconvenience.” He smiled weakly at him, barely showing for a moment that his gums were bleeding minutely. I should get going. He slowly ambled down the steps and towards the road, heading towards town.

“You're no inconvenience, Hun. You're always welcome here.” Lathe smiled to him, waving as he started down the driveway before shutting the door quietly, leaning against it with a heavy sigh, his conscience weighing heavily on him. ...he's so sickly... I should have made him stay... he should be in bed resting with breakfast and at least the comics to amuse him or something... resting, sleeping... fuck, I never gave him pills. He needs medicine! Lathe ran upstairs, grabbing the small bottle from his room, stopping and looking over the room. The bed was neatly made, everything back in place, as if he were never there. The sapphire blue handkerchief lay neatly folded on the dresser, one of the two things that didn't belong, right next to the small medicine bottle. ...I just want you to feel well again, as much as you can at this point.” Lathe resisted giving him

Tim was surprised as he was stopped, having heard the jogging feet behind him and expecting a runner to pass by him. Oh... Medicine... “T-Thank you…” He murmured quietly, taking the bottle from Lathe’s hand into his own shaking one. “You didn’t have to run just for medicine, I would be fine without it.” I mean I’ve survived this long… But just maybe… Tonight might be my last… He didn’t notice that Lathe had shoved the handkerchief into his pocket, having not felt the movement at all.

“...I just want you to feel well again, as much as you can at this point.” Lathe resisted giving him
another hug, his mind kicking at him to drag him back inside and make him better. “...I worry. Just… good luck.” Lathe looked to the ground, turning to amble back to the house. ...god dammit...

“Thank you, Mr. Quo…. It was really nice to meet you.” His words were soft as he turned away as well and made his way to the street and towards town. *I think I can drink and walk at the same time...* He could barely open the thermos with how badly his whole body was shaking. *I can do it...*

Lathe dragged his feet back to the house, unable to kick the guilt building up in the back of his head, feeling heavier. *...I could've done more...* Lathe looked up when he noticed movement, Ieva moving around the kitchen, straightening up. “Hey, Honey. Good morning.” Lathe moved to hug her around the waist, kissing her cheek before dropping his head onto her shoulder, unable to shake the sad, sinking feeling. *I should've done more...*

Ieva looked up as he greeted her. “Good morning, Hun. Is ‘Tim’ still sleeping?” She let him wrap his arms around her, soon turning her body and hugging him back. *How is he? I know you stayed up late fixing his clothes.*

Lathe shook his head, burying his face in her neck. “...he left a couple minutes ago, but I ran back out and made sure to give him medicine... he's so sick, burning up, but I couldn't make him or convince him to stay... so I made him a smoothie, he didn't want pancakes... and he just left... he's in such bad shape... and I can't do anything else about it...” *If anyone could help him... it could've been us... and I didn't do enough...* Lathe started to faintly tremor in her hold, sniffling a bit.

*Oh no... He’s gonna be crying... He’s guilty.... Or at least that's how he feels.* “No honey, there’s no reason to cry... You did everything you could to help him, that’s all that matters.” She started to rub his back, gently cooing to him. “You even said he’d be happy with scraps... And you offered him so much more... ‘Tim’ probably wasn’t used to that, Honey you did a wonderful thing, don’t be sad about it.” *You can’t cry, the kids won’t understand... They don’t understand why someone stayed in the house...*

Lathe couldn't help it, hot tears falling down his cheeks, holding onto her tightly. “H-He reminded me so much of myself when I was that old... I-I just... I let him walk out the fucking door and he looked ready to collapse and I can't believe I let myself do that...” *... he needs to change his mind and come back so I can take care of him and make him better first... “I know I can't force h-him... b-but...” I feel so shitty about it...*

“Lathe, you can’t force him, I’m sorry but if he wanted to leave you needed to let him go. I know it’s hard..... I really do, but if he wants to he’ll come back...” Ieva rubbed his back as she held him even closer. “Why don’t you go to Mark’s track meet? I can take care of the kids, you can keep your mind off of things?” *I know you wanted to see Mark run, apparently he’s ridiculously fast...*
...he won't come back though... I know he won't... “O-Okay…” Lathe forced himself to let go of Ieva, kissing her cheek before going upstairs, going through the motions of washing up and dressing. ...I hope he finds a few people who are at least a little kind to him... Lathe went downstairs a bit later, kissing Ieva goodbye and ruffling many mops of hair goodbye before he left, walking to his car. He hoped he wouldn't see Tim on his drive into town, knowing it would make his heart hurt, but it made him worry even more when he didn't see him at all. It was a half hour before Lathe parked at Sina high school, heading over for the field. I hope I'm not too late... they've started, but it hasn't been long I don't think...

Eren and Claire watched in amazement as many high school boys were running along the out door track, the sun doing very little to keep everyone warm. Good thing I had extra hoodies in the car. He picked up a program that Mark had thrown at them with everything he was doing circled and the times. Let’s see... He’ll be up again in 15 minutes... “We’ve got 15 minutes until he runs for a long time…” It's a long dash...

Lathe studied the stands, making his way over to where Eren and Claire sat, sitting next to them. “‘Sup. How’s Mark doing?” I hope I haven't missed too much..

“Absolutely horrible, he’s only broken 3 state records in his first four runs… The last one only set a district record.” He’s a fast little shit. “He’ll have colleges looking at him probably pretty soon… Mark’s a great athlete…”

“...if you're joking I'm going to smack you.”

“He’s not, they announced it and everything, I believe that everyone’s been talking about him this entire time.” Claire piped up as she kept her gaze focused towards Mark as he stretched out. He’s so fucking hot! Ah I’m gonna die while I’m waiting for this to be over...

“...well shit.” Lathe watched with interest as Mark raced ahead of his opponents in every heat he was slotted for, the others following him only by yards and yards when he crossed the finish line, his times and broken records sounding over the speakers. A few more broken state records... many more broken district records... ...I think I smell a college-level athletics scholarship.... The smile slowly returned to Lathe’s face, waving when Mark looked over the crowd and saw them, looking proud of him. You're doing so insanely awesome... It was his second-last heat of the event, all the other racers looking wary as Mark casually stretched for a moment. They all know they won't win... hm. Lathe watched as within a few moments they were off, Mark running ahead, easily leaping over his set of hurdles, steadily pulling ahead of the others. He's doing great! Come on... Lathe watched with a bit of worry as Mark nearly stumbled after landing from his third last jump, though he kept going. Just two more... almost there... Lathe watched Mark jump over the next hurdle, winding as his foot caught on it, effectively throwing him off balance.
The fall was the furthest thing from graceful.

It happened too fast to really understand what was happening until it was over- Mark was on the ground, on his back, his hand over his mouth as he tried to muffle sounds of pain. His leg bent as if he had a second knee halfway through his calf, bloody white bone sticking out from the flesh, his left arm laying limp on the ground next to him. 

Fuck. That got very bad very fast. The race of course immediately stopped, Lathe running down the stands and trying to get past the fence as the medic and coaches ran out and the other racers turn away, more than a few throwing up. Someone threw a towel over his leg to hide the injury, and someone called an ambulance. Lathe couldn't tell if Eren or Claire were behind him or not, just focusing on getting to him. Lathe finally was able to get past the fence, running over to the group huddled around Mark. “Mark!” Lathe saw the men around him turn to him, not moving to make room for him. “Please, I'm his father. Did someone call an ambulance?” They should've… Lathe was grateful as they made room for him, kneeling next to him. He looked over his arm, already bruising partway down his forearm. “It's okay Hon, just breathe. I'm so sorry.” Lathe very gingerly prodded his arm, wincing a bit as Mark gasped in pain. Both bones… “They're both broken… shit…” Lathe looked up to Mark’s face, seeing the fear in his eyes. “No, Mark, Hun it's okay, we can get you all fixed up. I know it really hurts right now but soon enough we’ll make the pain stop and you'll be okay. Promise.” Lathe carded a hand through his hair, knowing it was a waiting game until the ambulance got there. 

...he's going to need surgery for that leg… at least enough to get the bone back in place before… .......would we let him use serum…….? Fuck, I don't know.... but nevertheless, putting you back together is going to be a production. It's a good thing I can pull strings. “Don't worry, Mark, I'm just going to call Scotty, let him know what’s happening.” Lathe pulled out his phone, quickly dialling the number and holding it to his ear, speaking as soon as he picked up. [Scotty, it’s Lathe.]

[Oh fuck, what happened now?]

[Mark’s first track meet was today, he tripped over the second last hurdle. His right arm is broken, and his left leg too. The fibula broke skin. I'm not sure yet if we’re going to use serum to fix this but either way he's going to need surgery to at least get the bone back in place.] I don't want Mark hearing this- he can't panic more than he already is.

[Alright, I’ll see what my schedule looks like.... ] There was a pause and some shuffling at the other end of the line, Scotty flipping through papers. [Well, OR 6 is open.... When are you coming in? Do you know yet or is the ambulance not at the high school yet?]

[It's not here yet… oh, crap, we’re not at Trost. The meet’s at Sina, we’re pretty far away… I'll tell them to book it to Trost, we’ll be there as soon as we can. Mark doesn't exactly feel that great.] His other hand still carded through his hair, trying to calm him somewhat.
I can only imagine, surgery would keep him out of the rest of the year and maybe next season… But I’m not necessarily sure what his mindset is like right now, make sure you calm him down. I’ll look for you on the intercom when the call from your ambulance gets patched in.]

Oh my god…. I’m never gonna be able to run again… I’m done for… Mark’s tears were quickly falling down his cheeks from both pain and humiliation. I hit the hurdle…. I broke my leg and my arm… I have a bone sticking out of my leg and it hurts … Mark’s breathing was shaky as he slowly started to close his eyes, his good arm coming up to hide his face from his coaches. This is such an embarrassment….

[Got it, Scotty. I'll see you.] Lathe hung up, his full attention turned back to Mark. “It's gonna be okay Hon… I talked to Scotty, we’re going to fix you right up. ...but there's something very important I need to tell you about, before you even get in the ambulance. I know you love running, and we all want you to keep running. You have so much potential, and you still do. No, Hon, I'm not saying you'll never run again, no, you most definitely can.” Lathe tried to comfort him as he let out a choked sob, waiting for him to calm again. He picked his head up when he heard sirens in the distance growing louder, looking back to Mark, his voice serious. “There’s something Scotty, Casper and I have worked on for a long while, a kind of serum. It’s like a shot- it’ll make healing much faster, as in walk up the stairs later today without help faster, as in use your left hand to carry a bucket of sand faster. But it hurts while you're mending. It can really hurt for a little while, but it’s your best chance for your leg to heal properly and for you to stay in this season for track. You can think about it on the ride to Trost, but we need to know what you want to do. It's up to you; you're more than capable of deciding.” Lathe stopped talking when the ambulance came onto the field, moving with the others out of the way to let the paramedics carefully get Mark onto the stretcher, coming with them. Eren grabbed his arm, looking confused. “What-” He watched as Eren held up the keys to his car, just shaking his head with disbelief. “I've taught you too well.”

Dammit, he picked my pocket without me noticing again . Lathe turned back and ran to the ambulance, hopping inside. “He needs to go to Trost- there’s an OR waiting for him there already.” Lathe moved next to Mark, staying out of the way of the many doctors running around. ...what the fuck is going on? This surely isn't about Mark… Lathe looked up the hallway as he saw a stretcher rolling away from him, able to catch just a glimpse of the patient through a break in the doctors and nurses, seeing a bare pair of battered feet. ........oh my god. Lathe felt his stomach sink, immediately running over when he saw Scotty was hovering over the stretcher as well. “Scotty! What happened to him? I know he was sick when he left, but…” Lathe was able to...
break through the wall of doctors and make it next to Scotty, looking with worry over the teen’s gaunt face, his eyes shut. ...*fuck, is he okay...?*

“Worst case of Sepsis I’ve ever seen.” Scotty told him looking over the clipboard. “ID says this guy’s name is James Julian… He’s 17… And from…. Nebraska? That can’t be right… Jennie, go check his ID again, make sure this information’s right.” *He can’t be from Nebraska, the town is hundreds of miles away...*

“...he didn't tell me much… but he did tell me that the tattered boots he was wearing had served him for at least two years… he’s been gone at least that long… someone needs to check for any old missing persons reports. *Someone* must've noticed he’d been gone all this time.” ...*Sepsis... fuck, I should've known that those infections probably had been there long enough for it to be a threat...* “How did he end up here?” *He didn't want to go to the hospital.... we compromised, but he was so adamant about it...*

“Collapsed outside of the police station in town, apparently he went unconscious right then and there… But at this rate we won’t be able to administer any antibiotics in time to stop it…. It’s in his heart and lungs, the only thing we can really do is see if the serum can do anything or let it run it’s course, which would mean death in a few hours.” *It’s bad... Really bad, his feet are absolutely horrid. The infection in them spread like wildfire... He’s got a 108 fever too...*

...*he would've gone twenty minutes at most outside the house... the police station isn't that far...* “Please, we should see if the serum can do anything. We need to at least try.” *I can't just let us do nothing .... I can't ...*

Scotty shook his head. “He’s got no next of kin here… He’s not 18, I can’t legally give him the serum without someone responsible for him signing it off.” *That’s how this medical trial works.... We can’t do anything... ‘I’m sorry, Lathe...”*

“I’ll be the one responsible for him.” Lathe didn't have to think before he spoke, his grip on the edge of the stretcher turning his knuckles white. “Scotty, I look at him, and all I can see is me when I was seventeen, and he doesn't deserve to lay in a hospital bed and die because he doesn't have family… I can't let that happen to him...” *we need to try ...*

Scotty looked up as Jennie came back with the clipboard, taking it and seeing that his hometown still had not changed. “Okay, so he is from Nebraska, Jennie, I need 500 cc’s of TitanX and I need two bags of AB+ for transfusion.” *We’re gonna try to help him out... “You’ll have to sign a waiver, and is Daniel looking at Mark? I got an assistant to help with all the serum and bone cases...” You just appeared over here, did you leave your son alone?
Lathe looked torn, looking over his shoulder. “I-I don't know who he’s with…” I can't be in two places at once... fuck...

Scotty sighed quietly, shaking his head. “Go find Mark and tell Daniel to move him to Room 9, we can fit both of them in there…” He unlocked the gurney and started to move James to the specific room, making sure Jennie knew to bring all the supplies there as well, hooking him up to the IV again and to a heart monitor. It's irregular... Joy.

Lathe nodded, casting one last look to James before letting go, turning and hurrying back down the hall. He scouted the ER, bumping into someone. “Sorry-” He stopped when he saw their name tag, immediately pulling them over out of traffic. “Daniel- are you Scotty’s assistant?”

“Uh yeah… And who are you?” I've never seen you before? Daniel looked at him cautiously, trying to figure him out.

“Dr. Lathe Quo, one of Scotty’s close colleagues. Do you happen to know where I could find Mark DiAmici? Just came in in an ambulance, left broken fibula, right broken radius and ulna?” Cmon, you might know this… hopefully… it's a god damn madhouse in here.

“Uh, yeah, I do, but unless you have a relation to him I can’t bring you in.” Scotty would have my head!

Lathe looked to him flatly. “I've been his foster parent for about five months now, now we need to get him to Room 9 because he and the runaway I took care of last night both need serum and I need to sign waivers and crap already on both of their behalvs, so can we please go?” Come on, there's shit we need to do!

“Oh Christ.” Daniel nodded, leading Lathe to where Mark was currently tripping out on morphine. “He’s received drugs for the pain.” He’s gonna be loopy. Daniel made sure everything was in order to move him before ferrying the bed to move and wheel it towards room 9. “So you know the guy from Nebraska?”

“Well, he showed up on the doorstep yesterday night asking for scraps just as we were about to have dinner. I made sure he had a whole meal and water to drink, but he sat outside to eat because we had lots of people over for dinner and he didn't feel comfortable, so I got him a blanket. I convinced him to come inside and shower, I washed and mended all his clothes, and cleaned and wrapped up his feet. I made him take cold medicine for the fever because I thought it was just a
cold, I didn't know he had Sepsis… but I got him new boots since his old ones had the structural integrity of tissue paper, fed him a smoothie for breakfast and gave him more meds, and it wasn't like I could force him to stay and let me take care of him, so I had to let him go on his way… I sent him off with money and food, and his clothes were fixed, so I thought he could last a while longer. …but I was wrong. He's apparently been walking around for more than two years. I just…. I couldn't let nothing happen… he's gonna die if we don't try the serum, and there's no guarantee it'll work.” I really want him to be okay…

Lathe looked up as he noticed a cloud of steam starting to slowly pour out into the hallway, faint whisks near the ceiling. He's already trying. Lathe helped him steer the bed into the room, looking over with worry as Scotty hovered over James, administering the doses of serum, blood dripping from James’ nose.……he can't just die on us… he has to live...

Scotty looked as Mark was wheeled in with Daniel and Lathe pushing him. “Welcome to your first lesson in hell Daniel. That’s Lathe, and he’s responsible for these two, so get him the paperwork, it’s on my desk.” His voice was calm before he ran out of serum. “Jennie!” His shout carried into the hallway, quickly getting the nurse's attention, seeing the two patients in the room.

“I’ll just grab you the bottle and more syringes.” She went off as Scotty thanked her, hooking up a Transfusion for James and watching his progress. “He’s responding well so far, his heart beat is slowly getting back to a regular pace, and the temperature increase is normal for anyone who uses serum…” I just don't know if it'll be enough...

Lathe nodded, looking back to Mark. Scotty'd got James for right now. Focus on Mark. Lathe dropped his bag so it didn't weigh on him, going to inspect his arm first and foremost. “Mark, Honey, how are you feeling? Talk to me.” I don't know how much they gave you of what… Lathe watched with surprise as Mark just laughed, shaking his head at him. ….oh. “You legit feel nothing.” He watched him nod, considering this before shrugging. “Well, makes my job a bit easier. Don't worry, kid, this won't take too terribly long. The arm is easiest and doesn't require any surgery, so brace yourself.” Lathe worked skilfully to set Mark’s arm, wrapping it with the splint to keep it straight. “It was a clean break, its obvious it is when you touch it, so we don't need to worry much. That, on the other hand…” Lathe moved the towel from his leg, wincing as he saw the bloody bone. “….that is a problem. But one that we can solve.” Lathe inspected the flesh around it, soon shaking his head. “We can't just slip it back in, we need to open the wound further. Scotty, you're in scrubs. Help?” Lathe’s demeanour changed as he spoke and worked, trying to block out his emotions. I can't get overly emotional now... there are things to do.

Scotty looked over to what Lathe was doing sighing as he ripped off the gloves he was wearing and got a new pair. “Go watch James.” He stepped over to Mark’s side, getting a scalpel from the counter in the room, looking over the wound closely. Damn... That's a bad break, once I get my hands on more serum I'm gonna set it and then start him on serum...

Lathe nodded, moving over to the other bed, reaching instinctively and taking careful hold of James’ hand, his other carding through his hair as he studied the monitor. Doing okay... He glanced to the numbers every few seconds, but he mostly studied James’ pale face, smiling when...
he saw his eyelids flutter, a small sound of discomfort coming from his throat. He met his dark eyes with a gentle smile, his words soft. “Hey, James. Don't worry, you're safe.” He tried to reassure him as all he saw was fear in his eyes, squeezing his hand. “Someone found you on the sidewalk outside the police station, called an ambulance. You're in Trost hospital’s ER. ...you're really sick. The infection in your feet spread, but we're giving you what we can to give you the greatest chances of getting better. And that’s all you need to worry about- getting better. You'll be okay here, you're in good hands.” You really are. ...given I'm a softie and will probably refuse to leave until I'm 100% certain you won't die on me.

James barely cracked open his eyes before he felt the pain flood through his body. I'm awake?.... I'm alive?.... But I shouldn't be. His eyes cracked open finally looking around the blurry room before focusing on a familiar face. It's him.... Huh? I'm in a hospital? “I-” James was reduced to a horrible coughing fit within seconds of trying to speak. I can’t stay here...

Lathe looked worried as he coughed, trying to keep him calm. “It's okay, you don't have to speak. And what we gave you hurts, I know. I know it must burn all over but it's the best thing we can give you. We want you to get better.” Lathe waited for the coughing fit to pass, still carding a hand through his hair, trying to soothe him. We can't do much of anything for the pain... I'm sorry...

James groaned as he closed his eyes tightly, a wave of pain running through his whole body, the cloud of steam intensifying from his bare body. My feet hurt...... I can feel them... I can feel my feet... “F-feet...” James’ word was a whimper that he forced out from behind gritted teeth. His gums were bloody, though quickly changing from bright red to a healthy pink as he started to heal. It hurts...

Lathe nodded, moving down to check on his feet. The cuts were healing very nicely, some of the skin starting to flake away, turning yellow. ... oh my. Lathe gently prodded at his foot with a gloved hand, feeling the skin resist just a bit, behaving like a sock made of skin. ...well shit. Lathe went to retrieve a clean scalpel, moving down to his feet again. “I'm not gonna hurt you, James, just stay still, okay? Your skin needs to peel, and we need to get at the infected area.” Lathe very carefully cut the skin from his feet, gently rubbing the few parts that stuck until they came free, large skin flakes fluttering to the floor. He winced as he saw the infected area, a pus-filled discolored cut with flawless pink skin around it. Well that needs draining... “This is gonna be fun...” Lathe moved to do the other foot, sweeping the skin flakes under the bed and more out of the way with his boot. We went to get a small container to catch the pus, not wanting to make a mess. “James Honey, I need to do just a bit of work here to deal with the infection that's making you so sick. It's gonna hurt, so brace yourself, but stay still, okay?”

James was barely able to move his body at all, but managed to give Lathe a weak thumbs up before closing his eyes and bracing for the pain, not expecting to hear another shout of pain in the room, which caused him to jump. What was that? It wasn’t me! Who was that?!
Mark cried out in pain when Scotty had set his leg into the proper place and then gave him the serum in both his leg and his arm to heal the wounds. *Fuck it hurts! It feels like my body’s on fire too!*

Lathe immediately moved the scalpel out of the way when Mark cried out, looking over with worry. He looked back to James, tapping his ankle to get his attention again. “You've got company, James, another son of mine. I'll explain later but for right now, you need to focus, okay?” *I need to do this, otherwise this won't get anywhere…*

James was shaking in his own skin, both in fear and in pain. *What’s happening? What's going on? Why am I here?* He was really starting to freak out but he kept his feet as still as possible for Lathe, his teeth still gritted, and his eyes closing again in pain. *I’m scared, this really hurts… And I can feel everything…*

Lathe sighed quietly, though he focused, carefully cutting open the infected cut and draining out the pus, cleaning the wound thoroughly. He did the same for the other foot, getting rid of two cuts that had been infected. *…they're cleaned.* Lathe immediately set down the scalpel and container, leaving the skin to weave over the now-clean cuts, going to make sure James was okay. His hand returned to his hair, his voice worried. “How are you holding up, Hun?” *He looks more alert, that's very good…*

James opened his eyes more, looking to Lathe as his eyes finally focused on him. *“Why…?” Why am I here? I can’t afford this… And it’s not like anyone will come and help me with this.*

“Because you deserve better than to be left to die alone.” *I couldn't let that happen… it'd break my heart…* “You deserved a fighting chance.” Lathe smiled wearily to him. “You don't have to worry about anything besides fighting off this infection, you hear me? That's all you have to do. It'll hurt for a while, but then it'll get so much better.” *We’ll fix you up good as new.* Lathe looked over to Mark, seeing his leg was steaming just a bit. “One moment, James.” Lathe moved across the room, seeing his arm unwrapped from the split, straight and without bruises. *“How’re you feeling?” You look like you're doing pretty good… your arm is done healing and your leg is getting there… we’ll need to x-ray you just in case though…*

Mark looked up to Lathe, a happy look in his eyes. *“It doesn’t hurt… Will I get superpowers?”* His voice was childish as he moved to sit up in his bed, wanting to grab onto Lathe’s shirt, though his hands fell short when he saw movement across the room. *Who’s that? Is that Tim?*

Lathe chuckled, smiling. “Yes, your puppy eyes have been upgraded. For a week, using them on me gets you practically whatever you want.” *I'm a total pushover… mostly because I love you all too much…* Lathe was resigned to let him him tug on his sweater when he turned to see what got Mark distracted so easily. *Crap.* “James, no, you shouldn't be getting up…” Lathe moved to his
side immediately, gently pushing him back from where he was trying to sit up. “Please, just rest for now, okay? That's all you hold be doing for now. Your body has lots of work to do, and you can't go making it harder.” That's a very bad idea.

“Why am I steaming? What’s happening to me?” He voice was a bit clearer as he let Lathe push him down, though he moved to sit up successfully once he was let go, looking at the IV in his arm as well as the second blood transfusion that Scotty had put in. He hadn’t noticed that his nose started to bleed until he felt the warm liquid on his lips. Huh?

Lathe immediately had a wad of tissues pressed to his nose. “Don't worry about your nose bleeding, that happens. ...it's the medicine we gave you. A serum my colleagues and I worked hard to recreate and are still in the process of testing. It’s been so successful and it’s saved lives many times over so far, and it… it was the only chance you had. It heats your body up, you steam as your flesh works quintuple-time to repair itself. You’ll cool down eventually, and you seem to be doing much better. How do you feel? Legit, on a scale of one to ten, one being excruciating, and ten being I could probably walk around and do stuff with zero problems.” I need the frame of reference.

James was confused as he held the wad of tissues to his face. Huh? My nose is supposed to bleed… “I feel better than I have since I got frostbite…” This is the best I've felt in a long time… “How do you know my name?” His voice sounded fearful, expecting to be hurt.

“They found your ID in your bag or something. I was told you’re James Julian. ...and that you've managed to walk from Nebraska to Kansas in a bit more than two years. ...did you even know what state you were in?” You didn't look like you exactly remembered what year it was… “What could've made you walk that far...?” Lathe didn't expect him to answer that, shaking his head in disbelief. ...you're so far from home. ... why ...

James looked down, swallowing hard. “I don’t have a home….” His words were broken, and an utterly lost look was in his eyes. I have nowhere....

Lathe sighed, a hand going to rub his back lightly. “Talk to me, Hon. Who did you use to live with?” Opening up could make you feel better... and help us figure out who needs to know you still exist.

“M-Mom...” his voice was weak as he leaned into Lathe’s touch. “She couldn’t keep me…” And my uncle never noticed my presence at all... He left me alone, they probably don’t even care I’m missing...
Lathe moved to lightly hug James, the teen leaning into the warm touch, rubbing his side. “What was living with her like?” Did you have an apartment, a house…? Did you not have a roof over your heads?

“We lived in a 1 room shack on the outskirts of town….” It was barely better than living on the streets. He took in a deep breath as he looked to the steam billowing off of him, not even realizing that he was still so warm, he looked ready to cry all over again. I feel so much better… I can feel my feet, and my fingers… And my legs don’t really hurt anymore...

Lathe soon produced another blue cloth out of thin air, the teen looking at it with surprise. He smiled when he took it, resuming his careful hold on his thin middle. “…why did you feel like you had to leave? You would’ve almost been old enough to get a job, make some money. It would’ve maybe helped a bit.” Maybe you didn’t have to put yourself through hell like you did...

“I didn’t run away….” I didn’t run away from mom… And maybe my uncle expected me to go right back to Mom when he kicked me out...

“…did you get kicked out?” Lathe watched him nod, cradling him closer when he took in a shaky breath. “It’s okay, Hon. You can tell me, just let it out.” It's so easy to force yourself to not think about it… but after so long, it hurts to think about it at all...

“I-I don’t have a Dad… M-my uncle… He kicked me out…” I actually think that my Mom and my uncle might have been sleeping together... But I’m not sure...

“You three all lived together?” He watched him nod, tucking his head under his chin. “Did your Mom have any say in it…? Did she even know?” Your uncle very well could have kicked you out and you’d’ve been long gone before she realised it...

James nodded, looking down at his hands, clamming up. She was right there… She didn’t do anything ....

Lathe took his silence as his answer, his voice a quiet murmur. He felt hands weakly reach up to grab at his sleeve, letting James cry all he needed to. He was patient, waiting for James to calm down, his tears reduced to sniffs when he spoke again. “…do you ever think about going back… maybe trying to fix things?”

“I tried that once…it didn’t work…” I got kicked out again, then I never turned back… I just kept
walking as far as my feet would take me before I would sleep on the side of the road.

Lathe nodded, quiet. ...we need to find them anyway... they're still your next of kin, and your mom specifically is legally responsible for you. [Scotty, is anyone looking for this kid’s family?] Phone calls, google searches, anything?

[Yeah, Jennie’s calling the police station in Harrison, Nebraska to see if there are any missing persons cases.] I don’t know if there will be judging by their conversation. “Alright, Mark, time to go get an x-ray.” Scotty got Mark into a wheelchair to take him out of the room. Let’s see how well you healed.

Lathe chuckled a little as Mark seemed to incessantly giggle at everything, letting Scotty move him around and wheel him from the room, a comfortable quiet settling. “They’re calling to see if you’re listed as a missing person.” Lathe explained, not letting go of James. ....I'm sorry... “...do you think they would have changed much since you last saw them?”

“No…” They probably didn’t put me in for that.

“...Honey, when’s your birthday?”

“April 3rd…” My birthday was a bit ago...

Lathe gave him a small smile. “Happy late Birthday… seventeen?”

James nodded, watching as the last wisps of steam edged off of him. He gave Lathe a weak smile. “I'll be on my own again after this…” I don’t really like that idea...

“...you don't have to be.” Lathe rubbed his side gently, waiting a moment. “The offer still stands. If you don't have somewhere to go after all this… we’d love to have you. And even if you don't stay that long, it's barely a year until you're free to go get a job or do whatever you want. But nobody’s making you do this by yourself. You can have a home if you want.” There's no way in hell I'm letting you just go back to wandering around without a fight.

“I don’t deserve a home though.” I was thrown out... I deserve to be on the streets.
“Yes, you do. You didn't do anything to deserve being kicked out of your old home, and there’s no reason why you should have nowhere to go. Nothing can justify that. You need somewhere to go when the day’s over or when things aren't going great. At least give it a shot…?” Please? It'd hurt so much to just let you go back to wandering...

James was quiet as he looked up to Lathe before he nodded. I… I guess I can try it out...

Lathe smiled, holding him close. Thank you… “…okay.” Lathe smiled, looking very proud of him. “If for the first few days I seem to be in hyperdrive, please understand that’ll pass.” I won’t always hover over you. Just enough to make sure you’re eating and healthy and happy. At least until you tell me to go away and pay attention to the other eight people in the house.

James smiled softly, nodding as he pulled his feet in to look at them. “They look better… and I feel a lot better.” His words were still soft as he shifted closer to Lathe, his eyes starting to close as he fell asleep. I’m tired….

Lathe moved to sit on the bed next to him, watching his eyelids droop. “I'm glad.” Lathe felt James lean fully on him, asleep within moments, still sitting up. He's so tired… of course. Lathe realised he was still weakly clutching his sweater, laying down next to the teen, letting him curl up into his side. Lathe ran a hand over his back, his mind finally quieting. He'll be okay… Mark is okay, and he's okay… he stopped steaming… so he must be healed… Lathe nearly fell asleep himself when the doors suddenly opening jolted him awake, turning to coax James back to sleep when the teen startled a bit against him. He needs all the rest he can get.

[He stopped steaming, so tests should probably be run, see if his Sepsis really is taken care of. He said he feels a lot better, and his wounds all do too. The infection is gone from his feet. And did we hear anything about his Mom or Uncle yet?]

Scotty nodded. [They won’t be able to get him… Both of them were arrested due to being complete blood relatives and then committing incest with each other… no one knew he existed apparently… There’s no records of him aside from his birth certificate and his learner’s permit.] Scotty got Mark back up into the bed, letting the drugs wear off. We should be okay now hopefully… He made his way over to where James was currently resting, getting a needle ready to draw blood.

Lathe winced, looking down to James as he slept. He slipped through the cracks so easily… it's like he didn't exist until he collapsed outside a goddamn police station. “He’s going to need the original if someone can track it down or knows where it is… he agreed to stay with us for at least a little while.” Lathe shifted a bit, gently shaking James’ shoulder. “Hon, Scotty needs to take some of your blood. It’s okay, you can go right back to sleep when he's done. He wants to make sure your Sepsis is completely taken care of.” That's an important thing he has to do.
James nodded, holding out his arm without even thinking about it. Okay...

Scotty sighed quietly as he took his blood, leaving them so that he could take it to the lab. He wasn’t lying when he said he had no home... And I wonder... if he says he never had a dad... if his Uncle is actually his dad.

James cuddled up into Lathe’s side again, holding him. “Is.... Is my Uncle my father?” I’m pretty sure he is... but I’ve never known...

Lathe sighed quietly, thinking. “....I don't know. But it sounds like he is.” ...... Lathe tugged him closer, carding a hand through his hair. You're still very warm... you'll cool down eventually though, you'll be fine....

“Is that why Mom always kissed him all the time? And he always made me sleep outside? So I didn’t take up the bed?” So that I wouldn't be able to see them while they had sex? “Is.... Did Mom have her baby? Or did D- my uncle make her get rid of it again?”

Lathe didn't know what to say, trying to process everything. “...if your mom did have her kid... I don't think they knew about them...... so, I don't think she was allowed to keep them...” Lathe rubbed James’ back, not knowing what else to do.

James nodded slowly, closing his eyes and letting sleep overtake him. He didn’t even wake up when Scotty came back inside.

[Good news... He’s healthy, aside from being obscenely underweight.... I also have a copy of his birth certificate for you. It also appears that he never went to any schooling.] Scotty handed Lathe a folder, letting him see the few small sheets that were there, showing that he got vaccinated and that he was born to his mother on April 3rd, 20XX.

Lathe slowly nodded. [It's not like all hope is lost because he didn't go to school. He can still earn a GED and maybe get a degree, or go to a trade school. It doesn't have to be like this forever.] Lathe shut the folder, looking to James with a tired expression. [Whatever it takes. ....he's cleared for discharge?] I wanna get these two home...

[Yeah, both of them are... Just take them home, I’ll fill everything out and then bring the rest of the files to dinner tonight, Casper, Hannah and Sharon will be back by then.] I'm coming to dinner because you made me use serum on him. [I'll take Mark out to Eren, he’s waiting in the waiting
room… Have fun waking James up.

[Whoever said I’m waking him up? And I hope you don’t expect too much in the ways of dinner from me. I’ve got lots of Dad-ing to do.] Lathe carefully shifted out from under James, hauling the teen up in his arms. “Thank god he’s so small or I wouldn’t be able to do this…” He saw Scotty give him a look, glaring back at him. “I mean he’s short, and- ...shut up.” Lathe looked down as James stirred against his chest, walking with him into the hallway. “Don’t worry, I’ve got you. We’ll get you home and in bed as soon as we can, okay?” Lathe smiled when he simply nodded, walking towards the lobby. He saw Eren wave at him, ambling over. “Hey- ...where did Claire end up?” I don’t know what happened after we left….

“One of the Moms helped to bring the cars home, Claire’s chilling at home, I came to help with Mark…” He got Mark’s arm over his shoulder to help him on his wobbly feet. You’ll probably need help walking… “We got my car so everyone fits… is he gonna stay with us too?” Eren motioned to James, looking surprised to see him again. Did he end up here too? Lathe nodded, cradling James close. “Yeah, he is… it’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it later. But right now, I think we need to get these two home and let them rest.” They both could use some rest… Lathe followed Eren to the car, deciding to stay in the backseat, James stirring and obviously feeling more comfortable with Lathe right next to him to sleepy cling to. He swayed when Lathe got out of the car first, no Lathe chuckled when he reached for him, holding onto him. He reminds me of a sloth. In a good way. Lathe and Eren had to wait for Ieva to open the door for them, her shock no surprise when she saw Lathe carrying the runaway, all of his stuff slung over his shoulder. “Let me get him in bed and I’ll explain, okay?” Lathe pecked her cheek, grateful that she let him pass, going upstairs with Eren to get James in bed. He had made sure he changed into his pajamas to leave the hospital, the comfy clothes still too big for him, swallowing him up. “You need to sleep, Hun.” Lathe set him on the bed, tucking him in. He smiled faintly when James tried to hang onto him, ruffling his hair. “It's okay, I'll still be home. Don't worry, James.” Lathe gently cried his sleeve from his grasp, James already drifting and too tired to argue. ...I made the right decision. Lathe shut the door quietly, coming downstairs where Eren and Ieva were in the living room, waiting. “...I guess you wanna hear the whole story.”

Eren nodded, looking over to the staircase as Claire snuck away. She’s going to go and sleep with Mark… sure, sleep… we’ll call it that. “I thought you said he left the house when you got to the track meet…” At least that’s what I thought you said. “You didn’t take him to the hospital… how did he end up there?”

Lathe sat down on the couch, leaning back, his limbs feeling heavy. “He did leave this morning… he was still burning up this morning, I was still worried sick, but he really wanted to leave, I didn't see him on the drive to the track meet, but when we got to Trost after Mark’s ‘accident,’ the ER was a god damn madhouse. I was able to find out what was going on, I recognised his battered feet on the gurney… I ran over and Scotty had his chart. The kid’s been wandering around for more than two years and he started up in fucking Nebraska and he’d collapsed not too long after he left outside the police station. The infected cuts on his feet were bad, and the infection got into his
blood… it's called Sepsis, and the options were either take responsibility for him and give him the serum and hope he gets better, or leave him to die. ...that was it. We gave him the serum, I signed the waiver…” Lathe shrugged. “...but he can't go home. He doesn't really have one. His Mom and his uncle- or his Dad, whichever- are in jail for having incestuous relations. ...we think he’s the product of that. All he’d have to go back to is a one-room shack that might've been torn down already anyway. And there wasn't any real record of him. Just a birth certificate and a learner’s permit. I don't know how he managed to get it… but he's never gone to school or anything.... they never knew he even existed.” It's horrible....fuck, he probably doesn't know how to do shit. Like cook. Does he know how to read? How long has it been since he set foot in a grocery store? Does he know who the President is? ...what doesn't he know? Probably a lot...

Eren was quiet as he tried to take everything in. “How long has he been gone? Do we know? He’s so skinny…” I... He’s skinnier than I was I think… but he looks like he should be taller than he is... But at least he’s healthy now. “How should we go about educating him? If he even wants that?”

Ieva was quiet as well, listening intently. “I think we should at least teach him basics… So that maybe he can live on his own if he wants to…” I hope that he’d be up to learning basic necessities.

“He definitely needs to learn stuff like cooking, writing and reading, basic math and accounting, he should get his license…. car maintenance, like checking tire pressure and oil levels, where washer fluid goes... how to use a computer would be a good one… grocery shopping and using coupons and stuff… how to use basic tools to fix stuff, like if a cabinet door was wobble or something he could fix it… all sorts of random stuff, but there's plenty to life that he needs to become familiar with.” ...I legit just described like everyday of my life ever though… I do that crap constantly….hm. “We’ll have to talk to him about formal education, but that’s really up to him. At this point he might want to go to a trade school, but I don't know. He could do well for himself if he masters a trade; he could work for himself, or for a bigger company. Who knows? But he’s got about a year until he turns eighteen- a year until he's an adult. It's not like that's a time limit or anything, but that’s just a frame of reference. We have to teach him how to adult. ...that actually sounds kinda fun. I dunno.

“If he can’t write we should get one of those books that the kindergarteners use… The ones where you trace the letters? He should be good at that, I hope. And who knows we might be able to find some aspect of his abilities that he’s good at.... He seemed subpar with his social skills, we need to work on that first.... Also the usual order for dinner tonight? I don’t feel like cooking.” The kids exhausted me while you were gone... Ieva waited for a response, looking to make sure the kids were still occupied with the movie Cars on the TV in the other room.

Lathe rubbed at his eyes, nodding. “We’ll get him that book, yeah, and he does need to work on his people skills… Scotty told me he was dragging more people over for dinner tonight apparently… he has to bring paperwork over since we didn't fill out the discharge forms and stuff at the hospital… but I've got half a mind to tell him bring the papers and tell people to not come…” ...I just wanna relax, eat, and sleep... that would be sooooo nice....
“Well… If we need to work on his socialization we should have at least a few more people over so he gets that there are more people he could rely on… You can stay by his side and I can take care of people if we order from the italian restaurant… get some pasta for a sit down meal that keeps well and can be reheated… It’ll be a little better than ordering pizza for him.” I’m open to doing that and I can play hostess so you can take care of James.

Lathe paused before nodding. “Yeah, you're right. And pasta sounds better than pizza. We need to ask for one of the big salad things, though. ...and James is probably going to want to sleep as long as he can… so we’ll wake him up later. He and Mark are both very worn out, I think it's rather obvious…” Yeah, they need sleep… but they need to eat, too. ..........we don't get paid enough for this crap......

Eren snorted and shook his head. Oh yeah… sure… “Claire and Mark are going at it like rabbits right now… She snuck up there a little bit ago…” Highly unlikely that he’s asleep right now. “But I guess that he’ll sleep better after they’re done.” A smirk was on his face as he looked to Lathe and Ieva. “As long as someone’s getting some... hahaha…” Eren couldn’t help but giggle at the sex joke.

Lathe dropped his head into his hands, shaking his head. “Eren, thank you very much for stating that so eloquently.” Lathe deadpanned, dropping his hands and leaning back against the couch again. He was too tired to really care about the comment, and he looked as tired as he felt. ......can I just, like... sleep here... please...

“Why don’t you go sleep with James? He was clinging to you earlier wasn’t he? I bet he’d feel better with you there.” Ieva smiled softly, pecking his cheek. “Then I can clean the house up and order italian food.” I can manage.

“...have I ever mentioned how much I love you?” Lathe smiled as she kissed his cheek, standing and stretching. “I could use a good nap…” Lathe ambled the stairs, getting changed in his own room before lightly knocking on the doorframe of James’ new room, opening the door a crack. He peered in, seeing him turn over, tiredly looking to the door. “Hey Hon.” Lathe left the door open a bit, coming over to the bed. “Sleeping okay?” You looked like you were awake when I knocked... and I doubt I woke you up, I have a very light touch...

James whimpered as he shook his head, reaching his arm out towards Lathe before patting the bed beside him. I can’t sleep... I feel weird in this bed... I don’t sleep in beds... I sleep in ditches...

Lathe smiled reassuringly to him, shifting under the covers with him, chuckling when James timidly curled up to his side, hanging onto his arm. Come on, that won't do. “C’mere.” Lathe
tugged James on top of him, watching the teen tense before visibly relaxing into his hold, pulling
the blankets up over them. “...it'll get easier to sleep in a bed. You'll get used to it.” Lathe let him
nestle into his neck, feeling the gentle huff of his breath. *Anything so you can get some decent rest...*

“T-Thank you…. Mr. Quo....” James’ voice was quiet as he slowly closed his eyes, trying to relax
in his arms. *I don’t want to be scared of sleeping alone anymore.* His grip slowly started to tighten
on Lathe’s clothes. *I want to be okay with people again...*

Lathe ran his hands over James’ back, trying to coax him to relax. “You can call me Lathe, Hun.
Just Lathe. You're part of the family now, accept it.” Lathe smirked, cradling the teen close. *It's
okay.... you don't have to panic...* “You don't have to be scared to sleep… if anything happens, I
know Judo, I'll keep you safe.” Lathe was lightly joking, but he was also serious. *I'm not letting you
get hurt anymore.*

James nodded slightly holding onto him. “I… I got my permit…. And then he kicked me out…” *I
was 14.... I've been on the streets for 3 years...* “I… I haven’t slept in an actual bed in s-six
years.... I-I think....” His voice was still quiet as he held onto Lathe, his fingers gently going over
his clothes, feeling them. *I can feel them...*

Lathe nodded, holding him close. “It's been a long while for you....” Lathe sighed quietly, one
hand coming up to cradle the back of James’ head. “You’ll get used to it.... and until then, you can
come get me if you can't fall asleep.” *Most likely. I'll appreciate the nap.*

James nodded. “I haven’t eaten in a week… I was dumpster diving before I came to your house…”
*You were the only one who would give me food...* “ And I slept in a trash can the other night...
When it was raining.” He mumbled quietly, his breathing getting shallower as he got closer to
sleep.

“I'll make you whatever you want to eat, and you can rifle through the fridge whenever you want…
we’ll teach you how to cook… and you'll always have somewhere to sleep here. You'll have more
pillows and blankets than you ever thought you needed.” *We just want you to be okay.... and
happy...* Lathe was dozing, falling asleep like that, with James grounding him.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Claire crept up the stairs when the three of the adults seemed occupied, wanting to stay out of
mind. *I wanna see him... he got hurt, and he looked tired... but he deserves his reward if he's still
up for it.* Claire quietly knocked on the door, opening it and poking her head inside. “Mark?” She
smiled as she heard a tired grunt and entered, the door shutting behind her with a quiet click. She padded over to the bed, climbing in next to him. “...that was... a very, Uhm, interesting meet... but... you're okay?” She looked him over warily, as if expressing to still see white bone protruding from his leg. *That was so fucking hard to look at... I nearly threw up...*

Mark smiled softly as he shifted from where he was laying, showing her his leg was fully healed. “Yup, I’m fine...” *Everything’s all good...*

Claire let out a sigh of relief, tentatively reaching a hand out to touch the unmarred skin, relieved he was in one piece. “...by the way, how the fuck is that possible.” She dropped her head into his shoulder, drinking in his scent. *That's not a thing that humans do... heal that fast...*

“Dad apparently is a genius and has genius friends... It has some side effects tho... So um, yeah... I got a special kind of shot and it heals everything really quickly, but it drains you of all your energy.” He mumbled and flopped back down on the bed, a smirk on his face. *I wonder how many records I set?*

Claire’s eyebrows shot up. *...I need to look this up later. But for now... “You did awesome at the meet today, you know.”* She shifted so she was on top of him, leaning down to lightly kiss at his neck. “You broke so many state and district records... so, if you’re up for it...” Claire shifted so her hips rested over his crotch, sucking at his neck. *...I can give you your reward.” You’ve more than earned it... and I wanna, so say yes... please, I haven't been able to think of anything else. ...besides the broken limbs thing.*

Mark’s eyes grew dark as his large hands slowly came up to rest on her hips. “Absolutely, I’d love to watch you ride me.” He murmured with a smirk on his face, his left hand going to the nightstand to pull the drawer and grab a couple condoms out for her. “Go at your pace...” *I can already feel myself hardening under her...*

Claire smirked, taking one of the foil wrappers from him. “Hm, of course.” She set it aside, moving to tug Mark’s loose shirt off along with hers, feeling his hands trailing all over her as she moved to kiss across his chest, nipping at every sensitive spot she found. He lips latched onto a nipple, sucking on the pink bud as his hands splayed over his stomach. *I wanna take my time a bit with this... just enough to properly tease you...* She shifted her hips, lightly grinding down onto him, feeling him harden against her.

“Oh fuck...” *Claire... Holy shit...* He groaned as she ground down onto him teasingly. His hands moved to the clasp of her bra, wanting it off of her, but his eyes asked her for permission. *I want it off ... I want all of it off.*
Claire smirked, nipping the bud. “Hm, you want something…” Claire reached behind her and unclipped it, letting the fabric slip down her arms before tossing it out of the way, whimpering as Mark immediately cupped her bare breasts, gasping as he made her shift upward so he could take a bud into his mouth, whining with pleasure as his hands roamed everywhere. “…M-Mark… f-feels good…” *Fuck…*

Mark kept his mouth latched onto her perk nipple, his eyes closed and taking in all the sensations of Claire over his body. *I will always be glad to do a good job if it means that I’ll be able to hold you close…* His hands grabbed her ass, pulling her close to him, and grinding her down on him harder as he got even more engorged. *I’m horny as all hell now…*

Claire’s hands latched onto his broad shoulders, whimpering as he switched his attention to her other mound, wanting the fabric separating their nethers gone. “M-Mark…” She reached down, tugging at his sweatpants with a finger, trying to get him to comply. “O-Off…” She sighed in relief as Mark shifted to shimmy out of his sweatpants, though a needy sound caught in her throats as he ran his hands up the insides of her thighs, feeling her every curve through the thin leggings. She spread her legs a bit wider when he rubbed her through the fabric, unable to help it as she moved to get rid of the offending clothing. She froze when Mark’s hands met her hips, melting into his hold. His lips were on her nipple again, teasing it as he dragged her panties down her legs, soaked with want. “…fuck, Mark… I want you… so bad…” *I want it… please…*

Mark grinned as he came off of her nipple with a soft pop. “Hmm, I want you too… what do you say we get a move on with things?” His words were rough as he pulled her panties off of her, his hands coming to put her right over his hard length. *God, you’re so fucking warm….*

Claire smacked his chest lightly, reaching for the foil wrapper. “W-Wait…” She was impatient, quickly rolling the condom down Mark’s length and giving him a firm, teasing stroke before she moved back over his length. She was gasping for breath as she sunk down his length, basking in the sensation of being filled. *So big…* Claire leaned forward for better leverage, her head in the crook of Mark’s neck as she moved on top of him, riding him. “…f-fuck, you’re so big…” *I love this… more… I know I promised to ride you, but fuck, the things I would give to have you over me, pounding me hard… …that escalated so fucking quickly but I don’t care anymore…* *fuck I want him…*

Mark groaned in pure bliss as Claire encased him into her heat. *Holy fuck… She feels so good! Mhm… Claire… You’re so tight…”* His hands grabbed at her hips, helping to lift her up and down, his moans soft in her ears. *She feels so good… But… I want more than this… But she promised that she’d ride me… But I dunno if I can take it…* He felt a pulse of arousal go through his body, struggling to keep in his cries knowing that people were downstairs. “Can you be quiet? *I wanna fuck you…” I wanna really fuck you, keep you pinned and have my way with you… And then I wanna cuddle and fall asleep with you.*
“I really want you to... I'll really try to be quiet...” Claire couldn't help a small whimper as he drew out of her, slipping out from under her and moving her around. She found herself gripping the sheets and facing away from Mark, her head resting on a pillow with her ass in the air, at the perfect height for Mark’s hips. *Fuck... “Mark, please ... fuck me...” I really want it...*

Mark settled into his spot behind her, his tip slipping against her wet folds to tease her. “Hmm, you ready? Once I start... I’m not going to stop.” His voice was deep as he moved his hands up and down her thighs spreading her legs a bit further to give him better access. *God, this view is amazing ...* Mark kept his tip just at her entrance, ready to thrust forward and bury himself in her heat. *I want you so bad...*

Claire easily spread herself wider for him, moving back on him, wanting him to enter her. “Y-Yeah... please, I need you...” She choked on her words when he was suddenly inside of her, having to bury her face into the pillow when he started thrusting into her, needing to muffle her moans. *Fuck...*  

Mark was easy with his thrusts at first, though he quickly started to increase the pace and how hard he was thrusting into her. *God she feels wonderful ...* Mark kept his hands on her hips, pulling her back onto his thick length to slam into her harder. “Hmm, you feel good...?” *I wanna know if I’m hurting you or not...*  

“F-Fuck... so good... oh it feels so good...” Claire tried to bite back whimpers, burying her face into the pillow, loving the firm hold he had on her hips. She whimpered and moaned into the pillow, knowing she’d be too loud to moan freely. ....*fuck... feels soooo good ...*  

Mark continued to pound into her, groaning in complete bliss over her. Soon he leaned over her back, letting his weight pin her to the mattress. “Fuck... Claire...” *So good...* He pounded into her without a care in the world if someone else would hear, the bed barely creaked, and the most noise was being made by their skin slapping together. *Even though she’s moaning into the pillow, she sounds amazing.*  

Claire suddenly gasped, her grip on the sheets turning her knuckles white. “M-mArk, my God, there .... Haa, *fuck ...”* Claire was breathless, hearing his quiet sounds in her ear, tilting her neck as he nipped and sucked at her neck. *Feels too good... god...*  

Mark made sure to keep his hickeys and bites where they could be hidden as he moved to sink into her and roll his hips, grounding into that one spot. “Claire... I... I want you feeling great.” *I want you to be in complete and utter bliss...* He kept his pace steady but his thrusts hard into her spot. *I hope I’m doing okay...*
“M-My God, Mark… feels so good… you… right there… oh right there… so perfect….” Claire felt warm all over as his hands drifted up her thighs and her stomach, afraid to move when he started rubbing her clit even though she wanted to shudder hard, not wanting to lose the perfect feeling. “Fuck, Mark…. oh god it feels so good…."

Mark continued to pound into her, feeling her grow even more wet as he rubbed her clit. God… She’s so wet, all for me. “Let go… I want you to cum for me…” I want to feel you tighten around me. “Hmm… Claire.” Mark could feel his body grow warm as his coil started to tighten.

Claire incessantly whimpered as he teased her clit, her face buried in the pillow, feeling a beautiful aching burn in her nether. “M-Mark…” Her voice was quiet and higher-pitched, her moans getting higher. “O- Oh … Mark, I… M- Mark …” She quietly cried out, tightening around Mark as she felt bliss wash over her, Mark pounding her through her orgasm. .....so good ...

Mark groaned as she tightened around him feeling his coil tighten incredibly fast as he pounded into her. “C- Claire …” He groaned as his thrusts soon became erratic, slowing as he came inside of her, groaning as he gripped on her supple flesh. Fuck… That felt so good… I feel so warm… He felt himself spurt string after string of cum into the condom, his head dipping down to rest on her back. Oh my god...

Claire was panting, wanting to collapse onto the bed and rest in her warm glow. “Mark...... that was wonderful…” Claire sighed as he slipped out of her, letting him go and throw away the condom before reaching for him, dragging him back on top of her. She pulled him in for a long kiss, wanting to feel his skin on hers. You're so warm... and you're too good to me...

Mark came back to lay in the bed with her, kissing her sweetly before pulling back to breathe. “You’re perfect …” He kissed her cheeks before pulling her under the covers with him and pulling her close. “I’m sorry, but I’m too tired for a round two…” He mumbled quietly and his arms wrapped around her. I’m exhausted ...

“That’s okay, I knew you wanted to sleep… m’tired…” Claire nestled into his shoulder, wrapping herself around him. Warm. Claire chuckled quietly when Mark went out like a light, letting herself rest heavy on his chest. Mine.

A few hours passed in quiet, Lathe waking up some time later, James still nestled into his neck. Lathe played with his hair for a moment, thinking. You could use a haircut… your hair is past your shoulders…. Lathe glanced to the electric alarm clock on the nightstand. I should get up, food and people will be here soon. Lathe very carefully shifted out from under him, James mumbling a bit in
his sleep, though Lathe gently pried his hands from his shirt and pressed a kiss to his forehead, and he was back soundly to sleep. *I'll get dressed, then wake him up when I know what the situation is.* Lathe left quietly, getting dressed and padding downstairs, feeling much better after his nap. He looked over the living room, stopping short when he saw a figure sitting in the pen of their couch, the pups all tumbling over themselves around them, petting Nene in their lap. *....who the fuck is that?* “Uhm…” They lifted their head, Lathe surprised to recognise them. “Sharon?”

She grinned, still petting Nene. Her hair was a bright copper collar, cut boyish, dressed in a white shirt with green long pants. “Notice anything else?”

“You’re dressed like the Drama person we haven’t named yet.”

“Bingo.” She chuckled, tugging on her hair. “But it’s actually my hair. I got it done earlier last week- you should’ve seen Hannah’s face when I came home like this.” *It was the greatest.*

“Nearly scared me half to death when I got home… I thought someone broke in and was kidnapping Maverick!” Hannah’s voice carried from the kitchen where she was currently helping Ieva dish all of the food.

Lathe laughed, shaking his head. “That does sound like something you would do. And not just because you actually went out and did it.”

“Yup! Now I’m just waiting for her to dye hers blue like she always talked about. The best part though is she’d have to go around with white hair for two weeks if she did.” Sharon wore a shit-eating grin, looking over to Hannah, who sent her a playful glare.

“You do realize I did that our second year in college while someone was off looking around other countries.” *I’ve already gone through the blue phase. But I wouldn’t mind going through it again…. I found someone to do my hair here, I’ll see what I can do…*

“Exactly, I missed it, so you have to do it again now.” She giggled, Nene nosing her cheek as her stomach shook, making her giggle more. *Sorry, I keep making it hard for you to nap…*

“Other countries? Where’ve you been all?”

“In order, to the best of my memory… Canada, duh, Italy, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Great Britain,
and Japan.” She grinned as Lathe just stared at her. “There were tours my schools offered. I seized the opportunities.” *It was the greatest!*

“Still not as many as I’ve been to!” Hannah shouted with a prideful grin as she brought steaming plates to the table where two kids were already starting to gather. “I’ve been to 15.”

“I’m so jealous that your studying was pretty much all abroad. And you’ve been shipped like **everywhere** for work. I never got the chance to do that backpacking trip through Europe like I wanted over my last summer in college. Otherwise I'd be winning.” She smiled wistfully, scratching behind Nene’s ears. *I wonder if I'd ever get the chance to still do that sometime... I don't think so, with Maverick and work... but maybe someday.* “Where’s your newest charge?”

Sharon looked to Lathe, an eyebrow quirked. *I've already heard the whole thing.*

“He’s been napping for a while, I should go get him up. It’s time for food, apparently.”

“Probably should. Make sure he knows we won't bite. Just maybe weird him out a bit.” She smirked, shooing the pups off of her so she could get up. *He sounds like he could use some friendly people to get acquainted with. And he’s not much of a talker, but we’re here all the time. Things need fixing.*

Lathe nodded, going back upstairs. He went to James’ new room, gently shaking his shoulder. “Wake up, Hon. It's time for dinner.” He watched him blearily blink at him, then look around the room, still getting used to his new surroundings. “...there are people over today, but you're sitting at the table with us today. Everyone’s really nice and understanding, you don't have to be worried.” *Please don't freak out.*

James flinched a bit when he heard about people, looking over to the bag of clothes sitting next to the bed. *Great... those clothes aren't really the greatest for being around people... They were patched together yesterday for Christ's sake... “O-Okay...”* His voice was weak as he slowly pushed himself up onto his elbows trying to think. *Where am I again? I think I'm in Lathe's house? There's people over? And I'm supposed to stay at the table? I... I haven't eaten with people since.... Since my uncle moved in when I was four... I've always been alone to eat. He sat up watching as Lathe's mouth moved but not really hearing what he said. I need to sit with people.*

“...change if you want, but it’s fine. We’ll be getting you new clothes soon anyway. ...are you listening?” Lathe stopped, looking to him expectantly, chuckling when James gave him a deer-in-headlights look. “You're eating with us at the table, our friends promised not to act too crazy, and you can change if you want. Honestly, your pjs are fine if you just want to come downstairs in that. Nobody will mind. But dinner’s being served- make a choice, Hon.” *That's another errand-clothes shopping.*
“B-but… I don’t have r-real clothes…” James looked down in shame, his hands coming into his lap as he tried not to cry. *I’ll be an embarrassment in front of your friends…* “D-Do I have to eat?”

Lathe moved to sit next to him, tugging him into a hug. “Hon, you’re fine the way you are right now clothes-wise. Nobody would bat an eye at a sweatshirt and sweatpants- with everything that’s happened, and they all know, you’ve got a sort of free pass. ...hey, it's okay.” Lathe wiped at his tears as he sniffs, comforting him. “We’ll get you some nice new clothes soon, and some kicks of your own. Right now, you're fine. It's really okay. ...and you should at least try to eat. You're so skinny- we need to put some meat on your bones. And we ordered Italian, so it'll be really tasty. Pasta, salad, bread, the works.” Lathe coaxed him to stand, walking him to the stairs. “It'll be okay. And after dinner, you can come hide up here again or you can play with the puppies.” Lathe pointed to the couch when they got to the stairs, clearly able to see the makeshift pen for Tove and her pups clambering over each other, sleeping, or idly watching the mayhem. “The others are probably trying to get food from the table.” *You can play with puppies if you sit at the table and socialise a bit.*

James swallowed as he saw the bundles of black fur moving around in the pen, his eyes wide with both curiosity and fear. *What the hell? They’re small…* He turned his head as he heard something against the wooden floor, Spencer coming to greet him. James simply screeched and jumped up onto Lathe, quickly clambering up his tall body to put distance between himself and the yapping dog. *What do I do?* He was shaking like a leaf as he held onto Lathe and surprisingly able to perch himself quite high on him. His eyes were wide with fear as Spencer got on his back legs trying to get closer to see him.

*It's a new human!* He rested his paws on Lathe’s hip trying to sniff at James. *Why is he on top of big human?* Spencer whined, wagging his tail with his ears perked.

Lathe was shocked as James immediately scaled up to his shoulders, holding up a hand for James to stay balanced on him, the other hand going to distract Spencer. “Spencer, sit.” Lathe finally got Spencer to sit, looking up to James where he perched on his shoulder, not needing his hand to balance. “James, this is Spencer. He's just curious about you, is all. He won't hurt you. C’mon, you're lucky I'm still built like a tank and you're pretty light. Down we go.” Lathe was thankful when Sharon whistled, getting Spencer away from him. He looked to him again, realising how furiously he was shaking his head, sighing quietly. “C’mon Hon.” Lathe tilted forward, easily catching James when he lost balance and fell into his waiting arms, setting him on the ground. “They're all friendly dogs, James. They’ll just sniff you, it's like saying hi. Maybe jump a bit if they like you. ...can you do this?” Lathe looked worried, seeing how scared James was. *It's okay.*

“I-It’s big… I-It’s teeth are… Are big…” James whimpered, trying to grab at his Lathe’s shirt, wanting the safety of height. *I don’t want it to bite…* His whole body shook as he turned to see people looking around the corner at them. *Fuck… I’m an embarrassment…* James really started to freak out as he heard more clicks, this time Blake slowly coming up to them.
New human is freaking out…. New human is nervous…. I can help new human. Blake slowly came close, his ears perked towards them.

Lathe held James from climbing up again as Blake came up to them. He held out a hand, Blake obeying the silent commands, stopping and sitting a few feet from them. “James, I’d like you to meet Blake. He used to be Eren’s service dog. He's getting pretty old, but he's still as friendly and gentle as he always was. He's very good at telling when someone is really nervous. It's his job to make people feel better. C’mere.” Lathe guided James to sit on the floor with him. “I'm right here, don't you worry. It's okay, he loves people. ...Blake, c’mere.” Lathe reached for the dog, watching him rise and slowly walk over to them, obviously careful of James. Lathe had a reassuring hand around James’ middle, keeping him from fleeing.

It's okay. I've got you.

James whimpered as Blake got closer and closer, the dog realizing that he needed more time and coming to him even slower, laying down and doing almost an army crawl towards him. James jumped when Blake got close enough to touch him with his nose first, sniffing him. He's gonna bite me! James was almost ready to cry as he was held down in Lathe's lap. I'm scared...

“It’s okay, James, just stay cool. He’s just inspecting you a bit, he knows you're scared. I'm sorry, Hon, but we have four dogs… they're gonna want to say hi sometime… and Blake is the oldest and nicest. Look.” Lathe reached out his own hand, Blake sniffing his hand and immediately licking his fingers when he recognised his smell. “He's totally harmless. He's too old to even run around anyway. It’s okay, he'll love you, I know he will.” He loves everyone.

James was still shaking in Lathe’s hold as he slowly let his hand towards Blake’s nose, letting him sniff his hand but as soon as he mouth opened to lick his fingers he pulled his hand back to his chest, shaking his head in fear. It’s gonna bite me… It’s gonna bite me!

“It's okay, Hon. It's okay.” Lathe watched Blake sniff at his leg, moving to rest his head on James’ leg, staring up at him with his best puppy eyes, looking completely innocent and non-threatening. “…you can pet him if you want. All our dogs love being pet.” You'd love Nene. All she does is eat, sleep, and ask for pets.

James slowly let his hand away from his chest. It was shaking horribly as he reached out to pet Blake’s head. If it moves I’m running. He seemed to relax a little when Blake didn’t move under his hand, only jumping when he wagged his tail and it thumped in the ground. Huh? What was that?

“It's okay, Hon. It just means he's happy- he likes being pet.” Lathe ran his thumb over James’ stomach, grateful that Blake simply laid on the floor and let James pet him, completely calm.
James slowly started to relax while he pet him, though he snatched his hand back in terror as Blake yawned. “Nonono, it's okay, he only yawned, he's just sleepy. He rests a lot more than he used to.” *Sleepy pup.* Lathe coaxed James to pet him again, petting his along with him. You need to be okay with dogs if you're going to stay here... and having a phobia of them in this day and age is not good... I know Sharon doesn't like bigger animals yet she lives with three and a litter of pups almost constantly- Tove is always carrying... I wonder if you'd be more okay with pups... they're too tiny to hurt you. “...are you hungry at all, Hon? I won't make you eat out here if you really don't want to.” It's okay. You can be social some other time with us. And you need to get used to nearly everything now- everything is new, including nice dogs.

“U-Uh… A-A little…” *I think I can eat a bit…* “C-can I s-stay with y-you?” James' stutter came out full force as he gently pet Blake, watching the older dog close his eyes and let his tail wag a bit, a little less afraid of the dog now. *He just wants pets?*

Lathe pointed to the end of the table, two spots empty next to each other, adjacent. He was grateful that Eren had them shift down a seat to make room for them. “You and I can sit right there. Eren on your left, and I'll be on your right. I'll be right there in case you get nervous or scared, okay?” He watched him nod, smiling. “Now, lets go get you some food, okay? Blake will follow us- he's your new bodyguard for now, 'kay? He likes you, he just wants you to not be nervous. He'll keep the other dogs from getting too close.” *He's very good at what he does, even if he is getting old.*

James nodded, shifting as Lathe did and following him into the room where everyone else had started to eat, Eren quietly welcoming them with a smile. *There’s… There’s a lot of people…* His eyes were still full of fear as he looked to Lathe. What if I do something wrong? What if I do something embarrassing? What will happen if I do something that’ll embarrass you in front of your friends… He sat down, looking to the large amount of food. *It’s actual food…*

Lathe smiled to him reassuringly, Blake sitting behind James’s chair obediently, acting the perfect part of a guard dog. Lathe sat next to him, his voice quiet as James warily eyed his food, his fork nervously hovering. “You don't have to eat everything. We *did* give you a lot.” *As long as you eat something, we’re okay.* Lathe glanced over as he saw movement, seeing Nene ambling over. *Oh no, here we go.*

Nene always looked sleepy on her feet. She meandered the length of the table, Blake having made Spencer and Rico give James extra space. He didn't for Nene, letting her sit down in between the teen and the older man, looking to the former with her best pleading eyes. *Food? Can I has?*

James flinched and shifted away from her. *It's another dog… W-What do I do!?* He shook, slowly grabbing a fork and trying to ignore the dog as he ate. *Don’t look at it… It’ll go away…*
Nene whined after a bit, her ears drooping when she realised she was being ignored. She looked to Lathe, hoping he would let her have food. *Can I has?*

Lathe reached for his breadstick, breaking off a piece. “James, Hon, look at this.” He waited for his attention, smiling and petting Nene with his other hand. “This here is Nene. All she does is eat and sleep, and sometimes beg for food or pets. But she's really sweet. All she wants is a snack.” Lathe reached down with the bread, letting her sniff it before licking it up. He watched her look back to James, sighing. “…wanna try giving her some? I can make her go lay down if you want.” *She's my favourite though… she can have bread.*

James shook his head and pulled his feet up onto his chair, pulling his knees into his chest and curling up. *No… She’ll bite me when she gets the food… I can’t… I don't want her too…* James was quiet, picking at his food from then on.

Lathe sighed quietly, shooing Nene away. *Baby steps…* He kept a careful eye on him, noticing he barely ate, his head ducked down, not talking at all as people quietly chatted around the table. *Nobody really knows how to act around you yet… you're still so much a stranger…*

Casper looked around the table, sighing quietly. *This atmosphere is too awkward. ...might as well risk making it more awkward.* “Hey James? We need your opinion on something important.” Casper leaned over the table, looking to him seriously. “…does my hair look more like someone pinned a purple *rat*, or a purple *mop* to my head? We’re not sure and it’s imperative that we know.” *C’mon, at least laugh a little.*

James surprisingly held eye contact with Casper, before looking to his hair. *Well, I know what rats look like… “Um… W-What’s… a-a m-mop?” I don’t know what you’re talking about… “I-it l-looks like a clean rat… But like fluffed out… I-I guess…” That’s how I would describe it…*

Casper’s eyebrows shot up. …*you don’t know what a mop is?* “Uh, a mop is like this tool thing you use to clean floors, it has like ropes on the end… crap, how could I better describe it…” *Also, thanks for the compliment.*

“It’s this big stick with like ropes tied to one end, and you get the ropes wet and use the stick to rub them around the floor and clean the ground.” Sharon mimed mopping, shrugging when James stared blankly at her. “That's the best I can think of.” …*how do you not know what a mop is?*

“It's a running joke that Casper’s hair looks like someone pinned a purple rat to his head.” Lathe nudged James lightly.
“Now that I've dyed my hair, I can't decide if I'm wearing cotton candy and have dessert already on hand or if I'm on fire and someone needs to get the extinguisher.” She looked to Ieva. “Though I think we know who could use the extinguisher more than me.” Her hair always legit looks like it's on fire, it's soooo pretty! And it's very long…

James stared at them blankly. “What’s a fire… Ech… Echstinger?” James tried to repeat the word as he looked to the silent table. Did I do something wrong? Do I not know a lot? I was at home… Then on the streets, my uncle and mom wouldn't let me go to school… He put his fork down and looked between Lathe and the other people staring back at him.

Lathe looked calm as he spoke, though he internally began to panic. He doesn't even know what a fire extinguisher is. Fuck… “A fire extinguisher. They're these big red metal containers that have stuff in them to put out fires in case one starts where it shouldn't so your stuff doesn't get burned and people don't get hurt. I'll need to show you where we keep them and how to use them.” I need to write down everything you need to learn about...

James nodded, curled up and his arms wrapped around his knees. “Um…” He trailed off as everyone looked at him, clamming up. I don’t know who you are… Are you friends? Family?

Sharon suddenly had an idea, looking back to James. “Another question, Hon. On a scale of one to lamp, what is your favourite colour of the sky?” You might understand that one a bit better...

“The… The purpley-pinky glow in the morning….” It means I survived another night...

...huh. A legit answer. “The dawn sky is really pretty.” She saw his moment of confusion. “Dawn is another word for early morning, when the sun is just coming up over the horizon, the line where the ground and sky meet. I like dusk best, when the sky is orange and the sun is just setting over the horizon.” She tried to explain the terms best she could, smiling to him. ...hm.

“I don’t like the night…” I don’t want to go to sleep, I’m always afraid I’ll never wake up again… I’ll die in my sleep… Something will happen in the night...

...because it's so cold and scary without a roof or protection… ...or you might not wake up. Sharon just nodded, not wanting to push that and remind him of things he wouldn't want to think of. “What’s your favourite season?” Probably summer… it doesn't get too cold at night during the summer.
...because it's so cold and scary without a roof or protection... or you might not wake up. Sharon just nodded, not wanting to push that and remind him of things he wouldn't want to think of.

“What’s your favourite season?” Probably summer... it doesn't get too cold at night during the summer.

“S-Spring... Because the rain meant fresh water... So I wouldn’t get sick from drinking f-from the creeks....” I used to get sick a lot. “I didn’t like throwing up.... I’d have to wait until n-night and drink from some-one’s hose...” His voice was a little louder as he got more comfortable speaking with everyone.

Lathe kept from reaching out to touch his shoulder, instead giving him a faint smile of reassurance as Sharon and everyone at the table carefully coaxed him into talking a bit. He's talking... and he's holding eye contact. Good. ....good.
Chapter 78: Unexpected Visitors

Lathe slowly woke up in a room that wasn't his, recognising where he was after a moment. ...oh yeah, James made me sleep with him again... ...where is he...? Lathe felt the spots around him, all of them cold. I thought he was on top of me... eh, he's up, either way. Maybe trying to get breakfast or something. Lathe smiled as he stepped from the bed. I'll bet he's standing in front of the fridge wondering what all the shit inside of it is. I'll have to explain dragon fruit. Lathe padded to the stairs, wanting to get his morning coffee, stopping at the top of the stairs in confusion. Blake was sitting at the top landing, looking up and whining, Maisie at his side, trotting around in circles, whining. Even Nene was on her hind legs, her front paws on the wall, yapping quietly. What? He looked down as Krampus trotted over, biting his pant leg and tugging him backwards towards them. “Whoa, whoa, what’s going on?” Lathe came over immediately, looking up to follow Blake’s line of sight, going pale. ...fuck. “James...?!” What the fuck are you doing up there?!

James shifted, expertly crawling along the high beam across the ceiling. “Yeah?” He seemed to be comfortable up in the air, far away from the dogs. No... It tried to bite me with it’s big teeth.

“...kindly explain to me why the hell you're crawling around twenty-five feet from the floor. By the way, get down from there right now.” Lathe was calm, though he looked a bit exasperated, watching him carefully. It's not like I can catch you if you fall. I'd break half my bones.

James shook his head, looking down to Krampus and pointing at him. “It was gonna bite me.” I just wanted an apple... I was hungry.. He was still perched comfortably, like it was the only place he felt safe.

Lathe looked to Krampus, then back to James. “Were you holding anything that vaguely resembled food?”

“Y-yeah...”

“Well there you go. This,” He reached down to pet Krampus. “Is Krampus. He has a reputation for eating anything and everything, including things that aren't food, like cell phones, car keys, wooden trains, and expo markers. He just always wants food, even if what you're holding isn't actually food. If you're holding something he knows is edible, he wants it. He wouldn't actually bite you. Now come down, you're making me nervous and I'm not letting you chill up there any longer. We’ve got a big day ahead of us both, and you also need to learn not be terrified of the doge.”

Nope. Not happening.

James slowly nodded before clambering over towards the corner, easily hopping from beam to
beam to get there. Okay… he slowly slid down the wall, stopping himself as the dogs made their way to where he was, scared to step down, but low enough for Lathe to grab him. What am I supposed to do?

Lathe watched him with terrified eyes, nearly having a heart attack as he jumped from beam to beam, so scared that he would miss and fall to the ground below, breaking something. Or his fucking neck… Lathe moved, easily snatching him from the wall and setting him on solid ground, hugging him tightly. “Don't fucking scare me like that…” If you do that again I'll kill you. …well, panic until you're back over here, then suffocate you with a hug of relief. …same thing.

James stiffened when he was hugged. “But… I-I was safe up there…” The dog can get me now. He watched in terror as Krampus came closer until Blake managed to get him to leave him alone, sighing in relief. Okay, that’s the nice doggy. “W-What are we doing?”

Lathe let him go, smiling with determination. “Lots of errands, because you're not staying in the house all day. Here, we can talk while we food, okay?” Lathe ushered him down to the kitchen, his voice warm. “I've got things to do today, and since we woke up a bit later in the day, nobody else is home since the kids are at school and Eren and Ieva- my wife- are at work. That means we’re safe to do stuff.” Lathe brought him to the fridge, rifling through it for stuff. “First and foremost, we’re going to give you a small lesson in cooking. Wash your hands Hon, you're making your own breakfast today.” Day 1 of How to Adult.

James looked confused before he nodded. “Where’s the eggs? And the pan?” I'm used to fending for myself while Mom and Uncle were at work… We only ever really had eggs…

“I've got your eggs, but there's more, and I'll grab a pan too. But we’re going to need a cutting board and knife, one for each of us, because we’re not just making scrambled eggs.” Lathe dumped some vegetables on the counter. “We’re making omelettes.” Lathe went about getting things out for them, a pan sitting on the stove as he acquired a bowl and whisk. “Okay, first, vocabulary.” Lathe had everything set out for them, first pointing to the whisk. “Tell me what that is.” Let's see what you know.

“A metal loopy thingy.”

“…technically yes, but the metal loopy thingy has a name. It's called a whisk.” Lathe pointed to a green vegetable. “What about that?”

“Green……… It’s in a lot of food that gets thrown out… But I don’t know what it is… I eat it a lot… Most of the time it’s burnt… Is that why people throw it out?” Because it’s burnt?
“...people do end up throwing out burnt stuff a lot of the time, but I don't know why you'd find so much of it. It's a green pepper, and normally these big peppers are the sweet variety.” He pointed to an onion. “That?”

“That gets throw out a lot too... And it makes my breath smell after I eat it... Are we putting a lot in?” James' eyes were full of curiosity.

“...have you eaten one just like that? Like, whole and uncooked?” That's what you make it sound like...

“A part of it was missing before I ate it…” He looked down, twiddling his thumbs a bit and rocking back and forth on his toes and heels. Is that bad? “I was hungry…”

“Oh no, Hon, I didn't mean it in a bad way, I'm just surprised is all. People rarely eat them raw, but there's no problem with it. It's called an onion. People normally don't like cutting them up because the fumes get in your eyes and can make your eyes water.” Lathe pointed to a small bowl of shredded cheese. “Any ideas?”

“Does it have the puffy green spots on it?” James looked around for the usual mold which would warrant someone throwing away the cheese. It doesn't have them...

“I sure hope not. Those puffy spots you're thinking of is mold. It means that bacteria is growing on your food and eating it for you- not a good thing.” Lathe looked over when James seemed to pull himself closer, making himself look smaller. Oh my... “Hey, honey, it's okay…” Lathe pulled him into a hug. “I know you did what you had to to survive, I really do. But it doesn't make you any less of a person. You did what you needed to. But now you can live better, and I want to make sure you know how to, okay? We don't want you getting sick again.” Lathe rubbed his back, letting him go and smiling to him. It's fine. “Normally people throw things out once they see mold, so you would've seen plenty of it. But it's not too good to eat. It could make you sick. But that itself is cheese, it's normally made in big blocks from milk, but the factory shredded it for you so you can spread it on stuff and melt it, easier than cutting it up yourself.” Lathe pointed to a package of thick sliced ham. “Do you know what meat this is?”

“Sour.”

“...well, that's how it would taste when people throw it out... here.” Lathe grabbed a slice, cutting off a piece and handing it to James. “Try it, it's already cooked. It's called ham, it's pork, which
comes from pigs. They're the pink animals that say ‘oink.’” Lathe actually reached for a post-it, thinking better of it and actually looking to the window, searching. “...he sometimes wanders around… see that pink animal there?” Lathe pointed, Oliver still wandering around, much more grown, nearly at waist height. “That's a pig.”

“It’s the same color as its meat…” That’s weird… He brought the small piece to his mouth, slowly eating it and savouring the taste. “It’s not sour…” But… It’s got a flavor to it… It’s nice...

“Nope. I'll give you a tour of the animals later- show you around the barn and stuff, let you hold a chicken, all that jazz.” Yep, you get to hold a chicken. I wanna see the look on your face when you do. “That sound agreeable?”

“Are chickens the big feathery things that run after you if you steal their eggs?” They always try and bite you too...

“...the hens don't chase me when I take the eggs… ...maybe? ...do I need to fetch one right now so we can check?”

James shook his head. “I don’t wanna get bit… it got my heel last time…”

“...I don't think you're thinking about a chicken. Here.” Lathe actually got a post-it, drawing a cartoonish if accurate chicken. “Is that what bit you?”

James shook his head. “No… It had a long neck… And it kept squawking at me.” It chased me for a full three blocks… I was only able to get two eggs too...

“...this?” Lathe drew another animal next to it, watching James nod. “...James, that's a goose.” Lathe smiled, doodling something else. “They're the big birds that honk at people and walk across roads when they feel like it, and fly in the sky in these v-shaped formations.” Lathe made a small doodle of the formation, each bird only a curvy v in the sky. They look like that. ...they're definitely not chickens. “You can hold an actual chicken-chicken later. A lot of the hens we have are very chill.”

“You can hold them? Do they bite? Like the doggies?” I don’t wanna get bit...

“The dogs won't bite you, they just like to lick and sniff and beg for food and pets. That's what
dogs do. They'll only bite you if you hurt them or someone they love. A few chickens won't let you pick them up, but I know which ones will, so I'll make sure you pick up a friendly one. But the ones who won't let you stay away anyway, so you'll be okay. Bites are a last resort, really.” They won't want to hurt you, they'll only do it if there's no other real choice.

“But the black dog bit me…” The one who chased me up to the rafters…

“What, where?” Lathe watched him turn and tug up his pant leg, showing a few scrapes on his ankle. Shit… “Krampus was trying to stop you because you had food, you were probably running away from him. He missed. I'm so sorry Hun, he wouldn't mean anything by it. If anything once he realised it he would've licked the wound, tried to apologise. He wouldn't hurt a fly. None of these dogs would.” They'd all love you...

James was quiet and simply nodded, keeping his head down as he pulled his pant leg down again. It hurt when he bit me…

Lathe sighed, resting a hand on his side. “Here, let's get back to cooking, hm?” Lathe steered him back in front of his cutting board, reaching for the eggs. “So, step one is making the egg mixture that holds the omelette together. Take an egg, and crack it into the bowl like this. Watch me.” Lathe easily cracked the egg, dropping it in the bowl without any shell. “Your turn.”

James watched him with a raised eyebrow, biting into the egg and letting it drain before pulling it towards his mouth to lick at it. Why aren’t we just drinking it? He started to lick at the hole he’d created in the shell looking to Lathe as he watched him. Why are you staring?

...well shit. “Uh, James…” Lathe wasn't sure how to interrupt him, stunned. “J-James, you'll get sick eating it raw. Stop that.” Lathe gently swatted at his hand, getting him to stop. “Just… do what I did, okay?”...that was weird to just watch him do.

“But why are we putting it in a bowl? Isn’t it faster to just drink it from the egg?” James was really confused, licking up the drip from his chin. I've always eaten them like this… It's how uncle taught me to eat them... except we poured it into the pan... Right away.

“...we’re putting it in a bowl to mix up with other stuff before we cook it. You could get salmonella if you eat a lot of raw egg, it's not safe. Just give it a try, okay? With that one and the second one. One more look, okay?” Lathe tapped his second egg on the edge of the bowl, pulling the halves apart and dropping the egg in the bowl. “Give it a shot.”
James still tried to raise the egg to his mouth, going to crack it, before Lathe grabbed his arm. “But I wanna crack it…?”

Lathe sighed, moving behind him. “Here, we’ll do it together. We have the egg—” Lathe took hold of the back of his hand. “Now we crack it on the lip of the bowl.” Lathe had him tap the egg to the bowl, neatly cracking it. “Now, we use our other hand…” Lathe had him take hold of the two hemispheres of the shell, pulling just right so that the egg dropped into the bowl. “Okay? The last one is yours. Like we just did. It's a sanitary thing too just so you know, if you're cooking for other people.” They wouldn't like that.

“What’s sanitary?” I'm confused.

“If something is sanitary, that means it's clean. If you crack eggs like that, not only could you get sick, but you could pass germs to whoever eats what you made and get them sick. We don't want that, so you have to crack them this way.”

James nodded, cracking the egg on the rim of the bowl, not as cleanly as Lathe, but able to keep the shell out of the bowl. Okay... I'm assuming he doesn't want me to eat the shell….

“Do you eat the shell?”

“...no, we put that in the compost bin.” Lathe showed him where he could put it. ...I'm not even going to question this shit anymore. ...gotta get that calcium from somewhere, I guess... “Now, we're going to add a bit of cream. Do you know what a cow is? The big black animals with white spots everywhere, eat a ton of grass?”

“Y-yeah… The ones with the horns don’t like me… They chase me too...” I was going through a field and it almost hit me with it’s horns...

“They are called steers, they can be very aggressive… you don't wanna make them mad. We have two cows, but they're very chill, you can meet them later. The males are steers, but the females are the ones that you get milk from. If you leave their milk to sit for a little bit, cream rises to the top, and it’s a lot sweeter and a bit thicker than the rest of the milk, it has most of the fat in it. We’re adding just a tiny bit to the eggs, okay?” Lathe unscrewed the cap from the small carton, adding a small splash before handing it over. “Not too much, or your omelette will be runny.”

James took the carton, adding very little to his omelette before handing it back. I don’t want to use too much... He held out the carton for Lathe, a mere drop had been added. I mean I shouldn’t right? He’s only doing this because he feels like he has to... I could always just pack up and leave... James looked down, away from Lathe as he felt him take the carton away from his hands. I
could come back right? Or would they not let me? I’m not sure if it would be rude or not… It probably would be, I mean, he’s trying to help, but… James turned his head towards where the neat line of dogs was. He saw Blake and Maisie sitting patiently while Nene was sleeping beside Blake, but behind him was what really put him on edge. Krampus was pacing with his eyes glancing up at James with every movement. He felt a sense of panic flood through him, like he should scale up the wall again. I don’t wanna get bit again…

Lathe rested a hand on his shoulder, snapping James out of it. “It’s okay, Hon. They know not to get too close to you. And if anything, Krampus is probably guilty… he’s sure acting like it.” He doesn’t look that happy… “Come on, Hon, let’s focus so we can eat sometime this year.” Lathe faintly smiled, picking up the whisk. “Okay?” He watched him nod and pick up his own whisk. “So, all we’re going to do is whisk this all together nice and smooth, okay?” Lathe started to, still speaking. “Don’t do it so that you spill stuff everywhere, but you want to break the yolks- the yellow floating blobs.” Come on, this part is easy.

James looked to the whisk and started to do what Lathe did, silently, his eyes having a sullen look to them. They continued their cooking lesson with James following his instructions silently, and with barely any eye contact. I’ll have to leave soon… He looked down at his omelette as Lathe plated it, slowly taking the fork he was given and beginning to eat obediently. He said we need to go shopping… What kind of shopping are we doing? Food shopping? I’ll be an embarrassment to him, I don’t know how to act, and I don’t really feel safe around people anymore… I also just have clothes that have been sewn together…. I wouldn’t be able act properly… and he lives here, people around here know him… It would really be an embarrassment… I don’t wanna go… James could feel his face heating up in shame as he thought about it. I don’t wanna go outside… I’ll be looked down on…

Lathe ate quietly, cleaning up a bit when he finished, James still picking at his food. After a while when James was simply staring at it, he spoke. “You done, Hon?” You ate most of it, which is good. Lathe watched him nod, scraping it into the proper trash and washing the plate, his voice warm and careful. “A few things can happen today. You and I are at least going to go shopping at the bakery. But there are other things we can do. We can go and get you some new clothes you like, maybe see if you want to put that permit to use in the mall parking lot. Or we can just do the bakery, then come back home and meet the animals and maybe start teaching you random stuff. You can pick.” The bakery is a requirement because we’re out of muffins and Marco is such a sweetheart you won’t have any trouble with him.

James swallowed hard, curling up to himself in silence. I don’t wanna go out… People don’t like me… I don’t wanna… He buried his face in his knees, shuddering as he tried to hold in his tears, flipping out when Blake whined at him, having not heard him come closer. He was on the verge of tears as he stood up on the chair, looking ready to bolt to climb up to the ceiling again. N-No…

Lathe turned when Blake whined, seeing James standing on the stool as Blake worriedly looked up to the teen, looking ready to cry. Lathe shooed Blake further back from the stool, coming up to him, plucking him from the chair without much resistance and setting him on the ground, hugging
him. “Here, let me tell you something.” He soothingly rubbed his back. “The bakery I’m talking about is run by a Mr. Bodt, and his son Marco is always at the counter. He’s probably the only other person you’ll have to talk to. He’s a total sweetheart; I haven’t seen or heard him be anything other than kind and polite. You can’t stay inside forever. ...can we please just try that, and then come home?”

James let the tears that had welled up roll down his cheeks. But you know those people... They’ll look down on you too... Because I’m an embarrassment.... He kept his mouth shut as he simply nodded, keeping his gaze to the floor submissively. I’m gonna screw up...

Lathe soon wiped at his tears, pressing a kiss to his forehead. “It's okay, things will turn out just fine. I'm sure of it. You'll do great.” You will. “Let’s go get changed, okay? How about just your jeans, a shirt and your hoodie? We can go sift through clothes downstairs if you want.” I know you're probably very self conscious about your clothes... I did what I could, but they still look beaten to hell...

James shook his head, slowly prying himself away from Lathe before he noticed the dogs and sprinted away towards the stairs. No... No more... He ran up the stairs, a terrified look over his face as he closed the door behind him. He shifted through his worn out clothes, trying to find the ones that looked the best, finally picking out jeans, a t-shirt that used to be a bright green but was now a very faded version of said color, along with random stitch work everywhere. He then slipped on the hoodie that Lathe had given him to hide it all. I don’t want to push him... to do more than he’s already done... He probably doesn't like having another mouth to feed...

Lathe sighed quietly, going to get dressed himself. After about fifteen minutes he knocked on James’ door, his voice soft. “Ready to go, Hon?” I’m sorry... I know it's hard... but you have to do this. You can't hide forever. He smiled softly when he opened the door slowly, dressed and looking miserable. Lathe pulled him into another hug, guiding him downstairs to the car. “We won’t be gone long. And you can pick out whatever you want from the store.” We’ll be getting three of everything again I think, just so you can try them all. Lathe locked the door behind them when they had their boots on, bringing him to the car. “You're on the other side, Hon.” Lathe motioned to the other side of the car. ...please tell me you know how to open a car door.

James went around the car, looking down at the door, trying to figure it all out. How do you... He poked at the door handle, trying to see if it would open for him. Why’s it not opening?

“You see that handle you're poking? Grab it and pull.” Lathe opened his own, showing him how it swung out.

James grabbed the handle and tugged on it, watching it open up with wide eyes. Oh... Okay. He slowly clambered into the car, unsure of the surrounding area. I don’t like cars... Not anymore...
“Close your door, Hon.” Lathe tilted his head when James shook his head vehemently. “...why not? I'm not gonna hurt you.” It's okay.

James looked to the back of the car, seeing that there were in fact seats and not rugs or pillows... He wouldn’t be able to pin me... He kept his head down in shame as he curled up in the front seat, also not having his seatbelt on. I don’t like this...

....“Would you feel better sitting in the back, Hon? You'll be able to see me...” ........if you're thinking I'd try anything... oh. Oh. “Hon, I would never want to hurt you. I won't be able to reach you in the back if it would make you feel better.” It might...

James’ eyes were wide as he was thrust back into his memories. Come inside the back with us. We’ll have a bunch of fun. He could only watch as he was tugged into the back of the dark colored van and pinned to the floor without mercy. No more! Stop! He would shout, but the man wouldn’t stop and he wouldn’t let him go. He kept him locked in there for days before the door was finally unlocked and he bolted out. James was shaking in his own skin as he shook his head. “N-Not the back...” His voice sounded weak and full of fear. I don't want to... He pinned me down, and made my butt hurt...

Lathe nodded, reaching over and gently running a hand through his hair, trying to soothe him but not wanting to crowd him. He sighed when he leaned into his hand, his voice a quiet murmur. “It's okay, James, you're safe now. It’s alright, you don't have to sit there if you don't want to. Don't worry, it's okay now.” Lathe waited for him to calm, wearily smiling to him. “Nothing bad is gonna happen to you- I won't let it. Do you think you could try to shut the door? It’s okay.” I'm not gonna hurt you. Promise.

James slowly nodded before reaching out to grab the door. I... It won't happen, right?

Lathe smiled when he successfully shut the door. “Good. Now, one more thing. You need to put on your seatbelt. Watch me.” Lathe showed him where the strap was over his shoulder, showing him how it buckled across him. “Now you try. It's there to keep you safe in case we have to stop quickly or something unexpected happens.” It's easy.

James was wary but soon got the belt across his chest before curling up to himself again. I don't wanna be in here... He seemed antsy, ready to get up and bolt out of the car once the chance arose. I want out...
Lathe rolled down James’ window halfway once he started the car, turning the car around and going down the driveway, turning onto their street. He reached over to turn on the radio, quiet music filling the car, James staring at it with wide eyes. “That’s called a radio, James. You can listen to music on it, but the stations get to pick the music that plays. Sometimes there are ads so that the stations can make money and stay on the radio, but they don’t last too long. You can pick different stations and listen to different kinds of music, like pop or country or alternative kinds.” *I get to introduce you to music…* Lathe kept a careful eye out when they got to Trost, parking along the side of the road right in front of the bakery. He saw the same freckled brunette behind the counter, smiling. “We’re here, Hon. It’s just Marco inside that I can see. Let’s go say hi, okay?” Lathe rested a hand on his shoulder. “I’ll be right with you the entire time. Don’t worry.” *It’ll go just fine.*

James bolted out of the car the second he got the chance though once he was outside he felt very out of place. *We’re in town….. It smells nice…* James looked around with wide eyes, watching as someone came close to them a dog on a leash in front of said human. *It’s big…* He backed up, right into the car as the dog noticed his presence and started to veer towards him. *Huh? Why’s it coming here?*

Lathe rounded the car, putting a hand on James’ shoulder, smiling sheepishly to the woman looking to them with a flicker of confusion. “Sorry, he’s afraid of dogs.”

The woman nodded, guiding her dog away from James. “Sorry about that- Blaze, come back here.” She smiled sheepishly to them. “Sorry. Have a nice day.”

“That's fine, and you too.” Lathe looked back to James, guiding him by the arm across the sidewalk to the bakery. *Danger avoided.* Lathe opened the bakery door, ushering James inside. “Freckles?” Lathe grinned when Marco looked up to them with a soft smile, noting the way his expression changed when he saw James.

Marco still smiled kindly to him when he saw them. “Hello Mr. Quo. And hello.” Marco glanced to James, his eyes warm. “Don’t tell me you got another one.” *You’ve already got like what, seven?*

“Kinda-sorta. Marco, this is James, he’s gonna be chilling with us for a while. And James, Marco. He’s a good friend of ours and he’s normally at family dinners with us on Saturdays. He’s also effectively a pile of sugar at all times, and makes good muffins.” ...you can say hi if you want.

Marco’s cheeks tinted pink a bit at the compliment, smiling to James. “Nice to meet you, James.” *That seems like Lathe, taking someone in at a moment’s notice. You look pretty shy…*
James looked at him for a moment before shuffling behind Lathe a little bit, waving at him in silence. His eyes wandered around to the rest of the place. Usually I'm kicked out of places like this...

Lathe gave Marco a one-shoulder shrug, his eyes quietly pleading with him to understand. He can't human too well… “It’s day one of learning how to human, so I decided here was a good place to bring him. C’mon.” Lathe moved up to the glass case, James staying close behind him, using Lathe as a human shield and occasionally glancing up to Marco from behind him, nervous yet a bit curious. He looked over the things in the case, looking to James. “Anything in particular look tasty to you?”

James looked at one of the glass cases, making his way to a large ring of coffee cake, a sour cream coffee cake filled with walnuts, pecans and brown sugar. The cake was covered in powdered sugar and displayed on its own. It looks so good… I want it, but I can’t have it.

Marco watched as James seemed transfixed by the coffee cake, smiling to him. “The sour cream coffee cake? Do you want to try a piece?”

James looked fearful as Marco spoke, quickly shaking his head and going to hide behind Lathe. No… I'm not allowed to have any, because I can’t pay for it.

“It's okay. Hon. You're allowed to try stuff. If you really like something I'll buy some for you.” That's how this works. “Do you wanna try the coffee cake? You're allowed to.”

James was silent for a moment, slowly peeking his head around Lathe’s side. “Y-yes, please.” I wanna try it...

Marco smiled, nodding. He got a small plastic bowl and fork, cutting a small piece for him, holding it out for him. He watched James hesitate to take it, though he waited patiently, his expression calm and reassuring. It's okay, I don't bite.

James was slow to take the bowl, taking it and hiding behind Lathe again. He slowly took the fork and took a piece and bit into it. It does taste really good. He scrambled to eat the rest of the piece he was given before he even realized it.

Marco chuckled quietly when James scarfed down the rest of the cake, smiling. Looks like he likes it.
“You’re eating like it's going out of style.” Lathe smiled as James chewed the last bite. “We can get some to take home if you like.” You look like you really like it. “And can I try some? I need to buy enough so that James won't be short cake if I decide to raid the stash.”

Marco chuckled, nodding and getting him some. “I know how obsessed with coffee you are- you'll like it.” Marco handed the sample over, watching Lathe try it and just stare at the cup.

“...I think we’re going to need that entire cake.” That's too good... “Coffee in cakes... next thing you know they'll put chocolate in cakes.”

“...Uhm... Mr. Quo, chocolate cake has been a thing... for a very long time...” Marco looked at him oddly, lifting a hand to his mouth, trying to suppress a laugh.

“I'm just messing with you. But what'd you say, James, wanna help me eat that cake over the week?” It'll be gone in, like... three days. Tops.

James looked at him with awe. “Please?” His voice was small, using the puppy eyes as best as he could. I would love to eat that! It’s so good!

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Okay. You heard him, Marco. The whole cake, please.” Well, I know what we're having for dessert this week.

Marco smiled, nodding. “Of course.” He moved to box the cake for them, setting it on the counter. “See anything else you like?”

“Hm.” Lathe meandered with James down the case to where the racks of small muffins and rolls were. “We both know I end up getting at least thirty of these every week. But I think you should get to pick.” Lathe nudged James a bit, smiling to him. “Help me pick out a bunch, hm?” Everyone loves everything, which is great, because nobody besides Eren is too picky. ...expect Philip, he can get picky. But there really aren't wrong answers.

James looked to Lathe with confusion until Marco went towards the muffin case. I get to pick? His eyes were questioning as he pointed to himself. Me?
“Yes, you. You can help pick. We’ll take turns, okay? And everything is awesome, so there aren’t any wrong answers.” You’ll do fine. “You can start.” Pick something. Anything.

James looked at the muffins, looking around the different flavors before pointing at the coffee cake muffin. That one looks good… I want that one… If I can have it.

Lathe chuckled, Marco picking up the muffin and putting it in the big box he had ready. “Might as well have more coffee cake. A chocolate chip one, please.” Lathe pointed to the muffin, Marco picking one of those as well.

James looked back to Lathe as he pointed to a blueberry muffin. “What’s the b-blue stuff?” Is it moldy?

“Those are blueberries, they’re a little blue fruit that grows on a bush. Lots of people like them in baked stuff. You might like them.” I think you will.

James nodded before he shifted to hide behind Lathe again as Mr. Bodt came out with more pastries. No… He won’t like me. James gripped into the back of Lathe’s shirt, staying out of view of the man he’d never seen before. He’ll kick me out...

Lathe looked back to James as he hid, gently wrapping an arm around his shoulders and bringing him to his side. “Hello Mr. Bodt, it’s good to see you again. You’re always buried under cake and flour whenever I come by.” You’re always cooped up in the back- you’re busy making delicious stuff, which is great, but I don’t get to say hi too much. Lathe quietly pointed to a pastry with apple as he spoke.

Mr. Bodt looked up as he heard his name called. “Ah! Lathe my boy! How have you been? How’s Eren doing? Better yet I haven’t heard much about Levi, how’s the short stack?” Marco’s father was a joyful Italian as he came out from behind the counter and came to shake Lathe’s hand. I haven’t seen you in weeks! Marco always says you say hello. He smiled as he saw James shy away from him. “And who might this be?”

Lathe smiled as Mr. Bodt came around the counter, shaking his hand with a warm smile. “I’ve been doing pretty well, we all have really. Oh, and this,” Lathe turned to where James hid a bit behind him, bringing him to his side. “This is James, he’s going to be staying with us for a while. I’ve decided to show him around town, this is our first stop.” He’ll be going with me everywhere on errands over the next few weeks so he can learn how to human.
Mr. Bodt smiled kindly. “Why hello there James, is there anything here you really like? I’m sure Marco would let you try something if you asked.” He had a sweet smile on his face as he paused, watching James shift from Lathe’s side to hiding behind him. Is he scared? Well, I’ll stay here for right now… “How’s Eren doing? Is he singing again? I miss listening to his voice on the radio.” It was melodious… I hate that it’s gone.

James hid behind Lathe, shaking in his boots. I’m not gonna take anything! I don’t wanna! He shook as he held onto Lathe’s shirt tightly. I don’t wanna get kicked out…

Lathe reached behind him again, his hand on his middle, his thumb soothingly rubbing at his side. “Eren’s doing pretty well, hasn’t done much singing lately though. He’s got a job teaching German at Trost High School, which takes up a lot of his time. I’m trying to convince him to sing some of the stuff I wrote, though. I’ll get him back on the radio for you.” Lathe grinned. “Oh, and we’ve already been persuaded to clean you out of coffee cake, so don’t worry about that.” I wouldn’t mind going broke if it meant we get to keep eating all the random stuff you guys keep baking.

Mr. Bodt nodded, a happy smile on his face. “Well you should email me more, keep me updated on your family, Marco always forgets some interesting part of what goes on at your household… I’ve heard Eren’s looking to head to Germany this summer.” He must be excited to go back to his homeland.

“...he is?” Lathe looked confused, looking over to Marco. “Did Eren say anything about heading over to Germany over the summer?” If he did, I wasn't a part of the conversation....

Marco nodded. “He did mention it, a few months ago… he said he would talk to someone he knew over there about staying with them, I don’t remember the name… did he not say anything to you?”

“No, he didn't. And the only person I know he knows over there is a man named Hannes….”

“That sounds familiar- I think that was who he mentioned.”

“Huh. I'll have to ask him about that.” Lathe just shook his head, smiling faintly. “It seems like all of us are always doing something else.” There's a lot of us doing a lot of things… just yesterday Mark was breaking state records for running, then it was making sure you didn't die from Sepsis, and today it’s teaching you how to function as a human person. ...I need a vacation.

Mr. Bodt smiled softly, his eyes bright as he started to make his way behind the counter. “Well,
I’m glad I could see you today, though I must say you need to drag Eren along with you sometime soon, I miss the boy.” *I haven’t seen him in too long.*

“I’ll drag him along soon, don’t worry. You know I’ll be out of muffins by Saturday. And it’s nice to see you again.” Lathe grinned, watching him disappear back into the back room, presumably to tackle the large amounts of food they needed to make. Lathe gently nudged James, nodding back to the counter. “We’ve still got, like, twenty-six more pastries to pick. Your turn.”

James poked his head out to listen to Lathe speak before shaking his head and burying his face into Lathe’s back. *I don’t need any more… I’ll be okay with just that for this week… I can get some eggs from the chickens and eat those if I get hungry.*

Lathe sighed, looking back to the case, counting everything in the case. *There are twenty-four different things in here…* “Marco, here’s the deal. Can I have three cinnamon rolls please…” He watched him stow them in the box, looking back up to him. “...and now one of everything else.”

Marco quietly laughed, starting on that. “You always seem to end up ordering at least one of everything.”

“It’s the easiest way to make decisions- everything is tasty, and it’s less mean than buying everything that has chocolate in it and leaving none for your other customers.”

“Point. One Quo dozen coming up.” … *That’s what that order is called now.* Marco boxed everything up for them, sealing them with stickers and running through Lathe’s card. “I need your autograph, please.”

“Stop it, you'll make me blush.” Lathe joked, signing the slip quickly. “Wanna help carry boxes, Hon?” He looked to James. *We can take them and go home now.*

James nodded reaching hesitantly to grab the bags, following Lathe out the door to the car, though he froze, watching Lathe open the back up to the car. *N-no… Not again… I don’t want it to happen again.* James was frozen in fear, his eyes showing nothing but terror. *I’ll be a good boy I promise, just please anything but the back…*

Lathe turned for the boxes, seeing James’ terror, remembering what had happened before their drive to the bakery. “No, James, it’s not that. I just need someplace to put the boxes, that’s all. It’s okay, just give me the bag and we’ll be okay.” Lathe held out a hand for them, trying not to look
like any kind of threat. *It's okay, Hon. I'm not gonna hurt you.*

James was shaking as he slowly and very carefully approached Lathe still very unsure of the situation as he held out the bags for him. *I wanna go back... I can go hide, no one will see me up in the rafters...*

Lathe took the bag from him, stowing it on the floor in the backseat before shutting the door, going around the car. “It's okay, James, just hop in, okay? We'll be home soon.” *These are new revelations for me. ...I need to write all this shit down...*

James was again hesitant to get into the car, but he got in within a few minutes, and even closed the door before he buckled up. He pulled his knees to his chest, keeping his head buried so he didn’t have to watch the car move. *I wanna go back... Go back to Lathe’s home....*

Lathe got in with him, driving them home, shutting off the car when they finally reached the driveway. He let James run off when they were stopped, getting the bag himself and following to the front door where James awkwardly waited. “It's okay, Hon.” Lathe unlocked the door for them, letting him scurry inside. Lathe set the bag of boxes on the counter, looking over his shoulder when he noticed movement, James running upstairs and over to the nook, passing it and heading for the wall. “**James**…” Lathe’s voice was warning, nearly having a heart attack as James climbed the wall and caught a beam, dangling over the room for a moment before hauling himself up expertly. “James, get the hell **down** from there!” *You're gonna get yourself killed!*

James hurriedly shook his head. *I don’t wanna come down, I wanna stay up here... People don’t look up, they don’t find me... I’m hidden here... “N-no... I don’t wanna come down.”* He murmured and he climbed further out of reach as he climbed over the staircase without a thought in the world. *I like it up here...*

Lathe didn't want to panic, walking under where he perched in the beams, sounding very nervous. “James, you're scaring me. Get down from there **now**.” *I'm not fucking letting you climb around the beams of the fucking house.*

James pouted, shaking his head as he looked down to lathe. “I don’t wanna... I feel safe up here... People won’t find me…” *People don’t look up ...

Lathe’s face set, still scared, his voice firm. “James, you can't climb around up there like that, you're **going** to fall and break your neck at some point. It's not safe. And I don't care if you're good at it, you're not allowed to do that. Get down.” *I'm not letting you.*
James watched him, staring right down into his eyes still. “But I’ve only fallen twice... And I’m careful...” 

“I’ve only fallen off a building twice before, because I was high up and the wind knocked me down...”

“I don’t care. Stop arguing with me and come down and you might not get in more trouble than you already are.” I don’t want to be mad at you. Don’t make me be.

James shifted his weight. “Why are you mad?” I can hear it in your voice... What did I do wrong? I feel safe up here, the dogs can’t bite me... He was quiet, his eyes wide as he waited for an answer. I’m not hurting anyone...

“Because you’re scaring me with your swinging around twenty-five feet in the air. If god forbid you slip and fall, I might not be able to catch you and you'll break a bunch of bones, collapse a lung, crack your skull, all that. I get that you feel safe up there but I’m not letting you put yourself in that kind of danger so get down right the fuck now so I can stop worrying.” I will physically remove you from up there if I have to.

“M-My skull’s already cracked... What’s the point if it cracks more? I don’t wanna come down... I wanna stay here, I’ll be careful I promise.” I don’t wanna go where the dogs are.

...what. Lathe was internally seething, trying to stay cool. “That's it. I'm getting you down myself and if your skull really is cracked like you say so, we might as well drag you to the hospital too.” I'm so done. Lathe ditched his socks, going up the stairs, assessing the situation. This shouldn’t be too difficult... Lathe was very careful as he got to the corner of the nook, grabbing the first beam and lifting himself up onto it, creeping along until he was over the living room, the floor far away. Lathe refused to focus on that, instead keeping track of the other beams and where James was as he shuffled away from him. Lathe carefully stood, stepping to another beam when he was close enough, able to keep his footing well. “James, I don’t want to have to haul you off of here. Just go.” Lathe pointed to the nook with one hand, looking a bit mad. You’re not allowed up here.

James shook his head slipping away on the high beams until he was far away from both the nook and Lathe. I don’t wanna come down.

Lathe grit his teeth, creeping after him, careful of his footing as he went on the beam after James, thinking he had nowhere to go. “Come on-” Lathe panicked as James suddenly moved off the beam, swinging underneath it like a monkey when he got too close. He turned around just as James was coming back on top of the beam, bracing against a beam above his head for balance and wrapping his other arm around James’ waist before he was out of reach, feeling him struggle for a
moment before giving in. Lathe struggled to maneuver back to the nook with James, turning him around and hauling him up to cling to him while he moved them back to safety. He jumped down from the beam finally, not letting go of James even as he fought anew to get away. “No. I need to check your head for marks.” Lathe dragged him to the couch, sitting down and making James sit on the ground in front of him, his legs keeping him caged in and freeing his hands to go through his hair gently. Lathe gently felt around his skull, finding a ridge and tracing it along the back of his head, his brow furrowing. ...that's a problem. “Your occipital bone is pushed in… it’s not flush with the parietal bone anymore… when did you hit your head hard enough for that to happen last?”

How long has it been?

... Should I tell him? James was quiet as he looked down, letting Lathe’s hands trace through the sensitive area again. But... It’s been so long... I barely remember anything happening before that... “W-When I-I was five...” But I didn’t hit it...

Lathe paused, his hand threading through his hair comfortingly. “I'm sorry... it's probably healed by now... it's not a serious enough indentation to cause too much concern, and if you've had it for years... you're fine, I'd say. But you know what I'd recommend?” He paused for a moment. “...not climbing on the rafters and pushing your luck.” Lathe kissed the top of his head, letting him go. He smiled faintly when James didn't immediately flee, still staying put with his hands in his hair. “We can go do more stuff downstairs, you can go chill, or we can stay here like this for a bit if you want. Your choice.” I dunno... I'm having a hard time reading you still...

“But... I didn’t fall...” I didn’t fall when my skull was cracked... He shifted to look up into Lathe’s eyes, observing his reaction. “My skull isn’t cracked... Because I fell...”

“.....oh.” Lathe was quiet for a moment, his hands still playing with his hair. “M’sorry...” ...that's horrible... “I just don't want you endangering yourself when it’s very avoidable. ...do you want to tell me what happened...?” I don't really know too much about what your home life was like....

“My uncle did it... I was trying to climb up the tree so he couldn’t get me... He’d beat me when he gets mad... But he caught me before I could get high enough and pulled me down.... He didn’t bother catching me and I landed on my head... I don’t really remember why I was running from him... I can’t remember a lot that happened because of it anymore...” I guess it's a blessing? I can only remember so much pain. “I couldn’t feel my feet after that either...”

....I don't like the sound of that... “I’m going to call Scotty later, see if we can get you scheduled for an MRI sometime soon... that means we take you into the hospital and you're put in a special machine that'll take pictures of your brain. A CT scan would be good too, it does the same thing, taking pictures of your brain... and now that I think of it, you'll need a trip to the optometrist... they're the people that test how well you can see so we know if you need glasses or not so you can see better. A visit to a pediatrician, because you need a checkup and more importantly vaccinations...” Lathe noticed that James was starting to curl up to himself, murmuring to him.
“Hey, I'm sorry, I know it sounds like a lot… but we need to make sure you're taken care of. It’s not going to be easy all the time, but you're gonna get better. Promise.” I’ll make sure of it.

“Why do I need to go to the eye doctors? I can see fine…” James grumbled as he curled up, resting his head on Lathe’s thigh, almost wishing Lathe would rub his head again. It makes the aching stop…

Lathe sighed, taking the cue to gently massage his scalp, smiling faintly as James relaxed into the touch. “We just want to double-triple check that your eyes are doing okay. You only get the one pair to last you your whole life, and you need to take care of them.” Lathe faintly smiled as James seemed ready to drift off, reaching down and heaving him onto the couch, letting him rest his head in his lap, his hands returning to his scalp. You can relax… it's okay. “...I'm sorry if I sounded really mad at you earlier… I was more scared than anything. You don't normally see people climbing beams like it’s natural.” It was impressive, and terrifying.

“Hmm… It was… The only way… To get away from him…” James yawned as he closed his eyes, his body curling up as he felt the pain in his head skyrocket. Ugh… I have another headache… He whimpered a bit, curling into the fetal position and keeping his eyes closed. I want it to go away…

Lathe wanted to coax him to take a nap after the stressful afternoon, though he was worried when James curled up, whimpering in pain. “Are you okay, Honey? Did I hurt you?” Lathe moved his hands from his head, worried he would make it worse. Crap...

James shook his head, his hand coming to cover his ears as tears started to bubble in his clenched eyes. No… Don’t take your hand away… It hurts too much when you stop. His hand weakly tried to put Lathe’s hand back towards where his skull was a little caved in. It hurts… Make it stop … He whined when Lathe didn’t immediately touch his head. Rub it please … I want it to stop …

Lathe was tentative to rub it again, though he heard James huff with a bit of relief when he did, rubbing his head. “...does it feel like your head is splitting?” He watched James nod, wiping at the tears in his eyes. “I have medicine for migraines. I’m going to grab some, okay? I'll only be a moment.” Lathe slid out from under him, running to grab his bag from downstairs. He soon came back with migraine meds and a bottle of water, sitting James up. “Come on, get these down, they should help.” Lathe made sure James got them down and drank a decent bit of water, sitting on the couch again with him, massaging his head. ...this might not be a new thing… you're making me rub at the point where your occipital bone is pushed in... it could've been happening intermittently for years by this point… I'll ask when he doesn't seem to be in excruciating pain...

James was reduced to whimpers as Lathe rubbed the back of his head. It feels better when someone pushes on it… He let out tiny huffs of relief when Lathe pressed particularly hard on the spot. That
feels better… “Mum…” He whined in his pain, trying to get to a point where he could sleep.

Lathe sighed wistfully, still massaging his head. I'm not your Mum... if anything, you'd eventually call me Dad... but there'd be a long way to go for that... “You try to get some sleep, Hun.” Lathe kept up his motions, coaxing James into sleep....I need to schedule that MRI as soon as I can...

Lathe slid out from under him, wanting to leave him to nap and make the call without waking him up. He was halfway down the stairs when he heard a groan of pain, looking back where James was pressing on the back of his head, twisting and unable to find any relief or comfort. Shit. Lathe was next to him again quickly, shifting them back into their original position, one hand massaging his head while the other pulled out his phone. He sighed in relief as James grew lax at his touch, glad he wasn't in as much pain. “I'm going to make a call and see if we can't get you in sometime soon, okay? I think we’d both like to know if there's something we can do to fix your migraines.” We need to see how that noodle of yours is doing... Lathe dialled a familiar number, waiting for Scotty to pick up. I never go about the normal way of scheduling shit anymore. I just call you and we end up getting in pretty quickly. Being a doctor has its privileges. [Yo, Scotty, I've got another favour to ask. Can you please see when the next MRI scanner is free? James has his occipital bone out of arrangement a bit- it's pushed in a bit and he's having really bad migraines. We need to know if there's something going on we can treat or hopefully fix.] It could be simple, or it could be difficult. I'm hoping it's not the latter.

[You said it was the Occipital bone? Can he see? ] The taps of Scotty clicking away on the keyboard sounded through the phone. [How far is it indented?]

Lathe nodded, reaching over to the bookshelf next to him and tossing a book on the floor about six feet away from them. “James, there's a book on the floor. What colour are the letters on the front?” Even if you can't read, if you can see, you should be able to answer that.

James shifted, barely able to open his eyes without sobbing uncontrollably. It's all black... It's all black again... “I-I can’t…” He cried as he reached to put pressure on the back of his head again. It hurts so much.

“Can you see anything at all, Hon?” He watched him shake his head, seeing his expression contort with misery and pain. [Scotty, I'm going to say zero vision. He can't see, but applying pressure to a particular spot on the back of his head on the indented plate alleviates some of the pain.]

Scotty was quiet for a moment. [Stop putting pressure on it, bring him in now, I'm paging the neurologist... He's got something wrong…] Really wrong. [Don’t put pressure on it, it'll make it worse in the long run for him.]

[You got it, Scotty. Ten minutes max. Thanks.] Lathe ended the call, his hand leaving James’ head.
“James, Hon, you can’t put pressure on it. Word is it's gonna make it worse. We’re gonna get you to the hospital so we can have those pictures done, okay? They’re getting everything ready for you.” Lathe stood, having scooped James up into his arms. “I'm sorry, but you can't get out of this one.” Lathe carried him down the stairs, setting James down on the couch so he could get his socks and boots on, wincing as James whimpered and cried in pain. He had his things together very quickly, coming back to get him, prying his hands from his head. “James, please, I know it makes it feel better but you're gonna hurt your noodle in a way we might not be able to fix. It won't hurt forever, but you need to be strong and tough it out this time, Hon.” I'm sorry….

James broke that instant into sobs. “It hurts…. Mummy… Make it stop…” It hurts, I want the pain to go away, I can’t see anything… He did keep his hands away from his skull, instead grabbing onto Lathe’s shirt and sobbing.

Lathe’s heart ached as he watched him break down, wiping away his tears, trying to comfort him. He was even more worried when he got a glimpse of James’ eyes, his left pupil fully dilated, the other tiny. ...shit. “Don't worry Honey, I'm right here, we're going to go do what we need to to make the pain go away. Come on, Hon.” Lathe scooped him up, James hanging onto him and crying into his shoulder. Lathe thought for a moment, going over to the kitchen island and quickly writing a note for the kids when they got home, leaving Mark in charge and ordering them to behave. He got them out the door and in the car, setting James in the passenger seat and buckling him in. It hurt to see James cry harder when he was away for two seconds to get in the car, starting the short drive to the hospital. It wasn't seven minutes later that he was walking into the lobby with James in his arms, the nurses at the front desk instantly recognising both of them, looking worried. They know he’s the runaway who recovered from Sepsis yesterday… and that I'm the guy who’s always around when someone’s health has gone to shit.

Scotty came in a few seconds later. “Lathe.” He called for him, opening the door towards the elevators instead of the ER. Let’s get him up in an actual bed instead of an ER room.

Lathe passed by the front desk and beelined for Scotty, James quietly crying into his shoulder still. “How long till we can get him in for an MRI? And we should maybe do a CT scan too, see if that gives us more information so we don't read anything incorrectly.” Something’s very wrong and we need to know what it is. “And his left pupil is dilated and the other isn't.” That should be the full update...

“That sounds like a problem with the Occipital lobe.” A woman's voice sounded from down the hall as they waited. Is this who Scotty was talking about?

“Ah, good, you're here. Lathe this is Dr. Nanaba Zacharius, she’s the neurologist here…” I didn’t think she’d get here this early.
Lathe looked to her, recognition in his eyes. “...are you married to a Mike Zacharias?” He smiled when she nodded. “It's nice to finally meet you, ma'am. I used to work for him.”

“Oh, you're the one he would always rant about. I've heard a lot about you.” Mostly good things, but also... strange things. But mostly good nonetheless. “Come, there's a half hour wait for the next MRI machine. We'll get him set up in one of the rooms.” Nanaba ushered them into the elevator, bringing them up to the fifth floor. She didn't talk much beyond then, bringing them to an empty room, skimming over James’ rather sparse file as Scotty went to get him morphine at her instruction. He's in a lot of pain, trying to curl up and crying... he needs to be able to control himself while in the machine, and making the pain go away will fix that, at least for as long as we need it to be. Nanaba tried to get a good look at his head from where he sat on Lathe’s lap on the bed, though he jerked his head away from her each time she reached for him, crying into Lathe’s shoulder and trying to get her to stop. ...oh my....

“James, Hon, it's okay, she needs to have a look at your head, it's okay, she's doing her job...” It was futile, James refusing to let go of Lathe, jerking away every time she tried to look at his head. He looked helplessly to her, grateful when Scotty came into the room again. “James, Scotty just needs to give you medicine to make the pain go away. You'll feel a lot better in a minute, promise.” He shifted him a bit, coaxing him to hold out his arm so Scotty could give him an IV.

James had teary eyes as he timidly held out an arm, letting out a loud cry as Scotty put the IV in his arm and taped it down. It hurts... He continued to cry for a few minutes, the morphine taking awhile to kick in before he grew lax in Lathe’s arms. It... It feels better... “Mum... I don’t want it to come back again.” The headaches hurt so much... He blinked a few times, trying to see if he could see, the room coming out around him in blurry outlines.

Scotty watched as Nanaba seemed to sigh in relief before putting gloves on. She decides to put them on now... Oh well, the kids like her, I know that much. He looked to Lathe. “How long ago did the headache start?” I can help out, I've got nothing better to do. There’s a sheet of simple questions, so... I can handle that.

“It hasn't been more than twenty minutes or so, really... one minute he was fine, then the next he was crying in pain...” Lathe cradled James close, though he made sure Nanaba could see his head well, letting her feel his skull. “We’re gonna try to keep the headaches away James, we’ll fix them. Don't worry.” ...I sure hope this isn't some huge calamity...

Nanaba smiled as he nodded, her hands gently feeling his skull, her brow furrowing. “When did it cave in?” I need to know the details about this, his brain is probably under pressure. “What helps the pain as you know of?” Her voice quiet as she spoke.
“He was tugged on and fell onto his head when he was five or so, hit the back of his head. All I know is that pressure at this spot here in particular,” Lathe pointed to it. “Right there it alleviates some of the pain, but not by much. But pressing at all on the indented area relieves the pain somewhat.” Lathe still had a careful hold on him, sort of relieved that James was lightly dozing against his chest, woozy from all the morphine he had been given. “...Scotty, how much morphine did you give him?”

“Enough to make him hover on the edge of sleep for a while. He needs to sleep it off after this if he can, not be up for hours screaming in pain.” Nope.

Nanaba nodded. “He’s got pressure in his skull, which isn’t good. We’re gonna need that MRI as soon as we can.” I need to see what I’m working with… It’s not good by the looks of it.

...that doesn’t sound good… could it just be the pressure of the bone on his brain? ...but that doesn’t sound right… there’s space between the brain and the skull, there’s fluid, and the bone isn’t pushed in far enough, I don’t think… what could it be… Lathe waited anxiously, sighing in relief when the room opened and they could use the machine. Finally. “C’mon, Hon.” Scotty removed the IV, James still dozing in his arms as they headed down the hall.

Nanaba led them down to the MRI machine, making sure the technician knew what part of the brain to scan. Okay, we get to see what the problem is. She watched as James was laid down and strapped into the flatbed, which let him get into the machine safely and securely. The technician and Lathe came back into the room. “Now we wait…” It took a moment for the images to come up, her eyes widening as she saw the large white spot start to form between the temporal lobe and Occipital lobe, running down to the spinal cord. This... This is bigger than I’ve ever seen. And I think I know what it is now... I hope it's not cancerous. “Lathe… I need to speak with you privately.” Her tone was grave as she looked through the multiple scans that brought up a 3D image on the computer. It’s worse that I thought possible...

Lathe was deathly quiet as he looked at the scans, looking quietly fearful. He nodded, quiet as he followed her to the hall. “......I know that picture looked very wrong… what was that…” I don’t know if I wanna hear the answer...

Nanaba nodded quiet as she thought about telling him, deciding the truth would be best. “It’s a tumor… And a very large one at that. It could be a number of things, but I’m worried about it’s size. It’s something I can’t treat here in this facility, so I’m going to be referring you to the Cancer Center of Kansas in Wichita...” Let’s let you process that whole spiel for a moment.

Lathe stared at the floor, holding his head in one hand. “...he’s got cancer… and that huge white spot was the tumor.” As if life hasn't already treated him like shit enough.... Lathe didn't know
what to say, just blankly staring at the floor. ...fuck this. Just... **fuck** ... “...do you have any idea if he’ll live that long?” *Is he gonna die when he's twenty-five? Or will life lull us into a false hope and take him at forty?*

“Well, it depends, if it’s not cancer… The position of it might lead to some memory issues as well as eyesight and sensory problems… Part of his skull will have to be removed and corrected to relieve the pressure… but the tumor will have to be removed… If it’s cancerous, he’ll need to go through chemo and radiation, and if that works they’ll be able to figure out a plan from there on out. If it doesn’t respond well to the treatment, I can’t tell you to be honest… But his parents should be contacted and informed, even if they aren’t here legally… We should find out if cancer runs within the family… But I’m going to suggest that I perform a craniotomy here… and try and relieve some of the pressure within his head.” *That should help stop the headache, but it gives the tumor more room to grow if not treated quickly enough…*

Lathe nodded, trying to think. “...okay, that's probably a good idea so it doesn't do much more damage while we’re arranging to have the surgery… when you do it, isn't there a way to take a sample or something and test for cancer cells? Do you know if that could happen?” *Brain surgery is not my forte… but I'm pretty sure that's a thing you can do… but I have to check...*

“Well, it depends, if it’s not cancer… The position of it might lead to some memory issues as well as eyesight and sensory problems… Part of his skull will have to be removed and corrected to relieve the pressure… but the tumor will have to be removed… If it’s cancerous, he’ll need to go through chemo and radiation, and if that works they’ll be able to figure out a plan from there on out. If it doesn’t respond well to the treatment, I can’t tell you to be honest… But his parents should be contacted and informed, even if they aren’t here legally… We should find out if cancer runs within the family… But I’m going to suggest that I perform a craniotomy here… and try and relieve some of the pressure within his head.” *That should help stop the headache, but it gives the tumor more room to grow if not treated quickly enough…*

Lathe nodded, trying to think. “...okay, that's probably a good idea so it doesn't do much more damage while we’re arranging to have the surgery… when you do it, isn't there a way to take a sample or something and test for cancer cells? Do you know if that could happen?” *Brain surgery is not my forte… but I'm pretty sure that's a thing you can do… but I have to check...*

Don’t worry, relieving pressure isn’t my only motive for the surgery, I will be removing some and sending it to the CCK laboratories… He’ll be admitted, and if he needs to go to Wichita, we’ll have to arrange for special transportation….” *I’ll find out what we can do to get him there if it comes to that… “I’m sorry this is all I’m able to tell you now, but I’m going to have his blood sent to our labs and check for any signs of cancer elsewhere in the body.” Just to make sure…*

Lathe nodded, looking up to her. “That all seems like the best thing to do at this point… ...I'll see what we can find on his family, but… he barely came with a birth certificate. Other than that there wasn't record of him. I can only imagine that files like that might not exist for the family… I'll see about asking them directly…” *But I can only do so much...*

Nanaba nodded, a soft smile on her face. “Well, he’s going to be staying here… because of the amount of morphine he’s gonna be on… You’ll also need to tell him he needs to shave his head… or only a part of it will be razored…” *Usually patients do the whole head before surgery. “And due to circumstances, we won’t be able to do the surgery for a week or so.”*

“He can come home tomorrow when the morphine wears off, yes? And we come back for the surgery?” *You make it sound like he’s here for the week...*

“The facility isn’t legally allowed to give out that high of a dose of morphine to outpatients… He’ll need to stay here….. I can try and see if I can set him on a lower dose for shorter periods of time,
but nothing is for certain at the moment. However, he is required for an overnight at this point.” Her tone was gentle, trying to ease Lathe into the situation ahead of them. *Most parents don't like that their children have to stay overnight…*

“Yeah, I figured. He's really loopy, I knew Scotty probably gave him more than enough for the pain… am I allowed to stay overnight? He's still incredibly skittish around nearly everybody and when he wakes up he might freak out… I don't want anything bad happening as a result.” *I'm pretty sure I can, since I did with Eren forever ago, but I can't remember if that was bending the rules for me or not because I was an overprotective doctor of a father….*

“He’s under 18, you're allowed to stay.”

“Cool. ...wait, what time is it..” Lathe looked to his watch, thinking. “My six won't be home for another two hours, then Eren and Ieva… and I need to grab stuff… I'm sorry, I'm trying to figure out what to do with myself right now.” Lathe seemed a bit flustered, trying to get his act together. “Okay, I'm going to make sure James gets back to his room okay and sleeps, and I need to run home and grab stuff. I did this once before for a month, I can handle one night.” *I'm not going anywhere. ...at least once I have my shit.*

Nanaba nodded. “Okay, I’ll call the CCK, inform them of your case, and tell them when the sample will come in…” She motioned him to come back to the MRI where Scotty and the technician were placing James on his bed and getting the loopy teen comfortable to go back up to his room. *He’ll be out of it for awhile.*

Lathe moved to the side of the bed, smiling when James met him with a tired, lazy look. “Hey Hon. You look sleepy.” ...well, you also look high on drugs, but y’know. *It takes a lot out of you.* “Don't worry, you can sleep soon.” Lathe helped guide the bed along and out the door, still processing the new information. ... *what am I gonna tell everyone?*

James began to giggle as they waited for the elevator to come to the floor they were on. “Why do you look like a dinosaur?” Hahaha… *Dad’s arms look really short… He’s so tall… Is his head hitting the ceiling?*

Lathe smiled, moving his elbows close to his sides, making it look like his arms were half-sized. “Maybe because I am a dinosaur. We may never know.” Lathe gave him a dramatic look, trying to keep a straight face as he weakly flailed his short arms, getting a laugh out of James and strange yet amused looks from the two next to them. *I don't care if I make a fool out of myself. James gets special joke privileges.*
James giggled more, though he looked confused when the door to the elevator opened and he was wheeled inside. “Daddy… Are we going to heaven?” His voice innocent and curious as he looked up to the bright white lights on the ceiling. *Am I dead now? Did I fall?*

Lathe’s heart caught in his throat, trying not to tear up, smiling to him. “No, Honey. You’ve still got a long ways to go before you get to heaven. You’ve still got lots and lots to do first.”

“Lots and lots?”

“Lots and lots and lots.” ...*I really really hope so… I really hope they don’t need you back where you came from too soon…*

James’ eyes went wide with acknowledgement for a moment, turning to Lathe. “Do I get to be a dinosaur too?” He sounded so excited as he looked down to his arms, pouting when they were longer than Lathe’s. *I wanna be a dinosaur!*

Lathe smiled, moving. “Mhm. You get to be a dinosaur too. Look.” Lathe moved his elbows, moving his wrists, watching as his eyes widened with happiness. “You’re *already* a dinosaur.”

“Rawr!”

“Rawr!” Lathe smiled playfully, both of them lightly swatting at the other’s hands with their tiny arms for a moment. ..........*if you never got to really be a kid when you were little… like this… you can be one now. You deserve that kind of happiness.*

James giggled and laughed before the doors opened and he looked to Lathe again. “Are we in heaven now?” *I got to be a dinosaur!*

Lathe smiled wistfully, looking to James. “Not yet. …it takes a really long time to get there.” *Hopefully a really really long time for you…*

James nodded and he looked around as he was wheeled down the hall and towards his room. “Daddy, where are we going?” *It’s all white and grey here… Where is this place?*
“You’re tired, right?” Lathe watched him nod. “Well you’ve got your own room here where you can sleep. We both know you could use all the rest you can get.” Lathe gently ruffled his hair. I can’t tell you that you have cancer like this … you wouldn’t understand a word of it… and it’d hurt even more telling you...

“Okay…. Are you going to work now?” Are you gonna come back? His eyes looked like he was a disappointed child that he was being left alone, but accepting it nonetheless, like a good kid. I can go to sleep, it’s quiet here...

“I’m gonna stay with you until you fall asleep, but then I have to go get some things. But I’ll be here when you wake up, Hon. I'll be like I never left. I'll be back.” Lathe smiled to him, seeing the flicker of happiness in his owlish eyes. ...Lathe, you can't cry… don't. Save it for the car...

Once James was securely placed in his room and hooked up to his IVs, it didn’t take long before the drugs overpowered him and his eyes closed. Scotty came back in at that point, looking to Lathe. “Lathe… Do you…. Do you wanna talk about it?” I know what Nanaba said… And the tumor is very large...

Lathe was staring forlornly at James’ sleeping face, peaceful, and he just shook his head, looking to the floor. “...I just need to process a lot of stuff…” …it's a lot to take in… Lathe stood, wiping at his eyes before going to peck James’ forehead. I'll be back before you know it. Lathe rounded the bed, Scotty still standing there, looking worried. “...I don’t… I don't know what to make of all this… I need to think…” It took him a moment to register that Scotty was hugging him, trying not to break down as everything jumbled in his mind. ...it's so much...

Scotty’s arms wrapped around his shoulders. “I should drive if you’re going somewhere… you’re too out of it…. And it’s okay to cry, I know it’s hard.” It must be really hard on you, he seems like a good kid...

Lathe opened his mouth to try to speak, surprised when all he could let out was a choked sob, burying his face into Scotty’s shoulder. “I'm s-sorry… c-could you…? I just n-need my stuff from h-home…” I need to tell Eren he needs to cook something tonight or order out if he's got no time, I need to explain why James and I won't be home for the night and why I'm going to be spending so much on medical care for him… “I sh-should call Eren… tell him what the new plan i-is…” Lathe let Scotty lead him from the room, hurting when James vanished from sight. He pulled his phone from his pocket, fumbling before finally calling Eren’s number. It took a few rings before he picked up. “Eren? It's Lathe. A lot of stuff just happened… um… we found out James has a huge tumor in his brain… I need to schedule surgeries and he can't leave the hospital for the night because of the morphine they gave him and I can't stay home today… you're in charge of dinner and making sure the kids do homework… o-okay?” I can't be Dad to all seven of you right now... I need to focus on being Dad for just one of you for now...
“Hold on for a second.” Eren pulled the phone away from his ear, going back into the classroom. “Class dismissed, go to the library to study for your exam, I won’t have after school activities today.” He watched all the students shrug, pack their books up and leave with quiet chatter between them all, finally picking his phone up to his ear again. “Dad are you there?”

“Y-Yeah… M’sorry for interrupting your classes… I just had to tell you, so that the kids don't all go without dinner… Scotty’s driving me home to grab my medic bag and my laptop, but that's it… I'm too much of a mess to even drive…” I'm a mess … I just wanna cry about it but that won't get anything done or get anything fixed...

“Alright I'm coming home now… Do you want me to grab the kids before I leave? So you can tell them? Or should we wait?” His voice was soft as he collected his things from his room and headed towards the office to tell them he’d be leaving and to make an announcement that there would be no German classes after school that day.

“N-No, I don't think you have to… They… they barely even know who he is… he's practically a stranger to everyone but me… and… I dunno if Jared or Philip would even really understand… we should wait, I think…” I can't have that conversation when I've barely even accepted the facts about it myself… “Th-Thank you, Eren… you don't h-have to…” I just didn't want anyone to starve...

“I'm on my way home. I'll meet you there, and start getting your stuff together.”

“O-Okay…. I'll see you then.” Lathe hung up after a moment, his face stony as they left, staring at the ground on their way across the parking lot. The ride from the hospital to his house felt longer than it ever had. ...James could have cancer... and if he does... it didn't look like living a normal life would end up being an option… Lathe silently cried on the way, rubbing at his eyes, trying to stop the tears. I can't... I can't break down now... He mindlessly left the car when they stopped in the driveway, walking up unseeing and opening the unlocked front door, Eren enveloping him with a hug the second he was in the door. He listed to the side a bit, hugging him back weakly. I can't cry...

Eren kept his arms wrapped around Lathe, a hand going to the back of his head and guiding his head to his shoulder. “Let it out, Dad… Cry now....” You can cry while he’s not here... Cry while you’ve got people to lean on. He felt Lathe shudder in his arms, holding in his own worry for the moment knowing that if he asked questions now it wouldn’t go over well with him.

Lathe’s hands weakly grabbed onto his shirt, hot tears welling in his eyes. “I don't w-want him t-to die…” He can't die... Lathe heard Eren murmuring in his ear, letting him steer him to the couch to
sit, his face still buried in his neck. “I-It looks bad… the t-tumor is so b-big… i-if it is c-cancer….” Lathe didn't want to think about it, grateful when Eren didn't press, just holding onto him tighter. I don't want it to be cancer… I want it to be nothing and then they can get rid of the nothing and fix him and they'll send him home and he'll be happy… ...but that won't happen........... it's never that easy........

Eren held onto Lathe as he cried, keeping him close and against him. And life was just getting to be okay too... Everything was going right for once. “He’s a strong kid, he’ll make it, I know he will.” I’ve seen that he feels most comfortable with you, and that he’s got some problems, but I can also see that he’s a really really strong kid from that look in his eyes. “He hasn’t given up, don’t let him give up.” Eren’s hands gently rubbed against Lathe’s back as he kept him close. “If it is cancer we’ll be right there with him, we’ll be strong with him.” I know we will.

Lathe nodded, his breathing shaky. He needed a few minutes to calm down, sniffing after a bit, surprised when Eren was pressing his own kerchief into his hands, making him chuckle a bit at the irony of it. ...I keep forgetting that I'm not alone with this…

"Th-Thanks…. it's just… he reminds me so much of myself when I was that young… I wouldn't… I can't leave him to fend for himself at this point… he's a strong kid… he's gone this far… I don't want him to just give up after everything that's happened…” Lathe rested his head on his shoulder again, just wanting to be held for another moment. I won't let him give up… not now...

Eren was happy to hold him, glad Lathe didn't want to bottle in his emotions. “I know this isn’t the best time to tell you, but I finally got everything together and paid for for a trip to Germany, for me and the other German teachers… I um, I was actually gonna ask if you wanted to come with us and stay for a few nights before coming back? But with this.. I don't think you'd want to.” I thought you'd wanna go with us to see Hannes again, and then come back while we travel and experience culture...

“....Marco mentioned that you were talking about going back to Germany over the summer… I just… I don't know if I can, with everything going on with James… I can't sugarcoat it, he's got the knowledge of a five year old and he's about to be legally declared an adult in a year… And with this… I just… I'd love to, believe me, and if I saw Hannes again that'd be wonderful, but… I just… being a parent or a mentor doesn't mean you get vacation days…. or even sick days… I want to see if it is cancerous or not first, then maybe think from there…. but, for now… I don't think I can come… maybe another time I'll go with you, because I know you want to go back to see Hannes again after this… or at least, we should go so that he can see you again. He still really misses you.” He really loves you… I'll go with you some other time… but I have to be a Dad now...

Eren nodded, keeping Lathe close to his body. That's very okay, and if it is cancerous I know just the thing that I might do. “Um… Do you think we could call around and see if I can get a gig in Germany? Raise money for his medical expenses and such? I can call Mark, maybe we could do a charity live stream together… Make him a bank account of his own with whatever is left over.” I want him to be able to be financially stable if he pulls through, and I don't want you to have to
worry about money. “I can do my part to help.”

Lathe nodded, weakly clinging to him. “O-Okay… that sounds wonderful… he won't have to worry too much about any of that, then… he’ll have enough to get back is feet after all this is over… but you don't have to… if it’s not cancerous… he won't need so much for treatment and stuff… most of what he needs is… is time… and patient people to teach him how to function as an adult… and I don't wanna put that on anybody else…” No… I should be the one doing that… and if he has his own account, he’ll be okay for a while if he leaves to live on his own and can't find a job right away or struggles a bit… he’ll have a bit a safety cushion… “But I don't think the entire proceeds of the livestream or the concert should just go to him… it should go to other cancer patients too… this isn't just about him… and if it’s not cancerous, he won't need so much…” It'll be more than enough...

“Well, I’m going to do it anyways. I could do both…. I’ll call Mark and see if we can arrange a livestream sometime after I’m done grading exams… And everyone is prepared for the AP, I made sure of it.” It’s only about two weeks until then.

Lathe nodded, leaning heavily against him. “…I'm sorry if I can't be Dad for all of you much in the next few weeks… I just… if I could be in two places at once… I would be… but I can't…” I'm gonna be spreading myself thin and making myself sick with worry for the next month at least… I just… I have to help James… I have to...

“Don't worry about us, I can handle our family. You take care of James, I’ll be home every day soon…” I don’t want you to wear yourself thin again. “You’re not allowed to get sick.”

“I think I'll make myself sick with worry by the end of this week… they're going to take a sample of the tumor to see if it's cancerous at the end of the week… I'll be too worried to do anything until we know for sure… and even then I'll be worrying all the time…” I know how I function in these kinds of situations… “When you were in the hospital, I was always there because I loved you and I was always worrying… that something would go wrong, and that if I left for even one day everything would go to shit… that if you woke up I wouldn't be there when you needed someone to reassure you and dote on you…” Lathe’s grip on his shirt tightened. “I can't stop worrying about any of you… I feel so responsible for all of you and that I always need to be there in case someone needs me… I never want to stay in bed even a few minutes later than usual if I'm still really tired, and I won't let myself take a break from being Dad until the house is completely empty… and even then it feels so wrong… because I need to find something to do… even if I feel like crap and just want to nap… I can't… I can't stop caring long enough to do nothing for more than a second…” I can’t stop feeling guilty for even sleeping lately… I just… I always feel like I need to do something… I just… I can't stop...

Eren shook his head and looked down. “Dad, you need to pull your head out of your ass. How can you not realize that you’re doing the best you can for us? And that we could never ask for more.
We’d understand if you wanted to take a break which was why I wanted to take you to Germany… But maybe now I’ll think about sending you and Mom on that vacation you never got… We really want you to understand that you’re already doing the best for us, and we understand that you need to focus on James, and we understand that we’ll have to step it up and take care of each other… I want you to go be there for James, okay? And be the Dad he never got the chance to have…. Because I know you can be that Dad and make him happy, but I don’t want you to get sick about worrying about the house too, just worry about him, can you do that for me?” Eren’s voice was earnest, and caring, wanting Lathe to listen to everything he said. *I want you to be okay, and if that means becoming the family man, *I will*. 

Lathe tried his best to listen and believe him, though he shuddered as his mind completely rejected the idea, hating that he couldn't do both. “B-But… I…” *It's not enough.* “I can't h-help it… I look around at everything I've d-done and at the house we've built and at the kid’s grades and at how happy they all are and all our friends at dinner but it's not enough… I don't know why it's not enough… I can't give you all enough… I don't deserve time off… I can't stay away from you all, it'd kill me… I'd be nothing but a miserable pile of emotions… I wanna stay…” Lathe clung to him, his grip tighter. “I can't leave… don't make me…” *I need to do more... I need to...*

Eren looked to him. *I'm going to use blackmail.* “You need to take care of James, and if you don’t… I’ll cry.” Eren gave him the signature puppy dog eyes. *You've been blackmailed.* 

It didn’t help much. Lathe just started sobbing, holding him tighter. “D-Don't cry… I wanna take care of James… b-but…” 

“Then go take care of him, and I’ll call you if me and Mom need help…. But I need the practice too, to run the household, so please just try and focus on James for me please? And can I tell you some good news?” *I found out today... and I’ve been wanting to tell you all day.* 

“...but…” *but it's not enough....... “...w-what?” What good news.......?*

“You’re gonna be a grandpa.” 

Lathe paused, his crying turning into tears laughs, his face still buried in his shoulder. “R-Really?” 

“You wanna see the ultrasound pictures?” *They’re so tiny, but still, there’s a healthy heartbeat.* 

“Y-Yeah, please.” Lathe let Eren go so he could get them from the kitchen table, looking as he was
handed the image, a tiny form in the picture. “......that's a tiny person…” Lathe smiled, rubbing at his eye with one hand. “I'm so h-happy for you…” I know you really wanted your own kids...

“But you know what that means?” Hopefully I can use this as blackmail.

“......what?” Lathe looked to him, trying to think.

“it means I want you to be there when they’re born… I want you to be there for my kids… But I need you to be healthy for that, okay? So you can't worry yourself sick anymore. Please just focus on James, and if you get worried, we’re only a FaceTime or Skype call away…” Please agree, I know it’s hard... But please ...

Lathe looked back to the tiny form in the picture, swallowing hard. “I-I'll try… I'll r-really try… I promise....” I don't wanna be so worried all the time… I wanna stop worrying so I can sleep at night... so that I can be there for you and your kid... I'll try...

“Thank you, really, I need all the Dad practice I can get.” I'm gonna need it… He had a happy smile on his face, looking to where Scotty sat checking his phone. “Well, let’s finish getting you packed, okay?”

“Okay.” Lathe gave him the picture back, standing. “I just need a minute...” Lathe walked to the bathroom, shutting the door. He washed his face, staring at his bloodshot eyes helplessly. I'm a mess... Lathe sighed, taking a deep breath before leaving, going to get his medic bag and round up his laptop and things. I need to not worry. ...that's it. Worry about James, and that's it. That's my job. ...fuck, I'm already failing at this... Lathe tried not to think about anything as he walked back downstairs, staring at the floor. Just think of nothing. ...nothing.

Eren stood, holding a bag of his medic supplies and his laptop bag all neatly put together. “Go get a change of clothes, if you need more I can bring more…” I can do that, and you should know by now you can rely on me a little more.

Lathe nodded, going back upstairs to get a small bag of stuff together, not even remembering how Eren ended up with his stuff. ...I can't even keep track of that ... Lathe came downstairs, a backpack slung over his shoulder, looking over the house, his gaze settling on the kitchen, the small table shoved against the wall with the grocery list and recipe books on it, the calendar hung above it. “Are you sure you can handle stuff? You know how picky Philip gets with his snack after school, and that Jared will have a fit if he doesn't get the banana muffin today since there's only one, and who likes what juice box and-”
“Dad… I’ve got this. Focus on James, and bring him home if you can.” We’d like him to come home…

Lathe sighed, wearily smiling to him. “...I know you've got this. ...but I still have to worry at least a little.” I'll try not to.

The day passed without much incident, Eren easily managing to placate the kids with food when they came home, helping them with homework and herding them into the living room or the theatre room so he could cook dinner. He explained everything to Ieva when she came home, seeing the confusion in her eyes when she stepped inside and saw him cooking dinner instead of Lathe. Today wasn't too bad… the kids haven't asked where Dad is yet… They seemed curious through dinner as to where Lathe was, eyeing his empty chair, but they didn't say anything. Getting them to school was a bit more of a production, getting them fed breakfast and putting together a lunch for Philip because he refused to eat the lunches at school. He had since cleaned up the mess of breakfast plates and was going over the grocery list, adding to it when Lathe and James came home.

Lathe was weighed down by his three bags, but it didn't mean he had refused James when asked to carry him, carrying the sleepy teen inside. “It’s good to see the place didn't collapse when I was gone.” Lathe faintly chuckled, moving to the couch with James, setting him down near Nene. She lifted her head up, seeing James dozing in her territory, studying him. ...suitable pillow detected. She stood, padding over to him and settling on his chest, content when he didn't freak out, falling asleep there. ...this human makes for a good pillow. They are warm, and not screaming in terror. I like this. Lathe chuckled as Nene made herself at home, looking back to Eren. “How did the morning go? Did you remember to make Philip’s lunch, or did he have to pester you?”

“Morning went fine, Mike understood when I told him I needed the day off, he said I could take it since I haven’t taken one yet… I remembered, I even got him another muffin to put in his lunch as a surprise, I’m gonna head to Marco’s and he more anything James needs, any dietary restrictions? The boys have asked for meat tonight, so I’m gonna go get some porkchops. Does that sound alright? Mom was all for the idea.” He had a happy smile on his face as he added Marco’s bakery to the list of stores he needed to go to. It went well, and I bet Mark will probably ask where you went, but the boys were okay with you being gone.

Lathe was surprised, seeing the list he was writing. “N-No, no dietary restrictions I can think of… Uhm…” Lathe started reading the list, seeing a couple things he’d written. “Uh, remember that Philip only eats the one kind of animal crackers, and everyone likes them best, the red ones with the pictures all over the boxes… and we get the thicker aluminium foil…” He looked up when Eren just gave him a look, blushing and stepping back, looking embarrassed. “...sorry… it’s just that I’m the only one who really writes the lists… just, making sure…” I have to hover, I'm sorry… it's my first impulse whenever someone does something I normally always do…
Eren smiled softly, chuckling, letting Lathe looked over the rest. “If you want to write notes on there you can, also, I think it might be good if you set yourself to look through my old clothes for James. Do you think that’ll occupy yourself long enough? Or should I give you some chores to do?” Eren asked softly, knowing that Lathe would need a list to keep him occupied and not worrying about anything. *You need something to keep you occupied and it looks like James is out…*

“...I'll write notes and then do that... the clothes sorting, and Uhm... give me stuff to do... please...” *I wanna be busy, it feels weird to do nothing...* Lathe reached for a pencil, rewriting the grocery lists, putting them in order of stores and departments, being specific with brands when he needed to be and with specifics on light bulbs and things. *Doing it like this makes it easier... “I'm sorry for doing this completely over... but it makes shopping easier...” So you don't run around the store unnecessarily or miss stuff...*

Eren nodded, reaching for a new piece of paper. “It’s okay, if it makes you feel better about it, that’s fine.” He started scrawling a list for Lathe.

1. Go through clothes and find things that’ll fit James.
2. Don’t forget to give James his morphine.
3. Send Levi a message on skype and see when he’s next available.
4. Got out and feed the horses, also make sure that Arya gets a bottle and eats at least half of it.
5. Check out Annabell, she had kittens awhile ago again... Yeah I found them this morning, they’re big, so call Hanji to see what we need to do with them...
6. Think about lunch (if you want to make it you can)
7. Call Mark... Or call any possible place in Germany to get a gig... I’m available between June 30 and July 15th in Germany and any time after in LA.

Eren pushed the list to Lathe. “Will that work for you?” *I think that's enough.*

Lathe looked over the list, nodding. “Yeah, I'll get started on this after I finish making this list correctly.” Lathe pretended to glare at Eren, laughing quietly when they made eye contact, looking away again. “I'm just joking. You’re learning to Dad, James is learning to human and adult, and I’m learning to chill. We’ve all got our own stuff to deal with besides lists. It’s certainly not the end of the world. But if you come home with the wrong kind of aluminium foil I will smack you.” *It's not that hard to get right. “But I get to kitten, so that's a plus. Do I get to name them?” Kittens!!!*

“I guess. I saw four at least, but there might be more. We can only keep one more so pick your favorite.” Eren took the list from him when he was finished and smiled. “Alright, you get on that list and I’ll get the groceries.” He smiled softly and started to get his shoes, noticing the pile on the
couch. *They’re all sleeping on or near him.* “Be careful, the dogs are all on him, unless he’s too high to realize that.” *That’s entirely possible.*

“Oh, he’s just really high. He’s been very loopy with all the morphine Scotty gave him… he’s on a lower dose, but still. It’s a lot.” Lathe smiled at the pile on the couch, finishing the list quickly in his neat cursive. “Here’s the stuff you need to buy, and the piece of plastic you pay with.” Lathe forked over his credit card, pouting when Eren refused to take it. “Eren, I’m not making you pay for all the household stuff.”

“I can’t even use it- you got a new card and did that thing where you write ‘Check ID’ in the signature line. If any cashier checks I can’t use it.”

“…oh yeah… crap.” Lathe sighed, stowing it back in his wallet. “Whatever. I guess for you one shopping day won’t break the bank.” He shrugged. *I never let you really contribute… I guess you can do this…*

“Nope, YouTube is sending me bigger checks now, I did another cover… it’s up… I sent it to iTunes too…” *I’m getting some more money. And I think I might have more than you right now…* “I might have more than you at this point, especially thanks to Mark’s help…”

“Just wait until the serum gets FDA approval, Hon. And what song did you cover? I haven’t checked your sites in a while…” *You haven’t updated much for a while, and I just kinda stopped checking that stuff on my phone at all… I’ve made myself too busy to look anymore….*

“Despacito… “ *I had to have Mom teach me Spanish.* “I want to do a music video for it too, but I won’t really have the time for it… And Levi’s not here… It wouldn't be that great without him in it…” Eren got on his shoes, a smile on his face as he watched Lathe pull out his phone.

“Did you sing a thing in Spanish.” It wasn’t a question- Lathe was checking to see if he really did. “Oh my god, you sang a thing in Spanish. Sweet. And crap, that’s a lot of views.” *It's been...... two weeks? And that many people have seen it. ... well then. ......I'm sorry Levi isn't here. I don't know what to say about that anymore. ...maybe I don't have to say anything anymore. I think it's been that long… “Now we know the drill, right? Don't crash the car, get the correct kind of tin foil. That's all you've gotta do.”

“That's it? So what if I don't get the potatoes?”
“Fuck the potatoes. Tin foil, car and human in one unharmed piece. Everything else is a side quest.”

“Oh, so I’ve merged with the car now? Am I one with the car? Is that my real mission?”

“Just go before I actually smack you.”

Eren lightly laughed, going to kiss Lathe’s cheek, a smile on his face. “I’ll be back soon, don’t worry.” He walked out to his car and going to the store. *Everything I can get in at least an hour and spend a few chatting with Marco.*

Lathe smiled as his cheek was kissed, doing the same to Eren before letting him leave, sighing as the door closed. He looked to the dog pile, James still contentedly asleep with the many doge on top of him. *It’s like he attracts animals.* Lathe looked over as he heard a sound, Lucifer managing to nudge his way through the dog door. The cat stalked in gracefully, rubbing against Lathe’s leg on his way to the living room. *he even attracts cats? What the hell?* Lathe watched with surprise as Lucifer leapt onto the couch near James’ head, settling in like a hat while the dogs simply accepted his presence. *...I don’t understand, but I’m not going to complain.* Lathe chuckled, deciding to go check on the kittens first. *Kittens. I need to make sure they’re not overheating or freezing, that they’re all being fed and cared for and whatnot. Probably should bring them all inside... let’s check on them first.* Lathe got on his boots and walked to the barn, heaving himself up to the loft, greeted by the sight of six kittens scampering around the loft, a few coming over when they noticed his presence and scurrying away when he got close. *Their eyes are open, and they’re definitely doing quite a bit of moving around. They’re quite a few weeks old, then.* Lathe looked to Annabelle, laying on one of the beams, watching her kittens with careful eyes. He felt her eyes on him as he carefully plucked the closest kitten from the floor, the kitten fidgeting and mewling in his hold, though it dissolved into purrs, growing lax as he gently pet them. *Kittens... this one’s really cute... but they’re all really cute... we get to keep one...* Lathe let the kitten go, jumping a bit when he felt something weighing on his from behind, leaning forward a bit. A kitten had jumped onto his back, making its way up his sweater to his shoulder, draping itself there. He held out his arm, and the kitten stood and walked down it, inspecting his arm and the ring on his hand. *...I like this one best.* He chuckled as they all seemed to deem him safe, coming over to inspect him, crawling on his legs and in his lap. Even Annabelle came down from the beam to him, nudging at the kittens in his lap. Lathe laid down in the loft, quietly laughing as the kittens clambered all over him. *...this makes for wonderful therapy... ...oh yeah, call Hanji.* Lathe managed to pull out his phone, typing in the number as one of the kittens batted at the strange device, holding it to his ear. It took a few rings before it picked up. “Hanji? Hey, it’s Lathe. I’ve got a pack of about six kittens that have open eyes and are running around everywhere that we just discovered in the barn. What do we do?” *Halp.*

Hanji was surprised to say the least, thinking a little bit. “Can you bring them inside the house yourself? I can come over in about an hour and do shots...” *I can do that...*
“They all can’t seem to get their paws off me, so I think I’ll manage. Thanks, Hanji. We never come up in the loft and the cat had them there, that’s why we didn’t find them until today.” *You sounded surprised.*

“It’s alright, I’ll be there in an hour and should I call Moblit? I think he said he had a dog for Eren.” *I think everyone might be interested for it.*

“Yeah, call him, but Eren’s gone shopping and could be a few hours… I can message him as well when Eren gets home, but that sounds great.”

“Moblit could get there within an hour as well, how’s Blake doing?” Hanji looked at Blake's file on her computer. *He's already 11… Wow…*

“He's doing okay, sleeps a lot more than he used to, but I guess we expected that. He doesn't really run around, mostly just chills with the kids. Still as well-trained as ever, and he's kept Philip from crying more times than I can count on my hands.” *That dog’s as much of a miracle worker as ever.*

“Well that’s good, my appointment is here for right now so I’ll see you in an hour to an hour and a half.” *That should give me enough time to get there…*

“Sounds great, Hanji. Thank you so much.” Lathe hung up, his arm dropping, just enjoying the fact that there were kittens all over him. *Kittens.* “Okay, lovelies.” Lathe sat up, gently moving the kittens off of him. “I'm gonna go get a cardboard box for all of you to get you inside, okay?” Lathe smiled as a few of them still clung to him, sighing. “Okay, we’ll go this way.” Lathe carried a few of the kittens down the ladder at a time, making two trips and setting them first few on the ground before going back for the rest, Annabelle leaping down and following them, herding her kittens along as they slowly made their way to the house. Lathe held the doggy door open for them, doing a headcount as they made it through, letting in Annabelle before coming in himself. He smiled as she led them over to the couches, setting up camp under the coffee table near James and the dog pile, all of the animals eyeing each other before deciding they were chill with the new developments. *They're surprisingly getting along.* Good. Lathe smiled, going to kiss James’ forehead as he slept before disappearing downstairs to sift through clothes for James. He had gotten carried away, repainting the design back onto a fading t-shirt when the doorbell rang. *Hanji.* Lathe immediately made for the front door, making sure he didn’t have paint on his hands and letting them in. “Hey, Hanji. Thanks again for coming over on such short notice.” He ushered them in, the heap of animals all lifting their heads, the kittens already tumbling over themselves to inspect the new arrival.

Hanji smiled as they looked to the large kittens. “Well, they certainly are a few weeks old. I brought their shots.” They paused when they spotted a human underneath the massive pile of dog. “And who might this be?” Their voice was quiet as they saw that James was sleeping, worried as
the teen shifted in his sleep, his peaceful face no long present. *Did I wake him up?*

“His name is James, and it’s a long story… I think his morphine is wearing off… again, long story…” Lathe moved to the couch, his medic bag having been left nearby, fishing for the bottle of meds. “James? Hon, you awake?” Lathe brushed the hair from his eyes, Lucifer making room for him. “How are you feeling?”

“How long was I out for?” James’ groggy voice was full of pain as he reached for the back of his head. “Lathe… Am I on the couch?” *How did I get down here? I don’t remember… Eh, I don’t remember a lot that happens when I get a headache like that…*

“Yeah, you are. What do you remember last, Hon?” Lathe reached out to stop him from rubbing his head. “‘You can't do that, Hon, do you remember that conversation?’ *I explained you couldn't… you might not remember, though…*”

“No… You yelled at me for climbing on the rafters… And you were rubbing my head, and it felt really good, and I got a headache… Why can’t I rub my head?” *I want the pressure to go away… It’s uncomfortable…*

Lathe glanced to Hanji, grateful that they were busy, diligently working to give each of the kittens their shots. “…James, you can't rub at your head because it'll hurt you more in the long run… ...I can't sugarcoat this, Hon. I'm sorry. ...there's a big tumor on the back of your brain pressing at your skull and part of your brain. Pressing on the skull helps with the pressure, but hurts your brain. ...it's part of why you don't remember what happened during your migraine at all… we're not sure if it’s cancerous yet, but you’re going in for surgery on Friday to remove some of your skull so it won't ache anymore there. There’ll be another surgery later where they put you all back together, but right now we need to know if you have cancer or not. That's the big question. I'm sorry, Hon, but that's the way things are. We’re gonna help you through this.” Lathe took his hand, lightly squeezing. “We’ll make sure you come out of this okay.” *I'll do everything I can to make sure you get better…*

"…………… I have a tumor? “Is that why…. I’m falling over all the time too? And I can’t remember anything? And why I can’t see when I have a headache?” *Is that the reason that I thought I've been going crazy?*

Lathe nodded. “The tumor is pressing on what’s called your occipital and temporal lobes. It's compromising a lot of functions, and all of those qualify. ...Hon, do you remember what a goose is?” *I wanna see if you remember this...*
James looked at Lathe blankly for a long moment before closing his eyes trying to remember. “I uh… Is it… The one’s the chased me… When I stole the eggs?” I think that's what you said they were… He shifted his head to look at the dogs all around him, his eyes widening for a moment before he just gave up. I’m too tired to fight them to get off… Or climb a tree to get away from them…

“Mhm. And you don’t have to be scared of them, Hon. They piled on you an hour ago and have just chilled there. Same with Lucifer here.” Lathe reached up to pet the cat, James looking up at him. “He was using your head as a mattress. You've been a total animal magnet.” Lathe gestured to where a few kittens still were, hiding from Hanji and their shots behind their mother. They all just gravitated here. The doge all love you, and the kittens would too if they could reach you.

“I-I don’t remember cats in the house… And if I’m getting surgery… Will you just shave my head?” Get it over with, and get my hair out of the way… “When is it gonna be?”

..............I'm surprised he's taking this so well... you'd think he'd at least look worried..... but.... he's not. “The cats usually chill in the barn we have in the backyard, and we just found out today they had kittens. And you can just have the part of your head shaved that you need to, or you can shave the whole thing if you want. But most people only do part of it. Either way, since your hair is so long we can tie it off and cut it to donate.” That's a thing we can do.

James nodded, closing his eyes, his hands reaching to Nene and gently running through her soft fur. “... Just shave it all off… Can I pet a kitten?” I haven’t seen a cat in a long time… His eyes were still closed, the lack of sleep of the past few years having finally caught up with him and the pain of the end of a migraine, and the dull numbness from the morphine only made his eyelids stay closed. I’m so tired…

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Of course you can.” Lathe looked down for one, seeing Hanji let the one he had deemed the cutest go, scampering away from the person with the needles. Lathe gently picked them up when they came close enough, setting them on James’ chest where there was room, the dogs shuffling a bit to give the kitten space except for Nene, staying where James could pet her. “I’m thinking that this is the kitten we keep; we can’t keep the whole litter, and I think they’re the cutest.” He smiled as they nudged James’ cheek, licking it with their tiny tongue, making him giggle. “You can name them if you want.” I don’t know what to name them. And they like you, so you can pick.

“Hmm…. What are they?” Is it a girl or a boy? Do we know? He raised his other hand slow and jerky, reaching to pet the kitten near his head. Hmm... They’re really soft... His eyes were still closed and a soft smile on his face as he heard the tiny meows near his ear. Oh my god, that’s adorable… “Hmm, do you have anything for my head?” It’s still sore…
“They’re a she.” Hanji looked up them, their voice quiet.

“They’re a girl, then. And I’ve got meds for you here.” Lathe helped James take his medicine, making sure he drank plenty of water. “Anything come to mind?” Lathe smiled as the kitten nestled into James’ shoulder, still meowing quietly. So adorable...

“Hmm… Delia… I like Delia.” He opened his eyes to look over to Hanji. “Who’s that?” I don’t remember you. He looked up to Lathe, his one hand on Nene’s head gently petting her and his other petting Delia. She’s purring. He smiled even more as he felt Delia nestle against his neck and towards his chin. He stiffened when he felt paws slowly move around his other shoulder, turning his head to find that Lucifer was crawling down to his chest to nestle by Nene. Huh? Who was this guy again?

“That’s Hanji- they’re a vet that works in the clinic in town. They came to give all the kittens their shots since they were just found today. And that cat there is named Lucifer. The one using your head as a mattress? …you remember me telling you that?” I swear I said that like five minutes ago...

James’ brow furrowed, slowly shaking his head. “I don’t…” He murmured quietly, letting Lucifer crawl over him to lay beside Nene, looking over to Hanji as the last kitten let out a loud cry as they were getting a shot. Huh? What’s happening?

“The kittens just don’t like getting their shots, James. But they’re okay. Don’t worry. You’ll need your own shots soon, but that’s the least of our worries right now. Shots are things we give people and animals so that they’re better able to defend themselves against diseases. I’ll explain it later, Hon. You look pretty tired.” Lathe brushed at his hair, smiling faintly to him. “You and all the animals can get acquainted, but you need to sleep, okay? At least try to.” You look worn out...

“Hmmm…. Why am I tired?” He mumbled, turning his head to snuggle with Delia. I’m exhausted… James opened his eyes as he felt Blake shift from over his legs and get slowly off the couch and go over to Hanji. Huh? Does Blake know her? He sighed quietly as his eyelids closed without him even realizing it and his motions slowing down. I’m tired...

Hanji smiled as Blake came to greet her. “Hello there… Are you taking good care of everyone?” She smiled as he whined, looking over to James as his arm slipped off the couch and to the floor. “Is he asleep? You gave him morphine, I saw that much.” I wonder what’s up with him, I want to ask, but I’m not sure if I should. “What surgery does he need done? That he needs to shave his head?” Her voice was soft, but curiosity clearly present. I wanna know… I can’t help it.
Lathe smiled as James fell asleep before he could answer with Delia nuzzled to his cheek, the kitten as well soon falling asleep there. His smile was melancholy, brushing a hand through his hair. “...we brought him into the hospital for migraines, vision and memory problems yesterday… an MRI showed he has a huge tumor on the back of his brain. His head needs to be shaved so that they can remove part of his skull to release the pressure the tumor is putting on the skull and the brain, and they'll be taking a sample to see if it’s cancer or not. ...I… Hanji, this kid showed up barely four days ago asking for scraps at dinnertime as a runaway and already so much has happened… He reminds me a lot of myself when I was that young… I know I never really talk about anything when I was a kid and I know you’ve pressed for details before… but it was hard for me… and he’s had it harder. I wanna help him however I can.” And that's why I've taken him in as child number eight.

“Well, I think you’re doing a good job so far, he certainly seems to look healthy while he’s asleep and he’s covered in fluff…. When’s the surgery?” Her voice was full of concern as she looked over to him. I can only imagine how worried you are about hearing you say that. “Should I call Moblit? Or…” She looked around, trying to figure out if Eren was home when the door suddenly opened, Eren coming in with large bags on either arm. That went much quicker than I thought it would… then again, I’ve never gone shopping at 11 in the morning... Eren looked over to Lathe and Hanji, a smile on his face. “Oh hi, Hanji… how are you?” He didn’t wait for an answer as he went to the kitchen to set things on the island table, setting them down to let Lathe handle them. He'll want to do it...

“Friday afternoon… and now that Eren’s home, you can call him.” Lathe instinctively moved to take care of the abandoned groceries on the table. I need to put stuff away...

Eren’s brow furrowed but he just shrugged it off, going to get the rest of the groceries. He was just about to open the door when he heard a car pull into their driveway, turning to see Moblit parking his pick up. Moblit? Why's he here? He shrugged it off and went inside leaving the door open for him. “Mr. Berner’s here.” He murmured to Lathe, looking to him in confusion. “What’s up?” Does James need a dog?

Lathe looked to him, tilting his head a bit. “I thought you knew… you’re getting another service dog. Blake’s getting really old and he can't do the sort of stuff he always has done… with the way things have been, we thought it would be a good idea to have another trained dog in the house that they can go with you places in case you need them.” I know you've been doing so much better, but for rough patches or off days, or days when someone else in the house needs help, we have them.

Eren stood frozen as he stared at Lathe. What? He dropped the container in his hands, his ears beginning to ring. I thought I was doing better? He didn't register the commotion near the door as Moblit brought a new dog in. I....
Chapter 79: Time Turns

Eren stood frozen as he stared at Lathe. What? He dropped the container in his hands, his ears beginning to ring. I thought I was doing better? He didn't register the commotion near the door as Moblit brought a new dog in. I....

Lathe realised his mistake, immediately going to correct himself. “Eren, no, it's not like you're not doing better, you've improve so so much, you really have, believe me. It’s just for off days when you might need one for school and with the kids and now especially James, they’d be here for anyone who needs the companionship, I mean you've seen how many times Blake has kept Philip from crying or having a fit. And they keep Jared calm when he gets upset, and I mean look at the dog pile on James, he could use someone to keep him company if the stress gets to be too much. It’s not that you’re not doing well, you’ve done wonderfully. You're so much better. But I just really thought that we could use another well-trained dog in the house that could keep up with us still.” Lathe pled with him, trying to make the stunned and pained look in Eren’s eyes go away. “It’s not just for you all the time, Eren. It’s for off-days and times when things get too stressful. I’m so proud of your progress, but we both need to admit that Blake is getting old… he can't keep up like he used to. He's still a wonderful dog, of course. But we need another to keep up with us.” He can't run around like he used to, and he sleeps a lot more… we have to admit that.

Eren still had a shocked look as he saw a large Malinois come from around the corner, his dark tan fur different from all of their dogs. His eyes locked with the new dog’s, slowly slumping down to the floor as he felt his chest tighten, his ears simply ringing, and his mind trying to process everything that was going on. But... I-I don't need a dog... I don't want a dog! You're making me get one!? He could feel the underlying sensations of a panic attack as it started to creep closer to the surface. His eyes were blank as he stared face to face with the new dog, not able to process what as happening as the large dog sat in his lap, resting it’s head near Eren’s neck. Why?

Lathe looked to Moblit with worry, the man having heard the entire thing, looking worried as well. shit... I thought I told him... Lathe immediately knelt down next to Eren, seeing how confused and terrified he was as the dog sat in his lap, turning his head to look at him. “Eren? Eren, look at me.” It took a moment before Eren finally seemed to look at him. “It's not that you haven't made a lot of real progress. Blake is getting old, you still have your off days when things get really stressful, and when they're home they can be of real use with all the kids and especially since we just found out James could have cancer and could end up really needing some companionship too. It's not because you haven't done better. You've done so well. But he’s also for everyone else’s benefit. Blake keeps Philip from crying, Jared from having fits sometimes, and the rest of us from being too lonely. But he's old. He sleeps a lot more, he can't run and keep up with us much anymore. We all love him, but we need someone new to help keep us sane. I'm so proud of all the progress you've made. And that's all it really is, Hon.” Please please please believe me.

.... You wanted me to get a dog... He was still frozen as he slowly turned his head back to see the new bright blue eyes pierce into his own. It's a new dog... A dog I never wanted...
...he's not hearing me, is he. Lathe sighed, looking to Moblit and then to the dog, deciding something. "Moblit, I'm sorry, you'll need to give me a minute." Lathe shooed the dog off of Eren, heaving him up to his feet and dragging him out of the room, setting him on a chair in the living room. "Eren? Eren. Eren." Lathe shook him by the shoulders. "Eren, dammit, listen to me!" You need to stop staring into space and hear my fucking words!

Eren was still silent as he felt the oncoming panic attack, the new dog and Blake coming to Lathe’s side, trying to get to Eren. Am I… Am I going to be forever labeled as someone who can’t help himself? Is that what you truly think I am? His eyes were staring right past Lathe and down to the floor. Is that all you’ve ever seen me as? A pity project?

“....Moblit, can you get them out of sight please?” Lathe didn't even turn to look when Moblit wordlessly shepherded them back around the staircase out of sight, hearing Hanji follow him, both of them talking in hushed whispers. “Eren, you need to snap out of it and listen to me.” Lathe shook him, trying to get through to him, mentally scrambling to figure out what to do. He shook him again. “Eren, please. You need to listen to me. Tell me you can hear me.” Lathe looked to him helplessly as Eren still stared at the floor. “Eren, I get that this is new information and I didn't explain myself well right away, but you need to stop panicking and hear me out. It's okay, just listen to me.” Silence. “Eren, listen to me, damn it! It's nothing you did wrong! Snap out of it before I throw ice water at you!” Another firm shake. Wake the fuck up! I don't know what to do if you can't fucking hear me, because at this point hugging you and trying to console you would be rubbing salt in the fucking wound to you! So fucking listen to me!

Eren’s eyes finally moved as he was shaken. ..... Ice water? His eyes slowly began to focus and his fingers no longer locked in position as he flexed them. What were you saying? His head slowly lifted, his eyes going to look at Lathe’s. What's wrong? What did I do wrong? I don’t wanna be damaged... Levi won’t love me... He probably doesn’t... Maybe having a child was a bad idea... He didn’t realize he’d been speaking aloud.

Lathe’s eyes widened, shaking his head. “Nonono, Eren, none of that. You aren't damaged, Levi still loves you to death, and having a kid is the most wonderful idea… I know how badly you want kids. Now you need to listen to my reasoning with the new dog, okay?” He sighed in relief as Eren warily nodded, speaking evenly. “We’re not getting a dog simply because you need them. It's not the case. We know you sometimes have off days, so they’ll be there for that. We’ve also seen how well Blake keeps Philip from crying and Jared from having fits when he's frustrated or mad, and how he keeps us company when we’re lonely or sad. But Blake is getting really old. He sleeps a lot more, can't do much running around at all, and can't really leave the house. Sure, he will be there if you ever need him. But we need a new dog to keep up with us and the kids, and for you to take with in case there's a period of time where you do really need the support, just in case. I'm not saying it’s all the time anymore, it's certainly not. You've done so well managing yourself and I'm so proud of you and what you've accomplished. But the dog is mostly for the family to keep us all sane, especially since we just learned James might have cancer. But it’s important that we make sure he gets along with you specifically, in case there's ever a time you need grounding or to bring
him with you. Even if it’s very rare these days, it’s most likely to happen with you. It doesn't mean you haven’t gotten better. It just means that you’re the same as everyone- that everyone has their off days and sometimes needs extra help. Hell, Blake’s had to keep me from losing my shit every now and then. It happens . It makes you human. They seem very friendly and I can hear from even here that they're dying to come in here and make you feel better about this whole situation I’ve just sprung on you. And I'm really sorry, I thought I had told you about getting a new dog. But that’s the situation. ...do you think you can handle that? Is this okay?” Lathe reached for his hands, giving them a firm squeeze.

I'm so sorry for making you panic... I swore I told you... I just thought I made the best decision for everyone....

Eren was silent, looking like he was ready to cry. That’s not really how you think…. Is it? He looked down to his shaking hands, nodding a bit and watching as the new dog came skittering across the hardwood floors to Lathe’s side, trying to get to Eren. I guess that I can deal with my own father only raising me to be a whore, and then years later after I thought I found the perfect home only to realize that I've been living in a secluded reality from everyone… “Y-Yeah…. I- I…..” He paused, looking as the dog finally opted to vault over the side of the armchair, nuzzling into Eren’s face and whining to be pet, knowing that he was stressing out. I'm a pity case to you....

Lathe looked helpless, shifting to sit next to him, hugging him close. “…this isn't because I don’t think you're capable of managing yourself or your emotions. ...it isn't that I pity or feel sorry for you. It isn't that I see you and only think of what you've gone through. I looked at Blake, remembered all the good he's done for not just you but for all of us, and decided that we would continue needing that kind of help even as you got infinitely more better. He needs to get along with you, first and foremost. But it’s also very important that he can get along with all of us and help all of us when we need him. This is not pity, Eren. It's not . It’s help when you really need it which is very rare these days and I'm so proud of that, but it’s mostly help when Philip or Jared get upset, when I get stressed out, when anyone gets too lonely, or when we need companionship in a stressful time of life. We could all use their companionship, Eren. I'm not looking down at you and only seeing helplessness. I'm seeing a very capable and independent human who sometimes needs help, and when I look around the house I see a family that could use a bit of help staying sane. Please understand that.”

Eren nodded slowly, looking to the dog, slowly letting them as he started to calm down a little bit. No panicking.... I can panic later... I’ll take Charlie out after dinner... Maybe I can even take a razor? He watched as the dog bit his hand instantly, their bright blue eyes staring directly into Eren’s. Shit... He’s gonna be even stricter than Blake... Fuck....

Moblit watched as Mikhail took Eren’s hand into his jaws, smiling a bit. “Eren, this is Mikhail…. Blake’s half brother…He’s been training with me for the past four years, and he should do wonderful things for you.” I hope so, he’s already got onto you about something… what are you thinking?

Lathe looked worried, his thumb gently rubbing Eren’s side. “…I'm so sorry for making you
panic… I didn't want you to, I thought I remembered talking with you about it… but maybe with
the whole James thing I just went over what I would've said too much… I didn't want this sort of
thing to happen… I thought you'd like the idea of having a new young dog with us that's so well
trained, I know the kids will love him… I was hoping you would too.” Lathe rested his cheek on
Eren’s shoulder, feeling his face heat up a bit. *Fuck, don't cry… why the fuck do I want to cry? I
made Eren panic, I know, but I can't fucking cry… there are witnesses and it's a shitty thing to do,
Eren will feel bad for panicking when his worry was fucking justified because I didn't know enough
to remember to have this *fucking conversation.*

Eren shook his head, slowly pushing Lathe back a bit so he could see his face. “Dad… Don’t
apologize, really…. It’s not your fault, I over reacted, and I’m sorry… I just—” he groaned in
frustration as his words left him, feeling Mikhail bite harder on his hand, leaving indents in the
skin. *He knows… He can figure out so much… “I just…. Wasn’t expecting another dog….” That’s
not the reason… But I can’t tell him what really went through my head, he’ll think I’m ungrateful...
Or he’ll worry he did something wrong… “I panicked… Didn’t I?”

“Yeah, you panicked, wouldn't listen to a word…...and Eren, we both know that's bullshit.” Lathe
sighed, studying his eyes. “I know what it looks like when you lie. Is it because you think I pity
you, or that I think you're not good enough to be left to your own devices? Both ideas are
completely fucking ridiculous, just so you know. I don't think that.” Lathe tilted his head, his filter
gone. “What the hell is going through your head?” It was a neutral question, his voice holding no
malice, only worry.

Eren almost seemed like he was about to break down before Mikhail growled at him, forcing
Eren’s attention on him, and his hands were shaking as he moved to pet him, feeling the sinking
feeling in his gut return… *having kids was a bad idea… I... I got knocked off… So quickly, and by
one sentence… I’m not fit to be a parent… *Fuck … Levi’s gonna take the child and leave me
behind…... And because of one sentence… I think Dad’s turned his back on me for years! ... I was
doing so well, and now… Look where that’s got me. “You shouldn’t…. Be proud at all…” I’ve
been doing nothing but finding ways to mask the pain and hide it, from you, from everyone, from
Blake… But now… I can’t do that either…*

“Eren, Honey…” Lathe looked hurt but he refused to budge, holding Eren tighter. “Eren, I couldn't
be more proud of you. You’ve been so strong from the first day I met you and I've watched you
grow into a responsible, caring young man and I couldn't be happier for you and your successes.
I'm so happy that you found success in music and that you found an amazing boyfriend and that
you and Levi finally are able to have your own kid and that you always find ways to be kind and
always want to help and I'm so proud of you… I'm so proud to be able to say that I'm your dad… I
wish I had your strength… you really are something.” *I'm always going to be proud of you, because
you'll always manage to impress me.*

Eren smiled softly, a small tear in the corner of his eyes, his lip trembling as he spoke. “And…. I
wish I had your positivity…” *You have no idea what goes through my head... we should keep it
that way...*
“It’s okay… if you stay strong for the both of us, I’ll keep both of us looking to the bright side.”
We can help fix that for each other. “…how do you like Mikhail?” Lathe sounded careful as he glanced to the dog, busy licking Eren’s cheek. He already likes you...

“I can tell already, I won’t be getting out of going around without him by my side…” I don’t think he’ll let me out of sight. “And… I think we can do that.” Eren smiled softly, leaning his head over to Lathe’s shoulder, enjoying his presence. I miss being held… I don’t get it a lot anymore...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Today’s another big day, per usual. “Philip, no, that's not food.” Lathe ran over to get Philip to stop sucking on the wooden train. I thought I was over getting people to stop eating the trains…
......well, every day is a big day around here still. Lathe made sure Philip and Jared weren’t eating the trains when he went back to the kitchen, making sure nothing burned. Mark is flying in today, and Eren went to go pick him up from the airport. He’ll be here just in time for lunch, which is good, because we can't delay lunch. The kids will get fussy. Lathe smiled as James flitted around the kitchen with him, helping him cook. He's been doing so much better… three weeks since the first surgery, and he’s been so much happier… he’s actually friends with the dogs now, particularly Nene, since she napped with him the entire time, but he loves them all. Mikhail too, even if he's stuck to Eren’s side all the time. Lathe glanced over to a small pile of new cookbooks on the counter, many pages bookmarked. And it's wonderful that everyone’s been so supportive of James and all of us… It seemed like every other night one of the couples was volunteering to cook dinner for all of us… it’s been so nice… and I've been thinking about worst-case scenarios a lot less… Mark and Claire are still going strong, they keep giving each other these dopey looks and it’s so sweet it’ll give you cavities just seeing it… and with school out they’re always together, mostly here, but occasionally at her grandmother’s home. And Eren’s done grading exams and stuff, so summer has officially begun. Which is kinda good, because I have lots to do and less time to dwell on stuff I don’t want to. Lathe looked over his shoulder as the phone rang, leaving James to hover over the stove, answering the phone. “Hello?”

“Lathe, it’s Sharon. Is Eren home?”

“Uh, no, he's not… what's up?”

“I need a big favour from him, but it’s small, but it’s important.”

“Uh…” Lathe grabbed a post-it. “Am I able to take a message?”
“Yeah, y’know how I’m bringing you that copy of that game/animation thing I wanted Mark to do during the stream thing? All Eren has to do is make absolutely sure that Mark writes in his name as ‘Markiplier.’ It’s very important.”

“......don’t tell me you remade a whole ton of dialogue and made new stuff just for that input.”

“I had to! I already re-recorded and resubtitled everything! Because it’s Markimoo!”

“Oh my god, okay… I’ll tell him. Caps matter?”

“Nah, it’ll recognise anything as long as Markiplier is in there somewhere. Thank you thank you thank you!”

“Oh my god you’re welcome, now I have to make sure lunch doesn’t burn!”

“Fine, go cook! Bye~!”

“You’re insane!” Lathe hung up, shaking his head. She’s ridiculous. Lathe set the sticky note on the side table, going back to oversee lunch. I heard it’s gonna be good, what she fixed up for this stream... Lathe was just getting things into serving dishes when the front door opened, seeing Eren leading Mark inside with his suitcase. “Hey Mark! How’re you doing? The flight okay?”

“Yeah, it went great, I got to sleep all the way here, after cranking out videos until I got on the plane this morning... You know I’ve been here like thrice, and I still can’t believe it’s this big!” Mark smiled as he came inside and went instantly for a huge hug. It smells amazing! “What’s for lunch? Please tell me you made enough for me!” I’m starving!

Lathe chuckled, hugging him tightly. “Lunch is something new- a bunch of our friends flooded us with recipes as of late. There’s chicken on the grill to be made into wraps, home fries and lemonade, or whatever else you want to drink. I’m hoping the kids will actually deem it worthy of consumption.” Lathe chuckled. “And now there are ten of us, so I’d say the place is just big enough.” But only just.

Mark chuckled watching as he heard thundering feet coming from the stairs. I think I hear children! “Oh my god, they’re so cute!” He watched as Philip and Jared raced down the stairs, quickly followed by Maisie and Krampus. His eyes then came to land on Mark. “Well well well, if
it isn’t speedy Gonzalez! How are you Mark? I’ve heard you’ve been breaking records left and right?” Is that true or is Eren twisting my arm?

“......who now?” Lathe and Mark dramatically gasped, staring at him with shock.

“I thought you would at least **vaguely** pay attention to the cartoons Philip always insists on watching when you're in the same room.”

“Yeesh, sorry! But yeah, apparently I run **really** fast. They keep telling me I'm doing great, that I'm being state records and coming close to national ones… it’s insane when I look this up and they're **serious** .” Mark grinned, running a hand through his hair. “It's weird to see my name in the paper after every meet.” *It’s so weird… but it’s so cool…*

Philip looked up to the older Mark, coming up to him and interrupting him, speaking before he could and pointing up to his hair. “Hair wed.” *It's red... other tall person has purple hair... other other tall person has orange... why all the colours? Pretty... I want coloured hair too!*

Mark smiled, squatting down so that Philip could see his hair. “Yes, my hair is red, it’s awesome don’t you think?” He had a huge smile on his face as Philip nodded, looking over to Mark. *He’s quite the charmer... “So, got any girls interested in you?”*

Mark blushed a bit, nodding. “Yeah, I've got a girlfriend, Claire… we’ve been friends since I transferred into our school, she’s really great...” *Understatement of the century ...*

“Dah!” Philip piped up before Mark could continue, coming over to Lathe and looking up to him determinedly. “I wan’ coluh hair!” *I wanna look cool too!*

Lathe chuckled, ruffling his head of dirty blonde hair. “What colour would you want?” *I'm curious...*

Philip looked around, trying to decide. “Uh…. I like green!”

“Green? That's a very nice colour. Now, I'm not saying no, but maybe when you're older we’ll let you do that, m’kay?”
“B-Buh, I wan’ coluh hair!” Philip stomped his foot defiantly, looking like he would cry if he didn’t get his way. *I want it!*

Lathe knelt down next to him, not wanting him to have a tantrum. *Oh my… “It’s okay Honey, don’t cry.” …now I need to remember if coloured hair is against dress code at school… ...wait, it’s public school, who gives a sh*t. “Here, let’s make a deal. What if we wait a week, just a week, and if by then you still want green hair, I’ll let you get the ends of your hair green to try it out, okay? To see if you like it. Can you wait a week?” I think you’d look cute with green hair. And if you end up hating it, you won’t have to shave all you hair off to get rid of it. Just a trim.

Philip looked to him with wide eyes, nodding excitedly, bouncing on his toes. “O-Okay! I waih! I waih!” Philip hugged him tightly, giggling. *I get to have green hair! I look cool like cool big people!*

Lathe smiled, letting him go. “Now, can you go and get Lucas for me? I think he’s hiding upstairs. We’re gonna have lunch, kay?” Lathe grinned and Philip nodded, running off on his mission. *I love him…*

Mark’s eyes were wide from the exchange. “Well that just happened… And now I’m kinda glad I don’t have kids…” *I wouldn’t know what to do with myself if I had kids…*

Eren smiled as he came back after getting all of Mark’s things in a spare room. “It did just happen…” He helped usher the kids to sit at the table watching as Tucker eyed Mark warily before going over to Lathe to ask something. *Hmm… Probably wants Henry to come over… Cause mark’s over… I’m sure he wouldn’t mind…*

Tucker was twiddling his thumbs as he went up to Lathe. “U-Uhm, Dad?” *Oh god, you’ll probably say no anyways, because he’s a guest… But it’s worth a shot right?*

Lathe looked to Tucker, smiling. “Yeah, what’s up?” ...what’re you cooking up?

“Is it okay… If um… If Henry came to play video games for a little bit?” …. *Asking about Mark is asking for too much as it is… Maybe I shouldn’t ask… Tucker ducked his head down further as the ache in his chest grew. “N-never mind… It’s okay…” Mark’s a guest… We shouldn’t bother him…*

“….Henry, the video game junkie.” *That’s legit what he is. “Tucker, you tell him to get his ass over here with his Xbox and a Sharpie so Mark can sign it or whatever because I know that’s your*
motive.” You two are always playing video games. It's obvious he'd wanna meet Mark.

Tucker had his eyes closed, not expecting Lathe to agree, and not to bother the guest, only to snap them open when he heard what came out of Lathe’s mouth. “C-Can I ask him to come over after lunch?” That wasn’t the real question I guess….

“...Hon, call him and I can pick him up if he says yes.” There's plenty of food. And it's Markimoo. I understand.

“I-I’ll call him after l-lunch.” I'm still way to embarrassed to call him about anything... We haven’t played video games in a week... Tucker went to go take his seat beside Philip and Jake, staring at his food and contemplating if he was really gonna call Henry or not. Maybe I shouldn’t... No, I probably shouldn’t.... I can’t get my hopes up that he’ll like me as anything more than a friend... He probably only likes me because he has the possibility of meeting YouTubers... And famous people...

Lathe and James were busy cutting up the chicken when it had finished cooking, making sure everyone had enough of everything before sitting down to eat. ... this is really good... I'm hanging on to this recipe... even Philip is eating everything.... and that's a miracle. Lathe sighed as the phone rang again, standing. “I got it.” Lathe walked over to the phone, surprised and a bit worried when he saw the number for the foster agency there. “...it's the foster people.” Lathe immediately picked up, turning around to lean against the wall, seeing the table look to him, the brothers glancing around to each other worriedly. “Hello?”

“Hello, Is this Mr. Quo?”

“Yes.”

“Oh good! We have some great news!”

“What kind of news?”

“We’ve found parents who will take all four boys for adoption.” The voice was very cheery on the other end, waiting for Lathe’s reply.

Lathe was quiet for a moment, looking over to the four brothers around the table. Mark and Lucas
looked worried, glancing between their brothers. “...all four of them?” He heard the voice assure him they would be together, smiling. “That's wonderful to hear. ...when will they be officially adopted and stuff?”

“That's what I'm calling about, the parents have already filled out all the paperwork and want to know when they can take the boys.... When do you think that’ll be possible?”

Lathe was a bit caught off-guard, thinking. “Uhm…” I can't just say ‘tomorrow’ or something, that's no notice for them... and they need to pack up their stuff and say goodbye to people, I know Philip will want to say goodbye to all the chickens because he loves them and maybe they'll want to ride one more time... He looked to the calendar, thinking. “Is next Monday too far away?” I wanna hold onto them just a little bit longer... but I shouldn't be so selfish... I knew they weren't gonna be here forever...

“Hold please, while I figure it out.” The line went quiet for a few minutes as the woman on the other end was supposedly speaking with the new parents. “Mr. Quo?”

“Y-Yes?”

“What time do you feel would be best for them to pick the children up?”

“I'd say around 1:30 in the afternoon or so, after lunch...” They'll still have time to unpack their stuff when they get to their new home then...

“Okay, our agents along with the new parents will be around next Monday at 1:30pm, correct?”

“I meant the Monday after next, was that clear?” I don't know if you understood that or not... two days isn't long enough...

“Yes, we’ll be there in 9 days.”

“Y-Yeah, that's all good. Okay. Nine days, 1:30. ...okay.” But... but I love them...

“Thank you Mr. Quo, we’ll see you all then.”
“Okay. Goodbye.” Lathe hung up, and could hear the silence behind him. He couldn't bear to turn around, burying his face in his hands. *But I love them... I wanna keep them... but I can't...*

Mark looked over his younger brothers, seeing their look of concern when Lathe didn’t turn around. He rose to his feet, padding softly to him. “L-Lathe?” *I probably shouldn't call you Dad...*

           ..........*you always called me Dad.......* Lathe looked up to him, his eyes glassy, trying to smile. “Someone’s adopted all four of you. ...you've got a bit more than a week until they come to get you all. ....I'm sorry, I just....” *I just don't wanna let you go...*  

Mark smiled softly, wrapping his arms around Lathe’s shoulders and pulling him into a tight hug. *You shouldn’t be sad. “I-I’m sure we’ll still be able to call you... Even if we’re far away...” I have no idea where we’re moving to.*

Lathe smiled, hugging him back. “I'll always look for the news, waiting for you to break more records somewhere.” Lathe smiled, rubbing his back gently. He didn't notice the other boys had gotten up until he was surrounded, Lucas, Jared, and Philip hugging him. “I...” Tears trailed down his cheeks. “I love you all so much.... I'm gonna m-miss you....” *Please don't leave...*  

“We’ll miss you too.” Lucas said quietly as he held onto Lathe a little tighter. *I'll need to leave the books here... And I was just getting used to everyone at school too... Oh no, what about Claire? How is Mark gonna take that?*

Philip looked up as he clung to their middle, not entirely sure why Lathe was crying. “D-Don’ cw, Dah! Don’ cw! Is ‘kay!” *Why are you so sad?*

Lathe looked over to where Philip was, letting go of Mark to pick him up, heaving him up. “Yeah, you get heavier every time I do this.” Lathe smiled to him, seeing how happy Philip was to be taller than him. “Honey, you and your brothers are going to have a new home soon.”

“B-Buh... dis home!” Philip made a wide gesture with his arms. *Is this not home? It's so home!*

“You’re getting a new one, Honey. There's someone who really wants to have their own kids, and so they’ve adopted you four.”
“B-Buh… you no uhdop?” Philip’s eyes were wide. “B-Buh, buh… **dis** home! **Dis** home! I don’ **wanna** ‘noher home!” Philip teared up, clinging to Lathe and starting to cry. *This is home! No other home!*

Lathe wanted so badly to agree but he shook his head, shifting Philip to look at him again. “I’m sorry, Honey…” Lathe gently wiped at his tears, the child sniffling, trying to cling to him. “But I can't keep you all forever. I didn't adopt you. I gave you all a place to stay while trying to find someone to keep you forever. But that doesn't mean I don't love you and care about you.” Lathe gave him a small smile.

“Y-You luh m-me?”

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Lots.”

“Lohs an’ lohs?”

“Lots and lots and lots.”

Philip still looked unsure, clinging to him. “I luh y-you, Dah.” *I love you!*

Lathe held him tighter. “I love you too, Philip.” He nearly completely broke down when the other three hugged him tighter, hearing a quiet chorus of ‘I love yous’ around him. “I love you all so much…” *I don't wanna lose you all...*

Lucas looked to Mark, noticing how quiet he was becoming. *Oh no…* His hand reached out to grab Mark’s shirt before he could even let go of Lathe. *Don't you dare leave… I know how this goes, and I don’t want you going through this again...*

Lathe looked confused as Lucas suddenly grabbed Mark, looking scared as Mark started to pry himself from him and Lucas. “W-Wait, Mark…” He looked worried when Mark let him go, trying to get Lucas to let go of him. “W-what’s wrong? D-Did I do something?” *What happened...?*

Mark just shook his head, finally prying Lucas’ hand from him. *I can't… I can't take this anymore…* I’m going to lose everything again. He turned, leaving them all in the kitchen as he walked away, Blake getting up and following him. He disappeared up the stairs, Blake struggling with them ever so slowly.
Lathe choked on his words, hugging Philip closer. “Mark… I don’t wanna lose you before you’re gone… Lathe sank to the floor, the boys around him trying to comfort him, though it was useless. I lost him already… I… fuck….

Lucas looked between Mark and Lathe, growing angry, letting go of Lathe and storming upstairs, though he didn’t care who heard him as he began to scream at Mark. “God fucking damn it, Mark! You always fucking do this! As soon as you find out we’re leaving, you close yourself off like a fucking coward! I hate it! I hate that you always do this! Get your ass downstairs now, you MOTHERFUCKING traitor! You go off to mope about being separated again, when all you do is leave us to deal with it! To deal with it all alone!”

Mark was stunned as Lucas tore into him, watching him seeth and when he stopped speaking, he could hear Lathe’s sobbing and the hushed voices trying to comfort him. “…I keep leaving….. “…I just…” Mark looked to the floor, burying his face in his hands. “…I just don’t wanna lose everything again… it’s… it’s easier to ignore it…. I-I’m sorry… I left you guys alone… I…. I shouldn’t…” Mark looked up, vulnerable. “I-I’m sorry…” He looked away, moving to go back downstairs when his arm was caught. …fuck, he’s gonna hit me… …I’d deserve it….

Lucas grabbed Mark, pulling him to him and holding him close as he struggled not to cry. “You’re not losing everything… When will you realize that? That you have us?”

Mark hugged him back tightly, resting his cheek on his shoulder. “I kn-know I have all of you, but… but we’ve already gotten so used to our school and our home and we’ve made friends and we’ve found someone to call Dad and now… now we get to move really far away and not see any of it again…” I don’t want to leave… I really like it here… I have to leave everything behind… I have to leave Claire behind… fuck, how do I tell her…

“Well, we have to deal with it together… Okay?” We don’t want to deal with this all alone. He shifted so his head was on Mark’s shoulder, feeling the tears run down his cheeks. “I-I’m sorry for…. For yelling.”

“It's okay… I think I needed someone to set me straight about it… it's so much easier to run away from it…” …But I can't do that… Mark finally let of Lucas, tugging him back downstairs with him to where Philip and Jared, now with Eren and Mark, were trying to console him, the dogs and cats around, whimpering and meowing, wanting to help. Lathe was a mess, looking abandoned with Philip and Jared in his arms. …fuck… “L- I-I mean, Dad… I…” Mark knelt next to him, pulling him into a hug. “I'm sorry for walking away like that… it's just… so much harder to just face it and accept it…” I can't do that to you or my brothers… it's not fair.
Lathe breathed in shakily, nodding. “I-It’s okay…” Lathe leaned into the touch, looking up to Lucas. “And I guess I can let that whole spiel slide….” Thanks for screaming some sense into him...

Lucas nodded as he sat down on the other side of Lathe, letting him hug Mark. It felt good to finally get that off my chest… You two are probably gonna stay together for awhile...

Lathe sighed, his eyes slipping shut as he held onto everyone. I don't wanna let go… He opened his eyes as he heard a sound, looking over to see Philip asleep in his arms. He smiled faintly, rubbing his back gently. “That whole exchange really wore him out… I could use a nap too…” Lathe shifted a bit, chuckling when the brothers still held onto him, Eren and the older Mark slipping away from him. “We can migrate to the couches if you all want…” I don't think any of you want to let go… and I don't want you to either...

Mark, Lucas and Jared nodded, getting up to get out blankets and pillows. The boys waited for Lathe to come with Philip to the couches so they could all nap together.

Lathe smiled as they all assembled a nest on the couches, moving in with Philip still on his chest, smiling as the boy's nestled in on either side of him, tossing more blankets over them. They were all out in minutes, sound asleep. ...I love you all.

James watched them all fall asleep a soft smile on his face. I should get to bed too, I wonder if Nene will join me. He was slow as he walked up the stairs and to his room. I'm glad that my head doesn't really hurt as much as it used to, but I can't sleep like I used too… I still can't have the back of my head on a pillow…. He opened the door smiling as Nene followed him in a few seconds later. There she is. He smiled softly, getting in bed with her and curling up before he felt his eyes close and sleep overtake him.

Tucker had watched the whole scene unfold from where he sat at the table, now the only one there since Jake had shuffled to sleep with Lucas as well. So… I’ll take that as no Henry then…. I guess that’s okay, I can go sit in my room and work on some legos. He got up, helping Eren with the dishes from lunch, turning away from Mark and Eren, knowing the two of them probably wanted nothing to do with him. No one ever does....

Mark looked around as the family disbanded, helping Eren with the dishes. “So I guess it’s nap time now, apparently.” He chuckled as Eren shrugged and nodded. “Hey, I'd love to have a regular nap time. Who doesn't love sleep?” Mark looked up as Tucker started to slink off, remembering something. “Hey, didn't you want to have a friend over to freak out over me or something? That was a thing.” I'm pretty sure it was a thing...
Tucker froze as he heard Mark, turning to look at them, trying to hide his emotions in his eyes. “N-no… It’s fine, I can just call him tomorrow……….” He trailed off, looking to his feet. “D-don’t want to bother the guest.” He mumbled before continuing his way towards the stairs as well.

Maybe… No one’s noticed that I’ve been wearing long pants… No one will ever notice I guess…

“Aww… nooo, if you don't get him over here you'll make the guest sad…. ” Mark sniffled, pretending to be near tears. It's obvious you want him over. “Eren will bring him over, right Eren? Say yes.”

“Sure?”

“We?” C’mon, nobody else needs to be sad today.

Tucker was quiet as he looked back shaking his head and scampering off. No… I can’t invite Henry… I don’t want my thoughts to become reality…. He felt the sinking sensation once again in his chest, sighing. I don’t wanna cut again…. I already cut this week….

Eren sighed as Tucker walked away. “Just leave him be Mark… He’s got it hard as it is…” He was adopted and brought back within six months of being adopted… All he thinks of himself is a monster that nobody wants…. “Tucker’s got a lot going through his head…”

Mark nodded in understanding, going back to washing dishes. “…it’s a really great thing, what you and your family are doing.” It's so obvious how much you all care about and love these kids…. especially Lathe… Mark looked down as another dog sat by Eren, nudging Mark’s leg, sniffing him. “Hello! Who are you?” Mark reached down to pet him, pouting when the dog avoided his touch, looking up to him judgementally. “Eren, he's judging me. Help.” I just wanna pet him! He looks so cute!

“Mikhail, sit.” He watched the dog instantly obey and let Mark pet his head, though Mikhail stopped wagging his tail and his piercing blue eyes looked up to Eren. “Mark, this is Mikhail, he’s my service dog… And doesn’t really like it when other people pet him around me…” He’s always at my side… How have you not noticed him yet? He was behind you in the car the whole ride home… And he doesn’t let me be, my students didn’t understand why I had a dog either… That wasn’t fun, some of the seniors were talking about it after their exams… And I overheard them… I thought the name calling was over and done with?

Mark frowned, scratching his ear before letting him be. “Do you still really need the dog? Or is Blake just getting really old? I heard Lathe mention a bunch of random stuff on the phone, like how he’s eleven now. He was talking about getting another dog, for the house apparently. He just
“Yeah, he was in the car when I picked you up, and he doesn’t let me leave without him, so I guess I need him still.” I hate the idea that I need a fucking dog still. “I hate the idea…” I hate needing him… “But I guess it’s for the family that I’m no longer gonna have….” The two who really need him are gonna leave… Eren finished up with the dishes, sighing as he looked down to the empty sink. “I hate needing a dog, I’d thought I’d been doing well hiding everything from everyone, and now with Mikhail, I can’t do anything without him staring at me and knowing something’s wrong…..” I haven’t been able to take any medications I might have gotten from James… well, actually that new kid at the pharmacy that they hired, James was in the back and didn’t pay much attention….. Thank God dad hasn’t found out yet… “Oh um, we’re supposed to get James’ results from the CCK… So I need to watch for the mail truck soon, but we can go downstairs and start setting up for the live stream in a few days, make sure everything works.”

“Seriously? He blended right in with the car.” Mark looked worried when Eren continued talking, looking sympathetic, though something clicked. “...you’ve been hiding stuff from the family? I don't think that’s… that that’s the best way to deal with stuff…” Mark shied away from the topic though, not wanting to prod too much at it. “I'm just saying maybe it could be a good thing…” Mark tried to change the subject as he handed off the last rinsed plate. “But yeah, we should make sure everything’s in working order. If we need new cables or anything, or if anything needs readjustment, it’s best to do it early on.” So we know what to fix... ......crap, now I'm worried about you...

“Alright, so here’s the big question, do we want to live stream on the computer or the Xbox? Or at least, what do we need to play on? Because I can set up either…. Oh do you know how to set up a GoFundMe? Or something like that? So they can donate?” I still haven’t figured out how to do that. Eren put the last plate away, turning to Mark and motioning him to the studio where his computer was. We’ll need to take this downstairs anyways...

Mark nodded, following him. “I don't do too much Xbox stuff, and PC is much easier to set up. That's where most of my stuff is in accounts and such anyway.” Mark followed him to the studio, walking him through getting a GoFundMe set up for James. I'm very used to PC stuff, I normally only do Xbox gaming on my own time, if I have any time to kill, that is… “And we can just direct them to the other page for the Cancer Research Center if they want to donate to that one. It’ll take like ten minutes to get this set up while we’re live at absolute most, it’s not that much, really. Once you have the pages it’s pretty straightforward.” Not too much to it, just plenty of arranging on the screen...

“Okay, so let's get everything downstairs and ready to go…” That’s really the long part of this...

Mark nodded, following Eren back upstairs. He noticed Mikhail was walking in circles behind them when they stood, seemingly distressed. Huh? ...dogs don't just do that... he wasn't chasing
his tail or anything... Eren seems out of it too... He got his stuff, bringing everything downstairs to set up. ..........what the actual hell is going on with you? I'm really getting worried... Mark looked up as the doorbell rang, watching Eren go to get it. More people?

Eren was confused at first as he opened up the door, seeing Sharon. “Oh, right, dinner, thank you. Do you need help bringing anything else in?” You look like you have your hands full...

“Nah, I'm good. You already have my cookbook. And I left the child with Hannah, so it’s cool.” She smiled, coming in with her armful of groceries, heading over to the kitchen. “Oh! And before I forget...” Sharon came over to him, handing him a slip of paper with two codes on it. “These both get you the game for free off of steam- make sure Mark gets one on his account, Kay?” She watched him nod, beaming. “Thanks!” She moved back to the kitchen, rifling around and getting things out before tying on an apron, set to work. She looked over as Mark wandered out, waving to him. “Hey Markimoo!” I wanna see if you recognize me.

“......I know your face.” Mark studied her, coming into the kitchen. “......I know we must've met.”

“We did! I dyed my hair and cut a ton of it off, though. Even my wife didn't recognize me when she came home.” She grinned when recognition dawned on his face, nodding. “There ya go. I'm making you crazies dinner, by the way. I hope you like ribs.” I've got lots to do.

Mark smiled, nodding. “Y-Yeah, that sounds great, thank you.” He looked over to where Eren was studying a note, his curiosity piqued. “What’s that?” It's a bunch of letters and numbers...

“What we’re gonna be playing on stream first.” That's how this is gonna go. He put it into his pocket, making sure Mark didn’t see it. You’ll find out eventually. Eren’s eyes widened as Mikhail grabbed at his hand almost instantly as soon as it was in reach. But... I wasn’t.... Was I? Wait... Does he know that I have the pills in my pocket? Fuck ! Eren looked down to the piercing blue eyes latching on his hand. How the fuck... How does he know I have it? He didn’t watch me put them in my pocket...

“...uh, Eren, are...” Mark was unsure how to react to Mikhail biting Eren’s hand like that, though Eren didn't seem to be in pain. ...he looks scared. “A-Are you okay? Is he hurting you? You look scared, what's wrong?” I don't know what to do!

Eren shook his head, trying to reign in his emotions, panicking a little, struggling to take back his hand. “Mikhail! Let go of me!” His voice was rising with panic as he heard the low growl emanate from the dog’s throat. I’m panicking... This isn’t good... He knows I have the pills on me!
Mark watched, unsure of what to do as a Eren was dragged to the floor by the dog, watching a bottle of pills fall from his pocket, skittering across the floor. He went to pick them up, unable to keep from reading the label. "...that's a big word... uh..." Mark looked as Eren seemed to completely panic, reaching for the bottle of pills. "Uh, you want these?" Mark tried to hand them back, only for Mikhail to surge off of Eren and snatch the bottle from Mark, running off. He heard him drop the bottle in the next room, barking once to get attention. "Fuck, what's happening? "...Eren?!" Mark looked to him, shocked to see him scramble to his feet and run after the dog. He followed, stopping a ways away, seeing Lathe holding the bottle, Mikhail standing to guard the pile of them on the couches from Eren, the boys looking confused and scared.

Lathe looked to Eren carefully, reading the label on the bottle of pills. "I keep this on hand, but not in this size... it's a generic antihistamine, but you've never had allergies... ..." Lathe opened the bottle, dumping a few pills in his hand. "...Eren, these aren't allergy pills." He looked to him, standing from their nest. "Eren, what's going on." Out with it.

Eren had a look of shock. "This is why I didn't want a fucking dog! "Can I have my pills back?" His voice was full of panic, his eyes wide and his breathing starting to worsen. No! I was doing so well hiding it! You didn't need to fucking know!

Lathe looked to him as he started panicking, moving to calm him. "Eren, I just want to know what’s going on! Whatever you're taking, I need to know about it. I just want to help you. You don't need to hide stuff from me." Lathe moved to hug him, easing him to the floor. "I want you to talk to me, and tell me what's going on. I won't judge you. You should know that after all these years." I've never judged you. I just want you to be happy, and to get better. That's it. Talk to me.

Eren only started to panic more as he was grabbed and pulled down to the floor. "N-No... Get off..." He was trailing off as he struggled to get out of Lathe’s grasp. I didn’t want you to know! You thought I was doing better! I need the drugs to keep the thoughts away! I need them! I didn’t want you to know that I’ve become dependent on them! “I didn’t want you to know...” His voice was full of panic as he was struggling to push Lathe away, his arms weak as his muscles went rigid. I’m panicking! Fuck I’m panicking, I can’t breathe. He could feel his chest tightening, starting to gasp for air, his eyes were wide with fear as he struggled to breathe, his fingers locking in Lathe's shirt.

Lathe heard his breathing turn ragged, brushing his hair from his face, his voice warm in his ear, trying to calm him down. "Eren, it's okay if you still need your meds. If you still need the antidepressants, that's okay. You've been on them so long it’d be easy to understand you could grow dependent on them. It happens all the time when you take meds that long. Just breathe, Hon. I'm not mad, and I'm not gonna judge you. Just breathe Hon, it's okay.” Lathe brought him into his lap, his arms firm and reassuring around him. "I've got you, Hon." Just relax. It's okay.
Eren was still struggling to breathe for a long while before he started to calm down, relaxing into Lathe’s chest, warm tears falling down his cheeks. “I-I’m sorry… I’m really sorry…” Eren whimpered in Lathe’s hold. 

“It’s okay, Honey, I understand. I know it’s a hard thing to admit, that even after all this time you still need them…” Lathe dabbed at his tears, smiling faintly. “But that’s how human bodies work. We get so used to the meds we take, and after enough time has passed, if we stop, we don't know how to handle it. You forget how to function without them, and it hurts. It really does. It’s okay to be like that, I'd be surprised if you could stop cold turkey with no problem. We can see if we can wean you off the meds, or if you just can't do it. And if you're taking those pills for more years, that's okay too… how long ago did you start them again? I thought we’d done a detox a while ago…” We already got you off of them, when… I think when Levi was just about to leave, you stopped taking them… well, ‘stopped.’

“I was doing so w-well… And then I couldn’t take it anymore…. I finally got them again three months ago….” I was doing so well. “Y-You thought I was doing better… And… And I felt horrible for having to take them again… B-Because I started cutting again… And I didn’t know what to do… I just… I hid them because I didn’t want you to worry…. And then when we got the dog, I-I thought you found out… And you were mad at me for falling back on the pills…” I hate having the fucking dog! He knew I was hiding it…. He knew...

“Eren, if I thought something was wrong I wouldn’t just get another dog, I'd ask you what was happening. I had no idea… I'm so sorry… we can fix this, Honey. You could've told me you needed a lower dose again, we would've worked this out. We still can.” Lathe gently rubbed his stomach, thinking. “We can try cutting those pills in half, see what a dose for you that isn't excessive looks like and go from there. But don't try to do this alone, Hon. I’m your Dad, you can tell me this sort of stuff. ...and it makes more sense now, why you freaked out so much about Mikhail… he's a family support system, not my method of Eren-surveillance. That's not what he is. But this is why he's been stuck to your hip, isn’t it.” It wasn’t a question. “…Honey, you never have to cut or do this yourself. I'm here, all of us are here for you. We've got you.” You'll be okay.

Eren nodded, leaning his head into Lathe’s chest again. “I… I need the full dose…” I've been on them too long… And I'm afraid that I’ll want to cut again if I go down in the dosage. “I’m sorry…. But I didn’t want you to… To worry… You were already stressed out enough and with everything that was happening, I couldn’t bring myself to tell you because I was doing better with the pills…. And I thought I’d be able to keep hiding them…” I got dependent, that’s why I offer to do the groceries sometimes... Because I needed to pick up my pills...

“It's okay… I know that I've been kinda swamped with stress lately, but this is still a big deal… your welfare is important to me, as much as anyone else’s. It’s not surprising you're still dependent on them… and at this rate, I think you might be for a very long time still… we’ll have to be very careful if we try to get you off of them again. It's no quick process. I mean months and months, half a year to a year, ballpark. But I think you'll come out of this just fine. We’ll make sure you have your meds, and if you ever start to think things you shouldn't or whatever it might be… now
we have Mikhail. I promise his purpose isn't to antagonize you. It's to keep you, and all of us, safe.” *He'll do a good job. He was very good about the pills, he'll do well for you and for all of us.*

Eren nodded, curling into Lathe’s warm arms, sniffling. “Sh-Sharon’s h-here…” *fuck… I can’t talk right… I keep hiccuping…*

Lathe looked up, seeing Mark over by the kitchen table, quietly talking with Sharon who was expertly cutting up apple, a pile of slices growing next to her. “…I kinda forgot that we have company…” They watched as Mark snitched a piece of apple, Sharon not trying to stop him as he bit it. He immediately reacted to the bitterness, going to spit it out in the trash can, Sharon giggling. …*oh, she must be making pie.* Lathe and Eren both chuckled at the sight, Sharon looking over to them.

*Ah, they're doing a bit better.* Sharon smirked, holding up one of the apple slices. “Wanna try a piece?”

“Don't do it, the apples are evil!”

“Aww, they're not that bad.” Sharon popped the piece in her mouth, smiling as she chewed.

“…how.”

“Do you know how many pies I've needed to make to know the entire recipe from memory? It's the same as the number of times that I've snitched apple divided by ten.”

“.........I'm confused.”

“Just go snitch their animal crackers if you want something. They have the good kind.” Sharon smiled, going back to her chopping. Dessert- the most important part of dinner. *These things need to bake before we bake the ribs, though, so they get done first.* “Lathe, dinner is barbecue ribs, by the way. Just informing you.” *You'll love them.*

“Thank you for cooking, Sharon. It's very kind of you.” He smiled as she blushed, waving him off. “...how do you feel right now, Eren?” *Today has already been so stressful…*
“Well… Um, the mails here…” He murmured, showing Lathe the mail. *The results from CCK are right here… I don't wanna open it… unless you want me to.* His voice was small as he held out the letter shakily to Lathe.

Lathe stared at the envelope, realizing what it was, taking it from him. “...where's the letter opener.” Lathe was immediately handed it by Eren, opening the letter and taking out the papers, flipping through and reading. A minute passed, and he was deathly silent. “.............it's cancer. ...we have to call to schedule his treatment… he'll be going through surgery and chemo…” Lathe stared at the floor, burying his face in his hands again, feeling the kids and Eren all pile on him and give him hugs before he could cry, taking a deep breath. “...well… we know what to do from here. It'll go down a bit, but once the hardest is done, we can only go up. We’ll get there.” *Hopefully... “I… I should go tell him.”* Lathe stood, going upstairs to James’ room, lightly knocking on the doorframe. “James, Honey.” He came inside where he and Nene were napping, gently shaking his shoulder. “...wake up, Hon. There's something you need to know.” *I'm sorry...*

James cracked open his eyes, seeing Lathe, a soft smile on his face. “Hmm, is dinner ready?” He asked quietly, moving to stretch and sit up. *Was I asleep that long already? I'm glad I'm actually able to sleep and no one bothers me anymore.*

Lathe shook his head, sitting down on the bed next to him. “No, it hasn't been that long, Sharon just started a bit ago… Uhm… the results from the tests came in, about your tumor. ......I'm so sorry, Honey, but it's cancer. ...you need to go in for chemo, and then most likely surgery.” Lathe reached out to hug him close. “I'm sorry…” *It's going to be really hard...*

James froze as he looked back to Lathe, fear finally starting to kick in. “How… How big is it?” He murmured quietly to him, tempted to reach back to feel his skull, but knowing that he shouldn’t because it was still highly sensitive. *How much longer do I have left? Will I even make it before we have the surgery? “L-Lathe… I’m… I’m sorry…” You took me in.... Without realizing how much trouble i’d be...*

“...the tumor is really big… it goes from around here on you…” Lathe pointed to the back of his own skull, his finger trailing down to the nape of his neck. “To around here… you don't have to apologize, Honey…” Lathe tugged him into his lap, cradling him to his chest as he looked more and more upset. “Mark, the YouTuber guy, not the Mark we have with us, and Eren, they're going to be doing a charity stream, which basically means they play video games and do stuff to raise money. They're donating a ton of it to other cancer research centers, but they're donating some of the proceeds to you. We’re opening up your own bank account and we’ll pay for your treatment that way. Whatever is left will be there for you when you turn eighteen and go do independent person stuff. We’re gonna do everything we can for you, Honey.” Lathe rubbed his back gently, murmuring to him quietly. *It's okay... we'll fix it... even if nobody knows how to fix it 100% of the time, we’ll fix it...*
James smiled softly as he wrapped his arms around Lathe’s shoulders, taking a deep breath and quickly calming down. “That’s all I’ll need, thank you… Really… But um… Do we need to start right away? I’ve heard that doing chemotherapy makes you really sick, and I’m still trying to recuperate from brain surgery.” His words were mumbled near Lathe’s ear as he closed his eyes, already exhausted. I’m still tired, I can worry about my ticking time bomb later… honestly, it’s probably gonna hurt less than my childhood…

Lathe shook his head, holding him close and feeling him lean heavily onto him, laying down with him on his chest. “We need to start pretty soon, Hon… I know you’re still very worn out from your surgery, but we really can’t delay this much longer… it’s gone this far, we can’t let it go much more… and the chemo is going to take so much out of you either way… we’d best just start it and get you better a bit sooner.” That's all I know to tell you… it's all I can say…

James nodded against his shoulder. “After the boys leave… Then we can go…” he murmured again quieter, so close to falling asleep yet again. I’m tired... “hmm…. Tucker’s alone again…” He mumbled, struggling to keep his eyes open. I need more sleep… My nap wasn’t long enough… I heard him come into his room… But it’s been quiet… Enough to let me sleep decently at least.

Lathe quietly frowned, shifting a bit. “...okay. We’ll start you then, Hon. That'll give you lots of time to sleep and recover, okay?” Lathe moved out from under him, tucking him back under the blankets. “You sleep, okay? We’ll wake you up for dinner when it’s ready.” He kissed his forehead, slipping away and letting Nene crawl onto James’ back, falling asleep there. He made his way to Tucker's room, the door open. He watched quietly as Tucker sat on the floor with a single box of Legos, building the same house for the twentieth time. ...he's so stubborn... he won't let me get him anything, I mean look at his room... there's just... nothing ... he didn't even let me get him a real birthday present, and he refuses an allowance if he doesn't work for it... ...but he always looks so sad..... he's always away from everyone... Lathe very quietly knocked on the door frame, watching Tucker look over with sullen eyes. “Hey Hun. Can I come in?” He watched him stare at him blankly before nodding, shrugging and going back to building the house. Lathe traipsed inside, sitting on the floor near him, among the many lego bricks. “...how’re you doing, Hon?” He suddenly remembered something, his face lighting with recognition. “Oh, I had said I would get Henry so you two could play video games and stuff. Do you still want me to do that?” A moment of quiet. “...come on, you seem so lonely holed up in here. You need to smile and banter with someone.” Henry does a good job of that, making you look happier... you always seem to glow when he’s come over...

Tucker paused as he listened to Lathe before continuing to build his small house. “No... Henry and his brothers went on vacation.... I forgot about it, he wouldn’t be able to come over anyways...” He probably just wants to keep being friends because Markiplier comes over to my house... .... And I’m always supposed to be alone, I mean... No one likes the monster, so it’s a life of solitude for me... I can get working papers in December too... So I can find a job somewhere... “How long is Mark staying for? I can keep quiet while he’s here.” I never really got to know the plans for this week. And he probably doesn't want someone to interrupt his work. Tucker didn’t pick his head up again as he moved fluidly to finish up the house, taking it apart piece by piece and starting it all over again. At this rate I’ll never get adopted, I need to fend for myself...
“Mark’s gonna be here for a week, and starting tomorrow they’re gonna be doing livestreams. Every day has a theme and the funds go to a different cancer research organization, so it’s gonna be a busy week. But you can be somewhere other than your room, you know. You know we have the ability to pull off a huge game setup, we might even hook up a third computer if someone else in the house wants to give being player three a shot.” Lathe shrugged, seeing Tucker keep putting the house together apathetically, sighing. “...please, Tucker, don’t stay up here all the time. All you do is build and rebuild that one lego house. Are you sure you won’t let me get you a different set? Or a big thing of different pieces? I could get you all the pieces you want, you don’t have to make the same thing over and over…” You don’t have to be so sad and bored...

Tucker shook his head. “I told you, I don’t want you to get me anything, and I’ll buy more when I have the money…” I know I need to start saving every penny I find, because I’ll be on my own for college... And I’m stupid, so there goes any chance for scholarships.

I’m the one who gets your bank statements in the mail, you’ve got enough to buy six new ones right now. “Okay, then, I know how you really want to work for your stuff. There are always odd jobs listed on the fridge for when you want something else to do. ...and I do think you should come down sometime in the week, see what Eren and Mark are up to. Someone needs to supervise them.” Lathe smiled, his eyes warm. You shouldn’t be in here alone all the time... you must get lonely. “We miss seeing you around.” You’re always in here, except for at meals... that’s it, mostly... or you’re in the garage working and you yell at anyone who tries to interrupt you...

Tucker shook his head as he fumbled with a piece of Lego, furrowing his brow for an instant as he snapped it into place. “No, I’m fine up here, I... I might go and get more wood from the forest....” Chop down a bigger tree to get wider planks. “I’ll stay up here before and after dinner, and stay out of your hair.” You’re probably annoyed that you need to come talk to me... I know all my previous homes everyone just wanted me to shut up and keep quiet in my room.... “I’ll keep the door open...” I made sure the razor was put away...

“You know you're never a bother to have around, Tucker. We all love your company, we really do.” Lathe tried to convince him, his eyes pleading. “At least try to talk a bit during dinner, okay? You're always so quiet... I know you've got something to say. If asked when it's just one person around what you're working on you start gushing... you're always so stoic...” Lathe shrugged one shoulder, looking to him. It'd be nice to actually talk to you...

“What’s there to talk about? I’m boring compared to everyone else... I’m boring, I’m dull, I’m stupid and no one wants to listen to what I’m working on... They just smile and nod and then forget about it after a few minutes, so what’s even the point anymore?” He looked over to Lathe, his eyes showing that he was starting to crack. I don’t like talking when I know what the outcome is gonna be. “I’ll just be that ugly fag that nobody likes anyways... so why try and change it? I’m not interesting... At all, Eren’s a singer, Mark’s famous, you’re famous... Mark’s a runner with national titles, Jake knows basically everything up to high school education... Lucas can read a
book in under an hour and retain all the information about it, Jared can draw like nobody's business… Philip at least can make a creative story about something he saw… Mom’s a cop, and she’s got great stories to tell… Sharon’s a game Developer… Hannah’s a crazy genius, and so are Scotty and Casper… Maverick’s starting to walk without help and he’s only one and a half, Armin’s a freaking lawyer! Marco practically owns a business with his father, and Jean makes decent money…. But me… I’m just a stupid fag who can’t do anything… And can barely get an ‘A’ on anything…” I’m not worth conversation… not in this household, where even the baby has got a light that’s shining brighter than mine… He sighed as he messed up multiple times on the house he should be able to do in his sleep, grumbling about something before tearing it apart from its uncompleted state.

Lathe looked crestfallen, resting a hand on his shoulder. “You’re forgetting the part where you’re handy enough to go out, chop down trees and then make the dozen planters we have lining the patios and decks with barely any help or instruction. All you ever asked was ‘where are the tools?’ and ‘how do you put the harness on Charlie so he can draw over these logs I just made with a chainsaw?’ You’ve got a lot to talk about and we’re interested in it all, we really are. I’ve seen your sketches of stuff to build, you’ve got ideas. And you’re the only one who was interested in helping me repaint the doors and fix the big speakers, and you’re incredibly handy. You have a real talent and you could do a lot with it. I’m really proud of that. I don't care too much that you’re not getting A’s and get B’s instead- book learning is not really your thing, as much as you try, I understand it, I taught. But if you wanted to really go and do construction and that sort of stuff professionally, you could get pretty damn far at this rate. You do so well with so little instruction and you've got incredible motivation. I'm proud of that. And we'd love to hear what it is you wanna make next.” I want to know this sort of stuff, because you keep making cool stuff…please?

Tucker shook his head, shrugging his hand off. “Construction bores people… Henry probably doesn't even remember what I built Eren for his birthday… It’s not something memorable, so why talk about it, there’s nothing exciting about what I do… Anyone who’s got the tools can do it. I don't understand what you're so proud of… Construction isn’t exactly a desirable profession…. You don’t get paid well… You barely make any money with the one job and a lot resort to two jobs… He started to put the legos away neatly into the container he had for them. “And I’ll stay out of the garage this week too, I know how much the noise carries to the house.” I probably shouldn’t do it in the garage anyways… The house is connected through one measly door… Everyone probably hates when I’m using the power tools. Tucker’s eyes were broken as he put the Legos away in their specified space. You didn’t even try and deny that I was a fag… So does that mean you agree ? That you think I’m a worthless fag? Hmph… That’s probably what you think. “Can you go?” I wanna be alone… I wanna cut… I shouldn’t… But I wanna cut again… I know everyone wants to ignore me… So why don’t you just ignore me already? Tucker swallowed thickly as he picked up his eyes to look at Lathe’s, his eyes barely showing any emotions aside from being broken. I’m a monster… Nobody wants me… Mark and Lucas are getting adopted… And they’re older, but they’re kinder, smarter, better looking, they don’t have tempers, and they have each other…. I have no one, so I sit alone, like I should be, and I’m quiet… And nobody wants to adopt someone like me… An ugly fag…. Even Lathe doesn’t want to adopt me… I don’t blame him, I’m a horrible kid.

Lathe swallowed, moving to hug him lightly. “...I don't know how to say what I want to and make
you believe me… just remember that we love you, Tucker. Please don't forget that.” Lathe let go of him, not surprised that Tucker didn't try to hug him back. He ruffled his hair, standing and leaving him alone. They're on vacation… luckies. Lathe pulled out his phone, finding Kevin’s number and sending him a text.

LQ: You all are on vacation? I'm so jealous, where’d you all go?

KP: Vacation? I wish! I’m stuck at work.

KP: Why would you think that we’re on vacation? I barely have enough money to keep Brett fed.

KP: Fucker eats us out of house and home.

LQ: Tucker told me you all went on vacation, so Henry wouldn't be able to come over and play video games

LQ: Now I'm concerned

LQ: Probably just doesn't want to bother anyone...

LQ: He's holed up in his room half the time and the rest of the time he's in the garage building stuff and yelling at anyone who interrupts

KP: At least he does something productive, Henry does jack shit.

LQ: He's your stereotypical gamer all the time, isn't he?

KP: You have no fucking idea how annoying it is. I let him have the Xbox in his room one night and that was a mistake.

KP: I woke up to Brett screaming because he could hear gunfire and swore ‘someone’s in the house!’

LQ: ...well shit

LQ: Y’know………. there's a ton of shit we have to do around here, and if it gets both of them out of the house…. 

LQ: Is it possible for me to drag Henry over here?

KP: Don’t know how much help he'll be

KP: He’s dumber than a pile of bricks…

KP: But sure he’s at home...

KP: Our address is 403 Maria Ave.

LQ: Cool, and don't worry, there’s some stuff that even a rock could do if it had limbs
LQ: I’ll go fetch him and pry him from the television

KP: Oh, if Brett asks for the password to get in, it’s ‘Fuck Off Asswipe’

LQ: …..you know what, I’m just gonna go with it

LQ: Cool I guess…?

KP: Yeah sorry, he’s paranoid about letting people we don’t know in the house

LQ: Eh, it’s cool

LQ: I mean look at us, we have a seriously OP security system

LQ: Given one of them is sleeping at any one time, one can't run much and another will just eat whatever the intruders drop

LQ: But still

KP: Are you talking about the dogs? I assume you are

KP: Thank you for also getting Henry on my ass about getting a four-legged mouth to feed.

LQ: Sorry, they're all too affectionate to new people…

LQ: Actually now that I think of it they'd be horrible guard dogs

LQ: What would they do, lick the burglars to death?

LQ: ...legit they'd probably try

KP: Greg said you live in the middle of nowhere though?

LQ: Well kinda yeah, our closest neighbor is a mile or two up the road

LQ: But we own a crap ton on land out here

LQ: About 325 acres give or take of just woods and stuff

LQ: There's a pond thing too that's kinda pretty idk

LQ: Lots of deer

LQ: And trees

LQ: And more trees

LQ: Did I mention the trees?

KP: Just go pick up Henry and get him off his lazy ass please and thank you

LQ: You got it! You won't have to worry about feeding him, we’ll give him dinner

LQ: You three are welcome to come for dinner too you want
LQ: There’s always enough to feed an army when we make dinner

KP: As much as I would love to take you up on that offer, if I don’t warn Greg about changes in meals he freaks out, so maybe another time?

LQ: That’s fine, then let me extend a different invitation

LQ: Every Saturday we always have a ton of friends over for dinner

LQ: Would you four like to join us then?

KP: Saturday could work, I’ll make sure Brett’s got the morning shift, and I’ll try and get off work… Thank you

LQ: Of course! And it’s every Saturday

LQ: Open invitation for whenever

LQ: I'll go retrieve the human/brick pile

Lathe stowed his phone back in his pocket, stepping into his boots and heading for their house. It was easy enough to find, parking in the driveway and ambling up to the front door, ringing the doorbell. He waited patiently, hearing some scuffling after a moment.

“What’s the password?” A rough voice was on the other side of the door.

...well, if this is the day I die, at least it'll have been amusing. “Fuck off, asswipe.” Lathe studied the door, surprised to see it open. ...well then, that actually worked. Lathe tried to keep a neutral expression as he saw Brett. ...I hate to say it... well, think it... but the man looks like a stoner... well shit. “Hi, my name’s Lathe, Henry knows my son Tucker. Can I talk to him please?”

Brett nodded, meandering over to the staircase and shouting up the stairs. “Hey gay boy! Your lover’s father is here!” He turned to Lathe, a wide grin on his face. “Want a drink? I got Bud light, Budweiser, Heineken, a few other local varieties.”

Lathe looked surprised, composing himself when Brett turned back around. “Uhm, no thank you, I don't drink.” I really shouldn't drink anymore, and it’s too early for alcohol… at least for me...

“Ah man, no fun… There he is.” He murmured after cracking open a can of beer, pointing to Henry, who was wearing khaki board shorts and a tank top. “There’s gay boy.”
“Uhm, thank you…” Lathe looked to Henry as Brett wandered off, smiling to him. “Henry, I have a really important mission for you. You need to do me a huge favor and get Tucker out of his room and out the damn house, please!” He’ll listen to you.

“Ummm… Okay? I guess… Sure, let me get socks for some shoes.” I guess I can go and get Tucker out of the house… Henry went off to get his socks, slipping them on and waiting by the door. “Do I need to bring anything?”

“Thanks, and not really. Just yourself and your phone. And you’re staying for dinner, by the way. …..actually… you managed to get that new Xbox, right? Bring that. And maybe your favorite controller. Don’t worry, there’s a reason. A pretty good one, too.” Lathe smirked. If you wanted anything signed, it’s probably be those.

Henry seemed confused as he shrugged and went back up to his room, taking a few minutes to pack it up. He came down with everything in a box, a smile on his face. “Okay, I’m ready.”

“Cool, let’s go, hm?” Lathe held the door open for him, waving to Brett and shutting the door behind him. He heard the lock click a moment after they left. The drive to the house was comfortably quiet, surprisingly enough, Henry taking over the radio. He got him in the house without incident, kicking off his boots. “So Tucker’s still upstairs, he kicked me out, so-”

“I got it.” Henry set the box down with care near the door, kicking off his shoes before scampering upstairs. His door is closed. …eh, in my house, it means jack shit. “Tucker, stop being a hermit and-” Henry opened the door and froze. Tucker’s wrists were cut, red parallel lines halfway up his forearm. “T-Tucker…? Fuck, are you okay?” Henry sounded really worried, stepping further into the room before Tucker held up a hand, stopping him. “Wh-Why?” Why the fuck are you cutting? Why the fuck are you cutting?

“Don’t you fucking dare tell anyone, I’m fine alright? What the fuck did you barge in here for?” It was closed! You’re supposed to knock! He seemed angry as he moved to clean up his razor blade, taking the towel and cleaning off the red droplets from his arms. “Close the fucking door! Jeez! Do you not know to knock!?”

“…..no… we never knock on doors in our house… we barge into each other's rooms so much we broke all the locks…” Yeah, I keep forgetting that’s not something everyone does… Henry shut the door, looking to him warily. “…if… if you really are fine, then… why? I don't understand….” What’s the point of it, then?

“‘Why’ what?”
"Why cut to fix a problem that you say doesn't exist?"

"Because I can, asshole, you don't know everything about me, so fuck off." Why are you even here. "How the fuck did you get here?"

"...your Dad came to get me... he asked me if I could get you out of your room and out of the house... I could probably do with being outside too, I guess..." The swearing and harsh tone didn't seem to phase Henry at all. "He made me bring my Xbox and a controller though, which I don't get... and apparently you people are feeding me dinner." Hey, I'm not complaining. I could use a nice meal...

"Uh, just go down in the fucking basement and you'll understand why.... Get out! " Tucker was furious as he pushed Henry out of his room and slammed and locked the door behind him. Shit! He knows! He fucking knows! He slumped down against the door, looking to his arm, seeing the red that still covered his arms, looking at the lines with a sigh. I couldn't help it... I kept cutting...

Henry looked back when Tucker locked the door, knocking on it, his voice laden with worry. "Tucker, please, stop doing it..." There wasn't any answer for a few minutes and Henry gave up, going downstairs, looking scared. I don't know what to do... he doesn't want me to tell anyone, but... I can't just let him do that! But... he'd get so mad at me... I'd never be able to come over anymore... and it's so nice here... and there's actual food here.... I can't stay quiet. Henry looked around, going around the house to find Lathe, seemingly out of sight. He stopped when he noted the woman with coppery hair in the kitchen, inspecting the scene before him. "...are you making stuff?"

"Are you staying for dinner?"

"Apparently..."

"Barbecue ribs, mashed potatoes, asparagus, apple pie and homemade vanilla ice cream. That's dinner, Hon."

"......you're a saint." Henry left her to cook, her laugh in his ears as he moved to the basement. He said a thing was down here... He stepped into the first studio room, stopping dead in his tracks as he saw Lathe and Eren helping someone with black hair with a shock of red hook up a bunch of
computers on the table in a row, a camera facing the line of them. “...oh my god.” Henry had his hands over his mouth as the man turned to face him, nearly jumping up and down in excitement. “Oh my god!” You're MARKIPLIER!!11!!11!!1

Mark picked his head up as he heard an excited gasp. “What?” What’s worth the OMGing? Mark looked around the room. “Where’s the disturbance in the force?” Are you little dude’s friend?

Eren looked up with a smile. “Hi, Henry! How’re you doing kid?” Oh yeah, you’re a video game junkie…. Seeing Mark is gotta be like, really cool.

“...you're Markiplier.” Henry looked in awe, grinning. “I know you must have people fawning over you all the time but I’m just so excited!” Henry stepped into the studio, not sure if he was allowed to really approach him. ...you're Markiplier...

Mark smiled as he saw Henry, his smile following to his eyes. “So you’re little dude’s friend? Glad to meet you, I’ve heard you’re a video game junkie.” So you're name is Henry? Mark held his hand out for Henry, encouraging him to take it. Don’t be shy, I don’t bite... Much.

Henry shook his hand, still staring up at him with wide eyes. “U-Uhm… can I please have a hug?” Pleeeeееase?

Mark smiled even more. “Of course you can!” He quickly engulfed Henry in a bone crushing hug. Of course! I love hugs!

Henry laughed in disbelief as he suddenly found himself pulled into a crushing hug, hugging him back tightly. ...oh my god... I'm hugging Markiplier... I love my life... He smiled sheepishly when Mark let him go, shuffling his feet a bit. “Uhm, I have my Xbox and my controller... Uhm, is it okay if you please maybe sign them please?” I'll say please as much as I need to, I would be very okay with dying right now if you did. I'd be happy for the rest of forever.

“Sure, go get it, I’d love to sign that for you.” Mark was cheery as he looked around for Tucker, frowning a little bit. “Where’s little dude?” Did he not follow you? I thought maybe he’d come out if you were over.

“O-Oh, uh... he had to get washed up upstairs... he was a bit of a mess, so... but he’ll be down soon.” Henry looked nervous, glancing to Lathe before looking back to Mark and trying to smile, going back out to the living room to retrieve the box of stuff. He'd better come back downstairs
soon... I hope he's not still... still cutting up there... He walked back into the studio room, seeing there was an array of Sharpies in a bin on one of the long tables, setting the box down. “Thank you so much for this…” It means a lot...

Lathe was suspicious when Henry tried to explain Tucker’s absence, silently slipping away from them after some time had passed and Mark was doodling all over Henry’s Xbox. He's taking a very long time... I have a bad feeling about this... Lathe came upstairs, listening through the door silently for a moment... no real movement... He heard a very quiet but pained sound, lightly knocking on the door, hearing Tucker jump at the sound, scuffling apparent. “Tucker? Tucker, is everything okay? You shouldn't be up here still, it's been awhile.” ....what's going on...

“Y-Yeah... I-I’m f-fine...” Please do not come in here, my arms won’t stop bleeding... Tucker looked at his arms and the long red streams rolling down the sides of his arms and onto his clothes, he had tears of fear rolling down his cheeks. I'm scared... I did too much too quickly... Please don’t come in! You'll beat me... You'll leave me alone to die... B-but... I'm scared. He let out a strangled whimper of pain as he felt the stinging sensation becoming numb. I...I....

Lathe was worried as he heard the quiet crying, his voice gentle. “Tucker, I'm really worried. Are you sure you're okay?” Lathe heard him say again that he was fine, though he could still hear the quiet crying. He sighed, reaching for his keys in his pocket. “I'm sorry, Honey. I'm coming in.” Lathe didn't give him time to protest before he slid the master key in to shove the tumbler aside, opening the door. His eyes were wide as he saw Tucker’s arms slashed up almost to his elbows, the boy frantically trying to stop the bleeding. ....fuck... “Oh my god.” Lathe immediately ran for his medic bag. That's a lot of blood... he cut himself... fuck... Henry must've barged in on him cutting... that's why he was so nervous... Lathe was back in under a minute, getting Tucker over to the desk, rifling for things in his bag while one hand moved through Tucker's hair, trying to soothe him. “It's okay, Honey, it's okay, I'm not mad at you. Just breathe, okay? We'll get you fixed up.” I'll help you fix this...

Tucker had tears running down his face as he watched Lathe come in, feeling the numbness creep up his whole arm. He shook his head, regretting it as it made his head spin and a nauseous feeling come to him. Why are you here? I'm getting blood everywhere... “N-No....” You'll regret helping me... I should've known that no one would want a monster like me, I should've done this sooner...

Lathe steadied him as he swayed, recognizing that he was losing too much blood. He's lost plenty... and it doesn't want to stop... “It's okay, Honey, this is for the best. Just keep your arm still, okay? I'll fix you up.” Lathe pressed gauze gently to the cuts, trying to staunch the bleeding. He couldn't do much else as Tucker silently cried, needing both his hands to keep the pressure up and get the bleeding under control. “It won't hurt so much in a bit, Hon, just stay cool.” Lathe went to get a damp cloth from the bathroom, very gently cleaning up his arm before adding more gauze over them, beginning to wrap up his arm firmly. “Almost done, Hon. Almost there.” Lathe pinned the wraps in place, moving to hug Tucker tightly when he was done. “....Honey... I'm so sorry... do you want to talk about it? What’s made you want to do this?” Lathe pulled back to look at him,
worry etched into his face. *What went wrong? I thought you were at least somewhat okay... I knew you had low self esteem, but... I didn't think you were cutting...*

Tucker shook his head slowly and he leaned into Lathe’s chest, still shuddering as he cried. *I... I can’t... I can’t tell you....* Tucker felt the sensation of guilt crash in his stomach all over again. *I hate myself... I wish someone would want me... “h-hate.... I h-hate....”* I can’t tell you, you'll just brush it off and tell me I’m fine... That’s what you always do. His hands were shaking as he traced over the lines under the wraps. *Why did you wrap it....? I hate myself... I hate that I can’t control my temper.... I hate that I’m a pathetic fag, and that everyone agrees. I hate that you think I’m horrible, that you wouldn’t wish me on your worst enemy. You don’t even want me anymore.... “I w-wanna be..... A-alone....”* His words were mumbled in Lathe’s shirt as he started to pull away from his arms. *I just wish someone wanted me, and actually liked me for who I am... Everyone hates me.... I dug my own grave.... And even Eren’s new dog didn’t even realize I’ve been cutting.... I’m always all alone.... No one sees that I’m hurting inside.... I try and be strong and say I’m fine, because I know that no one really wants to be around me, but..... It hurts.... So much....*

...he hates himself...? That much ...? “I don't think we can leave you alone now, Honey. I'm not gonna.” Lathe sighed as he weakly protested, holding him to his chest. “I’m sorry, but you can't be alone. I know you'll try to take the wrap off... and I don't want you to be by yourself up here right now. You're always alone...” Lathe stood with him, moving him to the bed so they could sit. “...and you don't have to be, you know. It's okay to exist outside of your room or the garage.” *I can’t bring you downstairs right now, though... you're still a mess...*

Tucker shook his head. “I-I’ll always be a-alone.... E-E-Even y-you said s-so....” *You told me I’d have no chance of being adopted.... I’m all alone.... Whether I like it or not.... “A-And.... I’m not... I-I’m not good E-enough.... N-No one wants a fag.... No o-one wants a re-retard....”* Tucker shuddered violently as Lathe held onto him. *No one picks me... Ever ...*

“What? I never said you’d be-” ...*I was the one who had to tell him a bit after we took him in... how small his chances of being adopted were. “...Honey, come here.”* Lathe laid down on the bed with him, pulling Tucker close. “I never said that you always had to be alone. If you're talking about when I told you what your chances of adoption were... that's completely different. Even when you're not adopted, you're not alone. Right now, you're not alone. There's a family in this house where you live, and you can be a part of it if you want to be. And you’re no ‘retard,’ and you're no ‘fag,’ so stop calling yourself that. You are whatever it is you are, and even if you might not get the best grades, you’ve got a real talent that could really get you somewhere if you went with it. ...I know it must really hurt to be the one nobody has seemed to want.” Lathe heard him sniffle, rubbing his back. “...but the night we found out you’d beaten up Jake, I made a decision. You remember what that was?”

“Y-Yeah.... You kept me, because you would’ve felt bad for giving m-me to anyone else... Because I have a temper, and I-I don’t know h-how to handle it... And I-I let my fear t-take over my r-rage because I couldn’t s-stop looking at guys..... I... I keep m-making mistakes, a-and I
always try and be strong… B-because that’s what people want…….” Tucker broke down in sobs as he trailed off, his hands weakly grabbing Lathe’s shirt. I-I…. I can’t… I can’t do this…

“….that's not how I thought, when I made that decision…” Lathe gently ran a hand through his hair, thinking. “It’s okay to be gay, I know it's not something that you can just change… and it’s okay to make mistakes, because nobody can do everything perfectly all the time… but I didn't decide to keep you because I would've felt bad for the person who took you in-”

“But that’s what you fucking said ! How can I not think that’s what you think? No one wants anything to do with me…. Henry is probably only my friend because of Eren and all of his friends… And because of that, I’ve ruined his options of ever making friends…. No one wants to hang out with the fag at school, because I’ll just sue them for looking at me the wrong way! Eren’s new dog didn’t even realize that I was cutting, and neither did any of the other dogs! No one noticed anything…. And I… I can’t take this anymore, I’m not perfect in any aspect… And everyone… Everyone knows…. Everyone knows I’m not normal… And nobody wants anything that’s not normal…” Tucker was screaming at him in tears, his words slowly calming down as he leaned his head against Lathe’s chest, weakly smacking at him. “It hurts …. Because every decision I make is so…. Utterly wrong … And I know it is… I can never make the right decisions, and it always bites me in the ass… I just… I want to be able to fit in, and be normal, like other kids my age… and I can’t … you would think people wouldn’t care if you have parents or not, but once it got out that mine left me and didn’t bother to keep me, everyone judges me…. And I fucking hate it… I hate everything about it…”

Lathe let him vent, simply keeping him to his chest, quiet for a long moment. “…..Tucker, I'm so sorry…… and I'm so sorry for getting so mad at you forever ago… but I do know something else I'm sure I said… I told you that I thought it would be a better environment here. I meant that if you were going to learn to get better, to control yourself and to learn tolerance, that this was the place for you to do it. Anywhere else you’d still be frustrated with everything going on in your head… I thought that this would be a good place for you to grow up. …and you’ve grown up wonderfully… you’ve done so much better to be civil and accepting, you've found yourself a great pastime and wonderful talent, and you're working so hard trying to be independent, and I really respect all of that about you. I'm sorry, but when it comes to others… you can't control what they think about you. And I'm so sorry that your parents gave you up… but you're not alone in being left behind or hurt. Everyone in this house has something to say about that. But we’re all trying to learn to look to what we can change instead of wishing that we could change what we can't. You can't change what happened yesterday or the day before…. but we can control what happens today or tomorrow. …I just… I know it's been really hard to make friends, after what happened with Devon… but you just need to keep looking for someone that doesn't think you’ll sue them for saying hello… and until then, hold on to the friend you do have. Don't leave him downstairs by himself. You do so much to stay out of the picture because of what I said when I was so mad… and I can't change what I said… but I want you to know that I didn't mean we never wanted to see you again… you have changed so much, you're such a better person… we want you to be around… because so much these days it's like you don't even live here… you eat, you sleep, you play with your one lego set. You sometimes build in the garage but kick any visitors out. ….that's it. We miss you.” We really do...
“How could you miss what wasn’t welcome in the first place?” You were furious … And I was labeled as a problem child….. “And Henry can fend for himself, he’s better off without me, he’s isolated too, all because I was selfish and wanted someone to talk to… no one talks to him, not even Greg… And Greg’s his brother… Henry doesn’t need to be involved in my drama…..” He doesn’t… It’s not like he’s going to stay… No matter how much I would love to hear those three coveted words come out of his mouth, they never will. “I drag him down enough as it is, let him play with Mark… I don’t feel like going downstairs…” I’m a fucking mess, just wonderful …

“Tucker, we didn't welcome the homophobic, raging horse thief that you ended up being for a while. But we will gladly welcome the polite, civil, and talented you that you've grown to be. You needed to change- and that's not me trying to say 'you weren't good enough for us’ in some sort of conceited or selfish way, no. You did need to change because there were gonna be a lot of people who were different, and pitting yourself against the other is a recipe for disaster. But you've grown- you've become someone we loved knowing, ...but we don't know you or how you're doing or what you're up to because you're holed up in here or silent at dinner or yelling at us to go away while you're in the garage. We're not around you enough to understand you… and it's not selfish to want friends. We all need someone to talk to during school… anyone, to vent about dumb teachers or ask for homework ten minutes before it's due. But… I kinda get the idea that Henry’s home isn't the healthiest… it’s its own mess. But when he came into the studio at first, I caught his expression… he looked scared… and when Mark asked where you were, he became so nervous… I’m sure he was trying to find someone to tell about what you’d done to yourself… he was scared for you… he gives a shit about you, Tucker. That's worth holding on to.” He's a good kid… I'd hang onto him as a friend...

Tucker shook his head, his chest clenching as his words caught in his throat. I can’t tell him…. I can't tell him a single thing…. I’m a fucking coward too… Add that to the list of reasons why no one wants to hang out… He sat there, sniffling in Lathe’s arms, starting to rock himself a little, trying to calm down.

......Brett was… well, he wasn’t what I would think of when I thought of a responsible guardian… but he kept saying… “...Tucker, is there something you still need to tell me? Maybe about Henry?” ……..hm…… “I won’t be mad at you or judge you, Honey. Just tell me whatever you need to.” It's okay.

“W-When…. Y-your heart does t-that fluttery thing…. W-when you see s-someone…. W-what does i-it mean?” Please don’t tell me I’ve become attached so quickly .... I’ve been going years without getting attached to a person… Especially after I was returned the second time…

Lathe smiled, gently carding a hand through Tucker’s hair. Tucker’s got the feels… “That’s the same way I felt about Ieva since we’d started dating… you’ve got a crush, Hon… and it sounds like you’ve fallen pretty hard…” Aw…. Lathe looked down as Tucker instantly began shaking his head, trying to calm him down again. “Nono, Hon, it doesn’t always have to be what happened the first time… that wasn’t your fault, it was a serious anomaly… you’ve been around Henry a decent
bit, really talked to him and are getting to know him… I think we would've realized by now what would happen when he's mad…. I mean, I've heard him yell in anger at the television and you two come out of it unscathed… …maybe not the controller, but you were fine. That sort of stuff just doesn't normally happen… and you don't have to tell him when you're the only ones home… but, I mean… do you think you have a crush on him? Be honest.” Please.

Tucker nodded, burying his face in Lathe’s shirt in shame. “I-I’m not gonna tell him….” I refuse to go through that again… “I don’t wanna get attached anymore…” Why does my heart exist? Just to keep me suffering? “My chest always feels so heavy ….” He grumbled as he slowly made fists before releasing them, trying to calm down some more and stop his horrendous crying. Henry can fend for himself… “I don’t wanna see him…”

Lathe cooed to him quietly, his voice soft. “Tucker, I know it’s hard… I really do, but you can't just abandon Henry because of this… he really likes you, and he likes coming over here… I know their family is in a rough patch, so it means plenty for him to have dinner here… I extended the Saturday night dinner invitations to them indefinitely today, you know… they're part of the extended family now… I think you should hang on to him still… even if you can't tell him right away… because he’s a good friend, and if and when you do end up telling him… he won't hate you for it. I just haven't seen anything to make me think otherwise.” Who knows...

“I’m not gonna tell him… And he’s never going to find out…” Tucker was quiet as he rubbed at his chest. “S-So y-you don’t want m-me to hole myself up?” He asked softly, finally looking up to Lathe, and this time showing the smallest flickering of hope. “It’s lonely… And my Legos don’t help….” It’s so boring … just like me and the rest of my life….

Lathe smiled to him, pecking his cheek. “I don't want you hiding in here forever, Honey… I don't want you to be a hermit… you need to come downstairs and at least socialize with the dogs a bit. And there's so much more to do and occupy yourself with… staying in here with one box of Legos… it's a long summer, Hon. …and it's okay if you don't tell him. Maybe you'll change your mind, or it'll happen on its own. …but for now, staying quiet is okay.” It'll be okay like that.

Tucker was silent, taking everything in, slowly becoming lax in Lathe’s arms as he started to finally trust him a bit better. I don’t have to hide anymore? Okay…. “C-can… Can I h-have m-more… Legos?” He murmured, his eyes going to meet Lathe’s for a second before looking away. Will you still get me some? I’m bored with the house...

“I'll get you a big thing of all kinds of random pieces.” Lathe smiled, pecking his forehead and letting him lay heavily on him. “Then you can build anything you want. …and maybe a few nice sets with actual instructions.” He looked down as Tucker looked up to him, unsure. “C’mom, let me spoil you. Please?”
Tucker was weary but soon nodded and held onto Lathe. “I-Is Henry still here?” Can you ask him to go home... I don’t want him to see me like this.

“He is, downstairs fanboying over Mark. I don't think we should send him home… if you still want a little bit to just calm down and chill, maybe wash up a bit or something, then head down, that's fine. But we can't leave him by himself all day.” God knows he needs supervision.

Tucker shook his head. “I don’t wanna see him...” I really don’t... I don’t think I can handle it, being with him now that I know I have a huge crush on him.

“...Tucker, I know it feels like it’s gonna be torture… but could you please give it a shot? I really don't want to make him just go home… so he’ll be at the dinner table anyway… and you're not getting out of dinner. ...look, if things really go south and you're about to break down, you can bail and I'll take care of it, okay? We’ll figure something out. ...but I guess you can choose.”

Tucker nodded, looking down to his legs where his jeans rubbed against his cuts. “C-Can you wrap my legs up too?” They sting, when my jeans touch them...I think the material is too rough...

Lathe looked down to his legs, worried. “I'll clean them up and wrap them, Honey. Here we go.” Lathe carefully eased them up, kneeling on the ground in front of Tucker as he sat on the edge of the bed, very carefully cleaning out and wrapping up his legs, wincing every time Tucker hissed in pain. It didn't take long before he was fixed up, Lathe looking back up to him. “…what's the verdict? You’ll come downstairs and try being around Henry? If I give you two something to do like chores or something you might not be able to think too much about it…. I dunno, it might distract you at least a little… but I don't want him abandoned down there.

Tucker nodded, looking down. “I-I can do the chores…. Let him play video games with Mark and Eren.” He’ll be happy… Tucker looked down a bit, moving to his closet to pull out his usual long sleeve flannel and his jeans. No one had noticed I was still wearing long sleeves.... Or long pants... Well, Dad might now...

Lathe stopped him, holding his arm. “I told Henry that his job was to get you out of the house. ...please, please try to do something with him. If you get to a certain point and you just can't handle it, then you can tell him you're just feeling very off and then flee. He'll understand I think because he kinda walked in on you cutting… but try, at least for fifteen minutes or something. There's enough space set up down there for four, five if we hook up my laptop. Try to join them, and if it doesn't work, you can leave. But you'll have Mark and Eren there too, so it's not just you two. Okay?” I think that'll work better.
“S-So chores? Or…..” You tell me to do chores with Henry, but then you tell me to go down and join them. I’m not sure what you want me to do… He made sure that all the buttons were closed to hide everything thoroughly, having done it so many times before. His eyes were full of different emotions as he looked to Lathe. I think I can go down now… My eyes are probably still red but I can’t help that…

“I was thinking that, but I forgot how quickly they were going to set up the computers for gaming. He's probably down there now with them playing something… I’d really appreciate it if you tried to socialize with all of them, okay? Really try. You can bail and do chores instead if you need to, which might get your mind off of it. I'm sorry I seem to be all over the place telling you what to do, just… video games with them, bail to chores if you can't. Is that okay?” Lathe studied his choice of clothes, thinking. Jeans and long sleeves… even buttoning the whole thing up… “...you've been wearing long clothes for months… how long have you been cutting?” It's a good way to hide it...

“New Years….”

Lathe moved to hug him, his voice soft. “I'm so sorry we didn't know, Honey… we didn't know…” Lathe pecked his cheek, gently leading him to the door. “Now let’s both go downstairs and be nice, okay? They’d all probably like to see you. Mark asked where you were.” Mostly because you and Henry are normally joined at the hip, but still.

Tucker nodded, making his way downstairs and into the kitchen to grab a bottle of water and weakly say ‘hello’ to Sharon. He then crept down the stairs silently, hearing the multiple curses flying from everyone’s mouth as he got closer to the studio. What are they playing? Tucker was silent as he slipped into the room and took a seat on the couch, watching them play rocket league from across the room. Ah, it looks like they’re all having fun… That’s good… His eyes turned to Henry, looking over the eye candy with a heavy heart. I’m not gonna tell him anything....
James groaned as the car stopped in the driveway. *Fuck… “I feel nauseous…”* He mumbled behind the mask over his face. “How long do I need to wear this mask again?” *I know it’s so I don’t get sick from everyone else in the house…. But…. I don’t wanna wear it… It’s uncomfortable.* James held his stomach as he slipped out of the car with Lathe. The boys are gone…. It’s quiet in the house…. Well I’ll be easier for me to sleep, my head hurts a little. Chemo fucking sucks, I feel like *shit*. We had to stay in Wichita until I felt okay to come home, God, I feel like I could throw up for ages…. And then sleep for just as long.

“For a while, Hon. You’ll get used to it. And we can't have you getting sick while you already don't feel too good, it'll really mess with your system.” Lathe got out of the car, the wind blowing his hair into his face. *I need a haircut… it's getting really long… “C’mon, Hon.”* Lathe helped James out of the car, letting him lean on his arm as they walked up and inside the house, the trees swaying in the breeze. *It's been really windy lately… lots of tornadoes around the state… I hope we get lucky and don't get hit with one… I know we had the place built to withstand one pretty well given we’re in Kansas where this shit happens, but still… can't help but worry.* Lathe brought James over to the couch where he could lay and watch TV and rest, Nene already nosing the other animals off to make room for him, trying to drag James’ favorite blanket over to the couch, freshly cleaned and folded over the arm of a nearby chair. “Nene’s getting the place all nice for you.” They chuckled as she gave up trying to drag the heavy blanket, instead sitting and looking to Lathe with her puppy eyes. “Okay, I'll move it for you.” Lathe had them on the couch and properly tucked in, handing over the remote. “I've got paperwork to do, but I'm right over in the kitchen, so just yell if you want stuff, okay?” Lathe pecked his forehead when he nodded, going to get his stuff gathered up and into the kitchen, the radio playing quietly, a habit when the tornado season really started. *More paperwork… there’s so much stuff to do…* Lathe opened one of the bank statements, smiling thankfully at the balance. *Eren and Mark made so much on James’ day of the stream… hundreds of thousands …he’ll be set for his treatment and for whatever schooling he wants, and then some… I’m so glad…* Lathe read over a few credit statements, writing various checks. *Tucker let me get him all the Lego stuff he could ever want, he has a huge bin in his room with the miscellany and boxes of all sorts of stuff… He has to work on the desk though and clean up when he’s done, since Krampus can get in and eat the pieces if we’re not careful… he's gotten better about eating random shit, though, he hasn't licked the TV remote in two weeks! It's a new record. Eren’s doing the singing thing in Germany in a few days, too. Mercedes-Benz Arena in Berlin… the 17,000 tickets sold out within a week of scheduling it…. and it was so short-notice, only two months before the date of the show, tickets went on sale… We’ve already gotten like five calls on the home phone in the past week for venues trying to get ahold of him and book him for shows… it's ridiculous… Eren Yeager is back, and it’s good to say. …well, think.* Lathe glanced up to the clock, trying to remember when the post office last emptied their post boxes. *I think they do it at half past five… Ieva will be home around six thirty… that's a few hours… hm…* Lathe was caught in thought when the song playing was interrupted, looking over to the radio.

“….and we are just getting word of a Tornado Watch for Sedgwick, Butler, and Greenwood Counties, nothing has touched down yet but we are watching cloud formations closely as a few could potentially become a serious threat to nearby residents. Winds are already picking up on the ground in excess of thirty or forty miles per hour and rising steadily-”
It was enough for Lathe to hear. He quickly shoved all the papers into their folder and into a cupboard, weighted with a paperweight. *Those are important.* Lathe ran upstairs, knocking on Tucker’s door, poking his head in. “Tucker, tornado warning. You know the drill, Honey, don’t worry. Get James, Jake and the dogs, I’ll take care of the animals in the field. I won’t be long.” Lathe watched him nod before running back downstairs, looking to James. “Honey, tornado warning. Tucker will help you downstairs to the safe room, okay? I’m getting the animals into the barn.” Lathe watching him nod and shift to sit up, running to get his boots and get Maisie before going out to the fields. *The winds are picking up… “C’mon Maisie, help me get them inside.”*

Tucker put all his toys away, making sure that Krampus was not in the room, running down the hall to Jake’s room and picking up the sleeping boy and getting him on his hip as he walked downstairs. He looked to Jake as he shifted in his sleep. “It’s okay honey, just go back to sleep….” His voice was soft as he carefully made it down the steps, looking to James. “I’ll be right back, I’ll take him down first.” He watched James nod before going to the basement and holding Jake as he shifted in his arms. *You’re getting big…. I’m not gonna be able to carry you soon.* Tucker went towards the door far down the hall in the basement taking the vase from the shelf in the hallway. *Key, I need the key.* He boosted Jake on one hip so he could get the key out, getting into the room with some difficulty before he set Jake on the cot in the small room. *Okay, now James and then the dogs…* Tucker had just made it back to the top of the stairs when he heard the sirens, his eyes widening. *Fuck!*

Lathe and Maisie had just gotten the cows in when he heard the sirens, turning and seeing Charlie still far out in the field. *Fuck he’s still out there. “Maisie, get him!” You can run faster than me, and I need to get these stalls shut.* Lathe worked quickly when Maisie bolted off, getting Charlie’s stall open and ready, Luna prancing a bit, distressed. Arya looked unsure and scared, Lathe barely able to keep her in the stall. *Come on…* Lathe waited for Maisie to return, hearing her bark and the clang of hooves second before Charlie trotted into the barn, Lathe immediately steering him into the stall and shutting it. *That works.* Lathe ran and heaved the barn doors shut, Maisie bolting off to the house. Lathe struggled to close them, managing to lock them and turning to run for the house, seeing far off from the open field opposite the house as a dark cloud swirled. *Shit.* Lathe bolted for the house, running upstairs to do a quick check for everyone, Blake whimpering from his dog bed in the nook. *Everyone else should be downstairs… “Okay Honey, here we go.”* Lathe moved to pick Blake up, bed and all, carrying him downstairs as the wind howled around the house, cooing to him as he whined with distress. “It’s okay, Honey, you’re safe.” Lathe got them down to the basement, Tucker waiting with the safe room door open, the door shutting behind him as he came inside. “Are we all here?” Lathe looked around in the dim light, counting kids and dogs. *We’re all here… Lucifer, Delia…, Krampus, Blake, Nene, Maisie… Jake, Tucker, James… yeah, we are. “All right, let’s just try to chill, okay? All we can do now is wait.”* Lathe sat down on the floor against the wall with Blake, all of them huddled together as the wind seemed to grow louder. They could hear some crashing outside, the sound of wood breaking and a crash above them, making them wince. *That sounded like glass…* It was a while before it started to quiet down, Lathe turning on the small battery-powered radio once they could finally hear. *…can we come out now? They listened for the news that it was over, relieved when the message came over the air that they could. “Okay, lets go see what the damage is.”* Lathe carried Blake back upstairs, letting him go back to napping in the downstairs no for a change of scenery, looking around as they walked. *Nothing too bad, things look okay… oh.* Lathe stopped when he turned to go to the backyard, a huge branch still stuck in the large back window overlooking the fields, more branches littering the yard. Another
stick was on the floor, smaller and surrounded by glass, the small window over the sink broken as well. “Okay, stop moving wherever you all are, there's broken glass everywhere.” Lathe pointed to them, stopping them before they could go anywhere. “Stay put, I'll get you shoes since I still have my boots on.” Lathe retrieved them their glass-free shoes, going to sweep up the glass before inspecting the rest of the house. *We can't get our feet all cut up...* He just stared at the huge branch in the window, shaking his head. *Thank god we have good tornado insurance... that's a huge-ass window and it'll be a bitch to replace... the sink window, not so much, but still.* Lathe shoved at the branch with the end of his broom, wincing and covering his face with his arm when it finally fell, breaking off more glass in the process. *Ugh...* “I’ll get the packing tape...” Lathe got rid of the glass into the trash before covering up the gaping holes with clear tape, managing to hold the thing together. He went outside to clean up the glass from the patio, disposing of that before taking a look around the property, Tucker having decided to join him. “There are branches everywhere... a lot of trees broke, but they were pretty old... the roof is kinda okay, but...” Lathe picked up a stone, throwing it at the roof, watching it tumble down and take a loose shingle with it to the ground. “…yeah, that should get fixed.” *A good roof is kinda important.*

Tucker nodded, looking around to all the downed trees. “I’ll take Charlie out and the chainsaw and get rid of everything in the turnout first, then work on the rest of the field...” *That'll keep me occupied... At least for a little while.*

“That’s a good idea. Anything that's good for planks you can haul over to the big pile next to the garage, but a ton of this shrapnel can go over here for firewood and stuff. There’ll be plenty of it, and we can cut stuff to better sizes and maybe sell out front, since there's so much of it. We’d never use so much, it’d rot out here first. Maybe there's enough good wood here to build a treehouse or something,” Lathe smiled, thinking. *I was thinking having one of those would be cool. James might like having one for when he feels better... he likes climbing stuff, so...* “But either way, we’ve got our work cut out for us.” They ambled around to the front where the damage wasn’t as bad, and Lathe sighed when he saw the garden was so torn up. *I'll have to replant everything.... again...* “I don't think anything too serious happened, though... well shit, I'm damn lucky.” Lathe looked with wide eyes over to where the cars were, large branches having tumbled just feet from them. “If they’d gotten hit with big branches, we’d’ve had a real problem.” *We kinda need those cars.*

Tucker shrugged. “We would’ve figured it out... I doubt it would’ve been that bad.” His eyes shifted to Ieva’s truck as she pulled into the driveway, parking where she could before hopping out and racing over to Lathe. *What happened?*

Ieva looked like she was ready to cry as she came over to Lathe, wrapping her arms around his neck. *Oh thank god, you’re alright.... You're all okay....* “I-It went right over the house....” *I was so worried ...*

Lathe hugged her tightly, his hand going through her hair soothingly. “It's okay, we got all the animals in and everyone got down to the safe room, we’re all fine. A few broken windows and loose roof shingles, but we’re all safe. Don't cry, Honey, we’re all okay.” Lathe turned his head, catching her lips for a sweet kiss, trying to reassure her. *We're all fine, we're all okay. It's all okay.*
“Oh thank god, I was so worried that you guys weren’t home yet and that Jake and Tucker were home alone when it happened….” Oh my god, I panicked in the office because I thought the kids were alone …. Ieva took a deep breath, calming down a bit as she looked to Tucker a soft smile on her face. I’m so glad they weren’t alone…

Lathe shook his head, smiling faintly. “It was a bit close, though- we weren't home for more than half an hour… I’m just grateful that you took over getting everyone into the basement so well. You did a good job, Tucker. I nearly forgot though that Blake needed to be carried downstairs. And Maisie was very good at getting the animals in. I'm just glad things went as smoothly as they did.” Lathe pecked her cheek, resting his cheek on her shoulder, still holding onto her. “I'm glad you're okay.” …the tornado went right over us… so, when I saw that dark cloud… that was the tornado. …well shit.

Ieva smiled holding onto him still. “How does the backyard look? Are any of the fences broken?” That would need to get fixed first.

“I didn't see if it did, but there’s a ton of wood everywhere… well, at least we have plenty of wood to replace any broken fencing. We still need to check on the animals, but I think they'll be okay. I made sure everything was locked up tight.” That barn is sturdy as hell, it'll be fine. It looked unscathed from the porch. “We should go look- come with.” Lathe still had an arm around her middle, walking with her and Tucker around the back of the house again, tracing the fencing with his eyes. “…a couple places got knocked down, but only one spot got smashed… the one big tree that we left near the fence because it made good shade for over there actually split… half of it is now on the fence… that’ll need replacing, but the rest can just get hammered back into the ground easy enough. That’s your new project, Tucker.” Fencing. “Let’s hope they're not all freaking out.” Lathe walked them over to the barn, unlocking the door and pulling it open. The animals were mostly quiet, the only real difference being that light spilled in from the ceiling in one spot, the roofing panel torn off. Hm. “That panel’s probably on the other side of the barn.” They went around the side, seeing it stuck in some underbrush at the edge of the forest. “Yep, there it is.” They checked on the chicken coop, the chickens a bit ruffled up but otherwise okay. “Alright, that's that. I’m going to get that tree limb off the back porch and then hammer that panel back onto the barn.” That needs doing. Lathe looked over his shoulder as he heard a whinny in the distance, shocked to see a white horse with black splashes all over their legs and forehead come trotting over the street, wearing a halter with the metal clasp for a lead broken off. “Whoa!” Lathe moved carefully, trying to get the horse to stop, holding up his hands. The horse slowed as it saw him, stopping and watching him warily as he approached, gently petting their neck. “Now who are you?” He looked over their halter, seeing a metal tag on the side of the halter, reading the tag. “Maximus?” Lathe noticed the horse respond to the name, standing a little more still, attentive. “Good, good.” He looked them over, seeing a number written on the horse’s side with grease. “There’s a phone number on you, good. It's the same on the tag. Let’s see if we can’t find out who owns you.” Lathe pulled out his phone, petting the horse with one hand and keeping them in place as he dialled, grateful that the cell service was still up. Alright, let's see if we can work this out. He called the number, waiting patiently for someone to pick up, speaking when the line picked up. “Hello, I have your horse Maximus here. He seems to have broken loose of his lead.” That part of the halter broke off, the metal ring looks worn…
“Oh thank god, I thought he was still in the barn, thank god… Where are you?” The man on the other end seemed extremely relieved to hear that Maximus had been found.

“104 Rosewall Avenue, Trost. How far are you? We’ve got a trailer and could bring him if you still need to get stuff in order where you are. We’re mostly fine here.” Not much to do of super-great important, just order windows and get the roof fixed, then put the fence up again. It'll take a day to arrange all that, most.

“Well, I’m in Sedgwick County, but I have a problem....”

“What’s wrong?” I can't just tell this isn't gonna be good...

“My barn was destroyed three days ago, and I’m still missing eight horses… We had the F-3 tornado roll in....”

“Oh shit, that's bad… uh, if you’ve got nowhere to put him, we can board him here for a while, there's plenty of space… but that's terrible ...” Eight horses missing...

“Well I’m glad that my list is down to eight.... It was ten this morning, we found one in the rubble and now Maximus is found.... I would much appreciate it if you could board him, do you have any experienced riders? Who would be able to ride him around? He needs constant exercise.”

“My son is the most experienced of us, but he’s in Germany… one of our friends boards her horse with us, I'll talk to her... if not, I'll always be around, I can ride fairly well.”

“Thank you, and it could be very possible that there will be more around where you are now? Maximus was the herd leader.... Most of the horses would've followed him.”

“We own over three hundred acres around here, and he came from a flat open field across the street… if someone tried to follow him, we’ll see them. I wouldn't doubt it.” Lathe looked to Tucker, nodding to the barn. “Tucker, go get a halter and a lead, would you? We’re going for a walk.” I wanna go see if there are any other horses in sight around front. “We’ve got plenty to do outside, and we’ll be on the lookout for any more. I have the feeling they might look for somewhere people are...” Lathe handed Tucker the phone on speaker when he came back, starting to change Maximus’ halter, careful not to spook him. “We’ll take him for a walk out front, see if he
notices anything or if anything notices him.” They might...

“Thank you very much, the horses are very well behaved, if you find anymore you’re welcome to text me a picture of them using the same number, they all have grease on their sides, and almost all of them are white…. Oh um, my name is Zachary by the way, I don’t think I asked for yours.”

“Lathe Quo. Nice to meet you, Zachary.” Lathe smiled, starting to lead Maximus to the front, the horse easily following him. “He is very well-behaved, I must say. And we’ll be sure to let you know the second we find anyone else.” Lathe led him to the front yard, looking over the field, his eyes tracing the edge of the forest in the distance. C’mon… there’s another one of you out there somewhere...

“Thank you very much Lathe, I need to go and look for more animals as well as people, thank you very much.” With that the man hung up, and Maximus raised his head as he heard something, looking all around, finally letting out a loud whinny.

Lathe looked around as Maximus whinnied, looking over and seeing a white body in the woods to their left. There’s one. “We don’t have any more leads…” Lathe spoke as they came into the yard, walking over with the same number greased onto their side, their lead missing as well.

“I can go get Charlie and the rope?”

“Good idea, Tucker. Go do that, and grab the bag of carrots we keep out there.” Lathe held out his other hand for the horse, gently petting their neck as well. “Easy, hello there… Belle. Lovely name. Easy, girl.” Lathe calmed her, waiting for Tucker to return. Both horses turned to look as Tucker rode Charlie out, moving Belle towards him a bit. The two horses sniffed at each other before just looking at each other, chill with the situation. Belle didn’t fight when Tucker tied her to Charlie, Lathe sighing with relief. Good, she’s not fighting or anything. “Tucker, let’s get her and Maximus into a corral. Any other horses should gravitate over here if they followed Maximus at all.” That should work.

Tucker nodded, turning Charlie with the reins, looking all around with the higher vantage point. “White? We’re looking for white?” His voice was concerned as they were crossing the street, seeing a much smaller yearling gravitate towards the two larger horses. Well, there’s another… I think?

“Yeah- oh, there’s another. Hey.” Lathe held out a hand to the smaller horse, gently petting their neck when they came close to Maximus. They're very comfortable around us, which is fortunate. “And your name is… Lilly. Hello.” Lathe led her towards the corral with them, herding them all in
through the gate. Lathe let Tucker back out with Charlie before shutting it, letting the horses wander around their new home for the moment. “Okay, that’s three. So there are still six missing. I’m gonna go get the mallet and put the fence back up that borders this corral, part of it fell over there, so to keep them from wandering off, I’ll do that.”

“Well, they’re in a corral taller than their heads, I’ll get them some hay and a water trough.” *That should help them.* Tucker went to go out Charlie back in the barn and get what he needed to give them. *They’ve all got to be starving… We should have Hanji come and look at them…*

Lathe nodded, looking to Ieva. “Uhm, do you think you could try to find someone to come and fix that?” Lathe pointed to the back window, held together with clear tape, a large branch still sprawled across the back porch, the furniture all tipped over.

Ieva’s eyes widened as she saw the branch. “Uh, yeah, I’ll see what I can do about that, and I’ll start making dinner for the five of us.” *I can do that, I’ll let you guys handle the horses…*

Lathe smiled, kissing her softly. “Thanks Hon. I’m glad you’re home.” *…today isn’t gonna go out easy.* Lathe smiled as she pecked his cheek, heading for the house. He went to the front of the house, going to get the mallet. He left, looking back out of the field, his eyes widening as he saw three white figures. *Three of them in one clump?* Lathe set down the mallet, grabbing a length of rope and starting for the field. He was still quite a few yards away when he slowed, thinking. *…those aren’t horses…* His eyebrows shot up when they turned to him, hearing a distinct ‘Baaaa!’ *…they’re sheep… what the fuck do I do with sheep? How does one sheep?* Lathe approached them nevertheless, tying a loop into the end of the rope, trying not to scare them off as he came close. He reached out for one, letting them sniff him before it turned, letting him pet it’s head and look at it’s collar. *There’s the phone number again…* “Okay, let’s get you all to our place and fed.” Lathe managed to string them together, leading them across the field to their house. He just shook his head when he finally got to their backyard, Tucker looking at him incredulously. “I found sheep.” Lathe shrugged, moving them into a separate corral next door to the horses. He found himself googling what sheep could eat, assembling feed for them from what was in the barn. He came back to find them happily munching on the grass near the horses, seemingly more content to be around familiar animals. *…I forget that sheep like lots of grass.* Lathe made sure they had food and water anyway, going back to get that mallet. *We still need that.* By the time dinner was ready, they’d acquired another horse, two more sheep, a pig, and a goat. *This guy has a lot of animals…* Lathe took pictures of all of them, sending them to the man. “I’m gonna need to go to the store after this and buy extra feed. There are a lot more mouths out there to feed than planned.” *We have a small flock of sheep now.….idk, okay I guess.*

“Can you call Hanji? She should check all the animals… And I think Eren made sure there was enough feed in the storage room.” *There is enough hay for the horses…. And it’s warm enough that they won’t need any blankets.*
“I will- still, though, his barn is destroyed and unusable, so we might have these animals for a while. I just want to make sure they all stay fed and safe. We have a small flock of sheep, and they’re fine with grass and water, but the given new horses need more than that, and so does the pig and goat.” We’ve got quite a few. “And more might show up during the night and hang out, so I think I’ll leave a water trough and hay just outside the corral for overnight.” Just in case.

Tucker nodded, looking to the trough inside the corral, moving to go get another one to set outside the large corral. “Can you go get Henry? So he can help get the turnout cleared quicker?” It needs to get done, and he’ll help... He’s been texting me non-stop since he saw me cut... And it’s starting to get hard to ignore it...

“Yeah, I’ll get him. I’ll see how they held up too, though I get the feeling the rest of town didn't get hurt too much.” Lathe jumped as his phone suddenly vibrated, looking to it with concern and answering quickly. “Hey Hannah. What’s up?” Now what's the damage?

“Hey... Um... Did you get more animals? And did they get out?”

“...no, and all our animals are still in the barn... wait, what kind of animal? Is it a horse with a number greased onto it’s side? We’re looking for those.”

“No... there's a sheep in the front yard just eating the grass and Sharon's outside trying to get it to stay put and herd the sheep that's decided the grass in Casper and Scotty's yard looks tastier, and Casper’s like holding a stick and trying to get it to stop eating the plants in the garden and Scotty’s all confused as hell.” There was a shuffle of the phone. “Wait... Maverick!..... And now the sheep are chill with my son petting them....”

...well shit. “Yeah, there’s this guy whose barn got destroyed in that F-3 tornado a few days ago… five of his horses, five of his sheep, a pig and a goat all kinda wandered into our yard today because they just kinda ran free. We’ll come get them, I needed to retrieve Henry anyway. Might as well make the rounds with the trailer and see if there are any more animals to round up wandering the streets. ...and yeah, they're all very chill, even the horses. Very well-behaved.”

“Okay, so um... What do we do? Like should we just like try and hold them? Maverick is petting them...” Hannah stepped out onto her porch, watching the sheep graze.

“Yeah, they like pets. Just keep them in sight, okay? They shouldn't do too much wandering once they've found grass they like. Just hang on, I'm coming with the trailer. Whatever you do, don't lose track of them. I'll be right there.” Lathe hung up, looking to Tucker. “Wanna go for a ride?” I could use some help sheep wrangling.
“Should we bring Maisie?” I mean, she’d a herding dog, so why not? He nodded, setting down the bale of hay he put out. That should attract some animals.

“Yeah, she’s good for getting them rounded up if they don’t wanna move. And just in general.” Lathe ran into the house to grab the keys, looking over to where Ieva was cooking. “Honey, Tucker and I need to bring Maisie and the trailer out into town. A few sheep turned up in Sharon and Casper’s yards. We’re gonna see if there are other animals wandering around before they get hurt or hit by a car or get too lost. And we’re dragging Henry back to get the wood shrapnel under control, so he’ll be eating over probably.” That’s the situation, pretty much.

“Okay, I will, does pasta sound okay for tonight?” I can make enough and Jake will help make the good kind. She smiled, kissing his cheek happily, seeming a bit more bubbly with Lathe…

Lathe smiled, moving to kiss her on her lips, holding her close for a long moment. I love you. “That sounds wonderful.” Lathe kissed her cheek, smiling warmly. “We’re gonna get going before the sheep eat all of their plants.” Lathe let go of her waist, moving to the front door, waving. “We’ll be home soon, Honey. If we take forever to get back you all can eat without us. We won’t make you starve. And it could take a while if it turns out a ton of sheep ended up in town.” We have no idea how long we’ll be out there...

Ieva nodded. “Alright, I’ll make sure that you guys will have enough, now go get the trailer hitched on my truck.” She smiled, handing over the keys to him. You’ll need the horsepower.

Lathe nodded, thanking her and taking the keys. He moved out the front door, going to get the trailer hitched to the truck, Tucker helping him as Maisie sat in the cab, ready to go. Lathe shooed her in between him and Tucker, getting the truck turned around and heading for town, both of them keeping a careful eye out for more animals. He sighed as he saw a few in Armin’s yard, attracted to the vegetables that he still kept littering the grass, the blonde taking pictures from his porch. “Oh Christ, there's a bunch of them.” Lathe parked on the side of the road, hopping out and letting Tucker open the back of the trailer. “Hey Armin! There's a guy a county over looking for these. We've collected quite a few ourselves.” He grinned, looking over the bunch of them. You've got one of his pigs too… less animals to track down.

Maisie stood at Lathe’s heels, waiting for the command to round them up. There are more… I wanna herd…. She stood patiently awaiting instructions.

Tucker was careful not to spook the sheep as he opened the back of the large trailer. Why we have such a large trailer… I will never know, maybe for multiple horses? Even though we really only have three? This thing will fit like…. Ten…
Armin shook his head as he put his camera down. “I had no idea where the hell they came from…. I got enough pictures of them munching….” They kinda gravitated towards the food….

Lathe laughed, looking to Maisie. “Alright, girl, get them in the trailer.” Lathe motioned towards the sheep, Maisie going around the flock and starting to lead them right towards the trailer. “You know that F-3 tornado a county over a few days ago? It destroyed this guy’s barn, Zachary. We have five of his horses and a bunch more miscellaneous animals. We’re trying to find as many as we can before they get hit by cars or even more lost. We know where two others are besides these now.” Lathe shrugged one shoulder. “I never thought I’d be doing this kind of thing…. rounding up some guy’s lost sheep… idk, life is weird enough that it just about seems normal.

Armin nodded and watched Maisie herd all of them into the trailer with ease. Well, that’s amusing to watch. “Well, she’s good at what she does, should I alert you if I see any mystery horses?” The next county over is just really down the street anyways, I’m surprised it took them this long….

“Yeah, please. They’ll have a big phone number written on their sides with grease, that’s how you know they’re the ones. We’ll come back and get them if you call. Thanks, and you might want to make sure you keep plenty of vegetables out for a few days. It’s better than the rest getting lost.” Lathe grinned, looking back when he heard the click of the gate, Maisie sitting obediently next to Tucker as he locked the door. “Alright, we’ll at least be a street over. Thanks, Armin. We’ll see you around!” Lathe waved, hopping back into the truck with Maisie and Tucker, getting them going to Maria. Lathe chuckled as he saw Casper and Sharon petting the sheep, the latter holding Maverick on one hip, the toddler petting the sheep as well. Scotty inspected the sheep with a confused look, and Hannah was absently petting one, looking around in confusion. Yep, more sheep. “More wildlife to wrangle.” They hopped out again, ambling up. “I see you’ve found more sheep.”

“Yeah, and they ate my plants.” Sharon looked over to the garden dejectedly. “I spent a good amount of time on that…. at least they make for decent lawn mowers.” She shrugged, smiling.

Hannah chuckled, moving to try and usher the sheep towards the trailer. “Um… How do we get them in the trailer?” Honestly I didn’t even hear them making a sound until Sharon told me we had unexpected visitors… These hearing aids do jack shit!

Tucker came around the back of the trailer, opening it up and watching the sheep eye the exit until Maisie barked and kept them in. She then ventured to Lathe’s side, waiting to be instructed again. “We use a dog…”

“I choose you, Maisie!” Lathe gestured and Maisie was off, Maverick petting the sheep goodbye
before they were herded to the trailer, soon inside. “Maisie used ‘Herd.’ It's very effective.”

“I could kill you with this stick for that.” Casper couldn't help laughing, clutching his stomach. That was awful and great at the same time.

Hannah looked at everyone with confusion. “What?” What happened? She watched as Maverick went off to Maisie and pet her. God he’s adorable... But he’s walking ... and he’s only one and a half!

“It’s a Pokemon reference that I should get killed with a stick for making.” Lathe smiled, tilting his head when Hannah just stared at him, speaking very clearly. “You can't hear me, can you.”

“She hasn't been able to hear anything at all for the past few days, which is a bit disconcerting. I’m the one getting up at five in the morning again to feed the tiny human, which is necessary if he wants to live long enough to be a big brother.”

Lathe smiled. “You two planning on another tiny human?”

“Weeeelll... let’s just say if we didn't want another one, which isn't the case, too late.” C’mon, you’re smart. Figure it out.

Lathe thought for a second before grinning widely. “Wait.” He watched her nod excitedly, beaming. “That's wonderful!”

“Waitwaitwait.” Casper held out his hands, stopping everything and looking to Sharon. “.......I get to be the Godmother, right?” Please?

Scotty just looked to Casper, shaking his head. “Are you ever gonna consult me on things like this?” He raised a hand to his temple. Geez, we’re getting the dates for the wedding…. And you’re already pestering me about children...

“Are you ever gonna give me children?” Casper regretted it the second it came out of his mouth, paling. “Shit, Scotty-” Fuck...
Scotty’s eyes set in anger, turning around, getting in the house and slamming the door behind him. 

*You always use that phrase! And no, I can’t! If you wanted children you shouldn’t’ve said yes!*
Casper moved after him, knocking on the door when it slammed shut, hearing him lock him out. “Scotty! Scotty, I'm so sorry, I didn't think, please open the door!” He gave up when he was met with silence, the front shades dropping. He sighed, resting his forehead against the door, his face in his hands. “...I keep fucking up like that…” I know he doesn't like hearing it…. But I keep fucking saying it without fucking thinking …

SO: You have the key in your pocket, dumbass, and don’t even think about coming inside right now.

SO: I swear I **will** throw something at you.

CP: Scotty, I just

CP: I'm a fucking dumbass who's mouth doesn't consult with their brain

CP: I'm sorry I keep fucking saying that kind of shit

CP: I didn't even fucking think and I didn't //want// to say it

CP: It just

CP: Happened

CP: I won't bug you and come inside but just

CP: I don't want you to hate me

CP: Because this is like the third time this week I did this shit and I feel fucking awful about it and I don't know why I keep bringing this shit up when we don't even have a fucking wedding date

CP: I just

CP: I keep fucking up and I know sorry doesn't mean shit but

CP: I'm sorry

SO: …. I’m sleeping alone tonight…

SO: And it’s the fifth time this week, and it’s only Thursday…

SO: Go find more sheep, do something you want to do…

SO: and if you wanted kids, you should’ve said No…

CP: ...you do understand that we’ve never had the ‘kids’ conversation

CP: I know you hate those damn remarks but because we’ve never talked about this shit
CP: When Sharon had Maverick all you did was stew and make me leave you the hell alone with your thoughts

CP: But I legitimately do not know if you're upset because you can't give me biological kids

CP: And I don't really care if they're not biological to both of us or even either of us

CP: But I don't even know if you mean kids in **general**

CP: I don't know.

CP: And the first time I said it I was kinda trying to be playful and try to get you to talk

CP: And it blew up in my face

CP: But I can't stop saying it

CP: I think because I don't know how else to try and start this sort of discussion

CP: and if I'm going to marry you

CP: and I really, really want to

CP: I need to know if you're okay with kids

CP: ...because it's really important to me.

SO: The reason I hate you saying that is because I know that you want kids, and I don’t want to deny you your happiness....

SO: But I don't want any....

SO: That’s why I get pissed off, because you keep reminding me about how you’re so much more likely to leave if I tell you I don’t want kids!

Casper’s fingers froze over the keys, silently staring at his phone. .......you don't want any kids.

SO: I understand if you want to leave but I’ve been angry with myself because I can’t even picture myself having any kids....

SO: I really should’ve told you before you said Yes....

SO: We could always break it off, because I know that it’s really important to you.

CP: I don't wanna break it off with you...

CP: It is important to me, but I don't want to lose you...

CP: I’ve spent so long loving you and to lose you now I just...
CP: ...I need to think about this…
CP: ...because I don’t know what to do…
SO: I figured as much… I’m off tomorrow, so I’ll take the couch tonight.
SO: I’m sorry you had to find out you had a choice to make like this…
SO: I was planning on telling you, but…
SO: you know how I am with words and emotions.
SO: They aren’t that great…
CP: Scotty, we both know you don’t exactly fit on the couch
CP: and
CP: I don’t want to sleep alone
CP: I don’t want to have to get used to that
CP: Can we just try to have dinner and sleep in the same bed like we always do?
CP: I just
CP: I don’t want things to change
CP: And I know you can’t really words…
CP: It seems like it’s easiest to send someone a text instead of tell them..
CP: You can think before you send something
CP: And we all know I can’t think before I speak, so…
CP: …but, I love you and I don’t wanna lose you…
CP: and I need to think about this
SO: I love you too…. Okay I think I busted my knuckles enough….
SO: you can come in…
SO: I’ve calmed down…
CP: Wait what

Casper put his phone away in his pocket, fumbling for his keys before coming inside, not bothering with his shoes and walking through the house. “Scotty? Where- oh my god.” Casper stopped when he saw Scotty in the kitchen, his knuckled bruised and bloody, the marble counter smeared with blood. “…did you punch the counter?” Casper moved to his side, looking over his hands gingerly.
“Oh my god… we need to clean you up…” Casper moved to turn on the tap, gently tugging Scotty over to run his hands under the water and wash away the blood, gently cleaning out the cuts. That looks terrible...

Scotty nodded, letting Casper clean him up. “I’m sorry, I snapped….” I haven’t punched anything in awhile, maybe I should get a punching bag and hook it up…. “What do you wanna do for dinner?” His smile was weak as he struggled to make small talk. You probably hate me… I don’t want what you want...

Casper looked up to him as he gently patted his knuckles dry, smiling faintly. “Do you want to go out to dinner? Just you and me? Or would you rather order out and watch dumb movies together on the couch?” I don’t want things to change… I've spent too long loving you to give you up too easily... I'm not gonna let us fall apart so easily...

“Where do you wanna go out?” Anywhere you wanna go… I need to make it up to you, I know kids have been your ultimate goal in life… And I feel horrible for stealing it from you… Scotty leaned his head down, resting his forehead against Casper’s. I fucked up...

Casper let his eyes shut, leaning into the touch, one of his hands moving to cup the back of Scotty’s neck. “Hm, I dunno… I’m okay with anything as long as you’re there.” Casper brushed their lips, kissing Scotty softly. I love you... so much...

Scotty had his eyes closed as he let Casper brush their lips together, though soon he leaned in more and kissed him deeper. He savored the feel of Casper’s soft lips against his own, his hands moving behind Casper and pulling him close to his own body. I’m so sorry... Please stay ...

Casper made a quiet sound as Scotty pulled him close, his own arms winding around him, gripping the back of his shirt. He tilted his head, easily giving Scotty access, feeling his tongue tangle with his. I wanna keep you... I don't wanna think about leaving... about us breaking it off... I wanna think about living with you forever... and having you to hold onto all the time...

Scotty’s hands wandered down to Casper’s ass, gripping him gently and lifting him onto the counter so he wouldn’t have to crane his neck. His hands were gentle as he touched Casper, almost as if he would shatter with the slightest touch. I.... I don’t wanna lose you, not after you said Yes... Because you're probably the only one who would say Yes to me as it is.... His kisses were gentle and slow, his tongue dancing with Casper’s, a soft sigh leaving his lips as his arms caged Casper on the countertop.

Casper’s legs instinctively moved to wrap around Scotty’s waist, their hips level, whimpering
quietly when he moved forward and they rubbed against the other. I… I don’t want to have to settle for anyone else… His hands slid under the fabric of his shirt, feeling the warm skin underneath. I wanna keep this… He made a tiny needy noise as Scotty’s hands ran from his sides to his thighs, teasing him. I want you to have me… I want to know you still love me… I need you to remind me of that… Casper’s hands fist ed in his shirt, tugging him closer when his hands moved closer to his nether, whimpering into their kiss and hoping he understood. He sighed deeply as Scotty picked him up, leaning heavily onto his shoulder as he carried him upstairs, his hands running over him lovingly. Thank you… He didn’t resist when Scotty laid him on the bed, his own eyes loving as Scotty crawled on top of him, relishing in the feeling of hot lips on his and hands all over his body. Please… love me…

Scotty lowered himself down on top of Casper, his lips trailing from Casper’s down his jaw and towards his ear, kissing sweetly and sucking gently, careful not to leave anything visible. Hmm…… You’ll allow me to do this, but then what? Scotty simply shook his head, moving to the other side of Casper’s head, trying to rid himself of the thought. I think he’ll stay, hopefully…. But I know we’re gonna have to compromise and get kids anyways…. Fuck it, I should really just let him do whatever the hell he wants…. You know ‘Happy wife gets you a happy life?’ Why haven’t I just given in to his demands? Scotty’s hands trailed down Casper’s sides, his own hand working his way under and his long fingers splayed out over Casper’s stomach. I’m sorry that you wanted kids so much…. And I can’t give you any…

Casper reached up as he kissed at his neck, one hand tangling in his short hair, gently keeping him in place at his neck. Quiet moans and sighs left his lips as Scotty sucked at his skin, letting him unbutton his dress shirt and push it off his shoulders, raising his arms as the tank top came off too. He quietly whimpered as Scotty kissed down his neck, his lips latching onto a perky nipple, teasing the bud with his tongue. His legs wrapped around his middle, his fingers gripping his shirt. More...

Scotty was quiet as he listened to Casper moan, a soft smile creeping on his face. At least you’re enjoying it. His hands raked over Casper’s open skin, enjoying the feeling of his warm flesh. “I’m sorry….” He murmured against his skin as he very carefully made his way to the other nipple, sucking on it and listening to Casper’s response. God, you sound heavenly .

“I-It’s… nnggh…..” Casper squirmed under him a bit, holding his head to his chest, mewling as Scotty lapped at his buds. I don’t wanna think about it… b-but… “…n-not… ……..n-nevermind….” Casper clammed up, his eyes screwed shut. I don’t wanna think about it… I don’t wanna turn you off… I don’t wanna… but I can’t help thinking about it...

Scotty stopped picking his head up, and staring at Casper’s face. “Casper… Baby, talk to me.” I don’t want you to think that you can’t talk to me. “Please…” His voice was soft as he moved to kiss Casper’s neck, trying to coax him to speak. Please…

Casper turned his head, his face heating up as Scotty kissed his neck, holding him closer to him.
“N-Not…” He dreaded saying it, sighing shakily, his voice tiny. “…n-not even o-one?” ……if you won’t budge, I……. I don’t know what to do……

……... This is make or break..... Scotty looked to Casper with sorry eyes. “Casper…. I-I really don’t want any…. I don’t want to have that sort of responsibility over my head…” I am not the kind of material that a Father should be made out of…. “I wouldn’t be able to see them with how my work schedule’s like… I just….” It’s so impractical …

“W-We don’t have to have one right aw-way…” Casper’s fingers gripped his shirt tightly, sounding desperate. “We could w-wait until things s-settle, I could do so much of my job from h-home anyway… I just do management and make decisions, I can stay home… I….…” Casper choked on his words, tears starting to fall down his cheeks. “...I-I can’t have both…… c-can I……” I can’t have you, and kids… I have to pick ……. fuck, I…. I don’t know how to choose....

Scotty sighed quietly lifting himself up a bit so he could wipe away Casper’s tears. “Casper....” His words were soft as he held his face in his hands. “I…. I really don’t want to put anyone through not having a father…. You know how much that fucked me up when I was a kid…. I-I…. I can’t knowingly do that to someone…. And, I just, I’m not necessarily the best at handling children, I mean, I’m barely getting by with handling Maverick…. I’m not good parent material….” I’m really not, I’m a fucking Sadist ! I don’t do well with kids! That’s a known fact !

“I-It’s not like you’ll n-never be around…” Casper sniffled, looking to him. “And you’ve been doing so well with Maverick… you warmed up to him, and he just latched onto you like you were the best thing… I’ve seen you when you’re trying to comfort Eren or Lathe, and I’ve heard so much about how well you take care of your patients… I even heard all about how Sheila caught you when you were going through the hall because she couldn’t get one of the babies to stop crying and stop waking up every baby in the nursery, and you got them to sleep in like, two minutes.” Casper smirked as Scotty blushed, pecking his cheek. “It’s my job to hear this stuff… and… I think you’d make a wonderful father… and we have a big extended family to help us if we do have one and then have no idea how to take care of them… we have a wonderful couple next door who understand how to child, and I know Lathe would be ecstatic to have a kid to babysit and fuss over… it takes a village.” Casper looked up to him with pleading puppy eyes, his hands moving to cradle the back of his neck. “……in a few years, as long as you need…” As long as it takes… please ...

Scotty’s eyes looked into Casper’s, reading all of his emotions. He really wants one…. He sighed, closing his eyes and leaning his forehead down against Casper’s. “...One.” You can have one, but if the kid grows up horribly it's not my fault. I warned you. Scotty let his arms go lax, letting his full weight down on Casper, so he couldn’t go anywhere.

Casper sighed heavily in relief, smiling wearily, hugging Scotty tightly. “Thank you… so much…..” I'm okay with one. ...I'll try not to go into hyper-father-drive on them in the future, but no
promises. “...I love you…. so fucking much....” I was so scared... I don't have to pick... thank fuck ...

Scotty smiled softly, shifting to lay his whole weight on him, letting out a soft huff. “I love you too...” He murmured quietly and kissed his ear lazily. Hmmm, well now I guess we’ve reached an agreement.... So what do we do now? Scotty laid there, waiting for Casper to move or say something. I don’t wanna upset this delicate balance.

Casper gently pet Scotty’s hair, sighing after a quiet moment. “Are you gonna make us go get food, or are you going to make love to me first?” I'd kinda like sex first.... Please?

Scotty kissed at Casper’s neck, gently blowing air against his ear. “Well.... Since we're in bed....” His voice dropped an octave as he reached to finish stripping Casper, sliding off the bed to make a show out of slipping out of his own clothes. I think we need to have makeup sex... or whatever the hell this would be called...

Casper let Scotty undress him, watching as he slid off the bed to strip, his eyes tracing him without shame. ....he's so handsome... and he's all mine.... Casper reached for him when he had turned around, grateful when he crawled back over him, their lips meeting for a deep kiss, Casper letting him take over. I missed being so gentle about sex...

Scotty’s hands barely put any pressure on him as his hands wandered over Casper’s warm skin. His skin is always so soft... He was making do with the available skin on Casper’s collarbones, sucking gently and leaving marks. I want you to be really feeling it.

Casper sighed deeply, his hands roaming Scotty’s shoulders as he felt him leaving a trail of hickeys around his neck. “Y-Yours...” Always... Casper whimpered as his hands ran soothingly yet teasingly over his chest and sides, down to his thighs, his length slowly beginning to harden from the stimulation. Although, he didn't feel the normal desperate need to rush. .......we've slowed down so much.... I love it....... I... I needed this...

Scotty made sure that he was gentle as he slowly covered Casper in hickeys from the collarbone and down. His lips slowly latched onto a perky nipple, sucking gently as his hand came to tease the other nipple, listening. I’m so glad that I don’t have to lose you too, I would hate myself forever if I did.

Casper mewed, squirming under his tongue. “Mm.... ngh...” His hands roamed Scotty’s back, running up to his shoulders and the back of his neck, tenderly brushing his thumb over his cheek before it swept back down over him again. You’re so good to me....
Scotty let a shudder run through his body as Casper’s hands ran over his neck. *Oh my god… His hands… They feel so nice*. His head soon moved down to his stomach, still leaving a trail of hiccups to his navel, nestling his nose against the soft skin. *Casper… You better like this… because I’m trying to be as slow as possible before I ravage you….*

Casper squirmed as he made his way to his stomach. “C-Careful… if you tickle me I'll kill you…” He jumped as Scotty blew a raspberry into his stomach, laughing as Scotty held his sides to keep him from moving away. “You bastard…” Casper smiled, his eyes bright as he cupped Scotty’s jaw, his thumb brushing over his cheeks, the corner of his lips. “…I love you…” *So much…*

Scotty seemed to melt at those words, his hands shifting to Casper’s inner thigh, gently rubbing his thumb against Casper’s supple flesh. *I love this… You’re everything I could’ve ever wanted*. His head dipped lower, and taking in the sight of Casper’s length, dripping a bead of precum, he barely contained his urge to just devour it. Scotty managed restraint and slowly licked at the bead, his eyes locked onto Casper’s wanting to see his reaction. *I wonder what he would do if I rimmed him?….. We’ll find out I guess.*

Casper whimpered as he felt his hot tongue on his length, trying not to grip his hair too tightly, his hands running through the brown locks. He blushed darkly as Scotty stared up at him, feigning innocence as he lapped at his length. ….that's so hot… His heels pressed into the mattress as Scotty teased him with his tongue, loving the tender touches of his hands running up and down the insides of his thighs. *He's being so gentle… I love it…*

Scotty watched with hungry eyes, his hands gently spreading Casper’s legs further so he could ease his way between them. He teasingly licked down to casper’s scrotum, worshipping every inch of him. *I hope you're prepared for this…* Scotty let his tongue dip down to his hole, listening to his high pitched gasp. *Oh, you were not expecting this… I hope you like it…*

Casper whimpered as Scotty’s tongue lapped at his skin with care, gasping when it swiped over his hole. “Sc-Scotty…?” Casper let Scotty move him, his legs draped over his shoulders and his back arched, shuddering as he ravished him. *It feels so weird… but I love it…* “F-Feels weird… f-feels good, too…” Casper couldn't help the incessant whimpers that forced from his throat. *I can't believe he's rimming me…* He felt Scotty’s tongue leave him, whining at the loss before he was rolled onto his front, his ass in the air, fully exposed. He didn't have time to be embarrassed before his tongue was on him again, his entire body shuddering, panting. *God, I love this…*

Scotty’s hands gripped onto Casper’s ass cheeks and pulling them apart so he had better access. *God, the sounds he’s making…* He could feel his body heat from the pulse of arousal that went straight to his length. *Fuck, I'm so hard …* He groaned as he moved his hand, lapping at his
quivering entrance with even more vigor as he gently eased a finger into him. “Damn baby, you sound… Absolutely wonderful ….” I so wanna take you, but you won’t like that… I can take my time… His free hand gripped the ass cheeks as he let out a gasp. Holy shit… I want him…

Casper gripped at the sheets, on his elbows with his head hanging, looking behind him and seeing Scotty behind him, hungrily eyeing the taller man’s hard length as it hung between his legs. He sighed deeply as he felt him ease a finger inside, gently pushing back on the slick digit. “Mm… you're so good to me… f- feels wonderful…. ” His breathing was deep, relishing in the careful stretch as he added another slicked finger. He's being so gentle… it feels so good...

Scotty couldn’t help himself as he lifted his head, his teeth coming to gently nip on Casper’s ass cheek, his fingers easily slipping into his hole. He started to scissor his fingers, stretching out his tight pucker. God, we haven’t had sex in forever… I haven’t tied him up in forever either… I’ll need to do that soon. He even had the audacity to give Casper a hickey on his ass, smirking at his work. Well, you haven’t yelled at me to get off yet, so I guess that’s good… right?

Casper was practically putty as Scotty worked, letting him mark wherever he wanted. You can do what you want with me… I've missed this… we haven't really done anything for a while… I missed you…. Casper breathlessly chuckled as Scotty marked his asscheek. “Heh, you… you own that part of me too, hm?” His playful expression shifted back to one of want within moments, still shamelessly drinking in the sight of Scotty’s length. I want it… I want him badly...

“I own your everything…” Scotty's voice was rough and heady as he slipped in a third finger. I don’t want to hurt you… I want you to be loving every bit of this.

Casper shivered at the sound of his voice, trying to relax around his third finger. “I-It's all yours…. all yours…. ” Please keep me… He whimpered as his fingers moved deeply in him, groaning as they brushed his prostate teasingly, making him shudder with every brush. Please love me… “S-Scotty… baby, please… h-have me…” I ache… I want you...

Scotty grinned, his hand coming out of him as he kissed up his back, leaning his whole body on top of Casper’s, biting into his shoulder. I want to do this how you want it. His movements were slow as he gently nudged the tip of his length to his entrance. “Ready?” His voice was soft next to his ear. I hope you are.

Casper quietly whimpered as Scotty murmured into his ear. “Y-Yeah… slow, please…” He let out a deep gasp as Scotty slowly pushed past his entrance, melting as Scotty roughly nipped and sucked at the joint of his neck, feeling his body pressed to his back. It burns a bit… but it's a good burn… “Gentle… please…” I don't want rough… not now...
Scotty nodded, lapping at the skin of his neck in apology, slowly starting to pull out a few inches and thrust back in. He started a very slow pace, gingerly kissing all around his neck and shoulders. “I love you Casper… I really love you….” *I wouldn’t trade you for anyone else in the world.*


Casper sighed, quiet moans falling from his lips as Scotty started to move, swaying with his motions. “I love you too…. …always…” *I’ve always loved you… I don’t ever want to lose you…* He tilted his head, exposing more of his neck, letting Scotty mark his tan skin as much as he wanted, grateful for the lips on his neck. *I’m so lucky… to have you… after so long of wanting you… I have you…*


Scotty let out a low hum, letting Casper know he heard him. *I love you, I love you so much, I want to do right by you, and if that’s making sure that we have a kid… Then we’ll have a kid…* He kept his slow pace, his grip gentle on Casper’s hips, wanting him to relax in his hold. “You’re so handsome… So smart…” He continued his sweet nothings in Casper’s ear, moving his hips and trying to find Casper’s prostate with this slow pace. *I want you to feel amazing…*


Casper blushed at his words, his eyes unfocused as Scotty pleased him, his mind focused on the pleasure and the voice in his ear. “…..you’re too good to me…” *How could I ever deserve this…* I… He moaned freely as Scotty’s pace sped up just a bit, feeling his hands tenderly gripping his hips. *So good…*


Scotty let his pace increase a bit as he listened to Casper, listening to his moans, and his heavy breathing. He was playing him like a professional pianist plays a piano. *I want to push all the buttons that make you sing…* Scotty let one particular thrust be a bit more forceful than the others, hitting Casper’s prostate directly. *God, he feels wonderful, I hope that I’ll be able to outlast him…*


Casper’s moans became louder as Scotty sped up, the lewd sound of skin slapping skin and his own sinful whines filling the room. He panted loudly, shuddering. “S-Scotty… so good…” He gasped as he thrust particularly hard, feeling arousal pulse through him, aching. “…so good…. oh it’s so good…. …” He panted, whimpering as his neck was marked even more. *Too good to me…*


Scotty continued to thrust into him, his pace starting to build up a bit quicker and harder. *I want you to feel really good… And it sounds like you are.* Scotty gently pulled his hand away from casper’s hip, his fingers tangling into purple locks. He gently pulled, tilting his head back and giving him access to the underside of his neck. *God, I love this with you… I want to be rough with you, but I know that this is not the time for that.* His mouth soon made it’s way to Casper’s lips claiming them as he aimed for his prostate. *I wanna make you melt for me.*


Casper didn’t resist when Scotty pulled his head back, whimpering as he mouthed all over the soft flesh of his neck. He moaned into their kiss, bracing one arm under him and bringing his other up
to tangle in Scotty’s hair. He whimpered as Scotty began hitting his prostate without mercy, feeling himself start to come undone. “S-Scotty… I-I’m…” He whimpered. “W-Wanna cum…” Please, make me cum...

Scotty pulled back from kissing him for only a moment. I think I’ll be able to outlast him, which is good because this is about him… Not me. “Cum then… Cum for me.” Scotty made sure that his focus was on Casper’s prostate, abusing it with every thrust. “I wanna hear you scream my name…. I wanna know that I can please you, completely and honestly…”

Casper whimpered as Scotty’s lips brushed his ear, feeling his hot breath as he spoke smoothly. …fuck… he’s too hot… “I-I…” Casper’s voice became even more high pitched as Scotty abused his prostate, feeling himself tip over the edge… “S-Scotty… o- oh …” Casper cried out as he came hard, feeling Scotty pressed against him, his hands everywhere, pounding him through his orgasm. So good…

Scotty had a small smile on his lips, making sure he pounded Casper through his orgasm, calming himself down as he slowly started to pull out from him. Good… I can help clean him up. Scotty’s large hands soon slipped from Casper’s hips as he sat back on his heels, looking over Casper with dark eyes. His dick was still standing to attention, red and puffy, begging for release. God, he’s so beautiful …

Casper whimpered as Scotty milked him of his release, looking helpless when Scotty pulled out, his hips moving backwards, wanting him back. “S-Scotty, but what about y-you?” Casper looked back to him as he sat on his haunches, dipping his back and presenting his ass to him, sounding a bit desperate, trying to entice him back. “P-Please… I want you inside… C-Cum inside me, please …” I want your everything, don’t do this ‘only about you’ shit now … I want you...

… I’d love to, but I’d be too rough… You can’t do rough. “No baby, I can’t… I don’t want to be rough with you.” His voice was tender as he reached a hand out to gently rub his ass. “I’ll be fine, Casper….” Really . His cock had other intentions and continued to stay hard as a rock, dripping copious amounts of precum from his slit as he shifted his legs out from under him. He massaged Casper’s ass cheeks, his thumbs dipping into his wet hole. Everything about you… It’s amazing…

Casper’s expression shifted from exasperation to pleasured anger, his voice breathy and quietly furious. “…..Scotty, I want you to so fucking badly… if you don’t fuck my brains out and cum inside me right now I’ll swear this will be the time I kill you.” His eyes plead with him, helpless, wanting and desperate, pushing back on his hands. Please … I wanna feel you cum inside… cum inside…

Scotty watched his eyes harden and heard his voice give off the slightest hints of anger. Shit…. 
Wrong answer… He was slow as he shifted once again, getting off the bed and planting both feet on the ground. Well, if you want me to go rough, I’ll go rough. Scotty used Casper’s angry confusion to his advantage, grabbing his leg and pulling him to the edge of the bed, his ass hanging off of the side, right at hip height. He entered him without warning, staying fully sheathed and listening for Casper to finally calm down. If you want it like this... I can do this.

Casper felt a flurry of emotions as Scotty just stepped off of the bed, anger and disappointment making his heart ache. “D-Don't leave…” Don't leave me like this…” He gasped as he was suddenly tugged backwards, finding himself with his own feet spread wide on the floor, braced over the edge of the bed. Fuck… He let out a deep groan when Scotty sheathed himself in him again, still sensitive, though he and his cock were still very interested. …fuck… I want him… “…S-Scotty…” Casper let him tug his head back again, looking up to him with pleading emerald eyes, his hips pushing back on his own. “….please, Master… fuck me…” I missed this… I missed you…. I missed your everything … I want your everything again...

………… He called me Master …. Without even being asked if we could be rough… Scotty felt his restraint break, his hand reaching down from his hair and going over Casper’s neck. I can feel the blood pumping through his veins. He had a grip on his neck not so much that he would pass out, but that it was there, and it was tight. His hips moved on their own, setting a brutal pace against him, the lewd sound of their skin slapping against skip increasing tenfold. Fuck he’s so tight… He feels…. It’s….. It’s so hard to describe…. “Hmm, if I’m master… Does that make you my slave?” Scotty’s voice was dark, right next to Casper’s ear as he pounded into him. Fuck we haven’t gone rough in forever …. I miss this… He squeezed a bit harder on Casper's neck for only a moment to see what reaction he would get. I’d love to get rough with you.

Casper trembled as Scotty pounded into him, feeling a bit light-headed. “Y-Yes, M-Master…” He whimpered as Scotty squeezed his neck even harder, fear flickering in his eyes for a moment. I don't wanna pass out… “Please don't make me pass out, Master… I want to feel everything, Master.” His cock was again hard, still very sensitive. It's almost too much… I wanna cum… I want to feel him cum inside me… I really want to feel that....

Scotty let go of his tight grip on Casper’s neck, drifting his hand back to his hair and keeping his head pulled back. Hmm… Okay, so he doesn’t want to pass out…”I’m gonna cum soon slave…. What are you gonna do about it?” He nearly growled into his ear, enjoying that he could be rougher. I really like this, and I’m so glad you’ll let me do this...

Casper pushed his hips back, whimpering as Scotty growled in his ear, his entire body heating up as Scotty abused his prostate. “N-Nothing, Master… I’ll let you… I’ll help you, Master...” Casper turned his head, Scotty meeting him for a hungry kiss, whimpering when he felt a hand drift to his length only to grip the base firmly. I wanna cum… “M-Master…”
Scotty chuckled almost wickedly as he moved to suck and nibble on the tip of Casper’s ear. 

_Damn… This is so hot…_ “Hmm…. what is it, slave?” _I love having complete control over you._ He nipped playfully at his ear, pounding into Casper as he held his base. _I want you to wait to cum until I do._ He could feel his coil already beginning to tighten. _Fuck, you’re so tight. We haven’t done this enough…_

Casper whimpered, stuttering. “M-Master… I want to cum, Master… please …” _I need you…_ He trembled, his nether aching.

Scotty smirked, taking his grip and teasingly starting to rub his hand at his base in time with his thrusts. “Hm… But you can’t cum until I tell you to, understood?” _It won’t be much longer, trust me._ He could feel himself nearing his own edge as he teased Casper. _I’m gonna cum soon…_

Casper whined, shaking harder as Scotty pumped him, trying to hold back his own release. “Y-Yes, Master…” _He couldn’t help whining even louder as he struggled to keep from letting go, panting as Scotty nibbled at his neck._ “……I c-can’t, M-Master…” _If you don’t keep me from cumming I will with everything you're doing to me…_

Scotty nibbled up his neck and to his ear, biting down and tugging a bit harshly. He was silent for awhile longer, a soft grunt escaping him as he let go of Casper’s ear, his voice softer, and his thrusts becoming erratic. _Fuck… “Cum.”_ That was all he said before he stilled inside of Casper with one final thrust right on his prostate, letting go of his cock and letting him get his release. _Fuck…. It feels so good …_

Casper gasped, crying out loudly as he came hard, his release decorating the sheets and pushing back onto Scotty’s cock, feeling him fill him with his seed. _Feels so good…_ Casper relished in the feeling of being full, groaning as Scotty pulled out, letting the taller man pull him onto the bed and roll him on top of him, catching his breath. “……I love you…..” _So much…_ Casper looked up to him with innocent eyes. “Will you help me shower?” _I can clean myself out, but it's much more fun if someone does it for me…._

_Those eyes are innocent…. But those words…. Sinful as all hell._ Scotty nodded sitting up as he looked down to his flaccid member, covered in both of their choice fluids. _Great… That’ll need cleaning too, and I can only imagine that we’ll never make it to dinner tonight._ He followed Casper as he scampered to the bathroom, reaching his hand out and pinching one of his asscheeks. _Fuck, it’s so bubbly …_

Casper yelped in surprise, blushing as he looked back to Scotty, eyeing him and seeing his dirtied nether, flashing those same innocent eyes and reaching for his hips, pulling him close. _“I can clean here for you…”_ Casper looked over his chest, his hands slipping down his skin dangerously close.
to his nether. *I'd love to...*

“We’re never gonna make it out of the house, are we?” *Is that a respectable question to answer you?* Scotty leaned in to turn the hot water on, already feeling himself start to harden under Casper’s gaze.

“Mm, that depends…”

“On?”

“On whether you’ll fuck me against the wall or not…” Casper looked up to him with his prized doe eyes, his arms wrapping solidly around his middle. “Please?”

“You know your eyes and your words don’t match….”

“But they make you do what I want…” Casper gave him a small smile.

“I don’t think it’s very respectful for a slave to tell his master what to do…” He grabbed a fistful of hair, pulling his head back and exposing the front of his neck. *I wonder if you’ll let me be rough…*

“Then Master… may I please suggest you fuck me against the wall?” Casper looked to him, not fighting the hand that forced his head back. “Or we can play with wax if you’d rather do that, Master…” *The candles are my favourite...*

Scotty rose an eyebrow, a smirk on his face, his hand moving from his hair to his chin. His eyes bored holes into Casper’s whole body, critiquing him. “I think that might work…. You know where the candles and rope are?”

Casper shivered under his gaze, smiling faintly, sounding breathless. “O-Of course, Master…”

*Fetch.*” Scotty let go of Casper, slapping his ass as he left the room. *Oh…. I am gonna have so much fun tonight...*
Chapter 82: Levi's Personal Video

Finally … Levi walked across the base, his laptop bag slung across his shoulder. I finally have time enough to go back to my room and use this thing… it’s not like I only have ten minutes and have to make do with the commons… time is such a rare thing now… Eren sent me this video file thing like a week ago and I haven’t had the privacy to open it yet… he said I needed to be alone with headphones… so… Levi finally made it to his quarters, closing the door and sitting on the edge of the bed with his laptop in his lap, popping in earbuds. So now I’m alone with headphones. He went through his messages, clicking on the file and finally opening it.

**The camera was focused on the floor in front of the bed, in Eren’s room. It was angled downward, and some objects were around on the floor. It only took a few moments before Eren stepped out from behind the camera, completely naked and wearing a cock ring. His whole face was flushed as he sat down with his legs apart, giving Levi a full display of his nether.**

Levi flushed as Eren strode onscreen, drinking in the sight of his nether. Is this… fuck … He eyed the objects scattered around Eren for a moment, trying to process everything. Are those… sex toys? ……fuck …… I miss having him…. I’d kill to just hug him…………fuck, and he sent me this … god, I love him… Levi stared at his nether, watching his every movement.

**“Uh… H-Hi… Um… I’m not really sure what I’m doing… But I wanted to tell you that I, um… That I really miss you… And that it’s getting harder to fall asleep without you or someone else in bed with me…. Um… I kn-know that you can’t come home and see me… B-but I thought that-that maybe this video would help?” Eren’s words were marred by moans and gasps as he had reached a hand up to tease his nipple, squeezing it and tugging on it, his other hand going to his hole and starting to stretch himself out.**

...the things I would give to come home to you right now… Levi’s eyes darkened as he watched Eren beginning to stretch himself, a sight to behold. …he still sounds as beautiful as he always does… he’s… fuck, I miss him… Levi felt himself growing a bit uncomfortable in his pants as he watched Eren stretch himself further, shifting a bit. He's too hot… ....fuck.....

**Eren was a moaning mess, his eyes full of lust locked onto the screen, which made it look like he was looking right at Levi. His hand wanted his chest, pinching at the skin that Levi would normally cover in bites and hickeys to try and stimulate the same effect. “L-Levi… I… I really want you…” His words were high pitched as his fingers got even further into his quivering hole, his body beginning to squirm as he continued. “F-Fuck… M-my fingers aren’t enough…” He reached for one of the objects next to him and the bottle of lube, lubing the large rubber dick, getting it to stick to the floor with the suction cup before kneeling down and trying to get it into him. He continually let out moans and whimpers as the dildo finally entered him to a point he could sit back and show it off to the camera.**
Levi felt a pulse of arousal flow through him when Eren moaned his name, finally shifting back on the bed, setting the laptop next to him. His eyes were still glued to the screen, glancing to the locked door for a moment before he unzipped his pants, letting his hardening length free. He let his hand wrap around the shaft, pumping in time with Eren’s movements as he bounced on the large dildo. …fuck, that's hot... I miss your hot, wet heat... I miss leaving dozens of bruises all over your neck and your chest… I miss holding you... I miss you… I want you too...

** Eren looked like he was quickly getting near his release, and his cock ring kept him from going over the edge. He cried out in utter bliss as he should’ve gone over the edge, but no evidence was found of him doing so. “F- fuck … I didn’t think I would tip over that quickly… Thank god I got the cock ring.” His voice was a soft murmur as he slowly lifted off the dildo, a whine leaving his body as he laid down with his face facing away from the camera but his ass in full view. Eren brought his knees under him and reached a hand around to start fingering himself once again. “Levi … Ngh… I want your dick…”**

Fuck … he's so hot… Levi stroked himself until he felt he was nearing the edge, though thinking better of it and slowing his strokes, biting back sounds, his nether aching as he brought himself back down. I wanna keep going with this video… fuck… He slowly stroked himself as Eren fingered his ass, his eyes darkening at his words. I'd love to fuck your brains out…. but I can't… fuck...

** Eren soon shifted over to the dildo again, slowly sinking down onto the glistening rubber. “Ah… Shit... Levi, n-nothing is as good as you…. F-fuck!” He cried out as he fully sheathed himself on the overly long dildo. His whole body was shaking in pleasure as he slowly lifted his hips, giving Levi the back view of himself sinking on the dildo. His hair was starting to become damp with sweat and his moans getting louder and louder. “L-Levi... Haaaa…”**

Levi felt himself grow hot, stroking in time with Eren’s motions, his hand firm. …and nothing is as good as your tight, wet heat… your breathy moans in my ear, nails scratching back when you grip onto me too tight when I'm fucking you hard… ……….fuck, I miss that…. I miss all of it… Levi struggled to not make a sound as he stroked himself, aware of how paper-thin the walls were.

** “Levi… Levi…. Levi!” Eren moaned out his name like a mantra and he continued at a brutal pace for himself, his body finally pausing and shuddering as he let out a loud wail. “Fuck!” He groaned as he slowly moved to reach for another object, long and slim in style as he slowly shifted to face the front again, his cock even harder and redder from being denied the ability to release anything twice. “Fuck Levi… I’m gonna take this thing off… I wanna cum …” He whimpered as he slowly removed it, looking to the camera with wanting eyes.**

Levi had to squeeze the base of his length to keep from cumming at Eren’s words, watching
hungrily as Eren shuddered, his body screaming for orgasm. *He's so fucking hot... holy shit*... Levi watched as Eren slowly slipped the cock ring off, watching him slowly come down from his high, not wanting to cum right away. He watched with wide eyes as Eren handled the slim object with care, recognising what it was as he brought it to the tip of his cock. .....*that's... fuck...*

**Eren slowly slipped the sound down his length, groaning as the cool metal slowly became warm and going down easier until he was holding it in place, turning the dial at the top and let out a sharp gasp as it made a soft noise. His eyes were blown wide and his mouth hanging open, not caring if he drooled. “Oh my god!” His voice was at least three octaves higher than it normally was. Eren’s hands shook as he slowly pumped himself, gritting his teeth to keep from cumming even from such little stimulation. “Ha-Ah! Le-Le- Levi !” His words were frantic as he let the dial turn another click, his toes curling from the overwhelming sensation. “Oh my god…” **

Levi was pumping his length hard, watching with hungry eyes as Eren seemed to drown in pleasure, turning up the volume a bit, Eren’s moans clear in his ears. *So fucking hot... My god, now I want one of those... but I'd love to have you even more...* Levi clamped his hand around the base of his throbbing length, his other hand moving to tease his slit mercilessly, refusing himself release. *Feels good... and he sounds wonderful...*

**Eren’s eyes looked right into the camera, as he turned up the vibrations to max, his eyes widening as a result. “Oh... Oh... Oh! Oh my god! Ha... F-Fuck!” His eyes closed as he let the vibrations take over his shaking hands having to touch the floor. “L-Levi...” He whole body jerked as even more precum started to leak from his slit, starting to bring the sound with it. Eren watched the sight with a flushed face. “F-fuck.... Levi... Can I cum?” His voice was a desperate whine his eyes were glued to the slowly receding sound. Eren was even louder now, and his voice ranging a few octaves as he struggled to speak.**

*Yes, please, I wanna see you cum...* Levi mercilessly abused his slit, fighting off release and watching Eren on the screen, his moans going straight to his cock. *This is so hot... fuck ....*

**Eren moved to take out the sound, slowly and whimpering the whole time as he used his other hand to pump his length. “F-fuck.... L- Levi !” He cried out Levi’s name as he finally tipped over the edge, covering his chest in his white cum. “F- fuck ....... That felt so good, baby....” Eren’s words were soft, and his eyes blown from the bliss of having climaxed finally, his release decorating his chest. He took his fingers, starting to scoop it from his chest and then suck his fingers off. “I miss you, Levi...” **

Levi made a choked sound as he too let himself release, cumming into his hand, watching with dark eyes as Eren cleaned himself. *I miss you too... so much... .....I wonder..... if I could come back for a few days... they probably would only let me do it one time... but I would get to say hi to you all again... and then remind you how much I love you....*
Chapter 83: Tucker's Worst Fear

Eren’s been gone for a week... And he called this morning.... After he woke up.... Said the concert was a success, which is good and that he’d hopefully be home in another week after finishing up their tour of Germany. He’s been gone, and I’ve been helping with the laundry, and sorting everything so that Dad can help James.... He’s been legitimately throwing up every hour because of the chemo. Jake went over to one of his friends’ house to go play at the park or something... Not really sure what he’s doing... Over the past couple days we’ve accumulated 6 horses, 24 sheep, and two pigs from the guy’s barn from down the deserted road that I thought led absolutely nowhere, but I guess there’s a town on the other side of it.... The horses are really well behaved and I’ve been working with them on and off with Hannah’s help since Eren’s not here to ride them, they’re definitely not jumpers... and they seem to know lots of commands... Hannah thinks they might be dress-.... Dresstag? Dressegg? What was the word again? I don’t remember, but she showed me how to get them to a canter in the area the other day, which was exciting, and completely terrifying! I almost fell off, I didn’t expect the horse to move that quickly, but it’s okay now I guess that I’m used to it... I know I’m not looking forward to finding out what a gallop looks like on these horses. She’s also taught me how to tie up their hair and how to wash their coats properly so that they’re ready for showing.... I think that’s what she called it. But the guy who owned them came to take a look at them while I was building a shed for the sheep, and he seems like a nice guy and all... He looked worse for wear, but he seemed like he was grateful that the horses were all safe and accounted for now. He talked to Dad about their worth but I wasn’t really paying attention. The man did say that he would take the pigs back home, since their small shed was relatively put back together and he would come back as soon as a new barn was built and bring the horses back. I finished up the shelter for the sheep and they seemed to like it a lot more than being in their small corral. So after that I helped Dad bring the horses into the extra stalls we had. So he’s been worrying about James all day and said that I could go to my room and play with my legos... But I’ve got a different plan. Tucker watched as Lathe went back into the kitchen to get a small snack for James to try and keep down. He’ll be too busy to notice. He slipped upstairs moving into Eren’s room, quietly closing the door behind him, a blush on his face as he crossed the room, going to Eren’s nightstand and rifling through it for a second and grabbing the dildo. Fuck... this thing looks so much bigger than I thought it was...

Henry packed up his controller and thundered down the stairs, slinging a bag over his shoulder and largely ignoring Brett’s goodbye. Yeah, yeah, ‘Where you goin’, gay boy, off to see your lover?’ and all that good shit. I just wanna play video games. ...and may~be enjoy the eye candy when he’s not looking. “I'll text if I'm not gonna be home for dinner!” Henry called into the house before he kicked the door shut, going to get his bike from the side of the house. He was soon pedaling down the street, taking two turns before heading down the long stretch of asphalt, absentely keeping an eye out for stray sheep. He was panting a bit when he dumped his bike on the lawn, heading up to the front door and just trying to open it. It opened for him, Henry stepping in and shutting it behind him. “Hey Mr. Quo. Tucker around?” Henry watched Lathe jump as he spoke, Looking like he saw a ghost.

“Christ, Henry, you scared me. There’s this thing people do called knocking, you know.”
“But that's laaame. And is he inside or with the sheep again?”

“Upstairs, chilling with legos. Go say hi, I guess. And knock!” Lathe called after him as Henry scampered off, shaking his head. *He's gonna scare the fuck out of Tucker.*

*Heh, knocking. Very funny.* Henry went upstairs, meandering down the hall when he thought he heard his name. He stopped and listened, hearing Tucker call out again. *...what? Does he know I'm here already?* Henry came down to his room,

slowing as he heard his tone. *He doesn't sound… is he…?* Henry looked to the doorknob, praying that Tucker didn't notice as he very slowly turned the knob, peering into the room, his eyes wide as he stared through the small crack. He watched as Tucker lay on his back on the bed, his legs turned out wide as he fucked himself on a large dildo, his moans of Henry’s name filling the room as he moved, his hand unsure. Henry silently watched before closing the door again just as quietly, staring at the door with conflicted eyes, his own eyes shaded a bit. *Is he really… is he really that into me? I mean… if he's… and he's saying… then… fuck…* Henry convinced himself to walk from the room, hiding in a corner of the upstairs nook, the clear moans playing in the back of his mind. He looked up when Lucifer gracefully stalked upstairs, studying him for a moment before making himself at home in his lap.

*I could use a good distraction… I don't think Henry Jr. can keep from being so excited otherwise…*

Tucker was in his room for at least another half an hour, finally getting his relief, and starting to clean himself up. *God… That felt… That felt better than I thought it would, I thought it would hurt… I thought it would really hurt…* Tucker slowly changed into new clothes, making sure that he had long sleeves and long pants still. *I should go outside… Maybe ride Maximus again…* He slipped out of his room, jumping out of his skin when he saw Henry petting Lucifer. “*Jeez! Do you ever thinking about calling ahead of time dumbass?*”

Henry jumped as Tucker shouted at him, smiling sheepishly. “I'm sorry, I only got here a minute ago and Lucifer wouldn't leave me alone… he demanded pets, so I gave him pets…” *Play innocent. You heard nothing. Nothing at all.* “I thought it would be okay… your dad didn't kick me out, and I just thought it'd be cool if we just chilled or something…” Henry shrank a little under Tucker's glare. “M’sorry… I'm not used to how this stuff goes… oh, uhm… a-are your arms healing okay?” *I'm still worried…*

“Yeah, I’m fine, don’t fucking worry about it and go put your fucking sneakers on…” He grumbled, stalking off down the stairs to get his own shoes on. *Why the hell do you keep asking me? I don’t understand, and I want you to fuck off about that! You’ll never understand anyway…*

Henry nodded, shooing Lucifer from his lap and following Tucker back down the stairs, stepping into his shoes and dumping his bag by the door. He followed him into the backyard, looking over the shelter for the sheep. “You did a good job on the sheep thing, it looks nice.” *You're really good*
“Thanks…” Tucker’s tone was almost deadly as he led him to the barn, getting out one of the nicer looking saddles and putting it out on a stand to hold it while he went to one of the stalls. “So… why the fuck are you even here?” For all I know you could’ve heard me moaning your name like a fucking whore…

Henry swallowed nervously, shrugging one shoulder. “I just thought you'd be in the mood to hang out, do something, play games or something, I dunno… my house gets boring as hell a lot and it’s nice to come over and see you.” Also Brett can be hell if you don't blend into the furniture properly, so that's a thing. “U-Uhm…” …fuck, do I just like… tell him? What the fuck do I say? I just… like, ‘Hey I heard you moaning my name earlier and like I’ve kinda thought about you too like that sometimes so wanna make out?’ Fuck, no, that's horrible, don't say a word of that… uhm… fuck, he might rip my throat out if I do it now though… he's royally pissed… fuck, uhm… “Hey, Tucker? C-Can I uh, tell you something?” Henry took a step towards him, his hand brushing his arm. I don't know what the fuck I'm doing but it's gonna happen, dammit.

“What? You wanna try riding? I wouldn’t do it with Maximus though, but I can tack up Charlie for you if you want…” Tucker’s voice seemed to calm down a lot more now that he was in front of Maximus’ stall. He turned to look at Henry, waiting for an answer. You’ve never really shown an interest in riding…

“U-Uh, w-well, sure, I guess, but that wasn't what I wanted to tell you. ...It's kinda important.” Henry’s hand very tentatively drifted, brushing the small of Tucker’s back, looking to him nervously for his response. Fuck, I feel like I'm too close… am I too close? I wanna be closer, but it doesn't feel right for telling you this… fuck, can I just skip this part and go straight to the part where we get handsy? Please? I don’t know if I can even do this… fuck. Henry looked a bit terrified himself. I can't do this… but it's too late to bail...

Tucker shifted uncomfortably. “Yeah?” His eyes were glued on Henry’s face, his eyes full of uncertainty. What do you want to tell me? Why are you holding my back?

Henry seemed to shrink a bit as Tucker looked at him oddly, his touch barely even there, looking away. “U-Uhm… I don't know how to say it, s-so… I… I kinda…. r-really, uh… r-really like you…” Henry swallowed hard, looking back up to him. Please don't smack me.

Tucker’s brow seemed to furrow as he backed away. “W-What do you mean? I mean… I like you as a f-friend…” I…. I don't know what you're saying, you can’t possibly like me… You like girls!
Henry blushed, swallowing. “I-I um… I actually… I mean… like-like you… a lot…” Is he just trying to cover it up? I think so… Henry’s hand came back to his chest, intimidated. I fucking hear him moan my name and it's still so hard to come out to him...

Tucker started to back away a half a step, seeming to start shaking. “N-No… You can’t… You like girls…. You even told me you did…” You can’t like me! You can’t! It'll happen again! I don’t want it to happen again. His eyes looked wide with slight fear, frozen in place.

Henry was stunned at his reaction, reaching a hand out a bit, trying to calm him. “Tucker, I know I said that, but I’m bi… I like guys and girls… and I just… I really like you…” His eyes widened as Tucker shook, sounding wary. “Tucker, please don’t freak out… ...are you okay?” ... Why are you panicking so much?

“But… But you c-can’t…” His eyes were wide as Henry got closer, frozen, so unsure of what to do. It’s gonna happen again... And Dad’s in the house... I can’t.... I can’t yell for him...

“Tucker, I... fuck, I just really like you... please please don't freak out, I just had to tell you…” Henry sighed, shrinking a bit. “Y-You can just reject me if you don’t want anything to do with me... fuck, I come over to your house unannounced, make you mad, confess and then expect you to be okay with it… I’m sorry… I can just... I can just leave…” Henry took a small step back from him, looking to the floor. ................maybe he didn't mean me... my name isn't exactly too unique..... I just..... I want it to have been me....... You know what, if I came this far.... Fuck it, I want my goddamn kiss. “I'm sorry, Tucker.” Henry stepped towards him, his hands slipping around his middle, gently pressing him against the stall door with his body and pressing their lips together, sweet and gentle. I kinda really have a thing for you... ...fuck, his lips are as soft as I always thought they'd be... he smells so nice... He felt Tucker's lips part with a gasp, making the split second decision and going for it, his tongue moving in, brushing against Tucker’s own for a moment, tasting him. He tastes nice... .................fuck, I'll never get to do this again....... Henry took in one last deep breath through his nose, relishing in his scent before breaking their kiss, gently pecking the corner of his lips. I'm sorry.... I really wanted to...

Tucker’s face was full of fear, tears trailing down his face as he shook, taking the opportunity to slip out of his arms when he could. I... I can’t... He backed away from Henry, never turning his back to him until he was out of the barn.“N-No... Not again !” Tucker screamed and ran away to the house, screaming and crying in terror. No! I can’t! I can’t do it again !

...what the fuck? “Tucker!? Henry went after him, watching with confusion and worry as Tucker bolted for the house. He quickly followed, stopping in the back door, seeing Lathe hugging Tucker tightly, trying to calm the hysterical boy down.
“Tucker?!” Lathe had caught the teen when he ran full force into the kitchen, the boy latching onto his sweater, crying. “What happened?” What the hell?!

Tucker shook his head, crying harder. “I don’t want to do it again! I don’t want it to happen again!” His cries were full of terror, flinching as he heard the backdoor open again. “D-Don’t let him in!”

Lathe looked up as Henry came in, looking hurt and worried and very confused, his cheeks painted dark red. .......... oh. Well fuck. “It’s okay, Tucker.” Lathe held up a hand, stopping Henry. I need to talk to you. “Tucker, I’m right here, don’t worry. All Henry is gonna do is go around the stairs to the living room the long way.” Lathe motioned for Henry to obey, watching him disappear for a moment before reappearing in the living room. “And he is gonna stay there-” Lathe watched him obediently sit, nodding in approval. “And now we are going to go this way to the back door. There’s plenty of room and stuff there, you’ll know when someone comes outside. I want to talk to Henry for a little bit, okay? You can go calm down and take care of the sheep or just sit under a tree, but just try not to worry about anything, okay? I'll talk to him.” Lathe was bribing them to the back door as he spoke. He needs to know about this if you two ever want to be a thing...

Tucker nodded, slowly making his way to the back door and going outside. He got far away from the house, going to the barn and going up to the loft to hide among the hay bales. I don’t want it to happen again... Henry likes me... I... I... He could've raped me... I don’t want to see him ever again...

Henry watched him leave, his eyes instantly going to Lathe. “He hates me…. Doesn’t he?” Don’t sugar coat it... Please. I fucked up, but how? I... I didn’t think he would react like that ...

“Honestly, probably not.” Lathe sat down next to him, shrugging one shoulder. “I’m guessing whatever you did, it involved something romantic and you cornering him. Correct?”

“Y-Yeah... B-But... W-why did he react like that ?” Henry’s eyes were wide. What did I do. “I... I don’t want him to hate me... I just, I... I really like him, and I don’t wanna walk away from him... I really like him.”

Lathe gave him a sympathetic look, gently resting a hand on his shoulder. “It’s fine, I’m sure he doesn’t hate you. ...but there's some stuff you need to know about Tucker first. Have you heard anything about a student who used to go to your high school, Devon Bracknell?”

“N-No... I never really heard anything about him from Tucker... Why? What did he do?” I don’t think I like the sound of this...
“Well, Devon was a senior earlier this year, before you transferred in. He was in Tucker’s engineering class… and he was Tucker’s first crush. They got paired together for a project, Tucker ended up staying late at Devon's house to finish it one night, and he decided to confess that night…. it, uhm…. well, the short of it is that Devon is kinda sorta in prison for life for raping a minor………” ....yeah. That's a thing. “He's still pretty traumatized from it… I don't think he'll be too okay with doing romantic or intimate crap with another person for a while.. he doesn't exactly trust those two things yet… but… I do remember that he told me a while ago that he was kinda scared…. because he has a crush on you.” ...I'm just gonna let all that digest.

.... What? “W-Why didn’t… Why didn’t he tell me?” He tells me everything… No one else talks to me… Tucker’s all I've got… “H-He’s got a crush on me?” So he was moaning my name!

“He’s so ashamed of it… He thinks so little of himself anyway, and it just made it worse… and he does. He really does like you. So what I would suggest…” Lathe shifted a bit, turning to him. “Is that you go outside where he’s calmed down, have him in the big field of somewhere nice and open, he really careful about it, and convince him to make out or something, I don't know.” That’s all the advice I've got.

Henry seemed to nod, standing a bit. “What do I do if he screams at me to go away?” I really don’t want him to hate me… He’s all I got…

“Just be really submissive and non threatening and just try to coax him into the field. If that doesn't work, get me and I'll wrangle him out there for you.” Lathe smiled reassuringly to him. “Good luck.” …you might need it.

Henry nodded moving to the backdoor and going towards the field, not seeing him anywhere.”T-Tucker?” Where is he?

Tucker peered out to look through the door. “Go away!” He shouted, before hiding again. He came back! Dad let him go! Fuck!

Henry winced, stopping quite a few yards from the barn. “Tucker… your Dad told me everything. I don’t wanna hurt you. I just… I wanna talk. Can you come out so we can just talk?” Please?

“N-No! Go away! I don’t wanna talk to you!” Get away from me… “Don’t come back here!” His cry was shrill as he stepped closer. I can’t… not you too.
Henry stopped, signing and sitting down in the grass, picking at the green stems. “I’m not gonna hurt you, Tucker. Really. I just wanna talk to you. ...I was hoping you’d know that I don’t want to hurt you… I don’t. That’s not how all relationships are, you know. I just… I really do like you… legit… and I just… can we please just talk? Like friends?” I don’t want to ruin our friendship... Henry forlornly picked at the grass, not even glancing up as Tucker pokes his head around the barn door. I don’t wanna scare you off even more ...

“The fuck do you want then? I... I don’t want anything to do with you… So just go away....” I don’t want it to ever happen again. I don’t wanna like anyone... At all ... He kept only a part of his face in view. I don’t wanna go through that ...

“...your Dad told me too… that… that you have a crush on me...” Henry kept his head down, absently picking the grass apart. “I know what happened the first time you had a crush was more than hellish but... but I'm not like that... I wouldn't try to hurt you or take advantage of you... I just... I was just dying for a single damn kiss... and I'm sorry that I just did that while you were so scared but I didn't think I would ever get the opportunity to ever again and I just... kissed you... I'm sorry... I'm really sorry, I just...” Henry shrugged, studying a blade of grass. “......I give a lot of shits about you...”

Tucker slowly stepped out. “W-Why? I’m nothing special... And I’m weak ...” I hate this... Why someone would want me would be ridiculous ...“A-And... Y-You can’t touch m-me.... Unless... I-I say...”

Henry nodded, looking up to him, his head still bowed. “I won't touch you unless you say it's okay, I promise. And... I just... I just do...” Henry searched for words, looking down again as he blushed. “You're really good at building stuff and you don't think my family and life are shit or at least you don't say it and you don't think I'm automatically an idiot for spending a ton of time playing video games and you're really good at them and we can just talk on and on about stuff and it's so easy and you always help me with my homework even when I seem to have the intelligence of a fucking toddler and you're just... I think you're just too handsome and fuck, I just... I really wanna kiss you again... but I won't, unless you say it's okay...” I really wanna kiss you again....

Tucker slowly and carefully stepped out of the barn, walking over to him and sitting down, pulling his knees to his chest. “S-So... Y-You really like me?” His eyes were full of wonder and curiosity, but overpowered by innocence. I... I don’t want to be alone with you though... He glanced towards the back of the house where Lathe was standing and watching them, and he seemed to visibly relax.

“I-I kinda sorta really do... I just... you're so... I just... you're great ... and... I'm just...” Henry shrugged, looking up to him hopefully. “I'm sorry if you don't want me to, but... can I please sit
next to you?” You're still far away… I wanna be closer...

Tucker was silent for a long moment, looking at him with confusion. What is this? Why is my heart beating like a maniac in my chest? He shook his head, looking down and away, fear still quite obvious in his eyes. “N-Not yet…” I still don’t trust you… You pinned me to the wall...

Henry nodded. “Okay… I’m sorry…” Henry weakly smiled to him, still picking at the lawn. “…I... I really want us to be a thing… so... if we take really tiny steps where we need to… can we please be a thing?” Please?

“W-Wouldn’t you rather go out… W-with a girl? D-didn’t you ask Rebecca?” I thought you tried to ask her out last week?.... Isn’t that why you blew me off? I had to make the sheep pen myself! Tucker’s eyes drifted to his arms. I’m still cutting… Dad doesn’t know… But, I mean, I’m not worth your attention. “I’m not worth it… You’ll find out that you’ll hate putting up with me in a week or two and discard me just like everyone else…” His words were a mixture of pain and sorrow, obviously still hurting on the inside. I can’t … I can't take that opportunity from you...

“I did… it was a terrible idea… honestly I could find a pile of dirt with more personality, she's just... no... and then she got mad when I wouldn't kiss her goodbye and she just made it hella awkward and ugh… but we get along so well… we know how to talk to each other and can easily talk about anything and we don't have to change those standards... Is be fine if we didn't really change much… if we just did homework together and played video games, we’d maybe go get something to eat sometimes and I'd get to kiss your cheek whenever, I just… I'd like all of that… I want to date you … because it's easiest to date someone who's already your friend.” Kevin gave me this whole speech thing... it made sense, all of it...

Tucker looked wearily at him, curling up into a tighter ball. I wanna cut... “Y-You’re not… A-Allowed to be in the s-same room as m-me alone....” I can’t, I don’t want to be alone with you ever again... you’ll do something like that to me... I...

Henry seemed to wilt a bit at that, nodding. “O-Okay… if today just isn’t good… I know I’ve messed a lot up… I can go… I’ll leave you alone…” Henry sounded hurt, like it was the last thing he wanted to say. I don't wanna go… I wanna hold you until you're not scared... I wanna hug you and play videogames and have everything be okay... I just... I want at least a hug... but I can't have that... can I.

Tucker looked down at his trembling hands. Is my pathetic body... all I’ll be good for? “C-Close your eyes…. A-and keep them c-closed...” Tucker moved to sit closer to him, making sure his eyes were closed.
Henry kept them closed, his mind in overdrive as Tucker eased himself into his lap, his hands hovering. “C-Can I hold you? Gently?” Please?

Tucker was silent as he shook, his eyes full of fear as he looked to his hands near his waist. “Y-Yeah…” His voice was tiny, trying to figure out if he would actually be okay with Henry holding him. **He’s keeping his eyes closed…. T-That’s good right?**

Henry very tentatively rested his hands on his waist, his thumbs slowly stroking his sides. **It's okay. I'm not gonna hurt you. “Tucker…. can I kiss your cheek?” Baby steps… please?**

**H-He… Does he want to do it? Is that why he’s asking…** Tucker’s whole body shook with a new found terror and tears starting to bubble in his eyes. “Y-yeah…” He struggled to force back a sob,  **hoping that Henry would at least be gentler than Devon was. It's all I’m good for…**

Henry veeyes slowly leaned in, his lips brushing his cheek. He pressed butterfly kisses all over his cheek, slowly drifting up to peck away his tears when he heard him quietly sob. “Please don't cry… it's okay…” Henry pulled away, his eyes still firmly shut, one hand slowly moving to rub his back soothingly. **Please don't cry… you don't have to…**

Tucker stiffened when Henry’s hand rubbed his back, which encased him in his arms and his sobs got even worse. **“B-Be gentle…. P-please…”** Tucker was begging as he turned his head away from Henry. **You… You want to make me yours… You want to do the same thing Devon did. “D-don’t be rough with m-me please…”**

“What? Tucker, I'm not about to do that to you…” Henry’s hands retreated back to his sides, his voice gentle and soothing. **“I'm not gonna hurt you. I'll only do what you tell me is okay.”** Henry listed his hands from his sides, holding them up in a gesture of surrender. **“There. You've always been the one in control. You can choose what does and doesn't happen. I don't want too much from you, and definitely not so much so soon…”** **Way too soon… I'm okay with just being like this for now…**

Tucker shook his head, leaning his head down into Henry’s chest submissively. **“B-But… I-I’m supposed to… To take it… D-Devon took it…. Y-You want it too…. Y-You pinned me to the wall…”** Tucker's whole body shook as he sobbed, his hand coming up to scratch at the cuts on his wrist. **I’m supposed to be obedient…. Dad doesn’t like it when I fight back… And I-if he m-made you come back outside…. H-He wants me to take it too?**
“W-What? Oh, no, Tucker, I didn't mean that I wanted to take that from you by doing that, I just kinda... did it.” Henry ducked his head down, murmuring into his ear. “I didn't mean anything by it... if anything it only meant ‘I wanna kiss you so more.’ Nothing about hurting you or doing what you don't want... and just because Devon took that from you... doesn't mean that it is supposed to be taken from you. You don't deserve that kind of treatment. I won't ever do something you don't want me to when it comes to touching you or anything... okay?” Henry rested his hands in the grass, not thinking Tucker would want them back at his waist. I'm sorry... And I really don't want to hurt you...

Tucker was skeptical, his sobbing seeming to lessen. “D-Dad said I would be safe... w-when they put him away... But... It just got worse.” His words were mumbled as he kept his head down still, leaning into his warm body. He said no one would be able to hurt me... And they did... I can’t really trust anyone anymore...

Henry slowly brought his hands to his back, trying to calm him. “What happened? What got worse?” I'm almost afraid to know...

“D-Devon’s friends....” His voice was barely above a whisper. “They’re the reason no one talks to me... They’re the reason I cut.... Because they took away everything.... M-my dignity.... My m-masculinity....they kept taking it... Over and over and over again....” They never stopped, right up until they graduated... They called me so many names, they took so many videos... Everyone knows... I can’t trust that you haven’t see the video... For all I know you have... ‘H-have you s-

“W-What? Tucker, I'm so sorry.... seen... what?” Henry slowly rubbed his back, holding him close with a soft hold. ...this isn't good, is it...

“T-The videos... G-Greg probably has them....” You should ask him, they were spread around school before you specifically came in... But Greg made friends, and he probably has them. “Y-You can make another if you want.” His voice sounded so broken and hurt, his eyes full of pain and sorrow.

Henry cradled Tucker close, gently pecking his head. “Nonono, Tucker, I'd never try to hurt you like that... I wouldn't. That's horrible ...” ...does your Dad know about this? “I'm sorry Tucker... I'm so sorry that you had to go through all of that...” ....I can't even comprehend it...

Tucker was slow to shake his head. I haven't told anyone... It was the reason I was cutting... “I-It’s okay.... I-It’s what I’m good for...” Probably the only thing I’m good for... Being tied up and then fucked from behind. Tucker let out a soft whimper as he heard footsteps get closer to them. What’s going on.... Who’s that?
“Things don't look too good over here…” Lathe knelt down next to them, reaching out and gently carding a hand through Tucker’s hair. “....and what was that other thing you were talking about…? I don't remember hearing anything about it…” I legit thought I was losing my mind when I read that off your lips....

Tucker froze in Henry’s grasp. *He… How does he know about it? He wouldn’t’ve been able to hear anything…* His grip tightened on Henry’s shirt, shifting away from Lathe. *No one knows… You don’t know… You’re not supposed to care…*

Lathe let his hand fall from his head, though it remained in his shoulder. “Tucker, I’ve been on the porch this whole time, making sure this goes over okay. We knew you were gonna be skeptical of even getting vaguely near Henry. But when you really started crying in his lap I got worried… and I started reading your lips to see what was happening. ….it's okay Tucker, it's okay.” Lathe rubbed his back with Henry as Tucker shook harder, his voice soft. “We’re not mad at you, were just worried.”

Tucker shook his head. “I-It’s the only thing I’m good for anymore…” His words were mumbled and he kept his head down in submission. *It’s…. The only thing that anybody would ever want me for…. My body, this horribly abused thing …. “H-Henry can make a video t-too…” You made him come back, you probably want him to rape me too…*

Henry didn’t know what to do, his hands moving up to Tucker’s shoulders, hanging onto him gently. “Tucker, I really mean it. I don't want to take anything like that from you. I'm not like that…. I really don't want to see you hurt or upset about anything… I just… I don't want you to be hurt…” Henry gently pecked his temple. “You're the one in control right now. You're the one right now who gets to decide what does and doesn't happen. And whenever we're doing anything, it’s never just one person’s decision as to what happens. It's both of us.” *You need to understand that.*

Lathe looked between them, his voice careful. “Tucker… what video were you talking about earlier…?” *I didn't catch that…*

*I… I should tell him… “He…. He said something…. About Devon’s friends… And a video they took of him…” I think it might be a bad video. “I think they might’ve done something equally horrible …” But I can’t be sure…*

...oh shit. “Oh my…. I'll have to look into that…” He looked back to Tucker, his voice soft. “Honey, what happened with Devon’s friends? We need to know.” *It's important that we both hear this...*
Tucker shook his head. “They…. They did it too…” They made videos… You want Henry to make a video of it.

Shit. “Do you have names, honey? Anything like that?”

Tucker shook his head. “They all graduated…” They did it every day after school.

“We can look through a yearbook and you can point out faces… they shouldn't get away with that, Honey…” I never thought this would end up happening… revenge for putting their friend away for life...

Tucker shook his head, putting his hands over his ears. No! They said that we can’t put them away… We can’t… They made me agree… “I-I agreed….” He murmured quietly. It’s why I cut!

“You what? Did you want any of it?” That doesn’t sound right...

They told me I had to say yes…. “Y-yea…. I-I agreed…” We can’t do anything against it…. Tucker shifted out of Henry’s arms, sitting on the ground near him. We can’t do anything ....

“…Honey, there’s this thing called duress… it means that if you did something because you were legitimately forced to, you're not responsible for that action. It also means that if you consent because you felt forced to, that you had no choice but to agree, that consent isn't valid. Is that what happened?" There's no way you agreed to that shit...

Tucker whimpered as he nodded, cuddling up to himself and shaking. “Y-You want Henry to make a video too…” You don’t want me to be happy....

“What? Why the hell would I wish that kind of thing on you?’

“I don’t want to hurt you! I just want you to be happy! I'm not here to make you upset or anything, I care about you.” We’re worried...
“Y-You said I’d be safe…. A-And they did it….. All of them…. Every day…” No one asked what was wrong, and Devon's friends used me to get any and all frustrations out of their system... It always hurt... “...it hurt...”

“...I... I didn't think that would happen.... Honey, you could've told someone so much sooner, we’d’ve fixed this…” Lathe ran a hand through his hair, his eyes wide. “I had no idea…” Oh my god...

Henry watched with resignation as Tucker curled into himself next to them, his voice quiet. “Can I touch your shoulder?” He watched him slowly nod, resting one hand there, trying to reassure him. “I’m sorry we didn't know… I didn't think anything that wrong was happening…” I had no idea… fuck...

“I thought you would’ve seen the videos by now... They gave them to everybody... It’s why everyone ignores me, or whispers when I walk through the hall.... Y-You probably noticed that…” You’re observant.... I hate to say that I’ve been dealing with it, but I thought it would go away when they did....

“.....I always thought you had friends in other classes… I thought it was weird that you never mentioned anyone else, but... I didn't think there was no one…” Henry spoke carefully, sympathetic. I don't know what to do about any of this...

“I’m just a good for nothing whore that no one wants to deal with.... Y-You can go if you want…” You said something about leaving earlier... I expect now that you know, you’d probably hate me anyways... Tucker’s eyes were full of sorrow as he raised his head a little bit. No one ever wants to be around me... “The videos are on pornhub... And a few other websites…” They always made me watch them...

“...I'll go about taking those down later. They shouldn’t be out there.”

“And… I mean, if it's okay... I wanna stay... because I don't think you want to be alone... but if you really aren't okay with me being around, I can leave.” It's okay.

Tucker shook his head, getting up and going towards e house. “You should leave…” I can’t do this anymore... I can't sit there with you, I’m not supposed to... I'm just a whore everyone hates.... I spread my legs for anyone that can force them open.... You don't want anything to do with me... He kept his head down as he disappeared in the house, going to his room, locking the door before grabbing his razor. I can't take it...
Lathe looked to Henry with sympathy, patting his shoulder. “I’m sorry… you of course can still come to dinner Saturday… but I think you need to call before coming over now.”

Henry nodded, looking down. “Okay… and thanks…” I’m okay with real food on Saturday… that’s fine… “I’ll try to remember to call… just… fuck…” Henry buried his face in his hands, breathing in deeply. That went horribly… and so much has happened to him… what if he doesn’t want anything to do with me? What if he wants to be in a relationship but actually being in one with a man scares him too much for it to ever work? …fuck …

“I’m sorry… I really am…” Lathe glanced up as the back door closed, something in his gut telling him not to let him be alone. “I don’t think I can leave him alone now… I just need to get him back downstairs… if you want to stay a bit on the porch I can send you home with lunch…” Kevin told me a lot of stuff, I get the idea that money’s pretty tight between all of you…

“Th-That’s okay… you don’t have to…” Henry glanced up as something nearby moved, Lucifer bee lining for him from the house. He always comes over to me when something’s gone wrong…

Lathe watched Lucifer climb into Henry’s lap, demanding his attention. “I’ll go wrangle Tucker and make you lunch to take home, okay?” Lathe smiled when Henry nodded, heading for the house. I can’t leave Tucker alone. He walked quickly through the house, going upstairs to his room, knocking. “Tucker, Henry’s still way out in the backyard. It’s just me, Lathe. Open the door.” I'm sorry, but it's not optional.

“Go away…” His voice was weak as he cut another line across his forearm, watching the blade slice through his skin. I don’t want to do this anymore…. Everything got out! Now even more people know I’m a whore …

No. Lathe immediately went to unlock the door himself, opening it without any other word. He moved to get the razor out of Tucker’s hand, tossing it in the garbage. “I’m not letting you kill yourself over this.” Lathe pulled him along to the bathroom, going to clean and wrap the cuts. No. I'm not letting this happen.

Tucker was silent as Lathe dragged him to the bathroom. Henry’s still here… I want him to leave… He watched Lathe put his arm in tight wraps, looking down in shame when he was done. You’re gonna yell at me either way? Because I hid it.... And because you’re taking care of a whore. “You should call the agency…..Take a kid you’ll actually want to keep around until they’re adopted.” His words were broken and full of sadness.
Lathe sighed quietly, moving to hold his jaw with both hands, his words determined. “Tucker, I want to keep you around still. Nothing that you’ve done makes you worth any less or more of a burden to me. It’s okay. We’ll get through this, okay? We’ll all help you. We’re keeping you.” Lathe pecked his forehead, giving him a small smile. *I’m keeping you.*

Tucker just stared at him blankly for a moment before he nodded and looked away. *Okay…. I guess…. I mean, it’s no use talking anymore, is there…?*

Lathe sighed, kissing his temple. “I’m going to go make lunch. Are you at all hungry? I’ll make you whatever you want.”

Tucker shook his head, shifting to get up in silence. *I’ll go sit on the couch like the perfect child you thought you had, and I’ll stare at the TV… maybe if I’m good you’ll let me sleep with my door on it’s hinges…* He reached for the doorknob turning it slowly to venture downstairs.

Lathe sighed, pecking his unruly mop of hair one more time before letting him go, cleaning up the bathroom before going downstairs to make Henry lunch. *……I can't believe any of this… it's just… insane…*

Tucker sat there at the edge of the couch, curled up into himself. *I can’t eat…. I’m not hungry…* He barely noticed the time fly by as he stared at the blank TV screen. *Henry shouldn't come back…*

Lathe eventually came into the living room, having sent Henry off with a paper bag of food, looking to Tucker staring at the TV. “….do you wanna watch a movie?” He watched him shrug. “….is it okay if I at least turn the thing on?” Another shrug. Lathe sighed, not knowing what to do. He simply turned it on, a Harry Potter movie marathon on. *As always.* Lathe moved next to him, kissing his temple. “That’s from Henry. ……he really does care about you.” Lathe left him alone to process the new information, going to fetch his laptop. *I have videos to take down….*

Tucker watched with blank eyes, not even recognizing that James came in to watch the movies with him. *Henry can't come back… I don’t want him to come back…*

Lathe got out the laptop, setting up in his office upstairs. He searched Tucker’s entire name, and the first option was about the lawsuit, which was expected. But then the porn sites began to show up. Lathe clicked on one, blanching just at the thumbnail, quickly moving to save the video to a folder away on the laptop as evidence. *With any faces or voices in that video, there are people who can't get away with this.* He scrolled further down the page, finding a phone number and getting out his phone, calling. It was a long few hours of getting the videos he could find taken down, having to argue with some of the representatives he spoke to. *These aren’t staying up.* He managed
to get a majority of them down before searching using the specific video file, even more coming up. *Shit, they’re up everywhere*… He managed to get a lot of them taken care of before he finally looked to the clock, his eyes widening in surprise. *Shit, it's late. I never made dinner.* Lathe immediately went downstairs, Tucker in the same spot, accompanied by James. “I’m so sorry I didn't make dinner, you two, I’ll fix you something—”

“It's okay, Dad. I heated up leftovers and made Tucker nibble some. I already cleaned up.” James looked to him, waving.

“O-Oh.” Lathe paused, looking over them. “Well… wait, is Jake still with Lucas? I thought he was gonna be driven back.” *Their Mom said she'd bring him home...*

Jake popped out from behind the corner. “I had dinner with Lucas and Philip, and Jared and Mark….” He had a happy smile on his face and hugged him. “You didn’t hear me when I said I was home… James said I shouldn’t go in your office… Is Tucker okay?” *He's been silent the whole time I’ve been home.*

Lathe knelt down on one knee to properly hug him, looking to the happy child. “Tucker’s got a lot going on that isn't all very good, so he's not going to be in a very good mood for quite a while. Don't hug him too much about it, 'kay? He’ll get better with time. Promise, Hon. Now how are all four of those rascals doing?” *I'm so glad they're not states away… and Jake gets along with all of them swimmingly, particularly Lucas.*

“They’re good… Lucas says he misses the nook upstairs for reading, Mark won one of the state championship races…” *I remember him telling me that.* “So…. Is he not gonna talk anymore? He hasn’t talked since I got home…. Or really moved...” *I'm worried about him... Is he alright?*

“That's wonderful to hear… and we’ll have to invite him over sometime so you can chill here too. And as for Tucker… he's got lots and lots of thinking to do… and he's just not a very happy camper right now. He's gonna be pretty quiet for a while. Don't try to ask him about it much, okay? He just needs to do his own thing for a while.” *He needs time... plenty of it...*

Jake looked down a little bit. “O-Okay, um… Can I have ice cream?” *I was a good boy today!*

Lathe smiled, ruffling his hair. “Yep, you can have ice cream. But only if you say the magic wo~rd.”
“Please?”

“Okay.” Lathe smiled, going with him to get ice cream. *I love you all...*
Two days. Lathe padded back down the stairs, having gone up for just a minute, Jake and James still helping to unpack the rest of the groceries. Eren has more, ahem, items, and we're getting ready for the feasting of Christmas Eve and Christmas. I've made sure we'll have plenty of food for the whole troop of people who accepted the invite for Christmas dinner—...which is nearly everybody...

Plus one. Lathe double-checked the reminder on his phone. Early Christmas morning... that's when he'll be coming in... I'll be meeting him at the door, and he'll be just in time to kiss Eren awake. I know how much they miss each other... “Alright, as soon as we get everything away, we start getting some stuff ready. That means making too much applesauce and apple pie, which means peeling every apple we bought.” Legit tho. Lathe was very grateful for the help, everything in its proper place before they got things out to cook. Tucker's doing his one thing. He's been mute since the whole thing of Henry confessing... he won't let him come over anymore for anything besides food. But they've become regulars at the dinner table on Saturdays, which is nice. Tucker got his working papers a bit ago, so he's job hunting right now... I wonder what he'll end up doing first... Dunno. But he'll have to remember to say more than ten words of he wants to get hired anywhere, because he'll most likely have to interact with customers somewhat at least. Lathe glanced to the clock, letting the boys peel and cut up apples as he made pie crusts. I dunno... he could use something to distract him in his spare time... I got the videos taken down, and it took awhile, but... I figured out the pattern.... the entire football team that Devon was on. All of them showed up in the video, and I looked through a yearbook... the whole thing isn't over yet because we have to track these guys down and get them here, but... I'm not sorry that we're doing this and pursuing the case... I know they were just high schoolers, but it was gang rape... multiple times over... I just... no. They can't get away with this. Lathe tried to forget about it for the moment, the three of them working busily. They videos would be put back up as soon as they're taken down... fighting the companies was so damn difficult.... I would finally get through to someone who actually would do something, take it down and disable the user from posting more stuff since they'd put them right back up again... and then they'd come up under a new username. It's been... really difficult. We're tracking them all down, so hopefully once something happens, they won't come up again, but... I just really hope this'll end...

Eren came out of his studio, loosening his tie from around his neck. “Okay, that meeting was completely pointless... I mean it was nice that I only needed to wear a shirt and tie, cause they can’t see my pants... But Jeff was just apologizing the whole time and trying to get me to sign with him. Geh! Why do I have to be famous!” He groaned dramatically as he walked towards the stairs. “I’ll go get dressed for helping around, oh and I heard Tucker got a job...” He texted me a few minutes ago... He should be home soon. “It’s with the local handyman... I guess he doesn’t really need to talk, just fix stuff when it comes in...” It’s a perfect job for him.

“...That actually sounds perfect for him. He’d do well, I think.” Lathe felt his phone buzz in his pocket, checking it and seeing the text from Tucker. “Yeah, he got it. I'll have to go pick him up from the interview.” Lathe set down the rolling pin, untying his apron. “Hopefully he'll do a good job. But I do think he will.” He will.
Eren nodded, starting up the stairs. “Well go pick him up! I’ll start making food when I get downstairs.” He ran up the stairs and he was going through his drawers, his brows furrowing as he saw the extra bottles of lube. … When did these get here? I’m never gonna use that much all alone… He sighed quietly, looking down to his feet. I get to call him for his birthday tomorrow, that’s good. Eren smiled softly at the thought. I’m definitely gonna do that. Maybe I’ll send him more pictures for him to look at… He made his way downstairs, looking through the groceries and seeing the glazed ham in the fridge, looking to the post-it note on it. 250… for four hours… Okay so this should go in now I think… right? Or are we having people later? Well, it can wait until Dad gets home, I’ll start with some rolls. Eren shuffled for the necessities and started to create a few batches of dough.

James poked Eren’s elbow, looking up to him. “Dad said when we were getting the groceries that the ham has to go in the oven…. but I don’t know where the roast pan is.” I never got it out before...

Eren nodded, cleaning off his hands before showing him where it was. “Think you can handle the oven?” I’m proud of you, you’re doing much better, even if you look even more sickly than you did when you got here… Chemo is not your friend right now… But you’re doing much better around the house, I’m glad.

James nodded, going to get the roast from the fridge. He stuck the sticky note to the microwave where he would see it, going to start the oven, pressing the right buttons to turn it on. He was careful as he opened the plastic with a knife, draining it and lining the pan carefully before setting the roast on it, looking to Eren. “Do you know if we do anything fancy with it or not?” With the one thing we did there were all tons of veggies in the pan too...

“No, we just put it in, we got an already glazed one…” He smiled as he glanced over as James checked over everything. I’m so proud...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Tucker waited patiently in the store front, the owner beside him looking out the window as it snowed. He said I don’t need to talk… and my interview was just fixing a few things… and apparently I did a good job…. He’s gonna pay me for every hour I work, and he says I can come in anytime I want, just to clock in and he’ll pay me at the end of the week… He has a soft smile on his face, watching the snow fall slowly. Dad’s getting rid of the guys who raped me… well, he’s putting them away… Even though they keep uploading more of the videos…. The state even sent some officers from Wichita to come and help investigate because some of the seniors went there for college… I’m just glad that everyone leaves me alone and my teachers don’t give a fuck that I don’t talk… I don’t have any classes with Henry, and I barely see him, and I probably won’t see him anymore, which is good, he’s got new friends. He’ll forget about me soon.
Lathe soon pulled into the parking lot, waving to the man inside the small shop as Tucker came outside, looking excited. “You look excited. How did everything go?” Tell me what happened all!

Tucker smiled as he started to type into his phone, showing it to Lathe after a moment.

TQ: My interview was fixing a TV and a radio… and a clock… I did it really quickly so he said he’d pay me every hour I clock in and I can come in and work when I want to starting in January. I’ll probably go after school, okay?

He had a large smile on his face as Lathe read the text. I’ll be able to save for college.

Lathe beamed, looking to him and handing back the phone. “That’s great! I’m really proud of you, Hon. And you can go after school to work, of course. You just need to text so I know when to expect you home or pick you up when it’s this snowy, okay?” That's great!

Tucker nodded, his small smile turning into a large one, before it faltered a bit.

TQ: Is Henry coming for dinner tonight?

Oh god…. I don’t think I can handle that… I haven’t seen him since Thanksgiving when him and his brothers came, and apparently Greg showed Dad more videos that had been posted… He knows too… which means his older brothers all know. He swallowed hard, looking down to his hands which had begun to shake.

“It's just us for dinner tonight, Honey. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve and the day after is Christmas… that's when the big dinner is. ...and they're all coming to it. I wasn't about to turn them away for it, they always come over for the big holidays.” Lathe rested a hand on his shoulder, his voice soft. “It'll be okay, Honey. You don't have to worry at all about him or his brothers. You'll be just fine. And I'll beat up anyone who gives you shit for you.” Lathe gave him a small smile, lightly joking. You'll live.

Tucker nodded, watching the snow fall as they drove back home. I don’t wanna see him… It’ll be so awkward… I'm sure that he’s seen every video Greg’s got his hands on…

Lathe got them home without incident, letting Tucker go over to chill with the dogs in the living
room while he went back to the kitchen to work, seeing the boys starting to assemble the first pie, about to dump in the filling. “Don't do that just yet, you two. We can't bake them for a few hours still, let's wait so the crust doesn't get soggy and sticky. You can assemble the other crusts first.”

Apple, chocolate, lemon meringue, and cherry. Oh yeah, I have cherries to pit. Fun. Lathe moved to get the cherries out and set up at a cutting board, steadily working as the boys fussed over getting the other three crusts in their pans. "The ham's already in the oven, so the other crusts have to wait until after dinner to bake since the fillings don't need to bake. Lathe covered the cherry filling when it was done, moving on to cleaning and cutting up strawberries, Jake helping him with a small paring knife while James cut up vegetables to cook for dinner. Eren was working nearby to whip up more batches of dough, a pile growing next to him. I love the help... there's nobody who can do this all by themselves.

The next day passed quickly, and early Christmas morning the house was silent, everyone save one still asleep. The lock quietly clicked, Lathe opening the front door for Levi, smiling. “Welcome home.”

“It's great to be back for awhile.” Levi smiled faintly as he looked around, some of the dogs stirring in the living room. He took off his boots and came further inside, seeing Blake on his plush dog bed in the living room, his eyes blinking up to him tiredly. “Hey.” Levi moved to pet him, petting all the dogs that quietly came up to him, sniffing him. I missed you all. “So can I go wake him up now?” Levi looked up to Lathe.

“...are you really gonna ask me that? Go give him his damn Christmas present.” Lathe smiled as he nodded and quietly went upstairs, chuckling and going to get coffee. It might be four in the morning, but I'm up. ....then again... maybe I should go give leva her present...

Levi stepped carefully as he passed the kids’ bedrooms, carefully opening Eren’s door. He smiled as he saw him asleep, setting his bag down near the foot of the bed when the door was shut behind him, moving to the side of the bed. He reached to cup his jaw with one hand, turning his head gently and softly kissing him, feeling him shift as he woke up. “Good morning, baby. Merry Christmas.” I missed you.

Hmm... But it’s only four... “Hmmm... not yet Dad.... I wanna sleep another hour...” He grumbled as he shifted to turn away from him and move a bit away. One more hour, then I’ll go take the horses out...

Levi’s eyebrows shot up, chuckling a bit. “Last time I checked, I was your boyfriend and not your Dad. And besides...” Levi clambered onto the bed, his lips brushing Eren’s earlobe. “Wouldn't you rather have your present now?” His hand moved down his side, softly nibbling the flesh. I wanna give it to you now... you can sleep later...
Eren’s eyes opened lazily, shifting to look at Levi, his eyes completely full of amazement. “Hmmm… I think that might work….” I’m dreaming… I don’t wanna wake up, let him do whatever he wants with me. He rolled over, curling up to Levi, a soft smile on his lips as he leaned in to kiss him. I miss this… and I’m starting to go crazy thinking about this.

Levi kissed him gently, slowly deepening it as he moved over Eren, pulling back the blanket and letting his hands wander over his body, feeling him. I missed you… Levi swiped his tongue over Eren’s lips, slowly tangling their tongues as his hands slipped under his sweatshirt, feeling up his sides. So warm...

Eren groaned, squirming under his touch. His hands… they feel so real, I love this… He moved his hand to Levi’s digital camouflage jacket, pulling the buttons apart. He pulled back from their kiss, his breath hitched and his eyes looking into Levi’s silvery ones. Fuck, I hope we go all the way...

Levi smiled faintly, kissing down his jaw. “God, I love you…” Levi shrugged off his jacket, tossing it out of the way and tugging Eren from his sweatshirt. His lips trailed down to his neck, starting to suck dark marks onto his neck, nibbling at the soft flesh. “I've missed you… so much…”

“I miss you too…” Eren groaned as Levi’s teeth grazed across his skin. “P-Please Levi… Don’t tease me please.” I don’t want you to tease me, I want you to ravish me, completely …

Levi smirked, lapping at his skin. “Don't worry… I'll take good care of you.” Levi slowly undressed them both, enjoying the feeling of Eren’s hands exploring him as if it were their first time, his nose buried in his hair and drinking in the familiar scent as he made love to him, picking up speed and pounding him when Eren begged him to. I love you… Levi whimpered as Eren moaned loudly in his ear and squeezed around his length, both of them cumming hard tangled in the other. Levi panted to catch his breath, looking up to Eren, chuckling a bit breathlessly when he saw him passed out. Of course… Levi drew out of him, lapping up his release from his stomach and throwing away the condom. He tucked Eren back in, stealing some of his clothes before traipsing back downstairs, letting him sleep. I finally get to have real tea…

Levi soon sat at the kitchen table with a nice teacup, enjoying the peace and quiet, looking around, particularly at the photos dotting the walls. They all look so happy… He particularly studied a growing mural on the wall. He saw Lathe and Ieva, their hands on his and Eren’s shoulders, a growing group of kids surrounding them. It's all of them… Jake, Sammie, Eli, Mark, Lucas, Jared and Philip… Tucker and James… and James is bald… I've missed so much, being gone… He quietly contemplated this, studying their expressions. It looks so much like all of us… we all look so real… …I've missed everyone… He looked down as Nene sleepily trotted over, curling up at the foot of his chair, quietly whining. ......aw… “C’mere, girl.” Levi let her come up into his lap, petting the small dog and letting her sleep in his lap, smiling faintly. I've missed just peaceful interaction… I like the quiet… it feels weird now… but comforting.

Lathe traipsed downstairs himself after a while, dressed in sweatpants and a tank top, a few red
marks visible on his neck. He looked over to Levi, both of them silently judging the other, shrugging after a moment. *We both look like hot messes. Whatevs.* “I'm surprised Eren isn't clinging to you and refusing to let go.” *You'd think he'd fight you leaving.*

“He passed out….” Levi sipped at his tea, sighing as he sank into the chair a bit. “You guys are still trying?” I hope so, I know it’s hard, but you get to try… And I’m gonna be a father soon…. *That’s gonna be scary … What am I gonna do with a child?* “At this rate you'll be a grandfather before you have your own kid…oh wait, you will be.”

“Har har, don’t remind me. I see the gray hairs, I know they’re there.” Lathe moved to start a fresh pot of coffee. “And yeah, we are. ...I really hope we’re lucky enough to have at least one… at this rate that’s all we’ll get…” Lathe sighed, leaning on the counter. “How does it feel knowing you’ll be responsible for your very own tiny human soon?”

“It’s weird…. Eren won’t tell me what gender we’re having until I come back, he's told me that much…. I know they’ll be born in February… Or at least the due date is around then…. I’m upset I won’t be able to be there for him… When all that happens… So please, make sure you help him…” I won’t be able to… And heaven forbid that I won’t come back at all… *That part scares me… I’d be leaving more behind…* He looked down as Nene yawned in his lap, shifting for a moment before falling right back asleep.

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Don’t worry, we’ll help him adjust and learn.” Lathe moved to get out his old mug, yellow with train sketches on it. “...you’ll both be wonderful parents.” *When you get to come home, you'll do well... and Eren will do well from day one. He'll learn... well, he'll figure it out at least.*

Levi could only nod. “I’m not sure how great of a father I can be-” *Six feet under… “-When I’m on the other side of a screen.” His voice was a bit strained, trying not to give away his thoughts. I can’t help but have doubts, my squad continues to fall left and right…. I got shot already, glad Eren didn’t notice that yet.*

Lathe could hear the implied word as Levi tried to cover it up, going to rest a hand on his shoulder, sitting next to him. “I know the idea seems scary… that you might not be there for them at the end of this… but you need to keep trying and fighting while you're gone… you need to come home in one piece… better yet, alive.” Lathe said it, seeing Levi swallow. “You’ll come home to us when this is over. I know you will. It'll be okay.” *It damn well better be.*

Levi nodded, looking up to him. “Where’s Mom? Is she passed out too?” *Let’s get away from the topic of me coming home…. I still have almost three years left in the service…*
Lathe nodded. “Yeah, she needed more sleep… and I'm wide awake, so.” Lathe shrugged, staring into his coffee. *Things have been weird between her and me… I've been neglecting her with everything else going on… I don't try to, but… it's a lot...*

“How’s James’ chemo going?” *He’s bald, I know that much, and he’s been doing chemo and radiation for awhile now I believe.* He shifted in his seat, setting his now empty cup on the table.

“It's going…” Lathe looked to the painting on the wall. “He's been sick after every treatment like you'd expect, but he's doing so much better in general… he's learning how to adult and cook and he can remember stuff and he's just…. in so proud of him…” Lathe rested his head on one hand, smiling faintly. *I really am proud of him.*

Eren groaned as he shifted in bed. *What the fuck did I do last night? Ugh… Did I go out drinking? My back hurts…. He slumped off his bed, not even noticing his nudity and instead just throwing clothes on. Dad’s up… That dream was fucking weird… it was like he was there …* “Dad… I think I’m going cra-” Eren froze when he got to the living room, seeing Levi sitting on the couch and Lathe sitting on the arm chair. “Am I still dreaming?” *I must be…. He’s not here, he’s thousands of miles away…*

Levi smirked, Lathe chuckling as he set down his teacup. “I dunno Eren, you might be.” Levi stood, crossing the room and slipping his arms around his waist. “Or maybe I took my one break from my tour to come and see you…” Levi stood on tiptoe, pecking the tip of his nose. “I'm sure you can figure it out.” *Come on, I'm really here.* “C’mon… *surely* the sex wasn't a dream? You have the hickeys I gave you and everything…” Levi traced one with his finger, the look in his eyes mischievous and possessive.

Eren shuddered as his neck was touched, his hand going right to Levi’s chest, grabbing his tank top and turning to drag him back towards the stairs. “Make me believe it then.” *I still can’t help but think I’m dreaming…*

Levi stumbled a bit as he was dragged up the stairs, swatting Eren’s ass. “Who is it that gives the orders here?” Levi still let Eren drag him back up to their bedroom, though he himself took over, pulling him inside and onto the bed. *Mine.*

Eren yelped a bit when his ass was smacked, grumbling at him for a moment before tugging Levi to his room. He was about to speak when Levi pulled him onto the bed, trying to prop himself up but being completely consumed by Levi’s strong arms “L-Levi….” *Oh my god…. Are we gonna be rough? I wouldn’t mind it but…. I wanna cling to you after…*
“Hm?” Levi made himself busy stripping him and Eren of their tops, showing off his muscles. “There something you… want?” Levi tossed the garments aside, his mouth immediately going to latch onto a perky nipple. You always made beautiful sounds when I did this...

Eren’s eyes widened immediately, his back arching from the pleasure as he let out a loud moan, his face becoming flushed. “L-Levi…. Ah…. Ha! S-stop….” Don’t tease me… Dammit, I want the real thing. His hands ran through Levi’s hair, feeling his soft undercut and whimpering as Levi continued to abuse his pink bud. Fuck! I’m so sensitive… He could already feel the heat around his body starting to grow. I didn’t really touch myself while you were away… Fuck your hands feel so good ...

Levi lapped at the pink bud, kissing it. “It's still so early… what do you say we have some fun now… and later tonight…” He reached down south, gently gripping Eren’s bulge. “We have some fun with a-ll those toys I saw you have…” It'll be wonderful… I'll get to hear you beg for release and watch you come undone over and over...

Eren swallowed visibly, his eyes shaded with want and need. “O-Okay….” That sounds like a good plan… His eyes widened when Levi grabbed his length. “L-Le-v-vi… B-be gentle… I’m s-s-ah!” He cried out when Levi brushed his thumb over his slit, already starting to feel like he was ready to explode. Fuck…. I’m gonna cum so quickly ....

Levi nodded, moving to ease Eren out of his sweatpants, mouthing near his base as he slipped out of his own, lapping at the skin. “I'll be gentle…” Levi reached for lube and a condom, his other hand running over Eren’s nude body. “So beautiful…” You're still as handsome as always… as perfect as I remember...

“Hhmph….” Eren jolted when Levi’s fingers made it over his sides, his face flushing even redder down to his neck. I’m really sensitive.... Everything is on overdrive .... “Levi…. Hurry up…” He whined breathlessly, his hands coming up to cup Levi’s cheeks before making their way down his body and tracing every line down his abdomen. So gorgeous.... And he’s all mine...

Levi soon dipped his head down to kiss his neck, rolling on the condom and slicking himself up. “Don’t worry, baby, I’m here. I'll make you feel good…” Levi lined up with his entrance, feeling Eren cling to him as he entered him. “I'll make you feel better than good.” Levi started a brutal pace, nipping at Eren’s neck. You sound so wonderful...

Eren forced his eyes closed as he immediately wrapped himself around Levi’s torso. His fingers were clawing at his back, scratching him as his heels dug into Levi’s back. “F-Fuck…..” Eren whimpered, holding onto him tighter as he felt the warmth pool in his abdomen quicker than it ever had before. “Ha! Levi… Levi slow down!” I don’t wanna cum yet… But I’m going to if you keep
going like this… His face was buried in the crook of Levi’s neck, taking in his scent, struggling to hold off his orgasm. It feels so good … I haven’t had you in such a long time

“Hm… still sensitive, are we?” Levi reached down to firmly hold his base, deeply rolling his hips and making Eren shudder. His voice was husky in his ear. “Do I need to get out the cock ring? Give you a little taste of tonight, hm?” I’d love to draw this out…

“P-Please…” His words were breathless as he looked down at his throbbing dick, leaking precum like there was no tomorrow. Shit… I almost came! I almost just came… Eren sighed as Levi pulled out, a whine leaving him as he felt empty, flipping over onto his stomach in front of Levi as the shorter man grabbed the ring from the nightstand.

Levi rifled for the cock ring, reaching to slide it down Eren’s length until it firmly held his base, freeing his hands to strike teasingly over his stomach, his soft thighs. I love you… Levi’s front molded to Eren's back, his tip nudging his entrance. “Do you want slow… or rough?” Your pick...

Eren tilted his head back, shifting his shoulders so he could see Levi, pulling him down to kiss him, pulling away and looking directly in his eyes. “Slowly… Make love to me…. The cock ring’ll be able to hold me back.” Hopefully …

Levi moved to kiss him deeply at that, their tongues sliding against each other as he slipped into his heat, his hands tenderly wandering all over him from his chest to the creamy skin of his inner thighs. So perfect… Levi broke their kiss, going to suck marks onto his neck as he began a gentle pace, his hands everywhere on him. Mine...

Eren whimpered as he sheathed himself fully, though he quickly relaxed in his hold. I miss this, I miss this so much. He shifted his back, letting his ass come up higher in the air and join up with his hips better. Fuck he’s deep… “Shit…. Levi, you feel so good, I don't want you to leave.” I don’t wanna let you go.

Levi rolled his hips deeply into him, littering his back and neck with marks. I don't wanna let you go... “Don't worry… we’ll make the most of this.” Levi lapped at his neck. “All day for today… and tomorrow… all until New Year’s… all yours….” Thank fuck they let me come home……. I'm so happy I'm here...

Eren groaned as he felt Levi’s hands grip onto his hips. I wonder if he’s noticed I’m thinner…. I mean it’s not by much but…. He let out a loud cry as Levi finally thrusted directly onto his prostate. “Ha! Levi ! T- there !” Oh my god…. there please . Eren’s fingers gripped onto the sheets below
him, feeling his coil beginning to tighten.

Levi’s hands held him carefully but firmly, nipping at the joint of his neck as he steadily thrusted into him. “Baby, you’re so tight…. and you sound wonderful….” His fingers splayed over his hips. “Just for me…” I love this...

“Y-Yeah…. Just for Y-you….. Levi… Ngh, I-I-I’m gonna cum….” He whimpered as Levi continued to thrust on his prostate. Fuck… I wanna cum….. But I have that cock ring on… Fuck! His back arched more, sinking his stomach down to the mattress as best as he could. Eren shifted his head to the side a bit to look back at Levi and see his face as it looked over him. Fuck he’s beautiful ...

Levi could feel himself nearing the edge, and the look that Eren sent him as he arched his back, looking over his shoulder to him went straight to his cock. “So handsome…” Levi couldn’t keep his eyes off him, slowly thrusting onto his prostate. “You want to cum?” Levi’s hand trailed down to his length, lightly rubbing his shaft. God… that look ...

Eren’s eyes closed as he let out a loud moan. “F-Fuck! Levi…..” He could feel the drool already starting to come down his chin, his body growing hotter than he’d ever felt before. Fuck, I want you to be back and stay…. But you’re gonna have to leave aren’t you….

Levi felt the ring clamping around his base, slowly easing it down Eren’s shaft. He could feel himself nearly bursting, stroking Eren firmly when the ring was off. “Eren… cum for me.” I wanna hear you….

Eren’s face completely flushed as Levi took the cock ring off. Fuck… I won’t be able to hold it… He whimpered when Levi stroked his cock, wanting his attention and leaning his head back to try and get him to grab his hair. “F-fuck…. L-Levi… Make me….” I’m almost there…. I’m on the edge, I need a little push...

Levi stroked him quicker, his other hand moving up his hips and side, going to pull his head back by his brunette locks, sucking at his adam’s apple. “Oh, I will …” Levi thrusted into him harder, hearing his moans grow higher-pitched in moments. You’re so… perfect...

Eren’s whole body shuddered when he felt Levi’s hands pull his head back but he wasn’t expecting him to suck on his adam’s apple. The sensation threw him over the edge. “Levi!” He screamed his name as he came hard into his hand, clamping down on Levi’s thick cock. Holy fuck…. I can see stars…. Hmm, that felt so good….
Levi came hard as Eren clamped down on him, stroking his and drawing out his release, feeling him pulse in his hand. “God, you're gorgeous…” Levi kissed his neck, slowly untangling them, letting Eren roll over before he moved to claim his lips, kissing him deeply. Mine… all mine...

Eren’s hands moved to cup his face, pulling him close. I missed you so much… He barely noticed that he had started to cry, the warm tears rolling down his cheeks. I want you to stay...

Levi slowly kissed him, feeling the salty tears hit his cheeks, pulling away for a moment. He moved to kiss at the corners of his eyes, his voice soothing. “It's okay, Honey… I'm here…” Levi moved to toss out the condom from where he was, nestling on top of Eren. “I love you… so much…” I love you....

Eren’s arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders, his tears coming back anew. “I m-missed you…” He hiccuped as he pulled Levi close to him. I missed you so much…. “I don’t want you to leave.” Never, I don’t wanna let you go.

Levi held Eren tightly, drinking in his scent. “It's okay, Eren. It's okay. We have one whole week to do whatever we want together. You won't have to let go of me at all if you don't want to while I’m home. We’ll make the most of this.” Levi kissed his cheeks, trying to soothe him. I'm sorry I don't have forever… but we have each other for right now.

Eren nodded, holding onto him tighter, his hand coming up to thread his fingers through his undercut. “Uhm… I-I’ve been meaning to ask… Did um… Did you like the video?” I know it was forever ago that I sent it… But I hope you liked it....

Levi chuckled quietly, his hand lazily running over Eren’s side. “I loved it… there are quite a few of those toys that I'm interested in… playing with, with you.” .......and I kinda really wanna try the sound....

Eren blushed completely, averting his eyes in embarrassment. “Okay….” He trailed off as he saw a scar that hadn’t been there before, a small white dot near the top of his shoulder. “What’s this?” It’s so small…. It wasn’t there before?

Levi looked over as Eren touched the small spot, swallowing nervously. “Uhm… you're not gonna like this, but… that's a scar from a while ago, I'd been shot clean through… it didn't take long to heal, I was fine to just keep working after a bit, but… yeah…” Levi looked to where Eren's eyes were wide with fear, kissing his cheeks. “But I'm okay now, I'm okay. It wasn't serious, I wasn't in
too much pain… it's okay.” Please don't panic...

Eren’s eyes were wide as he looked at him, already feeling the tears start to well in his eyes. He got shot … “...oh my god…” He was close to hysteric as he looked to the white Mark, slowly moving his hands to cover his mouth. Oh my god, he got shot! I…. Oh my god! He could be dead! He didn’t hear Mikhail coming towards the door and getting his paws on the handle to open it and come in. Levi could’ve died …

“Eren, baby…” Levi cupped his jaw, pressing butterfly kisses all over his cheeks and lips. “I'm okay now. I know it's so hard to think about but I do end up in danger… but I'm so well protected, it was just a fluke… I know it's scary but I'm okay. Baby, look at me.” Levi pulled back a bit, his thumbs running over his cheeks. “Right now, I'm okay. I'm in one piece, and I'm here in your arms for the week. I won't make you let go.” You don't have to. Levi murmured to him and helped Eren to slowly calm down, immediately tugging the sheet over them as he heard the door open, confused when he turned and saw Mikhail trotting in. “...new dog?” I don't remember seeing you around… and you're a few years old it looks like...

Eren nodded as Mikhail came up into the bed and he licked at Eren’s face. “Y-yeah…. This is Mikhail… He um, he’s really good about following me and making sure he stays with me… He came with me to Germany…” He reached up to pet him, sniffing and rubbing at his face with his free hand. Yeah…. I still need a dog… “Can um… Can you put him outside? I just… I….” He trailed off as he closed his eyes. I know he's supposed to help... But I... I can't take it…

Levi nodded, slipping off the bed and reaching for Mikhail. “Mikhail, c’mere.” Levi got him to obey, getting him out the door into the hall and shutting it, locking the door so he couldn't come back inside. “We have another service dog? It makes sense given Blake’s getting old, but… do you still need one?” Levi looked over to Eren, looking skeptical. “You’ve been doing just fine, I thought.” …right? …yeah, right. You've been good. …….right?

Eren looked down, shifting to lay on his stomach, watching Levi come back to the bed. “Can you grab me my pills?” He asked quietly pointing to the bottle of antidepressants on the sink counter. I’m not doing all that great really…. But I don’t want to talk about it because I don’t want you to worry about it… “There’s like three prescription bottles I need to take in the morning…” Then I take two at lunch with the nausea…. Then I take all three at night before I got to sleep…. Along with all the other pills I need to take… like the PTSD meds...

Levi nodded, going to the bathroom, stopping where took in just how many pill bottles lined the counter. “...uh….. which ones?” Holy shit this is a lot…. What even are half of these for ? PTSD still? Not all of them, there's just WOF104 for that, but... everything else...?
Eren listed off three different antidepressant medications along with his PTSD pills, and his nausea tablets. “... I know it’s a lot, but… It keeps me functioning normally…” At least I think it does.... “Oh and um, the vitamin pills, I need those too…”

Levi slowly nodded, picking them all up with a glass of water, carrying them over to the bed. “Okay, so…” He let Eren go about figuring out how much he needed of what, looking down after a moment and realizing he was stark naked, blushing a bit and moving to lay down next to him again, shuffling under the sheet. .....that’s a lot of pills… Levi just slung an arm over Eren’s middle loosely, watching him. I just… I didn't think we’d be back at this point… where you need more medications than you can count on one hand.... maybe even both...

Eren continued to take his pills, the familiarity of the motions calming him. He had to get up and refill his water with how many pills he’s been taking, coming back and finishing them up. “‘So’ what?” You want to ask something .... And it’s probably about the pills...

Levi looked to him with confusion for a second before shrugging one shoulder, looking away and playing with the hem of the sheets. “I'm just kinda surprised you're taking so much…” Maybe it’s because I'm gone.... he nearly freaked out when he saw the scar from the bullet… “...is it because of me?”

Eren looked around, nodding slightly. “I mean… You’re not here all the time… And if I don’t take them I’ll just end up getting worried sick… Like Dad does… I already did that once while you’ve been gone.” He shuffled so that his head laid down in Levi’s lap. Well, now you know...

Levi reached to pet Eren's hair, playing with his locks. “I know it gets hard because of what I'm doing… but at the end of everything I'll come back okay. I'm sorry you have to worry so much...” I know how much it scares you.... that I won't come home.

Eren looked up to him with a raised eyebrow. “You better come home, because you’re daughter is gonna be 2 by the time your ass get’s home….She’ll know you by something that occasionally shows up on the screen.” Really, I don’t want to do that to her.... But...

Levi looked down to him with shock, before he started smiling. “...it's gonna be a girl?” We’re having a daughter?

Eren blushed, covering his mouth as he looked away. “Fuck… I wasn’t supposed to tell you…” His words were mumbled behind his hand, slowly looking back up to see him. God damn, he’s gorgeous .... “You’re gonna be a father…” His words were soft as he flipped his whole body, curling up around Levi and kissing his abdomen. You’re going to be stuck with me.
Levi smiled, his hands still carding through his mop of hair. “You are too… what are we gonna name her?” We never talked about names…

“No… I’m not gonna be a father… I’ve told you this, I will be her Mum… And I uh-haven’t really thought about names since we couldn’t agree on them.” He shifted, kissing every line on his abdominals, starting to sit up as he made his way to Levi’s chest. Fuck… I miss this...

Levi’s eyes softened as Eren kissed up his chest, one hand tenderly cupping his jaw. “Forgive me, I’ll make sure to call you Mum. Although I will admit, her Mum is rather handsome.” Like… very.

Eren smiled more, shifting up into his lap with ease and wrapping his arms around Levi’s shoulder, curling up to him, not caring that he was nude. Hmm… “I’m glad you’ll at least try.” He kissed Levi’s jaw, going back to his earlobe and gently biting down on it. All mine...

“Of course I’d try…” Levi groaned quietly as Eren nibbled at his ear. “I’ll have a family to come home to.” All mine... “Hmm…” Levi made a quiet sound, holding Eren closer. “Are you trying for a round three? Because if you are, it’s working.”

Eren made a soft non-committal noise, nipping at Levi’s earlobe. His ass moved almost on its own to grind down on Levi’s crotch. I want it... I want it bad... “Maybe I am…. And so what happens then ?” I don’t wanna have you wear a condom.... I wanna feel you inside of me, because then I can take you to the shower and have you bang me there too ...

Levi softly grunted, his hands moving to Eren’s middle, easily moving him so he straddled him. “You get what you want…” Levi moved his head, nibbling at Eren’s neck. “Especially if what you want is me to fuck you even harder.” Levi paused for a moment, tenderly kissing his earlobe, his voice softening. “Or if what you want is me to make love to you… I’d be happy to. But we can do anything you want.” What do you want? I’ll give it to you.

“Hmm….” Eren was at a loss for words for a moment before he blushed from the tip of his ears down to his neck. “L-Lay down…” I wanna do it... I hope I’ll still be able to do it, I haven’t done it to you in such a long time, and my legs are still pretty weak. He pushed Levi down onto his back and straddled his hips, making sure that he could shift and rub their cocks together. I can feel you hardening for me... God that’s awesome …
Levi watched him with dark eyes, his hands gentle on his waist. “You're wonderful…” Levi looked up to him with a faint smile, a small sound catching in his throats as Eren rubbed their hardening lengths together. *So beautiful…*

Eren smirked softly before he slipped down so that he could take Levi’s length into his mouth, lustful eyes watching his reaction. *I'm see you haven’t gotten blown in a long time…. You'll enjoy it… I hope I haven’t gotten too rusty…*

Levi watched him move south, his eyes widening as his lips sealed around his tip. “O-Oh… shit…” Levi tried to keep from bucking up into his mouth, his hands going to Eren’s hair, nor gripping it too tightly, but running through the thick locks. “F-Feels, fuck… g-good…” *Holy hell…*

Eren smirked, a mischievous glint catching in his eyes. He opened his jaw up as wide as he could manage, slowly taking Levi into his mouth until his nose reached the coarse hair at his base. *Oh thank god…. I was able to do it… I got it…* He could feel a tear form as he struggled to breathe around Levi’s length, slowly coming off of him with a pop and a string of saliva connecting them. *Still kinda hurts to do it though…*

Levi whimpered as Eren went further down his length, groaning when he went all the way down. “S-So good…” Levi cupped his jaw, his thighs shaking slightly. “So…so good…” He whined a bit when Eren came off of him, panting as Eren licked up and down his length. *God I missed this…*

Eren’s thin arms kept Levi’s thighs on the mattress, licking his shaft up and down to make sure that he was properly slicked. *That should be enough…* He gave him a quick teasing stroke before shifting to put his quivering entrance over his head. *Oh fuck, I'm gonna ride him hard …* “Levi… S-stay still…”

Levi nodded, his hands still on his hips as Eren sunk down his length, his hands running over his thighs as he became fully seated, adjusting. “So beautiful…” *God, I can't get enough of you…*

Eren blushed even more, bringing his hands up to hide his face. *I'm not used to you being like this…*

Levi reached up with a faint smile, moving his hands. “Don't hide that handsome face…” He watched Eren blush darker, leaning up to kiss his cheeks. “God, I could just watch you all day…” *Flushed, aroused, sunk on my length… god it's hot.*
Eren whimpered, looking at Levi with his heated face. “Y-You feel like you got bigger… Hnh…” He shifted his hips up to pull Levi almost out of him before slowly sinking himself back down. His length was red and swollen from the overstimulation. “Y-You d-don’t know how many dreams I- Ngh….. H-had of Y-You….” There were so many…. I just wanted you to come back and sleep with me for a few nights so I wouldn’t have nightmares…

Levi rocked his hips up into Eren, his hands helping to guide him up and down his length, his grip gentle. “I’ve had so many dreams about you… and after that video, God… dream after wet dream… I craved you…. And I… guh…. I have you…” And it’s wonderful.

Eren couldn’t help the smile that formed on his face, a mischievous glint appearing once again. “Hmm… Are you still strong enough to carry me? Would you be able to fuck me while I held onto you? I could probably do it I think… But you would hold me right? In case I fell? He stopped his motions, grinding down on Levi with him fully sheathed. Oh my god, he feels so much better than that fake dick I got…

Levi dug his heels into the bed a bit, his hips lifting Eren a bit off the bed easily, his hands still on his hips. “I think so…” Levi smirked, rolling his hips. He feels so warm...

“C-Can we try…?” He seemed almost too embarrassed to ask as he thought about it. I know you had me up against the wall once… and that felt really good, but I just want it to be you holding me and fucking me…. Without anything else to interfere. Eren’s eyes widened when he saw the absolute look of need in Levi’s eyes… “I-I said that out loud… didn’t I?”

“Oh, don’t worry…” Levi sat up, shifting and keeping Eren on his length as he moved then from the bed. He nipped at the underside of his jaw, moving to the wall. “…I only heard every word.” Levi soon pressed him to the wall, his grip on Eren’s ass firm. He rolled his hips deeply into him, starting a decent pace. “Tell me how it feels, baby…” Levi sucked at his earlobe, kissing his neck.

Eren let out a loud moan as Levi gripped his ass, inadvertently pulling his ass cheeks apart and making him go down on his length even further. “D-Damn… I-It feels really good….” But I don’t wanna be against the wall… I just want you to bounce me on your cock, and there’s nothing else touching me besides you…. I can live with this though… this is good. He whimpered as Levi found his prostate. “.... S- Sarge …. F-fuck….”

Levi paused for an instant when he heard the word, a smirk playing at his lips. “God, you're so tight…. you sound so amazing…. all those beautiful moans…. just for me.” Levi lapped at his neck, sucking more marks on every inch of bare skin he could reach. His eyes lit for a moment, nibbling at the soft flesh. “Is this what you want, Private?” I like this….
Eren’s eyes opened for a moment as he thought about telling him what he really wanted, hesitating. *But he’s here…. That’s all that really matters to me right now. “S-Sir… Yes, S-sir…. Ngh...”* Eren’s arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders keeping him close, and nuzzling his face into the crook of his neck. *I can’t be too selfish while you’re here… I mean, you’re here… That’s all I could really ask for...*

“You hesitated, Private. I expect honest answers from you. So I’ll ask again.” Levi ground hard into him, purring into his ear. *“Is this what you want?” Tell me.*

“N-No…. N-No S-Sir…. I-It’s not...” Eren could barely form whole words as Levi ground into him, quickly finding it hard not to let out moans. *Fuck... He’s grinding into me... so fucking hard... It burns... but like a good burn... “B-But…. I-I’m f-f-fine with th-this Sarge…. Be-because you’re h-home....” I just wanted to be able to touch you and feel you, who gives a shit about what I want, you probably want more relief than me at this point...*

“But if this isn't what you wanted, then tell me, Private.” Levi massaged his globes with his hands, nuzzling into his neck as he steadily thrust up into his heat. *“What do you want?” Anything.*

Eren whimpered, leaning into Levi’s hold. *“I-I d-don’t… I don’t w-want to be against the w-wall....” It reminds me of being forced into everything... even after... what... it’s been two and a half years... holy fuck ... He gasped as Levi shifted him, clinging to him for dear life when he wasn’t pressed against the wall. “H- Ha ... Oh my god...”*

Levi moved them back from the wall, barely swaying as he managed to keep Eren bouncing on his length, grinding forcefully still. *“Is this better, Private?” Levi’s eyes were dark, drinking in Eren’s pleased expression. God, he's hot...*

“S-Sir…. Y-Yes Sir…. F-Fuck me Sarge ...” Eren begged him as he clung to him his fingers gripping into his back. *I want it like this... Nothing but you... He felt his body heat up and a loud cry escape his throat as Levi nailed his prostate head on. Oh shit... this is gonna be a quick round... I hope he cums inside... Eren instinctively wrapped his legs around Levi’s waist, trying to cling to him as best as he could.*

Levi held him tightly enough to bruise, bouncing Eren hard, groaning at the pleasure. *God... “So tight.... God, your heat.... I want to hear you, Private.” All those moans... god I love this... I’ve missed you so fucking much...*
Eren’s eyes started to water from the sheer force. “Ngh…. F-Fuck…. S-Sarge… d-don’t stop… please… it hurts… b-but it hurts so good…” He felt the burn of Levi pounding into him and stretching him further, crying out in pure bliss. *It feels…. I feel so much…*

Levi slowed his pace just a bit, still grinding into Eren just as deeply, low moans coming from his throat. “Private…. nng, feels good….” Levi groaned, alternating between nuzzling Eren’s neck and lapping and kissing at the skin with affection. *So perfect…*

Eren whimpered as he thrusted on his prostate. *Fuck that hurt... That hurt a lot...* Eren felt his coil beginning to tighten. “S-Sarge….…” His voice had the barest hints of pain as his hands moved up into Levi’s hair, grabbing at it. Eren struggled to keep his whimpers down as he felt the sharp spike of pain emanate from his lower back. *Fuck... I think we overdid it.*

Levi tilted his head up, listening carefully when he heard certain notes in his voice, slowing down a bit. “Is everything, alright, Private?” Levi kept him up with one hand, the other moving for a moment to run near his hole, skimming over the creamy skin of his back before returning so his other hand could do the same. *You sound hurt...*

Eren’s eyes were hazy as he gripped onto Levi even tighter. “Ngh… S-Sarge no… P-please don’t s-stop…” *I don’t care if it hurts, I can rest after this... Just please don’t stop...* He dug his heels into Levi’s back, trying to use that as leverage to get him to get back to fucking him properly. *I can make it through.... I’m almost there... Please.....*

Levi’s hands returned to his ass, moving him on his length again, smirking at the desperation in his voice. “Eager, are we, Private?” He could feel himself nearing the edge as he nipped at his soft neck, purring into his ear. “I want to hear you scream when you cum.” *I wanna hear those sounds...*

Eren whimpered as his neck was nipped, his coil tightening. “S-Sarge…..” *It feels so good, but it’s really starting to hurt.* He let the pain ease out in his voice looking down for a moment to see the floor below him. His eyes widened when Levi nipped his adam’s apple, a loud scream leaving him as he was sent quickly over the edge, making a mess between the two of them. *F-fuck.... We over did it... I can feel it...* He groaned in pain as Levi continued to thrust into him on that one bruised spot. *I think we did too much too quickly.... Damn... He’s warm...* Eren felt Levi finally cum inside of him, more whimpers leaving him as he clung to him. *Don’t put me down, I don’t want you to put me down.*

Levi could hear the pain in his voice, moaning into Eren’s neck as he came, though he walked them back to the bed, carefully laying him down. Eren wouldn't let him pull out, so he just ran his hands soothingly over his hips, massaging his ass. “You okay, baby?” *You sound hurt....*
Eren whimpered quietly as he was jostled around. “I-It hurts…” He murmured quietly and shifted up a bit, so that his length wouldn’t be pressing against what he presumed to be a bruise. “I… I think we did too much too quickly…” His words soft as he held onto Levi, keeping their bodies together and not wanting to let go. *It feels like it’s a bruise.*

Levi sighed quietly, softly kissing down his neck, nestling into a warm spot there. *He smells wonderful…. T’m sorry… we got very carried away….∗ Levi ran his hands all over him, easing out just a bit, though Eren kept him from pulling out all the way. “Eren, Honey? Let me take care of you…” *I can’t properly take care of you when I’m still buried inside… and you’re hurt…*

Eren shook his head, holding onto him. “I don’t want to let go… I don’t want you to leave.” His voice was small as he shifted a bit to keep Levi seated within him. *Even if it’s just for a second, I’d rather stay in your arms. ∗ I wanna stay like this… in your arms.*

Levi sighed quietly, his lips ghosting over his neck. “Eren, baby, at least let me pull out so I can carry you to the bathroom without hurting you… we can take a nice hot bath together… does that sound okay?” *I need to take good care of you while I’m here… I have no reason to do anything less than everything for you…*

Eren was hesitant before he nodded, slowly shifting so that Levi’s limp length slipped from him. *Damn… I feel empty now…* He kept his arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders. “O-Okay… a bath sounds nice…. ∗ I think I can handle a bath with you… It’ll give me time to see if we’ll be able to do anything tonight or if it’ll hurt too much. “Hmm…. you really filled me up too….∗”

Levi smirked, lifting Eren to carry him to the adjoining bathroom, kicking the door behind them shut. “I’ve been waiting to have you for so long…” *I’ve missed you so much…* Levi moved to the large if seldom used bathtub, slowly easing Eren to his feet but still holding him flush as he turned on the water, patiently waiting for it to fill. His hands ran over Eren’s back, lifting him again when he shifted in discomfort. “M’sorry I went too hard…” *I didn't wanna hurt you…*

Eren shrugged, leaning his head into Levi’s chest. “I don’t really mind… I just hope that it’ll feel fine tonight… and maybe heal later… I think it’s a bruise….” *Definitely from going at it repeatedly like we just did.*

Levi hummed, his nose in Eren’s chocolate locks. “I hope so… and even if it does hurt too much to do that tonight, I remember seeing you have some *very* interesting toys to play with…” *Even if we can’t fuck, I can tease you all I want…*
Eren’s face flushed to the tips of his ear as the warm water started to fill the tub. “I-I… I guess y-you could say they’re interesting…” I don’t really think I got so many things that were that interesting… I mean I only got that dildo… the sound… anal beads… a cock ring… oh, I got a ball too… and maybe a few more kinky things… okay, yeah I did… I got some kinky shit. He raised his hands to cover his face in pure embarrassment. “Fuck… I just… I got everything without really thinking about it…”

Levi smirked, one hand moving to pull Eren’s from his face. “Aw, don’t hide that beautiful face of yours… and you’d better not try to hide it from me tonight…” Levi carefully stepped into the tub, easing him and Eren down, extra careful not to slip. “…because you make the most beautiful expressions when you cum…” They really are beautiful…. Levi quietly chuckled as Eren flushed darkly, turning the water off and sinking into the tub, their heads above the water, enjoying the warmth for a moment. “......I love you….” I really do...

Eren squirmed in his hold until he was facing Levi, his legs slenderly wrapped around his waist, his hands coming to cup his cheeks. “I love you more… And you better come home, because I needed you to be the father that your daughter can look up to.” He leaned in to kiss him gingerly, letting his tongue swipe across Levi’s lips, asking for access. I want you to kiss me...

Levi tenderly cupped Eren’s cheeks, shifting them to be more comfortable, lazily kissing him. He felt tired, content in the hot water with Eren pressed against him. Mm… wash… Levi didn't break the kiss as he reached for a nearby washcloth, rubbing soap onto it before moving to wash off their chests, soon gently washing Eren. He still kissed him as he sat up and moved him to wash his legs, tenderly handling the slender limbs, He's so perfect... all mine...

Eren continued to kiss him languidly, allowing Levi to move him around to wash him. He’s so gentle... I miss this, I miss all of this… “Hmmm….” He pulled back to look into Levi’s eyes. “What time is it?” It’s Christmas .... The kids should be up soon, though I’m not really sure how Tucker will handle having Levi here again... “.... And I want you to know you’re the best surprise gift ever ...”

Levi smiled, pecking his cheek. “I’d say around six or seven… and Merry Christmas, babe.” Levi held him close, washing him with care. His hand drifted to his entrance, gently prodding at the pucker, one finger slipping inside to clean him out. You'll feel even worse if I don't clean you out...

Eren gasped as Levi’s finger entered him with little resistance. Fuck.... “Levi....” He whined, trying to get away from his touches. “It’s sore…. Leave me be…” Eren pouted, putting his puppy dog eyes to good use. Why are you fingering me again...? I thought we were done...

Levi sighed as Eren used the puppy eyes, trying to resist. “Honey, I need to clean you out or else
you'll feel really sick…” Levi looked away from him, pecking his cheek and still moving his finger in him, trying to coax out the white substance. I came pretty hard… there's gonna be a lot… it shouldn't stay there...

Eren whimpered more as Levi’s finger got deeper in him. “S-Shit…”  He keeps hitting it… It’s so sore… I definitely think it’s a bruise… “B-Be gentle…. Please …” He begged, looking at Levi with his puppy eyes again. I'm gonna be limping at this rate...

Levi nodded, another finger slipping inside him, trying to be gentle. He murmured soothingly as Eren whimpered, feeling him hardening against his stomach. His free hand moved to grasp his length, slowly stroking him as the cum slowly leaked from his hole. “So beautiful…” Please try to relax… let me take good care of you...

Eren groaned as he was stroked. “Ngh….. It's l-like y-you’re trying to get me to pass out….” Fuck his fingers… They're so slender… They feel so good. He shuddered as Levi’s fingers ran over his slit, enjoying the feeling of pure ecstasy that followed. “Hgn….” His body started to relax against Levi’s chest, soft pants filling the air and echoing off the walls. It feels good....

Levi moved gently, cleaning him out and coaxing him to the edge. His voice was soft as Eren started to shake, purring in his ear. “You feel good, love?” He nipped at his ear as the last bit of white left Eren, kissing his dampening hair.

Eren groaned, dipping his head down to Levi’s neck and sucking on it hard, leaving a large hickey. I haven’t had my way with marking you up either… Now’s my chance…. He whimpered as he felt Levi toy with his sensitive head, his mouth going to his shoulder and biting down. At first it was just a gentle nip until he climaxed and his teeth dug into his skin. His eyes closed as he felt the coppery tang of blood rush into his mouth, moaning at the taste and lapping at the wound. “Hmm… Sorry………… Not really….” Eren murmured before he shifted only a few inches and sunk his teeth into Levi’s shoulder once again. You're all mine.

Levi winced as Eren’s teeth broke skin, grunting a bit at the pain. He whimpered quietly as Eren did it again, branding him over and over with his bites. “Hurts… but it's okay…” Levi stroked Eren through his orgasm, letting him bite as much as he wanted. You get to mark me too… hell yes...

Eren’s mouth wandered Levi’s shoulder and towards his neck, a bit gentler as he bit around the tender flesh. He didn’t seem bothered that copper was all he could taste as he shifted to Levi’s other shoulder and bit down once again. “All mine …” Everyone will know you're mine .... No one will try and touch you.
Levi grunted as Eren kept biting him up and marking him, letting Eren mark him as his hands wandered all over his back and shoulders. Eren marked him up for a long time, feeling the repeating sting of his teeth breaking skin. “Yours…” I love you...

Eren had littered Levi’s shoulders from shoulder blade to shoulder blade, all the way across them to his collarbone and around his neck. He spared no skin, making sure that his bites overlapped. He smiled lazily at his work once he was done, lapping at the forming scabs. “That’s **much** better…” His voice was low and in Levi’s ear as he licked all over him. I wonder if they’ll bruise...

Levi sighed as Eren lapped at the marks, relaxing against the porcelain, holding Eren close, his hands gingerly running over him. “Mm…. now everyone will know we belong to each other.” *That's a really nice thought*… They were jolted from their peace as they heard a shout from the adjacent room.

*They're not in the bedroom, so.* Lathe has opened the bedroom door, confused until he saw the bathroom door shut. Ah. “Breakfast is ready, you two! Stop fucking in the bathroom and come eat before everything gets cold!” That'll get them downstairs.

Eren’s eyes widened as he heard a shout from the next room, instantly becoming fearful and clambering into Levi’s arms again. He sighed in relief when it was just Lathe shouting at them that breakfast was ready. “Uhm…. S- Shall we get dressed?” He stuttered and blushed more as he shifted out of Levi’s lap, finally noticing how cool the water was now. *How long have we been in here?* Eren glanced down to his fingers, seeing how pruned they were and crinkling his nose. *A long time I guess…*

Levi chuckled as he heard Lathe, sitting up and pecking Eren’s cheek, soothing his nerves. “Let’s get out, babe. It’s been awhile.” Levi helped him to his feet, helping him step out onto the heated tile and reaching for a fluffy towel, helping Eren dry off. He kissed his nose, laughing a bit when Eren shook out his damp hair, watching him glare for a moment. *He looks like a puffed-up puppy… but he's my puffed-up puppy.*

Eren glared at him for only a moment before childishly sticking out his tongue, prancing off towards his drawer, his ass jiggling a bit. *I wonder if he’s watching my ass…. He probably is,* sitting down on a chair is not gonna be fun. He browsed through his clothing, grabbing sweatpants and a tank top slipping them on, his sweatpants and even his boxers barely able to stay on his hips as he flopped on the bed. *Ugh, I feel like I could sleep for the rest of the day…. But I think Dad made cinnamon buns…* “Fo~od….” He hummed as he watched Levi go through his own clothes, the sweatpants too long for him and the tank tops too small, which led to having his abdomen exposed, along with a majority of his shoulders. Damn… I hope Dad doesn’t question it… They’ve all pretty much scabbed over now…
Levi watched Eren move and get dressed, shamelessly ogling him before going to dress himself with Eren’s stuff. He tied the string of the sweatpants to keep them on his hips, not minding that the tank top exposed a sliver of his stomach if he raised his arms too high. *Whatever, they smell like you, so.* Levi moved to where Eren lay on the bed, tugging a decorative blanket around him. “You’re not letting go of that, are you.” He watched Eren shake his head, sighing and smiling faintly. “Alright.” Levi slid his arms under Eren’s frame, carrying him to the door and down the stairs, not giving a single fuck that his bites were visible. *It’s been so much easier to carry you… you feel a lot thinner… I kinda noticed earlier, but it just seems really obvious now…* Levi didn’t have to think about it much more at the moment, his mouth watering as he caught the smell of warm cinnamon rolls and pancakes, the table full of plates of breakfast food. *I missed Dad’s cooking…. and tonight is the big dinner… yeesh, I’m gonna go back with an extra ten-pound food baby…*

Lathe was getting the kids juice, looking over to the stairs as he heard them, his eyes widening as he saw the marks all over Levi’s shoulders. *More wounds? They look fresh… and…* Lathe instinctively moved to intercept them and fix Levi up before it occurred to him, blushing and going back to getting juice. *…they’re bite marks…….. yeah, I’m not gonna make it awkward.*

Levi quirked an eyebrow as Lathe looked worried in his direction, glancing down for a second. “Eren’s fine- and I’m fine too. Chill.” *Protective Dad mode activated, apparently.*

Eren popped his head out of the blanket he was in, looking at Lathe with confusion for a moment before seeing the orange juice. “Orange juice….” He looked up to Levi with puppy eyes, begging without even needing to say another word. *Please?*

Levi smiled faintly, nodding. “That is what that is, yes.” He chuckled as Eren glared at him, pecking his nose. “I’ll get you juice.” Levi carefully set him in a chair at the table, going to pour him a decent glass of juice and coming back with a glass and an empty plate for both of them. He set them in front of Eren, going back to get himself a mug of tea. He took the mug Lathe knowingly offered him without a second thought, filling it and taking a sip before he recognized which it was— the old yellow train one that Lathe had fixed. *…he’s letting me use the nice mug?* He felt Lathe gently shoo him to the table, his cheeks pink as he retreated to the breakfast table. *I want cinnamon rolls… I always wanted one when I was on Skype and you were eating breakfast…*

Eren was swaddled in his blanket, sipping at his orange juice, watching as Lathe brought out a huge plate of cinnamon rolls then another filled with pancakes. *Oh my god, food…. But I’m so damn warm… I kinda don’t wanna leave the confines of my blanket. Will he feed me if I stare at him long enough?* Eren set the glass on the table, his eyes going right to Levi and watching him fill his plate. *Why does he need to be sexy in everything he possibly does?*

Levi immediately reached to fill his plate, realizing just how hungry he was. *God, I'm starving… I've missed home cooked food…* He looked over to Eren when he didn't move, seeing him stare
longingly at him. “...you okay?” Eren looked to his plate of food, then back to Levi, pouting and turning up his puppy eyes to max. Those damn puppy eyes... “...you want breakfast?” He watched Eren nod, relenting with a tiny smile. “I'll feed you, don't worry.” Levi scooted a bit closer to him, the plate in between them. He cut up the pancakes, lifting the fork to Eren’s mouth and watching him take the bite. God dammit, he's too damn attractive... Levi gave exactly zero shits as he fed Eren breakfast, enjoying it immensely. I missed doing shit like this...

Eren smirked as he bit onto the fork, refusing to let it go. What’s he gonna do? I wanna know... He watched with determination as Levi tried to get the fork away from him. Nope... Mine.

Ieva sighed as she put her pager on silent. I'm not dealing with anything today.... Dave can deal with it, because my family is home. She smiled at the thought, slowly getting up and getting dressed. It's Christmas, I'm gonna stay home for once... She meandered downstairs seeing that Jake was quietly playing minecraft waiting for food to come out and once it did he was at the table, Tucker not far behind. Oh no, how is Tucker gonna be with Levi around? She watched him, though when he didn’t look up her eyebrows furrowed. Does he not feel comfortable? She was surprised to find her cheek kissed, a smile blooming on her lips as she turned her head to peck Lathe’s lips. “Good morning.” I miss having nothing to really worry about, I’m surprised that Jake didn’t instantly ask to open presents...

Tucker had noticed Eren and Levi sitting at the table when he walked in. I should make myself look small... I’m the only one that doesn’t belong here. He silently made his plate, not bothering to raise his head or his eyes. I wonder if I even have presents... I mean Lathe might’ve tried to make me feel more welcome and get me something... But I kinda wish he wouldn’t.... It’s not like they want me here, I’m a nuisance... Nobody wants me.... Nobody will adopt me.... I’m a monster. Tucker looked down in shame putting his fork down for a moment as he just stared at his food. I shouldn’t be here... But Lathe’ll keep me here anyways...

Levi gave Eren a look, gently tugging on the fork. You’re not letting go. “Eren, I will tickle you.”

Eren pouted but instantly released the fork, watching as Levi added more food to it and raised it to his mouth. Hmm.... I trained you well. He smirked as he opened his mouth, his eyes wide with glee.

Levi lifted the fork to his lips, changing direction at the last moment and eating the forkful himself, trying not to laugh at the utterly betrayed expression on Eren’s face. “But they’re tasty...”

“Good morning Honey.” Lathe kissed Ieva sweetly, hugging her close. I love you. “Are you staying home today?” Lathe looked to her with hopeful eyes. I don't want you to work again when the whole family is here for Christmas...
Ieva nodded, kissing his cheek again. “Yeah, I’m staying home, Dave can get the bonus, I don’t give two shits about it…. Is there anything I can help you with?” Though it looks like you’ve got everything covered… Her arms wrapped around his waist as she looked upon him, unable to keep from smiling as he held her close. I miss having my days off… That’s gonna change…

Lathe smiled as her arms went around his middle, pecking her cheek. I’m so glad you get to stay home for once… “There’s nothing much left to do for breakfast… but you can help eat it.” Lathe kissed over to her ear, gently nipping the soft skin behind it. I love you…

James migrated from the kitchen to the table, wincing every couple of steps, watching Levi get pancakes and cinnamon rolls, tilting his head when he fed Eren… person. “….are you the person from the computer we see sometimes?”

Levi looked over to James, nodding. “Yeah, I am. It’s nice to actually see you, James.”

“Y-You too.” James absently rubbed his chest in circles, the port in his chest painful. It hurts….

“James, please don't rub your chest. It doesn't help.” Lathe had broken away from Ieva as she moved to sit and eat, lightly smacking at his hand and setting down a bowl of Cheerios for him. “Do you want an apple cut up or a banana?”

James thought about it looking down to his chest. Which am I more likely to keep down? “Apple please….” He took the bowl and set it in front of him, slowly picking at the dry Cheerios one by one. At least I can eat these…

…oh yeah… Chemo is a bitch when it comes to messing with what you can and can't eat… Levi watched Lathe nod and go to peel an apple, filling a small bowl for him. He glanced to the bowl of dry Cheerios, out of place in front of the generous spread on the table. That sucks… it really, just…. every part of it sucks… Levi looked over again when Eren poked him, going back into boyfriend mode and lifting a bite of cinnamon roll for him. Food.

Eren smirked and chomped on the fork like a little child, his happiness clearly showing on his face as he stayed huddled in his blanket. I love this… I miss you feeding me, I really do… He looked up as he heard Jake call out to Tucker. Huh?
“Tucker…. You can’t leave yet….” His voice was small, but enough to get the older boy to stop walking and slowly turn back with his head down. *What wrong?*

*Fuck…. I was hoping he wouldn’t notice… No one else did…* Tucker sat down once again, letting his head rest on one hand and keeping his head down. *No one wants to see me anyways…*

Jake looked over to Tucker with wide eyes, reaching over the table and poking the top of his head, the teen looking up in surprise. “Don’ be upset. It’s Christmas! Eat cinnamon rolls and be happy!” *It’s easy!*

Tucker smiled before he looked down and away slowly pulling his phone out and texting his thoughts.

**TQ: I’ll be fine, just worry about yourself Kid…. I’m not hungry anyways…**

His eyes were downcast as he handed over the phone, looking away from everyone at the table. *I’m the only one here who doesn’t belong…. How can I be happy?*

Jake looked at the phone, pouting and speaking with a defiant tone. “I-I’m not gonna not worry ‘bout you. Y-Your Dad made a lot of food, and you didn’ barely touch a cinnamon roll. Everyone loves cinnamon rolls. Eat!” Jake pointed to the nibbled-at roll on his plate accusingly. *Eat the food Dad made!*

Tucker’s jaw set, taking a deep breath to came himself as he typed out a new message.

**TQ: Lathe is //not// my father! He is //your’s//… And I’m not hungry so fuck off.**

His brow was furrowed in silent rage as he showed Jake the phone. *I’m letting my anger out… Fuck, I need to tuck that back in…*

Jake took the phone, his brow furrowing a bit, looking up as if Tucker was dumb. “But he is your Dad! He’s all our Dad!” Jake pointed to himself, Tucker, James, Eren and Levi all with one swoop of his arm. He then tilted his head, his wide eyes curious. “A-An…. W-What does this word mean? …fuck?” Jake looked up as they all looked at him in shock, Jake shrinking a bit, thinking he was in trouble. “I just don’ know what it means!”

“Tucker, why did you write that word and then give it to a 9 year old?” Lathe was shocked
throughout the entire exchange, though he soon set his eyes on the teen, his look concerned and disapproving. Why did you do that?

Tucker snatched his phone back, typing as the anger poured from his system.

**TQ: BECAUSE I DON'T FUCKING BELONG HERE! AND I'M SICK AND TIRED OF YOU PEOPLE ACTING LIKE YOU’RE MY FAMILY! BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT AND YOU NEVER WILL BE!**

Tucker was furious as he threw the phone at Lathe, without even realizing what he did as he stood out of his chair and stormed off. *I should just leave! No one fucking wants me anyways!*

Lathe was shocked as Tucker suddenly stood, not having a split second to think before the phone hit his face, dropping the mug in his hand and hearing it crack on the floor, the phone tumbling into the puddle of coffee. “Shit!” Lathe swore, holding his eye. *Fuck, not good…* He rapidly blinked, his vision blurry, though he saw movement from the table, Ieva standing to go after Tucker only for her to be stopped by James? He watched him go after Tucker, Ieva instead turning to him with worry. *Fuck… what even happened?!*

Levi was on his feet as well, going into medic mode and approaching Lathe, pulling his hand from his face. “Are you okay? You're blinking a lot, can you see?”

Lathe was surprised, stuttering a bit. “Y-Yeah, it's a bit blurry, but I'm sure it’s nothing-”

“How hard did it hit your eye itself? Was it dead on or not really?”

“Levi chill, I'm fine, I swear! My vision's clearing up as we speak, it's fine !”

“Are you sure ?”

“Levi I will smack you, yes I'm sure!” My god, medic mode activated .

Eren was huddled up in his blanket curled tightly around himself. *Huh… W-Why? Why is Tucker mad?* His eyes were full of fear as he looked to Levi looking over Lathe’s eye. *He’s mad… Is he*
mad at me? Did I do something wrong? He jerked back a bit when Mikhail climbed up into his chair to nudge at his face and lick it. He got violent….

Tucker was furious as he slammed his door shut behind him grabbing his pillows and repeatedly throwing them at the wall. Fuck! I’m so angry! Why the fuck do they always think that they have to cater to me too! All I want is for someone to choose me! But that’s never gonna fucking happen and the longer I stay the more that becomes apparent!

It was a while before James managed to get up the stairs and make it to Tucker’s room, not even trying to convince him to open the door first and just getting the key from the doorframe, using a nearby book to poke it off the top. He shuffled over to Tucker’s door, opening it and shuffling inside, ignoring the angry shout to get out. “Don't shove, maim, or kill me. I have cancer and it does that for me already.” The perfect excuse. He shut the door behind him, looking to see Tucker on his feet, trying to get him out. “Don't yell at me, please.” James didn't seem to care at all about how mad Tucker was as he went to the desk, sitting on the chair there. “Given you just roared at me to get out and you haven't used your vocal chords in seven months, this is a pretty serious thing. So, since your phone is dead in a pool of coffee downstairs, will you start angrily talking in my direction, throw wadded up notes at me, or should I just talk at you and hope you listen?” Easy.

Tucker just got angrier as he continued to list his options, picking up the pillow and slamming it against the wall with an angry scream. He did it repeatedly until he exhausted himself to a point and he had opened up a knuckle or two. Fuck… Now I know why mom didn’t want me…. He could feel the hot tears form as he sat on his bed, in silence, holding his pillow, which had busted minutes ago and was littering down all over the floor, and now him. No one wants me…

….I think he's done for now. He was due a meltdown after seven months… James absently rubbed his chest a bit, his voice quiet, careful as he picked his words. “I don't know how you find it so hard to fit in here.” Tucker was silent, as he expected. “But it shouldn't be so hard. Them, a family all being so open and supportive of you… it's not like it's some sort of show. Like they feel pity for you and nothing else. What they're showing you isn't pity. …these are the same people who decided teaching some homeless teenager from Nebraska who knew as much as a kindergartener how to completely function as a human being was worth it. Pity might give you those thoughts, but doing it… that's it's own thing. Someone who sees a person with cancer might feel pity, but it takes more than pity to raise thousands of dollars for treatment and be the emotional support for when you feel like absolute shit which is more often than not. And I know it must've sounded like pity when Lathe kept you, like he was taking pity on anyone else so they didn't deal with you, but it took more than pity to be a guide to try to help you get your emotional shit under control, especially with the whole homophobia thing. And it takes a certain kind of person to do what's best for you even when you don't want them to and drive them to the ER when all you probably wanted to do was go home, shower, and forget about being raped. I get it. But they turned an uneducated and useless fuckwad like me into someone who actually might not get themselves killed when they go into the world, and I feel at home here. …I always wanted to live in a house… I was so used to boxes and alleys and ditches, you'd think I’d feel weird…. but I don't….“
Tucker was close to sobbing as he held onto his pillow, sniffling to try and calm himself down, but the tears not cooperating and simply rolling down his face. “B-But…. I-I did have a home….. I had two…..” I don’t know if Lathe even knows, maybe he does.... I was brought back.... “I-I had a home.... And n-now I don’t...” Tucker broke down into sobs as his body shook. I wanted to stay.... The people were nice, and they wanted me... But now... No one wants me... Not even Lathe... But he won’t give me up because he hates me.... And he doesn’t want anyone else to deal with me.... “I-I... I w-want a h-home too....”

...shit, this one needs therapy or something. I can't fix this I don't think... I sincerely doubt it. “You already had a home? Did you like it there?” Tell me stuff.

“Y-Yeah.... I had a-a Mom... and a Dad.... B-But she took m-me back.... Because I-I wasn’t wanted.... T-They didn’t n-need me anymore.... B-Because she was having a-a baby.... I-I was th-there for t-two years....” I was tossed aside like trash.... And I haven’t been even considered since then.... “I-I h-have less t-than three y-years left to f-find a h-home....” And if I don’t.... I won’t ever have one....

James looked to him with sympathy, shuffling over to the bed to sit next to him, gently rubbing his back. “I’m sorry...” Dad never said anything like that... “…You know how much Lathe talks about wanting kids... but do you know that he's been talking like that since before Jake got adopted and stuff? Even though he wanted his own kids, he adopted another kid, loves him to death... he loves all of us... I think that no matter how many or how few kids he ends up having, he won't want to kick any of us out... I'm not even technically adopted or fostered or anything... I just kinda exist here. They have no legal obligation to me, really. There was literally no good reason for them to help me. But they did because they cared. ...he spent thousands of dollars to help a complete stranger, slept in the same bed as me because I was so used to sleeping on the streets, became my doctor, and became my emotional support and teacher in two weeks. I just showed up wanting something so I didn't starve.” James shrugged. “He goes above and beyond for all of us. I've heard stories of all the stuff he's done for his family... and if you’d let them all become family... I’m sure I'd watch wonderful things happen for you too... he really cares about you. I think you should give being part of this family a chance.” Please? You'd be so much less miserable all the time, maybe...

Tucker shook his head. “I-It’s m-my fault.... N-No one w-wants a m-monster...” He wiped at his face trying to calm himself down. “Y-You should g-go.... Y-You can tell Lathe to call the agency I-if he wants... And t-to give Jake m-my presents.... A-And I’ll p-pay him back for the p-phone....” And I’m sorry for throwing my phone at him.... Fuck.... I probably landed myself into an orphanage...

“No.”

Tucker picked his teary face up, looking at him with confusion. “W-what do you me ‘No?’..... It’s not l-like th-they want me.... T-They didn’t ch-choose me... N-No one chooses m-me.... T-They
just a-agreeded f-for money f-from the s-state….“ I know how the foster system works… They can try and hide it all they want..

“Tucker, we both know Lathe built this house without going into debt and created a thing that legit reverses what should be death. I don't think he cares about the tiny bit of money the state or whatever gives him. Second, you just said it yourself. He could easily pick up a phone and give you back. But he hasn't. He didn't with the incident if you beating up Jake, so if that didn't do it, nothing will. They took you in because they fucking care, okay? And I'm not gonna go downstairs and punish you for you because you don't deserve to live in this denial of not belonging to a family. I don't give a shit if you're not happy with me. You're no fucking monster. You've been really nice to me and to everyone and been civil when that guy is over and you do all your chores and don't blast music or swear super loud or throw shit on a regular basis. You've been polite and well-mannered and diligent about homework and your projects in the garage making all the crap you do and you take good care of the animals. That sounds like a dream of a kid to have.” Really tho.

Tucker shook his head. “I just want someone who will like me for me… And who wants me… I want to be chosen….but when that happened…. I-I… I was just thrown back…. Like a piece of trash…” Tucker shifted so that his head was in James’ lap, his hand weakly curling into the fabric of his pants. I.... I want someone to pick me, and keep me.... I was assigned here, they didn’t pick me.... I want to be important.... But with my track record... I’ve fucked everything over for myself....

He just wants to be chosen… James gently pet his hair, his voice soft. “If you ever do get adopted… wouldn't it be hard not living here anymore? Wouldn't you miss any of us? There wouldn't be as many animals to take care of, that's almost guaranteed… there might not be a place for you to do woodworking…. you might not have any dogs to keep you company…” I’d miss living here... I’d miss everything... “No more dinners with all the friends on Saturday… no more theatre room… no more tutor living with you to help you with homework on any subject because hey be taught all the classes...” We have it really good here... “...wouldn't you miss any of it?”

Tucker was silent for awhile. “B-but it would m-mean s-someone w-wanted to take me h-home…” I’d have a home, and if I didn’t have time to do woodworking.... Or any animals, I could always just study... And try and raise my grade.... “I-I’d be o-okay...”

“You'd be willing to give up such a nice life just because someone took you home to someplace I can guarantee won't be as nice as this, to take care of you? Lathe and everyone here has been bending over backwards to try to make you feel welcome and you're ignoring it because they're your foster family and not your actual or adoptive family. A legally binding piece of paper is all that's keeping you from feeling at home. How could that change that they love you? They'll love you the same, paper or not.” They give an infinite amount of shits and you're dismissing it because they haven't adopted or chosen you?
“You wouldn’t understand… To a foster kid…. That single sheet of paper is everything …. And I’ve already had mine r-ripped apart in front of me twice…. I just want it to stay intact…..”

But… Lathe won’t ask to adopt me, neither will Ieva… Or Eren, because they all want their own kids…. I don’t fit….

James nodded. I'll yell at Dad later and tell him stuff. “I understand…. well, kinda… I understand how much it would mean to you to not have to think you’re gonna be left behind at a moment’s notice. ...I don't know what to tell you besides I hope you do get adopted… and that until then… please try to settle in and make this home… you've already punched holes in the wall, the room is yours.” There are holes, the technical drawings on the walls don't fool me.

Tucker could only nod quietly. “Plaster is expensive… I need a lot to fix them a-all…. A-And I don’t have enough money to buy it….” I couldn’t tell Lathe… It would make me feel horrible … That I had a breakdown, and I couldn’t control my anger, so I took it out on the wall...

“It's okay… you'll save up enough soon… don't worry too much, Tucker… you'll be picked soon enough. I know it.” I'll make them adopt you.

Tucker smiled sadly. “The chances are so low… Thank you for the thought… But I doubt it’ll happen…” I’ll call tonight and see if anyone is interested... “You should G-go downstairs… I’m not hungry… B-But you should eat…” I don’t think I can face Lathe without expecting to be grounded, which I probably am… Actually... “I’ll go take my electronics down….” I’m grounded, I know I am… I threw my phone at Lathe.... And I showed Jake the f-word....

“Nope. You can stay here and watch YouTube videos and try to chill and I’ll go down and see what the deal is with presents. We might be saving them for later tonight but I don't know.” I know Dad got everyone coming over stuff…. and I think they all arranged a secret santa thing… James shifted out from under him, leaving him to his thoughts. Time to go yell at Dad. James slowly went downstairs, finding Lathe in the kitchen wrapping up leftovers. “Dad? We need to talk now.”

“Okay, just let me put this away.” Lathe set plates of leftovers in the fridge, turning to James. “What’s up, kid?”

James shuffled over to sit at the kitchen counter, sitting on a stool. “Why haven't you adopted Tucker yet?”

Lathe was surprised by the question, taking a second to answer him. “U-Uhm, because… well, if Ieva and I adopted him we’d only be able to foster two kids total because Jake and he are under 18. And Eren and Levi are starting their own family, they don't have to adopt him.”
“But you all live in this one house.”

“...yeah?”

“So what if, because you and Mom are already trying for kids and that'll mean you guys can only foster two kids anyway... adopt Tucker and then make Eren and Levi the official foster people, and then you just take care of all the children?”

Shit.... “Hon, the problem with that is that neither Eren nor Levi are 25 yet and they both need to be around, and a ton of screening is involved and it's just a really hard process in general and they don't even qualify... but...” Lathe shrugged one shoulder, running the back of his neck. “...I will admit... we're hoping so much to have a kid of our own... if and when we do, that change will happen anyways... and we'll only foster two...”

“Then what's the difference? He had a meltdown because he wants to be picked and legally bound to someone and a home for forever! It's what he wants and needs! The kid needs a damn therapist or something, he's so fixated on being chosen and kept after what happened. Do you know that one? He was adopted for two years, then Mom got pregnant and didn't want him, called him a monster and sent him back? Ring any bells?” Lathes expression gave it away. “I take that as a no.”

“....shit, that's what the problem’s been...” Things make so much more sense now....

“Yeah. So what I'm going to recommend is you give him the Christmas present that he needs and give him permanent commitment instead of more legos. Do it. Right now.”

“J-James, I have to talk to Ieva, and we’d have to go down to the courthouse and I don't even know if Tucker would want us to be his parents-”

“But Daaaad....”

“James-”

“But Caaaaaaancer.......” You'll do anything for your sick kid....
Lathe sighed in defeat, smiling faintly. “I'll think about it, Hon.” He watched James nod in approval like he'd already won, shuffling over to kiss his cheek before going to chill in the living room. ...the kid has a good point..... He looked over as he heard the doorbell ring, the sound bringing him back to the land of the living. “Comin’!” Lathe went to the front door, opening it and seeing a small troupe of people, Sharon with a grocery bag in each arm, Marco next to her and Casper bringing up the rear. Huh? “........are you guys dinner reinforcements?”

“Yep!” Sharon watched as Lathe just shook his head and let them in, setting the bags on the counter, Casper setting his stuff near the liquor cabinet. “We know you decided to be insane and extend the family, so we’re here to help.” She saw a bowl of rice sitting on the counter, quirking an eyebrow. “Whose phone drowned?”

“Tucker’s... long story...” Lathe sighed, going to the pegs on the wall. “If you're all gonna cook, I might as well get you all aprons.”

“Please- I'm wearing white.”

Lathe chuckled, handing them all aprons and refusing to fork over the liquor cabinet key as Casper pestered him. Soon enough Jake appeared, saluting.

“I'm here for kitchen duty.”

Oh my god, he's adorable. “You can help, Hon. Let's see what you can do...” If Eren and Levi wanna just sleep or chill or fuck or whatever, that's fine. They don't have to cook.

I don’t wanna let go of him. All we’ve been doing since brunch is sit on the couch and cuddle. I’m not going to complain about that as all... Though Levi’s kinda hard to cuddle with, I mean, have you seen those abs? He’s fucking gorgeous! I swear, he worked out more, just so that I can trace more lines on his stomach.... Which is also another thing I’ve been doing, I just can’t help it, tracing his abs is so soothing to me, especially when I'm curled up to him and my head is on his chest, so I can hear his heartbeat.... That is so calming, I swear I fell asleep like... Actually, I’m not sure how many times I fell asleep, but I know it’s a lot. And his arms! They’re so strong, I love it when he wraps me up in them, and holds me close, and he lets me nuzzle into him... He smells different than he did before but, I’ll give it a few days of him showering at home and it’ll be different.... Eren shifted a bit, splaying his leg over Levi’s hips almost as if he was straddling him,
but his nose was buried in his neck as he laid on top of him. “Hmm…. I can smell dinner… It smells good…” *I think it might almost be ready. I sure hope it is… I'm starving…*

Levi smirked, looking up as the doorbell rang, Lathe going to let the first guests in, Jean followed by Scotty, both of them with an armful of presents. “Sup Scotty, Sup Horseface.”

Jean’s eyes widened at the sound of Levi’s voice. “So you actually came home? I thought you were just gonna be on a Skype call with us all night…” I mean, yeah, we got you a present because Lathe told us you’d be there…. But I figured he meant we were gonna ship you the presents….

Levi glared for a moment, his voice sarcastic. “No, I'm actually a hologram right now that can physically manipulate stuff. Skype has become very advanced.” *Yes, I'm here!*

Jean rolled his eyes. “Good to see you too, short stack….” He had a huge smirk on his face as he set the presents down where Lathe directed him and then went to the kitchen to go hug Marco from behind and kiss at his neck. *You’ve been here like all afternoon, leaving me alone…. Not cool.*

Marco jumped a bit, soon relaxing in his arms. “Hey, Jean.” He turned his head, pecking his cheek. “Thanks for letting go of me long enough to let me help cook.” He watched Jean pout a bit at him, pecking his nose with a small smile, his voice quiet. “M’sorry. I'll make it up to you. Promise.” Marco gave him a sweet kiss before turning back to the stove, carefully watching all the timers. *It's a good thing Lathe has two ovens now… and they're huge, and half the stuff cooks at the same temperature… very convenient.*

Scotty was finishing up setting his large bag of presents down as the doorbell rang once again. *Hmm…. Probably Hannah, she was struggling to keep Maverick in the car and in his car seat…. And he’s been walking around on his own now…. He looked out the window, nodding. “It’s Hannah, should I let her in?”*

“Let in the waifu, please.” Sharon called from the kitchen, her arms full with a stack of plates to get the table in order. *Everyone's hands are full… “Oh yeah, the child too. Forgot about him for a sec.” She grinned, obviously joking.*

Scotty nodded, getting over to the door and opening it and hearing small feet run into the house as soon as the little child could fit. “Woah….”
“Incoming!” Lathe managed to intercept Maverick, sweeping him up before he could crash into his mom with all the plates still in her hands. “At least take off your boots, kiddo, you're leaving wet footprints everywhere.” Lathe carried him back to the front mat, getting him out of his coat and boots and hat, making sure Sharon’s hands were empty before releasing him again. “My god, he moves fast.” I need to mop that up.

Hannah sighed as she watched Maverick run off with his boots still on. “Sorry about that Lathe…” She came in with an almost Santa-like bag full of boxes. “What are we doing with presents?” It was just easier to carry them all in this giant bag…. “Maverick, come out of the kitchen, and come pet the dogs!” She called into the house, a giggling child soon returning to her side.

“Doggie?” Maverick’s eyes were wide with excitement as he held his arms up towards Hannah. I want up!

“Maverick, Honey?” Lathe held out his own hands, Maverick turning and letting him pick him up. “Let's go say hi to the doggies, okay?” That'll keep you entertained.

Hannah sighed with relief as Lathe stepped up to take Maverick. Okay, time to get all the presents out… She smiled as she saw the already large pile before she added even more to it. Well I really hope that Henry will be happy…. We got him a game that’s not even out yet…. I don’t really know the kid… for Tucker we got probably the biggest erector set you could find on EBay…. And it’s in great condition… and we did other things like that for everyone else, I hope it’ll be a happy fest for everyone…

Lathe carried Maverick over to where the dogs were huddled on a couch near Eren and Levi, setting him in their midst. The dogs made room for him immediately, Nene going to rest her head in his lap, demanding pets. Tiny human gives tiny pets. I like the tiny pets.

Maverick couldn’t stop giggling as he gently pet Nene, a huge smile on his face. “Doggie!” It’s the sleepy doggie!

There was another ring of the doorbell before the door was opened and in came Henry and Greg, shortly followed by Brett and Kevin. Kevin was holding quite a few boxes, yelling at the others to take their boots and jackets off before they took another step. Sometimes…. I swear, I live with complete idiots….

Lathe looked up as the doorbell rang, unsurprised when the guests opened it themselves. “Ah, ring
and enter. Good compromise.” *Instead of just walking in and it taking us a good few minutes to realize you’re here.*

Kevin sighed quietly. “They were just about to open the door without even ringing the doorbell…I swear they never learn.” He smiled and held his hand out for Lathe when they got in. “Thank you for inviting us.”

Lathe chuckled, shaking his hand warmly. “Of course. We’re so happy you came. And they'll learn eventually…” Lathe smiled. *I'm glad you all came. I was worried you wouldn't.*

Henry sheepishly smiled, looking around the house. “Uhm…” *Is Tucker around anywhere? “Is Tucker around…?”*

“I should go get him. He's still upstairs. Make yourselves at home.” Lathe let them get rid of their coats and amble further inside, going to get the phone from the bowl of rice, carefully turning it on. He sighed in relief as it lit up, going upstairs with it. He soon rapped on Tucker’s door, his voice gentle. “People are starting to arrive Tucker, and dinner’s almost done. Come downstairs, m’kay? And I have your phone…” *Please?*

Tucker nodded silently taking his phone and sighing in relief when it worked.

**TQ: I’m sorry about throwing this at you earlier, I’ll be down in a few minutes…**

He looked down to his pajamas which he’d been in all day. *I need to change.*

Lathe smiled, handing the phone back before going to gently hug him. “It's fine, Tucker. We're cool. You might wanna pick something else to wear, though. I personally don't care, but you might.” He nodded to his pajamas. *Yeah, I dunno.* “Don't take forever, Hon.” Lathe left him at that, going back downstairs.

Tucker nodded, dialing one of the numbers he knew from memory. *I need to ask….***

Lathe was back downstairs, helping Sharon with the even longer dining table when he heard Tucker bound down the stairs and straight up to him, looking more happy and excited than he ever had been. “Whoa, what happened?” Lathe grinned, trying to get him to stand still. *Yeesh, what happened?*

“Someone’s interested!” Tucker had a huge smile on his face as he spoke. *Someone’s interested in*
me! I’m so excited! He could barely keep his composure as he jumped up and down in excitement.

He’s talking. And someone is interested in adopting him? Lathe beamed, pulling him in for a hug. “That’s great news, Honey! I’m so happy for you.” You really want to be chosen. And you just might be this time.

Tucker couldn’t help but laugh as Lathe hugged him, hugging him back for the first time in forever. I can have a home again!

Henry was frozen when he heard Tucker speak, his mind running into overdrive. He’s speaking… I’ve missed his voice…. but… if he gets adopted, I won’t hear it again…. I won’t see him again…. Fuck… Henry swallowed hard when Tucker broke from Lathe and turned and saw him, smiling and waving. “Hey Tucker. I’m happy for you.” If it makes you so happy to have a new home… I’m not gonna make you guilty for leaving…

Tucker smile lessened a bit before he nodded looking up to see Eren as he was captured in a tight hug. Huh? Why’s he hugging me?

“I’m so happy for you.” I know this is what you’ve wanted, for someone to adopt you… I hope it happens. He squeezed tighter as Tucker tried to get away. “Oh no you don’t! I haven’t gotten a hug from you in months, and you go right up and hug Dad, I feel so betrayed!”

Hannah smiled as she stood with more place sets in her arms beside Sharon. Oh, I’m so happy for him, he’s been here for a long time…

Scotty was in charge of wrangling Maverick and the dogs that he was surrounded by. He had gotten hold of Maverick and walked with him to the bathroom to wash up for dinner. I swear if he asks for presents again… Ugh…. He keeps asking…

“Pwsans? Pwsans?” Maverick’s eyes looked up to Scotty with hope in them. I want my presents.

Lathe chuckled as he heard Maverick while Scotty carried him. “After dinner, Honey.” Presents after dinner for everyone.

Sharon chuckled as Maverick asked Scotty for presents for the millionth time, looking to Tucker.
I'm so happy for him… he could have a permanent home soon.

James made his way to Tucker, frowning when he starting to flit away. “Tucker, stop moving for a second, jeez.” He finally got to the teen, weakly punching his arm. “I'm happy for you.” He smiled widely. You deserve a permanent home.

Tucker smiled and hugged James. “Thank you…” He murmured quietly, closing his eyes as he hugged him. I'm so glad… I could get a home!

James weakly smacked his back, pretending to struggle for air. “You're choking me.” He laughed lightly as Tucker let him go, smiling widely. A new home… talk about a Christmas present.

Maverick was cleaned up and set in his high chair to sit and eat at the table, watching over everyone at the table from the opposite end as Lathe. Presents…. I want presents. He kept staring at the large pile all throughout dinner, wondering if he could open them all. I want presents, I wanna open them all up! He grinned as he was finally cleaned up as everyone took away their dishes, a wet wipe coming to clean his face and his hands before Hannah let him out of the high chair. Presents!

Sharon chuckled as Maverick tried to take off for the huge pile, catching him before he could open everything. “Okay, okay, hold your horses.” She glanced up as Marco immediately latched onto Jean, laughing. “Okay. C’mon, we’ll all open presents in a minute, Honey. Don't worry.” She shifted to hold him on one hip, migrating to a couch to sit down. I need to keep you from tearing all the presents apart.

Lathe was grateful for the help in clearing the table rather quickly, soon ushering everyone with their drink glasses to the living room, the pile of presents on the coffee table. “Alright, let’s see how well we can sort out whose is whose.” There's a lot of presents here. They all reached to sort through the pile, handing all shapes of packages to the people they belonged to, everyone having something to open. Now how is this gonna work… He looked over as Maverick was already babbling excitedly, tugging at the gold wrapping paper of one of his boxes. “Are we doing youngest first, then?” He smiled, everyone watching the toddler tear at the paper, looking with wide eyes as a big blanket unfurled over his lap, stitched with all kinds of animals in different colors, his name along one edge.

“Bankie!”

Lathe smiled as Maverick happily hugged the quilt to his chest. “Yep- your very own blanket. It has your name on it, too.” He watched Sharon move the edge, pointing to the big letters.
Sharon smiled, bouncing Maverick a bit on her leg. “What do you say, Honey?”

“How about we all go from youngest to oldest and open one, then start over?” Everyone hummed in agreement, and Lathe looked to Jake. “You can open one, Hon.”

Jake smiled, carefully taking apart his own gift from Hannah and Sharon. *What’s this? It’s a bunch of green…* He finally got it out of the packaging and lifted it, squealing in excitement. “Oh my god! It’s a creeper hoodie!!” He grinned, slipping on the large hoodie and curling up within it. *Oooh, it’s even big and roomy for me! Yay!*

“Tucker, your turn!”

Tucker looked surprised for a moment before looking to Henry. *Oh yeah… I’m younger than him by a couple months… “S-Should I?” I mean, after this morning, I probably shouldn’t open any…. Can’t I just give all of them to Jake?* He looked down to his small pile, feeling guiltier than he had in a long time.

Henry nodded, nudging a present towards him. “Yeah, go ahead. You first. Open this one.” *Fuck, I hope he likes it…*

Tucker nodded, picking up the box from the bottom that Henry had poked towards him, unpicking the wrapping paper neatly. He opened the cardboard box, seeing a few things scattered inside. He picked up a tissue-paper wrapped piece, unwrapping and inspecting the black plastic. “...is this…?”

“It’s an extra terabyte of storage for the Xbox… because you download a bunch of stuff, and game data takes up a lot of room…” *I saw how close you were to filling it up when you downloaded Battleblock Theatre just for fun… “There’s another thing…”*

Tucker set it back inside, picking up the other piece. He unwrapped it, immediately recognizing it. It was an Xbox controller with custom lights and designs— he remembered both of them in the mall ogling them in one of the stores they went in. “You got me the controller?” He watched Henry nervously nod.
“Yeah… you still like it… right?” *Fuck I hope so….*

Tucker nodded, giving him a small smile. “Y-Yeah, I do. Thanks.” Tucker set it back inside the box, thinking for a moment. *Everyone's here…. and just…. today is a good day…. and I've…. I've been kinda shitty to you… so…* Tucker moved the box aside and moved to hug Henry. *I'm sorry.*

Henry blushed as Tucker moved to hug him, gently squeezing him to his chest. *I miss you…* Henry felt his heart pull as he drank in his scent, though soon Tucker wasn't in his arms anymore, and he flushed when he realized all eyes were on him. “O-Oh yeah, my turn.” Henry reached for one from his pile, the characteristic size of a video game. He unwrapped it, staring in disbelief at the case. He turned it over, then back to the front. He opened it in his confusion, and the disc was inside. “How the hell…. this game isn't out yet…. It's supposed to be out in a few weeks…”

“That's all just time to make the discs and deliver them and stuff. But the game’s done.” Sharon and Hannah grinned. “We know a guy.” *The production people were surprisingly easy to bribe.*

Henry just stared at them, grinning in disbelief. “...I'm not gonna ask… I'm just gonna go with it. Thank you, really!” *Oh. My god. YAAAS.*

Greg smirked as he was urged to open a very large box from Eren. *What could this even be? I mean, the box is fucking huge!* He ripped open the paper, and soon ripping open a large cardboard box. “What is this?”

“I’m not telling you until you open it.”

Greg was skeptical of Eren as he opened up one of the tissue wrapped containers. *Flax?* He opened up the next one and his smile grew. *Protein! Wait, so that means the big one…?* He hurriedly tore open the larger box which held a nutribullet. “Oh my god! This is awesome！”

Eren smiled. “Henry helped, he said you’re trying to get on the football team, so here you are, everything needed for protein and energy shakes and smoothies.” *All you need in is in there.*

James looked around, thinking. “Is it my turn?” He looked over the crowd of them, seeing nobody objected and shrugging. “Cool.” He reached for the biggest package on his pile, feeling it squish a bit. “I think I know what it is already, but I have to be sure…” James opened up the package,
untying the ribbon and unfolding a huge quilt, a huge scene of a forest by day on one side, by night on the other. “...Dad… you're insane...” He grinned as everyone laughed, tugging it around him. It's warm... He looked at one of the trees, seeing a teen looking like himself perched in one asleep during the night, and on the other side the same boy hid from a goose in the trees, cradling an egg. I love him...

“I'm next?” Armin reached for the gold-wrapped box, unpicking the tape and opening it, first pulling out a piece of paper on top. “...you got me that Blue Apron thing? Where they send you ingredients and stuff? That's so cool, I've wanted to try something like that.” Admin smiled up to them.

“Look under the tissue paper.” There's more.

Armin moved the tissue paper aside, gasping and pulling out a new apron and oven mitts and pot holders. Of course he sewed these... “It has a pocket and everything... thank you!” I love it!

Eren smiled watching him set everything in the bag, looking for the next person to go, only to realize it was him. “Oh, it’s me... Right.” He looked down at his presents, stealing the bow off one box and taking it to the couch and sticking it to Levi’s forehead, sitting down in his lap and kissing him deeply. Problem solved...

Jean simply sighed, shaking his head with his eyes closed. “Alright, alright, we get it! Your boy toy is back home, stop snogging and let me open my present!” This one is... From Lathe? The guy who hates my guts.... “Maybe I should pick a different one...”

Lathe grinned as a few people whistled, watching Levi turn pink. This is adorable. “Open it, I swear it’s not a rabid animal.” Don't worry.

Jean looked wary as he opened the box, sighing in exasperation as he picked up a small pile of pamphlets on rabies. ‘Really?’ He tinted pink as some of the people around him laughed or tried to hide it, rifling around further in the box. He froze, lifting out another slip of paper, reading the number on it. “......you didn't.”

“You two needed a vacation.” Lathe grinned as Jean and Marco looked to the voucher with wide eyes. Yes. We did that.

“...I thought you hated me. Thank you!” I can't believe you did that... you just bought us a
Levi cradled Eren close as they continued opening gifts, soon everyone looking to him. He reached up and plucked the bow off his forehead, sticking it to Eren’s head before stealing another kiss. 

Mine.

Marco smiled, looking away as Levi kissed Eren senseless. They're lucky they got to be together for Christmas... Marco reached for his pile after, picking up a slim package and carefully opening it, a small collection of papers. Recipes? He flicked through the few pages, recipes for pies and bread and a few other baked goods, recognizing the pictures. “...you're giving me the recipe to your apple pie?” Marco looked up to Sharon, who grinned widely.

“If you'd rather pay an arm and a leg for it, we can make it work.”

“N-No! I mean, crap, I just... thank you.” I love that pie... and there's even the recipe for the crust in here too... oh my god...

Brett looked around. “Wait… Does that mean I’m up?” I think it does…. But like, I’m not completely sure… His voice was slow, like he was stoned as he sat leaning his head against Kevin’s knee where he sat on the floor. I have a couple presents...

Lathe nodded, nudging a box towards him. “Yep, you're next. We got you stuff.” It was a decently-sized box, a bit heavy. “I think you'll like it.”

Brett was suspicious as he took the big box first. He’s right, it is heavy. He tore apart the wrapping carelessly, letting it fly all over the place and ripping into the cardboard box as well. His eyes widened when he saw the large amount of his favorite snacks. “Oh my god! Food!” And it’s all the good kinds too! It’s not the cheap stuff we’re always forced to get! Oh my god! Yes! “Thank you so much!” I’m so gonna get stoned and eat like half of this, but I don’t care...

Lathe grinned as Brett rifled through all the snacks. “We made sure to get all your favorites.” We had Kevin give us all the info in what kinds you liked. That was a conversation...

Brett smiled more. “Thank you, really.” I don’t have to feel guilty about eating a snack! Woo!
Casper grinned, smacking lightly at Hannah’s wrist as she reached for a box. “Not that one….” He pushed another one from the pile. “Thaaaaaat one.” Open it!!

“I should be concerned… You giving me a box, there could be a biological disease in here for all I know….” I don’t trust you. She chuckled and opened the box anyways, surprised to see white fabric. Huh? What’s this?

Casper grinned as Hannah stared at it with confusion, waving her on. “Take it out of the box and you’ll understand.” He watched her lift it out, a crisp new lab coat in her hands. “It’s even got your name embroidered on it.” All fancy-like.

…. What? “Casper this says ‘Your boss: Hannah Laskoski…” I’m grateful… But… Like why would you do that!? My name would’ve sufficed. “I’m not even the boss of really anyone….” I’m basically on the top floor alone…

“Hannah, yes you are. Legit you’ve had my permission to boss all my lackeys around for the past ten months or however long ago I promoted you and gave you that guy’s projects forever ago. You’re the boss of everyone except the medical trinity: Me, Scotty, and Lathe. Legit.” Highkey. “This will probably make more sense when you next get mail.” The letter and stuff is still in the mail… you didn't say anything about that position we offered you...

Hannah raised his eyebrow. “Should I be concerned for my job?” I should be really worried if I'm waiting for something in the mail. It's Sharon's turn now...

The three of them looked to each other, wearing matching grins. “Concerned isn't the adjective I would use…”

“Something else would be better, like excited.”

“I was thinking ecstatic.”

“That too.”

“So I'm deducing that I'm not being fired…”
“Nope, the sorta-opposite of that.”

“The opposite is being hired, but you already work for us, so.”

“Just look in the mail later.”

Sharon looked between all of them, sighing. “You three…” You’re ridiculous. Coming from me, that’s an achievement. She looked skeptically at the biggest box on her pile, wrapped in gold. She pulled it over, surprised. “It’s heavy…” She carefully opened it, opening the box and moving aside the tissue paper. She gasped, picking up a handful of baby clothes, just a small dent in the pile. “Baby clothes… they’re for the girl…” Sharon beamed, looking through all of them. “They’re all so cute… thank you so much… oh my- really?” Sharon held up a bib, showing the lettering.

‘Mum says I can’t date ‘till I’m 30!’

“Making use of that embroidery machine? Nobody spells it ‘Mum’ besides me and Britain.” She quirked an eyebrow as Lathe sheepishly smiled. “It’s all adorable… really, thank you…” There’s so much here…

Kevin looked over as Lathe reached over and nudged a thin package towards him, quirking an eyebrow at it. “...I feel like I should be scared.”

“Well… just open it.”

He picked it up, giving Lathe another questioning look as he unwrapped it, lifting the lid of the thin box. His eyebrows shot up as he saw the array of gift cards, all for places to eat. “Lathe…” You didn’t….

“You guys can eat out a bit more now. I thought you’d all like that.” The four of them looked to each other with surprise. They deserve a nice meal out sometimes...

Kevin flipped to the back of one of the cards, paling at the number on the back. He read the back for another, shaking his head slowly. “Lathe, I don’t know if I can accept this… I mean…” He set the box on the table, looking at it with uncertainty, sighing and smiling faintly as the few people sitting on the floor poked at it, nudging it back towards him. “...thank you… it’s a wonderful gift.” I’d like to have a nice meal out sometimes… we don’t get to do that much...
Eren smiled from where he was on Levi’s lap. “Some of us would like you to relax and enjoy yourselves once in awhile…. And open the silver one, while you’re at it.” I got you guys this… And I even had to pull a few strings from your work. “Happy vacation…”

Kevin stared at him, his jaw dropping. “You didn't …” He reached for the silver package, tearing it open and taking out slips of paper, leading through them. “Plane tickets… ...you guys bought us a cruise?”

“No just any cruise… An all inclusive cruise… So it’s all done and paid for, and you’re on paid leave… So have fun.” I just had to sign a couple of things for a couple of people and boom, you were off the hook…

...you…” Kevin shook his head, covering his mouth. He laughed quietly, looking ready to cry. “That's… you…” He sniffled, smiling when Henry moved from the floor to hug Eren, all four of them soon piled in a hug. “You're… there's no way we deserve it…. it's too good of you… you didn't have to…” You actually bought us all a vacation…. a damn good vacation...

“Oh, you better pack your bags, the limo is picking you guys up on Saturday morning, which means you got two days to pack and go shopping…” Henry’s told me you’ve never had a vacation since your father left… which is apparently how long Henry's been alive… So why the hell not? I mean I got too much money to spare as it is… “Oh… And the bronze packet… Open that one up too.” Eren smiled more as he was squeezed even tighter by Henry. You all need to get away from here...

Kevin broke from them, tears falling down his cheeks, wiping at them with his sleeve, he opened the last package, taking out a single gift card. “It's for the mall…” He flipped it over, feeling anew rush of tears as he read the number. “We can't…” How am I supposed to accept any of this? “It's too much…” A thousand dollars…. that's… it's so much...

“You can… And it’s fine, I didn’t even spend that much on you, please, it’s pocket change for me, and Henry convinced me that he wanted a vacation…” I couldn’t take seeing him say they’d never had one… “And trust me, I spent more than double on my parents’ vacation…” He smirked looking over to Lathe and Ieva, a wide smile on his face. Vacations for everyone!

Lathe and air a looked at each other in shock, looking back to Eren. “....you're insane.” A vacation? Just us? Lathe beamed, though suddenly a thought hit him from the back of his mind. But what about James and Tucker and Jake? Will I miss the last day he’s here? Would I get to properly say goodbye? What if the kids need me? I have to cook dinners and make sure we don't run out of food
and make sure the animals get fed. I can't take a vacation! Lathe looked too stunned to say anything, the conflict obvious in his eyes, the eyes on them making his nerves worse.

“Don’t worry about it, I couldn’t get you into the resort until July, you’ve got plenty of time to spend with your granddaughter… So quit your worrying and wait your turn so you can see for yourself!” I can see your worrying about everything, but it was a bitch finding you guys everything and then booking it all for you, three weeks to detox and think about nothing but each other will do you good. He smiled more as Henry kept hugging him and crying. Damn this kid is too adorable for his own good.

Lathe sighed, smiling and wiping at his eyes. “S-Sorry…” I don’t know how I’ll last more than two days not being a Dad or a Grandpa… oh my god, we’ll be grandparents soon… I don’t wanna miss any of that, we’ll come back and she’ll be all grown up already… Lathe moved to wrap his arms around Ieva, burying his head in her neck, hiding and just holding onto her. But a vacation with you would be so nice...

Ieva smiled leaning into his arms. Oh, a vacation, I wonder where we’ll go now? We went to Hawaii for our honeymoon… I’m excited to see where we’ll go now… She turned to Scotty, a smile on her face as she saw him holding onto Casper. “Alright, Scotty, you’re up, ya big baby.”

Scotty picked his head up, looking at his small pile of boxes looking to the gold one. “I’m assuming that this is Lathe’s present to me? I’m almost afraid to ask what it is…” It looks like it’s a freaking shoebox…. He opened it up carefully opening the lid and looking at the bottle of pills. “You’re an ass! I’m younger than you! You should be worrying about this yourself you old man!” God! Why the hell would you get me a full bottle of viagra?

Lathe smirked, peeking at him from Ieva’s shoulder. “We just need to make sure you don’t disappoint, ya geezer.” He watched him and Casper both turn red, chuckling. I’m so not sorry.

Scotty scowled. “I hate you… you psychotic asshole…” He looked around to Casper. “You’re next babe.” I’m so done with them… You get to deal with them.

Casper smiled, reaching for the package Eren adamantly pointed at. “Okay, okay, I’m opening it.” Casper tore open the wrapping paper, opening the box. “….huh.” He pulled out a box, looking at the picture on the front. Light blue, huh? “….I was thinking about maybe changing the color… I’ve had purple hair for years and years…. well, that depends on how upset Scotty would be.” Casper looked to Scotty, his eyes pleading. I’ll change it for a bit and see how I like it if you’ll let me… “Pleeeeeease?”
Scotty rolled his eyes looking at the packaging and reading the back of the box. “Yeah I guess you can, but we’re changing our sheets to black so you don’t stain the nice white one…” Hell no, I like my white sheets, you will not be staining it with your damn hair color.

Casper frowned in exasperation, though he still smiled. “Yeah yeah, preserve your favorite set of sheets and all that.” Yay! Blue hair! “Now you two need to tell us all about that vacation you’re apparently taking.” Open the thing!

Lathe and Ieva both reached for the package, opening it together. Lathe took out the plane tickets while Ieva pulled out the papers on the hotel room, staring at them, then each other.

“….Cancun.”

“Do you see this room?!”

Lathe looked at the pictures, mouth gaping. “Eren…. that's…” …fuck, that must've cost a lot of money…

“You’ll be there from Saturday July 1st to Saturday July 21st. I got pretty much everything I could for you guys, Spa packages, a couple bike tours, oh two or four Scuba sessions on the reef, um…. Oh yeah, water sports too… So like water skiing or something like that… There’s also this Lobster and Jazz thing on the beach that you’ll go to a couple times… All the romantic dinner packages I could purchase… Oh, and I got you a cabana on the beach and one at the poolside, that are both private for you two.” You needed a vacation… And I went all out. “I feel like I’m forgetting something…. Oh yeah, it’s adults only, no kids at all, I also got all your transportation settled between the Airport and the Resort… It’s all inclusive now…. Basically at this point.” I bought everything I possibly could so you could have the time of your lives …

They both stared at Eren in disbelief. “You… Eren, it's too much….” It sounds wonderful … but…. it's….

But I don't wanna miss a moment of your daughter growing up… and what if you all need me? I can't take three whole weeks off… it's hard enough to take just an hour break during the day every once in awhile… I just... I don't know if I can do that for that long without having a nervous breakdown… fuck...

Eren looked to Lathe. “When was the last time either of you took a break? And we are not counting
when either of you were sick or your honeymoon, because that’s necessary… Well, when was it?”

He watched both of them try and think. “My point exactly, you haven’t… So you’re going to go and enjoy yourselves before you come back and spoil your grandchild rotten.” I know with Dad, that’ll be especially true.

Lathe badly wanted to protest, but everything kept him silent. I don't want Eren to think I'm not grateful for this... and I don't wanna disappoint Ieva... especially not in front of everyone ... but... I can't... I just... I don't know if I can without feeling guilty the entire time... I'd ruin it for Ieva...

Lathe tried to speak but no sound came out, and he clammed up, his cheeks burning, staring down at his feet. Fuck, I can't even properly say thank you... fuck...

Ieva looked over to Lathe, noticing the conflict in his body language. “Thank you Eren, really, we appreciate it….” I think I’ll be okay with this, but will you? You don’t look so happy about this… She put her hand on top of Lathe’s on his knee, smiling as he looked up. The look in her eyes said everything. We can talk later if you don’t wanna go.... You don’t have to say anything right now...

Lathe looked to her, his hair hiding his eyes to everyone else but her, trying to make her understand for the moment. We do need to talk later... because I don't know if I can... but I can't ruin this for you.... He looked over as the attention of the group was directed back to Maverick again, the toddler tearing open another package. I'm sorry... I don't wanna ruin this.... He leaned his head onto her shoulder, trying to stay calm. ...but I don't think I can...

Ieva pulled him close, running a hand through his hair. We'll talk, don’t worry.

Lathe sighed, trying to keep cool as they all opened the rest of their presents and talked, people leaving intermittently as the night wore on. Soon enough the last guests had left, the leftovers stored in the fridge, and the kids were in bed, leaving the two couples to go to bed. Lathe found himself nearly shaking with nerves when the door closed quietly behind them, moving on autopilot to go get changed, a pair of arms slipping around his middle stopping him.

“You're gonna yell at me for ruining it already... Lathe buried his face in his hands, on the verge of tears. “I-I don't wanna ruin th-this for y-you…” I always ruin everything.... I can't...

Ieva slowly turned Lathe around, nuzzling her head into his chest, taking his arms and wrapping them around her instead of having them hide his face. “Lathe.... Do you not wanna go?” I can totally understand, but I’d really like to go with you...

“I-It's not like I don't wanna... b-but... I just...” I don't know how to just stop ... “I'm always doing everything ... I nearly panicked when Eren was in charge of the house for just one day ... I... I'd have a panic attack before we even leave ....” I need to stay and take care of everyone... they'll need me... “I don't wanna keep you from going, I'd love to go with you, but... I don't know how to
“Lathe… I know this is gonna sound really mean from your perspective, but… Eren’s gotta learn, we’re not always gonna be there to baby him. He’s gotta learn what it’s like to be in charge, I know it sounds really mean, but you can’t hold on forever….” She held onto him tighter. “You can hold onto me forever…. But, you need to understand that our kids need to learn to spread their wings and become independent… Hell, Eren bought us a vacation…. He’s growing up right under our noses…” That vacation probably costed him a fortune ...

“I-I know, but… It’s hard…” Lathe held her tighter. “I don’t wanna miss them growing up… and I just… I can't stop feeling like I need to be there… I just…. it hurts to be away…” It hurts whenever I’m away from any of them....

Okay, how about this, we’re going in July, so they’ll be home and out of school, so if you ever want to we can skype them, that won’t be an issue… But I was um… Kinda hoping we could set out focus on a different kid while we were there…” She blushed across her cheeks and up to her ears. If I’m not pregnant by then... We’ll have three weeks to do nothing but try ...

Lathe blushed, glancing away, swallowing hard. “I…” He breathed deeply, burying his head in her neck. “...you deserve this vacation… and I shouldn't be a nervous wreck the entire time…. I'd really like that.” He softly pecked her neck, trying to calm down. We’ll have plenty of time to try… “...I'm sorry… I'll try to get my head back on straight by then and understand that I can't always be here and can't always hover over the kids…” He gently nipped her skin. “...and we’ll have plenty of time for that…” He sighed quietly, his hands gently running over her back. “...let me make this up to you…” I'm sorry I'm a wreck who doesn't know how to have fun...

Ieva shivered in his hold. “Okay, tiger…” She whispered seductively, pulling away from him and going towards their large bathroom, stripping down on her walk there, and leaving her clothes in piles on the floor. She turned her head, curling her finger to get him to follow her. “I wanna shower with you…” I want you to know that I love you in every possible way.

Lathe swallowed, nodding, trying to look less than scared for a moment. “Give me a moment, Hon.” He watched her leave the bathroom door open a crack, nervously beginning to strip. I.... I don’t know how to ask.... He left his clothes on the floor in a corner, eyeing the bottom drawer of their dresser, swallowing and going to rifle through it, pulling out the strap-on. I don’t know how to ask… but… He forced himself to walk to the bathroom with it in hand, refusing to meet Ieva’s eyes as she turned, feeling vulnerable and guilty. Please....?

Ieva looked at him for a moment, realizing that he wasn’t meeting her eyes, looking down to his hands to see the strap-on. We could do that. She was quiet as she took the strap-on in her own hand,
leaning up to peck his cheek. “Is this your way of asking?” Her voice was soft as she pecked his cheeks. *I want to make sure i’m not reading this wrong…*

Lathe nervously nodded, leaning into her, his hands moving to her waist. “I-I’m sorry… I don't know how to ask…” *And I feel like I don't deserve it because you don't get any pleasure out of it…*

Ieva nodded, holding onto it. “Well why don’t we take a quick shower first? And get you all cleaned up for it?” *I don’t mind doing this, especially if you ask.* “I’m okay with you asking for it more, it’s completely fine for me…” She pecked his cheek again, setting it down on the counter, trying to usher him into the shower. *I can prep you with the conditioner in here… And it’ll be easier with the lube than when we get out…*

Lathe nodded, letting Ieva slowly pull him along to the shower, stepping with her under the hot water. He sighed as they warmed up, trying to make the tense feeling go away. *I don't wanna be so worried and tense…. I don't wanna...*

Ieva lathered one of their shower scrubbies with body wash, getting it to foam and starting with Lathe’s body, trying to get him to relax. “Lathe, you know it’s okay to ask for things, you don't have to worry about it….” *I want you to be relaxed, it'll be easier on you....*

Lathe tried to calm down, his voice cracking. “I-I just don't wanna be selfish about anything…” *I don't wanna take too much...* “I always feel bad when I do stuff for myself…” *I don't deserve all of it...*

“I want you to be happy with what we do, Lathe, and if that means asking for some extra lovin’ I’m not gonna complain…..” She kissed his cheek as she washed his front and arms, making sure to get every inch lathered in soap. *I wanna make you feel special, because you are ...*

Lathe smiled faintly as she kissed his cheek, feeling himself slowly melt as her mouth wandered to his neck, sucking gently at the skin there. Tension very slowly drained out of him as she washed him, enjoying her hands all over him. *Feels nice...*

Ieva made sure to be very thorough as she washed him, letting him rinse off and then washing herself off. *Hmm, this’ll be like last year all over again…. Has it been that long since we’ve done anything like this?*

Lathe nearly whined when her lips left his neck, though he moved to kiss and lick at her neck while
she washed herself, not wanting to just stand and stare. *I'm sorry... I just... it's hard to ask... and it's been forever....*

Ieva let out a loud gasp as Lathe’s mouth found her neck and his hands found her waist as she cleaned herself, stepping into the spray to wash the suds off. “Do you wanna do your hair? While I prep you?” She asked quietly, wanting to make sure that they did exactly what he wanted.

Lathe flushed, though he looked down. “I-I don't know how effectively I can wash my hair while you're doing... th-that...” *I probably won't be able to get very far...*

She nodded, reaching for the shampoo instead and reaching for his hair, beginning to lather his hair. “Hmm, we should take showers together more often.” *I like being able to pamper you sometimes too...*

Lathe relaxed as her fingers threaded through his hair, slowly growing lax. “Mm... we should...” His hands gently pulled her closer by the waist. “...I'm sorry if I haven't been paying as much attention to you as I should... it's just...” *It's hard for me to do anything at the end of the day besides collapse into bed... and you're always already gone in the mornings....*

“It’s okay, really, you don't have to worry about it, I should be apologizing right along with you... I haven’t been paying much attention to you either.... I think that vacation will do us some good...” *We barely did anything for our first anniversary.... I think we need a break, just for ourselves...*

Lathe sighed, stepping back under the water to rinse out his hair. “...you're right... we haven't been paying either enough attention... we should fix that...” *I miss you...* Lathe moved to shampoo Ieva’s long locks, carefully starting to wash the long fiery hair. *I missed doing stuff like this... we need to do it more often...*

“Well, hopefully my schedule change will help.... I get weekends off, and I’m only gonna be working from 9-5 now....” *We reconfigured our shift schedules.... So I’m letting Dave take over basically...* Ieva leaned into his gentle touch, looking up to him to see his reaction. *How will you take it?*

Lathe looked down in surprise, his next words careful. “...are you stepping down as Commissioner?”

“Yeah, eventually, I’m weaning myself off of my position and giving Dave more responsibilities
until I’m just the section Chief and he’s Commissioner.” She stood on her tiptoes to peck his lips, smiling and putting her forehead against his chest. I’m happy, I’ll get to spend more time with everyone.

Lathe felt himself sighing in relief, kissing her sweetly. “As long as I get to wake up next to you, I'm happy. …the extra time you're home will be nice.” I can pay more attention to you… and you’ll be there to distract me on the weekends so I start learning how to not be a helicopter parent...

Ieva nodded, stepping into the shower to wash out the shampoo, looking to him, biting her lip seductively. “You want me to start prepping you here?” It would help, cause we’ve got a lot of conditioner…. And I can always wash you up if you change your mind.

Lathe hesitated, drawing into himself, glancing up to her, to the ground, then back again. “U-Uhm… c-can we start on the b-bed please?” It'll be more comfortable...

Ieva nodded, kissing his chin. “Yeah, why don’t we dry off?” Get you all situated in our warm bed and ravish you.

Lathe nodded, shutting off the water and stepping from the shower with her. He found himself enveloped in a warm towel, Ieva kissing his cheek before getting one herself. I love you... He dried himself off, his hair still damp as Ieva gently reached for him, taking the towels and putting them on the rack to dry, tugging him along to the bedroom. He saw her set the strap-on on the nightstand, the redhead ushering him into the bed and clambering on top of him, his eyes fluttering shut as she kissed him. Thank you... I... it's hard to ask...

Ieva clambered over him, letting their warm bodies touch chest to chest, her kisses trailing down to his neck and sucking softly at his skin. She reached over to the nightstand, grabbing the bottle of lube and setting it on the bed near his hip. I want you to feel like you're on cloud nine.

Lathe was nervous as she got out the lube, feeling her hands trail down his chest to his hips, running over his thighs. He felt himself slowly begin to harden, whimpering quietly as she eased his legs apart. “Please be gentle…” I don't want it to hurt.... And I don't want rough... I want lovemaking... please...

Ieva nodded, her breath gentle against his neck. “I will be, I’ll be gentle, don’t worry.” She whispered quietly to him, shifting a bit so she could gently rub his thighs, wanting him to relax. I know you don’t want it rough, we don’t have to be rough...
Lathe sighed, his hands gripping the sheets from nervousness. He whimpered as she sucked marks all over his neck, stroking up and down the insides of his thighs soothingly. He willed himself to relax, though he couldn't help feeling tense when she reached for the lube. *Please don't be rough...*

Ieva was gentle, taking the lube between her fingers and warming it up before gently easing a slim finger into his hole. She paused every few seconds to make sure that he was okay, barely moving her finger to get him used to the sensation. “Tell me when you want me to put my whole finger in...” She was gentle slowly removing and inserting her finger up to the first knuckle. *I hope I’m going slow enough.*

Lathe tried to relax around the intrusion, breathing deeply. “Y-You can use your whole finger...” He sighed as she felt up his walls, growing used to it’s presence. *You’re being so careful... I love that...*

Ieva nodded, moving to peck all over him, her finger gently twisting and feeling up his soft walls. “Tell me when you feel comfortable for two...” *I want you to be somewhat in control of the situation, and if you don’t like it you can tell me...*

Lathe sighed, speaking after a moment. “Y-You can use two...” *I’m glad I can at least somewhat control this... it’s been a year since you did this for me... and...... I used it by myself once and I just felt so guilty afterwards... but I just... I want this to go okay...*

Ieva nodded, slipping down between his thighs. “Okay... You can tell me when I can add three okay?” She was gentle as she slowly added her two fingers, gently thrusting them in and out, slowly so he could get used to it. Her lips moved to the inside of his thighs, trying to pleasure him. *I want you to feel absolute pleasure, nothing else...*

Lathe breathed deeply as she stretched him carefully, drawing in a deep breath as she brushed over a spot deep inside him. He moaned quietly as she went over it again, and then again, and again. “Th-That feels good...” *More...*

Ieva listened to his breathing, her eyes looking over his body, watching his cock harden as she continued to rub at his bundle of nerves. *God, you look amazing...* She leaned her head up, taking his head into her mouth gently sucking on him. *You’ll relax more if I do this at the same time...*

Lathe groaned deeply as her lips sealed around his tip, instantly melting under her hands. *So good... “Y-You... mm.... can do three...”* He whimpered as her third finger entered him slowly, feeling the stretch. *Burns.... but it’s a good burn...*
Ieva continued her ministrations, making sure that she stretched him out enough for the strap-on. *I hope you’ll be ready soon, I really wanna make love to you...*

Lathe soon was easily stretched around her fingers, moaning freely as she teased his prostate. “Feels good… m-more…” Lathe looked down to her with pleading eyes, spreading his legs wider for her. *I want it really badly... please...*

Ieva slowly withdrew her fingers, coming off of Lathe with a lewd pop. “Ready?” She asked quietly, getting up off the bed and getting the strap-on on. *I’m ready.... I hope you are...*

Lathe nodded, his eyes dark as he watched Ieva strap on the dildo, hungrily eyeing the thick toy. *I want it...* He watched her coat it generously with lube, spread wide under her as she clambered back on top of him. *Please be gentle with me...* He quivered as he felt the tip nudge his entrance, his hands winding around her shoulders. *Please...*

Ieva gently eased the tip in slowly, pausing as she noticed any signs of discomfort and slowly easing into him until their hips were flush. *You seem okay with this... I hope you are... “Lathe?” How do you feel?*

Lathe held onto her tightly, his legs coming up a bit instinctively, adjusting to the sensation. *I feel so full... I love it... “Please, Ieva... please move...”*

Ieva nodded, pushing her legs apart a bit further so that she could pull out and slowly thrust back in. She kissed at his chest, gently marking him. “I love you Lathe...” *I really do, and I want you to be comfortable with that...*

Lathe whimpered as she began to slowly thrust into him, his body heating up. “I love you too... I love you so much...” His quiet moans began to fill the room, adjusting to her ministrations. *Feels good...*

Ieva smirked, slowly speeding up a little bit as he got more comfortable and trying to aim her thrusts towards that one spot that would make him go wild. *I want you like a puddle under me. Please...*

Lathe’s moans grew louder as she sped up, his legs wrapping around her, whimpering. *Please...*
you’re so close to hitting it… It took a few moments before he gasped, crying out as she hit his prostate over and over. “I-Ieva, there… oh please, there…” Feels so good…

Ieva continued, just as he pleaded for her to continue. “It’s okay, Lathe, let it all out…” I want you to feel absolutely wonderful… She thurst her hips a bit harder onto his prostate, but not by much. I don’t want to hurt you, I know you wanted me to be gentle with you.

Lathe let out a choked sound, whimpering. “Feels so good…” His moans were heady, his face flushed down his neck. His length ached on his stomach, dripping precum onto his pale skin. Feels so good…. “I love you so much…”

Ieva smiled, blushing as she thurst into him. “I love you too… and I alway will…” She reached her hand down to take his length and start to pump him in time with her thrusts. I know you’re feeling this… and I want to put you over the edge… I wanna cuddle with you.

Lathe gasped as she handled his length, feeling the heat pooling in his nether. “Ieva… I-I’m gonna cum…” He tried to keep from cumming too soon, clamping down on the toy as he struggled to keep himself from coming undone. I don’t wanna cum yet… “T-Too soon…” He whined desperately, thinking too soon it would be over. I don’t want it to be over...

Ieva paused for a moment stopping her motions and holding onto the base of his length. “Do you want me to slow down?” I don’t know what you want me to do… you need to tell me… “Please tell me, Lathe.”

Lathe ached, clinging to her. “P-Please… j-just… wait a minute…” I don’t wanna cum yet… He hid his face in her shoulder out of embarrassment, shaking as his entire body curled around her. It can’t be over yet....

Ieva nodded, stilling inside of him, her hands gently running up and down his sides. “It’s okay, baby, tell me when you want me to move again.” She was calm and understanding as she kissed at his neck, completely focused on Lathe. I want you to be able to talk to me, and ask me for things...

Lathe was still, his breath shaky as he came down from the pleasure, growing lax on her arms. “Y-You can move again…. please go slow…” I don’t want it to be over...

Ieva nodded, slowly thrusting into him like he asked her to, kissing at his neck to keep him calm. “Tell me what feels good Lathe, I wanna pleasure you…” I really do, because you’ve never asked
Lathe tilted his head back, his limbs still holding her close. “I-It feels good… wh-when you thrust deeply… and wh-when you're nipping at my neck….” He gasped as she rolled her hips deeper into him on a thrust, his cock jumping a bit. “L-Like that…” His breathing became labored as she started rolling her hips with every thrust, moaning loudly. “P- Please…” It feels too good...

Ieva nipped at his neck, rolling her hips particularly deep and grinding down into him. “You feelin’ good?” I hope you do… I really hope you do. She reached down to take hold of his length, teasing his slit. “I want you to let go, Lathe…”

Lathe whimpered, wanting both to protest and obey at the same time. I don't wanna… but it feels so good … “Ieva…. I-I….” He whimpered, his moans growing higher-pitched as he felt himself near the edge, leaking precum in streams. But I still need you...

“It’s okay Lathe… I want you to feel good, and if that means round two, we can do round two…. Don’t be afraid… I want you to cum for me.” Her voice was heady and seductive as she thrusted a little harder and faster, fondling him in time with her thrusts. I want you to love everything.

Lathe drank in her words, the promise of more helping him relax, letting himself revel in the pleasure. He cried out, his moans loud as he came hard over their stomachs, whimpering as she milked him of his release. He panted as they lay tangled together, glowing. He whined when she shifted inside him, clinging to her tighter. “P-Please…. I-I'm sorry, b-but… I-I need you…” I need more… I'm sorry… He sighed as he heard her murmur soothingly in his ear, his hold on her tight as Ieva started up the same slow pace again. The room was filled with his moans after moments, Ieva’s touch driving him over a second time. Sated, the strap-on was discarded out of the way, the two of them a tangle of limbs. I love you so much…. I needed that..... ....maybe I can learn how to ask...
Chapter 85: Why Leave?

Chapter Summary

PLEASE COMMENT!

“... w-what do you mean... that there’s no one?” Tucker’s voice was quivering as he held onto his cellphone.

“There’s no one that’s interested in adopting you anymore, Tucker.”

“B-But... I-I called y-yesterday... and someone w-was...” He had tears quickly forming in his eyes. It was yesterday! I called on Christmas... and someone was interested! I thought it was a miracle... but...

“Honey, they adopted someone else instead of you, you had next to no chance at being picked ... No one else is interested...”

Oh my god... Dad was so happy for me...

“You’re more likely to get adopted if you go to the orphanage, parents come during the day all the time to look for new kids. It’s harder placing foster kids in homes because the kids in the orphanage get seen first...”

He was silent for a moment. I’m gonna have to leave... “C-Can I get transferred? T-To the orphanage?”

“Are you sure you wanna do that Tucker?”

I’ll do anything if it means that slip of paper stays intact... “Yeah... When will I get picked up?” I need to pack some clothes...

“We’ll send someone around nine... Bye, Tucker.”
He sniffled, wiping at his eyes as he curled up into himself. *I... Why did they even tell me they were interested?* He curled up to himself, hearing everyone around him start to get up and make their way downstairs, except for him. He sat on his bed, figuring out what he could take to the orphanage with him. *I can take a backpack full of clothes, my cell phone, the charger... That’s really it...* He got up, made the bed perfectly and then started to pull out all his clothes and try to decide which ones he would take. *I should take all my long sleeves... My wrists are still healing... Oh, I should take my razors with me too... Get them out of Lathe’s house...*

Lathe was content as he woke up tangled in Ieva’s arms, her body pressed flush to his. *I could get used to this...* They managed to get themselves out of bed after a few teasing kisses, dressing and not caring that a few marks showed as they went downstairs to make breakfast, the table piled with cut-up fruit and pancakes. He looked over as he heard Tucker descend the stairs, his smile faltering as he saw him dressed. “You look ready to go out, Tucker. Where are you heading?”

“Aren’t you at least going to eat first?”

“No interest... So I’m being transferred to the orphanage in Wichita...” He cut into his pancake some more, solemnly eating it. *I probably won’t be able to ever come back...* “Oh um... I’ll go clean the garage up real quick, before they get here...” He moved to hop off his chair, putting his fork down.

Lathe tilted his head in curiosity. “You don’t look too happy... did you get adopted?”

“No interest... So I’m being transferred to the orphanage in Wichita...” He kept his head down, looking away. “Yeah... Someone’s coming to get me around nine... I should go clean up the garage... It’s a mess...” He kept his head down, looking away. *You wouldn’t understand why even if I tell you...* Tucker looked at the table as it quieted before getting away from Lathe’s grasp, ducking away to go into the garage. *I have a lot to clean up...*
Lathe stared after him, looking to the ground, all of them silent. *He's leaving... someone might snatch him up right away... but...* Lathe sat back down at the table, staring at his coffee mug. *He's leaving. .....but.... he can't..... he said forever ago that he'd rather be in foster care than some damn orphanage... what changed?*

Tucker worked on organizing all the pieces of wood by size and putting them in neat piles, he swept up the floor and got rid of any shavings on the counter tops. He put all the tools away and looked at all the designs he made. *I won't be able to make these... Oh well...* Tucker shook his head, crumpling the papers up and tossing them in the trash. *They'll get thrown out eventually...* He barely realized what time it was as he emerged from the garage, the doorbell already ringing. *Is is really nine already? I'll go grab my bag...*

Lathe watched as Tucker got his bag, stopping him before he could get to the door. “Wait, Tucker-” *Stay here and live with us.* He hesitated, looking over his shoulder where Ieva and the rest of the family were still at the table, locking eyes with her, his expression pleading. *We have to keep him. Please.*

Ieva got up from her seat, coming over to where Lathe was standing. “Tucker, honey, are you sure you don’t wanna stay here?” *Didn’t you say you never wanted to be in an orphanage again?*

Tucker nodded. “Y-Yeah...... Thank you.... For everything... Um, Jake’ll probably like the Lego sets...” He moved to hug Lathe tightly, slightly flinching when he heard the doorbell ring again, hearing Ieva go around to open the door and greet the Service worker. *I’m leaving now...*

Lathe held him close to his chest, carding one hand through his hair. “We love you, Tucker. We really do. ...wherever you end up finding home, I hope you're happy.” *Even if that home isn't here... if you get chosen before I can convince Ieva or anything... I really hope you're happy with where you end up.*

Tucker smiled faintly, nodding and turning to see who he was stuck with for the two hour drive to the city. “Oh... Hi, Mr. Jans.”

“Hey, Kiddo.... Long time no see, you got your backpack and everything else you need?”

Tucker nodded and slipped outside the door as Mr. Jans nodded to them, turning as well and going towards his navy blue car. Tucker getting into the back and looking out the window as Lathe came out the door. *I’m probably not gonna find a home... This is just a last ditch effort before I run anyways... People always come around Christmas... try and make it a big deal... I hope someone will come look at me...*
Lathe weakly smiled as Tucker looked to him, waving as the car pulled around and down the driveway. *I hope we see you again soon…* He stepped inside again and shut the door, turning to a quiet house, looking to Ieva and remembering the night before. *Ask for what you want.* “Honey… can we talk?” *We kinda need to.*

Ieva nodded, not expecting for Lathe to practically drag her upstairs and into their room. “What’s up?” *What are you gonna ask me?*

When the door was shut Lathe immediately wrapped her up in his arms, his head on her shoulder. He thought for a moment, speaking. “….you know how we’ve been trying for a kid for a long time?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, if and when we do, we’ll officially have two of our own kids under the age of eighteen… that’s the threshold for having six foster kids… after that, we can only have two…”

“….where are you going with this…?”

“When we have our own kid sometime in the next few years, we’d be at that threshold anyway. …..and, I have to ask…. what would you say, if…. …if I asked if we could adopt Tucker?” The next words tumbled from his mouth quickly, obviously scared of her reaction. “I know it seems like really dumb timing two seconds after he decides to go to an orphanage but James just had this conversation with me yesterday and I was still thinking about it, but… but seeing him leaving…. I don't want him to be gone….” *I wanna keep him…*

Ieva let him speak watching him for a moment, formulating words. “I wouldn’t mind… but, he decided he wanted to go… I think we should give him a few days, okay? Then we can go and see if he’s still up for adoption… Or if he’s found a home, okay? I know you want him to stay, but if he chose to go, we have to respect that.” She wrapped her arms around him as she felt him shudder. “I know… I know it seems horrible, but we need to give him space.”

Lathe nodded, leaning heavily into her. “Okay… okay.” *At least you didn't say no…*
Chapter 86: Roles Switch

Chapter Summary

Pure Smut

Levi was quietly anxious all throughout dinner, his ankle hooked with Eren’s. *I can’t help being so antsy… and horny as hell, I guess… it’s just… I’m home… and when I want to hold you, you’re there…* Levi and Eren finished dinner rather quickly, Levi dragging Eren upstairs. *I’ve been thinking about you all day…* The door was soon kicked shut, though he was surprised when Eren suddenly had him pressed up against it, kissing him hard. He melted, his hands winding around his shoulders. It clicked when Eren’s tongue had forced its way into his mouth, his hands pinned up above his head. *…wait… is he gonna be topping this time? “Eren…?”* Levi broke their kiss, his eyes already hazy. “Are you gonna top…?” *Yes please…*

Eren grinned almost wickedly. <“Shut up… You’re mine tonight.”> You get to be the slave tonight…

Levi swallowed hard, unable to keep from feeling excited. *He’s gonna dominate me… if it’s anything like what I’ve been doing to him, then… fuck…*

Eren’s mouth went right to Levi’s neck, where the scabs of a few mornings ago were slowly healing. <“Oh no, we can’t have that happening now, can we?”> He sunk his teeth down into his skin, breaking open multiple scabs and lapping at the metallic tang that ran over his teeth. *Hmm, I wonder if you’re prepared…. I wanna do everything to you…*

Levi winced as Eren bit into his neck, a quiet sound leaving him. *That stings…* Levi sighed as Eren lapped at the skin, enjoying the bit of relief.

Eren soon stepped off, letting go of him and pointing to the bed. <“Strip, Slave.”> His eyes were wide as he watched Levi move from the door and towards the bed, stripping as he walked there. *Damn he’s so hot… Even from behind…*

Levi sauntered to the bed, tugging his sweatshirt and his tank top off, not caring as they fell to the floor. He slid out of his jeans, kicking them and his socks off, soon tugging down his boxers. He climbed onto the bed, turning over and laying there exposed, not seeming to mind his nether was in full view, stretching his arms above his head. *If this is gonna be a thing, might as well get*
comfortable.

Eren had ventured to the closet, pulling out the wide range of toys they had, and grabbing the rope as well. His eyes seemed to darken as he saw Levi on the bed. <“Slave… Do enlighten me… Who told you that you could lay down on your master’s bed? I specifically remember telling you to strip and nothing else.”> I may have pointed to the bed, but I never said to lay on it.

Levi pondered it for a moment, smirking. <“You pointed to it, Master, and it looked so comfortable…”>

Eren’s eyes narrowed, grabbing one of the whips he’d gotten, almost feeling the sting etch across his back. I’m so ready for this… He stepped right up to the bed, motioning Levi to come closer to him. If you want to lay down, you’re going to get it…

Levi watched him pick up the whip, immediately obeying when he was beckoned forward, kneeling in front of him, eyeing the leather. That's gonna hurt, isn't it...

<“Turn around.”> Eren’s eyes looked like they could pierce into the soul, his tone commanding as he looked over him. You’ll get to see what it feels like…

Levi looked wary as he did, watching Eren moved out of the corner of his eye, setting some of the other toys down, leaving him with just the whip.

Eren leaned over Levi’s shoulder. <“That’s a good little slave. Do what your told, and I won’t rip you open.”> His voice was deep beside Levi’s ear only for a moment before the crack of the whip against skin sounded throughout the room. Ah, the crackle of a whip… Such a good noise...

Levi jerked as it hit across his back, wincing at the harsh sting. That hurts more than I thought it would…. ...worth the magnitude of stuff we’ve been doing where I'm usually the one taking control… how can Eren enjoy it so much ? And the entire time...

Eren cracked the whip across his back a second time, then a third, and a fourth soon after. He looked over his work, satisfied with the two uniform X’s he’d produced across Levi’s upper and middle back. God, that’s hot… He put the toy down, walking over to the bed and sitting on the edge, noticing Levi’s eyes follow him. <“Come here.”>
Levi immediately shifted for him, hesitating when he came next to him. <“I-In your lap, Master?”> I’m not so sure I wanna risk it and do this wrong.

<“Your knees…”> His eyes drank in Levi’s bare body as he spread his legs wider for him. <“If you’re any good at this, I might consider a reward for you… But we’ll have to see how well you can use that pretty mouth of yours.”> Eren grinned as Levi settled between his knees. Hell yes…

Levi knelt between his legs, his hands tentatively reaching to rest on his thighs, snatching them back as Eren smacked them away.

<“I said your mouth, not your hands, use your mouth…”> He almost seemed to growl as he pulled on Levi’s hair, getting him closer to his crotch. I wonder if he’ll actually do it? He hasn’t given me a blow… In… Actually, I’m not sure how long…

Levi immediately nodded, something clicking as he glanced to him. ...I have to take off his pants and underwear... with my mouth. ... shit. Levi decided to dive in, his tongue darting out and struggling first with the button of his jeans. He tilted it up far with his tongue, biting the denim and getting it unbuttoned after a bit of struggle, sighing in relief as he bit the zipper. Okay. He bit the hem of his jeans, tugging. He was grateful that Eren shifted for him, managing after a bit to get them down to his ankles. He did the same with his boxers, soon faced with his hardening member, his mouth watering at the sight. He immediately ducked his head down to seal his lips over the tip, beginning to bob his head enthusiastically. I wanna be good for you...

Eren watched, impressed that Levi was able to get his jeans off that quickly and with only his mouth. His eyes followed every movement as Levi began to bob his head. That’s it… He lifted his hoodie up off of him, tossing it aside. Don’t need that, and I won’t need my tank top either. He finally sat with his knees apart for Levi. <“That’s a good slave, taking care of Master… but does it know how to use its tongue?”> Eren’s fingers carded through Levi’s noir locks, watching his length sink into his mouth, disappearing for a few moments before reappearing in a glisten of saliva. He’s pretty good at this… I don’t have as big of a dick as him... So it’s easier to deepthroat...

Levi was careful of his teeth, trying to take Eren’s entire length in before he had to come back up for air, going back in before Eren could say anything, his tongue teasing his slit before going back to bobbing deeper. I hope I’m not terrible at this...

Eren’s eyes were hungry as he watched him, looking to see Levi’s own length, standing at attention. <“Hmm… You’re enjoying this too, Slave?”> He pulled Levi’s head up off his length, cupping his jaw and his thumb rubbing against his cheek. I want an answer from you...
Levi leaned his head into the gentle touch, looking up to Eren with dark eyes. <“Yes, Master…”>
I forgot how much I loved tasting you...

Eren smirked, smacking at his face a bit as he shifted to stand. <“Good boy, now stay.”> He walked behind Levi where he had put the toys and other such things, it took him a moment to decide on what to grab, finally opting for the rope and then the dog collar. <“Stay still.”> His words were once again in Levi’s ear, his hand reaching down his chest to tug at one of his nipples and squeeze the bud between his thumb and forefinger. He watched him squirm, a smile on his face. <“Put your forehead on the bed.”> It’ll be easier to tie your arms...

Levi immediately moved to obey, feeling Eren tug his hands behind his back and tie them tightly together. He soon felt leather on his neck, holding his breath as it was buckled in place. A collar… Levi stared down at the floor, wanting more. Now what...?

Eren’s hands went right to Levi’s ass, grabbing the tight globes and squeezing them harshly. <“Slave…. Since you were a good boy…. You’ve got some options, I can start teasing you now… Or you can wait for the teasing…”> His hands spread apart the two cheeks, giving him a good view of Levi’s ass, his thumbs dipping down to circle around his entrance.

Levi shivered as he felt the thick digits circle his entrance, trying to stay still. <“Can we… please start, Master?”> Please ...

Eren’s eyes seemed to darken more as he moved to grab the lube, a cock ring, and the anal beads he’d gotten. <“I guess we can.”> He reached his hand around Levi, stroking his length teasingly. Hmm, I wonder what noises he’ll make?

Levi whined as Eren’s hand stroked his length, eyeing everything he had in hand. He felt his length slicken with lube, groaning quietly as Eren slid the cock ring all the way down to his base, squeezing him. He studied the beads warily, not knowing what to think.

Eren grinned as his hand left Levi’s reddening length. His hand came back to his ass, smacking him hard, watching the red hand print form. Damn… That’s so hot… He took his other hand and smacked the other cheek just as hard, drinking in all the sounds Levi was making. You’ll like the anal beads…. Maybe...

Levi make a small sound as Eren smacked his ass, arching his back a bit, giving him a bit better view of his ass. This is okay… I don’t want the whip again really… but where this is going now, I like ...
Eren watched his back arch, which gave him a look at his entrance without even needing to pull apart his ass cheeks. He covered the beads in a generous amount of lube, using his thumb to spread the lube around Levi’s hole. Eren dipped his thumb in his entrance for only a moment, making sure that it was lubed to an extent. Good, time for the beads, you get to see how these feel now…. And I’m gonna leave them in.

Levi shivered as Eren’s thumb dipped into his hole, leaning down to rest on all fours. <*>I-Is this allowed, Master?”*>

Eren looked to his shift in position. <*>I’ll allow it, but next time, direct your questions to me before speaking, got it?”*> Call for me before you ask something, then I know you’re not just talking… He took the beads into him, watching them slip in one as a time before he got about halfway through, hearing him cry out. <*>Only half way? You can do better than that, slave.*>

Levi took in a deep breath as he felt the first beads enter him, the feeling of them entering strange. He make a choked sound as they prodded near his prostate, crying out quietly. He heard Eren speak, feeling the beads draw out of him and thrust back in, making lewd sounds as they did. Fuck, they actually feel really good...

Eren smirked as Levi continued to make pleasured noises. Good, I can go further in… Eren moved the beads ¾ of the way in, watching his body shudder as his hole was stretched out. <*>You’re gonna have to take the whole thing if you wanna be stretched out enough for your reward at the end of this… But I wanna hear you slave. Speak, tell me how it feels….”*> How does it feel for you? I know I personally like when you did the anal beads to me… It’s a good way to stretch out...

Levi whimpered, his head hanging. <*>Yes, Master… it feels really good, you're so close to my prostate… and it feels so good when the beads enter me, the stretch feels really good…”*> Levi let out a quiet cry as Eren thrusted them in harder once, his body shuddering. <*>I'll take them all the way, Master… please…”*>

 <*>Good boy.”*> Eren thrusted them all in, leaving him to stretch on the last and largest bead. Good, you took it all in, and a fraction of the time it would’ve taken to use my fingers… <*>You better hold those beads in, and you get to choose, front or back…. Lay on the side you don’t want.”*> He untied Levi’s hands letting him crawl on the bed before turning to get the candles out of the bathroom. I know I liked the wax, I wonder if you will too…

Levi reached behind him to keep in the bed, climbing onto the bed. He pondered his choice, deciding to lay facing up. He was grateful for his decision as he saw Eren come out of the bathroom with the candles, laying open for him, the beads still all the way in. I hope I like these…
they were certainly very fun to do with you ...

Eren crawled over Levi’s lap, letting his ass cheeks rest on top of Levi’s cock, teasingly grinding down on him as he held the candle up. He tilted it sideways, watching the first drop fall down near his left nipple. God that’s so hot ....

Levi jerked a bit as the first drop hit his skin, groaning quietly as Eren trailed wax in a circle around his nipple. His breath caught in his throat when Eren trailed over the bud, shakily moaning. Fuck, I like it....

Eren watched him shudder and moan, his eyes dark as he moved the wax over his right nipple. He repeated the same motion as he used his right hand to remove all the wax from around his nipple. I wanna do it again to each nipple...

Levi whimpered as his other bud was layered with wax, feeling the wax peel from his chest. He watched Eren trail the candle back over the first, groaning as he teased the already tender flesh. Feels good...

Eren repeated the process again with both his nipples before trailing the wax down his abdomen, letting the wax drip. <“Hmm… Should I?”> His eyes glinted with mischief as he shimmied off of Levi’s cock and started to fondle it with his freehand. I wanna see what you think about this... Hmm...

Levi watched the wax trail down his abdomen, his voice shaky. <“Master, please be careful, Master…”> I don't know how good it'll feel on my length... I kinda did your base when I did this with you, but I don't know...

Eren smirked, blowing out the candle and crawling off of Levi to go put it back in the bathroom. <“Come here, slave.”> He got the cold water running in the sink, intending to take good care of his slave. Hmm, what should I do next with you? Should I do the sound? Or should I take out the anal beads?

Levi shifted off of the bed, the beads still all the way inside of him. He whimpered as the beads kept brushing his prostate with each step, his nether aching as he slowly walked to the bathroom. He stood next to Eren obediently, awaiting his next command.

Eren watched him whimper with every step, a small grin on his face. Ah, so they are hitting it....
He shifted and got a wash cloth, running it under the cold water for a moment, using it to clean up the wax which had hardened all over his chest. I'm a good master, I'll take care of you. He leaned his head down and suckled under his ear, leaving a dark mark.

Levi sighed quietly as he was cleaned up, his eyes fluttering shut as Eren sucked under his ear, tilting his head a bit for better access. He opened his eyes when Eren pulled away, attentive for his next command. Anything. He moved as Eren dragged him to the bed, the beads still buried deep inside him as he was ushered onto the bed. He laid down when Eren pushed him down, watching him move. He nearly drooled when Eren picked up a thick dildo and the slim sound, eyeing them hungrily. Please ...

Eren brought the items close to the bed, getting out yet another bottle of lube. <“Squeeze the beads out.”> I wanna watch you struggle with this, because it’s hard to do… He watched intently as Levi flipped over and presented his ass as he started to push them out. That’s fuckin’ hot ...

Levi struggled to push them out of his system, breathing deeply before pushing again. It's so hard to do… Levi managed to get about halfway, his head hanging, not wanting to admit defeat. He kept trying, and it took a while, though finally the smallest beads slipped out as the toy hung in the air, falling onto the bed. Thank god...

Eren smirked, taking the beads and inserted them in him all at once and watching him squirm before pulling them out again, making sure that Levi was in fact as loose as he needed him to be. It’s pulling out easy... And then going in easy… His own cock twitched as he heard the lewd sound of the beads going in and out.

Levi panted, gasps and quiet moans leaving him as Eren teasingly thrusted them back in and out. Feels good… He arched his back, presenting his ass and letting Eren do whatever he wanted with him.

Eren soon pulled out the beads, letting them lay on the night stand. He grabbed the bottle of lube and the sound, a smirk on his face as he rubbed Levi’s length with his free hand. <“Are you gonna be a good boy?”> Eren’s hand wandered down to the cock ring, debating if he should take it off. I don’t want you to cum if you can’t hold it until I tell you, you can.

Levi nodded, though he hesitated when Eren toyed with the cock ring. <“Master, I'll do my best… but I won't be able to keep from cumming, Master… leave the ring on, Master, please…”> I won't be able to keep from cumming and I'll get in trouble…. I don't want that...

Hmm.... Well, he wants it on, so I’ll leave it on. Eren pushed him to lay on his side, lubing up the
sound and gently easing it into his slit, making sure that it was off. *I won’t turn it on until I start really toying with you.*

Levi was nervous as Eren lined the sound up to his slit, whimpering quietly as it slid down his length, looking to Eren with pleading eyes as he left it off. He lay still, watching Eren move. *It feels weird… I really wanna know what it feels like when it’s on…*

Eren got the dildo, starting to lube it up, watching Levi grab the sheets as he nudged his entrance. *I want you to feel everything …. *He pushed the dildo in slowly, aiming for his prostate. *Come on…*

Levi made a choked sound as he was stretched, panting as the dildo sunk into him, gasping when it firmly rubbed his prostate, shaking and trying to stay still. *<“Master… f-feels good, Master…”> More… please …*

Eren smirked, moving so that the dildo continued to hit his prostate every time his thrusted it into him. He felt his length throb with need as he turned the sound onto the lowest setting for Levi to get accustomed to it. *<“I wanna hear you moan, slave, don’t hold back….”> His words were firm as he continues to torture him without release. You already sound wonderful.*

Levi’s mouth gaped as Eren turned on the sound, a loud, sinful moan leaving him, more desperate moans leaving his threat as Eren thrusted the dildo harder. *<“O-Oh my God, Master, so good… oh god, Master, please, more …”> Holy fuck…. His thighs shook from the stimulus, whining.*

*He kept at it, slowly turning the sound’s intensity up as he kept fucking Levi with the dildo. His voice… It sounds so hot … <“Hmm, that’s a good boy, are you enjoying it?”> It sounds like you are, but I wanna be sure… *Eren let his freehand move to tug at the collar on Levi’s neck. I wanna look at your face…*

Levi let Eren tug his head back, his eyes full of pleasure, his voice syrupy. *<“It feels so good , Master… I love this, Master…”> His eyes widened as Eren turned up the sound, his eyes still locked onto Eren’s as his breathing grew ragged, shuddering from pleasure with each breath. <“I- It's so good , Master… please , Master…”>*

Eren smirked, thrusting the dildo into him for the last time before pulling it out of him and turning the sound all the way up. His fingers went to Levi’s hole, keeping it occupied while he reached for a condom in their drawer. *It’s just easier with this on… and I’m going to deny you your first climax… Bring you down and let you build yourself up again…*
Levi was breathing hard, his length aching as the sound vibrated. *Fuck…* <“Master…”> He looked over as saw Eren get out the condom, trying to draw him in with his eyes. <“Master… please fuck me, Master…”> *I want you… really badly…* Levi could already feel himself close to orgasm, the cock ring unyielding and keeping his base clamped. <“Master, I'm already so close…”> *I wanna cum…*

Eren’s eyes drank in the appearance of Levi offering his open ass to Eren. *Damn, that’s really hot…* He quickly got the condom on his length, burying himself into Levi’s heat in one motion. *Damn, he’s so warm…* His hands grabbed Levi’s and pinned them over his head on the mattress, forcing his head down on the bed, and his hips up. <“Then go ahead and cum…”> *You won’t be able to…*

Levi gasped and cried out as Eren buried himself inside, his hands pinned up above him, feeling so exposed. <“M-Master… I can't w-with the cock ring…”> *Fuck, I want it off…*

Eren looked down, feigning surprise as he spoke. <“Oh, so it appears that you can’t… I guess we’ll have to wait then.”> He grinned as he slowly pulled the vibrating sound out, pulling out himself. He let go of him to put everything by the bottle of lube on the nightstand. *I wanna hear you beg for it.*

Levi whimpered as Eren pulled himself and the toy out, his eyes wide as he heard him. *What?* <“M-Master, please…”> He trembled, keeping his ass high in the air. <“Master, please, let the cock ring come off, I can cum… please don't stop, Master, I'll be good for you… I wanna be a good boy for you, please Master, please don't stop…”> *I wanna cum… please let me cum…* Levi watched with hungry eyes as Eren took the condom off, reaching for his length and slipping the cock ring off. His length throbbed, his wrists still planted on the headboard, keeping himself completely at his mercy. He felt Eren’s tip brush his entrance, crying out as Eren suddenly rammed into him, pounding him as he instantly came all over the sheets, moaning as he came hard.

<“Fuck, Master …”> He shook as Eren stroked him, milking him of his release. *So good…*

<“That’s a good boy.”> He pulled out once again, leaving Levi there on the bed as he went back over to their box of toys, grabbing the crop. *I want you to ride me…. And I’m gonna use this…*

Levi didn't move, trying to catch his breath, his hands still above him. He looked back as Eren moved, seeing a riding crop come out. *That's new…*

Eren grabbed a pillow, putting it towards the end of the bed and shifting to lay down on his back. He cracked the crop on the back of Levi’s thighs to get him to move. *Get your ass over here, slave.*
<“Come on…”> Hurry up.

Levi immediately moved, yelping as the crop snapped against his thigh, his cock jumping at it. *Fuck*… He moved closer to him, waiting for Eren to move him, studying the crop in his hands. *…Well shit…* He moved when Eren yanked him on top of him, straddling his hips. <“What do you want me to do, Master?”>

<“Ride me…. Like a shameless slut…”> He tapped the crop against Levi’s thighs, trying to get him to move. *Come on, I wanna be in you.* <“We haven’t got all night… So hurry up!”> His words were a growl as he watched Levi instantly move. *Good boy.*

Levi instantly shifted forward, his hand guiding Eren’s length to his hole, sinking down his length. He groaned as he was filled, beginning to bounce on him. <“Y-Yes, Master…”> *I feel so full… I love it…*

Eren let his face flush as he listened to him. *God, you sound absolutely wonderful …* His free hand rested on Levi’s hip, thrusting him down as Eren thrusted up and grinded against him. <“Find your prostate.”> *I wanna be thrusting right onto it.* Eren kept the crop against Levi’s other thigh, ready to crack it against him. *I want you to be a mess …*

Levi shifted around, looking for it. <“Y-Yes Mas- oh … M- Master …”> *Levi was practically a puddle as Eren began grinding up into him, abusing his prostate. <“Master… it feels so good…”>* *More…*

Eren had a cheeky grin on his face as he let his hips back down, letting Levi work for his pleasure. He tapped the riding crop against his thigh. <“Keep up the pace, slave. You need to pleasure your Master…”>* I wonder what you’ll do with that information?*

Levi immediately nodded, bouncing with renewed vigor, his hands trailing over his chest, drinking in the sight of Eren below him. <“Y-Yes, Master.”> *Levi reached down to tease Eren’s nipples, watching for his reaction as he rolled his hips. Let me please you….*

Eren let out a moan as his nipples were played with. *Fuck…. He remembers where everything is still sensitive.* He bit his lip as he felt Levi’s hips roll on him. *It feels so good.*

Levi panted as he kept moving on top of him, feeling his body begin to heat up again. *I wanna cum… <“Master… I’m getting close…”>* *I feel warm…* He sighed as he felt Eren’s free hand slide
over his thigh, teasingly and gently holding his side.

Eren groaned, feeling his own coil begin to tighten. *Fuck, I'm not gonna last much longer…* His eyes darkened as he pushed him off, watching him flop on his side, a sly smirk on his face as he pushed his legs apart, turning him. He set one leg over his shoulder and the other under him as he thrusted back into Levi. *You on your side like this…. God damn….* He watched Levi’s eyes widen as he started up a brutal pace, his hands wrapping around Levi’s thick thigh to give him leverage. *You are mine ….*

Levi whimpered like a kicked puppy as Eren tossed him off, his eyes widening as Eren changed his position, gasping as Eren began pounding him. *<“Oh God , Master…”> I'm gonna cum…*

Eren grinned, his mouth latching onto Levi’s calf for a moment, before letting it go. *<“Cum , slave, I want you to cum, and I want you to cry out as I fuck you into the mattress.’”>* His hips thrusted deeply into him, loving the feeling of his tight heat. *I’ll let you have your reward after I’m finished with you.*

Levi moaned loudly, gripping the sheets tightly as Eren spoke. *[M-Master… I… so good….] His eyes widened as he felt his body flush, crying out as he came all over his chest, Eren releasing deep inside him as he clamped down on his length. [M- Master…] He panted, whimpering as Eren thrusted and carried him through his orgasm, soon laying on the bed still, trying to catch his breath. *Fuck…*

Eren groaned as Levi closed around him, unable to keep from cumming. *He’s so tight.* He continued to thrust until he’d filled Levi with everything he had to offer. *Fuck ….* He moaned as he slowly pulled out of him, sitting back on his haunches, looking over Levi to see his work. *Fuck he looks amazing… <“Come, my French slave, it’s time for your reward.”>* You started speaking in French…. *But I’ll let it go…* He shifted off the bed, heading towards their large bathroom, not bothering to clean up the toys at the moment. *I can do that later…*

Levi flushed as Eren spoke. *I switched to French? Fuck….* Levi sighed quietly as Eren drew out of him, following him obediently to the bathroom. He watched Eren start to draw a hot bath, standing quietly next to him. *….do I get to bathe with you? Or is this, like, a dog bath sort of thing…? I just wanna cling to you… but I don’t know if I'm allowed to yet…* 

Eren made sure to add all the oils and salts that he could to the bath before adding a generous amount of bubbles and letting them expand over the large bath. *<“Get in.”>* His voice was soft and caring as he got out the washcloths, which they almost never used, and lit the soft fragrance candles where they were. *Your special treat…*
Levi looked over everything, blushing as Eren gently nudged him closer, stepping into the hot water and sinking in, his eyes slipping shut with a quiet groan. *Feels nice...* He looked up to Eren, his voice small. <“Will you join me, Master?”> *Please?

<“I will in a moment, get situated.”> He ruffled Levi’s hair as he sat in the large tub, turning off the water before disappearing into their room, the sound of rustling fabric filling the air as Eren stripped the bed, and then brought all the toys in the bathroom to clean them thoroughly. He hummed along, letting Levi ogle his complete nudity. *I’ll be there in a second...* He put everything away, coming back to the bath and slipping in behind Levi, letting the shorter man come close to his chest.

Levi watched Eren with interest, making room for him when he slipped into the tub. He immediately moved to cling to his chest, curling up to him. <“I-Is this okay, Master?”> *...can I call you Eren again...?*

Eren nodded, moving his hands to Levi’s neck to unclip his collar. “Did you like it?” His voice was soft and questioning. *I really hope you did, because I like it when you do that to me....*

Levi let him take off the collar, his smile a bit dreamy. “Almost too much...” Levi nestled into his neck, kissing at his warm skin, grateful for the tender hands on his hips and back. “Thank you... so much...” *I loved it.*

Eren smiled softly, holding him close as he reached for the wash cloth and the soap. “I didn’t whip you too hard, did I?” *You’ve got red marks... But I didn’t do as many as you did to me...*

Levi shook his head, relaxing into his hold as Eren began washing his back. “No... I'm fine... I wasn't a huge fan of that, though...” *I should just be honest... so that if we do this again while I'm home, I'll have even more fun... and you'll know for sure what will and won't work for me....*

Eren nodded, gently going over the raised red lines. “If you hadn’t had the cock ring on me the other night, I would’ve came while you were whipping me.... And while you were doing the wax.... And probably everything else...” He had a cheeky grin on his face as he spoke, taking Levi’s arm next and washing the rest of his body. *I want you to feel better...*

Levi blushed, enjoying the care Eren was showing his every inch. “I almost came with the beads... I like those, the wax too... God, the sound... ugh, you could've only teased me with that and I’d still have been *very* happy...” *That was great...* Levi sighed contentedly, his body loose of all
tension. “Babe, I love you…” So much...

Eren smiled softly, leaning in to kiss his jaw softly. “I love you too…” I’m gonna miss you when you’re gone. His hands shifted lower towards Levi’s entrance. “I gotta clean you out…” I’ll be gentle, I promise… His fingers gently circled his entrance, waiting for him to give him permission.

Levi leaned onto him, his hands going to his shoulders, nodding. “Okay…” He sighed as Eren’s fingers eased inside, making quiet sounds as he was cleaned out. Feels good… He whimpered, feeling himself begin to harden against their stomachs against his will.

“Do you want me to leave it? Or milk another round off of you?” I dunno, you already came hard twice, and pretty close together. He was gentle as he worked him clean, feeling his white essence slowly work it’s way out of Levi’s system.

Levi clung to him, feeling Eren’s lips tenderly brush his neck. “C-Can you… please help?” His voice was small, not wanting to be too selfish after everything Eren had already done for him. You’ve already done too much… “I’m sorry…”

Eren nodded, his free hand gently starting to stroke his length. We need to actually sleep after this… for once in our lives… His fingers worked their way deeper into him as Levi shifted, moving around to look for his prostate to help him. “Don’t be sorry… How many time have you gotten me to climax in the past three days alone? …….. Don’t answer that.” It’s a rhetorical question.

Levi groaned, leaning heavily on him, moaning breathily. “Thank you… I really love you…” He held onto him tighter as he fully hardened, whimpering as Eren brushed his prostate. “Please, g-gentle, please…”

Eren nodded, shifting his fingers off of Levi’s bundle of nerves, gentle as he pressed it eventually. His hand stroked evenly, making sure that Levi’s whole length was touched. I wanna make sure you feel good… Really good…

Levi moaned quietly against his shoulder, his expression giving away all the pleasure he was feeling. So good… “Eren…” His voice was wavering, his hands running all over Eren’s back. “I’m… o- oh…” He relaxed more as Eren murmured in his ear, not trying to hold back as his coil tightened. Levi’s moans were breathless and whispy, banging onto Eren, completely at the mercy of his skilled hands. He arched his back, his hole aching. I love having him inside me… even just his fingers… and his cock is heaven … He's gonna make me cum again… I wanna…
Eren smiled as Levi was coming close to the edge, gently pressing against his prostate as he ran a thumb over his slit. “Let go, Levi… cum for me… I wanna watch you come undone…” He had the audacity to nip at Levi’s ear, gently tugging on the lobe. *I want you to be in utter bliss.*

Levi cried out quietly as he came, slumping against Eren as his length was stroked, feeling him run his hand over the insides of his shaking thighs as he released. He weakly held onto him as Eren washed him, enjoying all of the care in his touch. *He's so good to me...* Levi was content and sleepy when Eren drained the water from the tub and dried him off, lazy as they dressed each other and collapsed into bed, Eren letting Levi lay on top of him and listen to his heartbeat. “You're too good to me…” Levi heard a mumbled voice, but he was asleep a moment later, only needing to hear the sweet tone to know what was said.
Chapter 87: Sudden Surprises

The next few days dragged on, Lathe going through the motions, though in the back of his mind he kept worrying that he was already snatched up. I miss him... He had found all the plans from the garage walls in the trash, uncrumpling them and smoothing them out, tacking them back up. He found the holes in the walls when he poked around his empty room, finding nothing better to do with his time than patch them and repaint the walls. He was nearly out of his mind when the fourth day came, clinging to Ieva’s middle when they woke up, his voice mumbled against her shoulder blade. “Can we please go to see if he's still there today?” It's been four days... please...

Ieva cracked open her eyes turning to look at Lathe. “Yeah, let me take a shower, get dressed and make sure Levi and Eren are up for the challenge of watching Jake.” She sat up, stretching, and slipping out of the covers heading to the bathroom, not caring that she was nude as she walked. We can go see if he’s still there. I know you’re dying to adopt him, so let’s get going.

Lathe rolled over and shamelessly watched her walk, smiling faintly and heaving himself from bed. I love you. He got dressed neatly, wearing his favorite sweater and sweetly kissing Ieva when she left the bathroom, letting her get dressed as he washed up and tried to tame his mane. Eh, I probably look like a responsible adult anyway, so. He went to retrieve his wallet and his phone after a few minutes, pecking Ieva’s cheek. “Thank you for this…” I know I sprang this on you really quickly... I'm sorry for that...

Ieva smiled softly. “Did you deal with the bunnies that are fucking next door yet?” We gotta make sure that they know that Jake needs to be taken care of and not to fuck all day while we’re gone. She was still looking through the closet for something to wear. “You can go deal with the bunnies...” I can get dressed, since you’re already dressed.

Lathe nodded, his hands resting on her bare hips for a moment. “Alright, I'll go tell them...” His hand ghosted over her side, slipping away from her before he was too tempted to do anything. This is not the time for fucking. That comes later. He left for the hallway, knocking on Eren and Levi’s door, not listening first for fear he’d hear something he’d want to bleach his brain for. “I'm sorry if I'm breaking anything up, you two, but Ieva and I are going into the city today. You have to take care of Jake and not just fuck all day, got it?”

Eren groaned as he got up, rubbing at his back. Fuck, I'm gonna be sore all day... He grabbed a pair of sweatpants before walking to the door, not even realizing he was covered in whip marks, wax burns, rope burn and hand print shaped bruises. “Where are the heating pads?” I severely overdid it.... Levi's a fucking sex god.

Lathe looked over Eren in all of his well-fucked and ravished glory, just shaking his head. “I'll go
get you some… and put on a shirt so when Jake sees you he doesn't think you got beaten to hell in a violent way.” *You kinda look like a hot mess.*

Eren was confused for a moment before he looked down, his face blushing as he moved to hide his chest. “Uh… I’ll be right back….” He slipped into one of Levi’s old hoodies which hid everything and then came back to the door. “So how late do you guys think you’ll be?” *I assume you're going to get Tucker…* “Be careful when you’re driving, and take Mom’s truck… they got hit pretty hard the other night….”

Lathe chuckled, nodding. “Alright, duly noted. And it could be a long while if the drive down is gonna be pretty snowy. Id say…. a good five hours? Like, we **should** be home in time for dinner. But it'll be a while. You and Levi need to make sure Jake doesn't starve or fall down the stairs, ya hear?” *Be responsible.*

Eren nodded. “So we’re gonna lounge around all day and snack on leftovers, got it.” He closed his eyes as he yawned, letting out a soft squeak as Levi came up behind him and wrapped his arms around Eren, nipping at his neck, or at least what he could get at with the hoodie in the way. *Oh fuck… He scared me.* “Levi….” He whined, doing a half-assed job in trying to shoo him away. *Dad’s right there…*

Lathe sighed as Levi ambled up with his sweatpants hanging low on his hips, his own chest covered mostly with hickey and bite marks, scaring Eren as he hugged him. *Of course...* “That's pretty much it, yes. I'll get your heating pads and then leave you to it.” Lathe went back to his own bathroom to retrieve them from under the sink, forking them over to Eren as Levi still clung to him from behind. *Adorable.* “Keep it PG for the tiny human, okay?”

Eren nodded turning to Levi and weakly smacking him. “Off… I gotta fix my back which you utterly destroyed last night.” His voice was a bit off as he struggled to get Levi off of him so he could put the heating pads on. *It hurts, let me make it not hurt.…*

Levi kept one arm firmly around his middle, the other reaching for the door. “Let me help….” He looked to Lathe, his face buried in his hands in exasperation. “...we’ll get Jake breakfast, don't worry.” He shut the door for the moment, turning to kiss Eren senseless. *I didn't get to say good morning or do any aftercare… I'm gonna fix that now.*

*God, they are like bunnies...* Lathe just went back to his and Ieva’s room, seeing her mostly dressed. “They’re aware of their task and will be in it in approximately ten minutes. Or less.” *Depends.*
Ieva looked over her shoulder as she slipped on a navy blue blouse to go with her heavy black slacks. “Do I even wanna know what the bunnies are up to?” I’m sure they’re probably gonna go at it at least like twice while we’re gone…

Lathe shook his head. “Eren looked like he got his ass kicked and asked for the heating pads.” It’s pretty serious stuff.

“Well, I can only imagine, Levi had to be horny, and god knows Eren was with how much stuff he got and had delivered to the house…” I can only imagine what they did… “I wouldn’t be surprised if Eren’s got a collar on by the time we get home.” She picked out a nice necklace before grabbing socks for her boots. “Okay, well, let’s get going shall we? We got a long drive.” It’s been snowing hard, so… It’ll take awhile…

Lathe nodded, quirking an eyebrow in thought. …yeah, Levi will probably have him in a collar soon enough… at this rate… Lathe moved to peck her cheeks before they went downstairs, donning heavy coats before going out to the truck. This is gonna take forever… Ieva drove, the roads very snowy the entire way, greatly slowing down traffic. They got to the orphanage nearly three hours later, finally parking and coming inside. They ambled in, looking around a bit as they walked to the front desk. “Uhm, hi, we’re looking to adopt someone by the name of Tucker? 15, came in four days ago?”

“Well, he would be available if he was here…” The woman at the desk went to open a binder to get to Tucker’s information. That fucker weaseled his way out yesterday…

Lathe tilted his head a bit in confusion. “….did he already get adopted, or….?” What do you mean, he’s not here?

“Nope, no one can find him, he left yesterday before nightfall… We haven’t found him alive or dead, so there’s always hope… But it was a horrible storm last night.” The kid’s dead for sure …

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up, instantly feeling dread wash over him, as he suddenly felt furious at the woman behind the desk. You don’t sound like you even give a shit if he’s dead. “That’s horrible…. do the police know about this, to look for him?” What have you done about this?

“Yeah, they were notified as soon as someone noticed he was missing, they haven’t been able to find him either as far as we know.” The woman then went to the computer, pulling up his file. “Still nothing…” They know he’s a problem child, they probably are expecting a body to show up anyways…
Shit…. Lathe panicked, thinking. *How could you find him… it's not like he has a tracking device on him or anything…. ......wait. He does*. Lathe pulled out his phone, quickly opening an app and tapping on Tucker’s name. A pin popped up in a matter of seconds, across the city. “He still has his phone… it still has battery, and he was last tracked across the city…” He watched the pin jump to the next address down the street, grinning. “It's moving, so he's alive and out there. We’ll get him back, no worries.” *He's gotta be freezing …. And exhausted… we’ll go out and get him a nice meal, first thing. ...after we adopt him, of course.*

The woman looked at him with confusion. “You, sir, have his cellphone pinged? Even after he’s not in your care anymore?” She raised her eyebrow, judging him. “Well, go on Mr. Quo, find him. Since nobody else can.” *Or wants to…*

Lathe glared at the woman, seething internally. “I don't watch my children’s locations every moment of every day. Knowing where my son Eren was saved him from dying after being kidnapped, and it'll be nice to keep Tucker from dying of hypothermia. So yes . I will find him before he collapses from exhaustion in the dead of winter.” Lathe turned on his heel, leaving with Ieva before he could yell at the woman. *Don't kill her.* Lathe hopped in the truck, looking to the map. *The pin stopped moving… “I'll direct you. Straight ahead for right now. ...it's stopped moving, so please don't hesitate too much…” I'm worried…*

Ieva nodded, following his directions and trying to keep Lathe from panicking when the pin didn’t move again. *He’ll be okay, we’ll make it, we’ll make it in time Lathe.* She finally pulled up to where the ping was on the sidewalk, small dark alleyways on either side of the street and many of them. “He could be anywhere Lathe.”

“Then let’s start looking.” Lathe shoved his phone in his pocket, out the door the second Ieva stopped the truck, running in the direction the pin had been moving. He didn't shout for Tucker, afraid it would scare him off. *Where is he?* Lathe took off down an alley, looking frantically. *Something's wrong….*

Tucker could hear the footsteps get louder and quicker as they came down the alley, shivering as he curled up to the trash, a ratty blanket wrapped around him. He barely had the strength to open his eyes, let alone keep them open. *My whole body is frozen... I can’t feel my fingers…. Or my toes…* He coughed, his whole body shuddering with him as he did so. *It hurts…*

Lathe stopped when he heard a cough, turning around and scanning the alley, his eyes fixing on the human next to a dumpster. *I ran right past him…. “Tucker?”* Lathe ran over, pushing the hair from his face, his eyes widening as he recognized the teen. “Tucker, oh my god, are you okay? Let's get you in the truck and try to warm you up.” Lathe didn't hesitate to scoop him up in his arms, blanket and all, quickly walking back to the truck. *I hope it's not too late…*
Tucker recognized the voice that he heard calling his name, but he didn’t have the energy to look up, or fight back as he was picked up. *I’m cold…. And hungry…. I’m gonna die out here*…

Lathe was soon back at the truck, looking around. “Ieva!” He heard the crunch of snow underfoot, Ieva coming out of a different alley. “I found him. Unlock the truck so we can get him inside, the heat on high. He’s frozen.” *He needs to warm up*…

Ieva’s eyes widened as she looked to see the blanket in Lathe’s arms, and the only visible sign of Tucker was his boots and skinny legs. *He’s only wearing jeans! That’s it? Oh my god…* She hurriedly unlocked the car, hoping in and turning the air on high. “Is he okay?” *He’s gotta be frozen.*

“I think he might be okay, but that’ll change if we do nothing.” Lathe glanced up at the neighborhood around them, seeing nothing but dark buildings and alleys. “Here, inside.” Lathe hopped with him into the backseat, struggling to strip Tucker of the freezing cold blanket and jacket so the heat could more easily get to him, his arms and legs frozen in place. *Fuck…* “Ieva, drive to the hospital. He’s gonna lose his limbs if we don’t.” *He needs a hot bath and fast, and that’s what I can think of… he’s gonna lose his arms and legs.*

Ieva’s eyes widened. “Which one? The children’s hospital or General? Via Christi?” *This is a city! There’s more than one hospital here.* She did put the car into drive and started to peel out of the neighborhood. *He’s that bad?*

“General is close and will be well-equipped for this.” Lathe started to rub at Tucker’s hands, trying to stimulate circulation. “Tucker, Honey, talk to me. Tell me what you’re feeling right now.” *Anything. Talk, please.*

Tucker could barely keep his eyes open, struggling to stay awake. *Everything feels so cold…* His body was still rigid in place, trying to gain any warmth at all. *So cold…* He didn’t realize what was going on as he was ushered into a bright light, his eyes closing from exhaustion, only to snap open as he was put in a warm bath. *Fuck… It hurts …. What’s happening?* His head slowly turned, looking around for an explanation. *Why does it burn?*

*He looks so purple… and his skin… it feels like wax…* Lathe was right next to him as he was set in the warm water, sighing in relief as his eyes snapped open. His voice was gentle. “Hey, Tucker. I know this must hurt, but you kinda need your limbs, so we’re doing it.” Lathe ran a hand through his cool hair, dipping a cloth in the water and running it over his head, trying to warm that part of him up too. “Talk to me, please. Tell me anything. Doesn’t matter what.”
“C-C-...” Tucker couldn’t get a single word out without his teeth chattering and his lips turning purple from being frozen for so long. My legs hurt.... Why can’t I feel my toes? Why can’t I feel my fingers. He whimpered, soon coming down into a coughing fit, his eyes closing again as he got dizzy. Fuck...

Lathe cooed to him quietly, still running the warm cloth over his head and his face gently. “It's okay, Hon, don't worry. You can just nod or shake your head for stuff. Come on, stay with me.” Lathe looked concerned as his limbs still limply floated in the bath. “Can you bend your knees? Please, try.”

Tucker seemed confused for a moment before slowly trying to bend his knee, barely able to move it. “C-C-C-Cold....” He finally managed, but he didn't notice a woman coming in to put an IV in until his arm was pulled gently out of the water and straightened. Tucker’s face contorted in pain as it was straightened out and he watched the IV go in, to feel the warmed IV enter his system and start to warm him up.

Lathe caught his look of pain, still working to calm him. “I know it hurts honey, but the fact you can still feel them is great. That means we can get you warmed up and fix all this, okay? Just be patient with it and you'll be good as new.” You'll be fine... you kinda managed to move your limbs, hopefully you're fine.

I feel like I’m frozen... Why can’t I move my arm? His eyes scanned the room with confusion. “-cold....” Tucker’s voice was full of confusion and pain. I’m so cold....

Lathe felt the water, which was rapidly cooling. He's a giant ice cube... “Ma’am, the bath isn't barely warm anymore.” He needs new hot water....

The nurse’s brow furrowed, dipping her hand into the cool water, her eyes widening and reaching down for the drain to start. Okay, we'll get the cold water out, we'll put steaming water in. She walked off, coming back minutes later with what looked like coffee pots full of hot water to dump into the tank full of half cold water. This should work better in keeping him warm....

Well shit. Lathe moved to help her, picking up one of the containers and opening the top, carefully dumping the contents into the tub. This should work... it'll probably hurt like a bitch, but it'll work...

Tucker’s eyes were wide with pain as it bloomed in his feet, the first things to take effect with the
new hot water. *Fuck!* *It hurts!* He let out a loud whimper, able to try and shuffle his ankle away from the nurse and Lathe pouring hot water onto his feet.

Lathe winced as Tucker whined loudly, still pouring the hot water into the tub. “I’m sorry, Hon. It’s this or no more toes.” *That’s what it is…*

Tucker shook his head. “H-Hurt…” *It really hurts, it hurts too much! I want you to stop! I can feel my toes!*

Lathe and the nurse emptied the first tank, Lathe helping her set it back on the cart. “Tucker, try to wiggle your toes Hon.” *Let’s see what progress you’re making…*

Tucker shook his head. *They hurt… They hurt so much. “B-Boot….” I have my boots on… It feels so weird with the water on.* He shifted his legs a bit better, slowly able to unfurl from a ball.

Lathe sighed in relief as he began to slowly unfurl, reaching to feel the water. *It’s still pretty cool… “We need to add another, Hon. You need your arms and legs.” They’re important…*

Tucker shook his head, his eyes looking scared as he slowly started to shift his arms to uncurl from his chest. *It hurts, I don’t want anymore hot water…. The nurse reached into the water, starting to untie Tucker’s boots and pull them off, which of course made him start to scream and cry. It hurts! It hurts! Make it stop! “S-Stop….”* He begged, struggling to move his feet away. His skin started to look somewhat better around his ankle instead of purple. Tucker’s eyes widened more as he saw the nurse come close to him with scissors. *No! What’s she doing!?* He struggled to move, finding his efforts were in vain as soon the scissors touched his jeans, which were made quick work of and taken off of him. He cried more as the hot water was now almost completely touching his skin, the purple starting to fade quickly. “It hurts….” He whined, looking to Lathe with fear. *It hurts so much.*

Lathe ran a hand through his hair, relieved as the purple started to fade, his skin slowly flushing red. “I know it hurts honey, but you need to get warmed up. You were a human popsicle out there, we need to thaw you out. I know it hurts now but you'll feel so much better when you’re warm and can move all your limbs. Can you please try your toes again? It's important we know how well you're doing.” *I know it hurts, but it's for your own good.*

Tucker whimpered but nodded and slowly was able to move his toes. *It burns, it burns a lot … “H-How….” How did you know where to find me? Even the cops didn't find me..*
Lathe sighed as Tucker moved them slowly, thankful he still had feeling in all of them. “...how what? How we found you?” He watched Tucker slowly nod. “You still had your phone on you. We pinged it, and it told us just about where you were. I ran right past you in that alley… if you hadn't coughed, I might not have noticed you....” *That's a scary thought...*

*They probably called you to find me... “N-No I-Interest....” No one...* He whimpered as more hot water was poured on him, the purple color starting to leave his arms. *It hurts a lot...* Tucker started to move his fingers, slowly gaining motion.

Lathe helped dump the water into the tub, setting the second tank back on the cart. He knelt down next to Tucker, giving him a sympathetic look. “I'm sorry, Honey… I know it must've hurt to not be chosen... but, actually, there is interest.” Lathe watched him immediately perk up, giving him a faint smile. “Ieva and I drove all the way down here to see if you were still in the orphanage... and if you were, we'd adopt you. We went to find you when the woman said you were missing... and here we are.” Lathe paused for a moment, his eyes searching Tucker’s for his reaction. “Would you like to come back home with us? As our son?” *Please say yes...*

Tucker was shocked, freezing as he looked at Lathe to see the slightest hint of deception. “R-Really?” *You actually want to adopt me after everything I've done in the past two years to you guys?*

Lathe smiled warmly. “Really. You can come home, keep your room and fill it with all the stuff you want, take over the garage with all your carpentry and stuff, and have friends over and just... do teenager stuffs. And I just expect the occasional hug and eye contact.” Lathe poked his shoulder. “Does that sound okay?” *Please?*

Tucker’s eyes were still very wide before he nodded and moved his head against Lathe’s hands, yelping as hot water was poured into him once again, the pain like needles on his arms and hands. *It hurts... I can feel it...*

Lathe gently carded his hands through Tucker’s damp hair, smiling faintly and murmuring quietly. “We can’t have you being a human ice cube. As soon as you're thawed we’ll get you dried off and stuff, take you out for something nice to eat. That sound okay?” *This won't be forever.*

Tucker nodded, watching as Ieva came over to where he was, noticing the taller man behind her. *Mr. Jans? Why’s he here?* He groaned as Lathe ran fingers through his hair, wishing that he wouldn’t have to sit in the hot water anymore… *it’s hot... And my skin looks like it's red and puffy...*
Lathe looked over his shoulder, smiling to the taller man. “Hello. Mr. Jans, was it?” Tucker knows you.

The man nodded, holding Tucker’s backpack in one hand and a file in the other. “Yes, but you can call me Mike… Or Jans, either really.” Tucker looks like he could use some new clothes… And he looks better than I thought he would considering we couldn’t find him at all during the storm last night...

Lathe nodded, smiling to him. ...I like Jans, and I already know a ton of Mikes. “Okay Jans. He’s said yes to us adopting him. And he’ll be fine- he’s just taking his time thawing out.” He needs time for that.

Jans nodded, holding up a large file. “I got all the paperwork right here.” I figured he’d say yes, he looked absolutely miserable when he left you guys.

Tucker smiled softly as Ieva plucked the file from him and started to read over everything. They can take me home… I have a home …

Lathe grinned, turning back to Tucker, still cradling his head. “You have a home now, Hon. I fixed all the holes in the walls and repainted everything and I tacked all your plans back up in the garage. And you get to keep all your legos. They're yours.” You get to keep them. “...As long as you occasionally share.” There's plenty for more than just you.

Tucker looked at him with weak eyes, relaxing in his touch, a soft smile on his face for the first time in forever. I have a home. His eyes closed from utter exhaustion, his head becoming limp against Lathe’s hands. I have a home...

Jans smiled softly as he kneeled down near Lathe. “Do me a favor Mr. Quo….” I need to make sure he doesn’t end up like this again...

Lathe looked over to him, still holding Tucker’s head in his hands so it didn't have to rest on the edge of the tub. “Yes?” What is it?

“Don’t bring him back… Tucker’s had it rough from the start.” He needs someone to love him, and keep him.
Lathe smiled, nodding. “We’re keeping him, don’t worry. He deserves a good home…” He really does… and not a temporary one either.

Jans seemed to sigh in relief. “Good, how’s Jake doing with you guys?” He smiled softly. I remember when we picked him up from the psych ward… It was a year and a half ago… but it feels like it was yesterday…

Lathe smiled widely. “He’s doing really well. He’s such a smart kid. We actually started doing tutoring at home when he seemed to do really well picking up material at school, and he somehow understands Calculus… I’m actually not joking. We gave him a practice AP exam and he easily passed. The kid’s brilliant.” I can’t believe it… “And he loves it, living with us… he still can’t get enough of the dogs, and they all love him… we all do. And he loves to help cook. He’s a great kid.” He’s such a sweetheart….

Jans smiled, moving his own hand under Tucker’s neck. “That’s wonderful, but you need to go sign some papers too…. Go do that now, that way you can just take him and not have to deal with Gianna again.” I heard the whole conversation… I don’t know how she’s not fired yet…

“That was that woman at the front desk? Is there somewhere I can, I dunno, leave a complaint?” She was so goddamn apathetic…. what the hell...

“Even if you do it won’t help, she’s fucking someone higher up, so she’ll be staying…” I hate it, she’s been there for way too long and we’ve gotten way too many complaints. He smiled as Tucker seemed to sleep soundly. “I remember when this guy used to cry in his crib all the time…” He’d wake me and my wife up all the time…

Lathe sighed, shaking his head. “Of course she is.” Figures. Lathe smiled as Jans held Tucker’s head, going through the papers after he dried off his hands. “You’ve been working with the system for a long time, it sounds like.”

“545… Now 546 adopted kids from under my belt.” I’m really happy that he’s going to a good home. “Not many age out, I’ve only had that happen about 11 times… I wanted to make sure he got adopted, so when I heard that you were interested and Gianna was giving you shit I started getting the papers together.”

Lathe looked up, smiling. “That’s wonderful to hear.” That’s a lot of kids…. “And maybe after things settle a bit I’ll give a few higher-ups some shit about Gianna for you. The kids could do with a little less apathy to their possible future parents.” Really tho….
Jans nodded, running his hands through Tucker’s hair as the nurse came to put more hot water in his tub, watching him wince a bit before settling down again. *He’ll be okay, he’s completely unfurled, which is good.* “She’s had it out for Tucker since he tried to get away from the system after he was brought back a second time.” *I don’t think he could handle a third…*

“And that was yesterday……if she doesn’t give a shit about what the kids are going through, why even take the damn job? That’s all I wanna know.” *Yeah. People are gonna be hearing from me.*

“No idea, but I mean before that… He was brought back from his second adoption five years ago, she hasn’t cared about him since, which was why I tried to keep him in foster care…. I was really surprised to hear that I had to pick him up to bring him back to the orphanage…. It didn’t seem like him at all…” *He was absolutely miserable when he left…*

Lathe sighed quietly. “He was told on Christmas that someone was interested… and a day later told that they weren't anymore… he lost hope that anyone would want him… and he thought staying at the orphanage would help his chances. …I didn't want him to leave… he called himself for the transfer…. …but I don't want him to go without a home… and he has one now.” Lathe signed the last paper he needed to, glancing over the pile. “...I think that's it.” *Is he ours now?*

“Yeah, he’s all yours, but I still technically am in charge of him until things are processed, so I’ll need to sign his discharge papers… So I’ll wait here with you guys, and if you have any questions you're certainly welcome to ask.” *I know Tucker’s a handful, even if you’ve had him for two years…*

Lathe nodded, setting the papers on a nearby table and going to kneel down next to the tub, studying his peaceful face as he slept. ….I don’t think there’s much of anything to ask... Tucker’s Tucker. That’s what we know. They were mostly quiet for a while as Tucker napped, waking him up with a gentle shake of his shoulder. “Wake up, Hon. We think we can take you home now. Try to move your limbs, Hon.” *Let's see... you're probably still kinda stiff but we expected that.*

Tucker blinked his eyes, a loud groan leaving him. “I’m tired…” *I didn’t sleep last night…. It was too cold to sleep...* He was able to move his whole body around and the purple color had receded to bright red in the steaming tub. “W-warm…. I feel warm… Which is good…. I like feeling warm…

Lathe smiled. “That's good to hear instead of cold.” Lathe reached for the drain, looking around for towels. He and Jan's held out their hands, getting Tucker on his own legs, even if they were a bit shaky and stiff. They kept him steady and dried him off, getting him out of his soaked clothing and into the clothes Jans had brought with him. “You think you can walk, Hon? Or do the legs not
wanna cooperate?"

Tucker shook his head, holding onto Lathe with clenched fists. No, I don’t think my legs can hold me at all… He looked up as the nurse appeared with a wheelchair.

“Alright, Hun, no staying outside for more than an hour, okay?” I can only imagine you probably wanna stay inside now… She watched him nod and smiled, looking to Jans and Lathe. “He’s all set to go, I took the IV out awhile ago, and he’ll probably want to sleep, it seems he probably didn’t get much last night.”

Lathe nodded, smiling. “Yeah, he’s been napping for a good half hour. We’ll make sure he eats before we let him sleep, don’t worry.” Lathe guided Tucker into the wheelchair, walking with Ieva and Jans to the lobby, wheeling Tucker along ahead of them to get him discharged. They stopped to sign the papers, looking to Jans. “Thank you, by the way.” For bringing his stuff, actually giving a shit… everything, really.

Jans smiled softly, stretching his arm out for Lathe to shake his hand. “I’ll be dealing with you again, don’t worry, oh and I meant to ask, I know by law I’m not supposed to give you more than two, but no one really checks up on that… So I wanted to ask how many you’d be willing to take at once?” I’ve got a few under my care, and right now you two are my go-to foster parents…

Lathe’s eyes widened, thinking. He looked down to Tucker and back to Jans, smiling. “As many as you want to give us. Honestly, if there wasn't that limit, we could probably do eight... ten at most… you can give us whomever you want. Or whoever wants to come chill.” I'm okay with that... and we really could do eight...

“How do five and six year olds sound?” I’m sure you’d take them in a heartbeat, the kids are cute.

“As long as they don't all hate each other, of course. ...and even if they don't exactly love each other, the dogs will keep them in line.”

Jans shook his head. “They grew up together, orphaned at birth. I’ve been struggling to keep them together so that they’re easier to take on, but no one’s up for the challenge…” Because they’re so young ...

“How many of them are there?”
“Six.”

“We’ll take them.”

Ieva wrapped her arms around Lathe. “What are you agreeing to without me again?” She raised her eyebrow, curious. *What are you getting us into now?*

“...I just agreed that we’ll foster a herd of five- and six-year-olds...” He looked to her sheepishly. *I keep forgetting I'm supposed to consult with you on this stuff...*

Ieva smiled, standing on tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “I love you... You’ll have to make some bunk beds with Tucker then....” She smiled, ruffling Tucker’s hair as he grinned. *You look so happy.... All because of a sheet of paper we signed...*

Lathe blushed as she kissed his cheek. “Bunk beds would work... ...that's a good idea.” Lathe looked down to Tucker. “We’ll have our work cut out for us- and yes, I'm helping somewhat. Unless you really wanna just do everything yourself.” *As long as we can get mattresses and sheets to easily fit in the frames, we're good.*

“I just need measurements.... You can put everything together and paint it however you want... Or we could stain them, that would work too... You’ll need to cut some trees, I’ll need thick pieces.” *Especially if we're going to have kids bouncing on them... They need to be strong...*

Lathe nodded. “I'll get you measurements, and staining sounds good. We’ll get you your lumber, don't worry. ...come to think of it, we should probably be trying to plant more trees to make up for the ones we keep cutting down...” *That's probably, like, good for the environment or something.* “They'll need shelves and dressers too... chests and places to put stuff... pegs for their coats and jackets...” *They need things...*

“Allright, well you can help me figure everything out.” Tucker shifted in his wheelchair. “Can... Um... Can we get food?” *I’m really hungry... I left before dinner yesterday... And it’s already getting dark out.*

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Okay, we’ll get you something good to eat.” Lathe shook Mr. Jans’ hand, his smile warm. “We’ll probably be ready for all of them in a couple weeks, give or take. The
biggest problem is getting the room ready for them. We’ll let you know the instant everything’s done. Does that work?"

Jan nodded. “I’ll keep them together, Tucker’s got my cell phone number memorized by this point… Oh, they’re all boys. I forgot to mention that earlier.” They like trains and planes… One is fascinated with dinosaurs, another with horses… And they all love Lucy, who is my seven year old German Shepherd, so they’ll like your dogs… Oh and Kyle and Rico have ADHD, I know this is a lot, but-” He looked at Lathe to see him typing down the info in his phone. Oh geeze, this guy. He smiled more as Tucker seemed to realize who it was.

“Wait, you're letting us take them?” You never let them out of your sight! “We get the squad!” Tucker seemed excited as he did a weak victory fist pump in his wheelchair. I love them! This’ll be awesome!

“Let's see, we’ll need more of the wooden trains, a couple planes too, we’ll let them visit the horses… and we’ll be able to handle them if they have ADHD. We’ll get them extra tutoring if they can't pay attention well enough in classes and any grades start to drop. We’ll try to keep them busy.” We can handle boys. Lathe looked to Tucker, smiling. “You sure look excited.” You must’ve hung out with the flock of them before.

“We call them the squad! They’re so much fun! Can I build a fort outside for them? Please!?” I want to build so many things! They have such great imaginations! He looked up Lathe with pleading eyes. I have so many ideas of what to build…. I wanna do it all!

Jans smiled more. “Well, I better get back to the squad and keep them entertained.” He tipped his hat to Lathe before ruffling Tucker’s hair. “Be good for Lathe, okay? He smiled as Tucker nodded, leaning down to give him a hug before leaving. He’ll be fine, he’s got a great home.

Lathe beamed, looking down to Tucker as Jans left. “You can built them a treehouse after we get them bunk beds. And a playground would probably be a good idea…” Keep them from just lazing around all the time… that’d be good. “But let's focus on food for now. Where do you wanna go to eat? Anything on particular you want?” Whatever you're in the mood for.

“Mmmm, pizza….” I missed pizza night at home… I want pizza! His eyes were full of joy as Ieva chuckled. “Can we get pizza?”

Lathe chuckled, nodding. “We’ll get you pizza, don't worry.”
“...and breadsticks?”

“All the breadsticks.”

Ieva chuckled. “Alright, to the Italian Pizza shop we go.” She led Lathe and Tucker out to the truck after making sure Tucker was bundled with a hoodie and a blanket. He should be good... I’m hungry too...

Lathe helped Tucker into the back with his wheelchair, hopping into the passenger seat and directing Ieva to the closest pizza place. They soon were walking inside, Lathe still pushing Tucker along. “Okay. Do you know what you're gonna want on it? You can have more on it than just cheese and pepperoni.” You have options.

“Welcome to Romano’s!” The sweet girl called to them as they came into the large store front, customers sitting at table and eating pizza and other Italian dishes. The phone rang an instant later which she picked up as Tucker stared at the large menu above. “Hello, Romano’s Italian Restaurant, my name’s Jaycee, how may I help you?” I wonder what they’re gonna order...

Gordon was skimming a menu he had stashed in a desk drawer, studying it. “Hello Jaycee, I’d like to place an order for pick up please.”

“Of course, Sir, what would you like?” She picked up a pad of paper to jot everything down. Geez, this is a ton...

Gordon listed of a few different kinds of pizza, as well as some orders for pasta or parmesans. “I know it’s a lot, thank you for being patient with me.” He smiled as she read everything back to him, nodding. “That sounds correct.”

Jaycee smiled. “One moment please.” She rang up everything on the till, looking at the large total. “That’ll be $346.79, Sir, can I get a name for your order?” She punched everything in for pick up, waiting for a name.

“Ah, yes. Gordon.”

Jaycee typed it into the system, finding there was already another Gordon scheduled for pick up as well. “Can I have your last name took, Sir?” What are the odds?
“Of course. Ramsay.”

Jaycee dropped the pencil she was holding as her eyes widened. *Wait… Gordon Ramsay!! Oh shit!* “One moment please….” She put the phone on hold, running into the back kitchen. “Mitch! How fast can we make this order?” She showed him the huge list.

“I dunno, like an hour… Why?”

“Because Gordon Ramsay is coming to pick it up!”

Mitch’s eyes widened and looked over the list again. “Yeah, an hour, tell him an hour, that'll give us enough time to do everything right.” *Oh shit, this’ll make or break us! And the manager isn’t even here!!*

Jaycee nodded, going back to the phone. “Hello?” *Please still be on the line… Please!*

Gordon looked back up as he heard her voice again. “Yes? Yes, I’m still here. Everything alright?” *Hm.*

“U-Uhm yeah, can I have a phone number for the order Mr. Ramsay?” *Take the phone number then tell him it'll be done in an hour… You’ve got this…* Her voice was full of panic as her eyes were wide looking at the name.

“Yes- it's 316-660-9300.” *That'll eventually get you through to me if something goes awry.*

Jaycee quickly added that to the system, shaking in her boots as she knew she had to speak again. “Your food w-will be ready in a-an hour, Sir.” *Fuck I keep stuttering!*

“Thank you very much, Jaycee. I'll be there in an hour then. Goodbye.” Gordon hung up, looking at the phone before shrugging one shoulder. *I don't think I sounded intimidating…*

Jaycee let out a deep breath of relief as she sent the order to the back with the system, finally
looking to the three in front of her a smile on her face within a moment. “Hi! What can I get for you?”

Tucker was still staring at the huge menu list, trying to decide what he wanted with all the toppings they had. *But I don’t normally decide…. It feels weird…*

“You don’t have to have anything different if you don’t want. Cheese and pepperoni is okay with me. ...do you wanna sit down so we can have something to snack on and drink while you decide?” *That’s probably be better- you look so blindsided by the choices.*

Tucker nodded and looked down a bit as he shuffled his feet. *I don’t know what to get… There’s so many options…*

Lathe nodded, looking up to the woman. “Can we have a table, please?” *This works better… it wouldn’t really work letting the pizza get cold on the drive home… ...I forgot about that until now… I guess it’s a good thing Tucker can’t decide.*

Jaycee nodded. “Of course, just pick any open table and I’ll come by in a minute to get you guys some drinks.” She had a cheery smile on, sitting down to try and calm down. *Gordon Ramsay is coming to pick up food! Ahh! The boys better not screw up a damn thing!*

Lathe nodded, bringing them over to an open table near the front. “C’mere.” Lathe helped Tucker into the chair at the table and folded the wheelchair against the wall, saving space. “Alright, you keep mulling over all your choices. We’re in no hurry.” *It's fine.*

Tucker nodded, looking over the obscenely large menu. *There’s so many toppings… “Can I get bacon? And Ham? And Sausage?” That sounds delicious …*

Lathe grinned, nodding. “That sounds great, Hon. You can tell the waitress when she comes to take the order. It's a large, by the way. And you get to pick your drink, too.” Lathe pointed to the drink list. “Anything you want.” *As long as it isn't alcoholic. Duh.*

“Can I get a milkshake?” He asked quietly, looking up to Lathe with expectant eyes. *I really want a milkshake…*
“Yep, any flavor.” Lathe saw Tucker nervously glance to the front counter, his features soft. “We can order if you want. You don't have to.” *I wonder how many times you've been in a restaurant? Probably not many...*

Tucker nodded and pointed to the chocolate milkshake as Jaycee came over to their table. *What am I supposed to do?*

Jaycee had a pad of paper out and a pen. “Have you decided yet? Can I get you something to drink?”

Lathe looked up as Tucker hesitated, looking to Jaycee and speaking first. “I'd like a mug of coffee, please.” *Set the example. He'll catch on.*

Ieva looked up from her menu as well. “I’ll have a glass of water, please.” *You can do it Tucker.*

“C-Can… Can I h-have a c-chocolate milkshake?” He stuttered, his face flushing a bright red.

“Of course.” Jaycee jotted the drinks down on her notepad, smiling to them. “Have you decided what you’d all like?”

Lathe nodded. “Yes, a large cheese, sausage, bacon and ham pizza please.”

Jaycee wrote the order down. “Anything else?”

“Yes, an order of garlic bread, please.” He looked over to Ieva and Tucker. “Was that all we wanted?” *I dunno what else you two might've been thinking of getting.* They both shook their heads, Lathe handing her his menu. “That’s it, then.” *Easy.*

Jaycee smiled and nodded, taking the menus and going to the back and placing their order, coming back with a water and coffee before she went back to make a chocolate milkshake for Tucker. *The boy was so cute, stuttering like that...*

Lathe smiled, going to add sugar and cream to his coffee. “That wasn't too bad. And now, we wait. Though with that order in the phone she took, it could be a while.” Lathe shrugged, inspecting their
table as he stirred his coffee.

“U-Uhm…. Can I have a pen?….. Please?” His voice was small and quiet as he looked up to Lathe. *I have an idea…*

Lathe looked over with a quirked eyebrow, fishing one from a coat pocket. “Here.” He watched Tucker flip the paper placemat over and start to sketch. *...what're you drawing...*

Tucker started to sketch out his idea for the bunk beds, two high up against the wall, three sets, with a slide between each of the sets, along with ladders for easy access. *Hmm…. It's gotta have cubbies in it too…*

Lathe grinned as Tucker’s sketch took shape, looking over it. “What if this back here wasn't flush to the wall? You could put shelving in there, and maybe a thing here…” Lathe pointed to the wooden frame over each of the bunk’s heads, Tucker drawing in a shelf at one end. *For just random stuff.* “I like the slides, the boys will probably really like them too.”

“We should still anchor it to the wall…” So that they don’t move…” He drew a sketch of the wall and how the beds would connect to it. “And we need to get a lot of screws…” *Because nails will move too easy...* “We might also need to get some heavy duty wood too… Like at a lumber store or something…”

“I was thinking that, yeah, especially for the major framework. That needs to all be pretty sturdy.” They all pored over the sketch, soon others joining the first on the backs of the other paper mats, ones for a playground and potentially for a treehouse. *Anything for the kids...*

Tucker was enjoying making up designs with Lathe so much that he barely noticed the time go by, and did not notice as the large order was brought to the counter, tons of boxes set out on the shelf. *I wonder if Dad will let me work on a bunch of tree houses? And have them all connect...*

Lathe glanced up as the door opened, recognizing the Officer walking in, grinning. “Hey Ieva, that’s Commissioner Gordon.” *Did he order all that food? Probably for the precinct; he's still in uniform, but I dunno.*

Ieva picked her head up, looking up to see Gordon. “Gordon, how you doing?” She stood up to shake his hand as he finally noticed her. *I haven’t seen you in awhile.*
Gordon looked around, not seeing anyone at the counter right away. He looked over when he heard a familiar voice, smiling when he saw Ieva and Lathe. “Hello, I didn't expect to see you here. I'm well, how are you two doing?” He shook her hand, shaking Lathe’s as well when he stood.

Ieva smiled looking over to Tucker. “Just added a new member to the family. This is Tucker, and Tucker, this is Commissioner Ramsay.” He’s skittish... She watched Tucker wave before turning back to his drawings. “You order all the food?” Her eyes went to the door as another uniform came in. “Well if it isn’t Mr. Accident... drive any cruisers into any fire hydrants lately, Max?”

The man rolled his eyes. “Oh god, not you…” He smirked and moved to come up to her and kiss her cheek, looking to Lathe. “My name’s Max, Ieva and I have known each other for awhile...you’re Lathe I presume?” I remember people in the precinct telling me she was married.

Lathe watched Max kiss Ieva’s cheek, unable to keep from internally bristling. He still smiled when Max turned to him, shaking his hand, his eyes a bit narrowed. “Yep- Lathe Quo. Good to meet you.” Yep. As in I gave her my last name, so...

Max nodded, glancing Lathe up and down. “You certainly caught yourself a looker, Mr. Quo.” He smirked looking over towards Ieva, seeing Gordon by the counter getting the first batch of food. “What’s it been, a decade? Ten? Eleven years?” How long has it been since I’ve taken you to bed? His eyes glanced behind Lathe to Tucker. Wait... She can’t have kids... Whose kid is that? Max’s eyes were calculating as he watched Tucker doodle.

“Max… It hasn’t been long enough…” I didn’t expect you, and honestly I don’t really want to be with you if you’re gonna be like this... She closed her eyes to try and calm herself. I do not need you to fuck anything up... I am happily married dammit!

Lathe had to keep himself from saying anything sharp, glaring at the officer. Don’t. He studied him, watching him study Tucker with wide eyes. Oh yeah... “Oh, you haven't met our son.” Lathe smiled, his hand resting on Tucker’s shoulder. “Max, this is Tucker. Tucker, this is Officer Perry.” I have no idea who he is, but I don’t like him.

Tucker picked his head up, silently waving his hand before looking back down at his drawings. He’s looking at Mom weird...

Max glanced at Ieva looking her up and down, his eyes staying on her hips and chest a bit longer than Lathe would’ve liked. “You have a son, congrats... I thought you couldn’t have kids?” He
Lathe watched Ieva shift uncomfortably, deciding he’d had enough. “Is it really any of your business? I don’t think it is, so stop making her feel clearly uncomfortable and help Gordon with the boxes.” He pointedly looked to the counter, crossing his arms and standing up taller, looming over him. *Bye.*

Max narrowed his eyes for an instant before Gordon called him over to the counter to help with the boxes. *I wouldn’t’ve called it off if I had known you were gonna be able to have kids!* He seemed absolutely furious, like he’d gotten robbed of something as he exited the shop to put the pizzas in the cruiser.

Ieva sat down with a heavy sigh, her head in her hands as she tried to fight back the tears of remembering all the pain that single man had put her through. *Fuck… I can’t cry in front of Tucker… I need to calm down.*

Lathe looked worried as she looked ready to cry, reaching to take one of her hands on his own, squeezing reassuringly. His look said everything. *You don’t have to say anything, it’s fine. We can talk later if you want. But we should try to enjoy ourselves for right now.*

Ieva calmed down as their food came, Tucker losing interest in his drawings and beginning to attack his food. He devoured his first slice of pizza before grabbing another slice and slowly beginning to eat it. She watched him eat, a small smile forming on her face as she grabbed a piece of pizza and set it on her plate along with a piece of garlic bread. *I’m gonna be okay… I can be okay…*

Lathe took a piece of pizza himself, quietly eating and just studying the shop around them, his mind wandering. *Who even was that guy? I dunno. Ieva wasn’t too happy to see him. And he seemed so mad about Tucker. Why would he be mad if she had kids? That’s what I made it sound like… maybe he’s one of those boyfriends who stopped dating her when she admitted we couldn’t have kids? Probably one of those. They’d probably really be upset they couldn’t keep her if they thought she lied or something… hm…*

Their table was mostly quiet as they ate, Tucker happily devouring pizza before drinking his whole milkshake and curling up to Lathe’s side. *I didn’t think I’d ever meet him again…* They had the rest of the pizza boxed up as Tucker got dangerously close to falling asleep in Lathe’s lap. *Okay, we’ve a long drive back. Hopefully the four boys are still alive…* Ieva got the wheelchair in the back of the truck as Lathe hopped in the back with Tucker’s head in his lap. She hopped into the driver’s seat, starting the truck up and starting the quiet drive back. *What am I gonna tell him? I*
Lathe gently carded a hand through Tucker’s hair, smiling as the teen fell asleep in a matter of minutes into the drive home. He made sure he was asleep before speaking, his voice careful and quiet. “…tell me if you don’t wanna talk about this now… but who was that?” I don’t understand anything right now…

Ieva let out a sigh as she finally got to the highway heading home. “Remember when I told you I was engaged before…..?” She trailed off, letting him try and figure things out.

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up. “….that makes a lot more sense… he looked furious when I said Tucker was our son…” ...well shit. You almost married that guy...

“Yeah… That was the one thing he wanted besides sex… He thought I could have kids and when he found out… he took the ring right off my finger, packed up and left….” It was not a good time for me… I was all alone too.

“...well that was seriously shitty….” That fucker. “I'm sorry about that… and about having to deal with him…” I know it probably made being chill during dinner really hard...

“It’s fine really…. I should get over it… it was nine years ago…” Her voice cracked a bit at the end as she drove, sniffing a bit as she rubbed at her tears. “Fuck… I didn’t want to cry.” At least Tucker’s not awake to see me cry… She turned her focus to the road, watching the white fall down towards the window. It’ll be ten years soon.

“It's okay… even if it's been forever, it's okay to be upset about it…” ....you were in love. And he was shit to you. Lathe was quiet, still petting Tucker’s soft hair, staring out the window tiredly. It's been a really long day...

Ieva nodded and she watched the road in utter silence until they got to the house. “We’re home…” Her voice was a bit rough, and her eyes looked as if she’d been crying the entire time. We’re home, we can see what Eren’s making for dinner… or we’ll walk in on a movie… or them fucking… honestly it could be any of those...

Lathe unbuckled, leaning forward for a moment to softly kiss her, careful not to wake up Tucker. I'm sorry… Lathe scooped Tucker up, the teen stirring a bit as he came out of the car, feeling his
hands weakly grasp his shirt. Ieva opened the front door for him, looking around as they came inside. “Hello?” He looked to the kitchen, seeing Eren. “Hey Eren-” He paused when Eren turned, seeing the collar on him. Of course. “…I'm not gonna ask about the new fashion choice, so. What's for dinner?”

Eren blushed, tugging at it. “If you wanted to ask… ask Levi… And it’s um, It’s Sauerbraten… Like pot roast…” I hope everyone’ll like it… He looked at Tucker a soft smile on his face. “Did you take him out to lunch?” You guys were gone for most of the day.

Lathe nodded, smiling faintly. “It's a long story…. I'll tell you later… but dinner sounds good. I need to get Tucker in bed, he's had a long night….” Lathe let Eren be, going upstairs to get Tucker in pajamas. “Come on, Hon, just a moment and you can sleep.” You'll wanna be comfortable.

Ieva came in with the wheelchair setting it against the wall by the door. She looked up to see Eren fidgeting with his collar, a soft smile on her face. Called it… “Are James and Jake alive? You kept it PG, right?”

Eren nodded, his blush overtaking his features. “Yeah… I should’ve had you go out and get more heating pads though….” My back is gonna be even worse tomorrow…

“We could kinda hear you two making out in the bathroom when you got up during the movie!” James called from the living room, chilling in the usual pack of dogs. “I'm surprised you managed to not go insane sitting in his lap the whole time.” Impressive.

Eren flushed even more. “Actually…. I’m surprised too, probably why I dragged him out of the room to the bathroom.” His hands kept going under my clothes and pinching me and trying to jack me off under the blanket I held up to my chin.

“Yeah, I figured. I also figured that sorta thing was what the blanket was for.” We don't wanna know what happened under there...

“Eren! I thought you said you were gonna keep it PG!” Ieva looked at Eren as she yelled, watching him freeze and look down. Oh shit… “Eren…” She reached a hand out to him, watching him flinch. Fuck... I fucked up...
Levi sauntered into the kitchen, looking between Ieva and Eren, beelining for Eren. He slipped his arms around his middle from behind, looking over his shoulder to Ieva. “Nothing really bad happened in front of them, really. James is just really perceptive of what we’re thinking. And Jake had no idea about anything, trust me. We didn't scar him for life, he's fine.” He's fine. Levi ran a hand over Eren’s stomach, trying to soothe him. It's okay...

Eren whimpered, turning to bury his face into Levi’s shoulder. He heard Mikhail’s nails tap on the kitchen floor, coming up to them. Mom yelled at me… I did something bad…

Ieva’s eyes were wide at his reaction and how he seemed to calm for a moment in Levi’s arms. “Eren, Honey….” He won’t even look at me… shit, I must've really raised my voice… I need to stop letting what happened today get to me.

Lathe padded down the stairs, looking with worry at the scene from the stairs. “Is everything okay?” He came over to them, looking between all of them. “Eren, Honey, are you okay? What happened?” Someone talk.

Ieva looked up to him. “It’s my fault…” She had fresh tears in her eyes once again as her lip trembled. “It’s my fault….” She whispered again before more tears ran down her face and she walked off covering her mouth. I... I yelled at him...He looked so scared …

Lathe immediately moved after her, catching her around the middle, his hands gently rubbing her sides. “Hey, it's okay, don't cry honey…. what happened?” Talk to me...

Ieva shook her head, turning to cry into his chest. “I-I... I got so m-mad.... So quickly.” I yelled at him over a sentence .... I can’t believe I let my emotions get off the handle like that... Oh my god ...

...oh. Lathe pulled her close to his chest, looking over to where Levi was trying to comfort Eren, the both of them having a conversation with their eyes. This won't work if she doesn't apologize. “I think everything'll be better if you just apologize and we can all move on, okay? It's not your fault, today’s been a day… but it'll make both of you feel better.” They both ushered Eren and Ieva closer together so they could talk. It's not the end of the world.

Ieva looked to Eren as he kept his head down, fiddling with his clothing for a moment. He doesn't wanna look up… “E-Eren…. C-Can you look up please?” Her voice was soft, trying to be gentle with her words.
Eren looked up for a moment, his hands moving behind him to grip onto Levi’s hand. Is she gonna yell at me again?

“Eren…. Honey, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to yell at you, or scare you… I’ve had a rough day today and I didn’t mean to take it out on you…. I’m sorry, will you forgive me?” Please…. Please forgive me...

Eren nodded silently, moving to curl up to Levi still. “Y-You don’t h-have to apologize…. I-I shouldn’t’ve d-done it…” He looked down in shame. It’s my fault Mom yelled at me… I deserved it… Because I did something wrong...

Levi had the decency to look a bit guilty, holding Eren close. “…feel a bit better?” He watched both Eren and Ieva nod, sighing quietly here. “Okay. Here, let's go back to cooking, ‘kay?” Let's get your mind off of this...

Lathe led Ieva towards the stairs, his voice a warm murmur. “It’s okay, Honey.” He brought her upstairs to relax, laying on the bed and letting her curl on top of him. It's been a really long day...

Eren’s eyes were mostly glued to the floor as he set the tray in the oven, making sure the temperature was on right before starting a time on his phone. He was absentmindedly scratching at his wrists when Mikhail grabbed his hand with his teeth. I did something wrong… Mom’s mad… Mom’s mad at me …

Levi sighed, turning Eren to face him, embracing him. “Eren, Honey, I know it hurt for Mom to get mad like that, but it's not your fault. You heard Lathe, today was a rough day for her. She just accidentally got angry in your direction. It's not anything you did. If it's anyone's fault, it's mine. I was the one getting so handsy… I'm sorry babe…” Levi softly kissed his cheek, his expression apologetic. I'm sorry...

Eren shook his head, ducking his head down after Levi kissed him for a moment. It's my fault... I could’ve just cuddled with you, but I sat in your lap... He swallowed hard as Mikhail growled at him. I wanna scratch…. Did I take my pills this morning? Fuck… Eren moved to get out it Levi’s grasp, struggling against him. I need to take my pills.

Levi kept him in his hold, leaning up on tiptoe and murmuring in his ear. “Are you okay? Do you wanna sit down?” His lips brushed his ear, feeling him shiver. Relax, please ...
Eren thought about how he had sat down on Levi’s lap earlier in the day, closing his eyes and shaking his head. *No... I can't...* His hands were shaking as he finally got his hand back from Mikhail, still trying to get out of Levi’s hold. *I need to take my pills... I wanna scratch... I can't be scratching...*

Levi nodded, however his finger caught in Eren’s collar, keeping him in place as his lips ghosted over his neck. “I'm worried about you... don't run and hide upstairs... okay?” *I wanna cuddle... murr...*

Eren’s eyes closed as he immediately grabbed at Levi’s hand, fear gripping him almost immediately. *No no no no... Not again...* He looked terrified as he raced upstairs and into his room, going right for the pills and grabbing all of them. Eren’s hands were shaking horribly as he tried to shake out only a few pills at a time, cursing and hitting his fist against the wall as he dumped more than a few on the counter. *Fuck...* He tried again with the next bottle only to do the same, quickly becoming frustrated and banging at the wall again before he threw the bottle at the counter, pills flying everywhere as he curled up into a shaking ball, his hands covering his ears. *No no no no....*

Levi ran after him, stopping when Eren locked the door in his face. “Eren! Eren, I'm sorry!” *He's not opening up.* Levi went to get the key for the door, cursing his height as he struggled to get it. *Fuck...*

Lathe picked his head up as he heard clattering in the room next door, getting up as he heard banging. *That doesn't sound good.* “I'll be right back, babe.” He kissed Ieva softly before going out into the hall, seeing Levi throwing a book at the doorframe above him, cursing. “The hell?!?”

“Get the key, dammit! Eren’s having some sort of breakdown and it's not good!” *Hurry!*

Lathe’s eyes widened, reaching up and snatching the key. He hurriedly opened Eren’s door, Levi slipping past him and immediately moving to the noise in the bathroom.

Levi saw the pills scattered across the floor, Eren curled up in a ball on the floor, his hands covering his ears. *Oh no...* “Eren?” Levi knelt down next to him, a hand reaching to gently brush through his hair.

Eren shook as Levi and Lathe came in. *No no no.... “N-No more....” I don’t want it to happen again! I’ll be a good boy....* Tears quickly formed in his eyes and trailed down his face as he
rocked himself a little, his wrists protecting his neck and his hands shooing Levi’s hand away from him. I’ll be a good boy, I swear…

Levi saw him protecting the collar, watching him tug at it. Levi leaned in to murmur soothingly in his ear, his hands moving to try and un buckle the collar. This isn’t being nice to your head, is it…

Eren freaked out more as Levi’s hands shot towards the back of his neck where the buckle was. No! I don’t want it tighter! You’re gonna make it tighter! Just like they did! “N-No…” His voice shaky as he smacked at Levi’s hands. You wanna keep me in a cage…

Levi still softly kissed at his temple, very carefully undoing the collar. “I'm sorry Hon, it's gotta come off.” Levi finally managed to get it undone, getting it off of his neck and setting it on the floor. “I'm so sorry, Hon… are you okay?”

“I-I’ll be a good boy… I promise….” He whispered through tears, wanting the thoughts to go away as the collar was removed. They’re gonna put it back on… And whip me for taking it off. “D-Don’t take it off…. T-They’ll be mad…” His hands were gripping at his neck, hiding it. He can’t know it’s off…

Well shit… I took this too far… “Nonono Honey, it's okay. It's just me. There isn't a ‘they’ anymore. ‘They’ are gone. They've been gone for a long time.” Levi tilted Eren’s head up to look at him. “It's just me, and I'm not.…” Levi glanced behind him, recognizing that Lathe was gone. “...I'm not gonna make you my slave or my pet if it messes with your head like this. It was too much too fast. We don't have to do this if you don't want to. The whole thing isn't being so kind to you and your thoughts.”

Eren was shaking his head his hands covering his ears as Levi spoke, trying to rock himself more. “T-They’ll be back… They always come at night…. Y-You come with them…. H-He left you in charge…” You can’t take the collar off… He’ll make it tighter…. He closed his eyes as more tears fell, shaking horribly. Mikhail was sitting by the door, unsure of what to do, looking between Eren and Levi. He put you in charge…... He wants you to punish me....

...he's so far gone… fuck…. Levi gently cupped Eren’s cheeks with his hands, his voice gentle. “Eren, baby, they’ve been gone for a very long time… it's not like I'm in charge or anything… the collar, everything we did… I did it because I really thought you were enjoying it… there was a safe word and you weren't gagged, we could've stopped… with everything, at the end of it you've been in control. I wouldn't do anything I thought you'd react so badly to. I love you. I came home because I love you and missed you so much … and because you deserved love…” Levi softly pecked his nose. “I'm so sorry, Honey…” I fucked up…
Eren was shaking, looking up to him for only brief instances. “N-No… There w-was no s-safe word… Y-You alw-ways gagged m-me…” He shifted back up against the tub, unable to get away from Levi. Panic had settled it and was inviting fear to follow. I don’t wanna…. He looked around, the whole room changing around him into Levi’s apartment. N-No… His eyes were wide with terror as he heard Mikhail bark, looking towards him to see him shoved into a cage. No no no no! He covered his ears curling into himself as tightly as he possibly could, screaming. “I don’t wanna! I’ll be a good boy!”

Levi didn’t know what to do, looking around. His eyes settled on the abandoned bottles of pills, grabbing the PTSD pills. “Eren, you need to take your medicine.” He shook the pills into his hand, grabbing a glass of water and turning to him. “Eren, honey… you’ve always been good to me. Always.” Levi kissed his forehead, his voice soft. “Just take these pills, Hon. You’ll start feeling better soon. I promise.” Please just do it.

“No! No more! I don’t want them to do what they want with me! I want you to love me! You keep saying you love me and then you turn around and do everything you want with them!” His screams filled the room and the hallway outside, quickly attracting James and Jake, as well as waking Tucker up. “I’ll be a good boy! No more drugs! Please !!” He was begging by the end of it, shaking even worse as he rocked back and forth. This was by far the worst breakdown Eren had ever had. I don’t want you to hate me!

Jake’s eyes were wide as he looked at Lathe standing in front of Eren’s door, James slowly making it up the stairs behind him. “Daddy? Is Eren okay?” His small voice was full of worry as he heard him wail. He doesn’t sound like he’s alright...

Lathe looked distressed, kneeling down to hug Jake close. “Eren’s… he’s not doing too well… it’s not something that can easily be fixed.” Lathe pulled back, trying to figure out how to explain it. “Eren has to take medicine every day or else he gets sick. He forgot to take them today, so he’s pretty sick. It’s not any normal sickness, which is why it’s so worrying, but I promise he’ll be okay soon.” Lathe watched Jake worriedly nod, clinging to him again when Eren screamed. Levi, get his meds in him. I dunno how, just do it.

Levi didn’t know how to get Eren to take them besides force him, looking around for a solution. ……….oh fuck, that’d be cruel… but…. I might have to. “Eren? Baby, I love you so much…. but you're nothing like yourself.” Levi pressed the pills into his hand, murmuring in his ear softly, no malice in his voice. “Be a good boy and take them, would you?” I’m so sorry...

Eren’s eyes widened as he heard those words, struggling to swallow the lump in his throat that formed. Fuck…. I have to take them… If I’m not a good boy it’ll be worse … He quieted, taking the two pills in his hand and swallowing them after only a moment longer. Eren’s cheeks were
riverbeds for his tears, hiccuping the entire time. I'll be a good boy... I'll take the drugs... He closed his eyes after, crying silently to himself as he curled up once again, rocking himself back and forth and back and forth. The collar... I need to be a good boy... His hand was shaking as he reached for the leather collar, his eyes full of tears.

Levi pried the collar from his hands, managing to get Eren to down the entire glass of water. He then pulled him into a hug, his voice soft. “Eren, thank you... you're just perfect, don't worry baby... you don't have to wear the collar anymore and we don't have to do things you don't want to... I love you so much... and I wanna treat you right... I'm so sorry baby.... The pills are meant to help you, not hurt you or make it easy to hurt you... I love you too much to hurt you like that...” Please believe me...

Eren shook his head again. “T-They’re s-so that I-I’m a good b-boy... So I d-do what I’m t-told...” You’re gonna tie me down to the table over there and use me until everyone else gets back... “Wh-When are they c-coming back?” You know.... You always know. He turned his head to look at Levi, his own eyes full of fear and pain as he looked at Levi.

“I-Is he okay now?” Jake asked quietly as he heard Eren quiet down. I want Eren to be okay, not to be sick...

Lathe turned as he heard quiet shuffling, Levi carrying Eren into sight from the bathroom, looking torn as he cradled him close. “I think he’ll be okay... but he needs time...”

Levi’s voice was gentle yet firm. “Never. They are never coming back to hurt you. It's just me, babe. It's only ever me now.” Levi slid his hands under Eren, picking him up without him resistance. “Do you wanna just rest a bit, Hon?” We can just lay together and be until your meds kick in...

Eren laid lifeless in Levi’s arms, his head against Levi’s chest, his eyes clouded. I don’t get to choose... I just have to lay there... And take it. He flinched as Levi got closer to the table, laying him down, expecting to be tied up and not expecting Levi to climb on top of it with him. Huh? But... He’s supposed to tie me down? Is he giving me hope? Just so he can take it away?

Levi shifted them, laying Eren on top of him. “You can just get up and leave if you want... but please just know that I love you, baby.” Levi kissed him sweetly. “I love you so much... and you deserve better than the best when it comes to what I can give you...” I’m so sorry...

Eren eyes were still glazed over as he laid on top of Levi, in complete silence. I’m not allowed to leave... I know that much... He would kill Dad if I left... I can’t kill Dad.... His body was rigid as
he closed his eyes waiting for Levi to do something horrible to him, only to fall asleep, waking up in their own room with a start and with tears in the corners of his eyes. Fuck... It happened... I had the nightmare again...

Levi blinked awake as Eren suddenly shifted, coping to him as he saw the fright in his eyes. “Eren, Honey, it's okay, don't cry. You're just fine.” Levi kissed at the corners of his eyes, trying to help him calm down. Please don't freak out...

Eren took a deep breath, looking around the room and relaxing on top of Levi. “I had the nightmare again….” But I don’t remember where I fell asleep…. Or how it even started.... He nuzzled into Levi’s chest, taking in his scent which calmed him even further. I need to make sure he wears his hoodies so they smell like him again, so I can curl up into them again...

Levi gently pet his hair, sighing in relief. “...you forgot to take your meds… you were freaking out pretty bad… but you feel okay now?” You seem fine...

“I-It wasn’t a dream?.... It felt like the dream I have when I don’t take my meds….” I was freaking out? So… It wasn’t a dream then?...

“Dream might not be the best word… I think hallucination might be the one… I think that's what you mean… if you've dreamed about me and them using you, it's not real. I'm there, but I'm alone, and I'm just trying to give you the love you keep asking for and deserve… how often do you forget those pills?” It sounds like too often...

Eren could only nod as he clutched onto Levi’s shirt. “I don’t remember when it started…. What happened?” Do you know… And I don’t want to answer your other question... Because I forget too often... Or sometimes I won’t get out of bed until food drags me and I hurt take my nausea pills so I can eat. He sniffled as he thought about what happened. It was all so twisted… And it happened while I was awake ?

“Mom and Dad came home with Tucker, and you and Mom started talking and commented on the collar… James said something about how we barely kept it PG in front of them and Mom yelled a bit… you started to panic… and after she apologized you tried to go hide, I tugged a tiny bit on your collar because you'd be fidgeting with it and to keep you from leaving before I asked you to come back and not go hibernate…. You ran upstairs after that… you were going through your pills, banging on the wall and screaming… I came upstairs when you were in a ball on the floor, talking about wanting to be a good boy and not wanting to be punished… I thought the collar had a really bad effect on you and I took it off of you, and you resisted, like you'd be in trouble for not having it on… I… I made you take your pills… and then I just carried you here and let you lay on top of me… and you were so tense, thinking I’d take advantage of you… but you fell asleep… and it
Eren swallowed hard. “A few times a week….” There’s no use in lying to him…. He held onto Levi’s shirt, trying to process everything that Levi told him he did. “Did… Did… Did Jake see?” I didn’t freak out in front of him did I? His eyes looked towards the bathroom, seeing his pills and pill bottles scattered all over the floor. Oh my god…. I was throwing my pills… I thought they were the drugs Grisha kept giving me….

What. “Eren, you can't forget them that often … if not having them makes you react to stuff like that … and… you were screaming loud enough for the whole house to hear… He and James probably heard you… Tucker too” Well shit. ….I need to make sure Lathe ensures you take your damn pills. His hands slowly ran up and down his back, trying to comfort him. I'm sorry...

Eren sniffled, angry with himself. I try… And I try…. But, everytime that I either forget to take them, refuse to take them, or think I’m feeling better…. It’s never escalated this far… Fuck … “What time is it?” I had dinner in the oven, fuck, it’s probably no good now…. I don’t even know where my phone is … “D-Did I throw my phone t-too?”

“I don’t think so… and it’s been a bit more than an hour… I can only assume Dad took over dinner… he hasn’t called anyone to food yet… your phone is probably on the counter somewhere. I wouldn't worry about that. ...and it's okay…” Levi held Eren close to his chest. “I’m sure Dad did what he could to make the kids not worry… but you're okay now… and you forgetting those pills or not taking them will change.” It will .

Eren nodded. “I-I’ll try and remember them more… I-I’m sorry, this…. This is all my fault…” Because I thought I was doing better with you around… I really did… “A-Are you mad?” He felt the burn of fresh tears in his eyes, sniffling uncontrollably and trying not to shudder, only to fail miserably. I don’t think I can handle you being mad at me… You’re only here for three more days...

Levi shook his head, shifting Eren to kiss all over his cheeks. “Of course not, Hon… I’m not mad at you, I could never be… it’s okay, babe, as long as things really do change and you take them every day… it's okay.” Levi softly kissed his cheeks, holding him tenderly. It'll be okay....

Eren whimpered for a second, flashbacks of the horrible hallucination coming back to him for a moment. “S-Sorry…. C-Can y-you sit up?” I don’t like laying down… Every time I laid down… I couldn’t do anything about it. He shifted off of Levi’s chest, waiting for him to sit up. I still want you to hold onto me though...
Levi nodded and sat up when Eren shifted, still moving to cling to his middle, his forehead on his shoulder. “I’m so sorry…” I still wanna hold you though…

Eren shifted, moving into Levi’s lap and wrapping his arms around Levi’s broad shoulders. “Don’t apologize… it wasn’t your fault… really, don’t think that this is ever your fault…” It’s always mine… I can never do the right thing. His hands came up to Levi’s hair, running through his fuzzy undercut, trying not to stiffen as Levi’s arms wrapped around him, his thin legs wrapping around Levi’s waist. I miss you holding onto me… I feel like all we’ve been doing is fucking each other….. Is it wrong to ask for something else?

Levi held Eren close, his hands resting on his waist, trying not to make him feel caged. They rested their heads in the other’s neck, just drinking in their scents and holding on. I like this… “Don’t be so hard on yourself about what happened…. you’re gonna get better… and that’s what matters.” You’ll be okay… you will be.

“It wasn’t this hard to get over it the first time… why is it taking so long now?” It’s…. It’s been two…. No… It’s been three years…. Wait… how long has it even been? “H-How long ago… d-did it happen? I can’t remember…”

Levi looked up in surprise. “It’s been two and a half years since Grisha died… and I don’t know… maybe it has to do with me being gone and doing what I do… I don’t know…” I don’t have those answers…

Eren shrugged, nuzzling into his neck. “Can we not have sex tonight?” I don’t want to… and you told me to ask you… I feel really embarrassed asking you… but yeah…

Levi shrugged, nodding. “That’s very okay, Eren.” He gently nipped his neck, smirking. “I’ve really had my way with you the past couple days… as long as we get to cuddle I’m happy.” I wanna cling to you still…

Eren nodded, holding onto him tighter as he felt a wave of emotions suddenly come crashing down on top of his shoulders, tears pouring down his cheeks yet again as he clung to the shorter man. “I… I missed you so much…” I don’t want you to leave… I want you to stay home… We’re gonna be parents in less than two months…. And I have no idea what I’m gonna do without you… “I… I’m scared…. What if I’m not a good enough Mum?” What happens then? His shoulders shook as he started to sob, his grip on Levi tightening even more.
Oh no…. Levi held onto him tightly, his voice soft. “Eren, I'm sure you'll do really well as a Mum. And if you need help, Mom and Dad are around to help. And you can always call Sharon or Hannah, they've been there. They're still learning too, but Maverick lived, so they must've done something right.” He smiled faintly, nestled closer to Eren. “And I missed you too… so much… I know I'm not gonna be here when she’s born… and for a bit after that… but I will come home to you two. I have a family to come home to now. Don't be so scared. You're not alone in this.” You'll be a wonderful parent...

“But… What happens when she gets to 2 and a half… and you come home… and she has no idea who the hell you are?” I don’t want that to happen. He was thankful that Levi was clinging right back to him and holding onto him. I love this… I love this so much...

Levi gently rubbed his back. “I'll be there on skype from time to time when she's small, and when I am, you can pick her up and show me to her and say “Wave to Dad, and when she’s small she’ll see enough pictures of me and see me on Skype enough to recognize me, and when she starts learning words you can point to my picture and tell her that I'm Dad and you can have her call you Mum if you want.” Levi just spoke, the words tumbling from his mouth. I wanna come home and have her recognize me… and then immediately demand I pick her up… so I can give her all the hugs and kisses I couldn't while I was away...

Eren nodded, still holding onto Levi tightly as he started to calm down, hearing Lathe call for everyone for dinner. “W-Will you carry me downstairs? And can you see which bottles still have pills in them?” I need to take all of them… He rubbed at his eyes, his arms wrapping around Levi’s shoulders, not wanting to let go of him.

Levi nodded, his arms under his thighs, shifting them forward till he was standing, Eren still clinging to his front. Levi softly pecked his neck as he walked to the bathroom, one hand keeping him up while the other gently shook the bottles, figuring out which bottles still had pills inside. “Two are empty… but everything else has at least a few.” Not many, but a few… “You’ll have to call the pharmacy and get new bottles…” Yeah, that's a thing...

Eren nodded, holding onto him tightly, keeping his legs wrapped around him. “I can ask Dad to call them in… Did you get stronger? I feel like it’s almost too easy for you to lift me at this point…” I miss you being able to carry me everywhere… He watched Levi grab his pills and stuff them in his pockets before his other hand returned under his thighs, letting a heavy blush grace his features.

Levi smirked, hiking Eren up a bit, his hands cupping his thighs. “May~be… but if me carrying you around everywhere lets me do this…” He gently squeezed Eren’s thighs, his hands close to his ass. “Then I'm not gonna complain.” Nope. Not at all.
Eren let out a soft yelp as his ass was squeezed. “F-Fuck… Levi… Just carry me downstairs…”

Fuck, Dad’s probably gonna be worried as all hell...

“Sorry, it's too tempting…” Levi gently pecked his cheek, padding downstairs with Eren still securely in his arms. He sauntered into the kitchen, his tone casual as everyone looked up worriedly. “We're fine, don't worry. Everything’s chill.” Levi moved to set Eren in a chair, sitting next to him and sighing quietly with exasperation as Eren immediately anchored himself to his arm, smiling anyway. You're too adorable… I'm not gonna argue about the clinginess...

Lathe was relieved as Levi brushed their worries off, going to fix them plates. “That's good to hear.” Late set their dinner in front of them, looking up as Levi pulled out pill bottles and set them on the counter. They don't sound as full as they should… Lathe picked one up and shook it, the few pills inside clicking against the plastic. “You need more of these, huh.” I did see a bunch spilled on the ground… He started doing it for all the bottles, surprised a few were completely empty. “You'll need new everythings. I'll call the pharmacy for you later if you want.” That's a thing.

Eren looked to Lathe, his eyes a bit downcast. “Yeah, thank you…. A-and I’m sorry… about before…” I really need to apologize for my behavior… I should've known better than that. He sighed quietly, looking away from everyone else and nuzzling his face into Levi’s shoulder. You're gonna have to deal...

Lathe sighed quietly, smiling to him. “It's okay, Eren. We understand.” It's okay. Lathe sat down to eat, occasionally glancing up to the pair of them.

Levi moved to eat, letting Eren scoot closer so that he could stay buried in his shoulder as he ate. He soon nudged Eren, looking to his plate. “You need to eat something, Eren.” Sustenance.

Eren grumbled something in German before slowly letting his face come into existence, sniffing a bit. He picked up his fork, starting to eat a little bit, but his left hand never let go of Levi’s sleeve. Dad’s worried… I need to show him that I can manage on my own… “U-Uhm… S-So… Are we gonna be able t-to foster anymore kids?” Since you’re adopting Tucker… I don’t think it’s honestly that many anymore....

Lathe looked up, grinning widely and nodding. “One of the workers we met decided to make an exception for us. We’re getting a small flock of boys, five and six year olds, and six of them, as soon as we can build beds for them.” More humans!

Eren’s eyes went wide, a huge smile on his face. “I can move Mila’s crib into my room if I need to…” It’s not like I’ll be getting any… And it’ll be easier for me to wake up if she’s near me...
Levi looked up from his food, surprised. “That’s gonna be her name? I love it.” He smiled faintly, thinking. **Mila. ...it's a lovely name.**

Eren smiled. “Mila Rose Ackerman.” *She’s taking your last name dammit… Not mine.* He smiled as he watched Levi still from shock. *You’ll get over it…*

“… **my** last name? But I like **yours** …” *I like your last name…*

“No… I’m not letting her have the same name as….” He trailed off as he swallowed hard, shaking his head quietly and his grip on his fork tightening. *No… Don’t think about it…. Don’t think about it.*

Levi rested a hand on Eren’s, squeezing lightly. “It's okay, I understand. It's a lovely name.” **Mila Rose Ackerman. ...I’m gonna be a father … ...well shit.**

Eren smiled softly, calming down within a moment. *Oh my god… we’re gonna be parents …* Wait… Dad’s gonna be a grandpa at 40… and mom’s gonna me a grandma at 42… God they’re getting old… I wonder if Levi will stay up and talk with me all night? I kinda wanna talk with him… He was absentminded as the conversation happened around him, a happy smile on his face as he ate. *I’m gonna be a Mum…*

Levi was rather quiet through dinner, occasionally speaking though mostly focused on his food and the man attached to his arm. *We’re gonna be parents… …that makes Mom and Dad grandparents… well then… I can’t really imagine them being that old…* Levi looked up, studying them. ......they don’t… well…. fuck, I dunno… I don’t wanna think about them getting old…

Tucker looked up to Lathe a look of worry on his face. “Um… I-I… I can s-still work… right?” *I did get the job… but I don’t start until after school starts up again…*

“Oh yeah, you can have the job, that's fine. Idrove you to the damn interview, I'm not saying no.” Lathe grinned. “Remember though- since your hours are random, just tell me when you're working via text. That's the only thing you need to do. And tell me if you need rides home or anything.”

Tucker nodded and smiled happily, finishing up his whole plate for what seemed like the first time in a long time and actually asking for seconds. *I’m hungry…*
Lathe looked pleased when Tucker asked for seconds, going to get him more. “It's good that you're eating.” *You never eat this much...*

Tucker looked down a bit. *I never ate... I always kinda starved myself... I always tried to lose weight... “I... I’m hungry...” You’d yell at me for not eating...*

“That's fine- we always make too much, anyways. You can have as much as you want.” *I'm surprised you hadn't been eating us out of house and home- in high school everyone ate enough for two at lunch at least...*
...I'm at Caesar's. In Las Vegas. Checking in. And Valentine’s Day is in two days. ...what even is life anymore. Marco took the room keys from the man at the front desk, thanking him and wheeling his suitcase to an elevator. ...I have no words for this. “If you get the hotel room as messy as you normally try to make the bedroom back home, I’m make you sleep on the floor.” Marco gave Jean a teasing nudge as they waited for the doors to open. No socks everywhere, please.

Jean rolled his eyes as he waited for Marco to fidget with the keycard, following him in once it was open. It’s a decent sized room for how much it cost.... God I hope I don’t get sick anytime soon, because I’m gonna need to be working overtime for this shit... I legitimately took everything I had out of my savings account to pay for the hotel room and to have enough money for the week we’ll be here... He set his bag down near the dresser, which had a very large flat screen on it. “This is nice....” Stocked mini-fridge, microwave, snacks... $3 bottles of water, you know, the usual fancy place stuff... “Well, we’re here now, and we have our room keys, what do you wanna do first?” We could go eat downstairs? We could go gamble?

“Hm... I'm kinda thinking food first. Then we can go wander around and see what there is to do around here besides gamble. If anything such exists.” It's all casinos... and more casinos... and strip clubs of course, but I'm gay, I'm not indecent... ......I'll have to keep Jean reined in though, I'll just get jealous and then very uncomfortable and then I'd leave.

Jean nodded, getting his wallet and making sure that he had enough cash on him to hopefully pay for dinner without needing to use his credit card. “Well, let’s get goin’ then.” I honestly have never really been to a casino before, and I’ve always heard that it’s a fun place to go... but I’m not really sure if this was a good decision or not. He was quiet as Marco led him back to the elevators, waiting for any one of the six to land on their floor. Was it a good idea.....?

Marco studied the halls around them as they waited, watching Jean fidget for a moment. “You okay? You look really worried.”

Jean looked up at Marco as he spoke, the deer in the headlights look overtaking him, finding it hard to formulate words at that exact moment. How do I ask you since we’re already here? I mean, we’re not really gamblers... You’re freckled Jesus... “I-Is this okay? F-For our vacation, I mean?” Fuck I said it...
Marco sighed quietly, smiling. “Now’s a good time to evaluate the situation. And yes, I do.” He moved to peck Jean’s cheek as he looked terrified for a moment, trying to calm him. “I think it’ll be really fun. And it’s pretty much mandatory that everyone at some point should go to Vegas.” This’ll be fun! “Don’t worry, Jean. You do that too much.” It’s fine.

Jean smiled softly as Marco convinced him against his fears. “Okay.” He blushed as his cheek was kissed again, the elevator finally dinging and opening it’s doors to them, taking them down to the lobby. “I’m pretty sure we have to walk through the casino to get to the restaurant.” Pretty sure that’s what it is…

“If it gets us food, sure. I have no real idea where we’re going, so I’m just gonna follow you.” Lead the way because I literally don’t have a clue where to go. Marco kept close to him as they walked across the casino floor, soon seeing a sign for the restaurant. Food. He was confused as Jean suddenly looked over to their right, his eyes widening. He followed his line of sight to a blonde, thinking for a moment that he recognized her. ...Annie? ...No, it's not Annie. She looks pretty close though, but not quite. He was surprised as Jean suddenly went after her as the blonde turned to leave, catching the back of his jacket. Oh hell no. “Jean, that's not Annie.” It's not her. Her face isn't shaped like that.

Jeans eyes were wide as he caught a familiar stride towards his right, stopping as he looked up to see bleach blonde hair. Oh my god... Annie... He looked to see how the blonde turned to face them, his eyes widening more as he started towards her, only to have Marco grab him back. “Marco… that’s her!” She’s been gone… for two years, without a single trace! I can’t just let her go...

Marco glanced to Jean, his eyes studying the blonde as she walked, making a decision as their eyes met. I don’t think you’re Annie… but Jean looks like he might break down if he doesn’t at least try to say hi. Marco waved to her, bringing Jean with him. “Excuse me?” Marco saw her eyes widen as Jean started for her, watching with shock as she bolted off in the opposite direction. .....well shit. That must be Annie.

Jean was about to open his mouth, though the second she ran he held out his arm, as if to stop her. ....Wait! Don’t go.......... He looked absolutely destroyed as Annie managed to make it out of sight within a few seconds, blending in with the crowd. She left.... Without even saying a word to me... she’s just... gone...

Marco watched helplessly, reaching for Jean. “Here, c’mon babe… I’m sorry…” He gently pulled Jean along, not knowing what to think. .....well shit.
Jean’s eyes were full of torment as he was tugged along, silent as they waited for a table in the restaurant and silent as they sat down looking over menus. “Am I such a horrible lover that you’d just up and leave?” And then never answer me when I try and get ahold of you? His words broke his silence, and he was staring right at Marco. Are you gonna leave me too? It’s been two years since we’ve been together… I still don’t feel like a man at all…

Marco looked saddened by his words, gently nudging his feet under the table and tangling their ankles. He looked him in the eye, his smile soft. “Jean, I love you. You know that. I would never just up and leave. If anything ever were wrong, I’d tell you and try to fix it. But I really do care a lot about you. You’re wonderful to me.” I love you… and you don’t always seem to believe me when I tell you...

Jean seemed to calm if only for a moment, ordering a glass of wine when the waiter came to take their drink order. I need a drink…. I don’t really wanna break down but… She ran away from me again… Without even looking back. He was on autopilot as he gazed through the menu ordering whatever he thought seemed good, giving the menu back to the waiter, watching Marco’s lips move as he ordered too. I have half a mind to believe you, and half a mind to believe through experience and not trust your words at all…. I hate that...

Marco soon handed his own menu back, looking to Jean and seeing the pained look in his eyes. “Jean…” Marco reached over, grabbing one of his hands and squeezing it reassuringly. “Don’t let this ruin your mood for the whole week… I’m really sorry that just happened… but don’t let it get in the way of having fun this week, okay?” I’m sorry… but don’t let it take over your mind, please...

Marco’s right… I can’t let this bother me… I’m supposed to be having fun this week with him. “Alright… I’ll leave it be, It wouldn’t be fair for you to have a mopy boyfriend…” He took Marco’s hand, kissing his knuckles to take his mind off things before their drinks were brought. I don’t want you to leave me...

Marco blushed at the gesture, smiling sweetly. After dinner they went out onto the floor, sitting down at a blackjack table. Marco was doing more or less okay, more interested in watching Jean dominate than playing the actual game. There were four stacks of black chips in front of him, another cute brunette trying to hit on him. Third one in the past ten minutes. They're persistent. I just don't understand how anybody could be that lucky to win that much...

Jean looked back to Marco as the dealer paid off everyone from the previous round, people starting to bet, ogling Jean’s large stacks of black chips. “So um… can I have a kiss?” His cheeks were flooded with red. The girls around here keep hitting on me… and I’m getting uncomfortable… so we’re gonna leave soon, I already have all my money back as it is, so the chips I have on the table are the extra… I’m gonna go all in…
“If it keeps all the girls away…” Marco leaned over to kiss him, his hand cupping his cheek for a moment, his own cheeks burning. Dammit, I love you. Marco sat back after a moment, watching Jean put nearly everything on the next round. He watched him get a king…. and then an ace. …. You got a blackjack. “Are you sure you don't have a horseshoe hidden on you somewhere?” Marco grinned as the dealer moved to pay him, eight light blue chips pushed towards him across the table. That's a ton of money... holy hell...

Jean politely asked to ‘cash out,’ receiving 4 more light blue chips in exchange for his 4 stacks. He got up from his seat, which was quickly taken by someone hoping to be just as lucky. “So... What do you wanna do now that I can carry my winnings easier now.” I only have 12 chips to keep track of. “I can go cash this in? It’s probably safer in check form anyways...” I mean... it's 24 grand, it’s safer on a sheet of paper that has my name on it than it is as chips in my pocket.

“That's probably a good idea... it's a lot to just carry around at this point...” It's so much money... Marco didn't much care anymore, clinging to his arm as they moved across the floor. He looked around for a clock, finding none and looking to his phone. “We've been here awhile. We can go out and wander if you want, or go upstairs...?” You pick...

“Upstairs would work, I'm kinda tired from today's events.” That's not a lie either, I'm exhausted, but in a good way I guess. They finally found where he had to get the money cashed, the clerk’s eyes widening as she saw the light blue chips, carefully counting them, asking for Jean’s ID, which he gave and then writing him a check for around $22,000. He thanked her, taking the check and the paperwork that went with it. “Ready to go?” I'm ready if you are...

Marco smiled, dragging him back to the lobby. He kept close to him, leaning up to kiss him as soon as they were alone in the elevator. I love you... and that is a shit ton of money you just won... I'm not gonna question where you shoved the horseshoe.

Jean’s hands wrapped around Marco’s waist as he kissed him, pulling back to look into his eyes. “Excited are we?” You’ve got something planned.... Don’t you. He’s got an idea.... He followed as Marco pulled him from the elevator and towards their room, noticing how dark it was outside finally. Holy shit, it’s late ...

Marco dragged him to their room, opening it quickly and getting them inside. He let Jean put the check and paperwork down before he pulled him in for a hot kiss, his hands running down his front. I want you... and I wanna remind you how much I love you...

He smirked as Marco’s hands ran down his front, kissing him just as hotly as he was being kissed. Jean let Marco drag him to their bed. You’re gonna have your way with me... Aren't you? Jean’s eyes were shaded as he looked up to Marco. I love that about you...So shy it's adorable... well, shy
Marco broke their kiss to peck down his jaw, gently pushing Jean to sit on the edge of the bed, Marco making himself at home in his lap. He pecked down his neck, nipping at the soft flesh as he felt all the way down his front, tugging at the hem of his hoodie. I want this gone...

Jean obliged, shifting his head to give Marco more room before he tugged his hoodie and the shirt underneath himself up and over his head. God... He's so handsome... He bit his lip, feeling himself slowly becoming hard. Why is it taking so long? I used to be able to get it up quicker than that...

Marco immediately attacked the bare skin with his lips, Jean arching back as his lips sealed over a nipple, sucking at it as his fingers teased the other. I want you to feel really good. He switched between the two, feeling himself harden with Jean’s quiet gasps. I love all the sounds he makes...

Jean let out soft gasps as Marco’s lips took over both his nipples, letting his arms fall behind him and support him as he arched his back for Marco. Fuck…. He felt his pants tighten uncomfortably as he shifted, rubbing up against Marco’s crotch. He’s hard too...

Marco could feel Jean harden against him, ‘accidentally’ shifting his hips and rubbing their bulges against each other. He glanced up at another gasp, pecking softly at his chest. “There something wrong, Jean?” One hand moved down his front, cupping his bulge. “Something you need… help with?”

“Hmm, getting your ass to hurry up and fuck me.” That's what I need help with. He ground up against Marco’s bulge again, delighting the delicious friction that ensued. “M-Marco… Hurry, I want you dammit….…” His cheeks were flushed red from embarrassment as he spoke, his eyes full of lust and need.

Marco whimpered a bit as Jean ground up into him, flushing at his words. “If that's what you want…” Marco gave him a small smirk, staying put and tugging his own jacket and shirt off, stepping off of Jean and kneeling down to undo his jeans, tugging them down as he kissed up the insides of his thighs. He teasingly kissed his bulge through his boxers, kissing away as he tugged those down too. He gave the tip a teasing open-mouth kiss, his hands running over his thighs as he stood. He flushed darker as he undid his own jeans, Jean watching him without shame. Dammit... that look...

Jean shuffled on top of the mattress, his eyes shamelessly watching as Marco undressed. He beckoned him to come onto the bed with him, a smirk on his face. I want you, I want you bad.
Marco sighed quietly, smiling. “One second, babe.” He quickly moved to fidget with his backpack, setting lube and condoms on the bed before crawling over on top of him. *Makes things easier. And not hurt as much...* Marco straddled him, kissing him deeply as his hands slowly ran all over whatever skin he could reach, slowing their pace down. *I don't wanna hurt you or anything...* He moved his head, kissing back down to his neck and sucking at a spot on his shoulder, starting to leave a trail of marks. *And you're mine ... not someone else’s.*

Jean groaned as Marco marked him up. *I wonder if he’ll let me sleep after we’re done? I’ve been awfully tired lately.* His hands moved to Marco’s hair, tangling his fingers in the dark chocolate locks. *He’s so caring.... I love it, even if I am the lesser of us in this situation.* Jean watched Marco move lower and closer to his hard member, his eyes full of lust, his breathing hitched. *I want it... I really want it.*

Marco kissed tenderly down his stomach, soon licking at the base of his length, thinking. *I haven't done it in awhile...* Marco shifted to bring his legs over his shoulders, exposing his hole to him. He dove in, lapping at the ring of muscle, the tip of his tongue prodding at it. *I wanna hear you...*

Jean’s eyes widened as his lower half was lifted and his entrance prodded at. “F-Fuck... M- *Marco*!” He let out loud moans and cries. *Oh my god... His tongue ...* His hands grabbed onto Marco’s hair, his whole face flushing as he felt his wet muscle lap at his entrance. *It feels so good.*

Marco's hands ran over his thighs, up to his hips, teasing around his base before coming down again. *I love how you sound...* Marco’s tongue eased it’s way past the muscle, going in and out again a few times, feeling Jean struggle not to writhe above him. He soon pulled away, kissing back up to his neglected length, wetly kissing up and down the shaft. *I love doing this sort of stuff to you... you deserve all of it...* Jean jerked his hips, trying not to let the sudden sensations push him over the edge. *Fuck.... “M-Marco... Fuck... D-Don’t....” I don’t know why.... But I feel like I could let go any second ...* He whimpered as Marco left sloppy kisses all over his length. Jean struggled to get his arms under him, trying to boost himself up. *What the hell is wrong with me?*

Marco left one last kiss on his length, looking up to him, tilting his head a bit. “Jean, it's okay, you don't have to do much...” Marco reached up, easing him back down. “Let me take care of you, Hon.” Marco gently nipped at his ear, deciding to move on and reaching for the condoms and lube. *I'll prep you... don't worry, I'll make you feel good...*

Jean's eyes were wide, watching as Marco finally got the lube and condoms. *Fuck, this is gonna be...*
harder holding it in than I think it is… He whimpered as he felt a lubed digit push at his entrance, squirming at the touch before sighing as it slowly sunk into him. I never really realized how much of an absolute man whore I am… Jeez…

Marco settled on top of him, slowly stretching him as he kissed at his neck, trying to keep him relaxed. You seem so worked up… Marco tilted Jean’s head back, kissing under his jaw, feeling him instantly melt. There it is… that’s the reset button. He slowly slipped a second finger into him, searching him.

Jean’s tense body relaxed, slowly settling down onto the white sheets. Shit…. “M-Marco…” His voice was shuddery, his body shivering at each touch. He looked to his own wilting cock, seeing the streams of precum leaking from his slit. Fuck… There’s gotta be something wrong with me… Did I eat something?

Marco looked up to him with worry, looking down to his length, surprised when he saw him wilt, still leaking precum onto his stomach. Uhm… “Jean, are you okay?” A thought occurred to him, paling, his heart sinking for a moment. Am I not… am I not doing it for you anymore? “I-Is it… am I not…” He couldn't bring himself to say it, his hand drawing out of him, clinging to him. I wanna be enough...

Jean’s eyes widened, quickly shaking his head. “No, Marco, it’s not you… I don’t know what’s up with me… You’re perfect baby… I could never ask for more from you…” Shit… Is this…. Is this gonna fuck us over? “Marco… Please don’t stop… I don’t want you to.” Please believe me… I don’t know why I can’t stay hard...

Marco still looked distressed as he nodded, his fingers going back to his hole, though he still buried his face in Jean’s neck. “Are you sure it’s not… are you sure that… that I'm enough?” I don't know what else to think… He held onto him tighter, feeling overly possessive. I don't want us to fall apart because I'm not attractive enough… or that I don't do the right things… but… I don't get it… I thought… I thought everything was fine ...

Jean moved his head to press gentle kisses on his neck, his own hands slightly shaking as they wrapped around Marco. “You’re perfect…. Don’t you worry about it…” You are … I’m the one who’s in the wrong here… He let out a loud moan as Marco found his prostate, feeling his length begin to harden once again. What is with this fluctuation?

Marco sighed deeply, trying to calm down as Jean moaned, watching him begin to harden again. ...is it just because I'm hitting your prostate? But… you were hard when I was rimming you… and not when I was getting stuff… I don't know what to think… Marco eased in a third finger, kissing down Jean’s jaw. “...I love you…” His voice was small, shaky. I really do... I don't wanna think
“I love you too.” Jean’s response was immediate as he let out another loud cry near Marco’s ear as he was stretched out, his back arching in pleasure. *Fuck… It feels so good… “Marco… S-So good…”*

Marco’s eyes darkened as Jean moaned wantonly, nipping under his jaw before drawing his hand out of him, sure that he was loosened up. He teasingly stroked him with one hand as he reached for the condoms and lube, keeping him hard as he rolled the condom on and lubed up, moving on top of him, his tip nudging his entrance. “I love you so much…” Marco slowly slid inside of him, letting Jean adjust every other inch until he was buried, softly kissing his neck. *I care about you so much…*

Jean gasped when he first entered, slowly becoming accustomed to the burn of being stretched. “M-M-Marco…. F-Fuck me…” *Please , I need you… I really need you.* His moan caught in his throat as he started to pull out before thrusting back in. Jean’s length was still considerably hard, though a little softer than it normally was. *Fuck it feels good… No… It feels great …*

Marco was slow, his hands all over Jean as he thrusted into his heat. He felt Jean’s legs wrap around his middle, leaning up to deeply kiss him as they made love. *I want you to remember how much I love you… because you forget all the time…*

Jean groaned into the kiss, his hands coming up to let his fingers play in Marco’s hair. His mouth opened to let Marco’s tongue explore his mouth, letting their tongues dance with each other as he felt Marco getting dangerously close to finding his prostate. *It feels so good… It’s almost like the best yet… But I don’t know why I can’t keep myself hard.* His arms wrapped around Marco’s shoulders, keeping their bodies close. *I’m gonna be exhausted after this…*

Marco kept him close as he moved, one hand cradling his jaw, the other moving south, slowly stroking his length in time with his thrusts. *I want you to feel really good… ....you’re barely still hard… ....but I don’t get it…* He felt Jean break away from their kiss for a moment, gasping and letting out a sinful moan, his grip tightening on him. *If it feels so good… what’s wrong?* Marco tried not to think about it, picking up his pace just a bit.

Jean continued to let out sinful moan after sinful moan. His face was completely flushed, all the way down his neck as well. *It feels amazing… “M-Marco… I-I….” I feel weird… I feel like I can climax at any moment, like I should be able to… But I can’t… Something’s preventing me… is this to do why I haven’t been waking up with morning wood?* He let out a loud gasp arching his back more as Marco continued to hit his prostate. *Fuck… It feels great…*
Marco kissed and licked at his neck, deeply sighing as Jean moaned in his ear. He sucked dark marks up his neck, feeling himself grow warm all over. *He feels so good…. I don't think I can last much longer…* “Jean… baby, I'm close…” Marco kissed up to his jaw, his voice smooth as he looked him over. “I wanna see you when you cum…” *You're too handsome anyway… and my god, your expressions are too hot…*

Jean felt the sensations rolling around in his gut increase at those words. *He's beautiful… I love him so much…* He shifted his head to the side, giving him better access to his jaw as his toes curled. “M-Marc… I don't want!” Jean let out a shrill cry as Marco thrusted into his prostate dead on, allowing him to finally tip over the edge, his soft length hardening for a moment as he came between them. *Fuck… I'm tired… I'm really tired…* “Fuck… Marco…” He was breathing heavily as he laid under him, in utter bliss, the sensations still pooling around his gut. *I feel weird… something’s not right here…*

Marco came hard inside him, burying his face in his neck, moaning loudly. *Damn… my god, I love him…* They both panted to catch their breaths, Marco drawing out, softly kissing Jean’s cheek. “Let me clean you up, babe.” He tossed away the condom, going to get a warm washcloth from the bathroom, not minding his nudity for the moment. *I wanna take care of you…*

The rest of the week was nice- we had a lot of fun, Jean won way too much money to make the casinos happy, and it was a good vacation…we went to see a lot of cool shows, and it was wonderful… but… even on Valentine’s Day, things weren't the best in bed… and after the week was over, the problem was still there… he has soft erections, he doesn't wake up with morning wood anymore, he hasn't been in the mood since Valentine's and he's just been so… tired, all that week and now this week too… he's doing so much overtime now too… I've eaten dinner alone all week because he's home so late… I'm worried… …is it me? Marco tried to hide his distress Sunday, trying to smile when he ears the door of the bakery chime, seeing a familiar face. “Hello, Mr. Quo.”

Lathe smiled, ambling in. “Hey Marco! Long time no see.”

“…I was gone for a week, Mr. Quo.”

“That's a long time to me.” Lathe grinned. “So, how was Vegas?” *Tell me everything!*

Marco sighed, leaning onto the counter. “Well, it was great, like the shows were cool, we actually won some money, but…” He sighed, Lathe’s look imploring him to continue, blushing faintly and glancing down. “But I'm worried about Jean…”
Lathe’s brow furrowed a bit, shifting his weight. “...is there something wrong?”

“Well, I mean... he’s...” Marco ducked his head down a bit, staring at the counter. “I kinda... I just... I'm not sure if I'm... if I'm enough for him anymore...” 

“I don't want that to be it...

Late looked sympathetic and worried, moving to the counter and resting a hand on his shoulder. “What? I've seen the way Jean looks at you, he loves you... what on Earth is making you think that?”

“He...” Marco sighed as Lathe spoke, giving up on trying to filter his thoughts too much. “I feel like our sex life just all of a sudden tanked... I don't know what it is... he's never in the mood and he doesn't even let me try to start anything... he just brushes me off... I can't tell if he doesn't care or what.... and he just... he was barely able to keep an erection on valentine's and two days before even in the middle of things and I just... I don't know, is it me? Am I not enough anymore?” Marco looked to be nearly in tears, staring at the counter forlornly. I want to be enough... He looked up when Lathe was handing him a light blue cloth, looking up see him giving him a faint smile.

“...Marco, I think I might have an idea what the problem is, and it's certainly not you. Even though it doesn't happen with someone so young, the symptoms line up... He might have ED... but he needs to go to a doctor and get stuff tested.”

“That's a thing.

...seriously? “...huh...” Marco dabbed at his eyes, thinking. That's absurd, he's barely thirty. but it would make things make sense a bit more. “...that would make things make sense... but there's no way in hell he'd ever agree to go talk to someone about not being able to get it up... he feels like an inadequate man and human enough as it is...” He'd never agree....

“But I don't think you should just suck it up- that's not right. I'm sure Jean isn't exactly happy about it himself... maybe he's just good at not showing it. But Marco, you're his boyfriend. You've been going steady a while now. If anyone has the power to convince him to go talk to someone about it, it's you. And if he keeps refusing, threats are always on the table.”

Marco faintly chuckled, thinking. “He doesn't really go to the doctor anymore, though... and I don't think he'd wanna talk to you...”

“I don't even have an office or anything to do that sorta stuff, I don't have stuff for it... but...” Lathe thought, going through a mental list of doctors, thinking who Jean might talk to. “......you
know Casper.”

“Yeah…? ……wait. Why would Jean talk to him particularly? They're not even vaguely close.”

“Casper is a doctor. He’s hella gay, and a bottom. Jean can relate on one of those two criteria.” *We all know Jean is bi.* “If he’s got an image problem, he can rant to Casper about it, and Casper will actually understand where Jean is coming from with a lot of stuff.”

“...I can try to ask him to talk to him about it… but… he won't listen…”

“Then how about this. I tell Casper, we make an appointment on a day he isn't working and doesn't have plans, and your job is simply to get him to go. I don't know how you'll do it, but whatever it takes to convince him.” *Anything will do.*

Marco nodded, letting out a breath of relief. “Thanks…” *I have at least a little hope that this isn't about me… ……..now all I need to do is get Jean to go through with this.*
Chapter 89: Mila Rose Ackerman

Eren’s eyes widened as he heard his phone go off, instantly recognizing the ringtone. *Is it time….?
He fumbled with the bright screen looking to see that the numbers were somewhere in the early
morning. “H-Hello?” *It’s so early… please say it’s time…

“It’s time, she went into labour a few minutes ago, she wants you to hurry up.”

Eren gasped, his eyes widening. “I’ll be there as soon as I can!” He hung up, instantly awake and
grabbed clothes, running out of the room and towards Lathe and Ieva’s. He entered, not really
caring that he was clambering all over the place as he got to Lathe’s side of the bed and shook him.
“Dad Dad Dad Dad wake up!” His voice was high pitched and cheery, way to happy for 2 in the
morning.

Lathe jerked awake, blinking rapidly as Eren sounded like an overexcited puppy in his ears. “Whoa
whoa what? What happened?!?” Lathe sounded worried, sitting up, Ieva beside him stirring as well.
What happened?! Did someone get hurt?!

“It’s time!” Eren said excitedly before bounding off the bed and slipping out the door, thundering
down the stairs and getting his boots on before he ran outside and his car roared to life. He was on
a high as he drove to the hospital, quickly making his way up to the maternity wing. *It's time! My
baby girl is coming!

Lathe needed a second to process it before grinning, turning to Ieva. “It's time!” Lathe became
ecstatic, kissing her cheek before getting out of bed to get dressed. *I need to go be there for him.

Ieva groaned as she shifted. “Text me when she’s born…. Send pictures… I’ll take care of
breakfast…” *I need sleep still… I’m exhausted. She laid back down, curling up to Lathe’s pillow,
hugging it to her chest. *Sleep….

Lathe chuckled, leaning over to kiss her forehead. “I will, don't worry. And thank you, Hon.” Late
quickly went back to getting dressed, snatching his wallet and his keys, giving Ieva one last kiss
before running off downstairs to hop into the Thunderbird. *My granddaughter is being born…
Lathe made good time to the hospital, heading for the maternity wing.

Eren was standing beside the surrogate, holding her hand on one side, her actual husband on her
other side. The doctor was working them through the process, and she was starting to crown. *Just a
few more moments... and I’ll have my baby girl...

Lathe soon appears outside the door, not knowing what to do besides stay out of the way near the door of the small room, wincing as he heard the sounds of serious pain. ……that’s got to hurt worse than breaking both your legs at once ...

Eren stayed strong, a small sigh leaving him as he heard a loud cry, tears welling in his eyes. She’s… She’s alright! He smiled as the doctor cut the umbilical cord, the nurse taking his little girl to go wash her, take measurements and bring her back in a pink blanket within a few minutes.

“So, do we have a name?” The nurse smiled as she handed the girl to Eren first, letting him hold her close as she looked around.

“Yeah… Mila, Mila Rose Ackerman.” She’ll take after him, her eyes are a stunning color… like a blue-ish grey… like his… but a bit darker blue. He walked over to his surrogate, a wide smile on his face. “D-Do you wanna hold her? Before they let you leave?” I know they’re gonna keep you here for multiple hours but...

She smiled, reaching for her. “I’d love to. I spent nine months making her for you, after all.” She cradled Mila close, studying her features, her eyes. “She’s beautiful… and she has a lovely name. She’s taking Levi’s last name. Any particular reason? Or did it just sound nicer?” She grinned to him. “Are you gonna take his name too?” I know you really wanna get married as soon as he comes home...

Eren felt a pang of sadness fill his chest, smiling to try and hide his tears. “I’d hope so… yeah…” If he decides to ask me… Even when he came home he didn’t ask… and I didn’t want to bug him about it. “But… if I don’t he’ll be legally tied to me via Mila for at least 21 years.” He smiled softly, watching her handle Mila gently. I miss him even more now, fuck….

She smiled, looking back to Mila. “Hear that, Mila? You’re the leash Eren has on Levi.” She grinned as Eren blushed, pecking her forehead. “I think he’ll ask when he comes home. Being in the military and in a relationship at the same time can be a tough thing… but when he comes home he’ll sweep you off your feet, I just know it.” He will. “If he doesn’t I’ll murder him for you.”

Eren smiled, sitting on the edge of the bed. “Dad… apparently you’re at the head of the line for murder duty, but I wonder if I like Jessie more to give her first dibs…” Hmm... that's the real question here. “Thank you, really, for all you’ve done for us.” Allowing me to have a kid that’s actually my own…
“Nah, I'll let **him** take care of the military man. I'd do a crap job of killing him, and I'm too poor to get a hit man. And you're welcome. You now have your very own tiny baby.” Jessie gave them one last peck on the forehead, handing her back to Eren. “...are you the Dad, or the Mom?” *I need to know this information.*

Eren raised an unamused eyebrow. “Does it look like I could produce my own child if I wanted to? Because I’m male is the only reason we know each other and happen to be perfect friends, Jessie.” He chuckled as he held Mila close, loving his small daughter. *I'll never stop holding you... and Levi will be able to see you next week for his tri-weekly skype call.*

“I understand, but Mila is gonna grow up really confused if she needs to find one of you, yells for Dad, and gets both, or you can't figure out who she's talking to. If you wanna be Dad, you'll have to pronounce it weird so she can differentiate.” Jessie grinned. *These things are important.*

“I will be known as Mum in our establishment... and I will inform you that this is my Dad, Lathe, though I’m not actually sure if you guys have ever met. Dad, this is Jessie, Jessie this is Lathe, Lathe this is Matt her honeybunch who put up with my shit for awhile when I was panicking and had no idea who to talk to.” *He's a Dad... he gets the panic that I've been feeling.*

Lathe chuckled a bit, shaking Matt’s hand as well as Jessie’s. “It's nice to finally meet you.” Lathe looked up as Eren cradled Mila close, looking to him with pleading eyes. *I wanna hold the tiny human...*

Eren rolled his eyes, finally handing Mila off. “And grandparent mode has been activated... **joy.**” He watched as Mila closed her eyes just before Lathe could hold her. *She's so adorable.*

Lathe very carefully held her to his chest, watching her small eyes flutter open and look at him with awe. *She's beautiful... and so tiny...* Lathe gave Eren a quick and playful glare for a moment, his expression softening again as he looked back to Mila. “Hello, Mila.” He pecked her forehead, smiling. “I'm Grampa Lathe. It's nice to meet you.” Lathe very gently brushed her cheek with his thumb. “You try to behave for your Mum, ya hear? Be unpredictable **just** enough to keep him on his toes.” He smiled, handing her back to Eren, beaming proudly. *I'm a Grampa now... well shit, I'm getting old... eh, I've got a good few decades left in me, I can feel it.*

Eren couldn’t help but smile. “Thank you again, Jessie, and Matt thanks a lot for trying to help calm my nerves down, it really helped.” *I get to take my baby home soon... Oh yeah.* “Um, can you go get the carrier? It’s in the back of my car.” He carefully shifted his hold on Mila, grabbing his keys and handing them to Lathe. *We get to take her home!*
Lathe nodded, smiling. “Will do.” He soon left to retrieve the carrier, finding it in the backseat of Eren’s car. He came back inside with it on his arm, thinking. *I have a Granddaughter now... I wonder what her first word will be? I wonder what her favorite color will be...* Lathe daydreamed about everything and nothing, walking down the maternity wing. *I wonder when Ieva and I can have our own kid...*

Eren smiled as he saw Lathe with the carrier, happily holding onto Mila. *You’re so wonderful... I love this... I love this so much... I hope Levi gets to come home and see you...* He gently pecked Mila’s head, listening to her whine a little, the sound going right to his heart. *You’re not allowed to date until you’re 30...*

Lathe’s heart melted as he heard the tiny sound, holding out the carrier and letting Eren tuck Mila inside, letting him carry her. They walked to the lobby, Lathe’s voice quiet. “You better take good care of her.” *She deserves to be taken well care of.*

Eren had a huge smile on his face, looking down to the quieting babe. “Levi’ll get to see her soon, I wanna go show her off... But it’s like... 4 in the morning now...” *Yeah can’t exactly do that...* He walked to his car, making sure the baby seat clicked in, and that she was all settled in. “She’s so freaking cute!” *We have to teach her to say brains! I want my own little zombie!*

Lathe grinned, turning Eren and pulling him into a crushing hug. “I’m so proud... you have to start thinking right now if what costume I should make her for Halloween.” *You have so many options- it’s a very important decision.* “I love you, Hon.” *I’m so happy for you.*

“Dad... It’s like February, we have time to plan! Now let’s get home before any of the squad wake up and realize you’re missing and try and wake Mom up...” *The boys will be excited to see Mila, they’ve been counting down the days until they have a sister as they wanna call her, even though she’ll be their niece... Technically... Oh my god... If Mom and Dad give me siblings... They’ll be younger than their niece!* He grinned, going to the driver’s side and carefully driving back home. *Hmm, I wonder if she’s asleep? She’s been awfully quiet...* He got out carefully opening the side door, smiling as he saw her small eyes closed. *She’s so cute...*

“It’s an important decision. And you come straight home with her- I wanna hold her again.” *She’s so tiny...* Lathe smiled, heading back to his car to go back home. *She's adorable... and the boys will be so happy to finally have a sister... well, niece.*

Eren watched as Lathe’s car pulled in beside his own. *She’s adorable.* He carefully unlatched the holder, carefully removing her from the car and closing the door. “She’s asleep, so I think I might just take her upstairs...” *Let her sleep in the crib... I know you wanted to hold her, but I don’t*
Lathe nodded, smiling. “You let her sleep, and when she wakes up fussing for something, maybe I'll get to hold her then. We’ll tell the boys at breakfast.” They all need their sleep- no use waking them up now.

Eren smiled, standing to peck his cheek and quietly sneaking upstairs. His smile was huge, looking at the pale pink crib in his room, setting the carrier down on the bed and carefully lifting her out of it. You’re so cute. His eyes watched hers as she stayed asleep, gently lowering her into the crib. You get to sleep now my sweetheart. Eren made sure that she was safe before slipping into his own bed.
Chapter 90: Side Story 5: Marco and Jean (Solutions.... Maybe?)

Marco fidgeted, getting breakfast ready for the both of them. He was wearing a loose tank top and tight jeans, knowing Jean liked them. He has to agree... I have to convince him to go... He was tense, listening for the sound of movement from their bedroom. He's getting up... crap... He smiled when Jean tiredly meandered into the kitchen, moving from the table to embrace him, softly pecking the corner of his lips. “Good morning, babe...” This has to work....

Jean was surprised at first, smiling as he was kissed, wrapping his arms around Marco’s waist to hold him close and kiss him again. Hmm... I could get used to this in the morning. “Don’t you have to get to work soon, babe?” I don’t know what time it is... But it smells amazing, whatever you made... “At least I’m not fending for myself this morning.” He chuckled lightly. I’m still concerned for myself though.... No morning wood to speak of.... Not even a small erection...

Marco nervously chuckled, looking up to him. “Uhm, no, I asked Dad if I could take a day off again... just the one... and I thought you deserved a decent breakfast.” Marco calmed greatly when Jean kissed him back, smiling faintly. “There are a few things I had in mind for today... I wanna take you out to dinner tonight too, just you and me... c’mere.” Marco led Jean to the table, pulling out his chair for him, moving to sit across from him. “I hope you like everything...” I made your favorites...

Jean sat down, suspicion starting to grow. But you never take days off of work.... And just to go out to dinner? “We could’ve still gone out when you got back home.” I could’ve just gone to the gym to use my day off.... Or tell you I went and sleep... He looked to the pancakes, eggs and bacon on the table in front of him. “Thank you...” Jean started to load his plate with food, hunger clearly in his eyes. I’m starving too...

Marco blushed, stammering a bit. “I thought this would be nice... and we get to spend a bit more time together... and... there's some other stuff during the day that needs doing. I'll explain it later; you eat before everything gets cold.” I don't want this going to waste if I spent so long on it...

Jean nodded, quietly digging into the delicious food. It tastes so good.... But, I wonder what he’s talking about... What does he have planned for today? He continued to eat forkful after forkful, making sure that Marco had eaten enough before eating the rest of whatever he’d cooked. It’s so good .... It’s always good, I dunno what I would do without you...

Marco moved to take the empty plates away as Jean finished off breakfast, setting them in the sink for the moment. He didn't know what to do to tell him, moving Jean’s chair out, settling himself in his lap, wrapping his arms around him and burying his face in his neck, flushed completely red and nervous. “Babe... you know how much I love you... I'm not breaking up with you, don't worry.”
Marco immediately corrected himself when he felt Jean tense, softly kissing his neck. “Jean, I love you so damn much… but… we haven't done anything in two weeks… I don't wanna think that you not being able to get it up is my fault… and I don't think it is anymore….” Marco took in a deep breath, speaking. “...So I made you a doctor appointment to talk to someone about it.” You need to...

Jean listened to him, his eyes widening in shock. “............what?” You did what? “I never agreed to that… Marco, I’m not going, absolutely not.” I don’t need a medical professional to tell me that I’m less of a man cause I can’t get it up! I already fucking know that!

“But you need to go! Something's wrong and I wanna know what it is and it's hurting me as much as it's hurting your pride! I know you don't wanna talk about this kind of shit but it hurts when I barely even get a peck on the lips now… we haven't been intimate in too long and I miss you… and the doctor you'd meet with is a gay bottom too… he knows what sort of stuff about pride and relationship roles could be going on in your head… I just… I really care about you… and it needs to be fixed…” Please.

Jean was torn….. another gay bottom… He can probably get it up, he’ll just laugh… oh god, and if he has to look… I’m so fucking small… He groaned, leaning his head back and staring at the ceiling. But Marco’s gonna leave me if I don’t do something …. But talk to a doctor? He knows I hate doctors… Jean sighed covering his face with his hands. “Fine, but if I don’t feel comfortable I’m leaving and never doing it again.”

Marco sighed in relief, kissing at Jean’s neck. “Thank you so much, babe… but please give the visit a chance… I think you'll get a lot out of it.” I really do… “And if you do bail… at least bring home a bottle of Viagra or something…” Marco kissed his cheek. “I’d love if we had plans after dinner…” I miss you...

Jean sighed nodding. “Alright, but I think Viagra you need to order online… Or get a prescription or something.” I’m pretty sure that’s how that works. He watched Marco get off his lap, his eyes shamelessly going to his glorious ass in those tight jeans. He looks fabulous… And I can’t get anything going on down there anymore…. At least it doesn’t hurt to pee…

“Nah, you can just buy it. But it's not a permanent fix.” Marco kissed his lips, slipping off his lap and turning to go back to dealing with dishes, his hips swaying as he walked. “I'd love it if you did…” Marco glanced over his shoulder, his cheeks a furious red. I wanna love you again… please...

Jean smiled softly, nodding and moving to wrap his arms around Marco’s waist, his lips finding the back of Marco’s neck, leaving gentle kisses. You deserve better than a limp dick from me… “I’m
sorry… It’s not you… I promise…” His words soft in Marco’s ear as he kept his arms around his chest. *It’s me… not you, not in any aspect is this your fault…*

Marco leaned back into him, sighing as his neck was kissed, wanting to just melt into his arms. *I miss you… “Would you… feel better if I came with? I don’t have to, just… if you’d rather I do…” Either way it's necessary you go.*

Jean thought about it for a moment. *If I start talking about how I’ve felt… you’d be absolutely heartbroken …* He shook his head. “N-No, it’d be better if I go alone…” *For the both of us. “When is it and where is it?”*

“You’d need to leave within like the next ten minutes at latest… it’s in the Parsec building, the office is on the first floor. You'd just need to give your name and they'd show you where to go.” *It's already all sorted out….*

Jean nodded, pecking at Marco’s neck again before pulling away from him. “I’m gonna go get dressed then.” *The Parsec building? Isn’t that where Hannah and Casper work? I didn’t think that was a doctor’s office too.*

Marco nodded, sighing in relief. *Thank god…* He kissed him goodbye not five minutes later, sighing as he watched the door shut. *I don’t know how long you'll be gone. It could be really short… or you could actually learn to talk to him and be there for a long while…*

Jean got into his truck, driving a little over the speed limit so that he’d make his appointment on time. He parked, noticing that there were no signs for visitor parking, nor patient parking. *What the actual hell?* He shrugged it off, slowly making his way into the large pristine building. He was greeted at the front desk by security and he gave his name and said he was here for an appointment. *Who the hell am I even seeing?*

The man looked him up and down, pursing his lips. “Go down the hall to the left, walk all the way down, and then hang a right, go down that hallway all the way, and then the office will be the door at the end… Good luck.” *You look like you could get lost.*

Jean nodded his thanks to the gruff security guard before he made his way down the two hallways. *Do I knock? I suppose so…* He knocked on the door, trying to listen to see if there was any noise on the inside. “It’s Jean Kirstein… I’m here for a doctor’s appointment…” *This is the weirdest place for a fucking doctor’s office.*
The door opened after a moment, Casper looking up to him. He grinned, his light blue hair certainly a noticeable change. “Hey Jean. Marco convinced you to come? I'm surprised.” *There's no way you knew it was gonna be me doing this.*

Jean’s eyes widened as he saw Casper open the door. *Oh fuck no.* He shook his head, turning on his heel. “I’m leaving, sorry to bother you.” *I’m not talking with you about anything, fuck that.*

Casper marched after him, grabbing him by the back of his shirt. *Hell no.* “Jean, listen, please.” His voice wasn't pleading- it was rather collected. “You've got a problem, I get it. You've got issues not only with your dick but with your pride, and I understand that. But surely Marco told you I'm in the same position as you a lot of the time. I *get* it.” Casper turned Jean around, his expression calm. “Give this a shot- if not for yourself, do it for Marco. You're really young and this shouldn't happen- and Viagra isn't a fix for all of time. Let me help you.”

Jean looked at Casper as he spoke, sighing before finally giving in and following the man into his large office. “So what the hell are we even supposed to talk about?” *I don’t even really want to talk to you about this…*

“At this point? Anything.” Casper sat on the edge of his desk, Jean sitting in a chair in front of him. “You've got an issue and you're too young for it to be natural, and given your personality, I'm thinking of what else is at play. So. How do you like your job?” Jobs are huge causes of stress in most adults- it seems a good place to start and isn't too invasive.

“I hate it, they’ve been making me work overtime basically everyday lately, and my coworkers are shit to work with, and HR is a fucking joke.” He crossed his arms over his chest, crossing his right leg over his left as well, noticing a slight discomfort in his abdomen region. *I fucking gained weight since we went on vacation… Fuck I need to go back to the gym.*

Casper looked sympathetic, studying his body language. *Defensive. Very much so.* “Do you think there's any specific reason you're being swamped and given such a difficult time?”

“Cause I’m the only one who actually fucking works in the whole damn office.” *No one does jack shit, and if they do, it’s completely wrong, so I have to stay and do everything over again.*

“Do you think your coworkers are trying to dump their work on you?” A nod. “Why do you think that?”
“They know I’m gay…. HR doesn’t do jack shit about it either, and I’ve complained about it. They make my life a living **hell**.” I don’t like my job, I hate it… but it’s the only thing I could do without going to college…

“They’ve got a legal obligation to stop that… and I know that doesn't do much good in just saying it. Is changing jobs at all an option for you?”

“Didn’t go to college, so unless I wanna be flipping burgers, that’s a no.” I need to keep paying for our apartment… And I was thinking maybe to get a bigger one with the money I got from Vegas… move to a better apartment complex with Marco… “And Marco’s upset that I get home so late…” And I’m too exhausted to do **anything** with him.

Casper nodded. “…how do you think he feels about this whole situation?”

“He hates that I need to work late, but it’s the only way to keep my job at this point… It’s stressing me out, and just wiping me of any energy I had.” Not that it’s much anymore…

“You must worry a lot about how happy Marco is and how well your lives are going.”

“Yeah…” He shifted putting his elbows on his knees and holding his head. “I thought he was gonna leave too… I mean, he’s got every right to with all this shit happening to me. I can’t control it anymore, and I didn’t think not having any morning wood was a real problem.” I never really noticed it besides this… fuck this has been going on for awhile then.

Casper nodded, thinking. “…does it bother you that you always seem to bottom?”

“Not really, I mean I can’t even keep a woman at my hip, how could I possibly think that I could keep Marco if I was the one topping?” His eyes were distant as he lifted his head a bit, drifting off a bit. I mean, yeah, it was weird at first… but now I’m kinda glad he tops, he can still get off, even if I can’t.

“Do you think that if you switched it up and tried topping with Marco, he'd get bored and leave?” He was completely serious.

“Yeah….” His voice was small, trying not to cry. I don’t want him to leave me… I’ve become grounded in his arms… and I just, if I get uprooted from that again… I don’t think I can manage…
Casper sighed, hopping down from his desk and gently patting his shoulder. *That's all I needed to hear.* “My advice, based in everything you've given me, is to avoid stress. We’ll do a blood test, but I think with the amount of stress you've put yourself under and the amount of cortisol in your blood is making the symptoms of ED show even at this age. I'd say you should look for a better job, first and foremost. Secondly, know that your worth is not measured in girlfriends or boyfriends. Even as a bottom, you're a human worth every bit as much as the top. Thirdly, get a *hobby* or something. Occupy your mind- do jigsaw puzzles, meditate, I don't know, *something*. And lastly…” Casper looked up to him, deathly serious. “I recommend going to the pharmacy right after this with the prescription for Viagra I’m gonna give you and and going home and giving Marco the love he deserves when the time is right, okay? And you do the work. I promise he’ll be all *over* you for *days* …” Believe me- I've tried.

Jean looked down in shame, his thumbs twiddling in his lap. “I really wish that I’d be able to do that for him… but…” I don’t even know if I’ll be able to make it through dinner tonight, especially if Marco’s got plans for us for the rest of the day.

“But nothing*. That man is a freckled Jesus and he has been so patient with you and loving of your everything and deserves a bit of love. Trust me- you won't regret it. And if you're not sure, ask if you can switch. I guarantee he'll say yes.” *He will.*

Jean shook his head again feel his face heat up in utter shame. “I’m so fucking tired all the time… I had to stop going to the gym… And I’ve been eating absolute shit… I’ve been trying to hide it from him… but I don’t know how much longer I can. I’ve packed on at least five pounds in the last two weeks… But I’m too tired to go to the gym or even ask Eren to go to the dojo with me…” I’m *so fucking embarrassed with myself*… He let out a shuddery sigh, leaning over his knees and hiding his face with his hands. I’m *not happy with myself*… and there’s *no* way that Marco would like it… It went right to my fucking gut.

*That's a lot… “Jean, you could just be stress eating. It's a reaction a lot of people have when they're under a lot of pressure for a while. But I do need to grab someone to take a blood sample and test some stuff, okay? We’ll see exactly what’s going on after that.” Casper pulled out a pager, sending a message to someone. There could be something else at work here. Casper looked back to Jean, his voice and smile gentle. “We’ll figure out what's going on with you, Jean. Don't worry.” He picked up a pad of paper from his desk, writing. “This gets you what you need. Just fork it over, and since it’s me, they'll get you what you want first thing.” Casper set the prescription down on the desk again, looking up as an assistant came in with the proper medical equipment. “Jean, this is Andrew. He's going to take some blood to test, nothing too bad. Is that okay?” We *obviously can’t force* you to.*

Jean looked up to Andrew before he nodded and held out his arm for the man. He looked away from the needle though, knowing he’d pass out if he did. *I hate that there’s always something*
wrong with me… I hate that I can’t be a man in Marco’s eyes… I’m not sure if I’d be able to do anything with him tonight… He winced a bit as he felt the characteristic pinch of being stabbed with the needle. *Fuck I wonder how much he’s taking…. And how long are the tests gonna take?*

Casper still has a hand on Jean’s shoulder as the assistant took three small vials of blood, looking up to him as he packed up. “You get those things tested with first priority- my orders.” Casper watched Andrew nod and run off, deciding to sit next to Jean instead of sit across from him. “They won’t take long…. and even if you don’t wanna switch with Marco and be a top… do you particularly like being a bottom?”

Jean shrugged, looking down at his lap with defeat. “I’ve never been a good partner in bed… Annie always reminded me that she’d had better…” *I know that really killed my wanting to top with Marco… Not to mention that I’ve got a small dick compared to him… “I probably wouldn’t be able to get him off if I was the one topping…” We’ve been together for two years…. And I haven’t topped once.*

“You're basing that thought entirely on the idea that the girl that left you knows best. You say it like you've never tried- and you're missing out, Jean. Please, I *really* think you should ask Marco to switch with you for one night. Who knows- he might've wanted to switch for a long while now.” *You never asked, so you don't know.*

Jean shook his head. “He won’t enjoy a whisky dick… No one does…” *I’ve got nothing going for me at this point… “I don’t even know why he puts up with me anymore… I fucked up our vacation… I can’t do anything right in the kitchen…. I can’t get away from my job… I’m a fucking mess in the head that he’s got no idea exists… I’m so insecure about everything and everyone… I don’t deserve him at all…” I don’t know why he stays… I have no idea…*

Casper sighed, gently rubbing his back. “Even if you don't feel like you deserve him, you did something right, and you have him. He loves you a lot - and he cares a lot. It makes sense that you can't get away from your job right away- but start job hunting in your spare time, send out resumes and stuff, find a new place even if it takes a while. As for the kitchen, here's the thing. I agreed to marry Scotty and the idiot could find a way to burn water . Just because you can't cook doesn't have to mean anything. And the vacation getting awkward because you can't get it up is not your fault. You don't know what's going on with your body and we’re just about to figure that out. I know you're insecure and nervous about a lot of stuff, but you need to understand that even if your first time is a bit awkward and nervous, that's *okay* . It'd probably feel exactly the same as when you two first had sex- everyone gets nervous when it comes to intimate things like that. But you should try- and if he likes it, and I promise he will, it'd be good for him and for you and your confidence. I really think you should try that.” *Give you a nudge out of your nest of terror.*

Jean took almost immediately to biting at his nails, his foot incessantly moving as he tapped his
heel on the floor. I'm gonna have to tell him.... “I-I.... I don’t know i-if I’d even be able to do anything… 3 inches isn’t that much....” Fuck I told him, now he knows, and he’s gonna fucking laugh at how small I am...

Casper’s eyebrows shot up, thinking. “....hm.” Casper thought for a moment. Given that I think something medical caused that, it's not that surprising. But... “....you do know they make hollow strap-on, right?” That's a thing. If you think I'm gonna tease the fact that you're small you're wrong, by the way. “Also, the prostate is only two inches from the anal entrance, so he'd get off either way.” You might have to work for it a bit more, but it'd work.

Jean’s whole face was flushed. I don’t know if I can do it though.... I really don’t... “I-I can’t....” I can’t risk losing him.... He felt a sense of dread wash over him, giving him a hollow feeling in his chest which made him cross his arms over his chest and quit biting his nails. I can’t do that to him... He’ll be so disappointed ...

“Jean...” Casper sighed quietly, giving him a calm look. “I think we both know Marco deserves some love where he doesn't have to do all the work, doesn't have to initiate it, doesn't even have to know it's coming until you're all over him. I think at the very least you need to try to do something special for him, even if that means feeding him and then riding him off into the sunset. I don't care. But he deserves it- and you know that.” You sure as hell should, at least.

Jean’s head was down in shame as he felt the tears beginning to burn in his eyes. “I-I know....” I can’t pleasure him enough, I know I’m a horrible lover who’s too afraid to do anything else because I don’t want Marco to leave.... Thanks for pointing that out.... He moved his hand to wipe away his tears, sniffing. I should go....

“I'm sorry, Hon. But I just think you really need to find a better place in the bedroom where you feel you belong... it'll help you feel a lot more confident, I think.” He caught him as he tried to stand, sitting him back down. “Nope, you don't get to leave. You're waiting on test results. And I think you two maybe need a bit more excitement or something- oh stop blushing so hard, we get it, we all do the sex, it happens.” Casper gave him a look as Jean flushed down his neck, shrugging one shoulder. “I'm actually kinda serious. When was the last time you did something new, that you were excited about?” Anything?

Anything new? Well.... What even counts as new? I just let Marco take charge and I get off with whatever he does.... He shook his head, his chest hurting from the shame that he felt. I'm a horrible lover... He looked at Casper with a blank stare. “N-No.... We haven’t d-done a-anything like that.... S-since we started....” We’ve been doing the same thing for two whole years... But he hasn’t once complained about it... Jean seemed to shrink at that realization. Shit...
Casper’s eyebrows shot up. “Nothing? No thought-out romantic gestures besides taking him out to dinner first?” He watched Jean shake his head, exhalining in surprise. “Wow, okay, uhm... yeah, that’s gotta change. I can assure that if you’re mostly just laying there and taking it every time for two years, it’s gonna get a bit boring after a while. You have to mix it up a bit, even if it’s you just teasing him with your tongue and riding him. *Anything* different is good. And investing in a toy or two would definitely make things more interesting and pleasurable for you two. But I get that’s what a lot of your worrying is about, which is okay, because it’s very fixable. As long as you want to fix it, that is.” *My god, you need help...* …..and honestly, *I’m not a therapist, but I think you could use one...*

Jean could only nod, thinking. *What should I do? We’re going out for dinner tonight.... But I have no idea what else we’re doing. “What do I do... If we go out and it exhausts me to a point where I can barely keep my eyes open?” That’s what work’s been doing to me... and I don’t want him to go through that again...*

“Well... well, either learn to drink coffee or make love the morning of that day. Either works well. But are you planning on going out tonight?” He watched him nod, sighing. “Then promise him love in the morning. Let him know you’re thinking of him instead of staying silent and making him think he’s being neglected.” *Please don’t make him think that you don’t care.*

Jean nodded, twiddling his thumbs. “So... Um... How long until the tests come back?” *How long am I gonna be stuck here talking to you about this?*

“Eh... two... maybe three hours... I told them to put it at the front of the line for testing so it shouldn’t take forever. You’re stuck here... if you want I can keep giving you ideas on stuff you can do to Marco...” *Help you make him very happy.*

Jean shook his head. “At this point I don’t really think it’ll help...” *It’ll just make me think about how much I could’ve been doing...*

“I’ll tell you which toys you *need* to have...” Casper just gave him a deadpan look when he shook his head. “I’ll order them and ship them all to your house if you don’t listen.” *should probably do that anyway... you won’t buy them on your own...*

“Fine! I’ll listen dammit !” Jean snapped at him though almost instantly shrunk in Casper’s presence. *Fuck, I’m getting mad now... Shit ...*

Casper didn’t really flinch, his words sounding careful. “…I’m sorry. You don’t have to listen to me.
I'll drop it; I just wanted to make sure your relationship doesn't suffer any more.” It's recently kinda shaky from what I've heard…

Jean looked down with a heavy sigh. “And it’s my fault isn’t it? Because I refused to go to the doctor months ago…” Most likely…

“It would've been easier if you went earlier, but you probably wouldn't have asked the right questions if they didn't already know what the problem was about.” It wouldn't have done much...

Jean nodded, uncomfortable silence taking over the room. “Can I leave?” I'm seriously not comfortable with any of this, I'm only doing this because Marco actually wants me to function like a normal human being and get hard for him...

“If you leave, will you come back in two hours for the results and will you go straight to the pharmacy to get your meds?”

Jean got up, grabbing his coat from the back of the chair. “You have my cell number just fucking text me the damn results.” He made his way to the door with his prescription in hand. I'm gonna need to drink coffee with dinner if we go out...

Casper stood, starting to get pissed. “Jean, listen.” He caught him by the shoulder, yanking him around, staying up at him blankly, sounding apathetic either way. “When your results come back in two hours, I can either text you the name of a long and scary disease before I turn off my phone, or you can come back and I will explain in detail what is going on, what can be done to treat it, and how your life may change as a result. You get to pick. I'll be blunt and professional about it if you don't care about anything besides the bottom line of what is wrong with you.” Whatever.

Jean paused, debating his two options. “Text me when you get the results… I’ll bring Marco…” His eyes showed how uneasy he felt, wanting to just leave.

“Okay, that works well. I'll be expecting you later, then. Do you know your way back, or…?” We don't want you getting lost.

“I can get back.” He opened the door, about to walk out before he turned to look at Casper. “Thank you.” His words were soft and a sad smile on his face before he closed the door behind him and made his way out of the building and towards his car. I have no idea what Marco wants us to do…
Casper smiled warmly, nodding. “You can always talk to me, Jean. I’ll see you two soon.” He shut the door behind him quietly, thinking. He needs a therapist... and a trip to a sex toy shop...

Jean got into his car, resting his head on the steering wheel. *Fuck... I might as well go get the fucking Viagra now.* He sighed, turning the car on and then starting on his way. He parked down the street from the pharmacy on Trost, hearing the bell chime as he walked in. *This is so fucking embarrassing.... I need Viagra and I'm not even 30 yet...* Jean looked at the man working behind the counter, handing the slip of paper over. *You're gonna judge me... Look at me like I'm less than I already am...*

James took the paper, reading it and then Casper's signature on the bottom of the page. “Alright, Jean, I'll get this for you if I could just see some ID.” *You look about to implode from embarrassment and it's pretty amusing.*

Jean sighed quietly before digging out his wallet, and fishing out his ID. *You're gonna laugh as soon as you see I'm 26....* He handed it over to James, looking down in shame.

James took it, looking over the information and typing some stuff into the computer before handing it back. “Alright, I'll have that ready for you in just a few moments.” James stood, leaving quickly to go through the medicines in the back. *We have plenty... uhm.... here.* James made sure he had the right thing, slipping it into a paper bag and setting it on the counter. “Do you have insurance this would be covered through?”

“I doubt it, I barely get dental... And I barely have any coverage for a copay.... So I'm not even gonna try...” He simply handed over his credit card. *I don’t wanna know how much they are...*

James nodded, taking the card. “Okay... that's $1,592.00....” He hesitated before swiping the card, thinking, looking back at Jean. *Hasn't Casper told me about you?* He swiped it anyway, winced a bit as he saw it was declined. “It's been declined... is there another way for you to pay?”

“Are you sure?” He winced as the credit card was returned to him, shaking his head as he went through his wallet to pull out his other credit card. *I think the other one had a low charging limit.... This one shouldn't.* He pulled out the only other credit card he owned, giving it to James. “This one should work...”

James nodded and took it, swiping it and watching the screen beep at him again, turning to him again. “It's declined as well...” He handed it back. *Well shit. Uhm.... ....I've never done it for him though.... maybe if I ask...*
“Can I pick them up tomorrow?” I can run to the bank before I go back... And try and pull that much out...

“Actually, give me a moment to call Casper. This symbol here can mean more than just one thing, but I'm not sure.” James picked up the phone, calling Casper. “Yeah, hi, Casper? Yeah, it's James. Yeah, he's here. ...no, actually, not yet. That's what I'm asking about. His insurance is crap apparently, and he needs to pay, but you put the symbol on the paper and I don't…… oh…… oh so it does mean the same thing as like Lathe’s does… oh… okay, got it.” James hung up, typing away on his computer. “Thankfully, your new friend insurance has covered the whole thing for some reason. You can just have this now. Have a nice day.” James nudged the bag towards him, smiling. Apparently Casper thinks you're worth footing the bill for.

Jean looked at James with confusion, taking the bag and thanking him quietly, exiting the pharmacy without looking back. Okay... I have Viagra now.... Not sure how much but at least I might be able to do something nice for Marco... He smiled softly, driving to the apartment and going up to their room. He sighed as he walked in, stripping his coat off and hanging it up, toeing his shoes off before going to flop on the couch in exhaustion. Fuck... I need to nap if I'm gonna make it to dinner... He had set the bag with his prescription on the coffee table, a soft sigh leaving him as he closed his eyes.

Marco heard the door open, taking out his earbud and leaving the computer, sighing as he watched Jean go right past the bedroom without looking in and face plant into the couch. Of course... Marco ambled out to him, his voice quiet. “Jean?” He looked to the coffee table, seeing the prescription bag. You look exhausted though... “....do you want to tell me what Casper said before you fall asleep…?” Can I know?

Jean rolled over, turning to him and shook his head. “He’s gonna call when my blood tests come in and I said I’d bring you too, and I need to nap now before we go, otherwise I won’t be able to do anything with you tonight.” Casper will probably talk your head off anyways, and I swear to god if he says a damn thing about how insecure I am I will kill him.

Marco nodded, moving to softly kiss his cheek. “Okay, babe. I'll let you sleep.” Marco gently turned Jean’s head, kissing him slow and deep. They both felt their cheeks flood with red when Marco pulled away, kissing at the corner of Jean’s lips. “I love you, Jean. Thank you for actually going. It means a lot to me.” I'm proud of you. His eyes said exactly that, leaving him to his nap. I'll keep an ear out for the phone.

Jean woke up with Marco shaking him awake. What the fuck? What’s wrong? It took him a moment to figure out what was going on before he sat up, barely listening to what Marco was saying as he tried to rub the sleep away from his eyes. I'm tired... when did I fall asleep?...... Oh
*right, we have to go back to Casper’s office....* *Fuck.* He groaned as he slowly got up and went towards Marco as he finished up talking to Casper. “Mmmm, I don’t wanna go.” He whined like a child, clinging his arms around Marco’s waist and leaning his weight into him.

Marco chuckled as Jean caught him around the middle, his voice soft. “We’ll be there soon, Casper. Thank you.” Marco hung up, moving to hold Jean closer. “Hey babe, let’s go get this over with, ‘kay?” Marco shifted them, pulling Jean in for another kiss, feeling his heart melt as Jean kissed him back. *I love you.*

Jean kept his arms around Marco’s waist as he kissed him back, a dopey smile on his face as he pulled away. *Fuck... I could get used to doing that all day...* He groaned as Marco made him put his shoes on, and then ushered him out the door. They ended up in his truck, driving to Parsec in peaceful silence. *I hope it’s nothing too bad, nothing that I can’t handle...* Jean led Marco into the facility, the security guard just pointing in the same direction Jean had gone earlier. *Figures... I knew that we’d just go back to his office.* He nodded his thanks at the man tugging Marco along as they made their way down the hallway. *I really feel uncomfortable... fuck...* He squeezed Marco’s hand as he knocked on Casper’s door. *What are we walking into?*

Casper opened the door within a moment, smiling to them. “Good to see you two. C’mon in.” He held open the door, Marco and Jean coming inside to sit in front of his desk, their hands still tightly woven together. “Don't worry too much, I'll help you make sense of all this.” Casper sat down behind the desk, pulling a file out of a folder, looking up to them. “Alright, so there is a name for what it is, and it sounds scarier than it actually is. What you have is called testicular hypogonadism, which means that you're not secreting anywhere near the normal amount of testosterone. It causes things like impaired penis and testicle growth, erectile dysfunction, decreased sex drive and fatigue, which you told me about earlier.” He nodded to Jean. “It an also means a decrease in body hair, infertility and a higher risk of osteoporosis, but I don't mean to scare you with that. This could all be treated easily. One of the causes of hypogonadism is lots of emotional stress, which you have obviously been under as of late. And this can be fixed with a few things. First off, you need to get the hell out of that job of yours.” Casper looked to Jean seriously. “The emotional and physical implications of that abusive environment is *not* worth it. You need to stop taking responsibility for the inadequacy of your coworkers, let them do their own damn work, and stop taking so much overtime because you are not legally obligated to work overtime. That's extra time, and your normal time is enough for now. Secondly, you need to find something to do in your spare time. Give yourself something to do besides mope or worry or whatever. Try actually taking classes at the dojo and having a schedule instead of going when you feel like it, because I can assure you I don't think you'll ever really want to go on your own volition. You need the extra nudge. Thirdly.” Casper looked between them, keeping a straight face. “I'm going to try and say this in a professional way- you two need something more than the same thing in the bedroom for two solid years. I don't know the specifics, but the same thing week after week with one person doing most of the work mustn't be very exciting. I would seriously recommend either switching roles occasionally, investing in a few toys to try, or try a bit of role playing to make things more interesting for you two. I think you'll both be a bit happier with that.” He watched them both nod, Marco looking particularly interested. “Alright, there's one last thing I need to say, and Jean, I know you would flay me alive for saying this, but I need to.” Casper watched Jean turn pale and stand, Marco immediately moving to sit him back down, leaning over to murmur in his ear.
“Jean, Honey…” Marco’s voice was soft, his breath gently tickling his ear. “You can't keep stuff like this away from me… if I'm gonna keep you…” Marco squeezed his hand tighter. “Then I'm gonna eventually find it out. And I want you to be happy rather than miserable because I don't know what's okay and what's not…” He felt Jean faintly nod, kissing his cheek. “It's okay babe… I'll love you no matter what Casper says.” I will.

Casper watched Marco convince Jean to stay put, glancing apologetically at Jean before looking back to Marco, his eyes fixed on him. “Marco, can I please talk to you by ourselves for this?” He watched Marco nod, kissing Jean’s cheek before following him into the hallway, closing the door. “Marco, I need you to listen to me really well.” Casper’s eyes were imploring, his hands folded, in front of his mouth. “You need to understand that Jean is the farthest thing from confident. He has a shit image of himself and doesn't think he's worthy of you or of anyone. He's very conscious about his lack of kitchen skills and his lack of, ahem, other assets, and he is terrified of losing you. He loves you to bits and wants to do so much for you, but he's scared that if you don't like something that it'll tip the scale and you'll leave. He has no pride in himself or his work, and he really needs you to make him think he's a man because he doesn't feel like it as a bottom who can't even get it up and feels tired all the time and doesn't go to the gym anymore and gets emotionally abused by his co workers. He's a mess and he really needs your support. ...I need to know if you're able to give him that support.”

Marco nodded when Casper spoke, looking to the floor. “I knew he didn't feel too great about himself… but… okay. Of course I’ll support him, I just… I didn't know it was so bad…” Marco nodded, following Casper back into the room. He sat back down next to him, reaching for his hand and squeezing. I love you, Jean. Even if you don't love yourself.

Jean looked a bit distant, letting Marco squeeze his hand. Fuck…. He watched Casper sit back down behind his desk. “What if I can’t leave my job?” I really can’t…. It pays the bills, and I thought getting promoted would be a blessing since I didn’t get a proper education…. But it's turned out to be hell. “I can’t leave…. I can’t…” I’ll lose my 401K if I just up and leave… I’ll lose everything! “I have no education, and there aren’t any other businesses around here that I can do minimal computer work…. There’s not, not even here …

Casper sighed, thinking. “You need to do a lot of hunting since you don't have a degree or anything. ...honestly, maybe night classes and anything to bring in money during the day would work better for you I think… you really shouldn't stay in that poisonous environment.” I don’t know what else to tell you...

Jean only nodded, his leg starting to bounce in anxiety. “So…. What happens if it persists?” What if I have to rely on those damn pills just to get it up? I can’t do that to Marco....
“We’ll worry about that if nothing happens. But I do think that if you cut all your major stressors away, you’ll go back to normal. But let’s not worry about that, okay? It’s very unlikely that if you go on the correct path that this will persist.” You’ll be fine.

“.... So what am I not secreting?” You said I wasn't secreting something and that it wasn't helping me... “Do I need to take supplements or something?”

“Oh, I didn’t say? Testosterone. Your levels are really low compared to where they should be.” It’s a problem...

Jean looked down in shame again, simply nodding. “Is that it then?” Can we go? Now that I know I’m not a functioning man? Even my body agrees....

Casper sighed, nodding. “That’s it for now; I’ll be calling in a month or two to see how things have changed, if any. Okay?” I wanna keep an eye on you.

Jean nodded standing and ushering Marco to stand up too. “Thank you Casper....” You even paid for my prescription... Wait. “Uhm.... How should I pay you back?” His eyes said everything about the pills. I can’t not pay you for them... It might break the bank... But....

Casper shook his head, chuckling slightly. “Pay me back? How about you treat Marco to a nice night in bed tonight?” He smirked as Jean flushed completely before nodding and dragging Marco out of his office. Hopefully they’ll do okay...
It's been wonderful. Lathe was in the middle of getting dinner ready, a flock of boys all running around, antsy and waiting to be fed. Mila's absolutely adorable... Eren has her on his hip all the time, and I get to hold her a lot too... she's so cute... and the boys have all been a handful; but they're manageable. They love their huge bedroom in the attic, they love the beds with slides as just how much room they have. It's perfect. Lathe reached it's a spoon to remove a hot lid from a pot, easily keeping it from boiling over. Sharon has her baby too- the same night as Mila, actually. Calliope Galilea. She's adorable too- Sharon sent me all sorts of pictures and put them in the group chat. It's so amazing... Lathe looked over his shoulder as the phone rang, running over and picking it up, holding it to his ear with his shoulder as he reached to balance out the shopping list while he had a moment. “Hello?”

“Lathe, it’s Scotty.... I need you to come in and help me with a surgery... like now...”

Lathe was stunned, looking back over to the kitchen, James, Eren and Jake all busy cooking. “Scotty, what happened? Isn't someone else available?” Why me?

“It’s Marco.....”

“.....Scotty, don't fuck with me. Tell me what happened.” ...... Shit.

“Marco is in two pieces... and I know that we’ve never tried it before, but now that it’s FDA approved I can try it without his consent which is good because he’s fucking dead Lathe! Get your ass over here now ! I’m getting copious amounts of his blood and we’re gonna see how far we can stretch the boundaries of the Serum.”

Lathe nodded, setting down his pen, his mind settling. Marco. He didn't feel grief in that moment- he felt nothing. “I'm coming, Scotty. Less than ten minutes.” Lathe hung up, the phone instantly ringing, picking it up again. “What?” I thought that was it?

“Lathe.... Bring Eren to the hospital... Jean's about to break down and I can’t handle this by myself when I'm trying to get everything that happened down... Please... Marco had a ring on him... and he was in a horrible car accident... Just, please come quickly... I can't bear to see him sobbing like this...”

“I'm already about to leave to perform the surgery, Ieva. We’re gonna see if the serum can save
him somehow. I'll bring Eren.” ….he had a ring on him. That thought hit Lathe in the chest, things beginning to register. “…he was gonna…” He was gonna propose… “...I'll bring Eren. It won't be long. Ten minutes.” Lathe hung up again, walking to the kitchen and pulling Eren aside, his voice quiet so the kids wouldn't hear. “Eren, Marco’s been in a really bad accident. Jean knows and he really needs someone to comfort him. ...He's dead, Eren. And if the serum can't save him from this, he'll stay that way. ...he had a ring with him. Jean needs someone there with him while Scotty and I try to put him back together.” We need you now.

Eren looked at Lathe like he had two heads, struggling to process everything that he said. “M-Marco…?” His eyes were wide with fear. Oh god no… Not freckled Jesus…. He nodded, looking towards the kitchen, knowing the boys were capable of feeding the younger squad. “What should we do with Mila?” The boys don't know how to take care of her… Me, you and Mom do...

“We might have to ask a favor of Sharon and Hannah to watch her for a bit… Go grab her and her stuff, okay? I'll text her.” Lathe watched him nervously nod and go to grab her bag, taking out his phone and typing quickly.

LQ: Sharon I need a huge favor

LQ: Can you please watch Mila for a while? Maybe the night? She needs somewhere to stay where someone can take care of her

SW: Are you all going to the hospital or something? What the hell is happening?

SW: Hannah just left for the hospital after Casper like dragged her out of the house…

LQ: You know Marco?

SW: What the fuck happened to my cinnamon roll?

LQ: A car accident happened… and he's kinda dead

LQ: But Scotty and I might be able to fix that

SW: You get your child over here and go reverse death

SW: Go save my cinnamon roll

SW: And if you can't

SW: Tell him Calliope, Maverick and I all love him to bits.... okay?

LQ: Okay. We’ll tell him.

SW: Now get fucking moving!! Don't waste time!!!
Eren ready. “Sharon’s home. She’ll take her, but Casper stole Hannah for the hospital already.” This is very serious.

Eren nodded, making sure that he had enough formula and bottles in the bag for Mila as well as clothes and diapers for a couple days. “Okay, let’s get going.” He got her into her carrier, covering her in a blanket as he got her into the carseat. Did you tell the boys yet? “Dad, did you tell the boys we’re leaving?” I know it’s Thursday… they have off tomorrow so we don’t need to worry about them being up late… it’s a long weekend.

Lathe immediately ran back into the house, looking to James. “Hon, Eren and I need to go to the hospital. Marco is in a lot of danger and we need to help with that, okay? You're in charge.” He watched him nod, going into the flock of boys. “Boys, Eren and I need to go for a bit- we might not be back for a long time, but we’ll be back before you know it, okay?” He smiled as they all rushed him to hug and kiss him goodbye, kissing their foreheads before they flooded back to the couch. Of course. He made sure to kiss Jake’s forehead, leaving the house. He was soon enough donning scrubs, entering the operating room and seeing Casper, Hannah and Scotty surrounding Marco’s mangled corpse. He was completely split open as covered in blood, and someone had closed his eyes, his head tilted to one side. “...fuck…” He moved near his head, gently brushing a hand through his hair. “...we do realize that if his brain is too damaged, that might not mend. And if he does wake up after this… he probably won't remember anything. Memories can't heal… if his brain cells are dead his memories are just gone.” He looked up, his expression grave. “If we don't think he’ll wake up as Marco, we need to wonder whether this is worth it- to make him live without any memory. Jean will see a ghost haunting him of what he had and doesn't get to keep, and Marco won't know how to function at all in society, maybe not even know how to speak. Do we really want to do this?”

“Do you want him dead?” Hannah’s words were hard and right to the point as she was getting an EEG ready on Marco’s scalp, watching as Scotty worked with the artery and veins in his neck. “Did you reroute them yet?” She looked over as the machine finally came to life, running blood through Marco’s brain and out again without going to the rest of his body. Alright time to shock it… “Are we clear?” She watched as Scotty and Casper backed away from Marco’s body. She took the two pads, setting them on the lowest possible setting on either side of Marco’s head and then shocking him. I swear to God it this doesn’t- She sighed in relief as she heard the EEG start to steadily go off. “Okay, brain’s functioning, let’s put the rest of him together while we have the heart-lung machine running blood to his brain…. Her eyes were hard as she looked to Lathe. “He might have some damage… but doing this first will help the chances for there not being as much…” I really hope it does… And thank the Lord I had a professor who did experiments with cadavers… I thought he was crazy but he might be onto something… “Lathe, what’s the reading on the EEG?” I need to know… but I’m making sure he’s not pooling blood anywhere...

Lathe nodded, setting his determined gaze on his body. Okay. We’ll get you back together. “I just hope he’s the same Marco we know when he wakes up.” Lathe looked to the monitor, seeing the lines etched across it and start to be printed out. “Is it supposed to be wavy?”
“Yes, as long as it’s not flat, that means his brain’s working.” She looked over his head, making sure that there was no swelling or bruises forming anywhere. “Okay, I’ll keep tabs on his brain activity. You three start to patch him up.” She took over Lathe’s position next to the monitor, watching the scans come in. Deep sleep… That’s good for right now, I just need to make sure that the lines keep moving and don’t flatline…

Lathe nodded, looking over his entire being, his intestines spilling from his stomach, his heart visible, still. “Scotty… how long do we have before his heart needs to get going? …how much time do we have for this?”

“I don’t want to keep his brain on the heart-lung machine for more than five hours…. So we start with the heart first, and closing up open arteries and veins…. As well as trying to put his ribs at least somewhat in place, because once we have the veins in place, we’ll put him together and reattach the machine to his whole body and administer the Serum.” The machine will keep his blood moving… and that should heal the rest of his body together… we worry about main arteries and veins for right now…

Lathe nodded. “Okay. As soon as we get the major stuff put together, we’ll get the serum going.” Lathe sighed, looking over his entirety, everything a mangled, broken and bloody mess, his lips slight parted, a scrape on his face and a tooth chipped in front. We will put you back together… They immediately set to work, Lathe starting to carefully piece his veins together as Scotty began suturing his torn heart, everything going well except for the moments Hannah yelled at them to back away from him to shock his brain, keeping it from entering cerebral death. They worked steadily for a few hours until they were ready to hook him up to another machine, blood transfusions already injected with serum beginning to flood his being. They held their breath as nothing happened for a moment…

And they watched his heart beat once in his chest. Then twice.

And then it began to steam.

Everything picked up extremely quickly- they needed fans to blow away the steam and keep his innards visible, taking out the sutures where the growing flesh forced them out, carefully guiding his organs back together and into place, helping his bones grow straight and his skin stay open until the inside was done. This is working…

Hannah watched as the lines on the EEG started to quickly oscillate, sighing in relief. He’s okay…. Mental activity is stable. “He’s not a vegetable… he’s got good electrical waves going through his brain… the serum finally got there… it’s probably fixing whatever perished in the time the brain didn’t have oxygen…. It’s working… It’s actually working… HOLY FUCK PROFESSOR STEIN
Lathe nodded, not taking his eyes off of Marco, busy cleaning off his skin and making sure they
didn't miss anything, his body starting to look rather healthy and normal in places. …… He's
starting to look okay. ……how the fuck is science allowing this.

Scotty had his eyes on Marco, waiting for his chest to move as soon as his heartbeat was stable.
Come on… breathe! You need to breathe for this to be successful… “He’s not out of the woods
yet… He’s not breathing on his own.” He looked to the machine administering the bright red
oxygen to his body, the steam already starting to lessen from around Marco as he was healed
completely and fully. “Come on, Marco… breathe…”

Marco’s lips parted, his bare chest rising as he inhaled, the collective sigh sounding in the
operating room. His body lay still on the table, aside from his heartbeat being steady, and his chest
rising and falling as he started breathing completely on his own. The serum worked it’s way to the
tube where the machine was pumping blood into his system, starting to reject it and force it out.

Lathe moved to remove him from the machine, turning it off and watching the needle holes
immediately heal. He's okay… physically… Lathe looked to Hannah. “How's his brain? Is he
sleeping, or…?”

“Yeah, he’s in a mix of deep sleep and REM sleep… Natural coma…. Which I would’ve expected,
but he might take a long time to wake up from this, though with the way his brain activity
appears… He should be able to wake up…” Hannah gently unclipped the nodes around his head,
turning off the machine. “Well, we can retract time of death…” Holy fuck…. We brought back a
dead body…. “I think it’s best we don’t speak of this outside of this room… Can we agree on
that?” It'll be misused… If we say that it can be used to reverse death...

Lathe nodded, looking around all of them, running a hand through Marco’s chocolate hair,
watching him sleep. He kissed his forehead, looking worried. “If anyone hears that we brought you
back… this drum will be used to keep people alive for too long… this isn't meant to make you
immortal. You'll eventually die anyway from age… we can't say anything.” This doesn't leave the
room.

Scotty nodded, hooking up an IV to Marco’s arm and making sure he had fluids. “Alright, well,
let’s get him moved into a room, I’ll stay silent… I won’t be able to talk about this anyways
without loosing my license as it is…” My lips are sealed, we’ll get leva to change his records…
before they get processed.
Lathe nodded, helping wheel Marco to a different room, settling him on a bed carefully before going to the front lobby, seeing Eren there with Jean. Jean looked like a complete mess, his eyes still red, staring blankly ahead of him, clutching a small velvet box. “Jean?” Lathe smiled to him when he and Eren looked up, going over to them. “He's asleep- alive and in one piece. He should be okay. But, uhm, I should tell you…” He held up a hand when Jean nearly jumped out of his seat. “We’re not sure how much he's gonna remember… we don't know how many of his original nervous cells died and were replaced. He could remember things patchily. I'm just warning you for when he wakes up. But you can come see him.” Of course you can. I just hope he's not too different…

Jean jumped out of his seat as soon as Lathe said he could see him. I don’t care that he can’t remember me! I just want to be able to see him! And to hold him... I want him in my arms again... He was close to tears as he begged Lathe to show him where Marco was. I need to see him.

Lathe smiled, leading them to Marco’s room, opening the door for him and watching him quickly step inside. He watched him carefully approach Marco, hesitating for a moment before climbing into the bed next to him, curling up half on top of him. Lathe smiled, walking over to him. “....he loves you.” He looked to the box still in Jean's hand. He was gonna marry you...

Jean smiled sadly, feeling new tears fall. “D-Do you think he’ll remember that?” Will he remember that he loves me? He rested his head on Marco’s chest, hearing his heart beating, sighing in relief. He’s alive... Jean sniffled as he opened the bloodied box to see the blood covered ring. “He was dead… wasn’t he?” Ieva wouldn’t tell me… all she told me was that he was in bad shape....

Lathe looked between them, his voice quiet. “...yes, he was... but it's not recorded like that. It'll stay that way, because if people knew about it… it’d be so misused….” Lathe smiled faintly, looking over them. “I think he will. You're you. And you mean a lot to him.” You really do...

Jean watched as Mr. Bodt came into the room too, much more collected than he’d ever hoped of being. Fuck... He probably wants me gone... He started to shift to get up to let the older man have his time with his son. Probably hates that his son's gay...

Mr. Bodt watched Jean start to shift away as soon as he came into the room, holding up a hand and stopping Jean. “You don't have to move, Jean, it's okay. I'm not gonna separate you two.” He sat down next to his son, looking over him. “...he looks so peaceful… fine and healthy, even… but we won't know until he wakes up…” He sighed, looking to Jean and seeing him shifting uncomfortably. “You're allowed to hold your fiancé in this kind of situation, you know.” It's fine.

Jean could only nod as more tears spilled down his cheeks. He never got to ask me... He didn’t ask... “Thank you… Mr. Bodt…. But he never got the chance to ask…” He tried to smile weakly, his lip trembling as he held onto Marco. What if when you wake up you never wanna ask me?
Mr. Bodt looked over him with surprise and then sadness, his voice gentle. “I'm sorry, Jean… there's hope he’ll wake up and remember exactly what he wanted to ask you.” Hopefully he will… you both picked very well. He watched Jean bury his face in Marco’s neck, his eyes melancholy. I’m sorry...

Jean closed his eyes, trying to relax as he held onto Marco, not even noticing that he had fallen asleep on top of him, completely exhausted.

It was the early morning, nearly two AM, Jean still asleep in the crook of Marco’s neck, Lathe asleep in a corner and Mr. Bodt nodding off in chair, keeping a vigil for Marco. They all jolted awake when Jean’s phone went off, rubbing the sleep from their eyes, all the monitors beeping normally. Marco's fine, still….

Jean grumbled as he pulled out his phone from his pocket, holding it to his ear, his voice rough even after clearing his throat. “H-Hello?” Who the fuck is this? Wait, what time even is it?

“Jean Kirschtein? You're an hour late for work. Care to explain that?”

Jean sighed, looking at the clock on the wall. Why the fuck are they calling me at two in the goddamn morning? “Daz, why the fuck are you calling me at two in the morning? I don’t start work until six.”

“As supervisor it's your duty to be here early and oversee our work. You're not spending nearly enough time checking our work.”

“You know what, no. I’m not coming to work today, and I was gonna call in earlier, but I need to take a personal day because my fiance is in the hospital.” I am not leaving Marco's side no matter what you say. “Daz, why the fuck are you even at work at 2 in the fucking morning?”

“Because I have your number and expected you, and you didn't show up. And are you sure you have any more personal days to use? You just took quite the vacation not too long ago…”

Jean grit his teeth, sitting up and letting go of Marco as he slipped off of the bed. Fuck Daz… “What the fuck do you mean you expected me? You never told me jack shit! You fucking liar, you’re just trying to get me fired aren’t you? And I have plenty of personal days left dammit!”
“Wow, that's some... very unprofessional language, Jean. It'd be a shame if someone heard you cussing me out.”

“Daz, my fiance is in the hospital, I do not have time for your games, go back home and maybe I won’t put in for a deduction on your payroll. I’m not coming in, I am taking a personal day. You can be in charge of everyone else you you want Daz, you can figure out how it feels to be in my shoes.” Jean grumbled under his breath as he walked out of the room and down the hall. I can’t be yelling at him in the hospital... that’s unprofessional in itself...

“Of course .”

“Good, now fuck off.” Jean growled into the phone and hung up, quickly emailing his superiors and informing them of the situation, including putting Daz in charge for the rest of the day. Fuck Daz and his want to get into the building at fucking 2AM. He’s fucking nuts...

Mr. Bodt quirked an eyebrow as Jean came back looking pissed. “Why is your work calling you at two in the morning?”

Jean shook his head, moving to curl back up to sleep. “With any luck I’ll get fired…” Or Daz will understand how much shit that everyone puts me through, because they certainly won’t stop anytime soon...

Mr. Bodt’s eyebrows both shot up. Well, even I can understand that any workplace calling you at two AM for no good reason must not be a very good place to work... hm. They all relaxed after another moment, the tension in Jean’s form draining from him as he laid with his arm over Marco’s chest, his leg over his. He really does love him.

Jean’s whole body relaxed, taking in Marco’s scent as he nuzzled his face into the crook of his neck. I just want you to wake up... Wake up... please ...

And at the end of the day, Jean was fired. Lathe stood in the cafeteria, acquiring food for the three of them. Jean looked worried but he seemed so relieved... he refuses to leave Marco for more than a few minutes to go to the bathroom. That's the only time he's not curled up on top of him, sleeping or just looking over his face. He wants him to wake up and love him. ...I hope Marco does... Lathe came upstairs soon enough, handing out sandwiches. “Jean, you need to eat.” He sighed as Jean shook his head, burying his nose in his cleaned hair. “Five more minutes?” He chuckled as he nodded, setting it on the table and going to sit down and eat his own.
Marco’s eyelids fluttered open, blinking a few times before looking down, seeing a familiar someone nestled into his neck. Why are you all curled up to me? “Jean…?” He watched him sit up, a bit surprised at the emotions in his eyes. .....what the hell......? I don't understand. “......I must be dying.”

“Oh my god… you’re awake!” Jean’s eyes were wide with surprise and happiness, immediately leaning down and stealing a kiss as he cupped his cheeks. You’re awake! You remember me!

Marco was confused as Jean’s hands held his cheeks tenderly, his eyes wide with shock as Jean’s lips pressed against his. He's..... he's kissing me...... Marco was still too shocked by everything to enjoy it, pushing Jean off of him, not understanding why his heart tugged to see Jean look so confused and hurt. “Jean, I… wh-why? What's going on?” He looked around the room, seeing Lathe wave to him a bit nervously. “Am I in the hospital?” A nod. “......someone tell me what the hell is going on, please.” Why am I in the hospital with Jean laying on top of me? .....and it probably didn't mean anything that he kissed me... he's probably just happy I'm not brain dead. .....guh, the kiss was kinda nice though...

Jean stared at Marco in shock as he was pushed away, looking down in sadness and shame. He doesn’t remember me... He slowly shifted off of the bed, trying to rein in his tears. “Y-You were in a really bad car accident… W-What’s…” I’m not even sure I wanna ask... “What’s the last thing you remember?” Did I lose you too?

Marco thought hard. “...my graduation party was most recent, I think… a car accident? Was it really that bad? I feel fine…” He looked over himself, seeing no marks. I'm fine though...

Jean’s eyes widened and tears instantly started to form in his eyes. I lost you too.... Oh my god, that was... That was three years ago... He sniffled, bringing a hand up to cover his mouth, trying not to cry. He looked down, tears falling down his cheeks as he nodded, his lip trembling. Jean took a few shaky steps before walking out of the room and closing the door behind him. He doesn’t remember... He looked down to the box in his pocket, slowly pulling it out and flipping it open. Fuck.... He pushed me away... There’s no use.... Is there? I’m just destined to be alone... He didn’t even realize he’d walked away and out of the building until he felt the cool leather of his steering wheel against his forehead. Fuck.... Did I leave? He swallowed hard, banging his head on the wheel, wishing he’d forget. Why? Why does it always have to be me? Jean’s shoulders shook as he sobbed, letting out a loud wail as he slammed his fist against the dashboard, not caring that he was on the verge of hurting himself. Why did he have to leave me too?

Lathe has followed him, seeing the empty look in his eyes. He was quiet as he followed him, wanting to make sure he didn't get himself into a crash. He stopped when Jean got into his truck, watching him begin to melt down with sorrowful eyes. He ran over to his truck as he started
punching the dashboard, opening the door. “Jean, please…” He was prepared for the flurry of fists headed his way, catching Jean’s wrists as he weakly struggled to hurt him. The fit passed after a moment, Jean’s motions getting weaker until he collapsed into Lathe’s arms, trembling and sobbing. Lathe held him close, gathering him up and running a hand through his hair, murmuring soothingly, trying not to let his voice crack. I’m sorry… I’m so sorry...

“I-I… I lost h-him…..” Jean couldn’t help but hiccup as he tried to speak, his face red and blotchy as tears rolled unceremoniously down his cheeks. I…. I lost my Marco… I lost him… He’ll have no idea what the hell is going on… He doesn’t love me anymore. Jean pulled out the box in his pocket, crying more, though he looked like he was about to throw it as far as he could chuck it. This is useless now isn’t it?

Lathe reached for his hand, closing it around the box again, Jean shaking in his arms. “Maybe we can remind him… it took time with Eren… maybe he just needs time to remember that he loves you… please, Jean, be patient with him. He's confused and needs a friend with him. ...Marco mentioned something a while ago…” He held him close, slowly swaying with him. “He told me that he'd had a crush on you for a really long time. I asked how long… he said since the summer before Junior Year. But he's shocked and nervous and doesn't understand what's going on. It's not total rejection… he's too confused right now.” He’ll remember that he loves you so much...

Jean’s lip trembled, and his brows furrowed as he shook his head. “I…. I still had Annie during his party… He’s completely forgotten everything that had to do with ‘us’... I don’t think my heart can take trying to fall in love all over again.” I don’t think I can do this at all...

Lathe nodded, his hands running over his back. “We can show him all the pictures of you two… all the pictures of what happened… tell him everything that happened between then and now. It'll be hard… but we need to tell him what's happened with his life… if not you, then his Dad or someone who knows everything…” Someone has to tell him.

Jean shook his head looking down at the ring box. “Why bother? I'm not gonna get my Marco back…” He threw the box into one of the cup holders in his truck, closing the door and leaning on it, covering his face with his hands. Why does everyone need to leave me? Is this my punishment for something....? I’ll learn to feel numb…. That’s what you mean by okay.” Jean stressed as he shrugged out of Lathe’s arms and started to head towards the hospital door again. “Isn’t he getting discharged since
he’s up? And he’s perfectly fine?” Jean’s words were emotionless, expecting Lathe to follow.

Lathe went after him, his voice quiet. “We need to monitor him for a little bit, but he’ll be set loose before the end of the day… and Jean…” Lathe turned him to face himself, finding it hard to speak. “…there’s more to life after heartbreak than numbness. ...I was planning on proposing to my first girlfriend Viola when she died in a car crash on the way to our date. This isn't too different… except you’re being given a second chance. He was dead, and now he's not. If you can't keep hope that you'll manage to make the man who already has a crush on you fall in love with you again… or that he won't at least somewhat remember what you had after he's told everything and sees all the pictures of you two being adorable… then… then learn to do what lots of people have to do… and move on. But please, for the love of God, you have the chance. Try.” Lathe swallowed hard, looking at him intensely. You're lucky. You have to give this a shot. If you believe in anything, try to believe that this can work.

Jean could only nod, so unsure of what to think anymore. He pushed me away… He was gonna propose and now he won’t even kiss me… He had his head down as they returned to Marco’s room, Hannah already having the nodes attached to his skull and looking at the data being recorded. He’s gonna be here for while… Jean had a lost look on his eyes as he sat down in a chair, his leg tapping in anxiety, his elbows on his knees as he hunched over himself. What if Marco doesn’t want to date me anymore? Doesn’t want to propose? I’m supposed to just forget it all?

Marco was studying Jean as he came back, thinking. He kissed me…………… is it because I had an accident? Or because he………… he likes me? I really hope it's because he likes me..... but… doesn't he have Annie? I mean… I think he still does… but why is he the one to be here? He's been a good friend, but… I wouldn't think he'd be here even after I'm awake… He was curled up to me… I felt so warm while I slept… I felt a weight on me… and something on my neck… he was so close to me… guh, I wouldn't mind him holding me some more…. “...Jean? Can I borrow your phone?”

Jean picked his head up as his name was called though he winced when he heard the tone. It’s not the same…. It might never be the same. “Uhm…. Y-Yeah, that’s fine…” He pulled out his phone unlocking it and handing it over. I don’t know why you want it… Jean’s eyes looked over to where Hannah stood by the EEG machine silently. She’s still watching his brain activity?

Marco took it, wanting to open a notes app. Did he get a new phone? He opened a messenger app, typing and forking it back over.

Jean, why did you kiss me?

Jean looked down at the message and his shoulders slumped as he sat on the edge of Marco’s bed. He typed quickly, handing it back with a sad smile on his face. You don’t remember…. Well, this’ll
You don’t remember… If it weirded you out… I’m sorry, I was just so glad that you woke up, and you remembered what my name was.

Marco quirked an eyebrow, typing.

No, I just…. I mean, if it was something wasn't just… just happiness, then… I thought you had Annie still… I just I didn't know if it wasn't platonic… It's okay, I just didn't know… and uhm… what don't I remember…?

Jean swallowed hard, his hands shaking as he tried not to cry.

Well, you’re missing three years…. Annie left me about four months after we graduated… But that’s understandable with what happened to you.

Marco’s eyebrows shot up, typing quickly.

I’m so sorry Jean, I don’t remember... three years?! Surely I'll remember bits and pieces eventually, but that’s…. oh my god. But… are you sure that… Fuck, how do I word this…

Well, I could feel a weight on top of me in my sleep… you were buried in my neck… and you kissed me when I woke up, and… you looked so hurt when I shoved you away and I just…. I don’t understand… did something… happen… between the two of us? I’m missing three years… …did I manage to… fuck, is that something that happened? Do I not remember dating you? It would make sense… he looks so ready to cry… fuck, that's it, isn't it. …holy shit. He watched Jean stare at the phone in silence without typing, looking at him with a deadpan glare. “If you don't tell me, I'll just ask Dad instead.” I wanna know.

Jean looked down at the phone, his eyes seemed to lose all hope within them. I can’t tell you we were in a relationship… I can’t force you to go out with me…. He simply nodded, locking his phone and looking down and away. You don’t remember any of it… I’ll keep the ring hidden from you, you won’t have to tie yourself down to me… His hands shook in his lap as he stared at them, unable to look at Marco. He doesn’t remember….

“Jean.” He stared at him, waiting for him to look up at him after a long moment. “Tell me straight and let's not dance around this. Did. We. Date ?” Goddamnit, tell me!
Jean looked at him before quickly looking away. “Y-Yeah, we did… but it doesn’t have to be like that if-if you don’t want it to be.” Jean’s voice quivered, still unable to look at Marco, his hands shaking as he felt the tears well in his eyes. Fuck… This isn’t how this is supposed to go…. You’re not supposed to know, you’d be so much better off without me…

“…really?” Marco sounded hopeful, his eyes sparkling. “Jean, I… I’ve had a crush on you since the summer before Junior year… I don’t wanna hurt you, but… i-if it's okay… while I'm trying to remember… can we start over?” Please just say yes so I get to kiss you again… I didn't get to properly enjoy it...

Jean covered his face as he started to cry. His shoulders shook as he sobbed, hunching over his legs on the edge of the bed, his elbows his knees, supporting his head. Fuck… I don't know if I can do this… Not now, not with everything that’s wrong with me… You’ll just think I’m a freak. But I want him back…. Jean was torn as he sat there crying, not caring that Mr. Bodt and Lathe were standing near the door, and Hannah’s attention was drawn to him as well.

Marco watched Jean start sobbing, sitting up and being careful of the nodes as he wrapped his arms around Jean’s middle, looking up to him. “...I'm not gonna make you start over with me… you don't have to. ...but I really want to remember. You can help me remember! Tell me stories, show me pictures, anything . But… if you'd rather move on… if it'd hurt too much… can I at least have one more kiss?” I didn't know it was possible to miss something you don't remember having...

Jean slowly stopped his sobs as he looked to Marco with his teary face, sniffling and wiping at a stray tear. Well… Starting over might not be so bad… He shifted, cupping Marco’s cheek. “W-We can start over....” I can forget my heartbreak if it makes you happy.... Jean leaned in, his lips timidly brushing against Marco’s. I don’t know what to do anymore....

Marco felt himself flush down his neck, his heart tugging as Jean softly kissed him. Fuck… he's mine … Marco’s eyes fluttered shut, feeling Jean pull away and reaching to catch the back of his neck, both of them hovering there, gazing at each other for a long moment. They slowly leaned in and kissed again, their arms winding around the other, Marco feeling like he was floating. His hands are so gentle... He felt a hand gently wind into his hair, not giving a single fuck they weren't alone, drowning in his tender touch. He didn't notice the people around him leave them be, too wrapped up in Jean’s careful touch. Oh god, I love this.... gah, I'm gonna get hard if he keeps this up… fuck.... I... His face was on fire as Jean’s tongue made its way into his mouth, making out like they were about to make love. I love this so much... all those dreams have nothing on this... I want his hands everywhere... please ...
open mouthed kisses down his jawline. When Jean reached his ear he started his way down Marco’s neck, listening to him. *God, I missed this…. I haven’t really ever taken the lead like this…. And I should really stop before I get your hopes up…. Because I can’t get it up....*

Marco gasped as Jean kissed down his neck, his hands tangling in his hair as he sucked a mark onto his neck. “J-Jean…” Marco’s hands hovered over his shoulders uncertainly before latching on, running all over his shoulders and neck. He whimpered as he felt hands running up his sides to his waist and back, feeling his blood rushing south. He whimpered quietly as he felt himself harden under his gown, quietly panting. “Jean… I-I’m sorry, I…” He felt himself flush red, one hand going to cover himself. “I-I’m sorry, I… Y-You don’t…” You don’t have to take care of me… I mean…. He drew into himself a bit, feeling himself go lax with relief as he felt a hand cup him, massaging gently. “Oh God, Jean…” He sighed deeply, moaning faintly as lips met his neck again. “Y-You don’t have to take care of m-me…” You deserve me taking care of you more than I do this...

Jean carefully moved his hand under the hospital gown, his mouth still very much at Marco’s neck. His hand was timid at first as he grabbed onto Marco’s hot length, feeling it pulse between his fingers and give it a small squeeze. Jean blushed as Marco yelped slightly, shifting to get a better position which was right next to him, he could do it a bit more discretely. Damn… To think that you were the one who always did this to me…. I guess it’s time to return the favor.

Marco was completely red, his legs spreading on instinct as Jean stroked him, a breathless moan leaving him, clinging to him. “J-Jean… oh god, Jean…” He let Jean shift him, finding himself in Jean’s lap, his back to Jean’s front as he pumped his length. “Jean… oh my god, so good…” He panted, his legs apart as Jean worked. He could feel teeth grazing his shoulder, melting into Jean as he felt his other hand slowly running over the soft inside of his thigh. His hand reached behind him, holding the back of Jean’s head, the other resting on the hand going over his tanned flesh. “You feel wonderful…” He had a dreamy, pleasured look in his eyes, breathing hard. So much better than any wet dream… so much better than my own hands… so good...

Jean’s fingers worked over Marco’s length, his other coming up his side to tweak his nipple under his gown. *Fuck, the sounds you’re making are hot*… He wished they would go straight to his length, but it barely moved, his pants not even tight. “Marco....” His words were husky beside Marco’s ear, a smirk on his face as he continued to pleasure him. “I want you to cum for me…” It sounds like you can just about any minute...

Marco let out a sharp cry, hearing Jean gently shush him, shaking in his hands. “O- Oh…” His mouth was open in a silent moan, shuddering as he came harder than he ever remembered feeling, jerking as Jean milked him. He became a puddle in Jean’s arms, going completely lax in his arms. He sighed as Jean slowly ran his hands up and down his frame, soothing him. So good… “Jean… that was… guh, amazing….” He sighed deeply, completely at ease in his arms. He’s warm… and his touch is so careful and tender… I love it.... ..................he loves me. ...and I don't remember loving him. His expression shifted, turning his head, meeting Jean’s lips with a feather-light kiss.
“Thank you, babe…” I don’t know what pet names I’d have for you… maybe babe… but I dunno if you’d love or hate it…

Jean smirked at the pet name, chuckling a bit as he shifted Marco to sit back down and stand. “I guess I’ll always be babe… Won’t I?” He shifted his pants, wanting to hide the fact he wasn’t hard in the slightest. “What clothes do you want? I’m gonna need to go back home and get you clothes…” I can hide the ring too….

Marco smiled dreamily, pouting a bit when Jean left the bed. He reached for him, making a grabbing motion, smiling when Jean came over to kiss him again, hugging his middle from where he sat. “Hm… can I have a pair of jeans that you like, any tee shirt you like, and can I please borrow a hoodie?” I wanna look nice for you… and if I get to wear something that smells like you… I’d be so happy…

Jean rolled his eyes, ruffling Marco’s hair with a smile. “Yeah, I’m gonna go get you clothes, and let the doctors come back in.” He kissed the top of Marco’s head, about to pull away when he noticed the wet spot of Marco’s gown. He blushed, grabbing the blanket at the end of the bed, pulling it up to cover and hide it. “Keep this pulled up… To hide your mess…Will you be okay while I’m gone?” I don’t want something to happen to you…

Marco blushed as he shifted, realizing his sticky cum was still between his legs. “Y-Yeah,,. it's really sticky and weird… but I think I'll live…” I can manage… He watched with wide eyes as Jean suddenly seemed to have on idea, not resisting when Jean moved the blanket back and shifted him, his voice shaky. “J-Jean?” I wanna know what else you wanna do to me...

Jean smirked, shifting into the bed again. “Close your eyes…” His voice deep and husky. I might as well clean you up like a good bottom should. He waited for a moment before moving under Marco’s gown, eyeing the puddle of cum between his legs and on his cock. He licked his tongue across Marco’s length, beginning to clean it. I hope you like this...

Marco gasped as he felt the tongue lap over his soft length, whimpering as Jean cleaned him. He spread his legs wider again, his hands moving under the gown to gently hold Jean’s hair. “Jean… oh god…” I’m so sensitive… but it feels so wonderful… He could feel himself slowly hardening again, panting. “Oh Jean, please, m- more …” I need you… fuck...

Jean smirked as he felt Marco’s hands on his scalp, reassured that he was on cloud nine as he teasingly licked around Marco’s head. He had sufficiently cleaned him up, starting to pull away from him. Hmm, I can tease him… He pulled away, hearing Marco whine in need for more, simply leaning over him and kissing him sweetly. “You gotta be a good boy for me…” He smirked, shifting off the bed and starting to leave, making it to the door just as Lathe knocked on the other
side. “He’s all yours; I’m going to the apartment to get clothes for him.” He explained before slipping out of the room, disappearing down the hallways.

Lathe shook his head as Jean darted off, chuckling quietly as he poked his head in and saw Marco, blanket pulled up, a small hickey on his neck, his eyes starry and glowing. Of course. “We’re gonna come back in, Hon. That enough alone time with Bae?” He grinned as Marco blushed. “I'll go get them.” Lathe went a bit down the hall to retrieve them all.

Hannah smiled as she sipped from her to-go cup, a tea tag hanging from the side. “Is he ready for me to take the nodes out?” I’m not gonna walk in on Jean and Marco going at it? …. Right? She followed Lathe into the room seeing Marco bright-eyed and in complete awe. She shut the machine off smirking. “Thanks for your data for how the brain functions during sexual intercourse…” She grinned wickedly, starting to gently remove the nodes from his scalp.

Marco flushed, gaping. “W-We didn't... h-he…” He turned completely red, clamming up and looking down, letting her take them out. “H-He just took care of m-me…” He didn't want me to do anything...

Hannah shrugged. “What counts as sex is debatable….so thanks for your most gracious data.” She teased and got the last node out of his hair. “Okay, so the trick to getting all the gunk out is using conditioner first, then shampoo and conditioner again…” She smiled looking to Lathe. “My stuff’s all set, so I think he can be signed out and then just wait on clothes…” She took the large stack of paper from the EEG, a happy smile on her face. I’m glad he woke up... And it appears I got to his brain in time...

“...you're welcome?” Marco reached up to where one of the nodes was, making a face as he felt the gel. Gross. He looked up as Lathe was the only one left in the room, feeling awkward. They all know now… fuck, am I going to get yelled at or something?

“Marco, chill. You look scared of me.” Lathe ambled over, poking his shoulder. “I'm not gonna kill you, I promise. What you and Jean do is your business. You're a twenty-something who can do what he wants as long as we can tease you about it.” Lathe sat down on the bed, noting how wary Marco was of him. “...you don't remember us talking every time I came into the bakery and becoming really good friends. You don't remember it. And I know that because you're still so nervous of me. .......and you must not remember all the dinners at our house on Saturday when we would invite everyone we knew and loved like family.” Lathe was quiet, studying the floor. “You'll still come over on Saturday with Jean… right?” Please?

Marco looked to him with confusion a bit, thinking. “We’re friends besides saying hi in the grocery store or something?” He watched Lathe nod, the older man having a morose look, reaching over to him, gently patting his shoulder. “I'm sorry, Mr. Quo… I just can't remember this… do you have
pictures?” I wanna remember.

Lathe nodded, getting out his phone. “Lots and lots…” Lathe opened his pictures to the ones from the past Christmas, handing it over. “This was Christmas…”

Marco looked them over, scrolling. “I don't know a lot of these people… what are their names?”

Lathe pointed to their second-newest family member, James. “Remember him? The boy who turned up one night in the middle of dinner for scraps and ended up living with us?”

A memory faintly tugged at his mind. “That sounds vaguely familiar. I sorta remember seeing his face somewhere. What's he like again?”

“He's seventeen, wandered for years and years down from Nebraska. He didn't have much of a grasp on anything normal in American culture and didn't have the vaguest idea how to function as an adult. He's become a great chef and a very insightful person to tell all your woes, and he's in chemo right now, fighting a cancer in his brain. He's a sweetheart and we all love him.” He's great. “We haven't officially adopted him, but he'll always be family.”

“...I get the feeling that I knew that at one point.” Marco’s brow furrowed, mulling over the information, feeling it register a bit better, another thought coming to mind after a moment of quiet silence. “...he didn't know that a goose wasn't a chicken.” That was a thing. ….I think?

Lathe grinned widely, nodding. “That's right. He got to hold a chicken and say hi- and he learned they don't bite when you take their eggs.” You're remembering stuff with prompting after a while and this is wonderful. In this case, not all of your brain cells must have been killed. Maybe a few here and there interrupted normal neural patterns, and you just need to find those paths again, but they are there to be found. That's good. It'd be impossible to recreate them from scratch if your entire brain had died.

Jean came back in, having been told that Mr. Bott had signed Marco’s release papers, and watching him leave to go man his post at the bakery. He smiled as he heard giggling, coming completely in and seeing Marco and Lathe look over pictures from Lathe’s phone. Oh dear... “What are we looking at now?” He set the bag down next to Marco, a soft smile on his face as he looked at the two of them. Right back to being best friends? .......... But what about me ?

“The pictures from Thanksgiving…” Marco smiled, going through all of them. “I remember bits
and pieces of this… I remember Casper and Scotty held you down for your rabies shot and you screamed…” Marco couldn't help giggling at the memory, trying to hide his smile. “I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it's just really funny to see pictures…” That was horrible… but it was also great...

“That… That was two years ago….” Jean told him, trying to seem happy but failing ultimately. He looked down to the bag, trying not to cry. “I brought you clothes, if you’d like to go put them on.” I need to put myself together at this point....

Marco saw his tears expression, reaching for him, looking apologetic. “Jean, I know, Mr. Quo has been showing me some of the different big holidays…” He caught his middle, pulling him close. “I saw the ones from last Christmas… and I remembered a thing.” He tugged him down by his shoulder, murmuring in his ear. “I remember the riding crop…” Guh, I remembered the gift and thought of you… I don't know if we’ve used it yet… I don't remember anything sexual, really, except what just happened… ugh, I wanna remember what it was like… it's been two years... we must've... Marco, don't get hard again . That's creepy. Stahp.

Jean just seemed to have his heart crush even more. “Okay, well we can tell you more when we get back to ou-... my apartment…. Why don’t you get dressed?” Jean pulled away from Marco as his heart clenched. You don’t remember.... And I can tell by the way you said that it was a riding crop.... You didn’t call it that when we played....

Marco nodded, taking the bag and trying to keep he damp spot hidden as he stood. He was glad when he was left to dress himself, putting on a tee and jeans, pulling out a hoodie and donning it. He realized that it smelled nice after a moment, the thought registering. It smells like Jean. He smiled, coming out into the hall after he got his shoes on, going to latch onto Jean. “Okay, I'm ready.” We can get going.

Jean smiled weakly, leading him out to his truck, letting him get in the passenger side. “Alright to my apartment we go...” Why does it have to be like this? Why can’t he remember? His shoulders slumped as he turned the ignition and started the truck up, carefully driving back to the apartment complex. I’m gonna need to start looking for a job too... And I’ll sleep on the couch tonight...

Marco was quiet as they drove, looking around. He got out when they parked at the apartment complex, following Jean at his side. Before long they were inside, Marco looking around. The whole place smells like Jean.... I love it.... Marco looked over as Jean finished kicking his shoes off, going to hug him and bury his face in his neck. Mine. .....and I’m so, so sorry......

Jean was shocked as Marco instantly hugged him and wrapped his arms around him. “M-Marcos?” What are you doing? His eyes were wide as he slowly pried Marco’s arms from around his waist, looking confused as he pushed him back a bit. “I should make you food, you haven't eaten… You’re probably hungry.”
Marco was confused as Jean pushed him away, his brow furrowing, wrapping his arms around himself. “Y-Yeah, thank you….” A thought tugged at his mind as he watched Jean open a cupboard only for a packet of Ramen to fall out and scare him. There's something… He watched him pull out actual pasta, the thought clicking. Wait… he can't cook. But it's just pasta…. I feel like he's done this before. Marco shuffled up behind him, leaning his cheek on his shoulder blade, his hands lightly at his waist. Mine.

Jean just sighed as he put the water into the pot and letting it boil on the stove before putting pasta in. He waited patiently in silence before grabbing the strainer from the cupboard and draining out the pot, turning the burner off and putting the pasta in it again. “Marco can you grab the bo-” His eyes seemed more pained than ever as he reached to bowl two bowls out. “S-Sorry….” I just want you to remember everything… This is breaking me in more ways than one…

Marco sighed, kissing his cheek, trying to placate him. “I’m sorry, Jean…” You won't have your boyfriend back completely for a while it seems… Marco shifted as Jean did, thanking him as he was handed a bowl, going to sit at the table with him. He stopped and stared at it, thinking. Which side is mine… He seemed to remember something, sitting down. I think I picked right... because I remember kicking Jean's feet under the table.

Jean turned with his own bowl and he seemed to feel his heart shatter as he noticed where Marco was sitting. He decided not to say anything, sitting down and struggling not to let out another choked sob. Fuck… This is so much harder than I thought it’d be…. No…. I really can’t sleep with him tonight, I can’t with him tonight… He brought up a fork full of pasta, struggling to chew his food, the sinking feeling in his chest too real.

Marco picked at his food, eating a bit more than half of it, studying the garlic sauce pooling at the bottom. “Hey Jean, you put the oil on the list, right?” His mouth ran off before he knew it, looking up in surprise. What?

Jean froze for a moment, shaking his head and going to stand and write it on the list that was on the fridge. “I-I...I’ll add it….” How come you can remember useless things like the lists we made... But you don’t remember me? Or anything that pertains to me? You sat on the wrong side… “T-Thanks…” His voice was weak and so obviously broken.

Marco stood, going to hug him, pouting when Jean gently pushed him back, latching onto him. “Jean, I'm sorry…. I'm in here somewhere….” I'm hurting you.... and I don't know how to fix it....

Jean shook his head. “I just want you to remember…. I just…. I want you back… And it must sound so bad, that I don’t want this version of you… But…” He sighed quietly, his arms gently and
jerkily wrapping around Marco as he leaned his head down to cry, sobs wracking through his whole body. *I must sound like such an ass to you.*

Marco took in a deep breath at that, cradling Jean close. “No, I… I understand… you want the Marco that remembers everything… and I'm just Marco…” He gently swayed them, letting Jean cry. “It's okay baby, it's okay…” He rubbed his back, coaxing the tears out of him. *I know you need to cry… I'm apparently not myself anymore… and that must hurt… “...I won't make you suffer like this if you don't want to hurt so much…”* I won't make you hurt like that… I wanna keep you, but this isn't just me… it'll kill you if I don't remember everything soon…

Jean shook his head, his grip getting even stronger around Marco’s waist. “N-No… **Please** don’t l-leave me too….” He sobbed into Marco’s shoulder, tears running down his cheeks and creating wet spots in his hoodie. *I don’t think I’d be able to handle it… Not after everything we’ve gone through. “It’s my fault you were in the crash anyways…. And I’ll never be able to forgive myself… I just n-need to b-bear with it….”* Jean started to hiccup as he clung onto Marco, almost squeezing him tight enough to make breathing a chore. *He can’t leave me again….* No….

“Oh-Okay, Jean, I don't have to leave. I'll stay, I promise.” Marco slowly led them to the living room, settling them on the couch, tugging Jean on top of him. “Don't think that this is your fault… it isn't…” He ran a hand through his hair, holding him close. *Don't blame yourself...*

Jean shook his head, hiccuping again. “N-No…. It's my fault…. B-Because I wouldn’t w-wait for you….” *You were late for our date… So I started to drive to the city to go to the restaurant…. You were late because you were picking up the ring weren’t you? “O-Oh my god …”* Jean's eyes were wide with distraught tears spilling down his cheeks even quicker than before. *I should’ve waited… I would’ve been the one driving then....*

Marco looked worried, pulling Jean further up, nuzzling into his neck. “Jean, please don't cry… it's okay… I’m in one piece, I'm here. It's okay, it's okay…” *You're nearly hysterical… please don't cry so much...*

Jean just simply sobbed as he held onto Marco, shaking in his tan arms. He opened his mouth to speak but gave up as he cried until he exhausted himself of his tears. *Fuck…. How long was I crying for? It feels like my cheeks are soaked...* He shifted his head, turning to see the large wet spot on Marco’s hoodie. Jean felt a hand slowly thread through his hair as he finally quieted. *He’s alive…. I should be happy…. Why can’t I be happy? Why can’t I have a normal life?*

Marco cooed to him quietly, nuzzling into his neck. “I'm sorry babe…” Marco turned his head, softly kissing his neck. *I'm sorry…* Marco held him close, kissing up to his ear, holding him close. *I can't be what you want and remember...*
Jean slowly calmed down, reaching to hold onto him. “I’m sorry… But you should probably get to bed, you have work tomorrow morning….” You’ll probably like going back to the bakery… He shifted to sit up, sniffling and rubbing at his face after finally haven cried his eyes out.

Marco shook his head, running his hand over Jean’s side. “I’m not that tired… and I can just tell Dad I need another day to get used to stuff. He’ll let me off another day… if you want me to.” He sat up as well, one arm winding around Jean’s waist, the other tenderly cupping his tear-stained cheek. I remember that I work there… and Mr. Quo made sure of that.

Jean shook his head. “You should go… I need to go job hunting as it is… So maybe I’ll drop you off… You never know, getting back to your routine might help.” Jean let Marco hold him, his eyes trained on the floor, so afraid to look at him. I don’t want to be selfish… I need to learn…

Marco nodded, tilting his head and gazing up into Jean’s eyes. “Babe, look at me.” He waited, finally meeting Jean’s eyes. “I’ll go to work and you can go job hunting. But please don’t try to change every part of our routine. If we just try to act as close to normal as we feel comfortable with… I’ll remember faster.” He studied his eyes, his own soft. I wanna make this right.

Jean nodded, averting his eyes again. “I just… I want some alone time right now… I’m gonna sleep on the couch…. Do you know where the bedroom is or….?” I don’t know what you remember. His thumb ran over Marco’s hand on his waist, unsure if he wanted to actually sleep with his arms around Marco or if he would brave the couch.

Marco looked saddened at that. “I’ll give you some time alone… and I do remember where the bedroom is… but please don’t sleep alone. I would think you’d rather have someone to hold on to.” He held him a bit closer, resting his forehead on his shoulder. “I’ll hold you if you want.” Please? You look miserable…

Jean looked over to Marco for a moment, nodding once again. “O-Okay… I’ll climb in eventually…” He turned his head and quickly pecked Marco’s cheek before he had the chance to react to it. I just wanna go look at the ring again…. And I wish you would ask again… But I’m not gonna get that… am I?

Marco nodded, gently catching Jean’s chin after his cheek was kissed, softly brushing his lips to his cheek. “Okay, babe. You come to bed eventually, okay?” Marco let Jean slip from his lap, brushing his thumb over his cheek before leaving him to himself.
I didn't fall asleep for awhile- I ended up going into the kitchen a few hours later and dragging Jean back into the bedroom. He looked like he'd been crying… and I just held onto him and he clung to me… and he cried even more... He's.... he's in a lot of pain... and I can't fix it. He seemed happy for a second when I gravitated towards my side of the bed… but he just… it didn't last. Marco blinked awake, Jean still on top of him, feeling his warm breath huff against his neck. He sighed at the feeling, his hands slowly running up and down his back. That feels nice… ...I hope to god I don't have morning wood...

Jean groaned as he shifted, his eyes slowly cracking open. His head was instantly pounding, grateful that the hand on his back moved to his scalp as he sighed. “Hmm…. What time is it?” He croaked out in curiosity, his voice and eyelids still laden with sleep. I’m on top of Marco? When did that happen?

“It’s a bit before seven… it's still really early…” Marco gently massaged his scalp, smiling faintly as Jean relaxed. “Your head hurting?” He made a sympathetic noise as Jean made a quiet sound of pain, pecking his temple. “I'll go get you some aspirin.”

He was soon enough behind the bakery counter, absently gazing over the empty bakery. I made sure he was okay before I left…. I didn't want to go to work... I wanted to keep trying to convince him that everything will be okay… but that won't help… routine will help. I kissed his cheek… he wouldn't let me give him a real kiss, even a fleeting one…
Jean came into the house holding two bottles of bourbon hours later. *I'm useless, I can't get a job anywhere... No one wants to take on a high school dropout...* He didn't even bother with a glass, just sitting down on the floor with the bottle in his hand, opening it and tipping it back. Feeling the slow burn of the alcohol had him relaxing and taking another swig, then another, and another.

Marco came home after six, kicking off his shoes. “Jean, you home yet?” He could hear a quiet sound from their bedroom, the apartment mostly dark except for the small bit of light from the far window. “Jean?” He came into the bedroom, seeing Jean with a nearly empty bottle of bourbon in his hand, the deal on the floor. Another sat next to him, not yet touched. *He drank an entire bottle of liquor?! “Jean! What the hell!”* Marco marched over to where he was on the floor, snatching the bottles away from him. “This is too much for anyone, let alone a lightweight like yourself!”

Marco stopped for a split second. ....*why do I know that? “Jean, baby.”* He set the bottles behind him in the desk, going to where Jean still was, too drunk to resist a hug. “I'm sorry....” *Guh, you smell like you bathed in alcohol...*

Jean wobbled a bit when he was hugged. *Huh? What's going on?* He felt his stomach lurch a bit as he was moved. Shifting he tried and get away, feeling the bile rise in his stomach. “F-fuck…” He even sounded like he was gonna throw up, which he eventually did, liquor and acid spilling from his mouth and on the wooden floor. *Fuck...*

Marco moved out of the way as Jean spoke, knowing instinctively it was coming and glad he wasn't a direct target. He winced as he saw the puddle on the floor, gently rubbing Jean’s back as he vomited. He was glad when Jean sucked in a shaky breath, stable for the moment. “You're really sick, babe... c’mere.” Marco slowly helped Jean stand, getting him to the bathroom and parking him in front of the toilet. “Aim for this if you need to throw up again, okay?” Marco left for a moment, coming back with a cup for water. “Come on Jean, teeny sips.” *You need to not be drunk as hell...*

Jean shook his head, quickly regretting it as he threw up again in the confines of the toilet this time. “I... wan’ m-my alcohol.... B-back...” He swayed on his knees as he stuttered, looking around the room with glassy eyes, trying to find his bottle of liquor, yet too intoxicated to get up and look for it. *I wanna keep drinking... It makes it not hurt anymore... I don’t wanna hurt anymore.*

“You can't have it back, you're really drunk already. Please, baby. Drink a bit, okay?” Marco gently cradled his jaw with one hand, the other holding the glass to his lips, sighing in relief as Jean took a small gulp obediently. “Let's see how you feel in a bit, okay? Then we’ll see if you can move to the couch.” *I don't want you throwing up all over the furniture if you don't have to.*
“But I want it back…” He whined like a child, trying to weakly swing at Marco, his hand hitting his side like he was trying to grab at Marco and not hit him. “Ge’ ‘ff” Jean’s words were slurred as he tried to get to his feet, his head spinning from his movement, and his stomach not appreciating it. I’m gonna be sick… He almost fell on top of the toilet as he threw even more alcohol up with the water he’d just drank.

Marco winced, keeping Jean from hitting his head on the porcelain as he threw up, still rubbing his back. “Just let it happen, Jean. Better out than in.” He didn't try to make him drink any more water at the moment, just trying to comfort him. “You'll feel better if you get it out of your system. No more, babe. You've had enough.” You drank nearly the whole damn bottle and would've had the second if nobody stopped you. ....I don't know how to deal with this…

Jean grumbled something about his head hurting as he sat back down against the toilet. My head hurts… I want to make it stop hurting… He struggled to stand again, wobbling on his feet as he tried to get around Marco to go back into their room and grab his liquor. Jean didn’t even make it out the door before he fell over, tripping over his own two feet. He made a loud noise akin to a groan of pain as his body slammed down onto the hardwood flooring below him, not having the strength to even get up at this point, his head spinning out of control.

..........I can't deal with this. I need help. Marco patted his pockets for his phone, realizing he didn't had one. I need a phone. He patted Jean’s pockets when he couldn't resist, opening it and looking through all the contacts. Who.... who.... .... He read one name, thinking for a moment. They say he mother henned everyone in college when they were reckless, drunk, or both. Marco texted the number moments later.

JK: Mr. Quo, it's Marco

JK: Jean is really, really drunk and I don't know what to do

LQ: I'll be there in ten minutes

LQ: Are you at the apartment?

JK: Yeah we are

LQ: I'll get there

LQ: Don't let him leave, drink or drown in his own vomit

JK: Got it

Marco put the phone on the counter, going to carefully heave Jean back into the bathroom. “Come here Honey, you need to stay put so that you can feel better for a bit. If you're well enough, then you get to go to the couch and have water.” That's it. No more bourbon.
Jean shook his head. “It makes the pain go ‘way…” He slurred as he tried to get away from Marco. “Y-You’re nuh real…” You’re not my Marco… I want my Marco back…

Marco’s face fell, still wrapping him up in his arms and dragging him back into the bathroom. “Please, baby, listen to me. You're not thinking straight and I'm gonna take care of you, okay? Now please just sit down and try to relax, okay?” He kissed his cheek, trying to convince him to behave. Please?

Jean weakly tried to push him away again, struggling to stand. “Nuh uh…” He whined, trying to crawl away once he got his arms free of Marco’s hold, though he wasn’t getting anywhere when Marco wrapped his arms around his waist. He barely felt it. No… I want my Marco back… You’re not Marco… You don’t sound like him…

Marco stayed there with Jean in his arms while he waited for Lathe to come and help, sighing quietly as he weakly struggled and kept repeating the same thing over and over. ……I'm not his Marco. ………………..I've hurt him too much…… I can't stay and keep tearing up his heart…. I can't .... He didn't hear the knock on the front door, nor the jingling of the spare key in the door, jumping when suddenly Lathe was in the doorway. “H-How’d you…?”

“I've known where the extra was for two years.” Lathe knelt next to them, catching Jean as he swayed forward on his knees. “Jean? Jean, please, don't fight us. We’re trying to help you feel better.” Please don't struggle, Jean… “You've had a lot to drink, Hun. Let us take care of you.”

“Nuh uh…. I wann’ Marco…” His voice slurred as he still tried to push them both away. This isn’t my Marco…. I want my Marco! Jean had tears in his eyes as he struggled to push them away, starting to hiccup which would only lead to more vomit. I want my Marco! But he’s not gonna come back…. Is he?

Lathe caught him again, guiding him back in front of the toilet as he started hiccuping. “Marco’s here, Jean, he's okay. He's here, see?” Lathe watched Marco move to Jean’s other side, the freckled man cupping Jean’s cheek. He’s here. …..and somehow alive.

Jean shook his head again, prompting him to empty his stomach into the toilet once again. “… ‘hats nuh m-my Marco…..” Jean whined, his whole body shaking as he started to cry. That’s not my Marco!

Lathe looked between Jean and Marco, his face falling as he understood. He doesn't remember
everything... he doesn't remember being in love with you so much he wanted to marry you...

“Jean... I don't have any answers for you...” They rubbed his back as he vomited, managing to get him to rinse out his mouth with water. “Jean, please, just relax, okay?” Lathe got him to sit against the wall, running a hand through his hair. I can't fix that...

Jean’s lip was quivering as tears ran down his cheeks in streams. I... I want my Marco back... The one that loved me, even though we can’t do anything in the bedroom... The one that knew all my quirks, the one that knew when to give me space... The one that knew when I needed a hug.... The one that wanted to marry me..... And I can't have him anymore.... He sniffled, trying to calm himself down. Do I have to keep going? Put up with it? Try and make him happy again.... But he won't understand anything... He’ll get frustrated with me... And he’ll leave.... I don’t want to let him go, but it hurts so much to keep him with me....

Marco felt ready to cry himself, shifting next to Jean, hugging him and burying his face in his shoulder. I can't stop myself from clinging to him.... why ...? “Jean, I.... I'm so sorry I'm not the Marco you had... and that I'm not the one you want... I'm so sorry that got taken away from you...” I can't keep hurting you like this... I can't ...

Jean just looked away from him, his eyes starting to close. I'm tired.... He had finally cried himself to sleep after a few minutes, his body going lax against the wall and Marco. I want my Marco back...

Marco cradled him close, letting out a ragged sob when he felt Lathe’s hand on his back. I made him drink a whole bottle of bourbon and cry... I'm making him miserable... I can't give him what he already had... “W-W-What........” I don't know what to do ....

“Let's get him in bed and we’ll talk, Hun. Okay?” Lathe convinced Marco to let him carry Jean to bed and lay him on his side, getting out a bucket for next to the bed and a glass of water. He found Marco running his hands through his hair and gently over his cheeks, seeing the look on his face. “...Marco, please. Let's come out to the living room and talk, okay?” Please don't make this even harder...

Marco was reluctant to follow Lathe out into the room. I... I don’t want to make him miserable like this.... He drank a whole bottle, and if I didn't stop him he would’ve had the other too. He came out of the bedroom and sat down on the couch, holding his head in his hands as he leaned over his knees. “What do I do?” His voice was small, hating that he didn't know what to do. I can’t stay with him if this happens to him.

Lathe sighed and sat next to him, pulling him out of his tiny ball and pulling him in for a hug, feeling him shudder. “It's okay if you need to cry... and I don't think... I don't think that if this is
how much Jean is hurting…. that you can stay here.” He gently rubbed his back. “...I think that for a long while at least, until you get your memories back and only then… until that happens, you two can't be dating… I think even a casual friendship would hurt him too much…. ...for a lot of big reasons.” He saw the ring… he knows you… you wanted to marry him… that you were gonna propose...

Marco started to cry as he held onto Lathe, feeling oddly comfortable in his arms, like he’d cried to him about something before. I.... “So…. Y-you’re telling me…. That I should l-leave?” Marco felt like the world was falling down on him, and he had no idea why just the thought of leaving Jean hurt so much. Why? Why does it hurt? What is he to me? I don’t understand....

Lathe cradled him close, letting him cry. “Marco, it hurts to say it… but you're not the same Marco that Jean knew. You're not that same as when we were besties. You've lost memories and changed. And you and Jean were at a point where nobody thought there was anyone for one of you besides the other… and Jean has a heart to mend… because even if you do regain your memories… it'll be a long while before you remember enough to pick up again where you left off.” It'll take time...

“Where did we leave off? I’m so confused… He seemed so okay with me earlier… Then just… He broke down…” Marco sniffled, trying to refrain from breaking down himself. I can’t... I don’t want to leave him.... Where did we leave off? Why won’t he tell me?

“Marco…” Lathe hesitated, looking down, thinking. ...he'll never leave if he knows... “You and Jean had dated for so long… and Jean’s always been one to keep his actual feelings to himself. He… maybe he realized he couldn't lie to himself that everything was perfect. ...because it's not. No matter how much we want it to be right now.” He rubbed his back, one hand going through his hair. Whether we like it or not, a lot of shit isn't going to be the same for a long while...

Marco could only nod. “D-Do I move back in with my D-Dad?.... It seems like a lot stuff is here.... How long have I lived with him?” It seems like all my stuff is here...

“...it must've been a year and a half that you've lived together… a long while…” Figuring out what's yours and his would be difficult… besides clothes... “I think your Dad would understand with everything that's happened… but if it just doesn't work, and I can't imagine it not working out, you can always stay with us awhile.” You're like family- we're here for you.

“No... I-I was honestly surprised that my Dad didn’t bring me home from the hospital…. I... I want to stay… But I don’t wanna break him anymore than he already is…” That’s cruel.... “But I don’t think i’d be able to leave him if he’s awake…” I don’t think I’d be able to face him at all, if he knew I was going to leave... But just leaving him alone would be cruel...
“He's sleeping… Marco, I don't think there's much to do besides take your clothes and go home… staying would just… it'd slowly crush his heart.” You can't do that to him…

Marco nodded, shifting to go grab his things, confused on how he remembered what was his and what wasn’t, small tidbits flashing before his eyes. But it's not enough, I don't remember any of this in full… He heard the sheets move behind him, looking to see Jean sprawl onto his back. It's for the better… Marco grabbed his clothes, somehow coming across a suitcase with his name on it, taking it and packing clothes in it. He could feel his heart starting to become painful. I don’t… I don’t want to leave… And I don’t know why!

Lathe was quiet as Marco packed, shadowing him in the bedroom door. He watched morose as Marco closed the suitcase, going to the bed and giving Jean a feather-light kiss in his sleep. He held out a hand for him, guiding him to the front door as his head hung. “I'll drive you home, Hun. ...I'm sorry.” I know it must hurt… even if you're not too sure why it hurts as much as it does…

Marco sniffled, nodding as Lathe led him out the door. Fuck…. I don’t wanna leave him. But I can't keep hurting him. He sat down in the passenger seat, his suitcase in the trunk of Lathe’s Thunderbird. Marco looked out the window, watching the houses go by until he was in front of his own house, tears in his eyes. “I…. I can’t talk to him… Can I?” What's going to happen to him?

Lathe was quiet as he turned off the car, looking to him. “.......I don't think so.” He hugged Marco tightly, letting him shake in his arms. He waited until he stopped sobbing, kissing his forehead before letting him go, making sure he got inside okay. ........I'm sorry.
Chapter 93: Side Story 8: Lathe and Ieva (Vacation of Dreams)

Chapter Summary

PLEASE COMMENT!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The flight here wasn’t so bad… It was only a few hours, not enough for me to try and bother sleeping. Lathe held my hand the entire time as we were in the front section of the plane, with only the two of us in our part of the row. Eren really went all out when he got us these tickets…. Like, all out. We left around 10 this morning, which put us at the airport at around 3, customs wasn’t that long of a line and we got through relatively quickly, the hotel having a shuttle bus waiting for our arrival…..Eren…. How much of this did you plan out for the two of us? Ieva was quiet as she watched the city pass slowly, crossing over a large bridge to get to the island, watching the crystal clear water peek through between the different resorts. Before she knew it they were getting off at their resort, the driver helping Lathe get their luggage out of the shuttle and onto a dolly. She watched one of the hotel staff come and push it as they were directed towards the front desk in the large marble lobby. It’s so beautiful…. She noticed the peaceful quiet that also came from the rest of the resort. No kids… Thank god … I needed this…

….this is happening apparently. Lathe was still a bit on edge, trying not to think about everything left at home. Construction started just a few weeks ago… Okay maybe two months ago, and the kids are being a handful and a half, and Mila is a bit of a handful too just by herself and Eren’s in charge of everything and I just… “Reservation for Quo.” Lathe managed to sound neutral as he spoke to the friendly man at the front desk, squeezing Ieva’s hand as she looked around the nice lobby, gazing around himself a bit. It does look really nice… who the hell am I kidding, it’s really fancy… I don’t deserve this… Ieva does, but… not me… Lathe kept Ieva close as he was handed two key cards, immediately giving one to Ieva. They were pointed in the right direction to their room, walking down a long hallway. He was still a bit wound up even with all the time he had on the plane to get over his nerves, instinctively wrapping his arm around Ieva’s middle, keeping her close. Three whole weeks… just us… and no work to do. No bills to pay, no kids to wrangle, just… us. ……………I don't know if I'll last that long….. He waved the keycard in front of the sensor, the door clicking for them, gazing around the room. His jaw dropped as he took everything in. It's too fancy… it's wonderful… and it's too much….

Ieva’s eyes were wide as she came in after Lathe, she looked at the huge room with the large jacuzzi bath near the sliding glass door which led to a large balcony that overlooked the beautiful crystal clear waters in front of the hotel. “Oh my god… This place is gorgeous ….” She stepped inside moving to sit on the very large bed against the wall, a huge smile on her face. “La-…..” She was cut off as she looked up to see his face. “Lathe?” Her voice was instantly softer to try and get his attention. “Come here… We can call the kids if you want…” You look like you’re about to cry…
Lathe gazed around the room blankly, his eyes red, holding his head in his hands. He was even paler than normal, his mind going in circles. I don't deserve this... I don't deserve a second of it... I'm supposed to be home with the kids, making dinner and making sure construction goes well and making sure everyone gets their bedtime stories and not be here doing nothing when I don't remember the first damn thing about being romantic... Lathe barely noticed Ieva speak, slowly shaking his head, his gaze fixed far away.

Ieva slowly walked up to Lathe. “Lathe honey... Can you hear me?” I hope you can... “It’s just me... Okay?” Her voice was soft and calm as she slowly pulled him towards the bed, letting him lay down and holding onto him. “Lathe, honey..... C-can you hear me?” Please... Please hear me... She tried cooing to him, her hands running through his noir locks. I don’t want you to panic about this...

“I don’t... I don't deserve this…” Lathe looked ready to freak out, shaking as Ieva wrapped him up in a warm embrace. “I should be home because there's so much work to be done, I don't deserve to do nothing for three weeks and I don't remember a single thing about being romantic and I'm gonna do nothing but worry and ruin everything for you...” Lathe let everything spill out, trembling as he clung to Ieva, his chest aching. It hurts... I can't do this... you deserve it... and I don’t... .....help me not worry... “H-Help me n-n-not w-worry...” His voice was tiny and his breathing was shaky, panic slithering into his stomach.

Ieva nodded, shifting onto his chest, her legs straddling his sides as she felt his arms tightly wrap around her waist. “No, don’t say that, Lathe... You should be here with me, you deserve everything...” She slowly shifted to nestle her face into his neck, gently kissing his soft flesh. Please relax... I want you to be able to relax with me.... You deserve this, you never had a vacation except for our honeymoon...

Lathe couldn't help letting out high-pitched whines of distress as she shifted on top of him, so scared that she was going to shift away. Don't leave me.... please... He shuddered as she kissed his neck, feeling himself warm a bit as she did, his voice quieter. “I-It doesn't feel l-like I deserve anything like th-this...” I don't... I'm not supposed to have another vacation,... there's too much to do...

Ieva shook her head. “You deserve it.... Please believe me.” Her words a soft whisper as she kissed his ear gently and sweetly. Soon she moved her head, under his chin, gently kissing the skin as she felt his arms loosen from around her. That's it, calm down.... Please calm down...

It feels wonderful... Lathe slowly began to melt in Ieva’s arms, his voice soft as fret a while of quiet thought. “.........I do?” I... I deserve this? ............no............right?
Ieva nodded against his skin, gently kissing around his other ear. “You deserve a reward for being the best Dad that any of our kids could possibly want… For being there to support Eren while he learned how to handle Mila… For being able to try and help Marco get back into things… You’re an amazing man Lathe…. You deserve something just as amazing for a thank you.” Ieva kissed a towards his chest, her lips trailing down to his collarbone, her hands pulling the fabric of his shirt out of the way. It’s in the way… I want you to relax…

I….. “I…. it doesn’t feel l-like it…” Lathe’s voice was shifting from distressed to contented, sounding calm as she kissed down his chest. He let out a faint sound as her hands stroked soothingly over his slightly heavier frame. I’ve always been so scared… that I’m not doing things right… that I don’t measure up to your ideal husband… I never have any time to practice Judo or use the gym we have anymore… I… I’m starting to lose my muscles and my shape… and I know how much you liked them…

Ieva soon had her fingers around the hem of his shirt, tugging on it a bit. “C-Can I take it off?” I wanna make sure you’re okay with this…. She shifted up a bit so that she could pull his shirt off the instant he said she could. “I…. I wouldn’t want to be here with anyone else Lathe… You’re an awesome parent… You’ve raised Eren well, he’ll be able to do it, and he’s got Armin and Marco… And the rest of the village if he needs help.” She tried to soothe him more, trying to see if it would work or not. Please be okay … Please...

Lathe hesitated at her question, shifting nervously. “B-But…. I…. I-I just… A-Am I… s-still as attractive to y-you?” I can't sleep nearly every other night… and trying to watch boring TV helps… but just mindlessly eating leftovers and not having any leftover time for the gym hasn't been nice to my body… He shrunk as she gave him an ‘are you fucking serious’ glare, his voice tiny. “I-I don't exactly look the same… I-I keep gaining weight and I don't work out anymore really and I just… w-worry you’ll…” Worry you'll stop loving my body....

“Lathe….” Ieva trailed off as she pulled off his shirt, looking down to his abdomen, noticing that he had in fact gained a bit of weight, the normally hard lines of his muscles softened. She let her hands trail down the softer lines, a smile of appreciation on her face. “You still have abs… I don’t really care, your baby face hasn’t changed at all… and you haven’t changed the way you are on the inside, so why should it matter if you put on some weight?” Her voice was soft as she kept her hands on his abdomen, making sure that he knew she didn’t care at all if he’d lost some muscle tone. “You juggle everything around like a pro…. I’m not worried about this… I’d never be able to stop loving you, and I hope that the same would go for me too…” She murmured, her eyes hopeful as she locked her gaze with his. I really hope you won’t stop making love to me even if I run out of eggs… Because I’m going to.

Lathe looked vulnerable, his eyes hopeful as she looked him over with soft eyes. “.........I thought you’d hate it..... …..is it really okay?” I don’t want you to look at me and be disgusted….. I wanna look nice for you....
She nodded, picking up one of his hands and kissing his knuckles. “Trust me, you’ll look hotter than a majority of the men your age here…. You’re in your 40s Lathe… You’re fucking hot, and don’t ever think that I wouldn’t tap that….” She grinned cheekily, kissing his palm as he opened his hand for her lips. *Please be okay with this… I really am okay, because it’s you… I wouldn’t ask you to change for me…*

Lathe desperately tried to calm down at that, but the mention of how old he was sent new thoughts spinning. “B-But….. w-what about the gray hairs and the lines around my eyes and near my mouth whenever I look something other than bored…? I-Is that okay t-too?” *I want to be good enough for you…*

*Lathe…. Ieva’s eyes looked over his face, shaking her head. “Do you even realize that I’m getting those too?”* She leaned down to wrap her arms around his neck, hugging him. “I wouldn’t want you to change at all, I love the way you’re aging… I love it, and it’s sexy…” *The few grey hairs you have are barely noticeable… But even if they were it would be hot as all hell.*

*Lathe shook his head, reaching a hand up to cup Ieva’s cheek. “Th-That’s different… you’re so beautiful it hurts… and I’m just…. “* *I look in the mirror and keep thinking about how I’m never going to be good enough for you….*

*“Lathe… Why do you keep degrading yourself? You know I love you no matter what… Is it me? Am I not telling you enough? Because I can tell you even more if that’s what the problem is……” I don’t want you to think that I would ever stop loving you. She kissed his cheek as he cupped her face, a twinkle in her eyes.*

*Lathe clutched her closer to his chest, his voice tiny. “Y-Yeah… b-but you could tell m-me every minute of every day and it wouldn't be enough…. His grip got tighter, though his hold in her cheek was still the gentlest thing. “…I just wanna be enough for you…” He looked up to her, his eyes desperate. “H-Help me feel like enough… I wanna stop hurting so much…” It always hurts...* 

*Ieva nodded. “I think I have just the thing.” She murmured, kissing him sweetly before getting off of him carefully. She went to the bag she packed and started to open it up, though she started to strip simultaneously. I wonder if you know where I’m going with this…* 

*Lathe couldn't help the instinctive whine of protest as she left his lap, looking over as she moved, flushing as her clothes started hitting the floor. “I-Ieva…?” He looked confused, his eyes widening as she pulled a toy out of her suitcase, drinking it in as he flushed scarlet. He nearly drooled as he looked it over. *It's bigger than the one we already have, it looks like… “That looks new…”...I want it...*
Ieva smiled softly, slowly coming towards him left in only her panties, her bra having come off moments before. She let him look over the larger toy, the bottle of lube in her other hand. *I wanna make you feel wanted* ... “It is.... You like it?”

“It looks bigger…” Lathe could feel himself quietly ache, looking up over Ieva's nude form, feeling himself hardening. “I think I'll love it…”

….. *He’s all yours...* Ieva slowly clambered onto the bed, shifting to sit between his legs, her hands coming down to unbutton his pants, unzipping them and starting to pull them off of him. “You tell me if I need to slow down or do anything for you… Okay?” *I want you to be comfortable.* She leaned down, kissing his abdomen as she teased his boxers with her fingers.

Lathe spread his legs for her as she climbed up without even thinking about it, shakily nodding as she spoke. “Please, just… be gentle….” *Please...* He took a light hold on the soft sheets as Ieva gently ran her hands up and down his creamy thighs, throbbing with anticipation. *I want it... really badly...* He flushed scarlet as she tugged his boxers down, her hands returning to his thighs, whimpering as she teasingly brushed up and down the sensitive flesh and kissed all over his chest. *I want it....

Ieva was gentle as she let her hands wander his creamy thighs, her thumbs gently going over the skin. Her lips were still setting opened mouth kisses on his abdomen, following the softer lines of his abs. She soon made her way down to the coarse hair that led to his nether, kissing his base as her hands still ran up and down his thighs. *I want you to feel really good.* Ieva slowly kissed up his hard length, getting to the tip and gently licking over his slit. *I got a new one that vibrates ....

Lathe was rock hard as she kissed up his length, gasping as she lapped his slit, shaking, his legs trembling as her hands still ran over them. “F-Feels good…” *I miss this....* Lathe whimpered as her hands moved to his knees, his legs easing apart completely for her, his body heating up much more. *I want it....

Ieva shifted to lower her body closer to Lathe’s, grabbing the bottle of lube she had set aside. She opened it up, letting the lube drip onto her fingers, letting it warm up before slowly poking at his entrance. She let her finger swirl around, trying to get him to relax as she licked large strips up the base of his hard length. *I missed doing this with you... We should do it more often...

Lathe tensed a bit as he felt a digit slowly rubbing circles around his entrance, his back arching, wanting to give her better access. “P-Please be gentle...” He felt her murmur against his base, soon feeling a finger slowly finding its way inside. He breathed deeply, trying to relax. *I missed this kind of love... it's been too long.... A thought hit him with guilt, trying to shove it back down. Don't make this even harder...* He couldn't help the tormented look that flash past his eyes. *Stop it... don't think about it like that...
Ieva felt him tense up around her, cooing to him as she brought her free hand to gently rub his length. “Lathe… Do you want to keep going?” You’re so tense… She looked up to see the torment in his eyes, trying to figure out what to do. Do I stop? Did I do something wrong?

Lathe looked down to her, his look one of poorly hidden guilt. He nodded, his grip on the sheets tightening as he tried to calm down. “Y-Yes… I-I do, b-but…” If I tell you you’ll think that what you do isn't enough for me… I don't want you to think that…. He soon shook his head, looking away. “N-Nevermind…” I can't tell you… fuck, but now you're going to ask what's wrong… and I don't wanna tell you… but I feel too guilty...

Ieva looked to Lathe, watching him look away, picking up that he didn’t want to talk about it. Okay…. She nodded quietly, slowly easing in a second finger when she thought he was ready. You don’t have to tell me…. You can tell me when you feel comfortable…. She focused on him, trying to make him see stars as she gently massaged him open and worshipped his length. I can focus on you….

Lathe couldn't help it, still feeling guilt squeeze his chest as Ieva took his nerves in stride, continuing on like nothing happened. ... but I should tell you…. I should tell you… “I-Ieva…I-I should tell you… uhm… y-you know how we never really did m-much when things started getting r-really busy?” He looked very scared as Ieva nodded, looking up to him. “W-Well… I-if I had time in the middle of the day… I just… I missed being intimate with you, a-and…” He flushed scarlet as Ieva looked to him, looking away as her hand slowly stroked him. “I-I’m sorry… I’ve kept touching myself… I craved touch so much and there was never time and we were always exhausted when it got late and I don't want you to think you're not enough but—” Lathe was cut off as his length was encased with heat, his mouth wide with a silent moan as her tongue ran firmly over his slit. So good… are you not… mad…? “A-Are you… n-not mad…?” He breathed deeply, letting out a low moan as Ieva bobbed on him. Too good...

Ieva bobbed her head on him and kissed his length as she came off with a lewd pop. “Please tell me… It’s perfectly normal for you to want to be intimate…. All you need to do is ask.” I’d help you at least… “You don’t have to feel ashamed… Or guilty, it’s only human… I used to do it too….” Not much anymore, but I take that to being exhausted with all the kids… She gently eased her fingers towards where the bundle of nerves was, hoping to calm him down further.

“I-I didn't want to keep you from sleep… you always looked exhausted…” Lathe whimpered as she kissed his length, his words quiet. “I-I’m trying to learn how to- o- oh…” Lathe was cut off again as his prostate was firmly brushed, the pleasure causing his hips to buck up a bit. “A-A-Ask….. o-oh God, Ieva…” He moaned loudly as Ieva brushed the nerves again. “I-I'm not good at.. a-asking… a-and I just…” He whimpered, a note of pain in it. “I didn't know at all what pleasure was until we had our first night together… I'm not used to it at all… it feels like… like something to be ashamed of… I always feel so ashamed every time.. b-but…” But I crave love and I haven't been getting it…
Ieva shook her head, leaning up as she slipped her fingers from his entrance. She moved up to kiss at his neck. “Never be ashamed, I’m okay with you masturbating… Who knows… Maybe I’d like to watch you some time…” She leaned back up with the corner of her lip under her teeth. *I hope I can love you more… Our relationship needs some work…*

Lathe flushed even darker, slowly relaxing as Ieva kissed his neck and spoke. “I'm sorry… maybe I'll let you watch sometime…” Lathe sighed deeply as Ieva stretched him. “I missed you so much…” Lathe reached for her, clinging to her. “I missed you… I missed being able to do more than just spoon you or kiss you goodbye or hello… I… I needed you…” Lathe hurt to say it. “I need you… I need this really badly…” Please… “Ieva… I love you so much… …please love me…” *Please make love to me until I can't remember ever hurting…*

Ieva nodded, wincing as she heard him whine as she moved away from him. She stripped herself of her panties before pulling on the strap on and getting it all set against her hips. Ieva crawled back up onto the bed between Lathe’s legs, lubing up the vibrator before she slowly let the tip enter him, bending over him. Her hands came to cup his cheeks as she leaned down to kiss him deeply as she slowly rolled her hips to insert inch by inch. *I want you to feel okay with this….*

Lathe’s cheeks were painted red as Ieva settled in between his legs, a look of hunger in his eyes. *It's so big…* He clung to Ieva as she leaned onto him, his breath coming in deep pants as she sunk the toy into him. He shuddered as he finally felt her hips grind against his as they became flush, a needy moan leaving his lips, trying to keep his hips from pushing back against hers. *I feel so full…*

Ieva was busy grinding down into him, making sure that he was comfortable with the larger strap on. She was kissing up and down his neck, licking his earlobe every so often, a soft chuckle leaving her lips. “Hmm…. Should I turn it on?” She asked with a giggle. She let her hips pull back and slowly thrust into him again. *I wonder if you knew why it was bigger or not…*

Lathe’s brow furrowed the smallest bit in confusion, the expression muted as his jaw fell slack as she rolled her hips. “Wh-what do you… haah… m-mean, turn it… o-on… oh…” Lathe could barely speak as she ground into him, completely spread open for her. *You can have me… as much as you want...*

Ieva smiled and she moved her hand to part of the strap on, pressing something and feeling it begin to vibrate against herself and knowing that Lathe would be able to feel it. *How does it feel? It’s on a low setting right now….* She kissed at his neck still, making sure she ground her hips further into him. *I hope you'll like it…*

Lathe’s mouth fell open as he felt the toy begin vibrating inside of him, letting out a loud gasp as
Ieva ground deeper into him, clinging to her and keeping her in place as it vibrated dangerously close to that coveted bundle of nerves. “O-Oh God Ieva, right there, feels so good… m-more…”

It's so close…. If it was shifted just the tiniest bit… and if maybe it could go stronger… fuck, can it…? Lathe was nearly drooling at the idea, effectively turning into a pliable puddle in Ieva’s arms. More… god, please, more...

Ieva smirked, kissing and licking at his collarbones as she held onto his hips, using them as leverage. I like this... You’re certainly enjoying it. She listened to the music of his moans float around the wide room, a happy smile on her face as she continued to thrust into him. I wonder if he’d ask for me to turn it up… It can… I think a lot more too...

Lathe was a moaning mess as she thrusted into him, feeling the buzz of the toy inside of him and all around his prostate. More….? “I-Ieva? C-Can it… can it go higher than th-this?” Please turn it up if you can… His answer was a sudden increase with Ieva grinding into him, making him cry out with bliss. “So good….”

Ieva soon had her mouth latched onto his collar, sucking soft marks onto him, knowing that he’d probably want to go topless if they went swimming, so she kept the hickeys to a minimum. She let her hips pull out again and then thrust into Lathe’s prostate, grinding down into it. I love this… I love this so much…. He’s enjoying himself with me…. But……………. No, I can’t think of it like that… That’d be too selfish of me, I’ll let him enjoy himself...

Lathe cried out as she held her hips and ground into his prostate, latching onto her tightly as pleasure washed over him. “Oh god, Ieva, please, just stay here, please …. So good…” His expression melted to one of helpless pleasure as she turned it up even more, feeling warmth running through him. “O-Oh god, Ieva… fuck, I wanna cum like this… it's so good…” He gasped as it turned up even more, holding her to his chest tightly, his thighs shaking. “O-Oh god… oh ….” It feels too good...

Ieva waited patiently, grinding her hips down further into him. He enjoys it, I should be happy for him…. But…. No, don’t think like that, you still love him, that hasn’t changed. Her kisses trailed down to his perked nipple, grabbing it and sucking on it. “Y-You feeling good?” She struggled to speak over his moans, grinding into him further, the toy finally turned up to the highest setting.

“F-Feels so good… oh …” Lathe shuddered as he felt his orgasm creeping up on him quickly, unable to help himself and reaching one hand to his length, clamping around his base. “Too good…. n-not yet…..” He tried to keep himself from cumming, the resistance futile. He bought himself a few more seconds of bliss before he felt Ieva’s hand shoo his away and hold him firmly, his thighs trembling as he teetered on the edge. “O-Oh… I… Ieva…” He cried out loudly, feeling Ieva stroke him firm and quick as he came, covering their chests with white as he rode out his release. He whimpered as she milked him, clinging to her, feeling boneless. “I love you so fucking much…. ” He sounded ready to cry as he spoke, slowly rocking them. I love you....
“I love you too….” Ieva smiled softly, leaning into his chest, her hand creeping down to turn the vibrator off for a moment, letting Lathe bask in his after orgasm glow. Damn…. He’s hot… And strong… There’s no way he’s letting go… She nuzzled into his neck, her hands coming up to curl into his hair. “I’m sorry Lathe….” Her words were soft as she shifted to start to pull out of him, her arms coming to wrap around his neck. I’m selfish …. I need to stop thinking about it….

Lathe enjoyed the full sensation for a long moment, a lazy smile on his face. His expression faltered a bit as Ieva apologized, sighing deeply as she drew out of him. “Why be sorry…. It's okay….” Lathe’s voice was quiet, running his hands all over her back. Mine...

Ieva shook her head and nuzzled into his neck to hide her face as she felt shame wash over her. I can’t tell him… Because then he'll feel like shit too… “N-No…. It’s nothing…..” She sniffled as she clung to him, her fingers running through his hair, trying to calm herself down.

Lathe gently rubbed her back, his voice quiet and warm. “It's okay babe… you can tell me what's the matter… you don't have to cry…” You sound ready to cry… He tangled their limbs, quiet. Talk to me, love.

Ieva shook her head against his neck, struggling not to let the tears fall, but ultimately failing as she let the hot tears run down her face and onto Lathe’s neck. I… I can’t tell you…. “I-I’m sorry…..” She whispered, a soft sob escaping her as she clung to him, though one of her hands ventured down herself and moved to unclick the toy, shimmying it down her legs and putting it aside before really curling up to him now that the toy wasn’t between them. I'm sorry that I'm not enough… That I can't pleasure you enough… That I can't give you any satisfaction… I’m so sorry….

Lathe was worried as she started crying, coping to her and helping her shift to take off the toy. He held her close, turning his head to place soft pecks all over her cheeks, brushing the tears away. “Ieva, Honey, it's okay, you don't have to cry… please, tell me what's wrong. I won't be upset, I won't be mad… tell me… it hurts to see you cry…” I hate seeing you cry...

Ieva shook her head as she held onto him, burying her face into his neck again, struggling to calm herself down. No…. Cause you'll feel horrible if I say anything. “I’m sorry….” She whispered quietly as she clung to him, loving that he was still holding onto her even when she wouldn’t tell him. I love that you'll still hold me like this…. Even when I'm a mess….

Lathe held her close, slowly moving until she was under him, dipping his head and softly kissing her neck. “...you know that whatever you say… that I’ll still love you as much as I always have.” His hands slowly ran up and down her sides, admiring her figure. You're always going to be my wonderful, beloved wife… and I won't let whatever you can't say change that.
Ieva turned her eyes, a sensation of guilt overtaking her stomach as he touched her. “I-I’m sorry…. T-That…. I’m n-not e-enough…” Fuck… I said it... He’s probably gonna feel guilty as all hell now too…. Dammit! I didn’t want to ruin this vacation! Ieva turned her head to the side, guilt running through her, making her feel anxious and worried.

Lathe looked up to her, worried, his voice gentle. “What? Ieva, you're wonderful… you're more than I could have ever hoped for. You've always been so much more than enough in everything. What on earth makes you say that?” I don't understand...

Ieva sniffled raising her hand to rub at her face, not caring that the small amount of makeup she had put on smeared. “Because… You always wanna feel loved… But I keep trying… With just myself and it’s not enough unless I throw a toy in there… I’m trying Lathe…. I-I’m sorry I’m not enough for you…” I wish I could be…. I wish I could please you all the time, but I can’t…. And it hurts...

Lathe looked stunned, wrapping his arms securely around her, holding her flush to his body. “Ieva, I'm so sorry I made you feel that way… when you got that toy for me for Christmas and wanted to try it, I just… it feels amazing and different… and me wanting to do it more doesn't mean that I think you can't please me with just yourself… but it's a different way that you make me feel really good… and I'm sorry you think I want it more than you… and that I can't pleasure you while you’re taking care of me… I just… sometimes I just really want it… and it's not me thinking that I need real pleasure… it's me missing that feeling of being full… but it's all you…” Lathe softly kissed at her neck. “...would you let me show you how much?” I don't want you to ever think you're not enough… because you're always too good for me…

Ieva was quiet as she let Lathe’s words register in her mind as he spoke. But you always look like you're on cloud nine when I use a toy.......... I haven’t seen you like that any of the times it was just me and you.... She sniffled, rubbing at her face, not caring that her makeup was everywhere. “....O-Okay….” Her words were weak as her arms wrapped around his shoulders.

Lathe kept her wrapped up in his arms, slowly kissing at her neck. His hands ran all over her sides as he slowly made his way south, his lips latching onto one of her nipples, sucking gently. I want you to feel really good… because with the way you make me feel… you deserve it so many times over… One hand teased the other bud, the other going to her nether, starting to rub slow circles around her clit. “You're soaked….” He could feel the slickness against his thumb, his other hand moving down as well to gently pull her folds back, exposing the rosy skin and the tiny nub that made her shudder.
Ieva gasped as Lathe’s lips latched over her nipple, enjoying the feeling of being sucked on. She whimpered when his mouth left her skin for a moment before gasping in pleasure as his fingers found her wet entrance. “L-Lathe…..” *Shit…. His hands are like magic … But he’s doing it for me…. He won’t do it for himself….*

Lathe hummed onto her other bud, lapping at the soft skin. “You're so wet… just for me…” Lathe looked up to her as he dragged his tongue between her mounds. “You’re so beautiful… I want you to remember that I’ll *always* want you…” He pressed a kiss over her heart. “You’re always perfect for me…” *I love you…* His thumb darted back and forth, rubbing her clit with vigor as she shuddered. “You make such beautiful sounds…”

Ieva felt her body tense as Lathe’s thumb rubbed vigorously over her clit. She whimpered with need as she spread her legs and felt her toes curl as she got more comfortable with Lathe working her open. *Fuck…. If you’ll always want me why don’t you just *take* me then?* Ieva’s eyes widened when Lathe stopped, knowing instantly that she’d said that out loud… *Fuck I screwed up… Shit shit shit shit….*

Lathe stopped, though his thumb resumed its slow circles as he leaned up, murmuring in her ear. “Because you deserve to feel as wonderful as you make *me* feel…” His hands left her, his tip brushing her folds, and his hands going back to her hips. “You deserve the best kind of love that I can give you… you deserve to have it for hours… but you deserve what you want too…” He kissed her neck. “So tell me what you want.” *Let me know how to make you feel good.*

Ieva was quiet, wiggling her hips to try and get him to understand her want. “I-I…. I don’t want you to think a-about me…. T-Think about yourself…. P-Please… J-Just once…. I… want y-you to enjoy yourself… I want your everything…”

Lathe’s eyes flickered with confusion for a moment before he understood, giving her neck a rough suck before slipping into her heat, shivering at the sensation. “Y-You're so warm… so wet…” He drew out of her before sinking back in, hearing a shaky moan in his ear. “You're so…” His hands ran all over her, feeling every curve against his body. “…so gorgeous…” He was soon enough pounding into her, his face buried in her neck. *So perfect…*

Ieva’s cries got louder and louder, her legs curling around his hips, driving him in further. *Oh my god… So good…* She could feel the heat pooling in her abdomen already, even with Lathe having just started. *Fuck…. “L-Lathe… Don’t s-stop…. Please… Ah!… Ngh, d-d-don’t…”* She cried as her body tensed again. *It feels so good…. I wanna cum….*

Lathe smirked, nipping roughly at her neck. His hands cupped her ass, massaging the globes as he pounded her, tilting her so their hips went flush with every thrust. “You feel so good, love… I love
all the moans you make… I won’t stop until you tell me to… even if that means I pound you all night…” Lathe sounded like it was a promise, his voice deep. I want you to feel better than anything...

“F-Fuck… Lathe… I’m gonna cum….” She whined as her arms wrapped around his shoulders again, holding him down as her nails dug into his shoulders. A loud cry erupted from her throat as she felt the wave of pleasure wash over her, juices leaving her in an even faster pace. Fuck… It feels so good… She continued to moan wildly and unabashed as Lathe continued to pound into her. This is what I want… You to be rough with me… Please ...

The night dragged on, their room filled with their moans and cries of pleasure. Lathe woke up in the afternoon the next day, Ieva resting on his chest, both of them still nude. He smiled when he saw her peaceful face, brushing her hair from her face with one hand. So beautiful… He cupped her jaw, the brushing of his thumb on her cheek enough to make her eyelids flutter. “Good morning, beautiful.” Lathe smiled to her warmly. You’re wonderful...

Ieva smiled softly, shifting to peck at his neck, humming in content. “What time is it?” I’m starving… We fucked right through dinner…. And I assume slept through breakfast… “I’m hungry….” She whined like a child, curling up to his warm chest. But I don’t wanna get up...

Lathe chuckled, shifting to sit up with her still in his lap. “Let’s get dressed and go hunt down lunch, okay? It's almost noon.” Food sounds good… Lathe kissed her sweetly, helping her to her feet. He glanced over to their bags, studying them. I have good clothes in there… but do I wanna bother going through them? Lathe chuckled as Ieva dragged him over, helping her open them. Apparently so. His eyebrows shot up when she simply pulled out her swimsuit, tilting his head in confusion. Why…? ........oh. “By the pool?” He smiled as she nodded, kissing her cheek. “Sounds great.” It does...

Ieva smirked, pulling out two bikinis. “The navy blue one…. Or the Royal blue one?” She asked holding the two colors up to her breasts, hiding her nudity for a moment. You pick… Which will make everyone else jealous of you?

“Hmm…” This is a hard question… “I wanna say Royal Blue…” Lathe moved to kiss the corner of her lips, smirking as his hand swept over her side. “It makes you look even hotter…” You’re too gorgeous...

Ieva smirked, pulling his head down to kiss him. I love this…. I’m so happy we get to be here together…. And understand each other….
Lathe melted into the kiss, holding her close. *I love this… we can learn to better understand what we want…* “Hm… so what swimsuit are you gonna make me wear?” He chuckled as she rifled in his suitcase, shoving a pair of dark red trunks at him. *Of course.* “Red, hm? You certainly seem to love the color….” He smirked. *You always seem to be all over me whenever I wear anything red.*

“I do… And that's why you're gonna wear it!” She giggled, slipping into her bikini and grabbing a coverup to slip on.

Lathe grinned, stepping into the trunks and grabbing a black tank top to keep on until they reached the pool. He was happy as Ieva seemed to immediately latch onto his arm, walking with her from the room. *This is going to be wonderful…*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

We’ve been here for a week now…. I think, I’m honestly not sure at all… I don’t really check the calendar much. I’ve gotten much tanner, to a point where I was almost mistaken as a local… And Lathe’s even getting tan from all the sun we’ve been getting. We also got a list of everything that Eren bought for us, and so far we’ve gone biking around the island, and we’ve gone scuba diving! It was really cool to see all the colorful fish swim around us, and we even got to see a sea turtle and swim with it. We went to the spa a few times and got full body massages, it was so nice and relaxing… I swear I feel more energetic than I have in years. We’ve gone at it like rabbits too, getting better with reading each other and making sure we have enough time for cuddles. She shifted in the lounge seat as she looked over the waves softly crashing down into the shallows. I’m debating…. Do I wanna go swimming in the ocean again? Pretty sure the last time I went in with Lathe we almost did it in the water…. She glanced over to where Lathe was relaxing and holding a bottle of water. *This cabana is really nice too. It gives us shade and privacy, but we can still have the sand under our feet. People have also come around and complimented me on how pretty I am, and how much I’m ‘glowing’ apparently…. I wonder if Lathe’s noticed anything…*

Lathe was content to listen to the waves, comfortable in his lounge chair, on the edge of drifting to sleep. He opened one eye when he heard Ieva shift, blushing as he saw the look she was giving him. *You look so happy…* He reached a hand out to her, smiling as she laced her fingers with his. “You look so happy…” Lathe looked over her, noting another look in her eyes. “...I could just stare at you forever… you're so pretty…” *You've just... you've been practically glowing all week... and it makes me so happy to see how happy you are.*

Ieva smiled broadly, her thumb running over Lathe’s knuckles as far as she could reach. “How long have we been here?” She asked softly as she shifted to sit on the edge of his lounge chair, looking down on him with happiness following all the way up to her eyes. *How long has it been? We’ve done everything at least once, and we get to do it all again! “Can we go snorkeling tomorrow?”*
“It's been seven days… today’s the eighth… and of course we can.” Lathe smiled, making room for her, smiling as she curled up next to him. He pulled her close, settling the water on the ground. *We still have so much time left...*

Ieva smirked, resting her head on his bare chest. “Eren was right, we definitely needed this…” *He’s been doing good with all the kids... “We should do something for him after this… Now that he knows what it means to be a Father…”* She pecked his skin gently, her eyes looking into Lathe’s as she pondered what they could possibly do.

Lathe hummed in agreement, thinking as Ieva cuddled into his chest. “Hmm…..” *What would Eren love the most...? “........do you think that Levi would be allowed to come home again?” Maybe…?*

Ieva shrugged. “I’m not quite sure how his commander would handle something like that for him or his squad… We should skype him and ask…. Make sure that he keeps it a secret from Eren if he can…” *A surprise is always the best type of reunion...*

Lathe nodded, thinking. “We do need to check, there's quite a chance he won't be able to. But if he does get to come home… he'll be able to see Mila… and he and Eren can be as intimate as they want...” *Eren would be so happy if he woke up one day and Levi was on top of him... and it wasn't any kind of dream.*

“Hmmm…. The last time they would’ve been intimate would be Christmas last year.” *That could be a gift for him.... “Oh... Did he wanna go touring?” I know he’s been working on some songs with you.... But I’m not completely sure...* She stayed curled up to his chest, taking in the scent of the seawater that lingered on him. *I could get used to this...*

Lathe nodded, thinking. “We were thinking about putting him on tour again… I’d done a lot of writing while he wasn't singing, and I’d put together quite a few songs to do… we rewrote a lot of them because he liked melodies with different lyrics or he wanted to slow them down or speed them up… but he has enough to publish two new albums at the moment… but he said I should pick a few of them for the project first before he went through them and picked some.” *There are quite a few long cutscenes that need to be blocked still, and there's plenty of ambient music to write and orchestrate... “...but Levi should come home for Christmas again if he can...” He should be with his new family for Mila’s first Christmas... she needs to meet her Daddy...*

Ieva nodded, moving to stretch against Lathe before curling up to him again. “They had his song on the radio the other day.... The one he put up on YouTube.... He must’ve put it up on iTunes or something.... The Despacito cover...” She smiled remembering how he’d asked her to help him with the pronunciations. *He did a really good job of it.*
Lathe nodded, smiling as she stretched like a cat on top of him. “Yeah, he did a really good cover of it… so he's definitely still on the radar… he should get a few more songs out and see that people are aware of him again and then go on tour… make sure his name is still floating around first.” I think he'd still have shit tons of people coming out to see him either way, though. “But I'll get on him about scheduling stuff. He'll probably want to take it to Germany as well.” I know he would.

Ieva smiled and nuzzled her head into his chest. “Hmm, our boy’s growing up right under our noses.” She smiled, her hand coming to trace senseless patterns into his tanned skin. “You’ve certainly gotten tan…” I like this… It makes you look thinner too… Not that I’d be complaining about your size. “Are we having dinner at the Chef’s Plate? Or are we having dinner on the beach?” She asked lazily, enjoying the body contact.

Lathe smiled, holding her close. “I like the tan… It's better than looking like a pale ghost… and that's a good question…” Lathe ran his hand over her back, playing with the bikini string for a moment. “Would you rather have me in my trunks and tank, or in a red dress shirt?” Your pick...

Ieva groaned. “Is both an option?” She asked as she shifted to straddle him leaning down to make out with him, enjoying the peace and quiet they had in a secluded cabana on the beach. It's so quiet… Hmm, I wonder if he’d do it here with me… And then after dinner?

Lathe smirked, melting as she kissed him. “Hm… that can be arranged…” He let his hands wander her sides as they kissed, shifting to kiss her neck. He tugged at the string of her bikini top, the fabric falling as he flipped them over, kissing down her chest, glad for the privacy of the cabana. It's so nice that we have this vacation together… we both needed it...

Ieva left out soft sounds, glad that were relatively far away from anyone and the sound of the waves would overpower any curious ears. “Fuck…. Lathe…. Hmm…. I want you to really suck me… Please… We can go slow tonight…” She murmured quietly as she spread her legs, her bikini bottoms drenched in her slick. I want it bad… I want it real bad...

Lathe chuckled quietly, kissing down lower as he untied her bikini bottoms. He slipped them off, his hands holding her hips as he kissed to her nether, his tongue slowly dragging up her folds as he gazed up at her. I haven't done this in a while.. every other time so far you've just been desperate for me to pound you.. not this time...

Ieva’s eyes widened as she gasped and moaned, wiggling in his arms. “L-Lathe… Shit…” She whined as his tongue stopped for only a moment, sighing as she felt the wet muscle trail up her folds. It feels really good… Mhmm…. His tongue feels really good…
Lathe smirked, his eyes shaded. “Hm… you refuse to let me do this all week…” He lapped at the rosy skin, hearing her moan. “…when it feels this good…?” He didn't need to hear an answer; he was happy enough to hear the sounds coming from her throat without Ieva’s permission. *You sound amazing...*

“L-Lathe… Oh fuck…” Her hands made their way down to her chest, squeezing her nipples and teasing them harshly. *Oh my god ... It feels like I’m in heaven...* Ieva let her legs widen a bit to give him better access, her heels coming up to wrap around his back. *Fuck...*

Lathe looked up as she teased herself, his hands sliding up her stomach to her chest, slowing her down and teasing them himself, rolling the buds in his fingers. “Don’t worry, love…” He sucked at her clit. “We have all afternoon, and I wanna slowly coax an orgasm out of you for once…” *I wanna be gentle...* Lathe’s mind flitted around as he lapped at her folds, thinking as he drew out their foreplay. *She always loves this so much, with it just being me.... I wonder if she’d be okay with.... but she might not want to get any involved... but... I think she’d love it.... hm....*

Ieva was a wanton mess as Lathe’s lips and fingers teased her. “F-Fuck… Lathe… Baby....” She felt her toes curl up a bit as Lathe’s teeth grazed her clit by accident. Her head threw itself back from the jolt of pleasure. *Oh my god... I love this so much... But I don’t wanna be teased....* She felt the heat slowly starting to creep into her abdomen. *I’m so sensitive ... I’ll be cumming quicker than he can think about it...*

Lathe teased her clit with his tongue before latching on again, sucking roughly. *I know how much you loved sucking on it hard...* He looked up as she trembled, his hands rubbing all over her. “Feeling good, babe?” *You certainly look like it...* He continued as she simply let out a strangled moan, hearing her cry out his name and feeling her shake in his hands, feeling her juices run over his chin. *...she's already cumming?* Lathe pulled back and rubbed her with vigor as she came, prolonging the bliss as she writhed under him. He kissed her stomach as she melted into a glowing puddle, lapping up her juices before kissing back up her chest. “...sensitive... hm?” Lathe smirked as she flushed, kissing the underside of her jaw. “It’s okay, love...” *There’s plenty of time to do this more...*

Ieva groaned as she came down from her high of bliss. *Fuck.... “Hmm.... That felt really good...”* She purred as he kissed her and his hands went down to her sides. *Is he gonna continue? I really want him... All of him...* She squirmed her hips, trying to get him to at least understand she wanted him badly. *Take those trunks off... I want you...*

He smirked as she still wiggles her hips while staring up at him, his thumb brushing over the lip caught in her teeth. “Hmm... more?” He watched her nod, slipping his trunks off, revealing his nether. “More sounds wonderful...” He slid his hands up and down her sides, helping her relax and
come down from her high, easing her legs back open. He nipped at her neck as he sunk into her heat, both of them groaning at the sensation. So warm... so slick...

Ieva let out a loud moan as she felt Lathe sink into her. “Fuck… Lathe…” She felt her insides quiver as he plunged into her heat. She wiggled her hips, grinding down on him and smirking as she got him to moan loudly. Oh fuck yes… Moan for me… Her hands came up to his shoulders, her nails clawing at his back, leaving small marks where there was skin and not a tank top. Fuck you’re so hot….

Lathe whimpered as she ground her hips onto his, wincing as he felt her nails dig into his shoulders. “C-Careful, babe…” He leaned down to kiss her, slowing their pace. It's okay… Lathe drew near completely out of her, plunging back into her heat and starting a steady pace, grinding deeply into her, whimpering as he did so. So perfect...

Ieva whimpered as well, a soft groan leaving her as she tilted her head to the side to breathe. Fuck... So hot.... It's warm too... She let her nails ease up on his skin as she closed her eyes and let her lips fall open in soft cries of bliss. “Oh my god… Lathe… T-there…” It had not taken long for Lathe to find her overly sensitive area, a soft whimper leaving her throat once again without her consent.

Lathe steadily thrust onto that one spot that was driving Ieva insane, nipping at her neck roughly. “You sound so beautiful, babe… please, let me hear you…” Don't try to hold them back… His hands played with her nipples, grinding into her. I love this....

Ieva let out a sinful whine as she clung to Lathe above her. Her whole body shook as she felt him thrust into her coveted area. “L-Lathe….” She moaned out his name, feeling the warm surround her and her coil starting to tighten. Fuck... I’m gonna cum again...

Lathe felt her start to tighten around him, warmth pooling in him as well. “I-Ieva… oh god, baby…” Lathe started to pound into her, feeling hot. “Oh god… I'm gonna cum....” I wanna cum so badly… He whimpered, his hands speeding up their teasing until he was as rough as she had been. So good...

Ieva nodded, her hands coming to tangle in his hair. “Cum inside… please... ” She begged to him as she was pounded into him.

Lathe shuddered as she spoke, bringing one of her legs up over his shoulder, pounding into her heat. “Oh… oh Ieva…” He shuddered, still pounding her as he came, crying out in bliss. So fucking good… I love this...
Ieva let out a loud cry as she let the sensations overtake her being. “LATHE!” She screamed out his name in bliss as she clung to him. *Oh my god…. That was amazing*… She could feel him inside, warmth spilling between the two of them, unable to hold it all inside, letting her head fall back in bliss, trying to catch her breath.

Lathe cradled her close, cleaning them with his tongue before curling up around her protectively, a towel over them to keep them warm. *Mine…*

The next few days passed peacefully, the both of them spending much of their time entwined. Lathe was warm when he woke up with only a few days left on their trip, curled in the blanket. *Warm…* He reached for his other, his eyes cracking open as he was met with a warm spot and not a wife. *Huh?* He picked his head up as he heard something, his gut sinking as he heard retching in the bathroom. *She's sick…?* Lathe got out of bed, looking to the clock. *Four AM…. *Lathe remembered something, thinking as he moved to the bathroom. …*this happened after we were married… but, she's not… .....is she? *We've been going at it like rabbits*… “Ieva? Are you okay?” He knocked on the doorframe, his voice one of worry.

Ieva shook her head, prompting another spew of vomit to erupt from her. *Fuck… I can't stop…* “N-No…. I don’t think it was what I ate… I had it before….?” Ieva froze, looking towards where she kept boxes of feminine products, the gears starting to turn in her head. *Wait… “What day is it?”* *Oh my god… Did I miss my period? Have we been here that long already?*

“I think it's around the eighteenth… we have three days left here…” Lathe thought, looking to where she looked, then looking back to her. “...do you think…?” ............*are you really …?*

Ieva was quiet for a moment. “I missed my period…. For a week without even realizing it… I think I might be…” Her face lit up at the realization, though it was quickly taken away by another bout of nausea causing her to hurl once more. *Oh my god! I'm pregnant!*

Lathe’s face lit up, grinning and nearly bouncing on his toes with happiness. *You're… you're pregnant …* He winced as she vomited again, kneeling next to her and rubbing her back. He handed her a cup of water as she went for a few minutes without vomiting to wash out her mouth. *...oh my god…* He let one hand move from her side, brushing over her stomach soothingly. ....*you have a new tiny life inside of you now…. oh my god…*

Ieva couldn’t help but smile as Lathe moved to her side. “You’ll have to deal with me being pregnant all the time again… Sore feet, sore back…. sore everything…” She murmured to him and kissed his cheek, setting her hand on top of his, enjoying the presence of the hand on her stomach. *I can’t believe it! This vacation… We must’ve done it here… because we didn’t have sex much*
before we came here… “Eren’s vacation…. We’ll have to take this more often if we want more kids… definitely did the trick.” She chuckled, a happy smile on her face.

Lathe smiled, nuzzling into her neck. “Hm, certainly worked… good food, a big bed, you, and nothing but time… I could get used to it…” Lathe chuckled, his free hand holding her close. “And I'm sure plenty of time in the hot tub and plenty of back rubs will do the trick… as long as you stop resisting every time I try to help you with something…” His fingers splayed over her stomach. *I wanna keep this one… I want a tiny human of our own to fuss over….*

Ieva smiled and nodded, feeling safe in his hold. “Thank you… for this… for everything… I know you’ll be a great father.” She leaned in to kiss his lips chastely, not wanting him to taste the bitter aftertaste of her bile. “I can’t wait to tell Eren he’s finally gonna be an older brother… and that Mila’s gonna have an aunt or an uncle aside from Tucker and Jake… and James at this point.” She smiled and kissed his chin leaning her head against his chest, content.

Lathe smiled, cradling her close. “They're going to have a big family that loves them… and I'm gonna be the best Dad that I can be.” ..........*is your work gonna stay the same now? I know you’re not as active as you used to be… you probably are. I just... I don't want the baby hurt... “You're gonna be a wonderful Mom...” I'm sure of it.*

Chapter End Notes

Please Comment
**Chapter 94: Side Story 9: Lathe and Ieva (Vacation of Dreams)**

Chapter Summary

So... um... I made a goof... this was supposed to be around the middle of the last chapter... but it's before the whole pregnancy thing just so you all know!

Lathe stepped from their rental car, the bag hanging on his arm inconspicuous. *Hopefully she’ll be okay with all of this... I think she won't kill me two seconds in, at least...* Lathe was careful to stow the bag out of sight when he got back to their room, getting changed when he looked to the clock. *We agreed to go to the restaurant for dinner...* Lathe finished dressed in a nice green shirt and dark slacks, going to check on Ieva at the bathroom mirror. He couldn't help but feel nervous when he saw her, knowing all too well the plans he had for them later that night. *It's gonna go horribly... but she might like it... but what if she doesn't?*

Ieva raised an eyebrow as she was putting on her make up in the mirror. “What are you so jittery about?” I don’t get it? We’re just going out for dinner.... What gives?

Lathe straightened up, trying to give her an easy smile. “Sorry- it's nothing, babe.” *Quick- change the subject.* He looked her over, smirking as he saw her choice of dress- a long midnight blue gown. His arms wrapped around her middle, careful not to jostle her as she put on her makeup, his hand running up and down her side. “Ieva, you look **gorgeous** …” *You always are... but hot damn...*

Ieva smirked, looking over her shoulder as she started to put everything away. “Hmm, as opposed to any other night?” *Is that how you see it?* She chuckled as he grew flustered, smirking, standing in her tippy toes to kiss his lips. *God, I could watch him all day...*

He gaped, not knowing how to respond, grateful that she was joking and relaxing as she kissed him. He sucked on her bottom lips for a moment before kissing her jaw, one arm still around her middle. “You ready, Hon?”

Ieva nodded, holding onto his shirt as he kissed across her jaw. “Y-Yeah.” She gasped out, her entire face flushed. *Yeah... I’m ready to go down to eat...*

Lathe grinned, going down to the restaurant with her, so happy to have her hanging on his arm. *She's so wonderful...* Dinner was peaceful, both of them blushing darkly every time they glanced up to the other. Lathe had a hand around her waist as they made their way back to their room a
while later, immediately turning to her when the door was shut, gently pressing her to it. “Ieva, there's something I need to ask you… I wanna make sure you're okay with this.” He paused for a moment, gently cupping her jaw, tilting it up to look at him. His eyes grew dark, his voice soft and low. “…Will you be my slave for tonight?” I wanna do so many things to you… only if you'll let me.

Ieva was quiet for a moment in pure shock. He wants me…. To be a slave for him? Of course.... She nodded as she bit her lip, looking down submissively. “M-Master… Can I take my dress off… Please?” Her voice quiet and submissive as she kept her head down.

Lathe smirked, softly brushing his lips to her cheek. You can do this. “You may…” He caught her chin before she could move, his voice gentle in her ear. “In case you need me to stop anything, the word is Vase.” He kissed her ear before he let her go, moving to acquire the bag from the nightstand and setting it on the table. He drew three things from it- a small candle, a lighter, and a riding crop, setting the last item aside for a moment. He lit the candle, leaving it on the table and taking the crop with him as he sat on the edge of the bed. He looked up to Ieva, seeing her standing by the door in just her bra and panties, her dress pooled around her feet. She's so beautiful… “Come here, slave.” He nearly winced, the word feeling wrong on his lips. You can do this. ...I'll get used to it... He held a hand out for her as she walked over, pulling her close to straddle his lap, his one hand running over her back, the other still holding the crop. “My little slave.... I hope you remember how to please your Master…” His voice was syrupy, a dark little smile on his lips. “All you have to do is exactly what I say, and I allow you to drown in pleasure... but, if you don't… the consequences may be... harsh...” He dragged the leather end of the crop over the back of a thigh, making her shiver. "Unless, of course, you want me to… or we can skip to the fun part..." I wanna know what you pick...

Ieva bit her lip, her eyes absolutely feral. “I’ve been a bad girl, Master…. You should punish me first…” Her voice was teasing and innocent as she leaned back a bit further to give him a better view of her body.

Lathe looked over her, feeling a glare settle on his face, finding the right character. “Hm, such a little vixen...” Lathe shooed her off of him, moving and tugging her to the bed by herself. “Kneel on the bed, legs apart, head on the sheets… I need to make sure my slave doesn't even think about stepping a toe out of line…” ...this is gonna be fun.

Ieva immediately took the command in stride, clambering on the bed. She spread her knees apart, bending down and placing her head on the sheets. I wonder what he’s gonna do… I wonder if he’s really gonna be a master...
Lathe paced behind her as she got in position, eyeing her legs with distaste for a moment. He tapped her thigh sharply with the crop, his tone firm. “Further apart.” He looked satisfied when she obeyed immediately, studying her form. ...I like this. The leather of the crop slid over her ass, his tone questioning. “Are you going to obey me, slave?”

Ieva gasped as he tapped her with the crop, enjoying the small sting it left her with. She spread her legs further for him, watching him eye her like a piece of meat. Oh... Yes, I like that look... She nodded hurriedly at his question. “Yes, Master...” I can play innocent for right now...

He gave her a ass a sharp tap, just enough to sting, hearing her gasp at it. “Oh please, it can't hurt that much.” Another sharp tap, and she was silent except for a tiny whimper. “Much better.” He ran the crop down one thigh teasingly, watching her tense. “Are you going to do what I say without questioning me?”

Ieva’s body tensed as she grabbed onto the sheets underneath her. He doesn’t want me to do much more than whimper.... Hmm.... “Yes, Master...” Her voice was small with her head smashed into the bed sheets. I can do that. She shuddered as she felt the now warm leather glide over her skin, as if looking for the perfect place to strike.

Lathe looked her over, the crop snapping on the inside of her thigh, close to her hips. It ran over the area, inspecting. “Will you only cum when I tell you to?”

Ieva was quiet for a moment, shivering from the anticipation of the crop. “M-Master.... What if I’m too sensitive?” What if I can’t hold it... I could barely hold back at all while you were doing anything to me on the beach the other day... Her eyes looked worriedly back at Lathe. I don’t know if I’ll be able to hold out...

Lathe snapped her other thigh near her hips, thinking. “...let me put it this way... if you're about to cum, and you tell me, I'll stop only until I can build you back up again... but if you don't...” He snapped her halfway down one thigh. “The punishment might not be too nice.... But don't worry... I'll take my time coaxing your release out of you... understand that, slave?”

Ieva’s eyes widened as he spoke. “Y-Yes, Master...” She murmured quietly as her whole body shuddered from the anticipation. Oh my god.... What’s he going to do to me?

Lathe smirked, snapping the crop to her other thigh. “Very good. And every time you moan, and when I let you cum, won't you be calling for me ?”
“Of course, Master….” Ieva could feel her heart beating over a mile a minute, racing as Lathe took over. He’s actually being dominant… Oh I am going to enjoy this…

Lathe snapped against the back of one thigh, looking her over as she nearly trembled. “And you understand that if you step out of line, I won’t be so gentle… and if you seriously disobey me… I may not have much mercy… you understand, slave?”

Ieva swallowed thickly, nodding for only a moment before she shifted to get comfortable, her legs a bit wider than before and her ass in the air. “Yes, Master.” Her small reply came only a few seconds later. What’s he gonna do to me first?

Lathe gave her one last smack with the crop, moving over to her, his hand barely brushing over her skin as he traced up and down the inside of one thigh. “Very good.” He leaned the crop against the side of the bed, watching her. “On your back, arms out and legs apart.”

Ieva was quick to shift, rolling over and situating herself on their large bed. She laid down on her back, spreading her legs and arms out as Lathe asked. Her eyes were full of curiosity, not daring to move as she watched him. Where’s he going? What’s he getting?

Lathe slowly paced to one side of the bed, looking her over like a piece of meat. “Now, slave, I’m sure you know what this is for…” Lathe picked up the candle, looking to her for a moment. “…do you?”

Ieva looked to the candle, swallowing thickly once again before nodding. I still have my bra and panties on, and I swear to god if you ruin the nice pair with wax I will kill you in your sleep… “Yes, Master.” Her voice was devoid of emotion as she watched him with her eyes, trying to see what he’d do with the wax and where on her.

Lathe smirked, seeing that look in her eyes. “Don’t worry about your lingerie… in fact, take the top off, won’t you?” I don't wanna ruin that pair… it's my favorite.

Ieva froze for a moment, unsure if she was allowed to move to take it off. She shifted to sit up, bringing her arms to her backside, unclipping the straps behind her and shrugging it off. She laid it down beside her before returning to her laid out position. I had to move to get it off… But will he be mad?

Lathe noticed her hesitate, picking up the crop and slowly dragging it up her side. “Good… and I
know I said not to move… but if I order you to do something and two orders contradict….” He brushed the side of one mound, though the leather left her without snapping at her. “The last thing I said goes. **Very** good.” He studied her. “Now, my little slave, I love seeing you so spread out for me… I don't want to have to tie you up… just keep your arms and legs in place….” He knelt on the bed, holding the candle. “And I'll take care of the rest, hm?”

Ieva nodded subtly before thinking that he might want her to verbally communicate her approval. “Yes, Master.” She watched him kneel, holding the candle above her. *Is it going to hurt? I've never really played with wax before…*

Lathe could see her uncertainty, the crop slowly running up and down the inside of her thigh, not snapping at her. “I appreciate hearing you, slave… if I ask you something, I expect to hear back from you… and if you have anything to say, address me and I’ll listen. I’m a good Master… I want to take care of my slave…” His voice was dark and too sweet, the candle hovering over her chest. A single drop of wax fell onto her mound, close to her nipple, yet not quite there. *Let's see what you sound like…*

Ieva let out a low gasp as Lathe let the wax drip, feeling a shudder run through her body from the few moments of warmth. It was over quickly, the wax beginning to cool and harden in a moment, which led to a sensation she’d never felt before. *Damn…. Maybe I really like this… Oh geez… But what if this is a one time thing? What if he'll never do this again with me?*

Lathe smirked as he watched the pleasures expression flit over her face. “You like it, hm, slave?” He waited for her response, letting wax slowly trail around her rosy nipple in a thin stream.

Ieva struggled to keep her legs apart as the sensations went right to her crotch. She could feel herself getting wetter as the wax overtook her nipple. The action elicited a loud moan from her throat, her body humming with pleasure. “Y-Yes Master…” *It does feel really good…*

Lathe smirked, letting the stream trail over her nipple, coating it with the hot wax. “Good…” He still let the crop run up and down her thigh, seeing them slowly shaking as she moaned. He saw one foot inch closer for a moment, very gently tapping the soft flesh, not even enough to sting. “Apart, slave.”

Ieva whimpered for only a second before she struggled to open her shaking thighs. *Fuck… This is hard to do…* She let out a whine when he had completely covered her nipple in wax, which made it impossible to feel the hot wax cooling on her skin. *I want more.*

He watched her heels dig into the sheets, staying open. “Good…” He slowly let the wax trail
across her mound to her other bud, slowly surrounding it with wax. *You certainly seem to love this*… “Does this feel **good**?” He heard a breathless moan and stutters in response, chuckling quietly. “**Tell** me how it feels, slave.” *I'll let the lack of English slide.*

Ieva let out another high-pitched cry as Lathe lathered her other nipple. “I-It feels **really** good, M-Master.” Her body was shaking from the restraint she had on her legs. *I can’t close them… I need to keep them open…*

Lathe layered the bud with wax, smirking as she let out louder moans. “**Gorgeous**…” Lathe soon set aside the candle when they were coated to his approval, his hand going to her first bud, the wax having cooled over her chest. He lightly rubbed at it, slowly peeling the cool wax off of her. He discarded the wax onto the table, slowly massaging her bud with his fingers. “Do you want more, slave?” *You certainly look like you would…*

Ieva struggled to keep her body in check, her heels digging into the mattress, and thighs shaking. *Oh god… If he does it again… I won’t be able to keep my legs apart… “C-Can we do something else Master?”* She wanted to pull her thighs together and hide the fact that she was dripping wet with so little stimulation. *My panties are soaked… I wouldn’t be surprised if the bed underneath me is soaked too…*

Lathe smirked, dragging the crop over a shaking thigh, giving it another gentle tap. “**You’re shaking, slave**…” He watched her slowly calm as he blew out the candle and peel the wax away. She was still panting when he peeled the last of the wax away from her buds, setting the crop to lean against the bed, sweeping the wax into one hand. “**Stay, slave. Don’t move an inch.**” Lathe’s tone left no room for argument, going to the bathroom and discarding the wax, getting a damp washcloth. He came back, smirking as he saw her still spread open for him, going to gently clean her chest, his head dipping to suck on one cleaned bud as he took care of the other. He smirked as he heard her whimper, kissing the bud before teasing the other for a moment. He lapped at it for a moment, leaving to get rid of the washcloth. He rummaged in the bag when he came back, a few other choice things in the bag. “...**you want something else, slave? You have been a very good slave for me so far… should I let you choose? Or maybe…**” Lathe drew out a black silk blindfold, smiling dangerously to her. “...**make it a surprise?**”

Ieva’s eyes widened as she saw the blindfold. “Can…. Can it be a surprise M-Master?” Her voice was full of pleasure as she looked to the large black bag he had. *Is that why he was gone so long…? She shuddered as Lathe came closer to her. He’s gonna put it on…*

Lathe stalked over to the bed, one hand gently cupping her jaw, studying her face. “**Sit up, won't you?**” His voice was still dark as he spoke, his words deep and dangerously sweet. He smirked as she obeyed, glancing to her legs as she pulled them closer to sit, and kept them there. “**Did I say you could bring your legs together, slave? Do I have to use the crop to get you to behave? Surely I**
don’t have to bruise that beautiful skin...” He tied the blindfold on, chuckling as she immediately spread them again for him. “**Much** better.”

Ieva kept her legs spread apart, mindful that she was now blindfolded and couldn’t read Lathe’s expression. *Oh my god, this makes everything feel so much better.* She put her arms behind her to hold herself up as she sat waiting for Lathe. *I wonder what he’s gonna do?*

Lathe softly nipped her neck, slipping from the bed. “Hm… I suppose you can sit like that… but if you want to lay down, you may…” Lathe went through the bag again, opening a small box and taking out a small gold colored bullet and a small tube. “…I’d recommend it.” *She’ll love this…* Lathe moved to the bed, settling between Ieva’s legs. He uncapped the small tube, swiping up some of the gel with his finger. One hand ran over her stomach, making his presence known as he swiped the gel over her rosy buds, already feeling the tingle on his finger, wiping the rest off on the sheets. *That should feel good…* His hands slipped down her thighs to bring them together, slowly dragging her soaked panties down her legs and dropping them on the floor out of the way. He spread her legs again and moved one hand to part her folds with a thumb, slowly rubbing her clit in small circles. His other hand ran over her thigh, watching her reaction.

Ieva had laid down as per Lathe’s recommendation. She shivered as Lathe spread the cool gel over both of her nipples. *What the hell?* When she felt the tingly sensation start to form she sucked in a ragged breath. *Oh my god… it feels so good …* “M-Master…” She could barely keep herself from arching her back as she felt Lathe’s thumb rub against her clit in slow circles. “Oh… Oh fuck…. Ngh…”

Lathe smirked, his eyes raking over her body. “…you like it?” He chuckled as she let out another gasping moan, picking up the small gold bullet with one hand, still running circles into her clit. “I want to hear **exactly** how this feels…” Lathe reached for the small remote and turned the bullet onto its lowest mode, vibrating in his hand. His hand left her clit for a moment, only to spread her folds, the bullet pressing against her clit, humming. *This should get quite a reaction...*

Ieva let out a loud gasp her legs closing up a bit and her back arching though she struggled to push apart her legs once again. *Oh my god… If feels heavenly.* She let loud moans rip from her throat, enjoying the sensations that got warmth to pool all over her. *It feels so good...*

Lathe reached the hand not holding the bullet to one of her thighs, his thumb rubbing over the softer flesh of the inside. “Are you keeping these legs apart for me, slave? Or do I need to tie you down….?” He trailed off, looking over her with that same calculating gaze. *I'd love to see you bound underneath me...*

Ieva was quiet as she thought about it, the pleasure forcing her thighs closed. “T-Tie me up...
Master, please…” She begged him as her back arched off the mattress once again. *I want it…. I don’t wanna have to worry about my legs being open…*

Lathe smirked, turning the bullet off, setting it out of the way. He took his sweet time going back to the bag, getting out two long ties. He soon had her ankles tied, the length going over the edge, under the bed and up again, letting him spread them as wide as he wanted. The same for her arms, which were kept perfectly outstretched. *I wonder if you're normally like this…? Well, better question. Would you enjoy this becoming a part of normal sex? ...I have no idea.*

Ieva gasped as Lathe tied her down to the bed, eagerly waiting for his attention to return to her. She was confused when his touch didn’t come back to her. “Master?” Where’d you go? She tugged against the rope, trying to see what room she had, quickly realizing that Lathe had tied her down tightly. Her breath hitched as the bed creaked quietly, Lathe’s weight causing it to dip. *I almost feel scared… But I shouldn’t... It’ll feel good... I know it will…*

Lathe knelt between her legs once more, bending down and licking a single strip up her rosy folds, tonguing her entrance, listening to her shaky moans. He came up, his hands running over her thighs. “Remember, slave, you're not allowed to cum just yet… so if you're really close, you tell me, and I'll bring you back down. Understand? I don't want to have to cover these pretty thighs in bruises…”

Ieva nodded as she gasped, trying to find the strength to use her words. “Y-Yes Master.” She groaned with pleasure as Lathe’s tongue returned to her folds, licking up and down them. *Shit, I’m not gonna last very long... It feels so good... I can feel the warmth building already...*

Lathe tasted her slick, kissing her rosy flesh. He reached again for the small gold bullet and the remote, holding the small toy to her slick clit and turning it on, just a bit higher than the lowest setting. *I wanna see how long you last...*

Ieva’s eyes widened under the blindfold, her back arching as much as it could. “O-Oh…. Oh fuck… **Master ….** Oh my god… It feels so **good** ...”

Lathe smirked, leaning down as he held the bullet, his tongue gently lapping at her folds as it still vibrated against her clit. “Do you feel **good** , slave?”

Ieva nodded. “Y-Yes Master… I feel really good.” Her voice was high as her body shook. *It feels really good. She could feel her body warming up and the coil beginning to tighten. “M- **Master** …” I don’t wanna cum...*
Lathe gazed up to her, quirking one eyebrow. “Are you thinking of cumming, slave?” He ran one hand over a trembling thigh. “You **know** you're not allowed to… should I stop?”

“Y-Yes…” She whined as she arched her back. *Oh my god… It feels really good, this should be illegal with how good it feels.* She whined more when he didn’t take the bullet off fast enough. “Master!” *I won’t be able to hold it.*

Lathe took the bullet away, nearly growling as her pants still increased in pitch. “Don't you **dare**, slave.” *You can hold off.*

Ieva let out a cry as the bullet was finally taken away, though she felt herself teetering on the sweet edge of bliss. She whined as she felt her heat start to recede a bit, pulling her away from the edge. *Fuck… I wanna be able to cum… this is torturous.* She let herself pant as she calmed down, her breathing slowly evening out.

Lathe let her be as she slowly came down from her high, studying one of the last two toys he had gotten. He pulled it out, waiting for her to calm down and for her breathing to steady before he spoke. “You've been such an obedient slave… you get to pick one last thing….” His voice deepened, looking over her. “…the thing that makes you cum…” He ambled over, one hand trailing over the soft flesh near her nether. “Either we can try a new toy… or I let you have my cock… your choice.” *I wonder which you'll want…?*

Ieva took in a deep breath, closing her eyes to think. *I wonder… “Can I have both Master?”* She made sure her voice was full of innocence as she spoke, her head tilted towards where she felt the bed dip with weight. *I can’t tell where he is…*

“Not at the same time…” He studied the rabbit vibrator in hand, looking her over as he knelt between her legs again. “But yes… but which do you want first?” *Pick.*

Ieva tried to squirm as she felt his weight shift to between her outstretched legs, suddenly feeling very exposed. “T-The toy master… Please…” *What did you get me?*

Lathe smirked, reaching for the lube and coating the toy. “As you wish, slave…. I'm sure you’ll love it…” He gently parted her folds, nudging her entrance with the tip and slowly slipping it into her heat, a small vibrator meeting her clit. “Can you guess what I got you…?” *I haven't turned it on just yet…*
Ieva gasped as she felt the toy fill up her needy hole. Oh my god... It’s big... What’s it going to do? “D-Did you get m-me a vibrator Master?” Her voice was weak, unsure of what to make of the sexual toy.

“Not exactly…” He smirked, flicking a switch and turning it on. He heard it begin to hum and vibrate, watching Ieva’s shocked and pleased expression.

Ieva’s body jolted, straining against the restraints. Oh my god... It’s moving … She could feel the base of the toy beginning to move inside of her and her clit was exposed to yet another vibrating piece. Oh fuck... I’m not gonna be able to last with this…

Lathe grinned as she let out a choked moan, followed by more and more gasping breaths. “…do you like it, slave? Do you want a bit more?” He turned it up a notch in intensity, watching her writhe. Gorgeous...

“Ngh…. M-Master…” She moaned out his name, her toes curling and heels digging into the mattress as far as possible. Oh my god... It feels so good...

Lathe looked over her entire being, keeping the toy in place as his hand ran over her. “Do you want to cum like this, slave? I could give you even more…” Another click, and it was one step from the highest setting. “…if you don't want it to stop… but why would you want to if you're having so much fun?” Lathe was trying to convince her, smirking. I know it must feel so much better than just me...

Ieva’s moans were loud throughout the room. “Oh my god… M-Master… Please, don’t stop…” She begged, trying to move her hips back onto the toy. It feels.... Better than it's ever felt before... Holy shit... It’s so good...

Lathe gently pushed the toy deeper, turning it up to its highest setting. “Such a good slave for Master…..” His voice was dripping with dark affection, caressing her shaking thighs. “Slave…?” He heard her moans get higher and higher, smirking, knowing she was just on the edge. “ Cum for me.”

Ieva felt herself finally being pulled over the edge, her body pulled into over drive. She felt like she was on fire as her body shook, and more juices leaked from her, to a point where the vibrator was pushed out of her folds to drop on the sheets below. Her breathing was heavy, and her intake sharp as she basked in the glow of her orgasm. ......... I have no words for how good that felt... I loved
She was panting as her body slowly came down from her high, her juices still dripping from her entrance and soaking the sheets under her. *Fuck…*

Lathe smirked as she cried out, moving the toy away and switching it off as she basked in her glow, clambering over her and running his hands all over her body soothingly. “So perfect…” He kissed the spot over her heart tenderly, moving to untie her from her bounds. He kissed up her arms as he untied her wrists, down her legs as he did her ankles. When she was free he cupped her jaw, kissing her before untying the blindfold. He gazed at her with soft eyes, smiling faintly. “How was it, love?” *I hope it was good…*

Ieva looked into Lathe’s eyes, her eyes adding to the completely wrecked look she had on her face. Her eyes were hazy from lust and her face was completely flushed. “It was really good… Master…” *I don’t know if I should go back to calling you Lathe yet. She didn’t move, intent on following orders until she knew she was released.*

Lathe chuckled, his thumb brushing her cheek tenderly. “You don’t have to call me Master anymore…” Lathe softly kissed her cheek, smiling. “And that’s a wonderful thing to hear…” He slid his hands under her thighs, bringing her with him as he moved off the bed to stand, carrying her to the jacuzzi. “Let me take care of you, Hon…” *I wanna treat you right.* He very carefully set her in the warm water, turning on the jets before stripping, feeling his own length still aching from the sight of her writhing. *She’s so beautiful… I wonder if she’d be up to another round…?*

Ieva groaned as she was set in the two person jacuzzi, enjoying the warmth of the water. She sighed in relief when the jets were turned on, the tension she didn’t know she had leaving her body. *Oh my god… It feels so nice…* She closed her eyes as she let the water relax her, taking in the scent of the bath salts and oils he had used.

Lathe stepped in after her, his still hard length standing proud when he sank into the water, going to gather Ieva into his arms. He kept her close to his chest, and he knew she could surely feel his length in her folds. “Ieva…” His lips brushed her neck. “…are you up for another round?” *Please…?*

Ieva whimpered as he pulled her close, soon relaxing into Lathe’s arms. She shuddered as she felt his length brush against her slippery folds. *Oh shit… He’s hard…* Her skin filled with goosebumps as she felt his lips against her neck. She gasped, her arms slowly coming to wrap around his shoulders. “Mmmhmm… I did ask for both.” She murmured, sounding out of breath as Lathe kissed at her supple flesh.

Lathe smiled faintly, shifting to sit with her in his lap, the water making it easier to lift her up. He held her close to him as she sunk onto his length, sighing deeply with relief as their hips met, his aching cock finally getting attention. “You’re so warm…” Lathe held her hips with a firm grip,
Ieva let out a high pitched gasp, her whole body shaking against Lathe. *Oh my god… It feels so good.* “Hmm, Lathe…. So big…. I feel so full…. ” She shifted her hips down on him, gasping as he slid against her bundle of nerves. *Oh fuck…*

Lathe groaned into her chest, lifting her and letting her slip back down. “It feels so good… I was aching the entire time… watching you moan and writhe with everything I did to you… so beautiful…” He whimpered as they started a steady pace, slowly speeding up as he ached for release. *I wanna cum so badly…*

Ieva’s arms tightened around his shoulders, keeping him close. *I want you. “Lathe… Please …”* She begged him as she whimpered in his ear. *I wanna cum… Even though I just came, I want you to make me cum again.*

Lathe held her to his chest tightly, whimpering as they sped up, both of their quiet moans filling the room along with the sound of flowing water. *Feels good… “A-Ah… Ieva… you feel so…”* He whined into her neck. “So good… so perfect…” His grip on her tightened, coming close to the edge very quickly. “I-I'm gonna cum…” *I really wanna cum…*

Ieva moaned loudly, her breath hitching as she let Lathe move her around as he pleased. “O-Oh my god… Lathe… I’m gonna cum too.” She whined as he thrusted right onto her sweet spot, moans leaving her throat without her permission. Her nails bit into Lathe’s shoulders, making small scratched as she finally reached her climax and cried out in bliss. *Holy shit… I came… I came again… oh my god…* She slumped down onto Lathe as he kept pounding her through bliss. “L-Lathe…” *Fuck I’m sensitive…*

Lathe let out a muffled cry into her neck, releasing deep inside her, growing lax and feeling bliss wash over him. *So good…* He felt every ounce of tension drain out of him in the hot water in the glow of release, Ieva cradled in his arms. *Mine.*
Lathe woke up warm and sleepy, Ieva’s back flush with his front, a hand splayed over her growing stomach. *Tiny life…* Lathe blinked, glancing to the clock on the wall. *It's early... just enough time for cuddles...* Lathe softly pecked her shoulder blade, his light hips to her neck causing her to stir.  

*There haven’t been any complications to speak of- only because terrible morning sickness and constant aches and random cravings are normal.* Lathe gently rubbed her bare stomach, smiling faintly. *Tiny life…. there's been plenty of tiny and not-so-tiny life while we were gone… Maisie had more puppies, so Blake at some point apparently got some action… Mila’s gained a few pounds. She’s a healthy, happy baby who giggles at everything and she’s just too cute… and Eren got more horses shipped from Germany. Three of them: Gretchen, a cherry bay mare; Tristan, a black gelding; and Margie, a black mare. They’re very well trained and broken, like Luna and Charlie, and because of that Eren has volunteered to host a horse riding camp for the last week of August. Even Arya is big enough now to hold a small person- Im sure Rico is now aware of that. He chuckled as he thought about the small boys playing in the field, only Rico brave enough to let Eren set him on Arya… who promptly broke away and attempted to escape. I'm surprised he held on so well when she started trotting away. I'm proud of him. Lathe let his mind drift, feeling leva’s hand cover the one on her tummy. Eren had done a wonderful job taking care of everyone, and James gave him a lot of help, but Eren really ran the whole show. And it's pretty much stayed that way a bit while we've been home. Eren does a lot more than I used to let him do. And soon enough, I'll really be a lot busier than normal. The center just down the street finished construction early due to the beautiful weather. They have to paint all the walls, then put furnishings in place, and then they save the fun part for us. Hannah, Sharon, Eren and I all take a brush to the walls after that and paint on quotes and fancy designs. We have quite a few cartoon characters and scenes already thought out. All the library books have been shipping in, all the computers need to get hooked up, we need to find a kitchen staff, a general lunch monitor and free time staff so that none of the kids get themselves killed, and a maintenance/janitor person… and I talked to Mike, he's gonna check the whole thing out when it's done and see if he’d be okay with informing the teachers that this is going on and that they could host extra classes and be paid more per class… we’ll still have to see about getting the kids credits for classes if stuff happens over the summer… but it's wonderful. A place for kids to go to hang out after school, have snacks and dinner, study, go to extra classes either academic or not… a place to be after school if they have nowhere else they can or want to go. A basketball court is being paved, so is one for tennis, the soccer field is being staked and will be drawn out later… but... you can just go there for free... and stay all day if you wanted, and be fed breakfast, lunch and dinner, and read books and play games and learn how to do stuff or to do better in math or whatever class you need help in, and it's just…. it's perfect. And because I own the land all up the road, a huge sidewalk is being paved with a big stone wall up to the waist near the road so nobody gets hurt. Streetlamps are getting put in place and little breaks in the wall for any reason, and I know that probably nothing is gonna happen to the kids if they walk... but we’re cutting the tree line back about ten yards and putting a tall fence in front of it. I'm still thinking about a blue light system since it's a long walk, but I don't think we should allow them to leave the center when it's dark and they're not being driven or in a pack of four or more... especially for the kids who aren't thirteen yet, a pack of four six-year-olds isn't very safe...  

......maybe we should get a bus…. Lathe was distracted by this line of thought for a moment when leva kissed his knuckles, smiling. “Good morning, love.” He leaned over her, their lips gently touching. *I love you.* They made out lazily for a little while, Lathe being careful of her stomach. They broke apart after a while, Lathe pecking her nose before turning to the nightstand for the pad of paper and pen, beginning to scribble his thoughts down. *If over thirteen, four or more if going home at dark. If not, driven home by guardian or by bus. Blue light system just in case. Keep the open part of the sidewalk completely and well lit at all times....* Lathe smiled as he felt arms wind
around his middle, setting them aside. “Hm?” Lathe looked to Ieva, smiling as she looked up to him.

Ieva curled up to his side, trying to pull him back to lay down with her. “Come back and sleep a bit longer…” I want to hold onto you more. She could hear the shifting of feet in the next room, knowing Eren was up and either putting Mila back to sleep or getting ready to work down at the barn for a little bit. “Or we can go and make pancakes the American way for everyone…. I heard Eren went all out with his German food…. ” She nuzzled her face into his side, trying to get him to agree on something. If you're up... let’s go parent our children... We’ve barely seen them since we got back yesterday afternoon.... “We haven’t seen Eren at all yet… c’mon… It’s Sunday....” She murmured to him. Decide what we’re gonna do.

Lathe smiled, nuzzling into her shoulder. “As much as I'd love to cuddle with you more, we should probably go save the children from Eren’s German food.” He kissed her sweetly, stepping out of bed with her and going to the closet to get dressed. I need something that isn't pajamas if I'm gonna be cooking...

Ieva nodded, shifting off the bed as well, and going towards the bathroom to go and shower. “You get cooking then, I’ll meet you downstairs.” I wanna shower first, I feel absolutely exhausted, but maybe a warm bath’ll do me good? Or maybe a cold shower?

Lathe nodded, taking his time as he got dressed. He padded down the stairs not much later, smiling as he saw James feeding Mila a bottle on the couch. Aww... “Good morning, James. Eren’s out back, I assume?”

“Yeah, he won’t sleep no matter how much he needs it…. Can you make breakfast? And force him to go back to bed?” He’s literally been walking death for two weeks, and wearing a face mask to keep any of us from getting infected with whatever he’s got helps.... but it's really bad...

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up. “Has he not been sleeping?” Maybe he got overwhelmed with taking care of stuff...?

James nodded. “I’m surprised you didn’t hear him, he’s always coughing and he put Mila in my room so that he wouldn’t wake her up in the middle of the night. He’s gotten a huge fever.... And he’ll sometimes throw up at various times during the day.... But he still insisted on taking care of everyone… He’ll be back inside so-” He was cut off as the door opened along with the all too familiar muffled cough of Eren coughing into the mask and his elbow. There he is.... It’s a wonder you didn’t hear him last night.... Because I sure did...
Lathe looked over to the back door, his eyes widening as he saw Eren with a mask over his face, pale as a ghost. *Shit.* “Eren, you look *horrible* …” Lathe immediately moved to his side, feeling his forehead. “You're burning up… you need to get in bed. How long have you been sick?” *Oh my god…*

Eren shook his head, feeling dizziness take over and leaning into Lathe a bit more. His voice was quiet, muffled from the mask, and obviously pained. “Um….. Two…. Two and half…..” Eren murmured, his bloodshot eyes looking up to Lathe’s worried ones. *I didn’t want you to worry, I’m doing okay being the adult here…*

“…..two and a half? Days? *Weeks* ?” His eyes widened with worry as Eren weakly nodded, wrapping an arm around him to keep him on his feet. “Eren, you're not fit for Dad duty right now. Let's get you upstairs, medicated, and rested.” Lathe started to lead them to the stairs, having to reach down and haul Eren over his shoulder as the man swayed on his feet. *You're lighter than I remember…*

Eren groaned, not trying to struggle as he was lifted, letting his body go lax as he was put on his bed. The sheets were wet with sweat, and had been for almost the whole two weeks. *I didn’t have the energy to change the sheets…. I’ll just lay down in the sweat puddle I guess.* He coughed horribly, his body violently shaking as he turned his head away from Lathe. *I can’t get Dad sick…..*

Lathe looked confused as his hand brushed the sheets, feeling the sweat puddle that was the fitted sheet. *You're really sweating…* “Eren, you can't sleep just yet…” Lathe picked him right back up and out of the bed, taking him into the adjacent bathroom and depositing him on top of the toilet seat. “How does a bath and then a nap on fresh sheets sound?” *That'll make you feel less gross…*

Eren let out a soft groan of affirmation, sitting back on the toilet seat and feeling his body shake the instant he tilted his head back. His whole body violently shook with each cough that filled the air, horrible sounds coming from him as he hacked up a bit more than mucus. *Fuck…. It hurts…. Thank god I haven’t gotten anyone else sick….* He watched Lathe move from getting the tub set to starting to strip him of the clothes that clung to his clammy and pale skin. *God, I can only imagine what my skin looks like…*

Lathe rubbed his shoulder soothingly as he coughed, helping him undress. “Eren, you look like a ghost… when did you last take a bath?” *You don’t look too good…* Lathe left him in just his boxers, making sure Eren wouldn’t be scalded by the water when set in the tub. *It's warm… good.*

Eren shrugged as he was set in the tub. He could already feel the filth and grime starting to shed from his body like layers that had to be removed. “I… Was afraid I wouldn’t be able to lift myself
I've been so weak…. I'm afraid to even try holding Mila, let alone go near her because of how sick I am…

Lathe looked immensely worried, grabbing a washcloth. “Honey, why didn't you take some time to try to recuperate? James and Tucker could've helped a lot to run the house. It wouldn't matter to me if dinners were simple and you had to order food out. If you can't even lift yourself out of the tub, there's a problem.” Lathe helped Eren wash, his voice gentle. “I understand there's a lot of little people in this house to take care of, but if you needed to call in reinforcements, you could've. I know we have a lot of neighbors and friends who would be willing to come over and help out while we were away and you were sick with plague. Struggling through a sickness this bad isn't worth it, especially if you're too weak to even bathe yourself.” You really pushed yourself… “You worked so hard to take care of everyone and I respect that… but you need to take care of yourself too.”

Eren looked at him with a shaded glare. “You would've done the same thing…. I tried to call in Armin, but he got sick after two days of help so I didn’t want anyone else to get sick… I couldn’t cook for long periods of time…. I made a lot of German Crock P-” Just as he was about to finish his sentence he began coughing, turning away from Lathe since he had taken the mask off for once. He coughed out a bunch of mucus which went everywhere as well as tiny chunks of mucus which almost resembled rocks. Eren groaned, leaning against the cool tile instead of Lathe as he brought a shaking hand to his face and tried to clean up his chin. Fuck…. That was a bad one… At least I didn’t throw up…

Lathe was stunned as Eren coughed up mucus, looking very concerned. “Eren, if I wasn't a doctor, I'd say you were dying.” Lathe worked diligently to clean his face and his body, shampooing his hair. “I understand that I'm stubborn when I have the flu or a cold, but this is a whole other thing. Two weeks of being this sick… with a newborn in the house and six small kids on top of everyone else… my god, I would quarantine myself…” Lathe rinsed his hair. “I'm going to get you medicated after this and set you right in bed after I change the sheets. I'll wake you up for food later. But now, your priority is getting better so that you don't get anyone sick, god forbid Mila comes down with whatever you have.” She can't get sick... she's still so small...

Eren nodded. “I haven't held her since I got sick….” James has been a big help, since you and Mom were gone. He leaned his head back on Lathe’s hand, enjoying the gentle touch. He feels so nice. “I'm sorry….” I feel like I failed you…. I didn’t want you guys to worry while you were gone...

Lathe's face fell, massaging the shampoo into his scalp, the steam seeming to clear Eren’s nose as mucus dropped down his face, wiping it away with a cloth. “It's okay, Hon. The sooner you get better, the sooner you can go back to making German dinners and holding your daughter. I bet she misses you.” He smiled softly. “Get better for her, okay?”

Eren nodded, feeling his exhaustion finally take over and his eyes closing. His head rolled to the
side in his hand. *I’m so tired…* His breathing was ragged as his body relaxed against the porcelain tub.

Lathe smiled as Eren fell asleep, finishing cleaning him up and draining the water from the tub. He lifted him out and helped him get into dry and clean clothes, letting him nap on the couch in the nook while he changed the sheets. Soon he was tucking Eren in, wiping his nose and making sure he swallowed down some medicine. “I'll wake you up for food later, Honey. Sleep.” Lathe kissed his forehead, going downstairs and finding James cooking pancakes, Ieva holding Mila on the couch. He gave James a grateful smile, the teen saluting him before going back to cooking, a pile of pancakes sporadically growing next to him. *He's doing very well…* Lathe went to sit with Ieva, kissing the teeny baby’s forehead. *Such teeny…*

Mila giggled, reaching her tiny hands out towards Lathe’s face as he came into view, a happy smile on her face. Her eyes were starting to lighten, their color not as dark as they had been at birth. She reached her little hands out to him as she babbled, wanting to be held.

Lathe smiled, Ieva shifting and handing the babbling baby to him, Lathe having a soft look in his eyes as Mila tugged at his tie. “Hello Mila. My, how pretty you are…” He held out a finger, smiling as she latched on, trying to suck on his fingertip. “But that's not food…” Lathe barely brushed her cheek, distracting her when she looked ready to cry that she couldn't suck on his finger. He stuck out his tongue for a moment, smiling as she giggled more. *She's so cute… ...I want one…* He reached one hand for Ieva, squeezing her hand and sending her a loving look. ….and I’m gonna have one soon…

Ieva smiled looking at her with happiness. “We’re gonna have our own soon… we didn’t tell the boys yet… They’ll be happy.” She smiled, curling up to him as he held Mila close.

“They'll all be ecstatic that there’ll be another kid to play with in the house. They all adore Mila, I can imagine they'll love our own little kid…” Lathe smiled dreamily, Mila resting on his chest as he leaned back, one arm holding Ieva close and the other keeping the tiny baby from slipping away. *I can’t wait…*

Mila giggled as she attempted to crawl, just barely getting to squirm. She babbled, blowing bubbles from her mouth as she ‘spoke’. Her hair was growing in thick, like Eren’s when he was a baby, not that anyone would know that though. She definitely had his bubbly personality, and her tiny fingers tried grasping onto Lathe’s shirt.

Lathe smiled, peeking at her with one eye. “Hm? You like the blue?” He watched her grasp the old blue sweater he wore, reaching for his kerchief and gently dabbing at the tiny dribbles of drool on her chin. He chuckled as she latched onto the blue cloth, going to peck her forehead, watching her eyes sparkle. *She's so happy... I hope you grow up to always be this happy…*
Days passed like this, James seamlessly taking over the kitchen while Lathe and Ieva wrangled the kids, always holding or playing with Mila, making sure she was fed and her diaper was clean, making sure that she got her naps. *She's wonderful…* Lathe smiled, looking at the new pictures on his desk. There was a photo of all of them taken at Christmas, the entire living room full of guests, and Eren’s lap full of Levi. He looked to the other, taken just before he and Ieva left for vacation, with all six of their new charges all smiling toothy smiles at the camera. *I love them all so much…* He looked back down to his notepad, thinking as he wrote carefully. ‘Maintenance worker and groundskeeper needed. Flexible hours, must be able to operate machinery.’ He thought, crossing it out and rewriting it. ‘Must be capable of heavy physical labor, including operating large snow blowers and lawn mowers. Day to day jobs may vary based upon need. No experience necessary.’ He was about to write down the number when a thought occurred to him. *…no experience necessary…* He wondered why it stuck with him, thinking and gazing over the pictures again. His eyes settled on Marco who smiled at the camera, his arms full with Jean. …*I haven’t heard from him in a long while…. Lathe set down his pen, leaning his head in one hand. I wonder how he is… maybe I should give him a call… I heard he changed apartments, but his phone number probably hasn’t changed… last I heard he was struggling to find a job… …maybe he’d like this one?* Lathe thought a moment, reaching for the new cell phone on the desk. *I got a phone for work stuff since this is a big production and all...* He looked to his regular phone for the number, punching it in and calling. …*pick up…*

Jean took a few seconds to answer his cellphone, a huge sigh leaving his lips as he grabbed for it. He opened it up, pulling it to his ear as he answered the unknown number. “Hello?” *Which job is calling me now? To tell me that they’re declining my application…*

“Jean? That's you, right? It's Lathe.” *I have the right number, right?*

“That depends… What’s up?” Jean asked as he shuffled to sit up on the couch. *What do you want now? I’m trying to separate myself from everything…. You don’t sound like you really wanna chitchat about stuff…* “I just wanted to call and see how you were doing, but I also wanted to see if you'd be interested in a job opening at the new student center that’s opening soon…” *You still looking for something to do?*

“What student center… And what does the job entitle?” He shifted to get to his feet, going to grab a sheet of paper to start writing down details. *What kind of job is this?*

Lathe grinned as he heard the rustle of paper. “Well, just about a year ago I had the idea. Basically, we had a student center built where anyone in school can come. It kinda acts like an after-school program, but it'll also operate on weekends: a kid couple come in on Saturday and be fed breakfast lunch and dinner, they could go to a remedial math class or go to a class or club and learn
something new like cooking for example, read in the library or use the computers in the lab, use
the chemistry lab if they're old enough and there's someone supervising, play on the playground or
one one of the courts, color, do anything, really, until they have to go home. And they don't have
to pay a cent for it. I was thinking it could keep kids out of trouble, can help boost grades and keep
extra help options open to the people who need them, teach life skills like cooking or banking
because that isn't taught in schools anymore, make sure everyone is aware of how to wire a light
switch and how to build basic stuff… just normal stuff you should know. And we need a
maintenance person and groundskeeper. That's where you could come in. Day to day your jobs
could vary, but you’d need to keep the lawn and especially the soccer field mowed and marked,
snowblow the walks in the winter, fix stuff when it gets broken because the kids are gonna
eventually break everything, keep the place lit, all sorts of random upkeep. The hours would be
pretty flexible, and just because this is a nonprofit doesn't mean you won't be paid well.” I'll make
sure you get a fair wage like everyone else we end up hiring.

Jean was quiet for a moment as he looked down on the sheet of paper he had barely written on. “... When would I start?” I need to know, and manage how I’m paying for rent… He tapped his fingers
on the small desk he had, moving to get the bottle of liquor from the counter. I’m gonna drink to
that... If I can finally get a job!

“Well, we haven't completely finished painting the damn thing, but if you wanna come out and
help build all the shelving and load books and organize classrooms- you can start, say, next week
Monday? I can have a contract written up by then. Would fourteen dollars an hour sound fair to
you?” That number will go up eventually, don't worry.

Jean wrote it down. Fourteen an hour would be five dollars more than I was hoping for... “Y-
Yeah… that would be great, what time should I come in?” It's labor, but I can do that if I drink
enough coffee to keep myself awake at work...

“Well, I would say it'd be pretty normal hours, nine to five… but since the first week or two is all
just gonna be random assembling and stuff and there's plenty to do, you'll have a full paid hour for
lunch and you’ll be paid seventeen an hour for every hour after your eighth each day, not including
if you leave to go get dinner or something. And that’s pretty much gonna be the same sort of
policy for the time you’re there. I still have to write all the specifics down. Does that sound good?”
I hope so. “You'll have a spare key and can clock in and out as you please, but remember that if a
single screw is missing when you leave, I know where you sleep.” That's a lie. I don't know where
you live now.

Jean gulped audibly. Shit… Does he really know where I live? I thought I moved far away
enough…. “I uh… Uhm… Yeah that’s totally fine…” He struggled to smile, already fearing the
threat Lathe imposed.

“Jean, I don't know where you live, that's a lie. I'll need your address when you actually sign up for
this job though, so it'll change. But I'm not gonna murder you, don't worry. I'll see you Monday then?” He heard a quiet affirmation, another thought coming to mind. “Oh, uhm, another question… ...you wouldn't mind coming back to dinner next week, would you?” We miss you. “You don't have to, I'm just asking.”

Jean was quiet on the other end of his phone. “I don’t think I can… I can’t face him… I can’t Lathe, I’m sorry that you guys tried to get me better before everything happened, but…. I can’t…. I’ll be at work on Monday morning.” He murmured into his phone before hanging up abruptly.

“It’s-” Lathe was cut off when Jean hung up, quietly sighing. He pulled up the number again, texting him.

**LQ: It's okay, Jean. Whenever you feel strong enough, we’d love to have you again.**

Lathe didn't get a reply. It was read, but there wasn't any response. He didn't expect one. Instead, he went back to his laptop to draft up a contract for him. *There's plenty to get ready...*

Jean sighed as he read the text, closing his phone and letting out a sigh of relief as he took the bottle of liquor and raised it to his lips. He groaned as it burned the whole way down his throat, enjoying the feel of it. *Drink for a small victory…. I’ll be able to pay for rent at least...*
Chapter 96: The Skype Call Part 3

Eren’s eyes cracked open slowly to see the dark room. *I’m gonna be sick*… He struggled to move his head far enough towards where the bucket was on the side of the bed, barely making it before he threw up everything he had eaten earlier. *Fuck… I think that was lunch… I’m not sure anymore*… He closed his eyes, laying in the awkward position since the sheets weren’t covered in sweat there. *I’m exhausted, and I can’t move*…. He resigned to the fact that he wouldn’t be able to hold Mila for at least another week at this rate. *But I want my baby girl back*… Eren was trying to keep his mind off the putrid smell that wafted up to his nostrils. He hated that he couldn’t smell anything else aside from things that smelled absolutely horrible. *It smells really bad… Where’s my phone? Dad would want me to call him*… His eyes scoured the room, seeing his phone was sitting on Levi’s nightstand, on the other side of the bed. *Fuck… I can’t move and get it.* He groaned, deciding to close his eyes and try to sleep.

Lathe was scribbling down random ideas into a notebook in the kitchen, his laptop on sleep next to him. *Oooh… I wonder if we can do that? Making the common room for the college-level students Thieves-Guild style… since it’s still blocked off for the moment, we could ….* He looked up as he heard a quiet ringtone, smiling and pulling up the Skype request. He answered, soon met with the image of Levi. “Hey Levi! Sorry, Eren can’t really talk. He’s been sick for at least a month now. But we’re praying he’ll get better.”

His fever should break any day now….

Levi sighed a bit, nodding. “Okay, I was worried when he didn't pick up… Can I see Mila? Or is James occupying her attention still?” “I wanna see my baby girl, Eren’s probably asleep, and I’ll let him stay asleep…”

Lathe nodded, smiling. “I’ll go get her, James can fork her over for a bit.” Lathe left for a moment, coming back with the tiny infant in his arms, the girl giggling as she saw Levi. Lathe picked up her hand, waving it to Levi as he shifted her. “Mila, look, it's Daddy.” Say hi. He beamed as she happily babbled, reaching a tiny hand for the man on the screen. *She recognizes you.*

Levi felt his heart melt. “I swear, she’s going to be the death of me…” He looked around to see if anyone was near him before turning to the screen again. “Is anyone else within earshot?” “I wanna make plans again…”

Lathe looked around, shaking his head. “…no… one second though. We have to make sure our little witness doesn’t spill anything.” Lathe turned to Mila, looking at her seriously. “Mila. This is very important. Are you going to tell Eren everything we said as soon as you see him?” She just stared at him for a moment before tugging on his tie, giggling. “…you have sworn to secrecy. Good.” Lathe looked to Levi, trying to look serious with a babbling baby in his arms. “We’re all clear.”
Levi smiled. <“I’m coming home for Christmas again… We could always speak in German. I’m sure the small ones don’t know what that is… And better expose Mila to it early.”> I have a feeling she’s gonna grow up speaking it fluently like Eren…

Lathe grinned, nodding. <“Bilingual kid, of course.”> He thought for a moment before giving him a shit-eating grin. [Not French, though? It sounds cool.] I know you know it. I remember these things.

Levi shook his head. [No, Eren wouldn't want her to know because he doesn’t… Maybe she can take it in High School or something?] Eren would kill me…

[Good point. And if she does want to learn it then, she’ll have plenty of help getting used to it. But for now, it's good to use it so Eren can’t overhear anything.] He smiled, pecking Mila’s forehead as she gazed up at him. [You've gotten your time off set and everything?] That's what it sounds like.

Levi rolled his eyes. [Did you say he was sick?] I’m pretty sure you told me that. [And yeah, I’ll be able to make it hopefully at dinner… I couldn’t get an earlier flight in, and I’ll drive home with Erwin. That way we’ll be a big surprise for everyone because I’m assuming Armin is gonna be over?] That’s usually how it goes…

[Oh yeah, we’ll demand that he comes for dinner of course. It’ll be great! I can't wait. Eren’ll be so excited, and Mila will most likely latch onto you the second she gets the chance.] Lathe smiled. [Though I'm pretty sure you'd only mind that when she won't let go long enough to have your, ahem, ‘alone time’ with Eren.] Yeah, that's a thing. He grinned as Levi blushed. [Luckily you have babysitters for a family, so you're pretty much good.]

Levi groaned as he held his head in his hands. [Ugh… Don’t remind me… The videos he sends me are fucking torture…] What do you think about that? If you are going to tease me… I get to tease you back…

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up, smirking. [Oh, so I'm sure you're still very familiar at least with all the sounds he makes…] Nice slip, Levi. Beware my wrath.

[I miss his voice… The music videos are torture… What the hell were you thinking about? He’s sent them all to me before he put them on YouTube…] Levi gave a feigned look of being scandalized. How could I slip up like that!? Ah!
Lathe quirked an eyebrow, not believing him. [I’m sure that’s what you meant… you totally didn't mean something else that Eren recorded that was meant solely for your eyes and ears. Suuuuuure.] I don't buy it.

Levi shook his head. [Believe whatever you want… How was your vacation? I haven’t heard from anyone since you were gone for a few days… How did it go?] I hope you found time to relax while you were there...

Lathe chuckled as Levi changed the subject, his face lighting up as he remembered. [Oh, we haven't told you- while we were gone… Ieva conceived!!] Lathe was nearly squealing with excitement, his eyes shining with happiness. We’re gonna have our own tiny human! I can't wait!

Levi’s eyes widened, a huge smile on his face. [Oh that's so exciting! I’m so happy for you!] He had a bright smile on his face as he watched Mila look at Lathe in mild surprise and wonder as he squealed. She’s wondering why he sounds like a newborn...

Lathe looked over Levi for a moment, realizing something. I've never seen you smile like that before… besides when you heard the news about Mila and saw her for the first time. He tucked the image away in his mind, looking to Mila as she gazed up at him, wearing a mildly concerned expression. [I'm sorry Mila, Grampa Lathe is excited.] He kissed her cheek, bouncing her to make her giggle. There, all better. [I really want this to go okay, I want her to really take it easy and let me take care of her and I just… I'm so excited… I just can't wait…] he cradled Mila close, the baby clinging to his sweater. He sighed, his eyes closing for a moment as he was lost in thought. He seemed to remember Levi was there all of a sudden, looking stunned a bit and smiling sheepishly as Levi gave him a look. [...]What can I say, I'm a daydreamer…]

Levi rolled his eyes. [Do you know how far along she is? Or has she not gone for that appointment yet?] I know you guys just got home… And maybe you don’t want to know anything? He watched Mila cling to Lathe’s sweater, fascinated with the fabric.

[It's only been a week since we found out, she’s scheduled in a few days for a checkup… but given how long it would take for the hormones to start changing stuff to a point where we would notice, it probably happened the first few days we were there. We’ll have a better idea after she goes to that appointment.] Lathe looked down as Mila tugged at his sweater, smiling. “Yep, that's my sweater. It’s purple today. You like purple?” He got a happy gurgle in response, smiling. Purple!

Levi chuckled softly, watching Mila contentedly. “Alright, Lathe, time to give Mila to someone else, I wanna see the horses Eren messaged me about. I’ve heard he’s hosting a riding camp soon, but I guess he won’t be if he’s too sick to do it.” I don't know how bad he is...
Lathe nodded, smiling and sighing. “Oh-Kay… I guess I can give her to someone else…” He went to give James Mila again, gently prying her from his sweater. He came back and picked up the laptop, bringing him outside. [Alright, so we kinda have lots more horses….] Lathe flipped the camera, showing Levi the new row of horses peering at him curiously. [And even if Eren is still dying, I suppose I can teach it, and Marco is helping out with it, so I'll have him. We don't wanna cancel it or reschedule; it just wouldn't work out.] Yeah, we can't do that to the kids who signed up.

[And these are all the same breed of horses?] I think Eren said something about that… He looked to the horses, wishing that he could reach out and touch them, and get away from his reality for a bit. I really hope that I'll be able to make it home for Christmas… It's August… I got a ways to go first.

[Yeah, they are. Eren really wanted more Bavarian Warmbloods, so he just went and got some. They're all wonderful.] Lathe pet the nose of the one closest to him, thinking. [...]their names escape me. We came home and they were here. I don't know what Eren named them.] He must have them all named by now, of course.

Levi nodded, understanding. [How bad is he sick that you don’t want me to talk to him even for a few minutes?] How bad is he? I don’t understand… He’s like you... He’s almost never sick...

Lathe looked at him, his expression wary. “.......he's literally caught some kind of plague. He’s coughing up hunks of mucus, throwing up nearly everything he eats, soaking the bed with sweat, and trying to sleep it off until his fever breaks. He's really bad and you don't need to see that.” Nope.

Levi seemed to pale. “How long has that been going on for? I can only imagine what he feels like… He likes to cling to people when he’s sick… And I can’t imagine anyone wanting to get near him.” Geez, I wish I could say at least hi to him before I have to leave tomorrow...

Lathe sighed, nodding. “He's tried his best to be a normal functioning adult, but he's been a mess since a week into our vacation. So he's on week three. If you really do wanna talk to him and believe me, I get it, we can go up and see if he's awake. Horribly enough, this is just about the time when lunch would reappear....” Why is this a thing.....

Levi grimaced. “I'd like to at least say ‘hi’.... I’m leaving the base again tomorrow, I want to see him again before I go…. Please.” I don’t care if he’s throwing up or not...

Lathe nodded, understanding. “Of course. It should cheer him up to see his Bae.” Lathe carried the laptop back into the house, coming upstairs and lightly knocking on Eren’s door. “Eren?” He
quietly opened the door, seeing Eren peer at him miserably from the bed. “Levi is on Skype. He'd like to say hi since he's leaving the base tomorrow.” Please say hi...

Eren shifted to sit up, quickly regretting how quickly he moved, leaning over and dry heaving over the almost full bucket. *Fuck... I can’t even really sit up.* He groaned, weakly looking over to Lathe once he was done. *I wanna say hi...*

Lathe moved closer and set the laptop down for a moment, very carefully helping Eren shift to sit up and setting the laptop in his lap, going to get a new bucket to replace the old one before emptying it. *Gross.*

Levi looked Eren over as he was faced with the sick man, his voice gentle, a soft smile of his face. “Hey... it's good to see you, even if you are infected with the plague.” His voice was lightly teasing, looking over him. *I miss you. Even if you are gross and sick right now.*

Eren smiled softly, nodding his head slowly. “It's good to see you too.” He croaked out in his harsh voice. *I haven’t talked much... But it’s nice to see you're doing well...*

Levi looked him over, feeling a twist in his chest. *I don't want this to be the last time I see you. I wanna come home on Christmas when you're well and have you and Mila all to myself. “...Eren...I want you to remember that I love you... so much... and Mila too. When you're well you have to give her lots of hugs and kisses for me, okay?” I wanna come home to you both.*

Eren looked confused for a minute. “You’re going off base again?” *This is the fifth time this year... You always get like this when you have to go off base... you’re afraid you’ll never come home.* “You better get your ass back home or I’ll never forgive you...” He trailed off as he started to cough again, struggling to calm himself down and not cough. *I don’t want you to be like that...*

Levi gave him a weary smile, nodding. “Don't worry, I'll try my damndest. I wanna be able to see you and our daughter again.” *I wanna come home okay. I want to live so that I can come home and give you and Mila the family you both deserve.*

“Even if I’m sick you’ll clearly wanna see me...” *I want you to stay ... “I want more when you come back...” I want you to be tied to me... Because I’m not sure you’re going to ask me anymore...*

Levi studied him, the look Eren was giving him making him think he didn't mean sex. .....right, you
don't know about me coming home for Christmas. .........if we do come home on time, on Christmas... that’d be quite the Christmas present if I did.... but.... I don’t know... Levi gave him a soft look, trying to soothe him with his tone. “I'll always want to see you. ...and, I know. Don’t worry; when all this is over you can handcuff me to you and you don’t ever have to let me go.” I want to give you what you want... I wanna make it official... but.... It needs to be special... and I don’t... I mean, doing it on Christmas when I come home would be special... but I don't wanna have to leave you just a week after it and know that you were even closer to having me before... before losing me...

Eren’s eyes seemed to lose their luster in an instant. Handcuff you to me?.......... So you’re really not going to propose to me then? He felt an odd feeling in his chest, like he wanted to throw up, but it was also mixed with guilt and sadness. “Okay....” I get to keep you at least... Right?

Levi saw the overwhelming sadness in his expression, his heart twisting. ...I would propose to you now if it meant you wouldn’t look so miserable.... ...I’m making him hurt so much by putting it off... maybe... it’s doing more harm like this... than it would if I just did it before I left... “It’s okay, Hon. Really. ...You’ll have as much of me as you want soon enough.” ...maybe I should ... but like... when I’m home for Christmas.... I’d have time maybe to find a ring over here... or I could make Lathe help me find one... I should. I need to do it. Anything to stop that from hurting on top of that fact that I’m in danger. Levi gave him a gentle smile, wishing he could reach out and smooth out the sad lines from his face. Please don't look like a kicked puppy... I want to marry you.... but.... I'm shit at being romantic and I have to ask and shit and just... if anyone would fuck this up, it'd be me.

Eren struggled to smile for Levi, nodding. “I know... A year and a half, that’s all I got left to wait...” He glanced over towards the door, knowing Lathe was on the other side. “You get your ass home.... Or I don’t know what I’d do....” He whispered to Levi. I don’t think I’d be able to handle losing you... Not even with Mila with me...

Levi looked him over, his face falling. His voice was quiet and tender. “...I'm gonna fight like hell to come home for you two... but... if I don't... promise you'll live for me. Live for Mila. Please.” I don't want her to go without her two dads... I don't want her to only know me in images on a screen and know nothing else....

Eren swallowed hard, looking down at his hands like he was going to cry. I don’t think I could do it.... I don’t think I’d be able to live with myself if I couldn't have you with me....

Levi felt his insides fill with dread, his voice soft. ...you couldn't do it...? “Eren, please... no matter what happens, Mila needs her Daddy... she loves you, she'd miss you... if you won't do it for yourself, do it for our daughter... I want her to grow up with you... please ...”
Eren shook his head again, trying not to let the intense feeling of sadness overwhelm him. He wasn’t surprised that Mikhail jumped on the bed and forcefully took his hand away from his wrist. *I couldn’t do it...* *I couldn’t.*... Mikhail was keeping him from curling up in a ball as tears started to quickly form, sobs alerting Lathe, who came in to see if everything was alright. *I wouldn’t be able to handle myself...* *I wouldn’t be able to do it.*... Eren started to cough all over again, but it was worse now due to his already tearful state. *It hurts...*

Lathe set down the clean bucket, going to gently kiss the top of Eren’s head. “It’s okay, Honey. It’s okay.” Lathe ran a gentle hand through his hair before reaching for the laptop. “Say goodbye, Honey.” Lathe made sure Eren at least gave him a weak wave before taking it away, kissing his temple. He left him be, bringing Levi with him. He shut the door quietly, going down the hall to the nook and sitting down. He stared at him for a moment. “...it's gonna kill him if he sees you again and you don't propose. He really needs that, Levi.” *You need to do it.*

Levi watched as he was taken away from Eren. “I think I just made everything worse for him...” He sighed, running his hands through his noir hair, wishing he didn’t need to be in Iraq at the moment. *I want to come back.... But the mission we have now...* “I won’t be able to call in three weeks... We’ll be out for closer to two months... So he won’t hear from me for awhile...” *It’s scheduled that we’re out that far...*

Lathe sighed, nodding. “...okay, kid. And he's... he misses you so much... and he's dying waiting for you to make this... to make it official. He's been waiting for a ring for a long time, long before you even first left... I can't tell you to just bite the bullet and propose, but...” Lathe gave him a look. “Bite the bullet and propose, dammit.” *Just do it! Please!! When you come home, ask him! I can help!*

Levi looked like he was weighing his options. *I can’t do that to him... not if there's a chance of me not coming home... which there very well is... Which is why we all got Christmas off... Eyebrows is making that a thing. [Dad.... I-I... I can’t do that to him.... Not when we leave base every other month....] I could only imagine how badly that would tear him up...*

Lathe sighed, looking tired. [...Levi, Eren loves you. I know you don't want to hurt him... but... he's hurting so much because he feels unwanted... and that's on top of the fear of you not coming home at the end of this.... if anything, it'll hurt a little less for him. He'll know that when you come home at the end of everything, instead of there being this uncertainty... he'll know that you're gonna sweep him off his feet and keep him. He needs to have that light at the end of the tunnel, Levi.] ....he needs to know for sure you're gonna keep him.

Levi looked to Lathe, nodding. [I don’t have a ring... and I wanted the proposal to be special, because we all know I don't have a single romantic bone in my body.] *I want it to be good for him.... I really do...*
[If you come home on Christmas Day at dinner, with Erwin… it'd be a real surprise for everyone there… and it’s be a really sweet Christmas present, I think. Or I am get a hold of reservations for you two somewhere nice, you could propose sometime you're home while you're both dressed up and stuff… I can help you find a ring too… I can help you if you really want to do this.] Please let me help you do this. ....Eren needs this.

Levi nodded. [I think I’d like it to be a bit more private… But I’m not sure what Eren would want… I’ll definitely propose when I get home.] It needs to be done… He had determination set on his face as he looked at Lathe. [I need help with a ring… but I can’t talk right now, I’m sorry but I gotta go pack for off base….] I don’t want to leave the conversation like this… but I need to go.

Lathe nodded, understanding. [Okay Levi. I'll do some hunting and see if I can figure out what Eren might like, show you a few things next time we talk. We’ll get all this sorted out, Hon. And I'll get you two reservations somewhere nice for New Year’s.] Lathe winked, smirking mischievously. [That sound good?]

[Yes… Thank you. Tell Mila I love her, and give her more kisses and hugs from me, since Eren can’t.] I wanna be able to see her in person… I wanna be there for her.

Lathe nodded, smiling. [Don't worry, I'll give her lots and lots from you. ...Try to stay safe, Levi. Love you.] We miss you.
Chapter 97: It's not a Dream

Thank fuck Eren’s not dying anymore. Lathe was just across the street at the new center, marking boxes and making sure things were being assembled and put where they were meant to go. That horse camp thing starts today- everyone who signed up was a girl… except for Henry. I’m pretty sure he signed up because he knew Tucker was helping out and he wanted to hit on him some more, which works I guess. Marco signed up to help, so he’s on his way too- Lathe tugged at the collar of his dress shirt, feeling a bit warm. He looked outside to where Jean was assembling a shelf on a padded blanket on the concrete, his shirt having been discarded a bit ago so that he didn’t overheat. ...I’m pretty sure Marco’s gonna appreciate the view. Lathe sighed, pulling out his cell phone and dialing another number when he saw the clock. Where the hell is that guy with the air conditioning unit, he was supposed to be here an hour ago at latest...

Eren was in the middle of moving the saddles around for the girls. They’re all gonna learn how to saddle a horse… He smiled as he heard the sound of tires on the gravel outside. That’s either a kid or Marco. He troweled off his forehead before placing it on his shoulders going out to greet the first arrivals. Not Marco… But there’s his truck coming in now. He smiled at the girl and shook the Mom’s hand and they both seemed to squeal that a singer was teaching a riding class for a week. Marco help, I’m not good with people… He noticed Mikhail’s paw on his jeans, reaching down to pet his head, smiling to him.

Marco nearly missed the turn into the driveway, distracted by the sight of a shirtless Jean just across the street. He has abs…. dammit, I want a closer look… He sighed dejectedly as he turned into their driveway instead, wanting to ogle the two-toned man instead. He got out of his truck, smiling and waving to Eren. “Hello! Here for the riding lessons?” He watched the woman nod and the girl beam at him excitedly. “You’ll really like all the horses he has, they're all very friendly. I can take you out back to the barn?” He gave Eren a quick wink that the girl and her mother missed as he led them back. I know you need a break from the squealing fans.

Eren thanked him silently, going over to run across the street and inside. “Dad! The first girl is here! When should we break for lunch?” I know we said we’d provide, and I know you’ll like that. It's early, and the boys are at their summer camp so we don’t need to worry about them. Eren came to where the man was in the office, going through paperwork. You’ve been doing that a lot lately...

Lathe looked up to him, smiling. “I’d say just around… what time is it?” He looked to the clock. “How about noon-thirty? I'd have things ready for them and set out by then. Where are they eating again?” Where do I put all the food?

“The picnic tables are by the barn, can you put it all there? And no one has allergies… I checked again… umm… Marco’s here, so I’m gonna get back and see if more people have arrived yet.” Eren quickly came up to Lathe, kissed his cheek and then ran out the door to go and get back to the barn. He waved to one of the Moms who was leaving after dropping off their daughter. He was
surprised to find that everyone else was there, even Henry, who was trying to get Tucker to look at him. *He’s going to be flirting the entire time...* He sighed quietly before coming up behind the girls. “Alright, who’s ready to pick their horse for the week?” *You get to have a limited selection...* “Andrea will need to ride on Arya though.” He watched her nod and then the girls went off and picked their horses inside the barn and pet them as they stuck their heads out. Each stall door was adorned with a saddle which was for that specific horse. Eren turned to Marco. “So... you’re not afraid of any of them right? Because it’s me, you, and Tucker to keep track of the horses... two girls have prior experience, so I’ll be with them mostly... doing small jumps eventually... Just follow my lead and we’ll be okay...” Eren gave him a cheeky smile as he got Charlie out for Henry, easily tacking him and getting the stool out for Henry. *He can hop up...*

Marco shook his head. “I’m fine with all the horses, don’t worry.” He gave a sound of surprise as he felt one suddenly lipping at his shirt, turning and seeing Henry grinning impishly from on top of Charlie. *Henry... Are you trying to instigate something, Henry?*

“Nooooooo.....” Henry grinned, though he was soon distracted by Tucker bending over as he tacked one of the horses, getting a decent view from on top of Charlie. *...this is gonna be torture... but dammit, if I get him to maybe look at me and say something it'll be sooooo worth it.*

..... *aaaaand he's fantasizing about Tucker again.* Marco sighed, going to help one of the girls tack their horse. He at one point glanced out the barn door, able to see the front of the center from where he was, a shirtless Jean still working away. ..... *I might not be the only distracted one here...*

Eren made sure that once the girls and Henry were on the horses that they each grabbed two and led them into the large arena. He let go of the older girls and let them walk their horses around on the other side of the arena, keeping the newer riders with him and Marco to fix their posture. He sent Tucker to watch over the girls walking the mares. *This’ll go over well.* “Okay, so everyone sit up as straight as possible, and have your toes pointed up a bit so the stirrup is more situated near your heel.” He walked over to Andrea to help her up and move her arms so the reins were more comfortable in her grip. *I want to be a good teacher for this...*

Tucker had to keep his eyes off of Henry as he got up on the horse. *Don’t look at him, he’s not a knight in shining armor... Don’t look at him, he’s just like the rest of them... Trying to get close, and then use me...* He rubbed at his throat as he watched the two girls expertly handle their horses in their walk. *Why is he even here? I can feel him staring holes into my back... It’s uncomfortable...*

Henry kept his posture perfect when Marco went by, though he slouched a bit when he wasn’t looking, wanting Tucker to see and correct him. He felt himself flush when Tucker sighed, immediately straightening up when he felt the hand ghosting his back. He looked to Tucker, both of them turning scarlet as they made eye contact, wanting to look away and not able to for a moment. ..... *I want you to say something... anything...*
Tucker looked away first as he let his hand slide off of Henry’s back. *Come on, pay attention dammit… Why the hell do you have to be like this?* He looked towards one of the smaller girls, going to help her with her footing and keep his mind off of Henry. *I wanna forget about it… Why the fuck do you have to keep reminding me about it?*

Henry sighed, feeling morose as Tucker left, still feeling the ghost of his hand on his back. *....you still have all week. All week to get him to open up just a little.*

The morning went easily, all of the girls perfecting their posture on their horses. Soon enough it was time for lunch, one of the picnic tables filled with food and paper plates and cups. Everyone was munching happily, Marco sitting at a table facing the house and the road, still forlornly gazing over to the small speck of bare skin that was Jean. *Guh… I wish I had a better view…* He looked over the other girls as his mind wandered, snapping out of it when he saw the older girls a table over passing a small pair of binoculars between them, staring over at the complex and talking seriously. *……are they admiring Jean?* He tried to seem inconspicuous as he stood, going over to them. “….what’re you looking at?” *Be cool.*

One of the girls jumped, turning around and hiding the binoculars behind her back. *“N-Nothing.”* She stuttered with a huge blush on her face. *We weren’t watching the hot guy across the street…*

Marco quirked his eyebrows, thinking. *….you can use this to your advantage.* “If you let me borrow those I won’t tell anyone what you’re doing.” *I wanna see him… he has abs…*

The girls looked between each other for a moment before handing them over and giggling with him as they laid on the Hay bales, looking across at Jean as he moved, his muscles stretching. *“He’s hot… I wonder what his name is…”*

“Carissa… There’s no way he’s gonna talk to us, we’re 15…” Megan hissed at the girl who had handed the binoculars over.

“But Megan… Look at him!”

“First off, his name's Jean-” He had to pause as the two girls squealed at the French-sounding name. “-and sorry, but I've had dibs on him for years. He's mine.” *I want him.*
Crissa gasped at Marco. “Well, if you’ve had him for so long why haven’t you taken him for yourself?” I want to know why… It also means you’re gay. She raised an eyebrow at him, obviously unimpressed.

“...it's kinda a weird story…. well…” It doesn't really matter- if they were gonna say something about you being gay, they’d’ve said it. “.....I was on the way to a date of ours and I got into a really bad car crash… I forgot a lot after that… including nearly everything from our relationship…. we broke up because it was killing him trying to start over, and I can't very well just march up to him and demand he take me back because I remember as much as I do now… I remember a hell of a lot more than I did when I first woke up… and I seriously miss him… but he's moved and I think he blocked my number in his phone and it's just a mess…” I miss him...

Both the girls gasped and instantly hugged him. “Oh, I’m so sorry… I didn’t mean to bring that up.” Carissa was the first to speak in their small hug. I didn’t mean it… Don’t cry, I can’t handle men crying...

Marco gave them a weary smile, awkwardly hugging them back for a moment. “I-It's fine, it doesn't feel too weird to talk about it anymore. I just wish things could go back to normal now that I remember what normal had been for years…” I miss it so much... “I've got half a mind to march over there after camp is over… but honestly, I'm not that brave… but the binoculars are very appreciated.”

The girls giggled as they waited for their turn to spy on him. “But why won’t you ask him out again? If you remember more?” Megan asked curiously, watching him through the binoculars and getting a full view of Jean’s abs and swooning.

Marco sighed, running a hand through his hair and forking over the binoculars again. “....because…. if he's moved on I don't want to undo all of that… I've already caused him so much pain… I just… and I'm scared he won't want to even look at me… I don't want him to reject me again … but... I really miss him…” I didn't know it would hurt so much.... until I remembered what it felt like to hold onto him at night... .....the bed always feels too cold and empty...

“You’ll never know if you never try…” Carissa spoke as she handed the binoculars over to Marco. He’s looking over this way… I wonder if he spotted us...

Marco took them back, looking and swallowing hard as he saw Jean look back at them, straightening up as he saw the three of them observing him. He seemed to flush down his neck when he saw Marco holding the binoculars, turning away quickly and trying to ignore them. He's so damn adorable... and hot, definitely hot too.... Guh... “.....maybe I should…” ..... I could do it... I could walk right over after camp is done and have his tongue down my throat in ten
minutes… that would be wonderful… but what would I say? ‘Hey Jean, I remember like everything about our relationship, now take me back, dammit!’ That’s not exactly perfect flirting material… ……if I'm gonna do this, I need help. Who would know what to say? He looked over to Eren, thinking. ….I could just ask Eren. He'd probably know what to say. Maybe. “….you know what, okay. After camp, I'll interrogate Eren for help figuring out what to say, then just… go for it.” …I want to. I can do this.

Megan giggled and nodded, though all three of them picked up their heads as Eren whistled for them loudly. He had a riding helmet on and Charlie tacked up beside him. Eren's really good looking too… I wonder if he looks good without his shirt? His arms are covered in tattoos… And they’re so detailed…

Marco caught Megan gawking, giving her a small nudge. “He's taken, so don't think about it.” Levi would kill you. Even if you are just like fifteen.

Megan looked up to Marco. “But he’s hot and he doesn’t have a ring on! How do you know he’s taken? I can dream, can’t I?” He’s so hot… And he’s famous!

Didn't he put Levi all over his instagram? I thought everyone knew he had a boyfriend. “Well, maybe… but I'm pretty sure once his boyfriend comes home from Iraq he’ll have a ring to flaunt. And they kinda have a kid now, her name’s Mila. So.” That's a thing.

Megan looked like the words were new information. “That must be hard, not having a ring while he’s gone… I could only imagine what I would feel like… But what does he look like when he’s with her? Is it adorable? Do you have pictures…” She looked up at Marco, trying to use her puppy eyes on him. I wanna know these things!

“Yeah, he's dying for a ring… and I think I do…” Marco pulled out his phone as they walked, handing it over when he found a picture of him holding Mila one night before dinner, the baby happily tugging on his hoodie strings. She’s so adorable… “She’s just a few months old.”

Megan almost squealed as she saw the picture. “Oh my god! That’s so cute!!” Oh my god! She’s so cute! We didn’t know anything about this! His Twitter and tumblr have been quiet. “She’s adorable…”

Marco smiled. “Yeah, she really is. I’m surprised he hasn't been flooding his instagram with pictures of her. I'll tell him his fans want to be in the loop.” He let them hawk at the Live Photos on his phone until Eren whistled again for their attention, stowing away his phone. “Don't worry- Maybe you'll see her this week.” You just might, if James decides to come wandering outside. He's
The girls giggled and went where the others were gathered. Eren got all their attention before he hopped up on Charlie and he walked him around, showing how he could handle a horse without using the bridle and how he used his legs, showing them it was possible. All the kids watched in awe, wanting to try it, and so they were allowed to, Eren walking each of them through it on Charlie. *They’re doing well…*

The rest of the day went well enough. Henry didn’t manage to get a peep out of Tucker, though he did manage to coax a few fleeting touches and scarlet blushes out of him, and convinced Eren to let him stay for dinner. Eren had taken his shirt off an hour after lunch when he got enough comments about his tattoos, and all the girls gawked at their intricacy, all of them more than a little excited for the next day. Marco made sure that when the last of the girls were picked up he immediately dragged Eren into the barn, looking at him seriously. *I have to do this. Today.* “Eren, I need your help. And you need to be really serious with me and not dance around anything or else this won’t work.”

Eren looked at Marco and nodded, noticing his seriousness. He motioned towards the hay bales. *What are you going to ask me about?* He sat down and waited for Marco to start. *You’re serious about this…*

Marco sat down with him, sighing, his elbows on his knees, feeling dread slowly drop into his gut, holding his head in his hands. He stared hard at the floor. “…..Eren, I remember so much about everything Jean and I had. And it's killing me… The more pictures I saw and the more stories I heard the more I started remembering on my own and remembering all the dumb little details… and… the bed has started feeling colder and emptier and I just… I miss him so much… but I feel like there's something important missing… so if there's something important about our relationship that I might not remember, tell me… because if I don't go over there and try to get him back now I'm really gonna regret it…” *I miss him… so much…*

Eren was quiet for a moment, shaking his head. “I… I really don’t think I should tell you about anything, because Jean seems to have finally pulled himself together…..” *I shouldn’t tell you, ‘cause he’s staying for dinner…*

Marco looked up to him, a hurt look in his eyes. “I-I know he's tried his best to move on… but…. It's not like I was a completely blank slate, or that it feels like something optional…. …it really hurts… and I want to have him back… and I hope to God he doesn't have a breakdown and reject me but I really want to try because I’ve started hurting and it hasn't stopped… If I can, I really want to make him happy… please just tell me… I want as best a chance of this working as possible… because whether you tell me or not, I'm marching over there. You can't stop me. I won't let you.” *I have to do this. “…please… just tell me.” Help me win him back over.*
I have no choice... “You were going to propose... You were late for the date because you had to get the ring for him... Jean found out... He’s probably kept the ring with him since... He was heartbroken, he wanted you to remember... And do you remember any of the doctor’s visits?”

How much do you remember? Jean is probably not gonna wanna do anything with you... Knowing him he probably doesn’t have any viagra on him anymore...

Marco was quiet, thinking. “...Mr. Quo gave me the address for the place he got the ring for his wife... I remember deciding it sounded good, and going in... I had it made custom, I remember...” Marco smiled, thinking. “I knew he wouldn't want anything vaguely feminine, so it didn't have any gemstones... but it was both yellow and white gold, and etched really nicely... I dunno, it was nice, and he has two-toned hair... I thought it'd be perfect.” Marco thought some more. “Doctor’s visits... the ones with Casper? ...about Jean having ED?” He watched Eren nod with mild shock. “I thought those were just really weird and sarcastic dreams... apparently not. But... it does make a couple other memories make sense...” The ones where he’d take that pill before letting me have my way... He shivered as he thought about it for a moment. “...I kinda thought that by that point I would remember the first time I thought ‘I wanna marry him’ and I did... but I never really remembered what came after that... just lots of memories tangled up on the couch and then there are the memories of the dog and just... just coexisting all tangled up... it's nice to think about.” I miss it... I miss it all...

Eren sighed as he looked at Marco. “Marco... You can’t... Jean’s finally getting back to himself, okay?... You can’t do this... Jean... He... I’m sorry, but you fucking broke him when you left like that, he cried on the phone with me! He never calls me, Marco...” He sobbed on the phone until I lied to Lathe and went out to go comfort him...

Marco felt anger twist in him unexpectedly, gritting his teeth. “...I don't want to lose the man I want to marry just because of a damn car crash... it’s not like I wanted this to happen. It's not like I wanted to leave him. And just as I remember how much I love him, you're trying to convince me to move on because he has too. I... I don't think... I don't think he doesn't still wonder what it would be like if that crash hadn't happened and we were still together. ...I'm sorry Eren.” Marco stood, letting out a deep breath. “...I'll try to get this right.” I don't wanna break his heart again.

Marco left at that, staring at the ground determinedly.

Eren watched him leave, shaking his head. They're both staying for dinner I take it...?

Marco went past his truck and across the street, Jean nowhere in sight though his truck was still parked in the lot. Inside? He went inside, waving to Lathe who looked quietly curious as he went inside. Where is he...? He heard quick footsteps, catching a glimpse of him as he slipped into a maintenance closet, sighing quietly. He's hiding from me? Really? Marco went up to the closet, opening the door to see Jean looking over a sparsely filled shelf, seeing the scarlet blush he was struggling to keep down. “Hey Jean... can we talk?” Marco didn't step too close to him, holding the door open to let him come out, not wanting him to feel cornered. Just be cool about this. Don't
Jean looked over his shoulder for a moment, shaking his head. “Marco… I really don't think we should….” You left… You didn't stay when I was drunk… He looked down, his jaw set as he slipped out and walked past Marco towards his office. I don't really want to…

Marco looked defeated for a moment as Jean just ghosted past him, sighing, his eyes setting on him again and following, careful as he reached a gentle hand for his shoulder, just touching it, enough to turn him a bit. “Please Jean…” Marco looked for the right words, speaking before Jean could dismiss him again. “I know you've done so much to move on from me and you probably want nothing to do with me anymore after all the pain I put you through but I think I’ve finally come back to all my senses and I just… I’d really like it if we could talk a little… even if the most it does is give me a bit of closure about us not being together anymore.” ...at least help brace me for the rejection...

Jean was quiet for a moment before he pulled away and started walking from him. “Come on…” We can go to my office in the basement.... He walked without turning back, trying to look as emotionless as possible. He can't know I'm still hurting...

Marco gave him a tiny weary smile as he started them for his office, following him at a respectable distance. He was quiet when he was led downstairs, quietly thanking him as he held the door for him. He sat opposite Jean’s new desk, neither of them looking at the other, quiet for a moment. “......I know this whole thing of me trying to talk to you now is shitty and selfish of me and I’m sorry… because I know that it must hurt still… I left you when you were most vulnerable… ...I remember buying that ring, Jean. I'm so, so sorry I didn't even remember we had dated when I woke up.” He sighed quietly. “I…. It started to feel weird after a few months when I slept alone. ...it took me a while to realize it was because there wasn't someone to hold onto… and I remembered Curly when I set a bowl of dry cereal and a bowl of water on the ground for some reason… and when I realized that there wasn't anyone bugging me whenever I opened the back door. And… and everything came in little bits and pieces, sometimes I’d be in the middle of brushing my teeth and I'd remember the time you tickled me by surprise while I was brushing my teeth and the horrible mess that ended up being… and sometimes I just dreamed long memories, like when Dad took us fishing and you got so excited when you caught a sunfish that you kissed me on the cheek with Dad right there and normally you'd refuse to even touch me around him… and I remember all the random cooking lessons I had to give you when you tried making dinner and I you were so proud when you finally couldn't just make chicken cacciatore, you could pronounce it too…” Marco had his head in his hands, looking over the desk. “I thought all the memories of being in Casper’s office with you during those appointments were all just dreams because Casper was being so serious about gay sex and you were actually talking to him… but then I remembered every once in awhile I would have the dreams where we… where things get heated… and then you taking the pill just before it makes more sense. ..........I loved you.” Marco looked up to him nervously. “....and I'd be lying if I said it didn't hurt to hear everyone say not to try, that you'd moved on… and I know it’s so selfish to hope for anything besides ‘let's just stay friends.’” He looked away again. “I don't want to guilt you into anything… and I'm so sorry for stirring this up again… but I just really needed to tell you that… that I feel like I'm back to
being Marco… …and that even if it's childish and selfish I don't want to have to let go too.” *I'd love if we can go back to being us… and I can go back to living with you and laying on your chest as we watch Harry Potter marathons that we’re too busy making out during to really notice… I wanna learn what your hands all over me feel like all over again… please...*

“I was holding a knife to myself when Eren found me…” *I feel like I should tell you this… But I feel like it’s wrong to tell you….* “I called him because it hurt… And I know he’s tried… I couldn’t bring myself to do it no matter how much I wanted to… He talked me out of it… And I moved, erased your number from my phone… And deleted any messages from any unknown phone number… I had to get rid of Curly, cause I couldn’t pay for dog food… And my money that I earned went towards a new much smaller apartment, a gym membership and alcohol….. I don’t think you’d want me anymore… I’m not that Jean you used to know….” *Not when you fucked with my head like that...I couldn’t deal with you leaving me...*

Marco looked heartbroken to hear it, not knowing what to say. *I... I broke you… “....I'm so... so sorry you had to go through what I made you… I never wanted this to happen… I always felt like everything was missing because so much time had passed and I remembered so little… I always ached… and even when I started to understand why, it's not like it helped make it stop… it just hurt even more when I felt the cold bed and knew someone was missing… I… I'm so sorry that everything broke you like that… I'm so sorry you lost me and couldn't even keep Curly… I'm so sorry…”* He looked up to him. “...but I want to believe you're the same wonderful man I fell in love with.” *you can do this. “....Jean, please, don't feel obligated to, but… we can try this again. We can try to go back to the ‘normal’ we had… if you want.” Please, say yes ....*

Jean was quiet for a few seconds, before he stood, keeping his head down as he came around to the couch that was across from his desk. He stood in front of Marco for a moment before he kneeled down on the outside of his thighs, straddling him. *I don't want you to leave me... His hands came up to cup Marco’s face. His own had tears streaming down each cheek as he shakily ducked down to steal a soft kiss. Please don't leave...*

Marco had him wrapped up tightly in his arms the moment he settled in his lap, one hand familiarly running up and down his side. *This feels.... He let his eyes flutter shut as he was kissed, warmth slowly blooming in his chest, the feeling squeezing on his heart. ...so familiar it hurts....* He slowly kissed him, his hands slowly roaming him. *...but I always topped...* The notion finally clicked, Marco slowly shifting them, not breaking their lips apart as he sat Jean on the couch, one knee between his legs, his hands slowly running down his front. *...I missed you...* He let his hands brush down to his slightly parted thighs, bravely cupping him and feeling him, not at all hard. *...Right. And I doubt you have any Viagra on you, so... Marco broke their kiss, slowly kissing over to his ear, massaging him through the fabric. “It's okay, Hon... I'll just have to work for it.” He nipped his ear. *And I'm more than happy to oblige...*

Jean shook his head, his blush going all the way down his neck. “It’s okay… really… even if I’m not hard… I won’t be anymore...” *I had one more meeting with Casper... and he said I'd probably
never be able to get it up ever again… I’ve resigned myself to that fact… “T-There’s lube and condoms in the bottom drawer…” His breath was hitched as Marco nipped at his ear. He slowly slumped down to lay on the couch, his body shaking. I don’t know what to do…

Marco gave him a sympathetic look, softly kissing his neck. “I’m sorry babe… I want to take good care of you anyways. Of course I will.” He gave his neck a soft kiss before leaving for the desk, quickly rummaging for the tube and package. “I’m not going to ask why you have these…” He came back, straddling Jean’s lap. “…was it because you knew I would be hired here too…?” He ducked his head down to kiss at his neck again, tugging at his shirt, wanting it off. I wanna kiss everywhere… I wanna make up for lost time… He managed to get it off, his hands running down his abs. “They’re even better than before…” He ducked down, not even trying to resist the urge to kiss and lick every last line of them. I wanna make you feel really good… I wanna make love to you… and I wanna at least try to give you one more release… even if that’s all you’ll be able to manage for the rest of the time we’re together…

Jean smiled, gasping as Marco’s mouth latched onto him. Oh shit… He’s really gonna try and get me hard… isn’t he? He could feel the blush come out of his pale skin, making his chest look rosy. He let out a soft whimper when Marco expertly located all his sensitive areas one by one, and he felt the blood rush south for the first time in months. He might actually get it… “N-No… In case I…. I-I ever got h-hard out of the blue…” I wasn’t going to miss an opportunity if it presented itself…

“You wanted everything you’d need to take care of yourself…” Marco gently sucked on one of his rosy buds, Jean slowly shifting underneath him. I can understand that. Marco slowly lapped at his bud, his fingers hooking in his pants, wanting them gone too. …though… “I guess to be fair…” He was about to take off his own shirt when Jean stopped him, letting him help take it off slowly and sensually, revealing his tan skin, a bit heavier than he was when they dated, the lines of his body soft. He was about to speak with worry when he felt his hands move all over his sides, sighing as he saw the loving look in Jean’s eyes. … I don’t have to worry…

Jean’s hands glided over Marco’s soft flesh, his thumbs massaging his hips and hooking into his pants. “A-Are you sure?” If we do this… You’re not allowed to leave… “You can back out now…. But if we do this… I’m never gonna let you fucking leave my sight…” Jean’s tone was serious, his eyes portraying complete sadness with lust and warmth underneath it all.

Marco drank in the emotions mixing in his eyes, slowly leaning over him and laying on top of him, oh so slowly grinding their hips together, feeling a beat of victory when Jean’s legs eased open even more for him. His lips brushed his ear, his voice low. “If only I had a ring with me…” He gently nipped his ear, kissing the spot behind it. “I’m going to do everything I can to stay with you, even if it kills me. I want to keep you, Jean. I wanna have you. I want to make you feel loved.” He slowly kissed his neck, feeling Jean’s hands slowly come up to hold his hair. I wanna love you.
Jean let soft moans escape his throat as his hands ran up Marco’s sides and into his hair, holding onto him tightly. *I want this to last… please tell me this isn’t a dream… “M-Marco…”* He moaned out Marco’s name as he felt the heat slowly beginning to pool in his nether region. *Maybe I can get hard… maybe Casper was wrong?*

Marco smirked as he heard Jean moan, kissing his chest. “You sound so beautiful, Jean…. you’re so handsome…” Marco slowly pulled Jean’s jeans down, easing his thighs open for him, slowly kissing up the soft inside of one as his other hand ran over the other, brushing close to his nether. His hand drifted to his still-clothed length, looking over as he felt it. *He’s getting hard. “You’re getting hard, Jean… is that how good this feels?” I know the one time I actually did a tiny bit of dirty talk you loved it… just small stuff….* Marco nibbled the flesh, going to gently nip at his clothed length, the bulge slowly growing. “I wonder what would make you rock hard… would it be when I’m gently nipping your base? When I’m sucking your tip and running my tongue over your slit? Or maybe when I’m slowly fucking you into the couch? I wonder how long it’d take me to make you cum…” He hooked his fingers in the waistband of his boxers. “I’d make love to you all night until I made you cum…” *I would…*

Jean let out a high pitched cry as Jean nipped at his growing base. “F-Fuck… M-Marco…” Jean stuttered as he looked down at Marco’s eyes, seeing how dark with lust they were. *Oh shit… He’s gonna do all of that isn’t he? “P-Please …”* He begged, moving his hips into Marco’s hands. *I want them off.*

Marco let his eyelashes flutter as he slowly dragged his boxers down, revealing his half-hard length. He immediately dove in, his hands running over his thighs, keeping them open for him as he slowly licked and nipped at his base. *I wanna make you scream and moan and cry out until you lose your voice…* Marco let his lips brush up his length before pressing a gentle kiss to his tip, slowly starting to suck on him. *He tastes the same… like Jean.. and it's still… different… and a good kind of different.*

Jean’s eyes were wide as his hands went directly to Marco’s hair, gripping at it. “F-Fuck…” He felt his whole body go rigid as he felt his blood rush to groin and feeling it fully harden for the first time since he’d been diagnosed. *Oh my god…. I… I’m hard… Marco got me hard…* He felt his toes curling, and his legs instantly wrapped around Marco’s shoulders to keep him in place.

Marco slowly sucked on him, bobbing his head. His hands roamed over every bit of his skin that they could reach, coating him with saliva. He wasn’t done when he pulled off of his length, dipping down to even give his balls some attention. *I wanna relearn everything about you…*

Jean gave a soft gasp before a loud and needy groan ripped from his throat. *Oh my god…* He shifted a bit, to better display his ass for Marco, his hands still tangled in Marco’s dark brown hair. *“M-Marco… I-I need you please…”* He begged him, wanting him to hurry at least a little bit. *I can’t take it like this anymore… I want you, I want you to love me again…*
Marco chuckled quietly, lapping at the skin before pressing a small kiss to his needy hole. “Don't worry… you'll have me.” Marco cupped his cheek, a gentle touch so that he knew he would be sated soon. *I'll love you. Always.* Marco reached for where the small tube and condoms had fallen, getting the lube and slicking his fingers. “I'll be careful, Hon. Tell me if it hurts.” He slowly lapped at his neck as he traced the pucker with his finger, slowly slipping it inside. *Tell me how it feels...*

Jean hissed at first, instantly tightening around his finger. His nails gripped into Marco’s bare skin, trying to open the skin. *I can’t... It’s gonna hurt all over again... “Slow... please...” I haven’t done anything to myself while you were gone.* He whimpered as he tried to shift to a comfortable position.

Marco nodded, slowly reaching his other hand to give his length slow pumps as he adjusted, wanting to keep him feeling pleasure. *I want you feeling good... I know it must hurt after so long... “Tell me when you're ready for more, Hon...”*

Jean nodded, slowly relaxing around his finger. “Slowly... please... Y-You can put more in...” His voice was small as he reached his hands up to hide his face as Marco focused on his lower half. *God this is embarrassing...*

Marco slowly began slipping in a second finger, lightly nibbling at his neck. “Please babe, don't hide your face... I love all the expressions you make.... I still have the image of the face you make when you cum seared into my mind... beautiful...” Marco softly kissed his neck. *It's okay.*

Jean swallowed thickly, looking away as he slowly uncovered his face. “B-But it’s embarrassing...” *My face is flushed... I’m a grown ass man for crying out loud... I shouldn’t be reacting like a freaking virgin...*

Marco leaned up, softly kissing his cheeks. “It's not embarrassing, Jean... the expressions that you make every time we’ve made love... I love all of them... you're so handsome it hurts...” He pressed closed, very slowly thrusting his fingers in and out of his entrance. “You're just perfect for me...”

“He... Ngh...” Jean shook his head as Marco spoke. “I’m not perfect, Marco...” *I know I’m not perfect in any way, shape, or form.* He hissed in pleasure when Marco’s fingers brushed over his bundle of nerves. *It feels so good... I’m still hard... “M-Marco... I’m gonna need a condom t-too...”* He shuddered at the thought of being able to cum for the first time since he started taking Viagra. *Maybe this is what I needed?*
Marco nodded, still kissing up his neck. “Okay, Hon. Just breathe.” Marco slowly prodded for the bundle of nerves, easing in a third finger a bit after. He still slowly rubbed his length, his hand twisting. “Feeling good, Hon?” I want you on cloud nine...

Jean’s hand went to grab at Marco’s wrist. “M-Marco… I’m not kidding…” I can feel the heat building… I’m not gonna be able to hold it if I cum… He whimpered, arching his back with a moan as his prostate was rubbed forcefully. Yes please...

Marco immediately slowed his ministrations, his hand leaving Jean’s length. “…I’m sorry Hon… but you can’t cum just yet…” He moved to get him a condom, his hand still buried inside of him. He tore the wrapper with his teeth, slowly rolling it down his length. “Almost there, Hon. You'll have me soon. So soon.” You're almost stretched enough...

Jean whimpered against the gentle touch as the condom was rolled onto him. Fuck… Fuck fuck fuck… He cried out as Marco rubbed at his prostate again shifting to try and push back on it. I want to cum...

Marco slowly sucked on his neck, knowing he was leaving a hickey as his fingers slipped from his heat. “Almost, babe…” Marco murmured reassurances to him as he quickly shed his pants and boxers and rolled on a condom, coating himself generously with lube. His hands slowed after that, tenderly holding his waist, looking up to him. “Tell me when, Hon.” His tip lightly brushed his entrance. I'll go at whatever pace you need.

Jean nodded, moving his legs to wrap around his waist. “Please… Please Marco… I want you…” He didn’t know why but he could feel his face heating up. I want you to hold me again…. Please… I missed you so much. “I l-love you…” His words came out with a hiccup as fresh tears rolled down his face.

Marco let one hand come up to his face, brushing away the tears that he could. “I love you too, Jean… so much…” He slowly pushed inside of him, both of them panting as they slid closer and closer, their hips soon flush, scrambling to pull the other flush with their bared skin. He's so warm… “Tell me when to move, love… tell me how you want me to love you…”

Jean picked his head up, burying his face into Marco’s shoulder as he wrapped himself around him. “I want your everything… make me forget we were apart… I don’t care if it hurts… I want you …” His voice was shaky at best as he clung to him, sniffling as he cried still. I want you to fuck me into oblivion… Maybe I’ll be able to get hard if you do this more… Maybe I’m not impotent after all?

Marco nodded, his hands gripping him solidly. He slowly drew out before thrusting back inside of
him, relishing in the deep blissful gasp as he ground into him. “You sound so sexy…” Marco kissed his neck, starting to suck more hickeys onto his skin as he started a steady pace, wanting Jean to adjust to him at least a bit before he got carried away.

He couldn’t help the absolutely wrecked noises that were leaving his throat, his hands gripping into Marco’s bareback. The burn of being stretched was slowly being replaced with the pleasure he had known so long ago. “Marco…” His voice was high as he let out a breathy moan, his eyes closed in utter ecstasy. I want more.

Marco let the moans drive his motions, soon finding himself pounding into Jean as he sucked mark after dark mark at his throat, feeling dangerously possessive. You’re mine. “Jean… oh Jean…” He could feel the heat between his legs, panting as he heated up. I’m getting close… “Jean… I’m getting close, love…”

Jean shook his head, clinging to Marco. “D-Don’t leave… please…” His voice sounded desperate before a loud cry filled the large office as he came, filling his condom. He felt his body go slack, his grip loosening. “Shit… Marco…” He whined as he felt that he was still hard between the two of them. Fuck… It feels so good after so long…

Marco sped up as he came, finding himself dangerously close. Jean’s cry was enough to force him over the edge, his own release soon following him, panting as he rested on his chest. He’s still hard… Marco sighed, gently rolling his hips, hearing Jean let out a quiet moan. “…if I get each of us a new condom… will you let me make love to you?”

Jean was quick to nod. “Y-Yeah… please…” His hands were shaking as he reached in between the two of them to take off his condom, noticing how full it was and how red his member was. Fuck… I’ve been blue balled for too long…

Marco threw them both away, about to roll a new one onto him when he changed his mind, dipping his head down. He slowly lapped at his length, tasting the remains of his release, cleaning his length. He gave it a teasing suck before he pulled off, rolling on the condom. He did the same for himself, lining himself up and slowly pushing in again, both of them sighing as he started a deep, slow pace.

Jean could feel the tears bubbling in his eyes once again. “F-Fuck… Marco… I-I’m a mess…” I can’t keep it together… what’s it gonna look like when we walk out of here? He let out a soft sigh as Marco ground deeper into him. He feels so good… Better than what I remember.

Marco just kissed his cheeks, his voice soft. “You're so handsome, Jean. It's okay to cry, it's okay.
I'm here.” He paused, looking over his teary, lovesick expression. “I love you so much, Jean.” I really do…..

Jean whimpered, wrapping his arms around Marco’s shoulders, trying to pull him down. I want you to kiss me… Please kiss me! I want to know you love me.... He let out another sigh as Marco complied and kissed him deeply. He opened his mouth up to let his tongue in, his heels digging into Marco’s back to push him in deeper. It feels so good… Jean felt the tears roll down his cheeks as they kissed, not caring at the moment that he was a complete mess. Marco seems to love it....

Marco happily kissed him, his tongue prying into his mouth, tasting him. He was as close as he could be to him while still able to thrust as hard into his heat. I love this so much...

Jean whimpered occasionally, his body shaking with need and want, trying to get all of Marco wrapped up around him. Shit… I really hope I don’t regret this anytime soon… His hands started to thread through Marco’s hair, feeling the heat beginning to surge towards his lower half all over again. I want it…

Marco held him as close as he could manage, murmuring sweet praises in his ears at every moan and sigh, at every twitch and quiver. He’s so…… he’s perfect… “Jean… I’m gonna cum….”

Marco held onto him tightly, never wanting to let go.

Jean groaned, holding him closer, his lips moving to latch onto Marco’s ear. “Please…. Marco… I want your everything…” And I want to be able to sleep with you by my side… and not a bottle of liquor...

Marco let out a low moan in his ear, grinding deeply into him. “Okay, love…” He picked up the pace a bit from his slow thrusts, steadily driving deeply into him. I hope it feels as good as it does for me.... “O- Oh …. Jean...” Marco let out a choked sound, crying out into his shoulder as he came a second time, thrusting even harder into him as he did. So good...

Jean let out a loud cry, his arms clinging to Marco as he came again, filling the condom. Oh my god… The complete bliss he felt had him hold onto Marco where he was, trapping him. He tilted his head a bit, kissing at Marco’s neck lazily. “D-Do you wanna come home with me tonight?” I hope you will… I don’t want to sleep alone knowing that I could have you to curl up to...

“Please…” Marco sighed as he settled on his chest, a look of peace on his face. “I miss sharing the bed with someone… I miss holding onto you….” ...maybe after we get used to it again I can move in again….? I'd love to... “And when we get used to being with each other again… I can get all my stuff from my Dad’s?” I’d like that...
Jean nodded against shoulder, keeping his whole body wrapped around Marco so he couldn’t pull out quite yet. “I don’t wanna let go…” He whispered quietly, his voice sounding hurt as he clung to him. Even his legs were wrapped around Marco’s waist, keeping him against him in warm bliss. 

*I don’t want to leave… This could be a dream…*

Marco nodded, shifting to sit up with Jean still in his lap and firmly sunk onto his softening length. He murmured as Jean desperately whimpered, holding him reassuringly. “I’m not letting go yet, babe, it's okay.” sitting back and letting his hands run up and down his back. He softly kissed at his shoulder and neck, kissing the marks he’d left. “I'm sorry, I kinda left a lot of hickeys….” 

*You’ll be really hot while you're working the next couple of days if you can't ditch your shirt.*

Jean nodded, still holding onto him, and kissing at Marco’s neck as well, though he didn’t leave any hickeys. “I don’t care….” *I can just say they're bruises if I need to take my shirt off.* He shuddered as Marco’s lips latched onto yet another patch of skin behind his ear, a soft whine escaping him. *Fuck… His mouth, I miss having him all over me… “Y-You actually got me h-hard too…” And kept me hard…*

Marco smirked, a glimmer of victory in his eyes. “I wanted to make you feel good… I guess it worked. Casper can suck it.” He nipped his neck a bit more roughly. “You deserved to be loved like this… you deserve better than what I can give you after how long it's been…” *You deserve everything…*

Jean shook his head moving his neck away from him and cupping his cheek so he looked up. “I just want you, Marco….” He leaned in for a lazy kiss, enjoying how their lips tangled. *I want this to not be a dream… I really do…*

Marco smiled faintly, one arm wrapped around Jean’s waist, the other slowly moving over his shoulders, playing with the shorter hair at the nape of his neck. He held him close as they made out, enjoying the hands running all over him. *He's… I missed you so much…* He broke their kiss for a moment some time later, pecking the corner of his lips and glancing up to the clock, his eyebrows shooting up. *We’ve been here a while… “Wanna get dressed and go have dinner? I'm sure Lathe invited you to stay for food too… and if not, he’ll let you anyway.” He gives too many shits about us. And he can be a bit of a pushover sometimes, especially when it comes to feeding people.*

“Yes… that’s fine.” He murmured, whimpering as he shifted off of Marco’s limp length, not wanting to get off of him. *He’ll probably think it's weird that I still want him buried inside me…* He looked at everywhere but Marco as he took his condom off, tied it and threw it away, scooping up his clothes to start getting dressed quickly. *I wish I had time to take a shower, I look like a fucking mess, I can feel how puffy my eyes are…*
Marco poured as Jean seemed to move too quickly, doing the same with his own condom though he caught Jean by the waist, feeling him freeze up. He gently pulled him back to his chest, softly pecking across his shoulder. “Relax, Jean… it's okay. We're in no real hurry. And you don't have to be embarrassed about how you look. I can still read your mind.” He turned his head with his hand, softly kissing his cheek. “You look unbearably handsome, Jean, and you don't have to give a shit what the people at dinner are gonna think about how you look. They've always been family, Jean. That didn't stop when you stopped going to dinner. It's okay.” It really is. They all care about you.

Jean was frozen inside of Marco’s arms, shaking his head. “I doubt they’d want to see me look like I’ve been crying… I-I should go home…” He swallowed thickly As he pulled on his shirt, still not looking directly at Marco. Marco wouldn't want you back…. Why would you think any of this is anything but a dream?

Marco took gentle hold of his chin when he tugged on his shirt, quietly coaxing him to look at him. “Jean, these are the same people that giggled the entire time we explained hickeys to a nine-year-old and make fun of each other for having them. These are the same people who’ve invited you over every Saturday for a feast and even decided you deserved chance after chance when you kept being an ass to Eren and let you come back for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Lathe hooked you up with a job I'm sure is paying a hell of a lot more than anything else you don't need a degree for and they're all trying to make you feel welcome again. They all kept sending you food to make sure you were eating until you changed apartments and nobody could find you. They all care so much about you, and I'm sure they'll understand if you feel brave enough to go over there with me and let me hold your hand. It doesn't matter that your eyes are a bit red. They all know how much this whole thing has hurt you and if anything they'll be so happy that this is the end of all that sadness.” They all love you. They're family.

Jean shook his head. “This is all just a dream… Isn’t it? I should go home before I even think it’s reality… It can’t be real, Marco wouldn’t want me back… You’re just a figment of my imagination.” I really wish you weren’t… But you are …

Marco just gave him a look. “I give an emotional speech and that's the reaction. If I smack you, will the pain prove to you that this is real?” I just wanna go eat food with you and play footsie under the table so you can stop looking so damn miserable.

Jean turned to Marco, looking like he was about to cry all over again. “Marco I can’t tell what’s real and what’s not anymore! Okay?!” He practically screamed. “I can’t fucking tell anymore! One night I’m laying next to you! And then the next I’m at your fucking funeral!” He screamed at him, having finally snapped, tears beginning to stream down his face. “I can’t tell what’s reality anymore, for all a I know I drank myself to sleep and this is a liquor induced dream which I wish was reality but isn’t!” His voice was broken and full of pain as he screamed at Marco. I can’t tell anymore… I wanna be able to tell, but I can’t…
Marco looked stunned, carefully reaching for him when he stopped, cupping one cheek, his thumb gently running over his skin. Jean looked broken, and Marco picked his words carefully. “Jean…” He slowly stepped closer, enveloping him in his arms, burying his nose in his neck. “I’m so, so sorry I did that to you… I can’t apologize enough for all the pain you’ve endured… I want to help you learn what’s real. And I’m real. Right now, I’m here. And it’s okay if you don’t believe me until you wake up in two months and realize this is one hell of a long dream- too long to be a dream. It’s okay. We have time. And if you don’t wanna go to dinner and maybe wanna let me take you out somewhere or would rather go back to your place and order pizza and just lay on the couch… all of that is okay. We can do whatever you want now. It’s okay. Whatever will make you happy.” I just want you to be happy...

Jean sniffled as Marco held him. “W-We can go to d-dinner…” I have a feeling this is just a long ass dream… Might as well make the best of it right? He gave Marco a weak smile as he pulled away. You should get dressed...

Marco gave him a weary smile, gently pecking his nose. “Okay, Hon. Let’s get dressed, okay?” He let his hands slip from him, going to gather up his own clothes. He was dressed soon enough, reaching for Jean’s hand as he awkwardly shuffled near the stairs. He laced their fingers, feeling his chest flutter. “Is this okay?”

Jean nodded, following him silently. Yeah, this is okay… I’m gonna wake up from this to have been a dream… Aren’t I?

Marco let them past Lathe’s empty office and out of the building, walking with him across the street and up to the house. He gave Jean’s hand a reassuring squeeze when he knocked, taking a deep breath himself. It’s okay.

There was a couple of excited voices all piping up at the idea of guests, hearing someone shuffling to the door. “Chill, back up, make way-” James opened the door with Mila securely in one arm, stopping at looking at them for a moment. …hm. I thought …. Not anymore? …. oh. He smiled warmly to them, backing up. “Come in, please. Guys, back up, please!” James looked to the flock of kids with exasperation, shooing them out of the way. They love guests, of course.

Jean didn’t know what to do as the children all giggled and ran back to the kitchen table. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea? His grip was tight on Marco’s hand as they were led inside to the kitchen table and given seats next to each other. Jean didn’t look up as Eren came around to fill their bowls with soup and such…. I don’t wanna look up...

Lathe came around with a few stray plates of food, setting down the basket of rolls in front of the
two of them. He rested his hand on Jean’s shoulder, smiling when the man looked up nervously. “I'm happy for you two.” *I'm so glad things are working out.* He let them be at that, going to sit at his place when everything was at the table. *I won't press too much.*

Jean was confused for a moment, watching him move back to his seat. *Happy? But you're never happy with me... You hate me being here... You gave me the job out of pity... Did you even give me a job or did I imagine it?* Jean’s brow furrowed as he struggled to fight the urge to curl up to himself. He let go of Marco’s hand, grabbing at his shirt near the hem and tugging it.

Marco looked over when he saw Jean’s head duck down, seeing him nearing a nervous breakdown. “Jean?” He looked worried, his voice a whisper as he leaned over to him, resting a hand lightly on his back. “Do you just wanna go home? We don't have to stay here.” *It's okay.*

Jean shook his head, fighting the urge to pull his feet up to his chest. He wasn’t expecting to hear Blake bark at him and slowly clamber up in his chair. *Fuck... The dog, no... why....* Jean looked at Blake with broken eyes for a moment, too scared to see what the reactions around the table would be as he heard everyone quiet. *This isn’t okay...*

Marco watched Jean look nervously at Blake, the dog licking his cheek. Marco took gentle hold of Jean because Blake couldn’t, slowly coaxing him out of the chair and onto the floor. Marco held him while Blake licked his cheeks, Maisie nudging his foot and Mikhail watching from his spot next to Eren with perked ears. “It's okay, love.... It's okay.” Marco murmured soothingly to him, sighing in relief as Jean reached out shakily to pet Blake. *You can do this. You're fine.*

Jean felt his ears ringing as he pet Blake, the warmth on his back feeling comforting yet foreign all the same. *What is this? What’s happening to me? I don’t understand ...* Jean’s vision grew blurry before he realized that he was crying. *Oh my god.... Why? Why can’t I tell?*

Everyone at the table was very quiet, James silently motioning for the kids to not stare and go back to their food, a worried look on his face. Lathe and Eren both moved to kneel by them, the older man murmuring first. “Would you feel better if you laid down for a bit, Hon?” He looked to Jean worriedly. *You look really out of sorts... I guess this whole situation with Marco can do that to you... given all the pain it's already caused you... I'm not surprised this is a really emotional transition...*

Jean shook his head, his hands leaving Blake and gripping onto his shirt, which caused him to curl up to himself against Marco even more. *I can’t... I don’t... I don’t wanna wake up.... “I don’t wanna wake up....” I like this dream... It's gonna fall apart soon...*
... oh. He thinks it's a dream. Lathe and Eren shared a glance before the two of them and Marco did, all understanding. He doesn't want it to be. “Jean, hey, it's okay. Try not to curl up so tight, okay? Just breathe.” He watched as Marco turned Jean sideways in his lap, helping the two-toned man to unfurl a little bit. How to get him to realize this isn't a dream..... …… well …. “This isn't a dream, Jean, we promise.” ……he'd probably think it's dumb... but... maybe it'd help? “…would it make you feel better if we walked you through the dream tests?” He spoke when he saw the confused look he was given. “The dream tests are three simple things you can do to check if you're dreaming. People use them to help improve lucid dreaming abilities, but they work for any dreams. Do you want to try them? It might help.”

Jean looked at Lathe with confusion before he nodded, looking down at where his hands were clutching his shirt. What am I supposed to do? Is this a way to trick me? I don't want the dream to end... Because it's too good to be true...

Lathe smiled faintly. “Okay, Jean. They're all really easy. You see the big clock there?” He pointed to the wall clock, the hands slowly ticking away. “Read the time and remember it.” He waited for him to nod after a moment. “Now just look away from it, look anywhere. Then, all you have to do is look again and check that it's the same time. A lot of the time in dreams the time changes randomly or the words of a book or on a piece of paper become complete nonsense. Is it the same?”

Jean was afraid to look but he was relieved for only a moment to see that the clock was the same time. But what if I'm just imagining it? What If I'm imagining that it's the same? Jean looked vaguely confused as he sat up, rubbing at his head. Is... Is this real?

Lathe smiled as he saw the momentary relief. “Okay, second one?” He waited patiently for the slow nod. “Okay. Look at your hands. All you have to do is study them.” Lathe watched him confusedly unlatch them from his shirt and inspect them. “Our hands and feet are complicated parts of the body. Because they're so far away from the rest of our bodies, and because they're so complex, it's easy to dream them up incorrectly. Do they look right? Nothing extra, nothing missing or blurry?”

“Y-Yeah...” Jean’s voice was still weak, though he seemed more relieved than ever. What's the last one...? I... It seems like this is real... But I'm not sure...

Lathe nodded. “Good, there's just one more. If this is a lucid dream, you'd be the one in control of it, and normal functions would be thrown out the window. So it's going to sound silly, but pinch your nose, then close your mouth, and see if you can still breathe.” Try it. It's the one test you really can't get around.

Jean was quiet for a moment before he nodded, pinching his nose and covering his mouth to try
and breathe. When he realized he couldn’t he shuddered a sigh in relief and wrapped his arms around Marco and started to cry. It’s real... This is really real... Oh thank god...

Marco gave Lathe a look of gratitude, wrapping Jean up securely in his arms. “It's okay Jean, I'm real, it's all real... I'm here for you babe, it's okay...” He softly kissed his temple, trying to soothe him as he cried. It's okay now. You know it's real. You're a lot more sure than you were before. It's okay.

Jean sighed in relief, pulling Marco down for a rough kiss, not caring that it was rough. I want you to hold me... I really do... Please hold me, because I want you more that anything ... His hands were clutching Marco by his shoulders, wanting him to understand.

Marco cupped his cheeks as Eren and Lathe respectfully looked away and moved to go back to their seats, knowing that things had been fixed. He kissed him back just as forcefully, his arms solidly winding around him, keeping him even closer to his chest. He broke from him after a long moment, murmuring against his lips. “Jean… I’ll ravish you when we get home… let's try to eat for right now, hm?” He sighed as Jean pouted, hanging onto him tighter. “…you can sit in my lap if you want.” You'll probably take me up on that.

Jean nodded, moving to go sit between Marco and the table, enjoying that Marco’s arms were wrapped around him....

Marco kept his front pressed to Jean’s back, usually keeping one hand on Jean’s thigh, gently running his thumb over the denim. When we get home, you’re all mine... Dinner passed easily after that, most of the people at the table trying to hide their giggling as Jean made himself at home in Marco’s lap. He smiled as they were given cake for dessert, not giving a single shit and insisting on feeding Jean the cake. Because I want to.

Jean’s eyes widened as Marco started to feed him, but he gave in without any resistance. I like this... I really like this a lot... He ate without a fight, glaring at Eren as he rolled his eyes and went to take Mila from James to keep her occupied while he got dessert. I think I can handle this... Especially if he comes home with me...

Marco smiled as Jean cooperated, watching a tiny bit of frosting get stuck in the corner of his lips. “You have something…” He leaned in to kiss it away, smirking as Jean flushed. “…There.” I wanna show you off... you’re mine. Nobody else's.

Jean’s entire face flushed in embarrassment, moving to hide his face in Marco’s shoulder. “M-Marco…” He whined softly, leaning his head down to hide his face. You are being so
Tucker looked over where Henry was sitting as he picked at his cake. Why the hell is he still here? All he’s done is hit on me all day! I don’t get it… Why do you keep trying? He kept his head down as Henry looked up. I hate it, don’t you realize that? I want to stay away from you! You keep working your way in! I don’t want that anymore…

Henry internally sighed as Marco kept feeding Jean, looking over to Tucker. If they can work shit out… why can’t we? I want this to work, dammit… Henry didn’t realize he was staring at Tucker until all of a sudden they were making eye contact, a tiny bit startled. He soon just gave him a soft smile, winking bravely before turning back to his cake and hoping his hair hid the scarlet blush that crept down his neck. I don’t know what to do… It’s not as easy as just getting up and kissing you… I’d get punched for that.

Tucker looked away a blush on his face as well. Shit… He’s too goofy for his own good… What am I supposed to do about that? He shook his head focusing on his cake, and immediately getting up to help Eren with dishes. I don’t want to talk anymore… I know that Eren’s gotten accustomed to it too, just incase Mila grows up mute as well, he wants to be prepared, he’s tried to teach me sign language…. But texting is just so much easier… and Henry blows up my phone… Can’t you take a hint? That if I don’t text you I don’t want to talk to you? He grit his teeth and his brow furrowed as he dried off the plates, not realizing how tight his grip was until he broke a plate and shattered it in his hand. Huh?

Lathe looked shocked as the plate in Tucker’s hand suddenly broke, looking worried. “Whoa, just set the pieces down, did you cut your hand?” Lathe inspected his hand, finding all the cuts on his hands. “What the hell happened? What’s wrong?” Lathes voice was hushed, looking at him incredulously. What the hell is going on?

Tucker’s brow furrowed as he let Lathe hold his hands and take the shards out of his hand, grimacing as they were pulled out. I don’t have my phone on me… Dammit… He looked back to where the kids had dispersed and Eren was picking up the dishes and scraps from the table. Henry was staring back at him and he set his jaw again, glaring at him. Why the fuck are you still here!? 

Lathe followed Tucker’s line of sight, sadness settling in his gut….oh. “Tucker, Honey…” Lathe looked to him seriously, his voice quiet. “…I know there’s a lot going on in your mind about what happened, but he genuinely cares about you and the solution is not to be a dick to him. At least be civil, okay? I know he's probably not taking no for an answer- he's a persistent kid- but have some patience. Maybe trying to work something peaceful out would be easier than hating him.” He's been hitting on you every single time I looked outside- I could see it. He gives many a shit about you.
Tucker shook his head, angrily glaring at Henry before huffing and crossing his arm over his chest, the other still held by Lathe as he took out the pieces. *I don’t have my phone so I can’t even argue with you about how annoying it is! I stopped talking because of him! And he doesn’t realize a damn thing!* He winced when Lathe pulled out a big piece, which happened to be the first bleeder. *Fuck, that hurt*…

Lathe lightly smacked the back of his head, giving Tucker a disapproving look. “If you're gonna be an asshole about all of this, at least wait until I'm not around to see it.” *You're pushing it.* “I get that his persistence is probably annoying as hell as the stuff he did scared the everliving crap out of you but you need to understand that not all relationships go over the exact same way.” Lathe gently rinsed his hand of blood before continuing. “I have no real idea as to why you detest the idea of a relationship with him so much besides the fact of how your first crush ended up. But this is a different situation entirely, Tucker, and you need to understand that. You're the same age, you actually know him and have spent plenty of time together, and a great deal of the time you're under supervision where nothing bad would last for more than a second or two tops. Why the actual hell do you hate him? Because it'd be so much easier if he didn't give a shit about you? It doesn't look like that working, Tucker. He seriously cares. And I know him well enough to know it's legitimate. I hope at some point you grow up enough to realize that. …I know you can't exactly respond to me right now, but honestly, that's not the point right now.” He handed him his phone anyway, a new note open. *“I'm so done with this whole situation.”*

Tucker’s brow was furrowed as he listened to Lathe. *I don’t want to talk with him, I don’t like him eyeing me up! Why do you keep letting him over? I haven’t talked at all because of him! Why are you swearing at me? You never ask if I’m okay with him around! Why don’t you ever think of how I feel about everything that happened?* Tucker kept his head down taking his hand from Lathe once he was done and giving back the phone. He turned, moving to the table to grab his own phone. *No one thinks of me… No one ever thought of me, why did I think this place would be any different?*

Lathe read over everything, his face darkening a bit. He gave Eren a look, watching him nod and go to get a container for soup before going to grab Tucker’s arm, marching him out of the dining room into the downstairs nook. He sat Tucker down, sitting next to him and looking to him evenly. “Tucker, first off, this entire situation isn’t just about you. There's a lot more to this situation than you think. Do you honestly think the only reason I invite him to dinner so much is just to torture you? Don't tell me you haven't seen me send him home every single time with extra food. We’re both aware that in his house, money is tight and he could use the extra food. It's why all three of them come over on Saturdays. It's not to torture you. And I’m sorry that you feel that way because of all the pestering on Henry’s part, but don't try to tell me I haven't asked how you feel when every time I try to ask you flat-out ignore me. You've shoved away every memory from it and I've been trying to get through to you so maybe something could be solved but you haven't let any of it work. And I know that it can be a bit uncomfortable with all the flirting, but I'm sure he feels a bit uncomfortable with all the iciness you've been showing him for months. He keeps trying to either fix things or convince you that he's nothing to be afraid of and you've just met him with a lot of anger. And I swore at you because I'm fed up with how childish you've been about this when it'd be so much more easy to at least pretend to be civil. You could at least not glare at him every goddamn time you see him and maybe things would work out a little less shitty than they feel right
now.” I'm so over this.

Tucker was quiet as he listened his brow furrowing as he thought about everything Lathe said. I don’t want him to think that he has a chance though… What he did before… I don’t want to go through that again… If I stop glaring he’s gonna end up trying to do that again. He closed his eyes, putting his face in his hands and let out a loud muffled groan, a way that he would get out his frustrations as of late. Tucker took a deep breath, only nodding and locking his phone. With my luck I’ll get grounded… maybe it’ll work if I just ignore him altogether? That way I won’t glare at him...

Lathe sighed, snatching the back of his shirt and sitting Tucker back down. “Oh no, not yet. In a minute. …..I hope you know that if you are straightforward with him enough and say ‘I don’t want to date’ in a text or especially face to face it would be a lot more effective than ignoring him and hoping he gets the hint. If you're really uninterested, just let him know without having to make guesses based on the hints you dropped. At least tell him to wait until you're ready for an actual relationship. Something.” Anything.

Tucker nodded, looking down to his phone as he opened it up. Shit… Do I really have to tell him? I don’t want a relationship… I’m scared it’s gonna happen again… You can tell me how you feel Henry would react with me… But I can’t… Not after what happened. I like him, but I can’t handle him staring at me… Or trying to flirt, I don’t want any type of relationship… At all… I know what his family situation is! But I don’t want to have to deal with him! I can’t refuse him because I like him too! But I’m so utterly afraid of a relationship… I hate it… But I’ll stop glaring at him… I wanna keep my distance because he shouldn’t be interested in me, he can pick any girl he wanted just off of his looks. I can’t take his request seriously, and I hate that he tries to get me to talk by goofing off! He did it during the camp today! All day! Just to get my attention! He’s going to lengths he shouldn’t be going and it’s freaking me out. Tucker handed his phone over as he curled up into a ball. You can’t always look and see how I feel about his flirtatious nature, it’s scary… I mask my fear with anger, because if you show fear they'll overpower you...

Lathe sighed as he read Tucker’s text, sighing. “…I'm sorry, Tucker. It's okay. You're right that no means no… and with what you've been through it's very understandable. I know that he wouldn’t do anything you don't want… but that's not going to change anything. I’m sorry.” Lathe handed his phone back. “You're old enough to make your own decision about this. I'm sorry I keep forgetting that.” I'll back off.

Tucker took the phone back, silently reaching his palm out for Lathe, having quickly learned that it was for apologizing. He kept his head down, knowing that he should be lucky that Lathe even thought about how he felt in this situation. Why does he have to keep trying…? But I still have to apologize though, because apparently being an ass is bad if you don’t want someone hitting on you…. He kept his head down, and eyes focused on his rough hands, his eyes swirling with mixed emotions that Lathe couldn’t see.
Lathe ran his hand down Tucker’s palm, opening his arms, silently asking for a hug. He smiled as Tucker accepted, running a hand through his hair. “Just be straight with him about it. And whatever happens, I’m here for you, okay?” Lathe felt Tucker nod, smiling and pecking his forehead. “Okay. Come on, Hon.” It'll be okay. Lathe stood, walking back into the kitchen, seeing Henry still shuffling his feet by his chair, his bag over his shoulder. He's waiting for Tucker...

Tucker followed after, a little more calm than when he broke the plate. He saw Tucker standing by his chair, rolling his eyes as he saw him shuffle. Can’t sit still… He raised his hand as Henry was about to talk opening his phone up. I do /not/ want to go out with you. I do /not/ want to talk with you. Stop trying. It’s annoying as all hell! He forked over his phone, crossing his arms as he looked at him with a schooled emotionless face. You’re gonna cry, aren’t you?

Henry stared blankly at the screen, even as it grew dark and shut off. ………..there aren’t any chances left for me. Henry didn't look up, staring at the floor, his voice small and quiet. “……..I'm sorry for trying so much… I didn't know you hated it… I'll leave you alone....” Henry gave him his phone back, feeling his face heat up as he wanted to cry. “I'm sorry...” He turned away from him, feeling his eyes grow red as he made it to the door, leaving quietly and beelining for his bike as the tears started falling. I thought I had a chance… I thought he kinda felt the same way and that we could make it work..... ...I guess not...

Tucker sighed as he watched Henry run off. Maybe he’ll stop texting me and i’ll be able to breathe…. He shook his head, heading for his room and closing the door. Why does it hurt so much? To see him crying like that?...... It hurts....

Lathe watched sadly as Henry scurried away, seeing the telltale signs of tears. Oh no.... poor kid… Lathe sighed, letting him and Tucker run off before going to clean the rest of the kitchen. He heard a ping on his phone some time later, pulling it from his pocket. ...Kevin’s texting me?

KP: Care to enlighten me as to why Henry’s a crying mess?

KP: He won't tell me...

LQ: Remember when I told you about Henry having a crush on Tucker?

LQ: Tucker got fed up with all the relentless flirting...

LQ: I don't know what he told him but he wanted it to stop...

LQ: ...I'm sorry, but that's the situation....

KP: .... So you’re telling me he got rejected?
LQ: Yeah... and knowing how Tucker was feeling about everything ten seconds before it happened he probably didn't try to let him down gently...

KP: goddamn it... He's gonna be a mess For awhile then....

KP: Thanks for telling me.

LQ: I'm really sorry... there wasn't much I could tell Tucker...

LQ: If he doesn't want to come to dinners on Saturdays anymore I can still send food home if you'd like that

LQ: I know he probably doesn't want to be around him too much and probably won't for a while...

KP: He's gonna suck it up and learn though, because the world is a bad place...

LQ: ....the kid’s fifteen I don't want him to hurt /too/ badly... he's got enough of that for now

LQ: If you send him over I'll just send him home with food

KP: He’s 16 now... He’s gotta learn to man up cause he’s gotta get a job soon.

LQ: If the kid looks miserable he's coming back home. That's all I'm saying.

KP: Alright, well, we’ll see everyone on Saturday then... I'll try and keep him occupied for the week, I can’t imagine that he’s gonna wanna go back to camp.

LQ: Yeah... I'm really sorry about all this... it's not like there's much I can do to fix it...

KP: Well, I might be able to convince him....

LQ: ...I just hope he survives the week.
Like all other times of the year, time marched on, not stopping as time ticked down to Saturday dinner, mercifully carrying on through it. ….. that dinner wasn't awful… I mean, it could've gone better. Tucker just ignored Henry the entire time and when he left to go to the bathroom he looked like he had been crying when he came back. He's really been taking it hard…. Lathe was in his new office, going through paperwork for the building, the sound of kids laughing and playing muffled well by the walls and the door. We've already got more kids than I ever thought would show up… it's wonderful. None of the parents could believe that this was here- we made it easy to sign up, and they could be here nearly every day of the year; there are few exceptions- Thanksgiving and the day before it, and from Christmas Eve to January 1st. I don't wanna keep our workers stuck here, and we all need time with our actual families. I hope that works out fine. Lathe scrolled through the list of things for the library, still trying to assemble a good collection of books. Eren’s been helping to teach the kids who come after school, which is wonderful- he's got all the German classes taken care of, and he's been helping with every subject the kids ask about. It's great! Sharon said she had a lot of stuff on Latin, but I know the Latin classes at the school were kinda small… if she wants to give us her stuff, though, it'd be very appreciated, of course. I think she wanted to help organize a Home Economics class, which would be good. A computer skills class too. And Hannah was thinking about drawing class… if she ever had the time… all of us seem busier than normal. Jean’s seemed so much happier ever since he and Marco got back together. He's a great worker, and Marco is really good with all the really little kids that get dropped off for the whole day. ...Ieva went in for her two-month checkup just an hour ago ish… probably more than that… and I'm hoping everything is going perfectly… I'm so happy… I'm gonna have my own kid … well, I mean, we have plenty of kids right now and Eren, Jake and Tucker certainly aren’t nothing but I made this one! Well, helped. ...Ieva’s doing most of the work tho. ….I didn’t do too much of anything but I’m still so excited!!

Ieva got in the house… Okay, I have everything I need. I put two buns in the oven and I have the pictures… Oh that’s right! She took out a silver sharpie, drawing two hearts around their two small humans. That's everything! Ieva took a deep breath as she took out her phone, excitement lining her voice as she hummed waiting for Lathe to pick up. Come on... Pick up! I can't wait to tell you!

Lathe immediately rifled through the papers on his desk for his phone when he heard her ringtone. He smiled as he picked up, sounding a bit nervous. “Hey Hon! Is everything okay?” I don’t have to worry about something… right?
“Can you… Can you come over to the house? ...Now?” I can’t wait to see your face.

Lathe felt dread twist in his stomach, swallowing. “I-I'm coming Hon, are you okay? You're okay, right?” Don't tell me you have to tell me something other than it’s okay… He was walking quickly from the building, jogging across the street. Please be okay...

“J-Just come into the kitchen…” Ieva hung up with that, getting the camera ready to record this whole thing. You’ll be so happy...

Lathe looked legitimately scared, bolting up the driveway and running through the front door. He saw Ieva in the kitchen, not even bothering to shut the door behind him as he ran over to her. “Ieva, Honey, are you okay? What happened? Is something wrong?” He nearly looked ready to cry, his hands moving to her waist, a thumb brushing over her stomach. “I-It’s okay, right?” Tell me it’s okay...

Ieva but her lip, turning to Lathe. “T-There’s a hint somewhere in the kitchen… You gotta look for it….” She told him quietly, looking down from him. Shit, you look ready to cry...

Lathe looked at her in confusion. “...w-wait, what?” He looked around him for a moment, looking back to her. “…I-I have to look? Can't you just tell me?” Is it really that bad that you can't tell me? He felt his face heat up, trying not to cry. I want you and it to be okay...

Ieva shook her head. “You gotta look, I’ll give you a hint… It’s in an appliance…” That is a good hint right? If it’s in the oven…?

... the hell? Lathe was scared and really confused, sniffling and turning from her, feeling ridiculous as he started inspecting the kitchen. What the fuck is going on…? He felt dumb as he checked in the microwave, peering in the toaster and glancing over the contents of the dishwasher. “...what the hell happened…?” He looked to her incredulously, looking weary. He sighed as she shook her head, going to the ovens to check them, opening an empty one, and stopping when he saw two hamburger buns sitting on the shelf of the unlit oven. “....why…?” He looked to her in confusion, gesturing to them. “What the hell is this for?” I don't understand... is this like... a huge joke or something? Because it isn't funny...

“Think about it… What do some people say when they wanna say someone’s pregnant without saying it?” She looked at his face and saw the fear in it… I think this was a bad idea… But I thought it would be a cool thing to do…
Lathe quirked an eyebrow at her, looking back to the oven again. “....why'd you put two hamburger buns in the oven? I knew you were pregnant, and if this is some kinda metaphor, why use....” His expression shifted, looking to her. “.....there's two.” ...wait.

Ieva couldn’t help but smile as she pushed the picture with the hearts towards him on the table. *I’ll let you figure it out*....

He picked up the picture, studying the two tiny, growing humans in it. ...you… there’s... “...there's two...” Lathe set it down again, moving around the table and taking a knee, holding Ieva by the hips and pressing kisses all over her stomach, nearly crying in relief and happiness. *There's two of you... oh my god... we're gonna have twins ...*

Ieva smiled as he kissed her stomach, smiling as she ruffled his hair. “I’m on bed rest from now on, so I’ll be home for the rest of the seven months... My doctor wants me to take it easy.... We won’t know if their identical or fraternal for awhile...” *We need to see if they are the same gender...*

Lathe held her close, still gently kissing all over her tummy. *Two tiny little lives...* Lathe looked up to her with one cheek still pressed to her, his eyes glistening. “You’re gonna let me take care of you, right?” *I wanna make sure you have everything you need... I want this to be as smooth a pregnancy as possible for your sake and for the kids’ sakes.*

Ieva nodded and smiled happily. “I’m sorry, I wanted you to find them and figure it out yourself...” She ran her fingers through his hair, smiling wildly. *I love this... I love you...*

Lathe chuckled breathlessly, his eyes fluttering shut as he held her close. “...never terrify me like that again...” *I was so fucking scared I was about to break down... I thought you'd... but you're okay.. and they're okay... ...okay.*

Ieva smiled softly, moving to kneel down and kiss his cheeks, her hands gently holding his head. *So I’m off of work now... “I can help out with the kids more now.” We’re gonna be actual parents...*

Late smiled a goofy, lovestruck smile, pulling her close into a lazy kiss. *You'll be home now, and we’ll have two more little humans to fuss over... I'm so happy...*
The doorbell rang on a Thursday.

Lathe was just finishing a mug of coffee when it did, setting it on the counter next to the shopping list. *It's probably another confused parent… we still get plenty of them.* He walked to the door, opening it and blinking. A marine stood on his doorstep, and he felt dread immediately slither into his stomach. *Oh no… “Y-Yes?”*

“Mr. Yeager?”

“Uh, th-that's my son, sh-should I go get him?” …*this isn't good…*

“Yes, he’s been listed as the significant other to Levi Ackerman. This information is for him.”

Lathe nodded, a look of fear on his face as he left for the upstairs, knowing he was probably with Mila. “E-Eren?” He found him in his bedroom, cradling Mila to his chest, seeing his peaceful expression, watching it slip when he saw his own worried and scared look. “Th-There’s someone here to speak to you…” *I can't believe it…*

Eren’s expression fell before he nodded and he held Mila out for Lathe. “Can you hold her?” *This can’t be good whoever it is… Dad looks like he’s seen a ghost…*

Lathe nodded, taking the tiny toddler and trying to give her a smile as she looked up to him and poked his cheek. *It's okay… your Daddy is gonna be okay…* Lathe shadowed Eren, in the nook at the top of the stairs, still plainly able to hear, watching them from the couch. *I don't want to hear it… but I should…*

Eren opened the door again, all the color draining from his face as he saw the man standing with an envelope. “Um… You were looking for me?” *I don’t want to know what you have in that envelope.*

The marine nodded and handed him the white envelope. “I regret to inform you that your significant other has gone MIA… the base lost contact with him a week ago…”
Eren’s face fell even more as he moved a hand to cover his mouth, trying not to cry. “Th-Thank you for telling me…” Levi…. His mind had gone blank except for the fact that he’d never said goodbye to him, and that thought alone made tears fall from his eyes. He watched the marine nod before turning and walking back to the military vehicle he brought here. Eren closed the door behind him, slumping down to the floor and burying his face in his hands. No… I… I can’t lose him…

Lathe came down the stairs, his own expression grave, hugging Eren with one arm, his other still full of Mila. “They'll find him, Eren, they'll find him… he might've run into a bit of trouble but I know he’d do his best to get out of there… he’ll be okay…” He’s got to be okay… he can't just leave you behind like this… he was gonna pick a ring later this week… he has to be alive somewhere… he's somewhere…

Eren could only shake his head as he shifted to cling to Lathe, tears streaming down his face. “I don’t want him to be gone…” I don’t want him to be gone… I want him back home! I want him to hold me, to love me… I want him back…

Lathe gently rubbed his back, Mila looking at Eren with wide eyes as he cried, the toddler reaching for Eren as tears streaked down his cheeks. “Eren, Honey, he's not gone. He’s still out there somewhere, trying to get somewhere safe. He's got a really hard job but he's a very good soldier. I'm sure he’ll turn up in a couple of days. He’ll turn up, and he’ll be okay. I just know it.” …I seriously fucking hope so. “He's gonna come home and you three are gonna make the most adorable family and you'll be happy… he’ll come home for you and for Mila.”

Eren could only nod as he sobbed on Lathe’s shoulder, sniffling and holding onto him tightly. I want him to come back… what if he doesn’t come back to me?

Chapter End Notes

Please comment
Chapter 99: Everything Goes to Hell

Levi’s eyes slowly got adjusted to the low light as night fell, setting a dark blanket over the desert, the dry heat leaving with the sun. Well, it only gets harder from here on out …. I’ve still got everyone, that’s a plus. My usuals are still with me, Reiner, Bert, Farlan, Izzy… got my two snipers: Ivan, and Keith… The new guy, his name’s Tyler, he’s still younger than all of us, fresh out of the academy, the only private that I have in my special operations squad. He paused, raising his hand and the everyone followed suit, becoming silent, listening to the sand hiss around them in the wind.

“Sarge?”

He listened to the soft feminine voice come through their radio. “Easy, Iz, I’m counting.” Levi’s eyes tracked movement over the rough sand ahead of them. The wind was picking up the sand, both a blessing and a hazard that Levi knew all too well. I hate this part… We’re within two clicks of the reported base… and claims appear to be true, there’s definitely guards here, not just an abandoned building. He turned his head looking back to everyone in a uniform line, though keeping watch in all directions. “Two hostiles one click north of us, objective location two clicks north east… There’s bound to be more hostiles on the way in… Prepare yourselves… and keep your radio low… Bravo, Charlie: head two clicks north, follow the hostiles, we won’t infiltrate objective location until 0100 hours. Wrap around and look for more if you have time.” He barely needed to know that Bert and Reiner left, were silent in the sand. Okay, I have five in my command. “Delta, Echo: head two clicks east and locate the hostiles on the other side of objective location, make a sweep to meet Bravo and Charlie… Foxtrot, Golf: You two stay here, we’ll need sniper coverage, this is the highest point closest.” That’s the reason that you two are here… the only reason I asked Eyebrows to take you two.

“And me?”

Levi picked his head up, seeing Tyler, looking at him with uncertainty. “How quiet can you be?”

“As a mouse, Alpha.”

Levi nodded, weighing the options as he saw his two subunits go towards their objectives. “Have you been in a firefight, Kid?” I don’t want to throw you in the mix if you can’t handle it, the other six are well prepared for a heavy fire fight...

“No, Alpha.”
Levi could hear the slight fear in his voice. *I could ask him... and always stick to his side... It might not turn out as bloody as I think it will.* “Alright, you’re with me, and if you fuck up, it’s on you.” *I don’t wanna lead you into death.... But this is a job our unit gets on a weekly basis. These damn outposts in the middle of the fucking *desert*.*

“*Confirmed, Alpha. Hotel on tail.*” Tyler stepped carefully as they started walking, trying to keep his breathing steady. *You can do this. This is what you signed up for. This is what all that training was for. Don't let it all fail you now.*

Levi nodded, taking Tyler through one of the back doors of the closest building to them. *This building... It's got nothing in it but artillery... and supplies.* He looked to the mass of weapons that were being stored precariously on shelves. “*Bravo, Charlie... we found a ‘den’...*” *These fuckers... There’s gotta be more fire power on this base alone than what we can manage at this point. This is gonna turn into a firefight that we have no hope of winning.* “*All units disengage...*” *We can’t win this one, we’d need more fire power...*

Tyler looked over the huge mass of weapons, swallowing hard as he saw stacks of boxes of bullets, guns and gun cases strewn about, everything piled high on quickly assembled metal shelves. *...oh my god. There's no way any people we find are gonna be easy to take down... shit ...* He silently followed Levi as they carefully left, trying to ignore the few things strewn over the floor, the random live grenades stuck anywhere they would fit. *If one thing went off in here... my god, the explosion...*

Reiner and Bertholdt gave each other a look, speaking quietly. “*Acknowledged, Alpha. Bravo disengaging.*” *This can't mean anything good.*

“*Charlie disengaging.*” *There's got to be a literal shit-ton of armaments in there to getLevi to call this off.*

The radio chat filled with sounds of people disengaging, much to Levi’s relief. “*Meet back at.*” He was cut off as he heard footsteps behind them. His eyes were wide as he pushed Tyler into the corner of the room and out of sight from the man with the AK-47 strapped to him. *We’re not getting out of this.* “*Hotel, get out of here...*” *This is not your fight...* Levi took the first shot, before ducking behind some shelving, waiting for another hostile to come in his direction. His gun pointed right to his head and blew a hole in it as he heard an alarm sound. *Shit!* Levi looked back to see Tyler shaking in his boots. “*Get out of here!*” He screeched at him, picking up a few grenades from the shelves next to him and nodding. *Get out, and get away from here.*

Tyler couldn't bring himself to move as he was shoved back, watching with horror as the hostile dropped like a sack of bricks, his head covered in blood before it hit the ground. *Holy fuck...* He
Levi whipped his head around from stabbing a hostile in the neck, bodies surrounding him. *There are so many of them.* “Hotel! Get out of here! Bravo! I need Hotel out of here! We’re in the southern outskirts…” *I swear to god if he doesn’t leave here alive…* Levi was caught up with trying to keep Tyler in the present world that he was quickly becoming surrounded by hostiles. *Fuck…*

“Acknowledged. I’m heading your way.” *This can’t be good…*

Tyler didn’t know what to do, watching with horror as Levi found himself swarmed. *I can’t let them kill him… he’s gonna die…* His grip on his gun was shaky. *Maybe if you fucking did something about it, he’d fucking live! SHOOT THEM!* Tyler looked terrified as he brought the gun up again, the sights settling on the first hostile that came through his scope. *…just like target practice. Breathe…* The gunshot was a lot quieter than he expected, the recoil not what he remembered as the hostile fell at Levi’s feet. *…and shoot. Target practice.* He shifted his sights, another quiet bang as another body fell. *There are more targets…* He shot another as they turned their head towards him, watching them go down. *That one had brown eyes.* Another one ran for him, and they went down too. *That one looked shorter than some of the others… and that one has much lighter skin.* He seemed mindless as he shot one after the other, his expression blank. *I haven’t missed any yet. This is my best practice yet.*

Levi grabbed a gun off of the shelf, pointing it at the hostile behind Tyler and shooting him just over his nose. *Fuck this is getting bad.* “FoxTrot, Golf, get closer and give us coverage… I’m going in, no one follow. I’m calling an air strike in ten minutes, so get out of here… Hotel, get out of here.” He looked towards a bend hearing more shouting as he loaded up on guns and ammo. *I need to do this, because you just killed 8 hostiles for the first time…* Levi had his gun at the ready as he moved out, kill shot after kill shot ringing in the small building.

Reiner was silent as he quickly skirted the building, his gun held up as he neared an opened door. He moved inside, announcing his presence by taking down the first three hostiles he saw, moving further into the huge warehouse. He tried not to be distracted by the towering caches of weapons, instead shooting down every figure he knew wasn’t friendly. He was stunned as he Tyler seemed to aim straight for him, his eyes widening. “Hotel, wait–” He head the bang, feeling a form slump against him, getting out of the way and watching a knife fall from a limp hand. He looked back to Hotel, taking on his blank expression. ……..*oh no.* “Hotel, come on, we have orders to clear out
unless we wanna blow up with the rest of this warehouse. Let's go!” He grabbed his arm, tugging him up to follow him, surveying the floor littered with dead people and pools of smeared blood. *We can't stay here.*

Tyler looked up to him and only sort of saw him, his attention mostly taken up by the other figures still coming into the warehouse. He silently raised his gun, shooting them before looking blankly back at Reiner. *Target practice.* He let Reiner drag him along, keeping his gun up and an eye out for any other hostiles. *Target practice.*

Levi grabbed more grenades and ammo from the shelves before shucking one into the building once he knew that Reiner and Tyler were out of the building and in safety. He sighed quietly, running away, much to the confusion of the hostiles, until the initial blast went off, which caused a chain reaction, blowing up the warehouse and making it daylight outside as hostiles retreated away from the base. *Fuck…* He felt a searing pain shoot up his leg, wincing, knowing he hadn't gotten behind the closest building fast enough. *Fuck…I hope they got out of here…* His ears were ringing horribly, and he grimaced, knowing his ears were most likely blow out. *Shit… When did I say 10 minutes… Are they far enough away from here?* He heard another explosion go off, the blast knocking him over, even with the building behind him, though he quickly realized with the blast that the building behind him was no more… And he was on his stomach and not standing. *When the fuck…* All he heard was explosion after explosion, the ringing barely silencing them. He closed his eyes as the concrete kept him covered, sand covering his wounds that he didn’t know when he got. *My ears are bleeding…* He didn’t want to but his grip was loosening on his gun, his eyes starting to close. *I love you, Eren…*

Tyler stopped when he heard the first explosion, something in his mind making him stop and let Reiner struggle to keep him going. *Something isn't right…* “…Bravo…. …did we forget Alpha?” Tyler looked back to the building as it still glowed white for a *long* moment, the bang louder than anything he had heard before. *if he was in there… then… then he's dead.* He looked stunned as another building suddenly exploded, the air strike having started. “Alpha? Alpha, are you there?!” *Fuck, is he dead?!* Tyler looked to Reiner, then looked down as he saw something, seeing smears of blood all over his legs and feet. *That's not… that's not mine…. That's not my blood… That's not my corpse being torn to shreds by some huge fucking explosion…* “Oh my god… what the fuck have I done …?” *I abandoned Levi… fuck, there's no way he isn't dead… he's… he's dead…*

*He's gonna lose it.* “Hotel, please, stay with me. We need to go, it isn't safe here.” Reiner tugged Tyler along, seeing the kid turn pale as a ghost. *This isn't good… we need to get somewhere safer before he becomes hysterical… it's gonna happen, I can just see it…*

Ivan came up to them, watching Reiner drag Tyler. “Is he hurt?” *Levi was our medic… If he’s hurt we’ll need to call in a chopper…* His eyes looked around to where Tyler was. *Oh he’s gonna break down, we need to get away from here, Sarge's orders…*
“He’s not hurt, but he’s gonna have a breakdown soon. He was completely emotionless in that warehouse, he probably killed a dozen hostiles… have we heard anything from Alpha?” He’s not responding- at least, not that I can hear.

Ivan swallowed hard, shaking his head. “No… I’m going to call in a chopper, the air strike started, if he’s in there… he’s dead… We need to get out of here… Make sure you calm him down before he thinks about pointing that gun at himself…” He’s just a kid… fresh from the academy… Ivan turned to check on the rest of the group they came with, grateful that the majority were uninjured, Farlan having been cut by a hostile, though it was nothing serious. We lost Alpha…

Reiner felt a sinking feeling in his gut, nodding. we lost Levi. Reiner snapped out of it when someone nudged his arm, seeing a worried-looking Bertholdt, the taller man looking to Tyler. Reiner realized how much Tyler was shaking, reaching for him. “Hey, hey, look at me. Come on, look at me.” Reiner waited for Tyler to pick his head up, giving him a weak smile. “You did a really good job for your first real firefight. I know there’s a lot going on in your head right now, but you need to understand that you did the most that you could do and you came out in one piece. And that’s very important. No matter what condition Alpha is in right now, you did a damn good job covering him while you were with him. I’m sure with how you’ve done, he’s proud of you.” You must’ve gotten at least a dozen of them picked off. You did some good shooting for your first real fight. That’s something.

Tyler took in a deep, shaky breath, nodding slowly. “O-Okay…” He looked past Reiner as explosion after explosion went off. “…he’s dead, isn’t he.” He let out a shaky breath as Reiner was silent, all the answer he needed. ......I’m sorry, Alpha. Tyler let them tug him along and onto the chopper, letting them take him away. I’m sorry I left you to die.
We haven’t heard anything about Levi for a week… And I hate it, I can’t sleep, and I’ve been pacing the house. Mikhail’s been trying to get me to calm down… It’s not helping… Eren had settled down on the couch, hoping to try and get some sleep after eating his fill of lunch. I hopefully can sleep, Dad’s putting Mila down in the crib upstairs…

Lathe gently swayed with Mila in his arms, trying to help lull the infant to sleep. It's been hard… Eren’s looked like a ghost for the past week… He cried so much when that marine left… I keep thinking… about what would happen if… if he doesn't get found. I really hope he does… Mila needs both her Dads… and Eren needs Levi… …….I made a silver star the night we found out and hung it in the window… I don't know why I hadn't thought of it before, but I just kinda did it on autopilot….. …..I hope it stays silver… He sighed as Mila sized against his chest, gently laying her down in the crib and pulling the light blanket over her, a small stuffed puppy next to her. “Don't worry, Mila…” His voice was soft and quiet, smiling to her wearily. “Your Daddy is gonna come home… and he's gonna be here for you when you grow up.” He gently kissed her forehead, hearing the doorbell moments after he left the side of the crib. He immediately reached out and lightly rapped on the wooden door frame, looking down the hall to the front hall. …..it's been a week. …………….this is it, isn't it.

Eren had gotten up when the doorbell rang, going to it and he froze when he saw the three marines in dress blues on their porch. He looked to the folded flag in one’s hand, a large gold star in another’s hand… And a papers in the third man’s hands. No…. The tears were instantly there as he heard the words leave the man’s mouth.

“Sergeant Levi Ackerman was killed in action earlier this week during an air strike he ordered… We’ve come to offer you a flag and a golden star for his service.”

……………..my son is dead. Lathe looked heartbroken from where he stood on the stairs, rushing down when Eren was dragged to the ground by Mikhail, a mess of tears and grief-stricken cries. He knelt down next to Eren, scooping him up into his arms, letting him cling to him as he cried. He murmured to him soothingly, his voice quiet. “Stand up with me, Eren, please, come on, easy…” He carefully eased Eren back onto his feet, turning to the marines on their front porch. He led Eren back up to them, helping him take the flag and the star, the small pile of papers. “Thank you...” If it was an air strike.... “.....they don't have his body… do they.” If he's really gone... he's just... in the sand somewhere.

The marine turned to Lathe. “I’m unsure sir, I believe they were going to try and retrieve as much of him as possible, or at least his dog tags… I’m sorry for your loss…”
Eren’s eyes were glassy as he held the flag close to his body. I…… He’s gone….. He could barely keep from crying as he heard the words. He… He ordered the air strike? He willingly killed himself? What?

Lathe slowly nodded, swallowing. “O-Okay. Thank you.” Lathe didn't know what else to say as the men left, shutting the door. It was dead silent inside until Eren let out a shaky sob, Lathe helping him over to the couch, letting him clutch the flag tightly to his chest, the papers and star going to sit on the coffee table. “Eren, I'm so sorry…” Lathe pulled him close, feeling him shudder harder as he did. “I'm so, so, so sorry…”

Eren was a complete wreck. “He… H-He can’t be dead…. He… He’s supposed to come home… He’s supposed to be alive still!” He was quickly becoming hysterical as Lathe held onto him. “He’s supposed to be holding me…” He’s… He’s not gonna be here anymore…

Lathe looked helpless, cradling him closer. “I… I'm so sorry, I just… I don't know… we don't know everything that happened out there… he was trying to make the best decisions he could out there… I…” …killed in the airstrike he ordered… Lathe knew better than to try to give Eren false hopes, his voice gentle. “I'm so sorry… I'm so sorry….” He sounded like a broken record, not knowing what to say as they tangled together. I'm sorry… I'm sorry he's dead...

Eren inconsolable as he held onto Lathe tighter, his cries even woke up Ieva who almost immediately saw the gold star and knew what happened. He cried himself to sleep, his fists clinging onto Lathe’s shirt. I want him back...

Lathe held onto Eren tightly, letting him lay on his chest, the flag wrinkling in Eren’s iron grip until he grew lax, sighing as his eyelids fluttered shut and his breathing evened. He's asleep… He looked up to Ieva, his expression sad and weary. “….he's gone.” I don't want him to be… he can't be… it’s just… it doesn't sound right… He has to be alive… right? He's alive somewhere and they haven’t found him yet and his radio broke so they don't know yet… that's… what happened…. ………….right? He let out a quiet sob, the first few tears falling as he stared at the gold star. ….I want you to be alive...

Ieva moved to sit on the couch, to put Lathe’s head in her lap as tears started to form. “D-Do you know how? I-Is he coming home?” Even if he is in a box...

Lathe shrugged one shoulder, looking up to her. “H-He was killed in an airstrike he ordered.. they… they’re thinking of sending someone out to look f-for him… e-even if they only find his dog tags… b-but… an a-air strike, he…. he's….” Probably in shreds somewhere… all in little pieces… my own son, in little pieces....
Ieva nodded, taking her hand and wiping away the tears that formed in her eyes. *Oh my god… Levi’s gone… What is Eren gonna do? This is gonna kill him on the inside… Are we gonna lose two sons over this? “H-He did what he thought was best…”*

Lathe nodded, gently petting Eren’s hair. “I really hope whatever he did… however things ended up…. that it at least wasn't for nothing.”
“Alpha? Alpha, do you copy?” Reiner spoke clearly into his radio, Bertholdt next to him as they started walking, the taller man holding a sturdy laptop, a small blip on the map directing them to the GPS chip from Levi’s helmet. “He's silent.”

“His radio could be broken… he's supposedly this way.” The noirette led them down the site, the environment still and quiet. He stopped them and looked down, picking up a small scrap of metal. “This is the tracker…” Not attached to Levi… He dropped it, looking around. “….if there's much left of him, it'd probably be just around here.” He watched Reiner nod, the two of them moving and sifting through the sand and the wreckage, carefully feeling at least for the metal tags. Come on… please, at least your tags… we need to send something home…

“Charlie?” Reiner heard a ‘hm’ in response, staring at a concrete block. “...does that blood look fresh to you?”

“What?” Bertholdt looked to where he pointed, seeing a small pool of blood soaking into the sand from underneath a concrete block. “...oh my god.” They paused for a split second before immediately looking underneath the block. Bertl going around and peering underneath, catching a glimpse of silver eyes slowly blinking at him. Holy fuck. “Bravo, he's alive! It's him! Help me move it off of him!” They both dug their heels into the sand, heaving the block to the side and managing to drag Levi out from under it. He felt sick as Levi’s leg dragged along at a sickeningly unnatural angle, as if his bone had been turned to flimsy rubber. “Bravo, his leg is seriously injured.” I'd say fucked up, but… “…make that seriously fucked up. He needs medical help and fast.” He heaved him up, Reiner lifting up the broken part of his leg to keep it somewhat straight as they got back to the helicopter. “Alpha! Alpha, can you hear me?” He looked to Levi, worried. Can you still hear? Did your ears get blown out?

Levi opened his mouth to speak, though he started to cough almost instantly, which ended up with him coughing up blood. Fuck it hurts… It hurts all over… I can’t feel my leg… my throat is dry… and my back feel like it’s on fire… His face contorted in utter pain as he felt the blood begin to move from his back to the floor of the chopper. I need water… I went three days without it… fuck…. Levi tried to move his arm without hurting himself though he quickly found it impossible.

Bertholdt immediately nodded. “It’s okay, you don't have to speak. You've gone three days trapped under that concrete, we’ll get you some water… just stay with me, Levi, stay awake for us. We’ll get you fixed up soon.” He reached out as he was handed a water bottle, helping Levi lean up and drink from it. “Small sips, don't worry, there's time.” Bertl kept him up and drinking for a bit until Levi couldn't stand to anymore, laying him back down and helping clear away his mouth as he coughed up blood. “Just stay calm, Levi, stay as all as you can manage. We’ll fix you up soon.” He looked to his hand when he pulled it away from his back, seeing the blood drenching it. …oh my. “You've got wounds on your back, Levi-” I probably shouldn't try flipping you over… “Are they
bullets?” He watched him nod, coughing up more blood and helping him wipe it away. “Just try to rest, Levi, but stay awake for me. Just stay awake, and we’ll do the rest.” You’re gonna live if it kills you. …that doesn’t make sense but close enough. Just live, dammit!

Levi nodded and he swallowed the water down, relieved for only a moment. My throat… but I can’t feel my toes on my left leg… which means it’s crushed I’m pretty sure. He looked over to Reiner, trying to get him to listen. “Tour-Tourniquet…” I need a tourniquet on me or I’m going to bleed out the rest of my blood… Shit… Eren’s gotta be heartbroken… They probably told him I was dead… Fuck… He’s gonna kill me…

Reiner immediately nodded, getting the supplies he needed to cut off blood flow to his leg. He cringed as he moved his leg, the flesh bending so unnaturally he nearly wanted to throw up. Oh my god… that’s just wrong… Reiner managed to tie off his leg without revealing the contents of his stomach, worriedly looking the rest of him over. “You said about your back- gunshots?” He watched him nod. “We’re almost there, but while we have the time we should try to stop the bleeding, okay? We’ need to sit you up…” Reiner helped him up, and it hurt to see the tortured look on Levi’s face. “It won’t hurt for too long, Levi, don’t worry.” Reiner had Bertl help him get the bulletproof vest off of him, cutting off the shirt underneath and seeing the smattering of wounds in his back. Not good. “Bertl, we’re gonna need something to cauterize the wounds. We need to get the bullets out to do anything.” He grabbed the ruined cloth of his shirt, carefully wiping away the blood. He got the tweezers out of the medical kit, waiting for Bertl to get back at his side with a searing hot piece of metal. “Sorry Sarge- this is gonna hurt like hell.” He got a good grip on the first bullet, quickly pulling it out and moving the fuck out of the way for Bertl to immediately cauterize the wound, holding Levi’s shoulders so he didn’t lurch forward in pain, hearing him grunt and gasp at the bullet coming out and let out a pained cry as the metal seared his flesh shut. “I’m so sorry, but we need to do this and buy as much time as we can. You can do this, it's not forever.” Reiner watched him grit his teeth and nod, going to do it again. They managed to get four of the bullets out before they landed, and after that he was whisked off the chopper, out of their hands. …even if it just bought him five minutes… I hope they use those five minutes well.

Levi groaned, trying to steel himself of the burning pain that shot through his whole body, especially when his leg was tied off. He barely felt himself being lifted off of the helicopter and put into a stretcher and marched to the hospital, put in the OR and put under after he had more blood added into his system.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

The doorbell rang exactly two weeks after the first, one week after the second. The gold star hung in the kitchen above a small shelf with the folded flag, the embroidered silver star in the window having been changed out for a gold one, his name and rank in neat cursive underneath. …now what..? Lathe looked paler than he had in a long while, another sigh leaving him as he saw the star. We miss you. He ambled to the door, opening it and seeing the well-dressed Marine standing there. “…did you at least find my son’s dog tags?” He didn’t even wait for him to speak, his voice and face tired. I miss him...
“Actually, I come bearing good news… Sergeant Levi Ackerman was found yesterday morning in the rubble, He’s currently being treated for his wounds at a hospital on base until he’s stable to be transferred to Home Ground… We’ll send mail informing you of his movement through mail, but I came to apologize about our mistake on labeling your son’s Significant Other as KIA.” The marine bowed his head slightly, acknowledging their mistake.

Lathe just stared at the man for a moment, attempting to wrap his head around what he had said. “...Levi's not dead. ...and once he's stable they're bringing him home for treatment.” He received a respectful ‘Yes sir’ before just staring at him for another moment. “.........he's not dead. ........I have to tell everyone …” He gave the man a disbelieving smile, sighing as he felt a weight slump off of his shoulders. “Oh my god I have to tell everyone and when Levi gets home I have to kick his ass for scaring us to death. Thank you, really, so much.” Lathe gave the marine a grateful smile. 
......my son’s not dead…. he's gonna come home…

The marine nodded, offering a hand for Lathe. “I will make sure that the letter gets sent as soon as he lands safely on Home ground.”

Lathe shook his hand, smiling. “Thank you so much.” He waved as the marine left, running upstairs immediately to go get Mila from her crib. He picked her up, letting her bring her soft blanket and stuffed puppy as he cradled her close, murmuring in her ear. “They found your Daddy, sweetheart… he's gonna come home soon and he’ll get to hold his little girl...” He kissed her head, going over to their bedroom. Ieva was on the bed, sipping a glass of water as she messed around on Lathe’s laptop. “Honey? There's good news.” He was still quiet, holding the sleepy Mila securely to his chest. “They found a very much alive Levi… he’ll be home as soon as he's stable for treatment.” Our son is coming home... in one piece, mostly... alive...

Ieva’s eyes went wide as she turned to look at Lathe. “You’re being serious ?” Oh my god! “Did you tell Eren yet?” She got up from the bed and made her way over to him. “Are you okay with taking Mila over there? She just laid down to sleep...” But I want to go over and tell him too...

“I wanted to tell Mila even if she can't understand, I just got excited. But if we both want to tell him, she's coming with us.” He gently bounced Mila a bit. “Sorry, Honey, but you'll have to wait just a teeny bit for your nap. We have to go tell your Dad the good news.” Lathe smiled as Mila simply squirmed a bit in his arms before settling again when he set her on the bed, wrapping her up in her blanket with her puppy. She looks like a taco... a tiny baby taco... this is too adorable... “Let’s take the baby taco and go tell Eren.” Lathe smiled, cradling her close. He's just across the street, so it's easy. “He'd be in the middle of teaching German right around now, but that doesn't matter. Let's go interrupt class.” We have a baby. The kid's will forgive us.

Ieva looked at him and simply smiled and let him hold Mila all bundled up. “Be careful with her
on the stairs.” We don't need anything happening to her while we walk over there… She led them across the street, holding open doors for them. I hope he'll be okay when you tell him.

Lathe carefully held Mila to his chest, protective of the dozing toddler as they crossed the street. The parking lot had a decent number of cars in it from parents picking up kids or teens who already had licenses, walking in as Ieva held open the door. Lathe nodded to the security guard who saluted him, grinning. “They found Levi.”

Jeff’s eyebrows shot up, looking at him in surprise. “…you're kidding.” He grinned when Lathe shook his head, laughing quietly. “I’m so happy to hear that. You're goin’ to tell Eren?” He watched them nod. “Ah, then I'll be listening for the tears of joy. Little Mila needs both her Dads.” Thank god he’s okay… if anything, the news that your loved one is dead is the only kind of news you want to be wrong.

Lathe grinned. “She does.” Lathe pecked her head, walking on to the first classroom, noticing the older kids at the cafeteria tables quieted a bit when they saw the baby sleeping against Lathe’s chest. Lathe knocked quietly on the classroom door, he and Ieva poking their heads in. “Eren?” He grinned at the chorus of ‘awwww’s he heard from the girls as they saw Mila with her face sleepily smushed against her soft puppy. She’s a little celebrity.

Eren’s hand dropped from the board as he saw Ieva and Lathe. “Did they find….” He trailed off as he looked down, feeling a lump form in his throat as he motioned them to come into the classroom. <“Did they find his body?”> They won’t be able to understand me… We can talk in German in the level 1 class…

<“If you mean the one that's living, breathing, and coming home once he's stable, then yes. They found that body.”> He's coming home for you.

Eren’s eyes widened and he looked to Lathe like he had two heads. <“B-But… They said he was dead… H-He’s alive?”> Oh my god… Is Levi alive? Please say your not fooling with me...

<“They somehow found him on the site after the airstrike… I don't know how, but he's alive, and he's gonna be okay. When he's in stable condition they’ll put him back on American soil. Your daughter still has both her Dads, and you still have your Levi.”> You both get to keep him.

Eren looked like he was ready to cry, sitting back down on his desk and holding a hand over his mouth. <“Oh my god.”> He couldn’t stop the tears that formed in his eyes, turning to the student and down to Mikhail. “Go let them pet you, go on…” He shooed the dog off to the mass of children who eagerly got out of their chairs to go and pet the dog. <“You're not joking… right?”>
Lathe shook his head, smiling faintly. <“A marine in dress blues showed up on our doorstep not fifteen minutes ago. He's alive and they'll have a letter for us as soon as he's back in the US. You'll still have him to hold, Eren. You can keep him.”> He's yours.

Eren simply broke, moving over to Ieva and holding her close, not wanting to crush Mila since Lathe was holding her. “I can’t believe it… I can’t believe it at all… I want him to come home… Is he alive? Is he okay?” Eren’s words rushed out of his mouth as he looked over at Lathe hoping for answers. Please tell me he remembers who I am and what I look like...

Lathe sighed, smiling and giving him a one-armed hug, the other full of sleeping tot. “I know that he's alive, but it sounds like he's been hurt. That's all I know. We should learn more soon when he gets back to the states, but for right now let’s hope that he’s gonna come out of this just fine, okay? He's a tough guy. I'm sure he'll be okay.” He’ll get through whatever he has to right now.

Eren nodded and he hugged both of them tightly while the kids were distracted with Mikhail, who was secretly enjoying the pets. I'm so relieved… “He’s okay…”

Lathe beamed, pecking his temple. “He's okay.” If he's not I will kick his ass into next week.
Chapter 102: Home

The next few days passed by in a kind of tense excitement, Lathe of course being the one to again answer the door to another Marine, receiving one last envelope. *He's back in America! We can go visit him!* Lathe told everybody within minutes, going to book plane tickets as soon as possible. *We need to go see him. And we need to bring the tiny human too. So, two seats...? I'm not sure if Ieva is coming, what with the twins... is it safe? I'm a doctor and I don't know. What the hell. two plane tickets.* It turned out to be a question that answered itself because the morning of the departure, Eren was already gone, having stolen Mila to take a train to see him. *He even stole the baby.* “Hey, Honey?” Lathe gently shook Ieva awake, softly kissing her lips as her eyelids fluttered open. “Eren stole the baby and took a train to go see Levi. Now that we have an extra plane ticket, want to come with me?” I looked it up, you'd be fine... if you want...

Ieva shifted and nodded, sitting up slowly and carefully making her way to the bathroom. “Can you pack me some clothes? I don’t care if I look good I just want to be comfortable…” *I need to get dressed... But I can take a quick shower first I think...*

Lathe nodded, going to grab a small suitcase from the closet. *We only need one, we can split it in half. We won't be there for too long I don't think.* Lathe went about carefully packing clothes for them, enough to last them a few days when he heard the shower shut off.

“Ia-ath...” *I need clothes.*

Lathe chuckled, bringing her a cozy outfit. “Here you go Honey.” He handed it to her, pecking her cheek before leaving her be to change. He himself was soon dressed, waiting for Ieva. He smiled as she stepped into her shoes and shuffled behind him, helping her down the stairs. He made sure to write out a note for James, leaving him in charge before leading her to the car. *Four hours. That's all the flight is. It's nothing.* It felt like a short flight, and Lathe let Ieva use him as a pillow as she slept. .....soon.

Ieva barely stirred on the flight there, though when they landed she woke up. Her hands were gripping onto Lathe’s shirt, holding onto him since she hadn’t put her seatbelt on tightly cautious of her stomach. *I don’t want to do anything to them... I really don’t...* She sighed in relief as the plane was guided into its dock and they were all ushered off. *I want to go see him.* “We should go right away... Maybe we’ll see Eren and Mila...” *I assume Eren’s going to get there first before thinking about a hotel room...*

Lathe made sure he held onto Ieva well as they descended, not giving her the chance to sway forward and fall. *Nope. I won't let anything happen.* Lathe nodded, walking with her off of the plane and going first through customs before they could acquire their luggage. He wheeled it behind them as Ieva called for a taxi, knowing that any taxi they saw outside would be already
taken. It wasn't an hour before they were walking up to the hospital, approaching the front desk. His eyebrows shot up as he saw Eren at the front desk, Mila in his arms, gazing around the room. The bag with all of Mila’s things was slung over one shoulder, and the baby immediately giggled as she saw Lathe and Ieva, throwing up her arms, nearly dropping her puppy. “Gah!” Grandpa and Gramma!

Eren turned to look where Mila was waving her arms, seeing Lathe and Ieva and he seemed to sigh as he leaned up against the desk. “Did you guys just get here too?” He looked like he hadn’t slept in a week, looking back to the lady at the desk when she finally gave him a room number and how to get there. He thanked her, motioning Lathe and Ieva with him. I want to go see him, and you can hold Mila while I kick his ass...

Lathe nodded, taking Mila from him, picking up her stuffed puppy when she dropped it. “No, don't drop Toby, you get to keep him.” He gave it back to her, kissing her cheek as they followed Eren. He and Ieva smiled excitedly when they saw the correct room number, following Eren inside and watching as Levi’s face lit up-

A split second before Eren smacked him clear across the face. Well shit. He sighed as Eren then crashed their lips together in a deep kiss. Of course.

Eren’s eyes had a look of murder in them as he smacked Levi across the face, though as soon as Levi was about to say something about it he grabbed his shirt and leaned down to kiss him. At first it was sloppy, but turned out to be a rather deep kiss, which Eren sat on the edge of the hospital bed for. Oh my god, he’s back... He lifted his hand up to run through Levi’s hair as he kissed him, soon breaking away to breathe. Eren couldn’t help the sob that left his throat, leaning his head against Levi’s shoulder and holding onto his hospital gown tightly. “I thought I lost you…” His voice was barely above a whisper as he clung to Levi. I don’t want to lose you.

Levi winced at the hard smack, stunned. ...I probably deserved that. He had just opened his mouth to speak when he suddenly found Eren’s tongue tangling with his, reaching to hold onto him, his eyes slipping shut. I missed this... I was scared I wouldn't come home... that nobody would find me... Levi held onto him when he broke away, one hand carding through his chocolate locks. “...I'm so sorry... I... I did what I could... to get my squad out of there alive... I... I didn't think they'd come looking for me... that they'd find my busted helmet and leave... I got crushed under concrete... Bert and Reiner found me... I couldn't speak... I'm so glad they saw me...” He clung to him tighter. “I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I left you... it was torture, being there for three days with nothing to do but think...” He looked up as he heard a sound, much clearer than he remembered, seeing the tiny baby in Lathe’s arms reaching for him. “...Mila.” He reached one arm for her, his eyes pleading with Lathe. “Let me hold my daughter, please.” I wanna hold her.

He watched Eren make room for her, carefully reaching for her and taking her from Lathe, smiling breathlessly as she giggled at him, throwing her hands up again. “Lee!” Levi! Daddy Levi!
Levi was close to tears as she exclaimed it, cradling her close, giving her kisses all over her cheeks. “It’s Levi… It’s Daddy… I’m here, Honey… I’m here.” My own little daughter… He reached his other arm for Eren, pulling him close too. …my family…. I… Levi looked up to Lathe, smiling faintly. [Mr. and Mrs. Quo, may I please have permission to marry your son?] I want to… so much…

They looked at each other for a minute, giving each other a look before turning to look around in thought, stroking imaginary goatees. [Hm…. should we let the guy who has a child with our son and makes our son happy as hell marry him… or not? It's a big decision.]

[Just say yes, please.]

They sighed, looking to him and grinning. [Yes!] Go right the hell ahead.

Eren looked between them all with the stank eye, not appreciating the language he didn’t understand. “I get here for ten seconds and you’re already telling secrets?” He seemed hurt in more than one way as he buried his face into Levi’s shoulder, trying to understand his motive. I don’t get it… Why are you keeping secrets from me already? He looked ready to cry all over again when he looked to Mila and how she was trying to grab at Levi’s nose. Oh god……… That’s adorable...

Levi was faced with the important task of keeping Eren from crying whilst fending off a tiny human. “Eren, babe, I'm sorry, I had to ask them something important. We’re not keeping big secrets from you, it's okay.” Levi softly kissed his cheek, brushing their lips together. “Don't be upset, please… it's okay. I’m okay. …mostly.” He watched Eren look to him with worry, sighing quietly. “…my left leg kinda got crushed, so the bone is practically all metal right now…” It wasn't pretty, I was told...

Eren looked shocked as he shifted to lift up his blankets to see a cast from Levi’s knee and down. “It wasn’t amputated? Do they think you'll be able to walk properly?” I hope they do… I really want you to be okay…. He watched as Mila finally got hold of his nose and tugged on it while blowing bubbles and giggling. Fuck… That's adorable …

Levi looked to Mila, giving her an exaggerated pout as she tugged on his nose. “Dat’s meh node.” He gently moved his head around, Mila still latched on. He smiled, looking with sympathy to where Eren was staring at his leg. He gently pried Mila off of his nose, kissing her tiny nose and letting her squeeze his finger instead. “I should be able to, but I have to go through physical therapy. I'll probably have a limp for a while, and either a cane or crutches for a bit. I dunno, we’ll have to see how things go. We’re hoping I get used to it sooner rather than later.” I want to be able to use my legs, please and thank you.
Eren seemed to sigh in relief and move to curl up to Levi, not caring that he kicking off his shoes in the process and that he was holding onto whatever he could tightly. *I feel like I can finally sleep now that I know you're safe.* He managed to fall asleep with his face buried in Levi’s neck, his body warm against him. *I’m tired…*

Levi chuckled as Eren curled up him, scooting over and making room for him. He held him to his chest, surprised when Mila too seemed to loosen her grip on his finger, laying her head down on Levi’s chest. Levi smiled at the adorable sight, tugging the blanket she was wrapped in up a little higher, kissing both of their heads as they fell asleep. *Now that they know I'm okay, it's apparently nap time…* He looked up as he heard a click, seeing Lathe and Ieva with their phones out, taking pictures. Levi couldn't bring himself to glare, just giving the camera a small smile. *I'm home… and my family's okay…*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

*I hate these.* Levi managed to maneuver to the kitchen from the bedroom upstairs, making tea before he realized he had no good way to get it to the living room couch. *I can't carry shit, I go so fucking slow, and it's just ugh. And the kids kept stealing them the first couple days so I'd be stuck in one spot until someone tracked them down again. It's so dumb…* He sighed, simply deciding to sit at the counter and drink the tea in silence. *And Eren and I haven't done anything since I've been home… not even a single handjob to speak of… I miss him… I want something…* Levi glanced out the window and across the street. *He's so busy with the new center, too. Don't get me wrong, it's a great thing, but… I want attention too…* He sighed, abandoning his mug in the sink. He looked up as he saw an SUV pull into the driveway, quirking an eyebrow as Sharon got out, holding something. *Why's she parking over here? Her classes are across the street. He managed to get to the door and open it with his crutches nearly falling over, looking her over. “Hey Sharon… what do you need?” You look suspicious.*

She grinned, rocking back on her heels. “So, a little birdie told me you hate your crutches more than anything and hope they burn in hell.”

“…that isn't not true…”

She chuckled. “Exactly. So, Lathe and I decided that you could use something a little better than crutches now that you're managing your leg better.” Sherry brought the object out from behind her, a black cane with a silver handle, various etchings and rings decorating the metal. “We thought you'd appreciate something a little classier.”

Levi blinked, reaching for it and inspecting the handle. ...*that's very detailed…* “Wow, uh… th-
“Oh, uhm, another thing. Grip the black part near the handle real quick with one hand.” She waited for him to, noting the suspicious look he gave her. “Now grip the handle with the other.” And he did. “Now twist counter-clockwise.”

Levi did just that, feeling it move and click. The handle felt looser, slowly pulling it back. He stepped back a foot as he drew out a long silver sword, the blade etched with tiny words and designs. “....holy shit.”

She grinned madly. “We thought you'd appreciate it. We had it made a while ago, it's kinda part of a character's design… but since you're the person the character is based off of and could use it, it seemed fitting to let you have it.”

Levi didn't know what to say, looking stunned. “You put me in.. that…” He swallowed, giving her a faint smile. “Th-Thank you, really. It's very thoughtful.” It's very nice. “And now I'll look a lot scarier than I do with my crutches. Gotta make sure the kids know how much of a badass I am.”

Sharon laughed. “Don't worry, I think it'll do the trick. I'm gonna run over to start my classes- you be careful with that thing, Levi, it's sharp.” She waved before leaving, jogging back down to her car to park it closer to the center. It suits him.

Levi waved and shut the door, leaning his crutches against the wall. He held onto the cane with his left hand after he twisted it shut again, slowly walking with it. ...this could work. He didn't feel strained after he walked a short lap around the couch with it, going to make himself another mug of tea. He held it with his right hand, able to easily make it to the couch with it. He sipped it, slowly smiling. ...victory.

Eren was the first to make it back from the center, holding a few papers that needed to be graded. Mikhail was at his heels still. His eyes looked over to Levi on the couch, his crutches nowhere in sight. “Did the boys steal your crutches again?” He sighed as he set the papers down on the coffee table going to sit with him on the couch. How the leg holding up without the cast on it now? You got the boot on last week…

Levi smirked, picking up the cane lying on the floor. “I apparently have this now, and not only do I not have crutches to wrangle, I can carry stuff.” This is a major improvement. Levi leaned over for a kiss, pouting when Eren immediately turned his attention to his papers. “Eren…” He moved closer to him, one hand resting on Eren’s thigh, leaning in to softly peck his neck. “Isn't there anything else you'd rather be doing…?”
Eren looked at Levi with a raised eyebrow. “You really shouldn’t with your leg, and your wounds are still healing on your back.” *I know they’re small, but I don’t want to push you.* “You need to focus on recovery, I don’t want to hurt you more…” *I really don’t.* He did his best to distract himself from Levi’s approaches, struggling not to shudder with his lips on his neck. *Oh my god… He’s pushing it…*

Levi shifted to better kiss his neck, one hand bracing to balance him as the other cradled Eren’s jaw. “…please? We don’t have to go all the way… just something, anything… because hanging onto you at night and only sleeping is killing me…” *I’ve waited too long for you…*

Eren’s gaze was calculating. “Go upstairs…” *I need to grade the papers, they won’t take me long… It might take you that long to get to the stairs and up them.* He turned back to the papers, grabbing his red pen and marking something on them. *If you realize what I’m getting at you’ll go upstairs…*

Levi smirked, nipping his neck before letting his hand slip from him. *Yes!* He picked up the cane, making his way with a little more ease to the stairs, taking his time to get up them. He walked on to the bedroom, deciding to get comfortable. He stretched out like a cat on top of the bed, settling in, waiting for Eren. *…don’t keep me waiting…*

Eren was up in ten minutes, making sure that the house was quiet as he opened their door, moving to close and lock it behind him. He moved to strip himself of his shirt to show Levi how far down the tattoos had gone. “It’s gonna be hard to mark me now…” *You won’t be happy about that…* He crawled onto the bed where Levi laid stretched out.

Levi reached for him, pulling him onto the bed next to him, slowly rolling over onto him and burying his nose in his neck. “Hm, It's okay… I can mark you here…” He gently nipped the side of his neck. “Or maybe here…” He moved to kiss at Eren’s chest, nipping a spot on his pecs. “The tattoos make you look even hotter… it's a miracle…” He latched into one of his buds, slowly sucking it. *I wanna draw this out… I miss this…*

Eren let out a soft sigh as he felt Levi’s lips on him. He groaned even more, his body reacting even more to Levi as he was touched. *Fuck… His lips feel like magic…* His eyes closed as he shifted slowly under him, spreading his legs for him. *Fuck I missed this…*

Levi let his hands moved slowly down Eren’s front, tugging at the waistband of his pants. *I want them gone…* He stopped when he felt a hand on his chest, letting Eren take his black jacket off of him, letting him help with the buttons of his white shirt. His back wasn't bandaged anymore, the scars where the bullets had gone still prominent. He sighed as Eren tugged him up further, gasping
as Eren’s lips latched onto one of his own pink buds. Oh… “...m-missed this…” So much...

Eren wouldn’t let up, shifting so that Levi was on his back and his hands were all over his now tanned skin. Oh my god…. He’s almost as dark as me … He hummed as he latched his mouth on Levi’s other nipple, his hands moving to get his pants off, pulling them down quickly. I want to please you...

Levi whimpered quietly as Eren’s hands worked to unbutton his pants, groaning with frustration when the boot got in the way. Make it go away… He sighed as he helped Eren get his boot off, carefully pulling them and his boxers off and out of the way. He spread his legs for Eren, looking up to him with wanting eyes. I need you… please… He watched Eren hesitate, reaching up a hand to gently cup his cheek. “Eren, it’s okay… If something starts hurting I’ll tell you and we can stop or change positions so that I’m not in pain… but I haven’t barely felt any discomfort for a while. I think I’ll be okay, babe. Please… I need you.” He looked to him with pleading eyes. I want it...

Eren swallowed as he looked at Levi, nodding silently, moving carefully over him to the nightstand. He rifled through the drawer and brought out a condom and lube, his eyes on Levi’s body as he settled between his thighs. You’re not keeping your promise… But that’s okay....

Levi paused as he saw the hurt look in Eren’s eyes, reaching out to stop him. “Eren, what’s wrong? If you’re really not okay with this, I won’t make you do anything… tell me…”

Eren shook his head, moving to take Levi’s length in his mouth. I can’t be selfish… I knew he wouldn’t keep it… I shouldn’t be upset… I should just be glad he still wants me at all… You wouldn’t be able to do it anyways… He swallowed down Levi’s whole length, trying to distract him.

Levi gasped as Eren suddenly sank down his length, though he reached for him, pushing his shoulder. Something’s not right… He pushed him off even though he ached, looking to Eren seriously. “Eren, babe… tell me what the matter is… because if you’re not happy with this, then I don’t want it…” I’m not gonna force you to please me… He gently cupped Eren’s cheek as he saw guilt wash over Eren’s face, his voice soft. “Talk to me, Honey…”

Eren felt the guilt wash over his whole body, shaking his head and looking down. “N-No, i-it’s fine… I can wait…” You probably don’t even remember what you promised. “D-Don’t worry about anything…” His head moved away from Levi’s hands, moving back to take his length in mouth again. I can do it...

Levi stopped him again, sitting up. “Eren, please, stop…” He lifted Eren’s chin up, softly kissing
him. *why are you so upset?* “Eren, please… help me understand… I'm sorry that I can't do much to please you in return with my leg and back keeping me from doing everything I normally can… but… …if you want to wait until I'm better so that I can properly take care of you, that's okay.” He softly pecked his cheek. “I'm okay to wait.” *You deserve better than what I can give you now…*

Eren shook his head, “I-I'm fine really … I’m okay, I can do it…” *I know you want it... I know you do... “I can do it...”* He shifted to sit in Levi’s lap, kissing at his cheeks, holding his head. *I should've known you wouldn’t remember...*

Levi looked worried, thinking. …*you keep sounding like you expected something different.... I... I must've promised you... “Eren, love… if I promised you something when I came home… I just… I can't give it to you because of what happened. Just my leg got fucked up and my back isn't perfect yet and even though I'd love to ravish you I just... I can't yet… and I'm so sorry for that… as soon as I can, I will… because you deserve that… you deserve so much more than what I can do to you now…”* Levi blushed as Eren pecked all over his cheeks, smiling. *You're wonderful...*

Eren murmured something against Levi’s skin and he simply nodded. *I’m sorry that I can’t pleasure you... Even if it’s all you want...* He buried his face in Levi’s neck, wrapping himself around Levi, trying not to hit any of the wounds on his back. *I don’t want to hurt you...*

Levi held onto Eren, tugging the blanket around them, his hand running over Eren's back soothingly. “Babe… can you help me get dressed and my boot on again? I just… I don't want anything happening to my leg...” He kissed his neck. “But then we can cuddle all you want… promise.” *All the cuddles.*

Eren nodded slowly and carefully easing Levi into his boxers and some sweatpants before putting the boot on him again. *Should I give him a shirt? He probably wants a shirt... So I should put mine on too.* He clambered off the bed, picking up the clothing they discarded earlier, slipping on his shirt with ease. He moved to unlock the door his head down in a bit of shame. *I fucked it up, I couldn’t hide anything from him... Shit... I need to work on that...*

Levi smiled as Eren buttoned up the soft shirt he’d worn earlier for him, reaching for him when he stood at the now-unlocked door. “Babe, come here, please...” Levi waited for Eren to come back over, pulling him on top of him. “It's okay. Hon… soon enough I'll be well enough to take damn good care of you...” He pecked his neck. “...we can still make out if you want to.”

Eren shook his head hurriedly moving to turn his head away from him as he curled up to his side, his ear resting on Levi’s chest as he had done so many times before to try and get himself to calm down. He barely noticed that Mikhail came into the room and jumped up on the bed. *I’m.... I’m..... He could see his hands shaking and let Mikhail come and lay down between them, petting him to
try and calm from. I’m okay…

Levi watched Eren worriedly, gently carding a hand through Eren’s hair. “Eren, babe, it’s okay that we called that off for now… I'm okay to wait. You're worth waiting for. And if you want to wait until you can have my everything… then we can wait.” Levi looked to him, smiling softly. It’s okay.

“It’s not fair to you though…” He murmured quietly, glancing at the soft smile before looking away. “You’ve been dying for touch… I shouldn’t deny you that…” He nuzzled his head into Levi’s chest, listening to his heartbeat, trying to calm down. I want to be a good boyfriend… Cause you’ll leave…

Levi’s voice was soft, feeling his slight hard-on go down. “I promised you that the first intimate thing I’d do was ravish you… and I should keep that promise. Otherwise, it's not fair to you. I wanna be good to you- and that includes keeping my promises.” ...does that still include me proposing on New Year’s? ...I think it does... I said I would, at least to Lathe... and... you’re dying for a ring... I need to do it before anything else happens. Levi softly kissed the top of Eren’s head, his voice gentle. “...I'll make good on all my promises.” I need to stop making you wait. I need to... I need to stop wasting time. Because you and Mila deserve a real family.

Eren nodded, curling up into Levi’s side more and enjoying the warmth of his body. His own body going lax as his eyes closed and all he heard was the steady beat of Levi’s heart. He’ll wait for me… I’m happy…
Chapter 103: Love, Lust, and Lashings

Levi was happy to leave the doctor’s office without the boot. His expression was still neutral however, and his weight still slightly on the silver and ebony cane, though it really wasn't necessary. *I do like the cane, I'll admit. And thank *f**ck* I don't have to deal with that boot anymore. I'm free to walk and do whatever I want now. ...and that includes fucking Eren into the mattress the second we get home.* Levi nudged Lathe as the two of them walked to the car. “Hey Dad?”

“Hm?”

“Since we’re out, and you have the day off and can drive me around, let's go ring shopping.” *I still have to do that.* “Oh, and maybe look for someplace nice to propose? A nice restaraunt?” *I need to do this for him.*

Lathe chuckled, smiling. “Okay, okay. We can. Which would you rather do first?”

His answer was immediate. “The ring.” *I need a ring.* He got into the car easily, smirking as Lathe took them to the jeweler on Trost.

“You don't have to buy anything here, there are others up in town, but keep an eye on styles you think Eren would like.” Lathe made sure Levi nodded and understood before getting out of the car, leading him inside. They were inside for about half an hour before leaving, Levi looking deep in thought. *Nothing really looked right here.* The next few hours were spent driving to town and looking around for nice restaurants as they went from one jeweler to another, Levi trying to find a ring that spoke to him. Lathe kept a careful eye on him as they lingered for a while in one shop, Levi looking over everything in the case, always seeming to gloss over more masculine bands and look over the ones set with stones. *They're all certainly very nice...* They were there a while, Levi asking the man behind the counter to show him some of the different rings, letting him inspect them. After a while they had left, and all they had to do was wait the three weeks for the custom order to be finished. *A band of tiny diamonds, and one emerald and one sapphire...* “It's going to be a beautiful ring.” Lathe smiled to Levi.

“I really hope he likes it… I don't know if you noticed, but I'm not exactly what you would call romantic… I'm giving this my best shot.”

“You're doing just fine, believe me. And Eren’s dying for a family- you could offer him a ring woven out of three blades of grass and he’d say yes.” *Don't worry.*
Levi chuckled at that, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. “I’m gonna be nervous either way.”

“I know- you're the one proposing. It's part of your job to be nervous. Here, let's keep looking for a place to take him.”

Levi hopped back into the car with him, taking a bit longer until they had four good options of where Levi could take Eren. They called the place Levi wanted most first, seeing about making a reservation, sighing as they were told everything was booked. They tried the second and were told the only opening was at five, not thinking it good enough but marking it down on the page to call back just in case. They were finally greeted with good news the third call around- a very late opening where they would be there at midnight. Perfect. Levi took it, smiling as they hung up the phone. “....that's when I'm gonna ask. I'm gonna ask him to marry me…. he’ll say yes…. right?”

Lathe smiled, patting his back gently. “Of course he will.”

...of course he will. ...he's Eren, and we have Mila. Of course he will.

Eren sighed as he looked down at one of the boys as they snitched the food he was making. “I told you that you have to wait until we sit down!” He grumbled but sent the boy off with another scrap of cooked chicken. I swear, all they do is eat. He muttered something in German as he had to shoo another away from the bowl of chicken. “We are not gonna have anything to eat at this rate!” He had gotten on the last straw as the fourth kid came and stole food. “Alright! That’s it! All of you go get dressed! Tucker! You’re taking the kids outside to build snowmen! The one who can make the biggest one wins a prize!” Eren shouted out, his patience obviously drawn to a thin wire as the boys all scattered and ran upstairs to put warmer clothes on for underneath their snow gear. During his shouting fest he hadn’t heard the door open, shaking his head and going back to rip apart the cooked chicken. <“I swear they never listen unless I yell…”> I hope Mila won’t be like this…

<“They're boys… it's what they do.”> Levi ambled up to him with a slight limp still, having left the cane at the door so he could properly wrap up Eren in a hug from behind. “I got the boot off today…” He smiled into his shoulder, gently nipping his neck. “We both know what that means…”

<“Do I know what that means?”> Eren asked slyly as he turned his head to kiss at the corner of Levi’s mouth, smiling as his hands continued to pull apart chicken. He leaned into Levi’s touch, so happy that his arms were wrapped around his waist, a smile creeping on his face. The anger he’d displayed only moments before completely wiped away thanks to Levi. Damn… He knows how to make everything better…
Levi quirked an eyebrow, kissing his nose. “Hm, I think you do…. I think quite a few things will be put to good use…. and maybe we can have some fun with all the new toys you bought…” *I saw plenty of new ones in the videos...*

Eren’s face flushed in embarrassment. <“If you’re going to talk like that you better be speaking German or so help me god I will murder you if one of the kids hears you…”> He half growled at Levi, no real threat in his words as he tilted his head to the side, letting Levi have at his neck. *You’re gonna ravish me…. I hope at least…*

Levi smirked as the skin was bared to him, gently sucking at the flesh. <“Hm, you’d rather hear in German how hard I'm gonna fuck you into the mattress? Is that what you want?”>

<“Language…”> Ieva looked at them with an amused grin as she saw Levi slowly pull away from Eren to glare at her. <“I know none of the kids can understand what you’re saying, but please try and refrain from fucking on the counter… the same one Eren happens to making dinner on…”> She giggled as she ran a hand over her abdomen, watching Eren gape like a fish. *Oh this is too good...*

... *And we are caught yet again by the ‘Mom-dar’*... <“B-B...But...B-”> Eren could barely form words as a blush graced his features, running all the way down his neck and hiding the red spot that Levi had created just seconds before. He was a stuttering mess as she laughed. *Oh geez...*

<“I’m just teasing... I’ll go put Mila’s crib in our room so you can get to know each other again…”> She smiled and walked off, heading up the stairs and calling for Lathe to come help her with something as she got to the stairs. *I love teasing them... It’s too much fun...*

Lathe grinned evilly as Ieva teased them, following her up the stairs. *Their reactions are just too perfect.*

Levi sighed as they left, draping himself right back over Eren. <“Hm… I could use some time to get reacquainted…”> Levi ran one hand over his thigh, his eyes slipping shut, simply listening as Eren cooked and taking in Eren’s scent.

Eren was content as he hummed, looking out the window as he saw the boys having given up on their quest to build the biggest snowman and were now in a massive snowball fight. <“They’re all gonna be freezing when they come in…”> He murmured and moved his head to the side for Levi to have access to his neck again. *Mila’s napping with James right now... He’s going into surgery next week, after Thanksgiving... He’ll be home for Christmas is everything goes correctly.*
Levi smirked, softly kissing his neck again. <“Mm, we can just give them hot cocoa with dinner…
that'll fix it. And dinner'll be nice and hot. They'll warm right up.”> They'll survive.

Eren smirked, letting out a soft gasp as Levi’s lips trailed over a sensitive spot. <‘I’m so happy
they went back and found you… I was so worried about you…’> I know I haven’t really talked
about you being home much… but I… I think I can talk about it with you now… He hummed softly
as he finished up with the last chicken breast and went back through the bowl and started to tear it
further apart.

Levi sighed, resting his cheek on Eren’s shoulder blade, his voice quiet. <“...I thought that I was
gonna die out there. I was either going to stay crushed under that cement for years and years, or I
was gonna be found. When I heard those footsteps, I thought I was gonna get shot. ...but I wasn't
gonna be. I'd spent a lot of time coming to terms with the idea that I was gonna die out there… and
then suddenly I wasn't.”> It happened so fast...

<“They told us you were missing before you were dead....”> He trailed off quietly as he moved to
the sink to wash his hands. <“They gave me a flag and everything… You never told me you put
me down as a significant other… What’s up with that?”> You haven’t mentioned anything like that
to me before...

Levi suddenly felt nerves wash over him, his eyes flickering to where the shelf in the kitchen still
held the flag, the silver star hiding the two gold stars behind it. <“....give it a little more time and
you’ll know why, babe.”> Levi softly pecked his neck. <“I'm sorry you thought I was dead for so
long… I'm sorry I almost left you two alone...”> I wanted Mila to grow up with both her Dads...
...and she gets to... thank god...

Eren was about to ask Levi about it before he let out a soft moan, leaning back into Levi’s touch as
he held him close. <“Do you think you’ll go back?”> I know I don’t want you to go... But you
worked hard to be a marine.. And now... You’re.... you’re home... But are you gonna enlist again?
Eren felt his hands begin to shake as he thought about Levi returning and losing him for real. He
swallowed hard, closing his eyes to try and rid himself of the thought. What would happen then?

Levi let his hands drift as Eren shook, his voice gentle. < “I'm not going back, Eren, I'm not the
same. My leg is full of metal and I'm still not good as new after all this time. I haven't tried running
or jumping because I'm still limping when I walk. If I really did want to enlist again, I'd’ve gone to
Wichita General Hospital and had the serum fix my leg good as new… but Eren… I have a family.
I was in danger, was declared missing, then dead, then in critical condition, and now my leg has a
metal bone. I got a Purple Heart out of it… I think that's enough of the military for me.”> I'm done.
Levi let one hand slip under Eren’s shirt, gently rubbing the warm skin of his stomach with his
thumb.
Eren nodded, seemingly letting out a sigh of relief. *So he'll stay home.... He really will*... He had a soft smile on his face, along with a blush as he felt Levi’s thumb on his stomach. He could feel the warmth the small gesture gave him. <“Hmm… I still need to make dinner though…”> Eren trailed off as he shifted out of Levi’s hold for a moment going to grab barbecue sauce he’d made earlier. *The boys like barbecue chicken... And we probably won’t have leftovers...*

Levi sighed, his hands still resting on Eren’s hips as he moved. He stayed behind him like that as he made dinner, leaning against his back and listening to him work. He pouted when too many things were going on at once to hold him, retreating to the counter when he was shooed away. He leaned his head in one hand, his legs crossed, studying Eren. He shut his eyes, sighing quietly. He jolted a bit when he felt a hand on his shoulder, Eren waking him from his light doze. The table was already filled with food. “Dinner?” He smiled faintly as his nose was kissed.

Eren smiled softly, ushering him to the table where he normally sat, going to call the boys in and get everyone from upstairs. *They'll be excited... I wonder if Tucker will eat, he's been down lately, worse than he was before... Levi's getting used to him not saying a word... But Lathe still tries to get him to talk every once in awhile...* He shook his head, telling Lathe and Ieva dinner was ready through the door before going to pick Mila up from where she laid on James and gently shake him awake. “Dinner...” He smiled as he followed downstairs, the boys coming in and shaking themselves off of snow, their faces bright red from the cold outside and Tucker wordlessly helping to get their snow gear off. *Oh... Jake went outside too? Hmm...*

Levi was out of sight for a moment, coming back with towels to lay on the floor as they dripped slush. He helped them hang up their coats on the long row of pegs, helping them get off the ice crusted onto their hair before letting them run off. *They got water all over the floor...* Levi mopped the floor with his foot, drying it with a towel. He left the towels in a neat pile to hang up later, Jake tugging him to the table when he took too long. “Okay, okay, I'll sit down so you can eat.” He smiled faintly as he was given a toothy grin, sitting next to Eren and immediately going to nudge his feet under the table.

Eren smiled as he held Mila in his arms, feeding her small spoonfuls of baby food. He hooked his ankle with Levi’s, letting his plate go empty for now while he fed her. *She's so cute, and she eats well...* He looked up when he heard a sigh rip through the room, Tucker looking down on his food without interest. He felt his heart sink a little. *I wonder what's up with him? I tried to cheer him up... This is one of his favorites, I noticed he hasn't been eating...* Eren spared a worried glance towards Lathe. *What are we supposed to do?*

Lathe caught it, sending a small helpless shrug back. *I don't know what to do anymore! If this is all about the Henry thing.... I'm starting to think that if he was okay with a relationship, he wouldn't've rejected Henry. I'm starting to think to him, the idea is terrifying and really nice at the same time. ....I can maybe talk to him later, but right now, there's not much more to do...* “Tucker, make sure you finish everything or you can't leave the table.” He saw him look up in surprise. “I
know you weaseled your way out of eating lunch, so you get to eat all of dinner, okay? It's your favorite- it shouldn't be too hard.” We're worried about you.

Tucker looked up, swallowing before quietly nodding. I don't know if I'll be able to stomach it all... I know that Eren’s trying to cheer me up, but last week was brutal at school.... We're getting closer to when teachers start assigning papers for over Christmas break, and the counselors are breathing down my neck to figure out if I wanna go to college or not.... He slowly brought the fork to his mouth, trying not to gag as he forced it down. Tucker managed to swallow, and forced himself to slowly eat the rest of the plate as the number of people at the table slowly dwindled down to just him. I can't eat it all... He sighed, softer this time, and leaned his head on his hand, his elbow on the table, his eyes were glassy as he stared at the rest of the uneaten food on his plate. I can’t finish it...

Lathe was quiet as he cleared the rest of the table, watching Tucker put his head down in defeat. He went over to him, his hand gentle on his back. “...Tucker, I think we need to talk a bit...” His voice was soft. You're not in trouble... but we're so worried...

Tucker looked up and nodded, feeling the uncomfortable lump in his throat. Oh god, what are you going to talk about with me? That I'm depressing to be around? Probably.... He slowly pulled out his phone, waiting for Lathe to start talking at him. This is usually how it goes, you talk first...

Lathe sat down next to him, looking him over for a moment. “....I know that I don't know everything about what’s had you so upset lately... so I just wanted to tell you that I'm always here to talk to if you need advice or someone to rant and complain to. If there’s something you want to talk about, you can tell me, or we can leave it at that and I’ll let you do what you think is right about them. You're fifteen and can make your own choices; but we want to be here if it gets to be too much. ...anything.” Lathe was quiet after that, waiting patiently for any response.

Tucker was quiet as Lathe spoke. Okay, not what I was expecting you to say... But you noticed... Joy ... He let out what seemed like the millionth sigh of the day and opened his phone up, quickly opening a note and writing in it. Henry got a girlfriend... I know I did this to myself... But it hurts, a lot... He bit down in his lip hard enough to make it bleed as he handed his phone to Lathe. He didn’t care that he could taste the metallic liquid. I did this... And I wish I could just cut open my chest and pull out my heart and be done with it... It feels like it got trampled...

Lathe read it over, sighing quietly. “Honey, I'm sorry...” I know you really care about him... “...there's not much to say about this in particular... it may or may not last... but you can't just go and wreck their relationship if you've suddenly changed your mind... ...have you been thinking about trying to take back what you said, and starting a relationship?” Are you actually interested in dating him?
Tucker felt the tears he hadn't been able to shed before finally surface. **What right do I have to take back what I said? He's happy.... I can't do that him... I wish I could go back and tell him how much I love him, but we can't all have what we want... I realize that now, I'm gonna try to finish eating, I'll clean up the dishes when I'm done.** He handed the phone back to Lathe, picking up his fork and forcing himself to eat another bite as he let the tear silently roll down his cheeks. *I realized it too late...*

*...Tucker's in love and hurting... and I don't find it too hard to think that Henry is still hurting too... He hasn't come to dinners in a long while... he was utterly broken for a good week, and was very out of sorts for a while after that... Lathe thought for a long moment, standing after a bit. “...I think it's very likely that Henry is still really hurting after what happened... he was so upset after that.... he really cared about you. I wouldn't be surprised if he still does. It's not very uncommon for people to try and get over one breakup- and I know you didn't date, but still- with another boyfriend or girlfriend. Kinda sorta like a distraction... ...now it'd be seriously crossing the line to say anything that's trying to intentionally trying to break them up.... but there's nothing that's stopping you from sending him something well written that pretty much goes ‘I was a dick, I'm sorry, I'm here if you need anything, if things don't work out for you I’d like to give things a try.’...it's always an option.” You could try. “...how long have he and this girl been dating?”

Tucker looked down at his phone, trying not to submit to the bile rising in his throat. *No, you can’t get sick... Force it down. I have no right to tell him that. He’s happy, he smiles at her like he used to smile at me... Now his eyes are so cold towards me.... He could feel his gut clench. They’ve been dating since the end of September... So two months now, and I’m starting to lose it... Funny right? How I can push everyone away, even the one who I love because I’m afraid of getting hurt, only to feel like I’m dying on the inside everytime I see that smile that isn’t directed at me...* Tucker let the tears roll as he stabbed the rest of his food, forcing himself to swallow and hold it down. *I can’t get sick...*

Lathe sighed, gently rubbing his back and reaching for his kerchief, Tucker’s phone set on the counter next to him. “You always have the right to talk to Henry. One well-thought-out message to him is allowed, and after how he reacted to it.... I think it's appropriate. At least the apology. But if you word things well, this could fix plenty of things. I know it's very easy to mask hurt with anger, and it's very easy to do whatever is convenient to distract yourself from any pain. If that's what this is, and it sounds like it... He could just be leading this girl along and not really intending for it to go anywhere... she could end up getting hurt either way. It's only two months- that's not very long when it comes to dating. Unless they knew each other well beforehand, they probably don't have too much of a connection. I think you should write something out and send it to him. See what happens. If anything, it'll make him stop glaring at you. And I can imagine it just makes it worse to see that.”

Tucker nodded silently, taking his plate and going to wash the dishes, like he said he would. *Maybe I should text him... But with my luck he’s blocked my number. His mind was everywhere as he washed the dishes in silence, tears still freely flowing down his face and dropping from his chin. He probably hates me...*
Lathe followed him, gently taking a plate from him. “Honey, please, you go do what you think is right. Don't worry about the dishes. Just worry about yourself.” Lathe gave him his kerchief before letting him run off, sighing as he ran upstairs. *Poor kid... good luck.*

Tucker ran upstairs to his room, locking the door behind him as he looked down to his phone, opening Henry’s contact info before he started to type out what he wanted to say.

**TQ: Hey, Henry, it’s me…. But if you deleted my number you’ll have no idea who this is so it’s Tucker. I don’t know if you’ll get this, you probably already blocked my number, and to be honest I probably deserved that. I wanted to tell you that I’m sorry, and that I was an ass when I rejected you before school started. I know you really liked me, and I’m just realizing now how much I like you as well. You probably don’t want to hear any of this, and that’s understandable… But I wanted to tell you I’m sorry… And your girlfriend seems nice... I’m really glad that you’re happy, please don’t stop smiling, even if it’s not at me, okay?**

**HP: ……To say I'm happy isn't exactly true....... I really cared about you and it really hurt for you to be so blunt when you rejected me... and I mean, she's okay.... just..... this is gonna sound really dumb but she's not you... and that's the problem... I still really care about you, you know.... and I really appreciate the apology...**

**HP: ………does this mean you want to go out with me?**

**TQ: You’re dating someone, I can’t break that relationship up, I’m sorry that it came out like that after you guys have been together for this long, I just... I couldn’t take it anymore....**

**HP: Tucker, it's been two months and we haven't done much of anything... she's just... I feel bad because I'm barely paying her any attention and I know I'm not gonna care enough to really pay much attention in the future either… I just... I thought it'd distract me... and it wasn't working... I've been hurting this whole time really... I was thinking about breaking it off... if I get to have you maybe as a boyfriend... I'd really like that... if you're seriously okay with it...**

Tucker felt his breath get stuck in his throat. *Fuck... But... But I’m still afraid...*

**TQ: Henry.... I’m not sure that’s a great idea.... I’m still having issues with relationships...**

**HP: Tucker that's very okay... I didn't expect you to be able to suddenly flip the switch from not okay to okay when it comes to this sort of thing... we can go at whatever pace you want I'll never complain about being supervised if having someone else there makes you feel a lot better about this until I can prove to you that you can trust me. I really want to do this right if we’re gonna do this and you deserve that.
Henry didn't need any more confirmation. He scrambled up from his bed, turning off his Xbox and shoving clothes into a backpack. He ran down the stairs and stepped into his boots, getting his coat and hat and gloves. “I'm going for a sleepover at Tucker’s! I'll be home eventually!” He was gone before anyone could respond, setting off down the street, careful on the icy roads. He took a while, but soon crashed through their front door, his face red from the cold.

Everyone in the front hall jumped out of their skin at the sight and sound, Lathe running over to him. “Jesus Christ, kid, are you okay? And how did you get in?!?” He watched as Henry held up the spare key normally hidden outside. “...take off your boots and hang everything up. I'm assuming you wanna talk to Tucker.”

“Please?”

“Wow, you said please. I'll run.” Lathe went up the stairs quickly as Henry got his shit sorted out, knocking on the doorframe. “Tucker? Someone’s here to see you.”

Tucker picked his head up from staring at his phone with a hurt face. *I think I made it worse... He hasn’t responded to me yet.* **Who’s here?** He handed Lathe the phone, confusion and sadness clearly written across his face.

Lathe smiled to him. “Let me guess- Henry stopped mid conversation because he was too busy running over here to say hi.” **Yeah. He's here. ...that sounds like something he would do.**

Tucker’s eyes widened and he barely registered that he was running down the hallway until he’d already hit the end of the stairs, everything seeming to stop as his eyes met Henry’s. He was still pulling off all of his snow gear and he looked at him and smiled softly, his feet carrying him over to Henry with amazing speed, almost knocking him over with the force he slammed into him with as he wrapped his arms around Henry’s shoulders, his face buried into Henry’s neck as he tried not to cry. **Don’t cry... Don’t cry... He’s here, he’s right here...**

Henry was stunned as Tucker nearly knocked him over, his hand rubbing his back gently, sighing as he felt the small puffs of Tucker’s breath against his neck. “...I'd love to be your boyfriend.” **Please...**

Tucker’s grip on Henry got tighter as he held onto him, softly crying. “I-I love you…” His voice
was harsh from disuse, quiet as well, right next to Henry’s ear. *I don’t want you to leave… Please don’t make me go through that again…*

Henry was stunned as he heard the sound, practically melting. “…I… I love you too.” Henry reached one hand to his cheek, softly kissing the corner of his lips for barely a moment. *I don’t wanna overstep anything…* He made sure his hold was gentle enough for Tucker to break free if he wanted.

Tucker turned his head, leaning to press his lips against Henry’s soft ones as he melted into his touch. *I don’t want this to end… Please tell me it’s not going to end…*

Henry smiled into their kiss for a moment, breaking it for just a moment, murmuring against his lips as he shrugged his coat off. “Let me get the rest of this off…” He quickly hung everything up before turning back to him, glancing over to the living room and seeing the couches unoccupied. He looked over to the kitchen for a moment, Lathe having settled with a book at the table just out of sight of the living room. *Ah.* Henry reached for Tucker’s waist, gently pulling him to the couch. He sat down with him, slowly coaxing him to lay on top of him, looking up as his hands rested on his waist. “…is this okay?”

Henry nodded, shifting on top of him and curling up to his chest, his face buried into his neck. “Yeah… it’s okay…” He murmured quietly as his hands gripped his shirt. *He’s comfortable… It’s so nice… It’s not scary at all…*

Henry smiled, one hand coming up to play with Tucker's hair. “……can we make out?” *I wanna kiss you again…* He blushed violently as Tucker picked his head up and looked at him. “……please?” *I wanna…*

Tucker was hesitant at first but soon he leaned his head down to press their lips together once again, feeling a shiver run down his spine at just how right it felt. *His lips are soft… I didn’t think about it like that before… But now I can’t stop…*

Henry kissed him slowly, one hand cupping his jaw and the other running up and down his side. He tilted his head, feeling his cheeks heat up as they kissed. *He’s…. I don't wanna stop…* Henry was very careful as he let his tongue swipe at Tucker’s lips for an instant, pulling back when Tucker froze for an instant. “W-We don't have to, it's okay, I just-”

Tucker’s eyes were wide as he looked at Henry, shaking his head as he spoke, cutting him off and kissing him, leaving his mouth open for him. *You just surprised me is all… but we’re not doing more than French kissing tonight… and cuddles if you stay the night…*
Henry was surprised as he was cut off with a kiss, his eyes slipping shut as their tongues tentatively moved and brushed, both of them shivering. *He tastes nice…* Henry grew limp as he felt Tucker press closer, his tongue invading his own cavern, whimpering quietly, his grip on his shirt tightening. *I really like this…*

Tucker tensed for a moment as Henry’s grip tightened minutely. He went rigid, trying not to pull back from Henry, wanting so much to be okay with this, trying to distract himself with kissing Henry deeper, though he was quickly getting out of breath, pulling back and burying his face in embarrassment. *Oh shit… He’s still holding my shirt tightly…*

Henry felt his grip loosen as Tucker pulled away, his cheeks flushed, his eyes glazed over. *I love this…* He blinked when Tucker found his way into the crook of his neck, his hands lighting resting on his shoulders. “Are you okay, Tucker? …why’d you stop…?” Henry sounded breathless, wanting more. His hands came up to cup Tucker’s cheeks. *You’re okay… right?*

Tucker was quiet for a moment, shaking a bit in his arms. “T-Tight…” He murmured quietly, sighing in relief once Henry’s hands weren’t gripping to his shirt. *He stopped…* Tucker felt like he could breathe again as he nuzzled into Henry’s neck more, trying not to cry. *He won’t hurt me….*

Henry needed a moment, the thought finally processing. *Oh…. oh shit, that’s right… nothing even vaguely rough…* “Hey, I'm sorry, I'll be much more gentle… here, let's try this…” Henry nudged Tucker a tiny bit, coaxing him to take hold of his wrists before moving them above his own head. “...you're in control of the stuff we do…. I want you to know that.” *You can control this. I trust you.*

Tucker looked at Henry with confusion before he understood what he was talking about. He shifted to straddle Henry’s chest, his hands still pinning Henry’s above his head. *I'm short… I need to scoot up to even be able to reach.* He finally got comfortable, leaning his head down and pressing his lips to Henry’s a bit more timidly than before, though he was quickly growing more accustomed to it.

Henry sighed as their lips met, a blush creeping up his neck as he felt his tongue invade his mouth. His toes curled a bit as Tucker pressed their kiss deeper, letting out a helpless and pleased whimper. *I love this…..*

Tucker tilted his head to the side their kiss going even deeper as he tried to coax Henry’s tongue into his own mouth, finally resorting to sucking his tongue into his mouth and teasingly using his teeth gently. *I…. I don’t know what’s gotten into me…*
Henry whimpered as Tucker nibbled at his lip, kissing him back as best he could while still pinned, not wanting to upset their balance. *Fuck, you're a great kisser...* Henry whimpered as they made out, wanting more, even though he didn't know what. *...what's gotten into me...? My god, I must sound like a dying puppy...* He gasped quietly as all the small sounds rewarded him with a broken kiss, lips brushing down his jaw. *...fuck...* He was melting under Tucker’s lips, a whimpering and breathless puddle.

Tucker kept Henry pinned as he shifted to kiss at his neck, trailing down from his jaw and leaving small open mouth kisses as his free hand ran through Henry’s hair. *You’re making such beautiful noises....* Tucker soon braved licking a stripe up Henry’s tanned skin, smirking. *How will you take that?*

Henry couldn’t help letting out breathless sighs and quiet moans, his breathing shaky. *Fuck, I can't get hard... but it feels really nice... I don't want him to stop....* He gasped as Tucker locked up his skin, his whimpers even sharper as he kept lapping at his neck. “T-Tucker, w-wait.... I-I'm gonna get hard....” He whimpered as his lips left his neck, instinctively tilting his head back and baring the rest of his neck as he let out a distressed sound. *I don't want you to stop but I can't get hard...* He jolted from his thoughts when he felt Tucker shaking, looking up to see him staring at him in terror. *Shit.* “Nonononono, Tucker, it's okay, I *don't* want to, what you were doing felt so good but it was too good and I know you don't want that so soon... we’re never going to do anything you don't want, I just didn't want to get hard and scare the crap out of you or make things awkward, I just... please don't be so scared, I was trying to stop it from happening... *please* don't be so scared...” Henry pleaded with him, knowing better than to move a single muscle. *Don't freak out... please...*

Tucker shook horribly as Henry tried to correct the situation, though he let go of Henry and moved to curl up at the end of the couch, hugging a pillow to himself as he stared at Henry with wide eyes. He peered over the edge of the couch, seeing that Lathe was still in the kitchen, reading from his book. *Dad’s still here....* He seemed to calm down a bit at that thought, though he looked at Henry with slight fear. *He doesn’t want to do anything?*

Henry looked to him carefully, mimicking Tucker’s position, hugging his knees to his chest. “I don't want to do anything... and I know you don't want to... is it okay if we just... cuddle or something? I'd love to hold you...” *Please?*

Tucker looked to him like his head was chopped off. *You.... You want to hold me?* He seemed like he’s just short circuited but he slowly crawled over to Henry, stopping every few moments if Henry moved. He was finally by his side, leaning on him, still curled up and hugging the pillow to his chest, trying not to panic. *I... I can do this...*

Henry slowly wrapped his arms around him, guiding him to lay down. He managed with a bit of time and reassurance to end up spooning Tucker, his hand on his waist. He softly kissed the back
of his neck, his voice quiet and infinitely gentle. “I love you, Tucker.” ... *I meant that.*

Tucker seemed to melt into Henry’s hold closing his eyes as he relaxed against his chest. *You feel comfortable...* Soon enough Tucker’s breathing evened out beside Henry, his head resting on Henry’s arm, using it as a pillow. *I’m tired...*

Henry could feel his arm fall asleep, feeling a bit awkward. *I'm cold...* He looked up when he saw something move, infinitely grateful as Lathe got them pillows, Tucker included, so no arms fell asleep. He sighed as a blanket was drawn over them, mouthing ‘Thank you’ to the older man, who smiled. He moved closer to Tucker, burying his nose in his hair. *He smells so nice...* He found himself falling into a deep sleep, the lights dim, though a light was left on in the kitchen to see by.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren had gone up to their bedroom first, making sure that he had enough lube to last them the night before he stripped and hopped into the shower. *I need to shower... Dinner was nice, I’m glad everyone ate... Even Tucker...* He sighed as he let the water rush over his back, relaxing the muscles from the stress he had earlier. *What I would give for a spa day...*

Levi wasn't far behind him, hanging up the black jacket on the stand in their room, walking over to the bathroom as he heard the water run. *Hm...* He knocked on the door, opening it just a crack so he could hear him. “Mind if I join you?”

Eren peeked out of the shower. “Hmm… should I be afraid that you want to come in?” *I think we might not make it out of the shower if I let you join.* He watched Levi open the door further, motioning for him to come in with his finger, curling it towards him slowly and seductively as he stood, steam pouring away from the water. *We haven’t had shower sex in a while... But will you be able to lift me with your leg the way it is?*

Levi came in and shut the door, stripping out of the rest of his clothes, discarding them sensually and showing off his toned body. He carefully stepped into the shower behind him, his arms immediately wrapping around Eren from behind, his hand moving over his chest. *I missed you...* He tilted his head to nibble at his neck, his eyes slipping shut as his lips and tongue went to work.

Eren let out a moan without even thinking about it. *Oh my god... I need it... “Levi...”* His voice was intoxicating as he dipped his head, giving him more room to nibble at the un tattooed flesh. *Fuck, I missed having his hands on me...*
Levi smirked as Eren gave him an immediate moan, going to nip roughly at the joint of his neck. “Patience…” Levi kissed the spot he dragged his teeth over, smirking faintly. His hands ghosted to his hips, turning Eren around and prying the washcloth from his hands, standing on tiptoe for a moment to kiss his nose. “You're not getting out of a proper shower.” And I'm not gonna push my luck and try to fuck you here in the shower… that has sketchy written all over it… Levi reached for the soap, deciding that teasing Eren with touches all over as he cleaned him was in order.

Eren whimpered with every touch, frozen with pleasure as he let Levi touch him all over his body. “Fuck Levi… you're a fucking tease…” He hissed out his words, leaning into his grasp as his length was grasped to be washed. Oh god… Please, even if it’s gentle, touch me more…

Levi got down on one knee to wash Eren’s length, softly kissing his hip as he slowly washed him. I know. Levi could feel Eren slowly hardening as his nether flushed, rinsing him and giving his head a soft kiss before going to wash his legs, still gently nipping his base. You make all sorts of wonderful sounds whenever I tease you...

Eren’s whole body shivered as Levi looked at him with hungry eyes, not sure what to do as his legs suddenly felt like jello. He leaned a hand back on the tile wall to brace himself, wobbling a little on his feet from the pure pleasure. Fuck… He's making me feel hot… I can’t even think straight anymore at this point…

Levi kept a hand on Eren’s hip to steady him, gently kissing his head one last time before standing, pulling Eren flush. “Something… bothering you…?” Levi smirked as Eren just flushed with embarrassment, kissing his neck. “You've been good…. we can skip washing your hair….?” He reached down, slowly stroking Eren’s hardening length. “I know you'd much rather be doing other things… or, having other things do you …” Let me take care of you...

Eren’s words caught in his throat as Levi stroked his length, slowly and surely. A soft moan left his throat without his permission. He could see the feral look in Levi’s eyes as he nodded, feeling like a newborn fawn with how wobbly his legs were all the sudden. “P-Please…” He begged as Levi shut off the water from them. I want it… I want you so badly.

Levi smirked, guiding Eren from the shower, drying him off. He held him up as he shook, drying them both and letting the towel fall to the floor. Fuck the towel. He slowly guided Eren to the bed, easing him back onto it and clambering over him. He lifted one of Eren’s long legs, seeing him flushed and spread open for him as he kissed down the length of the limb, gently nibbling at his thigh before his mouth found Eren’s length, giving the sensitive flesh wet kisses, mouthing lightly at the tip and watching as a drop of precum beaded there, kissing it. That's so hot….

Eren whimpered as Levi mouthed at his length, his hands gripping into the sheets below him. “L-
Levi…” You said your first meal back would be sausage… *Mine* in particular… He let out a loud
gasp as Levi’s lips closed around his tip again. *Fuck* … He squirmed, spreading his legs further
apart. *I want him*…

Levi slowly bobbed on his length, his hands slowly running up and down his naked form. *He’s so
beautiful*… Levi sucked hard on him for a moment before coming off of him, lapping up his shaft
soothingly. He then latched onto his tip and sucked hard, pressing his tongue flat to the head. He
watched Eren writhe under his tongue, smirking. *I love teasing him*…

Eren groaned, reaching a hand up behind him and grabbing a pillow as a body stretched. He
whimpered and whined as Levi teased him. <“Bastard… If you’re gonna be a tease… At least
stretch me out while you’re out it…”> He almost growled as one of his hands went to push Levi’s
head down on his hard length. *Fuck I want it… I want more from you*…

Levi bobbed down as Eren pushed his head, though he came right back up, smacking the soft flesh
on his thigh as he gave him a teasing look. <“Patience… or I’ll drag it out more…”> Levi reached
for the lube in the nightstand, coating his fingers and tossing the tube aside. His hand slowly
slipped between Eren’s legs, tracing his hole with one finger as he dipped his head down, gently
sucking on one perky nipple as his first finger plunged inside. *So warm… and he’s so soft*… He
quirked an eyebrow as there was very little resistance, Eren barely tightening as he went to two
fingers, then to three. <“Have you been doing things yourself…?”> Levi’s voice was dark, gazing
up at him as the image burned in his mind. *That’s hot*…

Eren hummed quietly. <“Maybe… I’ve been dying for you to take me…”> *I’ve been waiting for so
long to you to ravish me like you said you would*. <“I don’t wanna sleep tonight.”> He squirmed,
thrusting his hips down on Levi’s fingers with a heavy moan. <“Oh shit… Levi…”> He whined
for the older man, wanting him to hurry up, his moans desperate.

Levi smirked, softly kissing his hip. <“Who said anything about sleeping…?”> Levi drew his
fingers out of him, reaching for the lube and coating himself, not bothering with a condom. *I
wanna feel all of you*… Levi let his tip nudge Eren’s entrance, feeling the man already wrap
around him, ready to be taken. “I love you…” Levi murmured in his ear as he slowly pushed in,
kissing under his ear as he ground their hips together. *He’s so warm*…

Eren let out a loud cry of bliss as Levi entered him fully, whimpering quietly for a moment as he
clung to Levi’s upper body. His legs wrapped around Levi’s waist, wanting him to grind even
deeper. *I want all of you*… “I love you… all of you… metal and all.” He murmured and tilted his
head to the side to offer him his neck to mark up. *My whole neck will be bruised after tonight… I’m
not gonna sleep at all either*…
Levi smiled as Eren spoke, diving in to mark up his neck, slowly beginning a steady pace. Eren’s nails digging into his back and his legs around his waist coaxed him to go harder, soon pounding into him as he left dark marks up his neck, neither caring how visible they would be. *Mine… ...he’s so perfect.....*

Eren felt the noises that Levi forced out of him get louder and louder and higher in pitch, but something wasn’t right. He pushed on Levi to get him to get off, trying to get him up off of him for a moment. His eyes were full of love as he pushed him up further, getting him to draw out of him. *You’re probably confused as all hell, but it doesn’t… I feel like Missionary is all we do… I want something different.*

Levi looked confused as Eren pushed him off, looking hurt for a moment. “W-What is it…? What’s wrong?” He looked worried, looking Eren’s neck over. “Did I hurt you?”

Eren shook his head, moving his legs under him as he kissed Levi deeply, though pulled away with a toothy grin. “We always do that position, I want something else…” He murmured before flipping himself onto his stomach, letting his knees up, presenting his ass to Levi while he pressed his cheek to the mattress. *I want to be had… maybe this’ll make it feel better?*

Levi breathed a quiet sigh of relief, smirking when he saw Eren presenting his ass to him. *Hmm…..* Levi couldn't resist, his hands cupping his cheeks, pulling them apart, exposing his hole. He dipped down, his tongue pressing against his entrance, slipping inside the loose muscle. *He’ll forgive me.*

Eren’s eyes widened as he felt Levi’s wet muscle enter him, yelping at the sudden surprise. A soft mewl left his lips as he closed his eyes and enjoyed the sensations with a huff. He whimpered more as he felt his whole body flood with heat, wanting it to continue but wanting more at the same time. “Le~vi…” He whined for him, spreading his legs farther for him. *I want you… I want you to wreck me… to make love to me all night… Both… any… just please ravish me.*

Levi chuckled quietly, bringing his tongue from him and kissing his hole before picking up his spine, nestling into his neck, his tip brushing his entrance. “This much better…?” He felt his tip slowly enter him, going agonizingly slowly, his own length aching. *I wanna hear you say it...*

Eren whimpered as he pressed into him slowly, feeling his whole length brush against his prostate due to the angle. < “F-Fuck… Levi…”> His voice was a quiet gasp, full of pleasure as his hands gripped the sheets in a white knuckle grip. *Fuck it feels good… It feels good to be full.*

Levi smirked, burying his face into Eren’s neck, picking up exactly where they had left off,
thrusting deeply into him, looking for the angle that made Eren louder than before. *You make the sexiest sounds... holy shit... “You're so handsome…”* Levi let his hands roam his front. “Just perfect for me…”

Eren was a mess as Levi spoke to him. “Hmm... talk dirty to me... **Please...** ” *I never ask for that... But I want it, I want to hear what you can come up with.* His breaths were coming out in gasps, and he was in utter bliss. Eren’s face was flushed, and his hands grasping onto the sheets below him in pure ecstasy as Levi thrusted onto his prostate. *It feels so good... fuck I can barely think...* His mouth was filling with saliva, already knowing that he was drooling from this. *Oh I’m gonna be so fucking sore... but I couldn’t care less right now...*

Levi smirked, lightly kissing Eren’s neck. “Mm, you're so tight... you're just drooling for me... how does it feel to know I’m gonna pound you and tease you, tie you up and make love to you for hours? Know that you're not gonna get any sleep as I torture you with pleasure? I'll have you begging all night for release... I’ll make you my little slave all night... and we all know that slaves that behave... are allowed to cum...” He reached lower, slowly and firmly stroking Eren. “What do you say...? Will you be my **slave** for the night?”

Eren whimpered as he heard each and every word, his body feeling like it was on cloud nine. *<“M-Master...”> His accent rolled off his tongue spectacularly, his length leaking precum faster than he’d ever thought possible and Levi rubbed his length for all he was worth. *<“Master... I-I’m gonna cum...”> He whined as he tilted his head so he could look back at Levi over his shoulder. *I wanna see you, but this feels so **good** ...*

Levi’s look was dark, his voice smooth. *<“You’ve been a good slave for Master...”> He ran his thumb quickly over the slit of his length, hearing his cries of pleasure. *<“Cum, slave.”> I wanna see you cum for me.*

Eren swore he saw stars as everything went black for a moment, his body catapulting off the edge of ecstasy. *It feels so good... His body grew lax as he came into Levi’s hands, his eyes closed in unconscious bliss.*

Levi could feel Eren slump under him as he came, letting out choked moans as he came inside of Eren, shuddering. *So good...* He took a moment to catch his breath before drawing out of him, shifting Eren to lay him on his back, sweeping the hair from his shut eyes. *Hm, you're unconscious... hm.* Levi pondered this as he went to clean off his hands, coming back and deciding to rifle through their box of toys in the closet, pulling out a silk blindfold and comfortable restraints. *Let's give him something to wake up to...*

Eren’s body was pliable as he was unconscious, though he started to stir as Levi started to restrain
him. I feel warm... But also cold... Did Levi steal the blanket again?

Levi gently tied the blindfold in place, deftly locking his wrists and ankles in the soft cuffs and tightening them, spreading him. He gently dragged a hand up his thigh, gently kissing his neck. “Are you awake yet, slave? You shouldn't keep your Master waiting...” His voice was gentle as Eren stirred. Wake up... you'll want to be conscious for this...

Eren’s eyes opened, confused for only a moment when all he saw darkness. What the fuck... Oh... I passed out? <“Master?”> Eren’s voice was timid as he tried to move, quickly finding that he was bound to their bed. When did he...? Did he tie me up when I was out?

<“It's okay, my slave, I'm right here...”> Levi cupped Eren’s cheek when he looked worried for a moment, persuading him to relax. <“Your Master is going to take very good care of you... if you'll let me...”> I need to make absolute sure this is what you want...

Eren swallowed thickly shaking his head. <“C-Can you take the blindfold off?”> His voice was weak, almost scared that Levi wouldn’t. I want to see you, and I don’t think the blindfold with help get me off... It’ll put you out of sight... I don’t want to think of losing you... He whimpered when Levi took even the slightest moment to respond. <“P-Please... M-Master?”>

<“Of course, please, don't worry...”> Levi quickly moved to remove the blindfold, taking the silk away and looking into Eren’s nervous orbs. <“Better?”> You sounded really nervous...

Eren wanted to reach up and touch Levi’s cheek though when he wasn’t able to move he sighed quietly and nodded. A weak ‘thank you’ left his lips as he watched Levi move above him. He’s not disappearing from my sight... He’s okay...

Levi smiled faintly, brushing their lips. <“In case you need me to stop something, the word is ‘Tea.’ We can change anything you don’t like, Hun.”> Levi left his side at that, going to their box again and studying its contents, string for a moment. There’s a lot of shit in here... He took it to the bed and rifled through it between Eren’s spread legs, looking for something. He set a few toys down between Eren’s legs, setting the rest of the toys aside. <“You bought yourself quite the collection while I was gone...”> Levi went to put it back, noting that something else stood beside the riding crop in the corner. He took out the slender piece of flexible wood, narrowing at the tip. Hm... <“A cane, slave?”> He walked with it back to the bed, running it over his soft flesh. <“It's like you're asking to be punished...”> He looked up to him, his eyes hooded. <“Have you been a bad slave? ...do I need to teach you a lesson?”> Levi’s expression was one of schooled indifference, looking over his flushed body.
Eren looked at the wood, his eyes widening as he felt it come across his skin, trying to shy away from it. What… No… No no no no… He could feel panic beginning to swell as he looked at what position he was in. Does he want to? On my stomach? Eren’s were fearful as he plead with him. <“N-No Master… I-I’ve been a g-good boy…”> He could keep his body from shaking as he watched the flexible wood run over his thighs and away from his stomach… His body twitching away from it.

Levi saw the fear in his eyes, taking it away from him and leaning against the side table. <“Good.”> He looked him over, thinking as he studied the toys he had for him. <“I don’t like that position.”> Levi went to undo the restraints, tossing them aside. <“I want you back on your knees slave, ass in the air for me.”> It’ll make this so much better...

Eren nodded in an instant and flipped to his knees immediately getting the position Levi wanted him in with his head pressed to the mattress. Like this? This is good… Right? He eyes Levi cautiously, trying to figure out what he was going to do to him with the toys behind him I know I saw Anal beads… But… I don’t know what else there was...

Levi watched him move, smirking as he immediately got into position. He picked up the cane again, watching Eren tense. <“Don’t worry slave… I won’t really hurt you… unless you deserve it.”> Levi gently tapped his thigh. <“Further apart.”> He smirked as Eren immediately obeyed, getting the lube and slapping a cock ring. He moved behind him, slowly slipping it on to Eren’s length, giving a few good pumps to harden him more. <“You’re still so soft, slave…”> He gave him a disapproving look for a moment, thinking. <“We need to fix that…”> Levi took the bottle with him as he went back to the array of toys, picking up a butt plug and slicking it, hearing Eren sigh as it slipped into his entrance. He gently tugged it, hearing his deep gasp. Good. He looked between two toys, deciding on the latter- a small bullet vibrator. This is new. Levi moved the toys out of the way, settling between Eren’s legs on his back, facing his cock. <“On your elbows, slave.”> He smirked as he made more room for him, reaching up and running one thumb over his slit, hearing him let out a shuddery breath. He turned on the small bullet, holding it to Eren’s slit. <“Are you not turned on by your Master, slave? Does this not feel good to you?”> Levi’s voice was slightly dangerous as Eren slowly hardened. <“You’re barely hard…”>

Eren whined from the stimulation that the vibrator sent through his whole being. <“M-Master… I just came…”> He whimpered as he ever so slowly started to get hard again. Oh my god… He sounds like he’s angry… Is he? Is he angry? Eren let out a loud moan once again as he shifted his legs a bit wider to try and appease to the man below him. Is he angry?

Levi let out a disapproving ‘tch,’ quirking an eyebrow as he hardened very slowly. <“It’s no excuse slave…. you’re saying one thing…”> He turned up the intensity to no avail, despite Eren’s louder moans. <“But your body is saying otherwise.”> Levi took away the bullet, slipping out from under him, picking up the cane. <“If that’s how well you take to my teasing… let’s see how well you take to being punished.”> Levi ran the thin wood over his ass, looking over him. <“Down further, slave.”> He watched him drop from his elbows, giving him a decent snap with the cane, seeing the red line on his cheeks slowly bloom. <“Better.”> He has him another sharp smack, much more
than enough to sting. <“You need to learn to obey your Master, slave…”>

Eren’s eyes were wide as Levi smacked him with the cane, his head tilted away from Levi, struggling to hide his yelps and whimpers from him. His knuckles were white from their grip on the sheets, not sure what to think of the sharp sting that went through his whole being. *It hurts… But it feels good.* He groaned out at the warmth that filled his being with each harsh snap, trying not to moan too loudly.

Levi quirked an eyebrow as he caught a choked moan with a particularly hard snap, looking over his trembling form. <“…is my slave enjoying their punishment…?”> He looked between his legs without shame, seeing his cock hanging, rock-hard. <“I see that your punishment turns you on more than touching… maybe I’ll just stay away from your cock then…”> Another sharp snap. <“If that's what turns you on… but then again, what good is a punishment if it’s your favorite part?”> Another thwack. <“Maybe we’ll find the riding crop better suited for punishing such a bad slave…”> *I wanna see if you'll object or not…*

Eren stayed silent, his whole body shaking, so unsure of what to think. *I like the pain… But it really hurts… And you sound like you’re angry… angry at me… Did I do something wrong?* His eyes closed as he tried not to cry, remaining silent aside from a loud whimper he let escape from his mouth, not meaning to. His eyes widened and he hoped to god Levi hadn’t heard him, though he knew it was useless, the older man most likely had heard him. *What’s he gonna think?* Eren was torn his mind a muddled mess as his ass almost radiated heat from the abuse it took.

Levi looked genuinely worried when he heard the pain-filled whimper, moving to Eren’s side and gently lifting his chin. He saw all the unshed tears, immediately dropping the act. “Eren, Honey, are you okay? You’re about to cry… was it too much?” *You look so distressed and you didn't use the safe word… are you scared to use it?*

Eren nodded quickly. “I-I’m sorry Master… I’m s-sorry I’m a b-bad boy…” He murmured through tear filled eyes before he looked down where his hand were shaking and grabbing at the sheets under him. *I’m okay right? You aren’t angry at me… Right?* He couldn’t help but shift a bit, uncomfortable with how hard he was between his legs.

Levi shook his head, moving the cane out of the way and moving to take off the cock ring and take out the plug, murmuring in his ear. “No, Eren, you haven’t been bad… it’s okay, Honey… you're so good to me… you're perfect, it's okay…” Levi ran a hand over his slightly bruising ass soothingly, shifting behind him again, draping over him, his hands soothingly going over his entire body. “Let me take care of you, baby… will you let me make love to you?” *I'm so sorry…. I'm so sorry, I thought you'd be okay with this…*
Eren watched Levi move to behind him again, spreading his legs almost impossibly wider. “Yeah…” His voice still a bit weak, and obviously pained as Levi held his bruising cheeks. They hurt. Sitting down is gonna be a bitch tomorrow... Fuck... His eyes were no longer filled with tears as Levi’s gentle voice filled his ears. He’s not angry...

Levi’s voice was soft as he again filled Eren, breathless as he praised him. “You're so handsome, so warm and slick for me…” Levi slowly rubbed Eren’s length, starting a slow, deep pace. “So hard for me... you're so good Eren... so good for me…” You always have been... I wasn't trying to intimidate you, I was teasing... I wanted an excuse to see how you'd react to the cane, and you just fell apart... I need to be careful with how angry I sound...

Eren whimpered every now and then when Levi’s skin touched the marks on his ass a bit too hard. His body stretched out under Levi as he was held gently and filled to the brink. It feels nice, like this... I like this... “Ha... Levi... Y-You can go faster...” He could feel his coil beginning to tighten, arousal filling his whole being.

Levi hummed, though instead he only ground deeper. “You sound so amazing when you're about to cum...” Levi gently kissed his shoulder blades. “So gorgeous... I'm close...” You're wonderful ...

Eren whined with need as Levi ground deep into him. “F-Fuck…” His voice was high as he clung to the crumpled sheets again. It feels so good... He closed his eyes, focusing on the heat that was running through his body. “L-Levi... you feel so good... take care of me...” I want you to promise... but... that would be so selfish of me.

Levi smiled faintly, his hands running over him, his grip gentle and secure. “I'll take very good care of you, Eren... I always will.” Levi kissed his neck, groaning into his shoulder. “So good...” He found his breath turning to pants, the heat between his legs overbearing. He cried out quietly into Eren's shoulder as he came again, filling him further. So perfect...

Eren let out a soft moan as he came all over his chest, as he’d been toying with himself for the better part of that round. He shuddered as he tried to regain his breath. That was good... It almost knocked the wind out of me... Eren sighed softly, shifting down to relax his aching knees, letting Levi slip out of his heat as he laid face down, breathing harshly. His hair was wet with sweat from the exertion that Levi put on him already. I can only imagine how much more he wants to do...

Levi laid down next to Eren, brushing the damp hair from his face. “Come on babe, how does a bath sound...? We at least need to clean you up a bit and clean you out...” He ran a hand up and down his back. “We can't let it sit; you'll get sick.” We don't want that. And you look worn out... we don't have to do any more tonight. We’ve got lots and lots of time now.
Eren mumbled something incoherent but nodded and shifted his elbows under him to try and push himself up, and he managed to. His eyes closed for a moment before stepping towards the bathroom, hissing as his ass moved with each step. *Fuck that’s gonna be really painful...*

Levi helped him to the bathroom, starting to fill their tub with hot water. He gently eased Eren in, reaching for the shampoo to wash Eren’s sweaty hair, the bubbles cleaning the sheen from the rest of his chest. He had a very gentle touch, cleaning him with reverence. “You’re so beautiful, Eren...” *I’m so lucky...*  

Eren mumbled something that sounded like an apology, gripping onto his arm and trying to pull him into the tub with him. *You too... I don’t want to be alone...* His eyes plead with him, trying to get him to understand. *Please... I don’t know why but I don’t want to be away from you anymore...*  

Levi smiled faintly to him, kissing his nose and placating him with quiet murmurs as he shifted to get in. “Okay, I’m coming...” *You really want me close...* Levi pulled Eren carefully into his lap, going back to shampooing him. “I’m right here, babe... don’t worry...” *It’s okay.*  

Eren seemed to relax more when he was in Levi’s arms, letting him wash his hair, and letting him rinse it out as well as condition it. He shifted, wincing as he tweaked his asscheeks, whimpering as he felt the heat of the welts flare once again. “Fuck...” he swore under his breath, trying to get comfortable again. *Shit this is not gonna be fun... dammit I’m gonna have to have a wrap or something on my ass, I won’t be able to go riding... Charlie won’t be happy.*  

Levi looked worried as he saw the pained look on his face, helping him adjust. “I’m sorry Eren, you sounded like you were enjoying it... I’m sorry for going overboard...” Levi gently rubbed his lower back, not wanting to ghost over his ass and cause more pain. *I'm sorry...*  

Eren shook his head moving to lean back against Levi, sigh softly against him. “It’s alright...” *You wouldn’t have known because I had the cock ring on... So you would never had known...* He whimpered again as he shifted and leaned his head against Levi’s shoulder, trying to stay close to him as much as possible. *I don’t want you to leave...*  

Levi stopped trying to condition his hair, holding him close to his chest. He shifted them a bit, Eren straddling his lap. He held onto one thigh as his other hand moved behind him, gently rubbing his entrance. “I need to clean you out, Hon...” He gently sucked on his neck as his fingers eased into his loose and slick hole, going deep to coax out his release. *I came twice... you're pretty full...*  

Eren whimpered as Levi’s limb brushed over his now heavily bruising ass. “It hurts.” He whispered quietly keeping his head buried in Levi’s shoulder. *God, my ass is gonna be bruised to...*
Levi apologized, hearing another pained whimper. *My arm can't move out of the way exactly... human limbs don't do that.* “Here, let’s try this...” Levi shifted them, getting behind Eren, coaxing him to spread his legs as he knelt in the bath. Levi held one hip as he again felt his way inside of him, trying to help the cum drop along and out of him. *You can't get sick...*

Eren hissed as he was shift, Levi now able to see the damage he’d done. *Fuck...* He was quiet as Levi’s fingers went even deeper inside. *It feels good. But not enough to override the pain.*

Levi looked over Eren’s bruising ass, wincing as he saw the welts on his skin. “I’m so sorry.... I really am... I didn't think I was doing it so hard...” Levi heard a quiet pleased whimper, looking down and seeing Eren slowly harden as his fingers pushed deeper to clean him out. *Hm...* Levi reached around him, careful not to touch his bruised skin as he took his length in hand again, firmly stroking him once more. *You deserve all the pleasure I can give you...*

Eren’s eyes widened slightly and he let out a soft groan as Levi worked the drops of cum out of him. He whined when Levi grabbed his length and started to stroke it. *Of fuck... He’s trying to get me to cum again? So soon?*

Levi’s voice was gentle as he handled him. “I can stop, we can let it go down... but you deserve as much pleasure as I can give you....” *And you were already hard...*

Eren shook his head. “D-Don’t stop...” He let out another loud moan, shifting back on his fingers a bit. *It feels good, I want it to feel good... Not hurt...*

Levi nodding, kissing all over Eren’s back as he worked, feeling the cum slowly drip from his hole. “Just relax babe... let me do the work...” He calmed him as Eren tried thrusting back on his hand, keeping him still. *Relax... let me take care of you...*

Eren whined but stilled and let Levi work his fingers inside of him. “O-Okay...” He murmured quietly, his eyes closing as he relaxed more and got looser around his fingers. *He’s being gentle... I like this...*

Levi stroked him, brushing against his prostate as he felt for the last few drops of cum. He heard Eren’s breathless moans, murmuring against his back as he felt him tighten around his fingers. “Let go, Eren.” He coaxed him ever closer to the edge, his hands firm as they moved. *I want you to feel*
Eren groaned as he got closer, his breathing coming out in pants as he got closer to the edge. *It feels so good... "L-Levi..."* He called out his name as his hips moved back on his fingers, so close to the edge. *I'm gonna cum soon.*

Levi rubbed his prostate in slow circles, the last of the cum dripping from him. “I'm here, Eren... Please, I want to see your face when you cum...” *You always look so amazing when you do...*

Eren whimpered turning his head towards where Levi was, his face flushed. Soon enough, his orgasm came and rushed the pleasure through his whole being. *Holy shit...* He came, pearly white jets leaving his length, his breathing heavy as he leaned on Levi, weakly. *I'm spent... Fuck...*

Levi drank in the beautiful image, slowing his ministrations and pulling his hand from him. *So beautiful... “Let's get you in bed, love...”* Levi rinsed him and moved to drain the water, helping him out of the tub and dry off. *You look so tired...*

Eren hissed when Levi touched his rear, or even let the towel touch it. “Be gentle, please... Can you actually get the numbing cream?” *This needs to get taken care of...*

Levi nodded, trying to dry him with as gentle of a touch as he could manage. “Okay, I'll run to get it.” Levi went to the next room and got in a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie before leaving their room, going to a hall closet and getting the coveted medic bag. *I think Dad repainted the insignia on it.* Levi came back to the bedroom, getting a glove on and taking out the cream. He guided Eren to the bed, coaxing him to bend over the bed so he could work, both of them blushing in embarrassment, though Eren was scarlet. Levi softly kissed his shoulder, a hand ghosting over his back before he uncapped the small tub of cream. “I'm gonna start... tell he if I'm being too hard on you, okay?” Levi gently started to brush the cream over the welts, wincing as Eren hissed. *I'm sorry...*

Eren was silent save for whimpers and cries of pain, his hands hanging onto the sheets with a white-knuckled grip. *I can't take this... I really can't... “Fuck Levi stop!”* Eren cried out halfway through, moving away from his touch in pain. *It feels like you're burning the skin...*

Levi immediately took his hand away, his other hand gently running over his back. “Let's wait a bit for the pain to go away, and see if the cream is really working...” Levi moved next to him as Eren kept the position, gently carding a hand through his hair and softly brushing their lips to
Eren whimpered as he was forced to lay down, the stinging sensation not going away. *Fuck it hurts… It hurts a lot… “L-Levi, it hurts…”* His voice was weak as he moved away from his lips, trying not to cry. He felt every welt that ran across his asscheeks, feeling like they were each on fire. *I hate this…* Eren closed his eyes, struggling to calm himself down.

Levi laid down with him, reaching out to gently cup his cheek, at a loss for what to say or do.

*...what can I tell you…? I don't know what to do… you're gonna be in so much pain for a while… fuck… I didn't think this through… “I'm so sorry…..” This is my fault… “....do you want me to see if I can get my hands on some serum? A little so you're at least not in agony…?” It'll help...

Eren nodded, moving to shift towards the center of the bed, wanting to keep his legs on the bed, though he let out a cry of pain as he moved. “Shit…” His voice was high from the pain, looking to the stick with distaste. “You’re not allowed to use it like that again.” Eren mumbled, trying to calm down and not cry.

Levi nodded, kissing him and trying to soothe him. “Okay, I won't, I promise.” Levi stood, walking to the door after throwing away the glove with cream still over the fingers. “I'll go talk to Lathe…” *I know he has serum… under lock and key, of course…* Levi walked silently to their bedroom, peering in through the slightly opened door, stopping himself from knocking when he saw Ieva asleep without Lathe, the bathroom dark. *Huh.* He crept downstairs, his eyebrows shooting up as he saw Lathe curled up in the corner of the couch, ignoring the TV as some war documentary played, staring forlornly into a bowl. …? “Hey Dad…?” He saw him look up, seeing him curl up further into himself, avoiding looking directly at him. “I'm… uhm… are you okay?”

Lathe shrugged one shoulder, his eyes sad. “Yeah, I'm okay I guess…” Lathe looked up to him, forcing a weak smile. “What’s up, Hon?”

“Uhm, Eren’s….. well… I just got the cast off, and Eren and I were kinda busy… and uhm… we maybe went kinda overboard with uhm…. with the cane, and uhm…. can we have some serum…?”...Please?

Lathe sighed, nodding, barely even reacting to what he said. “Yeah, sure….” Lathe set down the bowl, dragging the quilt with him as he went downstairs into the storage room, unlocking a small fridge and getting a single small vial of serum. He brought it upstairs, handing it to Levi. “You’re a trained medic. You know where we keep the needles and where the key is for them, and where the biohazard disposal is… inject around the affected area, and remember that you can always use more, but you can't take it away. Try not to leave him with extra serum in his system.” Lathe seemed out of it, not barely looking at Levi as he spoke. *Can I go back to the couch now…?*
Levi took the small vial, reaching to hug Lathe before he could get away. “Thanks… and are you sure you're okay? You look so upset…”

Lathe sighed, leaning on him a bit as he was hugged. “I'm okay, Levi. I'll survive.” He pecked his head, shooing him away after a moment. “Now go, take care of Eren.” ...I have to go back to thinking...

Levi warily nodded, leaving him be. He looked back when he reached the top of the stairs, seeing Lathe back in his spot on the couch, staring at some point ahead of him. ....it's so unlike him.... Levi turned away and shoved aside the worry, going back to their bedroom and seeing Eren still largely unmoved on the bed. “I have the serum, Hon… one second…” Levi went to get the injection ready. It'll be a second...

Eren nodded, tears having run down his face as he waited patiently. Well today's my lucky day.... I'm getting a needle in my ass... great. He closed his eyes, his hands still gripping the sheets below him as he waited patiently. I want this to be done.... Maybe Levi will let me thank him for getting the serum?

Levi soon got the shot ready, wiping a spot on his ass clean gently. “Alright, don't think about it, just one two three…” Levi quickly administered it, taking care of the needle. “That's it- I'll grab tissues.” He ran off and came back with a handful just as the first drop of blood fell from Eren's nose, some of the bruises beginning to fade.

Eren groaned as Levi pressed the tissues to his face, feeling his ass on fire once again. Fuck I forgot how hot you get... His whimpers died down as he felt the pain lessen. The welts already had disappeared, the bruises fading with them. Oh thank god... He felt the air around him get warmer as the steam formed from where his bruises once were. It's warm...

Levi sighed in relief as the bruises faded to a green before they stopped steaming. That's just fine. “They're still a bit bit bruised, but only barely. How do you feel...?” Hopefully better…?

Eren shifted, thankful that he could actually move with little discomfort. Better… He moved to pull Levi fully on the bed, putting the bloody tissues on the nightstand for now before he situated himself in Levi’s lap, looking into his eyes as he wrapped his arms around him. “Hmm… Better...” His voice was lazy as he leaned in to kiss Levi passionately, his mouth open and waiting for Levi to kiss him back.
Levi smirked as he found himself with his lap full of Eren, eagerly leaning up to kiss him, feeling his tongue invade his mouth, letting him push him back on the bed, feeling him drag down his sweatpants, wearing no boxers underneath from his haste. “Someone’s… eager…” ...are you gonna top this time…? Because if you are, fuck, please ....

Eren grinned as he pulled back, mischief in his eyes. “Let me do the work, hmm?” He murmured quietly into Levi’s ear as he kissed at his jaw for a bit before trailing down to his chest and kissing every scar he found before making his way to Levi’s length and stroking it a bit. I want you hard when I ride you...

Levi sighed as Eren kissed down his chest, holding his head gently as he licked at his skin, his hands in his hair. He whimpered quietly as Eren’s hand closed around his length, letting out a breathy moan. “Feels good…” I love it when you take control… It feels good to let you take the reins sometimes...

Eren soon crawled back a bit to settle on Levi’s side, his mouth latching itself to Levi’s length. He swallowed the whole thing down without gagging, managing to suck at him harshly. I haven’t given you a blow in a long time… And I haven’t ridden you in a long time...

Levi let out a choked moan, trying not to tug at Eren’s hair as his back forced itself into an arch, trying not to buck up further into his mouth. “E-Eren… oh fuck ….” I forgot how good you are at giving blowjobs…. Fuck....

Eren looked up to Levi, his eyes watching his body shift and twist. Good… He likes it… He smirked, humming as he lathered Levi in his saliva, pulling off of him after a few moments, using a hand to jerk his length a few times. When his fingers were sufficiently coated, he reached back to start and slick up his hole, returning his attention to Levi’s length. I’m so glad he likes this… Eren’d head bobbed, his eyes shaded as he watched for his reaction.

Levi watched Eren slick himself up with dark eyes. “Babe… you…” He settled further into the bed when Eren pulled off of him, watching him come further up, hovering over his length. His hands drifted to his hips, spreading his legs a bit, looking up to him with shaded eyes. You're so beautiful...

Eren spread his legs as he sat down on Levi’s length, a loud moan escaping him as he was fully sheathed. Fuck…. “Hmm, you fill me up so good…” He whined as he lifted himself and accidentally pulled him out, moving to hurriedly put him back inside. I wanna be full...

Levi smirked, his pants quiet as Eren bounced in him, helping guide him back onto his length. His
hands were gentle in his hips, looking over his tan frame without shame. “You're so perfect…”

How am I so lucky to have you…?

Eren smirked as he bounced himself, soon grinding down onto Levi’s length and squeezing his insides with a lopsided grin on his face. “Hmm, you like the tattoos? Have you felt the muscle under them yet?” They’re hard to notice… But I’m not sure if you have really….

Levi nodded, his hands going up to his chest and arms. “I really like the tattoos…” He was surprised to feel much firmer muscle underneath the skin, gently feeling his arms. “...have you been working out?” I appreciate this….

Eren shuddered as he felt Levi run his hands over his body again. Damn… His hands… I miss him touching me, and holding me… And admiring me… Which is what he’s doing right now… He nodded, yelping as Levi teased his nipple out of the blue. What the hell? Eren let out a low moan. “I-I’ve been lifting, hay bales… And working the horses…. It's hard work doing barn chores… Riding is a lot of core strength too….” His voice got a bit higher as the pleasure started to really sink in again, his face flushing down to his neck, looking down and noticing his dick bouncing with each movement, leaking precum.

Levi smirked, looking him over, catching his length as it bounced, feeling the slickness. “You’re so slick… and I love the muscles….” He slowly stroked him, gazing up at him with lust and awe. “It makes you even hotter….” I love you...

Eren’s face darkened even more, creating an even darker red on his features. Holy shit… He thinks I look good… A small smile crept on his face before he felt a wave of pleasure pass through him, threatening to pull him over the edge, but he squeezed himself tight around Levi, wanting to hold off on his own climax until he got Levi to fill him. I want you to fill me up.

Levi whined as Eren squeezed around him, feeling his own release approaching, albeit slowly. “Eren… nngh…” He panted, his grip tightening a bit when he started getting really close, whimpering in warning. I wanna cum...

Eren heard his whimpers, which drove him to work faster, shifting a bit so he would be able to roll his hips and find his own prostate. His eyes widened when he did, grinding down deeply on it and shifting his hips to keep pressing Levi to it. He swore he could feel his eyes roll back from the sensation. Fuck… So good… Eren couldn’t concentrate much more than that, barely acknowledging the noises that left him as he continued his ministrations. Levi feels so good…

Levi felt himself tense as Eren mewed while he shifted on him, seeing him with his back arched,
reaching blindly for Levi as he struggled to stay in his blissful state. *He’s*.... “A- Ah … Eren… E- Eren…” Levi gasped, whining as he came, his hips slowly rocking back and forth, gently pushing further into Eren. *So good...*

Eren whined as Levi ground even harder and deeper into him, finally finding his own release. His toes curled in utter bliss, his body slumping down a bit, trying to stay up, but unable to keep himself upright. He sighed as he curled up to his chest, breathing hard from the pure ecstasy. “Hmm…. That felt really good Levi…” Eren whispered quietly near his ear, his eyes closing as he relaxed. *Maybe it’ll be okay if we sleep?*

Levi sighed as he felt Eren nestle into his neck, his arms gently finding their way over his back, running up and down his sides. “You always feel so wonderful…” Levi sighed deeper, letting his eyes slip shut. *I love you...*

Eren smiled more in his sleep, snuggling closer to him and trying to stay warm. The two of them having fallen asleep on top of the covers.
Chapter 104: Illness is a Bitch Part 4

Eren woke up after only a few hours, a horrible feeling in his gut, lifting himself off of Levi, realizing that he hadn’t pulled out nor cleaned himself up at all. *Fuck*… He tiredly stumbled along, feeling the rising bile in his stomach, making it to the toilet in time to hurl. *Fuck, I forgot to clean up…*

Levi let out an instinctive sound as the heat around his length was gone, waking up fully when he heard the sound of sickness in the bathroom. *…f*uck. *We never cleaned you out that second time.* “Eren?” Levi got up, not minding his own nudity when he went to the bathroom, knocking on the doorframe. “Are you okay? We forgot to clean you out again… do you need help…?” *I can help…*

Eren looked over his shoulder once the bout of sickness had finally washed over him. *I don’t think I do…. Well…* He looked over to the large tub. “Can-Can you fill it with hot water? I wanna wash up… You can go back to sleep…” *I know this is a rude awakening.*

Levi nodded, going to turn on the hot water. “I’m not gonna let you be sick alone… I forgot to take care of you and clean you out… let me take care of you…” *It’s only fair… and it feels wrong for you to trust me so much and let me have you and then just leave you alone when I didn’t take care of you…*

Eren looked up to him as he sat back against the wall near the toilet still, waiting for the bath to be drawn. “It’s alright, I’m gonna take a bath and that’s it…. I can do it myself…” He murmured quietly, watching the hot water steam. *I can shower… I need to try and be alone without needing to cling to him… He’ll get sick of it real quick.*

Levi looked hesitant, shifting on his feet. “It’s… I’m supposed to be the one taking care of you… I didn’t do that… I wanna take good care of you.” Levi offered a hand to him, gently guiding him to the bathtub. “Here, let me wash you and clean you out… okay?” *Let me take care of you…*

Eren shook his head as he stepped in carefully, slowly easing himself down. “Levi… Really, just go get some sleep okay?” *I don’t want to argue with you about this… Because if I let you touch anywhere near my ass I’m gonna get hard again and you’re going to jerk me off and then I’m gonna pass out in the bathtub…* Eren shook his head, closing his eyes as he tried to calm himself down from working himself up. “Just go sleep…”

Levi sighed, going to gently kiss Eren’s forehead. “Okay, babe.” *I’ll wait for you…* Levi went back to the bedroom and slipped under the covers, trying to stay awake as Eren took his time in the bathroom. *I wanna cuddle, dammit…*
Eren let himself sink all the way to his shoulders, watching the water still as he did. He couldn’t contain the sniffle that left him, feeling his eyes well with tears. *Fuck... I know I shouldn’t be like this... I’m acting like a fucking kid again...* He let his tears fall silently and he moved after about half an hour to finally clean himself. He was quiet as he cried, already feeling the headache blossom in his temples. *Shit... Crying quietly is hard to do...* He cleaned himself up, going back to sit into the warm water, sitting in it and not realizing just how long he was in the tub until he shivered. *When did it get so cold?*

Levi woke up early in the morning, the sky still a deep grey. He reached blindly for Eren, wanting the extra warmth, finding only cold sheets. *Eren...?* Levi sat up, blinking and looking around, hearing a small sound from the bathroom. “Eren?” Levi stood, quietly padding over, lightly knocking. “Eren?”

Eren at that point had gotten out of the bath and his eyes were puffy as he sat wrapped up in towels near the toilet. He sniffled, reaching for the tissues he brought to his side to blow his nose.  *My nose is running more than it should if I was just crying.... I... I don’t know what the fuck is wrong with me... I threw up too...*

Levi slowly opened the door a crack, seeing Eren with puffy eyes and a runny nose. “Hon, were you crying? What's wrong?” Levi looked very worried as he suddenly came to Eren’s side. *Are you okay?*

Eren looked up as he came in, looking down and away as he curled up into himself and held his knees close, much closer than he'd been able to accomplish in awhile. *I think I might be sick again... Fuck... “I-I...”* He stuttered at first trying to think of an excuse as he felt the bile rise once again, leaning over the toilet and expelling the small amount of acid in his stomach. *Shit, definitely sick...*

Levi winced, reaching a hand for him, rubbing his back. *You don't look too good... “I think you might be sick... I'm going to go get you something nice to wear and help you into bed when you're up to it.”* Levi softly kissed his temple. *I'm one room away.*

Eren shook his head quietly, regretting it as he dry heaved and the sensation making his head spin further, prompting even more tears. *I wanna tell him I’m sorry... For being a horrible lover, because here I go getting sick when all he wants to do is probably spend time with Mila... Now he’s gonna feel obligated to take care of me... The useless person who demands too much of him.... I’m really not that great a person... Shit ...* He whimpered as he cried in silence, turning away from Levi to hide his teary face. *I can’t do that to him... Maybe having a kid was a horrible idea? What have I done? I’ve ruined his chances..... Shit....* He whimpered, holding his head as his headache worsened with his mind in overdrive.
Levi looked even more worried as he saw tears start falling, kneeling next to him, his hand gently running up and down his side. “Eren, what’s wrong? You’re crying…” Please don’t cry… He gently turned him when Eren looked away, his voice soft when he saw his splotchy cheeks, wiping some of the stray tears away. “Please, talk to me.” I hate seeing you cry...

Eren shook his head, his hands shaking as he struggled to push him away. No… I don’t wanna! You’ll see it too! He let out a ragged sob for the first time since he had started crying horribly. Eren kept his eyes closed as he tried to push Levi away. You’ll leave me if I’m too clingy, I need to be able to be in a different room than you and not have to cry… And now I realize really how fucked up I made this when I begged for a kid!

Levi looked even more worried, his hands gently cupping Eren’s cheeks when he weakly tried to shove him away. “Eren, please, tell me what’s wrong. I hate seeing you cry… and you know I’ll love you no matter what you tell me.” You can talk to me… you don’t have to be scared that I’m gonna judge you...

Eren whimpered shaking his more, pulling his hands away from his face. “N-No…. I-I fucked up…” He sobbed more as he moved to throw up again, panic already beginning to surge through him as he knew Levi wasn’t about to leave him be. You’ll leave… I can’t trust your words… I can’t and it hurts that I can’t… you hate seeing me cry? Well right now the only way for me not to is to be in the same room as you and we all know that’s not gonna fucking work.

Levi looked hurt, gently embracing Eren and pulling him a bit closer. “Eren, it’s okay, please, don’t be upset… what’s the matter?” I don’t know why you’re so upset…. I can’t think of anything...

Eren whimpered before he started to curl up to Levi’s side, enjoying that he actually put his arms around him. Maybe I still have a few more months before he tells me he wants to leave? He was still sobbing, his whole body shaking horribly, his forehead warm from fever.

Levi looked helpless, knowing he wasn't getting any answers out of him. Levi held Eren closer, shifting and managing to stretch to the sink, getting a cup for water for him. “Here, rinse out your mouth.” Your mouth probably tastes very gross right now… and the stomach acid isn't gonna be nice...

Eren slowly reached for the glass, moving out of his lap to go and greet the toilet once again, spitting out the last of the water in it before flushing it. He whimpered as he moved to curl up to Levi’s side. Fuck… He’s taking care of me...
Levi set the cup back on the counter, carefully scooping Eren up and standing, going slow so he didn't upset his stomach. “Let’s get you dressed and back in bed, Hon. You could use some sleep.” He carried him to the bed, setting him down and going to get comfortable clothes together for him. He helped him dress, tucking him in before taking the towels back to the bathroom. He came back, getting back into bed and nestling next to Eren, coaxing him closer to curl up to him, gently petting his hair. It's okay… “Try to sleep, Eren…. We want you to feel better.” I'm not gonna let you force yourself to function while you're sick...

Eren shook his head, sniffling as more tears rolled down his cheeks. “B-But…. The horses….” I need to go take care of the horses, and teach class later today…. He did nestle up to Levi, his head resting over his heart, listening to it beat. It's so calming… But I'm not gonna have it soon am I?

Levi sighed, kissing the bridge of his nose. “It's okay… I'll go down when you fall asleep and take care of them… or I can ask someone… and I’m pretty good with German, I can teach your class today. I'm kinda fluent. And I have nothing to do, really. I'll take care of you. You needed a day off sooner or later.” You've really been working a lot ever since the center opened. It's good that the kids have the extra help, but you've seemed overwhelmed lately with just… with everything….

“I'm…. I'm sorry…” He mumbled quietly, sniffing as he shuddered, curling up to Levi with the covers pulled up to his chin. I'm cold… Even though I'm in warm clothes… He probably doesn’t wanna take care of a sick person… Shit, I gotta try and get better, cause I need to take care of Mila too…. Levi hasn’t really been able to hold her for more than hour or so… His eyes closed as he tried not to think about his aching body and the headache he had. I fucked up….

Levi murmured to him, bringing him closer when he shivered. “Don't apologize, Eren, you couldn't help getting sick… It's okay. I don't mind doing the stuff you normally do. You need a break anyway… you're always doing everything. Lathe’s rubbing off on you too much.” Levi smiled faintly, petting Eren still. “I'll take care of the horses, take care of Mila, take care of you, teach your classes… it'll work out okay. And I need something to do besides twiddle my thumbs.” Seriously... I need something to do around here.... I've been doing jack shit for weeks...

Eren shook his head slowly as not to upset his stomach. “I-I’ll be fine…. I can live without.” He cut himself off as he realized what he was going to say. I can’t say that… Cause that’s a complete lie at this point, I'll probably wake up crying because he’s not in the room with me… Eren felt more tears bubble to the surface, starting to cry all over again. And to think I almost had to live without you….

Levi looked surprised as to how easily Eren almost said that, looking hurt. …could you really live so easily without me in the picture….? You can't mean that…. “Eren, please, I know you don't like feeling useless and I know you don't want to be taken care of but you're sick and I'm here… it's my job to take care of you. To make sure you're okay and that you get better. Just focus on resting, and in a little bit I'll get up and get you food if you're hungry, then go take care of the horses.” It's still
Eren couldn't help but begin to sob all over again, moving to get up from off of Levi, his face pale as he sobbed harder. He curled up to himself, hugging his knees to his chest as he cried loudly. “I’m… I’m so sorry…” You probably hate this…. That I can’t even say what I want properly…. He struggled to calm himself down, hearing a soft whine on the outside of the door knowing that at least one dog was standing there waiting to be let in. Fuck… I can’t control my emotions.

Levi sat up with him, shifting behind Eren to wrap his arms around his waist, softly pecking all over his neck. “It's okay, it's okay…” Levi held him close as Eren cried, his voice soothing in his ear. Please don't cry… I hate it when you cry… you deserve to be happy...

“N-No… No it’s not… it’s not okay… I’m a fucking mess…” Eren cried more as he heard a woof, not wanting Mikhail to wake up the whole house so soon. He scrambled out of Levi’s grasp, moving to grab his hoodie and socks. I'm going outside to go cry on Charlie’s back... Cause he’ll be warm...

Levi looked concerned as Eren got out of bed, following him and setting the hoodie right back down. “Eren, please, you're sick. You need rest. You really need this. I don't want you going out and aggravating your symptoms. You don't deserve to be sick any longer if you can help it. Please, let me take care of you.” Levi turned him and pulled him into a warm embrace, doing something he rarely did and giving him the puppy eyes. Please?

Eren looked at him and sniffled. “B-But y-you’ll get sick too…. Y-You should go be with M-Mila… B-because you haven’t b-been able to hold her much...” You just got out of your crutches... And I need to prepare myself for when you’re not around... You won’t stay forever... You'll wanna leave...

Levi sighed, holding him still. “Eren, it's okay… you deserve to have someone fuss over you. I have the rest of my life to give Mila all the hugs and kisses I want, but I want you to get better when you get sick. I can hold her again soon. I don't give a damn if I get sick. You're gonna let me baby you because I want to take care of the man I love.” I want to do this. Don't worry, Hon.

Eren sniffled and nodded, looking to his hoodie and grabbing it again. “C-Can we go to the barn? I-I feel more comfortable on Charlie…” I remember when I was a kid I’d always go and cry on the horse’s back when I was upset. I wanna do it again...

Levi sighed, nodding. “Okay. I'm coming with you though.” Levi quietly mother-henned Eren, making sure they were both dressed warmly enough for the early morning before opening the
bedroom door. He pet Mikhail as he stood outside the bedroom door, the dog sniffing at Eren’s legs when he squeezed past Levi. He saw Blake sitting there too, staring up to him with wide eyes, whining quietly. Aw… Levi sat down next to Blake, gently hugging him and petting him for a moment. *You're my favorite.* “Eren's okay, Blake. He's bit sick, but he’ll be better soon.” Levi smiled faintly to him, letting him stand and walk to Eren, sniffing his hand as well. *They care about you, Eren.*

Eren had kneeled, letting the two of them stand on either side of him and lick at his face, smiling a bit. He still had tears rolling down his eyes every now and then, his hands shaking. His eyes slowly looked up to Levi, sniffling. “Can… Can we go now?” *Mikhail will probably follow me… Blake’ll probably stay in the house, Nene’s not up yet, and Krampus is probably with the boys upstairs….*

Levi nodded, petting Blake one more time before standing. “Yeah, let's go.” Levi led Eren to the stairs, Blake whimpering before turning back to his dog bed, going to lie down. Mikhail followed them, waiting when Levi made them put on shoes and continuing out the door to the barn. Levi brought Eren out to see Charlie, helping Eren feed all the animals. *They're all pretty hungry…*

Eren coughed every now and then, making sure all the horses got their fill before he went to Charlie’s stall and he left it open a crack. He used the wall to get up on the horse’s back, sniffling as he laid down on his back, his arms wrapping around Charlie’s thick body as much as they could. Eren let himself cry as he hugged the horse, who of course stood there looking at Levi as if judging him. *I just wanna cry… I’ve needed to for a long time…*

Levi watched Eren drape himself over Charlie, looking worried. *This is what he wanted to do? ....oh my.....* Levi let him be, going around and finishing the chores before he heard the sniffling quiet down, seeing Eren still on Charlie’s back, sound asleep. *Oh my…. that's adorable… but I can't carry him... uhm....* Levi got out his phone, firing off a text.

**LA:** Dad?

**LQ:** Yeah? What's up

**LA:** Eren fell asleep on Charlie’s back… and I'm not allowed to carry him

**LQ:** ......I’m coming

Levi waited patiently, putting things in order and looking over as Lathe came into the barn, still looking a bit sleepy. He pointed to Eren, Lathe sighing.

“Poor kid… looks like he's been crying…” Lathe went and helped Eren slip off of Charlie, the horse letting him, simply sniffing his hair for a moment. “Is he okay, Levi?” Lathe looked worried.
What was he crying about?

Levi looked down, shrugging. “I have no idea, he was crying when I found him this morning… And he was throwing up, I think he might be sick… I tried to get him to tell me what was wrong, but I couldn’t get him to talk. I have no idea what’s wrong with him….” I don’t want us to fight… But I don’t know what to do… I wanna protect him and take care of him, but he won’t let me…

Lathe sighed, carrying him from the barn, Levi following him. “...He really loves you, you know.” Lathe seemed hesitant, picking his words carefully. “....and...... he's dying for that ring…. Levi, I think he has separation anxiety….. and he's trying to deal with it himself…. he's been trying to pry himself from your side, and I think I've been the only one who sees how pained he looks whenever he has to leave your side or whenever you need to leave him for just two seconds, or regardless of however long it takes… and you know… I remember him saying that if you two had a kid, you'd have to stick around for eighteen years. …..I think he was serious. It was his way of hanging onto you when you didn't propose. He needs you, Levi.” He does...

Levi nodded, silently thinking about the situation. “I wanna do it on New Years… Start the year off right… But what if that’s not soon enough for him? Thanksgiving is next week… Is he gonna be like this for a month? He almost said that he’d be perfectly okay without living with me…. It hurt…..” He almost said it so…. Easily. Levi hobbled around in the snow, Mikhail at his side, the two of them following Lathe up the stairs and into the house. It’s still early… I should’ve let Eren sleep on Charlie a little longer, Dad’s gotta be tired, he was up late last night…. I wonder if Tucker and Henry are still asleep, they were dead to the world last night while Dad watched TV....

Lathe sighed, carrying Eren inside and to the stairs, both he and Levi smiling as they saw Henry and Tucker still entwined on the couch, looking peaceful. They'll make the cutest couple... present company excluded. “I think Eren wants to not feel this way…” Lathe carried him up the stairs, waiting as Levi took his time. “It's not like I think Eren wants to not love you so much, but I think he wants to be able to be away from you without feeling so alone… he's trying to convince you and himself that he's okay without you stuck to his hip. I know it must hurt.... but he's not willing to admit that he's having this anxiety…” Lathe laid Eren down in their bed, turning back to Levi when he was tucked in. He had faint circles under his eyes, looking older than he was, sighing for what felt like the hundredth time. “I should go make breakfast for everyone… Henry and Tucker will wake up soon and we know how much they'll eat…. well, how much Henry eats…” Kid’s a black hole.... Lathe moved to leave for downstairs, stopping when Levi caught his arm. “Huh?”

Levi shook his head. “Go sleep, I can handle breakfast, Eren’ll be asleep for awhile, I don't think he slept at all last night… Go sleep and cuddle with Mom while you can, her baby bump is already getting big and she’s only four months along.” Levi smiled at him softly. I need something to do, and you look like you could sleep for a couple decades....

Lathe gave him a weary smile, giving him a hug. “Levi, you're a saint… I could use more sleep...”
I keep not being able to fall asleep... Lathe let him go, ruffling his hair and grinning when Levi weakly swatted at his hand. “Okay, okay, I'll go. Make sure that you wake up the lovebirds when food’s ready. And if Henry stays over awhile, please hang around and keep an eye on them while you can... Tucker needs to get used to Henry being his boyfriend and learn to trust him... I don't have to explain why, correct?” He watched Levi nod. “Good. And I can take over as babysitter later if you want to take care of Eren’s classes. We can't let him get everyone sick, so that's a thing.” That needs taking care of.

Levi nodded. “They’re just German classes, right?” I'll be able to manage German classes. He looked over as Eren moved, coughing for a moment before stilling. At least he’s still asleep... “I’ll make sure everyone eats, the squad is still asleep, so I’ll make them breakfast too, they’ll wake up once they smell food.” I know the boys, they smell bacon and they are out of the bed in a second...

Lathe nodded. “Yeah, just German stuff. Eren’s class binder is in the room, and you know which one Eren’s classroom is. And wait until the last minute if you make bacon.” They'll be up in two seconds. Let's let them sleep until then and hold off releasing the tornado. “I’ll be asleep if you need me...” Lathe wandered off, content to go lay down again until he had to eat and go across the street for work. Just ten more hours, please.... Lathe went into their bedroom, happy to curl around Ieva like a sleepy cat, gently resting one hand on her bump and smiling. Tiny humans....
Chapter 105: Moving Forward

Levi sighed, smiling faintly as Lathe wandered back to his room to sleep, going downstairs to make breakfast. He got out every ingredient he needed, making a huge pan of breakfast quiche. It was in the oven in half an hour, Levi cleaning the kitchen meticulously. *They'll want bacon too, most likely… the kids all need some kind of protein with breakfast…* Levi fished two big links of sausage from the fridge, cutting them into disks to fry. *They'll like this… and because it's pork sausage it'll go with the ham in the quiche…* He jumped as he heard the fridge open, seeing Tucker getting out a jug of juice. “Shit, Tucker, you scared me.” He quirked an eyebrow as the teen simply shrugged, still going to get out a glass. “How’re you doing? Enjoy waking up with your new boyfriend?” Levi’s tone was quietly teasing, smirking as Tucker blushed. *I'm glad you two pulled your heads out of your asses.* Tucker’s whole face heated up, giving Levi the finger for insinuating what he had. *He’s an ass… But at least I’m not alone with Henry.* *{What did you make?}* Resorting to sign language… *Because I have no idea where my phone is.* He poured himself orange juice silently, waiting for a reply. *If Eren taught me you must know…*

The man smirked. “Come on, we all know how much you wanted that. And I have no idea what that meant.” *I know like, five words.* Levi forked over his phone. “Here, type it.”

Tucker looked at him for a moment before hesitantly taking the phone. *What did you make?* He handed the phone back, lifting his glass to sip at his juice. *So Eren didn’t teach him sign language… Got it…*

Levi looked at it, looking over and lightly kicking the oven. “There’s a quiche in the oven, and I’m cutting up pork sausage.” Levi looked back at him, glancing over to the living room as he hear a creak and a confused sound. “Sounds like your boyfriend’s awake. Better go give him his good-morning kiss.” Levi gave Tucker a flat glare, his tone a bit sarcastic. He smirked as Tucker flushed and scurried off to the living room, turning his attention back to the chopping board. He sighed as he heard the sound of lips smacking moments later, the shifting of weight onto the couch. “Just don’t fuck on the couch and you’re fine!” Levi called over his shoulder, smirking as he heard exasperated and embarrassed sounds, the sounds of them making out quieting. *Of course I'm the one who has to babysit the horny teenagers…*

Tucker froze as he heard Levi call out to them from the kitchen, his eyes going wide with fear for a moment before he more hesitantly kissed at Henry’s lips. *I don’t wanna do that… Please don’t try… Please don’t try to fuck me… I’m scared you’re going to.*

Henry caught his look of fear, cupping his cheek and gently guiding him to look at him, still with a
sleepy look on his face, his expression calm and caring. “Don’t worry, Tucker. Nothing will happen until you want it to.” I promise. He let his eyes flutter shut again when Tucker leaned down to kiss him with added vigor, his hands gently roaming his back. He’s okay… good. And thanks for terrifying him Levi. We appreciate it.

Tucker soon pulled back, shifting off of him as he stared at him with wide eyes. What’s he gonna do? Is he gonna stay here today? Or is he gonna go home? He was silent as he watched him, almost expectantly, his chin on Henry’s chest.

Henry quirked an eyebrow at Tucker, his hand coming up to pet his hair. “Hm? What’s up?” Tucker was quiet, tilting his head, looking curious. “....Tucker, use your phone.” Henry stretched an arm for the coffee table where his phone had been tossed sometime last night. I need to read your words.

Tucker nodded, taking the phone and quickly typing. Are you leaving? Or can you stay?

Henry read the words, blushing and looking at Tucker. “I’d like to stay if you all wouldn’t mind… I don’t really have anywhere to be…” Please? I’d have all day to just do shit with you… I would get to steal kisses and cuddle… I wanna stay...

Tucker nodded laying his head down on his chest as he shifted on top of him and he typed out a few things. We can raid the basement or we can go build a fort… Depending on how warmly you dressed…

“I did bring my jacket… but I don’t have snow pants… and if my jeans get soaked I don’t have anything else to wear… I actually didn’t really bring another set of clothes besides pajamas which I kinda didn't change into...can we raid the basement for video games? The couches have good cuddle potential…” Henry smiled as Tucker blushed, playing with the hair at the nape of his neck. “Or we could go outside and play on the snow and I can make you fork over some of your clothes when mine get soaked....” He chuckled as Tucker turned an even darker red at the mental image of Henry in his clothes. “You’re so adorable when you blush…” You always are, even if you aren’t blushing… They jumped when they heard a knock on the wall, seeing Levi standing near the stairs, both of them flushing.

“Breakfast is ready- come and get it before the squad gets here and eats everything.” Levi turned to get up the stairs, about to wake up the squad and everyone else, bringing a plate up for Eren. They can have first dibs on stuff.

Both of them looked at each other before sitting up, going over to fill their plates with the best-
looking food before the six boys all flooded downstairs, along with Jake and James, the latter holding a sleepy-looking Mila who tiredly ate her baby food as James helped her use a spoon. The quiche was quickly gone, the sausages all eaten up after breakfast was finished, Levi busily cleaning up and Lathe making sure all the boys washed their hands before running off to play. He herded them out of the theatre room when Tucker handed him his phone, nodding to them. Thank god... we can have our privacy...

Tucker lead him downstairs, loading up the Wii and pulling out the Mario Kart disc. We haven’t played this together yet... He should like this... He got the game all set up and got the wheels in place as well around the remotes. This’ll work. He turned and had the wheel out for Henry to take. I hope you're okay with this at least...

Henry took it, grinning evilly. “You've made a very bad decision. I just so happen to be the King of Mario kart.” I'm actually not shitty at it. That's good. They set up a race series, playing for hours, bickering back and forth as to who was the better player, laughing maniacally as the other fell to their doom or got hit by shells. Henry grinned as Tucker fell from Rainbow Road get again, looking to him. “Just admit it, Tucker! I win!” He watched Tucker look at him evilly, pausing the game. Huh? He had half a second to react before Tucker pounced, tackling him. He laughed, blushing when Tucker became flush with his front, both of them reaching with grabby hands to pin the other down, yelping. They both eventually landed onto the floor with a grunt, Tucker ending up on top of Henry, both of them laughing at what they'd just done. Their laughter died down as they slowly realized they were flush, Henry’s thigh between Tucker’s legs and feeling a hardness between his legs, his own hardon clothed and settled near Tucker’s hip. ...oh... oh shit.... Henry looked up as Tucker seemed caught between want and panic, his hand coming up to cup his cheek. “Tucker, please, don't panic... it's okay.... really....” He studied him, his eyes widening when Tucker shivered and ground down on his thigh minutely on reflex, watching him flush. ...does he...? “Tucker… you know you can say no to anything… if you want.... would you let me take care of you? I don't mean anything like all the way, it's too early for that, but... if you want...” Henry didn't know what else to say, shifting a hand down and very gently cupping the bulge in his pants, very slowly palming him. It's okay.... Please don't freak out... His body laid flat on the floor, his other hand moving to pin itself to the floor, glancing away, all signs of submission. You're the one in control...

Tucker let out a small gasp as he looked at Henry, watching him move. I'm hard... And his hand feels really good... He whimpered a bit as he ground into Henry’s hand, sighing at the friction it gave. He's being gentle, and not taking over...

Henry gave Tucker a gentle smile, his eyes wide with awe as he heard Tucker gasp and give him a shaky moan. He sounds... Henry shifted so that Tucker knelt, helping him unbutton his pants and tug them down and off of him, his hands careful as he dragged down his boxers. He looked Tucker over, grasping his length and giving him a slow pump. He's skinny... He let his other hand cup Tucker’s cheek as he slowly started pumping him, hearing the moans begin to drip from his throat. ...but he sounds so amazing, I don't mind...
Tucker’s whole body was simply thrumming with pleasure as Henry continued to fondle his skinny length. His eyes widened as he let out a sharp cry when his fingers got close to his head. “H-Henry…” His voice was weak, and full of pleasure as he whimpered. His shaking arms came up to grasp onto Henry’s shirt as if hanging on for dear life. *It feels really good… But it feels really weird with him doing it… My body feels like it’s on fire…*

Henry let his hand speed up a bit, teasing Tucker’s head when a brush against it earned him a loud gasp. His eyes were dark with lust as Tucker moaned in his ear, his other hand moving all over his side and front. “You sound wonderful ….” *I love this…*

Tucker let out a ragged breath as he leaned his head against Henry’s shoulder. *It feels really good, it feels better than when I do it to myself…* He couldn’t help but buck his hips up into Henry’s hand, wanting him to keep rubbing him. *I want it… But I’m scared to go past this… He’s being gentle right now… But what if he’s not gentle later on? What then?*

Henry wrapped his arm around Tucker’s back, keeping him close as his strokes grew faster. He held him as he heard his panting grow more and more ragged, feeling him begin to shake in his arms. “You’re so wonderful like this…. please, Tucker… I want to hear you when you let go….“ *Please… I want to know what it sounds like when I make you cum….*

Tucker whimpered, holding onto Henry as his orgasm got closer, his body feeling warmer than he thought possible. “H-Henry… I-I can’t… M-mess my clothes….“ *I can’t have Dad know… Because he’ll yell at me…* He whimpered, curling his toes as he got closer and closer to the edge, feeling the burning in the pit of his stomach building. *I wanna cum…. His hands feel godly …*

Henry slowed, slipping further under him when an idea came to him. “Don’t worry….“ Henry reached up to hold Tucker’s hips, a bit intimidated when he was faced with his length. He still leaned up and sealed his lips over the tip, gently sucking. *If you cum like this, your clothes won’t get messed up….*

Tucker saw stars as Henry sucked on his head, immediately cumming from the pleasure. *Oh my god…. Oh my god …. He let out a loud cry of pleasure as one of his hands gripped onto Henry’s hair, keeping his head where it was as he came hard into his mouth. Holy shit… That felt…. That felt amazing….* He groaned as the sensations of warmth and pleasure spilled over him more than they ever had before, his face buried into the crook of his arm, shaking as he held himself up. *That felt better than trying to fuck myself on the dildo… Shit…* Tucker’s whole body was shaking as he let go of Henry’s hair, watching him. *What’s he gonna do now? He’s gotta be hard too…*

Henry tried his best to swallow every drop of cum, needing a moment before coming off of him, gently lapping at him for a moment before tilting his head back to gaze up at Tucker as the other
teen knelt over him, his smile lazy. *You sound so hot…* He moved back up to face Tucker, softly pecking the corner of his lips. “Was that okay? *I hope you liked it…*

Tucker nodded quietly, though he moved back away from him as he pulled up his boxers and his pants, keeping his eyes away from Henry. *He’s hard too… What’s he gonna do now?* He could feel the panic that was starting to rise in his chest, his eyes wide as he silently moved away. *I’m scared…*

Henry sighed as he leaned up on his elbows, resigned. *I have to take care of myself, don’t I….* He looked up as Tucker curled into a ball on the couch, watching him with scared eyes. *Huh? “Tucker, are you okay? …is it because I’m still, uh…”* He nervously drew himself together a bit, his length throbbing. “*Y-You don't have to take care of me if you don't want to…. just, tell me where the nearest bathroom is….”* *I need to take care of this…*

Tucker watched him with scared eyes as he moved, his hand shaking as he pointed to the door down a small hallway. *He’s still hard… He’s not gonna do anything right? He said he wouldn’t hurt me…*

Henry nodded, trying to seem non-threatening as he stood, turning away and going to the bathroom. He let out a soft sigh as the door was shut behind him, leaning against it as his pants and boxers slid down his hips. He didn't need long to cum, the memory of Tucker’s flushed face and pleased cries still burning in his mind. *My god…* Henry was back about seven minutes later, sitting down on the couch as Tucker shrunk away from him, mimicking his position. “*Tucker? Can I give you a hug?” You look so scared of me… I don't like that…*

Tucker stared at him like his was crazy before he slowly crawled close to him and curled up to his side. “*I’m sorry…”* He murmured quietly, huddling up to him. *You had to take care of yourself… But you took care of me too…*

Henry gathered him up into his arms, gently petting his hair. “*It's okay… You can take your time until you feel comfortable enough to do anything… I'm never gonna force you to do anything… it's okay, Tucker… it's okay…”* Henry cradled him close, wrapping him up in a warm embrace. *It's okay… “I got to hear you and see you like that… that's more than enough for me.”*

Tucker nodded and he cuddled into his side, content with just laying with him. *I can deal with this right now…*
Levi came up the stairs with a bowl of soup awhile later, softly knocking on Eren’s door. He came inside quietly, seeing Eren still fast asleep in bed. He's so adorable… Levi ambled inside, setting down the bowl and pecking his cheeks to wake him up, kissing his nose as his eyes fluttered open. “Hey Eren, I made you lunch. You should eat. Do you feel much better?” Hopefully you do...

Eren groaned, shooing Levi away. “Go away….” He whimpered, trying to nestle back into his bed. I wanna sleep, I feel like shit … Eren shifted, feeling his stomach turn… I feel like absolute shit, I wanna sleep and not think about how much I threw up in the bathroom...

Levi sighed, shifting to turn Eren onto his back slowly so he wouldn't feel nauseous, softly kissing his temple. “Please? I made soup…. it's beef and barley…” Lathe would let me make it if I made a triple batch of it… so I did.

Eren shook his head. “I don’t feel good Levi…” I don’t wanna throw up more. “Levi… I don’t wanna throw up…. I hate it, my throat is like raw already.” I’m sick… I don’t wanna be sick, I wanna sleep it off.

Levi sighed, nodding. “At least try to drink some water… it'll maybe make your throat feel better…” Please?

“I-I can try….” He whimpered as he sat up, looking up to him. My whole body aches....

Levi helped Eren sit up, taking a small bottle of pills out of his hoodie pocket. “Here, these’ll help with your fever, and you'll need the water anyway…” Levi gave Eren two of the pills and patiently waited as he took them, lifting a cup of water to his lips when his hands shook terribly trying to grasp it. He helped Eren drink slowly, coaxing him to get half of it down before letting him stop. “Okay, you don't have to finish it, I know you don't want to…” Levi ran a hand through Eren’s hair, feeling his hot forehead. “You're still very warm… I'll let you rest…” Levi moved to help Eren shift again to lay down, tucking the blanket around him, kissing his forehead, his temple, his cheek. “Feel better…” I hope you do soon...

“A-Are….” Eren trailed off as he stopped himself from reaching out for Levi, watching him sit at the edge of the bed. Of course he’s leaving… He doesn’t want to be here… He wants to hold Mila… He closed his eyes as he felt his stomach turn. Fuck I don’t wanna throw up…
Levi looked worried as Eren clammed up, looking nauseous. “Eren, are you okay? Don’t try to talk if you don’t think you can, just relax….” Levi gently tangled his hand in Eren’s hair, keeping his head still. *Don’t throw up…*

…. You don’t want me to talk because you don’t want to throw up… He doesn’t want to clean it up. And you’d be wasting pills… Eren nodded slowly, moving to turn on his side so that his stomach could settle, he turned his back to Levi, knowing he’d leave and feeling his gut clench worse. *Sickness, and depression do not mix… But I can barely hold this down, I wouldn’t be able to hold down my pills as it is…It’s gonna get worse… Isn’t it?*

Levi sighed, very slowly shifting to lay parallel to Eren, his hand on his side. “It’s okay….” He waited a moment until Eren’s breathing had evened, his voice soft. “…what did you want to ask me?” *You wanted to ask a question…?*

… I can’t ask him…. “Y-You’re not gonna m-make me eat… Right?” I don’t think I can handle it, so it’s a good a white lie as any. He whimpered moving Levi’s hand from his side. I don’t really want you touching me, I can’t blame it on the sickness now… But it’ll just give me false hope. He should leave anyways… Right? I mean, he’s gonna get sick at this rate, and he can hold Mila now…*

*What? No, I gave up on that. “No, I’m not, I told you it was okay if you were feeling too sick to……..is there anything else you wanted to ask?” …you didn’t sound like that was gonna be your question…. I dunno, it just sounded different…*

Eren shook his head. “Y-You should go hold Mila, get her used to having you hold her… Cause James won’t be able to in less than a week.” *That’s coming up… That’s a good excuse…. Why do I do this to myself?*

*Cause you know he’s only in it for her, not for you.*

*But why?*

*Because what could he possibly like about a fuck up like yourself?*

…. Point…. 
Levi looked at him oddly, leaning up on one elbow. "that doesn't make sense... "We both know how much Mila clings to me whenever I do get the chance to hold her... she likes me a lot... ...Eren, is there something else...?" You know you can tell me anything...

“I don’t want you getting sick.....” You shouldn’t be here, giving me hope.... I can deal with life without you, for all I know you’re gonna try and take custody of Mila, and argue about my mentality being the reason and then I won’t be able to see her again. He felt his face go pale and his heart sink further into his stomach, trying not to let the tears surface. Don’t cry... It won’t help, it’ll make it worse...

“You're not gonna get me sick, don't worry…” Levi looked him over as his face grew red, seeing his eyes turn glassy, his expression softening into one of worry. “Eren, please don't cry… talk to me... what's wrong?” I don't understand...

Eren shook his head, immediately regretting it as he weakly moved away from Levi, feeling his stomach twist into a knot as he wobbled on weak legs into the bathroom, closing the door as he sunk down in front of the bowl, starting to throw up, and after about five minutes, started dry heaving because nothing was left. Tears were streaming down his face as he sat back, curled up in a ball on his side on the floor. His hands were over his ears, trying not to be loud as he cried. I don’t wanna be ripped away from her... But he can do that... He can do that...

You’re right, he could....

It’s scary...

He’s scary, I can’t believe we like him, all he can do is hurt us...

Levi was quiet as Eren threw up, wincing as he waited on the bed. He listened to the silence that followed, hearing the quiet sobs and standing. He's crying... Levi came over when he heard the sobs, lightly knocking on the door. “Eren? Eren, can I come in?” Let me help fix this...

Eren was still crying as he covered his ears with his hands, like he’d done years ago to keep them from being chopped off. He whimpered as he heard Levi’s voice calling his name again, his eyes searching the room and not seeing him, panic flooding through his body, causing him to dry heave once again. He’s gone... He’s gone... Dad’s coming back.... Where’s my collar?
Levi looked concerned as he heard more dry heaving and panicked breathing, opening the door and seeing Eren leaning over the porcelain with terrified eyes, his gaze darting everywhere, not seeming to really see Levi. *What the fuck has gotten into him?* Levi knelt next to him, resting a hand on his arm. “Eren, look at me, please. You’re okay. It’s all okay. Please don’t be scared.” *Please don’t...*

Eren’s eyes were filled with terror as he slowly reached out to cling onto Levi’s sleeve. “I wanna go home…. I wanna go home, Levi take me home, Dad’s gonna be home soon… He’s gonna hurt me, I don’t have my collar on….” Eren’s words have everything away as he whimpered, moving closer to Levi, hoping he would be the real one and not the one that had tormented him. *Levi’s nice, right?*

*No... He’s just going to pin you down and take you... He just wants your ass, not you...*

Eren’s eyes widened when his internal monologue finished, looking at Levi with horror, his hand slowly letting go of his sleeve and his whole body beginning to shake. *No no no no no no no...*

Levi looked in his terrified eyes, things clicking. *What the fuck... what- He looked over his shoulder as he heard scratching at the door to the bedroom, the dogs trying to come in and help calm Eren down. Oh shit... he must not have taken his pills.* “Eren, your Dad won't be home for a little, we can still fix this.” Levi decided to play along, getting the pill bottle. “You just need to take some of these before he gets home and you’ll be okay. It's okay, I'll help you.” Levi dumped the right dosage into his hand, giving Eren the PTSD meds and getting a cup of water. “Just take these. That's all you need to worry about. I'll help you make sure Dad doesn't hurt you.” *...I can't believe this is happening again... I know you're not talking about Lathe...* Levi looked back as he heard a knock at the door, a quiet voice. *...shit...*

*“Levi? Eren? What's going on?”* Lathe listened with an ear to the door, motioning for the dogs to stay put as he opened the door and slipped inside, seeing the bed empty and the bathroom door ajar, pausing. “Are you two okay?” *I hope it's nothing too serious...*

Eren’s eyes were wide. “I wanna go home...” His words were high pitched, letting out a ragged sob as he started to rock himself. He had swallowed the pills but refused the water. “I wanna go home… I want you to stop leaving...” His breathing was getting worse, quickly turning to gasps for air. *I wanna go home... I don’t wanna stay here...*

Levi looked helpless, turning to your bedroom where Lathe was. “Dad, help, *please ...* I don’t know what to do...” Levi turned back to Eren as he felt him jerk in his arms, watching the beginnings of a seizure. *Fuck. “Dad, he's having a seizure...”* Levi carefully laid Eren down on the ground on his side, waiting for it to pass as Lathe knelt next to him. *A minute... two..... “I think he forgot to take his PTSD meds.... he was so out of it...” I don't know what he was talking about....* Levi was scared as Lathe called the ambulance at three minutes, both of them still waiting at six
minutes when Eren finally stopped jerking, slumping into the floor. Oh my god… Levi carded a hand through his hair, both of them waiting for the ambulance to come get him. I just want you to be okay…

Ieva was the first to realize that the flashing lights down the road were headed towards their house. Huh? What the hell? She was confused, opening the door to watch paramedics hurriedly pull out the gurney, and bring it towards the house. What the hell? “Lathe?” She called out into the house, James holding Mila closely as she cried in his arms, not liking the sound the ambulance had made while it pulled in. What is happening? Why are they here? Don’t tell me Eren’s so sick he needs to go to the hospital?

Lathe was just leaving the bedroom to get the paramedics, looking to Ieva helplessly. “Eren had a six minute seizure… we had to call an ambulance.” Lathe had to run at that moment, letting the paramedics in and directing them upstairs. He's not in great shape...

Ieva raised a hand to her mouth, feeling emotions already beginning to overwhelm her. Oh my god… He had a seizure? From what? What happened? She rubbed at her large baby bump, trying to calm herself down, knowing full well that her doctor did not wanted her to stress at 20 weeks. I’ll let them handle that and I’ll stay home with the kids.

Eren’s body was motionless aside from his chest rising and falling in slow patterns. The paramedics had brought the flat board up with them, leaving the gurney at the base of the stairs. The two of them surrounded Eren, getting vitals started right away, and bracing his neck. They asked if he had hit his head, and relieved when they were told ‘no.’ They slowly shifted him to his side to put him on the board, strapping him down to it, his unconscious body easy to move.

Lathe led Levi out of the bathroom to make room for the paramedics, looking to him and seeing his wife, scared eyes, his fists clenching and unclenching. Oh no. “Levi…” Lathe gathered him up in his arms, feeling him stiffen and shake. “Levi, please, it's okay…” Please don’t panic….

Levi looked at Lathe. “What happening? I don’t understand… Why is he having a seizure?” He felt absolutely useless in this situation, his training as a medic not having prepared him for this moment. What’s happening to him? Please tell me I didn’t do it…

“He was panicking about something, his mind was in overdrive… the serious stress could've brought it on… it wasn't your fault, Levi, if he forgot to take his PTSD meds there's no telling what the stressor was… come on Hon, come with me.” Lathe brought him downstairs after Eren as he was carried, making him put on shoes and bringing him to the car. “We’re gonna go be with him, okay, and make sure that he gets better.” Someone needs to be with him…
Levi nodded, swallowing hard as Lathe drove him, watching the ambulance peel away from the house before Lathe followed it, going to park and going right into the ER entrance. He followed, his eyes peeled for Eren in one of the bays. They found him still unconscious and Scotty looming over him with a clipboard.

“Alright, how long was it?” He asked when he heard the footsteps stop behind him, knowing it was either Lathe or Levi, or both. *He’s completely pale… And skinny, has he been eating much?*

“Six minutes…” Lathe kept a reassuring hand around Levi, seeing him pale as he saw Eren unconscious on the hospital bed. *You can't panic now, Levi… you can't… “We think he forgot his PTSD meds and freaked out, and the stress caused it…” That's the theory…*

“Okay…. Well, his eyes look okay.” He said as he flashed light into them, watching them react properly. “That’s a good sign after all that, and he’s breathing on his own, but he smells like acid… Was he throwing up?” He moved to get a glove on his hand before opening Eren’s mouth and wincing at the smell and the sight of the inside of his mouth. *Like a desert in there… Jesus… “When and what was the last thing he ate?” Does he have food poisoning on top of this?*

Levi nodded slowly. “He woke up sick this morning, threw up… I let him sleep until like half an hour ago and woke him up for food but he could barely drink water… he threw up again, broke down in the bathroom, and that's when he… had the seizure…” *That's that… I guess….*

Scotty looked to the bags under his eyes. “Are you sure he slept last night?” It looks like he’s been up for awhile.

Levi thought. “I-” *I left him to bathe… but… he was in towels when I found him.... .....was he.... “...he didn't sleep… I left him to take his bath last night and I wake up to find him in towels…. he didn't…” What the fuck… He was up all night…?*

Scotty nodded, putting his light back in his pocket and going to pull the curtain around them. “Alright, Levi, do the honors of stripping him…” *I don’t wanna, you can do it, and I’ll check over him really quickly then… “I’m gonna go get an IV started, Lathe there’s a gown in that drawer right there, I’ll be back in less than five minutes… So be quick about it.” Scotty went out, making sure you couldn't see into the room and then went to get the IV and a needle. They should be done by now, right? Scotty sighed in relief as he came in to see Eren in a hospital gown, Levi sitting on the other side of him, holding his hand. “Has he been crying?” *His eyes were bloodshot, but that could also be due to the vomiting and seizure, but I should ask... He carefully cleaned up Eren’s arm before putting the IV into him to get some fluids into him. He's thin....*
“Yeah… he was…” While he panicked and thought Grisha was coming home to hurt him… Levi held his hand, studying his fingers. I want him to be okay… He looked lost, not knowing what else to do with himself.

“Lathe go get me a coffee will you?” I wanna talk to Levi alone… He glanced at Levi before looking back at Lathe, watching him leave, waiting a moment for Lathe to get out of earshot. “What are the bruises on his legs?” Please tell me it was sex and it is not what I think it is…

Levi looked down to the marks on his hips, still faint circles on his hips. “Uhm…. th-those are kinda bruises from fingers….” Hanging on too tight…. Fuck I don't wanna tell you this shit… you're Scotty, it's weird…

Scotty sighed in relief, nodding and looking over the rest of him. It's not HSP… That's great, there goes the doctor thinking worse case scenario. “What did he say to you before the seizure happened?” I can tell he was freaking out, Mikhail’s underneath the bed right now, doubt either of them realized the dog followed them… He had his gloves on as he gently held Eren’s head, feeling his temperature and getting the thermometer out and spreading his legs a bit to insert it. He’s still passed out which is concerning, but for now I’m going to write it off as illness and sleep deprivation…

Levi looked away as Scotty went to insert the thermometer, thinking. “Uhm… he was saying something like Dad was gonna come home soon… but he didn't mean Lathe, he meant Grisha… he needed his collar or he was gonna get mad and beat him…. He was freaking out… I made him swallow his pills but he refused water… and then he started seizing…. he only took them because I told him if he did Dad wouldn't be mad… I didn't know what else to say, I thought playing along would work… so that he's snap out of it faster….” I feel horrible for having to do that...

Scotty nodded, letting Eren’s body back into the original laying position. He then put the oxygen tube for his nose. “Alright, well I’m going to suggest not playing along…. It seems to make things worse… But it could be any number of things if he didn’t have his PTSD pills… We might have to put him back on daily injections…” That would help, Levi and Lathe and Ieva all know how to wield a needle.

Levi nodded, looking Eren over. “Okay… I just… in that moment I thought it would work to get him to take the pills… I didn't know what else to say, he wouldn't’ve believed me if I told him Grisha was dead… he just… he seemed nearly hysterical and I didn't know how to fix it….” I'll do better….

Scotty nodded. “Has he been anxious lately?” That could cause the stress… He looked through his vitals, jotting them down and pulling up a stool to sit by Eren’s still body. He’s still breathing, his heart rate looks okay… “And why did he seem hysterical?”
Levi slowly nodded. “Yeah, he's been on edge lately… I think he's been worrying about me and Mila… and he kept saying stuff like ‘Get her used to you holding her instead of taking care of me’ and it all just sounded weird… I don't know what to make of it, I think…… maybe he thinks I care more about Mila? But he knows I love them both… uhm…. he was hysterical because he thought Grisha was coming home and that if he didn't have his collar on he’d be beaten….” That's a thing….

Scotty nodded. “Has he seemed like himself? Clingy? Or distant?” He pulled out his pad of paper to write notes. This might be a psychological issue as well, not just physical…

“That's a thing….

“Uhm… he always wants to be around me, I've noticed… and he looks really hurt whenever I leave like even for just two minutes to use the bathroom or something… but I don't think he likes that he's so clingy…. he looks so embarrassed whenever he follows me around…” I can understand wanting to be around me… I almost died, and you all thought that I did… but it's been awhile… and you're still latched onto me as tightly as ever… I don't mind much, really… but… I don't know...

Scotty sighed jotting down notices. “Has he put distance between him and Mila?” This seems like something that I can’t fix… I'm not a psychiatrist….

“.....a bit…. I know that while I was gone, when Eren had classes and stuff James became the child wrangler… but now when he’s home he doesn't go get her and play with her as much….. I’ve been playing with her and taking care of her a lot more… I kinda think he is… but… I don't know why….” I thought we were fine....? He hasn't wanted to hold her.... at all, really.... why not?

Scotty sighed quietly, looking to Levi. “How often do you tell him you love him? And what does he do when you say that?” This is looking more and more like a problem a therapist should be dealing with...

Levi looked to Eren, thinking. “I try to tell him every day… like, every night before we go to sleep and stuff… I'm not that great of a romantic, but… I know he needs to hear it…. he… he always looks like he doesn't want to hear it… or he looks really sad… he looks a bit guilty whenever I kiss him on the cheek because I can… he doesn't… he doesn't look as happy as you'd think he would…” I don't know what to do… is it me? Am I doing this wrong?

... Damn… “Have you mentioned anything about leaving? Did he ask if you were leaving?” This seems like separation anxiety, but I think with what happened to him when he was young… And when you had ‘died’ he was a wreck....
Levi shook his head, looking over Eren’s tired face. “I never said anything about it… but he asked if I was gonna go back… of course I told him ‘Hell no.’ I have a leg full of metal and a Purple Heart, that’s enough for me.’ Levi looked up, thinking. “But whenever like we’re just sitting on the couch and I shift a bit to get comfortable Eren like grips my sleeve really tight and he looks over to me all scared… it’s like he’s so afraid of me leaving his side…” ....does he really have separation anxiety... like Dad said…?

“Well…. It would be separation anxiety… But he’s over 18… So I don’t know where his head is, I dunno where his head is right now....” Scotty set his pen down, looking at Levi. “You and he both need to visit a therapist….” He looked over as Lathe came back in with his coffee, taking it from him and sighing. He could still think his Dad is still around from the first time around, before Lathe... But I’m not sure...

Levi sighed, nodding. “Yeah… we should. I didn't think it'd be so bad…” Levi ran his thumb over his knuckles, studying them. This isn't good... we should go... and I need to really talk with him... about how much I love him and Mila....maybe actually proposing would fix all of this... it'll be fixed in a month..... not that long to wait, Eren... I'll put a ring on it, don't worry...

“You were dead for a week in his eyes, Levi…… And I bet he feels like you’re gonna leave him any second by the way he’s been acting.” I really don’t think that he thinks you’re going to stay... “We’ll see when he wakes up… I’m sorry but there’s not much I can think otherwise… I might need to keep him overnight....” Scotty sighed quietly, looking at Eren’s pale face, slowly starting to get colorful again. Well he was definitely dehydrated...

Levi nodded, raising Eren’s hand to his lips, softly kissing his knuckles. He dropped their hands back onto the bed after a moment, staring down at the ground. “...I'm staying overnight with him. .....and I'm going to do everything I can to always stay there for him.” I don't want to leave him...

Scotty nodded, looking over to Lathe. “Alright, I’ll go find a room upstairs and admit him…” He walked out of the room, though he stopped to look at Lathe. “Have you heard anything from Damien? I tried calling him to see how he was doing and he didn’t reply…. And the mail came back… He’s not in California anymore....” I kept in touch with him, I’m not sure how much you did....

Lathe quirked an eyebrow, shaking his head. “Nah, I haven't. He hasn't been responding to the group chat texts, and we know how Phoebe said he went silent a bit after the wedding… normally they’re always talking. I dunno…” I'm kinda worried... “Does anyone have Iroh’s number? Maybe we can talk to him… but, you don't think he's....” In trouble... arrested somewhere... ...dead...? Nah, he's not dead... he's Damien, it'd take a hell of a lot to kill him.
Scotty shook his head, shrugging a shoulder before disappearing for a few minutes, coming back to
the room with a nurse. “Alright, we got a room for him… You gonna follow us up? Or do you
wanna go back home and get clothes and food for you two first? I know Eren hates hospital
food…” He’ll need to eat when he wakes up too…

Lathe and Levi looked at each other, the older man sighing as Levi inched closer to Eren, smiling.
“You want me to go get stuff for you?”

“Please.”

Lathe chuckled, nodding. “I’ll bring stuff, don’t worry. You keep an eye on him, okay? Make sure
he doesn’t panic when he wakes up, okay? Take care of him.” You’ll be fine. Lathe left at that,
heading back to the car. I’ll bring all that soup Levi made, and a bag with clothes and stuff for both
of them…

Levi looked to Scotty when Lathe left, standing to follow upstairs. I need to be here for him… so
that when he wakes up he knows I didn’t leave… that I stayed.

Scotty lead them up while he pushed Eren and the nurse took his IV holder, walking them to the
elevator and getting them up to the second floor. They wheeled him to a small private room with a
couch and a few chairs. “The bathroom is connected, so as long as you’re here, we can close the
door… He might be unconscious for a few more hours so I’ll text Lathe what room he’s in… Need
anything else?” Did I give you the proper run down? I don’t think I forgot anything…

Levi shook his head, looking Eren over. “…no, I’m okay.” He waited until he and Eren were left
alone, gently shifting Eren over a bit and climbing up to lay next to him, curling up into his side, an
arm around him. Mine… He didn't move when Lathe came in some time later with the huge
container of soup and overnight bag, staying put at Eren’s side as the man left, leaving them to take
over the German classes. Levi lightly sized for the next few hours, left to his thoughts in the quiet
room. …he's scared I'll leave him…. …..I just.... ....just one month until you propose... then it'll be
fine... and therapy should help him get better too.... Levi looked up when he felt Eren shift a bit
under him, looking up worriedly and seeing Eren giving him a small smile. “Hey Eren… how
are you feeling?” Levi ran his hand gently over his side. You don't look as manic as before...

Eren looked at him with slight confusion, hearing his stomach rumble and the feeling of emptiness
gnawing at him from the inside. “ Starved …. I threw everything up, didn’t I?” My throat sure
feels like I did…
Levi nodded, smiling faintly as Eren’s stomach rumbled loudly. “Here, there’s food for you. Dad brought the soup from the house.” Levi sat up, going to get him a bowl of the still-hot soup, having been set in a Croc-Pot to keep from going cold. Levi ladled some out for him, getting him a spoon and setting it on Eren’s tray. “We know how much you hate hospital food…” I could use food too…. I’m hungry… Levi turned away again to get himself some, soon sitting on the edge of Eren’s bed again to eat.

Eren smiled softly, though it turned into a sad smile after a second, looking down to the soup. “You remembered?” Please tell me it was your idea…right? He was a bit shaky as he lifted the spoon to his mouth, groaning at the taste. “You made it….” I can tell, there’s fat in the soup, Dad usually scoops it out, but you don’t…. It’s so good… He wiggled his toes as he took another spoonful, chomping down on it happily. I’m gonna miss this when you leave…. His eyes almost instantly watered, the thought upsetting him. I don’t want him to leave me….

Levi nodded, smiling faintly when Eren looked happier than anything as he ate. “Yeah… I knew you liked this soup… I hope it tastes okay….” He watched him nod, though his expression became one of worry as Eren suddenly looked ready to cry. “Eren? Are you okay, what happened?” Levi reached a hand for him, his thumb brushing his cheek. What happened?

“Y-You’re not gonna stop making it… Are you?” Please say no… Eren looked up to look into Levi’s eyes as a tear rolled down his cheek and Levi’s thumb brushing it away. Please tell me you’re staying here with me… And you’ll keep making me your soup?

Levi looked over him, thinking. He thinks you’re not gonna be around to make it anymore soon… “Eren, there are plenty of decades left to have this soup…. I’ll make it for you whenever you want. You don’t have to worry about not having it.” I’m not gonna go anywhere…. I wanna stay.

Eren seemed to let out a whimper of thankfulness before he started to really cry. A shaking hand coming to cup Levi’s hand on his cheek. He’s not gonna leave anytime soon… Maybe having Mila to tie him down wasn’t a bad idea? He’ll stay, right? He sniffled, a happy smile on his face before he started laughing softly. I can’t believe it…

Levi set down his bowl, his other hand going to cup his cheek as well. He leaned over to softly kiss his cheek, looking him over as he started laughing. “…What?” You’re giggling….

“I’m happy… I like your cooking…” He murmured, moving his hand to grab at his shirt, but he stopped right before he could. I’m not sure if you’ll let me cling still… I want to, but it’s embarrassing as all hell… I don’t want to cling, I wanna be able to be away from you too…
Levi looked to the hand outstretched to him, reaching for him and lacing their fingers, holding their hands close. *It's okay...* “I'm glad you do... I'll make sure to cook more...” Levi gave him a reassuring look, his features soft. “I love you...”

Eren smiled more, sniffling quietly. “I love you more...” He murmured softly, his heart melting as Levi intertwined their fingers. “So... Do you wanna tell me why I'm in the hospital?” Eren looked down to his food, letting go of Levi in favor of filling his mouth with deliciousness. *I'm starving... So I know I threw everything I ate up...*

Levi nodded, letting him go. “You.... you had a six-minute seizure... you were nearly hysterical this morning when I found you... you hadn't slept and hadn't been able to take your PTSD meds.... it was a mess... I was so scared... Dad called you an ambulance... I'm glad you're awake... you're pretty dehydrated too, you threw everything up... I'm just... I'm glad you're awake and okay... ...and I love you even more.” *I really do... and I'm so glad you're okay...*

Eren paused as he heard Levi tell him he loved him more. *So... You're not gonna leave me then? Really?*

*But love doesn't last... He’ll move on from you.*

*I don’t want him to-

*Then you better step up your game and make yourself better for him. You’re completely useless otherwise.*

Eren swallowed thickly, taking another spoonful of soup. “Dehydrated?” *I would feel like shit because of that?*

Levi watched the emotions flicker in his eyes, slowly nodding. “Yeah... and... you know I mean it, right? Every time I've told you I love you, I've meant it... I love you more than anything ...” *You're everything to me...*

“What about Mila?” The words were out of his mouth before he even realized his internal monologue had thought them. His eyes widened and he covered his mouth, looking down and away in shame. *Don’t answer that, she’s yours... Of course you’ll love her more than me.... Why did I even ask?
Levi looked at him in shock, stunned. *What?* “Eren, I love Mila too… she’s our daughter, of course I love her to bits… that’s no question. But it’s not a matter of who I love more. What matters is that I love both of you too much to ever want to let you go. I want to hang onto both of you for as long as I can… as long as life will let me.” *I love you too much to ever want to let go…*

Eren felt the tears form in his eyes once again, the familiar sting gracing him as he tried to hold on his sobs. “How can I be so *stupid*? How can I be so *jealous* of my own *daughter*?” *I don’t get it…. I hate that I’m like this…* “Why can’t I be happy with myself?” He started to curl up into a ball as he began to shake again, his eyes already turning bloodshot from crying.

Levi moved his bowl and tray out of the way, moving closer and wrapping his arms around him. “Eren, please, don't cry… it's okay… if anything Mila should be jealous of how much we’ve been together lately… and it's not like I don't love having you there with me all the time, I really do. You don't have to be jealous of her when you're the one I've been giving most of my attention to.” Levi gently held Eren’s chin, tilting it up to look at him. “Eren, there are so many reasons to be happy with yourself… you're allowed to feel this way. It's okay.” Levi leaned in to brush their lips, a small kiss before he pecked his nose. “I’ll love you no matter what.” *I really will.*

Eren started to hiccup as he curled up into Levi’s arms. “What i-is there to be h-happy about? I-I’m u-useless….” *I haven’t been able to sing at all in like two or three months… Or paint… Or do anything really… What am I supposed to be doing?* He leaned his head onto Levi’s chest trying not to hiccup as he sniffled. *I wanna hear what you got to say about this because I’m a fucking wreck…*

Levi held him close, his tone soothing as he ran his hands over his back. “Eren, you've got so much… you're an amazing rider, you’ve got classes full of kids that look up to you and love what you do because you're helping them understand German and you're helping with anything else you can… we have our own *daughter* for God’s sake… a beautiful, healthy baby girl and she's got two Daddies that love her and love each other… isn't there anything in that to be happy about?” *I adore Mila… how can you not be happy?*

Eren shook his head. “…. T-There’s something missing….. I feel so empty inside… I don’t wanna be empty anymore… I wanna feel full, and be able to enjoy the things I do.” He murmured quietly, his hands finding their way to Levi’s shirt and gripping it. *You just listed everything I do…*

*And he didn’t say a damn word about how he thought about you….did he?*

*No…*
Because he doesn't love you….

Levi’s eyes softened, holding him closer. ……..I can't make you wait another month. I'm not gonna make you suffer anymore. “Eren, I think I can maybe fix that…” Levi shifted on the bed until he was on one knee, reaching down and taking Eren’s hands into his own, his voice soft. “Eren, I know I don't have a ring and this is a hell of a time to ask, but… will you marry me?”

Please… I don’t want to stall anymore...

Eren’s eyes widened as he watched Levi’s lips move. …………… Did he just…? He tried to keep his jaw from falling as he looked at him with pleading eyes. “A-Am I… s-serious?” I need to make sure…. He glanced up to where Levi held onto his hands. You're being serious right now?

Levi felt himself flush, his cheekbones painted pink. “Eren, I know this is unexpected and the least romantic thing ever, but I'm shit at being romantic… and I can't wait any longer to ask. I want to marry you so we can raise our daughter together and be a family and maybe have more kids if we want and grow old together and make each other happy… because you make me so happy… will you please do me the honor of marrying me?” I mean it… I really mean it… please say yes...

Eren’s eyes filled with tears for a new reason now as he hurriedly nodded, reaching to pull Levi down into a hug. “Y-Yes…” His voice was a bit shaky as he let the new tears fall, a smile on his face, his heart beating so quickly it triggered an alarm on a monitor, Scotty stepping into the room about thirty seconds later worried he would be seeing Eren seizing. Eren’s arms were wrapped tightly around Levi’s shoulders, a sigh of relief leaving him. I'm so happy… He wants to stay… He’s gonna keep me and Mila...

Levi nearly crushed him to his chest as he heard him say yes, shifting so he was practically in his lap, straddling him. He said yes … Levi embraced him, turning his head and meeting him for a deep kiss, the single kiss quickly turning into a heated makeout session. He's mine… I'm gonna keep him now… He didn't hear the door open, not giving a damn about anything besides Eren. Mine ...

Eren held onto Levi even tighter as he was kissed. He’s…. He’s gonna marry me? And love me forever? He smiled under their heated kiss, his eyes closing as his hands tangled in Levi’s undercut. It’s getting long, he’s gonna need a shave…
Chapter 107: Awkward Conversations

Scotty’s eyes widened at the sight and he shook his head, covering his eyes before he turned and quietly closed the door, taking his phone out and opening up his conversation with Lathe.

SO: I think everything's gonna be okay.... Eren scared me half to death with his heart monitor blaring

SO: so I run in and find that Levi’s in Eren’s lap making out with him heatedly...

SO: Damn... It was hot, I’m not gonna lie

LQ: Scotty, stop being a creep

LQ: Those are my children

SO: it was hot though... Pretty sure I should go stop Levi from choking Eren with his tongue tho...

SO: Or should I just watch and call Casper and see if they're up for a foursome? Ha...

LQ: Scotty that's really creepy, just leave them alone... and don't watch them, guh I need to get that image out of my head

SO: .... I wonder what Casper would say if I asked him about a foursome?

SO: Come on... Admit it, it’s hot, you have one son with the smoking bod... And the other has the golden voice...

SO: I’m kinda jealous.... Wonder what he sounds like if you play him right...

SO: Hehe

LQ: Scotty that's not cool seriously, stop...

LQ: They're my sons, that's seriously fucking messed up...

LQ: What the fuck is wrong with you?!

SO: But didn’t they already kinda sorta have a foursome before?

SO: ..... Many things...

LQ: It was with people that were their age and they were around like all the time... they were all really good friends

LQ: I swear to fucking god if you actually think you're gonna ask them I'll come over there and punch your teeth out

LQ: We’ll see how attractive that makes you to them
SO: Oh come on! Take a joke Lathe…. I can imagine shit can’t I? Like you’ve never thought about how it would look to watch your sons go at it?

SO: How much you wanna bet that you could look up FanFiction of them?

SO: I bet you $500 you can… $5,000 that it’s sexual…

LQ: That's fucking bullshit, I'm not looking that shit up

LQ: And if you wanna imagine shit you don't have to go and fucking tell me! Keep that shit to yourself!

LQ: It's fucked up!

SO: ……………. You look it up yet?

LQ: Fuck no I'm not gonna look it up! What the fuck is your problem?

LQ: Stop fucking texting me until you decide to grow up and stop being a fucking creep

SO: …. Sorry, Casper's mad at me, and swore abstinence…. It’s not going over well for me…

SO: I apologize for my behavior… But I’ll be releasing your son tomorrow… He’s up and awake

SO: and I assume Levi was feeding him something at one point…

SO: …… Sorry

LQ: ………it's fine.

LQ: I'm glad he's awake and not dying

LQ: ...I hope things with you and Casper get better soon

LQ: Because that sucks...

SO: …………. I don’t know what I did either, and it’s bothering me to no end, but I don’t know how to fucking talk about it…

SO: shit I gotta go, bye!

LQ: Bye…?

LQ: Yo Casper

LQ: I has a question

LQ: I heard that you're pissed at Scotty and swore abstinence but like

LQ: He isn't aware of why you're so mad at him so
LQ: ....?

CP: Oh for the love of God, is this a ploy he’s pulling to try and get me to stop yelling at him?

LQ: What? No, I was just texting him and this whole thing happened and he was being kinda shitty and I yelled at him and he actually apologized… he's upset because you're so upset and he doesn't know how to fix that

LQ: He had to run tho, but I wanted to know what's going on if it's okay

LQ: Maybe help fix things...?

CP: He forgot our fucking anniversary…Again!

CP: He never fucking remembers it! I even got him a gift and he had no fucking clue why!?

CP: Why can’t he realize I’m pissed at him because of that!? That it wasn’t just some senseless gift and that there was a reason behind it!?

LQ: ...Casper, keep in mind that Scotty can be seriously fucking dumb sometimes

LQ: Actually, a lot of times.

LQ: And the man isn't exactly sentimental

LQ: So question

LQ: Is the date on the calendar you have in the kitchen?

CP: Yes… Does he look at it? No...

CP: I took him out for a change and he doesn’t think that something might be up? We went out to Dave & Buster’s in the city and then I got us a nice hotel room for the night and the bed had rose petals on it and everything! But he didn’t say a damn fucking thing about it!

CP: I’m sorry…. I’m frustrated with him…. I’ve been trying to drop hints but apparently he’s even more dense than I thought he was...

LQ: ………wow

LQ: That's a first class Anniversary thing you did

LQ: And that's a whole new fucking level of density on Scotty’s part

LQ: He apparently has the emotional sensitivity of a pile of bricks

LQ: …..okay, so I have an idea.

LQ: The next time you see him (preferably when there are no witnesses and no yelling) tell him this:

LQ: Scotty you dense motherfucker, I've been pissed at you because you forgot our Anniversary for the third year in a row. Please actually //look// at the calendar so you know
when important shit is coming up, and you're still not getting any more sex until you make up for all those Anniversary gifts I gave you.

LQ: But like completely calmly and with a straight face

LQ: He'll actually listen to you if you do it that way

CP: ..... He remembered it two years ago.... So I tried to change it up a bit when we didn’t do anything on our anniversary last year...

CP: Am I doing the wrong thing? I feel like I can’t get through to him anymore...

LQ: I feel like you need to be more straight with him

LQ: Not like not being gay anymore that's fine

LQ: But like if you're mad you need to just not yell at him and tell him exactly why

LQ: Because he's dumb and needs help understanding this shit

CP: Why does being gay have to be this difficult?

CP: Why does Scotty have to be so dense?

CP: I’m contemplating my life choices atm.... Instead of working, because I’m too pissed at him to give a fuck about work rn

LQ: Casper if you're really contemplating why you decided to say yes when Scotty asked you to marry him then like I am not qualified to help you anymore

LQ: And not every relationship is sunshine and rainbows- it takes work

LQ: Some more than others

LQ: I'm pretty sure even if either you or Scotty was a chick (and legit it'd probably be you tbh) I'm pretty sure it'd be just as difficult if not even more because you'd have to deal with making another human and then getting it out of your body

LQ: And we both know how not pretty that is.

CP: He doesn’t want kids.... If I were a woman he would’ve gotten fixed or something like that....

CP: Fuck I even pushed him to agree on one... But it just.... It doesn’t feel right, he doesn’t //actually// want a kid....

CP: I can’t deal with this I’m crying at my desk and eating ice cream straight from the tub... I’m a fucking mess

LQ: Do I need to come over and give you moral support?

LQ: You sound like you need it...
LQ: And honestly I think it’s less of Scotty not wanting one and more of him being sure he’ll accidentally kill it

CP: it still hurts tho…. And yeah, you should probably come and stop me, my body won’t like me if I eat this whole thing…

LQ: Casper stop you're lactose intolerant

LQ: I don't care how many Lactaid you took stahp

LQ: I'm coming

CP: but it’s creamy goodness! I can take as many of those damn pills as I need!

LQ: No you can't- take too many in a short amount of time and you'll grow resistant and then you won't be able to have /any/ of the creamy goodness

LQ: Think about it

LQ: A future without ice cream, or butter…. or god forbid

LQ: Cheese pizza.

CP: you're coming to pry it out of my hands right?

LQ: No shit

LQ: And just to be safe I'll eat the rest so you can't have it when I leave

LQ: Like a true friend would

CP: you better drive fast…. It's almost gone as it is…

Lathe was soon enough parked and in the building, waving to the person at the front desk and heading up the elevator. He marched straight past Casper’s secretary and onto his office, prying the carton from his hands, sighing. “Casper, you ate the whole damn thing.”

Casper’s eyes were red and bloodshot as he let Lathe tug the carton away from him. “There’s another one on the freezer.” He mumbled miserably as he pointed to it, curling up into a ball. My stomach hurts…. But I don’t really care…. It was worth it… Maybe…

Lathe sighed, his expression softening as Casper curled up in his chair. He threw away the carton and the plastic spoon, going over to him and kneeling next to him, carding a hand through his hair. “I'm sorry, Casper… I'm so sorry things aren't as smooth as you'd like them to be… ...but even if he is a goddamn imbecile, he loves you.” He really does. “I know he’d give anything to keep you, and he wants you to be happy… but he still needs conditioning before he's the perfect husband… and even then he's gonna have his idiot moments. He has a lot of those.” It's a wonder they ever let him loose in a hospital…. 
Casper could only nod and snuffle as he felt Lathe’s hand run through his hair. “I’m sorry…. You probably don’t wanna deal with this, especially with all the kids you’re in charge of… I’m stupid…. I’m sorry for making you come here….” *Fuck now I feel even more guilty…. I made him come out here, and all he has to do is say a few words and I wished I hadn’t bothered him.* “Life isn’t always smiles and rainbows, I should know that, I’m sorry, I need to grow up too…” *I need to realize life isn’t perfect…*

Lathe shook his head, still running his hand through his blue locks. “It's okay, it's not like there's any problem needing someone to vent to and be there for you. And James is more than capable of child wrangling for a little while. It's not stupid. And even if we know that life isn't gonna be perfect, it feels good to complain about it to someone. I understand.” Lathe gave him a small smile. “It's okay. You know I'm always here.” *Don't feel bad. It's okay.*

Casper looked down at him from his perch on the chair. “Can I have a hug?” He asked quietly, wanting to curl up to someone. *Because I stupidly told Scotty that I was abstaining from sex until he got his shit together, but it seems like that’ll never happen…*

Lathe nodded, shifting up and kneeling one knee on his chair, pulling him close. He felt the man shake, sighing and holding him close. “It's okay… it'll work out…” Lathe murmured quietly to him, trying to calm him. *It's okay….*

Casper held onto him and cried for awhile, though soon they shifted to the floor so Casper could sit in Lathe’s lap like a little kid. *I feel like I’m back to being a teenager, crying over Scotty, because I'm gay and he’s not…*

Lathe held onto him, cradling him close. *It's so hard... and I know how long you've wanted to have him... and having him isn't as easy as you'd thought it would be... that must really hurt... “Things will smooth over eventually, Hon…. eventually they will.” It'll get easier.*

“Hopefully…. It was a single word that Casper croaked out before he shifted and got up from Lathe’s lap, offering him a hand to help him up. *I should just go home, and claim the couch as my own…. It basically is at this point…*

Lathe stood with his help, giving him one last hug. “You can't just go home and drink away the sadness, Casper… go home, try to distract yourself until he gets home, then tell him how it is and enjoy the makeup sex… that's all I can tell you… but please don't try to use liquor to avoid this. You two need to be able to talk and stuff. It's important.” *Please don't hurt yourself more...*
Casper shook his head. “I’m not gonna drink…. I’m gonna sleep, I have no idea when he’s coming home anymore….” I don’t know anymore, it’s like we’ve detached ourselves from each other… He moved to get his car keys, and his jacket as well. It's probably snowing outside, I can lay on the couch after I start a fire in the fireplace…

Lathe sighed, walking him down the hall to the elevator, giving him a hug before they parted when they left the front doors. “Don’t worry yourself sick. Just do what you can to fix this.” He watched Casper nod, walking off to his own car. ….I can only hope this gets fixed.
Eren’s hands still had a death grip on Levi’s shirt, not wanting to let him go. Their lips had barely parted from each other for the past half hour, Levi still very much in Eren’s lap. He’s such a good kisser…. He hasn’t stopped holding me. Soon Eren had to pull back, gasping for air as his stomach growled. Oh right, I didn’t finish eating…

Levi chuckled as he heard Eren’s stomach, feeling hungry himself. He looked over Eren’s saddened features, his cheeks red and his lips scarlet and swollen from the attention. “You’re so handsome…” Levi softly kissed his cheek. “You should finish eating… so should I. And then there’s still plenty of time to make out.” Levi smirked, shifting a bit. Let's get you fed...

Eren looked over towards his half eaten bowl. “Can you put more in it?” He seemed a little breathless, the heart monitor having been shut off remotely and no longer squealing at them. It’s peaceful here…. Never thought I would say that about a hospital...

Levi nodded, leaning in and giving him one more kiss, stepping from the bed and going to add more soup from the Croc-Pot. He came back with the soup, handing it back to Eren before picking his own bowl back up, both of them attacking it eagerly. Food...

Eren groaned at the taste as he raised his spoon to his lips again. “I love this…. He murmured after he swallowed down the whole thing, eagerly eating it all. I love this so much .... He’s gonna marry me! But what if he doesn’t get you a ring? Eh... Do I really need one? For all I know we’ll go and get tattooed for it. He nestled into Levi’s side as he finished off his bowl, giving him puppy eyes to give him more. I want more of this goodness....

Levi looked over as he nearly finished his own bowl, smiling faintly when Eren gave him the puppy eyes. “Okay, okay, more. Got it.” Levi stood with the bowl and refilled it, handing it back to Eren. “Don't eat so much that you get sick, babe. It's tasty, and it'll be there later too.” There's plenty.

Eren smiled, taking the bowl with a soft thank you. He ate much slower than before, savoring the taste. I love this.... It’s so good. “What else can you make?” I wanna try it all ... He leaned into Levi’s side, getting comfortable next to him. I love this.... I love this a lot... I feel like my chest is full...

Levi thought as he ate. “Lots of stuff… I can make the pasta everyone likes, and the sauce too, and I could really make anything if you gave me the recipe… I remember this recipe for bread that I haven't made in a long while… I could make whatever you want.” Whatever it is, I can cook for
Levi was solid as Eren leaned on him, both of them eating contentedly. I love this...

Eren soon had eaten everything in their bowls and he was beginning to yawn. I’m tired.... He looked up as Scotty came in, seemingly exhausted and checking Eren's vitals before he administered a few shots which he explained were his medications. So I’m on shots now? That’s how this is gonna work? Eren glanced over to Levi, watching him as he ate the last bit of his soup. Is he gonna stay here tonight?

Levi finished off his soup, setting their bowls on the side table. He yawned, nestling onto Eren’s chest a moment later, not caring that Scotty was there. He’s mine. “Is this okay?” Levi rested his cheek on Eren’s chest, looking up to him, laying completely on top of him. I don’t want to move.

Eren nodded, happy that Levi was holding onto him. His hands moving to thread through Levi’s hair as he listened to Scotty explain that he was gonna be released tomorrow. He watched the older man leave, a soft sigh leaving his lips as he looked down to Levi. “You gonna sleep like that?” You almost never sleep on top of me...

“Mhm....” Levi burrowed further into him, curling up on top of him. “Is that okay...?” It’s okay.... right...? You’re warm, and I’m tired, and you make a really nice pillow.... ...also I don’t wanna move...

Eren raised an eyebrow, looking at him. “If you come up here I can be the big spoon?” I know I usually have you be the big spoon, but I can hold you if you want.... He patted the bed beside him, a soft smile on his face. You like me holding you, so you might...

Levi smiled faintly, shifting up and curling up next to him, relaxing when arms curled around his middle, feeling Eren’s lips brush his neck. I like this... “Mm....” Levi sighed quietly, melting when Eren softly kissed up his neck. I love it... I’m always the big spoon... I like it when you hold me sometimes too....

Eren smiled, making sure his arms were wrapped solidly around Levi. I wanna hold you sometimes too.... “Good night, Levi...” He murmured, kissing up Levi’s neck to his ear and licking it teasingly. I wanna sleep... Soon enough his eyes closed and his breathing evened out. He’s mine....

Levi felt a small whine catch in his throats when Eren licked his ear, needing a moment to relax again, feeling the steady huff of his breath against his neck. “...goodnight Eren.... I love you.” Levi fell asleep a bit after that, the night passing peacefully. They woke up early the next morning, looking over as Scotty came in with Eren’s medicine. Levi watched Scotty carefully as he was shown how to give Eren his meds via needle, accepting the small box with the syringes and
Eren woke up a few minutes later, looking at the two of them discussing where the best place to put the needles was for his medicine. He shifted to curl his arms around Levi’s waist from where he was sitting up. “Mm... ‘mornin’...” His voice was rough from having just woken up and he yawned as he shifted to sit up and lean against Levi’s back. *Do we get to leave yet...?*

Levi smiled faintly when Eren draped himself over his back, reaching a hand back to play with his hair. “Good morning, Hun...” He enjoyed the arms around his middle, listening to Scotty as he continued. *I love this...* Soon enough they were being left to themselves, Levi looking back to Eren. “Do you want to eat more soup first or get dressed and go home?” *Your pick.*

Eren grinned as he rubbed his body against Levi’s back teasingly. “I wanna go home...” He kissed at Levi’s neck, again licking at his ear in hopes that he understood. *You asked me to marry you, we better be celebrating with lovemaking...*

Levi sighed, leaning back into him. *Guh...* “That's very doable...” Levi turned his head, grateful when Eren met him for a lazy kiss, tasting him. He pulled back and teasingly nipped his nose, getting off of the bed. Levi rifled through the bag Lathe had brought for Eren’s clothes, handing them to him. “Here- better than going home in scrubs.” *Really tho...*

Eren thanked him and started to strip off his gown, getting it off before he started to put his own clothes on. *I wanna go home...* “Levi... Whatever happens... You’ll still love me?” *Right?* His voice was soft as he looked up to him. *I wanna make sure... I really wanna make sure...* Eren looked at him as he slipped his tank top on, thankful the IV was out of his arm.

Levi looked back to him, going over to him before he could get himself stuck in any other garments, hugging him close. “I'll always love you, Eren... I want to keep you forever... I always will...” *I promise.*

Eren smiled leaning down to kiss Levi happily. *I love you...* His arms wrapped around Levi’s waist, holding him close. *You wanna keep me, that's all I'll ever need...*

Levi embraced him, letting their tongues meet before reluctantly breaking the kiss, sighing. “If we keep this up we’ll never get home...” Levi leaned up, softly nipping his earlobe. “And I have plans for you when we get there...” Levi let go of him, his cheeks pink as he turned away. “Get dressed so we can get you out of here.” *I wanna take you home...*
Eren blushed nodding as he slipped on sweatpants and a hoodie, waiting for Levi to get dressed, Scotty having come and discharged him. *I wanna go home!* Scotty told them to wait for a minute before he came with his keys and his coat, ready to go home. “You gonna give us a lift?”

Scotty nodded, motioning towards the door. “Let’s get you two home, then I need to go home myself.” *Casper is gonna flip his shit when I get home…. He didn’t even text me that he noticed my absence…. At least I don’t think he did. My phone died…. He’s gotta be pissed at me. Scotty unlocked his car as they got close, rubbing at his eyes. Shit, I’m exhausted….*

Levi followed, taking the Croc-Pot that had gone from hot to warm overnight, their bag slung over his arm. *You look exhausted…* Levi and Eren sat in the back together, leaning against each other on the quiet drive home, noticing the sad and more than tired look in Scotty’s eyes. He thanked him quietly when they pulled into the driveway, letting him be. *Whatever’s going on, even if it’s just normal doctor stuff, I’m not gonna get involved…* Levi kicked the door when they got to the front door, waiting for Lathe to unlock it.

Lathe sighed as he heard the kicks, wandering over from the kitchen and unlocking the door for them. “You’re home?” He saw the car turning around in the driveway, waving. “Oh, Scotty drove you.” He stepped out of the way, seeing the quiet focus in Levi’s expression as he brushed past him to set down the Croc-Pot, Eren waiting by the stairs for him. *Ah. ….yeah, I’m not about to get in their way.*

Eren waited for Levi at the stairs and as soon as he set the crockpot down he started to make his way up the stairs. *I wanna feel you again… I want you to love me…*

Levi followed him, needing an extra minute to get up the stairs still, soon padding to their room. He shut the door behind him, seeing Eren stretched out like a cat on their bed, looking comfortable. Levi walked to the bed, climbing up over him, seeing Eren look up at him with feigned disinterest. “Well **you** look comfortable…”

Eren smirked and nodded, stretching out even further to a point where his stomach showed from his clothes being raised, the soft flesh teasing Levi. “Hmm…. I am comfortable… **You’re** here with **me** …” He smirked and leaned up to kiss him as he came closer. *We have all the time in the world, and I’m feeling much better now too….***

Levi leaned down and softly kissed the smirk off of his lips, settling down lower and straddling him, his hands lightly roaming his front as he did. *We have time… we have as much time as we need. Levi kissed the corner of his mouth, going to suck at the soft flesh of his neck, taking his sweet time. We have all day to make love… there’s no rush…*
Eren tilted his neck to the side, letting Levi take over his neck. “Hmm…. Your lips…” He let out a soft sigh of pleasure as his hands moved up to Levi’s waist, his fingers messing with the hem of his shirt. *We’re gonna take this slow… Aren’t we?*

Levi smirked a bit, taking his time leaving marks down his neck, paying rapt attention to the soft spots at the joint of his neck, listening to Eren’s quiet mewls as he nipped at it. *He sounds wonderful…* Levi let his hands slip under his sweatshirt, brushing his sides lightly, stopping when Eren jerked. He slowly did it again, chuckling when Eren quietly cursed him for tickling him. His hands wandered more firmly, distracting Eren with his wandering lips.

Eren’s eyes closed as he focused on Levi’s lips moving down from his neck towards his collarbone but stopping when his hoodie wouldn’t allow him further access. “J-Just take it off…. And quit tickling me…” He murmured in Levi’s ear, moving his hands over Levi’s abdomen. *I wanna get a move on…*

“Patience… and maybe.” Levi smirked, slowly taking the hoodie off of Eren. He chuckled when Eren impatiently flung it away across the room, his hands firmly planted on his chest. “Patience, Eren…” Levi leaned down, nipping at his collarbone. “We have all day to make love…” *There’s nothing but time right now…*

Eren groaned as Levi took his sweet time. *He’s really gonna draw this out, isn’t he?* His eyes followed Levi’s movements, shuddering as his hands ran down his body. *Oh my god… It feels so good…* “I don’t want to be patient… I wanna be had by my fiancé…” His eyes were laid back as he looked to him, his hands running under Levi’s shirt, feeling his abs.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Scott fucking Octavian.” Casper’s eyes were sharp with anger the second Scotty came into the house, standing from the couch when he was ignored in favor of heading for the stairs. 
…..*remember what Lathe told you.* “Don't just fucking ignore me! Get back down here so we can talk.” Casper’s tone left no room for argument, his arms crossed, holding himself back from seriously screaming at him. *Don't try to piss me off more. I'm barely able to control myself.*

Scotty stopped, turning to look at him with tired and sad eyes, his shoulders slumped. “Okay, you’re obviously pissed at me, but can we talk after I’ve showered? I haven’t slept in three days, and I need one desperately, can I at least do that real quick before I’m resigned to the fucking couch for a week?” *I’m sure that's how this argument is gonna end up isn't it? At least let me wake up before you start yelling at me, and maybe I'll be able to figure out why you're so mad at me…*
Casper took a moment to really look at him, the anger draining out of him as he saw how exhausted he was. *He looks like death learned to walk.* “...oh my god.” Casper’s anger was forgotten, coming up to him on the stairs, a hand on his back. “You look terrible… let's get you showered and in bed. What I’m mad about isn’t important right now.” *Can’t have another anniversary if you die from exhaustion...*

“Not important? **Not important!?** Casper, you’ve been mad at me for over two weeks! We’re fucking talking about it when I get out of the fucking shower....” He sighed, shaking his head, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Look I’m sorry, just let me take a shower first, and then we’ll talk.” He sighed, turning into the bathroom and starting to undress. *I need to calm down, yelling at him won’t help my case.*

Casper sighed, stopping Scotty before he could shut the door. “Scotty, after you take your shower, you're going to go straight to bed, so let me speak. You forgot about our anniversary, and yes, it was on the calendar. You remembered the first year we were together but not last year, and I got pissed because you had no idea that anything out of the ordinary was going on when I took you into the city and we went to Dave and Buster's, and the hotel room bed had rose petals and everything. I was hoping you’d remember, and I got pissed that you didn't but it's my fault for just being angry instead of just **telling** you why I was pissed. But it isn't gonna do any good to be mad now when you look like actual, literal death so just go take your shower and come to bed after so we can sleep and actually just exist together without any harsh feelings, okay?” Casper let out a deep breath after that, feeling much better having ranted. *...it felt good to say all that....*

Scotty sighed, looking down at Casper and hugging him tightly. “Look, Casper, I’m sorry, I’ve just….. No nevermind I’m not even going to make excuses…. I’m really sorry about that.” He leaned down, kissing his forehead, but his head spun the instant he did it. *Fuck... My head hurts, I really should’ve come home sooner....*

Casper felt Scotty lost to the side, holding him up. “Yeah, a shower can wait. Let’s just get you in bed, Hon. ...and it's okay... as long as you figure out a way to make it up to me.” Casper left the clothes Scotty had managed to shed on the floor, bringing him to their bedroom, sitting him on the bed and tugging off the rest of his clothes until he was left in his boxers. Casper stripped as well, tugging him into bed and pulling the covers over them, curling up into his chest. “Sleep well, Hun…” *You'll need as much of it as you can get...*

Scotty shook his head as he was pushed into the bed. “Casper…” *I should take a shower, I really need one... “...I should be on the couch…”* He muttered quietly as Casper curled up to his side. *I shouldn’t be on the bed, you’re pissed at me… And for a fair reason too.... I fucked up...*

Casper shook his head, laying on top of him so Scotty couldn’t move in his exhausted state. “Nope. You're comfy, and exhausted, and I was pissed for far too long to be justified. You're staying here.” Casper kissed his bare chest, pecking the spot right over his heart and nestling in. *Mine.*
Scotty groaned, reaching down to rub his hands over Casper’s body. “Baby…. I should really take a shower tho….” Then once I take a shower I can escape and then I can go lay on the couch. I smell horrible … He groaned as Casper kissed his chest, trying not to let his body get the best of him. If you get hard now, he is never gonna let you touch him ever again.

Casper made a dissenting sound, trying to hang on. “If you really wanna bathe, you're taking an actual bath and I'm coming with so you don't slip and fall or drown when you fall asleep…” Casper shifted with him as Scotty sleepily stood, staying stuck to his side.

Scotty nodded weakly and they made their way to their large tub in the bathroom in the hall. “Hmm, I'll get the water started…” He kneeled down beside the tub and started the water hot. I need to wake up, especially if Casper really wants to talk. “Are you gonna come in with me?” ….. That's a bad question to ask... He probably will, and I'll get hard… Fuck ...

Casper nodded, kneeling next to him. “If that's okay…” Please? It'll be nice and warm... and I get to cling to you...

Scotty nodded, looking over to the side for a moment before he shut the water off and he stood to strip himself of his boxers. He cursed himself when his length was at half mast already, wanting attention. Fuck, can’t I just relax for him for once? Why does my body need to betray me?

Casper stepped out of his own boxers, his eyebrows shooting up when he saw Scotty's slowly hardening length. He's hard? ….? Casper stepped into the bath after him, settling in his lap, careful to keep their hips from meeting as he reached for a washcloth and the soap, starting to wash Scotty’s chest with care. It's not like I'm mad that you're getting in the mood... I just didn't expect it... we haven't been intimate in a while.... I miss you too...

Scotty looked away in shame. “C-Casper…. I think it’d be better if I washed myself…” I can’t handle you touching me right now.... You probably don’t want anything to do with me at the moment anyways... He closed his eyes, reaching out to grab Casper’s wrist before he got any further down his chest, knowing that he was fully hard. Fuck ....

Casper pouted, glancing down for a moment. Is he... he is. “Scotty…” Casper surrendered the washcloth, though he leaned forward, his hands on his chest and lips brushing his neck. “It's okay… do you want me to take care of you?” His hands very slowly drifted down his chest. “I'd love to…” Please let me...
Scotty looked at him with confusion. “But you said…. You said you were practicing abstinence…” Why does even being in the same room as you make me hard like this? It's embarrassing that I can't control my urges…

Casper sighed, leaning his forehead against his shoulder. “I know I said that, but I was being an asshole and not even telling you why I was pissed and I've been really shitty to you and it hasn't been fair… if you want me to, I can take care of you… I wanna make it up to you… or you can decide what happens… if we leave it alone… or something else…” Casper softly kissed his collarbone. “I wouldn't mind that something else…” Let's hope you know I don't mean you jerking yourself off.

Scotty was torn. I'd love to tap that… But… “Why do you need to make it up to me? I was equally shitty to you by forgetting… We could call it even?… No, scratch that… It’s not even at all, you deserve a week’s worth of dates… You deserve it all… And I'm sorry I'm a horrible fiancé…” We haven't even started planning that yet…… How are you even with me still?

“You're not horrible…” Casper started softly kissing his neck, shifting forward a bit more in his lap. “You need some work though.” Casper smiled, pecking his neck. “But I really do love you… and I want some nice dates, Scotty. Nice ones.” Casper gently lapped at his skin. “We’ll get around to becoming husbands eventually… I’m okay to wait… as long as you keep me until then.” Please keep me… I wanna keep you...

Scotty nodded and smiled softly, noticing how close he was getting to his hardness. “And what exactly counts as a nice date? I was under the impression that Dave & Busters was the best place for a date….” I know it's not…. But I could pull your strings a bit, find out what you really want, and make it perfect.

Casper smirked, sucking a mark onto his collarbone. “Hm…. a nice dinner out, just you and me…. maybe skating in that outdoor ice rink in the city… there's stuff to do…” Casper held onto him as he shifted forward another inch, feeling the tip of his hardening length brush Scotty’s, biting back a whimper. “…you'll figure something out…” I want it… damn....

Scotty struggled to stifle the moan he felt rise in his throat. “Mmm… Yeah… I'll figure something out…” He looked to the wash cloth that had been forgotten. “Maybe you should finish washing me up first?” He handed the cloth back to him, shifting a bit closer and struggling not to let out a whine as their lengths touched more. I want him… But will he want me?

Casper nodded, swallowing down the desperate sounds his threat wanted to make as he hurriedly finished washing Scotty, still trying to be gentle as he got him clean, jerking every once in awhile as their lengths shifted against the other. I want it… Casper tossed the washcloth out of the way,
going to carefully wash his hair. He reached to drain out the bathtub the second his hair was completely rinsed, looking at Scotty with desperate eyes. “Scotty… after we dry off, please… have me…” *I really really want it...*

Scotty’s eyes looked simply predatory when Casper said those words, following him out of the bath and drying off. He reached for Casper’s ass, squeezing it teasingly every now and then. *I’m allowed to touch… I wanna touch.* Soon Scotty was standing behind Casper, his towel forgotten on the floor and his length pressed on Casper’s asscheeks, his hands holding his hips. “Hmm, I wanna make love to you Casper…. I want you screaming my name…. I don’t give a fuck that it’s like 9 in the morning....

Casper nearly became putty when he murmured in his ear, leaning back into him, his legs spreading a bit on their own. “Scotty… I want that…” *So badly.* He turned, reaching up as he was suddenly lifted from the ground, holding onto him as Scotty brought him from the bathroom to the bedroom, laying him down on the bed. He moved further onto the bed as Scotty went to get the lube and condoms, stretching and getting comfortable, watching Scotty with quiet lust in his eyes. *I want you to love me....*

Scotty looked over to Casper where he stretched. “What do you think? Condoms… Or?” *Do you want me to use a condom? We don’t have to if you don’t want to…* He waited for a response, his length already starting to weep precum in excitement. *I wanna do this well...*

Casper looked over him, shaking his head. “N-No… I wanna feel you cum inside…” *I want it…* Casper watched him climb over him, letting Scotty turn him over and position him, his ass in the air. *Please… do everything to me... Love me… I want all of it...*

Scotty smirked and he grabbed Casper’s ass cheeks, pulling them apart. *I wanna eat you out, I know you always liked that...* He dipped his head down, licking a stripe up his hole, watching his body shudder. *Oh yeah*.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Levi smirked as Eren shuddered under him, his hands gently keeping his mounds apart as his tongue dipped in and out of his hole. *You always loved when I did this...* He pushed his tongue deeper, hearing Eren’s warbled moans. *He sounds amazing... I'll never get tired of hearing all those sounds...*

Eren’s body shuddered as he let out a strangled sound, his mind complete mush from the slow pleasure that Levi had dragged him through. *Oh my god.... “L-Levi....”* He grabbed at a pillow to
put under his chest, his grip tight on it as Levi’s tongue slid into his ass again, causing him to let out a soft keen. “Fuck….” It feels so good, my body feels so warm...

Levi slowly fucked him with his tongue, massaging the soft flesh in his grasp. He let his tongue slip from him, kissing the pucker. “Feeling good?” He let the tip of his tongue tease his hole. “More…?” I love seeing you so wrecked... so beautifully wrecked... because of me ....

“Oh god…. Yes… Please…” Eren whimpered as he pushed back on Levi’s hands a bit. “I want more… It feels so good…” He whined as Levi teased his hole, licking it over and over again. It feels wonderful... His tongue is gifted, so gifted... “You’re making me melt Levi….”

Levi chuckled, pecking his hole again. “That's the idea... it's all about you ...” Levi leaned forward again to slip his tongue inside as far as he could, feeling Eren shuddering, his ass gently pressing back against his mouth. He's perfect... he deserves everything I can give him...

Eren groaned loudly, feeling his face flush with embarrassment from the level of noise he made. Fuck, his tongue is so good... He felt the heat already flowing south, making his body warm, and his nether ache. Shit... his hand moved on its own to grab at his length, wanting to touch himself and relieve the burning sensation that was building within him.

Levi felt him shift his weight off of one arm, looking over and seeing his hand move to his nether, reaching out and catching his wrist. “Eager, are we?” Levi pressed his tongue flat to his hole, moving his hand back to where it originally was. “Just let me do all the work... enjoy it... enjoy the burn... I know it aches....” Believe me, I feel that too... “But would you rather hurry things along.... or let me eat you out just a bit more....? Suck on your length like a lollipop for a little longer...? Make love to you more? Take more time teasing you...?” I wonder what you'd pick...

Eren was quiet as he felt with the pleasurable burn in his stomach. “M-More.... Please...” I wanna cum... I really wanna cum, I want you to make me cum. He pushed back on Levi’s hands, wanting him to be pulled apart and taken but knowing Levi was gonna eat him out to completion first.

Levi smirked, dipping his way down to finish eating him out. His tongue worked and worked on him until Eren was near the edge of bliss, drawing out of him and rolling Eren over, settling between his legs and slipping his lips as far down Eren’s length as he could go, gently sucking him, his hands forcing his thighs open for him. I wanna taste you... and hear everything ...

Eren whined from loss when he was flipped. I was just about to cum! He opened his mouth in protest, which was quickly forgotten as Levi sucked his length. The sensation sent him into overdrive, letting out a cry into the room. His legs were shaking as his toes curled and he filled
Levi’s throat with his cum. Oh my god…. Eren’s hands were running over Levi’s shoulders, not sure what to make of the odd sensation of Levi sucking his length, even when he’d just cum. Fuck, it’s so good…

Levi did his best to swallow his cum, lapping up all the cum that dribbled from his mouth, cleaning Eren’s length. He kissed his length before kissing up his chest, nipping his neck. “Don’t worry…” He reached for the lube, nibbling his earlobe. “I have so much more planned for you…” I want you on cloud nine...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Casper was shaking as he came down from his high, his entrance slick with saliva and cum decorating the sheets below him. His tongue is always amazing… fuck… Casper looked back to Scotty, seeing him get the lube and coat his fingers, his back arching again as he settled between his legs again, presenting his ass to him. I want them...

Scotty was gentle as he inserted the first lubed finger. His lips never left his flesh, kissing him all over his ass cheek, and watching his body shudder. I wonder how much he’ll let me finger him…? He groaned as Casper pushed back against him. Oh my god, he’s such a tease. His teeth grazed against his supple flesh, as if trying to get him to stop moving around. I wanna do the work...

Casper’s body tried to move on its own, a sharp nip to his ass getting him to still a bit, shaking as a second finger entered him, shifting his legs further apart. Deeper... please... I wanna feel it.... Casper whimpered helplessly, wanting so much to push his hips back with every thrust of Scotty’s fingers, staying still instead, and it was killing him.

Scotty hummed when Casper finally stayed still. “Good boy…” His words were dark, and deep as he kept his eyes glued to Casper’s twitching hole which basically sucked in his two fingers. He started to scissor him, waiting for him to react to how close he was to fingering his prostate. How will you react to it?

Casper whined as he got closer and closer to his prostate, his voice breathless and high. “Scotty… please, deeper… please …” You’re so close to hitting it… His eyes widened as Scotty suddenly brushed over it very firmly, trying not to shake too hard as he did it over and over, his length as hard as a rock and throbbing as he did. Fuck.... more... please, more...

What was once two fingers became three, firmly rubbing against the bundle of nerves that made Casper’s body go wild. That reaction…. Is priceless…. He smiled more and more as three easily went deeper within him and rubbed him incessantly. I wonder if you'll be able to cum just from
this? He looked at Casper shaking below him, looking to the side to see his length weeping again, adding to the mess under him. *Gonna have to do laundry I guess…*

Casper was nearly drooling, his hands clenching and unclenching the sheets below him, slowly rocking in time with Scotty’s motions. “Oh god… Scotty… o- **oh** … m-more…” *I want it… I wanna cum…*

Scotty grinned as he watched Casper move in time with his fingers. “You want more babe?.... You sure?” He waited for a nod before inserting his fourth finger and really pressing down on Casper’s prostate. *Damn…. He’s gonna cum soon, just from my fingers… He hasn’t done that in awhile…*

Casper sighed as the fourth finger entered him, stretching him out. He gasped as the pressure on his prostate increased, moans and pleas tumbling from his mouth. “Oh god, Scotty, so **good** … o- **oh**…. S-So close….” He could feel himself teetering on the edge, his nether aching for attention and release. His eyes were wide as he saw Scotty reach for his length and close his hand around his shaft, cumming instantly, infinitely grateful for the merciful strokes of his length. He shook as he came, slumping down when he was empty of Scotty’s fingers, his ass still in the air. He looked back to him, quietly enjoying the look Scotty was giving him. “...I want **you** …” *Please?*

Scotty came up behind him, letting his length rest between Casper’s asscheeks as he pushed their hips flush. He leaned over him, bending his head down to kiss as his neck. “Hmm…. You want me like this?” His voice deep and husky, his eyes full of lust and want. *You want me like this? Hmm… I could torture you this way… And you wouldn’t be able to do a single thing…. Nope, get your mind out of the gutter, this is about Casper, not about how frustrated you are!*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Eren whined as Levi’s lips and fingers left him. *I feel empty…. I want you to fill me up again…. “L-Levi…”* Eren whimpered, shaking his hips, wanting to entice him to continue. *I want you to make **love** to me…*

Levi looked him over, wiping his hand on the sheet. *It needs washing anyway. “Hm? Do you… need something?”* Levi shifted, his hands running over Eren’s back to settle at his hips, kissing up his spine. *I wanna hear you say it….*

Eren whined, shaking his hips back onto Levi’s hips. “I want you…. I want you to love me…” He turned his head to look at Levi, his eyes full of lust and want. *I want you….***
Levi smiled softly, kissing his shoulder blade. "Mm... I'd love to." Levi let him go, reaching for the condoms, about to tear one open when he stopped. "Do you want me to or not...?" Levi gestures to the box. He smirked, whispering near his ear. "If you say no, I'll help you clean up later..." I wanna give you everything... and if it means making you cum a fourth time, I'm certainly not gonna complain.

Eren shivered at the thought, smirking as he turned to kiss Levi's cheek. "Hmm, I don't want you to wear any...." He tilted his head back gasping as Levi attacked his neck. God I love this.... I love that he's being like this... I love it... I love it so much... Eren pressed his ass back against Levi's thick length, wanting more.

Levi nipped at his neck, his hands moving to slick his length, tossing the tube of lube to the side with disinterest when he was done, wiping off his hands before they met Eren's hips. He softly pecked the flesh of his neck, his tip brushing his hole. "Tell me when, Hun...." I want you feeling nothing but pleasure.

Eren's mouth opened, letting moans fall from his lips as he felt Levi's length brush his entrance. "P-Please... I want you Levi..." He whimpered as he felt Levi slowly push into him, the heat already surrounding him increasing tenfold. Oh my god, this feels amazing... Like this is the first time all over again...

Levi stilled inside of him when their hips met, letting Eren adjust for a little before slowly pulling out and thrusting back in. He made love to him like it was their first time, slow and careful, his lips softly nipping at whatever skin they could reach. "Beautiful..." Levi's hands roamed him as Eren moaned quietly, holding him securely to his chest. Mine... all mine...

Eren groaned, pushing back into is thrusts to make sure he would go deeper. "Hmm, Levi... deeper.... Please..." His words were separated with high pitched moans, while his hands clenched and unclenched on the sheets, feeling Levi fill him with his whole length. It feels so good.

Levi relented a bit, his hips grinding against his, going deeper and earning him gasps and quiet whimpers. He softly kissed his neck, murmuring in his ear. "Feeling good?" You sound.... too good....

"Yes... Oh my god, it feels so good... Levi... Oh good..." He reached behind him to run his fingers through Levi's undercut. It feels so fucking good...

Levi let his hands wander further south as he steadily thrusted into his heat, one hand closing around his length and slowly pumping him. "You sound wonderful..." Levi nipped a bit more
roughly at his neck, feeling heat pooling in his abdomen. *It feels so good....*

Eren let out a loud cry as his length was pumped. "**L- Levi !**" He whimpered as Levi got rough biting him. He could feel the coil in his abdomen beginning to tighten. *I'm gonna cum soon...*

Levi left marks all over his shoulder and neck as he pumped him, holding himself back, focusing on Eren. *This is about him. You don't get to cum until he does.* "Eren... let go... I want to hear you come undone." *I want to hear you... you sound so wonderful...*

Eren slowly wrapped his arms around Levi's shoulders pulling him down flush to him. *You're so handsome... And you're all mine...* He pulled back to breathe, smirking as he looked up to Levi. "Hmm, you filled me good..."

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Casper sighed as he felt Scotty fill him, though he slipped flush to the bed when his body became dead weight, still buried deep inside him. "Wh- Scotty?" Casper squirmed weakly, Scotty not moving nor even grunting in response. "Scotty?!” Casper got his hands and feet to cooperate, shifting him off of him, groaning when his length slipped from him. He turned over, seeing Scotty completely out. "Scotty?! Are you okay?” Casper shook him, panicking when he didn't respond at all. *Fuck*. Casper looked around the room, not knowing what to do. He got up, going to the bathroom to fill a glass with water, taking it back to the bedroom and shifting Scotty so he wouldn't soak the bed doing what he was about to do. His head hanging over the hardwood, Casper splashed him with the water, panicking and dropping the cup when Scotty didn't react at all. He hurriedly went to check his pulse and make sure he was breathing, not sure what to do. *Fuckfuckfuck... I need help...* Casper grabbed for his phone, calling Lathe. *Pick up pick up pick up...*

Lathe looked to his phone, picking it up when he saw Casper’s name on the screen. *Oh no, do I need to go stand between them while they yell at each other?* He took in a deep breath, setting down the last food bowl for the dogs and answering his phone. “‘ello?” *What do you need?*

“‘Lathe? I'm sorry if this sounds awkward but I need your help. Scotty and I may have… done it… but I don't think it's good that he immediately passes out after where even a cup of water to the face or a vigorous shake isn’t waking him up. What should I do?!” *Help!*

“Okay, okay, first off calm down…. Get Scotty onto the bed and make sure that his mouth and nose aren’t blocked by anything okay?” *Shit.... This could be serious if Casper’s panicking this badly... But let's wait a bit before I drive there...*
“Okay.” Casper set the phone down on speaker, getting Scotty back entirely onto the bed, lifting his chin and peering down his throat, listening for a moment. “His breathing isn't obstructed, and his pulse is normal…” I don't know what's going on…..

Lathe nodded. “Alright, did he take anything before you guys acted like bunnies?” Did he take Viagra or something? Anything like that?

“No, he didn't… no meds or anything…”

“Okay, what did you guys do before you started your intimate time?” Was he exposed to something? If his heart rate is normal he wouldn't be having a heart attack…

“He just… he came home from work and wanted to take a bath, and I maybe joined him… after he got cleaned we went to the bedroom but that was it… nothing out of the ordinary really…” Nothing odd happened… I dunno…

... Got home from work? “Casper… How long has Scotty been at work? He seemed really tired when we dropped Eren off at the ER yesterday…” He could be sleep deprived...

“It's been…. uh…” …shit, how long has it been? “Uh…. I think… …three days…” He listened to the silence on the other end. “…that's the problem right there, isn't it.”

Lathe nodded. “Yeah…. I think that’s your problem right there…” He hasn’t slept in three days? Man that guy is a wack job…

Casper sighed, nodding. “Okay, I'll let him sleep… I'll panic if he hasn't woken up in twelve hours and smacking him does nothing… …thanks for putting up with my shit…. I just called you and asked why my sleep deprived fiancé passed out minutes after we finished having sex… …you deserve a medal or something…

Lathe chuckled. “Make sure he gets back into a reasonable sleep schedule… Okay? It’s only nine in the morning….” I would ask how you had sex so early… But Levi and Eren are at it upstairs right now…. I’m not gonna ask. “So did you clear everything up? And have good make up sex after your abstinence?”
Casper blushed, nodding. “I'll make sure he sleeps… and it was really nice, so stop judging me… but we made up, we're okay now...” I think so, at least... “He owes me a week of dates now though, and he is aware of that. I'll make sure he doesn't forget.” I want my nice dates.

“Good luck with that with his schedule....” He works crazy hours now... it's gonna be hard with how much he works... I can see how the anniversary completely slipped his mind...

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Levi softly kissed Eren’s neck as he picked him up, feeling his legs wrap around his middle as he walked them to the bathroom. He turned on the water to fill the bath, gently setting Eren on his feet, his lips still busy marking him up as they waited. Mine...

“L-Levi....” Eren whispered softly into his ear as he was marked, his voice rough from being completely wrecked. Fuck... That felt amazing... Hmm, and he’s been kissing me all over since. “Are we gonna bathe together?” I thought you were gonna get the toys and clean me out that way...

Levi hummed, sucking another mark under his ear. ‘If that's okay… unless… you'd rather keep playing…?’ Levi’s hands ran all over him. “We can bathe now and either nap or get out the toys…. or we go back now, and I'll torture you with bliss first....” Levi nipped his neck. “...which do you want?” You can pick.

Eren hummed, looking back towards the room with longing. “What if we d-did the toys in the bath?” We’ve never done that yet? And you might enjoy that.... I dunno, it sounds interesting...

Levi quirked an eyebrow, smirking after a moment, nibbling his skin. “Hm… that's an idea… you can pick...” Levi’s hands were light on his waist, teasingly kissing the corner of his lips. Whatever you want.

Eren smirked and he kissed Levi’s lips softly. “I want the dildo… Hmm… And the sound…” I wanna feel really good... “Please?” His eyes were begging as he looked for Levi’s approval.

Levi smirked, the tip of his tongue grazing Eren’s lower lip. “Hm... I'll allow it.” Levi let Eren scamper off to fetch them, turning back to the bath and making sure the water wasn't too hot. Hm... it's fine. Levi stepped into it since it had finished filling, turning when Eren came back to the bathroom. He carefully tugged him close, settling them in the very warm water, Eren in his lap.
Levi didn't hesitate to get handsy, his hands roaming all over Eren. “Hm… tell me…” One hand moved down Eren’s arm to where he held the toys. “Which do you want first…?” He leaned forward, nipping his ear. “Or do you want both..?” I love teasing you.

“B-Both…” He mumbled, handing them over to Levi and shuddering as his ass was massaged. “L-Levi? A-Are you gonna be gentle?” I don’t want you to be rough like you were last night…

Levi’s lips hovered over his neck, pausing as he heard his tone. He murmured quietly, softly kissing the flesh. “I'll be gentle, Eren. Don't worry.” I won't be rough. Levi set the toys on the ledge of the bathtub, pulling Eren close to his chest. He reached for a bottle of conditioner, pouring some onto the clean ledge. His now-slick fingers drifted to Eren’s lower half, rubbing his entrance in small circles. “I'll be very gentle.” Levi slowly eased his fingers inside his loose hole. I need to clean you out first... and then we can have more fun....

Eren whimpered softly at first as he was touched, the sounds soon dying down as he got used to the finger in his loose hole again. “Mmm… Levi....” He moaned out Levi’s name, his eyes shaded as he looked into Levi’s eyes, adoration and love filling them, hinted with a bit of lust. I want him to enjoy himself too... I hope he’ll be okay while he’s with me... I hope I’ll be able to pleasure him enough...

Levi was unable to look away from Eren’s eyes as he worked him further open, his own eyes giving way to a loving look. “You're so handsome…. and I love it when you look at me like that...” Levi cupped his cheek with his free hand, watching Eren’s jaw drop a bit, his pupils going wide when he brushed his prostate. He's... fuck...

Eren let out a loud cry as Levi brushed his prostate again, pushing his hips back down on Levi’s fingers, wanting more as he felt Levi’s cum starting to leave him. He's cleaning me out.... His fingers feel so good... He finally looked away as he slumped down a bit, leaning on Levi’s shoulder, and trying to move his hips again.

Levi held Eren close, mouthing at his shoulder as he kept cleaning him out, feeling the white drip from him. He reached deeply, taking his time as the rest slipped out. He didn't stop after he was cleaned, rubbing slow circles into his prostate. I want you feeling very good.... We have lots of time... lots of time to take care of each other....

Eren whimpered softly as he felt Levi’s fingers rub his prostate again, shaking his head. “L-Levi… Stop….” I’m gonna cum too soon if you keep doing that... And I wanna cum from the sound and the vibrating dildo....
Levi slowed immediately, his hand drawing out of him. “Eager, are we?” Levi reached for the dildo first, slicking it and bringing it south. Levi held Eren close as he slid the toy inside of him, hearing Eren groan when it was as deep as it would allow. Levi reached for the sound as well, leaving Eren full for a moment as he slicked it, giving his length a few teasing pumps before slipping it down. I can just tell… having both of these going at the same time will have you practically screaming with pleasure….

“Oh god…. Oh god yes ….Hmm, Levi t-turn them on…” I want them on, though I know it's gonna push me over the edge really quickly. It feels so good …. Eren begged him as he kept his arms around Levi’s shoulders and his legs spread for Levi, the warm water making him feel everything. It’s heavenly ...

Levi nipped his ear, reaching down to turn the vibrator on, simultaneously clicking the sound to its lowest setting, hearing the deep gasp Eren let out as he did, a long moan following. “…mm… feels good…?” The lowest settings and you sound like you're in heaven ...

“Fuck Levi… It feels good…” It feels really good. He let out a loud cry as he shifted and hit his prostate with the dildo. His eyes blown wide with pleasure and desire. “O-Oh fuck!” Eren’s length jerked with the pleasure and he could hold in the moans and gasps that fell from his lips, his thighs beginning to shake. Holy shit…. It’s right there, it feels so fucking good… I can feel it up my spine, it's so good...

Levi smirked. “You like that, hm? Does this feel…” He turned it up another click. “... better?” He chuckled lowly as Eren’s moans got louder, turning it up one more, as well as the sound. I love that expression... the one where you're dying to cum….

Eren was struggled to hold it in, his face twisting a bit from the strain. “L-Levi… C-Can I cum?” I wanna cum, I feel so warm, I’m not gonna be able to hold it for much longer… But you'll need to take the sound out, or I won’t be able to cum… He whined, looking into his eyes and hoping he would say yes and jerk him to completion. Fuck I wanna cum...

Levi smirked, turning the dildo up and drawing out the sound, his hand wrapping around his length. “ Cum , Eren.” He watched with awe as Eren’s expression shifted, seeing the bliss filling his eyes as he came all over their chests. He's so… so… I keep saying perfect… but there's no word for it... too beautiful...

Eren had a fucked-out expression on his face, slumping down into Levi’s grasp as his whole body shook from bliss, feeling the vibrator still working in his ass. He groaned as he reached back and started to pull it out, completely spent from their activities. I’m exhausted… That was so good… Shit, I wanna cuddle now…
Levi drew the vibrator out, turning it off and rinsing it in the bath water. He set it aside before running his hands all over Eren, smiling faintly, “Hm…. let’s get you washed… then we can nap, okay?” He heard an assenting hum, taking a washcloth and going over Eren’s body with tender touches. *I’m here…. I’ll take good care of you.*
Chapter 109: Sexuality

It's so much quieter without all the boys... Lathe was upstairs in his study, trying to work through the paperwork that had been piling up. Three different families wanted two each... they're all in the same neighborhood still, way up north of Wichita, which is good. They'll all be in the same school, they'll stay friends most likely. It's very good- before I could finish explaining everything they all clung to each other crying... they were scared of being separated. They're all like brothers. I love them all to bits... it was hard to send them off to their new homes. ...but they all got their Christmas quilts early, so at least they got those. Lathe glanced up, leaning his head in one hand as he saw one of the many pictures on his desk, all the boys enraptured by a movie on the TV, tangled in blankets with legos and snacks strewn around. ...and there are pictures. Lathe smiled, sighing and looking back down. One week 'til Christmas...... things are really looking up. Eren and Levi are all over Mila, she's still healthy and adorable as ever... Ieva's having a bit of trouble getting around the house, she's already so big with the twins.... there haven't been any complications with them... her 26-week appointment is just after Christmas... and James... he's cancer-free. I'm so happy... Eren's gotten to be so much happier after the engagement... he's drawing and singing and painting again.... Jake has been bumped up into eighth grade instead of fifth, and he's the top of his class.... he's a brilliant kid.... Tucker and Henry have been doing okay, Henry's over pretty much everyday now. They stay inside a lot, play video games... I'll still have Tucker running to me if things start getting out of hand a bit... but he's getting better at letting Henry in. Everything is going so well .... Lathe set his pen down, staring boredly at the paper, sighing. Then... why, if.... if everything's so great... I feel so empty... Lathe dropped his head on the desk, his eyes shut, thinking. ..........fuck...... I ache.... Lathe tried to swallow down the guilt, thinking of the few dreams littering his sleep for the past month, a faceless form setting his skin on fire. Why do I feel like this...? I want Ieva to be enough... why do I feel like she isn't? She's pregnant with my kids... she's a wonderful wife... but... why am I being so selfish? What's happening to me? Lathe buried his face into the crook of his arm, trying to calm down. Am I falling out of love? But I love her, I know I do... but I ache ...and it feels like the dreams always make me feel better for split seconds better than she has made me feel... I don't understand... I want to understand... I want to know why every time I've had those dreams that... that form or whatever it is looms over me and I feel so relieved that I'm not on top... I don't get it.... Lathe felt his throats tighten up, rubbing at it, not sure how to make the tightness go away. I can't be falling out of love... I don't know what the fuck is happening... I didn't last a day before I gave in and googled Eren and Levi when Scotty had mentioned it... I found so much... and not a small portion of it was sexual... I want to feel guilty... I read ten words and knew exactly what it was and I couldn't stop reading... I got hard as I don't know what the fuck is wrong with me... Lathe was struggling to breathe, letting out a tiny choked sob. I don't know what's wrong with me....

Eren was on his way upstairs from the kitchen, having made lunch for everyone. James was already situated in the kitchen, Levi was feeding Mila her food and he’d already helped Ieva downstairs into the dining room to eat lunch. Now, I just need to get Dad. Eren knocked on the door before opening it, hearing a choked sob, his eyes widening. “Dad? A-Are you alright?” His tone was full of worry, closing the door behind him and going towards the desk. Shit, what’s wrong? What happened?

Lathe jumped as he heard Eren come in, shaking his head and rolling back in his desk chair,
holding one hand up to hide his face with his wrist. “E-Eren, please, go away… I'll be downstairs soon, j-just give me a minute…” I need to compose myself…. I'll break down if I go down there now...

“Dad, you know you can talk to me about things…. Please? I know you’ve been there for when I needed to talk, it’s the least I can do for you….” He paused, thinking. “I can bring your food up for us… If you wanna talk about it…” You look like whatever it is you’re thinking of is wearing you down, and I think it has been...

Lathe shook his head, drawing a bit into himself. “You don't have to do that… u-uhm… I don't know if I can talk about it…” I don't want to…. I don't want to have to explain it… Mental images conjured up from what he read flashed in his mind, and his face burned with shame. Fuck...

“Dad… You know I wouldn’t judge you, no matter what, right?” You look like you want to hide something…. From me no less… Am I not trustworthy? “I can go get you your lunch if you wanna stay up here for now…” He trailed off as he looked down, heading towards the door slowly. I won’t argue with you if you don’t want to talk about it… But I would hope you would know that I wouldn’t judge you...

Lathe shook his head. “I-I'm not hungry right now… and…” ........if I were to talk to anyone about this… “...you promise you won't judge me…? It's not… I-I don't know….” I don't know what the fuck is happening..... ......help...

“Why would I judge you when all you been to me is accepting? … You could’ve left me to get infected and die bleeding out because I was gay… But you didn’t, you accepted me from day one… Why would I do anything less than that for you?” Eren spoke quietly, reaching for the door, and opening it. “I can bring you food in an hour? Does that sound okay?” You should eat, I know how you've felt with gaining a few pounds, but I’ve been making health foods lately… And Mom likes them… And so does everyone else....

An…. an hour…? “....I thought we were gonna talk…?” Lathe’s voice was tiny, knowing he wouldn't be any more ready to talk in an hour than he was then. I don't wanna have to suffer thinking about this for another hour… if I'm gonna tell you... and I should… I should do it now...

“You want me to grab food for us now? I can come back up here with it while you collect yourself?” Eren offered, looking a bit hopeful that he was willing to talk. If he's willing to talk I can get food now… I nmjust thought he would maybe push me away still....

Lathe slowly nodded, watching as Eren quietly closed the door, feeling too exposed in his chair. I
wanna curl up… Lathe was in autopilot, moving to the floor under the desk, holding his legs to his chest, his face buried in his knees. It hurts… make it stop...

Eren got the food together carrying up the sandwiches and salads for them as well as fresh juice. He should like this. He made his way carefully up the stairs and into Lathe’s study, though he was confused when he didn’t see anyone. “Dad?” Where did you go?

Lathe picked his head up when he heard Eren, his voice weak as he spoke. “….I'm under the desk…” I'm sorry I'm such a fucking embarrassment… what the fuck am I doing as an adult hiding from my problems underneath a fucking desk? …how the fuck am I qualified to be a fucking father? I'm a shitty excuse for an adult….

Eren set the tray of food down. “Do you want me to get some pillows and blankets for the floor? Or do you think you’d be okay with sitting on a chair? Whatever you’re more comfortable with, okay?” Eren’s voice was soft and non threatening as he poked his head out from the side of the desk to see Lathe curled up fully under the desk. I see we’ve got a few things to talk about.

“.....can we have a nest please?” Lathe was quiet, his face red. I don't want you to make too much of a fuss over me…. “I-If that's okay…. I don't want to sit in a chair… being curled up feels better....

“Yeah, I’ll make one on the other side of the desk, but if you feel comfortable here, why don’t you eat part of your sandwich while I go get everything and make it?” I can build a huge fort for us to ‘hide’ in and then bring enough blankets for you to be swaddled...

Lathe slowly nodded, accepting the plate from Eren as it was handed to him. It looks tasty… Lathe slowly started to eat, hearing Eren go in and out of the room many times over, hearing rustling. ... what is he even doing...? Lathe had eaten half of his sandwich before he had the courage to poke his head out from under the desk, seeing that Eren had moved the furniture all aside and built a pillow fort for them, blankets pooling in the middle. ... Lathe set his plate back in the tray, still hiding when Eren came back in with more pillows, watching him silently as he left empty handed. Lathe slowly crept from the desk, wading into the fort and tugging blankets around him, curling into a corner of the fort, leaning back against where it leaned against the wall, comfortable and watching quietly for Eren. ...I'm allowed to be in here... right...? It's comfy...

Eren came in with another armful of blankets, setting them inside of the fort, his eyes bright as he saw Lathe curled up. Oh good, he’s comfortable. “It’s not too overboard… Is it?” I hope not, but you seem to like it.

Lathe shook his head, burrowing further, clutching the quilts closer to himself. “It's… I like it.” It's
nice... Lathe was still scared as Eren came into the fort with him, his heart tugging. ...help... Lathe shifted, moving closer to Eren, leaning against him, his head on his shoulder. He was silent for a long moment before he spoke, his voice tiny. “...I don't know what's wrong with me...” Lathe breathed in shakily, feeling Eren’s arms wrap around him. “Everything's been going so well and the kids were adopted and Jake is a brilliant kid and Tucker is happy with Henry and you and Levi are happy and Mila is a happy and Ieva is gonna have twins... but... I... I feel so empty....” Lathe could feel the hot tears streaming down his cheeks, shaking. “It feels so wrong... something feels so wrong... and it hurts so much... and I don't know why... I-I don't think I'm falling out of love... b-but... how can I be in love with Ieva... and still f-feel that kind of empty...?” I want it to be enough... why isn't it enough...?

Eren was quiet as he held onto Lathe as he cried, letting him cry and rant knowing he would feel better if he let it out. Hmm.... Maybe it’s not a Dad problem like I thought it would be... well, let’s start with small questions. “Do you still love Mom?” Start small, this should be an easy question for him then we’ll explore his thought process...

“I-I love her so much... she’s wonderful... she makes me so happy... I know she does...” I really don't think I'm falling out of love... after that vacation and when we found out she was pregnant things really were so much better for us...

Eren nodded. “And if Mom wasn’t pregnant... You’d still love her the same?” Could this be an expectant father issue? The one I kinda went through?

“I would... I'm so much happier because we've been trying so long for her to conceive... but even if we didn't... I'd still love her to bits...” She's wonderful... and the fact that we’re expecting is just even better....

“Would you love her the same if Mom was a man?” Are we having a sexuality problem here? Are you bi-curious and you feel like you’re missing something because of that?

Lathe was quiet. ......... He thought for a minute, trying to picture what Ieva would look like as a man. ....... “...I... I think I would......” ........she could make you feel the way you want to if she was.... The thought made him flush, trying to hide in the blanket, still clinging to Eren’s shirt.

Eren nodded, holding him close. “Are you questioning your sexuality?... Like are you confused about feeling a certain way? Or wanting something different?” How are you supposed to say it? I feel like you just need to ask... But I’m not sure if I’m asking the right questions...

Lathe was still before he slowly nodded, sinking a bit with shame. “U-Uhm... I just...” .....you can
tell him. …you’ll be okay…. “F-For Christmas a while ago… u-uhm… I’m sorry, I don’t know how to say it any other way… uhm….” Lathe’s voice was small, his face scarlet. “Ieva bought a strap-on for my present and we used it… and I don’t know what the fuck happened after that… it was like a switch flipped and I’ve just… it’s like I just crave having her top… I’m sorry you probably don't wanna think about it but it's been driving me insane and I don't know what the fuck is happening to me…” Help me understand…

Eren was quiet as he took everything in, gently rubbing Lathe’s back to try and soothe him. “You know it’s alright to question your sexuality… Which is what I think is happening… Especially after you’ve gotten a taste of the homosexual side of things….Do you wanna talk about different sexualities?” That might help you feel less confused… I think?

Lathe slowly nodded, trying to relax against Eren’s chest. “Yeah… please….” I know a bit about it and I'm okay with people who are whatever other sexuality… but that whole community has been changing… and I don't know what I am.....

“Okay, well, let’s start with basics, Asexuality…. Basically not interested in sex, so that one’s out of the question I imagine?” But you know, putting it out there…. Just in case you have that preference now...

Lathe nodded. “That's not it…” I can't stop craving it… that's definitely not it....

“Okay, then there’s heterosexuality, which as you know is when people of the two sexes come together in a coupling… And this can result in a biological kid on their hands…” Basically the relationship you and Mom have when you're on top...

Lathe was quiet. “....it's not like I mind it… but… it just feels incomplete when it's only that…”...I just need a word to put to what I'm feeling...

Eren nodded. “Then there’s homosexuality, which I am under… not necessarily Levi though, I’ve never actually asked him what his sexuality was… eh, another question for another day. But you know… gay, queer, lesbian…. A bunch of other names which people can refer to themselves as… Though it’s pretty much strictly the same sex, so I doubt that’s you.”

Lathe shook his head. “It doesn't fit… I mean, like…. boobs are great….” Lathe immediately turned scarlet, a hand clapping over his mouth as he felt Eren start shaking with laughter. Oh, my god.
Eren struggled to contain his laughter, his body shaking a bit, and he had to bite his tongue to save himself from full on laughter. 

Best quote ever…. It shall be known as such… “I mean I can understand that statement on the artist side of things… but we’ll scratch that off the list for now. There’s bisexuality…. Where either of the sexes would work…” I think Levi might be bisexual…. Not sure though…

Lathe shrugged one shoulder, still embarrassed. “Maybe… …what else is there…?” I don’t know if that quite fits though…..

“There’s Demisexuality, and that’s where sexual attraction to someone only occurs after you’ve grown emotionally attached, and deeply at that….so like they would be the last person to go out on a one night stand.” Eren told him and continued to rub his back. This is a good definition for you, I know you kept yourself for Mom… For when you were married…

Lathe thought about it. “…that one fits better….. …is there anything else…?” I know there are plenty…

“Well…. Let me think.” He tapped his chin for a few moments before his eyes lit up. “Pansexuality… Basically if they associate themselves as a human… They’re fair game as a lover or spouse…” Whatever you prefer to call them…

Lathe was quiet, settling against Eren’s chest. …would I really care if Levi was a man…? He was glad that Eren was patient as he thought. ………..probably not. I probably wouldn’t ever be convinced to do a one night stand…. and I can appreciate a nice set of abs… …now that I think about it all that staring at other guys at the gym makes more sense… “…..I kinda wanna say pansexual works best… because I can’t see myself giving a shit about how someone thinks of himself in terms of gender as a determining factor in whether or not I’d date them… it just seems dumb…. no offense, I know you don’t hate people who aren’t guys…” Smooth save, Lathe. Good job.

Eren shook his head chuckling a bit at his comment. “It’s just how we prefer things… Well me at least… I can appreciate a good set of boobs here and now too, I mean, they’re fun to draw… But so is Levi’s dick so… Win-win I guess…. Anyways… Do you feel a bit better now?” I hope you do, you sound better, and more confident… At least to me…

Lathe quietly chuckled, still curled up to Eren. “I do… …oh.” Lathe felt his gut twist, feeling dread wash over him. …how am I gonna tell Levi? “What do I tell Levi? ‘Hey, I just figured out I’m pansexual. That means I still love you, but now want cock.’ …what the actual fuck happened to my filter…” Lathe buried his face in his hands, not knowing what to do. Fuck...
Eren shook his head. “Do not tell her that, she’ll get the wrong idea of what Pansexual means, don’t do that… I would explain it to her, and I know you still love her and make sure you reassure her of that, it won’t really change the way your relationship works I don’t think… Maybe a few more toys here and there… But otherwise still the same I would imagine?” Right? *This isn’t gonna screw with your relationship too much is it?*

“I was exaggerating, I'm just too worn out to have any kind of filter…. and I really hope it won’t… I don't think it will if I just explain it correctly… but I kinda hope that it changes just a little bit… because once she has the twins and we’re able to have sex again I want the empty feeling to go away…” *I don't wanna ache anymore…*

“You do realize you can still….” Eren trailed off as he thought about his words. “Well, if you only have a strap on, not much is gonna happen, but I could always give you a dildo, you shouldn’t be penting yourself up while Mom’s pregnant, it’s not healthy for you…” *You should be able to relieve yourself too, I’m sure Mom would understand…*

Lathe was quiet. “….we do have, uhm… a vibrator… and I maybe got a sound… but… I just… you know I never did anything like that until Ieva and I started dating… I can't help but feel so guilty about touching myself… I know she’s told me before that it's okay but it just…. I want to… But it feels wrong…” *I don't know how to deal with that…*

Eren thought about it, looking up at the blanket pattern. “What if you asked Mom to help you get comfortable with it? Until you could do it on your own?” *I know Mom would help you because it'd be better for you to release some of your frustrations and other things… “I’m sure Mom would understand… And I can give you a dildo that has a base so you don’t have to hold onto it…. If you want that?” I don’t use it much since Levi likes to use the vibrating one and hold onto it…*

“…I… that might work better…. I'll have to get up the nerve to ask sometime… and uhm….. ...what do you mean?” ….? *I don't understand…*

“About the dildo?” He watched Lathe nod. “Oh, it’s got a suction cup on the bottom so you can stick it to almost any surface you want and then fuck yourself on it…” *I haven’t used it in awhile, it should still be in my closet…. Well that was blunt… uhm… ......it might be better than craning for a good angle… and having my hand get tired and cramped… “....if it's okay…” Please…*

“Yeah, do you want me to go get it now? Or do you want to talk with me some more? Or do you want to go talk to Mom?” *Knowing Dad he’s gonna clean it like seven times over even though it’s*
washed before and after every time I used them... eh, he’ll do it, I know he will, but I wanna make sure he’s comfortable...

Lathe quietly nodded. “Can you go get it? ...I'll tell Ieva later today… and I don't really have much else to say…” *I don't know what else there is to say...*

Eren nodded, pecking Lathe’s forehead and slowly unwrapping his arms from him and then getting out of the fort and heading towards his room. He noticed Levi putting Mila down in her crib awhile after having eaten, and a smile on his face as he went to the closet. Though when he shuffled a few things around, his brow furrowed. *What the hell? Why isn’t it here? “Hey, Levi?”*

Levi set Mila in, kissing her forehead. “Yeah?” Levi’s voice was quiet, not wanting to disturb her. *What’re you looking for?*

“Remember that dildo that had the suction cup on it?” His voice was soft as he turned to look at Levi, his arms crossing over his chest as he leaned against the closet door.

Levi thought for a moment. “...the one that you used in those videos you sent?” He watched Eren blush and nod. “...I haven't seen it, why? ...Eren, if that's what you're thinking, not now. We’ll wake her up and it'll be awkward.”

Eren shook his head. “No, I had a conversation with Dad about his sexuality, and I think it’ll help him if he’s got something to relieve himself with if he’s stressed, but I put it in my closet... And I haven’t used it in forever....” His mind was reeling for where it could possibly be before he thought of someone. “Tucker…” His voice was quiet as he moved from their room to the teen’s room, seeing him at his desk with his Legos, closing and locking the door behind him. “Tucker... We need to talk…” *If you don’t have it, I have no idea where it would be because no one else would be able to reach it...*

Tucker looked up from the intricate castle he was constructing, sighing and typing quickly into his phone, handing it over. *What’s up? And be careful not to step on anything, I don't want to rebuild the six spires. No thank you.*

“I’m only gonna ask once, and I want you to know I’m not mad, but I want your honest answer okay?” He handed Tucker his phone back, carefully making his way to Tucker's bed and sitting down on it. *Can’t destroy anything here...*
Tucker’s eyebrows shot up, his mind running in circles as he nervously nodded. *Fuck, what could I be in trouble for? What’d I do? I don’t remember… shit*

“Did you take a dildo from my room?” *I mean, I wouldn’t be mad, but I would much rather have you ask for these things… Especially if you wanna talk about it…*

Tucker froze before he completely flushed, looking down. *Fuck… he noticed… it'd been so long since I took it…* Tucker was completely still before he slowly nodded, his eyes glued to the floor. *….are you gonna tease me about being a needy whore now…? Just… get it over with….*

“Do you want me to order you one? Cause I’m gonna have to confiscate it from you right now….” *I wouldn’t mind, you don’t have to look like that…* “Pick your head up, there’s no need to be embarrassed about it, it’s natural, you’re a growing teen…”

Tucker slowly looked up, surprised at his attitude about it, typing again. *You're not… mad that I took it? I thought you'd be pissed… or at least tease me about it…*

Eren took his phone, reading it for a moment before shaking his head. “Why would I be mad? You’re 17 now Tucker… And technically the legal age for the state is 16, and I know you found it earlier this year, so I don’t really care… But i’m gonna need it back, and if you want another one I’ll get you one…. The only thing that comes out of this is that Dad’s gonna probably give you the ‘talk’ after this…” *You’ll be embarrassed, but you’ll be fine… Eventually.*

Tucker swallowed, taking his phone back and hesitating before typing. *...okay… and uhm… ...I kinda want to look for something else if that's okay… and thanks for not freaking out… I'll get it…* Tucker handed him his phone before going to his nightstand, shifting things around before coming back with it, embarrassedly surrendering it, spelling with one hand. {It's clean, I promise.} *I knew not to be dumb about having it…*

Eren nodded, and thanked him, taking it and hiding it in his shirt and getting it out of sight. *Just incase Jake walks by… “Okay, well, you don’t have a credit card or anything yet, so if you find something or a few things you like you can send me a cart and I’ll order it for you.”* Eren smiled and ruffled his hair before he carefully got up and made his way towards the door. *I’m glad that he took care of it at least…*

Tucker stared after him as he left, thinking…. *that just happened. ……..now maybe I can actually get something nice …*. The lego castle was abandoned in moments as he scrolled through his phone. *Hm… decisions…. 
Lathe was nearly nodding off in the blanket fort when Eren came back, looking up to him tiredly. *Hm?* “That took you awhile…” *Is your closet that cluttered?*

Eren shook his head. “You’ll never believe where I found it….you’re gonna have to give Tucker ‘the talk’…” *How are you gonna react to him having a dildo?*

Lathe’s eyebrows shot up. “…are you telling me that Tucker snatched your dildo and has been using it?” …. well shit. Eren having used it is one thing… “…I’m not so sure I want it now…”

“He took good care of it, don’t worry, and if you are that paranoid about it I will give it back to him and order you a new one…” *I told him I’d order him one… Hell I said I’d order him a few if it makes him feel better about himself…*

Lathe hesitated before nodding. “...yeah… I'd much rather have my own… it's just… I know he probably took care of it but just… the idea of where Tucker in particular put that just doesn't feel right…” Lathe shivered. *No. Absolutely not. “It was weird enough that you used it.”*

Eren just sighed shaking his head and mumbling something about giving it back to Tucker. “Okay, well I’m going to go return it where I found it then go order you a new one then go to sleep… You can probably go down and rub Mom’s feet, she’s probably on the couch with Delia again…” *I swear, she’s been a cat magnet…*

Lathe nodded, though he sighed as he sunk further into the blankets. “*I should* go downstairs…. …but I also don't wanna move.” *I'm comfy… and tired… “...can you hand me my sandwich?”* Lathe reached vainly for the plate, far away on the desk four feet away from him. *Cannot… reach… sandwich…*

Eren chuckled and handed him the tray of food. “When you finish eating promise me you’ll talk to Mom… Okay?” *I want you guys to be okay…. And not stress out about anything…*

Lathe sighed, nodding. “...okay. I'll talk to her.” Lathe made room on the floor for the tray, eating quietly when Eren had left. …*you can do this.* Lathe barely thought as he finished lunch, taking the tray downstairs and putting away the dishes in the dishwasher. *You can do this.* Lathe kicked the dishwasher closed, coming over to the couch where Ieva was, Delia on her chest, purring as she was pet. *Aw… “…Hey Honey?”* Lathe sat down next to her, biting back nerves. *You've got this. She'll understand. …right?*
Ieva looked up, her fingers still carding through Delia’s soft fur. “Yeah, Hun?” What’s up? You were upstairs doing paperwork and stuff, did you finish yet? I wonder if Jake will wanna help with Dinner? He’s been in his room a lot lately with his homework, though I’m pretty sure he finished everything for break already...

Lathe hesitated, taking a deep breath. “There’s something important I need to tell you. Uhm... I’m pansexual. I-It doesn’t mean I don’t love you or anything, it’s okay.” He held up his hands, hurriedly correcting himself when Ieva looked stunned. “I-It means that I would be fine dating any human of any gender... but... I wanted to tell you... because, uhm... remember how you bought that strap-on for me for Christmas forever ago?”

Ieva’s eyes were wide as she was trying to process everything that he was saying. Huh? Pansexual? ..... Any human? But didn’t you just say you loved me?.... The strapon.... She nodded silently, waiting for him to continue. Are you more interested in men now because of this? Ieva couldn’t help but put a hand on her abdomen almost protectively. You’ve wanted kids since you were a teen.... What will happen now?

Lathe couldn't help but feel guilt twist in his gut when he saw her hand drift to her huge bump, swallowing hard. “I-It was a completely new feeling for me, and I just... it feels as natural to me for you to be on top as it is for me to be on top of you, if not more so... I just wanted to tell you... because I'd just be a lot happier if when we're able to be intimate again... if you topped some more... and... while we can't... I just felt like I needed to tell you that I've been going absolutely insane and I've been feeling so empty and I just... I hadn't done anything to myself before you... and I can't help but feel so guilty about it... I wanted to ask if it's okay if I give in for once...” Lathe buried his face in his hands, embarrassed and feeling guilt weigh him down like a lead jacket. I don't know what else to tell you... “I love you so much and I'm sorry if this all seems so confusing but I just needed to tell you...” Don't ever think I don't love you and the two tiny lives you're carrying.

Ieva looked at where he was, his face buried in his hands. She knew she wouldn’t be able to sit up from where she was lying without help. Her hand carefully reached for his hair, carding her fingers through his locks. “I’ll always love you Lathe.... If you don’t want us to change, we won’t but if you want us to change we can.... I won’t hold it against you.” What we did was new for you, I wouldn’t be surprised if you wanted to try and find someone else.... I’d be sad.... But if it made you happy, that’d be fine...

Lathe looked up, shaking his head, desperate for her to understand. “N-No, we don't have to change, just...” He sighed, curling up to her side and resting one hand on her stomach, his thumb running over her bump. “Honey... this isn't some new thing... I think I've been this way all my life. ...it's just that now there's a name to it. And we don't have to change much of anything. You gave me a taste of a different kind of pleasure and I just can't get enough. It's not that I came to some realization that I’m not what I thought- I’d never labeled myself before... ...all that I'd want to
change is that sometimes I’d love it if you topped… that’s all that has to change. Nothing else. I’ve never stopped loving you. Nothing could change that.” *You're too precious to even think of giving up.…*

Ieva seemed to sigh in relief as he cleared things up for her, leaning her head to the side, and resting her head against his. She moved her free hand to lace her fingers with his. “You could’ve asked, I won’t mind…. But I’m sorry we can’t really do anything while I’m pregnant…. “*We could technically…. But I doubt he would want to have sex with me looking like this.* She whispered quietly as she looked to where their hands were intertwined on her large abdomen. *I can’t believe I’m at 25 weeks already….*

Lathe breathed a sigh of relief, twining their fingers, their laced hands resting on her stomach. “It's okay, I know we can't with you as far along as you are… I just needed to tell you… because it's still not a thing I'm used to…” *I feel so bad every time I do it… or want to….*

Ieva shook her head, rubbing her thumb against his hand. “Don’t worry about it…” *I know you’ll want something else…. I should’ve known better… “It’s okay….“*

Lathe turned, softly kissing her cheek. “I’ll always love you to bits, Ieva. That hasn’t changed at all. I don't think it ever will.” Lathe’s fingers spread over her tummy, resting his head on her shoulder. He stared at her stomach, smiling faintly. *Tiny humans…* Lathe slowly shifted forward, his hands gentle on her stomach, his lips brushing her bump, his voice low and quiet. “Your Daddy loves you two so much… I want you two to know that.” He looked up as Ieva jumped a bit, feeling one of the babies kicking. …*aww….* Lathe faintly smiled, his eyes fluttering shut. “You’d better be good for your Mommy…. she’s working overtime making sure you’re both okay. Maybe let her sleep sometimes, hm? She likes to do that. Does that sound fair?” He felt another kick, gently rubbing her stomach. …*I think only the one is kicking… …huh…. “……Honey, is it okay if I go get a flashlight?” I wanna do the thing….*

Ieva looked at Lathe, almost rolling her eyes. “You’re gonna wake both of them up…” *At least he’s showing interest in how much the babies are moving.* “Go ahead, I can nap later….” She shifted a bit to brace her stomach as he shifted off the couch. *It is weird… Only one is moving when we speak.*

Lathe smiled sheepishly, kissing her lips softly. “I'm sorry, I'll leave you alone in a little… I wanna say hi to the other one… I think only one of them is kicking…” *Hm…* Lathe ran to the kitchen to fetch a small flashlight, coming back and clicking it on. He held it against her stomach, his hands still splayed over her tummy, smiling as he felt both of them kick. *Aw… he moved it a bit, feeling them shift a bit closer to it. He clicked it off after a moment, placing small pecks all over her stomach. “You two be nice to your Mommy, ya hear? We both love you lots and lots….“* Lathe kissed her bump, feeling them both kick the spots he kissed, coming up as they kicked his mouth. “Hey, all this love and this is the thanks I get…” Lathe smiled, rubbing her stomach. “I know you
two like partying, and I wanted to say hi… but maybe let your Mommy get some sleep sometime in
the next year, hm? Word is Mommies like sleep.” Lathe kissed her one last time. “…but we’ll love
you to death even if you do deprive her of sleep. …..we’re obligated to.” Lathe chuckled as Ieva
poked his shoulder, giving him an amused look. “Okay, maybe not only because we’re obligated
to… …..your Daddy loves you.” Lathe gently rubbed her tummy, leaning up to softly kiss Ieva,
Delia purring from her spot on Ieva's chest. “I love you…. I really really do….

Ieva smiled softly, kissing him back just as softly. She couldn’t help the tears that started to well.
He’s so gentle…. And I feel like it's for the first time… Why? Why do I feel like this now? Is it
because I’m expecting him to leave? She sniffled, reaching a hand up to rub at her eyes and hide
her face. Shit… And now I’m crying about it...

Lathe gave her a sympathetic look as she started crying, softly kissing her cheek and cupping her
cheek with a careful hand. “It's okay… it's okay…. ” He held her close, letting her cry. I love you...
I'm right here for you...

“I’m…. I’m sorry…” She whimpered and tried to move away from him, feeling her face grow
bright red in embarrassment. “I’m so… So sorry…” I can't handle it... I hate these hormones that
are screwing everything up. She could feel the twins kicking around and responding to her tears
and stress. Fuck… The babies...

Lathe looked worried, wrapping his arm around her, his other on her stomach, feeling the babies
kicking as she cried. “It's okay Honey, I know you can't help it… it's fine, I'm right here for
you…. ” Lathe softly pecked her cheek, nestling into her neck. “It's okay, love. It's okay.” Really, it
is.

It's not okay…. I still don't understand what you mean.... Are you gonna leave me after I have
them? She whimpered as she leaned her head towards him, sniffling as she tried to calm down. Ieva
closed her eyes trying not to think about it. I should be happy that he’s paying attention to what I
tell him about the twins... That he’s here right now...

Lathe held her close, kissing her head. …..maybe it's still hard to understand. “....Honey… you
know that I'm not just staying for the twins… right?” Lathe’s hand rubbed her stomach soothingly.
“I'm not just staying because you're pregnant. Even if the word describing my sexuality changed it
doesn't mean that I wasn't always this way. It means that I could love anyone and I picked you. I
love you so much... I only want the way we love to change sometimes. That's all that's gonna
change. I'm always gonna hold onto you, I'm always gonna love you, and there isn't ever gonna be
anyone else. I'm so happy with you. I just need to make sure you understand that.” I love you...

Ieva stopped crying as he spoke, looking up to him with large eyes. “Y-You’re not gonna leave?”
You’ll stay?

Lathe looked up to her, his eyes soft. “I’d never dream of it.” Lathe placed pecks all over her cheeks, nuzzling closer to her. “You’re all mine… my beautiful wife….” You’re wonderful….

Ieva smiled softly as she sniffled. “Can you help me up?” I’m hungry… And I’m starting to get weird cravings too….

Lathe nodded, offering her his hands and helping her slowly sit up, easing her to her feet, Delia shuffling up onto her shoulder, mewing as Ieva started walking with Lathe’s help. Kitty….

Ieva thanked him quietly, heading towards the kitchen with him. “I hate that I’m getting so unbalanced on my feet… And my belly button popped…” She complained as she leaned on Lathe for support. I don’t wanna harm the twins…

Lathe was steady as they walked, supporting her. “That sucks… but it won’t be forever…. all three of you will be just fine. Fifteen weeks.” Fifteen weeks until teeny babies….

“Yeah…” She smiled when she got to the counter seat and looked at Lathe. “Will you make me some more food?” I’m still hungry….

Lathe chuckled, nodding and helping her into the seat. “Yeah, I’ll cook you something. What’re you in the mood for?” Your eating habits have been whack for a bit now… I have no idea what you’ll want. Some of your favorite things you’ve turned away from in disgust, so I have no idea what’s going on.

“Can I have a Caprese Salad with Turkey?” I know we have mozzerella and tomatoes… And basil… But I want some turkey too!

Lathe nodded, fishing for ingredients in the fridge, getting out a cutting board and starting to chop up the ingredients. “Do you want me to warm up the turkey or no?” Is it okay if it’s cold? You’ve been getting progressively picky and it's not hard to warm it up on the stove a bit.

“No, I want it cold…” I want it really cold, I wanna cool off, I feel like I’m getting warmer the more I’m cooped up in this house. “Can you ask if we can go riding with the twins?” I wanna do something, even if there’s 6 inches of snow on the ground…
Lathe looked up to her, his voice careful. “Honey, you’re on bed rest and halfway through the second trimester… I don’t think going riding is a good idea. Getting in and off would be hard, and god forbid if you fall….” *It’s just not a good idea...*

Ieva whined and put her head down on the counter. “But I wanna do something! I’m getting sick of being sick in the house and watching bad TV shows… I don’t have any kids to watch anymore, and Eren and Levi are taking care of Mila…” She whined as she watched him continue to make her food. *I wanna do something! Even if we just go out for a bit...*

Lathe sighed quietly, handing her her salad and a fork, watching her pout and stare disappointedly at her salad. *I hate seeing you so upset… “I’m sorry, there’s just not much you’re able to do carrying around two teeny humans…”* He thought, an idea popping into his head. He looked out the window, seeing the center across the road, a couple kids making snowmen and forts outside in the snow, one of the hired college students keeping a careful eye on all of them with a thermos in hand. *Hm. “...do you maybe want to go over to the center after you eat? I'm sure the kindergarteners would like someone new to read to them if you want. It'd be a change of scenery, give you something to do. They'd all love you, I'm sure.” We get a lot of little kids on the weekends- we’ve more or less become a free daycare.*

Ieva looked at him with wide eyes. “R-Really?” *There’s kids over there right now? She picked at her salad uninterested now, though she still continued to eat it. “Can we look for nursery stuff?” We haven’t done that yet... At all ... fuck.... “Can we go shopping for nursery stuff?” We need to do that...*

Lathe nodded. “We can do that too... and yeah, we’ve been having tiny children dumped on us from day one because we’re practically a free day care service. I don’t mind, because a lot of the kids are learning to read and draw and stuff. And it’s good that they’re being social and making friends. And some of the kids are really small, like two or three years old small. We actually have a couple healthcare providers flitting around on weekends and we’ve got some college students trained because there are a few kids who are showing signs of autism, they’re around the age it's becoming more apparent they have it. They're learning to be a bit more social, even if all they do is color and talk to the students. They have their own big room in the center, we have times for coloring, reading, and we give the students a break and set the kids down for naps... everything’s going well. …if you want to go out shopping for nursery things today we can. And we still need to decide what color we’re gonna paint the walls.” *I wanna doodle all over the walls.... God please...*

Ieva nodded, eating her salad with a little more interest and just eating it. “I wanna go shopping, I need to get out of the house... Please ?” *I’m so bored with being in the house...*

Lathe sighed and save her a small smile, coming around to kiss her cheek. “Of course we can. But
you have to promise me that the second you feel too tired or out of sorts, you'll tell me, okay?” He
rested a hand on her bump. *I wanna make sure all three of you are okay.*

Ieva nodded, smiling as he touched her abdomen. “Will people think I look fat?” *I hope not.... I
know I'm huge as it is... and I bet people think I'm ready to pop.... “I don’t wanna be fat.”*

Lathe gave her a gentle look, drifting behind her, both his hands on her middle.“They won't think
you're fat, honey... anyone who sees you, in a store to buy things for a nursery or not, will know
that you're carrying tiny life inside of you... and that's beautiful.” Lathe softly kissed her neck,
softly nipping her neck as he felt her relax in his arms. *Mine....* 

Ieva nodded, taking her fork and eating the rest of her salad. *So good, absolutely perfect ...* She
held onto him to get off the stool, walking towards the stairs. “Help me get dressed, so we can go!”
*I wanna go!*

Lathe sighed, following her. “Alright, Hun.” *...this'll be an adventure....*

.......*oh. My god. It was hours before they were back home, the boxes of things all piled next to the
front door, Lathe collapsed on the couch. ....I just... my god, her baby brain is *horrible ....* She
found a crib she loved and changed what color she wanted five different times before going back to
the first one.... she almost cried three times in the store because she saw all the tiny baby outfits
and thought they were too cute, then when we were picking mobiles she couldn't decide between
elephants or fish, and then she didn't know which stuffed animals they would want, so we got one of
every animal she liked and got upset when she couldn't decide if she even liked any of them or
not...... *fifteen more weeks ......... shit ...... ....and we still have to decide what color she wants the
walls of the nursery and what color the carpeting should be..... ......I love her, but my god, that was
hell.... .....even if everything we picked out was adorable...... .....it was hell.*

Eren nudged Lathe after he flopped down. “We’ve got some choices for dinner, you can eat when
you want, Mom’s raided the food and sat down at the table already.” *I know you wouldn't mind
sleep. He smiled as he watched James come down the stairs, quickly followed by Jake and Tucker
to get food. Good everyone else is coming down to eat too... You guys came home with a lot of
stuff, I can only imagine how much more Mom’s gonna want and how much she’s gonna make you
bring back...* 

Lathe nodded, shrugging and pulling a blanket over himself, his voice quiet. “Thanks, but I'm
kinda wifed out from today... please don't tell Ieva I said that.” Lathe picked his head up and
looked to the table, glad that she hadn't overheard. “...the trip to the store was low key a nightmare.
Be glad neither you nor Levi have to deal with baby brain.” *...I'm so done.... I need a nap....*
“Well… I made all sorts of her new wacky favorites and some other dishes, so why don’t we try and find you something to eat?” Eren reached a hand down to lift him up. *Come on… You need to eat…*

Lathe whined in dissent, pouting childishly when Eren dragged him to his feet again. “Mur…” Lath followed Eren anyway, looking over the array of foods on the kitchen table. *what are half of these again…?* “...I don't recognize some of these…” *You haven't made some of them before I don't think… they smell weird….*

“Well, Mom’s been wanting Asian food…. So we have some Asian dishes with what I had on hand…. Mom likes it so, I’m not gonna complain, but it’s Sesame Deer…. Instead of chicken, it tastes pretty good actually, but lacking the chicken smell…. Mom wanted some pork, so I attempted Lo mein… then there’s brotchen, like usual, and some pasta dishes…” *Mom got some of everything…*

Lathe looked over everything, slowly shaking his head and getting a plate, reaching for the pasta. “I at least know I'll like these… I recognize them.” *I'm not feeling adventurous right now, just give me familiar pasta and I'll be happy….*

“Hmm, Mom wants some Raviolis, so There will at least be cheese ones for you to munch on… And we only have a few days until Christmas… And it’ll just be us this year, that’ll be nice…” *It’ll be really nice…*

Lathe nodded, thinking. *We don't have to entertain a huge house of people…. we already have all our presents in the mail since yesterday… all we have to do is chill. That sounds ridiculously nice…* “…make sure to add shredded spinach to the cheese ravioli… we need to make her eat vegetables *somehow.*” *She's just been eating the most random crap…*

“Yes, Dad…”
The past week has been both good and bad. The twins won’t stop kicking me all over the place, I swear I’m waking up every other hour now to go pee, so I nap while I can. Nene, Delia and I have become the best of friends, and getting up is even more of a chore as I gained another 2 pounds and I feel fat. Jake’s gotten interested in how the twins are developing and I swear he waits around the corner with a flashlight so he can feel the babies move around… He’s almost as fascinated as Lathe at this point. She sighed as she was finally able to lay down on the couch with the TV playing some random Christmas movie marathon still, Jake at her side playing with the flashlight. I need to ask the doctor why only one moves when we’re talking… And then both react to light… “Jake Honey, you can play with the babies later, will you let me sleep for a bit please?” I really didn’t get any last night after all our Christmas festivities…

Jake looked up at her, his eyes wide. “But Mo~om…..” He pouted when she shook her head, turning off for flashlight. “Okay…” He leaned up to kiss her cheek before scampering off, leaving her in peace. I'll be able to play with them later…

Ieva sighed in relief as she watched Jake scamper off. Oh thank god… Peace and quiet. She sighed, closing her eyes to get some sleep, only to hear a phone ringing near her. Oh my god…. What do I need to do to get peace and quiet? “Whose phone is that even? Lathe!” I can’t get up…

Lathe looked up from his book, coming downstairs. “What? The phone?” Lathe listened for it, rifling through the cushions when Ieva gestured vaguely to her right, finding it. Eren lost his phone… who the hell is this? It's not in our area code… Lathe decided to answer, running upstairs to get Eren. “Hello?”

<“Is this Eren Yeager?”>

…..uhm. <“This is his father, I can get him for you. Who is this?”>

< “This is Dr. Schwäggler, I'm calling for Hannes Holtz... Eren is listed as his health care proxy.”>

Oh shit. <“Oh, uh, I’m getting him right now.”> Lathe peered into their bedroom, seeing Eren holding a sleeping Mila. “Eren?” Lathe was quiet, coming in with the phone. “There’s someone on the phone for you. It’s about Hannes.” I don't think it's that good… Lathe set down the phone before taking Mila from him, swaying to keep the toddler comfortably asleep.
Eren looked shocked as he took the phone and handed Mila over to Lathe. <“Hello?”>

<“Eren Yeager?”>

<“That’s me…. Can I help you?”>

<“You are listed for Hannes Holtz’s health care proxy, so as his primary physician, I, Dr. Schwäggler, am allowed to disclose his medical information with you.”>

<“Yes, I understand, what happened with Hannes?”> This is bad… Vatri is getting old.

<“It seems he’s developed quite the case of pneumonia, and he’s currently hospitalized due to the condition.”>

Eren’s eyes widened. <“I’ll book a flight, I’ll be there within the next two days, please call me if his condition changes.”> I hate planes… But I will book a flight for this…

<“Of course, Mr. Yeager, we will be expecting you.”>

Lathe’s eyes were wide as he heard Eren. …but… <“Eren, what the hell is going on?”> Why are you flying out to Germany? Is Hannes gonna be okay? What happened?

Eren swallowed hard, looking down at his phone after he ended the call. “Vatri… He’s hospitalized…” I need to book a flight… He pulled up an app on his phone already starting to look of flight prices and times from various airports. That’s the quickest way to get to Vatri…

Lathe looked immensely worried, nodding. “Does he need surgery? What’s going on?” Help me understand….

“He has pneumonia… But Vatri hates hospitals… If he went to one, it’s bad, and if he’s willingly staying in the hospital, it’s worse. I probably need to take care of his horses too, so I need to fly out there…” He was quickly approaching the verge of tears. Oh my god, he could be dying… What if I don’t get there in time?
Lathe moved, gently laying down Mila in her crib before moving to hug Eren tightly, trying to calm him down. “Eren, please, he’ll be okay. If he's in the hospital he's going to be receiving good care. And I understand you want to go out there, and it does sound like you're needed.” ....Levi can do a romantic proposal some other time. “We’ll miss you if you're not home for New Years… and it doesn't sound like you will be. But that's okay.” Lathe pecked his temple. “You're so ready to drop everything for Hannes. He raised you well.” He really did...

Eren smiled softly and nodded, letting a few tears fall. “I can only imagine how far he let the pneumonia go before he went to the hospital….” He hates going there, I can't imagine how much worse it is after holding it off.

Lathe sighed, keeping a solid hold on him, rubbing his back. “Whatever condition he’s in, I'm sure he’ll only get better from where he is now. You can look up tickets, get things arranged. Do you want to bring anyone with you…?” One of us should go with you maybe… Levi could be moral support....

Eren shook his head. “I’ll take Mikhail… But you guys need to stay home.” Everyone’s got someone to take care of, it's better if I go alone, and I know the area, so I can get a rental car while I’m there...

Lathe sighed, nodding. “Okay… but if anything changes and you need someone else there, you call and we’ll express ship you one boyfriend, okay? Oh, excuse me- fiancé.” Lathe grinned, kissing the tip of his head. “You need to take good care of Hannes, and good care of yourself too. Don't forget that.” You need to not kill your own health worrying about Hannes’.

Eren nodded and smiled softly and he moved to go down to his studio to look up flights on a bigger screen. His hands were shaking as he wrote things down, going back to the kitchen where Lathe was. “Would you be able to drive me to the airport tonight?” There’s a flight at 10 tonight....

That was quick. Lathe nodded, smiling faintly. “Of course. You get packed and tell me just about when we should leave, okay? We’ll make sure you eat before you go.” You should have dinner first.

Eren nodded, moving to peck his cheek before he went back and booked two seats for the flight and all the connecting flights to get to Germany. I need my passport and Mikhail’s ID too… He printed off all the information he needed for the two of them, biting his lip as he did it. I’m.... I’m going on another plane... Fuck ...
Lathe was busy getting dinner ready, looking back when he saw Eren come out of the studio, looking depressed and scared as he stared at the flight information. "...he hates planes...." Lathe went to give him a hug, smiling to him reassuringly. "You'll be okay on the planes, Eren. It'll work out okay. "...do you think you’ll visit Carla when you're there?"...you should.

Eren froze as he heard Lathe speak his mother’s name, looking up to him and trying not to cry. I didn’t even think about going to see Mom.... What kind of son am I? He nodded, unable to speak, knowing it’d come out in a sob.

Lathe softly kissed his cheek, giving him a gentle look. “...give her some flowers and love from me, okay?” I’d love to have met her... I hope she’s okay wherever she is.

Eren nodded, letting a tear fall down his cheek before he quickly moved to wipe at his eyes. I will, I’ll get to see Mom for the first time since we buried her...

Lathe looked away when his tears fell, handing him his kerchief, letting him go. I won’t make you stay and be sad... I don’t think visiting her even crossed your mind. You’re so worried about Hannes. “Dinner’s in about an hour, Hon. We’ll leave a little after then.” Lathe let him run off, sighing, his chest feeling heavy as he looked over to the piano. She raised him well... Very well.

Eren ran up to his room, shuffling through his clothes and started to grab shorts and t-shirts as well as some long pants and long sleeves. There won’t be snow on the ground when I get there... It might not even be cold...

Levi looked up from his laptop, watching Eren pack with wide eyes. Huh? “Eren? What's going on?” Levi shut his laptop, sitting up. You look like you're getting ready to leave for somewhere.... What happened...?!

“I'm going to Germany...” Eren said without looking up from the drawer he was shuffling through and pulling out what he wanted to. I need to go see Vatri, and I’ll be leaving soon... Shit... I hate planes...

Levi’s eyes were wide, standing. “Why are you going to Germany? What happened?” Tell me! Levi went up to him, resting a hand on his shoulder. Calm down, you look ready to panic...

“Vatri’s hospitalized... And I’m his health care proxy, I need to go.” I need to, he could get worse, he hates being in hospitals. The hospitals in Germany aren’t that great either... Eren moved away
from his hand. “I’m sorry but I need to pack.”

Levi’s eyes widened. **Hannes is in the hospital… ...and you're the person he's want there most.** Proposing again… isn’t as important right now. “I understand. You pack, okay?” Levi kissed his cheek, letting him keep packing, going back to his laptop. *I'll let you do your thing.... it's something you have to do, I understand.*

Eren was grateful Levi let him pack in peace, even if he was internally losing it. He went over everything he packed multiple times to make sure he wasn’t forgetting anything. He almost didn’t hear Mila crying when she woke up, his head raising to the crib. **Oh no, Mila…** Eren got to his feet, making his way to the crib and picking her up and gently holding her to try and calm her cries. **Don’t cry baby…. Where’s Levi? “Don’t cry, Mila…”** He trailed off as she wailed louder and he set her down on the changing table and got her out of her onesie. He struggled to shush her as he cleaned her up, getting a new diaper for her and setting her back in her onesie again. Eren sighed as Mila screamed again when he picked her up. “Mila… Don’t cry, baby… Mum’s right here… You don’t need to cry… Please don’t cry baby.” **Fuck... Is she hungry? She ate an hour ago tho... I have no idea what to do... Where’s Levi, he understands her so much better... when did he even leave?**

Levi picked his head up when he heard Mila’s cries, looking back to his laptop on the couch as they quieted a bit. **Eren’s got her...** He looked up worriedly again when they picked up, getting up and heading upstairs when they didn't stop. **...is she okay?** Levi came into their bedroom, watching Eren trying to calm her down. **“Eren?”** He went over to them, reaching for Mila. He accepted her when Eren immediately handed her over, cradling her close and giving her a finger to latch onto. **“Hello Mila… don't be upset, we’re right here.”** Levi took a step closer to Eren, pecking his cheek before looking back to Mila, his head resting on his shoulder, Mila between the two of them. **“Your Daddies are right here, Hon. It's okay.”** She didn't quiet down much, still looking distressed, and he sighed. He moved from Eren’s side, looking in her crib for her stuffed puppy, not seeing it. He peered underneath, seeing it had fallen through the slats of the crib. **Ah.** “Eren, I think she wants her puppy.” He nodded to the animal, his hands still full of upset child. **“Don't worry Honey, we’ll get your puppy…” Please don’t cry, it's okay...**

Eren looked at Levi in confusion at firsts before he saw the stuffed dog and seemed to sigh in relief. **Is that it?** He picked up the stuffed dog and moved to hand it to Levi, looking at Mila with saddened eyes. **She likes Levi more too.... And Levi understands her so much better than me, and he’s only been with her for two months...** Eren swallowed the lump in his throat as he turned back to go over what he had packed once again.

Levi smiled faintly as Mila quieted when she had her puppy, grabbing it tightly and smushing her cheek against it. **Aw... “You like your puppy?”** He smiled as she gazed at him with wide eyes before turning her attention back to the soft floppy ears on the toy. **Too adorable...** Levi shifted her to one hip, freeing up one hand as he looked to Eren again. **“Alright, she's fine now- ...Eren?”** Levi looked worriedly to Eren who was pointedly looking away from them, seeing his upset expression. **“...are you okay?”**
Eren nodded, leaning over to kiss his cheek before going to the dresser, rifling through the little shirts and pants. “Hm…. which do you want, Mila?” Levi pulled out a small shirt with stripes, shrugging a shoulder when Mila swatted at it, not looking happy. “Okay… then….” He pulled out one with polka dots, smiling as she tugged on it hard possessively. “Okay…..” He let her hold onto it while she pointed at pants, getting her dressed and putting on her shoes, kissing her nose when she was all dressed. “Beautiful little girl….” I love you. Levi held her close, catching her puppy when she dropped it, nudging her nose with the soft paw as he walked her to the stairs. He came down carefully, happy to have the weight on his hip. My own little girl....

Mikhail was right behind Eren’s feet as he situated everything he needed by the door. I’m leaving tonight... Well, Mila will be fine with Levi taking care of her... Right? He swallowed, hearing Mikhail whine for his attention and he smiled softly, moving to put Mikhail’s vest on already so he didn’t have to rush and put it on him when they needed to go. Mila will be fine... She loves her daddy very much...

Levi ambled over to the kitchen table, setting Mila in her high chair, gently takin her puppy, kissing her forehead when she reached for him. “It's okay Honey, he's gonna sit right here for when you're done. We don't want him getting all messy, do we?” He gently set the puppy on the table where she could see him, getting her a bib and gently tickling her when she pouted, making her giggle. There's that smile. Levi looked up when he hear Mikhail whine, seeing Eren with a sad look on his face as he watched them. .... “You okay, Eren?” Why are you so upset...? Besides the obvious....

Eren nodded. “Y-Yeah…. I just wish I didn’t have to leave so soon....” He looked over towards where Lathe was just finishing up making dinner. At least I get to eat Dad’s food before I have to leave and I have no doubt that I’ll be making food for Vatri when I get there...

Levi nodded, going over to softly kiss him, their lips barely brushing. “Hannes needs you…. it says a lot how quick you are to drop everything and rush there.” It really does. Levi gave him a soft smile, going to sit, Mila between them as always.

Eren smiled as Levi pulled back, but he noticed how little Mila looked at him and always grabbed towards Levi in her senseless babbling. She hasn’t spoken her first word yet....
Chapter 111: Changes

The airports were hell. The flights were okay, but I got shit for having bought Mikhail a seat on the plane, and apparently they overbooked one flight and he was shouting about Mikhail being in a seat and the woman told him I’d purchased the seat for him and the guy went off the handle. He didn’t care that people had their phones out and even the woman behind me was defending me at that point. They delayed the flight because the guy had to be pulled off the flight. That was from Wichita to Vegas... Then from Vegas I flew to Chicago, and from there to Berlin. Those flights weren’t so bad. Berlin to Munich was another fucking nightmare with Mikhail in a seat beside me. I gave up and just let the woman yell at me that it wasn’t right for a dog to be sitting in a person’s spot, even if they were a service dog. They upgraded me to first class and she complained the whole trip... I got out of the airport without anyone really realizing who I was. Customs was fine and the line was short, so I rented the car at about 9pm here... which means it was two in the afternoon back home. I drove another half hour to Shiganshina, and finally got to Vatri’s home around 10 at night, one of the hands waiting for me and giving me the list of everything that was done on the daily and where the hospital was and when visiting hours were. He was helpful, and I swear he was hitting on me... He even asked if he needed me to go and be the translator at the hospital when I go... Then I may or may not have told him off in German to get his ass off Vatri’s porch and go home. I have 47 horses to take care of before 8 in the morning tomorrow... Eren sighed against the door and he opened up his phone, finding now new text messages.

EY: I’m home, I’m in one piece, I have an early morning again, so I need to sleep. Night babe, tell Mila I love her, and I love you too.

LA: Okay, I'll give her enough hugs and kisses for the both of us. Sleep well- Love you too.

Levi put his phone on sleep and set it in his pocket, turning back to Mila, the teeny toddler sitting on the floor with him in the living room, watching her pet Nene, the dog nosing her gently. Nene’s good with her... she knows to be gentle... Nene ducked her head away when Mila smacked at her face, Levi reaching to calm her. ...and she’s very patient. “Don't hit Nene, Mila. Gentle, okay?” Levi took her hand, helping her pet Nene without making her flinch. She’s getting acclimated to all the animals well. They all like her- and she needs to know not to harass them and make them upset.

Mila looked up to Levi from where she sat on the floor, her hand still in Nene’s fur. She shifted forward a bit, moving to crawl towards Nene to get closer. Mila gurgled a few words, smiling as Nene stayed still as she got to her side, putting both hands on her and rubbing her closed fists over her fur, giggling. Dahgie...

Levi smiled faintly, reaching for her hands. “Your hands are teeny little fists….” Levi took one of her hands, spreading her fingers and setting it on Nene’s back again. “Like that, Honey.” He did the same, showing his spread fingers, watching her slowly mimic him, her other fist opening. You're learning......it's gonna be a nightmare when you stop crawling everywhere and learn to walk and run... you'll be chasing the dogs down like there's no tomorrow... you're already trying like hell to
Mila continued to babble as she watched her hands open and close out of little fists. She kept them open as she put them against Nene’s fur, successfully getting her feet under her and standing as she held onto Nene’s fur. She giggled as she looked at Levi, giving him a toothy smile. Dahgie! Dahgie!

… ....she's standing. .....we’re all doomed. The house isn’t exactly baby proof. Levi smiled nevertheless, watching her steady legs. “Wow, you're up! I'm proud of you, Mila.” He was about to continue speaking when Nene slowly stood up, watching as Mila stayed up with Nene as her balance, the dog slowly taking a step. .....does Nene know how this works? Levi stood, dumbfounded when Nene very slowly tried leading Mila along, the toddler slipping, only to be caught by Levi. “I've got you, Honey. Come on, like this.” Levi took one small hand, the other hanging onto Nene’s coat, helping her take her first few steps. She's walking ....

Mila couldn’t stop giggling as she got her feet under her, holding onto Nene’s fur with a strong grip. Her smile was bright and filling the room, which quickly caught Jake’s attention, who watched Mila walk around. She stopped to stare at him, watching him stare back at her, but she began to cry. Muh? Muh Muh?

Levi looked at Jake, both of them looking at each other with surprise before Levi knelt down, hugging Mila close. “It's okay, Honey, don't cry. I'm right here, Jake was just watching you walk. We’re both so proud of you, Honey.” It's okay....

Mila still cried as her hands slowly clamped onto Levi’s shirt and refused to let go. Muh muh! She sniffled as she was raised up off the floor and into Levi’s arms, looking around her surroundings as the dogs all looked up towards where she was being held.

Ieva came to stand beside Jake, her hands on his shoulders. “Is she okay, Levi?” What happened? I heard giggling two seconds ago, I swear...

Levi shrugged one shoulder, bouncing her on one hip. “I think so…. she was giggling like mad while she was walking and then she stares at Jake for two seconds and starts crying…. I don't think she’s hungry, and she was changed half an hour ago…. I don't know... it's not your fault Jake, you didn't do anything.” Levi turned his head and kissed her forehead, moving to sit on the couch with her on his chest, his voice a quiet murmur. It's okay Honey....

Mila soon quieted, her crying spell over for the moment as she laid on Levi’s chest, reaching her fist to her mouth and mouthing at her own fist. Her teeth were still coming in and her teething
phase still in full swing. She sniffled, drool and snot running down her face as her head was against Levi’s chest. Her mop of hair stuck out all over the place still. Mila’s steel eyes watched Jake and Ieva leave the room, her eyes closing as she listened to Levi’s heartbeat, but it wasn’t Eren’s…. She noticed.

Levi smiled faintly as she quieted, reaching into his pocket for a wad of tissues, knowing to keep plenty on hand. *Messy tiny humans*… Levi gently wiped her face clean, wiping off her hand and shifting with her, reaching for a teething ring on the coffee table and giving it to her, letting her mouth at it on his chest. He sighed, playing with her thin hair, gently moving it back in place. *Tiny human… my own beautiful daughter…..*

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

……..*can I go home yet.* Hannes looked around the hospital room boredly and with distaste, his nose crinkling at the smell of antiseptic. *I hate the hospital…. when can I leave again? I have horses to take care of, why couldn't they just give me some pills and ship me home?* Hannes looked up to the door as it opened again with a done expression. *What, another nurse going to check my lungs? What does that make it, the fourth time today?* He blinked when he saw Eren in the door, his face slowly cracking into a smile, his voice a bit weaker than normal. <“Eren? Oh, I'm so happy you're here! Please tell me you’ve come to take me home. I can't stand it….”> He smiled nevertheless when Eren came up to him, accepting a tight hug. *I missed you.*

<“As much as you would love me to take you home, you’re stuck here… I’ve heard that they’ve had to drain your lungs a few times already… You’re not leaving.”> Eren was firm as he held onto Hannes, glad he was alright. *Thank god you’re not on death’s door, though I probably should’ve thought you’d be fine... I mean you are one tough motherfucker…*

Hannes frowned, grumbling when Eren let him go. <“I’m still convinced they’re not giving me the good drugs. Aren't these people supposed to just give me something and after a few minutes everything feels better?”>

<“No, Vatri, that's called morphine, and you are not getting your hands on any of that…”> Eren shook his head and chuckled. <“I got in last night…. Technically yesterday afternoon for me, and left the night before… I had to go through four airports to get here, Vatri… You’re staying in this damn hospital until you get your ass 100%”> *I expect no less from you!*

Hannes’ eyebrows shot up, giving Eren a smile, sitting up and reaching for him. <“You hustled over here for a grumpy old man like me?”> He smiled as Eren went in to give him another hug, pretending to put him in a choke hold. <“And now that I've got you, give me some damn morphine.”>
“Vatri! I can’t give you morphine! And I came over here because the doctor made it sound like you were on death’s doorstep!” Eren shouted, expertly getting out of his hair, a smile on his face. “When did you change me to be your health care proxy?” Don’t I need to sign off on that?

Hannes rolled his eyes, grinning. “Of course they scare you into thinking the funeral’s next week. And I did after I came home from that visit to America to see you…I was so happy you were alright and that you still gave a damn about me. …I don’t really have anyone else that cared. I knew I could trust you the most with my health.” You're responsible. And you won't make dumb decisions if and when the time for decisions comes.

Eren smiled and nodded. “Fair… Fair… But what do I do about the 47 horses you now own? Hmm?…. I woke up at six this morning and to do all the chores took me 3 hours with 5 other barn hands…” You have too much space, legitimately we had to take a ATV to get to the separate barns…

Hannes sighed, thinking about all of them. “I love all my horses… it feels weird to not be out there taking care of them… they're all alright? I hope the hands didn't give you too much trouble…. If any of them did, give me their names and I'll kick their asses for you.” Hopefully none of them got on your nerves….

Eren rolled his eyes. “Like you’re in any condition to kick asses right now… I’m fine, though the late night crew you got… That guy Moritz, he’s a total flirt, he thought I couldn’t speak German because I was from America… So am I allowed to instill the hand of God on them? They acted as if I knew nothing.” It was quite amusing that Charlie recognized me instantly and he let me hop on his back the way I used to… Vaulting over his rump much to the amazement of the two hands in that barn. He sat back until his back was against the bed, his legs dangling off the side as he laid at the end.

Hannes laughed, smiling. “Believe me, I could still get up from this bed and kick some major ass for you. But you have my permission to make sure they know you know your shit. And Moritz is…. he's Moritz. Feel free to harass him as you like, just don't get him killed or seriously injured unless he actually deserves it.” I don't want to have to deal with that lawsuit.

Eren rolled his eyes. “Yes, Vatri… No maiming… Got it, I’ll try not to… They were surprised when I got on Charlie, he seemed happy to see me, we even went around bareback for a bit.” Happy old horse… He’s like what, 35… 34 by now? I remember riding him around as my first ever horse… That was almost 20 years ago… Holy fuck I’m getting old…

Hannes smiled, thinking. “I'm glad you came and saw him… he’s getting pretty old, I'm sure it
made him happy to see a familiar face. You were always his favorite.”> Hannes smiled wistfully, remembering a tiny Eren riding the big horse, smiling like a million dollars. *I miss those days…*<

<“How’s your daughter doing? Is she on her two feet yet? She’ll be driving you nuts the instant she is.”> You were quite the little terror when you were two and three… you ran into *everything*… walls, tables, people, horses… thankfully the horses all just kinda stood there when you hit their legs…

<“No, not on her legs yet, she’s been trying to stand up on her own and hasn’t been successful yet… But you need to watch her carefully now, because she’s crawling **all** over the place.”> Eren’s smile faded a bit. <“She’s with Levi…. Oh, we got engaged too… I forgot to tell you that…”> *Probably should’ve told you that first…*

Hannes smiled, chuckling. <“She’ll be terrorizing the house soon enough, that's mistake number one- don't underestimate the ability of small humans to drive you insane in a new way every day. And Eren, I'm so happy for you two. I'm happy he makes you happy.”> *It's more than obvious how much he means to you. That's good enough for me.*

Eren smiled, chuckling a bit. <“She’s starting to teeth… And I swear Levi can read her like an open book and I can’t figure out when she’s hungry or just dropped her toy… At least he’s with her right now, she probably doesn’t even realize I’m gone.”> *I miss them though, already… It was too quiet without listening to her mumble in her sleep and Levi’s heart beat… It was too quiet in my room.*

Hannes gave him a gentle look, waving it off. <“Eh, I doubt things are going to be that easy back at home. Nothing ever goes easy when it comes to little kids. Trust me- I’d give it three or four more days before he’s calling you in a frantic tone saying Mila won't stop crying because she misses you. Believe me- sometimes I was sure you didn't give a damn about me and then after I left for two seconds to use the bathroom you’d cling to my leg because you missed me. She loves you, Eren. Whether you think so or not.”> *She's your own daughter. She loves you.*

Eren smiled and nodded, watching one of the nurses come in and squeal when she saw Eren. *And here come all the screaming women… Oh geez…* He tried to fend off their pleas for autographs, signing a few before he got the nurses to go and get the doctor. *I wanna talk with him about how he’s doing…*
Chapter 112: Never Underestimate the Baby

It's been a nightmare. Levi was trying to get Mila to quiet, trying everything he could to calm the piercing wails audible throughout the entire house. She won't stop crying and screaming and I don't know why…. She’s not hungry, her diaper’s clean, she has her puppy, I’ve been holding her and everyone’s tried to coo to her all day, and Nene licking her cheek only got her to quiet down for two seconds out of surprise… why…. She’s gonna wreck her voice screaming so much…. Levi struggled to get her to drink water, not knowing what to do. Why are you so upset? Five days without Eren and already this has gone to shit. ....wait. “Mila? Do you miss Mum?” Levi looked to her, trying to get some confirmation, realizing she quieted a bit when he said ‘Mum.’ “Do you miss Mum, Honey?”

Muh muh…. Mila quieted as she thought about Eren and looked around for him quickly beginning to cry all over again, her cries just short of being as loud as her screams. “Muh muh!” She cried as she held onto Levi’s shirt, wanting Eren to hold her. Muh muh!

Oh. Levi was so proud of her when he pulled her up into his arms. Her first word .... ....I need to get Eren on skype right the fuck now and stop her screeching. “You wanna see Mumma? Okay, we’ll get Mumma for you.” Levi pulled out his phone, typing with one hand.

LA: Eren, Mila has been screeching all day at the top of her lungs because she seriously fucking misses you

LA: She said her first word- Mumma

LA: She misses you so much and can you //please// Skype so that she doesn't ruin her little throat?

LA: We can't take any more screeching

EY: Levi, I’m at the hospital… Things got complicated yesterday, Vatri is getting his lungs drained again.

EY: I really can’t call right now…

EY: And it's late here… I’m waiting for Vatri’s procedure to get done before I head back home to take care of the horses again...

LA: I'm sorry, I just haven't been able to get her to quiet down at all...

LA: I'm gonna see if I can find a video of you somewhere on YouTube that she can listen to...

LA: But Eren even if you can't really call and just send a voice message for her to listen to

LA: That'd be wonderful
LA: I really hope things get better on your end.

EY: I hope so too, his fever isn’t breaking yet, I might be here much longer than New Year’s…

EY: There should be a ton of video’s on my YouTube…

EY: Try and get one that //doesn’t// have swearing in it!

LA: No shit, we’re not having her second word be ‘fuck’

LA: I’ll try that

LA: But if you find time and send a random video and I know you're seriously busy but if you do, I'm sure she'd love to hear from you

EY: I’ll try, and maybe the Der Mond video? It’s slow, it might get her to sleep?

LA: Oh my god if it gets her to nap I will miraculously love you even more than I already do

Levi went upstairs with Mila, murmuring to her as he did, searching for the video on his phone. Come on… where are you… Levi clicked on it, letting the ad play, kissing Mila’s nose when the song began playing, the sound filling the room. He slowly swayed with her. “Listen, Mila, it’s Mummy.” Please?

Muh muh! Muh muh! Mila’s cries quieted as she heard Eren’s voice as the song played. She stopped crying, listening to Eren’s voice, his head ducking against Levi’s shirt as he swayed. Mila was obviously tired as she listened, her whimpers quiet from being thirsty and her throat sore from crying and screaming.

Levi could hear the hoarseness of her whimpers, gently setting her in her crib with the song playing. “I'll be right back, Mila, don't you worry.” Levi ran off downstairs, getting the bottle he’d been trying to get her to drink from, coming back upstairs with it. He lifted her again from the crib, sighing with relief as she accepted it tiredly but without protest. Thank fuck, she’s drinking it…

Mila raised her arms up to hold onto the bottle as Levi fed it to her, her eyes closing after she sucked down the entire bottle. The song on repeat steadily calmed her down. Muh muh… Muh muh hul…

Levi sighed, setting the empty bottle down. One is enough for now. He burped her, still slowly swaying with her as the song played. He was relieved as she fell asleep, wiped out from her day-long tantrum, waiting a while before laying her in her crib with her stuffed puppy. He left the room, breathing a huge sigh of relief as he listened to the quiet house. Oh god... sweet, sweet silence....
Mila was only asleep for two hours before the crying started once again. Though this time it was mostly due to the full diaper she had and how thirsty she was. “Muhmuh!... Muhmuh!” Mila repeated the word, wanting Eren to come and pick her up. *Muhmuh hul!*

Levi was quick to come upstairs with another bottle, having one at the ready for when she woke up. He saw her in the crib, picking her up and quickly realizing her diaper was full. *Oh my.* “I’m sorry Mila, Mumma isn’t here right now… let me change your diaper and give you a drink, okay? We can listen to Mumma too.” Levi set his phone down on speaker, quickly turning on a playlist of music from Eren he’d put together, knowing it would come in handy. He set her on the changing table, glad that her cries quieted again when she heard his voice. *Thank god he has so many videos up…*

Mila let Levi clean her up, looking up to him as his brows furrowed in concentration. *Muhmuh?* She reached for her toes, grabbing them, making it a bit difficult for Levi to clean her up, but she giggled as she heard Eren. Although, the joy fell as the music stopped from the incoming skype call. Her eyes closed almost immediately and her tears formed quickly. *Wah muhmuh …*

Levi’s eyes widened as he saw the call incoming, immediately accepting it when he saw the name, propping the phone up. “Eren! Eren, I’m just cleaning Mila up, I’m so glad you called.” *She’s about to have a meltdown ….*

Eren was holding the phone to his face looking as Mila turned to look at him. He waved to her, smiling. “Hi Mila. How’s my baby doing? Are you being a good girl?” *I know you weren’t happy today…*

Mila’s eyes widened as she reached for the phone, looking behind it for Eren, expecting him to be there. “Muhmuh?” Her tone was questioning as she tried to touch Eren’s face.

Levi finished getting her dressed, picking her and the phone up to sit on the bed with her in his lap. Levi smiled softly, bouncing her with his leg. “It’s Mumma, Mila.” Levi looked up to Eren, shaking his head. *It’s been a goddamned nightmare but we love her anyway.*

Mila’s smile had returned as she saw Eren, reaching out to try and touch the screen. “Muhmuh… Muhmuh.” She held both of her arms out towards the phone, as if Eren could reach through it and hold her like she wanted him to do. *Muhmuh hul…*

Levi gave her a small smile. “Eren can’t pick you up, Mila…. it's him, but it’s a video.” He tapped
one part of the screen, the surface flat. “I'm sorry Honey….” Please don't cry.

Mila was confused as he spoke, looking up to Levi with confusion and holding her arms out for Eren still. Mu mhuh hul… Her arms waved for him to pick her up, wanting to be held by him.

“I’m sorry honey, I’m not there…. I’m sorry baby…” Eren’s heart hurt as he watched her try and grab for him, and want him to hold her. Awe… She really misses me… I can only imagine how much…

Levi shifted Mila a bit, his arm solidly wound around her. “I'm sorry Honey… Eren will be home soon though. And when he’s home he’ll scoop you right up and he’ll hold you as long as you want, m’kay? Mumma misses you too, you know.” Levi kissed her temple, gently bouncing her. Please don't be upset that he can't hold you….

Mila was quiet for the rest of the skype call, falling asleep to Eren’s voice, and didn’t wake up when Levi set her down in the crib. Mu mhuh...

Eren sighed in relief as she fell asleep. “Are you holding up alright?” I can only imagine that I’ll be here for awhile. Vatri’s gotten worse since I got here...

Levi gently kissed Mila’s forehead before setting her in the crib, sighing when he took the phone with him to the nook. “Just barely… I get the feeling she’ll wake up screeching for you again…. she misses you a lot…” She doesn't know how to deal with not having you around…. she wants you to be here… “Did you know she stood up on her own yesterday? She looked so happy when Nene and I helped her take her first steps…. and she looked so upset when Jake was there to watch… but Mumma wasn't.”…. she's growing up… and she wants you to be there when she does...

“She stood up on her own?” Eren sounded surprised and his face showed both how tired and how happy he was. “That’s great to hear… You and Dad are gonna have to baby proof the house, especially with Mom expecting twins too…” Oh my gosh, we’re gonna have so many small children running around soon… Ah, my heart … “Vatri’s fever isn’t breaking and it doesn’t appear the antibiotics are working… So their gonna try giving him a different one…” He needs to get better… He needs to…

Levi nodded, smiling faintly. “Yeah, we have to make sure everything is set up so they don't run into everything and break things…. we need to get playpen fencing… it'll keep them corralled until they learn how to climb over it…” And they'll learn. Eventually, they will. “We’re gonna have lots of tiny humans running around soon… …I really hope things get better for him. He’ll get better. It might take time, but something will work enough to break his fever and get him better.” Something
Eren nodded and rubbed at his eyes, trying to hide the tears that formed. “I’m sorry… I know it’s only 9 there… But it’s like four in the morning here… I need to wake up in an hour…” Shit… I can’t believe I’ve barely got time to sleep at this point… Or eat… I don’t remember when the last time I ate was…

Levi’s eyes widened, sputtering. “Eren, you need to sleep! You're not gonna be any use over there if you're dead on your feet. Hannes has people over there helping take care of the horses, right? Let them work and sleep for at least three or four hours… or sleep in the hospital room so you're there for Hannes if something changes. But you need to sleep. If you keep this up I will personally fly over there with Mila and smack you upside the head, then force you to sleep. Take care of yourself.” Please.

“I know… I know… I just, I came home at 10, and then at 11 they called me that they needed to drain his lungs again, so I went back and I just… He’s so pale… He looks like he’s not gonna make it…” Eren sniffled as he rubbed at his face. I need to sleep… maybe if I cry myself to sleep I’ll be able to actually sleep and not worry he’s gonna die on me…

Levi’s features softened, his voice gentle. Fuck… why can't I be there? You need a hug… and moral support… “Eren, don't say that. Hannes is gonna be okay. He has very qualified doctors looking after him and monitoring him. They're not gonna let pneumonia take him- trust me. He'll be okay. It could take time, and plenty of it, but he'll be okay.”……..I should be there with you… you shouldn't do this alone.
Chapter 113: German Living

…..hell hath no more fury than a baby upset. Levi cradled Mila to his chest, waiting for the taxi to drive them to the hospital, the driver not very talkative, which he was grateful for. The day after that Skype call Mila woke up as a screaming terror again and we just couldn't take it. I practically had Eren’s music playing nonstop of shuffle for her to keep her from crying and screaming herself hoarse. I applied her for a passport that day so we could go and see Eren… we were lucky it got here so fast. It’d been four weeks before it came in the mail, and I can understand that, given she’s a tiny baby who can’t really commit any crimes. Getting her through customs was easy… and the plane ride would’ve been a lot worse if she didn’t have her over-ear headphones on. They’re the fancy noise-cancelling ones, but she cried when her ears popped… and I can understand that. Your ears hurt like a bitch after ascending and descending… but it went okay. She slept a lot of the ride and if she wasn’t sleeping she was content to let me play with her and her puppy. She’s still teething… that’s a thing. I just… it could’ve been worse. And I’m glad it's over because she can stop missing Eren so much now. Hannes is…. he's alive. But he's still in bad shape. But we’re hoping. Levi thanked the man when he was dropped off, thankful that he got his luggage out of the trunk for him, wheeling it inside after paying him, Mila in the other arm with a duffle bag on his shoulder.

We have enough to last us for a few weeks… and I’m really glad that my leg is strong enough to let me carry so much at once… I only barely felt the strain in the airport. It's like… kinda like normal. Levi found getting directions to Hannes’ room was rather easy, signing in and walking down the hall, Mila staring with wide eyes around the wing. He smiled faintly when he saw the room number, knocking quietly. He heard a weak ‘come in,’ opening the door and nudging it open with his foot, coming inside and stopping short as he took in the room. Hannes looked grumpy and pale as he looked to the door before he recognized Levi, Eren looking extremely tired as he slumped over the end of the bed, as pale if not paler than Hannes. Oh my god. <“Hey, thought we’d come say hello.”> Levi moved the luggage and duffle bag against the wall, coming up to Eren when he lifted his head, feeling his head spin as he sat up.

Fuck… Mila’s gonna want me to hold her… He didn’t realize he let out a groan as he sat back, reaching his arms out towards his over excited daughter as she moved all around in Levi’s arms wanting Eren to hold her. “This is gonna be confusing for her, one moment it will be English, then the next will be German…” He murmured, not even realizing how badly his arms were shaking as he held his arms out for her. I wanna hold my daughter… But I don’t know how long I’ll be able to with how dizzy I am, as long as I sit back in the chair I should be fine…

Levi looked at his state warily, shifting Mila as she squirmed. You don’t look too good…. like you’d drop her… “Here.” Levi moved to sit next to Eren, giving him Mila and tugging them both into his lap, making sure they were secure. Here… you won’t fall or drop her now. He smiled as Mila clung to Eren, her face bright as she giggled uncontrollably.

Eren smiled as Mila giggled, leaning down to peck her forehead as she held onto him. “When did you land?” His voice was ragged as he leaned his head against Levi. I’m exhausted… I stayed here
last night…

“Muhmuh! Muhmuh!” Mila babbled happily as she clung to Eren’s shirt, a huge smile on her face. *Muhmuh hu!*

Levi held them both close, nuzzling into Eren’s neck. “We landed maybe two hours ago… we came straight here from the airport. …Eren, I'm sorry, but you look terrible … have you been eating?” Levi sounded legitimately worried, feeling Eren’s side. *You’re thinner…*

Eren’s eyes were half way closed already. “I-I think I ate some toast….” *I’m not sure what morning that was anymore, they all blur together now…. “You could’ve told me you were coming…”* He murmured, nuzzling his head against Levi’s shoulder. He didn’t mind Mila between them, holding onto his shirt and playing with the buttons. *I’m exhausted… I don’t know what the last time I slept was…*

Levi looked worried, keeping him from falling as Eren fell asleep, keeping Mila from squirming out of their laps. He turned after he heard a cough, giving Hannes a sheepish look. *< “It's good to see you again Hannes. Holding up somewhat?”> You look like the embodiment of death, but I can't exactly tell you that.*

< “Why can’t they just give me the good drugs and let me go home? I wanna get back to my horses, I’ve been in this place for too damn long.”> The older man spoke a bit harshly, obviously annoyed with the amount of time he’d spent here. *I wanna go home! Eren’s barely getting sleep because he’s worried, and I don’t want him to worry so much… I keep trying to get him to eat too and made sure the nurses forced him to eat the other day…*

Levi chuckled, shrugging one shoulder. *<“I’m sure if they had a miracle drug to give you, they would. And Eren’s been taking good care of your horses. You’ll be able to go home eventually and take care of all of them. It sucks being stuck here… believe me, I've had my own share of living in hospitals….”> Yeah… not fun. <“Do you know if Eren’s been eating or sleeping at all? He looks like death and I'm worried…”> He's probably been too worried about you and your horses to worry about food or sleep….*

< “I’m not sure, I can’t stay awake much longer than two hours at a time… I know he’s been here this whole week, and he’s had a barn hand come and bring him clothes, as well as updates on the horses…. I know he’s worried… I know that's why he rushed here, but I fear it's taking its toll on him.”> Hannes had to pause a few times to cough, his body shaking but not as badly as it had early in the morning. *My fever hasn’t really gone away either… So he’s really stressing…*
Levi nodded, looking worried for the both of them, looking to Eren again. The man was pale as a ghost, the circles under his eyes painfully dark. He's so exhausted... <"He looks so tired…"> He needs a break... Levi sighed, not knowing what to do for the moment, especially when Mila started squirming even more. Levi tried to calm her, tugging her close to his chest. He shook Eren awake, his perch on the bed delicate. “Eren, you're about to fall. Come on.” Levi helped Eren ease down to sit on the floor, Mila immediately getting to her feet when she was set down, slowly walking over to the side of Hannes’ bed, tugging on the sheet. “Mila, that's not for you.” Levi reached for her, trying to get her attention from where he was stuck on the floor, Eren’s head in his lap. Don't crash into anything... Hannes... help..., 

Hannes looked down to Mila, slowly moving his hands to her shoulders and catching her. <"Gotcha!”> I see she’s already started to really walk. He shifted enough to pull her up into the hospital bed with him and made sure that she didn’t tangle her with wires. <"Hello Mila.”> Are you adorable....

Levi smiled faintly as Hannes caught Mila, seeing the toddler look at him with confusion. <"We haven't taught her any German yet. She’s barely said ‘Mumma.’ Doesn't mean she doesn't like you anyway.”> Levi smirked as Mila grabbed at Hannes’ nose, the man making a face at her. This is too adorable....

<"Ah, well, I remember when Eren was this small…. He was adorable, but a little devil, you'll have to watch where she is in the house when you guys go back, she’ll disappear in an instant…”> Believe me, I turned my back on Eren for not even a minute and he was gone, out the doggie door and into the barn already by that point... Running into everything ...

Levi chuckled, nodding. < “Oh I know, once she learned to walk by herself she’s been running everywhere. We’re lucky that the dogs all love her and herd her away from dangerous places- she almost ran and fell down the stairs already, she managed to get out of her crib somehow… Nene woke up and blocked her way; she got lucky. But I've been keeping an eye on her a lot lately.”> She's an energetic little thing....

<“Ah I see, she’s a little escape artist like her father… I swear, once Eren got to walking on his two feet at 8 months old, he escaped the crib almost on the daily, we had to practically lock him into it at one point and he still managed to escape.”> The escapist genes have been passed down I see. He chuckled as Mila played with his nose, unsure of what to make of his words. She still doesn't know what the hell I’m saying... <"So if she gonna learn German first? Or English?”> I would imagine Eren wanting her to be fluent as well.

< “English first… but she’s surely going to be learning German too… once she has an okay grip on some English we’ll start talking to her in German too.”> Levi explained, petting Eren’s hair, chuckling as he thought about a tiny Eren escaping his crib and causing havoc. That's adorable...
Hannes nodded, giving Mila a finger to play with, making sure she didn’t pull at the cords he was attached to. <“That’s good, and I assume you’ll teach her sign language and French as well?”> I remember someone saying something about people being fluent in your house.... <“Are you still living with Eren’s parents?”> His voice quiet as he saw Levi brushing Eren’s hair back. They’re adorable...

Levi glanced up at that, nodding. <“We still are, yeah… I think Eren wanted to have a house built a ways down the road… but I don't know. I wouldn't staying… and it's not like we’re… what's the word, mooching off of them? We help pay the bills… and I think they're glad we help keep the foster kids they have out of trouble…”> Levi faintly smiled. <“But I think we’d both like a place of our own… somewhere that's just ours. ...she’ll probably learn sign language… French…..”> Levi hesitated, thinking. <“Mom and Dad are both fluent, and a lot of their friends are… as am I…. but I don't think that'll be one she’ll learn. We have to be able to talk without her understanding somehow. We need to keep our secrets.”> Levi smirked as Hannes chuckled, sighing deeply. I don't know what we’re gonna do about housing… ....I'd kinda like to have our own place...

Hannes nodded, gently bouncing Mila as she whined a bit, trying to figure out why the hospital gown felt weird. He chuckled, giving her back his finger, which she took. <“Wait until Eren puts her on one of your horses… I hope she’ll be just as good a rider as him…”> She'll just wanna be around the horses all the time... <“And keep an eye on the doggy doors if you guys have any, Eren used them as escape routes to get to the barn…”> That was a nightmare trying to figure out how he got outside so quickly, especially when he couldn’t reach the door knob...

Levi chuckled, imagining the scene. <“I get the feeling as soon as she sees one of the dogs doing it she’ll start doing it too… that'll be fun panicking about where she went...and I’m sure Eren would love to put her on a horse as soon as possible. If she's anything like him, she’ll fall in love instantly.”> Eren loves horses... I'm sure Mila will too.

<“Knowing Eren he’s gonna put her on Charlie before you guys leave. I can see it happening alread-”> Hannes was cut off due to a coughing fit, holding Mila with one arm, while coughing into the other. Damn, my throat hurts. <“Why don’t you take Eren back to my home? Take your luggage with you… I can watch Mila for you until you come back.”> Eren’s keys are in his pocket, and you’ll be fine, we drive on the same side of the road as you...

Levi looked unsure for a moment, looking back to Eren, carding a hand through his hair again. He needs rest... and you'll take care of Mila... Levi begrudgingly nodded, giving the man a grateful look. <“Okay, I'll get him home and in bed... and I'll be back for Mila... and I'll probably stay until Eren calls and demands to know how he got home and to come back.”> Levi smirked. It'll happen.
Directions to my house are rather simple… When you pull out of the parking lot, make a left, then keep going until you see a sign for Bavarian Warmbloods Stables… It’s on the right…”

Pretty easy to get to and the horses’ll be out in the pastures by then…

Simple. <“Alright, thank you… I’ll try not to leave you with her alone too long in case she gets fussy… and I’ll make sure Eren’s taken care of.”> Levi shifted, feeling in Eren’s pockets for car keys, pulling them out. <“I’ll figure out which car is yours. I’ll see you in a little while.”> Levi scooped Eren up off the floor, taking him from the room and down the hall, his weight not bothering him much. You’re lighter than I remember… Levi managed miraculously to get Eren in the truck and home, settling him into the room that had Eren’s clothes and hoodies strewn about. He took off his shoes before laying him down, tucking him in. He left a note on the side table and kissed his head before leaving again, not wanting to leave Hannes in charge of Mila for too long. She can get fussy… and she’ll probably want to walk around some, play a bit…

Hannes wasn’t in the room by the time Levi came back, nor was Mila. The two of them in a break room with the nurses as they gushed over Mila, who seemed to enjoy the attention. Hannes couldn’t help showing off his granddaughter of sorts and he was proud that she wasn’t fussy at all. She’s a good kid, and she’ll keep Eren on his toes, which is good. The kid deserves it after how much he made me panic over him…

Levi looked around for them, taking the duffel bag with Mila’s things as he hunted for them, eventually having to go to the front desk and talk to one of the nurses. <“Uhm, excuse me? I'm looking for Hannes, he's not in his room…”> He kinda has my daughter, so…

<“Oh he’s the one with the baby right?”> She watched as Levi nodded and she led him towards the large break room and where one of the nurses was holding Mila while Hannes watched in a wheelchair. <“She’s your’s right? She’s very cute.”> The nurse let him into the room as Mila was passed to another nurse, her grip still on her toy. Muhmuh? Muhmuh?

Levi saw Hannes’ proud expression as the nurses all cooed over the little girl, Mila looking around at all of them, her expression a bit confused, but happy with the attention. Levi felt a surge of protectiveness that startled him, taking a step forward to get her before catching himself. It’s not like they’re gonna hurt her, she’s fine…. She’s fine. Levi breathed an internal sigh of relief when the last nurse in the break room handed her back, holding her close. He smiled faintly as Mila gripped his shirt. She’s had her fill of attention I guess… she’s her own little celebrity I suppose.

Mila whimpered when she was in Levi’s arms. “Muhmuh? Muhmuh h-hul…” Muhmuh! Her eyes looked sad as she looked around the room without seeing Eren again. Muhmuh!

Levi’s features softened, giving her forehead a kiss. “Mumma is sleeping at Hannes’ house… he’s really tired. Mumma will hold you when he’s awake and rested, okay? He needs his sleep.” Levi
gently bounced her, hoping she didn't cry. *Please don't cry… I shouldn't go home with you and leave you alone with a comatose Eren*….

Hannes watched as Mila asked for Eren again, starting her small cries as she buried her face into Levi’s shirt. *Oh no… She wants Eren…*<“Levi, you can take her to the house and go sleep too, I can sleep while you guys are gone. I’ll be fine, and they’ll call Eren if anything goes wrong…”>

*I’ll be fine, you probably would want to sleep too. I know Eren was in the air for a long time, but were you?*

Levi sighed, giving him a grateful look. <“Thanks… I could use the rest, and Mila really wants Eren… I’ll grab my bag from the room and go then. We’ll see you again later, Hannes.”> Levi left and headed for the room, bouncing Mila, trying to calm her with his murmurs. “We’re gonna go see Mumma now, Honey, okay?” He grabbed his suitcase, heading for the truck and driving home. It wasn't that much longer before Levi was slipping into bed with Eren, settling Mila on Eren’s chest as he laid flat on his back. Levi slung one leg over Eren’s, hanging onto both of them. Mila quieted as she was set on Eren, settling in and soon falling asleep with the both of them. *I could use a good nap*….

Mila woke up after a few hours as she’d slept mostly on the plane. She still felt Levi’s arms around her back, slowly crawling up Eren’s chest and staring at his face. She poked him, as if trying to see if he would wake up, doing the same for Levi when Eren didn’t budge. When she got out of Levi’s hold she made her way to the floor where Mikhail laid. She walked over to him petting him ‘gently’ as Levi had taught her to do. “Dahgie.” She murmured quietly as she pet Mikhail who stayed still for her. *Dahgie!*

Levi stirred as he heard a sound, picking his head up and thinking. *Huh…? What’s…* Levi suddenly realized Mila was absent, sitting up and looking around for her, seeing her petting Mikhail on the floor. *She's okay…* “Mila?” Levi got up from the bed, stretching and ambling around to get her. He was surprised when she didn't come to his open arms, instead running around him and out the door. ....*huh?*

Mila followed Mikhail through the doggie door in the front and followed him towards one of the fences. She was fast as she followed the dog around, giggling the whole time. Soon enough she dropped to her knees to follow Mikhail out into one of the pastures. *Dahgie! Peh dahgie!*

*What!?* Levi ran after her, watching her use the doggy door with shocked eyes, unlocking the door and barely remembering to close it before he was running barefoot after Mila. “Honey, come back! You don't even have shoes on!” Levi reached one of the fences, easily hopping over it and running after them, whistling for Mikhail. *Come on, get back here! How are your tiny legs going that fast!?*

Mikhail stopped and came back coming into a clearing where he could be seen by Levi…… But
Mila wasn’t with him, and she was shorter than the tall grass she was running through. She giggled as she was headed towards the tall horses in the pasture at the other end, already they noticed something in the grass and we're starting to get spooked. *Peh dahgie!*

Levi was close to panicking as he heard Mila’s giggles still moving away from him, looking at Mikhail as he followed him. “Mikhail, get Mila.” Levi didn't stop running, grateful when Mikhail peeled ahead of him and into the tall grass. *Where is she!?* Levi heard a soft umph and the piercing whinny of a spooked horse, watching it rear up high before trotting away, his heart stopping as he heard a loud wail. *Fuck, did she get stepped on!?* Levi found her in the grass, Mikhail licking her cheek as she cried, on her back and stuck in the grass. *She just fell over*... Levi heaved her up into his arms, holding her close to his chest. “Oh my god, Mila, you're okay… oh I'm so glad you're okay…” Levi pressed kisses all over her cheeks, starting back for the house. “Don't you ever scare me like that again…” *Please… no more heart attacks*....

Mila still cried as she was picked up though she quieted as one of the horses came over to them curiously. “Dahgie…” She held her hand out stretched towards the horse, thinking it an oversized dog. She sniffled, quickly forgetting the tears she shed. *Peh Dahgie!*

Levi turned as the horse approached, smiling faintly as she spoke. “This isn't a doggie… it's a horsie.” Levi reached for the horse as it came close, gently petting it’s face. He moved them to pet their neck, the horse chill with them. “See? Horsie.” He kissed her cheek when Mila reached to pet them, a look of wonder in her eyes. *It's a big horse. Lots bigger than you.*

“Dahgie?” She asked questioningly, looking up to Levi as she reached to pet the coarse hair with two hands, which quickly became dirty due to the horse having been outside and rolling around recently. Mila flinched as the horse tossed it head as it sneezed, causing her to tense up in Levi’s hold from the sudden movement. *Dahgie?*

Levi held her close, chuckling as she looked scared when the horse sneezed. “The horsie just sneezed, Honey. They're fine. You're okay.” Levi petted them again, looking to her. “Horsie. Can you say horsie?” *You've got two so far… make it three*....

“Peh dahgie.” Mila continued to pet the horse, giggling as it turned it’s head and sniffed near her ears, letting out a sharp squeal of joy. *Dahgie!*

Levi chuckled, holding her close. “Pet horsie. This is a horsie, Hon. That's a doggie.” Levi pointed to Mikhail. “This is horsie.” Levi pointed to the horse sniffing her. “Horsie.” *It's a horsie. If it's not, then damn that's a big dog.*
Mila just stared blankly at Levi for a few moments before grabbing his shirt with her dirty hands. “Muhmuh…” Muhmuh? Peh dahgie?

…..Mumma, doggie, and pet. …..close enough. Levi made a face as she left dirty handprints on his shirt, giving her nose a kiss anyway. “Okay, let’s go get your hands washed and see Mumma, okay?” Levi walked them back to the house, carefully getting them over the fence and to the home. He went right to the sink, washing their hands and going to change her out of her dirty clothes, as well as changing his own shirt. Don’t want dirt everywhere… Levi set the dirty clothes neatly aside, making sure the door was closed so Mila couldn’t run off, picking her back up and going over to where Eren was still knocked out, settling back in the bed with Mila between them. ….I have my own family now. ….I love you two….

Mila crawled up onto Levi’s chest, gripping at the fabric of his shirt with interest. She started to drool a bit as she was intent at gripping the fabric letting it go flat and then gripping and pulling it again. …. Huh? She seemed to be amazed as she let go of the shirt and watched it flatten out against Levi’s chest.

Levi smirked as she played with his shirt, the sport mesh quick to snap back against his chest. Mhm. My shirt does that. Levi was happy to let her play with his shirt, his head heavy on the pillow. I’m still so tired… but you’re awake, and god knows you need supervision. … unless we lock the door. Levi got up with her, going to do just that before laying back down. Better.

Mila continued to grab at Levi’s shirt, watching it snap back into place quickly. She watched with fascination for awhile, staying quiet as both of her parents slept. Soon enough she started to look around the room for anything of interest. Muhmuh?

Levi slept soundly with Mila on his chest, Eren and Levi shifting closer to each other in their sleep. Levi blinked awake when he heard sniffling, Mila trying to get his attention as she cried. Huh? He looked to the time, understanding. “Hungry?” He picked her up, going to get the baby food from her bag, taking her to the kitchen. She stayed mostly still as he fed her, wiping her mouth clean when she was full, going to play with her in the living room, feeling well rested. She’s too cute…. After a while Mila was happy to drape herself over Mikhail, a teething ring in her mouth and her hands buried in his fur.

Eren blinked awake as he heard giggling, feeling how stiff his body was as he tried to shift, looking around the room in confusion. When the hell did I get home….?…… Hannes! Eren instantly bolted upright and noticed his shoes were off, quickly slipping them on and patting himself down for his key. Keys… Keys… Where are my keys?

Levi heard hurried footsteps in the bedroom, scooping Mila up and going to the bedroom, Eren
rushing out just as he reached it, nearly crashing into him. “Eren, whoa!” Levi rested a hand on his shoulder, seeing the frantic look in his eyes. “It’s-”

“Where are my keys?!” Eren asked, freaking out a bit. *I need to get back to Vatri… I need to know he’s okay, how the fuck did I even get here?!

“Eren, I have them, it’s okay-” Levi paused as he heard Mila whimper, looking down to see her teary eyes. *Oh no… “Nonono not you Mila… you’re perfect, it’s okay.” Levi kissed her head, looking up to Eren again as he bounced her, wanting to keep her crying at bay. “Eren, at least eat something before we go back to the hospital. Hannes told me to take you home and let you sleep. You looked like death and if you can’t even remember when you last ate then there’s a problem.” You need to eat.

Eren looked at Levi with confusion. “Levi… I need to go to Vatri! He’s in the hospital, I need to make sure he’s alright!” I need to! He was getting slightly agitated, not really noticing how loudly his stomach growled. I don’t care if I can’t eat...

Levi sighed, going to get Mila’s things together. “Let me get Mila’s stuff packed and I’ll drive us. Here.” Levi handed Eren his daughter, not listening to his momentary protest before going back to packing. *Just hold the baby and let me pack.

Eren held Mila to his chest, gently bouncing her in his arms. “Has Mila eaten?” I hope she did… It’s after lunchtime for her… But I’m not sure cause her internal clock is all screwed up now. He winced as he heard his stomach growl which of course startled Mila and she started to whimper, close to crying. “No baby, shhh… Mumma’s got you.”

“She ate, I made sure of it. But you obviously haven’t.” Levi slung the duffel bag over his shoulder, coming back over, kissing Mila’s cheek. “Don't worry Honey, Mumma is hungry is all. You're okay.” Levi looked at Eren pointedly. “The instant we get there we’re getting you food, for Mila’s sake if not yours. Scaring her with your stomach isn't that great of a thing.” Nah- don't make her cry please...

Eren nodded, ushering them outside and towards the car. At least she ate… But i still can’t believe you guys came… I could’ve handled this on my own… maybe… He was quiet as he got into the car, getting in the driver’s seat before realizing he didn’t have the keys and reaching an open palm out for them. His eyes didn’t come up to meet Levi’s. Is he mad at me? He sounded kinda angry… But I can’t tell if he’s angry with me or just stressed… It could be either… it could be both… he’s angry with me isn’t he?
Levi fished for the keys, handing them over. He saw the look on his face, leaning over the console, looking up to him. He gently pulled his face down, giving the corner of his lips a soft peck. “I love you, Eren.” I really do."

Eren couldn’t stop the blush that formed on his cheeks. Shit… He smiled but turned away and started the car, heading towards the long driveway to the road. I swear I can’t tell anymore when he gets really angry at me."

Levi was quiet for the short ride, getting Mila out of the back with her carrier and her bag. Levi started walking up to the lobby with Eren, leaning over and kissing his cheek again. Because I can. They went inside, Levi letting Eren speed walk to Hannes’ room. He’s gonna be fine, he looked okay when he showed off his sorta granddaughter. I’m sure a few hours didn't kill him.

Eren got to the door and opened it without knocking, a sigh leaving him in relief. Hannes was laying in his hospital bed, asleep, and his color seemed to have returned to his face. Oh thank god… He’s okay. He smiled, trying not to let tears fall from the slight improvement he had. His color is coming back…. Did his fever break?

Levi came in soon after him, smiling faintly when he saw the pale skin slowly regaining its color. He looks better…. Levi set down the bag as well as Mila for a moment, fishing out a baby carrier. “Now normally I make you carry her around, but since you're about to be eating like a starved wolf…” Levi put the harness on, soon having a little Mila squirming against his chest before making a happy noise at the freedom of her limbs. “Alright-” Levi looked to Eren as he looked ready to burst out laughing, giving him a glare, the effects sharply weakened by the presence of the child on his front. “Something funny?” ......I probably do look ridiculous."

Eren had raised a hand to his mouth to prevent from laughing and waking Hannes. “From head to toe…. She’s almost half the size of you already.” I wonder who’s genes she got for that? Will she be my height? Levi’s height? Between us? Eren couldn’t help but watch as Mila still squirmed against Levi’s chest. It's fucking adorable too…. He pulled out his phone and got about 20 pictures in a few seconds.

Levi glared at the camera, sighing as Eren smiled widely. “...let's go get you food.” Levi shook his head, walking from the room and down the hall, Eren at his side. He glanced over as Eren looked over his shoulder, blankly watching the empty hall in front of them. He gasped as Eren quickly moved and kissed his neck, feeling a flush fight it's way onto his cheeks. <“....You bastard....”> Levi’s voice was faintly breathless, a bit closer to him as they walked. I missed you... I missed having you there...

Eren chuckled, though the sound was quickly covered by the sound of his stomach growling. Holy fuck it’s loud… He covered his stomach with his arms in embarrassment. <“I guess I could eat
Levi smirked, tugging him along. “Yeah, you need to eat. You need to not just take care of Hannes; you're supposed to take care of yourself too. But since you haven't done it on your own, it's become my job to make you.”> Yeah. You've been letting yourself go to shit and it's not good.

Eren nodded as he was tugged along, accepting his fate as Levi led them to the small cafeteria. I don’t know what kind of food they would have here… For all I know it’s macaroni and cheese…

Levi led him inside, looking around. “Alright, Eren, pick something or I'm gonna pick for you.”> Whatever gets food in your stomach fastest.

Eren looked at the few options he had, deciding on a sandwich as well as a yogurt parfait. This I should be able to eat… I hope… He held up his choice for Levi to see he decided before he went to go and pay. I have the German cash, I doubt you do…

Levi nodded in approval, looking around and getting himself some soup. Levi fished in his wallet when he went to pay, pulling out the German printed Euro to Eren’s surprise. I made sure I had cash on me. He paid for the soup, following Eren to a table, looking around and fetching Mila a high chair. I kinda can't eat with you attached to me.

Eren settled down to eat, his stomach grumbling the whole time. Shit, I really don’t remember when the last time I ate was. He shook his head, watching as Mila fought Levi as he tried to put her in the high chair. She doesn’t wanna go in it… She’s used to being on someone’s knee…

Levi sighed as Mila got close to tears, lifting her up and into his lap instead. He made sure she was settled, leaning down, murmuring against her hair. “You're gonna behave if I let you stay in my lap, right?” He heard an unintelligible word, but it sounded happy, so Levi decided to let it go. He started to eat, gently bouncing Mila on his leg. We’re spoiling you rotten...

Eren ate with Levi in the peaceful silence that was only disturbed with Mila’s random babbles as she chewed on a teething toy. <<“So she’s started to walk by herself?”> I still haven’t really seen her walk on her own… God, I’m a horrible parent for not being there for her…

<<“Yeah, she has. She's been running, too. And she’s taking after you. When I woke up earlier today she’d gotten off the bed, pet Mikhail, then run with Mikhail outside through the doggy door and I had to chase after her. She’s turning into a little escape artist.”> Those tiny damn legs move
Eren chuckled a bit and smiled softly. \("\text{Think she’ll have the musical talent to boot?}\)\) I hope she does, she can start early that way... But if she doesn’t I don’t know what to do... \("\text{I hope she never goes through what I went through with either of us or with anyone else}\)\) He took a bite of his sandwich, his eyes solemn. \(\text{No one should ever go through what I went through}\)

Levi faintly smiled, setting down his spoon. \("\text{I have a feeling that if you're not the one setting her in front of the piano, Dad will beat you to it. …and she’ll have a good life. We’ll give her lots of love and she’ll be happy and know what a good relationship is. And know how to kick ass if she needs to.}\)\) Levi gently nudged Eren's foot with his own, giving him a reassuring look as he held Mila close, gently pecking her cheek. “Our beautiful little daughter…” I love you.

Eren nodded, chewing as he listened to the buzz around the small cafeteria. \("\text{We’re putting her on a horse tomorrow…}\)\) If Vatri’s fever’s broken then I don’t have to stay for the whole day, just have to visit... I still need to visit Mom...

Levi sighed, shaking his head. \("\text{Of course…. she thinks they're just really big dogs. She wouldn't say horse.}\)\) ……I can kinda understand that, but still. Horses. \("\text{I think she should at least be able to say horse before being allowed to ride one.}\)\) It seems logical....

\("\text{I didn’t really speak for a year after I first got on a horse… I was practically mute until Charlie helped me to open up a bit more… honestly I don’t care, I think you’re just jealous cause she hasn’t called for you yet.}\)\) Eren pointed out, switching over to his parfait. Opening the plastic top and then spooning it into his mouth. Damn it’s good...

Levi frowned, looking down to Mila, speaking in jest. \("\text{What’s the big idea? Do you love him more than me?}\)\) Levi watched Mila look up to him with wide eyes, both of them having a staring contest before she looked away, reaching for Eren across the table. \("\text{I knew it. I'm obsolete.}\)\) Levi gave Eren a weak look, though he couldn't help the tug in his chest. ... she hasn't asked for Daddy yet... ...why not...? \("\text{As long as we’re careful to make sure she doesn't fall off.}\)\) I want her to be okay....

\("\text{You think I’m just gonna let her sit up there by herself? You must be crazy…}\)\) Eren clarified and watched Mila reach out to him, but quickly lost interest as Levi gave her a teething toy. Who knows... maybe she’ll have the attention disorder that I probably had when I was a kid... He shifted a bit as Levi ate his soup. \("\text{She’ll say it soon... don’t worry…}\)\) I believe... she’ll say it soon, we just need to encourage her...
Levi nodded, though the thought still swirled in his head. „I want her to say it soon…. I need to hear it….” “You’d better make sure she doesn’t get killed on one of those horses.” His tone was borderline disinterested, not wanting to give away his growing worry. „maybe she does like him more than me… she’s always pining for him to hold her whenever he can… she has favorites…

„Would you prefer to come on the trails with us? I’m sure we can find you a horse to ride.” You haven’t really ridden by yourself in a long time… He watched Mila giggle and hold up the toy to Levi as if showing off an accomplishment. The toy a bit bloody from having her tooth finally come through her gum. Did she just get another one in?

Levi looked to the ring, his eyes wide as he saw the blood. “Oh my…” He reached into his pocket, wiping off the toy with tissues and looking in her mouth, seeing a tooth just beginning to peek out from her gums. “Yep, there’s one more. Another teeny tooth.” Levi gently dabbed at her gum with the tissue as the bleeding slowed, looking proud of her. “You’re growing up right under our noses, Mila. Soon you’ll have lots and lots of teeny teeth.” Levi kissed her nose, watching her smile. She’s so adorable...

Eren smiled scooping up another bite of parfait, watching a few nurses walk in and get snacks and then walk back out again. I need to talk with Vatri’s doctor to see how he’s doing. He smiled as Mila tried to grab the toy from Levi’s grasp. “She still wants to chew it through…. Maybe there’s another one coming in?” I can’t tell but it seems like they’re all coming in soon.

Levi sighed, giving it back to her. “Maybe… she’s been teething like it’s going out of style.” Levi watched her continue chewing on the ring, picking up his spoon again. “....and I’d appreciate having my own horse… I need to keep an eye on you two.” I don’t want anything happening to my little girl. Levi’s voice tried to keep his thoughts hidden, seeming a bit playful at most.

“You’re almost as protective as Dad at this point…” Eren chuckled as he watched Mila gurgle. She’s so freaking adorable… I love her… I love them both. “So has she calmed down since you got here? I know I haven’t really held her much since you’ve gotten here….” She was so adamant about me that you came here… but now she just wants Levi to hold her aside from a few occasions…

“Eren, she wouldn’t stop literally screeching for hours and hours while you were gone. By day five we were going insane and I was sure she would scream her vocal chords out. She’s so much better… she missed you so damn much….” Levi gave him a pointed look. “And is there a problem in the idea that I don’t want Mila trampled by a horse or falling on her head? She’s still really small, Eren.” I’m allowed to be protective of her.

“She’s not gonna get trampled… believe me, I never got trampled when I escaped the house and
ran out into the fields… that was always fun, the grass was longer than I was tall, so it always freaked Vatri out when he couldn’t find me… usually he went to where there were a cluster of horses staring at something and it was usually me… And don’t worry, she’ll be sitting in the saddle right in front of me, she’ll be fine.”> I promise she will be. Eren threw the look back at him in challenge. Our daughter will learn to ride… and she will be amazing…

Levi stared at him with a deadpan look. <“....Eren, when she pulled that stunt and ran out into the fields, I couldn’t see her in the grass and neither could the horses. She ran into a horse and spooked it. It reared up high before running off. It scared the shit out of me when she cried and I thought she'd gotten stepped on. She just fell over. Eren, I was fucking scared. So excuse me for being protective.”> Levi couldn’t help himself as he snapped at Eren, feeling a deep worry painfully tug in his chest. I want her to be okay…. I really do....

Eren stopped, looking down as Levi snapped at him, quietly apologizing and knowing not to press further on the subject. I’ll let you take care of her. <“If you don’t think I should… I-I won’t…”> I can understand where you’re coming from especially with that… He looked down at the last bit of yogurt in his cup, scooping it out to eat. I shouldn’t have pushed the topic… Shit, Levi’s probably mad that I want her on a horse so soon…

Levi looked over him as Eren looked down, regretting what he’d said. <“I didn't... I didn't mean that…. I'm just worried about her because she scared the shit out of me just earlier today and I want her to be okay. But I know you'll keep her safe…. of course you will. She's your own daughter… and you're such a good rider…. I shouldn't have said it like that... I'm sorry.”> I'm just worried about her.

Eren shook his head, getting up and taking care of their trash, feeling fuller than he had since he’d gotten there. You’re worried, I understand... I put Vatri through the same shit, so I can only imagine what she’ll do when we get home. <“Let’s go see if Vatri’s up, shall we?”> Eren’s voice a bit quiet and timid, trying to change the subject. I won’t do it, you’re worried about her... I can wait...

Levi nodded, scooping Mila back up into her harness and going to throw out his empty paper cup. He followed Eren back down the hall, very aware of the tension that hung in the air between them. He stopped them when they were out of sight of anyone, moving to catch Eren’s jaw and softly kiss him. I'm sorry.... Levi pulled away, not knowing what to say, and looking away, his cheeks pink from embarrassment and shame.

Eren stood stunned for a moment before he raised a hand to gently touch his lips. <“Did you just....?”> He trailed off as he followed Levi towards Hannes’s room. I hope his fever is broken… I hope he’s awake too, but at least if he’s not he’s getting rest… Eren was thankful that Hannes was up, and speaking with his doctor when they arrived. Okay, good I can talk with him about Vatri’s health then. He followed the doctor out of the room leaving Levi and Mila with Hannes. They’ll be
fine...
Chapter 114: Brawl

Levi came in with Mila, letting Eren and the doctor leave to talk. Levi sat down with Mila, letting her out of the Cartier when her grabby hands reached for Hannes, bored of the noirette handling her at the moment. <“You're looking better, Hannes.”> He was- color was returning to his face, and he looked a bit less grumpy. He looked even better when his hands were full of Mila, smiling.

<“My fever finally broke…”> Hannes answered simply and he gave Mila his fingers to inspect. <“Why did Eren look upset?!”> He hasn’t figured out he can’t hide anything from me… But from you apparently he can…

Levi looked down a bit, sighing. <“I kinda snapped at him over lunch…. he wants Mila on a horse soon and I'm worried about her getting hurt… just today when she got out the doggy door and into the fields she crashed into a horse and they got spooked….. they reared up so high and just ran off…. I was terrified she'd get trampled… I'm scared that she’ll manage to get stepped on or fall off… and I got kinda defensive when Eren told me I was being too protective…”> I don’t want to make him upset…. <“I didn't mean to sound so harsh…. but it happened anyway….”>

Hannes nodded, understanding for the moment. <“He’s never taken well to being yelled at or even really chastised… But you’ll learn, and he needs to too. You both need to be able to tell when you can no longer push buttons, and that eventually it’ll set someone off.”> Every couple goes through difficult times and problems… You're no exception.

Levi nodded, looked away again. I just don't want him to hurt so much whenever I accidentally lose my temper…. and Mila’s barely two….. I don't want her hurt.... she's so small… I want her to be okay.... I have the right to be overprotective as hell. <“I'll try to be careful.”> Levi didn't know what else to say, pointedly looking at the floor.

<“Be careful about what?”> Eren’s voice was small as he came back into the hospital room. Vatri’s got ahold of Mila again, I wonder if she didn’t want Levi holding her? He glanced at Vatri as he raised a hand and shook his head, Eren nodding and dropping the question in just a few seconds. He walked to the opposite side of Hannes from Levi, sitting down on a stool. <“Your fever broke, which is a good sign but you'll at least be staying until the end of the week.”> You’ll be able to go home soon.

Levi looked up, a smile tugging at his lips, keeping a rather neutral expression. <“That's good to hear. You won't be stuck here much longer.”> It's quite obvious you hate it here.

Hannes seemed relieved, bouncing Mila a bit as she giggled. His eyes widened when he heard her
“Vadi….”

She said my name… Well, at least tried to call me what Eren calls me. <“Yes, that's me… I’m Vatri…”> He beamed as she giggled more and started to repeat it over and over again.

Levi watched with wide eyes as Mila spoke. She learned to say Vatri… And she's known him for two days. I'm her fucking father… Levi could feel jealously swirl in his head, one hand clenching and unclenching from a fist before he caught himself, hanging onto the edge of the chair with a white knuckles grip and looking on. .....doesn't she give a damn about me…?

Eren looked surprised as Mila started to call Hannes Vatri as well. Oh geez…. He glanced over to Levi, looking down as he saw him gripping the chair. He’s gotta be mad…. Probably because Mila hasn’t called for him yet…. Shit, it’s my fault isn’t it?.... I kept saying Vatri this and Vatri that.... Eren kept his face towards the floor as he curled up into the chair across the bed from Levi. He swallowed hard, watching as Vatri settled Mila down so he could cough.

Levi looked up, watching Eren curl into himself, seeing his guilty look. .....is he still upset from when I snapped at him? Or is it about Mila….? Levi looked away again, needing a moment before he stood from his chair, moving to sit next to Eren, silently leaning his head on his shoulder. .....I don’t know what else to do…. I'm not too sure why you're curled up but I want you to know I'm not mad at you....

Eren watched Levi come over closer to him, letting him lean his head on his shoulder without bothering him. They stayed like that, Mila content to let Hannes hold her while she chewed on her toy. Hmm….. It’s quiet, it’s so unusual… Eren looked up as a nurse came in with some medicine. <“I think it’s time for us to get going for the night, I’ll make sure the horses are taken care of, you get some rest okay?”> Eren smiled when Hannes nodded, leaning over him and giving him a big hug and picking up Mila as the nurse came closer. “You wanna say goodbye?” Eren asked Mila, her eyes blank as she looked up to him before she leaned into his chest. I’ll take that as a no...

Levi faintly smiled as Mila tiredly leaned against Eren, looking to Hannes. <“Sleep well, Hannes.”> Levi picked up Mila’s bag, following Eren to the car. The drive home was short, and Levi set the bag down in the bedroom while Eren went to feed Mila. Levi came back out into the kitchen, wrapping his arms around Eren’s middle and resting his cheek on his shoulder blade, feeling clingy. I’m sorry....

“You wanna feed Mila? I need to go take care of the horses outside…” Eren offered him to take
Levi shook his head, just burying himself in his shoulder. “I just wanna hold onto you for a minute……I'm sorry I made you upset……” I didn't mean to… Levi didn't want to let go, one minute stretching to two, three, and past five. I'm sorry….

Eren hummed in response, shifting a bit on his feet but leaning into Levi’s warm chest as he fed Mila the whole jar. Kinda glad I don’t have to burp her anymore, Levi probably won’t let go for awhile. “You know it’s okay… Right?” I’m used to being yelled at, I should just get used to it from you… Shouldn’t I? He turned a bit, pecking Levi’s head, making sure he kept a hand on Mila as she stared at them.

Levi shook his head, still latched onto Eren. “It's not okay, I got upset and snapped at you and didn't even properly apologize… I'm sorry….. I lost my temper and I don't want you to be upset….” Please don't be…. “It's not okay….”

Eren nodded, moving in his arms so he could wrap his arms around Levi as well. “No, it’s okay, I pushed you until you snapped, I should be the one apologizing…. But I get why you don’t want her on a horse. I’m not upset, I don’t want you to think I am.” I might have been while we were there but I think you're right now… I can go out riding later. When the hands are here to help bring everyone inside. “You did nothing wrong, Levi.” He murmured in his ear leaning his cheek against the top of Levi’s head, watching Mila play with her spoon. She’s gonna wanna feed herself soon…

Levi slowly nodded, nestling into Eren’s chest. “….okay…. I still shouldn't have gotten so mad… she's our little girl… I want her to be safe…” She deserves to be safe. Levi slowly relaxed into Eren’s arms, his breathing steadying. I love you… i missed having you to hold on to….

Eren nodded and smiled softly as he kissed Levi’s head again. “Why don’t you go play with her and see if she’ll say Daddy for you? I can go take care of the horses…” Maybe I can get out on the trails before Moritz gets in… His hands drifted up and down Levi’s back, trying to get him to calm down a bit, and relax.

Levi leaned heavily on him, enjoying the contact. His hold on him tightened when Eren moved, catching himself before he whimpered. Don't leave…. Please stay….

Eren sighed softly, holding him closer for a moment. “Don’t worry, I’ll only be out for an hour or
two…. I’ll come right back, and you can bond with Mila some more.” You’ll get to hold me all night, I promise you will…

Levi slowly nodded, untangling their limbs and letting Eren go, looking to Mila. “Hey Honey…” Levi lifted Mila from the counter, bringing her into the living room and sitting on the couch with her. He watched her yawn, yawning after a moment as well. “Tired?” He watched her snuggle into his chest, gently playing with her hair. “Honey, can you say ‘Daddy?’” He watched her look up with sleepy and curious eyes. “Daddy?” Please… I wanna hear it…

Mila looked at Levi with curiosity, smiling as she held onto his shirt and giggled. Da! She happily smacked at his chest as he said ‘Daddy,’ knowing that it was him. Da!

Levi smiled faintly. She recognizes the word… I think. “Can you say Daddy, honey? Daddy?” Please? Levi held her close, his eyes quietly pleading.

“….da…..” Mila was quiet as she mumbled it out in a jumble of words. “…da!” She giggled excitedly, hitting against his chest. Da!

Levi smiled, relief filling him. “Da da?”

“Da!” Mila giggled and shifted as if to try and stand on his legs. “Da… Muhmuh…” Da hul…

Levi smiled faintly, though he felt a tug in his chest when she said ‘Muhmuh.’ Does she want him again? The thought immediately left him when she managed to stand on his legs, balancing with her tiny hands in his, catching her as she moved forward and hugged him around his neck, holding her close, hearing her say ‘Da’ over and over. His heart felt full as he held her. I love you….

“Da… Da…. Muhmuh?” She asked quietly and tried to straighten herself out so she was looking into Levi’s eyes. “Muhmuh!” Muhmuh hul! Muhmuh hul!

Levi chuckled, standing with her, listening to her squeal as she dangled for a moment before she was secure against his chest. “Let's go say hi to Mumma, okay?” Levi went to the front door, making sure he had one of her teething rings with before leaving for the barn. It was a long walk, Mila pointing out all the huge doggies as they went. Levi kissed her nose as they stopped at one stall, Mila intent on petting their nose. He continued on when she was happy, rounding a corner, stopping dead in his tracks. Eren was against the wall of a stall, one of the other hands cornering him, seeming very insistent on flirting with him, their hands on the wall, trapping him. What the
Levi saw the hand look over at him. “Yeah you fucker, I'm talking to you. What the fuck are you doing with my fiancé?”> Levi walked over to them, his cold glare settling on him. *Back the fuck up.*

Moritz turned to Levi, a twisted grin on his face. “Oh please, he isn’t taken, Eren’s single, not a ring in sight… So scoot along.”> His face hardened as Eren tried to move away from him. He stepped forward, getting his knee between Eren’s legs pinning him further with both arms and his leg. *Oh no, you’re not going to get away from me anymore.*

Levi’s eyes widened, seething yet very aware of the tiny child he held. Careful of his cargo, not wanting to set her down where she could run off, he moved and shoved the hand as hard as he could, sending him to the ground and away from Eren. “You son of a bitch, you stay the *fuck* away from my fiancé. *And* our daughter.”> He smirked as he looked up with an incredulous expression. “Yeah, he's got a kid. He may not have a ring yet, but that doesn't mean he’s single. So do us both a favor and stay the fuck away from him.”> *Get the fuck out of here.*

Moritz looked stunned as he was pushed to the ground, quickly getting up and glaring at Levi. “What the fuck? You actually like something about this short fucker?”> He growled at Eren who had hidden from him behind Levi. Though it didn't really work, because of how tall he was. *What the fuck? You're fucking gorgeous and you're wasting it on that short stack?*

“Enough to agree to marry me. I’d recommend you shut up and go do whatever it is you’re supposed to be doing. Didn't anyone ever teach you to not piss off a soldier?”> Levi wasn't intimidated in the least, turning a bit and giving Mila to Eren, staying in front of them to protect them. *Stay the fuck away from my family.*

Eren’s eyes widened as he watched Moritz tear off his shirt in challenge as Levi stepped closer to him. “L-Levi…” His voice held complete fear and worry as he held Mila close, taking a fearful step back. He’s just like those men…. All those years ago…

“Eren, get back. Don't let Mila see.” Levi cracked his neck, fixing Moritz with a hard look, watching him carefully as he heard Eren run off behind him. He saw Moritz look desperate as Eren ran off, ready for when he charged at him, fist swinging wildly at him. Levi easily caught it, twisting hard and shoving him to the ground, his elbow and knee digging into his back as he twisted his arm. “Want a do-over and a broken arm, or do you wanna apologize to Eren?”> *Have your pick, asshole.*

Moritz let out a sharp cry of pain. <“Don’t do it! Don’t break my arm! I need to be able to work dammit!”> He shouted and he struggled underneath Levi. <“What the fuck even are you!? You’re too fucking strong to be human!”> *Holy shit! What the hell? I didn’t even stand a chance…*
“I warned you not to fuck with a soldier or their family. It's common sense not to shove yourself between the legs of someone’s fiancé, or hell, anyone. It's fucked up. Now are you gonna apologize or do you wanna learn how to pop a shoulder back in its socket by yourself?” Levi’s grip tightened, not beyond making good on his threat. **Apologize.**

“Alright! Alright! I’m sorry! I’m sorry alright!” He shouted, his loud voice attracting the other hands that were arriving for work. *Oh, good maybe I can get them to help.* “Lance! Get this fucker off of me!” He pled with the man who came rushing in, though as soon as he saw Levi’s glare he stopped in his tracks. *Huh?*

Levi gave the hands that came around the corner a look that kept them at a decent distance, looking back to Moritz. “Looks like you're not getting out of the shit you got yourself into. You'd damn well better swear you’re not gonna touch, flirt, or even **look** at Eren, you hear me?” Levi looked ready to commit murder, his tone icy. “I'm **not** above permanently fucking up your arm.”

**Swear it.**

Moritz went rigid. “Okay! Okay! I swear! I won’t do anything!” His voice was high as Levi strained his arm further, still struggling to wiggle out from under him. *I need my fucking arm!*

Levi nearly growled at him. “Good. If I **ever** catch you trying any shit with him, I won't just shatter **one** arm. And I wonder what your chances of getting a date will be if you don't have any teeth left...” Levi let go of his arm, getting up and letting him scramble to his feet, nursing his sore arm. “Now get the fuck out of my sight.” Levi watched him run off, the other hands all looking intimidated and quickly dispersing. *Good.* Levi looked back to Eren, his demeanor doing a complete 360. “Are you okay?” Levi looked worried, his tone soft. *I hope he didn't do too much....*

Eren had sunk down to the floor in Charlie’s stall, holding Mila close to his chest as he shook. *I can’t stop shaking... I can’t....* Mikhail was already starting on his way towards the stall, coming to calm Eren down. *I’m panicking... Levi... I’m scared...*

Levi quickly found him, kneeling next to him, gently brushing the hair from his eyes. “Eren, Honey, it's over. I took care of him; he’ll never bother you again. It's okay. You and Mila are safe. I'm right here.” Levi wrapped them both up in his arms, kissing all over Eren’s and Mila’s cheek. *You're okay.*

Eren could only nod, relief washing over him as he held onto Mila tighter, which made her fussier. He didn’t realize he was crying, whimpering as Mikhail tried to pull him out of Levi’s arms. *I’m scared... He’s gonna rape me! He’s just like the men!*
Levi heard Mila whine with dissent as Eren held her tighter, his voice gentle in Eren’s ear, one hand moving to his arm. “Eren, love, you're squeezing her. It's okay, you're safe. Nobody's gonna try to hurt you. I'll make sure of it.” It's okay.

Eren continued to shake in Levi’s grasp, holding onto Mila tighter without really even processing it, at this point she started to whine more, and had the starting signs of tears. I'm scared.... He’s gonna do it again… “H-He’s gonna do it again….” He did it before... He’ll do it again...

Levi’s eyes widened but he shook his head, gently taking Eren’s arms and nudging his forehead with his own, slowly prying them open and letting Mila squirm into his lap, clinging to him, her eyes teary. “Eren… what do you mean ‘again?’ Did he already do something before…?” Levi's insides twisted with dread. Oh no ....

Eren nodded, curling into his side. “H-He’s done that b-before… A-And he’s grabbed m-me too.” He whimpered as he shook beside him, tears rolling down his face. H-He was gonna do more... I know he was…

Levi was nearly seeing red, trying to keep himself in check, reminding himself that he had arms of upset toddler and shaking fiancé. You can beat the shit out of him later. Levi murmured quietly to him, watching out of the corner of his eye as Charlie stood, coming over and laying near Eren, sniffing at his hair. “It's okay, Eren. We’re here for you. He's never going to touch you again. I'll come with you when you have to do chores out here from now on if it'll make you feel better. But I don't think he's gonna mess with you anymore. I'll break his arms if he tries anything.” Levi made it sound like a promise, nestling into his neck. It's okay.

Eren whimpered as he moved to hold onto Levi’s shirt. “T-Take me home… I wanna be home…” I don’t want to be in the barn if he’s here… I wanna go inside. He couldn’t stop the tears that quickly formed in his eyes. I wanna be safe, and lock the door.

Levi nodded, giving Eren Mila back. He scooped the both of them up, letting them out of the stall and walking back to the house. Levi let them inside and set Eren and Mila on the bed, taking his shoes off and tucking them in, Mila on his chest. “You rest, okay Eren? I’ll be back soon. The door will be locked; you're safe.” Swear it.

Eren nodded, looking as Levi left his side. “W-Where are you going?” He seemed panicked as he held Mila who was struggling against his arms only a little now. I don't want him here... I need to tell Vatri... he’s a pervert…
“I'm going to head to the barn and make sure they all pick up the slack since you're not there. And that hand and I need to have a little chat.” And by that, I mean I'm gonna break his nose. “I'll try not to kill him, but at this point, he just might piss me off enough for me to want to.”

Eren nodded and settled into the bed with Mila on his chest, calming down as he gave her a pacifier. That should keep her quiet, and maybe let her sleep while Levi’s gone… I don’t wanna be alone for long…

Levi smirked, leaving and locking the doors behind him, heading for the barn again, rage in his steps. The hands that he came across all moved right out of his way, looking for the right one. He found him easily enough, the hand not noticing him until his fist smaller into the metal of a wall, the loud sound making him jump out of his skin. <“You. I just so happened to find out that wasn't exactly the first time you harassed Eren like that. So, what, you're into fondling taken men in the middle of barn halls? Is that it? Or is that just because you didn't have enough time to fuck him against the wall?”> Levi’s tone was impossibly cold, his eyes sharp. I want answers.

< “What would you expect me to do? He never said he was taken… He had no ring… He was up for the fucking taking…. ”> Moritz growled at him, trying to take a more intimidating stance. I’m much taller than you… I can use that to my advantage.

Levi didn't appear to give a shit about his tone, taking another step forward, smirking when Moritz took a step back. Gotcha. <“So if someone isn't wearing a ring, they're free for you to rape and have your fun with? You do understand that when people date they still don't have rings? And I'm damn well sure that cowering against the wall of a barn isn't any kind of consent anywhere in the world. Your head is seriously fucked up if you genuinely think you don't deserve to be a broken mangle of limbs for that.”> That's fucked up.

< “Oh come on! He never said anything to me! He just looked away! I figured it was in embarrassment…!”> Moritz’s voice sounded pleading, wanting Levi to stay where he was and not come closer. I thought I was off the hook!?

<“Did you even fucking ask him?!”> Levi took another step, hearing the fear in his voice as he stepped back again. <“Did you even think about what would happen if what you did got back to Hannes or to the police? Did you think you'd be off the hook insisting that it was consensual when there's a man with a pissed off boyfriend who knows there's no way in fucking hell Eren would ever want shit from you?”> You piece of shit. Levi looked ready to kill him, his fists clenched. You wanted to fight so fucking badly, so fight me now. Do it.

Moritz backed away in fear, shaking his head. <“N-No… I didn’t think about that ‘cause I thought I could charm him…”> I thought I was getting through to him… <“Why the fuck are you taking it
out on me? You should be angry that your fiancé looks so damn enticing!”> Moritz glared and soon he stepped forward, moving to grab at Levi. I can use my height…

<“Sure, blame the victim, not the fucking pervert.”> Levi saw him reach for him, not hesitating to grab his arm and turn him, his fist connect with his nose, hearing a sick crack and shoving him away, watching him collapse to the ground and scramble to get up. <“I'd come to terms with the fact you're gonna lose your job right about now. Hannes just so happens to care a shit ton about what happens to Eren; and I'm sure he'd be happy he doesn't have a near-rapist on staff anymore.”> Not my problem.

Moritz stared at Levi with wide eyes, his hands coming up to touch his nose as blood dropped down his face. <“you fucker!”> He shouted, running at him and shoving them out into the hallways of the barn. I can get help from the others… <“Lance!”> He shouted for help, hoping it would come.

Levi barely stumbled, hopping back as he was shoved, moving with him before digging his toes into the ground and tackling Moritz as he kept coming, easily taking him to the ground. He rolled him over, his knee in his lower back as he took hold of both his wrists, not caring about the legs kicking at his hip from behind. <“You need to calm the fuck down before I make good on that threat.”> Levi started slowly twisting his other arm. <“I don't hear your friends… they're not coming to help. Now are you gonna try to beat me up again or are you gonna pack up your shit and leave quietly?”> I want you the fuck out of here.

< “I’m not giving up my fucking job!”> Moritz yelled out and he finally got his body weight to move, rolling over and struggling to get his arms free as he kicked at Levi. I'm not gonna let that fucking happen...

Levi found himself under the hand, shifting and thrusting up and shoving him to the side, quickly getting to his feet as the hand hit the ground again. <“You don't seem to understand. The second Hannes hears about this you're gonna be out of a job. He won't give a shit about what you or your friends say; Eren and I will be good enough. You're done.”> You're not gonna be here long.

Moritz groaned as he got up, looking at Levi with a twisted grin. <“Well if I’m gonna be gone so soon, I’m glad I held that ass while I could….Eren didn’t even move when it happened, he let me use both hands and massage him. You shoulda heard him… You’d be jealous…”> His voice was so high, it's no wonder he can sing like that … He grinned as he taunted Levi, standing up again, putting up his arms ready to fight.

Levi fixed him with a flat look. <“…you do realize you're confessing to sexual assault… right? It'll come in handy when I file that police report….”> I don't want this staying off your record. <“I
wonder what any future employers would think of that…”> They'd probably deny you any job ever...

<“You can't do jack shit, you fucking American! You have no power here!”> He shouted, his anger boiling over as he started throwing punches again. *I will beat you! I can do it!*  

Levi easily dodged his punches, returning one straight across the face, on guard. <“Just because I'm an American citizen doesn't mean you can go ahead and molest my fiancé and get away with it, you fucker. If that was true, I could burn down your house and not get in trouble for it. And that just makes no fucking sense, right?”> Levi glared at him, punching his jaw again when Moritz tried to grab his neck. *Fuck you.* Levi heard a shout from down the hall, immediately jumping back from Moritz and putting his hands up, Moritz still coming after him, bracing for the blow. He felt pain explode in his face, backing up against the barn wall, watching though slotted eyes as an officer tackled Moritz to the ground, looking to the other officer, his hands above his head, wrists pinned to the barn wall by himself. <“Officer, I don't know what you've been told, but there's a lot more going on than what you're seeing.”> *I can't fuck this up.*  

<“And just what am I seeing? Who called?”> The officer looked around when finally a younger boy popped his head out of the doorway of the barn, looking in.  

< “I-I did… Moritz started fighting… But he’s b-been assaulting H-Hannes’s son…. A-Almost since h-he got here a m-month or so ago…”> The young boy no older than 16 stuttered as he came fully out from hiding. I *got scared when I saw the blood… He’s still bleeding…*  

< “Turn around, sir… We’re taking you both to the cruiser…”> The cop was calm as he waited for Levi to turn around, glad his hands were already up. His partner was still cuffing a struggling Moritz, who was kicking and screaming to be let go, that it wasn’t his fault.  

<“It’s Eren’s fault! It’s his fault! It’s not my fault!”> Moritz struggled futilely, soon enough grabbed and dragged to his feet to be taken to the cruiser. *Fuck!*  

Levi obediently turned and moved his hands behind his back, knowing struggling would be a terrible idea. He turned his head, looking worried as he spoke. <“Please, the man that man assaulted is my fiancé. He's at the house with our daughter and he's going to be terrified if I don't come back and only hears that I've been taken to the station. The doors are locked; someone needs to get him, please. He has PTSD, he'll have a panic attack if he doesn't know I'm okay.”> *I can't just leave him there…. he needs me... I can't leave him and Mila alone....*  

The officer looked at Levi with confusion for a moment before he nodded and he pushed Levi into
one of the cruisers, making sure that he didn’t hit his head on the way in. He conversed with the other officers that had come to assist them. “Apparently the man who was assaulted is in the house… And he’s got PTSD and a kid with him and the doors are locked.” They thought about the best way to go about getting in the house, knocking first, and when the door didn’t budge they resorted to looking around for a key first before they destroyed the door.

*Muhmuh*? Mila watched Eren curl up on the bed, shaking and crying. “Muhmuh?” Mila felt sadness wash over her as Eren cried, tugging at his sleeve, not understanding. “Muhmuh!” She cried when Eren ignored her, her tears slowing when she heard a knock outside, going to the floor. She slowly walked to the door, staring at it before reaching for the knob, managing to get it open before she fell over, crawling into the living room. She made it through the doggy door, looking with wide eyes to the two men on the porch. “Muh….” She got to her feet, scared as the men moved towards her, bolting off. “Da!” *Muhmuh sad! Dah fix!* Mila heard one of the men call after her, running through the field and towards the barn, her little legs carrying her through to the barn and past it to the parking lot, a hand chasing after her, seeing Levi in a cruiser. “Dah! Dah!” Mila ran to the car and crashed into the side, her little fists smacking on the metal. “Dahda! Muhmuh sah! Dahda fih!” She looked ready to cry again, wailing loudly as she was picked up, terrified. *No! Muhmuh hul! Dahda hul!* 

The officer sighed in relief as he finally picked Mila up and held her, looking at Levi through the glass, pointing to her and then to Levi, watching him nod. “Okay, the kid’s out of the house… Now we just need the witness….” The officer tried to get Mila to calm down as she wailed, gently bouncing her as he watched his partner kick in the door, screams barely audible to him. *What the hell?*

Levi watched with wide eyes as the Officer kicked in the door of the house, knowing from Mila’s high pitched wail and the Officer’s expression that things were going to shit. *Holy fuck…*< ”What kind of shitshow are you running?! Eren’s gonna have a *seizure* at this rate! Let me out of this car so I can fix this mess! He's gonna draw so far into his head he won't speak to me for weeks! You need to let me fix this and get this fixed!”> Levi pleaded with the Officer through the crack in the window, looking scared and desperate. *This is gonna be bad if I don’t get over there now.* < “He's terrified he's gonna be raped, he's missing a daughter and fiancé and your partner just busted into the house! I could've given you the keys!”> *What the fuck?!*

The officer looked to Levi contemplating things, before he opened Levi’s door up and carefully helped him out as he held a squirming Mila. He unlocked Levi’s wrists and let him go to the house. *Why does he think he’s going to get raped? We’re the police…* He reached to his walkie talkie and radioed to his partner to stay away from the man and that his fiancé was coming to try and calm him down. *I hope things haven’t escalated too badly…*

Levi thanked him as the cuffs were removed, looking to the Officer’s name tag. *Officer Frankel.* <“Keep her safe.”> Levi immediately bolted for the house, running through the field to get there faster. He passed the other Officer, coming in the front door. “Eren? Eren, baby-” He went into the
bedroom, seeing Eren rocking on the bed, tears streaming down his cheeks, Mikhail whining for attention. “Eren, Honey…” Levi moved onto the bed, tilting Eren’s head to look at him, seeing recognition flicker in his eyes. “Eren, Honey, I'm here. I know you're scared but everything’s okay. That hand that touched you is in a cruiser right now and the person who broke the door is an Officer- he was just trying to do his job. I'm so sorry you got so scared. And Mila is with the man’s partner, she’s okay.” He watched Eren’s lips move, his heart breaking. You'll be a good boy… “It's okay Eren, you're so good, it's okay. It's okay Honey, you're okay, and Mila’s okay.” Levi looked into his eyes, willing him to calm down. It's okay.

Eren continued to cry as Levi held him, looking to his eyes. I’ll be a good boy I promise…. He glanced over to the door where he saw the police officer, his breathing worsening. “I'll be a good boy I promise… I promise… I promise!” He got louder and louder with every promise, wanting the man in the hallway to be gone. I'll be a good boy! I don't want it again…

Levi looked over his shoulder, seeing the man there at a loss for what to do. < “He has PTSD and he was expecting that man you cuffed to come here and rape him…. breaking down that door probably caused the attack… he's in very bad shape…”> Levi turned back to Eren, cupping his cheek. “Eren, Honey, please don't be so scared… it's just a police officer. He wanted to make sure you're okay. Nobody is going to hurt you, Eren. I'm so sorry I wasn't here for you. Look at me, Eren.” Levi locked eyes with him, his voice gentle and firm. “You've been so good. And nobody is going to do anything you don't want them to. You're okay now. …..they need to bring me to the station… do you want to come with me? We can't stay here…” Levi shifted until Eren was in his lap, the officer standing out of sight in the hall, Levi petting Eren’s hair. It's okay….

Eren looked at Levi as he crawled into his lap, gripping onto his shirt. “I-I I wanna go… Go home…” He murmured as he held onto Levi. I wanna go home... Where's Dad? I want Dad… Mikhail was starting to growl at them, trying to alert them of Eren’s impending seizure. He could sense it and knew it was coming from the stress.

Levi watched Mikhail growl, knowing what was coming. Oh no. Levi gently guided Eren onto his side on the bed, laying with him and brushing his hair from his face. “Eren, Honey, we can go home later this week Eren when Hannes is all better. It won't be long before we can go home, okay? Just relax, look at me babe.” Levi held onto him, softly kissing his cheeks as Eren breathed deeply. It's okay…. “Stay with me, love. Just stay calm. It's okay. I'm right here.”

Eren didn’t really understand why Levi moved them around but he let him be moved, trying to calm down as Levi told him to stay with him. “I wanna go home…” He murmured quietly as he looked around the room. Where am I? i’m not in your apartment… Or in the old house… Am I in Germany?

Levi was quiet, still carding a hand through his hair, sighing in relief as Eren calmed down. “It's okay, Eren… soon we can go home. Here, let me carry you. I have to go to the station, and Mila is
worried about you.” She was so upset that you were upset.

Eren nodded, shifting slightly, wanting Levi to pick him up. *I wanna go home, if we can go home soon I’ll go…* He wrapped his arms around Levi’s shoulders and buried his face into his neck as he tried not to cry. “H-Home…” *I wanna go home…*

Levi sighed, heaving Eren into his arms and standing, walking with him from the room. He saw the officer, stopping to explain the situation. <“He had a panic attack, he’s very easy to set off right now. Please, just let me carry him with me. If I leave him alone he’ll surely have a worse attack or a seizure from the stress.”> Levi watched the man slowly nod, walking all the way back to where the cruiser was, seeing Mila sniffing in the officer’s arms, looking upset still. “Mila, Honey?” He smiled faintly as she looked at them and reached for them, Eren reaching a hand for her as he was in Levi’s arms. Mila stopped fussing the second she was in his arms, pressed against her parents. *So adorable…* <“Officer… what do I do? I can't leave him here… and if he sees him…”> Levi made sure Eren couldn’t see inside the squad car, looking worried. <“He nearly had a seizure…”> *This is going so well.*

The officer glanced over to his partner discussing things briefly before they called in for another cruiser. It only took a few minutes before they pulled up into the driveway and parked near the occupied cruiser. A woman stepped out looking at the two. <“Does he need to be cuffed?”> She looked to Levi carrying both Eren and Mila without breaking a sweat at all. It was settled after a few minutes that Levi, Eren, Mila and Mikhail were put into the back of that cruiser while they went and got the statements from the remaining hands quickly. It was enough to set a charge on Moritz’s shoulders.

Levi held Eren close in the cruiser, not letting him out of his lap while he didn’t have to. He gently pressed his forehead to his temple, his voice soothing as Eren shook. “It's okay, Honey. I'm here. You're with me, and we have Mila safe and sound. They're going to talk to all the hands and have enough to get him out away for a long while. He'll never bother you again. You're safe with me here, Eren. You're so safe. Mila’s safe too. You're okay. It's all okay.” Please don't worry…. “Just relax, Honey. Just relax, you're okay. You're here in my arms. It's alright.”

Eren closed his eyes as he shook, trying to forget about it, his arms coming up to cover at his ears, shaking his head. “N-No…” *They're coming… They’re gonna find me… “I wanna go home…” I want Dad…* He jumped when he heard Mikhail bark on the outside of the car, he had gotten his vest and was whining as he stood by the car, sensing Eren in distress.

Levi looked up as he saw Mikhail, speaking through the crack in the window. “Mikhail, quiet.” Levi motioned for him to sit, another motion commanding him to be silent. *I'm sorry, but you're freaking him out.* “We can go home soon, Eren. Soon enough we’ll be home. It'll be okay.” Levi slowly rocked them, his voice soft. “You're safe in my arms, Eren. You're safe now. Nobody is gonna hurt you now.” *I've got you.*
Eren whimpered as he shook, burying his face into Levi’s shoulder. He shook as he heard three officers approach, looking at the dog with the vest. Soon enough Mikhail was loaded in the back with the three of them and they started their way to the station. His grip tightened on Levi’s shirt, his breathing becoming heavy and erratic. *I’m scared… Where are we going?*

Levi held him and Mila close, his legs bracing them, wanting to keep them from jerking as they stopped and started, their seat belts foregone. “Eren, we’re going to the police station. They need to talk to you and me about some stuff that’s happened today and over the month. I know it’s scary but you have to do your best, okay? Just stay calm, Honey. I’m right here. You’re right here in my arms. I’ve got you, Honey.” *I love you. Don’t be scared.*

Eren could only look on as their surroundings changed, the woman picking up Mila, who instantly got fussy and then Levi carrying Eren in as his whole body shook. *Is this where they are? Did you take me to them?* Eren’s eyes were full of fear as he clung to Levi’s shirt, burying his face in his shoulder as he tried not to panic further.

Levi murmured to him as they went in, Mikhail obediently following with his leash in his mouth. “It’s okay Eren, the Officer has Mila. We can trust her. We’re at the station; the officers here have the job of keeping us safe. You’re okay here. You’re safe. Nobody can hurt you here. It’s okay.” Levi followed the woman into another room, looking around. *…did you bring us into a break room…? I’m probably wrong….*

The woman pointed to the couch. <“Calm him down… We’ll speak with the assailant first.”> She left them be, the room quiet since almost all the officers in town were with this case.

Eren whined as he held onto Levi tighter. “A-Are they coming? D-Did they take Mila a-away?” *I want Dad… I want Mila too… I wanna go home.*

Levi sat with Eren on the couch, looking back up as he realized the woman did still have Mila. He and Eren reached for her, grateful when the tot was again in their arms, curling around her. “Eren, look. Mila’s right here, she’s okay. And they’re not coming to get you; nobody is. You don’t have to be scared of anyone right now. You’re okay, and all these people are here to protect you from anything bad. We’re gonna keep you safe.” *You and she are just fine.*

“They’re…. They’re not coming to get me?” Eren asked as he scooped Mila up, holding her close to him and trying to calm himself down with Mikhail’s head on his thigh as well. *I need to calm down… I need to calm down, I wanna go home…*

Levi shook his head. “No, nobody is. That guy who touched you is in the officer’s hands now.
They're gonna make sure he gets put away for the stuff he did. You're safe now. You are okay, and your daughter is too. You're okay.” I promise. He softly kissed his cheek, willing him to believe him.

Eren nodded. “I don't wanna be touched again…” He murmured as he held Mila close letting her play with his hair, and pull on it. I just wanna be yours… He was quiet, starting to calm down as he reached to pet Mikhail’s ears as he really started to calm down even more. I'm not gonna get taken away…

Levi faintly smiled, nuzzling into Eren’s neck. “I'll do my best to not let it happen again. You've got lots of people watching out for you now.” We're here for you. Levi was content, sitting there with his family. My own little family…

Eren soon enough relaxed to a point where he was falling asleep on Levi’s shoulder, curled up in his lap and Mila knocked out on his own chest. I wanna go home…

Levi let them sleep, cradling them close, Mikhail laying down at his feet for a nap of his own. The dog instantly lifted its head when the woman came back some time later, watching her expression soften a little when she saw the pile of them. <“Ma’am?”> What happened with that guy?

< “We need to take you and your fiancé back for questioning, and we would like to know if you would like to press charges.”> He could go in for sexual assault with the list I have, and at least 10 counts of it… Her voice was quiet, as if not to wake Eren and Mila.

Levi nodded. <“We would like to press charges, that's for sure…”> Levi looked to Eren, gently shaking him. <“Eren? They need to question us now…”> He watched Eren wake up, giving him a calm look when he looked confused for a moment. <“We’re at the station; they need to question us.”> It's a thing that needs doing.

Eren looked around with wide eyes, seeing Mila asleep in his arms and beginning to stir a bit, the woman standing near the door and the empty break room around them. “I wanna go home…. This isn’t home… He could be here…” I don’t want him to be here… I don’t wanna see him...

“Eren, that hand might be in the same building, but he's not gonna be able to get you. You're fine. And once Hannes is better in about a week, we’ll go home.” It's okay.

Eren nodded, holding Mila close to his chest as she stirred, hoping she would stay asleep. “C-Carry
me?” His voice was still timid as he leaned into Levi’s arms. *I don’t wanna be alone... That’s scary...*

Levi looked up, unsure. He stayed sitting with Eren and Mila in his arms, his voice wary. <“Are we allowed to be in the same room for questioning, ma’am?”> *I want to keep him with me.... he’ll feel much better if I’m right here.*

<“Considering the circumstances… I’ll allow it...”> She led them to the interrogation room that they used, chairs having been brought in to surround a metal table. <“Sit.”> Her voice was a bit harsh as her partner came in with a large file and set it down on the table before sitting. *Big stack... for which one of them?*

Levi followed her, helping Eren sit in the chair next to him, nudging his foot with his own to reassure him. He saw the large file she came in with, not batting an eye at it. *Yep.... that’s Eren’s file for you....*

The woman opened up the file, looking through Eren’s records. <“Alright, what happened with Moritz Schultz?”> She said, looking to Eren pointedly. *This kid’s had it rough, I can tell here... Damn...*

Eren swallowed thickly as he looked over to Levi in nervousness. *Is he gonna be mad if I talk?* He glanced down to the floor, holding Mila to his chest still. <“It um... It started as soon as I got here.... He started flirting with me, and trying to impress me by speaking English with me... I ignored him and went inside to sleep... I-I didn’t think that he’d try and touch me the next day... He touched me, holding me by the waist as I was doing barn chores... and he tried to flirt some more... I-I tried to ignore him again, but he kept doing it over and over again b-before he finally pushed me to the ground when I was bringing a horse in and none of the other hands were around... I tried to get him to stop but he’s stronger than me... and he kept me pinned under him as he grabbed me... I-I thought he was gonna rape me, but he... he just slid his hands into my jeans a-and grabbed at my ass...”> Eren swallowed thickly and looked away from Levi. *You’re gonna be mad I didn’t tell you... aren’t you?*

Levi looked worried, reaching over and gently touching his arm. *It's okay. I'm sorry.... I'm really sorry I wasn't there to help you.* Levi gave him a look, imploring him to keep going. *It's okay.*

Eren jumped a bit when Levi touched him but soon calmed down, rubbing Mila’s back to keep himself calm. *I need to calm down... I need to... Or I’m gonna panic again.* <“O-One of the hands was getting to work l-late and so he got off of me so h-he wouldn’t get caught....... I thought he would stop like I asked but he did it again, and I really thought it was gonna happen this time... He’d gotten my pants down to my knees and was struggling to keep me pinned and try and pull his pants down... H-He got bit... Charlie grabbed him b-by the hair and kicked him and I ran away...
After that he didn’t do anything except flirt with me… He tried to get my attention and I tried to ignore him, because I didn’t want to have a panic attack alone…” I closed myself off… I remember you tried to call me, and I kept declining your calls… You were probably worried about me and Hannes…

Levi seemed expressionless, though his eyes were pained. Shit…. that could've been a hell of a lot worse…. I'm so glad he didn't get that far…...and it explains why you didn't want to take any calls for a while…. I'm so sorry… Levi kept his hand on his arm, a reassuring and steady presence. It's okay. Don't panic. It's over.

Eren struggled to swallow, shaking his head not wanting to talk anymore. < “N-No more… No more… Please ...”> His voice was weak as he started to cry all over again. I don’t wanna panic… It could’ve been so much worse…

Levi immediately turned to him, wrapping him up in his arms. “It's okay, babe, you don't have to talk anymore… just breathe, it's okay. It's over.” Levi gently rubbed his back, letting Eren hold Mila close and helping him calm down. It's okay.

Eren shook his head as he held Mila to his chest, shaking as he struggled to calm himself down. “N-No more… D-Dad promised n-no more… I don’t want it again…” I don’t… I don’t want it! He whimpered, moving his hands away from Mila, curling around her so she wouldn’t fall, but he covered his own ears. He wanted desperately to hide. No!

Levi carefully held onto him, his voice soft. “Eren, Dad meant it when he said that nobody would ever get away with this again. That man is being put away and as long as I'm here with you, you're safe. I know it was scary being alone with him, but we’re here now. It's okay now.” It'll be okay.

Eren shook his head furiously, curling up more as he continued to cry. “N-No…. I-It almost h-happened…” It almost happened twice…. Oh my god… I was practically raped the other day… Before you got here… He whimpered, not realizing that Mila was starting to wake, not liking being squeezed.

Levi looked worried, looking to where Mila was squished to Eren’s chest, on the verge of wakefulness. He gently took Mila, cradling her against his own chest, his other arm around Eren, still murmuring into his ear. “Eren, I'm so sorry… it's over. And he won't be around to hurt you anymore. You're okay. He didn't get as far as he wanted. It stopped. He's gone now. You don't have to worry about him anymore. Please, it's okay.” Levi nudged his chin up, looking at him with soft eyes. It's okay now.
Eren looked into his eyes with fear apparent in his eyes. He flinched when the woman coughed to get their attention. *Huh? Why is she here? I don’t get it… Why is she here?*

<“Okay, that’s enough about past events… Eren what happened today?”> *What happened that started the fight?*

Eren shook his head, curling up further into himself and not wanting to talk. *I don’t want to… Not anymore…* He’d closed in on himself, no longer going to let anyone in as he covered his neck with his hands and covered his ears with his wrists as he curled up tighter. Mikhail whined and tried to get Eren’s attention, but it wasn’t working.

Levi gently shook Eren’s shoulder, trying to coax him to listen. “Eren, *please.*” Levi gently took one of his hands, tugging lightly and leaning where Eren could see him, his voice soft. “Eren, please. If you want this guy put away you need to at least tell us a bit about what happened, okay? Then you’ll be done with it.” *Please.* Levi looked down as Mila made a sound in her sleep, looking back after a second. “Eren, please. The part where you have to see him is over. Just tell us what happened and you can forget all about it.” *Please.*

Eren was shaking horribly. <“He-He grabbed me… And pulled m-me off of Charlie… H-He told me he was g-gonna t-take me… And I couldn’t stop him…”> He pulled himself away from Levi as he cried and closed himself and his mind away from the world around him. *I wanna go home.*

Levi sighed as Eren spoke again, gently rubbing his back. “It’s okay… that’s it, it’s done.” Levi looked back to the woman. *What questions do you have for me…?*

The woman continued to write everything down, making sure that she had everything. <“Who started the fighting?”> *I need to know… I need to know what happened…*

Levi looked to her, his expression neutral. <“I may have gotten angry at that hand, but he was the one who threw the first punch.”> *I wasn’t stupid enough to just start wailing on him.*

The woman nodded still taking notes. <“You confronted him? Were there witnesses?”> *There must have been… we were called in… I think it was one of the younger hands that called it in…*

Levi nodded. *Just tell the truth.* <“Earlier I’d found that hand with Eren against a wall, and I went up to him and shoved him off Eren when he shoved his knee between his legs, because Eren was frozen with fear and couldn't do anything. He tried to fight me then too, but I managed to pin him*
and make him apologize before letting him go. When I heard that wasn't the first time this had
happened, I went back to confront him about it being a repeated thing. I got mad, and he looked
angry as hell too… but I knew enough not to try and hit him if he didn't. I just wanted to make sure
he knew not to go messing with him like that. You can understand how furious I was. But I only
acted in self defense.”> *He started the fights. Not me. I might've been mad, but he started swinging
first.* <“He was calling for help from some other hands, but I didn't see any in that particular hall of
the barn. After he started throwing punches I wasn't exactly looking to see if any showed up if I
didn't hear footsteps.”> *I was kinda focused on the fight…*

The woman nodded and set her pen down. <“You’ll need a ride home… we’ll press charges
against him, and he’ll probably have a court date relatively soon.”> She paused, glancing over
towards where Eren was curled up and crying in his chair. <“Will he be okay?”> The woman was
concerned as she watched him shake. *I don’t know what to make of it…*

Levi looked wary himself. <“I really hope so.”> “Eren?” Levi gently nudged him, his hand on his
shoulder. “It's done now, we can leave. We’ll go back to Hannes’ house. You'll feel better after a
good night’s sleep. Does that sound okay?” *Please… it's done.*

Eren was still curled up tightly to himself, whimpering and flinching away from Levi’s nudge. *I
wanna go home… I wanna go home… I wanna go home.* He started to rock himself, tears
streaming down his cheeks as his eyes grew glassy and his look far away. *I wanna go home…*

Levi gently rubbed his back, leaning his forehead against his temple, his voice soft. “Eren, love,
you're okay. It's all over. We can go now. Please, take Mila and I'll carry you two out to where our
ride is, okay? Can you do that? Then we can sleep and the rest of the week will be gone before you
realize and we’ll be able to go home. Just take Mila and let me carry you, okay? You're safe. I'm
right here, and you're safe.” *Please.*

Eren didn’t respond to him, his eyes glassy as he rocked himself. *I wanna go home… I want Dad…
I wanna go home…* He wasn’t there anymore, he’d blocked himself off from the world, and not
even Levi was able to knock on the door.

Levi looked worried, looking to Mila still asleep in his arm. *I need two hands for this…* The
woman seemed to understand, standing and offering to take her. Levi gave her Mila gratefully,
looking back to Eren and coaxing him to unfurl, scooping him into his arms, leaning their
foreheads together and speaking quietly. “Eren, can you hear me?” He softly pecked his cheeks
when the Officer started to lead them to the car, momentarily without any eyes on them. *Please.
“Eren, Honey, you're okay. Please, let me know you can hear me.” Please.*

Eren still didn’t respond. He didn’t move as he was lifted aside from his steady breathing. His eyes
seemed worse than only a few moments ago, staring right through anyone and anything, I want Dad... I want Dad...

Levi was getting a bit scared, quiet on the drive back and as they all walked to the house, setting Eren on the bed and putting Mila in her crib. Levi thanked the officer and her partner before they left, closing the kicked-in door which refused to fully shut, setting a chair to brace it before going back to the bedroom, carding a hand through Eren’s hair. ...what do I do... .....Dad will know. Didn't Eren say something about Dad? I think he did... he might like to hear him. Levi reached for the laptop, quickly signing in and sending a skype request for Lathe.

Lathe heard his phone buzzing in his pocket, setting down his pen and taking it out, immediately answering when he saw the name on the screen. “Levi, hi! What's-” His voice died in his throat when he took him in. “...What's wrong?” His voice was soft, looking worried. You look like you've gone to hell and back... and are you starting to get a black eye? The fuck?

“It's Eren. One of the hands at Hannes’ barn... he tried to... hurt him. He's so shaken up, I caught the guy in the act, he didn't get in his pants, but he'd managed to a week or two ago... just... I got mad and there was a fight and we were taken to the station.... long story short, we’re not in trouble, and the guy will have a court date soon. And Eren’s so shaken up... help, please....” I don't know what to do...

....... “Levi, give Eren the laptop. Sit him up, and set me in his lap.” Lathe glanced up to make sure the office door was shut, the sound of kids playing in the center muted. He was soon faced with a glassy-eyed Eren, his expression gentle as he saw him, sitting down on a couch. “Hey, Eren. It's been awhile since I've seen you.” Hopefully my voice will help a bit... you were always good with telling me stuff like this...

Eren looked up a bit from where he was curled up, seeing Lathe. His eyes were still glassy and he appeared to be looking right through the screen. He slowly reached out to the screen to try and touch Lathe, whimpering when he couldn’t touch him. Dad... I want Dad...

Lathe sighed as Eren reached for him, his smile sad. “I'm sorry I'm not there, Eren. But you'll be home soon, I hear. And when you come home you can have all the hugs you want. I miss you too, you know.” We all do.

Eren whimpered as he pulled his arm back to curl up to himself. I wanna go home... “I-I’m scared...” He whispered, finally speaking after a few hours. I wanna go home, I don’t wanna stay here...
Lathe gave him a small smile. “I know it's scary… bad things happened and you'd been hoping to put everything behind you. But it's over now, and you can move forward again. Levi's there to keep you safe. And you'll be home soon; In about a week, I heard?” He watched Eren slowly nod. “Eren, just hang on until then. And when you and Levi come home I'll make you whatever you want for dinner and give you plenty of hugs, okay? It won't be forever, honey.” You'll be home soon.

Eren swallowed shaking his head, curling up more to himself after he put the laptop on the bed, off of his lap. I wanna go home, I wanna go home... “I wanna go home....” He murmured quietly, starting to rock himself where he was curled up. Mikhail whimpered and pawed at his knees, trying to get him to calm down.

Lathe gave him a weary look. “I know, Honey. But you need to stay until Hannes can go home, okay? It won't be long. You have Levi and Mila, and I'm always a call away whenever you need to hear or see me. It's okay. You'll be okay.” You will be. I'm trusting Levi with you.

Eren shook his head more, Mikhail slowly getting Eren to unfurl and pet him. He licked his face in his attempt to calm him down further. I wanna go home. “I don’t wanna stay…” He mumbled as he held onto Mikhail.

Lathe sighed, looking at him with sad eyes. “...if you really don’t want to stay anymore, we can fly you home and Levi can stay with Mila… but you two should stay together. If you’re still desperate to come home tomorrow after you sleep well, then we’ll see about bringing you home, okay?” We can fix this.

Eren could only nod as he became quiet, holding Mikhail close to his chest as he struggled to calm down. “O-Okay…” He murmured softly and he looked down. I just wanna go home...

Lathe gave him a soft smile. “Okay Honey. I'll let you sleep; it's getting late over there. ...I love you, Hon.” I really do.

Eren nodded as he held Mikhail close. He didn’t speak after that, Levi taking care of Mila when she fussed about a diaper and food, but he barely noticed them leave or come back. He was lost to the world as he laid down with Mikhail on his chest, struggling to fall asleep as he closed his eyes. I wanna go home.

Levi changed Mila and helped her eat, wiping up her chin whenever she missed her mouth with the spoon. Soon he was laying her down to sleep with her stuffed puppy, settling into bed with Eren, having changed into looser clothes. Levi curled up around Eren, spooning him and kissing his
shoulder.
Chapter 115: Seizures

Levi woke up with the space next to him cold, bolting upright when he saw Eren was missing, the house deathly silent. Where is he? He stepped into shoes and carefully picked up Mila, carrying her with him as he went outside to look at the pastures, seeing Eren far, far out on Charlie, riding bareback and practically laying on top of him. He's so far out there…. I should just let him be. Levi went back into the house, settling back to bed with Mila on his chest, falling asleep again. When hours had passed and Eren hadn't come back, he went out again with Mila, taking his time walking across the pasture and looking up to Eren, a small bag on his arm. “Hey Eren.” He saw Eren’s blank expression, his eyes glossy and sad. “You've been out here a long time. I have food for you if you're hungry.” He watched him slowly shake his head. “...you need to eat at least something, Hon. Just a granola bar, please.” Levi fished for it, holding it out to him. Please eat.

Eren shifted, looking at the granola bar with only slight interest. I just wanna go home, but Charlie’s comfortable… He took it, opening the package and taking a small bite as he laid back down on Charlie’s back. I wanna be left alone… And Charlie will protect me… He already almost bit one of the hands…

Levi gave him a small smile of approval, taking a small cloth bag and tying the very long string he attached to it loosely around Charlie’s neck. “It's has more food and a water bottle in it in case you want it… I'll leave you be. I'm going to take Mila with me to the hospital and check on Hannes, okay? Do you wanna come? You don't have to if you don't want to.”

Eren shook his head, looking down in silence. I don’t wanna go, I’m safe with Charlie, I don’t wanna be alone in the house. He stretched as he laid over Charlie’s back. The horse’s ears perked towards Mila, interested in her as she tried to grab at him. Charlie’s okay with kids…

Levi looked down as Mila reached for Charlie, stepping a bit closer so she could pet his nose. “It's Charlie, honey. He's a horsie. Can you say ‘horsie’?” Please try...

“Dahgie!” She said excitedly as she pet his nose. Dahgie! Dahgie! Dahgie! She giggled as Charlie snorted at her. Mila let out a loud squeal before petting Charlie again.


Mila looked confused before she waved as well, pouting when they started walking away. “B-Buh… Muhmuh…”
Levi made a face when Mila looked overwhelmingly saddened, coming back over and looking to Eren. “Honey… can Mila have a hug before we go?” She didn't get to see you at all today. She misses her Mum.

Eren shifted, turning his head to look at them, Mila reaching for him. Levi doesn’t want her on a horse…. He groaned as his body ached as he hopped down from Charlie, stumbling a bit before getting his proper footing. I can hold her, I’ll be able to do it…

Levi reached with one arm to catch him as he swayed, helping him steady himself. “You didn't need to hop down, it's-” He stopped himself, thinking. I said before that I didn't think her on a horse was a good idea. “....Eren, I overreacted earlier… I'm just being too protective of her. It's okay for her to be held on a horse, and if you're right there in the saddle or on the horse with her, she can ride. I take what I said before back. It's… it's honestly a very nice idea. She certainly loves the horses already.” Levi handed her over, smiling when Mila squealed happily and grabbed at Eren’s shirt. So adorable.

Eren held her as she held onto him, slowly shaking his head. “You don’t want her on a horse…. I won’t put her on a horse, even if I’m on it …” His words were mumbled and his voice rough from not using it. I won’t make you worry. “S-Should I come with you?” He murmured quietly, looking down and away from Levi’ gaze. He’s gonna yell if I didn’t jump down... I don’t have a saddle...

Levi gave him a soft smile, his hand going to rest on his arm. “Eren, really. I got mad and I was feeling really protective of her. It's fine if she rides, saddle or not, as long as you're there. Really. I take everything else I said back. Please, it'll make her so much happier if she gets to spend time with you and the big doggies.” He chuckled quietly as a small smile graced Eren's lips for a second. “And you don't have to come. You can stay here by yourself or with Mila if you want. It's up to you, Hun.” I don’t mind.

.... Is he testing me? He probably doesn’t want to trust Mila with me while I’m prone to a panic attack any second… “Y-You should take her with you… Vatri will wanna see her.” He mumbled quietly, gently prying her from him and holding her out for him to take. I’ll stay home with Charlie and Mikhail...

Levi watched Mila’s face immediately shift, looking on the verge of tears as she realized she’d be leaving her Mum and the big doggie. “Eren, she looks so upset… please, it's okay.” Take her. She’ll be just fine. Levi’s eyes were pleading, genuine.

Eren shook his head, still holding Mila out to Levi. I don’t… I can’t… Not to her… He kept his head down, his eyes glued to the grass. Mikhail was whining as he pawed at Eren’s legs, trying to
Levi sighed, taking her. “Okay.” Levi stepped forward anyway, reaching for Eren with one arm and hugging him, Mila cradled between the two of them, her tiny fist reaching up for Eren. He tilted his head, softly pecking Eren’s neck when he felt arms slowly encircle them. “We love you, Eren.” They stood like that for a little while, Mila calming down, surrounded by her parents. She didn’t fuss when they split up, leaning against Levi without squirming. Levi gently kissed Eren’s cheek, leaving him be as he went back across the pasture. *We’ll be back soon.*

Eren watched them leave, feeling his guilt and anxiety quickly consume him. *Fuck… I made him leave… But he probably wouldn’t want to me to keep Mila anyways… And I won’t put her on a horse, he doesn’t want her on a horse…* He could feel Mikhail grab his hand and try and get him to reality. Eren simply fell to the ground with a blank and glassy stare.

Levi left him be, getting Mila’s bag and going to the truck, driving the short distance to the hospital. He went to Hannes’ room, smiling faintly when he looked a bit better, though still ruffled. <“Good afternoon, Hannes. You're looking much better.”> *This is great!*

Hannes smiled warmly at the two of them looking to his vitals. <“Apparently I’m allowed to go home in three days… Where’s Eren?”> *Why’s he not with you guys? What happened?* Hannes looked up to Levi, seeing a swelling black eye. <“Who beat you up?”> *Did Eren do that? I know he’s feisty… But yeesh…*

Levi looked a bit hesitant, shrugging off the bag and deciding against sitting in a chair, sitting on the end of Hannes’ bed, Mila immediately reaching for the man. Levi former her over, the man happily accepting the tot while he thought. <“Uhm… a lot happened last night… I caught one of your hands with Eren pinned against a wall, trying to uhm… touch him… I think the guy’s name was Moritz? But I easily got him off of Eren and had him pinned when he got violent, making him apologize before letting him run off… it wasn't the first time he'd done that, I'd heard… and he had tried uhm… taking everything from Eren, if you understand… and I got so mad I went to confront him again about it… I said I'd take it to the police… and he swung at me and it just escalated… another hand called the police and when they showed up I immediately stopped fighting but he managed to get a punch at my face in before he was tackled… It was… it was a mess… Eren had a panic attack and the officer kicked in the door because he was in there with Mila and the cop wasn't patient enough to get the key and it made it worse… he's… he's been either a wreck or just… not there… the questioning at the station didn't go well, there aren't any charges against me, just Moritz… but Eren had a tough time with it… and this morning he went out early to ride Charlie, bareback, just laying on his back… I made him eat something and hug Mila but I left him alone mostly… he's… he's hurting and he really misses home as he misses Dad a lot too… I think he’ll only really be better once we’re home.”> Levi rambled on, not really a ring about being eloquent for the moment. *He's a mess… and I can't fix it….*
Hannes was quiet, his face changing as emotions swirled through him. *That all happened to Eren? He never said a word about it to me though? What happened that got him so afraid?* He sighed softly as Levi finished, holding Mila as she tugged at his nose. He gave her a finger to hold onto and she happily accepted it. <“Are you sure you should be leaving him alone? I-Is Eren okay… Up here?”> He was worried as he tapped his forehead, knowing what Levi said and hoping he misunderstood. *Please be that, he shouldn’t be broken anymore… He’s gone through too much…*

Levi looked at him, shrugging. <“He’s gotten through much worse before… I think he just needs time to move on from this. Because of what he went through before… I think he just needs some more time. He didn’t expect this kind of shit to ever happen again… he needs time, but he'll be okay.”> *He will be. I know it.* <“He’ll be okay with Charlie… knowing him he won't move for a few more hours.”> *He'll stay on Charlie and be okay. He has food and water. …he'll be okay.*

Hannes nodded but he still looked worried. <“Levi… I-I’m not entirely sure you should be leaving him alone. I don’t like the feeling my gut has right now…”> *I don’t like the sound of this situation… I don’t like it one bit….

Levi hesitated, thinking. He felt uneasy himself, not too sure what to make of it. <“…..do you think I should go back and keep an eye on him…? Just in case something happens? Will you be okay by yourself? I know it must get boring in here by yourself…”> *….I probably should go make sure he’s okay…*

Hannes nodded. <“Of course! I’m just glad you could come visit today, go home, make sure Eren’s okay…”> He pecked Mila’s forehead before holding her out for Levi to take. *She should go home too and be with her Mumma…* <“There’s a door in the basement that I think will fit the front door… You could replace it if you get bored… It has a lock on it, and it’s the same key.”> *That might make Eren feel safer.*

Levi nodded, taking her back and picking up his bag. <“Alright. I'll see if he's in any better shape tomorrow and I'll bring him if I can… I'm sorry if I don't come tomorrow.”> Levi gave him a small wave as he left, his strides quickening when he saw Charlie trotting along riderless by the fence, whinnying in distress with Mikhail going in circles near the wall, barking for attention. *Oh shit.* Levi immediately got out and hopped the fence, running where Mikhail led him and finding Eren in the grass, on his side and absolutely still, drooling heavily. *Eren had a seizure. Fuck, I don't know how long for… “Eren?! Eren, can you hear me?”* Levi knelt next to him, brushing his hair out of the way and peering at his glassy eyes. “Eren? Eren, please!”

Eren’s body lay still on the ground, the only part of his body moving was his chest, and that was just barely. His eyes were glassy, and completely glazed over, staring at a fixed point around Levi’s knee because of where his head was. He continued to drool, which came out in long streams down his cheek. Eren’s fingers were locked in odd positions from his seizing. He was covered in
dirt and there was some blood across one of his arms due to seizing and his arm catching a rock. The wound was messy, and full of dirt at this point. He looked worse for wear as he laid still, completely unresponsive.

….he needs a doctor. Levi heaved him up carefully, bringing him to the truck and laying him down carefully in the backseat, buckling him in an awkward way so he wouldn't slide off the seat. He let Mikhail hop in before he drove back to the hospital carefully, carrying Eren inside the lobby, looking to the nurse at the front desk whose face immediately washed over with worry. <“He had a seizure, I don't know how long it was, but I found him like this. And his arm got cut, probably on a rock or something when he fell off his horse. He was riding when I left him…”>

The nurse quickly got a bed and got Levi to set Eren down. She quickly paged the neurologist before starting to clean out the cut thoroughly. *It needs to be cleaned out and bandaged before it gets infected.*

Levi set him down, letting the nurse work while they waited for the neurologist. He spoke up after a moment of thought. <“This isn't the first time he's had a seizure… he's been really stressed lately for a lot of different reasons, and the extreme stress causes them for him… it's happened a handful of times before.”> *This isn't the first time we've dealt with this.*

The nurse looked to Levi with concern before nodding and continuing with her task. <“I’ll tell the neurologist.”> She bandaged up his arm before leaving them in the ER bay.

Eren’s body laid still, though his fingers started to twitch, Mikhail starting to growl at Levi. He was going to have another seizure, while Mila slept in the back seat of the car.

Levi watched his fingers twitch and lock up, cupping Eren’s cheek and murmuring. “Eren, Honey, can you hear me? Eren, please, it's okay, you'll be okay, just stay calm.” The only response was a violent jerk, his eyes holding a flicker of fear as Eren started jerking with another seizure. *Fuck.* Levi kept him on his side, looking to the clock. *Half a minute… one minute…. two…… two and a half….* Levi sighed with relief as it stopped after two and a half minutes, Eren slumping back onto the bed after that, drool still dripping from his mouth. *Fuck, this isn't good…*

A nurse came in a few moments later holding the sleeping Mila and her bag. <“Should I bring her to Hannes? Or….”> *You left the car unlocked, so I grabbed her before someone else could… I've been around Hannes long enough to know she’s yours.*

Levi looked up, seeing Mila asleep in the nurse’s arms. *Oh my god… <“Y-Yes, please, I couldn't get her yet, Eren just had another seizure for two and a half minutes….”> …Help.*
The nurse’s eyes widened and nodded, leaving and paging the neurologist once again and putting Eren at the top of the list. She then went with Mila and brought her to Hannes, who was extensively worried that she was here, which meant Levi and Eren were here as well.

Levi stayed with Eren, still murmuring into his ear as they waited. “Eren, please… you're scaring me…. it's okay though, you're gonna be okay… we’re in a hospital and the people here will know what to do to help you. It's gonna be okay.” *It has to be.*

Eren’s eyes had finally closed after a few minutes, still drooling profusely. The nurses were worried as they hooked him up to all the machines to check his vitals. It was nearly a half hour later when the Neurologist came to evaluate Eren’s condition.

Levi was sitting next to Eren, in a chair with his hand on Eren’s limp one, looking over him and the machines with slightly fearful eyes. He schooled his expression when the neurologist came in, looking up to them with quiet expectancy. *What are you gonna say? Is his brain okay?*

<“This has happened before?”> *You seem like you're waiting for answers…. I’d need to do testing for that.* <“Who’s his primary? They must be informed.”> He checked Eren’s eyes with a light, liking the way they retracted. *He’s responding well…*

Levi nodded. <“It's happened before, a few times, but it's been a year since the last one… uhm, his primary doctor is in America… he's not a German citizen.”>

<“Alright… I need their number so I can speak with them, I’ll get a translator as well… Do you know if he hit his head?”> *I see his arm his bandaged.*

Levi shrugged, thinking. <“When I left he was on his horse… so he definitely fell… but I'm not sure if he hit his head. Probably. And I can speak English on a native-speaker level, I can talk to the doctor with you.”> *That'll work easiest.*

<“Alright, call them, it should be around morning for them now… It’s about 3 here… Where are you from? What time is it there?”> *I want to get this addressed now… And it’s at least 6am there…*

Levi took out his phone. <“We’re from Kansas, it should be about…. 8 AM?”> *Ish?* Levi dialed the number, holding it in front of him on speaker, waiting for Scotty to pick up. *Come on Scotty.*
Scotty’s eyes slowly cracked open as he heard his phone going off. *Who the hell?* He groaned, coughing as he turned to grab his phone, looking at the ID. *Why is Levi calling me?* “H-Hello?” His voice was rough, followed by a coughing fit. *Fuck my throat hurts…*

Levi heard the rasp in his voice. *He doesn't sound too good himself…* “Hey Scotty, uhm… I'm sorry for waking you up if I did, but uhm… Eren and I are in Germany right now with Mila, and Eren had two seizures today… and the neurologist at the hospital here needs you to know that and I need to act as translator because I think he needs to ask you stuff…” *It's a thing….*

Casper’s head poked in the door, seeing Scotty awake again and with his phone, frowning. “Don't they know enough not to call you on a sick day?” *Really.* “The soup still has about an hour, by the way.” *Chicken noodle. The only thing you'll care about eating when you're this sick.*

Scotty shook his head at Casper, coughing weakly. “What happened, Levi?” *What happened with Eren? I knew Eren was in Germany… But you guys too? Man, I have been out of the loop.* He coughed again, his whole body shaking as he coughed up some phlegm. *Fuck that’s gross…*

Levi hesitated when he heard him cough, hearing Casper in the background. *You're sick…* “Eren came over here originally to take care of Hannes’ horses and to make sure the guy was alright… but one of the hands at the stables was apparently hitting on him pretty aggressively… and they touched him and came close to raping him… I was able to stop it when it almost happened again yesterday and long story short fights were to be had, the police were sled, and he's in trouble and I'm not. But Eren… he's been a wreck… and he was out on the first Charlie, the one from when he was a kid, all day, just laying on his back… when I came back from the hospital a bit later he was on the ground and drooling, it was obvious he had a seizure but I don't know for how long…. and he had another one at the hospital, two and a half minutes.” He looked up to the nurse. <“I just relayed everything that happened today to him, I'll translate when he says something.”> He watched the neurologist nod.

Casper was silent as he heard Scotty speak, going to get a box of tissues and thrusting a handful into Scotty’s hand. Casper gave his temple a kiss before going to sit next to him on the bed, wanting to listen. …..*I'm allowed to listen, right? ….it's Levi, and I'll hear it anyway. I probably am.*

Scotty looked to Casper, sighing before he put the phone on speaker. “Alright what do his vitals look like? Are they all over the place? Or are they normal?” *Is he in stable condition?*

Levi looked up, reading the monitor. “….his vitals all look normal. They've looked okay since he was hooked up… at least after the second seizure passed….***
Scotty nodded, coughing horribly for a few seconds before a soft groan was heard. “Have they given him anything? Has he eaten? Did he drink anything?” I need to know these things.

Levi shook his head even though Scotty couldn’t see. “No, he’s been unconscious the entire time… he ate at least part of a granola bar just before I left him, but he’s practically on an empty stomach… he didn't have breakfast…” That wasn't a thing...

Scotty sighed heavily. “He should be eating… Anyways, what do his eyes look like? Does he have any bruising around his cranium?” That’s something the neurologist will probably answer. He coughed up another clump of phlegm which grossed him out as he hacked it into a tissue. So fucking gross.

“His eyes are glossy and his stare was distant when he was still conscious, and from what I saw they’re responding well to light. Let me ask the neurologist about the other thing.” “Sir, his doctor asks if there’s any bruising around his cranium… and how well would you say his eyes responded to light?” It looked decent to me… but I need to hear what you’re thinking.

<“His eyes are well, they may be a bit slow, but that’s normal after successive seizures…. I’ll check his cranium again, but he appears to have no bruising.”> He spoke softly as he checked Eren’s skin again. I’m not positive that he fell...

Levi nodded, letting him inspect his head again, speaking when he shook his head. “Scotty, the neurologist says that his eyes’ response is a bit slow but that it's normal after having had successive seizures. There isn't any cranial bruising, so I don't think we can be sure that he fell…” It doesn't seem like it...

Scotty nodded, only to end with another long coughing fit, with a few tissues full of phlegm. “Alright, he should be fine… But I wanna know as soon as he has another seizure… Okay?” He shouldn’t be having so many in a short period of time. “I want him admitted though, and a full test done when he wakes.”

“Got it.” “He says that he should be fine, but he wants to know the instant he has another seizure if he does, and when he wakes up he needs to be fed and have a full test done. He needs to be admitted.” Can't get around it.

<“Alright, do you know who his health care proxy is?”> They must be called because he’s being admitted. The man looked over Eren’s limp body, as he slowly breathed. It looks like he’s
...it might be me... but I think it's still Lathe... 

"That'd probably be his father... Should I call him, or do you need to?"

"I should really be the one to call, does he know German?" I'm not very good with English, I need to work on it more.

"Yeah, he's fluent as well." Levi looked back to his phone. “Alright, Scotty, I'll let you go back to being a sick mess.” Your whole schedule is probably booked with just being sick and sleeping it off.

Scotty let out a very fake laugh before becoming serious. “Hahaha... Fuck you too, call me if anything changes.” He murmured before he leaned his head back down into his pillows. I wanna sleep... It's still early...

Casper sighed as he flopped right back down, putting his phone back into charger and tucking him in, not caring that he was fussing so much over him. He saw Scotty smile when he kissed his cheek, and it made it worth it. “I'll let you sleep until food is ready, Honey.” You'll get better soon.

Levi hung up, watching as the neurologist walked over to the phone at the wall, giving him the number to dial. This'll be an interesting conversation... I wonder if it'll get him out here?

Lathe was dozing on the couch when the phone rang, a nearly empty plate of waffles in his lap, startling a bit when his phone rang. Huh? Lathe picked up his phone, looking at the international number. He shrugged, answering it. “Hello?” Who are you?

"Hi... Is this Uhm, Lathe Quo?" That's how you pronounce it right? He tapped his fingers against the wall, waiting for a response.

Lathe immediately felt more awake, setting the plate down. "Y-Yes, that's me.... what is this about?" My sons are okay... right?

"My name is Dr. Streigler, I'm the neurologist at Shiganshina Hospital, I'm calling on behalf of one Eren Yeager." Oh this'll be a wild conversation.
…..oh shit.…..neurologist? <“.....oh my god, what happened?!”> I talked to him yesterday and he seemed fine…. what the hell happened?

<“It appears that your son has experienced two successive seizures within the span of two hours, he’s being admitted, and due to hospital procedures, I’m to inform you of his admittance.”> If this has happened before, I can imagine what you’re thinking…

Lathe paused, thinking. Two seizures in two hours.…..well shit. <“Because of what I’ve heard has been going on lately with him over there I’d say the cause is most likely stress… this happens when he’s seriously stressed out. If he’s kept calm it shouldn't happen again. Is he awake at all? What are his vitals like?”> Lathe’s entire demeanor shifted, switching to doctor mode. Tell me everything.

< “He’s currently unconscious, his vitals are stable and his reaction to light is a little slow, but with how close the seizures were it seems normal…”> Wait... Are you a doctor too?

Lathe nodded, thinking. <“...okay, sounds right… uhm, when he has seizures he has a tendency to drool, just putting that out there… when he wakes up, priority number one is to keep him calm. He could get scared if he doesn't recognize where he is, and it could trigger another seizure. It would be a good idea to check his memory if something seems off when he first talks- check if he remembers what a chicken is when he sees a picture of one and stuff like that. He should probably have a CAT scan or an MRI to check for any brain damage when he's in a little better shape. If something looks wrong and looks like lasting damage I'd like to know about that as soon as you do.”> ......<“And make sure he eats, will you? He forgets to do that a lot and since he's been caring for a loved one in the hospital he's been neglecting his own health. If he looks a little sickly that'd explain it.”>

The doctor nodded. Definitely a doctor for a father... <“Of course, Sir. We’ll keep you posted, and I’ll do a full evaluation on him when he wakes.”> I’ll go the whole nine yards too.

<“Thank you very much, that sounds good. I'm sure a Levi Ackerman is there with him? Short, black hair, perpetual scowl?”>

<“Yes, he brought Eren in.”> Is he making sure this man is with Eren? Is this his bodyguard or something? Isn’t this man famous?

<“Good- does he have their kid? Is a toddler anywhere in sight?”> Knowing Levi he probably forgot Mila in the car and the cops are showing up just now to save her.
The doctor looked confused before glancing over to the man again and sighing. "No sir, there’s not a toddler in sight…”>

"I see no child with Levi…"

"Can you ask him who has the kid? If he left her in the car I need to get over there and smack him because you're not allowed to do that.”>

> Not a thing.

The doctor nodded, putting the phone to his shoulder. "Mr. Ackerman… Where’s your child?”>

Did you forget her like this man thinks you did?

Levi looked surprised at first, speaking after a moment. "A nurse got her from the car; Hannes has her.”>

She's fine.

The doctor relayed the message to Lathe, a soft smile on his face. "Anything else I can do before I get back to work?”>

Is there anything I should know?

.....called it. "Yes, please kindly inform Levi that the next time I see him he will promptly be smacked into next week for forgetting his kid. Thank you, and I hope the rest of your day goes well!”>

Lathe hung up after that, thinking. ....yeah, he's dead for that one.

The doctor hung up, looking to Levi. "Apparently you’ll be smacked the next time you see him…..”>

Is he actually going to beat you? Because it sounded like he would.

Levi sighed, running a hand through his hair. "Yeah, I kinda expected him to say something like that… and the worse part is I know he’ll actually do it.”>

He registered the strange look he was given, speaking again. "It's not like he beats me or anything, he’ll smack me for forgetting the kid in the car and then immediately apologize and start fussing over everything in sight.”>

It's how he works.

The doctor simply nodded before looking to Eren. "He’ll be here awhile.”>

He looks peaceful while he sleeps…. "Is there anything I should know about before I evaluate him when he wakes up? Any pre existing conditions I should know about?">

His eyes gazed down at the floor seeing Mikhail lay down on the floor with his vest on. Who's dog is that?

Levi nodded, looking to Mikhail. "Uh, yeah, Eren has PTSD… that's his service dog, Mikhail.”>

Yeah…. that's a thing...
“Okay so what topics should I steer clear of?” The man pulled out a pad of paper and a pen, starting to write Eren’s details down. *I can evaluate him pretty quickly if I know what won’t set him off...*

Levi hesitated, speaking. “He has PTSD because of sexual abuse a really long time ago… but given the past month he’s been really on edge… just don't try to allude to anything like that, and I'm sure you wouldn't have anyway. I'm sorry but your presence and especially touch is going to make him nervous, but that's why I'm here. And knowing Dad, if and when he comes, Eren’ll feel a lot better and be a bit more comfortable.” *Sorry, but Eren's not gonna want anything to do with you when he wakes up.*

The man nodded. “Understandable, I can definitely steer clear of that topic… A nurse will come by and move Eren out of the ER and into a room soon.” *I need to go prepare some tests for him and see if I can schedule the MRI and the CAT scans...*

“Thank you.” Levi watched the man leave, reaching for Eren’s hand when he had left, watching Eren peacefully sleep. *I wish you'd wake up and be okay.... but it's not going to be okay for a while.... and I'm so sorry about that...*

After a few minutes, a nurse came and brought Eren’s bed up to Hannes’ room. He’d been shifted over to make room for another hospital bed as Eren was rolled in. Mila was happily pulling on his scruff of a beard, giggling when she saw Levi, moving to stand on the older man’s lap to get to Levi. *Da!*

Levi quickly moved to catch Mila when she stood, trying to take a step and about to fall. “Honey, be careful!” Levi pecked her nose, bouncing her and settling her on his hip. He looked to Hannes, seeing the absolutely disbelieving look on his face. … oh. *“Uhm, Hannes… Eren had had a seizure when I found him… he had another after we got here. We think he'll be okay, but we can't be sure until he wakes up.”* …this is a thing… please don't panic...

Hannes looked shocked before looking at Eren’s limp body. “Has he woken up yet?” *I’m worried about him.*

Mila giggled as Levi picked her up. “Da!” She excitedly held onto him and looked at Eren sleeping on the bed. “Muhmuh?” She calmed down as she called for Eren again, but he just laid there. *Muhmuh?*
<“No, he's still unconscious….”> Levi faintly smiled as Mila clung to him, seeing the confusion in her eyes as Mila called to Eren, one of her hands reaching for him. “Mila, Honey, Eren’s sleeping right now, okay? He's really tired.” It's not completely a lie… seizures exhaust him…. Levi shifted his hold on her, cradling her closer. It's okay, Honey.

Mila shifted her gaze to Levi, mumbling something before she lifted her hand to chew on it. Tee hur…. She whimpered a bit as Eren laid motionless. “Muhmuh…” Her voice was whining, wanting Eren to hold her, not really noticing how white he was.

Levi sighed, going to the bag and getting her teething ring, letting her chew on it while he wiped off her hand with a tissue. “Mumma’s asleep, Honey.” Levi went and sat next to Eren, Mila crawling out of his arms, his eyes sad as she curled into the space by his chest, nuzzling into his neck. She missed him already… “Gentle, Honey.” Levi reached for her, smoothing her hair as she settled, letting her stay there. …….. Okay.

Mila was content to lay where she could hear Eren’s heartbeat. She was only fussy for a moment, chewing on the ring as another tooth started to come in. Muhmuh…

Levi sighed quietly as he sat there, dropping his head, his eyes shutting. ….I thought today might be okay… and it's not. Levi covered his mouth with his wrist as he yawned, looking back over to Mila, who was happy to lay with her ear pressed to Eren’s chest, teething like her life depended on it. Another tooth is probably coming in…

They stayed like that for awhile, Eren’s heartbeat still slow on the monitors and Hannes getting more and more worried about him. He’s been unconscious for hours! Mila’s already broken her gums for two more teeth, took a three hour nap and woke up crying for food and her diaper to be changed. He hasn’t stirred at all. <“Levi… Is this normal?”> I’m so worried…

Levi sighed, nodding. <“More or less… seizures exhaust him… and I'm sure with two of them happening in succession he'll be out a while more…”> Levi had long since shifted, deciding not to give a damn that Hannes was there and laying down behind Eren, spooning him a bit, an arm over him to make sure Mila didn't squirm and fall off the bed. I'm tired… but I shouldn't sleep… but I've been half-sleeping this whole time… and then I think I actually did sleep…. fuck it, I'm not allowing myself to care if I fall asleep.

Hannes nodded, going back to his book of puzzles, the nurses coming to check on them at regular intervals. Eren had just about slept through dinner when his eyes opened slowly. Mila was the first to notice, giggling. “Muhmuh!” She shifted to put her small hand on Eren’s forehead, trying to get to her feet.
Levi lifted his head, immediately sitting up and picking up Mila before she could topple over. “Careful, Honey!” He immediately pecked her cheek, looking down as he saw Eren shift the tiniest bit, standing and coming around the other side of the bed, trying to hide the wiry in his voice. “Eren? Eren, can you hear me?” Levi gently ran a hand through Eren’s hair as he came to, watching his eyes flutter open, his voice soft. “Don't worry Honey, you're okay. I'm right here. You're safe.” You're just fine.

“My body feels like lead.” Eren groaned as he shifted, feeling how stiff and heavy his body felt. “What happened? I remember you made me eat something…” What happened after that? Why am I in a hospital bed? In Hannes’ room?

Levi sighed, though he was inwardly grateful when he spoke. Thank fuck he remembers this morning… “Eren, you had a seizure this morning after I left for the hospital… I came back a bit later and you were on the ground, the seizure already having passed. You had another one when I brought you here… I'm sorry you feel like shit.” Levi gave him a small smile, still carding a hand through his hair. “Are you hungry at all, Hon?” You should be… we’re making you eat either way.

Eren was about to open his mouth before his stomach spoke for him. “Food.” He agreed, looking to Mila as she held her arms out for him to hold her. He smiled and shakily reached for her after he sat up. He smiled as she sat down on his lap, and he glanced over to see Hannes was asleep, an empty plate by his bedside. So I just missed dinner?

Levi nodded, making sure his hold on Mila was steady enough. “Yeah, we’ll get you food. I'll be right back, Hun.” Levi left, going down the hall and stopping the first nurse he saw <“Excuse me, ma’am? Eren Yeager just woke up and needs dinner. He was unconscious until just now.”> Surprisingly, he seems rather okay.
Chapter 116: Nightmares

Chapter Summary

Hello, Hello

Update:

I've started Uni.... it's hell, well hell in a good way, but I'll try and get chapters out as much as I can, most likely they won't be long, but they'll hold a lot of meaning to the story, so yeah... have fun reading!

~Duke

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

......Eren's been....... not himself... Lathe was still washing dishes long after dinner was done, taking his time. When he and Levi came home from Germany with Mila, he.... he's so far back into his old mentality.... when he came back he clung to me and cried for an hour.... it was so hard to see him like that... The dishes took him another hour, glancing up and seeing the time, sighing quietly. I still have paperwork to do... Lathe settled at the kitchen table and got to work, coffee making him jittery and anything besides tired when midnight rolled around, craving something sweet. I shouldn't.... I've kept gaining weight... It didn't take long for him to crack, curled up on the couch with a bowl of ice cream and a wedge of chocolate. I feel like I've been abandoning Ieva when it's this late and I'm not in bed... I get to sleep so late and wake up early... and we've got three more months until the twins are born... He was only vaguely interested in the war documentary, watching the images without really listening. And... my new... uhm.... toy came in the mail... and I've felt too guilty about it still to use it... even if Ieva said it was okay... she's never in the mood for anything sexual these days, I don't want to bother her... Lathe stared at his empty bowl with sad eyes. When she has the twins, and she really sees how much weight I've gained... will she even think I'm still attractive? Will she want to give me what I want? Lathe sniffled, going to rinse the bowl and put it in the dishwasher, going upstairs to their room. He was careful to be silent as he changed, settling in and unable to help from curling away from his wife, the space between them feeling so much bigger than a few inches. I'm sorry I'm a shitty husband..... Lathe stared off across the room, feeling his body slowly fall asleep, blinking and finally feeling himself blink out of consciousness.

He sat on the couch in the living room, the quilt spread out behind him, warm. The room around him was blurry, but his focus was snapped up to the brunette in his lap, the hands in his hair, appreciatively stroking over his shoulders and up his neck, the touch warm. ...?

The man’s eyes were soft as he held Lathe’s jaw gently, his fingers delicately curling into his dark black hair. His lips parted a bit, looking over Lathe as he sat in his lap, his legs cross around him expertly. “Hmm.... So handsome....” His voice was rich and a bit deep, but full of love and
passion as he dipped his head down to Lathe’s neck, placing gentle kisses on the pale skin. *So handsome…*

Lathe felt himself gasp, immediately tipping his head to the side, slowly leaning into the touch, melting as his lips brushed his skin. *… really…?* “Y-You think so?” Lathe’s voice was small, his hands slowly wrapping around their trim waist.

“I don’t think so… I know so.” He murmured in his ear, gently kissing the sensitive spot and feeling Lathe shudder as a result. *So sensitive…* *I love it.* “I wanna hear everything, Lathe, don’t hold back.” The brunette let his eyes open lazily as he mouthed at the man’s neck, his hands moving to finger at the hem of his shirt.

“I want it off… So I can worship this body.”

Lathe made a small sound as the man gently tugged at his shirt, his face heating up with an embarrassed flush. *But…* “I-I’m not in the same shape you're used to… I’m sorry…..” Lathe felt close to tears, ducking his head down. *I let myself go to waste… I worked so hard and then I stopped taking care of myself….*

The man shook his head, removing his hands to bring them up to cup Lathe’s cheeks. “No, that doesn’t matter to me, not at all… I’d still love you no matter what you looked like, you certainly did the same for me…” He murmured and moved to lean in and kiss Lathe’s eyes, gently licking away the tears that threatened to fall. *I don’t care, I would never care…*

Lathe wanted to cry even more when his tears were kissed away, his heart tugging at the words. He held onto him tighter when the man gently pulled his sweater over his head, undoing the buttons of his shirt without barely any struggle. He flushed when it slowly slid off his shoulders, out of the way in a moment. He felt himself being pushed gently onto their bed, not remembering being carried up the stairs. It didn’t matter for long, shivering as the man nibbled at his neck, down to his chest. He reached and held onto his shoulders for purchase, whimpering incessantly as he started to pay attention to his chest. *P-Please be gentle, please…* *It’s too much…*

Eren sighed softly, shifting to move and kiss at his neck again. “Don’t worry, I’ll be gentle, and if anything feels off, or you don’t want to do anything, you tell me.” His bright teal-green eyes were soft and full of emotion as he slowly trailed down his chest once again with gentle open mouth kisses. *I want you to feel safe, and secure.*

Lathe breathed out softly, nodding. “O-Okay…” Lathe still held onto him tightly, gazing down, his breath catching when he recognized the eyes staring up at him, unused to the kind of love in them. *W-Wait…* Lathe’s mind stuttered when Eren gently nipped at one of his buds, shaking. He knew for a moment that he should be shoving him off, but after that confusion filled him. Why would he shove this beautiful creature away? When he blinked he forgot the reason of his discomfort, the emotion in those eyes making him feel safe, warming him to his toes. He tried not to squirm as
Eren started to lavish him with attention, his breathing even and deep. *How could I deserve this...?*

Eren’s eyes were soft as he closed his lips around Lathe’s nipples, sucking softly. *I want you to feel utter bliss. “Tell me what feels good... Okay?” I want to know...*

Lathe let out quiet, breathy moans as Eren sucked on the sensitive flesh, his hands roaming over his clothed shoulders. *I want the shirt off...* He watched Eren leave his skin, a whine leaving him before he could stop it, unable to bring himself to move when Eren sat back in his lap. He watched him slowly take his shirt off over his head, his skin decorated with those same beautiful tattoos, the dark linework and colorful flowers everywhere on his arms and chest, even spilling onto his back. He held him close to his front when he shifted back down, his legs instinctively spreading when Eren shifted further down his chest. “O-Oh...” Lathe felt very warm as Eren gently kissed his stomach, feeling very conscious of the soft flesh. “I-Is it really okay?” *I'm so sorry...*

Eren paused looking at him with confusion. “What’s okay? Shouldn’t I be asking you that? Or would you rather top?” His voice soft and gentle as his hand moved to gently cup his bulge, kissing his stomach more as he waited for his answer. *I don’t understand, I’m okay with this... But are you not?*

Lathe shook his head immediately, sighing shakily when Eren gently handled him through his pants. “It’s n-not that, I... I don’t want to top... I just...” He looked away, ashamed. “I’m sorry I haven’t kept myself in better shape for you...” You’d like it better if I wasn’t this pudgy... I don’t wanna be like this if you don’t like it...

Eren shook his head. “If that’s what you're worried about, I don’t mind at all... I love all of you, every last bit, from your head to your toes. Don’t have a warped sense of what your body looks like, you’re beautiful, and if people can’t see that, they don’t deserve you. You’re amazing just the way you are, no matter if you’re as skinny as I was when you found me, or if you're on the thicker side, like Hannah is... You’re you, that’s all I want, and that’ll never change.” Eren murmured to him lovingly, his words full of compassion and love. His hands working on pulling Lathe’s pants down the whole time, intent on pleasuring him. *I want you to feel good about yourself...*

Lathe felt hot tears trail down his cheeks, not speaking for fear of letting out a sob, nodding. *What did I ever do to deserve you...* His lips parted in a gasp when Eren nipped lightly at him through his boxers, his heart feeling heavy with the affection Eren poured into him, still nervous when Eren slowly tugged down his boxers, gasping when he felt his hot tongue on him. “O-Oh...” Lathe spread himself more for him, his hands running through his hair. “F-Feels good...” He sounded weak, his toes curling. *Please...*

Eren let his tongue lavish him, swirling around his tip before backing off of him and looking into
his eyes. “Can you flip over and get on your hands and knees for me?” His words were soft and his eyes held nothing but warmth. *I want to really treat you right*…

Lathe slowly nodded, looking away and shifting for a moment, not wanting to ask. *I don't know if he'd be okay with it though*… Lathe shifted onto his hands and knees, looking behind him as Eren shed his pants, still wearing his boxers for the moment. He shook with nerves when Eren settled onto the bed behind him, not knowing what to expect. *What are you going to do to me?* Lathe felt fear run through him for a moment, though it settled somewhat when he felt hands tenderly holding his thighs, steadying him. *Please*…

Eren smiled softly, gently kissing his ass cheeks, moving to gently rub his thighs to calm him down. *I want you to be okay with this*… He slowly moved his kisses towards Lathe’s pucker, licking a broad stripe over his quivering hole and watching the shiver that ran through his body. *Good*…

Lathe gasped, shaking when Eren did it again. The sensation felt so strange and so wonderful, arousal filling his belly as Eren slowly lapped at him, feeling the tip of his tongue gently prod him. He slowly pushed back into him, his face flushing as his muscle slowly entered him. “Oh **Eren**…” *Feels so good*… Lathe’s thighs shook, his length aching for attention. *More… please, please more*…

Eren smirked, shifting his hold so his hands moved his cheeks apart, giving him better access to his ass, and let him dip his tongue deeper. His own length was straining against his tight boxers, wanting to be set free, and a wet spot was already forming on them. *Fuck, his body looks divine*… *I want him, but I doubt he’d want it rough*…

Lathe let a moan rip from his throat as Eren reached deeper with his tongue, feeling hot, his blood still flowing south. *Oh god*… “Eren… I… I want it….” Lathe loved the feeling of his tongue, but he was still aching with want. “It feels so good, but I really want more…” Lathe whimpered as Eren’s muscle left him, looking back as Eren suddenly held a small tube of lube, swallowing hard. *Guh… I wanna feel good*…

Eren shifted him to lay across his lap, his hardon hidden from his view that way, as he was able to gently grab at his ass. “Hmm, you sure? You don’t have to do this if you don’t want.” He leaned down and kissed his lower back, feeling him shiver from the gentle touch, coating his fingers in lube still. *I would like to really drive you wild… But I’m not sure you’d like that*…

Lathe slowly slid down from his elbows, his face pressed to the soft sheets, presenting his ass to Eren. “I-I’m nervous, but… I want this… I **really** want this…” He sounded breathless, trying to keep his nerves down when Eren coated his fingers with the slick substance, his knees parting a bit
more for him. He held his breath when his fingers ran around his pucker in a slow circle, making a small sound as the first finger entered him, trying to relax around the intrusion. *It feels weird...*

Eren made sure he kept kissing sensitive areas all along Lathe’s back as he gently worked his finger inside of him. He made sure he was gentle as he worked in a second finger, curling them, looking around for his prostate to try and get him to relax. *Fuck… I am really hard, and the sounds he’s making… They’re going right to my dick...*

Lathe mewled at all the attention, moaning loudly when Eren brushed that spot inside of him. *Oh...* “Eren… Eren, o-oh god...” Lathe felt like he was falling apart, the burn of the stretch as he added a third finger barely noticeable over the pleasure. *So good...* His eyes were screwed shut, shivering with the sensations. *I love this....*

Eren felt a blush overtake his features as he held Lathe close to himself. “I love this…. I love the way you sound when we’re like this… I love everything about you.” He nuzzled into him, feeling his fingers easily able to corkscrew around, a soft smile tugging on his lips. *I wanna be inside of him, will he still want it?*

Lathe blushed scarlet, feeling like it was their first time, everything so new and wonderful to him all over again. He blushed at his words, feeling him smile against his back. “I-I love how gentle you are with me when I... w-when I can't handle anything else...” *How have you put up with me?* Lathe moaned softly as Eren rubbed slow circles into his prostate, melting further into the bed. He quietly groaned when the fingers left him, looking back to Eren, shaking his head when he reached for a foil wrapper nearby. “N-No... I...” He blushed heavily, looking away. “....I want you to cum inside....” *I wanna feel everything... “...please be gentle with me...” I don't want rough... I'm so sorry... but I can't take anything else right now...*

Eren looked down at Lathe with surprise written across his features, slowly nodding and he shifted to get behind him, his length aching against his boxers which he finally decided to strip off of himself, letting his length leak precum as he shifted to grab the tube of lube. *I should coat myself, he’s not gonna wanna touch my dick in any respect, I know he’s not gay, at least he’s let me go this far...*

Lathe watched him, nearly drooling when his eyes rested on his length. *Red, hot... he's dripping ...* “E-Eren...” He reached back and swatted at his hand, looking up to him, his knees spreading more for him. “Like this… *please...*” He watched Eren’s expression, his face falling when he read his expression, shifting around to hold him close, burying his nose in his neck. “I... I might not be entirely gay... but that doesn't mean I’m entirely straight... I want you... so badly...” Lathe softly kissed his neck, feeling Eren hesitate in his arms, shivering at the touches. “You're everything I could ask for… please, don't doubt how much I want this...” *I really want you...*
Eren looked a little wary. “I should really put the condom on.” He murmured quietly, letting his head roll to the side, a low groan leaving his mouth as Lathe kissed at his neck. His lips feel nice…. I know he doesn’t want it rough… But at this rate…. I’ll be nothing but if I feel how warm he is…

Lathe felt fear grip in his chest for a moment, not wanting Eren to disagree. “B-But I want to feel everything… I really want to…” Lathe felt almost desperate, clinging to him, burying his face in his neck. I wanna…

Eren was easily swayed as Lathe clambered into his lap, shifting him so that his length poked at his entrance, wet and warm. He kissed Lathe’s ear, gently pushing his hips down onto his length as he sat there, holding onto him closely. You’ll like this position better I think, you can control what’s happening, and it’s hard to be rough with you on top of me…

Lathe draped himself on Eren, holding onto him tightly as he hovered over him, anxious. He felt his tip slowly enter him, gasping deeply as he sunk down his length, his head falling back at the sensation. He was so warm and wet, so much better than cool plastic, a stiff rod of silk. “O- Oh …” Lathe wanted to cry as Eren gently ground up into him, choking back a sob at the pleasure. I love it… I love it so much… I've missed out on so much… “I love it…” Lathe clung to Eren, trying to lift himself and sink back onto Eren, unused to the movement. “I wanted this so much…” I always wanted to know… it feels so much better than what I imagined…

Eren helped him move, his hands gripping onto his hips and helping him shift almost off of him before he plunged into him again. I want to be good for you, but is this okay for you? He turned his head to lap and kiss at Lathe’s neck, gentle as he let the man over him set the pace. I’ll let you lead….

Lathe struggled to lift himself and sink back down, his legs shaking as he was overwhelmed with everything, how right it felt to be full of Eren’s hot length, feeling him pulse when he shifted his hips on him, settled in his lap. I want you to take over… “Eren… please…” Lathe pulled Eren back with him, still buried in his heat as he fell onto his back, Eren over him. “C-Can you please…?” I want you to take care of me… I’m so sorry I’m being selfish…..

Eren looked over his whole body before he reached over him to grab a pillow, lifting his hips so that he could easily get his thighs under Lathe to really get going. “I-I’ll try and be gentle… But I can’t promise anything with how you look under me.” I really can’t, I can’t control myself…

Lathe nodded, slowly wrapping his arms and legs around him, groaning when Eren slowly thrusted into him. “I-It’s okay…” Lathe whimpered as Eren started a steady pace, looking up to him with love-filled eyes. “I get to have you…” I’m so happy….
Eren shifted forward bit by bit, his mouth latching onto Lathe’s skin as he formed an even pace, moving his thrusts around to look for his prostate. Where is it? His eyes widened as Lathe’s grip got tighter and his cries louder as he hit a certain spot. His hands grabbed the older man’s hips thrusting into that spot harder, wanting more and more to hear those sounds again.

Lathe cried out when Eren found his prostate, clinging to him tighter when his thrusts grew faster, shaking as he felt his coil tightening faster and faster. “Eren, o-oh my god… I-I'm gonna cum…” His voice was high-pitched, suddenly seized with fear. It's going to be over so soon…. “Y-You'll stay?” Stay with me… keep me warm…

Eren nodded against his neck. “Of course I’ll stay… Now relax…” He murmured huskily into his ears as his thrusts became jerky. Fuck you feel so tight…

Lathe stilled as he teetered on the edge, tightening around Eren, letting Eren pound into him, loving every second of it. He heard Eren moan loudly in his ear, feeling him cum inside of him, the sensation making him cry out loudly, his nails digging into his back. His head fell back as he blinked and let out a silent scream in bliss, his hands gripping the sheets as he looked up to the dark ceiling of his bedroom, cumming hard and panting as he orgasmed, slumping into the bed, confused for a moment at the lack of a beautiful brunette in his lap. What… His head fell to the side, his eyes widening as he saw locks and locks of bright hair. Ieva… and… I just… I… He looked back to his chest, the white streaks of cum on his bare chest doing nothing to calm the nausea rising in him. I dreamed… that, Eren and I.. we… and I loved it… Lathe was out of bed in an instant, managing to shut the door before he was curling over the toilet, vomiting everything in his stomach. Oh god… What the fuck is wrong with me?! Lathe dry heaved over the toilet for a long while before the crying started, going to rinse out his mouth when he was sure the vomiting was over, going to clean himself up. He looked in the mirror, feeling upset and utterly broken as he saw the white streaks on his pudgy stomach, his eyes red and puffy with tears. He looked over his entirety, feeling disgusted and sick, trying not to break down as he stared. I'm… I'm disgusting…

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment! I love reading them, and I'll reply when I can!

~Duke
Chapter 117: Tears

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Eren woke up when a crack of thunder clapped over the house, effectively shaking it. He let out a quiet yelp, seeing the bright flashes illuminate the room, and the tears instantly rolled down his face as another clap of thunder sounded. No... No more... No more... He shook as he curled up into a ball, starting to rock himself back and forth as he cried in silence, looking over towards Mila as she shifted. No no... No no... My fault... If she wakes up she'll cry... Levi doesn't want me to hold her....

Levi rolled over as the thunder sounded, the crack that faintly shook the house making him wake, sitting up. He looked over, seeing Eren curled up in the dim light. “Eren?” Levi shuffled closer to him before a shrill cry pierced the air, swearing under his breath. “One second Eren, I'll get her.” Levi for up and lifted Mila from her crib, bringing her to the bed with them, coaxing Eren closer to hold her between the two of them. “It's okay, it's just thunder. Your Daddies are right here, Honey.” Levi kissed her forehead, moving to kiss Eren’s cheek. “You have nothing to be scared of, love. It's just thunder. I'm right here.” You don't have to worry.

Eren shook his head, moving to curl up to himself tighter as he shook, let out a loud sound of fear as another boom of thunder sounded overhead. I'm sorry, i'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry... He kept murmuring on autopilot, not even realizing he was doing it. His eyes glistened with tears that quickly fell down his cheeks. His knuckles were white from his grip on his own legs, hugging himself close, trying to hide away as Mila’s cries and screams got louder from the thunder as it got closer and louder.

Levi held Mila to his chest with one arm, the other wrapping around Eren and kissing at his tears, his own voice gentle and sweet just for him. “Eren, you don't have anything to be sorry for, it's not your fault... the thunder isn't your fault, Mila’s crying isn't your fault. You're okay, we’re all okay. It'll be over soon, Honey. Promise.” It's okay. Levi reached for a moment to tug the blankets around them, cocooning them before hugging Eren back to his side. It's alright.

Eren grew instantly stiff against Levi, now flinching every time Mila cried as well as every crack of thunder. He kept his head tucked down on his knees, sniffling and hiccuping as his tears came back full force, though his murmurs were nonexistent. I'm scared... I want Dad... I made Mila cry.... She's scared of me.... And Levi doesn’t want me to touch her.... He thinks I’m crazy.... Am I crazy? I probably am....

Levi noticed Eren grow stiff, shoving the blankets wrapped tightly around them away, feeling him relax a bit more. “Eren, Honey, hold Mila with me. She’ll feel better.” Levi pressed against him, Mila reaching for Eren in her teary, scared state. She wants you...
Eren’s eyes were wide with fear as he turned his head to see Mila reaching out for him with just as much fear in her own eyes. He glanced over to Levi, his whole body shaking as he felt his walls crumble around him. No…. Eren shook his head, still trying to grip his legs and keep them as close to his chest as possible knowing that his hands were shaking worse than anything. You don’t want me to hold her… Y-You even told Dad….

Levi understood, keeping Mila close to himself. “Mumma is scared too, Honey, it's loud and scary right now. But you don't have to be scared, neither of you do. Just hang onto me, Honey. You'll be okay.” Levi felt her clutch his shirt, Levi hanging onto them as the storm raged, rubbing Eren’s back as he cried. I can't fix this… at least not now….

Eren flinched at first, though soon he became accustomed to Levi’s gentle touch as he cried. He whimpered as the thunder slowly faded away. Mila fell asleep in Levi’s arms as the thunder lessened. I’m scared… Mila was crying because of me…. Fuck…. Levi’s probably mad at me…. He shook, whimpering as he still held himself tightly, watching Levi get up to put Mila back in her crib.

Levi turned back to their bed when Mila was in her crib, going to Eren and gently running a hand through his hair, his lips gentle on his temple. “Eren, Honey, none of this is your fault. It's all okay. Please don't be upset, it's okay. I love you so much.” Levi gave him a small smile. It's alright. “Do you want me to go get Dad for you?” He might make you feel better… I know he’ll be okay with helping you calm down and sleep again...

Eren stopped shaking for a moment, thinking about it. If you go and wake up Dad he’ll lose sleep… And he’s been tired lately and pushing me away… He swallowed hard shaking his head as he slowly unfurled, shifting to move towards the door. His eyes were bloodshot and full of fear as his hands shook horribly against the doorknob. I wanna go out…. I can’t bother Dad… And I can’t let you not get any sleep either...

Levi watched him shake, standing and resting a hand on his arm, another on his waist to steady him. “You're shaking so terribly… let me walk with you…” You look ready to topple over...

Eren shook his head. “N-No….. I’m s-sorry, g-go back t-to bed…” He flinched as Levi touched him, back away from him as he moved to struggle with the doorknob. I can’t let you go without sleep… And I can’t stay here, Mila will cry again. It’s my fault....

Levi nodded slowly, helping him open the door before kissing his temple and retreating back to bed. “Goodnight, Honey.” Levi settled back into the covers as it rained, unable to hear much over the sound of rain on the roof. I hope you feel better soon...
Eren watched him go back to sleep, glancing down the hall towards Lathe, wanting to go run to the man for his comfort but too scared of being a nuisance. He carefully clambered down the stairs. Maisie following after him as he slipped outside in the rain without shoes or even socks to protect his feet. It's cold. The water's cold…. He made sure to close the door behind him and slowly walked to the barn as he shivered, his hands shaking so bad that it took him a long time to open the barn door and then close it again. It's warm in here….

The house was slow to wake up on a Sunday, Jake practically obligated to be up before eight, watching cartoons by the time James was coming downstairs to help make breakfast. Lathe was soon to follow, the two of them cooking and letting Levi and Ieva sleep in, allowing Tucker and Henry plenty of time to make out and get handsy before they had to get up and eat. We might as well just add Henry under the insurance plan already, he's over so much. Lathe looked over his shoulder as Levi padded downstairs with a sleepy Mila, smiling wearily to him. “Hey, Levi. Eren still sleeping?” He's been so tired lately...

Levi paused, shifting Mila as she tried to fall back asleep in his arms. “He didn’t come back to our room last night…. I thought he was with you? He got freaked out after the storm last night……” Levi trailed off looking around the room and seeing that Eren was in fact not up yet. Shit… Where is he??

Lathe blinked. “He never came into our room… I thought he was with you.” Lathe looked to James, then to a shocked Jake and Levi, the two of them immediately shutting off the burners, James going to sweep the first floor while Lathe went to take the second. “Levi, check the basement, we need to find him. The storm must’ve scared the hell out of him.” I can't blame him, it was really bad...

Levi nodded, taking Mila with him as he walked down the stairs, getting to the basement and turning on all the lights. He opened up one door, searched the room before exiting and leaving the room going to the next one. Making sure that I check everywhere…. He even opened up the small cabinets and closet spaces, becoming worried when he didn’t see him. Where are you?

Five minutes they were convening at the base of the stairs, all of them looking frazzled.

“I checked behind all of the couches, in the dining room and bathroom and pantries, the studios too, and I even scouted the porch. He's not there.”

“He's nowhere upstairs, and I even checked up in the attic. He's not there.”
“He’s not in the basement, I checked every nook and cranny…. Did one of the dogs follow him?”

_How many do we have?_

Lathe quirked an eyebrow in thought, whistling. He heard many yaps coming from the living room, a small flood of dogs coming to them, sitting at their feet. They counted heads, adding one for Blake still sleeping in the living room. “They're all here… does anyone know where Eren is?” They tilted their heads at him. “Eren. Find Eren. Fetch Eren.” That seemed to get the message across, Maisie bee lining for the doggy door, the other dogs and pups following. _Oh my._

Levi looked worried, handing a sleepy Mila off to James before he threw on a coat and shoes and beelined after the mob of fur. _Where did he go?_ His eyes widened as they all slipped inside of the barely opened barn door, moving to push it open himself. _He was wear too little clothing last night! He was just wearing boxers and a tank! And he came outside!_

Lathe quickly stepped into his boots and ran after them, scanning the barn for Eren. _Where would he be… “Charlie’s stall?”_ Lathe and Levi immediately went to the extra large stall, opening it and peering inside. Charlie was still asleep, hay piled around him. They sifted quickly through the hay before they were sure he wasn't there, doing the same for Luna and Arya’s separate stalls, looking more and more worried with each passing moment. _Where the hell is he?_

Levi looked at him in worry. “I-I don’t know… I don’t know what’s going through his head anymore, he didn’t want to stay in the room with me and Mila… He thought Mila crying was his fault again…. “I have no idea where he is… Where did he run off to? Oh god, he doesn’t have any clothes on, he’s gonna get sick again. Levi could feel his chest clench with worry, looking around the last stalls and noticing that Eren was not in their stalls either. _Where are you, Brat?_

Kanji whined quietly, sniffing around the barn with the other pups. _The big human that likes the other big humans…?_ He scampered into Charlie’s stall, sniffing, looking around. _He was here, but he left…_ He trotted out again and went to the slightly ajar barn door, going out and running over to the chicken coop, sniffing the air and listening intently. _He's in there!_ Kanji squeezed in between some of the netting and the side of the coop, crawling up the small ramp into the coop and finding Eren curled into the far corner, yapping loudly and running in tight circles, as if he were chasing his tail. _I found him!_

Lathe heard the pup yapping outside, he and Levi going out to the chicken coop, seeing Kanji get chased out by the hens and roosters. _Oh my… “Kanji!”_ Lathe plucked him from the pen, holding him up. “You're getting into trouble again?” He watched the pup squirm intently, yapping at him. _Huh. “Is… Is Eren in there?” What._

Levi moved inside the pen, going to the back of the hen house where they would get in to acquire
the chicken eggs. It's still locked. “Lathe, do you have the key on you?” He crawled in, I bet he did, he likes to hold Carla… And I don’t see her anywhere…

“Not on me, no… here, the pen’s strong as hell. Step in.” Lathe helped Levi step in, pointing to the small opening for the hens. “Try there, I'll go get the keys if you can't fit.” Lathe left and set Kanji on his head, the pup yapping as he walked. Hello, pupper.

Levi shifted to see how the hell he was supposed to be able to crawl into that fixed hole. How did Eren get in? He laid down on the little walk way up and stuck his head in seeing Eren shiver as he held Carla close to him, the hen seemingly calm in his arms. How the fuck did you get in there!? My shoulders are way too broad for that. “Dad! Get the key! He doesn’t have a shirt on!” His eyes were wide, seeing his fiancé shivering in just his boxers. Where did your tanktop go?

Lathe got the keys, running back with them and with Kanji on his shoulder instead. He hurriedly unlocked the henhouse, seeing Eren inside with Carla. “Oh my god, Honey…” Lathe felt his heart breaking to see the freezing man, letting Levi past him to gather him into his arms. Oh my god…

Levi’s eyes were wide as he gathered Eren, seeing that his fingers were blue as his lips and his teeth chattering, his eyes barely opening as he was picked up. Shit! He stood carefully, looking to Lathe with worry. “Can you make him warm broth? I’m going to go out him into a warm bath.” He shifted Eren trying to shield him from the rain that continued to pour.

Lathe nodded, gently taking Carla and setting her back in the pen before shutting the door, herding all the pups and doge back into the house. He got them dried off, going to make chicken broth. He poured some into a mug when Levi carried a freshly bathed Eren down the stairs. He carried it over to them, looking worried as Eren mumbled the same words over and over. He's sorry...? “Eren, Honey, this isn't your fault at all. You're okay, everyone's okay. Here, drink this. You'll feel better.” Please.

Eren’s eyes were still fearful as he looked to the soup set in front of him, his words a bit louder as he apologized endlessly. His hand came up to scratch at his wrist, turning his hand into a fist and hitting his head as tears formed. I’m so sorry... I burdened you... I should've been up to make breakfast.... He sniffled more as he apologized and still hit himself. I’m so sorry...

Levi reached out and caught his hand, he and Lathe both quietly murmuring to him. “Eren, it's okay, you didn't have to make breakfast or do anything for us. It's okay, you did just fine. Really. Please, don't hurt yourself.” The two of them gave him small smiles, reassuring him. It's okay.

Eren whimpered as he was held, weakly tugging at his arm to be let free wanting to scratch. Mila
started crying because of me... Dad had to make breakfast because of me.... Because I keep fucking up... “I’m sorry.... I-It’s all m-my fault...” He stuttered, fresh tears welling in his eyes. I hate this... I really do...

Levi cupped his cheek, gently kissing all over his cheek. “None of it is your fault, Eren. It's all okay. Mila crying, the storm, me waking up, it's none of your fault. It's okay, I'm fine and Mila’s fine. It's okay.” Levi held Eren close, his smile tired. It's okay.

Eren shook his head, feeling his whole body tense as Levi leaned in closer to him, though soon he was used to the comforting contact. I... I-... it's my fault.... “V-Vatri... W-Where’s Vatri?” He asked with wide and fearful eyes, looking to Levi for answers. I can’t bother Dad... He’ll push me away, just like he would’ve last night if so bothered him...

Levi looked stunned, silent for a moment before he found the words. “Eren, he's still in Germany... we were there a few weeks ago.” He's still there...

Eren’s eyes seemed to go a bit dull as he grabbed at his hair and pulled on it hard. The new word on his lips was ‘stupid’, calling himself that as he tugged on his longer hair. Stupid.... He’s not here... You’re a bother... He didn’t want you to stay....

Levi took Eren’s hands from his hair, looking up to Lathe with worry. He needs his meds... He watched the man disappear, holding Eren to his chest, kissing over his features. “You're not stupid, Eren. You're a very intelligent man... I love you.” He kissed his nose, smiling faintly to him. I'm right here.

Eren watched Lathe walk away from him, his eyes wide with fear. He’s... He’s leaving.... No, no no! Eren pulled away from Levi, scrambling on weak legs to chase after Lathe, his arms tightly wrapping around Lathe’s middle, fear obvious in his eyes still. Don’t go...

Lathe was on weak legs when he felt Eren pressed to his back, his mind flooding with every lewd image that had burned into his mind, blushing scarlet and feeling sickness twist at him. He turned and gently pushed him away, his voice still firm. “E-Eren, I'm sorry, but please don't do that...” I can't handle that... He looked up when he heard sniffling, his face becoming one of heartbreak when he saw Eren’s expression. He looked broken and betrayed, hopeless and scared. Oh... “Eren, just go sit with Levi while I get you your medicine, okay?” Lathe struggled to kiss his forehead before trying to scurry up the stairs, trying to force the images away for the twentieth time in the past 72 hours. Guh....

Eren stood there where Lathe pushed him away, looking down at his hands and sinking down to
the floor in defeat. I’m….. I’m a nuisance… Aren’t I? I don’t do anything helpful….. His head dipped lower in sadness and heartache. My own father wants nothing to do with me…. He sat there, his shoulders slumped and shaking slightly as he cried. I can’t…. I don’t wanna be useless….

Lathe’s eyes widened, his hands coming up over his mouth in shock. Oh my god… …..what… what the fuck am I doing?! Lathe knelt on the floor in front of Eren, looking to his face. This Eren… and the one in my dream…. they’re not the same. This one here needs you to be their father and to help reassure them. “Eren, love, I’m so sorry…. I didn't mean it, really. Please don't cry, honey.” Lathe reached for him, gently cradling him to his chest, feeling him clutch at his sweater tightly. “Your Daddy loves you. I'm so sorry, I wasn't thinking… please don't be mad at me. I love you, Eren. Please don't be so upset.” Lathe pulled out his blue kerchief, gently wiping away his tears, kissing Eren’s cheek. “Your Daddy loves you, Honey. He thinks you're wonderful, and smart, and he cares about you so much. I love you, Eren. I'm so, so sorry.” Lathe insisted on helping Eren, giving him his kerchief. “It's okay to cry, Honey. I got upset, and I hurt you. I really shouldn't have. I didn't mean it. Please forgive me.” Lathe held out his hand, palm-up, asking for forgiveness. Please…

Eren just continued to cry looking down and away from him where he sat, his hands shaking as he clung to Lathe’s sweater. I'm useless…. You're only saying this because I was crying…. I should stop crying…. He sniffled, turning his head away from Lathe as he tried to wipe away his tears, letting go of Lathe’s sweater to rub at his own eyes. I need to stop, I'm being a nuisance…. He doesn’t want me to cry, he probably doesn’t want me to be here....

Lathe insisted on helping Eren, giving him his kerchief. “It's okay to cry, Honey. I got upset, and I hurt you. I really shouldn't have. I didn't mean it. Please forgive me.” Lathe held out his hand, palm-up, asking for forgiveness. Please…

Eren looked at the hand present to him in confusion. But he doesn’t need to apologize. He shook his head moving his own tearstained and shaky hand to rest over Lathe, asking for his own forgiveness. I probably deserved it.... His other hand grabbed at his hair, tugging on it to try and get him to stop himself crying, muttering about how ‘stupid’ he is. I’m stupid…. You don’t want me to cry…. I’ll stop crying…. I’ll stop crying when people are around… I’ll smile instead? Eren tried to turn his head to smile at Lathe but it didn’t look like any natural smile, obviously forced and his eyes held no gleam for it with how bloodshot they were.

Lathe moved his hand under Eren’s, gently closing it and holding onto his fist, bringing him completely into his lap as he shook harder. “It's okay, it's okay… you don't have to pretend to be happy don't stop crying, it's okay. And you're not stupid, love. You're so smart, and you're wonderful. You didn't deserve me pushing you away. I'm so, so sorry. Please forgive me.” I fucked up...

Eren rocked himself as he shook in Lathe’s lap shaking his head. “I deserve… I deserve…. I deserve…. I bad…. I deserve…. I deserve…. I nuisance....” He repeated the words over and over
again sounding like a broken record as he took both hands now to pull at his hair, not bothering to
be gentle with himself. *I deserve it…. I’m stupid, and I can’t stop crying even with a smile...* 

Lathe scooped Eren up into his arms, bringing him to the couch and sitting with him still in his lap, gently untangling his hands from his hair. “No, no honey, you didn’t deserve that. You did nothing wrong. You wanted to hold onto me and I pushed you away. I’ve been pushing you away too much lately and I’m so sorry for that. I’ll stop, Honey. I’ll be a better Dad for you. You’re absolutely not a nuisance. You’re a wonderful piece of this family; I’d be heartbroken if we didn’t have you around. We love you, Eren. I love you.” Lathe kissed his cheek gently, peppering his face with kisses. *I’m sorry… don’t feel so badly about yourself...* 

“That nuisance…..” Eren murmured, though he was slowly starting to calm down in Lathe’s arms, he hadn’t realized Levi had left and gotten his medication until he came back with a syringe. He sobered up right then and there, looking down with dull eyes and holding his arm out. *Oh no…. They must think I’m crazy…. Which is why I have medication…. Right? They don’t want to be bothered with it, so they give me shots.* Eren kept his eyes closed as Levi cleaned his arm, barely acknowledging that Levi had given him a shot before he felt him put a bandaid over the spot. He swallowed hard, sniffing and looking away from both of them. “I’m sorry…” *I need to stop, everything is so fucked up in my head… I need to stop relying on people.... They probably hate it, I know they do… Dad pushes me away, even though he says he’s not going to anymore, I know he will, everyone does....* Eren lifted his head to see Mikhail staring back at him. *I know... I’m thinking about it again, but can you blame me?*

“Don’t be sorry, Honey.” Lathe held Eren close, gently rubbing his arm as Eren’s head rested on his shoulder. He dragged a blanket over them, making sure Eren was warm. His voice was gentle. “You’re no nuisance to any of us, Eren. We all love you. You have nothing to apologize for. It’s okay.” Lathe looked up when Levi came back into the room, making room for him, the two of them shifting Eren between them. *It’s okay...* 

*He’s doing really badly this morning.* Levi settled next to him, wrapping his arm behind Eren’s middle and leaning his head on his shoulder. He shifted and kissed his cheek, the two of them showering Eren with affection, holding onto his hands so he wouldn't tug at his hair. “Be gentle with yourself, Eren. It's okay. You don’t deserve to hurt. It's alright.” He leaned over and very lightly brushed their lips. “....I love you.” He faintly murmured in Eren’s ear, his eyes warm. *It's okay....* 

*But do you really?.... I thought you loved Mila, you can’t love both of us at the same time.* He was quiet as he slowly calmed down wrapped up in their arms. *Dad doesn’t have time for me, he pushed me away too...* *He’s getting rid of me, because I’m useless.... I’m a nuisance ....* He watched Mikhail whine at him, moving to put his paws up on the couch and try and lick at his face. *You can’t make it better Mikhail.... You really can’t...*
The two of them curled up into Eren’s sides, murmuring in his ears, reassuring him and promising that they loved him. Lathe watched Mikhail lean up and lick at Eren’s cheeks, smiling faintly when Eren faintly giggled for a moment. It was over as soon as it began, though, Eren gently nudging the dog away. He had settled down as time passed, watching Levi shift up to stand, going to scoop Eren into his arms. It was in that moment he realized the man was asleep, limp in Levi’s arms. “We’ll let him sleep until lunch, okay?” He watched him nod and disappear up the stairs, standing and putting the blanket back. The day was rather quiet after that, time passing uneventfully until dinner came, Eren finally joining them at the table, quiet, his hair ruffled from sleep. Lathe set a plate in front of him, gently ruffling his hair further. “Sleep okay, honey?”
You look a lot better than this morning….

Eren nodded, though he still kept his head down and his gaze to the floor. “Y-Yeah, I’m sorry about how I acted, I’ll make sure that I take my meds properly.” I can't hug you, you'll push me away from you like you did this morning…. Maybe I should go…. I think I should….

Lathe softly smiled, kissing the top of his head. “It's okay honey, you couldn't control your actions because you forgot your meds. It's okay, we’ll help you remember to take them on time, okay? That starts today.” He gave him a small smile, leaning down to give him a gentle hug, his face falling when Eren shifted away from him, giving him a bit of a saddened look. “Are hugs not okay…?”

You’re just forcing yourself… Eren shook his head and looked down, holding his wrist awkwardly, too ashamed that Lathe was forcing himself to hug him, knowing that he was doing it just to make Eren feel better about himself. I don’t want you to force yourself to think about me. He kept his head down as he moved to pick Mila up from Levi’s lap and go and get her food for her. I'll let Levi eat in peace, he probably hates that he needs to take care of both of us a majority of the time.

Lathe felt hurt, though he gave him a weak smile, nodding. “Okay. You talk to me if you change your mind, okay? We love you.” Lathe went to sit at his own plate, picking at the food he’d given himself. It tastes good, which is a plus, I guess… it'll work…. I don't want anyone worrying….

Eren could only weakly nod as he sat down beside Levi and helped Mila eat her bits of solid food. She’s doing well, which is good… He smiled faintly, though it didn’t last long on his face. She’s barely around me anyways…. She’ll be fine if I leave… Eren was already going through ways to leave in his head and where he would go. Mom probably wants me gone to make room for the twins…. He shook his head, not bothering with his own plate for the moment, making sure Mila was fed. She’s much more important than me….

Levi helped Mila eat, smiling faintly as she ate her cooked carrots. Thank god she doesn't hate her veggies… Levi wiped her chin with a napkin, losing her cheek when she had finished everything. He himself had worked through half of his plate, frowning a bit when he saw Eren’s, untouched. “Eren, you should eat. You haven't had anything all day.” You need food.
Eren looked over to his plate and nodded, shifting his attention to his plate and silently beginning to eat. You’re probably worried… Am I getting too skinny for you? That’s probably it… You probably hate holding a twig, but you’d hate holding me if I were bigger than this… He swallowed his food, looking down at his red wrist from the scratches he’d made. Fuck… I need to start wearing wraps around my wrists.

Lathe finished his plate, staring at it for a long moment. It tasted good… Lathe excused himself to go to the bathroom, locking the door and turning on the water, though he didn't bother with the sink. He prayed no one was listening as he turned to face white porcelain for the third time that day. It can't stay down…

Levi finished his plate, smiling as Mila reached for his finger when Lathe came back to the table, looking paler than usual. He seemed fine when he sat down, immediately drinking from his coffee mug. He looked over when he saw Eren scratch at his wrist, reaching out and gently catching his hand. “Don't do that, Hun, you're hurting yourself.” You shouldn't.

Eren watched Lathe come back, seeing how pale he was before he drank some coffee, seeming alright. He glanced over to Levi, shaking his head for a moment, going back to eating his food. I’ll get packed when you sleep, and I’ll go over to Armin’s…. They won’t have to worry…

Levi’s face fell, though he stood and went to pick Mila up, letting James silently take her and go to the living room with the child. He moved to help with the dishes, only taking Eren’s when he was sure he had eaten enough. He looked to Lathe, seeing his hand shaking a bit when he was handed a plate. “Dad, are you okay?” You don't look that great…

Lathe gave him a quizzical look, nodding. “Yeah, I'm fine.” Just believe me, don't ask questions… I'm fine. He sighed in relief when Levi went back to the dishes, busying himself as well. It's okay. They're not suspicious….

Eren moved to get up and help with the dishes, though he quickly realized that Lathe and Levi didn’t want him there, shooing him away, which only made his heartache worsen. I’m not a good boy… I’ll never be good enough for them… He sniffled as he walked to the studio, looking over the projects he’d started so long ago and never finished. ………… Maybe I could use what I’m feeling to write new music?

Lathe and Levi finished with the dishes, the older man gently patting Levi’s shoulder. “See if you can round up Eren to go to sleep, okay? You and he have both had a long day. You need rest.” It'll do you good to rest, maybe cuddle… I'll be down here a bit longer, I have stuff in the gym to do first…
Levi nodded, drying off his hands, folding the towel back up and carefully setting it back. “Alright, I’ll go see where he wandered off too, I should grab Mila too… Maybe I should do that after I get Eren to sleep, James can hold her a little longer.” *I want to hold him, his eyes still aren’t as bright as they are when he’s happy.*

Eren was picking up various pieces of charcoal, looking it over with dull eyes. *Should I make a big piece with it? I could theoretically, It would be easy… Maybe I could paint the wall, take a video and keep the door locked while I sing or something?…. Maybe… But I need to think of words first…*

Levi knocked lightly on the doorframe, looking over to Eren as he sat with the charcoal, seeing his dull eyes. “Eren? Want to come upstairs and sleep? Or do you have ideas?” He smirked faintly as he studied the stick of charcoal. *You might be having an artistic moment, I’m not sure…*

“Can… Can you see what color paints there are for the wall?” His voice was small as he looked over the charcoal still. *I could do it… I think I can… Dad would probably send me to therapy after… Who knows, maybe I’ll feel better if I go to therapy…*

Levi nodded, going over to Lathe’s half of the studio, skimming the boxes of wall paints. He soon came back, leaning against the doorframe. “We have white, black, the primary colors, some metallic ones, and that glow-in-the-dark stuff you like.” *He made sure we’re stocked up…*

“Are there any dull colors? Like greys and browns… maybe odd shades of blue?” Eren murmured as he moved to set the charcoal down, moving to tear down a massive picture he had been working on ages ago, which hung on the wall. He barely showed any emotion as he tore it apart, pulling the pegs out of the wall, making sure the white surface was even. *I’ll need these two walls, which means I’ll need to take that down too…* His gaze was set on the picture in charcoal of Levi holding Mila to his chest. *I…. I can’t take that down….*

Levi walked over to Eren, looking where his gaze was, his eyes shining when he saw it. “Eren, I didn’t know you drew that…” He looked over Mila’s peaceful sleeping face, her cheek to his chest, seeing the faintest hint of a smile on his face. *It's wonderful…* He looked to the largely unfinished work torn up on the table, realization hitting him. *…oh. “Eren, if we’re careful we can take it down… I don’t want to tear that one up…” It has Mila in it… and she’s so adorable…*

Eren felt his chest tighten more, shaking his head, looking away as he scratched at his wrist. *I can’t take it off… If I touch it… I’ll end up destroying it… There’s a reason I’m not in that picture… It’s because you look so fucking happy together…* He barely recognized that he was crying until a sob wracked through him.
Levi’s expression softened, going to wrap him up in his arms when Eren sobbed, pulling him to his chest. “Eren, please, it's okay, really. I love the drawing, I really do, but it's okay to take it down. Please don't be so upset. It's okay, really. It's okay, Honey. Stay with me.” Levi pled with him, kissing his temple. *It's okay.*

“T-Take it down…” Eren harshly whispered, looking away from him, shaking his head as he pushed himself away from Levi. I *need to take my pills*... I’m gonna fucking lose it if I don’t… He hiccupped as he started walking towards the door, bolting away, only to bump into Lathe and be sent crashing to the ground with more tears in his eyes. *Fuck*... He looked up with broken eyes as he broke down on the floor in front of Lathe. *Shit*...

Levi followed when he heard a crash, seeing Lathe looking at Eren with wide eyes, putting two and two together when he saw Levi’s expression. The two of them fell to the floor with him, lifting him and carrying him to the living room. They held onto him, Levi practically in Eren’s lap as he murmured in Eren’s ear. *We love you so much*...

Eren just continued to shake and cry, clinging to the both of them like his life depended on it. “I-I…I-I-I…” He could barely speak over his sobs, which made his whole body shake more in their arms. *I need my pills... I need my pills... Someone go get my pills... please*… Eren whimpered as he cried, not knowing how long they were sitting there before Mikhail dropped something in his lap, but he was too afraid to see what it was.

Lathe looked to see what Mikhail brought, beaming. “Mikhail, can you get a water bottle from the pantry? Water bottle. Fetch.” He watched Mikhail scamper off, sighing in relief when he heard the crinkle of plastic, soon a bottle being dropped in their laps. Lathe fiddled with the bottle of meds, pressing them into Eren’s hand. “Here, Honey, your meds. Take these, oka-” It didn't take an instant for Eren to swallow them down, obediently drinking half the bottle of water when it was given to him. “Okay, Eren.” He set the bottle of water down, going back to holding Eren tightly, he and Levi nestling into his shoulders. “We’re both here for you, Eren. We love you so much.” *More than anything.*

“I-I’m sorry…” He whispered as he clung to them, slowly starting to calm down from his crying fit. “I-I’m sorry, I… I couldn’t stop…” He murmured, calming down to a point where he could talk and sniffle, feeling how tight his cheeks felt from the tear trails. *Fuck, I probably look like a mess... I... I’m so sorry, how do you two always hold me like this for the whole time I have one of my fits? I don’t get it*...

“It's okay, you couldn't do anything about it.” Levi kissed his cheek, gently rubbing his stomach with his thumb absentmindedly. “We’re always going to be right here when you need us, Eren. We’ve got you. ....I love you, Hon.” He whispered in his ear, nuzzling into his neck. *I really do*...
“D-Did you take it down?” He asked softly, tilting his head to the side to make it easier for Levi to nuzzle him, feeling his body slowly fill with warmth as Levi held him close to his chest. You’ll still hold me even after all the shit I put you through?

Levi slowly shook his head. “I didn’t… I didn’t have the time. And I don’t want to take it down. It’s a beautifully done piece… even if it’s missing Mum.” Levi smiled faintly and softly kissed Eren’s neck. I love you. “We don’t have to take it down. But if we do, we’re doing everything we can to keep it in one piece.” I love that piece...

“It… It’s gotta come down… I-I need the wall….” Eren murmured looking down a bit. “I… I can’t touch it… I’ll rip it… Can you guys take it down?” He murmured quietly, looking up to Lathe with a bit of hope in his eyes. I really hope you can do it… You two look happy in it, without me, but I don’t need to be in there... Maybe one day, but not now...

Lathe and Levi smiled, nodding, the younger man speaking with a faint smile. “Yeah, we’ll take it down. But tomorrow. And after it’s down, it’s getting sprayed to set it and getting hung back up somewhere. It's too nice.” I love it...

Eren shook his head letting go of the two of them. “N-No… Take it down… Take it down, I don’t wanna rip it…” Eren set his head down on his knees, curling up as he thought about ripping it. I'd be stuck with Mila.... And you would leave me.... You really would....

Levi looked surprised as Eren let go of them, shifting to help him unfurl, kissing his cheek. “Eren, it's okay, we can take it down and put it away. It's okay if you don't like it. ...one of these days I hope you can maybe draw all three of us together… you, me, and Mila... my own wonderful little family.” I'm so happy I have you.

Eren blushed a bit as he was kissed, his words catching in his throat as Levi spoke. No.... I can’t draw that yet, I’m not your family, Mila is though. He shook his head looking down. “Take it off the wall…. Please.” His voice was desperate, waiting for the two of them to leave him be and go take the picture off the wall. I want it gone...

Levi nodded, softly brushing their lips as they stood, going with Lathe to take down the picture.

“I know where the spray to seal the picture is. Here.” Lathe went to a shelf and fished the can out of a box, getting a piece of blank paper and going to set the picture while it still hung, the extra paper keeping it from hitting the wall. “In case it would otherwise get smudged.” Lathe fanned it
with the paper when he was done, looking to the tacks embedded in the wall. “Levi, get one of the finer flat screwdrivers from the junk drawer, would you? If there isn't a good one, grab that small jeweler’s kit.” That’d have something in it.

Levi looked at him and just shrugged, moving to get a flat screwdriver and handing it to Lathe carefully. “I don’t know why he wants it taken down… He… He tore down the other one he was working on.” When was the last time he was in here? He hasn’t been in here since we came back, has he?

Lathe took the fine screwdriver, carefully wedging it under the tack, prying it off, seeing it skitter across the floor. “Pick them up, could you? I’d rather not stab my feet. ….and I think…” Lathe pried off another one. “It’s because it's just you and Mila in it….he hasn't been in here in so long, either. He forgot what he felt when he was making these different pieces of art. I think he forgot the fondness he must’ve felt when drawing this, and with his mentality the way it's been lately, he must've forgotten how it was to draw anything.” He gestured around them. “The happiness, the sadness, the reservedness and the sensuality… he's probably forgotten it…” I think that's what happened...

Levi was quiet as he picked up the tacked from the floor. “He was gonna tear it…. But he stopped himself, I have no idea what he’s doing with the wall…. He wanted darker colors…. And greys and Browns…. I have no idea what he’s going to do…..” Not at all, nor with how he’s been functioning without the pills and relapsing so much… He made sure he picked them all up, looking to the picture of him and Mila. “Will he be able to work on it still? Or not?”

Lathe shook his head, very careful as he pried out the last tack, the sheet draping over his hand. He moved it to the table, still in perfect condition. “No, he won't be. But he signed it… it's done.” Lathe pointed out the hidden signature, going to get a large sheet to make a folder for the art. “It's a beautiful piece…” Lathe quietly admired it for a moment. Very well done...

“Yeah…. I just wish that he’s get better, he’s not himself anymore…. He even broke down at least twice today, maybe three if you count his escapade to the chicken coop.” I want my Eren back, the one that blushes, and laughs with me, and says snarky remarks…. I want him back to his old self.... Is that selfish?

Lathe sighed quietly, going to hug Levi, feeling his head drop onto his chest. “It's okay… He'll feel much better after he's back regularly on the meds… his system got thrown off after that trip….he'll be okay soon.” Don't worry.

Levi nodded, wrapping his arms around Lathe, though his arms started to feel up his sides, his brown furrowing. Is he thinner? No, I have to be imagining it, right? I'm just used to thinking about it because of Eren’s habit of not eating... Levi sighed, closing his eyes and enjoying Lathe’s
arms around him. “I’m going to start looking for a job soon…” I won’t be in the house much…

Lathe felt panic rise in his chest as Levi felt his sides, sighing in relief when he didn't say anything. Thank god… “Of course; what did you have in mind?” There's a lot you could do….

“I’m looking into the paramedic requirements… I have all the training for it, but I’ll need to go to the gym again to work on my upper body strength…. And make sure my leg works good…” He murmured, letting go of him and looking towards the door. “I should get Eren to bed, so he can wake up in the morning….”

Lathe smiled, going after him and catching his shoulder. He turned Levi a bit, pecking his temple. “I’m proud of you.” Lathe chuckled when Levi shooed him away with a grumble, meandering with him back to the living room, the drawing having been quickly shoved behind a cabinet in Lathe’s studio. They came back in to where Eren was, Lathe giving his forehead a small peck before letting Levi scoop him up. “Goodnight, Hon. Love you.” Sleep well.

Levi picked Eren up from the couch, carrying him upstairs. He laid him in bed before clambering in next to him, seeing James had already set Mila to sleep. “Goodnight, babe.” Levi kissed Eren’s cheek, settling next to him and letting Eren curl up in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment! Thanks!
Chapter 118: Taking a Break

Chapter Summary

Eren needs to find himself again

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Levi felt cold when he woke up, blinking awake slowly, feeling for Eren. He's up… the bed’s cold. Levi got up and stretched, picking up Mila when she heard the bed creak and fidgeted in her crib. He gently bounced her as he went downstairs, seeing Lathe cooking breakfast. “‘Morning, Dad. Is Eren downstairs?” He was doing better last night....

Lathe looked over his shoulder, slowly shaking his head. “I haven't seen him.” They were silent for a long moment before all the burners were off again, Lathe jumping into his boots. “I'll check the barn and chicken coop, you get this floor, the studios, and the basement. James-” He watched the older teen salute. “You get the second floor and attic.” This is yesterday morning all over again.

Levi nodded, going to look over the art studio first, noticing that everything had been moved away from the walls, but Eren was no longer in the room, checking the closet and still nothing. He went through everything on the first floor, the living room, the closets, the kitchens… No sign of him whatsoever. Eren… Where are you? He cooed to Mila as she fidgeted in his arms, making his way downstairs to the basement as well and looking everywhere with no sign of him. Oh no... Where’d he end up going? Levi made his way back up the stairs, checking the porch once more, though he noticed that Eren’s shoes were missing, along with a coat and his scarf. Oh no… Fuck .... Levi moved to put Mila in the hands of Jake, making sure he sat on the couch with a pillow under his arm so she was cradled carefully before slipping on his own shoes and running towards the barn. “Dad! Dad he’s gone !”

Lathe jumped down from the ladder up to the loft, running outside again. “He's not here! He didn't take Charlie or Luna- where is he?!” Lathe pulled out his phone, dialing their neighbor quickly. “I'm calling Armin's since he's so close- if anyone, he’d see him.” Lathe had the phone on speaker as they walked back inside, nervous. Come on, pick up... please ...

Armin groaned as he shifted, carefully lifting Eren’s head from his chest. He grabbed his phone from the nightstand quietly padding to the hallway and shutting the door to answer it. “It’s barely eight in the morning on a Saturday…. What?” His voice was tired as he yawned, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. I bet this is about Eren, even though he said that he told them that he was coming here.... I’m exhausted, Eren kept waking up and crying, then he got up to take pills and then he fell right asleep, I’ll make sure he takes them properly...
“Armin, I’m so sorry for waking you up, but have you seen or heard anything from Eren? He’s gone missing and we’re worried about him.” He just up and left… “His car and the horses are still here so he left on foot…” help...

“He came over last night…. We’re still sleeping because he came over and woke me up… He doesn't want you to come get him if last night’s tear fest was anything to go by.” Armin answered, yawns separating his words as he made it downstairs. I need coffee...

Lathe and Levi looked at each other with wide eyes, sounding worried. “Did he say much of anything? Or did he just… cry?” This sounds bad…. 

“Well, he cried for awhile, kept saying he was useless and a nuisance…. You pushed him away when he went for a hug, that really fucked with his head…. He thinks you're forcing yourself to be nice to him. He doesn’t feel like part of his own family, mostly because Levi keeps Mila…. He’s hurting, and his pills are only helping so much for him…. I know a lot about what happened, and I kind of understand why he ran away…

Lathe winced as Armin spoke, rubbing the back of his neck. “I didn't think about it… he started crying so much after I did that… wasn't a very good moment…” I fucked up.

“And I do kinda monopolize Mila… but Eren shies away when I try to hand her over…” Not good….

Lathe sighed. “Armin, do you think you could hang onto Eren for a little longer before we come get him? He sounds like he needs a break for a bit… but we’ll come over after lunch to retrieve him, if it's not too much trouble… we're sorry for waking you up…” Yeah… sorry...

Armin sighed as he held the phone to his ear. “You should probably leave him here for a few days… He’s not that great right now, and Mikhail followed him, so he'll help with his pills and stuff, but I can handle him, I’m home most of the time anyways.” He rubbed at his face, shaking his head. Eren was adamant that neither of you two come to get him…. “He’ll think you're forcing yourselves to come and get him, and he also thinks that you don’t want him to handle Mila, Levi… I’d let him go home on his own time, but I’ll talk to him.” He’s a mess, and I hate seeing him like this...

The two of them sighed, nodding in resignation. “…okay. Thank you, Armin. Really, it means a lot that you're willing to put up with him… and with us. Please talk to him… let him know we’re here
waiting with open arms for when he feels okay enough to come home.” We’ll miss him by the end of today.

Armin nodded, even though the two of them couldn’t see it. “Well, we’ll be over for dinner today at least, have fun with making all that food without the German cook on staff.” I know Eren makes a lot of the food for the dinners. “I’ll talk to him, don’t worry.” He hung up after a few goodbyes, sighing as he got out a mug for his coffee, pouring himself some before he went back upstairs to his room, seeing Eren still asleep and sprawled all over the bed. Figures… I’ll talk to him when he wakes up.

Eren shifted in his sleep, slowly waking up around two hours later, grateful that Armin was in the bed with him. Moving to reach for his bottle of pills he took them and sat up, rubbing his face. “They woke you up, didn’t they?” I bet they called already…. I thought it might take longer, but since you’re up I assume they called…

Armin nodded, still laying back on the bed, propping himself up on one elbow. “Yeah, they did. They couldn't find you; they got worried.” Armin gave Eren a sympathetic look when he curled up, going to rest a hand on his shoulder. “Eren, they really do care about you. Even if it doesn't feel like they're not showing it very well sometimes. You can stay here a while and recenter yourself, but soon enough you’ll have to go back home. They already miss you. You can relax for today, but tonight we’re going over for dinner like always. You won't have to cook, you can just come with, eat, and leave if you like. But I really think you should come with. By the time dinner rolls around, Mila is going to miss you lots and the rest of your family is too. But I know it's hard to remember that sometimes.” It isn't easy to remember for you….

Eren nodded, moving to curl up to Armin again. “I always feel like such a burden, and I can’t help it… I take my pills, and they make me sleepy, and I’ll forget to take it again, and then my emotions get out of control, and I swear I cried for three hours yesterday.” I want to be normal… Can I ever be normal? He sighed, snuggling close to Armin’s warmth.

Armin sighed, bringing Eren in for a hug. “You could probably set reminders on your phone to take them, have alarms set up. And you can't help what happens when you forget your meds; improvement on that will come with time. But for right now, you're doing what you can to improve and take care of yourself. And that's what's important. You're no burden… Lathe and Levi love you so much and they try to show you and tell you all the time, it’s obvious to everyone else… but it's okay if you have trouble seeing it. You'll learn. And you'll begin to remember that they love you too.” They do care about you…. a blind man could see it.

Eren sighed quietly. “They didn’t sign up for this shit…. I’m so afraid they’ll just up and leave soon… Mila’s turning 1 soon, can you believe that?” Mila’s turning one in less than a month… My baby…. Well, Levi’s baby… “Levi doesn’t want her on a horse either, so I guess she won’t ride horses then….” I wanted to teach her so badly, but Levi doesn’t want her on one…. “And Dad
doesn’t want me to hug him… He’s forcing himself to be kind, isn’t he?” Eren closed his eyes, trying to calm down before he burst into tears. *I’m gonna cry if I don’t stop…*

Armin shook his head, letting Eren bury his face in his shoulder. “Eren, your Dad isn’t forcing himself to be kind. He’s always been so kind to everyone, and even then he’s had a soft spot for all of his family. But he’s been… he hasn’t felt himself lately, he said. He didn’t mean it, Eren. Doing that is anything but normal to him. …and Mila’s barely one. She’s still so small, she's barely walking yet. I can understand if Levi is worried about her being on a big horse, but I doubt he’d forbid her from ever riding one. …and they're not about to leave. You and Levi have a kid, and Lathe built a whole house for all of you to live in. He's settled here; he's not going to want to leave, and he's not going to force you to leave.” *He’d be fine with you and Levi staying there forever if you wanted… but I know you and Levi are going to want your own place soon to start your own family…. Levi's talked about it before a few times… not many… but a few.*

“The twins are gonna be born in less than three months… They’ll take over everyone’s time… And maybe they love me, but I don’t feel like I fit…” Eren murmured, looking at the wall. “I might go on tour…. I probably should, I’ll have to write more music…. And find a band to stand behind me….” He murmured, his eyes still dull. *I won’t be there anymore….*

“You don’t have to tour if you don’t want to.” Armin rubbed his arm gently. “It sounds like you really want to stay and just find your space in your home first… and I think that should take priority. Don’t worry too much about writing music or getting a tour together just yet, just find the strength to go home and remember they love you first. And sure, the twins are going to need a lot of attention. But that doesn't mean you’re loved any less. Little kids are a lot of hard work; you of all people should be aware of that.” Armin’s smiled faintly. “You should take your time learning how to fit in again in your own home before you try to go and find your place elsewhere. Otherwise, you won't have much of anywhere to go after.” …*you need to learn to be okay at home before you can be okay anywhere else in the country or even the world...*

“What am I supposed to do at home? I’ve got nothing to do except take care of the horses… Maybe cook, but… No one wants German food anymore, even Henry asked if I could make normal food like Levi.” *Even the endless pit got tired of what I was making, how is that even possible?*

Armin sighed quietly, thinking. “Maybe you could switch things up a bit, try a new kind of cooking… and I think it would do you some good to get back into art. As a way to express your thoughts and things, drawing and painting could do you well.” *It should, at least.*

Eren thought about it, nodding as he gave a weak smile. “I could… I’d need to go shopping with someone to make sure I don’t buy the whole fucking store, but yeah I could… I guess I could start getting back into art… Even with my melt down yesterday… Fuck I acted like a complete child. How the hell does Levi even wanna marry me? I mean he could take it back any second he wanted to, I don’t even have a ring yet… who knows maybe I never will.” Eren muttered quietly, looking
down to his hands, which were devoid of jewelry. *Fuck, now my mind is going off on tangents and this is making it fucking worse... But if I go back to art and try and be normal, maybe they’ll think I’m better? Maybe I won’t have to go to therapy?*

Armin gave him a gentle smile. “Levi’s over the moon for you, Eren. He really does love you. You and he have a kid together too, so it’s not as if he’d disappear forever anytime soon. He wouldn’t want to, anyway. He loves you. And he wants you there for Mila too.” *He's crazy about you, it's obvious.* “I can go with you to get art stuff if you feel up to it while you’re here. Maybe doodling in peace and quiet will do you good.” *It sounds like it'd be good therapy of sorts... ‘But as for today, you should just rest and relax. You barely slept last night with all your crying, and there's a dinner to attend.’ You need sleep.

Eren nodded, shifting a bit off of him. “Can you get my charcoal pencils and my charcoal paper? Dad knows where they are…” He murmured quietly. *It might help to have a different subject to draw than Mila, Levi, the boys, or the horses... Maybe... I wanna be able to draw in peace though, that sounds really nice for a change. Even though my studio is supposed to be soundproof, I can still hear Tucker in the garage sometimes.* His eyes looked at least a bit hopeful that Armin would retrieve his art supplies for him, practically begging after a few silent seconds.

Armin sighed good-naturedly, nodding and gently patting Eren’s back. “Alright, I'll grab it for you. Don't get into trouble.” Armin went to the dresser, setting down his mug and grabbing a change of clothes. He changed quickly in the bathroom, draining his coffee as he went back downstairs. He rinsed his mug before he snatched his wallet and keys, going to make the short drive to the Quo residence. He knocked, knowing how early it was to ring the bell and awaken everyone inside, chuckling when he saw Mila scamper to the door before James swept her up, the teen opening the door to him. “Hey James. Uh, Eren wants his charcoal pencils and sketchbook.” *I don't know where he keeps that stuff....*

Lathe looked over to them, nodding when the blonde looked to him. “Alright, I'll get it.” He quickly went to the studio, grabbing the box of charcoal sticks and pencils, as well as a sketchbook, going to hand them over to Armin. “...thank you.” He smiled to the blonde. *I don't know what to do about him half the time... maybe he needed a break from us... you're too kind.*

Armin smiled, nodding. “Of course. He'll be just fine.” Armin left shortly after that, soon plopping the book on the bed, setting down the pencils with it. “This what you wanted?” *It'd better be. I don't wanna go to the trouble of leaving the house again...*

Eren shifted on the bed to sit up, inspecting the pencils picking them up along with the sketchbook. “Thank you... Are you doing anywork today? Or are we going to just chill?” *Your house is quiet... I love it... It’s never this quiet at home, not until it’s late, but then I can’t sing because I risk waking everyone up at the same time.* He slowly flipped through the various sketches in previous pages. “Should we eat breakfast?” He asked softly. *I can help... The phrase unspoken, but...*
implied.

Armin nodded, though he set a hand on Eren’s shoulder when he moved to stand. “Is it alright if I make us breakfast? You’re my guest- you don’t have to help.” *It’s fine.*

Eren thought about it before he nodded. “Alright, that works…” He trailed off, but shifted to get his clothes from his bag he’d hastily made. *Yeah, but I’ll come downstairs and keep you company.*

Armin nodded, seeing Eren start to hastily get things together to dress. He reached out and touched his arm, looking away defensively when Eren looked up to him and froze. “You don’t have to rush to keep me company and follow me around if you don’t want. Take your time getting dressed, come downstairs in a bit, it’s fine. Take your time adjusting to what’s going on.” *You’re trying to be 100% comfortable with this too quickly…. *

Eren looked at him for a moment, perplexed, slowly turning his head away as Armin’s words sunk in. “O-Okay...I’ll-I’ll meet you downstairs then.” He murmured quietly, looking down to his clothes. He looked over to Mikhail by the door. *Shit, he kinda just followed me… and I didn’t bring him any food… Fuck…* He sighed quietly, pausing in his rush to get ready. *I need to calm down.*

Armin gave him a sympathetic look, turning and seeing Mikhail in the doorway. *Dog. I don't have any food for you…. Armin stopped in the doorway to pet Mikhail, smiling faintly when he sniffed his hand and allowed it. “I’ll cook for us… but then we should both probably get your things from the house for while you're here. Changes of clothes, Mikhail’s stuff, all that. Think a bit about what you want.” We should get it soon so Mikhail doesn't starve. “We’ll feed you, don't worry.”* Armin smiled as Mikhail looked up to him and licked his hand, letting him trot over to Eren as he went downstairs. *You need your things…. you just booked it in the middle of the night.*

Eren nodded, letting Mikhail come and trot over to him. He slowly calmed down as he ran his hands through Mikhail’s fur. *Well, Armin’s right, after breakfast we’ll have to go back, because you need to eat at least something that’s supposed to be your food. It took him a few minutes to calm down before he reached for his clothes again, slowly getting undressed and into new clothes. Yeah, I’ll need new clothes, I only brought pajamas and today's clothes…. Armin’s right... well, Armin’s always right so I guess that isn’t a surprise.*

Armin took his time making breakfast, though it didn't take long for him to be pouring pancake batter into a pan, soon hearing the patter of paws on the floor, Mikhail sitting quietly at his feet, leaning his head against his leg. *Aw... “You can have breakfast in a little bit, Mikhail. We’ll get your stuff soon.”* Armin patted his head, hearing him whine. He had to keep making breakfast, plating their pancakes and setting the table. *It's weird to set the table for two now... I keep feeling like any moment Erwin’s just gonna hug me from behind and kiss me good morning...* Armin had a sad smile on his face when Eren came downstairs, thinking. *I miss him...*
Eren looked at Armin’s sad smile, looking at the table set for two. Oh shit, I didn’t even think about it, fuck, I fucked up…. He put his head down, mumbling an apology. I shouldn’t have come here… I should’ve stayed home, who knows, maybe it was worse to come here. He sat down anyways, though he was too afraid to look Armin in the eye, Mikhail having come over to his side of the table and set his head in Eren’s lap.

Armin couldn’t help but feel his heart jump when he heard quiet passing to the table, almost hearing Erwin’s solid footsteps, trying not to show his disappointment when he saw Eren, smiling. “I hope you’re in the mood for pancakes.” Armin sat across from him, his feet tucking under his chair, unable to keep his mind from wandering. Erwin always sits there… Armin looked around as he chewed, considering the house around him. It's so big, even for just two of us… but since it's just me all this time… ...it's too big.....

Eren thanked him quietly, the meal close to silent as Eren kept his head down. I didn’t think how Armin would feel… I just sorta came over, I just…. He grimaced as Mikhail whined, giving away his agitation. Fuck, it doesn’t help that you’re giving me away! He picked up the piece of pancake with his shaking hand trying not to seem suspicious. He’ll probably want me gone, because I’m not Erwin...

Armin snapped out of his daze when Mikhail whined, seeing Eren’s hand shaking. “Eren, are you okay? I’m sorry I’ve been quiet, it's nothing to do with you.” I just... sometimes I'm reminded of how alone I am in this house....

Eren nodded, quietly apologizing as he set his fork down, still keeping his eyes down. “I-I… I should g-go home… Shouldn’t I?” You probably want me gone too...

Armin's face fell, his voice soft. “You don't have to go home, you should go back on your own time, when you feel up to it. It'll take a few days to settle back into yourself, I know… I just… I don't know how I keep managing to forget that I'm so alone in this big house…. ...I just really miss him....” Armin leaned his head in his hand, staring at the table. I feel like if I say his name I'll just start crying....

Eren nodded, putting his hands in his lap and letting Mikhail lick them, to calm himself down. “He’s coming back in October, you’ll be happy to see him.” I know you will, you haven’t seen him since Christmas, which wasn’t that long ago, but I know you didn’t want to give him up. He looked down at Mikhail, his hand moving to scratch by his ears. I probably seem like a brat for crying about Levi hating me…. Shit, he’s probably sick and tired of my antics by now.

“T’ve been counting the days… I miss him so much…” I can't wait until then.... I've been craving
his touch... I miss his voice... Armin didn't realize he'd called silent again until he heard Mikhail shift a paw, his nails clicking on the floor. Oh. “I'm sorry, I keep spacing out. Here, are you finished?” He watched Eren nod. “Alright, I'll wash dishes. Go get some shoes on, and know what you want to take back from your house, okay?” Get that sorted out....

Eren nodded, grabbing his phone from his pocket and making a list. I’ll have Dad print off some sheet music while I pack clothes and such. He kept a his eyes on his phone, though he soon enough was engrossed in petting Mikhail’s head again. I reminded him, I should really just go home... He doesn’t deserve to be bothered with all my shit...

Armin was soon done with cleaning up, going to grab his keys again, looking to Eren. “Ready?” He watched him nod, going to his truck with him. The drive was short and quiet, the radio faintly playing. They pulled in after a little, Armin hopping out. He looked back when he didn't hear the other door open, seeing Eren frozen in the passenger's seat. “Eren, it's okay. You can do this.” It's okay.

Eren was frozen in place looking to Armin to try and get a bit of courage to return to him. I can do this... He was slow to come out of the car, heading towards the door. Should I just go in? Or should we ring the doorbell? I don't know what to do....

Armin led him up to the door, smiling when Lathe opened the door. They were led inside, Mikhail going straight for his food bowl and whining loudly until Jake filled it, munching away. He's really hungry.

Levi was curled up in the nook upstairs, looking down when the door opened. Eren... He unfurled and went down the stairs, catching Eren and burying his face in his shoulder, hugging. “Eren, you scared me.... I missed you.” I was so scared when I didn't wake up next to you this morning...

Eren’s eyes went wide as Levi wrapped his arms around him, surprised by the gesture. What is he doing? He's hugging me? He slowly and jerkily moved to wrap his own arms around Levi. His body was still tense as he held him, not completely sure what to do. I... I’m not sure if I should be doing this... Since I’m leaving with Armin again.

Levi gently ran his hand over his back, trying to help him relax. It's okay... You're okay... “Lay down with me?” Levi’s voice was quiet, his eyes hopeful. I missed you... I want to cuddle, if it's okay....

Eren looked away from Levi, shaking his head. “W-We came to grab some stuff... I-I’m not staying...” You’ll probably be mad that so don’t want to stay. He got more tense in Levi’s arms,
Letting go of him and attempting to step back and away from his hug, *I need to get clothes, then get Mikhail his food.*

Levi looked genuinely hurt when Eren pulled away, schooling his expression when he realized how vulnerable he must look. *You're not staying.* “O-Okay…” Levi looked down, turning away to go back to the nook, wanting to curl away from everyone. *Okay… I can be alone….*

Eren watched him turn and leave feeling mixed emotions in his chest and gut. He dropped the hand he didn’t even know he raised, feeling a sense of guilt wash over him as he slowly followed Levi upstairs but went towards their room to pack. *Shit, I probably made everything worse… For all I know Levi’s gonna take Mila and leave…. Which he has every right to do, and I’m honestly surprised he hasn’t called off our engagement…. All these thoughts were pooling in his head to a point where Mikhail was whining right next to him and he didn’t even acknowledge him.*

Levi turned around at the top of the stairs when he heard Eren following him, saddened when he walked right past him. He went to the couch and curled into a corner of it in a thick quilt, sighing when Lucifer meandered over and nestled into the nest right with him and made himself comfortable in his lap. *Oh… Levi gently pet the cat, his mind running in circles. I miss him… it's barely been a few hours, and it feels like he’s been gone for so much longer.*

Mikhail continued to whine, beginning to bark and try and get Eren’s attention, but alas, that woke up Mila, which lead to her cries sounding from her crib. With the added cacophony of noise, Eren finally snapped out of his thoughts, moving to go and pick up Mila and try and coo to her. *Shit, what do I do? Was she still sleeping? Or did she wake up early and Levi put her down again? He quickly became frazzled as she continued to cry in his arms, not seeming to want to calm down in the slightest, even after Eren got the idea to change her. Why do you always cry in my arms? And then once Levi picks you up you’re perfectly fine?*

Levi came to the door when her cries didn’t quiet, seeing Eren with an armful of crying child. *Oh. He stopped himself from just going and taking her, thinking. If I don’t let him take care of her, he’ll think I’m trying to steal her away from him… He instead looked around, seeing her stuffed puppy on the floor, having fallen from between the bars of the crib. He went and picked it up, going to Eren and handing it to him. “She likes it when you play with her- it’ll calm her down.” She’ll love it.*

Eren looked surprised by the stuffed puppy, taking it with confusion written on his face. *You’re not gonna take her? But you usually take her away from me…. He lifted the small stuffed animal to let Mila see it and she slowly calmed down, grabbing at the puppy with wide and happy eyes. Huh? She…. She actually stopped crying for me? Eren has the barest hint of a smile on his face as he ignored the large bag he’d been packing and moving to sit on the bed with Mila in his arms. I’m… I’m surprised, usually she doesn’t want anything to do with me when she cries.*
Levi smiled faintly when Mila calmed down, moving to sit next to Eren on the bed, leaning his head on Eren’s shoulder. He watched Eren nudge Mila’s nose with the puppy’s paw, Mila’s giggle bright. Aw.... “She loves you, you know.” Levi let his eyes fall shut. “I want her to grow up with you there for her… with both of us there.” I love you… “I love you, Eren.” I do.... so much....

Eren couldn’t help the flush that suddenly formed on his face. He said it... He said he loved me. He also couldn’t help the wide grin that crossed his face as Mila sat on his lap, playing with the puppy Eren had given her. Eren turned his head, looking over to Levi. “You’re not mad?” He asked softly, his eyes looking into Levi’s for the barest hints of anger. I want to make sure you’re not gonna kill me if I leave...

Levi shook his head, looking up to him. “....I know you probably need a break from everything… it's a busy house and it's hard to find a space to be alone… it's never really quiet… it's okay. But we’ll miss you… you come home when you feel better, okay?” Levi leaned up and softly kissed his cheek. It's okay... I can cope.

Eren’s face flushed even darker when Levi kissed his cheek, stumbling over words that didn’t want to come out of his mouth. Fuck, I’m not making any sense. He shut his mouth, looking over Mila quietly chewing on the puppy’s ear as she looked at them. “Y-You should probably take her…” You’ll want her back, won’t you? He shifted his hold on her, lifting her to set her in Levi’s lap. I need to pack, I shouldn’t keep Armin waiting.

Levi chuckled as Eren stumbled over his words, shifting to hold Mila between them, the toddler still looking up to them with wide eyes. He held her in their laps, going to gently cup Eren’s cheek, his eyes soft as he studied his face. “Eren… may I kiss you?” I want to… but you probably don't want me to right now....

Eren looked surprised before he looked away for a moment, thinking about it. He bit his lip as his mind went in circles about the decision before he carefully looked back to Levi’s piercing silver eyes and nodded timidly. You can kiss me... there shouldn’t be any harm in doing that, right?

Levi looked relieved, leaning up and gently kissing him, their kiss chaste for a long moment. Levi gently brushed his lip with his tongue, grateful when Eren opened up for him, letting Eren come to him and feeling his tongue wrap around his own. Levi held onto him, gently nipping Eren’s nose when he broke their kiss, looking a bit playful. “I love you… you're coming back for dinner today, right? It's Saturday…” We feast tonight...

Eren looked completely flush when Levi bit his nose. “Y-Yeah, we’ll be back for dinner.” He murmured quietly and smiled softly, getting up off the bed. I need to get my bag downstairs, and
Levi nodded, cradling Mila in his lap as Eren packed up, getting her a teething ring to chew on instead of her puppy’s ear. She’s still teething like crazy… “We’ll have to figure out what we’re doing for dinner without you here to make German foods with us. Knowing dad, he’ll go nuts with the Italian fare. If that’s okay. It’s been mostly the same every week. Not that I’m complaining, it’s always been delicious. But a bit of a change would be good. And I’m sure Dad will find a way to make ravioli very interesting.” He’ll be busting out the pasta roller and have a whole huge pot of sauce simmering in no time….

Eren chuckled, shaking his head. “Henry complained about it, he doesn’t like when I cook apparently.” Well when you stay at our house and we make you food, you end up getting what people can make.

Levi rolled his eyes. “You see what happens? We give him free food and he complains. I wonder what he’d say if Lathe set a bowl of squid-ink pasta in front of him. I know dad’s been waiting for a good night to try and make some.” He’s wanted a day of Italian cooking for a while… “I do love your cooking. I really do. But a different kind of feast would be nice too.” I want ravioli….

Eren looked at him and nodded. “Yeah, Dad will get to have a field day, I’ll see you guys tonight.” He murmured quietly and smiled as Mila chewed on the puppy’s ear again. Still teething… She’ll still be teething when I get home. He picked up the duffle bag he made for himself before he made his way to the stairs and he went around it towards the studio and grabbing a few other things he wanted for his art supplies, Mikhail following at his heels. I can draw…. I’ll probably draw Armin, he’ll be the only one around….

Levi chuckled as Mila chewed her puppy’s ear again, the scene too adorable to bear, taking a picture of her before giving her back the teething ring, letting her crush the pup to her chest as he held her for a moment, standing and swaying a bit with her in his arms, his heart softening as he heard her happy little sounds. My beautiful little daughter… Levi brought her downstairs after a little, wanting to catch Eren before he left. He watched the pups swarm them as soon as they were on the ground floor, all of them yapping for Mila’s attention. They all love her… and she loves them. Levi set her down, the pups knowing to be gentle with the toddler, Mila giggling as they noses her cheeks and her tummy. They knew better than to take her stuffed animal, the first incident ending quickly with her screeching cries. They all love her- she gives them all lots of pets. Levi looked up from playing with the puppies as he heard footsteps, seeing Eren with his duffle bag of things. He gently scooped Mila up, going to catch him, Armin and Lathe still talking over by the door. “Hey.” Levi gently rested a hand on Eren’s shoulder, smiling faintly. “Say goodbye to Mila and I?” He came close, Mila between them, hanging onto the shirt of her Mum. “She’ll miss you. …I’ll miss you too.” Levi rested his head on Eren’s shoulder, drinking in his scent. I love you….
Eren smiled, taking Mila from Levi’s hold and bringing her to his chest. “You be good for Daddy, okay Mila?” He watched her giggle, a small smile on his face as he dipped down and kissed her nose. *I love you baby...* He carefully handed her back, carefully unfurling her hands from his shirt, leaning down to peck Levi’s forehead as well. “We’ll be back for dinner.” He murmured, straightening himself to look at Armin, holding Mikhail’s dishes and a large bag of his food. *Good... He’ll be fine with us.*

Levi blushed faintly as Eren kissed his forehead, leaning up to gently nip Eren’s ear before taking Mila back, chuckling as she again nibbled at her puppy’s ear, the teething ring on her grasp disregarded. “That's not to chew, Mila. That's to play.” He gently let her close her yap on the ring again, going to sit on the couch with her, making her puppy meander over her tummy and poke her with its nose. *You're adorable...*

Armin looked up when Eren came over, smiling. “Ready?” *You've certainly got quite the armful of stuff....*

Eren looked to his duffle bag on his hip, filled with clothes and art supplies. *I think I got everything.* “Yeah, I should have everything.” He glanced up at Lathe, taking a bit of a wary step towards Armin. “So we’ll be back for dinner then.” *You don’t have to force yourself to be affectionate, I realize you don’t want any hugs from me.*

Lathe looked crestfallen when Eren stepped away, holding out his arms. “Okay, but can I please have my goodbye hug?” *I want hugs...*

Eren looked at him with a confused gaze. *I'm not... You don’t.....* He sighed looking at Lathe and away. *I'm not too sure you're not forcing yourself.... “Lathe... You don’t have to force yourself, I’ll be fine.” You pushed me away, there’s no chance in hell you’d want a hug from me unless I really needed it, which at that point you would force yourself...*

Lathe looked like a kicked puppy, drooping. “Eren, I'm your Dad... I'm not forcing myself to do anything. I'm your Dad and I love you, and I want my hug. Yesterday morning was a fluke- I'd been feeling weird and unlike myself for weeks up to that point, but today you scared us and I miss you already. I don't know how else to get you to understand.” *I don't know what else there is to say.* “Can I please have a hug?” *I want one... I was worried sick this morning....*

Eren looked to see Lathe’s eyes after he asked for a hug again. *You look like you're ready to cry... And at this rate I would expect Mom to be like this... Not you ...* He sighed quietly, setting his duffle bag down before he walked up to him, wrapping his arms around the older man and letting him hug him. He struggled not to tense up but soon relaxed in the hold. *This is Lathe.... He gives big hugs.......... Maybe....*
Lathe tried to resist the urge to crush Eren to his chest, one hand running over his back as the other carded through his hair. “I love you, Eren.” He kissed the top of Eren’s head before letting go, giving him a small smile. “You keep out of trouble, okay? Be good for Armin. Don’t trash the place.” That would not be good.

Eren smiled softly and nodded, picking up his duffle before he waved to the rest of the family, Ieva absent and still in bed. Well, she’ll see me tonight, hopefully, with everyone else. He followed Armin in silence, getting into his car and letting him drive the short distance to his large house. “Can you take Monday off?”


“Take Monday off.” Eren looked over to him and smiled. I’m glad I grabbed my laptop, though I could really do it on my phone…. He smiled, hopping out and helping carry Mikhail’s things into the house. We could go for two days… That should be enough to relax…

Armin quirked an eyebrow, opening the door for him. “Why? I wanna know what you’re thinking up.” This is suspicious. He let Eren get Mikhail’s stuff situated in the kitchen, going to sit on the living room couch, looking over the large room. Erwin liked this end of the couch better… he wouldn’t have to crane his neck when we cuddled…

“Spa day… downtown? What do you say?” I could use a spa day, I really could, and it would be nice to enjoy it with someone. “We’d leave tonight, sleep overnight have our day tomorrow, and then sleep overnight again and then drive home Monday afternoon after lunch or something like that.” That should work, right?

Armin pondered it, unable to shake the want for strong arms around him, sighing quietly when he remembered how far away he was. “Yeah… I could use it… and this house feels too damn big…..” Armin fished out his phone, wanting to make the call and take off if he could on such short notice. They’ll give me the time off… I’ve only requested off for a day twice before…

Eren smiled, nodding and going through his phone to get numbers of places to call and get reservations. Shouldn’t be too hard.

I’m a little while Armin had put his phone away, a small smile on his face. “Approved. You have a place for us to go yet?” You’ve called at least four different places so far…
Eren smiled softly and looked to Armin, sitting down on the couch beside him. “Do you wanna go to a small shop? Or do you wanna go to a rather large place?” It’s up to you, I’m fine with either at this point.

Armin thought, crossing his legs at the ankles. “Hm… I’d rather go to a larger place, honestly….” I dunno, either is really fine I guess….

“Alright we’re going to Healing Waters, it’s a bit more upscale but it’ll do, I’ll call them back and set up the day for us, is there anything you want me to get especially for us?” I’m good with everything, I don’t know if there’s anything that you would specifically want.

Armin slowly shook his head. You can't get me what I want… “No, I'm good.” I miss him… Armin was quiet, looking up at the ceiling. I can't wait until he comes home….

“Alright. I’ll go call in our reservations for the whole day then.” He smiled and shifted off the couch, going to go call the place in the kitchen, and making sure that when they got there they wouldn’t be surrounded by fans or anything. I never really thought about getting a guard… I might, but that would seem a bit impersonal, they’d follow me around to make sure I didn’t get mobbed all the time.

Armin was absentminded on the couch, his eyes shutting. He didn't know what to do with himself, not wanting to browse the Internet mindlessly like he so often did. His mind was filled with a certain blonde, wanting to be scooped up in his strong arms again. When you come home, I'm not letting go….

Eren finished off their finalized plan for what they were going to experience, making sure the two of them would be in the same room the whole time. We get there early and spend practically the whole day there. He smiled, ending the call and looking over towards Armin, about to yell that they got the spa day before he saw his closed eyes. Well, now is as good a time as any to draw him, I’ll be quiet.

Armin was still as Eren moved around, not having the energy or the will to do much else. It's just Eren, he can do his own thing. Armin could almost feel arms around him as he lingered on the edge of sleep, daydreaming. He wanted to feel soft breath on his neck, cracking open an eye when he heard the scratch of charcoal pencils on paper. He didn't move when he saw how intently Eren was staring at him. “Are you drawing me?” His voice was quiet, not wanting to disturb the peace. It certainly looks like it...
“Uh, y-yeah…. I can stop… If you don’t want me to.” I never really asked if I could draw you, I guess I should have. He flushed with embarrassment, putting his pencil down and looking down from his stare at Armin. I’m sorry.

Armin faintly chuckled, waving one hand so as not to mess his hair, knowing Eren was already a bit of a ways along. “No, it's fine. I don't mind at all, as long as you make me look pretty.” He and Eren chuckled at that, the blonde letting his eyes shut again as charcoal again met paper. It'll look good…. And it's something for Eren to do to relax.

Eren chuckled and smiled softly, slowly picking up his pencil and drawing image after image of Armin as he rested on the couch. This is relaxing and it helps me to draw people a little bit better...

Armin hadn't moved much, occasionally shifting when Eren had finished one sketch and flipped to a new page to start another. He looked forlornly across the room, feeling the ghost of touches around his middle, on his neck. Armin sighed quietly after the third hour, stretching and standing when Eren tore off another sheet full of him. “Are you hungry at all? I know we just had breakfast, but it's been awhile…” I want something to do besides mope..... cooking fixes that....

“Sure, I can draw you while you’re cooking, so I can move my stuff to the kitchen.” He smiled softly, shifting to put the papers in a neat pile. I wanna draw still, it’s very relaxing.

Armin nodded, going to fetch his light blue apron, seeing the green and grey one still hanging neatly next to his. He looked away, going to make them lunch as Eren drew. The day dragged on, Armin puttering around the house and Eren following with his drawing tools in hand, finally looking to him. “I’m going to get changed so we can go to dinner, alright?” I always feel like I'm underdressed going to your house for dinner..

Eren nodded, packing up his art supplies and looking over the dozens of sheets of paper he created of Armin. They look pretty good… hmm, I wonder if Erwin would be up for letting me draw them when he got back? His face completely covered in a blush once he realized a few other things that could very well happen when Erwin got home. All of us would be home… We might end up coming here for a break from Mila, so we could have a night to ourselves… That would be nice, a double date? He smiled at the thought, looking over his arms and instantly knowing that he would have to wash up before they went over. He headed for the sink, carefully washing everything off and cleaning out his fingernails. Levi and I haven’t gone on a single date since he came back home...

Armin quickly found a nicer pair of jeans and a button-down shirt, coming back downstairs. He laughed when he saw Eren trying to dig the charcoal dust out from under his nails. He stood by the table as he waited, looking over the many pictures of him. Wow… “These are all really good, Eren.” You always manage to impress...
Eren’s face flushed even more from Armin’s words. “Oh-um-uh, th-thanks.” He smiled softly as he glanced over his shoulder. *Fuck, I haven’t really thought about going out on a date with Levi since we got back, though I don’t think I can really be blamed for it. “I-I’ll be done soon, sorry.”* His hands shook a bit from the embarrassment he felt running through him. *Levi’s probably upset about this… Why did I running away from everything would help?* His shoulders tensed from the thought, though soon they slumped, insecurities sweeping over him.

“It’s okay, Eren, take your time.” Armin studied all of them, thinking. “….do you think you could maybe draw Erwin and I when he comes home?” *I want one of us… you’d do a wonderful job….*

Eren’s face flushed an even brighter red, lewd images crossing his mind before he nodded hurriedly. “Y-Yeah… I can do that…” *I’ll probably draw you two when he gets home anyways, it’s good practice with two people. And you’d probably want platonic pictures, I would imagine.* His hands shook slightly as he cleaned out the last of his nails. He shook his hands out after turning the water off, drying them. He picked his head up as Mikhail came to his side, holding the bottle of his pills. “Th-Thanks Mikhail.” He murmured, taking his pills with shaking hands.

Armin came over to him when he saw his hands shaking, settling a hand on his shoulder. “Eren, are you okay? You don’t have to if you don’t want to….”

Eren looked at Armin and he blushed even more, stammering even worse now that Armin was touching him, looking down a bit and holding out the bottle in his shaking hands. *I won’t be able to open them with my hands like this. “I-I… I can’t do it.”* He told him, swallowing hard, attempting to change the subject. *I can barely get my head out of the gutter… Fuck… I haven’t had sex in a long time either, I think it’s making it that much worse….*

Armin saw Eren’s face flush, noticing the look in his eye as he uncapped it for him. *What’re you so worked up about…? Are you…. oh.* Armin’s mind flickered to one specific drawing on the studio wall, a fucked-out Levi staring at the viewer with dark eyes. *Oh.* “Uhm…. Armin didn't know what to say for a moment, setting down the bottle of pills. “Are you thinking of a… less than PG drawing? I didn't mean that when I said it, but…”* He thought for a moment as Eren flushed further red, his own cheeks pink. “I wouldn't exactly be opposed…” *Guh, if you drew that… I’d have to frame it and put it where I could always see it in the bedroom….*

Eren looked at him with wide eyes, taking the pills he needed from the opened bottle and letting Armin close it back up. “W-Well I-I could do more t-than one…” He murmured quietly to him, fidgeting a bit on his feet. *Shit, now I’m just thinking about Levi… and sex…. Which we haven’t had in such a long time, and mostly because of me.*
Armin blushed further, smiling faintly, looking a bit embarrassed. “That’d be really nice…” The last time the four of us did anything like that… You and Levi going at it was so damn hot… I wouldn’t mind watching again… Armin set the bottle on the counter, giving him a shy look. “Come on, let’s go have dinner, okay?” When Erwin comes home, I want you to draw us… everything from head to toe… as many as you want.

Eren nodded following him to the car, settling in with Mikhail on his lap. “Did I… Did I do the right thing? I know I haven’t done anything with Levi for so long… but I… I ran away from him… I-I’m basically going on a date with you before I’ve gone on a date with Levi since he got back.” Basically… And I’ll drive us there so you can sleep in the car…

Armin stared at the steering wheel, thinking quietly for a moment. “…I don’t think it’s exactly a wrong thing to do… but I know he’d hurt if he knew what we were going to do tomorrow… he’s probably wanted to do something like this with you for a while… but first he was recovering from his injury, and Mila’s still tiny and needs attention, and then you went to Germany for your sick Vatri, and things happened and you came back in a different state of mind. He’s probably been waiting for the right time to take you away from the familiarity of home, thinking it was better for you than trying to drag you out and go places with him. ….he’d probably be upset, even if he tries to say it’s alright.” Even though he can be so well masked, it's no secret it must hurt to hear this kind of stuff….

Eren nodded, shifting a bit and petting Mikhail to calm down a bit before they finally pulled up, noticing that almost everyone was there already. Are we late? Did I make us late? I’m not really sure what time you usually come over because I’m in the kitchen… “I-I think I’ll go home Monday night… i-if that’s okay?” After I’ve spent a nice relaxing day with you and then drove home.

Armin nodded, looking over to him and smiling faintly. “That’s just fine, Eren. Whenever you feel up to it.” Armin hopped out of the truck with him, walking up to the front door. It was soon opened a crack by a mop of fiery hair, Sharon keeping the puppies at bay.

“I’d love to let you in, but puppies.” Puppies.

Eren was surprised, looking down to Mikhail who stuck his head into the door and growled a little which sent the puppies off towards their mother. Well... that works I guess... He smiled as they were let in, making sure no one got outside. Once he was inside he took off his shoes, only to be attacked by a small child. His eyes widened as Mila clung to his leg, bending down to pick her up. “Mila, what are you doing by yourself? Where’s Daddy?”

“M-Mumma! Mumma!” Mila refused to let go of him, latching on when Eren lifted her up into his
Levi saw Eren’s surprised expression, coming back over with her abandoned toys. “She was so upset when you were gone for so long… she’s been asking for you for over an hour. Music kinda helped…” He gently nudged Eren’s nose with her stuffed puppy, which Mila promptly snatched from his grasp, chewing happily on the ear. “But she wanted the real thing.” He smiled faintly, stepping a bit closer and gently nosing at Eren’s cheek, kissing a spot on his neck. “As did I…” I missed you already…. He chuckled when he heard Eren sputtering, holding his blushing mess of a fiancé around the waist. I love you.

“Levi?” Armin looked to Eren, sure that he saw a wisp of steam coming out of his ears as he sputtered from embarrassment, tilting his head and smirking. “I think you broke him.” He looks really embarrassed… but you’re being really sweet, so I guess that explains it.

Eren flustered even more as Armin spoke too, his eyes wide from the added embarrassment. This isn’t going well, not with what I’ve been thinking about in the last fifteen minutes. He looked to Mila holding her close to his chest and running a hands through her soft hair. “Well I’ll be home soon baby, don’t you worry, okay? You gonna be good for Daddy while Mumma’s gone?” His words were soft as he walked away from the embarrassment before heading towards the kitchen and seeing Lathe and James having an absolute field day with the pastas. “What… is this some sort of Italian feast now?”

Lathe and James fervently nodded, James with an armful of sheets of pasta dough, Lathe still rolling the last of it. “We’re almost done, the filling is cooked. We just need to fill them, cook for a minute since the filling is cooked already, and then everything’s done.” They shooed him out of the kitchen, Lathe kissing his forehead before sending him off. “Go, be sociable!” Do the thing! He turned when James tapped his arm, demanding he get to cutting out pasta discs. Fine, fine.

Eren let them shoo him out of the kitchen, heading towards the family room where Marco was sitting in Jean’s lap, the two of them all lovey dovey, Casper in Scotty’s lap on the other side, Armin in between the two couples. Ieva was sitting with Hannah, her hair a bright blue, which made her stand out from the crowd. Wow…. It’s bright. “Mila, honey, I’m gonna give you to Daddy, okay?” He asked, trying to pry her off and hand her to Levi who sat near Sharon, discussing video game characters most likely. I’m not sure where I should sit…. Conversations have started without me…

“-obviously Chess, but I thought he might work well as the tailor, even though I kinda want to go with Marco- oh?” Sharon looked up as Eren approached them, seeing Mila still vainly hanging onto Eren, looking ready to cry as he gently tried to pry her from him. Oh my…. Sharon gently bounced Maverick on her knee, looking over to Levi. What’s he doing?
“Eren?” Levi looked up as Eren tried to hand him Mila, seeing him struggle with the baby. “Eren, she wants to keep you, I think.” Levi smiled faintly, reaching up. “Here.” He saw Eren’s relief, though it quickly turned to surprise when he pulled Eren into his lap, settling his back against his front, kissing his shoulder blade. “Better?” They looked over as Sharon giggled, the redhead with a happy look in her eyes.

“Everyone’s being too sweet with each other, I’m getting so many cavities…” She cackled as Eren flushed red, tilting her head a bit. “....I think I have an idea as to who you should be….”

“But Marco would make a better tailor.”

“Yeah, I can see that… it's decided. But still, you'll kill me if he isn't in there somewhere.”

“Not really. I'd only maim you.” Slightly.

Sharon chuckled. “I'd rather not risk it.” She watched Maverick squirm in her arms, reaching for Mila. “Hey Honey, you wanna say hi?” He likes Mila…. They're already friends. They bonded over the puppies last time we were here.

Eren let Mila shift in his lap, letting her look at the older 3 year old. I can’t believe he’s three already…. He’s so big, and so adorable… He watched the two of them stare at each other, Mila chewing on her puppy’s ear still. She's just gonna stare at him because she doesn't want to let go of me...

Maverick watched her chew on her puppy, reaching out and poking her foot. “Puppy?” It's a nice puppy… I want one...

Eren glanced over at Maverick, looking down to where the puppies were huddled by their feet, reaching down and scooping one up for Maverick and putting the pup in his lap. I swear we have puppies here all the time.... He shifted back in Levi’s lap, instantly flushing when he knew that he was sitting directly on Levi’s crotch. Oh fuck...

“Puppy!” Maverick was shifted back further in Sharon’s lap with the puppy, petting the puppy and giggling when it licked his face. Puppy! He reached for Mila when the girl seemed interested, Sharon making room to sit them both on the couch between them, letting the puppy clamber over their laps. Puppy!!
Levi’s arms wrapped more firmly around Eren’s middle, shifting him a bit further back into his lap, right over his crotch. *Fuck*... “Sometime soon, love.” Levi gently nibbled the spot behind his ear, his voice a quiet murmur. *Mine.*

Eren’s eyes widened a fraction as he felt himself almost move his hips against Levi as if on reflex. He caught himself, blushing profusely as Levi nibbled behind his ear, moans catching in his throat. *Oh my god…. He’s holding onto me…* He sunk into the strong arms wrapped around himself and almost seemed to purr, tilting his head to give Levi more room. *Mila let go…*

Levi flicked his eyes over the rest of the room, checking if anyone would notice. Jean seemed busy kissing Marco; Scotty and Casper were in a stalemate as the former threatened to tickle the latter, the blue-haired man threatening abstinence; Armin, Hannah and Ieva were wrapped up in a conversation and Sharon was busy sitting on the floor with the puppies, bringing the two toddlers with her to play with them. Levi even caught sight of Henry and Tucker tucked away in the nook around the corner from the living room, tangled in a quilt, smothered with each other. *We’re not being watched*.... Levi dipped his head down, his teeth gently scraping Eren’s tan neck, slowly nibbling and nipping at him, his hair hiding him, though with the position it wasn’t hard to figure out what was happening. *I love you… so much…*  

Eren... *Don’t you dare let a sound escape your lips!* Eren hastily grabbed a pillow to cover his front as Levi nipped and sucked at the back of his neck. *Oh my god… I wanna moan so badly…* “L-Levi…” His voice was quiet and full of want and need. *Your lips feel amazing…*  

Levi glanced up as he heard a swear from the kitchen, Lathe and James sheepishly looking over to them when heads turned. “Uh, sorry… ten more minutes. *We’re a lowkey mess right now…*”  

*Perfect* ... Levi gently nipped Eren’s ear, his voice quiet. “Eren, would you come with me for a minute?” He stood up with him, nearly dragging him to the bathroom and locking them inside, pushing Eren against the door. His motions slowed from that moment on, going to kiss his collarbone, his hands running down his sides. *I’ve missed you… so much…*  

Levi was met with a soft moan that quietly made it’s way from Eren’s mouth. His hands went up to run through Levi’s undercut, loving by the feeling that went through his whole body. *Fuck he got me hard with barely any effort…* “L-Levi…. We… We can’t…” *You and I both know we can’t do anything in 10 minutes…*  

Levi looked up to him, his eyes soft. “I don’t want to go all the way with you right now… there's no time for that. But, if you’d let me…” Levi slowly fell to his knees, his hands on his hips. “I’d love to show you how much I adore you…” *I want to taste you….***
Eren swallowed hard, shifting from against the door, making sure it was locked before he walked towards the long counter and hopped up on the sturdy marble. *I know I won’t be able to keep myself standing if you give me a blow.* “I’d like that…” Eren eyes were already blown and an obvious bulge in his pants as he waited for Levi.

Levi shifted when Eren moved, settling between his legs, unbuttoning them and helping Eren drag down his pants and boxers. His hands ran over his thighs when the annoying fabric finally found the floor, nipping gently at his base, lapping at the underside of his length teasingly. *All mine… I’ve missed this….*

Eren couldn’t help but let out a shuddery whine. “Levi…. Fuck…” “I’ve been so pent up, I’m not gonna last long at all… Not with the way that he’s looking at me like that…” He lifted a hand to his mouth trying to stifle his moans, knowing better than to let them out. *I can’t let them out…*

Levi gently licked up to his tip, gently fondling his sac as he took his tip into his mouth. Levi slowly began sucking, bobbing his head. *I want you to fall apart… I want you to relax… and feel good.*

Eren let out a soft whimper as Levi took his length into his mouth. *Oh fuck…* “Le-Levi…” Eren couldn’t help but run his hands through Levi’s hair, the black silk running through his fingers and exciting him more. *Fuck his mouth feels so good…* He couldn’t help his toes starting to curl, and his leg crossing over his shoulders, hooking at the ankles. He could feel his whole body heating up from the intimate position they were in, a loud and shaky gasp leaving him as Levi sucked particularly hard.

Levi hummed on him, rocking his head back and forth, taking in as much of Eren as he could. He gazed up at Eren, his eyes full of affection, handling him with care. *Just relax…*

Eren’s eyes were wide with bliss, letting out another choked moan. *His mouth… Oh my god, it’s so warm…* He already started shaking from the absolute pleasure, trying not to get too worked up so soon. *I don’t wanna cum right away, though it would probably be better if I did…*

Levi gazed up at him, hearing the few choked sounds he made, pulling off of him and letting his low voice breathe against his shaft. “Please, Eren… cum and let me taste you….” He slowly worked his way back into Eren’s length, not holding back. *I wanna taste you…*

Eren shook his head, his hold on Levi getting tighter as he sunk down on him. “I-I don’t wanna…. N-Not yet…” *fuck it feels so fucking good, I’ve missed this, I’ve missed you.* He had a fucked out look on his face as Levi continued to suck him, almost as if he intended to suck him dry, which he
most certainly did.

*Whenever you wanna*… Levi slowed his bobbing as Eren whined, taking his time to work Eren up to where he was shaking hard with pleasure. *Please*… Levi looked straight into his eyes, sucking hard on his tip, his tongue toying with his slit. *I want you to cum for me… please*…

Eren couldn’t hold himself back, biting at his thumb to lessen the moan that escaped him. *Oh fuck*! He came hard into Levi’s mouth, unable to shake off the pleasure, letting it send him over the edge. He panted, trying to catch his breath as he shot stripe after pearly stripe into Levi’s mouth, filling it and then some. *Shit, I was pent up.*

Levi struggled to swallow, catching what dropped out of his lips with his hand, lapping it up and licking Eren’s softening length clean. He licked his lips, standing and giving Eren a gentle kiss, his hands on his hips. “You’re so beautiful like this…” Levi brushed away some of the damp hair stuck to Eren’s forehead. “All mine…” Levi kissed the corner of his mouth, surprised when Eren tugged him closer, melting into his kiss. *I miss this*…

Eren pulled Levi into a deep kiss, his hands twined behind his neck. He only pulled back to breathe, resting his forehead against Levi’s and looking into his eyes. “I’ll be home Monday night….” *Maybe you’ll put Mila in James’ room?*

Levi gazed into Eren’s dark orbs, nodding breathlessly. “I’ll have James take care of Mila for the night…” Levi’s hands ran over Eren’s lithe frame, melting into his embrace. *Mine.* “And I’ll have you all to myself for the night…” *I miss you*…

Eren blushed down his neck at that statement, moving to scoot off the counter. *I need to put my pants back on, and look presentable*… “Yeah… But I’ll be gone all day tomorrow…” He murmured quietly. *Everyone probably knows exactly what we did. Fuck*.

Levi sighed, helping Eren stand and redress, pecking his neck. *You’re going to be gone… probably out enjoying yourself somewhere.* “Okay… you come home ready to relax for me, okay?” Levi nestled into his neck, a small patch of pale skin tempting him. “Eren… please, can I mark you here?” Levi nibbled the skin, feeling possessive. *You’re mine… I don’t give a damn that it’d be visible. You’re mine and nobody else’s.*

*Possessive, are we?* Eren hummed, tilting his head to the side and letting Levi nibble at his neck. *I can do that… That would be fine*…
Levi’s eyes sparkled for a moment, pulling Eren flush as he dove in to attack his neck. He sucked hard, the hand on his neck holding him there encouraging him, scraping the skin with his teeth and leaving a large red mark at the juncture of his neck. He lapped at the skin in apology, hugging Eren tightly. *You sound more like yourself already.... maybe it's been kinda suffocating around here for you.... we should have the talk again when you get home, about our own place... somewhere to raise Mila where she won't just be one of the herd...* 

Eren let out a loud groan, his fingers digging into Levi’s hair as he was marked. *Shit, that’s gonna be awkward for our spa day... But oh well...* He hummed when Levi licked at his neck, a soft smile on his face. “We should go get ready…” He murmured quietly, looking at the mirror and seeing how ruffled their clothes and hair was. 

Levi hummed, pulling away and smoothing out the wrinkles in Eren’s shirt, helping to somewhat tame his hair. He left it beautifully tousled, smirking. *Damn, you look hot like that...* He adjusted the collar of his shirt back into place, the red mark peeking out from the fabric. “Perfect.” *I love it....* 

Eren looked to Levi, rolling his eyes and playfully pushing him back. “Okay now what? You slip out of the bathroom first? Or should I?” *I could always go hide in the studio and pretend I'm looking through my art...* 

Levi quirked an eyebrow, shaking his head, a devious smirk on his face. He took Eren by the waist and opened the door, pulling Eren with him back into the living room. He sat back into the couch with him, pulling him in his lap. *Nobody batted an eye at us...* He glanced up as Casper and Scotty gave them a knowing look, wagging their eyebrows at them. Well, they batted their eyebrows, but that doesn't matter. They're idiots. 

Eren shifted and buried his face into Levi’s neck, murmuring profanities and cursing him to the high heavens. “Fuck you, Levi.... Not funny.” *I don't want anyone looking at me like that...* He felt the couch shift, glancing at Mikhail as he sat staring at Levi and judging him. *At least someone’s on my side! Do you think!?* 

Levi shot Casper and Scotty a death glare, managing to get both of them to turn their attentions back to the other. “Sorry, Eren…” Levi thought as he held him close, soon deciding to tilt his head back a bit, murmuring in Eren’s ear. “...Mark me.” He looked down when Eren looked up in surprise, his voice still quiet enough only for him to hear. “Right now, please. As much as you want. I don’t give a damn who sees.” *You can be possessive of me too. I wouldn't exactly mind it.* 

Eren’s eyes held a feral glint in them, his hand moving his shirt to the side, giving him open ground near his collar. “You asked for it.” He murmured almost evilly, bending his head down and biting
down on Levi’s shoulder, hard enough to break the skin and feel the metallic tang of blood grace his tongue. You said I could… You get to make up for Scotty and Casper being asshats…

Levi bit back a gasp, struggling to remain silent as Eren bit at his neck, covering him in bites. “I-Is seventeen enough?” I’m gonna get hard if you keep this up….

“How many hours am I gonna be gone?” Eren asked him softly, licking his teeth, which still were a bright red from the amount of skin he opened. One for every hour…

Levi thought, trying to function with Eren sucking harshly at his skin, the sound of yipping puppies drowning out the faint smacks of his lips. “Uhm…. fifty?” He held back a moan when Eren moved to a new spot on his neck, holding onto him even tighter. Guh…..

Eren opened his mouth again to latch onto Levi’s neck, biting down into the flesh over and over again. He was keeping track of how many he made, making sure that he licked all the blood clean from each of the bites, soon shifting to the other side of his neck for more room. He’ll have a collar on… And he won’t be able to do jack shit about it…

Levi let Eren mark him, sighing quietly when Eren finally relented biting him, letting him lap at his wounds, relief filling him. I have so many… Levi ran his hand over Eren’s back, leaning into the tender touch. I like this…. They all jumped as Lathe whistled from the kitchen, grabbing their attention.

“Dinner’s finally ready, so come to the table before James and I eat everything ourselves!” It looks sooooooo good….

Levi stood when Eren clambered from his lap, glancing up as Tucker and Henry came over from the nook. He saw them gape at his bruised and marked neck, holding his head up, proud of the many marks. Yeah, I’m his. And he’s mine. Deal. Levi sat down next to Eren, tempted to climb into his lap. He decided to wait until Mila was fed, going to fill his plate, smiling faintly when Mila giggled as she ate. Beautiful little girl….

Eren had picked up Mila and had her situated in his lap, and her food on his plate first. Gotta make sure you eat, then I’ll pass you off to someone so I can eat… He smiled more as Mila held onto him and let him feed her, happy she wasn’t being fussy about it. She’s cute…

Levi ate slowly while Mila was being fed, moving as soon as Eren had set her back in her high
chair. He shifted to take over Eren’s lap, his half-eaten bowl of ravioli in front of him, looking up to Eren, his voice faint. “Feed me?” He smirked leaning his head back on Eren’s shoulder. “I’ll happily return the favor…” I’m not used to doing this kind of shit… I hope I’m being okay for you….

Eren was surprised by the intrusion, blinking a few times as his mind processed what Levi had said. F-fuck… What does he want? I’m so confused… He looked to the bowl of Ravioli, picking up a ravioli with Levi’s fork and holding it out for him. This is what you want to do?

Levi’s eyes lit up, leaning forward and taking the ravioli from the fork with his teeth. Levi relaxed into Eren’s chest as Eren did it again, feeding him the rest of his dinner, catching the stunned looks from the teenaged couple a few seats down, Levi smirking at them smugly before Eren fed him another piece. Yep. If you’re bold enough, you get shit like this. Try it sometime. Nobody else at the table really paid them much mind. Nobody here really cares about this kind of PDA… we just yell at people to get a room if they start making out in the middle of the living room or something.

Eren continued to feed Levi even sending the bowl down to get refilled and lifting more raviolis for him to eat. You never let me do stuff like this with you… Though it's okay, I enjoy this, and I can always eat later… His eyes softened as he fed Levi another ravioli, wild thoughts spinning around in his head.

Levi smiled faintly when Eren lifted one last ravioli to his mouth, catching his wrist, gently taking the fork from him. “Here, I'm full…” Levi turned in his lap, holding the bowl, offering a ravioli to Eren. Please? He smirked triumphantly when Eren ate it, going to get him another. I love this… it's simple, and it's just… really nice.

Eren let his cheeks bloom with color as Levi insisted on feeding him. You don’t normally do this… What’s up with you? He gave him a questioning look, leaning forward to take the next ravioli.

Levi’s eyes moved to Eren’s lips, seeing a small drop of sauce. “Oh, you have something there…” Levi leaned forward and quietly kissed the spot, licking up the sauce before moving back again, picking up another ravioli. We haven’t done much lately… I’ve been meaning to do something nice with you… anything would have done… and this seemed like a good idea. He looked up, seeing a scarlet flush high on Eren’s cheeks. Soooo worth it.

Eren had words caught in his throat, taking the ravioli from his fork and eating it. Okay, okay, I’ll eat it… He looked away from Levi, the blush still on his face as he ate the raviolis he was fed. This is childish… Especially for you, I’m honestly surprised you did it…
Levi fed him until the bowl was empty, gently pecking his cheek. “Still hungry?” I can get you more....

Eren shook his head, shifting a bit uncomfortably from Levi’s weight on his lap. He’s heavy... And it’s all muscles, good lord... “Levi.... C-Can you get off of me?” My foot is falling asleep and it’s uncomfortable as all hell...

Levi nodded, looking worried when he stood from Eren’s lap, helping him stand. His leg fell asleep... “Sorry… I wanted to....” It was nice... we’ll have to do it again...

Eren nodded, taking his plate and Levi’s and helping to clean up the table in silence. I should still help with dishes, it’s the least I could do before I leave.

Levi followed suit and helped with the dishes as always, everyone else migrating to the living room to talk a bit more for a while. It's always a chill kind of party on Saturdays... Levi caught Eren when they had finished, bringing him out of sight of the living room in the hall that led to the studios, gently pressing up to his front. Levi nestled into his neck, hanging on tightly. You looked anxious to leave... I'm gonna miss you... even if it is one day.

Eren looked to him, a little grateful he’d been whisked away. Oh thank god, I didn't want that embarrassment to continue. “I’ll be home soon... Don't worry.” He wrapped his arms tightly around him, holding him close. I’ll be home soon...

Levi didn't want to let go, grateful to have him leaning into his touch, for once not minding the contact. You're not shying away from me... thank god... Levi leaned up to kiss Eren deeply, yielding when he felt Eren grab a fistful of his shirt, taking over the kiss forcefully. Shit... Levi held Eren’s head, his fingers tangled in the dark hair. I like this... I'll miss it... I hope you come home wanting to pick up where we left off...

Eren kissed Levi back roughly, pulling at his hair a bit to make sure he held the upper hand. Shit, I almost don’t wanna leave.... But I have a long drive with Armin. He pulled back to breathe, a trail of saliva still connecting him. “Hmm.... I’ll be back home soon...” He murmured quietly to Levi, shifting his head to the side and kissing Levi’s cheeks all over. I like this... Maybe when I get back we’ll kiss for hours.... I could do that...

Levi blushed as Eren kissed all over his cheeks, his hands still in his hair. “I'll be waiting for you....” Levi let his eyes flutter shut when Eren gave him one last kiss, long and slow, sucking on his lip before pulling away. Levi let him go, following him back to the living room. ...he has to go now.... but when he comes back, he's all mine. Levi felt his heart flutter when Eren kissed him
goodbye, him and Armin leaving for the night.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment!
**Chapter 119: The Return**

Chapter Summary

Sorry, this is so late guys! I promise there will be more updates soon!

~Duke

PS. Don't kill me! Uni's doing that for me!

Levi blushed as Eren kissed all over his cheeks, his hands still in his hair. “I'll be waiting for you...” Levi let his eyes flutter shut when Eren gave him one last kiss, long and slow, sucking on his lip before pulling away. Levi let him go, following him back to the living room. ...he has to go now.... but when he comes back, he's all mine. Levi felt his heart flutter when Eren kissed him goodbye, him and Armin leaving for the night.

Levi managed to sleep, waking up the next morning to help with breakfast. He was surprised when Henry and Tucker came downstairs, each of them consciously trying not to hide a single dark bruise on their necks, their places mirroring the other's. Levi smirked, giving them a nod of approval. Be damn proud of it. Sunday dragged on and on, Levi’s mind continually stumbling back to Eren, unable to keep from thinking of everything he could do to him, keeping him up late into the night. His thoughts were interrupted by Lathe helping Ieva down the stairs, looking worried out of his mind. “Dad? What's wrong?” You two look terrified .... His eyes widened, looking to Ieva. The twins...

“I think they're just false contractions, she’s probably fine, but they're twins.” Lathe explained hurriedly, gently guiding Ieva along to the door to put on shoes. “We’re worried... just in case something happens, I'm taking her to the hospital. You're in charge, okay? I'll call if anything changes and when we should be home.” You'll hear from me.

Levi nodded, his brow furrowed a bit. He went over to them, giving Ieva’s cheek a kiss. I hope they're okay... they're twins... two small lives. He rolled his eyes when he was pulled in for a hug by both of them before they left, going back to his work, worry in the back of his mind. He was relieved when Lathe texted him a few hours later, saying that Ieva and the twins were just fine, and that they'd be home for dinner. She's okay... she and the twins are alright.

When Monday came, the bruises on his neck were still very dark. After gazing at his neck in the mirror for a long while Levi found himself fidgeting with a leather strap, his fingers worrying over the buckle. I could... I want to... perhaps it would get the message across. Levi couldn't help it and fastened the collar around his neck, even taking his time to fish a toy out from the back of the closet, getting himself ready for when Eren came home. He refused to give a damn when he when
he went downstairs. The perpetually shocked expressions of their two resident teens were still very amusing, stunned when they came home to find Levi leisurely cleaning the house with a tank top and collar on as if it were natural. His hips swayed a bit more than normal, both from nerves and how he was dressed, and for... other reasons. *I can't wait to answer the door for Eren like this....*

Eren had pulled up in the driveway around 8pm, opening the door and letting Mikhail go outside to venture to the house while he carried everything in. The dog slipped right through the doggie door, his vest still tight on his body as he searched the house for someone to take it off of him. *And he just leaves me out here... wonderful.* Eren set his things down, pulling out the keys from his pocket and jingling them around to try and find the house key. *It's locked... It's always locked, where's the fucking key?*

Levi stood from the couch when Mikhail trotted inside, sashaying to the door, knowing Eren was home. He saw him come up to the porch, opening it for him and leaning against the doorframe, staring at him with a faint smirk. “Welcome home.” He had a knowing glint in his eye, watching Eren’s expression shift. *I wonder what you'll do...*

Eren’s eyes widened as they looked over Levi in all of his glory. *Oh my god... Is he...? He’s wearing a collar?* He looked around towards the semi-empty living area over Levi’s shoulder knowing they must’ve eaten dinner already. “Uuhm... A-Are you gonna let me in?” Eren bit the corner of his lip seductively, looking as innocent as possible for him. *I have a bag still... even if it’s on the ground for now...*  

Levi looked unimpressed, tugging gently at his collar as he pretended to think about it, looking away. “Hmm, I was thinking about it, but I think I will. You know how lonely I get...” Levi feigned innocence, stepping back and letting him inside. *Please, get the fuck in here... just drag me upstairs already...*  

Eren’s eyes widened for a different reason this time, looking away sheepishly, bending down to pick up his bag and keeping his head down in shame. *He was lonely?......... Fuck, what did I do? Did I make this worse?* He could feel his face heat up as Mikhail trotted towards him sitting in front of him and whining a bit. “I-I’m sorry...” He murmured, bending down again and unclipping Mikhail’s vest. *I left you alone when you didn’t want to be....*  

Levi’s eyes widened when the comment made guilt flit by Eren’s expression, going over to him and making him stand back up, his arms wrapping around his middle. “Eren, I'm fine, I missed you, but I wasn't so lonely...” Levi leaned up, softly pecking his neck. “I'm so glad you're home, though.” Levi pulled back to gaze up at him, his eyes quietly pleading with him. “I've been thinking... maybe fifty bites aren't enough...” *I want more...*  

Eren looked at him with shock, melting into his touch easily, without tensing with his hold. “I
could… I could fix that…” His whole face flushed in embarrassment, his slightly shaking hands holding onto Mikhail’s vest, not sure what to do with it for the moment as he was wrapped in Levi’s arms. *What are we gonna do now?........ He’s acting weird again, I don’t know what’s up with him…*

Levi pried the material from Eren’s hand, dropping it next to the door and bringing him to the stairs. He walked upstairs with him, pulling him into their room and locking the door before pressing himself to Eren, his arms around his middle. “Eren…” Levi blushed violently, looking away, his expression frustrated as words failed him. *Fuck… come on, say it…* Levi seized up, needing a moment before he helplessly leaned into Eren, his voice small where he buried his face in his shoulder. *Fuck… “Eren… I want you to take over…”* He fist his hands in his shirt, pulling back and showing him what he'd done. *And that's not even everything… “Please…”*

Eren’s eyes were full of shock, but quickly started to melt away from the lust underneath it all. His hands were gentle as he reached up and he slowly unclasped the collar from around Levi’s neck, letting his fingers run over the bare skin. “Hmmm… you want **me** to take over?” *I know we’ve done it before… but you’ve never put the collar on before…*

Levi nodded, refusing to meet Eren’s gaze, suddenly feeling very vulnerable in Eren’s shifting hold. “Y-Yeah… please…” *I… you haven’t really taken over and dominated, ever… I want to know what it’s like to be on the receiving end of all the attention I’d given you before… I really want to know…* Levi found himself backed up against the door, shivering when Eren’s dark eyes settled on his. *Please… I want to know…*

Eren let his body rake over the loose tank top that Levi had on. “Hm… you need to get some rope, and the blindfold… and a toy… go fetch.” Eren murmured seductively into his ear, nipping at his earlobe and trying to make him work for it. *I’m not so sure I’ll be the greatest at being the top… especially with what you want me to do…*

Levi shivered as Eren murmured in his ear, immediately moving to obey him. He went to their closet, turning to look at Eren, his voice quiet, rope in one hand and a long piece of black silk in the other. “I’m sorry- rope or silk…?” *You could honestly want either…* He had a matching silk blindfold in his hand, nervously holding the crop as well. *Is this okay…?*

“The silk… and get a different toy, put the crop away.” Eren muttered, taking the blindfold and the long strip of silk from him. *This’ll work well…* He moved everything towards the nightstand, a little quiet as he waited for Levi to return. *I don’t want to use the crop, you didn’t like it last time I used it, and I remember you were nursing those bruises for days.*

Levi hurriedly moved to obey, finding himself unable to decide which toy he wanted. He reached
for the anal beads, bringing the things to the bed and setting them down. He looked up to Eren, his head tilted submissively. *What're you going to do to me...?*

Eren took the beads inspecting them for a long moment. “Get the lube that you want... the edible kind...” He murmured quietly to him, a soft look in his eyes as he looked over Levi. *I wonder if he’ll strip for me...? Maybe he’ll ride me too? Or maybe I could treat him like a dog? ...No, that doesn’t really seem right...*

Levi was a bit disappointed when Eren's eyes softened, going to get the lube, setting it on the bed as well before sauntering up to Eren, grabbing his collar, looking up to him deviously. “Why won't you use the crop on me? Don't I deserve to be punished? I've been less than good while you were gone...” Levi was fishing for the reaction he wanted, pouting when Eren’s look didn't change. *Dammit, don't lecture me on how I got badly bruised last time you used it on me...*

Eren quirked an eyebrow, shaking his head. “Why should I punish such a good boy?” He pulled Levi into his lap, taking the collar from his hands and throwing it away and out of reach. He sat on the edge of the bed, holding Levi by his lower back. “We don’t want this beautiful skin to bruise... unless I put it there myself... Even you said you wanted more bites.” He murmured softly, reaching up to kiss his nose.

Levi was shocked as Eren turned the mood around, torn between being upset and giving in to the gentle touch. *Fuck... but... “E-Eren...”* Levi blushed as his nose was kissed, looking away. He felt himself settle comfortably in Eren’s lap, unsure. *...is this how it'll go? I didn't think you'd be like this... ...fuck, I should be thankful you want to do anything at all. Levi sighed, leaning into Eren, his nose nestling into the crook of his neck. “...j-just please take good care of me...” You can do whatever you want...*

Eren saw the uncertainty flit across Levi’s eyes before he felt him nestle into the crook of his neck, his hands softly running up and down his sides as he held him close. *Hmm, I haven’t really held onto you in a long time.* His fingers were gentle against Levi’s skin as he slowly lifted his tank top up. *Come on, take it off, I wanna be able to touch you...*

Levi lifted his arms, letting Eren rid him of the clothing, tugging at Eren’s top, wanting it gone. He nestled back into the skin, gently nipping at the flesh until Eren shifted him, gasping as lips met his sensitive neck, slowly moving with him, in time with each dragging kiss. *Guh...*

Eren gently kissed at his neck, his hands running slowly up and down Levi’s front, making sure his touch was light, almost like a feather. *I... I want you to be hard with just simple touches everywhere...* He kept Levi under him, mouthing at the bites and bruises on his neck and collar. *I want you to remember what it felt like getting these before I keep going down with them...*
Levi whined quietly, letting Eren turn him and gently push him on the bed. He reached for Eren’s dark brown locks, tilting his head back and letting his tongue and lips roam everywhere. *Please... feels good...*

Eren reached up, pulling at his wrist and lifting his head away from his skin, kissing at the pale skin on his wrist, and up towards his palm. His eyes held longing in them, not caring that he was going unbearably slow. *I want you to feel everything... I want your senses on overdrive.* He smirked when he sucked a slender finger into his mouth, giving it a hard suck before lathering in saliva as he twirled his tongue around the digit.

Levi watched Eren suck on his finger with dark eyes, relaxing into the bed as Eren did.*It's going to be a long, slow night, isn't it?* Levi wasn’t complaining as Eren suckled and licked at him. *... I could get used to this..."

Eren absolutely worshipped his fingers, one by one until he’d showed them all the attention they deserved. He smirked, taking his wrist and holding it tightly as he dug his teeth into the pale skin, feeling the metal tang of blood fill his mouth as he broke the skin. His grip was strong as Levi tried to pull his arm away, holding it in place as he bit down again and again on the inside of his wrist. *Mine... All mine ...*

Levi struggled against his grip, a little worried as Eren’s teeth dug into the flesh just above his pulse point. “E-Eren...” Levi struggled to not shove him roughly off, his tone one of faint warning. *Stop..."

Eren stopped, licking at the blood from the teeth marks. “Yeah?” He asked softly, looking at him with worried eyes. *You said you wanted more bites.... Was this wrong? I wanted you to cover you in them.*

“N-Not there.... there's a vein there...” *It's freaking me out...* Levi sighed quietly when Eren nodded and shifted further up nibble at his arm, nervous as he skirted his elbow and the visible vein there. *I'm sorry..."

Eren nodded, getting to the top of his shoulder before he sunk his teeth into Levi’s skin once again. *Here is okay... Right? I can bite here?* He pulled back, licking at the wound with careful timidness. *I don’t want to freak him out..."

Levi gently nudged into Eren’s touch, relaxing more when he found his shoulder. *The shoulders*
and chest are all okay… there's nothing there that'll freak me out… Levi squirmed as Eren set to work, feeling him cover every inch of his shoulders and chest and stomach with bites, feeling himself aching in his jeans. More... it's been so long.... His hands gripped Eren's shirt, pleading with him. “More...”

Eren looked up to him with wide eyes, shaking his head. “Not yet.” He murmured quietly, sitting up and twirling his finger, motioning for Levi to flip over on the bed. I wanna do your back, because you’re sensitive in your lower back... And I’ll be able to knead your ass...

Levi groaned quietly, turning over and getting on his hands and knees until Eren smacked his ass, dropping flush to the bed. He was rewarded with hands all over his ass and lips on a shoulder blade. Oh... Levi unconsciously spread his legs wider for Eren, his hard length trapped between him and the bed. He gave out small moans and cries, feeling Eren bite at his sensitive lower back as he kneaded his ass and coaxed him to rock his hard bulge against the mattress. Fuck...

Eren smirked as he squirmed, his hands digging into his ass, though he felt something press against his thumb, his eyes widening. “Levi?” His voice was soft and full of surprise as he pulled him up off the bed, his hands cupping his jaw and the bulge in pants. “What’s in your pants?” He asked softly to him, nipping at his ear as he held him against his chest. He knew Levi would be able to feel his own bulge against his lower back. I wonder....

Levi leaned back into him, dizzy with arousal and wanting so badly to feel the bulge pressed to his back somewhere else. He felt Eren rubbing the tip of the toy inside of him, sighing deeply when it moved. “I-I maybe wanted to be ready for when you came home... I-I've had it in all day…” It was so hard not to practically rut against any chairs today... “I want you...” Please...

Eren smirked, moving his hands to his front and unzipping Levi’s pants, pulling them down over his hips, along with his underwear. I want you trembling under me in absolute ecstasy. “Grab the lube... And the beads.” He murmured softly to him, nipping at his ear before pushing him down against the bed and getting rid of the pants and underwear he had. His eyes traced over Levi’s lithe form under him. Oh... He looks awesome...

Levi moved when he was stripped nude, grabbing the beads and the lube, handing them over to Eren. He turned over when he took them, kneeling on the bed with his head pressed into the mattress, presenting his ass to Eren, the handle on the plug visible. I want you to have your way with me...

Eren looked at his ass with amazement, reaching out to touch the soft skin and rub it between his hands. His thumbs teased at his plug, pressing it forward before he pulled it out, looking to see how loose Levi was for him. “Shit... That’s enticing Levi...” I won't be able to hold myself back....
Levi groaned as the plug easily left him, feeling loose and empty without it. “I wanted to be good for you...” Levi shifted, not minding that he was showing off his loose hole to him. “Please, Eren... I’d love to be full again...” I want it....

Eren smirked, kissing his ass cheek as he grabbed the lube and lubed up the anal beads. “Patience Levi...” I want you to feel really good, and I can see that you’re already dripping in precum... He smirked softly and rubbed the lube into the toy, making sure that it was covered before he pressed them at his hole, smirking as they sunk in easily. _Fuck that is hot..._

Levi groaned as the beads started to enter him, feeling the rod of beads slowly press at his prostate right away, a guttural moan leaving him as they sunk deeper and deeper with ease. _Fuck..._ Levi arched his back, shifting to get more comfortable, panting as Eren slowly began to draw the beads out and push them back in, moaning loudly. _God it feels good...._

Eren smirked, watching the beads leave Levi’s hole, and then get sucked back in. _Fuck that's hot... I wonder what it would feel like to have the small beads in... While I entered him... Or would he not like that?_ Eren pondered the thought as he watched, his bulge aching in his pants. _Fuck, I'm hard..._

Levi was a panting mess, rocking his hips back onto the beads not much later. “Eren... n-need you... please...” _I want it... I've ached all day...._

Eren pushed the beads all the way in, leaving them there as he pulled away from Levi, shifting off of the bed to take off his pants, his length aching. _I should probably wear a condom..._ He shuffled to the nightstand, grabbing a few foil wrappers from the drawer and putting them on the bed, crawling up to his side. “Hmm... Should I get the small ones? And leave them in?” He asked softly, his lips brushing over Levi’s lower back, the sensitive area, making the shorter man shudder.

Levi didn't barely have to think before he was nodding fervently, looking back to Eren. _Anything..._ He was still as Eren went to the closet, knowing better than to shift or to take the beads out himself.

Eren was quick to find the string of smaller beads, coming right back to him and slowly pulling out the anal beads. He replaced them with the string of small ones, watching each get sucked up into his quivering hole. “Levi... Give me a condom...” He murmured in a husky voice, his one thumb teasing Levi’s hole. _I wanna go slow... And let you enjoy this..._
Levi nodded, reaching for one of the wrappers on the bed, feeling the beads move inside of him. He gave it back to Eren, settling back on the bed, trying to relax. *Fuck... I ache*....

Eren ripped the condom with his teeth, rolling it onto himself expertly before he nudged his tip against Levi's hole. “Hmm, you ready Levi?” *I want you to feel everything*.

“**Yes...**” Levi let out a deep gasp when suddenly Eren sheathed himself in him, the beads and his length filling him up. “**Oh....**” His voice was shaky, gasping as he drew back as thrusted in again, his moans quickly filling the air. *Oh my god*...

Eren gasped as he filled Levi until their hips met. He gasped even more as he felt himself slide against the beads within, the new sensation making him feel a bit on edge. “F-Fuck Levi, you're so warm...” Eren sang his praises about him, whispering in his ear as he worked up a slow and steady rhythm. *It feels heavenly* ... 

Levi shuddered at the praise, whimpering when he felt a tongue drag up his neck. *Oh god*... “E- Eren...” Levi moaned lowly as Eren thrusted into him, his length and the beads filling him, and filling him with pleasure. *So good*...

Eren smirked, moving to kiss and bite at his neck more as he kept his slow pace. “Hmm, you like the beads Levi? Should we use them more often?” *I guess we could change it up a bit... I could always treat you in bed.............. Don’t think about it Eren, he loves you....* Eren’s thrusts faltered for a moment before he got back on track, trying to distract himself.

“**God, please...**” Levi was putty in Eren’s hands, looking back when he felt their rhythm get thrown off. “Y-You okay?” *You look sort of upset*...

Eren nodded. “Y-Yeah I’m fine...” He stuttered as he bucked his hips into Levi, already feeling the heat raising in his body. He bent over Levi’s back and kissed at the nape of his neck, wanting to distract both himself and Levi. *Don’t think about it, it’s not just about you... This is about Levi’s happiness too*...

Levi deeply sighed as Eren kept thrusting into him, reaching back and gently guiding Eren’s head to him, murmuring in his ear. “Eren, I love you... so much...” Levi had to let go right after, collapsing back into the mattress and shuddering. *More*...

Eren felt his length get even bigger as Levi’s words went right to his nether. “Shit Levi...” *I don’t...*
want to cum without you cumming too…. Shit I haven't even found your prostate yet… He started to panic a little, his thrusts faltering once again as he shifted to move his thrusts in different directions, trying to locate it. *I want you to be in utmost pleasure*…

Levi whimpered as Eren shifted around, smacking the mattress to get his attention. “Eren, please. It doesn't matter that you haven't found my prostate- it feels so good, just please keep the pace… it feels so good…” *More…* Levi whimpered as Eren continues, the anal beads rubbing him everywhere.

Eren had a conflicted look in his eyes as he held Levi’s hips simply nodding and he kept his forehead against Levi’s shoulder, kissing the skin where he could reach. He was quiet aside from a few grunts as he thrusted into Levi rhythmically once again. *I'll do it like he wants it… I'll try not to cum…* The beads feel really good against me, I can only imagine what they feel like for you…

Levi moved with Eren, craving the sensation of being so full. *Oh god…* Levi pushed back on Eren’s hips, thankful when Eren ground deeper into him. “Eren, like that… please, just like that…” 

Levi felt himself nearing the edge, his nether burning in the best way. *I want to cum…*

Eren heard Levi’s voice get higher and higher as he ground into him, his eyes closed as he focused on pleasing Levi. He shifted his hand under him to stroke Levi’s neglected length, feeling the shorter man shudder as Eren kept him pinned in place with his weight. *You're gonna cum soon…*

Levi shook when Eren’s hand wrapped around his length, tutting into his hand. *So good…* “E-Eren, I…” *I'm gonna cum…* Levi tensed around Eren, tightening around him as he cried out. He came into Eren’s hand, panting as he did, helplessly moving his hips with Eren’s thrusts. *God…*

Eren kissed at Levi’s shoulder again as Levi came, bringing his hand up to Levi’s mouth to lick it all off. His other hand held a tight grip on Levi’s hip, waiting for his second hand so he could absolutely ravage Levi. *I wonder what it’ll feel like with you like this? And with the beads?….. Maybe I shouldn’t….* His grip loosened on Levi’s hip, still staying flush with Levi, grinding into him. *He’s warm…. And tight…*

Levi pressed his hips back into Eren, whimpering at how sensitive he was. “Eren… m-more…” *I don’t want this to be over yet…* He pressed back until Eren’s hands tightened on his hips, crying out quietly as Eren started pounding into him. He sounded desperate when Eren slowed after a particularly sharp cry, trying to keep the rhythm going. “Eren, please, don't stop…” *God, please don’t…*

…. *But you sounded like I hurt you?* Eren was conflicted as he kept his hold on Levi’s hips gentle
for the moment, keeping his slow rhythm once again. *I don’t want to hurt you, Levi...* His eyes were full of worry, along with undeniable want as he held Levi’s hips. *This is about you Levi, I know you didn’t want me to stop, but I don’t want to hurt you, even if I don’t cum from it...*

Levi whimpered incessantly, trying to push back on Eren and pick the pace back up. “Eren, please, I want it harder... please give it to me... you won't hurt me, there's no pain, I'm just so sensitive... but I want you so badly...” Levi tilted his head back, catching a glimpse of Eren’s eyes. “Please, Master...” *I want it... it feels really good...*

Eren swallowed hard, looking down at his ass as he nodded, shifting Levi’s knees farther apart before gripping at his hips and starting to pick up the pace once again. He could feel the heat building in his abdomen again, his face flushing as Levi continued to cry out with each thrust. *Are you this sensitive because we haven’t done this since you got back? Or are you this sensitive because I’m actually hurting you and you won't tell me?*

Levi’s cries were full of pleasure, gripping the sheets for dear life. “O-O- Oh, Eren...” He moved with Eren’s thrusts, whimpering loudly. “So good...” He could feel himself slowly hardening again, his face buried in the sheets. *More...*

Eren’s eyes trailed over his body, watching him squirm underneath him as he grabbed at the sheets. *Fuck... I’m gonna cum soon if I keep this up... But it won’t be anywhere near you cumming... I need to hold back then.* Eren thrusted in a bit shallower though he kept up his rhythm, trying not to give it away that he was trying to hold himself off.

Levi noticed instantly, his voice shaky. “E-Eren, please... m-more.... don't slow down... I need it...” He was a mess, not caring as he begged for Eren to keep going. *More... god, please, more...*

Eren shook his head against Levi’s shoulder. “I need... to slow down...” His voice was strained as he kissed at the nape of Levi’s neck, wanting to try and get him to understand. *You’re getting harder... If I slow down a little, I can bring you right back up... “Don’t... w-worry, I’ll... take good care... of you.”* He spoke between thrusts and kisses to Levi’s neck, his hands still gripping Levi’s hips and keeping him in place. *I can’t cum yet... Cause then we’ll have to stop...*

Levi begrudgingly nodded, relaxing into the mattress, letting Eren move for the both of them. *Guh...* He felt the beads rub him with every little movement, sighing with the pleasure even as Eren slowed. *I shouldn't complain if I'm going to be drowning in pleasure for even longer...*

Eren made sure to go slow to keep himself from his own climax. Once he knew he was out of the clear he shifted his hold on Levi, a little softer as he reached to feel how hard he was, smirking
when he was hard. Oh good… He gently pushed Levi down so he was flush with the mattress again. “Hmm, you want it hard again?” He asked, kissing at Levi’s ear as he ground into him, the heat slowly rising in his gut.

Levi spread his legs wider, feeling his length rubbing against the fabric beneath him, grinding down into it when Eren thrusted forward. “Oh god, please…” Please… Levi gasped as Eren massaged his globes, gasping and crying out when Eren suddenly slammed into him, arching back of the bed as Eren didn't relent. “O-O-Oh god….” More…

Eren smirked, pounding into Levi as he massaged his globes. Fuck he feels amazing … He continued to grip him, letting out low moans and huffs as he worked him. “Hmm, y-you like this?” You’ll want more surely…. I’m sure this’ll be all you’ll ever want…

Levi moaned wantonly, so unused to hearing the sounds tumbling from his throat, but nowhere near able to stop them. “Oh, Eren… I love this…” So good… Levi whined as Eren lapped at his neck, tilting his head down to give him room. Feels so good… He rutted into the mattress, feeling his own orgasm creeping up on him again. “G-Getting close…”

Eren looked a bit surprised by that, looking down at Levi with a bit of curiosity. Shit… I waited too long again…. He nodded, continuing his motions and feeling the burn in his abdomen, not nearly as great as what Levi must’ve been feeling. Fuck, he’s gonna cum again… I hope he does… Eren hummed, kissing Levi’s neck and making sure to keep his pace the same. I want you to love this…

Levi tightened around Eren, trying to hold off. “Y-You too…” I want you to feel good too… Levi tried to still his hips, gasping as Eren sucked on his neck. Oh… “Please…” You should feel good too…

Eren hummed as he continued. “I’ll take good care of you, don’t worry, let go Levi…” He murmured quietly into his ear, his voice soft. I can always just finish myself off after you're done…. Then I can flip you over and clean you off…

Levi made a sound of dissent, his voice shaky. “B-But I want you to feel good too…” Levi felt Eren slide in and out of his loose hole, blushing scarlet when a thought came to him. If he wasn’t wearing a condom, this wouldn't be over yet… we could go in the bath for another round… but I can just drag him to the bath later… Levi looked away, still clenching around Eren, wanting to drive him closer. Please…

Eren’s groans got louder as Levi clenched around him. “F-Fuck… Levi… Relax…” Shit that felt amazing, but it’s not enough… “I’ll finish… don’t worry, Levi. Just l-let go.” He stuttered as he
thrusted into him deeply, making sure that he was still keeping his rhythm though it was getting harder with Levi getting tighter around him.

“N-No… d-don’ care….” Levi didn't relent, trying to stay tight around Eren. “Want you to feel good…” He braced himself on the bed, gripping the sheets, trying desperately to hold off from cumming. You should cum too…

Eren grunted, moving to an unmarked area on his shoulder and sinking his teeth into his skin again, feeling Levi tense under him. He came again… Fuck he’s tight … He groaned as he still inside of Levi’s tight heat, the burning sensation in his abdomen wanting to release, but not enough behind him to push him over the edge. Shit…

Levi gasped, choking on a breath as he came, grinding against the bed desperately. Oh god… He melted bonelessly into the bed, shifting his head to look back at Eren when he pulled out. He lifted his head when he saw the condom on his red length was empty, shifting. “Eren…” Levi looked a bit upset, though he was cut off when the small beads were pulled from him, his slightly clouded eyes settling on Eren. You know what. That’s it. Levi shifted, reaching for the silk that had gone unused. He reached for Eren, dragging the condom off of him and pushing him down, straddling his chest. I’ll just have to do it myself.

Eren’s eyes were wide as Levi pushed him down in confusion when his chest was straddled. “L-Levi?” He was confused obviously, his eyes slightly panicked, his mind going over a hundred miles an hour. What happened? What did I do? I thought you liked it? What did I do wrong?

Levi saw his panic, stopping and leaning down, his lips brushing his ear. “Eren, that was wonderful… I loved every bit of it… but if you're not going to let yourself have release…” Levi reached for his wrists, the silk wrapping around one. “I'll just have to do it myself… if that's alright of course.” Levi tried to sound seductive, his voice low. Let me take good care of you…

Eren looked at him with still panicked eyes, looking up as he felt the silk on his wrist, his eyes widening further, his hard length dribbling precum in streams. Fuck… Did I Did I not do it right for him? I thought he wanted to feel good? He yelped a bit as Levi licked his ear, his whole face flushing from embarrassment. Fuck what do I do?

Levi gently nibbled his ear, though he leaned back when he felt Eren tense up. He looked over him, a finger tracing his chest as he held the other end of the long silk loosely. “...is this okay, Eren?” Can I do this for you? I want to…

“What-What are y-you doing?” Eren stuttered, feeling his heart beat right out of his chest. I'm
Levi looked up to him, his expression soft. “I want to take good care of you… you took good care
of me, but I don't just want to repay you…” He toyed with the end of the fabric. “We haven't done
anything in the longest time… and you've just become more like yourself… I know it's only so
much to tell you I love you…” Levi rested his hands on his chest. “So let me prove it. As much and
for as long as you can stand.” I want to...

Eren looked at him for a moment, nodding as he looked away. Alright… I thought you wanted me
to treat you…. He didn’t realize he had mumbled the words, a defeated look in his eyes if Levi
would pay close attention. “T-That’s fine…” I’m still confused as to what you mean… You took my
condom off… I thought you wanted to be the bottom tonight?

“Eren, you did treat me…” Levi leaned down to kiss his chest, his hands on his shoulders, the
black ribbon loose on the bed. “I loved it… but it'll be a wonderful treat to watch you fall apart…
you deserve it…” Levi looked up again, gently kissing his unmarked neck. “...you'll let me?” You
don’t sound like you want to...

Eren nodded, silently consenting for him to continue. I don’t deserve it, not after what I put you
through. “But you need to promise me that you'll make me take my pills before I go to sleep, o-
okay?” His voice was timid as he chanced a glance at Levi’s silver eyes. I don’t really… I mean
I’m not opposed to it, but I don’t deserve it...

Levi nodded, though he shifted to stand, letting Eren stretch out. “Let’s do that now, alright? Then
we won't forget later when we won't want to get up…” Levi went to retrieve his pills and a glass of
water, handing them over to Eren. “Alright?” This should be okay...

Eren nodded, taking the pills in his unbound hand and raising them to his mouth to take them. He
drank from the glass he was given, his hardon still red from being denied release twice. It’s
starting to get really uncomfortable… What’s Levi going to do?

Levi set the glass aside when he was done, settling again on Eren’s chest. He reached up to tie him
to the bedposts, leaving him unable to move his arms much, and with spread legs. He leaned back
to admire his work, his eyes glinting. Perfect. Levi stood and sauntered over to the closet, going to
rifle through their toys. Hm… this, of course, this perhaps… and this. Levi walked back to the bed
and laid out the toys, settling with a bottle of lube and a different plug, moving to coat it. I want
you loose… and you'll feel it with every little movement...

Eren looked to the plug wearily. He’s gonna use toys?
Why would he want to touch you himself? He didn't even oppose to you wearing the condom.

... I thought that’s why he wanted to be bottom? To have me please him...

And look where that ended up, you being tied to the bed because you couldn’t do it right.

Eren’s whole face flushed in shame as he closed his eyes, waiting for Levi’s touch. He could tell his body was still shaking a little as he couldn’t move his arms. *I wanna be able to please him...*

Levi’s hands on his chest shook him out of his daze, the noirette looking down at him with worry. “Eren, please, are you okay? Just... let me untie you...” Levi reached up to take off his binds, releasing his hands quickly. “I'm sorry.. I pushed you into this... If you don't want this it's alright... but I want you to know that either way, you've so good for me... at least let me help you finish... you deserve it...” *You do... “And of course... that face you make when you do is wonderful too...”*

Eren shifted to sit up, rubbing at his wrists, looking down to his hard on between his legs. *I'm surprised it hasn't gone down yet. “You... Y-You don’t have to...”* He murmured quietly, looking up to Levi with shame lacing his features before hurriedly glancing away. *I'd like to think you'd want to touch me too... But you looked so angry at me earlier... “I-I don’t want you to be mad at me...”*

Levi gently cupped his cheeks, tilting his head to look at him, resting their foreheads together. “Eren, I'm not mad at you... I could never be. I was just upset that you wouldn't give yourself release... ...I love you so much.” He gently pecked his cheek. “And I want to make sure you remember that. My hands and tongue and everything aren't enough... you deserve everything. Let me give it to you.” *I love you... I want you to stop forgetting that.*

Eren was silent as he let Levi speak, slowly nodding before he leaned up to kiss Levi, softly at first, letting his lips part when Levi brushed his tongue against his lips. *O-Okay...* His movements were slow as he wrapped his arms around Levi’s shoulders, finding himself in Levi’s lap. *I'll let you...*

Levi shifted, going to untie Eren’s legs, letting him settle in his lap. He pulled Eren close, settling him in and reaching to gently knead his globes, glancing over to where the lubed plug still rested. “Will you let me use the plug...? You can say no to anything...” *You don't have to do everything.*

“Y-Y-You can use i-it if you w-want...” He murmured as he buried his head into Levi’s shoulder. *I should’ve known you didn’t really want to touch me...* Eren let his shoulders slump a little, but still kept his arms around Levi’s shoulders, and his face away Levi’s sight.

Levi hesitated before he set it back down, his hands coming up to Eren’s shoulders. “Would you
rather I just use myself? Lips, tongue and teeth… fingers…” Levi dipped down to gently suck on Eren’s shoulder, holding him flush to his chest. “Would you like that better? I'd love to ravish you like that…” Is that better…? If it’s me and not just toys?

Eren nodded hurriedly against his neck, burying his face against the marked skin. “P- Please …?” His voice was quiet as he clung a little tighter to Levi’s shoulders, his legs wrapping around his waist and pulling himself flush with Levi. I want you to touch me...

Levi nodded fervently, his hands running over his back, his voice quiet in his ear. “Yes, Eren… always yes…” Levi cradled the back of his neck with one hand, the other running down to his ass, softly nipping his shoulder. “Let me take good care of you…” Levi reached for the lube, gently nudging Eren over and onto his knees, keeping the tube nearby as he faced Eren’s entrance. I know how much you love this… His tongue darted out and lapped over the pucker, feeling Eren already shivering in anticipation. I love doing this with you...

Eren let out a loud moan as he felt Levi’s tongue against his entrance, his hands instantly grabbing at the sheets below him as he cried out. “L-Levi…” He whimpered as Levi continued, his whole body shaking from the amount of pleasure he felt. My... My length.... Fuck... I’m leaking... So bad... He could feel the tremors running through his body, shaking with pleasure.

Levi’s tongue pried further, his hands close to Eren’s base as he moved with him, letting Eren rock back into his tongue. “Does that feel good, Eren?” Levi murmured against his skin, his hand wrapping around him and slowly stroking. “Better…?” I want to hear everything you're thinking about all this...

Eren’s eyes widened, a low guttural moan escaping him as Levi closed his hand around his length. “F-Fuck… D-Don’t… Don’t touch it… I-I’m…” Eren felt his cool tightening even further, so close to the edge that his length was absolutely weeping as he was touched lightly. Fuck it feels so good, but I want you too...

Levi immediately let go of him, his hands returning to his thighs. “I know you're close… is there something you'd rather cum to…?” I want to hear it... “Should I finish you with my tongue…?” He traced a hand down his chest, tweaking a nipple. “Maybe with my fingers?” Tell me what you want.

“T-Tongue.. A-a-and fingers…” He stuttered, turning his head to look back at Levi to see if he would comply. Please ... He spread his legs even wider, letting his ass be presented to Levi. I want your fingers and your tongue.
Levi nodded, easing Eren down so his elbows were on the mattress, diving back in with his tongue, plunging the muscle deeply into him. 

“I can do that….” He ran his hands all over his body, hearing Eren mewl in pleasure. 

“You make the best sounds while you’re like this.”

Eren shuddered, a loud whine leaving him as his coil tightened more. “F-Fuck! Le- **Levi**!” Eren shouted as he finally came, a large load once again. 

Fuck! His whole body absolutely shook from the pleasure that pushed him over the edge. **Oh my god…. I think I see stars…**

Levi finally reached down to stroke Eren when he shook from his release, milking him of it. He felt him melt into the bed, sliding down to press his cheek into the bed, his ass still facing him. He cupped Eren’s globes, his voice soft. “Do you want any more, Eren?” He kissed one cheek near his entrance. “Do you want me to make love to you?” **You look like you need gentle…**

Eren’s eyes were glazed over in pure pleasure. He shifted to lay down his whole body on the bed. “mmhmmm.” Eren nodded, looking a little love drunk at the moment. **I want it… I want you…**

Levi chuckled, shifting to be flush to Eren’s back as he reached for a condom and the lube. He stopped when Eren caught his wrist, chuckling quietly when Eren tossed the condom away. He gently kissed Eren’s ear, slicking himself up. “If you’re tired after this, I’m still going to drag you to the bath… clean you out after this…” Levi’s hands found Eren’s hips, lined up with his entrance. “You ready, Eren?” **I'll be gentle, don’t worry.**

Eren shook his head a bit and wiggled his ass. “C-Can y-you stretch m-me?” **We haven’t had sex in awhile, and your tongue felt really nice, but I don’t want it to hurt…** His eyes looked hopeful as he looked over his shoulder to Levi. **I don't want it to hurt.**

Levi nodded, shifting down and grabbing the lube again. He soon had a slick finger running circles around his pucker, slowly plunging into him, stretching him a bit. He felt around his warm cavern, feeling Eren bend and relax around him. **Always so soft… so warm…**

Eren let out a shuddery breath as he felt Levi insert the finger into him one after another. “Ah…. Shit…. Levi… I-I wanna see you…” He murmured quietly, rutting back on his fingers as they filled him. “I wanna see you when you make **love** to me….” His words were heady as he attempted to flip himself over.

Levi felt his heart tug as Eren spoke, helping him roll over before going back to fingering him open. He scissored his fingers, staring at Eren as he whimpered. “You’re so handsome…” He smirked when Eren blushed, drawing his hand out of him when he loosened around the three fingers he’d had inside. “Ready, love?” **Are you comfortable?**
Eren let out a whine as he fingers left him, a blush taking over his whole face as he spread his legs even wider for Levi. “Yes…. Yes please …” Eren begged him and he looked at Levi with want in his eyes. I want you, I want you to hold me...

Levi seemed to hear him, leaning down and wrapping his arms around him, holding him flush as he slowly began to enter him, going slow when Eren whimpered. “Take your time… it's okay…” It was a long few minutes before Eren was adjusted, Levi trying hard to stay still when he finally became buried in his heat. So good...

Eren whimpered, wrapping his arms around Levi’s broad shoulders, wanting them to be flush. “Stay… Still…” You’re fucking huge... It's a good thing I asked you to stretch me.

Levi nudged Eren’s cheek, going to suck marks onto his neck as he adjusted, distracting himself. Levi bit at his neck gently, grinding a bit deeper into him. I won't start just yet... not until you say. He smirked as he was rewarded with a loud moan. ...but I’ll do just enough to get those sounds out of you.

Eren’s eyes widened impossibly as he let out a loud moan, his toes curling when Levi ground against his prostate. “F-Fuck… Oh god, Levi…” He whined when Levi stilled inside of him, moving his hips, trying to entice him to move a little bit more. That felt amazing ...

Levi pulled back a bit for a very shallow thrust, his hips rolling against Eren’s. “Like this…?” He murmured in Eren’s ear, feeling Eren’s hard length trapped between their stomachs. You’re dripping... so slick...

Eren let out a loud cry, his fingers gripping at Levi’s back. “Haaa..... Yes… L-Like that…” Eren whimpered as he rolled into him. “Oh my god… I-I love you, please don’t stop.” He murmured quietly into Levi's ear as he held his head to his neck, tilting his head to the side in offering. Mark me... Please ...

Levi melted, his voice soft in his ear. “I love you too, Eren... so much…” Levi dipped his head again and sucked marks onto the tan skin there, his hips slowly moving as he thrusted into him. So good... Levi moaned softly into his ear, his nether aching from the pleasure.

Eren shifted, a soft moan leaving him as he pressed back as much as he could into Levi’s thrusts. I want it... I want you so bad… He felt his heart melt as Levi softly spoke to him. His legs moved to curl around Levi’s lower back and push them closer together. “Y-You do…?” Eren shivered as
Levi kissed a sensitive area on his neck. \textit{I feel warm… I want him to feel good… Does he feel good too?}

Levi kissed the mark he made softly, his voice tender. “So much… more than I could ever tell you…” \textit{Words aren't enough…} Levi began nearly pulling out before thrusting back in, keeping a slow and deep pace. “So good… you feel so good…” \textit{I love this…}

Eren let out moan after moan slowly becoming a mess under him. “L-Levi… fuck me… Please…” \textit{You were gentle… but I want more now… I want to really feel you, all of you, your strength and your power.} “I want you to fill me up…. I want another kid…” Eren murmured to him quietly as he pulled his head back against the mattress and cupped Levi’s jaw. \textit{I want another precious human with us…}

Levi pulled back from him, his eyes full of surprise. “You want another?” He watched Eren look up to him and timidly nod, his mind in overdrive. \textit{Another little kid…} A soft smile broke out over his face, leaning down and pulling him closer, burying his face in his neck. “I'd love that… I'd love to have another little kid with you…” He drew back and thruster harder into him, relishing in the pleasures gasp it drew from him. “Like that?” \textit{You surely sound like you love it…}

His cries were the epitome of pleasure as Levi thursted into him harder and deeper. He nodded, feeling his mind begin to fog up as Levi held his hips. “Y-Yeah…” \textit{It feels good… I can feel it trailing up my spine…} \textit{I want it… I want it bad…} He could already feel the heat building in his abdomen. \textit{I want a kid… I want more of Levi's kids…}

Levi was soon pounding into him, his voice soft in his ear. “I love you so much, Eren… I-I… I’d love to make a family with you, more than we have now… as many little kids as we want… I can't wait to have you and keep you and love you like this for the rest of my life… you're all mine…” Levi bit his neck. “And I'm all yours.” \textit{Mine …}

Eren let out a loud guttural moan as Levi bit his neck, his breathing starting to become labored pants as he got closer. “I-I love you, Levi…” \textit{I love you... I love you, I love you a lot…} He curled his toes, feeling his heat pool in his abdomen, knowing it wouldn’t be long before he came between them. “Levi… I’m gonna cum…”

Levi groaned, feeling Eren clenching around him, knowing he was close as well. “I love you so much…” Levi rolled his hips as he thrusted, feeling Eren’s length slide between them. \textit{Please… cum…}

Eren’s face was flush, feeling the emotions bubble to the surface, tears forming from the bliss and
happiness. He let the pleasure take over and he came between them. Seeing stars for a moment before everything turned black and he went slack against Levi, he clenched around him tightly.

Levi felt himself on the brink of orgasm, though he pulled out as Eren went slack, cumming on his stomach. He panted as he saw Eren decorated with their releases, leaning down to gently peck the corner of his lips. Beautiful. He managed to get himself up from the bed and clean them as best he could, soon curling on top of Eren and dragging a sheet over them, feeling the press of bare skin on his body. I love this… and I love you. We should have at least one more little kid… and I think it's time we leave the nest and make our own family. I love this house… but it's time.
Chapter 120: To Find a Home

Levi hadn't barely been able to touch his tea since he set his mug down, trying to get Mila to eat, not knowing what the issue was when she wouldn't eat her cheerios. They're even the honey ones, you love those! Right? Levi tried in vain for a few more moments before giving up, taking the bowl away before she could knock it onto the floor. What do you want?! He went to the fridge, showing her a few strawberries, sighing in relief as she smiled. He quickly cut one up and let Mila nibble on it as he cut up the rest, quickly using the cooling water in the kettle to make her oatmeal and dumping the strawberries all over it. Please eat it... He sighed in relief as Mila accepted it, jabbing at it with a spoon and taking bites. Thank god she's eating... Levi finally sat down, taking a sip of tea. We're going house hunting today... Mila's been incredibly fussy all morning... it took forever to get her into clothes she liked... Levi quickly wiped her face when she began to make a mess, trying to get her to eat and not only play with her food. It's going to be a long day... Eren's been doing much better... he's done lots of drawing and painting.... he's been singing too... I think he's putting an album together... Dad’s written tons of stuff since he last covered anything, so he has plenty to pick from... and mess with, of course. None of Dad’s songs will come out unscathed. And some of them are kinda short too... like not even a minute long... I dunno, it's what happens. He gets a good melody in his head and writes it, then writes an accompaniment, and then adds harmony, and then makes words. Or he makes words and then just pretends that he knows the melody and writes it down and then it actually sounds good. Whatever it is, it works, and Eren has plenty to play around with. Levi looked up to the wall, a new painting on one of the walls, an oil on canvas of a gorgeous creature, nondescript with tall, shining black eyes that glittered in purples and gold, flecks of color on their muted skin. Their inner corners pointed sharply down to a point, their raised chin and lack of any prominent facial features- any nose largely absent- giving the impression of mysterious and deceitful grace. Dad and Sharon have been doing a lot of work on that game... I think they're conspiring with someone else to work on it. But all the ideas Dad’s getting that won't go into the game, he's been doing stuff like that with it. ...I hope today goes well. Levi smiled faintly. We talked with Mom and Dad about us leaving... Dad looked upset but I can understand... and he just hugged us really tight and wouldn't stop telling us he loved us... he's going to have really bad empty-nest syndrome for a bit... but I hope the rest of the kids will all keep him occupied. He has plenty of other baby chicks to fawn over.

Eren came down the stairs, his hair still a little damp from his shower, his shirt a simple button up long sleeve with a darker vest over it, along with khakis. Hmm... we’ll see what we can get done with the house hunting, I kinda liked the area near the school, it's not too far away from here... Eren was buttoning his sleeves when he finally got to the kitchen, kissing Levi’s cheek. “Did she eat?” I know she’s been fussy all day... and I know I should help, but, I feel like every time I pick her up, I have an urge to paint, I have no idea why... but I do... He smiled as Mila picked up another spoonful of oatmeal and strawberries, nearly missing her mouth as she ate. That's adorable... even if she’s a mess...

Levi sighed, though he faintly smiled as his cheek was kissed. “Yeah, she actually is. She refused a scrambled egg, even with cheese, honey cheerios, and nearly knocked both onto the floor. But she’s eating strawberry oatmeal.” Eh, the egg was tasty. Levi ran a hand through his hair, fidgeting with the cuff on his charcoal grey dress shirt for a moment. He was wearing very dark grey jeans and black boots, reaching for Eren and gently pulling him close when he had acquired his own mug of tea. Mine. He softly pecked his cheek, enjoying the quiet of the house, keeping a careful
Eren smiled as he leaned back into him, holding the mug to his lips. “I wanna paint my studio when we get back…” I thought of a good song, and I think I’m ready to do it… and I can edit the video for it… and make it look nice… and then I can paint over my wall and do it all over again for the next one. He took a deep breath and smiled. “So, do you wanna hold her? Or do you want me to hold her?” Who are we gonna set up for the pouch? He glanced over his shoulder, looking at Levi with soft eyes. I swear she’ll be fussy for either of us.

Levi thought, sighing. “I can take her… you took her the other day when we were on errands…” He already felt tired of the day, humming quietly when Eren brushed a hand through his hair. That feels nice… Levi leaned into Eren’s side, enjoying the pets. Today’s going to be a headache of a day.

Eren chuckled quietly, shifting to put his mug down and lean down to give Levi a real kiss. His arms wrapping around his shoulders to pull him closer, a wide smile on his face. “Why don’t we put her crib in James’ room tonight, hmm?” I know the sex we had like two weeks ago was great, and we’ve gotten better with each other since… but we haven’t done anything else… not even a handjob here or there… I wanna do something tonight… Even if it’s just cuddling without having to worry about being bothered.

Levi smirked, giving him a suspicious look for a moment. “Does that mean what I think it does?” He watched Eren faintly blush. “That’s what I thought…” He gently kissed Eren back, letting Eren lean into him. That sounds nice… “You’re insatiable…” He sipped from his mug, leaning his head on his shoulder. This is really nice, actually… it's quiet… peaceful.

“Does that matter? I wanna have fun, I’ve been taking my pills on time, and I feel a lot better… like better enough to do the song I want to do…. but I knew that I’d never be able to do it until I got better…” It needs to get out there… it needs to, I need to do it, I think once I do it I’ll finally be able to come to terms with what happened.

Levi nodded, looking up to him. “I’m really proud of you… I really am…” Levi rested a hand on Eren’s thigh, gently rubbing his thumb over the cloth there. You've been doing so much better… I really admire that… that you've worked so hard and now you're here.

Eren smiled, leaning back into his gentle touch, looking over Mila as she finished up eating. “Alright, wanna clean her up?” I’ll go grab the holder for you, and help you put it on.

“Yeah, thanks.” Levi kissed his cheek before standing to get a soft cloth, dampening it and going to
gently clean Mila’s face. *It's a miracle you didn't get any- He sighed as he saw a bright red spot on her shirt, wincing a bit when she cried as she saw it. Oh my… “It's okay, Honey, we can get you a new shirt.” He lifted her from her chair and kissed her cheek, bringing her upstairs. “We can get you a new shirt…” He opened the drawer full of shirts, still in disarray from her last shirt-picking session. *Anything you want.*

Mila looked down at all the shirts, beginning to pout and her lower lip start to tremble. *I don’ wan these shir’ Da! “N-No!”* She shouted her new favorite word, looking away from the shirts laid out and down at her own.

“You have a spot on yours… you want me to clean it?” *I guess I can….?* He sighed as she stared at him, kissing her cheek. “Okay…” He watched as Eren came into the room with a questioning look, setting Mila on the bed and taking her shirt. “I’m going to wash this spot out of her shirt…. I'll use the hairdryer to dry it.” *She's being really fussy…*

Eren smiled and nodded, moving lay down with Mila. “How are you today Mila? Pretty fussy if you ask me.” He smirked, running a gentle hand over her belly as she giggled, leaning his head down to blow raspberries on her soft flesh, which enticed more laughter. *Maybe if she laughs she’ll be happy about going to a few houses today.*

Levi chuckled as Eren spoke, going downstairs and fetching the detergent. He washed the small shirt in the sink, rinsing it thoroughly and using the hairdryer to dry it quickly. Soon he was slipping it back onto Mila while it was still toasty and warm, smiling in relief as she happily babbled. *Thank god…* Levi kissed her cheek, watching as Eren lifted up the baby carrier. *Here we go.*

Eren helped secure the carrier on Levi, and made sure Mila was all snug in it before they walked downstairs. “Okay, Mila goes in the car seat in the back, I'll drive… Mikhail!” He called for the dog who immediately came to his side and sat obediently. Eren bent down and picked up his vest and slipped it on him, smiling as he picked up his own leash for the car ride. *He’s a good dog.*

Levi nodded, settling Mila in her car seat before going to sit up front with Eren. The car was quiet, the radio quietly playing. *This'll hopefully go okay…* They got put at the first house, their sales person getting out of their car when they arrived, the silver-haired man greeting them.

“Good morning! I hope you're all feeling well.” The man smiled broadly to them, his eyes lighting up when he saw Mila in Levi’s baby carrier. “Aw, good morning beautiful!” He gently reached a finger for her, smiling as she giggled and tugged on his finger for a moment. *I think we’ll get along rather well.* “Alright, I looked over all the information you've given me, and we’ve got a few houses within most of your specifications and the price range you gave. I'm sure you'll find at least one you really like, and if not, there are other days and more options. If any ideas come to mind
about things you'd want to add to your wish list of things you'd like, tell me, okay?” I’ll do my best.

Eren smiled as Mila seemed to instantly attach herself to the man in front of them. He held Mikhail’s leash, trying not to freak out from his over enthusiasm. *He’s not gonna be a wack job… we hired someone good to help us look for a house…* He took a deep breath, calming himself down as he almost moved to hide a bit behind Levi, a bit of his anxiety setting in. *Shit, still not good with social interactions….. it’s okay Eren, you just need to last today and then you can cuddle Levi tonight.*

Levi watched the man move with a careful eye, nodding minutely after a moment. *He made Mila laugh, and he still seems pretty competent. Good.* Levi caught Eren by the waist, his thumb gently brushing his side as they followed him to the house. *It’s okay. He's a bit enthusiastic, but that's not exactly a bad thing.* Levi gave him a quick peck, his attention on the salesman as they went inside.

“This one here is closest to the school, we’re just a block away at the moment, and I know that was one of the must-haves, to be within bussing distance. This is nice because when your little one grows up, if she wants to stay after for anything, she’ll be able to walk or bike home and not need someone to come and get her. That’ll be in quite a while, but it’ll happen so fast, it's good to think about it now.” He opened the door, letting them inside. “Four bedroom, two bath, and there’s two other bathrooms, one just there and one in the basement. It’s a relatively open floor plan, and a notable feature of this house is the amount of natural light it gets. Looking at the back of the house, you're facing east-” He gestured to the far wall, the angled ceiling over a large set of sliding glass doors and window, nearly taking up the entire wall. “-and that means in the early morning, there'll be plenty of beautiful light. And with the window over the door, you'll get plenty of evening sun too. This is a bit on the higher end of your price range, but it’s still very easily within it. And there’s always room to negotiate.” *There really is, don't worry.* “A nice big garage, fits three cars, or two cars and extra stuff if either of you are particularly outdoorsy. A big backyard too, good for a German Shepherd. And a growing daughter, of course.” *Lots of space to run around.* The man let Mikhail sniff him, knowing not to try to pet him. *Service dog.*

Eren looked around the rooms in awe. “Belgian Malinois.” He corrected as he passed the man, going back to look towards the backyard. *This house…. this is beautiful. We’d have to paint the walls white… or I can paint right over them I guess.* He stopped at the back of the house, letting Mikhail look out the window to the backyard. *That’s a good place for him to run around with Mila… we could get a pool too, and still have room.* Eren smiled more as he looked at the backyard, thankful that it was so large, and right behind it was the ending of the forest. *Maybe some deer too?*

The man had the good grace to look a bit embarrassed. “Ah, alright. I'm certain that either way they'll need quite the space to run off energy. And there’d be lots of extra space as well when if you decided to add a swing set or an above ground pool, perhaps. In-ground if you so wished. I’d keep an eye out for some wildlife too, since we’re rather close to a forest. Deer like to wander around so you could see some further in the brush in the evenings.” *That happens a lot with the houses around here.* “We’ve heard one or two reports of foxes, but it's been a few years. And it's to
be expected. But you most likely won't have an issue at all with that.” I sincerely doubt it.

“It doesn't sound like it should be an issue. We currently live right next to a huge forest and haven't had any real problems. Just some deer.” Levi looked around, thinking. Wide halls, nice counter space, plenty of room for a long dining table, a roomy couch or two too... Levi opened the back door, inspecting the porch. Wood, big... it could use some stain, but it’s an easy fix. And there's lots of space for a picnic table and umbrella... outdoor furniture too.... and a grill... the garden could use some work... I don't think we'd want just barren dirt or grass. We need some color in there...

Eren looked around as well, going to look back in the house, asking where the basement was, and following the man. I can do it... I can go down on the basement... well, maybe not. “U-Uhm… wh-where’s the light switch?” Eren asked quietly as he looked around the wall near the door. I need to turn the lights on before I go down... or I need someone to go down first... fuck I hate basements. Eren’s hands started to shake, Mikhail sitting back and taking his hand into his jaws to prevent Eren from scratching himself. I know... I know...

The man looked a bit at a loss for what to do, obviously recognizing what was happening. “It's alright, they're on the wall just to the right as soon as you open the door. The panel turns all of them on. Would you prefer I follow, or would you want to follow me, or...” He trailed off, trying to gauge what was happening. I'm not entirely sure what to do... you're distressed and I don't know how to fix that...

Eren nodded. “C-Can you turn the lights on... and go down first? M-Make sure they're all on?” Eren leaned down to pet Mikhail to help him calm down, smiling when the dog slowly let go of his hand. Good boy. He got up and followed ye man towards the door, Mikhail whining as Eren simply stared at the door, frozen in place for a moment. I need to make sure it looks okay... I need to do this, I can't be afraid of my own basement...

The man nodded, giving Eren a bit of space as he walked to open the door, turning on all the lights on the panel and walking downstairs, his eyes sweeping over the empty, warmly-lit space. He walked a bit into it, his voice gentle as he asked upstairs. “Everything’s on, you can follow if you like.” He looked around, keeping from watching Eren as he slowly came downstairs. Whatever it is, I'm not going to push it. It's not at all my business- but you shouldn't be afraid of the basement if you're interested in living here.

Eren nodded, slowly walking down the stairs and keeping his eyes on Mikhail as he made it all the way down, looking up and sighing quietly as he made it. Okay... that's fine, I can do this... I really can... He looked around the warmly lit area, most of the walls white to make it look brighter. It's not bad... this isn't the basement like at the old old house.... he can’t pop up anywhere... he's gone. Eren swallowed as he saw doors underneath the staircase they’d come down. “St-Storage?” Eren asked and pointed towards them. Is that what they are or are they for the utilities?
“Yes, storage. There’s a sliding door here-” The man went to one wall, pushing it aside, hearing the sound of wheels rolling as he revealed a closet-like room with a water tank and other things. “Which holds all the utilities that need regulating and so on. Water and such is in here.” He let Eren inspect it, making sure not to step between him and the way out. He led him to the stairs, opening them and showing him the neat shelving installed. “There’s plenty of room down here; you could and most likely will extend shelving, but this could be for things you don’t need your daughter getting into.” Anything toxic or breakable shouldn’t be within her reach.

Eren nodded slowly, backing up and looking around to how large the main room was. There’s outlets… it would be easy to build a false wall in the corner and soundproof it… “U-Uhm… D-Do y-you know what’s above the corners?” I’d need somewhere to record… I mean I could always go back home, but if I’m singing late at night… I’d rather do it at home…

The man looked around, thinking. “Hm… I know that that corner is at the boundary of the kitchen that’s closest to the door… so the kitchen is just above that corner, the living room is above that one, that corner is under the garage, and that one is just under the dining room.” He quickly rifled through the folder he was carrying, pulling out a floor plan. “…yes, that's exactly it. This is what it looks like.” He handed Eren the sheet, the lines of the basement bold with the first floor in faint grey, showing the dimensions relative to the rest of the house. That should be okay. “Why, if I may ask?” I'm curious.

Eren nodded and he looked through the house plans he was handed. “Oh right… Levi organized this outing… and I probably look a lot different than what the public is used too… do you follow music?” If I drop my name you might know who I am… there’s a good chance of it…

“Sorry, I'm not too familiar with American music. If you're someone I should know I'm sorry for not recognizing you.” The man smiled sheepishly. “What’s your name? I should recognize it.” I probably will… I listen to the radio a lot but I never really see pictures of any of the artists…

“I’m Eren Yeager.” Eren smiled widely, looking at the floor plans. “It’s fine, I’m actually glad though, you’re treating me like I’m a normal human, even if I’m known for music around the world…” I know that event that I did in Germany really spread it across Europe. “It’s for a recording studio… It’s easy to make a false wall and make it sound proof this way… but not necessarily sound proof for the floor above.” That’s a little harder to do…

The man’s eyes instantly lit up. “Oh my gosh, I do know you! You're very popular still all over Europe! Don't worry, I won't treat you any differently. I'll keep in mind though that you need a space to record where you're not disturbing the space above you, yes?” He watched Eren nod. “Alright, that actually is a bit of an issue with one of the other houses I had listed to visit today… because of the way the basement is, and I'm assuming you'll keep recording mostly in the
basement,” He watched Eren nod, digging out another sheet. “There’s one home where there isn’t any good space for it. Because of where the garage is, you’ll always be under the dining room, the living room, or the kitchen.” He showed Eren the paper. “I can add having a basement space underneath, say, the garage, as a must-have? It'll save a bit of trouble.” *It's a necessity with what you do...*

Eren smiled and nodded. “Thank you… really, that’s really helpful with the house hunt, so um… can you show me around upstairs?” He asked quietly, heading towards the stairs to go up to the main floor. *I wanna see what is upstairs... I like this house...*

The man nodded, leading Eren upstairs. “Of course. A question, actually… you have listed that you wanted at least four bedrooms and two baths… why is that, if I could ask?” *You only have one little girl- so far, at least...*

Eren followed him, a soft look on his face as they got to the stairs. “We’re looking for another surrogate at the moment, for child number 2.” His smile was wide as they walked up the carpeted stairs and to the large hallway with a lot of doors. *This looks really nice...*

“That's wonderful to hear. This house certainly had plenty of room for both kids to have their own rooms as they grow older, with an extra for whatever you'd like to use it for. Oh, this is attic access here.” The man gestured to a door at the end of the hall. “It isn't shoved into the roof of a closet, which is a plus, it's a stairway with a sliding trap door.” He opened it, showing him the panel in the ceiling. “Shall we?” He opened it when Eren nodded, turning on the lights from another panel and stepping up into the space. “It’s got flooring down, which is good. However, it does have plenty of exposed insulation, and the ventilation could use some work.” He gently poked at a torn piece of foil covering the insulation. “But it could easily be used for storage, which makes the stairs leading up to it particularly nice. Less of a hassle moving things.” He thought as Eren inspected it, rifling in his bag. “Actually… I have a bit of an idea. There's this one home that’s a bit out of your price range, and I'm not exactly sure what you’re going to do with all the space you've asked for so far, but there's something a bit more upscale you might like… and I don't currently have anyone else really looking at it. But since you're a bit of an exception, maybe the extra money is worth it.” He handed him a few sheets of paper. “Five bedroom, three full bath with the master bedroom’s bath quite a bit nicer. There’s a study in the master bedroom and off of two the other rooms, extra space all over, and there’s an in-ground pool. I'm not pressuring you into anything, but if this sounds more like something you and your husband would be interested in, I could very easily show you today since we’re skipping one of the houses.” *I thought it might interest you.*

Eren looked up as he spoke, only one word finding it’s way into the back of his mind. *Husband.... I don’t have a ring yet.... All I have is his word... “Fiancé, actually... and yeah, I’m sure that would actually be better... could we see that next?” I would like to see that... I think I might like a big house, since we’ve been living in such a big house for so long.*
The man blushed, embarrassed. “I'm sorry, Mr. Yeager.”Dammit, I keep assuming things. But he has a daughter. …..wait, is he wearing a ring? He glanced to his hand quickly. Nope, no ring. Huh. Rings are signs of engagement all over Europe… I dunno… honest mistake. “Of course we can. Let’s inspect the yard, yes? And we lost your fiancé a while ago.” He looked faintly amused, walking with Eren back to the stairs. …I don’t think it's my place to ask why you don't have a ring.

Eren nodded and moved to look around for Levi and Mila. He leaned down to pet Mikhail as he wagged his tail next to him. He’s not concerned… so I don’t think I need to be. He went outside to try and find where Levi was. “Levi?” He called for him, stepping out on the deck to look for him. Where did you go?

“Yeah?” Levi wandered over from the side of the house, inspecting the siding. “The siding could use some washing, and the garden needs work… we also should have a gate put in so that Mila and Mikhail don't end up running off. Or anyone else.” He smirked faintly as Eren smiled, stepping onto the porch again. “I do rather like it…” It's nice… He looked around, thinking.

Eren nodded. “Hmm… I wanna go see the other house he has… It’s bigger than this one… I wanna see it first…” I wanna say it’s nice for a starter house… but I like the big house we have now… I kinda want a big one too.

Levi quirked an eyebrow at him. “A bigger one?” He watched Eren nod. I'm beginning to wonder if you want more than just two… “Of course, we can go see it.” This one is pretty nice, but I'm not sure if I like it enough to buy it… I dunno, it just feels a little different than what I hoped...

Eren nodded, pulling Levi back into the house. “Can we go see the big house you were telling me about?” Eren asked him hopefully. I wanna go see the house… If we get a big house… we could always adopt too...

The man nodded, smiling widely. “Of course! Let me get you the address… it’s actually just a few streets over, still very much within walking or biking distance…” He quickly wrote it on a post-it note, handing it to them. “Just follow my car and we shouldn't get lost.” You’ll like it. He led them out the front door, making sure it was locked before going to his car again.

Levi settled Mila in her seat again, looking over to Eren as they sat inside. “…were you thinking of having more than two?” He reached over and gently took his hand. “It's a lot of space, what you seem to want… is you want to foster, or…” Or have them as our own?

Eren looked over to him, a soft smile on his face, but it was slowly diminishing. “Would you be opposed to fostering? We’ll be old enough in a year or two…” Please say you’ld be okay with it… I
want more than just two…

“I’d love to foster more kids with you… I just would want to know if we’re going to be buying a house with five or six kids in mind.” He chuckled faintly, leaning over to softly kiss him. “I’m very happy with that.” It was nice to have all those kids to take care of at home… they’re all little shits, yeah, but still… “And I’m okay with more than two.” He gave him a gentle look. I’d like to have a big family…

Eren seemed to sigh in relief. “I know you wanted to help pay for the house… but if it’s more than our price range, I can pay for it… it wouldn’t put that much of a dent in my account.” I’d still be able to have a black card and everything else…

“I don’t really have much saved, so anything too far out of our range I really won’t be able to pay for… Mom and Dad would give me gifts and my paramedic job pays half decently, but it’s not nearly as much as you have… and my pension isn’t much to look at…” Levi shrugged, leaning his head on his shoulder. “Though I guess if I’m going to marry you that either way, we’ll both be paying for it…” Then we’ll practically be one entity… Levi smiled faintly, cupping Eren’s cheek gently. “I can’t wait…” He softly kissed the corner of his lips. Mine… all mine…

Eren blushed as Levi kiss the corner of his lips and cupped his cheeks. “What’s the address again?” I wanna make sure we’re going to the right place… and you have the sticky. Eren turned to start the car, and put it into drive. Let’s go look at the house…

Levi sighed quietly, nodding. “Okay-” Levi gave him the address, meeting their energetic salesman again. He got out and got Mila from her seat, gazing up at the much larger house. Shit… this one is really big…

“Don’t be intimidated- just take it in.” The man smiled as Levi looked over the facade, looking to Eren as well. “The gardens are still rather well-kept. It’s no small feat to keep them nice but if you find an hour or two here or there they’ll stay beautiful. There’s no fence here already, but that’s probably because it’s such a huge yard, it wouldn’t be too cheap. But it’s nice, you have this overhang here-” The man led them up to the stone porch, a nice stone wall lining it, shaded by a stone overhang. “-so you could have a few tables and chairs out here. A couple plant pots are actually molded into the stone here-” He gestured to the small parts in the wall that held poppies. “-and I always thought that was a nice touch. This house is a lot of stone and wood on the outside, but don’t worry, the inside is a lot better for a kid to run around in.” He unlocked the heavy front door, letting them in. It’s very nice…

Eren looked up as they were immediately greeted with wooden stairs which led to the second floor and vaulted ceilings. “Oh wow…” It’s big… and roomy… I like it… He stepped further inside with Mikhail, looking to the large room to the left of the entrance which also led to the kitchen in the far
corner. Open spaces… barely any walls… which is nice, we can have her on the floor in here and I’d be able to see her from the kitchen…

“It's very open…” Levi tilted his head back and gazed up at the ceiling, able to see where the stairs went up, a small balcony before disappearing off, presumably to the bedrooms. Levi rested his hands over Mila’s tummy, letting her tug at his finger, kissing her head. “Do you like it, honey?” He wandered further in, looking over the stove that was built into the counters and flush with the marble countertop, looking over to the hearth. It's very fancy…

Eren smiled as he walked towards the other side of the house, the room’s context once again, and the space large enough to have a table for everyone for dinner. We could have everyone here… we could fit everyone here. He smiled more as he circled the back side of the house, seeing the door to go down into the basement as well as a very well hidden pantry. Large windows overlooked the sprawl of a backyard and pool. Oh look at that… all the dogs would love that here too… They love the pool at home… and the kids would love it too…

The salesman smiled as Mila giggled and threw up her arms. “I know, it is really nice! And there’s actually something rather special about this house upstairs, so before I forget, come with me…” He motioned them to the stairs, bringing them into the master bedroom. The first thing that caught their attention was a bookshelf, the only piece of furniture still in the home, a single statue left on it of George Washington. “It'll look much less suspicious if you put more things on it, but the people who built this house had an idea…” He reached for it and tipped it forward, all of them hearing a click. He gently guiding the bookshelf to open for them, a warmly lit room on the other side. “And this is in addition to the other room there, which can be used as a study. Do with this what you will.” He backed up a few steps, letting them inspect it. I'm sure you'll find something to do with it.

Eren was really hesitant about going into the room. “L-Levi, you first…” He stuttered as Mikhail whined a little. I don’t like secret rooms… even if I used them when I was younger… I’m still kinda afraid to go into places first…

Levi nodded, stepping into the small room. Small, but not cramped. “It's okay, here.” Levi reached for Eren, gently taking his hand and bringing him into the room. “It's okay. It's nowhere near as big as the other rooms, but it's plenty.” His voice became very quiet. “I think I know just what to use it for…” That would be great…

Eren felt his whole body shudder and he nodded as he let go of Levi’s hand and made his way out of the room. “I wanna see the master bathroom…” It was his on the spot excuse to get out of the room. He went to the bathroom, carefully sitting down and letting Mikhail come to his lap and help to calm him down. I’m freaking out, I know… it’s new places… I know, I know… I’ll get better…
Levi looked a bit worried, giving Eren a bit of space and inspecting the bookshelf for a moment until he heard Mikhail whine. He went to the bathroom, looking around. *Shit, it's nice... a walk-in shower and that bathtub is huge... it even has jets... fuck, I love it.* He looked to Eren, coming over to him and smiling when Mila immediately reached to pet Mikhail. "...I'm sorry if I'm making this more difficult." Levi gave him a soft look, turning to look back over the nice stone tiles. "It's very nice in here... lots of room everywhere..." *It's so upscale...*

Eren nodded as he sat against the side of the tub, petting Mikhail to calm himself down. "It's fine... just... n-new places and... Um... you know h-how I feel about s-small entrances..." *I don't necessarily like them, and I'm already kinda on edge...* "I really like the master bedroom though." *It is nice...*

Levi nodded, kneeling next to him, gently carding his hands through his hair. "Yeah... it's okay. It's to be expected, since everything is new... don't worry, you have me here." Levi gently held Eren, helping him calm down. "There’s lots of room everywhere which I like... and the downstairs has lots of carpet... and the fireplace looked nice too." He talked quietly, helping Eren calm down. *It's okay.*

The silver-haired man lingered out in the bedroom, near the door to the hallway, unable to hear anything that was being said. *Eren seems very nervous... It's not my place to say anything. I know there was that huge case a few years ago, things happened, he's gotten better... I'll just try to make sure they have their space. Maybe go a little slower with this- he's on edge.*

Levi waited for a little with Eren, soon gently kissing his cheek. "Ready to go again?" *It's okay. I'm here.* Levi’s arm immediately moved around his waist, helping him to his feet, his hand staying on his waist. *Mine.*

Eren nodded, shifting to move forward, glad that his wobbly legs didn’t instantly give way. "Thanks... can we see the rest of the rooms?" *I wanna see them... I wanna see the other bedrooms and how big they are... how many kids we can foster...*

Levi nodded, smiling faintly. "Yeah, of course." Levi kept a strong arm around him, walking with him back into the bedroom, grateful that the man simply gave them a smile and led them through the house. *The bedrooms are spacious, like everything else... There are two more full baths here, which is good, if we're going to have lots of kids who all need baths...* They gazed out the windows of one room, looking over the expanse of the backyard. *Shit, this one is really nice... I really like it...*

Eren was thankful that the real estate agent understood that he needed to take everything a lot slower. "W-We’d be able to foster... and we’re right by the school..." *It would be so doable... and*
we’re close to Dad… “C-Can we check the basement? I need to know what corner Tucker needs to make a wall for… O-Or actually is there an a-attic?” Eren looked back to the man to ask. *I should probably go up before going back down…*

The man nodded. “Yes, there’s an attic. It looks much better than the other we’ve seen.” He walked along with them leisurely, opening a door that led them upstairs. He walked up first, giving them time. He walked further in a bit, showing them the space. “Good wooden flooring, and the insulation is also new behind these panels.” He gently pushed one panel in, the three of them watching it shift a bit before settling back into place. “This would be a nice place for storage, or you could have half storage and half either a space for beds and such or you could have bean bags and things settled around here, a place to hang out if you’re going to have a lot of foster kids around like you mentioned. A space that’s a bit out of the way would probably be appreciated, especially if they’re twelve or older.” *A bit of privacy.* “The ventilation is all working well, so it shouldn’t be too hot up here during the winter. You don’t want to have heavy icicles, especially two stories up.” *That wouldn’t be good.* “And a few windows, of course.” He pointed out a few small windows, plenty of small spaces to tuck away. *I’m sure you’ll have at least one kid come through who needs their solitude…*

Eren looked at him and then back to Levi. “Yeah, that should work right?” He looked back over to Levi for a moment. Wait, what would we do about the kids if you have a job and I get called to sing with someone? Or something like that? “Sh-Should we go l-look at the b-basement?” *Fuck I’m stuttering again…*

Levi slowly nodded. “Yeah, we can.” He slowly walked with Eren as the silver-haired man walked down the stairs first, stopping Eren and giving him a slow, soft kiss. “It's alright. We’ll talk about anything that's worrying you in a little while, okay? We’ll sort out the details.” *It'll be okay.*

Eren nodded and smiled softly, pecking Levi’s cheek before slowly making his way down the stairs in front of Levi and Mila. *I can do this… we can do this, it’ll be okay, I can stay home and do art…*

Levi followed him, staying at his side when he could, his arm around his waist. He murmured to Mila when she got a bit fidgety, letting her tug on his fingers. “I'm sorry Honey, you’ll have Toby back a bit later, okay?” *He’s lost in the wash somewhere… we’ll find him again soon.* He let his arm slip from Eren when they reached the basement, letting Eren go ahead of him when he gave him a look. *You can do it.*

Eren took a deep breath, looking away from him and Mila to look down the stairs. *I can do it…* He swallowed thickly as he saw the man at the bottom of the stairs. *Oh fuck it, I can do it…* He grabbed the handrail and brought Mikhail down with him, his breathing a little harsh as he had to force himself to open his eyes to see the wide open space that was even bigger than the first home. *Oh wow…*
The man gave him plenty of space, smiling warmly when he finally opened his eyes and saw the expanse of space. “It’s quite a lot of space, isn’t it? Plenty of room for anything you want. That corner there?” He pointed a ways off. “That’s directly underneath the back porch, and with the extra muffling from the soil and concrete and then the wood, nobody’s going to hear you. The space under the stairs holds the water tanks and all the utilities.” Look around. The man slowly meandered the room, inspecting everything again. It's very spacious...

Eren’s eyes were wide as he slowly stepped closer towards the far corner. “This is even bigger than our basement right now….” And that’s a hard thing to do… wow… it’s so big! And open! We could add sooo much to it!

Levi wandered, looking around. There’s a crap ton of room in here…. Wow… that's an accomplishment. “And because it’s got a good amount of height to it, we could maybe do something like stadium seating… just an idea for movie nights, maybe…” Levi looked around. There’s the space for it… Yeesh, only two houses in and I love it… He sighed as Mila squirmed and looking up at him with her doe eyes. Dammit… “Okay…” He lifted her from the pouch, holding her hand as she stood and walked with him. She needed to move somewhat… He was surprised as she suddenly yanked her hand away, scampering up to the salesman. Oh no… “Mila!” Levi called her name, trying to get her to come back, walking after her. He was stunned at the man’s response.

“Hello, beautiful.” The man knelt on one knee, smiling to her. “Needed to stretch your legs?” He smiled as she babbled, letting her latch onto his hand, chuckling. “You certainly look happy. I hope you like this one. Your Daddies seem to.” He gently nudged her back to Levi. “Come on, your Daddy needs you back.”

Mila looked over towards Eren instead, walking with her arms reached out. “Mumma…” I want Mumma!

Eren’s eyes widened as Mila started her dash over to him, bending down and picking her up and cradling her. What is it now? “Hello, Mila…” He kissed her nose, smiling happily as she giggled.

Levi smiled faintly as Mila went to Eren, not missing the look on the salesman’s face. He loves the cuteness… “At least she’s not as fussy as she was this morning… a little energetic, but that’s okay.” Levi continued to look around from where he stood, thinking. “….I really like it, Eren…” I really do… I can see this as being home...

“I think we should have Dad come and look at it before we get it…” Eren turned to look the salesman. “You said no one was interested?” Right? So we can think about it for a little bit? Cause I’d like to take this house…
“No one else has a price range that this house falls in at the moment. If you're legitimately interested I can certainly give you time to sleep on it, bring in second opinions and things like that. I can keep it just in your scope for the moment.” I'll make sure you can have this one if you do decide you want to have this one be home.

“Could you? We would really appreciate it.” I'm sure Levi could call you again once we see when Dad can come? I would like that better, with his opinion...

The man smiled broadly, immediately getting a pen and writing something down on a piece of paper. “Of course, of course. You have dibs on this house for the moment. You can call me again when you're ready to see it again and make a decision. That sound okay?”

Levi nodded, smiling faintly. “That sounds great, thank you.” Dad should come and look at it with us... see if he notices anything else... and if he likes it at all. He will... ...yeah, he will. I just know. He let the man bring them back upstairs, shaking his hand when the door was locked behind them. This has been a successful day... I like this one...

The man smiled as Levi shook his hand, turning to Eren and seeing his hands full with leash and toddler. Aw. “It’s been a very lovely morning- I hope the rest of your day goes well. And goodbye, Hon.” He smiled as Mila shook his finger, the three of them going to their respective cars. Today is a good day.

Eren helped Mila and Mikhail onto the back of the car, making sure Mila was settled before he rounded the car to the driver’s side. That was... well, it could be worse... “S-So home?” He asked quietly, looking over to Levi in the passenger seat.

Levi nodded, smiling faintly and leaning over to kiss his cheek. “Home... I want more tea and cuddles on the couch...” I demand it. He chuckled as Eren flushed, pecking him one last time before letting him drive. I'll stop harassing you for the moment...

Eren smiled and he put the car in drive, immediately going to drive back home. He noticed Lathe’s car wasn’t in the driveway when they pulled in, his eyebrows furrowing. “Levi? Did Dad call you?” My phone was on silent... and yours might've been too...
Eren smiled and he put the car in drive, immediately going to drive back home. He noticed Lathe’s car wasn’t in the driveway when they pulled in, his eyebrows furrowing. “Levi? Did Dad call you?” My phone was on silent… and yours might’ve been too…

“If he did, I didn't notice… mine was on-” He went deathly silent as he pulled out his phone and saw ten missed calls. ….oh my god. “Eren…” Holy shit…

Lathe was clasping Ieva’s hand, feeling the bones in his hand shift as she squeezed back with a death grip, wincing internally at her pained sounds. “I've got you, you can do this…” Lathe tried to be reassuring, trying to hide his fear. Your water broke a month early… and once your water breaks, there is no stopping it…

Ieva’s eyes were bulging as she felt yet another contraction rip through her abdomen. “F-Fuck… Lathe, it hurts….“ I can understand how those ones before are considered false contractions! Oh my god this hurts like a motherfucker! She squeezed his hand as the doctor assessed her position and where the twins were. Ieva didn’t pay much attention to his words other than when a nurse on her other side told her to push as much as she could. The first one…

“It's okay, you can do this… just focus, love, I'm here. You'll be okay.” He held onto her as he heard the nurses speaking, her screams of pain continuing for what seemed to be forever. He looked back as Ieva gasped in relief, hearing a loud screech. They look like a bruised and beaten potato… but they're alive.. oh thank god... “One more, love… you're doing so well…” Oh my god… this is happening…

Ieva’s eyes were dead set on Lathe’s face, angry only as she spoke her words. “I will kill you if we have another set of twins!” Just one is enough struggle! Her look softened as she let out another pained cry, feeling another contraction course through her, then another and another. Moments turned into minutes, and minutes quickly turned into an hour with Ieva laying there in pain, and another baby that seemed to want to stay. Fuck it hurts... It hurts a lot…

Lathe was exasperated and in shock. That second one just won’t be born… what the hell? I know it was probably really nice in there but it's time to come and live out here now…. Lathe held onto her tightly, the hours dragging on and on. Lathe never left her side, trying to soothe her and keep her calm. It's okay…. The sixth hour finally dragged on, jolting when leva suddenly gasped, gripping Lathe especially tightly. I think it's happening. “It's okay, just hang on and do what feels right…” It's okay. Just keep your head about you.
Ieva’s pained cries of labour picked up again, a nurse coming in and checking her over and immediately calling for the doctor to come back into the room. She let all their words tumble over her ears, looking over to see Lathe with a pleased look on his face as the doctor told him something, a horrific scream leaving her throat as she felt a particularly painful contraction. She had tears running down her face, and the back of her head becoming sweaty again, only after a few moments. Oh fuck it’s happening, he’s coming... the baby's coming!

Lathe held onto her hand tightly, his other going to run through her hair for a moment, trying to soothe her as she cried out in pain. “It's alright, you're doing so well. You're almost there. Please, just hang on. You're doing wonderfully.” It's going to be okay.

Ieva could only push as her strength was starting to leave her, thankful that the ordeal was finally over after a few minutes. Oh thank god... It’s over... It's over... Ieva hadn’t even realized that the baby hadn’t screamed, the doctor getting a nurse to grab something and taking him to the counter to try and clean out his airways. He’d been born alongside the placenta and a bit of it caught in his mouth, not allowing the baby to breathe. Ieva’s head leaned back on the bed, her eyes starting to close from exhaustion. It’s over...

Lathe looked extremely worried as they cleaned his airways, his hand still in Ieva’s hair, gently murmuring to her. “You did so wonderfully, it's over… you did so well, we have two little babies now...” He sighed in relief as a shrill cry sounded in the room. “And there it is... you’ll see them soon... they look like teeny bruised potatoes but they're beautiful ...” They're ours ....

Ieva could barely nod, letting her eyes slip shut as she fell asleep, finally feeling the pain killers start to sink in. We're done... I'm done... they're breathing... Lathe can take care of them... She sighed a bit as he body fully relaxed. I'm exhausted...

Lathe smiled faintly as Ieva relaxed and gave into exhaustion, turning as he heard the doctor come up to him. He found himself with a small bundle in his arms not a moment later, his baby boy gently washed and wrapped up in a blanket. “...I have a son...” He smiled, nearly crying as he gave them a faint kiss on their forehead, chuckling as they tiredly squirmed. “It’s Daddy... you're beautiful...” He looked up as another nurse came in, reaching another arm and letting her hand him his daughter, wrapped in a blanket. “Honey....” He smiled as she immediately squirmed at his voice, reaching up to the sound. “It's me, honey... it's Daddy....” He softly kissed her cheek, turning to Ieva, so close to crying. “Ieva, they're beautiful...” You have to see them... please...

Ieva’s eyes slowly cracked open, a soft though sad smile on her face. “Hmm... I’m gonna sleep... I don’t think I’d be able to hold them...” My arms feel like Jelly.... Her eyes were already starting to close once again. I’m exhausted....

“Okay... you can sleep... Mommy deserves it...” Lathe smiled, kissing her cheek. My beautiful wife... He didn't know what to do, his arms full of newborn. I need to call Eren and Levi... “Can
you please hold one for just a moment? I need to get Eren and Levi here as reinforcements…”
Because children…

Ieva nodded, slowly taking the boy, and pulling him up to her chest, feeling him squirm around. I’m exhausted… I don’t know why… but I don’t… I don’t feel happy about this… I mean, I’m glad they’re healthy, but… I’m not excited. She sighed quietly as she gently touched over his ears with her finger, noticing he didn’t move in the slightest. Hmm?

Lathe took out his phone and turned it off silent, his daughter jumping a bit when it immediately pinged. “Sorry, love…” He noticed Ieva’s slightly worried expression, looking to his son. It wasn’t long before another incoming call made his phone ring, his daughter squirming at the sound, his son’s reaction next to nothing. “….oh my god. You made him deaf.” He's deaf!

Ieva’s face seemed to pale, and tears instantly formed in her eyes as Lathe made it even more obvious. This is my fault isn’t it… Oh no… what if she’s gonna turn out to be deaf as well and lose hearing with age? She held him a little looser, watching as he didn’t squirm, even with Lathe beginning to get out his phone. Oh fuck…. This is my fault…

Lathe stopped the second he saw Ieva begin to cry, immediately going to brush her hair out of her face. “Nonono, Ieva, love, I'm so sorry… it's okay, he'll be okay. None of it's your fault, you never would've known. There's nothing else you could've done. But look at him.” He gently touched their son’s head, smiling as he turned to him and reached out, letting him grasp a finger. “Look at how beautiful they are… you went through hell to give us these two…. And you did such a wonderful job… We’ll give them lots of love and support…. and we’ll make sure they're happy….” Lathe moved to softly kiss Ieva’s lips, still cradling his daughter to his chest. “I'm so sorry for saying it like that… we’ll see what can be done when he gets older. And we’ll make sure he learns ASL. We’ll make sure they grow up happy.” He smiled gently to her, his eyes full of love. I'm sorry… but look at what wonderful things you've given us… I'm so happy…

Ieva shook her head, her eyes turning away as she began to refuse her son, holding him out for Lathe to take back. You want him back, you don’t want anything to happen to your precious son. I’m sorry that he’s deaf! Her eyes were full of sadness as she continued to cry, even after Lathe took back the baby. He loves them more…

Lathe took him, his hands too full of his son and daughter to call anyone. “Ieva, please…” He was grateful when a nurse took his daughter for a moment, getting out his phone. I have to call help… He quickly dialed Eren’s number again, anxious. “Eren? Ieva had the twins. They’re okay, just please come help.” We need you here…

“Levi and I will be there in a second, we’re grabbing James and making sure Mila’s taken care of. We’re coming!” Eren quickly hung up and went to grab Levi.
Ieva was still crying and refused to look at any of them. *You’re upset, I couldn’t give you whole kids… you’re angry they’re not gonna be perfect… you’re mad at me… you’re gonna leave and look for someone else…. She continued to cry, the exhaustion of labor still tugging at her for her to sleep. I wanna sleep, but I can’t…*

Lathe held onto his son, taking his daughter back and sitting on the edge of the bed. *You don’t look happy at all… “I’m sorry I said that like that, love… but it makes sense. One of them always responded to light and not to our voices. But it’s okay. I love them… they’re our own little children… and I love you so much … you’ve given us such a wonderful gift…”* He softly kissed her cheek. “Love…. what are we going to name them?” *Please, help me pick names… we never finally agreed on any…*

Ieva just shook her head, looking away from him as she covered her face with a shaking hand. “Wh-Whatever you want…” She sniffled, turning her head away from him and looking out the window that was open. “I don’t…. I don’t want them….

Lathe looked stunned, a thought filtering through his head. “...Honey…” He shifted a bit, softly kissing her temple. “I think I know what’s wrong… “It’s okay to not be excited… or even not want them right now… it happens to a lot of new mothers… but I know you had a few names you kinda liked… please? I want you to be okay with what we name them…” *Please?*

Ieva let out a breathy sigh as she looked at him with red and puffy eyes for a moment, a tired look on her face. “Just pick what you want… I want to sleep.” I’m exhausted, can I just close my eyes and forget about what just happened? They’re your kids anyways… you can name them…

“...okay, love.” He looked down at the two ring squirming babies, softly kissing his daughter’s nose. “I know we talked about passing on weird names… but I don't think we should be mean and name them after anything in a machine shop.” He smiled when that got a small quirk of the lips out of Ieva. “...the boy…. How about Andromedus? That sounds nice… and the girl can be Perseus so we can call her Percy… does that sound okay?” He watched Ieva silently nod, not even looking at them. “Any ideas for middle names?” *Please? Anything…. “...Perseus Aureus sounds nice… but Andromedus needs a middle name.”* He looked over Ieva’s indifferent expression, giving her a soft look. “...what about Andromedus Leone?” More silence. *Please say something… Lathe couldn't help but feel hurt, shifting to gently nuzzle her cheek. “I just want you to be okay with what we’re going to be calling them for the rest of their lives….”* *Please, say something…*

Ieva just looked down at her shaking hands. “That’s fine…” Her words were short, looking up to see Eren and Levi coming through the door. *Oh good I can sleep now… She sighed, shifting to lay on her side, her back to all of them and closing her eyes. I’m tired, I wanna sleep.*
Lathe looked lost, turning when he heard footsteps. His arms were full of his children, looking nearly ready to cry. *I know it's normal... but she won't even look at them... and they're beautiful...* He tried to give them a smile, the look in his eyes tormented as he cradled them to his chest.

*They're wonderful...* He nodded to the hall, bringing them from the room. “Your mother... she has postpartum depression...” A tear trailed down his cheek with no free hand to wipe it away. “She won't even look at them...” *But they're so beautiful...*

Eren looked at Lathe with shock, picking up the small child swaddled in blue, holding him so that Lathe could fix himself. *What do we do? “Have they been fed yet?” Maybe she'll want to help feed them... but I'm not sure... she hasn't looked happy in awhile, and I thought it was 'cause she was stuck on the ground floor. Eren gently cradled his younger sibling, a soft smile on his face. “They’re too adorable not to want... she’ll come around Dad...”*

“Postpartum depression can get really bad... and they haven't been fed yet... Ieva wants to sleep...” He nestled his daughter closer. “...she wouldn't even help name them...” Lathe gently held the tiny girl, unable to stop the tears. *What if she never even wanted... and she never told me?*

Eren looked at him with wide eyes. “Dad... you know that those things can happen... and I’ll be right here with you, should we go see if a nurse can get a bottle for them?” *We can start them off with formula, it’ll be okay, Mom can rest for a bit.*

Lathe wanted to say yes, looking at his daughter's face. “....okay.” *I don't know if Mommy will want to feed you, honey...* Lathe gently pressed kisses all over her cheeks, trying to stop crying. *I'm sorry... I'll give you both enough love for the both of us... Mommy will love you soon... I promise...*

Eren walked with the swaddled baby, finally finding a nurse and asking if she could get two bottles, she looked the slightest bit concerned before she nodded. She came back with the bottles and handed Eren and Lathe one, going inside the room to check on Ieva. “How long was she in labour for?” *I'm not sure... I know it could be long...*

“Seven hours total... Percy took an hour... and Andromedus took six...” *He wouldn't come out...* Lathe watched Percy with soft eyes as she ate, smiling faintly. *My own little daughter... You're so teeny...*

Levi looked between the boy in Eren's arms and the girl in Lathe’s, his smile soft. “Mind telling us which is which?” *I can't tell by the names...*
Lathe smiled sheepishly. “Yeah… I’m holding Perseus Aureus… I liked the name Percy… and that’s Andromedus Leone… we couldn’t let them get away with normal sounding names.” He smiled as they chuckled, watching his daughter. *I hope you like your name… I always liked mine… even if it sounded weird to all the other kids…*

Eren chuckled softly. “So how’s it feel to be a Dad?” *They’re your kids, you were helping create them… you must be so happy. “So this is my little brother Andy?”* Eren asked surprised the newborn didn’t move at the sound of his voice. *Huh?*

“…it feels like when you said yes a week after I met you…” *It’s like when I adopted you… “…that's little Andy… oh, uhm… you remember how one baby would never respond to your voice, but responded to light?”* He watched them nod. “…that's because Andy is completely deaf…” *He can't hear you…*

Eren looked at him with wide eyes, unable to stop the tears that formed in his eyes. *He… he actually… oh wow, I can’t believe it, after all this time? And this is the exact feeling? He smiled weakly, his lip quivering as he cradled Andy a little closer. “My little brother’s so cute and adorable…” Even if he can’t hear me…*

Levi smiled softly, wrapping his arms around Eren’s middle, resting his head on his shoulder. “He really is…” He gently swayed them, letting Eren cry, gently rubbing his side. *It's okay… He sighed as Lathe moved and kissed Eren’s cheek, blushing faintly when Lathe did the same with him. “Stop being so emotional, old man…” So many tears…*

Eren rolled his eyes, but smiled nonetheless. He made sure that Andy ate it all before shifting him to burp him gently. *He’ll be just fine, they both will be. “W-We found a house, it’s only a few blocks away… and Everyone can come over on Saturdays for dinner…. and there’s enough space for us to foster…” Levi’s 27 and I’m 25…. We can both do it…*

Lathe’s eyes shone at that, his smile wide as he looked between the two of them. “You really want to foster, too?” He watched them nod, his heart swelling. “I’m so proud of you two… you'll let me inspect the house first, right?” He watched them smile and nod, patient as Percy finished off her bottle, gently burping her. “Good… you’ll do wonderfully…” *I just know it…*

Eren smiled even more. “The house is a little expensive, but it’s near the school… and big enough to raise a flock of children…” *And we’re close enough that I can go back to your place to ride Charlie, and Levi won’t have to worry about Mila escaping or getting hurt since there aren’t doggie doors. He smiled as he held Andy as his eyes slowly closed, the child relatively quiet. He’ll be okay, he’ll grow up just fine. I know he will…*
Lathe smiled. “That sounds really nice… it sounds like it'd be perfect. ...do you know if you want more than just two? Of your own, I mean…” I've been wondering…

Eren shrugged, looking back to Levi. “Maybe, but we’ll have to see when we get baby #2… Do you think you guys’ll be home for dinner? Or should I bring you some food?” They might want Mom to stay since it was an early birth...

“I think they'll want to keep her here a little while… if you could bring food, that would be wonderful…” Please. Lathe could hear Percy’s steady breath, smiling faintly. You'll be home soon. “I haven't finished their quilts yet though… you'll have to be patient, they'll be done soon enough.” He smiled, thinking. I didn't think we'd be getting you so early.

Eren smiled softly, looking over to Levi. “Do you wanna hold him? I can go home and make sure everyone’s fed and ready for bed before I come back with food.” I need to make sure no one is starving and Mila gets put to sleep on time. She needs her beauty rest.

Levi nodded, gently taking Andy from him. So small… Levi looked between the two of them. “...which one was born first?”

“Percy was.”

“Ah. She’s the big sister-” Oh wait, you said this… “...by a whole six hours.”

“Six hours can really teach you stuff.”

“Agreed…” She shall wield her title well.

Ieva shifted to lay back down on her back, her still damp hair all over the place. I'm exhausted but I can’t sleep… I feel really weird… and empty, but relieved at the same time…

Levi kissed Eren’s cheek. “I'll make sure Dad doesn't kill them… thanks.” He let Eren go, looking down to the sleeping baby in his arms. They're adorable… they look beaten to hell… but they're adorable… He looked to Lathe, sitting with him on a bench just outside the room. I'm sorry Mom isn't as happy about this as you want her to be… it'll be over soon. She’ll love them… I know it.
Lathe drove them home the next day, the two tiny babies buckled into the backseat. He drove especially carefully, he and Ieva rather quiet as the radio played. *It's going to be okay.... oh, crap, I wonder how all the animals are going to react to the new babies...* They soon parked, Lathe retrieving Percy while Ieva wordlessly took Andy. He walked them to the front door, opening the door quietly. He shut it after them, looking up as Krampus yapped loudly upon seeing them. Within moments the animals swarmed around them, all of them sitting down a few feet away. *Oh my-* He was surprised when Delia and Nene walked through the pack and up to them, expectant. Lathe slowly knelt down, holding Percy carefully. “Mommy had her twins… this is Percy…”

Ieva watched as Delia and Nene nosed at the new child, sniffing and licking her. She watched as the two then came to her next to inspect Andy, letting out a sigh as she kneeled to let them inspect the baby. *You can look at him.... I wanna go sleep in our bed... I'm tired, I don't wanna hold him anymore…*

Lathe watched them sniff and then very gently lick both of them, meandering back to the group and lying down with them. It cued the other dogs to stand and slowly sniff at them, learning their scents. *They've been accepted into the pack...* Lathe watched the ritual, smiling as Krampus gently tugged on Percy’s blanket. “You're not allowed to steal her, Krampus…” He gently tugged back on the hem of the blanket, the dog dropping it for once. *Wow- you're actually listening.*

Eren soon enough rounded the corner, carefully helping Blake to get to his feet and let him walk up to the babies. He smiled when he licked their heads gently. *Awe that’s so cute... and he's at least gotten to say 'hi' to them.* He glanced at Ieva his brow furrowing a bit. “Mom?” He stepped a bit closer, a soft smile on his face. “I can take Andy....” He was surprised with how quickly he was handed the child and then passed for the stairs. *Oh....*

Lathe smiled as Blake gently licked their heads, warm as Blake gently nuzzled them. “Hi, Blake.. this is Percy and Andy…” He sat on the floor, letting the dogs swarm around him, laying down and giving them company. He looked up as Eren was handed Andy, watching sadly as Ieva bee lined for the stairs. *.....come back...* Lathe felt his face burn, hot tears running down his cheeks. He reached for his son, wanting to hold him. *I want my son...*

Eren looked down a bit, sitting beside Lathe and letting the animals come up and sniff him more and lick his head. *I'm so sorry about Mom.... she'll pull through, I know she will...*

Lathe held his children in his lap, sniffling and crying as the animals piled around them. “I'm sorry... I promise Mommy loves you...” He smiled to them as they opened their eyes, reaching for them and letting them grip at his fingers. “Mommy loves you... and Daddy loves you too... so much...” He looked up as Nene settled herself in his lap, the small dog looking at the two babies and whining. He watched Percy and Andy stare with wide eyes, both of them reaching for her paws, gently feeling her. “That's Nene... she's a nice puppy... she likes naps... I'm sure you'll get along very well...” Lathe smiled, not noticing as Eren took a picture of them. *You're adorable...*
Eren smiled happily, looking at the picture on his phone. *That’s awesome* … He leaned back to lay down and be covered in fur as animals laid out on top of him. *I’m tired*… “We put the cribs together in your room, so they’re all set to to sleep.” *I know you’ll be waking up to feed them like every other hour, but you know we’ll do our best to help.*

Lathe smiled gratefully. “Thank you… and I finished their stuffed animals the other day… so they’ll have company…” *One has a lion and the other has a horse*… Lathe gently pet Nene, smiling as she fell asleep there. “I hope they'll be okay…” *I want to do this right.*
The next two weeks were exhausting, Lathe being given the arduous task of waking up every two hours in the night when they cried, calming them, feeding them, changing them, and making them sleepily giggle until they fell asleep again. I love them... but I also love sleep... ...and Ieva still won't help... He rose before they could cry out again, wandering over to Percy’s crib. He was surprised to see her blinking up at him, her little face red. What. He reached for her, his eyes wide as she felt warm. Oh no.... He went to Andy, his face also red. Shit... He picked them up, gently holding them to his chest. Oh my god... they're sick... I don't have any medicine for this... anything I have is too strong.... “Come on, loves...” He carried them downstairs with him, going to warm up bottles for them, if just to keep them from getting thirsty. Medicine... what do I do? Come on, I was a surgeon in a children's hospital, you think I would know this... ibuprofen... not too much.... He set them on the carpet near the couches, the dogs shifting to watch over them as he quickly went to get his bag and pill cutter. He very carefully cut the pills he needed into small enough pieces, crushing the right dose and adding it to their formulas. They'll drink it like this... He went back to where they laid, picking up Andy and beginning to feed him. Come on, it's okay... you need your strength...

Ieva woke up needing to go to the bathroom, coming back to look at the babies and noticed that they were missing. She couldn’t help the sinking feeling in her gut, her eyes wide with sudden fear as she saw the empty beds. Oh my god.... Where are they!? She immediately threw a shirt on, rushing down the stairs to see Lathe trying to feeding them bottles, but both of them fussing around. “Lathe?” What's happening... what's wrong? Why does this feel wrong? Lathe watched her come over to them, stunned as she gently took Andy.....you actually look really worried... "...If you're feeling up to it, you could maybe try to feed him... there's a bottle if you don't want them suckling...” I know you haven't wanted to feed them... you don't have to...

Ieva shook her head, moving her tank top off of her shoulder and bringing Andy up to her front. No, I’m worried about them... they might want this.... She shifted to sit back and hold him properly, a soft smile on her face as she felt him latch onto her nipple and start to suckle. It was the first time she’d smiled while holding them. He is pretty adorable...

Lathe smiled as Ieva fed Andy, the baby immediately latching onto her. It's good... that you're actually feeding them, that you seem to really care... maybe them being sick did something...? Lathe simply held Percy, cradling her. “...would you want to feed Percy too?” You haven't really bonded with them much at all... and your milk is going to be the best thing for them right now... I’m so happy you're not still uncaring, especially since they're feverish...
Ieva nodded. “Yeah, I will once Andy’s done…” It’s the least I could do, and it’s not too bad to let them do this, so I’m not worried at all to let Percy suckle too. “Hmm… is it weird that it feels better for them to be suckling?” My breasts have been aching a lot since I had them… is this why?

“It’s not weird at all… you’re in really good health and you’ve been producing milk, enough more or less for two. It’s what you’re made to do after giving birth; women have done it for hundreds and hundreds of years… it’s natural to.” I think that’s it… you’ve been making milk and it hasn’t been going anywhere… Lathe let Nene gently nudge Percy, the baby squirming a bit. At least you don’t seem to be too terribly warm… a couple degrees which isn’t good… but not a lot.

Ieva nodded and took Andy off of her, handing him to Lathe and taking Percy. “I’ll feed her, can you burp him?” She asked quietly. Shifting her tank top around, she exposed her other nipple and started to feed Percy, who also immediately latched onto her. They’re so hungry… I wonder why they were refusing the bottle...

Lathe took Andy, gently holding him, burping him. He slowly swayed with him, smiling as he yawned. He's tired… he hasn't been able to sleep… “They haven't slept for a while… I’ve been up since four…” They're not feeling well at all… Lathe gently pet Nene, trying to fend off his own tiredness. I want to go back to sleep… please… Lathe leaned back against the couch, gently rubbing Andy’s back. Please, please sleep… He sighed in relief when he looked again and Andy’s eyes were closed, his breathing steady. Thank god… “He’s finally asleep…” He smiled to Ieva, his own eyes shutting as he held his son. I'm tired…. He dozed off, blinking awake when he was gently shaken, Andy still against his shoulder, his arms instinctively holding him there. “...hm?” Sleep.....

Eren smiled softly at him, glancing over to Ieva. “You wanna wake Mom up? It’s 8:30… and breakfast is ready.” We have pancakes and eggs and bacon and sausage… I got enough pictures of them all asleep together… definitely going on social media… because it’s fucking adorable.

Lathe looked around, realizing that Andy was still fast asleep on his shoulder, Ieva curled up next to him with Percy on her chest. Oh my god… Lathe smiled, leaning over and softly kissing his wife awake, his eyes warm as she blinked awake at him. “Good morning, beautiful… breakfast is ready…” Gah, I love you....

Ieva looked up with bright eyes, shifting to kiss Lathe back. “Hmm… good morning, handsome.” She flirted back as she kissed his ear, making sure not to disturb Percy’s sleep. “Should we go put them in the crib?” They don’t feel as warm...

“It’s been two hours… I think we should let them eat first… then we can put them to sleep and have breakfast…” They eat every two hours… it makes sense, but it kills when they wake up every two hours in the night… “I can feed them if you want to go eat…” It’s okay, I know you only
breastfed them for the first time two hours ago… they can have formula...

Ieva shook her head. “I’ll feed them.” She smiled softly, rubbing her fingers gently on Percy’s scalp to try and wake her. You can eat first… I don’t know how much I’ll be able to feed you two… but we can try… She looked to make sure no one was really watching as she shifted her tank top again. The boys don’t need to see my nipple.

Lathe shifted, curling next to her as she fed Percy, resting his cheek on her shoulder. His eyes slid shut as he held Andy, holding him close. I feel better than I have at all for the past two weeks… it's been so stressful… He heard the boys all come downstairs, staying with Ieva as she handed him Percy. “…I'm glad you're doing this…” You haven't done much for the past two weeks for them… you went from barely looking at them to going into Mom mode… I appreciate it…

Ieva handed him Percy, carefully taking Andy as he began to cry. She cooed to him, moving to let him suckle her, looking to Lathe as he burped Percy. “I’m sorry…. about everything… I don’t know what happened… but last night… I just… I don’t know… it all clicked I guess?”

“It's okay… this sort of thing happens… I'm surprised you got over it just like that… it normally doesn't happen like that… maybe you just saw the babies missing this morning and got worried… whatever it is, I'm glad you're okay.” Lathe kissed her cheek, rubbing Percy’s back gently. You're okay. “Does this mean you'll help take turns when they wake up at two in the morning?” Please?

Ieva nodded, shifting to curl into him more. “Yeah, I will, but you get to change the diapers…” I'm gonna have to start hitting the gym too… from all the extra baby fat on me. She sighed quietly, closing her eyes for a moment as Andy suckled quietly, his eyes half closed. He’s still deaf, he probably has no idea what we sound like or what anything sounds like...

Lathe made a mock gagging sound. “I guess as their Daddy I can do that…” He smiled as Ieva elbowed him. “Yeah, of course.” It's okay. Lathe was quiet for a long moment, looking to Andy. “…even if he can't hear us… we’ll always make sure he knows we love him… and we’ll give him all the support he needs…” It'll take getting used to… but he’ll be okay. He's our own wonderful son… I love him...

Ieva nodded, leaning her head down as Andy soon detached himself from her nipple, handing him to Lathe for the moment to fix herself before taking Percy back. I can hold her while I’m eating, or someone else will wanna hold her...

Lathe smiled to her. “Shouldn't we let them go sleep upstairs? I can put them to bed if you want to go get something to eat.” They're both ready for a nice long nap…
Ieva nodded, holding Percy still. “Well… let’s go put them to sleep…” *You might need a hand since there are two of them…*

Lathe stood, helping Ieva up and walking with her to the stairs, a hand around her waist. *Mine…* He kissed her cheek as they entered their room, going to Andy’s crib. A colorful quilt was spread across the mattress and tucked in, a soft stuffed horse occupying the space. He gently kissed his nose, settling him inside. “You get some sleep, Honey. You need your rest, especially since you’re sick….” He smiled faintly, nudging him with the horse and chuckling as he immediately grabbed for it. *You have another little friend….*

Ieva smiled as she watched Lathe put Andy down in his crib moving over to the similar crib that Percy had, settling her down and giving her a stuffed lion, watching her instantly grab for it. *I have a feeling she’s gonna love lions…*

Lathe moved over to Ieva as she looked down at Percy, wrapping his arms around her and softly kissing the back of her neck, his voice warm. “I love you…” *You're wonderful…*

Ieva smiled, melting into his touch as he held her. “I love you too…” *It feels so nice to be held again.* She smiled softly looking towards the hall. “We should go eat, and then we can come back and sleep… Eren can handle Sunday cooking on his own.”
Chapter 123: She's Never Getting on a Fucking Horse

Levi sat back on the couch with Mila, sipping from a mug of tea as she chewed on Toby’s ear. *There’s no use stopping her. She does what she wants.* Levi was pleasantly surprised when Eren came up behind them, tilting Levi’s head back for a deep kiss. “Mm, what was *that* for? I must’ve been good…” He smirked as Eren blushed. *I love teasing…*

Eren’s whole face was flushed. “I’m gonna go out and ride for a bit, I need to exercise the horses, I might take them out on the trail one by one…” *It’s unseasonably warm, so we’ll be fine… they need the exercise.* He smiled and leaned his head back again to kiss his nose.

Levi enjoyed the attention, feeling Mila stand on his legs to reach for Eren. “…why don't you take Mila riding with you? I'm sure she'd like to ride with you.” *She loves the horses.*

Eren froze, pulling away from the both of them. “I’m not going out for that kind of riding Levi… I can’t… I don’t want her on a horse.” *You don’t even want her on a horse!* He looked away as he moved to head towards the back door, Mila calling for him, forcing him to come back and kiss her forehead. *My little baby… but she’s not allowed on a horse per her father’s orders.*

Levi watched him walk, gently catching him when he came back to give Mila a kiss, shifting his daughter so he could pull Eren into his lap. “Eren, I want you to know that whatever I said before about putting her on a horse, things have changed. She's older now, she's not so close to being a newborn that she’s in danger. She would love to ride a horse a little and I know that you wanted her out on a horse too… I think you should ride with her at least a little bit…” *It’d be good for you and for her too…*

Eren immediately shook his head, shifting to get off of Levi. “Not today….” *And probably not ever…. I don’t care how much you tell me you’ve changed your mind…. I’m not letting her on a horse because you snapped at me for it while we were in Germany. I don’t even bring her near the horses anymore…* He got up and head towards the door, leaving Mila with Levi. *No….

Levi watched Eren move, sighing quietly. He looked to Mila, his expression soft. “Honey?” That got her attention, her mouth still chewing away on Toby’s ear. “Do you wanna go visit the horses?” *I know you like the horses.…*

Mila’s eyes seemed to glow as she giggled. “Pleez Daddy?” *I wanna see the big horsies! Mumma won’t let me see them anymore.*
Levi smiled faintly, kissing her nose. “Okay Honey. We’ll go see the horsies.” He stood, going to slip on his shoes, heading outside with her, going towards the barn. Of course, we got more horses…

Eren was inside the barn, getting Charlie racked up with riding gear, already wearing his helmet. He glanced over when Levi was coming over towards him, Mila in his arms. Huh? “What are you doing outside?” I thought you were gonna stay in?

“Mila wants to visit the horses…” He walked with her inside, going to Charlie when she pointed at him. He let her reach for his nose and gently pet him, Charlie sniffing her hair before accepting the pets. She likes you best still.

Eren looked at Levi like he was crazy. Holy shit… okay, well, she’s still not getting on a horse… He sighed moving to unclip Charlie’s tether and lead, holding him by the bridle and pulling him away from Mila. “Alright, I’m going riding.” She’s not getting on a horse…

Levi saw it coming from a mile away, Mila’s face looking heartbroken before she reached insistently for Charlie, looking ready to cry. Oh no… “Eren, wait…” Levi reached up, touching his arm. “You don’t have to go anywhere with her there with you… but could she at least sit in the saddle with you for a moment? She doesn’t have to actually ride if you really don’t want her to, staying still is okay. I’d just rather hold off the waterworks…” He gave him a sheepish smile, gently bouncing a teary Mila. Please?

Eren pulled his arms away rubbing as his face as he sighed, trying not to give into Mila’s tears eyes. “No, Levi, I’m not gonna put her on a horse,” She’s not getting on one. He sighed, making sure Charlie sidestepped before he walked him towards the trail. I’m not gonna give… you didn’t and quite honestly it’s freaking me out that you’re bringing her so close to the horses when you were adamant about keeping her away from them.

Levi sighed, looking around and seeing Dawnstar looking at them from one stall, tilting her head and shaking her grey mane. Hm. “Do you wanna ride a horsie, Mila?” He gently bounced her, trying to quiet her wails. I’m a half decent rider… I can walk in circles with you.

Mila nodded as she cried, rubbing her fists against her eyes as she cried more. “Why Mumma ma? I do?” Did I do it? Is that why Mumma won’t let me ride?

“You didn't do anything honey… I said a while ago that you were too little to ride, but you're not anymore… but Mumma still won't let you. But Daddy thinks you're a big girl- you can ride a horsie.” He kissed her cheek, gently setting her down and carefully keeping an eye on her as he get
Dawnstar from their stall and tacked. *We can go in nice big circles... that'll be okay.* In a little while Levi had his helmet on, settling Mila in the saddle in front of him. He had her tucked against his front, having Dawnstar go at a slow meander to the doors of the barn, onto the large circular trail around their yard. He smiled as Mila giggled uncontrollably, his voice soft. “Having fun already, Hun?” *You look so happy.*

“No! No! No!” Mila giggled as she practically bounced in the saddle in front of Levi. *I wanna do more!*

Levi chuckled, one hand around her as he let Dawnstar walk a little faster, making sure she stayed in the saddle. *You'll bounce right out of we're not careful at this rate.*

Mila was a happy mess as Levi walked Dawnstar in circles for her. *This is awesome!!* She barely heard the thundering of hooves getting closer towards them, only noticing when Dawnstar stopped where she was, her ears flicking back for a moment. *Huh?* She looked up to see Eren’s angered eyes blatantly on the back of Levi’s head. *Mumma’s mad...*

Levi turned when he heard hooves on the ground, seeing how angry Eren looked. *...what.* “Eren, she's big enough to be on a horse, I'm being very careful with her. And did you see how happy she was?” *She's having a lot of fun.* “I know what I said before but that was when she was barely a year old and I didn't want her to get on a horse when she was still that small. It might have only been a year but now she has all of her teeth, she can speak coherently, and she can outrun either of us. She’s big enough to ride.” *She really is...*

Eren’s anger slowly turned to betrayal, shaking his head and looking away from them, his voice small. “Fine, do whatever you want then.” *I didn’t want her on a horse because you fucking yelled at me for mentioning it... I didn’t bring it up almost ever! You keep pushing the topic onto me every time I try to ride! I’ve been trying to keep her safe and away from my supposedly dangerous best friends.* He turned Charlie back to go back the way they came. *I see how it is... make me the villain, Mila will like you more... and then you'd get custody...*

Levi looked really worried, guiding Dawnstar to Charlie’s side. He reached for Eren, stopping both of them. “Eren, please... I'm so sorry for going ahead and just doing this despite what you said... but you're not around to hear her ask why she can't go riding every time you leave to go ride... I always thought you just kept saying it because I said it a year ago, and I know I got really upset with you, but it was because she was barely a year old then... she couldn't barely use her limbs then... I'm sorry if you actually mean it, that you don't want her riding. I'm not trying to make you look bad to her... but she can't understand why she isn't allowed to ride the horses or even go and pet them... she’s older and more able, which is why my answer has changed so much... but I won't let her ride anymore and I'll get off of Dawnstar with her right now if you really don't want her riding. It's your decision too. She's your daughter.” *It really is...*
Eren just shook his head, looking down at his hands. “It’s fine, let her ride, you said she was happy….” He urged Charlie on, leaving the two of them there, guilt settling in his chest as he left. I’m a horrible father to her… if she wanted to do it so badly and I’ve just been denying her… well, what good am I to understand what the hell she wants. He looked down at his shaky hands, watching as Mikhail sprinted to walk beside Charlie and look up to Eren every few seconds. Mikhail’s gonna be covered in mud, and I’m gonna have to clean him too.


Eren froze on top of Charlie as he heard Mila’s wails. “Goddamnit.” He turned Charlie around and trotted with him back to where Dawnstar was. Goddamnit Eren, don’t be a pansy and cry about it. She probably wants to yell at you for not letting her ride.

Mila sniffled as Eren came back, reaching for him in demand to be held. “Don’ be mad, Mumma… and don’ be sad…. Please…. Mila clung to his shirt, burying her face into his chest. Mumma…

Eren sighed, plucking her from the saddle in front of Levi and putting her in front of him as she clung to him. What do I even do with you, I can’t necessarily trot with you on Charlie… guess we’re going back into the barn. “Alright, why don’t we get you inside?” You’ve had your adventure for today…

Mila sniffled. “O-Okay…” I rode horsie… it's okay… Mila held onto him as they rode back to the barn, still clinging to him. Mumma…

Levi didn’t know what to say as they walked back to the barn, tying up Dawnstar and getting down to take off her tack. In a while when he had them back in their stall, he caught Eren around the waist before he could escape. “...I'm so, so sorry… I-I don't know what else I can tell you… a year has gone by and I'm still very protective of her but she’s better handling her own limbs… I know I might suggest it a lot but it's because of how often Mila asks…. I don't know what there is that I can say to make this vaguely better…” I didn't mean to upset you… but I have no fucking clue how I was supposed to tell you my mind had since changed besides asking if she could go with you…

Eren tensed in Levi’s hold, though he relaxed after a few moments. “No I’m sorry, I’m just bad at parenting…. take Mila inside, I gotta wash off Charlie.” We found a mud pit… His hands moved to slowly untangle Levi from him looking at Charlie with dull eyes as he untethered him, leading him to the shower stall. He made sure Mila was still standing where he’d told her to stay put. Fuck she’s probably never gonna ask me about anything ever again is she?
Levi caught Eren by the shoulder, turning him before he could get away and pulling him close, his voice gentle. “You’re a wonderful parent, Eren… never doubt that.” He softly nipped his ear, letting go of him and slowly moving to get Mila. *It’s okay.*

Eren watched them leave, his head down as he put Charlie in another set of tethers in the shower stall, cleaning all the mud off of him and making him look beautiful. “What do you think Charlie? My husband wanted Mila nowhere near horses, then all the sudden he asks me to bring Mila along, and I’ve been keeping her away because a very specific someone wanted me to keep her away from my beautiful dangerous beasts… So he puts her in a saddle. Daddy: 1…. Mumma: …. probably at like -4 at this point…” *She’s probably not gonna wanna talk to me, great, I’ve fucked over our relationship for the long run haven’t I?*

Levi settled Mila in the living room, in front of the wooden train set on the floor. “Maisie, Krampus?” He watched the dogs shift to make room for Mila. “You keep her out of trouble while I go talk to Mumma, okay?” He softly kissed Mila’s forehead, going to the barn again. He was quiet as he came in again, his voice soft as he wrapped his arms around him again. “Eren… we should talk…” *I don’t want things to get heated where Mila could hear…*

Eren looked back to him, a soft sigh leaving him as he resigned himself to talking. “I thought you didn’t want her on a horse? Levi you practically snapped at me for bringing it up once! And then you go ahead and tack a horse, and ride around with her! What the actual hell?” Why? Why did you do it? You yelled at me! I was scared you would yell again if I brought it up anymore.

Levi looked surprised at his sudden outburst, his voice calm. “Eren, she was one when it happened and I’d barely been home six months… she didn’t have that good of control over her limbs and I was still so scared she was going to get hurt… but look at her now, she’s running around like it’s her job and she’s always asking to pet the horses, see them, ride them… she loves the horses, and they all love her too… they’re gentle with her, Dawnstar was so careful when she sniffed her, and Charlie’s always been even gentler than he always is… and even when I yelled at you about putting her on a horse at age one, it wasn't entirely justified… I knew she'd be safe with you, because you're such a responsible rider… but she's our baby girl and the idea scared me… she's still so small… but she's got enough personality for one and a half, and she's a tough little thing… I was wrong to snap at you the first time around… I'm really sorry about that… the possibility that she could get hurt, however small, stuck with me then… I want her to be happy, and I don't want you to think I'm framing you as the bad guy here… I just want her to be okay.” *I really want her to be okay…*

Eren sighed and nodded. “I’m sorry, I just…. I was scared… you snapped so quickly at just the mention of it. I didn’t bring it up again because so figured you wouldn’t be okay with it… And then you started asking if I wanted to take her with me, and I just… I didn’t know what to think about it…” Eren shifted in his hold a little, uncomfortable with the way he was holding him and squirming out so that he could continue to wash Charlie’s legs, Mikhail waiting patiently for his turn to get clean. “I’m sorry I overreacted… I should’ve realized you’ve changed your mind by now.” His eyes were downcast as he washed the muddy suds off of Charlie’s hind legs. *How could
I not understand with how much you ask me?

“It's okay... I wasn't being very clear with everything I’d said and done... I yelled at you when you didn't deserve it...” Levi let go of Eren, watching him. “...I'm really sorry.” I don't want you to be upset with me.

Eren looked down and sniffles a little, rubbing at his face with the inside of his shirt to dry away the tears. “It’s fine... I just... I need to get used to it, I know you haven’t been home for a long time, but Mila’s your responsibility too... not just mine, and we’re probably gonna fight like this a lot... I’m sorry, I thought for some reason that you’d be pissed at me if I ever accepted the offer to take her riding... pretty stupid to think that, now that I’m looking back at it...” I’m stupid, that’a a given, I never went to college to get a degree and just rely on music and sales... and concerts... speaking of which. “I’m probably gonna go on tour within the next year...” I’ll need to, I can pay off whatever we would need for the house, I can buy it right now, but we’re gonna need to furnish it...

“It's okay... you're not dumb, I was just being a distressed parent... and I hope we don't ever get too angry at each other, much less where Mila could hear any of it...” I don't want to fight with you. It'll happen again... but it doesn't mean I want to. “A tour? Just in America, or over in Europe too?” Levi wanted to hug Eren, seeing him cry, but letting him work to wash off Charlie. It's okay...

Eren sniffled a little more and shook his head. “Just the states... I need to find a band to put behind me though... and an album out first... I’ve got a lot of recording to do when we move in...” A lot... that’s probably an understatement... “You can go back inside...” You probably left Mila with the dogs, and you probably wanna go and watch her again... He shifted to stand, getting on the other side of Charlie to keep washing him off. He got covered in mud so quickly...

Levi shook his head, seeing Charlie’s tack. That doesn't exactly look clean. “It's okay... And I know you'll have a lot of work to do when we move in...” He moved to get what he needed, settling in to clean the tack. “But I want to spend time with you...” I don't know if you want closeness... but I want to just be around you right now...

Eren looked over towards where Levi settled, but the tack, sniffling once more. “Make sure you use the right soap for everything... and take his bit off before you clean the bridle.” His voice was a little weak as he washed off Charlie’s entire body and then got out a squeegee to get the water off of him. There... that's better... He shifted to start putting braids into his mane, his fingers working flawlessly, even as they shook, Mikhail sitting right beside him. I know... I’m still freaking out... I know I know, I can’t break down... it was just a little argument, right? That’s it, right? He doesn’t hate me......... right?
Well you don’t have a fucking ring that’s for sure….

But he said…

Don’t give me that! He said this! He said that! His word apparently means jack shit after what happened in his conversation!

But he…

Eren, it’s not gonna happen, you’re not gonna have a ring…

Levi kept a careful eye on Eren, worried when his hands shook really hard. Shit… “Eren?” Levi stood, moving to gently take Eren’s hands in his own. “…you know I love you, right?” He saw the conflicted look in Eren’s eyes, gently pulling him close. “I love you so much… please don’t be upset… I’m not mad at you, or anyone… It’s okay…” He felt Eren shake harder at that, his mind flickering back to the ring stashed away at home in a dressed drawer. …I need to… soon… Levi took Eren’s left hand, kissing his ring finger. “Soon, you'll have something to put here…” He looked up to him, his features soft. “And then I get to keep you…” That sounds so nice….

You can’t trust anything he says… He lies… He doesn’t keep his promises and his views change… who knows, maybe you’re too fat to be loved… I bet he doesn’t even wanna buy that big house with you, he probably would’ve liked the other ones… You should go back and look at the others.

But….

No, he hates it, he definitely does… That room? That’s where he’s gonna keep his side chick… And make sure you don’t know until it’s too late and he wants to move away… He’s already got Mila wrapped around his pinky instead of your’s. It’d be so easy.

Eren couldn’t help but begin to sob and shake as his mind supplied even more details of how his life could turn around. He struggled to swallow, only nodding and leaning his head against Levi’s shoulder as he struggled to try and calm down. He’s… He’s not like that though, I don’t want him to be like that though.

Levi held Eren close to him, looking over towards the barn door. It's a really nice day... and we don't have anything to do... it would be so nice if…. “...we should go to
Medicine Lodge today…” He held Eren tightly, looking to him when he made a sound of confusion. “It’s so nice out… There’s more than enough time to pack a nice lunch, drive to the trails… the Gypsum hills are supposed to be beautiful for riding in, and it won't be too hard with Mila since she's taken so well to it… I want us to do something today…” I want you to say yes so I can go and get that ring while we’re at home getting ready… I need to…
Levi held Eren close to him, looking over towards the barn door. *It's a really nice day... and we don't have anything to do... it would be so nice if...* “...we should go to Medicine Lodge today...” He held Eren tightly, looking to him when he made a sound of confusion. “It's so nice out... There’s more than enough time to pack a nice lunch, drive to the trails... the Gypsum hills are supposed to be beautiful for riding in, and it won't be too hard with Mila since she's taken so well to it... I want us to do something today...” *I want you to say yes so I can go and get that ring while we’re at home getting ready... I need to...*

Eren looked at him skeptically for a moment. “O-Okay... We can do that... You want to ride too? I can pull out Dawnstar and Charlie and make sure we have all our tack... Do you want to get Mila set up then?” He was slowly starting to calm down, the aspect of riding more appealing to him than sobbing the rest of the day. *It's to get my mind off of things...*

Levi nodded, smiling faintly. “She can ride with one of us... though I'm sure she's been dreaming of riding the big horse with her Mum... I'd love to ride too... it's relaxing... I haven't don't as much as I would've liked to lately.” He gently rubbed Eren’s back, tilting his head and softly kissing Eren, chaste and sweet. *Mine.... shit, I'll have to have Dad help make lunch... oh my god, I'm going to do this...*

... *You’re right, she probably would...* Eren nodded and sniffled, unable to stop the blush forming on his cheeks, rubbing at his face as he pulled his hands away from Levi. *That’ll do... “I’ll get the horses into the trailer... you want to get food?” It’s still pretty early in the morning... We have breakfast pretty early.... And that’s not that far of a drive North for us... Maybe 45 minutes.*

Levi nodded, gently kissing Eren’s cheek. “Of course... I'll get lunch for us all put together and pack some extra things...” *Mila will need her own stuff, and so do we...* Levi gave him a gentle look. “I should have everything ready by the time you get things cleaned and in the trailer with the horses?” *That's enough time... maybe...*

Eren nodded, his blush flourishing even more, and getting darker. “Y-Yeah... I need to get the keys to Mom’s truck so I can put the trailer on it...” *That’s hard part number one... getting the trailer on... and I can call and tell them that I’m coming to ride with my..... Boyfriend? Fiance? I mean I don’t have a ring to even say that it’s official.*

“Okay, I'll bring the truck back with the trailer with me when I've got everything ready... does that sound okay?” He kissed Eren when he nodded, wrapping him up in his arms, his tongue gently brushing Eren’s before he broke it, softly kissing his nose. “I'll be back soon, don't worry.” He chuckled as Eren blushed darkly, finally untangling them and going to the house. Levi walked very
quickly to the house, bee lining for the stairs before he saw Lathe, sipping coffee at the counter. “Dad?” He watched Lathe quirk an eyebrow at him. “…I'm going to propose properly today… can you help make lunch?” He watched Lathe’s expression shift to one of shock, about to continue speaking when Lathe held up a finger.

Lathe tipped his head back, finishing off his mug in a few gulps and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand before fixing Levi with a look. “I don't know where it is you're doing this.”

“We’re going trail riding in Gypsum hills, in Medicine Lodge.”

“Nice choice. I'll make you lunch, of course. You run and get everything else ready, okay?” I've got this.

Levi looked immensely relieved, accepting a big hug from Lathe, standing on his toes to kiss his cheek. “Thanks Dad…” Levi left, going to get Mila. “Hey Honey… come and help me pick out what you want me to pack, m’kay?” Come on Hun. Levi managed to get a bag together for all three of them, coming downstairs and seeing the bottle of champagne tucked away and chilling on the counter, a pile of nice dish cloths piled around. “…you're too good at this whole romantic thing.”

Eren was getting together the tack they would need for the two horses, making sure everything was in order before he set it out. I can tack them while we’re there… He smiled softly, pulling Charlie and Dawnstar out once more and tying them off on a fence post outside, grabbing helmets, and Mila’s little helmet Lathe got for her for her tricycle. “Jesus… Levi didn’t even put this on her when they went riding…”

Levi helped Lathe fill the picnic basket, the nice towels wrapping around the bottle and tying closed to hide it and protect it, more laid down in the basket. Levi took over cutting up fruit for Mila when Lathe turned as a pot of water simmered, watching him add a glass bowl over the top, chocolate added to it. Why’s he melting chocolate? His question was answered when Lathe rinsed off strawberries, looking sheepishly grateful at his quick wink. He knows what he's doing… Levi took over strawberry duty while Lathe set to making sushi, glad they had containers with room for crushed ice in separate compartments, keeping the chocolate from melting and their lunch from growing too warm. They carefully packed glasses for the champagne, a nice picnic blanket set aside. .....it's done...

“Okay, Levi, let's see if we have everything. Champagne?”

“Check.”
“Sushi?”

“Check.”

“Mila food?”

“Check.”

“Silverware, napkins, glasses.”

“Check, check, check.”

“And here’s water bottles…” He carefully added a few, shutting the lid. “Only one side opens, so Eren could grab a bottle of water and not see the champagne or glasses. Now. You have the ring, right?”

“Y-Yeah…” Levi’s hand went to his pocket, feeling the small velvet box tucked away. I’m going to do this…

“Levi, he already said yes once… he’ll say it again.” Lathe smiled, bringing him close to his chest. “I’m so proud…” I’m so happy…

Levi smiled softly, hugging Lathe tightly. “Thank you… for everything…” You do so much…. Levi slowly untangled them, kissing his cheek before picking up the basket and blanket. “I’m going to put this in the truck and get the trailer for Eren…” He got the keys from the small table, fishing in the basket full of the other sets of keys. “Oh my…” He went to the living room, picking up Mila. “You ready, honey? It’s a big day today…” He kissed her cheek, thankful when Lathe opened the front door for him. “…I love you…” He looked to Lathe with soft eyes, then to Mila. “…both of you.” I’m going to propose… oh my god, I’m doing this…

Mila looked to Lathe as they left. “Bye bye papa…” Where are we going? Where’s Daddy taking me and Mumma? She looked around as Levi set her down in the truck for a moment to run to the car and get her car seat. Why truck?
Lathe smiled warmly, waving. “Bye-bye Mila…” I hope you all have a good time riding... and I hope things go over well...

Levi went to get her car seat, settling it into the backseat of the truck and soon buckling Mila in. “It’s okay, Mila. We’re getting the trailer so we can take the horses to a really nice park to go riding. You can go riding again today. Does that sound fun?” He chuckled as she happily giggled, kissing her nose and giving her Toby. “We’ll be there before you know it.” He went to get into the driver’s seat, moving the truck closer to the trailer and hitching it to the back after some struggle. Finally. He drove the truck back all the way to the barn, parking in front of it. He got out, going inside the barn and kissing Eren’s cheek where he stood feeding Charlie an apple. “I’ve got everything ready for us, and the trailer’s right outside…” We can get the horses in the trailer...

Eren nodded, making sure that Charlie and Dawnstar were ready to be loaded, carefully taking some wraps and wrapping the lower section of their legs. He kept Charlie tied, reaching for Dawnstar first and loading her. He carefully crawled out through the crawl space and made sure that Dawnstar was secured from behind before grabbing Charlie and loading him as well. It’s a good thing we got a two horse trailer. He crawled out doing the same for Charlie before he grabbed some hay and moved to crawl back in to put it where they could reach. “Okay, Levi… you wanna grab the tack? And put it in the back of the truck?” I can make sure that the trailers closed and that Mila’s all comfortable.

“Yeah, got it.” Levi opened the back of the truck’s bed and went to get the tack, careful to make sure they had every piece they needed for both horses. He made sure they all had their helmets as well, moving to draw the cover over the back so that nothing would happen to it. He moved to get in the driver’s side, softly kissing Eren before starting the truck. Mine. He was careful with the horses in the back, getting them back to the driveway and then onto the road, starting their trip. It’s such a nice day out... this’ll be perfect...

Eren smiled when they got out on the road, looking back as Mila played with her puppy in the back seat. This’ll... this’ll be good for us, I called… I come here often enough that they don’t mind me coming out on my own anymore...

Levi let the radio quietly play, reaching when they got on the highway for Eren’s hand. He gently rubbed the back with his thumb, careful as he drove. Today will be a nice day... After a while, Levi eventually had to let go of Eren’s hand, getting them off the highway and soon pulling into a large parking lot. He found a place to park, making sure the trailer was in the lines before shutting off the engine. “We’re here, honey.” He turned around, seeing Mila bounce excitedly in her seat. She's so happy.

“Okay, I have to unload Dawnstar first, so I’ll be getting her out.” He opened the door to the truck,
hoping it and going to open up the back of the trailer, making sure Dawnstar would be able to get out without hitting anything. He got into the crawl space, moving to push on her chest and push her back and out of the trailer. Eren held onto her lead as she looked around the wide open area. *Yeah, take it in, you’ve never been here before…*

Levi got out as well, leaving Mila in the cab with the windows down as he got out the tack for Dawnstar. He set to tacking her up, watching as she looked all around, her ears flicking around at every sound. *It's nice out here… you'll like it.*

Eren crawled back into the trailer, easily getting Charlie out of it. He looked around once before he shifted on his feet, knowing they were going for a trail ride. *Oh he knows…* Eren smiled and tied him up, going to the back of the truck and grabbing his tack. *Gotta make sure we have everything…*

Levi soon had Dawnstar completely tacked, letting Eren continue to tack Charlie while he got out the picnic basket, carefully fixing it to Dawnstar, the blanket tied to the back of the saddle and their bag of extra clothes and Mila’s things tied to the other side. *That should be fine. They're not really heavy.* Levi then went to get Mila, smiling to her as she giggled at the horses standing near the trailer. “Do you wanna ride with Mumma or Daddy first, honey?” *You can pick.*

“I ride with Daddy?” She asked, looking stunned as Eren handed her her tricycle helmet that was still pretty big on her but was still a helmet. *I put on?*

“Levi, make sure she wears a helmet this time, please?” Eren asked, handing Levi a helmet as well. “You too.” *We can’t have you two riding around without helmets… no, absolutely not.*

Levi looked a bit sheepish, nodding. “Yeah… I’m sorry I forgot about those earlier.” *They're important.* “Come on, Honey, you need your helmet.” Levi helped her latch it on, letting Eren hold her while he quickly latched on his own helmet before going to mount Dawnstar. He smiled as Mila was handed up to him, settling her against him and shifting around part of his jacket, tucking her against him. *You're not going anywhere.* “You can ride with Mumma too in a little while, Mila, don't worry.” *You should ride with him too…. I know he'd love to.*

Eren smiled, moving to make sure he closed the windows on the truck, leaving them only open a crack. He then locked the truck and put the leads for the horses in the trailer, and closed the trailer up, hopping up onto Charlie a moment later. “Alright, where do we wanna go?” *Where do we want to ride too? Towards the hills? The creek?*

“I want to say towards the hills, and we can hook around to the creek after a while. It'll be a bit
cooler down there and shadier for around lunchtime.” It's beautiful down there... He watched Eren nod, setting them off walking, their horses going nearly side by side. I hope this goes okay... He watched Mila look around the new space, Toby still firmly in her grasp. He untied the small soft piece of yarn that was around Toby's neck as a collar with a bow, one end having been stitched to his fur. He gently tied it with a bow around Mila's wrist instead. I don't want you dropping him.

Eren smiled as they continued on the trail without much spoken between them, Mila getting excited and pointing when she saw deer or any animal of any kind. She's so cute... He smiled grabbing his phone and taking a few pictures of Levi and Mila together. That's adorable...

Levi held Mila close to him, answering her every excited question about all the wildlife they saw. She wants to know all the names... Levi glanced to his watch after a while, looking to Eren. “Do you want to hook over to the creek now?” It's getting to around when we eat. He watched Eren nod, stopping Charlie and Dawnstar. “Okay, honey. Ready?” He carefully handed Eren Mila, chuckling as she immediately latched onto him. Aw...

Eren smiled and held his arms around her as he urged Charlie forward at a trot instead of a walk, helping Mila get adjusted with the new pace. It's okay, you can go a bit faster while I'm holding you... And I'm hungry... He turned his head, looking back at Levi with soft eyes. “Come on slow poke!”

Levi’s eyes glinted, his voice playful. “Who're you calling slowpoke?” He urged Dawnstar on to a trot as well, hearing Mila’s excited squeal at the faster pace. This is really fun...

Eren smiled more, going a little faster as Mila got more comfortable and making sure she was secure in his arms. “I’m calling you a slow poke, old man!” I love teasing you, and you’re getting much better at riding a horse.

“Oh, I’m old?” Levi easily kept up, feeling confident as they rode along. This is okay... and Eren’s a good rider. He'll take good care of Mila.

Eren smiled at him even more, keeping their pace as they headed towards the creek bend, slowing as they came up on it, Mila still giggling in his arms. He smiled, leaning down to pat Charlie’s neck. Good boy... “Alright, where are we gonna sit and eat Levi?” This is all up to you, you brought us here...

Levi blushed, looking around. We’re alone. It was quiet save for the sound of their horse’s hooves, the creek quietly running past. “Up a little bit…” He smiled when a small series of waterfalls came into view, a small space cleared under a large tree just a bit to their left. “Right here.” Levi jumped...
down from Dawnstar, holding her bridle as he was given Mila. He let Eren jump down, helping him take down the things they'd packed. He felt nerves squeezing in his chest as they laid down the thick blanket, Mila sitting next to the basket and playing with Toby quietly. “Eren?” Levi reached for him before he could sit down, catching his hands. He looked up at his faintly confused expression, calming when he saw his viridian eyes. “Eren, you make me so happy… I love you so much… you've given me so many wonderful things… and we even have our own beautiful daughter… I'm so happy that we’ll soon have our own home and many more kids to share it with… and I know I already asked, but you deserve so much better than that…” Levi slowly knelt on one knee, the air quiet as he pulled out the small box, opening it and showing him the ring. “...Eren, will you marry me?” Please? You deserve a ring… you deserve everything…

Eren watched Levi get down on one knee, and open the small ring box, a ring with emeralds, sapphires and diamonds lining it. He gasped, surprise in his features as he covered his mouth with his hands, feeling tears well in his eyes. Is this why you brought us all out here? So that you could do this. “L-Levi, it’s beautiful....” I’ve already said yes… do I need to say it again?

Levi looked up to his teary eyes, his own expression hopeful. “I thought you'd love it… is that a yes?” I need to hear it… please?

Eren nodded furiously, shifting to his knees and wrapping his arms around Levi’s shoulders. “Yes! Yes of course!” Oh my god… I-I.... I have a ring! He wasn’t lying! He couldn’t help but cry as he clung to Levi, holding him close, making him shift to sit down and climbing into his lap, wrapping his legs around Levi’s waist. He refused to let go of his clinging, wanting to make sure that Levi wouldn’t let go of him as he cried. Oh my god, it’s… it’s actually happening.

Levi buried his face in Eren’s shoulder, holding him tightly. “Eren, here, please...” He took the ring from the box, coaxing Eren to lean back long enough for him to slip the ring onto his finger, overwhelmingly happy as Eren immediately kissed him. I love you....

Eren couldn’t help the building of emotion in his chest as he smiled even more when Levi slipped the ring on his finger. He was unimaginably happy, leaning in to kiss him deeply, not caring if Mila was watching them or not. Levi proposed to me... And I said Yes!

Levi cupped Eren’s cheeks, kissing him back deeply. Mine... all mine... He soon broke from him when they heard a sound, Mila staring at them.

“Lunch?” Another one of her new words. I want food... I'm hungry... “Why’s Mumma crying? Is Mumma sad?” But you look happy... why?
Eren smiled as Mila spoke, shifting out of Levi’s lap as he chuckled, rubbing at his face. “No Mila, I’m not sad, Mumma’s crying because I’m happy.” Eren smiled as he picked Mila up and put her in his lap. “And you know what that means?” I wonder…. Levi might have told you… but I’m not sure.

“…i-is it because Daddy loves you?” Mila stared up at him with wide eyes. “Daddy says it lots…” Is that why?

Eren chuckled. “Daddy loves me very much Mila… so much, that he’s gonna love me forever… and soon we’ll have a big house, and you’ll get to have older brothers and sisters, and maybe younger brothers and sister, how does that sound?” How does that sound for you?

Mila beamed, looking up at him. “Tha’s a long time…” Forever is a long long time… papa told me...

Eren nodded, running a hand through her hair. “Yeah, it is a long time… and Daddy’s gonna love the both of us for that long…” He really will, we’re engaged for real this time. “Hmm, do you know what happens when me and Daddy get married?” I wanna know if you know…

Mila thought for a moment. “Y-You get to w-wear fancy clothes an’, an’ then you eat cake! Papa told me ‘bout it!” She smiled up at him, proud of herself. I remember!

“Did Papa tell you about his wedding?” He asked, not paying much mind to what Levi was doing around them as he held Mila, though he knew he was getting lunch out. Oh geez, what am I gonna tell Dad when we get home!?

“Uh-huh! He wears a ring too, and I asked him ‘bout it, and he told me ev’rything! Papa lets me ask questions! He tol’ me about how a kid gets to, uh, sca’er flower pe’als an’ stuff?” Flowers!

Eren smiled, picking her up and kissing her nose as he held her above him, laying back so she was in the air a few feet. “Oh Yeah? You wanna be my flower girl for my wedding?” That’ll be interesting, you’d probably race down the aisle and do it as quick as you can...

Mila squealed as she was held, looking overwhelmingly happy. “Wan’ throw petals!” I wanna! She giggled even more as she was brought back to Eren’s chest, feeling him sit up, watching Levi bring something out of the basket. “Wha’s that?”
Levi untied the cloths from the bottle of champagne, the glasses sitting next to him. “Something special for your Mumma and I…” He took the foil off from the top of the bottle, carefully loosening part of the wire hood and going to twist it open carefully. He smirked as it popped open, Mila squeaking at the loud sound. He poured a glass for Eren, handing it to him before pouring one for himself. *Something fancy… damn, I really owe Dad for this…*

Eren smiled, taking the glass. “Not too much Levi, one of us has to be okay to drive home… and I would like to remember tonight.” *I really would be really nice if I could…* He sipped at the glass, helping Mila with her own food, watching as Levi pulled out sushi for the two of them. *Oh wow…*

“Don’t worry, I want to remember this too…” Levi set out the dish of delicate sushi, getting out two pairs of chopsticks. He smiled as Eren untied Toby from her wrist so she could eat without getting him sticky, spoon in hand and actually managing to get the food into her mouth. He shifted a bit closer to him, softly kissing his cheek. *Mine.*

Eren couldn’t help the blush that formed on his cheeks. He leaned closer to Levi, smiling softly, picking up a piece of sushi with a smile, watching as Mila ate. *I could get used to this… I can’t wait until she’s on her own horse… and then we’d need a bigger trailer…*

Levi reached for sushi as well, enjoying the peace around them. *This is really nice…* In a little while, the sushi almost gone, Levi reached into the basket again, bringing out the chocolate strawberries. He opened the lid, picking up one and offering it to Eren with a glint in his eye. *Please?*

Eren looked at him with surprise. “Oh… you play soooo dirty.” He murmured and instantly inclined his head to take a bite, savoring the sweetness. *This is awesome… I like having dates like this…*

Levi smirked, letting Eren lick the last of the juice from his fingers before going in for a sweet kiss, reaching for another. *I love this…* He and Eren stole kiss after kiss as they finished off the strawberries, letting Mila nibble on two before packing up to continue on, riding side by side.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Lathe, where the hell is the pasta roller?”

“IT’s in the second drawer down from right behind you!” Lathe was unpacking a bag full of silken
“I need a tennis ball or something…” It’s a good thing we don’t have too many things that are breakable…

“And where are my apples?” Sharon flitted around the kitchen, rifling through grocery bags, Casper and Armin behind her, getting food ready. We’re having lots of people over. Someone has to make the food for the engagement party.

“Ooh, I’ve got this!” James handed Percy and Andy to Scotty, leaving the man looking stunned to suddenly be responsible for two tiny babies. He snatched the ribbon out of Lathe’s hand, quickly going upstairs and to the corner near the nook. He quickly scaled the wall, on a wooden beam and tossing the ribbon over them before they could blink. This will look really cool!

Lathe nearly had a heart attack as James was suddenly on the beams, his eyes wide. “James, you’d better be careful as all hell or I’ll wring your neck!” He had to admit that after a little, the light greys and blues and greens looked beautiful hanging in the air. Okay, that’s a lot nicer than I thought it would be.

Tucker looked up as a roll of ribbon hit the floor near where he was vacuuming, grabbing it and throwing it back up at the ceiling, James easily catching it. Not where I’m vacuuming! He vacuumed around the couches where the dogs were, making sure to take the brush attachment and vacuum Krampus. If he won’t move, he’s getting vacuumed. He quirked an eyebrow as Krampus wagged his tail furiously, rolling over onto his back and letting Tucker vacuum his stomach. …you like this? ….okay I guess. Tucker continued to vacuum Krampus, shrugging.

Marco stopped his cleaning to drag Jean over to where Scotty was, taking Percy from the awkward-looking man. He looked to the tiny baby who stared right back at him before reaching up for Jean, successfully getting his nose. “….I want one.” He looked at Jean with wide doe eyes, his lip faintly quivering. I want one…

Jean looked at Marco with wide eyes, a blush furious across his face. “In time Marco… in time, don’t rush anything…” We’re not even engaged… or are we? I’m not necessarily sure anymore, I mean I know you were going to and a lot of shit happened and we’re back together busy are we? Jean couldn’t help but chuckle as Percy grabbed at Marco’s nose this time.

Marco smiled softly, fending off her grabby hand and letting her take hold on his finger. “I know… but I’m just making sure you know.” He kissed Jean’s cheek, smiling. It doesn’t sound like you’d be against one… I’m happy about that.
Eren stretched after hopping off a Charlie, reaching up to take Mila from Dawnstar’s saddle so that Levi could get off. “Hmm, let’s go put you in the truck Mila.” I know that you probably wanna take a nap, it was a long day for you. He looked back to Levi already starting to untack Dawnstar, a smile on his face as he wrapped his arms around his back, his mouth latching onto his neck. Fuck, I’m horny… this isn’t good we have a 45 minute drive...

Levi stilled when Eren sucked gently on his neck, groaning and leaning back into him. “Damn tease…” He leaned his head back onto his shoulder, feeling teeth scraping his skin. Fuck, that feels good… He felt himself twitch with interest, turning around to hug Eren close. “Damn, it's going to be a long drive…” Guh… the things I would do if we could...

Eren smirked, kissing his neck still as he turned. “Hmm, I’ll let you fuck me when we get home…” I’m feeling up for it… I’d love too… Hmm, maybe even in the barn, Mila will be asleep by the time we get back...

Levi smirked, nipping his ear. “Did you really think I wouldn't take care of my fiancé?” He picked up the hand that held his ring, kissing it. You’re mine. He held Eren close for a long moment before they finally untangled, hurrying to untack the horses. I want to get home already… I need you...

“Then get us home, Sarge.” Eren teased, already starting to load up Dawnstar into the trailer. I wanna go home… I’m horny as fuck...

Levi looked at him with dark eyes. “You're asking for it, Private.” He smirked, settling their things in the back. The ride home was quiet, their twined hands resting on Eren’s thigh as they drove. Levi felt wound tight to snapping when they got out of the truck, putting away the tack as Eren unloaded the horses, relieved when they were finally in their stalls and Levi could catch Eren, his lips latching onto his neck as Mila peacefully slept in the truck, alone in the barn. Finally… I need you… I need you now.

Lathe and everyone saw them coming home, their cars parked at the center just a five minute walk away to not seem suspicious. They all waited for them to come back from the barn, Lathe glancing at the clock after a while. They should be done by now. “Henry, Tucker? Could you two go out to the barn and retrieve them for us?” They're taking a while.

Tucker looked over to Henry and nodded, taking Henry with him. He probably wants Henry to come so that someone can actually get their attention. He smiled as Henry almost instantly twined their fingers as they headed towards the barn, hearing something he didn’t expect to hear. Oh my god…. That’s Eren! He froze for a moment as a loud moan came from the entrance, Henry pushing him to look over the side… Oh fuck that’s hot…
Levi had Eren against one of the empty stall walls, their clothes heaps on the ground as Levi fucked up into him, holding up his weight as he sucked in his neck. *Fuck… I've needed this…* He felt Eren scrabbling for hold at his back, his moans music in his ears. *You sound beautiful…*

Henry saw them with wide eyes, both of them seeing them from the side, flushing a deep, deep shade of scarlet at the sight. *Holy fuck that's hot…* It took him a long moment before he yanked Tucker back, both of them staring at each other, half hard and stunned. They were silent as they quickly began walking back to the house, the image seared into their minds. *Holy shit….*

Tucker struggled to move his pants around to hide his hardon, swallowing thickly as he opened the door to the house, his whole face red from embarrassment and the scene he’s just watched. *Even after seeing it a few times… I still get worked up over it…. They could easily be porn stars…*

Lathe and everyone turned to look, Lathe facepalming as they came in alone and shifting uncomfortably. “….they're really, aren't they.” He let them nod in embarrassment and scurry off, sighing quietly. *They're like rabbits…*

Tucker went to his room, his mind racing as he felt his length completely harden. *Oh shit… there’s no way this is going down anytime soon…* He glanced up when Henry knocked on the door before coming in and closing it, grabbing a pillow to hide his hardon. *You don’t need to feel obligated to take care of it…*

Henry looked to him as he hid himself, moving to kneel next to the bed, knowing Tucker felt better when he wasn't taller than him. “I know we’re obviously a ways away from doing anything like that…” He looked up at him with gentle eyes. “But can I help you fix that..?” He glanced to where he was hiding himself, licking his lip. *I wanna taste you again…*

Tucker looked suspicious for a moment before he nodded and removed his pillow hiding his length and he started to unbutton his pants. Pointing to the door to try and tell Henry to lock it. *Please… I don’t want to be like Levi and Eren and get caught…*

Henry smirked devilishly, going to quickly lock the door before settling on the bed, lying on his stomach between Tucker’s legs. He nuzzled his bulge, gently kissing his clothed hardon. He reached to pull away his boxers, immediately pressing wet kisses all over his tip and down his shaft. *You always sound wonderful when I do this…*

Tucker’s eyes were focused on Henry as he kissed up and down his hard on. *Fuck… it feels really*
good… “Mmm…. h-Henry…” Tucker’s voice was weak from disuse as he carefully threaded a hand into Henry’s hair. *Fuck his lips always feel really good…*

Henry chuckled faintly as a hand immediately went to his hair, enjoying the gentle touch as his lips immediately went for his tip, sucking agonizingly slowly as he looked up through his eyelashes. *Fuck, you're always so hot when I get you like this…*

Tucker’s whole face was flushed, letting out a ragged breath as he tried to keep the soft moans escaping him quiet. *Fuck he feels really good… and it’s the only time that I’ll talk to him, even he knows that… fuck what if he asks me to talk to him during sex… That’d be embarrassing…* He let out a hoarse whisper of Henry’s name, his fingers digging into his hair and gripping it.

Henry quietly moaned onto his tip, pulling off of him, his lips teasing his head. “You sound wonderful… I’m so happy with whatever you'll give me…” Henry looked up to him, slowly moving down his length, his lips sliding down around his shaft. *I love this… and you sometimes speak when I do… I love hearing your voice…*

Tucker’s whole face was flushed as he watched him, knowing he wouldn’t last long with how aroused he was. “H-Henry…. F-Fuck.…” *It feels really good.* His toes curled as the heat pooled in his lower abdomen, wanting to hold it off.

Henry bobbed a bit faster, softly humming as Tucker gripped his hair. He pulled back to let his tongue play with his slit, pumping his shaft and feeling Tucker pulse, trying his best to swallow everything as he came in his mouth, shaking under him. He watched his face, his own cheeks flushed. *He's so hot…*

Tucker shook as his chest heaved, letting his head rest back on the pillows. His voice was quiet as he shifted to grab for his clothes. “Th-thank you… Henry….” *It felt really good… You’re getting really good at it…*

Henry caught his hands, gently helping to ease him up and put him back together, his head resting on his stomach when he was done. “Thank you… for giving me that…” He looked up to him, his voice soft. “I love to hear your voice… you don't have to give me more if you don't want…” He softly kissed his stomach, happily noting that he felt soft. “It just makes hearing it that much more precious…” *I love hearing you speak….* He looked up to him, his features soft. *Mine… all mine…*

Tucker blushed as he spoke, giggleing a little bit as his stomach was kissed, ticklish. “Hmmm… Are you gonna stay over again?” Tucker’s voice was still rugged and quiet, unsure if he would or not. *You usually stay over, and we usually sleep with the door open… and I usually run the instant I
feel you get hard but… I think I can do it this time…

“I'd love to…” He looked up to him with wide, innocent eyes. “Can I? I get cold all by myself…” You're warm… it's nice having someone to hold onto….

Tucker bit his lip and nodded, turning his head to look at Henry better and he nodded. “Y-Yeah… You can.” You'll have to ask someone for condoms… Oh god, what if I tell Lathe? What would happen…. Would he kick Henry out? Tucker’s body got tense with nerves, so unsure of what to do as his mind ran in circles.

Henry smiled warmly, looking worried as Tucker tended underneath him. “…are you okay..?” He slowly shifted further up, holding onto Tucker’s waist, his head on his shoulder. It's okay….

“Y-Yeah…” Tucker shifted as a sinking feeling landed in his gut. I don’t want to ask… what if they still hate me after what I said when I got here… and I’m not ready for Dad to know that I’m having sex… let alone that Henry’s staying over for it!

Henry didn't look convinced, shifting to hold Tucker flush to his chest. “…you can tell me anything you need to whenever you're ready… I just want you to know that.” Henry kissed his cheek, simply lying there with him. It's okay, whatever it is. He was grateful as Tucker very slowly relaxed, gently rubbing his side with his thumb. It's okay.

Tucker nodded and shifted to curl up into his chest, his eyes closing for a quick nap. I'm tired… Even a blow job takes everything out of my system... But I just need a short nap and I'll be fine…

A few more minutes passed before Levi came in through the back door, carrying a sleepy Mila, Eren behind him. He was stunned as he saw the number of people there, all the decorations set up. “Wh-What-”

Eren looked around as well, a huge blush forming on his face as his eyes widened to the size of dinner plates. “U-Uh Hi…?” Eren’s voice was weak, and a little hoarse. His shoulders sore as he came inside, Mikhail trotting to his side from his embarrassment. Oh god, why are there so many people here!? It’s Sunday! They were all over yesterday!

“Hi!” Mila threw up her arms, dropping Toby and looked surprised at the chorus of ‘awww.’ Huh?
“They're not here for no reason, you two, Eren.” Lathe smiled to him. “...you're wearing a ring.”
* I'm so happy. *

Eren’s eyes widened as he looked down at his slightly shaking hand the blush traveling down his neck and too his ears. *Oh my god... I... I just fucked with Levi... and everyone here knows now.* He swallowed thickly and nodded, feeling like he needed to apologize for his behavior, but he didn’t. He kept his mouth shut as he looked down at the floor, Mikhail whining loudly for him to come to the floor, which he did after a moment, feeling him lick at his face. *Fuck, I'm shaking pretty badly...*

Levi and Lathe were immediately at his side on the floor, Lathe gently pulling Eren to his chest. “Eren, it's okay. You don't have any reason to be so nervous or upset. We’re all here because we love the two of you. You make each other happy... and we’re so, so proud of both of you...” Lathe pulled them into a small group hug, smiling faintly. “I'm so, so happy for you.” *You'll be so happy together.*

Eren looked up a bit as Lathe pulled him closer, trying to apologize but the words dying in his throat as he tried to speak. *Great time for my vocal chords to stop working...* He shifted, looking away from him and towards Levi with scared eyes. *We just had sex! How are you taking this so calmly! I’m freaking out here!*

Levi softly kissed Eren’s cheek when he looked to him, glancing to Lathe. “....did you know-”

“Yep. We know.”

“....does anyone give a shit?”

“Not even vaguely. You two had a damn good excuse.”

Levi snorted at that, smirking and looking to Eren again, cradling him closer. “…what do you say? Am I allowed to show off my handsome fiancé?” *Please?*

Eren swallowed thickly before he nodded, forcing himself to relax and try to control his shaking. *I can do this… Th-They apparently don’t care... and the ring is beautiful, I should be showing it off...* He watched Mila squirm out of his arms and run off somewhere in the house, moving to stand on shaking legs. *Fuck, I can’t stop my shaking...*
“Tiny human!” Sharon caught Mila before she could get anywhere, settling her in one hip and meandering over to where Eren and Levi still were, giving him a careful smile. She touched his arm, her smile soft. “I'm really happy for you two.” She shifted Mila in her arms. “I think you lost this.” She chuckled as Eren turned redder. *It's okay.*

Eren looked at her for only a moment before looking down towards his feet, keeping his head low out of nervous habit. “L-Levi… can you take Mila?” *My legs feel like I'm a newborn horse… They're shaking horribly.* He glanced up for a moment as Casper and Scotty came closer to them. *Oh no… what're they gonna think?*

Levi took the tot as the two of them came close, smiling faintly as they were pulled into a gentle hug, allowing the contact, even if it got him a face full of blue hair.

Casper rubbed Eren’s back, smiling to him when he leaned back from him. “I'm so happy for you two… you take good care of him or I'll flay you alive.” Casper pointed a finger at Levi, chuckling as the noirette simply gave him a deadpan look. *He knows.*

Eren was still kinda shaking as he lifted his hand up for Casper to see the ring in its beauty. *I really like it, it's beautiful…. “L-Look….” It looks so pretty…*

Casper smiled, taking his hand and inspecting the ring. “It's a beautiful ring…” Casper smiled to him, pulling him into another hug. “Levi’s going to take very good care of you…” Casper murmured in his ear, trying to help him calm his shaking. *It's okay.*

Eren nodded slowly, soon jerkily wrapping his arms around Casper as well. “Th-Thank you….” He murmured quietly to Casper, looking over his shoulder to Scotty. *What are you gonna say?*

Scotty gave him a gentle look, looking between him and Levi. “I don't know how it is that you’re planning on having a flock of tiny Milas….” He smiled as the tot immediately looked at the sound of her name. “…but I really hope that you two will be happy… you're already off to a good start.” *You'll be good for each other.*

Eren looked to him and smiled softly, lifting his hand up from around Casper and showing him the ring. *You might wanna look but I'm not sure if you will….* He let Casper hold onto him, his shaking slowly fading away, though his legs continued to shake.

Scotty gently took his hand, looking over the ring. “It really is beautiful… you both are very lucky
to have each other…” He let go of Eren’s hand, his eyes soft. *I hope you two are happy.*

Eren smiled, slowly letting go of Casper as Hannah and Sharon came up next. *They wanna see the ring too?* His legs still a bit wobbly as Hannah carefully took his hand.

“Oh Eren this is **beautiful** …” *It’s gorgeous!*

“It’s just gorgeous!” Sharon beamed, both of them taking in the shining gems. She smiled as Maverick looked at it to, staring with wide eyes at it. “Even Maverick loves it.” *It's lovely*.... She pulled him into a one-armed hug, Maverick reaching for Eren’s shirt too. “I’m so happy for you.” She looked over to where Levi was, holding onto Eren’s waist with one arm. “You damn well better take care of him- I have a baseball bat collection and a damn good swing.” She smirked as Levi rolled his eyes, getting a chuckle out of him.

“Don’t worry, Sharon. You don't have to tell me.” *I was going to anyway, of course.*

“You better, we have a bat collection and about three Roller Derby teams who wouldn’t even think twice about coming down here to beat you tiny butt in!” Hannah chuckled and shifted to hug Eren as well. *You’ll be absolutely fine*.... She smiled as they pulled away to allow Marco and Jean to come up to them.

Marco still had Percy close to his chest, looking between the two men. “...you two are really good for each other… it’s been so obvious to everyone who knows you… you have a daughter and now you even have a new brother and sister…” Marco looked to the tiny baby in his arms. “I hope that if you two have more kids, and I know you really want more… I hope that they make you proud…” Marco gently hugged Eren before lightly hugging Levi, still very careful of the tiny baby in his arms. *You two will keep each other standing… no matter what.*

Eren smiled softly at Marco, looking to Jean where he was standing, seeing him flustered. *Oh jeez… He’s gonna say something… Isn’t he?*

Jean shifted from one foot to the other, looking at Eren. “...look, I know we haven't exactly been great friends… ...but I'm happy that you're happy. You both deserve each other… I hope everything for you two works out.” *...you deserve to be happy.* He felt like he should give Eren a hug, hesitating, not sure if he could. *He probably doesn't want me to.*

Eren shifted on his wobbly legs, moving to try and hug him. *It’s okay to hug me.*
Jean shifted forward, hearing the room go quiet as he gently hugged him. He gently rubbed Eren’s back after a moment. *this is okay.* “...I really am happy for you.” *I’m not always an asshole... I should probably get around to apologizing for all that shit sometime.*

Eren smiled and held onto him to steady himself. “Don’t think of yourself as any less… Okay?” His voice was quiet as he spoke to him, making sure that only Jean heard. *I know you have a bad image of yourself...*

Jean stilled at that, though he soon relaxed a bit into him. “...I'm really trying...” *Marco tells me all the time how much he loves me... I'm still so nervous about everything... I'm trying... He actually enjoyed the contact, not wanting to let go. Shit... “...I'm sorry that I've been a serious ass to you so much...” ...I don't know how the fuck you've gotten so angry at me and how I've pissed everyone off so much and yet you still keep inviting me back...*

Eren smiled softly, holding him close. “We forgive you... we always forgive you, Jean.” He murmured quietly, looking over to Marco. “You’ll have to man up and propose to Marco this time.” *I bet you will, and he'll say yes.*

Jean blushed, feeling warm. *I don't know how you all manage to keep forgiving me... but it's good to know... I have friends here... “I-I know... I want to... he deserves something really nice for it... give me a while, okay? I'm still getting used to us being together again...” It still feels strange sometimes... but I'm always so happy that it's real...*

Eren nodded. “Take your time... ask us if you guys ever need anything...” He smiled softly, letting go of him, watching Armin come over to hug him immediately. His legs still wobbled around as he hugged him. *Fuck my legs...*

Armin smiled into his shoulder, resting his cheek on his shoulder. “It's about time you bastard...” He looked to Levi, both of them quirking an eyebrow at the swear. “Now let me see the ring.” He pulled back, beaming as he inspected the shining band. “It's beautiful...” He grinned, crushing Eren to his chest. *I'm so happy Levi finally pulled his head out of his ass.*

Eren smiled and nodded. “Y-Yeah...” *At least you haven’t mentioned anything about us fucking out in the barn.* His legs were still wobbling like a newborn as he looked over towards the stairs. *Henry’s here with Tucker? Oh well.... I’m sure he’s heard us fucking...*

Henry had an arm around Tucker’s middle, gently pulling them forward. He smiled up at Eren,
going to cling to him. “I'm really happy you're happy…. you're like a big brother to me… and it's so nice to see you so happy…” I know you've wanted this…

Eren’s eyes widened as Henry hugged him tightly. “I-I am?” I’m like a big brother to you? Eren smiled at him, hugging him closer. “I’m happy that you’re happy too….” Tucker’s comfortable…

Henry smiled, nestled into his shoulder. “You are… you make me feel welcome and you let me take home leftovers and sleep over all the time and give me all kinds of food even though I'm a black hole… and I've been over so much that you've roped me into cooking sometimes too and I don't burn water anymore… you taught me how to ride a horse too and you've just been really nice…” He looked over to Levi, his head down a bit as he slowly let go of Eren, shuffling over to hug the noirette too. “I'm sorry if you don't like hugs much… but I really look up to both of you… I don't have a very good role model at home besides Kevin, and even then, it's…. I'm just glad to have both of you… being here and being around you all feels like home....” I'm so lucky....

Levi was stunned as Henry went for him next, wrapping an arm around him as Henry made a quiet sound. He's crying…. Levi smiled softly, letting Armin take Mila from him and wrapping Henry in a hug. “...I don't mind it… ...it's really something else to have you think of me like that….” Levi rubbed his back soothingly. “You're family to us…” You try your best to be polite and you make Tucker happy… you help around the house when you're over on the weekends and Dad is trying to get you to do something besides lay in bed all day and you don't complain...

Henry buried his face in Levi’s shoulder, needing the quiet moment, unable to stop his tears. I really care about you.

Eren watched their moment, smiling softly, moving to tug Tucker to him. “Come here.” He smiled softly as he pulled him him close. Come here, I want a hug from you too.

Tucker froze up as he was hugged, slowly relaxing into him. …… His fingers slowly gripped the back of his shirt, his voice hoarse as he whispered into his shoulder. “...I'm happy for you…” You and Levi were made for each other…. you deserve to be happy together...

Eren smiled softly, listening intently to his rough voice. Oh thank god… he actually talked… “I’m happy you're happy too.” He smiled more, kissing Tucker’s forehead with a happy smile.

Tucker clung to him, glad for the quiet. Thank you… He eventually had to pry himself from Eren, everyone soon migrating to the dinner table to eat, a large spread set out over the table. The mood was a bit calmer than normal, every couple at the table either nudging their partner’s foot or hooking ankles, some leaning on the other. Mine. It was a sentiment that everyone shared,
conversations rather quiet. Armin, James and Jake were the only ones without someone to tease, though the they all ended up with dogs and cats around their chairs, fending off puppy eyes begging for scraps. They all ate their fill before a cake was cut, the night ending a bit early with how many of them tended to leave just after dinner, Marco dragging Jean home with a look in his eyes and Casper wrapped around Scotty.

*Can we go upstairs?* Levi scoped out the room, noting who was still there. …. *Sharon and Hannah are just leaving… and Armin left a few minutes ago… we’re safe.* It took him barely a minute to reach for Eren’s waist and heave him into his arms bridal-style, carrying him upstairs. *James has Mila…. and we have plans…*

Eren’s eyes widened as he was picked up bridal style, but he let it slide a huge blush on his face instead. “Hmm, what are you gonna do to me Sarge?” His arms wrapped around Levi’s shoulders, a sultry look in his eyes. *I want you…*
Chapter 125: Side Story 10: Tucker and Henry (Goals)

Tucker watched them leave, Henry still sitting next to him, with a pillow between them. *I... I think it's time...* His hands shook a little as he grabbed for Henry’s hand to pull him up the stairs once Levi had scaled them.

Henry let Tucker pull him along, unused to the sudden urgency. “T-Tucker?” He let him bring him into his room, watching him shut and lock the door before he was suddenly pressing to his front, his hands shaking a bit as he held onto his shirt. “Wh-What...” He was unused to the look in his eyes, nervous but wanting, looking determined in a way as he was settled in the bed, Tucker in his lap. *What...*

Tucker still shook a bit as he cupped Henry’s cheeks with his hands, moving to kiss him on the lips, his mouth open already to let Henry have access. Please understand... I want you to understand that I’m ready...

Henry was stunned as he was kissed, the thought slowly registering as his hands slid down his neck and over his shoulders, Tucker settling further into his lap, over his crotch. .....are you... Henry pulled away, looking over him. “...Tucker, are you...” His hands gently settled on top of his thighs. “...are you ready?” Is that what this means? ...are you really?

Tucker looked to him and nodded, biting at his lower lip, adding a hint of seduction to his innocence. His cheeks were on fire as he looked at Henry. I hope you’ll be okay with it... I really do... I want to, I really want to, and I know you’ll be gentle.

Henry looked at him with awe, flushing scarlet. Oh fuck... He wants to... “...d-do you have anything? Lube, condoms?” We need those... He looked lost when Tucker sheepishly shook his head, trying to think even as his hands slowly slid down his chest. Fuck... where could I get some now? He didn't need to look down to know how hard Tucker was, his own cock stirring. Fuck... “...wh-where would we get some?” We need some... doing it without lube is a really really bad idea... and we should use condoms...

“E-Eren..... o-or D-Dad.....” Tucker’s voice was weak as he looked down at Henry’s hardening bulge. Oh my god.... I want it, I want it really bad, and we aren’t prepared for it in the least.
Henry looked helpless, knowing he couldn't do nothing about Tucker, the teen already panting with want in his lap, hardening even more. *Fuck…* “Eren and Levi are probably already in the middle of things… I don't want to interrupt that…” *fuck, I have to ask your Dad… for lube and condoms* … He swallowed hard, rolling over and settling Tucker on the bed, softly kissing his cheek and gently cupping him for a moment, massaging him. “….I'll be back…” It hurt to leave Tucker splayed with want on the bed like that, willing his hardon to go down, his nerves at asking Lathe making it go down. *shit*... He slowly moved downstairs, seeing the man in the kitchen. “.....u-uhm, Mr. Quo?” Henry shrunk as Lathe turned to look at him. *Fuck*...

“Yes, Henry?” He looked over to him, surprised when he saw how embarrassed he looked. “.....are you alright? What is it?” *What?*

“...u-uhm… I'm sorry for bothering you like th-this, but….. uhm…. c-can I…. uhm…” His voice was incredibly small, staring at his feet. “H-Have some lube and condoms…?” *Fuck…. you know I'm about to fuck your son... ...shit*... He slowly stepped away from him, ready to be yelled at. *Fuck*...

...*now the embarrassment makes sense.* Lathe turned a bit pink despite himself, giving him a small smile. “Henry?” He waited for him to nervously look up. “...if you're down here asking someone like me for that, and it takes a hell of a lot of guts, it tells me you actually give a damn about taking proper care of my son… and you'd damn well better. I'll get you two some things, okay?” He had a hand on his arm, walking with him upstairs. *I'm surprised… but at the same time I'm not… Tucker cares so much about you… and if he trusts you enough to do that… you're obviously worth it to him.*

Henry was stunned as Lathe didn't snap at him, walking awkwardly with him, flushed red. He waited outside his bedroom door as he heard him move for a moment, flushing as a package of condoms and a tube of lube was handed to him. “U-Uhm, th-thank you….” *Fuck*...

“...Henry, you're like family here. And you mean so much to Tucker. Take good care of him…. okay?” Lathe watched him nod, letting him scurry away. *I'm glad they asked rather than deciding to make a stupid decision*…

Henry shut and locked the door again immediately behind him, looked to the bed where Tucker lay, watching him whimper as he stood there. *Fuck*… Henry moved to the bed, climbing up and over him, the two packages set aside on the bed as his hand went for Tucker’s bulge. *Fuck*... *you're just splayed out for me*…
Tucker let out a soft squeak as he was grabbed, soon enough becoming putty in Henry’s hand. “Ngh… H-Henry…” *fuck I want more than just your hand… please?* He looked up to him with wanting eyes, making a soft noise as he reached to pull at the hem of his shirt. *I want it off, I want everything off…*

Henry smiled breathlessly at the amount of arousal in his voice, leaning back to pull off his shirt, throwing it off the bed. He reached to do the same with Tucker, though his motions slowed way down, slowly bringing it off of him with reverence and dropping it from the bed. He immediately dipped down, wanting to catalogue every bit of his bare chest. *Mine…*

Tucker shivered under his hold, breathing in sharply when his mouth latched onto his collarbone. *Oh my god… this is… is really happening.* He squirmed a bit as Henry’s hands brushed his sides, trying not to force him off from being ticklish. *Don’t tickle me… please…*

Henry stopped when Tucker jerked a bit as his hands met his sides, soon realizing he was ticklish. *Oh yeah… I forgot about that…* His hands moved with gentle purpose, rubbing his sides up and down, his shivering turning from a fear of being tickled to pleasure as he slowly sucked a mark onto his skin. *I won't tickle you…,* He held onto him, grateful for the extra bit of flesh at his hips. *I like this… you sound so wonderful…*

Tucker let out a soft sigh, shivering in his hold before he shifted his legs a little wider, giving Henry more room. *I-I like this… I like this a lot…* He closed his eyes for a moment, looking back with blown pupils from the sensations that were driving up his spine. *His hands feel really nice…*

Henry looked up to him, slowly hardening as he saw the look Tucker was giving him. *Oh fuck….* Henry melted under Tucker’s bedroom eyes, his tongue slowly wandering down his chest, tentatively lapping at a pink nipple, slowly sucking on the nub. *Does this feel good? I really hope it does….*

Tucker’s body jerked as he led out a sharp moan, his hands working into the sheets below him. His back even arched at the sensation, his body stretching out for Henry to appreciate. *His mouth feels amazing…*

Henry watched Tucker’s reaction with lidded eyes, his voice beautiful in his ears. *He sounds so amazing…* He tucked away every little sound he made, gently licking and sucking at his bud before kissing over to the other, letting one hand coming down to slowly massage him through his pants. *You're so hard already…*
Tucker’s breath hitched, his legs spreading further. “O-Oh fuck, Henry… m-more please …” Tucker’s begs were quiet however accompanied by large puppy eyes. *I want you to take my pants off… I want more, I feel really good…*

Henry watched him with wide eyes, barely believing he was allowed to as he reached for Tucker’s pants, unbuttoning them and sliding them off. He took a moment before reaching for his boxers, slowly pulling them down too. They were soon gone, admiring his face flushed down his neck, panting with want, his chest moving steadily and his length laying glistening with precum on his stomach. He watched as he leaked another drop under his gaze, shivering at the sight. *Oh fuck that’s hot…* Henry moved to strip as well, naked in barely a minute before he shifted to kiss across his hip, hungry to taste him and lapping at his tip, his mouth eager. *…you always taste wonderful…*

Tucker’s eyes watched every movement, enjoying that Henry’s nakedness actually brought him excitement rather than fear. *I’m not afraid, he’s not going to hurt me… he’s going to be gentle.* His hands gripped that sheets below him once more as he felt Henry’s tongue on his length, lapping at his precum. *Oh my god …. It feels so good…*

Henry was more than happy to lave at him with his tongue, tasting him. *I love doing this…* He gently cupped his sac, slowly massaging him as he kissed his tip appreciatively. “You’re so handsome like this… my god, look at you…” He looked over him, flushed and helplessly aroused. *Fuck…* He was at stiff attention, aching for attention yet ignoring himself for the moment. “….I-I, uhm…. I’ve done this before myself….. so I’ll be careful…..” He was embarrassed to admit it, reaching for the lube and unwrapping the plastic seal. *I wanted to know what it was like…. Guh, it was good…*

Tucker flushed. “I…. um….. I-It shouldn’t hurt…. I’ve…. I’ve used th-things before…” *It really shouldn’t hurt too badly, so you’re okay… oh god why did I tell him that?* Tucker’s face instantly flushed and looked down towards Henry’s hands.

Henry flushed at the mental image, remembering when he'd watched Tucker fucking himself with a certain toy, moaning his name. *Oh fuck…. “It's okay… you're not the only one…”* *I just barely saved enough… I was going insane…* He blushed, settling further between his legs and pouring lube onto his fingers. “I'll still be really gentle…” *I want this to feel good…*

Tucker nodded, shifting to spread his legs further and close his eyes as he let his head rest on his pillow. *Oh my god, I want it to happen so much…* He took in a shaky gasp as he felt Henry’s fingers at his entrance press in. *Oh fuck… please …*
Henry slid in a tentative finger, feeling how easily he relaxed around him. He gently nipped at his base as he moved, a second slipping in without much effort. *Just relax...* Henry stretched him achingly slowly, grinding down lazily into the mattress where his own length was trapped, sucking on him teasingly. *I want this to feel good...*

Tucker was on cloud nine, soft moans and mewls leaving him as he was stretched. “H-Henry… oh god… Henry …” He couldn’t help the soft words coming from his lips, wanting to kiss him but knowing Henry wanted to stretch him out completely. *Oh my god it feels heavenly, my own fingers have never felt this good before....*

Henry continued to lazily suck on his length, scissoring him. He eventually added a third finger, slowly spreading his fingers in him. He felt his warm, soft heat, searching for something. Where... He soon found a small bump of nerves, feeling Tucker violently jolt when he brushed it. He held him down, firmly pressing down and moving over it, watching his back arch lewdly as he let out a high sound, breathy and intimate. *Oh fuck... he sounds heavenly....* He massaged that spot, hungry for his chorus of moans. *You sound so good...*

Tucker couldn’t help the sounds coming out of his throat, his legs already starting to curl up from the pressure. *Oh fuck it feels really fucking good, and he found my prostate. “F-Fuck....” Oh please I want you to fuck me, please hurry.*

Henry was aching as he continued to loosen him, his hand drawing out of him when he was loose enough. *Fuck, I want it...* He has nearly shaking as he picked up the package of condoms, fumbling it open and taking out a wrapper. He looked back to Tucker, seeing him spread out under him. *... I need a better angle...* He reached for an extra pillow, settling it under Tucker’s hips. *Better...* He tore open the wrapper, managing to get the condom on and adding a generous amount of lube, his hands shakily moving to Tucker’s hips. “R-Ready?” He watched him shakily nod, very slowly pressing into him, watching his expression immediately changing. *God... I love the view....*

Tucker couldn’t help but arch his back as he felt Henry press into him, feeling him stop as he bottomed out. *Oh this feels... this feels amazing*. He shifted a bit as Henry stayed sheathed inside him, his hands coming up to pull Henry down, wanting to kiss him. *Please I wanna kiss you, I really want to...*

Henry let Tucker pull him down until their chests were flush, overwhelmed with the intimacy of it as they kissed, sucking Tucker’s tongue into his mouth, the muscles sliding against each other. *Fuck...* He very gently ground deeper into him, feeling Tucker whimper in the back of his throat.
Tucker whimpered as Henry ground deeper into him, letting his tongue explore the cavern that he was sucked into. His arms wrapped around his shoulders, scratching in his attempts to find something to hold onto. Oh fuck, he’s got me full…. I’m not… I’m not afraid of this….not at all.

Henry felt Tucker grip his shoulders, taking it as his cue to very slowly move his hips back a few inches before thrusting into him, careful as he began a tentative pace. You probably still need to adjust…. They whimpered and moaned into each other's mouths, not wanting to break their hot kiss. Fuck… you're so warm… and tight….

Tucker was the first to pull back to breathe, tilting his head to the side to give Henry his neck as an open surface. I know you like to leave bruises…. “M-Mark me…” Please?

Henry looked over him with dark eyes, immediately going to mark his skin, softly kissing the flesh before finding a spot he liked, licking and sucking before moving on. You’re all mine… A few were dangerously close to being obvious and above to collar, but Henry didn't care, still steadily thrusting into Tucker and marking wherever he could reach. You sound wonderful.....

Tucker’s eyes were wide as the sensations built all over his body. “F-Fuck me, p-please Henry…..” I wanna have you fuck me, it feels really good now… but I want more…. He let out a soft whimper as he turned his head to give Henry more access to his neck, wanting to be marked.

Henry blushed at his heady voice, gripping his hips tighter as he picked up the pace, his forehead on Tucker’s shoulder, moaning quietly as Tucker’s own cries grew louder. Fuck, you sound so good… and you feel wonderful… “You're so warm…. you feel amazing…” Henry tried to keep marking Tucker, most of his focus on his hips, pounding into him. Fuck…

“O-Oh Henry…. y-you feel… oh shit !” Tucker instantly swore as Henry found his prostate, his eyes widening further as his back arched. Oh my god, it feels so good… “Oh my god… H-Henry, right there… feels so good… I’m gonna cum soon….!” Tucker could feel his coil already beginning to tighten, and heat pool in his stomach.

Henry felt Tucker scratching at his back, trying to grip his shoulders. Oh my god… He could feel himself getting close too, clutching him to his chest. “You feel so good… fuck. Tucker….. I- I'm….” He tried to hold off as long as he could, aiming for his prostate and letting out a breathy cry as his hips stuttered, still pounding into him deeply as he came. Oh fuck….
It wasn’t much longer before Tucker let out a strangled cry of pleasure, decorating their chests in white, his whole body relaxing as they stilled. His hands slowly came down to his sides, and his legs laid out flatly as he panted. Oh my god… that... that was my best orgasm as of yet... “Holy fuck, Henry...” That felt amazing!

Henry slowly pulled out of him and sat back on his haunches, looking over him. “...my god, you're beautiful...” He looked over his chest, immediately moving to lick up every drop of white on his chest. He soon crushed Tucker to his chest, kissing all over his neck. Fuck... you make me so happy... Henry was glowing, smiling widely.

Tucker let out a soft squeak as he was crushed to his chest, his eyes wide. “H-Henry... I-looser...” Don’t crush me, you can still hold onto me, but don’t crush me please... His eyes were still hazy as he stayed curled up to Henry even when his arms loosened. Much better...

Henry slowly had to let go of him, taking off the condom and throwing it away. He quickly tossed on his boxers and a shirt, kissing Tucker’s cheek when he protested. “I’ll be right back.” He quickly ran to the hall and snatched a washcloth from the closet, running it under hot water and cleaning his own chest quickly before going back to the bedroom and cleaning Tucker as well, wiping off his chest and, very gently, his length and further down around his entrance, wiping away the extra lube there. Better. He went to rinse it out, coming back and forgetting to lock the door in his fit to shed the clothes, sliding into bed with Tucker as soon as he could. He wrapped around him, enjoying the feeling of their bare skin pressed together, smiling softly. “....I love you, Tucker.... thank you so much for that...” It was so good...

Tucker’s eyes were full of adoration as he immediately curled up to Henry’s side, his head resting on Henry’s chest as their legs tangled. “I love you too....” Tucker’s voice was a little stronger, a happy smile on his face as he ran a finger over Henry’s abdomen, not noticing the multitudes of heavy bruises that were starting to form on his skin. Hmm... he’s comfortable...

Henry smiled at his voice, looking down to him, his eyes widening as he saw the large bruises on his neck. “Wow. I really marked you up... I didn't think I did it so much...” He ran a finger along the edge of one in a circle, nearly every bruise at least the size of a golf ball. .....damn, did I really do that much?

Tucker couldn’t help but purr as Henry ran a finger around a bruise on his neck. “Hmm.... feels nice...” I don’t care if you marked me up a lot, your hands feel really nice on my neck like that... Tucker was already starting to close his eyes to let his exhaustion take over.
Henry smiled as Tucker purred, shifting to turn off the light on the nightstand, the golden light going out and curling up to him. He pulled Tucker nearly on top of him, kissing his cheek softly before letting himself relax. *All mine.*

Tucker smiled, not minding that he was shifted on top, curling up to him and quickly falling asleep, not even caring that he’d slept in, honestly not even wanting to go to school on that Monday. *I’m tired, and I’m with Henry…*

It was early morning when the house began to wake up, James, Jake, and Lathe all rising early. Jake settled in to watch cartoons while James made him breakfast, Lathe feeding Percy and Andy. He sighed as neither Henry nor Tucker came down like usual for breakfast, giving the kids to James for the moment before going upstairs. *They can't lay down yet, they just ate. They're too young to do that right away.* He walked to Tucker’s room, listening for a moment to the quiet. After a moment he lightly knocked, his voice soft. “Boys? Are you coming down for breakfast?” Silence. Another knock, a bit louder. “Henry, Tucker? It’s a school day.” Still silence. *Of course…* He quietly opened the door, quickly glancing in to see it was safe. It was obvious their clothes were anywhere but the bed, though their bare shoulders was all that was visible, a pile of limbs on the bed. *That's adorable…. ...wait.* Lathe looked over Tucker’s shoulders, the huge bruises covering him. *That doesn't look right.* “Tucker, Henry?” He moved back behind the door when he finally heard them shift, his voice warm. “Don't worry, I'm not looking. Are you two going to go to school today?” ….you probably should. ….but I can't exactly stop you if you wanna go in late. “...and Tucker, put something on your lower half and come over here.” *I need to inspect those bruises because even if Henry really is just that possessive there's no way he actually did that…*

Tucker nodded and waited for Lathe to leave before he stood up, not realizing just how many bruises were all over him. He shifted to grab his boxers, moving towards the door. *Why does he need to see me?* He made sure Henry was hidden before opening the door and standing in front of Lathe, looking at his shocked face. *Huh?*

Lathe looked over his shoulders and neck, completely covered in huge bruises. “…there's no way that Henry did all that…” Lathe pulled out his phone, turning it around and showing Tucker what he looked like. *Oh my god.* Lathe let Tucker look at himself in shock as he inspected him, gingerly touching his neck where one outlier of a mark had bloomed to the size of a baseball. *Holy shit… why are you so bruised… .....there's a word for it, uh… Haemophilia…? But we would've noticed… unless it's mild enough… “I wouldn't panic, I think I know what's going on, but it's okay.” Don't freak out.*

Tucker looked at him in shock, lifting his hands. {Why am I so bruised? Henry didn’t do this…} *Please don’t think that Henry did it! Please! I want him to stay! I don’t want you to kick him out*
“It’s okay, it’s okay. This makes a bit of sense given how when you were cutting before it took awhile to stop the bleeding. It's called Haemophilia, and if you have it, it's mild. But it would explain why a small hickey would bruise so much.” Lathe very gently touched one, watching his expression twitch. “I think you're okay…. your blood just takes a bit longer to clot than normal. You're okay.” He looked between the two of them. “...now. Are you two going to classes, or would you rather stay home?” I'll allow you to skip this once....

Tucker looked a bit hopeful as Lathe spoke. {Can we stay home for today?} I don’t want to… I wanna stay with Henry and cuddle...

“I think I can allow it…” He smirked, ruffling Tucker’s hair. “Go ahead. I can make you two breakfast later in the day.” You need to eat sometime. Lathe left them alone, hearing the door shut and lock again. It's okay.

Henry reached for Tucker, pulling him into bed again when he got close enough. “...too many clothes…” He tugged at Tucker’s boxers and threw them aside, pulling them flush. “...mm…. better…” I like being able to feel all of you...

Tucker’s eyes widened as he was hastily stripped. He couldn’t help the blood that rushed to his face and to his dick. Oh shit... I'm horny again now...

Henry opened his eyes again when he felt Tucker hardening against him, lazily shifting to kiss at his neck. “Mm… you're warm…” He ran his hands down his chest, holding his hips. Mine...

Tucker squeaked as he felt Henry’s hands run over his body, feeling himself harden more. Oh fuck, please ... He whimpered, trying to grind himself against Henry, wanting that sweet friction. It felt so good, I want it so bad.

Henry chuckled quietly as Tucker moved against him, one hand moving to his nether and very slowly stroking him, kneeling between his legs as he lapped at his neck. ...fuck... I could get so used to this....
Tucker flushed as his hard length was grabbed. “H-Henry…” *Fuck I want more than just your hand, I want to have sex again, you felt really good inside of me…* He tilted his head to the side, allowing him to mark him more on his bruised skin.

Henry sighed quietly as he heard Tucker’s voice, smiling and kissing up his neck. “I could get used to this…. ...do you want all the way?” Henry pumped him with a firmer hand. “I’d love to….”

Tucker heard Henry’s lustful and husky voice, his eyes widening to the size of dinner plates. “P-Please?” His voice was weak as he let out a loud moan. *Oh fuck it feels good. I want more… he’ll do more right?* Tucker looked over Henry’s taut body, appreciating his strength. *It feels… it feels really good…*

Henry smiled, nipping his jaw. “Of course…” He shifted, picking up the tube and package from where they’d fallen onto the floor. He snapped open the tube of lube, his slicked hand going to his entrance again. He gently mouthed at his bruised neck as he slid two fingers into him, loose enough that it didn't hurt. *I want you…*

Tucker’s mouth fell open as he moaned out soft profanities, opening his legs up wider for Henry. “Oh Henry, fuck….” *Your fingers feel amazing working up and down my skin. “C-Can you h-hold me…. after?” I wanna cuddle after…. Even if it's because you're still inside of me…*

“Of course… why wouldn't I want to?” Henry slowly scissored him, very slowly easing a third finger inside. “Of course….” He murmured quiet promises into his shoulder, his fingers thrusting in and out of him.

Tucker relaxed at his words, appreciating that he was holding him in his arms as he did this. *This is… this is nice, I really like this… “Hmm Henry… hurry up…” I want more I want you …*

Henry chuckled, kissing his nose. “Eager, are we?” He smiled as Tucker just gave him an unapologetic look, kissing him softly as his fingers dove in deeply before leaving him, reaching for the condoms. He shifted a pillow under his hips, leaning back as he opened the condom. *You'll feel good so soon…. don't worry…*

Tucker looked at his eyes with with his own lust filled ones, his pupils blown and biting a corner of his lip to try and seduce Henry as much as he could. *I want you inside, I feel so empty… I want*
Henry smiled breathlessly at the look he was being given, slicking himself up and shifting to cover Tucker’s body with his own. “...my god, look at you...” He softly kissed down his neck. “Just spread open for me...” His length brushed his hole, his arms winding around him as he slowly pushed inside, cradling Tucker to his chest and arching his back. I want you to feel good...

Tucker let out an immediate cry of pleasure, feeling Henry sink down and fill him. “It feels... really good Henry...” Your dick is perfect, it fills me up, and it doesn't even hurt to be stretched...

Henry softly kissed his jaw, his voice a soft murmur. “You feel so wonderful... but you can't be too loud... it's okay...” Henry let Tucker grip him tightly as he began to thrust into him, hearing his whimpers in his ear. I've got you.

Tucker nodded, though he continued to struggle holding off his moans. Oh my god... it feels... it feels amazing! His hands gripped his back, trying to find something to hold onto as he was held close to Henry’s chest. Oh fuck it feels good...

Henry quietly moaned into his neck, his pace becoming more steady. “You feel so good... you're so warm... I love it...” Henry held him closer. “...I love you...” Fuck, I really think I do... and you trust me so much... enough to give me this... and it's amazing...

Tucker could feel his heart beating out of his chest, his eyes wide. He barely noticed as the blood began to rush from his nostril. Oh my god, it feels so good.

Henry looked over his face, stopping abruptly when blood fished from his nose. “Holy shit!” That's a lot of blood! Henry’s brain short circuited, reluctantly pulling out of him and quickly moving to snatch the box of tissues off of the desk, shoving a handful at Tucker. “I'm so sorry but your nose is really bleeding...” He looked really worried, making him pinch his nose with the tissues. Come on.

Tucker was confused as he swore and pulled out, upset he didn’t come back to him. “H-Huh?” He raised his hand to his nose, pulling it back to see the bright red. Huh? What the hell? Well I haven’t had one in a long time.... He pinched his nose, though knew there would be no stopping it as the first wad of tissues quickly became soaked and there was no sign of stopping. “Can you get my
pants?” *Fuck… Dad can help…*

Henry nodded, sadly throwing away his empty condom and helping Tucker with his pants. He went to get his own on as well, still half-hard and very horny. *Fuck…*

Tucker immediately grabbed more tissues, taking them with him as he moved to the door and then down the stairs. His face was white as he went right up to Lathe, his tissues filled with bright red. *Fuck…*

Lathe turned at the sound of footsteps, stunned as Tucker came up to him. “Oh shit…” Lathe brought Tucker over to the table, sitting him down and getting him more tissues. “There’s nothing we can do besides pinch and wait, Hun…” He looked up as Henry soon followed, cheeks pink and looking scared. *Shit.* “You’ll be okay, it’ll take a bit longer to clot, just stay calm.”

Tucker looked at him with tears in his eyes. “I-I haven’t had one…. in a long time…” Tucker panicked, starting to cry. *I didn’t want it to happen now! Why did it have to happen now!?*

...*oh my… it must've ruined whatever was going on…* “It's okay, you're fine… it has nothing to do with whatever you two were up to, I'd just say it was rather random… maybe you were due for one, I don't know. It'll take a bit to clot, but this certainly isn't going to happen every time.” *It won't. It's not medically a thing.* Lathe gently rubbed his back, moving a bit so that Henry could come and sit next to him, wrapping his arms around him and pulling him closer.

“Please don't cry, it's okay…” *It's okay… we have the rest of today to do whatever we want…*

Tucker struggled not to cry as Lathe rubbed his back and Henry held him. *Fuck… I'm tired… I want to sleep, my head hurts...* He whined as Lathe kept his nose pinched. *I wanna cuddle with Henry…*

Lathe made him keep his nose firmly pinched, swapping out tissues quickly after a few more minutes. “You'll be okay soon…” It was an agonizing seven minutes before Lathe gently dabbed at his nose, the bleeding stopped as Tucker very gently sniffled. “Be careful, okay? It'll bleed easy if you do anything to aggravate it. But you'll be fine.” He tossed out the bloody tissues, turning as he heard the floor creak.
Henry shifted out of his seat, scooping Tucker up into his arms. *Mine.* He cradled him to his chest, making his way upstairs with him. *I need you, still…*

Tucker smiled as he was picked up, holding onto him tightly. *I don’t want him to let go…* “C-Can we play video games after we cuddle?” Tucker sniffled, resting his head on Henry’s shoulder.

Henry nodded, setting him on his bed and going to lock the door again. *…the mood’s probably gone…* He settled in next to him, burying his face in his shoulder, looking morose. *I'm so happy that I have you… but fuck nosebleeds…*

Tucker pulled him down onto the bed, his arms wrapping around his waist. “Was I good?” *Was I any good for you? Even if it was only for a minute or two?*

Henry nodded, turning pink. “You really were… you… you wouldn’t be opposed to trying that again… would you?” *I still really want you…* He gasped as Tucker’s thigh ended up between his legs, a small sound escaping him as he hardened a bit against him, grinding onto him. *fuck… he’s moving with me…* The limb gently moving against him was a blessing, Henry trying not to hold onto him too tightly. *Fuck….*

Tucker looked down at him with a flushed face. “Do you wanna put it inside?” *I want you too… I really do…* “I want to feel you fill me up.” *I want it, I really want it…*

Henry didn’t waste any time in shifting over Tucker again, stripping them hastily. *I need you…* He ached as they were finally bare again, nearly shaking as he tore open another foil packet. Some more lube and he was all over him, rolling Tucker over and soon sliding into him in one smooth motion. *Fuck….*

Tucker’s eyes were wide as he was on his hands and knees with Henry at his back. His hands gripped the sheets below him as he lowered his body, spreading his legs a little wider and arching his back for Henry. *Fuck, he feels wonderful… and perfect.* He couldn’t help but moan as Henry shifted. *It feels wonderful.*

Henry’s body curved with Tucker’s, beginning to move in and out of him, thrusting deeply. *Feels*
so good... They both moaned as Henry thrusted particularly deeply, his hands roaming his front, taking his length in hand and lazily stroking him. I want you to feel good...

Tucker was a shaking and shuddering mess as he fucked himself back on each of Henry’s thrusts. “Oh Henry… f-fuck me there… please.” His voice was small, moaning into the sheets below him to try and stave off from screaming in pleasure. Oh fuck his hands feel amazing!

Henry’s toes dug into the sheets, fucking hard into Tucker and hearing his muffled cries. Holy fuck…. He could feel Tucker clenching around him, his own nether burning. Fuck.... “Tucker… I'm gonna cum…” It feels so good....

Tucker whimpered and nodded, feeling himself tighten around Henry. “C-Cum then….” I want it… I want you to be on cloud nine… He could feel the heat in his own gut beginning to wash over him, close to the edge but not quite.

Henry whimpered, burying his face in his shoulder. “Tucker… oh...” Henry quietly cried out into his shoulder as he pumped him quickly, still pounding him roughly as he came. Holy fuck...

Tucker’s whimpers and moans continued, getting closer and closer to getting thrown over the edge, his whole body tightening, his eyes closed as he wanted to release, the sensation in his gut overpowering. Oh fuck, it feels so good…. I’m gonna fucking cum.

Henry pulled out as he softened, overly sensitive. His hand immediately replaced his length in Tucker’s slick warmth, going for his prostate as he still pumped him. Cum… I want to hear you when you do...

Tucker couldn’t hold it any longer, finally coming undone. “Henry …” He let out a soft cry of his name, gripping the sheets as he came into Henry’s hand, a pleased look on his face. Fuck that felt amazing.

Henry carried him through his orgasm, his hand slipping from him as he went lax, coaxing him to lay down. He softly kissed all over his neck, his lips gentle. Gorgeous... “I'll be back, Tucker....” He managed to get in boxers and retrieve the same washcloth from the night before, hot and damp again to clean off his own hands before going to gently clean Tucker, wiping away the extra lube from his entrance. He softly kissed him, gently playing with his hair for a moment. “I’ll be back…”
He smiled as Tucker pouted, nipping his nose. “Promise.” He left when Tucker rolled his eyes, going to rinse out the cloth and hang it up. He was stunned to walk into the bathroom and see Levi there, leaning against the counter seemingly casually. *Fuck…* Henry was very aware that he was just in boxers, intimidated by the older man. …*I’m dead.*

“So. You and Tucker have any fun?” Levi gave Henry an even look, rolling his eyes when Henry looked ready to combust, faintly smirking. “Relax, it's fine. You're family.” His expression immediately switched to one of distaste. “But if you hurt him I will hurt you a hundred times worse. Got it?” *He deserves someone who will treat him right. You'd damn well better hope it’s you.*

Henry flushed, nodding. “Y-Yes… uh….. S-Sir….” *Fuck. Henry kept his head down, going to rinse out the cloth.* *Fuck…*

Eren finally meandered towards the bathroom as he stretched out from his festivities with Levi, his lower back aching as he wore only a pair of boxers. He heard the water running, stepping in to see Levi and Henry with his head down. “Awww— good morning…” Eren yawned as he stretched out before looking at him with dilated eyes, glancing towards the washcloth he was washing. “Take it you and Tucker had some fun, eh?

Henry didn't think he could turn a darker darker, glancing over to Eren as immediately proving the thought wrong. *Holy fuck… he's covered in bruises and hand marks… “U-Uhm….”* Henry didn't know what to say, simply stating pointedly at the cloth, wringing it out and putting it up to dry. *Dammit….*

“Oh they had fun, all right. He's doing his job, taking care of our little brother.” *At least nobody has to tell you how to take care of him… I appreciate that.*

“I take it Dad gave you condoms? And the spiel?” Eren smiled and ruffled Henry’s hair, pulling him in for a hug. “If you guys need anything…. fun… just ask us, and don’t be afraid to ask, and if he comes running to one of us crying… you better hope you’re dead before I find you.” Eren kissed his cheek before moving away to wrap his arms around Levi’s shoulders. *I want you to fuck me in the shower…. we haven’t done it in the shower yet… “Sarge….”* Eren’s voice was high pitched as he whined. *I wanna fuck.*

Henry felt weirdly warm when Eren hugged him, scarlet as his cheek was kissed. He watched Eren go to cling to Levi, scurrying out of the bathroom. “I'll let you be…” *I don't want to get in the*
middle of that… He went back into Tucker’s room, seeing the teen laying on the bed, looking morose. *Fuck*… Henry immediately shed his boxers and slid into bed next to him, pulling their nude bodies close under the covers. “Sorry- your brothers stopped me…” *I’m here now.* He softly kissed up his neck, nuzzling him. *Mine.*

Tucker immediately grabbed him and laid him down on the bed, curling up to his side and putting his head on his chest to listen to his heart beat. The position was comfortable and something he would always do when they napped together. *I want you to hold me, I want you to sleep with me…*

Henry held onto him, settling further into he bed. *I’ve got you.* He enjoyed the intimacy of it, falling asleep with Tucker on his chest. They dozed through the morning, Henry finally nudging Tucker around eleven. “Can we please go get something to eat?” *Please?*

Tucker shifted, looking up to Henry and nodding, shifting to grab his clothes from where his boxers had been ripped off. *Hmm… I can wear these still…* He got up to grab a shirt and pants from his closet, letting Henry watch his back. *He’s not gonna hurt me…*

Henry moved to pick up his own clothes, stopping Tucker wen he put on his shirt. “Here.” He helped him put on his own sweatshirt, smiling at the sight of him wearing it. “Much better.” He went to his backpack, snatching another one to wear. *I’m still cold though.* He wrapped him up in a hug when he was dressed, lifting him suddenly and carrying him out of the bedroom. *Mine.*

Tucker yelped as he was picked up, though he relaxed within a few seconds as he was carried downstairs. *He’s carrying me… I could get used to this… I could really get used to it…*

Henry set him down near the kitchen island, kissing his cheek. “What do you want to eat?” *I can make something… In here often enough, I know where things are*

*{Waffles.} Let’s see if he remembers sign language…* Tucker waited patiently as Henry stared at him. *Does he not remember anything Lathe taught him?*

Henry looked at him, thinking as he raised his hands. *{Okay, I’ll make waffles.}* He saw Tucker’s relief as he mouthed the correct word, going to get out the cookbook and quickly flipping to the bookmarked recipe, washing his hands and setting to work. *I’ll make food…*
Tucker smiled and looked back at him. *I know we’re trying to go to the same college… I wonder if we could get an apartment together… would Dad let us?* His brows furrowed as he thought about it. *It’s closer to Wichita… so we wouldn’t be able to commute….*

Henry only had to search for the proper things for a moment, getting out the bowls and utensils, and all the ingredients. It was a little while before he was heating up the waffle make, getting out some cut-up strawberries from the fridge and adding sugar to some in a bowl. By the time a waffle was set on Tucker’s plate the strawberries were syrupy, setting a waffle with strawberries and powdered sugar in front of the teen. He shyly smiled, handing him a knife and fork. *I hope you like it…*

Tucker smiled widely. *He remembered I like strawberries.* He smiled softly, looking down at the food in front of him. Tucker didn’t hesitate to pick up a fork and eat happily. *It tastes really good… just like Dad’s…*

Henry sighed in relief as Tucker happily ate, making himself a waffle and soon sitting to eat with him, glancing over to him. “Tucker, you have some syrup there…” He leaned over and kissed his cheek, licking up the drop of sweet red juice from him before going back to his waffle as if nothing happened. *I like that I'm allowed to do that now…*

Tucker’s whole face was red as he paused in his eating. *Did he just… holy shit, he just kissed me, and licked the syrup off my face…* His hands turned shaky as he struggled to comprehend what happened. *Oh fuck… I can’t….* He put his fork down before he dropped it, trying to calm himself down. *Why am I so worked up over a kiss?*

Henry looked over to him, worried when his hands shook. “Tucker?” He reached for him, taking gentle hold of his hands. “Are you okay? It's okay if you don't want me doing that….” *It's okay…*

Tucker shook his head, his face still flushed as he looked at his food. *I’m fine… I don’t know why I’m so embarrassed…* He took his shaking hands back, moving to grab his fork, which clinked against the plate as his hands shook. *Fuck, I wanna eat…*

Henry didn't know what to do, slowly shifting to wrap his arms around Tucker’s middle, resting his cheek on his shoulder. *It's okay.* He gently rubbed his stomach, trying to calm him. *It's okay. I'm right here. I'm not going to hurt you.*
Tucker let out a sharp yelp as Henry’s finger’s ran over his side, tickling him. Oh fuck! His eyes widened as he let instinct take over and shove Henry away, panic in his eyes as he got off the chair clutching his stomach region. He hadn’t even realized he did it until he noticed how far away he was from Henry. Oh shit… I freaked out again… fuck… Tucker looked down his whole body shaking from even more embarrassment. Fuck.

Henry didn’t know what to do, his expression shifting. Wait... you’re ticklish. “Did I tickle you?” He blushed as Tucker nodded shyly, chuckling and going to hug him. “Sorry…. I didn't mean to.” He could hear the very quiet shifting of floorboards behind them, looking to see Lathe leave them be as soon as Tucker hugged him back. Oh.... ...Tucker's okay... but your Dad got worried...

Tucker watched Lathe leave them be, thankful that Henry understood what he did. He shifted them back to their seats to sit down and continue eating. I wanna finish up eating...

Henry sat down again with him, going back to eating. He soon finished his huge waffle, going to rinse his plate and clean up the mess. Dad will- .....Mr. Quo... he’ll kill me if I leave a mess out...

Tucker brought up his plate once he was done and started to help. I wonder if Dad would let us? I have a bit of money saved up from my job, probably not enough for an apartment… but maybe...

Henry put away the dishes when they were dried, going to catch Tucker in a hug, his cheek on his shoulder. “...do you know what we’re doing in college?” I think about it a lot.... because I'll be relying on financial aid and stuff... I'm banking on scholarships or financial aid or god forbid student loans.... It's a big thing and I have to worry already...

Tucker looked over to him and shrugged. I have no idea, Dad said he’d pay for it... but does that include dorming? I’m not really sure...

“...okay… I'm just kinda worried.... because I have no fucking clue how I'm going to be paying for all of this... financial aid and scholarships don't cover dorm costs and there isn't a good university nearby that a commute to is feasible for… I just… I'm worried…” I don't know how I'll pull it off... I have to get a degree, I won't last if I don't....

Hmm… I’ll have to ask Dad one of these nights... {I get it, you’re worried, and you don’t want to have Kevin worry about it.}
“I don’t … he worries about enough, and even then we wouldn't have nearly enough even with everyone combined… and Greg is starting next year and that's something we’re already feeling…” There aren’t ever any snacks in the house anymore…. and Brett has been complaining because he’ll get the munchies and he won't have anything to eat… “I'm just really worried…” I don’t know how the fuck it's going to work...

Tucker nodded, shifting to hold onto Henry. “We’ll think of something.” His voice was rough and weak, leaning his head against his chest, listening to his heartbeat. We’ll think of something, I know we will.
Chapter 126: Move In

Levi let Mila and the dogs loose in the new home, looking over the newly painted walls, some of the furniture in the living room already in place. *We still need the bookshelf, the two end tables, the ottoman…. the curio cabinet too…* Levi went to get another box from their car, unpacking the new sets of kitchen utensils and pans. *Lots of new everything… I really like the plates and silverware we got…. He set them in a cabinet, pulling out one piece that was wrapped extra carefully in tissue paper. Levi unwrapped the old yellow mug, the sketches of trains all over it. Dad said we could have this… he wanted us to. He tucked it away on the shelf, smiling faintly. It looks nice there… He shut the cabinet door, looking around at the piles of non perishables still in bags around the kitchen. …it's *expensive* to furnish a house…. not just with furniture, but with all your basic ingredients, spices, food, towels, blankets…. light bulbs, foil, everything… ...it's insane. Levi looked down as Krampus nudged his foot, kneeling down and hugging the dog. “Hello.” He let him lick his cheek, leaning back after a minute. *He likes hugs, apparently. He's always so happy when Mila gives him hugs, and he begs everyone for them now… “You're not getting into trouble, are you?”* An innocent stare. *Yeah, right. “O-Kay.” I *completely* believe you.*

Eren carried in another box from their car and set it on the island where Levi was unpacking things. “You know we could’ve ordered food for dinner and gone shopping tomorrow?” *After we dropped Mila off at daycare…* He watched as Krampus looked up at him, curious. “You can get a hug if you're good….”

“I didn't want the first thing we ate in our new home to be takeout… and besides, as soon as we’re done unpacking the kitchen I'll get a roast in the oven….” He stood, going to hug Eren, kissing his cheek. “It sounds better to me than Chinese….” *Dad let us have a shit ton of recipes… which is good, because I've wanted to have lamb again for a while, and it's a special day…*

Eren rolled his eyes. “At least I married a good cook…. where’s Mila?” *Don't tell me you let her run off?* He pulled away from Levi, looking around the large living room for her, and towards the backyard. He sighed as he saw her outside with Maisie, a sigh of relief leaving him, Blake having joined them outside as well. *Well she’s got good dogs with her…*

“She has natural babysitters… and it’s fenced in, so she'll be okay. They're good dogs.” He smiled, kissing his neck. “And we’re almost there, but thank you.” *I'm glad I don't suck at cooking…*

“Yeah, But there’s a pool in the backyard and she doesn’t know how to swim….?” *That’s the part that I’m worried about, though Maisie is keeping her distracted pretty well.* He sighed and moved to go and grab yet another box from the car. *My god, how did we fit all this in the car!?*

“Okay, good point…” He and Eren moved to the backyard, opening the door. “Maisie? Mila?”
Levi went to catch Mila, grateful when Maisie started to guide Mila over. “We can play outside later, Honey. You can have fun inside.” You really should be supervised… Levi took off Mila’s shoes, letting her free inside, Blake tiredly ambling inside as well. Levi knelt down to give the dog a hug when he quietly whined, watching his tail slowly wag. You’re really getting old…

Eren sighed in relief when Mila was inside, grabbing another box, then going back to get the last and take it upstairs to their room. This one is our toys that we brought… and thank god we already put the beds together, I made sure that that was done first, that way we can unpack until we need to go to bed…

Levi donned an apron and got to work getting out the ingredients for lamb, getting it in the oven and setting the internal temperature of the meat thermometer. This thing has a probe so it’ll yell when the meat’s done… which is great… after how easy they made making dinner at home I demanded we get an oven that had one. Levi then set to stocking the pantry, organizing cans and jars, filling bins with potatoes, onions and garlic, and organizing the baking goods. He filled a ceramic jar with sugar and set it on the counter next to a butter cup. It's coming together… He set a pot of water on the stove to boil, preparing asparagus as well. Eren doesn't really like asparagus, but I kinda love it… and Mila likes it with a little lemon… Levi soon had peeled potato chunks boiling, fussing over the stove as Mila ran around. He turned and scooped her up the second she came into the kitchen, sweeping her back into the living room. “Daddy’s cooking, honey, just stay out here for now, okay? Play with the doggies.” He smiled as she looked over to Blake, sitting down and petting him. Good. He went back to the kitchen, working. The lamb had been in the oven two hours before it was finally done, Levi lifting it out and tenting it. Done. He hung up his apron, the mashed potatoes and asparagus done, a plate of stuffed mushrooms sitting under foil, extra lamb sauce in a small dish. “Mila?” Levi smiled as she ran to him, catching her and heaving her up. “Hey honey. Dinner’s ready.” Levi kissed her cheek, going to the stairs. “Eren?” He called upstairs, his eyes bright. I made dinner… He came upstairs when he didn't hear a reply, wandering into the bedroom. He sighed with a faint smile as he saw Eren curled up on top of the covers, still in his clothes with a box of clothes open beside him, a pile of shirts next to him. Oh… He took out his phone and took a picture, going to gently shake him awake. “Honey? Dinner’s ready. You can sleep again after you eat.” You’ll want to eat… it's a very nice dinner…

Eren blearily blinked as he shifted to sit up, rubbing at his eyes as he yawned. “M’kay….” I guess I can wake up to eat… it smells really nice… He looked over to Levi, a smile on his face as he leaned over to kiss him. “I love you…” I’m really happy…

Levi smiled, reaching up and softly kissing Eren for a long moment, nipping his nose. “Come on, before anything gets cold.” He held his hand as they went downstairs, setting Mila in her high chair, pulling out Eren’s chair for him. The food was already set out on the table, Levi reaching to fix a small plate for Mila. She can eat most of what’s out, and it's lot of vegetables… He cut up a piece of meat into very small pieces, tender enough for her to chew. I think you'll like it… you're not too picky…

Eren skirted around the table, looking around for the food bowls for the four dogs. He grabbed
their dog food, filling each bowl and calling for them to come and eat. They get to eat too. He smiled softly, shifting to sit down between the other two, making sure Mila ate. This is nice, with just the three of us, kinda lonely but... we’ll get used to it.

Levi sat down with them, glad they Mila nibbled a piece of mushroom and filling before giggling happily. She likes it, thank god... He and Eren both had wine glasses, sipping from it occasionally, the quiet feeling strange. ...we’ll get used to the quiet. And soon we’ll have foster kids to worry about... ...hopefully it won't be so quiet for too long.

Eren shifted as his phone started to go off, his brow furrowing as he ignored it the first time, before it went off once more. Who’s trying to call me? I don’t wanna go and get it, but it’s annoying.

Levi quirked an eyebrow. “You can get it... I wanna know who it is.” Who'd be calling you? Besides Dad or Mom...

Eren nodded going to walk upstairs and get his phone. He opened it up answering the call when he saw Jessie’s contact. “Hello?”

“Hi Eren! I’m not bothering anything am I?”

“No, you’re fine, Jessie, what’s wrong?” Why are you calling me?

“Oh nothing’s wrong... actually something good is happening.”

Eren’s eyes widened as he heard her. Is she.... “Are you....” Are you pregnant?

“Just finished the pregnancy test, and it came back positive...”

Eren’s eyes widened as he felt tears line in his eyes. “Do you mean....?” Please tell me it’s mine.

“In 8-9 months you’ll have another little one...”

Eren couldn’t believe the joy that he felt rush through his body. He thanked her profusely before...
racing down the stairs and moving right to Levi’s side and kissing him passionately, not caring that he made him put his utensils down. *That can wait.. I’m so happy*. 

Levi set his utensils down when Eren suddenly kissed him, letting him shift into his lap. He broke their kiss, breathless. “Wh-What was that for?” *Why’re you so happy?*

“You’re gonna be a father again.” Eren said, happily bouncing in his lap. He turned his head kissing up Levi’s jaw, happy tears running down his face as he waited for Levi to finally understand. *We’re gonna have another little kid!* 

Levi paused, smiling slowly when it clicked. “...Jessie’s....” He held onto Eren tightly when he nodded, going to kiss him deeply, cupping his jaw. *Oh my god...*

Eren didn’t hesitate, not caring that Mila could’ve very well been watching them. *I don’t care... I’m so fucking happy right now.*

Levi held Eren close, the two of them making out for a long moment before he broke their kiss, softly pecking his cheek. “We can celebrate some more later, love...” He smirked, gently shooing Eren from his lap. *Don’t worry. He gasped as he felt Eren firmly grasp him through his pants, still as Eren slowly moved his hand. “Eren… please, Mila’s right there...”...and ah kinda wanna finish dinner... “A-After dinner...” Please...*

Eren nodded, kissing Levi’s cheek before sitting down in his seat again. *I’m so happy, at least we don’t have much more unpacking to do... Thank god, we can break in our room.*

He looked up when Eren moved, seeing Mila staring at the with wide eyes. “Mila, your Daddy and your Mumma love each other very much....” He leaned over and kissed Eren’s cheek again, looking over her plate. “Do you like dinner, honey?” *Your plate is almost empty.*

Mila shifted and nodded, picking a few asparagus spears and lifting the pieces to her mouth. *I like dis...*

“That’s good. Do you want more?” *You’re probably still hungry.* Levi took another sip of wine, watching Mila make a face, trying to decide. *Are you hungry, or not? A big question.*

“More?” Mila asked quietly, putting her fork down and waiting for more. *Can I has more? I want*
more food. I is hungry…!

Levi smiled, taking her plate and cutting up more pieces of everything, setting it down for her again. A little more of everything. He sat down again, looking over Eren as he went back to eating. ...I wonder if you'll like what I got us for the secret room…. I hope you aren't freaked out too much by it… I'm planning on being careful introducing it to you, but I'm hoping you like it… you should... Levi soon set down an empty wine glass, his plate clear, feeling warm. I want you…….it is set up upstairs… I had it brought upstairs early today… and you haven't said a word about it, so I doubt you went in there and saw it… hm. Levi stood with his empty plate, going to rinse things and fill the dishwasher, storing leftovers. I'll be nice to future us and clean up...

Eren picked up his own finished plate and his glass of wine giving Levi his plate with a peck on the cheek. He leaned back against the counter, watching Mila eat. A smirk grew on his face as he reached down to grab at Levi's crotch again while Mila wasn’t looking, sipping from his wine in his other hand. I wanna get handsy with you before we do anything in our bedroom... I still need to put away the rest of the shirts and things.

Levi stopped when Eren’s hand gripped his crotch, letting out a slow breath. “...you bastard…” He muttered under his breath at him, trying to continue to work. Fuck...

Eren only chuckled, rubbing his hand against Levi’s large bulge. I want you to jump on me again like you did after you proposed to me... That night… that I would like to do again… I wonder if he would fuck me in the shower too? Eren hummed as he continued to fondle him, getting bold and unzipping Levi’s pants enough to reach into them.

Levi stopped what he was doing, grateful that the leftovers were already away when he put down the plate in the sink, shutting off the water. “Eren… let’s put Mila to bed, hm?” Levi looked over Eren with dark eyes, hunger in his orbs. I need you... I'd fuck you over the counter if Mila wasn’t there...

Eren’s smirk widened behind his wine glass. “She’s still eating, Levi… Let the girl eat.” He murmured, moving his hand to stroke his length inside of his pants. I want to see how long you can last with this temptation.

Levi gripped the edge of the sink, sighing deeply as he was stroked to full hardness. Oh fuck… Levi couldn't stand it, moving to drag Eren just out of sight, pushing him against a wall. “You're being very naughty, Eren…” Levi gasped when his length was squeezed, his head falling on his shoulder. Fuck...
“Hmm, am I being naughty? I thought I was being nice... But since I’m not being nice, I guess I’ll stop.” Eren squeezed his length one more time before he shifted away from him and went back to the kitchen to help Mila clean up, leaving Levi alone. “All done Mila?” He watched her nod, picking up her dishes, setting them in the sink and then picking her up to take her upstairs. *Wonder how long he’ll stay there?*

Levi needed a long minute to calm down, tucking himself in and going upstairs after Eren took Mila to their bedroom. He came in, seeing Eren setting a clean Mila in her crib, smiling when he kissed her head. He too went to give Mila a kiss, soon turning to Eren. “…I must admit… that was rather nice…” Levi pulled him flush, murmuring in his ear. “…perhaps you deserve a reward… ...would you maybe like to see how our our little bunny den is furnished?” *It's rather nice, I think…*

Eren’s eyes widened a bit. “Hmm… We need to put the rest of our clothes away first, okay?” He asked softly a small smile on his face as he tried to hide his slight fear. *You already furnished the room!? When! I don’t remember you even going up there! ..... I’m... I’m kinda scared.*

Levi nodded, kissing his cheek. “Don’t worry, I know you'll like it.” *I really hope so… I was careful when I picked it all out...* Levi helped Eren hang up the clothes that were strewn around, stowing in drawers the ones that didn’t require hanging up. Soon Mila’s clothes were all organized the way she’d want, Levi looking to Eren and pulling him flush, holding him. “…are you ready?” He murmured quietly. “We’ll go as slow as you want with things, remember that.”

“Y-Yeah… S-Slow though…” Eren nodded, shivering as Levi’s hand ran up and down his back. *Yeah… I can do this… I can be okay with this.*

Levi nodded, slowly pulling him with to the bookshelf, tipping the small statue forward until the bookcase very easily slid aside. He paused, letting Eren take in the scene. The hardwood floor was switched for a rich cream carpet, the walls painted warm scarlet with a soft yellow light overhead. In the center of the small room was a bed at hip height, plush and red, curving in a way that coaxed the legs apart and the head to tip back and relax. The metal stand wasn’t overly obvious, the bolts into the floor hidden by a piece of metal. A large chest, also at his height, was pushed against the far wall, padded and plush with a red top and black box. The top had it’s own curve, a bed on top of the storage. Levi didn't try to push Eren inside, holding onto him and waiting for him to take it in. *It's okay... you can go in when you think you can...*  

Eren peered in, surprised with the area’s warm feel to it. *Oh.... oh wow...* His curiosity spurred him to continue looking into the room. *What is this... It looks homey... Like you should live in this room... But that certainly doesn’t look like you should live with it...* Eren was curious, and slow as he approached the bed at hip height, looking it over. *You could fuck on this...*  

Levi let Eren wander in slowly, looking over him as he inspected the bed. “It's really rather
comfortable…” He reached for Eren’s waist, gently lifting him up and settling him on the small bed. His hips fell exactly in the dip of the bed, his legs naturally falling apart and dangling off the end at the knee. His back gently curved with the bed, his head on the small cushioned headrest.

“...how does it feel?” *It looks like a perfect fit…*

Eren looked at Levi as he was lifted with wide eyes, a small gasp leaving him as he sat back into the comfortable seat. *Oh wow… This is… This is really nice…* He blushed furiously as he noticed his legs spread and the space between them big enough for Levi to come right to his crotch. *Oh my god… It’s the perfect height.* He couldn’t help the instant spark of arousal that made his length jump in his pants. *Oh fuck… I think… I think I’d be okay with this…*

Levi looked over him, smirking when he saw his bulge grow. “You like it? I looked everywhere for something nice…” Levi stepped easily between where Eren’s legs were spread, the bed going out to Eren’s knees, a cutout letting him go right up to Eren’s hips. “It’s so perfect…” He gently ground their hips together, watching Eren’s head fall back. “It came with some other things too…. there are all kinds of straps and things to hold your arms and feet too… we won't use those right away…” Levi turned to make sure the door was shut behind them, a baby monitor sitting on one of the shelves on their side. *Just in case…* He turned back to Eren, easily bending over to make their chests flush, kissing up his neck. “I just want you to get familiar with it… because I'd hate to let something like this go to waste… especially if it makes you look like that without even trying …” *Legs spread, back beautifully arched, head back, hard… fuck, perfect.* Levi gently rested his hands on Eren’s thighs, teasing near his crotch.

Eren’s blush flourished all the way up his ears. *Oh my god…* He shifted, trying to grind back but realizing that it was difficult with his knees hanging off the edge. *Oh… he’s in control of me… I think… I think that could work…* Eren nodded hurriedly as he felt Levi’s hands on his thighs near his crotch. *I want you, and this bed would make it so easy …*

Levi smirked, softly kissing up his neck. “Good…” He let go of him, beginning to strip as he walked over to the shelving on their side, retrieving a bottle of lube and condoms. He was shirtless when he came back to Eren’s side, setting them down next to him and helping Eren sit up. He pulled his shirt up and over his head, tossing it aside and going to hold onto him, sucking marks onto his neck. *I’ll be gentle this first time… I want you to like this.*

Eren watched, his eyes following Levi’s movement as he stripped his shirt off and then came back with lube and condoms. He smiled as Levi helped with his shirt, feeling his arms wrap around his waist and hold him up. Soft sighs left him as Levi made marks on his skin, his legs spreading to the very edge of the leg rests. *Fuck his mouth feels really good, I’m so hard and he’s barely touched me…* “Hmm, Levi…” *You can do more…*

Levi left a dark mark on his neck, gently easing him back down and reaching for his pants. He unbuttoned them, slipping them off and dropping them on the floor. He looked over Eren’s naked
body, his length flushed on his stomach. “Beautiful…” Levi dipped down, sucking lightly on Eren’s tip, teasingly licking his slit. *I love this.*

Eren’s eyes widened and he watched with surprise as Levi licked his tip and sucked on it. “Oh fuck…. Levi…” *Goddamit, it feels really fucking good, and I can't tell if it’s because I’m extra aroused or not…* He felt his length twitch from just the thought of Levi fucking him on this bed of sorts. *I want it, I wanna get fucked…*

Levi smirked as he felt him twitch, coming off of him. “Someone’s excited…” He moved to shed his own jeans, looking over his body. *God, I'm really glad I decided to risk it and get this…* Levi kicked his jeans and boxers away, reaching for the lube. He soon had a slick finger circling his hole, easily able with the new space to take his length into his mouth as he slid a finger into his heat. *I hope this feels good…*

Eren’s head rolled back along with his eyes as he felt Levi’s finger enter him. *Shit, there was basically no resistance… I’m getting looser… fuck.* He let his back arch and follow the curve of the bed, watching Levi’s motions carefully, a shudder running through him as he felt warm heat encase his length. *Oh fuck me, he’s gonna want me to cum a lot…*

Levi loosened Eren, able to fit in a second finger with barely any effort. “You’re beautiful…” Levi nipped at his base, watching precum leak from his slit. “Do I need to get out a cock ring for you?” *I can't have you cumming so soon….*

Eren’s eyes widened, watching Levi look up at him with dark eyes. “I-I’d r-rather not…..” *Not right now…. this is our first time on this… I don't want to use any toys…* His eyes were pleading with him silent, a tinge of fear that he would put it on him anyways.

Levi nodded, kissing his tip. “Of course….” Levi scissored him slowly, gently sucking on his tip. *You taste wonderful.*

Eren shifted a bit, slowly getting more comfortable with his lower legs hanging off of the edge. *It still kinda feels weird…* He watched with dark eyes as Levi sucked his tip and scissored his hole, feeling a shudder run up his spine as his fingers brushed near his prostate. *Fuck… That felt good…*

Levi teased him as he was stretched, a third finger slowly entering him. He rubbed around his prostate in circles, smirking as Eren moaned breathily. *You sound wonderful…*
Eren let out breathy moans and small curses as he felt Levi’s fingers circle around his prostate, but not directly touch it. *Oh fuck… Hurry up Levi… I want you to fuck me, shit… I’m so hard.* “Levi… I wanna get fucked…” *I really want it…*

Levi chuckled softly, kissing his tip. “I know…” He opened him a bit further, finally slipping his hand from his warmth. He reached for a condom and the lube, soon gripping his hips and letting his tip brush his entrance. “What was it you wanted again, Eren? You’ll have to tell me…” *I want to hear you say it…*

Eren’s eyes were full of lust as he looked at Levi. “Fuck me… please, I want your hard cock…” *I want it now…*

Levi gave him a dark look, sinking into him in one motion. *Fuck, you’re tight… and so warm…* “Oh fuck…” Levi moaned softly, leaning down to kiss and lick at Eren’s neck as he adjusted. *I love it…*

Eren let out a soft cry as Levi sheathed himself in one go. *Oh my god… It… it feels so fucking good.* “F-Fuck me, Levi… please…” *I want it…* His voice was high as he shifted around, trying to get Levi as deep as possible.

Levi gripped his hips, gently grinding further into him. “Fuck… Eren…” Levi looked over him. “You want it hard?” He watched Eren fervently nod, snapping his hips into him once and listening to him cry out. “Like that?” *I want you to really beg for it…*

“Yes, please, Sarge… I want you to fuck me… Fuck me really good, I’ve been a bad Private.” *Please tell me that’ll get me what I want… I want you to really go at me, please.*

Levi smirked, his eyes dark. “I won't stand for any insubordination, Private…” Levi held his knees, lifting them up and wider apart. He snapped forward into Eren’s heat, beginning a brutal pace. *I'll make sure you can't stand right for a week…*

Eren’s eyes widened as he felt Levi thrust into him with brutal force, a loud moan leaving him. His back arched more, his head against the headrest as his toes curled instantly. “Oh fuck, Sarge! Fuck me there!” Eren’s shout was loud as he felt Levi ran him right on those sweet bundle of nerves, making him see stars. *Holy shit! It feels… oh my god…*

*Thank god this little room is soundproof…* Levi thrusted harder into him, holding him apart as he
fucked into him. “Don't you dare cum, Private. Not until I say.” Levi looked over him, his length flushed and bouncing on his stomach. *God… that's hot…*

Eren’s cries grew in volume as he struggled to hold off the building tension in his lower abdomen. The sensation of pleasure running up his spine and spreading throughout his entire being. “Sarge…” He whined as he looked at him with pleading eyes. “I wanna cum… I really wanna cum.”

“Hmm…” Levi pretended to ponder it, setting down one leg and wrapping his hand around Eren’s length, squeezing his base. “Do you really?” He chuckled darkly as Eren whimpered, going to quickly stroke him, knowing he wasn’t far behind. “Then cum…”

Eren’s eyes widened as he was stroked quickly, letting out moan after moan in quick succession. *Oh my god… It feels so good… “F-Fuck… Levi!”* He cried out as his whole body clenched, his orgasm taking over and making his body shake. *Holy shit, my ass is gonna hurt a lot… Shit… But it felt so good, it was worth it.*

Levi moaned as Eren clenched around him, gasping as he came inside of him. “Oh fuck…” He was breathless as he fucked Eren through their orgasms, letting down his leg and bending over to kiss all over Eren’s jaw and cheeks, his hands running over him, his voice full of quiet praise. *That was wonderful…*

Eren shifted a bit, letting his back rest against the bed, a soft sigh leaving him as he felt Levi’s hands all over him and rubbing at his muscles. “That felt great…” *Fuck I’m tired…* He felt exhaustion hit him like truck, his chest heaving. “Fuck Levi, can we take a bath?” *Please, I wanna get clean… and use the big tub.*

“Of course… you deserve a nice hot bath…” Levi pulled out of him, picking him up and opening the door. He gently set him on the bed, tugging a sheet over him while he went to start their bath and toss out his condom. *You’re probably exhausted…* Levi came back to get him, cradling him to his chest and bringing him to the bathroom. He gently set him in the tub, slipping in with him and letting the jets turn on low. *This'll feel nice…*

Eren groaned as he felt the warmth incase him, leaning back into Levi’s arms. “Hmm… That felt really, really good… I-I think I’m going to enjoy that room Levi.” His voice was soft as he rested his head back on Levi’s shoulder, closing his eyes as he relaxed. *I wonder if he will massage me…*

Levi smiled softly, his arms wrapping around him. “Do you feel okay? Does anything hurt?” *I can help however I can…*
“Hmm… Can you rub my back? Near my hips?” *I know it’s gonna be sore for a while, but I might as well be prepared for it.*

Levi nodded, going to gently kiss Eren’s neck as he went for his hips, his thumbs carefully digging into the meat of his hips, hearing Eren groan. *Hopefully you won't be out of commission tomorrow…*

Eren let Levi dig his thumbs into his supple flesh, trying to be quiet, as not to wake up Mila. “Shit, I’m gonna have bruises for a week, that table is both good and bad for my health.” He chuckled, looking back at him as he sighed when Levi rubbed a particular knot out of his lower back. *That feels much better.*

Levi carefully worked out the knots of tension in his muscles, letting Eren rest his head back on his shoulder as he worked. “Feeling better?” He chuckled when he simply heard a soft contented sigh, his hands leaving his hips when Eren turned boneless in his arms. He reached for the bottles of shampoo that had already been set out, going to lather Eren’s hair, his fingers playing with the hair at the nape of his neck, keeping the bubbles out of his eyes.

Eren let out repeated soft sighs as he relaxed, Levi taking care of him. “This is… this is nice…” He mumbled tiredly, letting Levi do as he pleased at the moment. *Shit, my back is starting to hurt again… I’m getting too old to do this shit…*

Levi washed Eren, rinsing him of the soap and conditioning his hair as well. He let him relax against his chest as he washed himself as well, dunking his head under the water to rinse. *Good.* He smiled as he saw Eren’s sleepy expression, helping him out of the tub and drying him off, soon settling him into bed and slipping in next to him. *You must be exhausted…*

Eren immediately snuggled up to his side a happy smile on his face as he draped himself over Levi’s pale skin. “Hmm… mine.” He muttered possessively, a sweet smile on his face.

Levi pulled him flush, enjoying the warmth. “Mm, you're warm.” Levi enjoyed the feeling of their bare skin completely flush, nuzzling into his shoulder. *I like this.* He felt heavy, drifting to sleep after a short while. *Mine…*
Chapter 127: A Death in the Family

Chapter Summary

I'm only kinda sorry

~Duke

The days went on, the house soon filling with their things, online shopping carts still full of things they were pondering getting. Levi was waiting around with other EMTs later, bored to death. *There hasn't been anything for a few hours... and that's good because it means nobody's been mutilated lately, but I'm bored as hell...* He jumped as his phone rang, immediately picking up. “Eren?”

What's up?

Eren was completely hysterical on the other line, tears and shouts barely made understandable. *THERE’S BLOOD EVERYWHERE AND HE’S NOT MOVING!!!*

Levi immediately stood, suddenly scared. “Eren, what's wrong? Please, calm down a little and tell me, please!” *Oh shit... what happened??*

“Come home....” *There’s so much fucking blood! He stopped moving. “Nononononono! BLAKE!!!”*

Levi was stunned as Eren shouted, sounding frantic. “I'm coming home, Eren, I'm coming home. I'll be there soon, please, just stay calm!” *Fuck.... it's time...* Levi stowed his phone away and looked to the others with him, all of them nodding to him. ...*fuck...* He immediately left, running back to his car. *I have to get home...* He jumped into his car, going as fast as he could to get home. He was shocked to see Eren in the street, holding Blake, another car stopped nearby. He parking in their cul de sac and jumped out, running to their side. “Eren, is he....” *Is he still alive?*

Eren looked up with tears in his eyes as a bloody hand continued to groom through Blake’s fur. He shook his head, sobbing even more as the fact became obviously clear. *No, he’s not alive anymore... my dog was killed... He’s not alive anymore...*

Levi felt his chest squeeze, reaching to very gently pet the dog. “...we love you, Blake...” He looked up as Eren shook with sobs, reaching for his phone. *You need Dad...* He called him, glad when he quickly picked up. “Dad? Blake, uhm... he got hit by a car... we need you here... we’re just outside the new house.... can you please come?”
“...oh my god... I'll be right there, don't worry.”

Levi hung up, going to gently cup Eren’s cheek with his other hand. “It's okay, Eren… was he still alive when you found him?” I really hope he at least died in your arms… if he had to… it would be better to be with someone you love…

Eren could only nod as he cried heavily, trying to pick Blake up and get him out of the street, the pool of blood under Blake finally visible. He... The car didn’t even stop for him… he was trailing along from our walk, and they just ran him over… He made such a horrific noise...

Levi looked up as he heard a sound, seeing the car that had pulled over start to drive away. “The fuck?!” He immediately picked up his phone, quickly moving to take pictures, getting the license plate. What the fuck. He didn’t have the energy to go after them, going to help Eren move Blake from the street onto the grass. He gently petted him, hugging Eren with his other arm as the man broke down. You loved Blake… you’ve had him for as long as Dad’s been your Dad… it’s been a very long time… Levi tried to keep him calm, glad when Lathe suddenly came around the corner on his motorcycle, quickly parking and tearing off his helmet.

Lathe looked crushed when he saw the pool of blood in the street, going over to where Eren was sobbing and kneeling next to him, hugging him and burying a hand in his hair. “Eren, it’s okay, I’m here… I’m so, so sorry…” ....Blake was so good for you… you loved him, and he loved you too.

Eren was inconsolable, holding onto Lathe, not caring that his hands were covered in blood, and leaving the red evidence all over them. He’s… he’s… he’s gone ... and he won’t come back. Why won’t he come back!? Eren continued to cry as he soon shifted to lay down right beside Blake, curling up to the stiff body and clutching him close, tears streaming down his face. “Blake… Blake come back buddy…. come back to me… please ….”

Lathe felt his face burn as he started to cry, watching Eren curling up to Blake, sniffling. “Eren…” Lathe gently carded a hand through Eren’s hair, one hand gently reaching to pet behind one of Blake’s ears, still soft and floppy, ...fuck... “...I’m so sorry Eren…” Lathe looked over them, his voice quiet. “...I miss him too...” ...at least he got a hug the last time I saw him...

“Blake… Blake come back… please… wake up…. wake up Blake…” please! I need you back! Eren’s fingers were starting to spasm, as he struggled to pet Blake’s stiffening body. Mikhail immediately coming close to them, but not daring to take over Blake’s spot next to Eren.
Lathe laid down next to him, hugging Eren from behind. “I'm so sorry, Eren… he's been there for you for so long… he's done so many good things for you… you've had him almost as long as I've had you as my son… ...he's had a good life. We loved him as much as we could while we could. I'm sure that he was happy to at least have you here with him when he died. If he remembers anything wherever he is, I'm sure it'll be how much you loved him, and how much he loved you.”

*He always cared about you… at some point it stopped just being his job and started being his nature…*

Eren shook his head. “He’s coming back! He needs to come back! I want Blake back… I want him back… he’s coming back…. come on Blake… wake up.” Eren began crying horribly as he tried to shake Blake’s stiff body to life. *He needs to!*

Lathe reached for his hands, he and Levi going to gently bury his hands in his fur, gentle. “I'm so sorry, honey…. I'm so, so sorry…” *He's not coming back…* Lathe gently pet Blake with him, curling up with him. “I'm so sorry…” *It'll be okay… it hurts so much right now and it will for a while… but you'll be okay soon…*

Eren shook his head extensively. “No!! Blake! Come back!” He shouted shaking Blake’s still body, his fingers continuing to lock fully and his arms beginning to spasm as he started to freak out. *No! I want Blake!*

Lathe held onto Eren tightly, keeping him still as his panic attack began. “Honey, please, I'm so sorry, but Blake is gone… he loved you while he could, but it was time for him to go. As terribly as that time came, it had to. He's up in heaven now, or wherever it is that good dogs go, and he's happy. It's okay to be sad, and it's okay to be angry, but he can't come back. But wherever he is, he'll be waiting for you…. it'll be a long time, but he'll be waiting. We have so many pictures and happy memories. But he was old and he slept so much…. it was time.” *He was going to any day…. it had been getting hard to ignore that.*

Eren shook his head, trying to fight off Lathe weakly. “No! Blake! I want Blake!” *I want him! I want him to wake up! I want him to be alive, and to cuddle! I don’t want him to go.* Eren’s screams and cries were already starting to attract neighbors out of their houses to investigate. *I want Blake!*

Lathe tried to calm Eren down, shifting him a bit closer to Blake and letting him bury his nose in his clean fur, the scent of Blake seeming to calm him down somewhat. Lathe gently pet his hair, his voice gentle. “…he loves you, Eren. Wherever he is, he still loves you… he loves you so much… it'll take a long, long time, but sometime you'll be able to be with him again.” ….*It's a nice thought… ...I kinda hope so.*

Eren took awhile but soon enough his cries quieted, though his panic attack was still in full swing, his fingers locked in odd positions and his whole body shaking. *I want him back… I want him back.*
He didn’t realize he was moved until Levi was holding him and carrying him towards the house, Lathe picking up Blake and heading towards the backyard with him. *I want Blake… where’s…. where’s Dad taking him…*

Lathe gently picked up Blake, bringing him to the backyard through the gate and gently setting him on the grass near the back of their yard. *…here?* He turned, seeing Levi helping Eren walk into the backyard. The man sniffled, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve. “…..is here okay?” *I can get a shovel…* Lathe knelt next to the dog, gently petting him. *…I miss you already…*

Eren immediately nodded, moving to sit down right by Blake and pet him. “Y-Yeah…” *Yeah, it’s okay, we’re not giving this house up… I don’t care what you say Levi… even if it's destroyed in a tornado… we’re coming back to get him….*

Lathe nodded, standing. “I can go home and get a trench shovel… make something to hold him real quick…. if you want….” *We have wooden board… I can make him something…*

Eren immediately nodded, shifting to put Blake’s head in his lap and let his hands run through Blake’s fur as he started to cry all over again. *I want him to come back… but he’s not… he’s gone…*

Lathe nodded, gently hugging Eren. “…I’ll be back soon with something nice for him…” Lathe kissed his cheek, looking up as Levi knelt next to Eren, hugging him and leaning his cheek on his shoulder. He could see how glassy his eyes were, his expression morose. Lathe kissed his cheek too, giving him a small smile before standing and leaving them for the time being. *I want this to be nice for him…* Lathe looked over what he had created nearly two hours later, a wooden coffin with hinges, simple with a flat top. *it's too plain…* He reached for a cup on the wall and plucked out a sharpie, starting to doodle. Blake’s name in neat letters, surrounded by little accents and flowers. *………* Lathe went inside, going upstairs to the sewing room. He rifled through a small stack of quilts, pulling one out covered in red, brown, and gold patterns. *this one…* He folded it up, bringing it downstairs and setting it inside the wooden box. He carried it to his car along with a shovel, going back to get a different shirt, a black button-up. He stopped on the way back to their house, arriving with the box, flowers piled on top, and a small sapling. He set the box down before getting the small tree, picking up the shovel. He was silent as he started to dig, Levi and Eren still there, laying down with Blake. It took a long time, though a large pile of dirt grew, finally big enough and deep enough for the box. He set the shovel down, looking to Levi and Eren, the brunette still breathing in Blake’s scent. “Eren… honey…” He knelt down with them, one hand resting on Blake’s head. *It's time to say goodbye…*

Eren shook his head, holding onto Blake tighter. “I don’t wanna let go of him…. why can’t he be okay?” *Why? Why can’t he be with me still. And curl up next to me on the couch…. and die of old
“...I'm sorry... but sometimes bad things happen to good people... and good dogs... It would have been so much better for him to go without any pain and just fall asleep warm and surrounded by family... but if something like this was going to happen... at least he had somewhere there to be with him when he was hurting. All we can do now is say goodbye, tell them how much we love them, and then give him a place to rest. It's all we can do for him now. But we've always told him how much we loved him when he was still alive... we didn't let him forget. I'm sure he'll remember that.” Somewhere, he knows he's loved. Lathe leaned down to kiss Blake’s head, stopping when Levi slowly shifted. The noirette gently played with Blake’s ear, giving his head a kiss. ...we’ll all miss you... Lathe moved to get the quilt, gently wrapping Blake up and lifting him into his coffin. They all gave him one last pet before shutting the lid, the clasps on it shutting very tightly. They all very gently lowered it into the hole, all of them crumbling a handful of dirt over the top before Lathe picked up the shovel again, filling it in in somber silence as Eren sobbed in Levi’s arms. He planted the sapling just at the head of his grave, patting down the dirt and setting the stone down. The flowers rested over the top of the dirt patch, all three of them sitting in a quiet pile for a while, holding each other. I'm so sorry....

Eren was quiet as he curled into Levi’s arms. “Can we... can we go see Charlie?” I wanna lay down on Charlie... and I wanna calm down... I wanna lay down with Charlie... and cry myself to sleep... Eren’s head pounded from all the crying he’d done for the past few hours. I miss him already...

Levi nodded, slowly standing with him. “Okay...” You always feel better when you're with Charlie... it helps when you're upset... Levi looked over as Lathe picked up the shovel, looking worn. ...he looks so much older than we is... “...thanks, Dad...” You did a lot for him...

Lathe gave him a tired smile. “...He deserved something nice.” He did... he was a very good companion for Eren for a very long time... Lathe let them lock the door and walked with them to the front, putting the shovel in the back as Levi settled Eren into the passenger’s seat of their car. It was a quiet drive, Lathe not even bothering to turn the radio on as Levi and Eren followed in their car. ......he's gone. Lathe parked, going to give Eren and Levi a soft kiss before they went to the back. “Stay for dinner tonight.” I'll make something homey....

Eren nodded, clinging to Levi to be able to walk, his legs shaky. Fuck, my legs feel like jello... and I'm probably gonna fall asleep on top of Charlie... He was thankful that Levi could help him along, and help him up onto Charlie’s back when they got to the stable, Mikhail having followed them there, and currently sitting by Levi’s feet. Eren sighed as the warmth from Charlie’s body flooded into his front, a soft sigh leaving him as fresh tears formed once more. Fuck... I miss him...

Charlie let Eren lay down on his back, turning his head and looking back to him, whimpering quietly. You're crying... He looked down to Mikhail, he and the dog sharing a look. I'll let him be
sad… he needs to be upset and cry sometimes… being happy all the time can't be done…

Levi gently patted Charlie’s nose, letting him out into the yard. You can meander around… Eren just needs to be with you right now. He looked over at Dawnstar, the horse straining their neck for him. Hm? He came over, chuckling quietly as they thrust their head into his chest. “Okay, okay.” He gave in and gave Dawnstar pets, his mind slowly wandering. ….I'm really going to miss him.

Eren was woken by a shrill cry, panic setting in immediately as he snapped his eyes open. Mila! He looked up to see Levi carrying him, and the familiar surroundings of Lathe’s house. Oh, we’re at Dad’s… wait! He looked up as Ieva walked up to them with a crying Andy in her arms. Oh… it’s just Andy… He heaved a sigh in relief, looking back to Levi. “I-I think I can walk now…”

Levi nodded, setting him carefully down and letting him lean on him as they walked. “Dad made burger bombs…” It's been a long time since we had them… “And pigs in blankets, potato wedges, mac n’ cheese…” Comfort food…

Eren smiled softly as he settled against Levi’s side, slowly making it to the long table and seeing the expanse of comfort food. “Thanks Dad.” His voice weak and rough as he rubbed at his red and puffy eyes. I really appreciate this…

Lathe smiled to him, handing them plates. “Of course… do you want tea, or something else?” I'll get you things…

“Tea would be great… please and thank you.” Eren’s voice was soft as he took his plate, noticing Ieva come back with Andy suckling on her and no one seeming to really care. Hmm, at least she’s holding him now…

Lathe nodded, looking to Levi and watching him nod as well. He went to get them mugs of tea, setting them down as James meandered in with Percy. He chuckled as he and Ieva swapped kids, Ieva feeding her daughter. I'm just glad that she really cares so much about them… Lathe waited for Henry, Tucker and Jake to come downstairs, getting them plates before sitting down himself with a plate and coffee. It all looks tasty… I just wanted you to have something familiar to eat…

Eren smiled as everyone came down to eat, happy that no one asked about the memory too fresh in his mind. They’ll notice eventually, especially with Mikhail sitting right next to my chair, his head in my lap. He took the first bite a small groan leaving him as the taste exploded in his mouth for his burger bomb. It tastes so good…
Levi filled his plate, starting to eat. He absently pet Mikhail with one hand, the table quiet save the sounds of eating. This is nice… Dad hasn't made burger bombs in a long time… Levi sipped from his tea after a moment, feeling strangely warm. …I'm glad Dad made this…

Eren looked down a bit, petting Mikhail between bites and even giving him some potato wedges which he cut into small pieces and let cool down. You've been a good boy…. I guess it’s your turn to try and get Maisie now… hmm… maybe I can get another Blake after you can’t help anymore either… He smiled softly, eating his fill and then some. Dad made a lot, I’m glad…

Nene sleepily ambled up to the table, curling around Tucker’s foot- the one that Henry’s hadn’t hooked around- and quietly whined, looking up to him. Feed me? It smells tasty…

Tucker looked down, a weak smile on his face. Oh fuck… she knows I can’t help but give in. He sighed, cutting up a potato wedge and letting Nene eat it from his fingers. He tried to go back to his food, though he ended up sneaking her more and more pieces.

Nene happily ate the pieces she was given, enjoying the pets from him before going to bug Henry, her head in his lap, quiet as she looked up at him. He likes me… he'll give me food. She happily ate the potato she was given from him, accepting their pets before going to curl up. Today is a good day.

Eren soon enough stood to help with the plates and make sure that Mila did in fact eat at least a whole burger bomb and some wedges. She’s gotta stay strong… hmm, I wonder if we’ll do fruit smoothies for dessert today? Since we kinda pigged out at dinner.

Lathe did indeed get out fruits, promptly followed by juice and ice cream. These things aren't exactly healthy… but they're tasty. We can afford a sugary dessert once in awhile. He cut up fruit when the kids asked for them, making them smoothies. They're pretty much milkshakes, but that's okay. Normally we don't use ice cream… but today it's okay.

Eren smiled as Lathe pulled out the ice cream. “Dad, can you make Mila’s with yogurt?” Not ice cream, she can’t have too much sugar in her system yet… strawberry and juices are okay. But I don’t want her having ice cream yet. He picked her up, taking her to the bathroom to wash her up. Even though we didn’t have messy food… It’s all over you.

Lathe smiled, nodding. “Of course.” Lathe made hers with plenty of milk and yogurt, giving Eren a cup of her dessert when he came back. It's in a sippy cup so it shouldn't spill everywhere…. key word shouldn't.
Eren thanked him quietly as he took the cup, settling Mila in her high chair again and giving her the sippy cup which she quickly took. At least she’ll drink it all. He worked around Lathe, helping to get the ingredients prepped for each smoothie, a smile on his face as Tucker signed the ingredients to him. He’s getting much better with his sign language.

Henry thanked them quietly when he got his smoothie, looking to Tucker and reading his hands. He tapped his arm, signing a bit unsurely. {What does that last sign mean?} He repeated it, looking confused. It's probably a fruit I don't know.

Tucker looked at him for a moment before pointing towards the dragonfruit that Eren picked up. I should probably sign it to him again. {Dragonfruit.} Did you get it this time?

Henry repeated it slowly. “Dragonfruit?” He watched him nod, taking a moment and signing it twice more. ...oh. Okay. {Thanks.} I need to get used to all these words... He picked up his cup again, sipping from it. Tasty.

Tucker smiled and kissed his cheek before taking his drink from Eren and signing a quick thank you. Hmm... I wonder if he’ll go downstairs and watch Netflix with me...

Henry blushed as his cheek was kissed, letting Tucker tug him along. “Games or Netflix?” He let him spell out the word, smiling. “Okay.” He caught him by the middle, walking with him. Mine.

Tucker dragged Henry down to the basement, moving to get Netflix all set up to watch a movie. Hmm... should we watch a horror film? Or an action movie?

Henry immediately shook his head when he hovered over a horror film, quickly signing to him. {Please- anything that isn't horror.} No thank you. I just wanna cuddle and watch cars explode or whatever.

Tucker nodded and shifted the mouse back over to action, turning on Hot Fuzz and leaning to curl into Henry’s side, sucking on his straw. I have a milkshake and a movie... and Henry...

Henry shifted, pulling Tucker into his lap and kissing his cheek before looking back to the screen. This is nice... ....it's warm, I have a milkshake, dinner was great... I have a family now... a less dysfunctional one at least... and I have you. Henry smiled, keeping Tucker close. Mine.
Eren helped to make Lathe’s, looking to Levi. “What do you want in yours, Sarge?” He smirked at the nickname, knowing it would get him riled up. Who knows, maybe we’ll have Mila stay here the night… I mean, Day care is right across the street for her.

Levi looked over him, quirking an eyebrow and faintly smirking. Of course… “Strawberries and peach, Private.” Two can play at that game.

Eren smirked as he got everything together, fixing up his milkshake. Oh my god… I could so sing that song… fuck I have it stuck in my head now. My milkshake brings all the boys to my yard, and they’re like, it’s better than yours, damn right, it’s better than yours…. Eren’s face instantly flushed at the thought. Oh fuck.

“Something you wanna say, Private?” Levi chuckled quietly as Eren completely flushed, watching him. You’ve got something in your head...

“Sarge… Do you remember what track 8 of Disc two of ‘Covering It Up’ was?” I don’t know if you remember because it was so long ago… but you never know… you might remember...

Levi quirked an eyebrow at the question. …what the hell? What song could he be thinking of… …..wow, I’m dumb. “Milkshake?” There's no way he's not thinking of that one...

Eren couldn’t help but snort and nod with a huge flush on his face as he handed Levi his milkshake. He came right up to his ear and began to seductively whisper to him. “My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard… and they’re like, it’s better than yours.” Oh this is too good not to tease you with.

Levi was shocked as Eren leaned over, though it took all of his willpower not to dissolve into laughter. Fucking hell… He covered his mouth with his wrist, ducking away from him, his eyes bright. Shit..

Eren smirked at him and shifted to kiss his cheek, before scampering back to make his own. Yup, now I can’t get that song out of my head.

Levi let him kiss his cheek, composing himself before sipping at his own milkshake, hugging Eren from behind as he made his own. Mine. “...you wouldn't mind making good use of our new toy when we get home, would you?” We haven't used it since that night...
“Hmm… You get to ask Dad if Mila can stay here overnight… and you need to actually go to work tomorrow too, Okay?” Eren asked quietly, leaning up to kiss him softly. I love you, but we need to make sure we actually do what we’re supposed to...

“Of course… I’ll make sure we don't stay up too late…” We’ll have lots of time to ourselves… Levi kissed his neck, letting go and meandering over to Lathe. “Hey Dad?”

Lathe looked up at him, tilting his head, his eyes narrowed. You want something. “Yeah, Levi?”

“Is it okay if Mila stays the night here? Please?” Daycare is just across the street...

“Any particular reason?” He watched Levi hesitate, catching the pink flush on his cheeks. “That’s what I thought.” Lathe shook his head good naturedly. “Alright.” He rolled his eyes when Levi kissed his cheek and stalked back over to Eren. Of course...

Eren watched him come over, pouring his own milkshake into his glass and grabbing a straw, innocently sipping from it. “I see it pulled in Sarge…” Bringing all my favorite boys to the yard.... And by yard I mean the kitchen.

Levi smirked at him. “The milkshake you’re holding isn't the one I'm interested in.” Nope… He wrapped an arm around his middle, pulling him close and softly kissing his neck.

Eren smirked, keeping a straight face as Levi kissed at his neck. Hmm, I think I'm gonna like tonight. He sipped at his smoothie, watching as a majority of the family curled up on the couches to watch the last bit of the Harry Potter movie marathon. That’s so cute...

Lathe took Mila to the couch, curling up with Ieva. James and Jake curled up around them, surrounded by a small sea of dogs, puppies, and cats. I like this. Lathe looked over to the two in the kitchen, smiling faintly before turning his attention to Ieva, kissing her cheek. I can understand... you two can have each other to yourselves.

Eren smirked as Lathe’s attention turned away from them, turning his head to whisper into Levi’s ear. “If you fuck me here, you’re dead… but… heavy petting’s okay I guess.” His lips feel wonderful on my neck.
Levi smirked, shifting around to Eren’s front and setting his milkshake down, not caring as he wrapped his arms around him and began to slowly suck on his neck. He heard Eren faintly sigh, gently nipping his flesh. *I love the way you sound...*

Eren let Levi continue, shifting a bit and giving him better access to open skin, even if his hair was starting to get in the way with how long it was. *I wonder if Levi’ll tie me up to the bed? I think I might even be okay with that.*

Levi brushed away some of his long hair, gently nibbling at the soft flesh. *I can’t wait to get you home... I wonder if you’ll let me use all the straps? It’s still rather early into the night... we have more than enough time for me to torture you with pleasure... I’d love to... “...do I get to tie up my beautiful fiancé?”* He softly kissed his shoulder. “I’d love to… I’d do so many things to you...” *I really want to...*

Eren hummed thinking about the option. “I think I might let you...” His voice was sultry as he was kissed, turning his head to watch Levi’s actions. *Yeah... I think I could handle it.*

Levi looked up at him, his eyes shaded. “That’s wonderful to hear...” He turned around to pick up his melting milkshake, pressing into Eren’s front as he sipped from it quietly, enjoying the arm that went around his waist. *This is nice.*

Eren grabbed his milkshake with the other hand, sipping at it as he held Levi close to him. *I like that you’re all over me still, especially after you got me the ring...*

Levi was content to stand pressed against him, absently watching from where they were. *I kinda miss living here with the family... but not as much as I thought I would... I have my own family now.* He looked over his shoulder at Eren, flatly glaring with a quirked eyebrow as he felt Eren grab his ass. *That’s rather blunt.*

Eren tried to look oblivious, his eyes still focused on the TV in the other room. *Try not to laugh from his glare.... try not to laugh...* Eren soon enough let go off his ass, only to grab at it again, his thumb going towards his crack. *I will tease you...*

Levi’s head slowly fell back onto Eren’s chest, his legs slowly shifting further apart, letting Eren handle him, out of sight behind the kitchen island. *Damn...* He felt Eren teasingly thumb over his hole through his jeans, pressing back into his hand. *Hm, we haven’t done it like that in a while... but that’s for some other time...*
Eren chuckled at his reaction, ducking his head down to kiss his neck. *I love this...* He smirked, soon letting go and moving to wash his cup. *I finished mine...*

Levi glared at him when he stopped, picking up his nearly finished cup and downing the rest, going to wash his as well. The second it was put away Levi caught Eren by the waist, pulling him flush. “...let’s go home...” Levi gazed up at him with dark bedroom eyes, his fingers gently playing with the hem of Eren’s pants. *I want you...*

Eren nodded instantly, shifting to grab his wrist before he could pull more on his pants. *Levi...* He shifted off of him and moved to go kiss Lathe and Ieva goodbye and give Mila a hug goodbye as well. *I like it here...*

Levi followed him, kissing Lathe and Ieva on the cheeks before kissing Mila’s nose. “You're going to stay here for the night, Mila. But it’s okay- Mama and Papa will take good care of you.” *Of course they will.* He let Eren tug on his wrist after that, feeling warm when his own cheeks were kissed goodbye, letting Eren walk with him to the door and to their car. *Mine.*

Eren led him to the car, slipping into the passenger seat. *I'm really kinda glad that we stayed for dinner.... Now we have to go feed the dogs at home.... just the three of them now....* He seemed to slump in his seat at the thought.

Levi got into the driver’s seat, leaning over to softly kiss Eren when he saw him slump a bit, not knowing that to say. *I'm sorry.* He got them home quickly, turning off the car and catching Eren before he could leave the car. He leaned over, unbuckling his own seatbelt and softly kissed his neck as a hand went to his crotch, gently palming him. He heard Eren groan, feeling him slowly hardening in his hand. “Let’s feed the dogs and then get you upstairs... okay?” *I don't want you to be too upset... It's really sad that Blake is gone... but you've cried and cried so much today... I want you to have at least a little bit of pleasure or happiness today.*

Eren nodded, making his way away from the car and starting towards the front door. He was greeted by three wagging tails and six perked ears. *It's okay, just feed them and then let Levi take you upstairs...*

Levi followed him inside, helping Eren to feed the three dogs. He and Eren both paused when they saw Blake’s bowls sitting empty, the water bowl still having some left inside. ...*he's gone.* Levi turned to Eren, catching him in a hug and murmuring softly into his ear. “Let’s get you upstairs, love...” *I'll take good care of you... you deserve to be happy... even if it's just for a little while before you remember...*
Eren nodded, letting Levi drag him up the stairs and into their room. He let go then, moving to strip his clothes and head towards the shower. *I wanna clean up before we start… would that be okay?*

Levi shed his clothes as well when he realized what Eren wanted, following him into the shower. He caught him when they stepped into the hot water, Levi reaching for the soap, his tongue already getting newly acquainted with his collarbone as he began to wash him. *I'll take care of you.*
Chapter 128: Together Once More

Chapter Summary

IM SO SORRY!!! I should be back for a few more chapters before going back to university. Please comment if you have any suggestions about anything at all I would really appreciate it!

~Duke

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Levi shed his clothes as well when he realized what Eren wanted, following him into the shower. He caught him when they stepped into the hot water, Levi reaching for the soap, his tongue already getting newly acquainted with his collarbone as he began to wash him. *I'll take care of you.*

Eren watched him take over washing him with surprise. *We haven't done this in a long time… a really really long time…* He hummed softly, smiling as Levi cleaned him up, a sharp gasp leaving his mouth as Levi got close to his length. *Fuck…*

Levi very gently handled his length with a soapy hand, feeling him slowly hardening. “Mm, I see someone’s excited…” He gently moved his hand a bit further back, brushing his taint before lightly rubbing over his hole. “Mm, you're going to be so tight…” *Teasing you is so much fun…*

Eren nodded, moaning softly as Levi rubbed over his hole. “Fuck… W-Why don’t you stretch me out then, Sarge?” Eren’s voice was a little strained as he tried not to let his legs shake. Already having spread them on instinct, it was hard not to allow it to happen.

Levi smirked, cupping Eren’s jaw. “You know what, Private, that’s a wonderful idea.” Levi reached for the small tube of lube that he had decided to stash in the small wire basket. *It's better than conditioner for this sort of thing.* He poured some into his hand, his hand reaching down to slowly circle his entrance again. He sucked at Eren’s adam’s apple as he slowly pressed inside, his other hand holding his cheek to the side, giving him more room. *This should feel good…*

Eren watched him grab the tube of lube from the shower basket, his eyes hungry as they followed the movement of his hands to his entrance. *Fuck I want his fingers inside of me…* He shifted as soon as he felt his fingers circle his hole, his leg moving to hold itself up against a small ledge, giving Levi easier access, especially with his hand holding onto his ass cheek. *Fuck yes, please stretch me out…*
Levi held Eren close, lapping at his neck as he began to slowly feel inside of him, his voice soft. “Just relax…” He waited a while before sliding a second finger inside of him, nipping his tan flesh. *You’re always so warm… I love it…*

Eren couldn’t help but moan, his arms wrapping around Levi’s shoulders, not caring that he was leaning on him a bit to stay balanced. He tilted his head to the side to give him access to his neck more, letting him nip without a care in the world. *Fuck his fingers feel really good…*

Levi gently scissored him, his lips gentle on his neck. He massaged Eren’s cheek, his fingers slowly twisting inside of him. He carefully added a third, his fingers curling inside his heat. *Where is it…* He felt Eren drawn in a shaky gasp as he brushed one spot, letting him melt into him with a shaky breath as we slowly rubbed it. *That’s it…*

Eren left out a soft huff as he moved to relax against Levi’s body, letting his leg shake a bit from the strain of keeping it lifted. *Fuck it’s starting to feel really weird…* He whimpered as Levi rubbed his prostate, clinging to him and trying not to let his knee buckle. “Sarge…” Eren whined his nickname, kissing at his neck.

Levi gently shifted him as he shook, pressing him to the wall and letting his legs weakly hook around his waist. *I can hold you up.* “Mm? Is this better?” Levi reached around him, his fingers sliding back into him comfortably. *I’ve got you.*

Eren nodded, soft moans leaving him as his fingers slid back inside of him. “Mmm yeah…. Fuck, Sarge… I want you to fuck me…” *And fill me up… I haven’t had you fill me up in so long…*

Levi smirked, his voice smooth in his ear. “Do you want me to fuck you here, Private? Or would you rather wait for me to tie you down and tease you until you can’t even remember your own name?” *Which do you want?*

“How do you want it, Private? Hard… or slow?” *I’ll do whatever you want…*
“S-Slow… please?” You can go rough when you tie me down… I don’t wanna be bothered about that right now…. I just want you inside me and filling me up… and we haven’t done slow in such a long time…

Levi nodded, letting his tip slowly press inside of him. *Slow sounds good…* Levi eased himself into Eren’s warmth, groaning as he bottomed out. *Fuck.. you always feel so wonderful when you're bare around me….*

Eren let out a soft whimper as Levi fully seated himself inside of him. *Oh god… it feels… it feels so good… “Sarge… your cock feels so good… feels so amazing…” It feels fabulously wonderful… I feel so full, and he’s warm, it feels so nice. I like doing it without a condom…*

Levi slowly slid in and out of him, Eren’s cavern feeling like warm silk against him. *I needed this…* He started a slow and deep pace, his hands gripping his hips. “You're so soft…”

Eren shifted back a bit so Levi could get even deeper inside of him, bent over and braced on the wall. “Hmm… you like it? You like how soft I am?” *I want to know…*

Levi sighed softly, grinding deeply into him. “I do… you feel so good like this…” Levi ran his hands over his hips, teasing near his base and rubbing all over him. *It feels really good…!*

Eren smirked, letting his face lean against the cool tile as he kept himself supported. He couldn’t help but shiver as Levi’s hands worked all over him. *Hmm, I wonder if he’ll give me a massage again tonight?*

Levi slowly bent over until his front was flush with Eren’s back, grinding deeply into him. *Beautiful….* He took hold of his length, slowly pumping him in time with every thrust. *You sound so sexy…*

“Oh… oh my god….” He looked over his shoulder, seeing Levi’s face near his, a smile across his lips as he felt Levi thrust directly on his prostate. *Oh fuck !* He let out a guttural cry, full of pleasure and lust as his coil tightened. *Fuck I want him to fill me up.*

Levi snapped his hips into him again, his hand doing slow drags up and down his length from root to tip as he did. *I love this…* He made a choked sound, his length burning. *I need to cum…*
Eren knew Levi was getting closer with the way he was holding onto his hip with his free hand. *Oh shit he’s gonna cum, and he’s gonna fill me up…* “P-Please Levi… f-fill me up.”

Levi bit his shoulder, a dark mark blooming under his lips as he sucked hard. *Fuck…* He gripped him tightly, soon pounding into him as he came with a low moan, his wrist moving quickly on his length. *Cum….*

Eren felt Levi fill him with warmth, feeling him pulse with each and every thrust he gave him. *Fuck he gave me everything.* He shifted a little and moved to spread his legs wider as Levi pumped him, his own coil snapping and white covering the tiles in front of them. His loud cry of bliss echoed off the walls as his body shook in pleasure. *Shit that was… we haven’t done it slow in so long….*

Levi slowed as Eren’s orgasm shook him, pulling out as Eren trembled. He shifted to help him back upright, kissing him softly. *That was wonderful….* He gently kneaded Eren’s ass in his hands, smirking as Eren sighed. “...should I clean you out now, or later when we have a bath?” *You're going to need to get cleaned up after the rest of our fun…*

“Hmm… I think later should be fine…” He hummed, closing his eyes as he curled up to Levi as he grabbed his asscheeks. “Fuck Levi…. Hmm…. you can tie me up… but if I start panicking you need to take them off okay?” *I need you to realize that I’d probably be really susceptible today…*

“Of course… I'm not going to gag you or anything, and you can always tell me what you do and don't want… we’ll use ‘red, yellow, green,’ okay? I want to be careful this first time around.” *This is the first time the two of us are doing something like this together... I want it to go well.*

Eren nodded, looking him over, a weary look in his eyes. “Don't blindfold me… please…?” *I don’t want you to blindfold me… It’d remind me too much of what happened.... so many years ago….*

“No blindfold… maybe with time you’ll get to the point where you want to be blindfolded… or you might want something else… but that time isn't now, and it doesn't have to ever come. I'll take good care of you, Eren.” *I will.* Levi gently pulled Eren from the shower, deciding they were clean enough and reaching for the towels. He dried them off, gently pulling Eren with him to the small room. It was still lit with that warm light, the bed looking inviting. Levi kissed Eren’s cheek before easing him onto the bed, laying him down. He went to the box on the far side of the bed, opening the lid and looking over the padded pieces. *I’m thinking the ones for the legs… hm. “Eren?”* Levi went back empty-handed near his legs, lifting his knees from where they were and lifting them, spreading them. He could see everything from the new position, smirking. “There are a few extra pieces to this bed… do you want the ones that keep your legs just like this?” *I’d love to have you
tied like that.

Eren’s whole face flushed as he looked at the position. He nodded, watching Levi grab the extra padded pieces for his legs to rest on, finding that they too were a perfect fit for his lanky body. *Oh wow, this spreads me out so well…*

Levi easily fitted the parts into the covered holes in the bed, carefully lifting Eren’s leg into before pulling it where he wanted and tightening it. He did the same for the other, taking the straps around their backs and pulling them around Eren’s knees, tightening them. His feet fit firmly in the stirrups, fastening those as well before going to step in the space cut out between his legs. He rested his hands gently on his thighs, looking over him. “What about your arms, love? Do you want those tied up too?”

Eren bit at his lip, silent for a few moments as he debated it. *I know he would like to tie me up… but… I just… I can’t do that… what if I freak out with my arms tied up too? I already can’t move my legs…*

Levi watched him think, nodding after a bit. “I won't if you don't want me to… this is already a lot… and it's gorgeous.” Levi kissed Eren’s ankle, smirking as he looked down the long limb to his nether. *Beautiful view… “I won't if you don't want me to.” It's not a huge deal.***

Eren nodded, looking to the side as his face flushed. “N-No…. I don’t want you to tie my arms.” I hope that’ll be okay for you…

“Of course. You just say the word, and it's done. That's the same for your legs. If you don't like it…” He softly kissed his other ankle. “Then I'll untie you. Easy as that.” Levi had a devious look in his eyes as he went to the shelf on their side, a box with most of their toys residing there. He took it to the box behind Eren, settling it on the plush surface. “Hm… what should I use…. I rather like this one… this one, of course… you make the most beautiful sounds with this one… and your face when this one makes you cum… perfect…” He could hear Eren's quiet whimper, looking back to see him hardening. *Good.* He came over with a cock ring, softly kissing his hip. “Can I use this, Eren?” *I need to keep asking…*

Eren watched him kiss his hip, a blush forming high on his cheeks, nodding at the sight of the cock ring. *Yes… you can use a cock ring, especially if you're gonna wanna control when I cum or not…* He looked over towards the other toys he’d pulled out, his eyes widening when he saw the thick dildo he had. *Fuck…. hell yes…*

Levi brushed a thumb over Eren’s tip, slicking the ring with the bit of precum. He gave Eren’s
length a few slow pumps to slick his length, sliding the ring down his cock all the way to the root. Perfect. He looked over him, thinking. ….he might like it… he might not want to do anything too out there besides being tied up today… but I kinda have to ask… “Eren?” Levi rested a hand on his hip, his thumb gently ghosting over the flesh there. “….you can say no, and we can save it for sometime else… but would you let me use melted wax with you?” I wanna know… It’d be wonderful if I could...

Eren’s length jerked at the mention of melted wax. Oh fuck… I take it that would be my answer for you? “Y-Yeah…” he stuttered with a huge blush on his face. Yes, we haven’t done that in awhile...

Levi smirked, going to softly nip at his jaw. “Wonderful….” He gently took hold of his length, slowly pumping him as he kissed his neck. “I might not have tied down your hands… but that doesn't mean I don't want you to keep them at your sides, Private.” Let's see how well you can do that… He let go of him, heading over to the box again and getting out a small candle and lighter, igniting the wick and letting it burn. He picking up a plug in the meantime, reaching for the lube and slicking it up. “We can't have you getting too tight again… you need to stay nice and loose for what I have planned…” He walked between Eren’s spread legs, brushing his thumb over his hole. Beautiful. He brought the toy down, slowly inserting the plug and making sure it was firmly seated inside of him. He smirked as Eren clenched around it. “Now, love, we’re going to play a bit of a game… this is a rather new toy I've wanted to try out with you…” He gently nudged the base of the toy, lifting up his hand, a small remote visible. “This particular toy will let you feel the vibration everywhere… if you can go so long without making a single sound, I'll reward you… if not, you'll get quite a bit of wax…. It can sting, but it's not bad after a little while… “How does that sound, love?” I want to see how well this works...

Eren couldn’t help the shudder that ran down his spine at the thought. “That sounds… really good…. I think I might be able to hold off...

Levi smirked, one hand on his hip as he looked over him. “Ready?” He watched Eren nod, seeing his face shift as he clicked on the plug. “To ten.” Levi murmured the numbers, watching Eren’s breathing pick up a bit. He likes it... good.

Eren had just about made it to ten seconds before he let out a soft whimper, grabbing at the bed below him. Fuck! I almost made it… this is gonna be really hard, fuck… but I get to be waxed now...

Levi tsked, walking back to the box. “You were so close… but a deal is a deal…” There’s a decent bit of wax melted… He walked back to his side, holding the candle up high and very slowly tipping it, wax dripping down and onto his chest. He circled one nipple, then the other, before he was out of wax, hearing Eren cry quietly whimper. “You can do better than that, love. Fifteen.” He looked over him as the wax slowly cooled, counting for him.
Eren was completely silent as he moved. His eyes were wide as he looked at the wax being poured on him, trying not to make any noise as Levi counted down. He swallowed thickly, heaving a sigh of relief as he made it through the 15 seconds of pleasured torture. *Fuck this is gonna be harder than I thought*…

Levi smirked as Eren made it the whole fifteen seconds, rubbing his hip. “**Very** good.” He went to put down the wax, moving between his legs again. His lips hovered over his length, murmuring quietly. “Fifteen again.” He immediately took Eren into his mouth, slowly sucking on him and sliding further and further down, taking more in. *I'm sure this is torture*…

Eren’s eyes widened as he watched Levi slowly sink down on him. The sucking sensation quickly threw him over the edge, a loud cry escaping him as his body jerked from an orgasm and he wanted to cum but was denied. *Fuck... I wanna cum... this is... he's gonna put wax on me again*…

Levi had mercy and sucked him through his dry orgasm, coming off of him. “That sensitive? I thought you’d be able to hold off longer…” There wasn't much more wax melted, Levi taking the candle and slowly pouring it over Eren’s nipple, watching him hiss before quietly sighing. “That feel good?” He watched him lazily nod, setting the candle back down. “That feel good?” He didn't stop his slow motions. *You're very sensitive*…

Eren struggled not to let a sound leave him, his toes flexing and his legs straining against his bounds. *Oh fuck... this... fuck I'm sensitive... especially after an orgasm... oh fuck!* Eren had to close his eyes as his whole body went rigid, trying hard not to make a sound still, his body on edge. *Fuck it feels too good... I'm not gonna last! Hurry up Levi!*

Levi watched with wide eyes as Eren’s head fell back in a silent cry, his body quaking with another orgasm. *Holy fuck...* He finally hit thirty, immediately going to suck his length. “**Very, very** good Eren… my **god** that was hot…” Levi decided to give Eren a break, simply lapping at his length. “I want to hear you now… it's okay to right now…” *My god*…

Eren was breathing hard, his whole body tense still as Levi lapped at his oversensitive length. *Oh fuck it kinda hurts but it still feels really good… I can’t believe I could stay quiet…* He whimpered as Levi’s tongue teased his slit, looking at the small stream of precum that was struggling to come out of him. *Fuck it hurts… but it hurts so good*…

Levi came off of him, his hands gently running over him. “You’re so good…. you want more?” He gently rubbed his stomach, his touch soothing. *It's okay.*
Eren nodded, looking down at Levi with desperation in his eyes. “Fuck me… fuck me please…” I wanna be filled with your cock again… Even if I have the plug inside it’s not enough… I want your cock…

Levi looked over him, smirking. “Do you want me… or would you rather have a toy? Something bigger, thicker?” I wouldn’t blame you… it feels very good…

Eren looked torn, looking at Levi’s hard length for a moment before looking towards their box of toys. “C-Can I have a toy?” I can take a toy… but I’ll want your cock too… fuck I can’t decide… can I have both?

Levi paused, smirking. “If you can't decide, might I make a suggestion… do you remember those anal beads we have?” He wandered over, showing them to Eren. “What if you have these, and me?” Would that be better?

Eren squirmed a bit, nodding. “Please?” That would be amazing… I really want that to happen. He watched Levi bring them over close to him, his jaw dropping a little as he drooled a bit. I want it… I really want it…

Levi smirked at Eren’s expression, having slicked up the toy with a generous amount of lube. He stepped between his legs, taking gentle hold of the plug and slowly easing it out of him. He went to put it down for the time being, coming back and easily sliding four fingers inside of him. “Look at how loose you are…. so ready for my cock…” He took the beads, going to slowly slide them in and out of him, watching each bead disappear inside of him. “Look at you…” That's so hot…

Eren mouth was wide open as he let moan after moan leave him, his body shaking as he felt the beads move within him. Fuck I can feel them inside of me… “Levi…” he whined when he wasn’t immediately filled with his length. “I want your cock…” I wanna be full.

Levi smirked, the beads sliding inside of him, his own cock slipping inside. He made a quiet sound as he gently ground into him, feeling the bumps of the beads all along his length. Damn…

Eren let out a loud cry as his back immediately arched, his length struggling to weep more precum. Fuck it feels really good… “Don’t go easy…. Please don’t… I want you to fill me up with cum, and I want it hard…
Levi smirked, his hand gently going to pump his length. “Should I let you cum?” He teased his tip, drawing back a bit before snapping into him. *We can drag this out… or I can go hard with you…*

Eren looked at him with wide eyes about to open his mouth before his head snapped back in a loud cry with the thrust Levi just impaled him with. *Oh fuck! Oh fuck! Oh fuck!* He whimpered as Levi’s fingers pumped his length, and teased his tip. “F-Fuck… I wanna cum…” *I really do, and as soon as you take that off I’m gonna cum all over the place…*

Levi watched Eren’s expression shift, beginning to pound into him. *I’ll make you cum.* Levi stroked him, toying with his tip. *I’ll make you feel good…*

Eren shifted around his hips as best he could, trying to get Levi to thrust into his prostate and once he did, along with the beads, his whole body jerked. *Oh fuck, I wanna cum! I wanna cum! Levi take it off! I wanna cum…*

Levi reached for him, the cock ring sliding up and off of him, watching with wide eyes as Eren jerked and cried out, cum splashing over his chest in thick white streaks. *Oh fuck…* Levi felt Eren clench around him, pounding him through his orgasm.

Eren’s cum kept coming, spilling out three times his usual load due to being build up with the cock ring. His eyes were closed in utter bliss and his jaw wide open as Levi continued to pound him through orgasm. *Fuck it feels amazing…*

Levi held onto him tightly, moaning as the beads rubbed all along his length, soon enough spilling his own load into his heat. “Fuck…” He pulled out of him, gently pulling the beads out of him and going to softly kiss all over his hips and stomach. *Beautiful…*

Eren chest was heaving, his whole body aching as he felt his length go limp on his stomach, still dribbling small beads of white. *Fuck… that was, that was probably the most intense orgasm I’ve had as of yet…*. He let his head lay back, trying to catch his breath as he closed his eyes. *Fuck…*

Levi very gently rubbed his side, going to put the toy down before coming back and untying Eren. He eased his legs down to a more comfortable position, leaving for just a moment to get a hot washcloth, gently cleaning him up. “That was wonderful, love…” He softly kissed all over his cheeks, very gently scooping him up into his arms. “Let’s get you into a hot bath, okay?” *You deserve it.*
Eren nodded weakly, letting his eyes close as his head rested against Levi’s shoulder. *Fuck... I’m gonna be sore for a long time...* He groaned as Levi finally set him down in warm water, jets assaulting his sore muscles. *Fuck it hurts, but it feels good at the same time...*

Levi wrapped him up in his arms, going to carefully massage his sore muscles. “You were wonderful....” He smiled as Eren’s head fell back with a groan. “I’ll take care of you tomorrow too... if you’re hurting....” *You probably will be... we went pretty rough...*

Eren shook his head. “Work...” *You gotta go to work... you just kinda left during the middle of the day today...* He sighed, letting him pull him close, hissing when Levi pressed too hard near his hips. *Fuck my hips hurt...*

Levi sighed, easing up on his hips. He worked carefully, smiling when he found a knot in his hips, Eren groaning as he worked them out. “That feel good?” He let the heat of the water soak into him. *It feels really nice...*

Eren nodded tiredly, his head tilted back on Levi’s shoulder with his neck exposed, covered in marks. *I guess I’ll be able to record the song I wanna do tomorrow... I’ll have to go back to Dad’s and finish up the video on the wall...*

Levi slowly massaged him, smiling as he dozed. *I need to clean you out.* He gently shifted Eren, a few fingers slowly going to open him up a bit, letting his cum drip from him. *Just relax...*

Eren’s eyes cracked open as he felt Levi reach his fingers inside of him. “Hmm.... it’s in there deep... and I think the toys pushed it back further...” *I was so full... It felt so good...* He whimpered as Levi eased the cum out of him, slowly getting used to the feeling of being empty. *It feels... it feels okay, I still ache all over...*

Levi gently eased the white out of him, softly kissing his neck as he did. He held Eren closer when he had the last of it out, gently rubbing his chest. “Let’s get you a bit washed...” He reached for the soap, gently handling Eren’s tan limbs as he washed him. *You’re really tired... you can sleep soon...*

Eren let Levi work with his body, laying limply. He didn’t respond to anything Levi had said, already having passed out on his shoulder a few minutes ago. *I’m tired...*

Levi washed him, carefully rinsing him and draining the tub when he realized he was passed out. He lifted him from the tub, waking him up enough to have him barely stand long enough to dry off.
He picked him up when he was only slightly damp, letting him fall asleep on the way to the bed, settling him in. Levi went to dry himself off quickly, coming back and retrieving their toys, going to wash them and put them away. He shifted the sheets around when he was finished, making sure he had an alarm set for the morning and curling up to Eren, gently holding him. *You're wonderful.*

Chapter End Notes

Please comment and subscribe for future updates

~Duke
Eren woke up in a cold sweat, gasping for air as his eyes snapped open, and his body lurching into an upright position. Where am I? He looked around the darkness which slowly gave way to a familiar room, his breathing beginning to calm down as he looked over next to him, Levi sound asleep on his back. Oh thank god I’m home. It took a few long moments to finally tear his eyes away from his sleeping fiance to look at the clock, his eyes widening when he saw the bright glowing red numbers. It's only 2:37? Fuck… I’m not gonna be able to sleep at all… and Levi gets up at 7 for work… Eren sighed quietly, shifting to curl up to himself a bit, his head on his knees and ears covered with his hands. I forgot to take my pills… for like the first time in 2 months… Fuck…

Levi slowly blinked awake when he felt the bed shifting a bit, sleepily reaching for Eren. “Babe? It's really early… sleep…” He gently tugged him close, waking up more when Eren made a small sound, taking in his form. …what. “Eren, love, are you okay? Do you hurt?” Are you in pain? He immediately went to gingerly touch his waist, gently pressing on the flesh in a few places. You were rather achy last night… we weren't exactly gentle…

Eren smacked at his hand, not really hurting him but enough to get the point across that Levi prodding at his side was not welcome. I forgot to take my pills, fuck I need to go take them now before they get worse… He just shook his head when Levi asked him what was wrong again, getting up from the mattress, not expecting his legs to completely give out under him and send him to the floor, only then the pain shooting up his spine. The all too familiar ache became too real for him and he broke down, slowly curling into himself from his sprawled out position.

Levi looked confused when Eren smacked away his hand wordlessly, immediately getting up when Eren thudded to the floor. What the fuck?! Levi knelt next to Eren, recognizing the fear in his eyes. Oh fuck… right… your meds… “I'll get you your medicine, Eren…” Levi ran to the bathroom, hurriedly getting out the proper dose and a cup full of water. He was too tired to take them last night… I completely forgot… fuck… Levi hurried back with the pills, handing them to Eren with the cup. “Here, you'll feel better…” Please.

Eren struggled for a few moments to pick himself up, his back aching worse than it had ached since they’d gotten the new house. Fuck… I should’ve remembered… I know I can’t forget them… He let out a shuddered sob before he reached for them, taking his pills and downing them along with the entire glass of water. He set them down, feeling the lump in his throat grow from his sobs, curling up into a ball and moving to lay down and get off his spine. It hurts… we went really rough….

Levi shifted to pull Eren closer, his touch gentle. “It's okay… do you hurt anywhere Eren? Tell me…” You’d start feeling it by now… He watched him whimper and nod, very carefully shifting his arms under him. “I’ll be careful, just let me get you onto the bed…” Levi slowly picked him
up, getting him onto the bed and gently rolling him onto his side. He shifted into bed behind him, gently embracing him from behind. “I’m so sorry it hurts… do you want anything? A massage? A hot soak? The heating pads?” *Let me take care of you.*

Eren sniffled as he shook his head trying to calm down. “I-I’ll be fine…” *I’ll be okay, you need to get to sleep… “Get some sl-sleep Levi…” I don’t want you to be exhausted because I can’t put up with a little bit of pain…… Okay, maybe a lot of pain…* Eren had shifted only a few inches before he felt a sharp pain run up his spine and cause him to hiss. *Fuck… don’t move…*

Levi paused when he heard Eren hiss, his fingertips going to very slowly brush his lower back up his spine, hearing Eren whimper with every small nudge. *...ouch… you’re in a hell of a lot of pain… “I’m going to get the heating pads, it should help your muscles relax…”* He slowly shifted off the bed, coaxing Eren onto his front. He quickly went to the bathroom, bringing back a box of heating pads. He carefully positioned them on Eren’s lower back and spine, plugging them in and turning them on. He gently touched the back of Eren’s thigh when he shifted uncomfortably, watching him wince as he pressed with his thumb. He let the pads drape over him there as well, kneeling next to the bed as they slowly heated up. *I want you to feel functional at least somewhat today if I can help it…* He retrieved a small bottle from the nightstand in the meantime, shifting further down him and opening it. *I got massage oil after last time…* Levi was careful as he started on one of his calves, feeling for knots in the muscle.

Eren tensed for a moment before he felt Levi slowly working oil into his skin, and gently rubbing his muscles. He relaxed almost immediately and shifted his head to the side so he could look back at Levi. *Shit… He’s too good to me… He’s staying up even though he needs to wake up earlier than I do… I could’ve just stayed in bed all day and rested.* He whimpered as Levi found a large knot in his other calf just below his knee. *Fuck he found it….. And I’m kinda surprised that it hasn’t forced me to limp around yet.*

Levi could feel all the tension in his calf, carefully digging his thumb into that spot, coaxing the muscles to relax back into their proper places. He gently rubbed the oil into his skin, his flesh heating up under his attention. He smiled as Eren groaned, ghosting back over his calf and making sure he had done what he could before moving on to the other with a fresh hand of oil. He slowly worked out what knots he could find, gently removing one of the heating pads from his thighs when he was done. He got more oil before he carefully set to work, the warm muscles much easier to coax back into place, working out all the spots of tension he could feel. *You were really stretched last night… and by that I mean that your position wasn't the most natural. Your muscles cooled weirdly…* He softly kissed the back of his neck, working diligently. *It's okay.*

Eren seemed okay with Levi’s menstrations, that was until Levi’s hands got to the dip in his back over his spine, sending a shock of pain up his spine with each touch of his thumbs. “Fuck! Levi stop…” He swore loudly, closing his eyes and gripping the sheets under him. *It fucking hurts, holy shit… maybe having my legs that high in the air isn’t such a good idea…*
Levi immediately stopped, kissing across his shoulder in apology. “I'm sorry, I'm sorry….” Levi put the heating pads back, tiredly rolling over onto his back next to Eren and curling up to him. *I'm tired… “Do you think you'll be okay today?” Can you function?

Eren had his head facing the wall, not Levi as he shifted to lay down. *At least he won’t be able to see the pain in my eyes. Fuck… I hope I didn’t throw out my back…* Eren let out a soft groan and nodded. “Y-Yeah… I should be fine, what do you want for dinner?” *I should be able to cook you something…*

Levi thought, shifting a bit to kiss the nape of his neck. “Grilled chicken… it's easy enough to make.” *And it's really good…* Levi tugged a sheet over them, enjoying the heat from Eren and the pads. *Warm…*

Eren didn’t move when Levi got up to get ready for work, he laid perfectly like he was still asleep, his chest barely rising and falling, and his body aching with every small movement. *Think I'm asleep, so you don’t worry about me…*

Levi went to get washed and dressed, coming back to the bed and smiling faintly as he saw Eren. He gently rested a hand on his back, going to kiss his cheek when he heard a tiny whimper, his hand shifting to his shoulder. “...Eren? Eren, are you awake?” He stared at him for a moment before his eyes finally cracked open, stunned at the amount of pain in his eyes. *Oh fuck… “Eren, how badly does it hurt? Tell me…” You might need medical attention at this rate… fuck…*

Eren shook his head as best he could. “I’m fine….” His words were mere whispers that he could barely get out, he didn’t want to tell him that he couldn’t move almost anything without pain shooting up his spine. *I need to be careful getting up…*

“No you're not. You need medical attention. I'm so, so sorry, but I'm really worried.” He leaned in to softly kiss his cheek, standing and grabbing for his phone. *I need to get you to a doctor… fuck, who should I even call? …..Scotty. He's actually at the hospital, so…* Levi dialed his number, anxious as it rang. *You've got to be up by now…*

“Hello?” Scotty’s voice was rough as he settled back down in bed, curled up to Casper. *My day off and someone’s calling me….*

“Scotty? Shit, I'm sorry for waking you up, but we have a bit of a problem… things happened, and Eren’s in a lot of pain right now, in his lower back and up his spine. I don't have any real medical equipment, I don't know what to do…” *Fuck…*
Scotty sighed closing his eyes knowing that he had to actually get up and go to work. He carefully removed himself from Casper to sit on the edge of the bed. “Well first off call him an ambulance, you’ll wanna get him on a backboard… I’ll get up and meet you guys there…”

Levi nodded, his voice even. “Okay, I will. Thanks…” He hung up, dialing 911 directly after. We need an ambulance… After one was on the way there wasn't much else to do, Levi carefully removing the heating pads and carefully getting Eren into a pair of boxers. At the very least you should be covered. He went downstairs, texting his boss and waiting for the ambulance to arrive. Dammit…

Eren hissed as he was moved, his tears beginning all over again. Fuck it hurts…. it hurts a lot… I don’t wanna go to the hospital… He whimpered more as sirens grew closer, hearing heavy feet enter the house, unsure why there was a second siren distinctly different. Did…. Did they send fire rescue too? Because I’m on the second floor?

Levi brought them upstairs, going to Eren’s side as they brought in a backboard. “Eren, they're here. It's okay, you'll be fine.” Levi was next to him as the paramedics carefully rolled Eren over and lifted him onto the board, hearing him cry out in pain. Shit.

Once Eren was on the board he was strapped down so his back was in one place and hastily given a neck brace before more men came in to help carry him. He was unfamiliar with the six who carried him down the stairs in fireman’s apparel, trying to look around for Levi. Where is he? Is he coming? Please tell me he’s coming….

Levi was on the heels of the procession, locking the door quickly before jumping into the ambulance with them. He was at Eren’s side when he was ushered into place, looking surprised as Mikhail immediately shuffled in under his feet, whimpering. Oh… Levi gently pet him, a hand going to gently card through Eren’s hair. “I'm right here, Eren. You're okay. You'll be just fine.” Levi gave him a gentle look. It's okay.

Eren looked at Levi, as best as he could with the neckbrace restricting his movement. “Scotty…?” Is he the doctor who's gonna be taking care of me… he is, right?

Levi nodded immediately. “Scotty will be the one taking care of you, Hun. It might take a little bit for him to get there, but he'll be there to take care of you.” He'll be there soon…. and we know him enough to be honest about stuff…. I don't think we could tell another doctor what happened…
Eren looked like he was relieved to hear Levi say that. *Thank god... this would be too embarrassing otherwise... but he’s probably gonna call Dad because of it... shit.*

Levi gently pet his hair as they drive to the hospital, coming with him as he was moved inside to a room. “Scotty should be here soon... we have to tell him what happened, but don't worry, I'll threaten him so that he doesn't tell Dad. He might tell Casper, but Casper is hella gay and he'll probably just laugh and then move on.” *Casper wouldn't tell Dad; he's chill.*

Eren closed his eyes with a heavy sigh. “Dad’s still my health care proxy, he’s at least going to find out that I’m here…” *I haven’t changed that... I need to change it to you now...*

Levi sighed, gently playing with his hair. “We need to change that… I’d rather hear about you directly than have Dad call me in a panic.” *That'd be better.* Levi was patient as they waited, the room quiet as Mikhail jumped onto the bed, curling up on Eren’s legs. *Aw...*

Eren reached his hand out carefully to pet him, finding he was okay with the movement and relaxing for now. It wasn’t long before there was a knock at the door and Scotty came in, coming right over to finish hooking up Eren’s vitals and check his eyes.

“So, who wants to talk first?” *You we're both there I presume... “Or are we gonna wait for Lathe to get here?”* *I already called him, even if you didn’t...*

Levi and Eren looked at him, the noirette looking faintly angry. “This isn't something Dad should know the specifics of. I swear to god, if you tell him what exactly happened I'll flay you alive.” Levi gave him a death glare. *You won't breathe a word of it to him.*

Scotty sighed quietly. “He’s gonna have to know eventually, at least a generalization, and how they work into Eren’s condition... So if you want to get this over with before he gets here... I suggest you explain what happened.” *This is gonna be a mess when he gets here... We need to get X-rays and and MRI...*

Levi sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. *This is going to be messy to explain to Dad... “...Alright. Uhm... Eren and I happened to get a new bed specifically for, well, things.”* He saw Scotty quirk an eyebrow. “It’s curved, making it comfortable for the back to arch. But it also can let you position the person any way you want. Well... last night, uhm, Eren’s legs were positioned up high and apart... and we weren't exactly gentle... and he ached afterwards but I didn't think it would be this bad... most of the ache went away after a good massage... but his back and spine are still in a lot of pain...” *That's pretty much the gist of it...*
Scotty nodded looking over the rest of Eren’s practically naked body. “Okay, I see…. So your back was in an odd position… Do you know how long approximately? And have you done that position more than once?” Scotty pulled out his notepad, jotting down details. *I need to know, I need to know what I need to look for.*

“That’s pretty an hour, an hour and a half…. and we did it before where his back was arched, but his legs weren’t up at all. That was an hour and a half, I think.” *That was fine...*

Scotty nodded, looking over Eren, shifting to gently touch his feet. “Can you move your toes?” *Hopefully you can…*

Eren hummed in agreement, slowly moving all his toes, thankful that it wasn’t painful to move them. *I can move them…*

“That’s good sign number 1… alright Eren can you try bending your knee?” He watched as Eren tried to pick up his knee, watching his face almost immediately contort and a loud cry of pain rip from his throat. *Well… this isn’t going to be fun for him…*

Lathe knocked on the door, coming in, looking worried. “Hey.” He walked inside a bit, seeing Eren on the bed with a neck brace. “What happened to you? Did you hurt your spine?” Lathe looked around, his eyes finally landing on Scotty. *Tell me!*

“I need x-rays and MRIs of his back, but from the looks of things you either really strained your lower back when you fell down the stairs, or you aggravated something from not riding with the correct posture….” *You are so lucky I can make shit up....* Scotty then asked Eren to bend his other knee, hearing another strained cry as he dusted the sheets under him. *You definitely did something to your lower back.*

Lathe looked to where Eren was struggling to lift his leg, coming over next to him. “I'm sorry, Eren.” *That's awful...* He gently reached to pet his hair, giving him a faint smile. *You'll be okay... after an X Ray and MRI we'll know what's exactly wrong.*

Eren could only look back at him, feeling tears prick in his eyes. *We’re not gonna have sex for awhile... I can imagine that....*

Levi gave Eren a gentle look, going to hold his hand. *I think you're okay... you maybe bruised*
something a bit badly, strained a few muscles, but you'll be okay...

It was an hour before Scotty could get Eren into the X-ray machine, having a team carefully hoist him onto the cold flat table and position him to get good pictures of his spine, one in particular sticking out to Scotty, enough for him to order prints right away. Scotty then took Eren down to MRI where the same process of having a team of people lifted him happened and Scotty’s suspicions were proven right. He herniated a disc....

Levi looked to Scotty, Lathe mirroring the taller man’s expression. “...something happened to his spine, I can tell… I just don’t know exactly what…” I don't know the word for it...

Scotty sighed quietly. “He herniated a disc in his lower back… which is why he’s in pain… it’s common, treatable if he wants to go through with surgery, but we could always see what the serum will do….“ Definitely a lower spine herniated disc...

Levi pondered this, thinking. “...I know nobody is really using the serum as of yet…” He watched Lathe and Scotty shake their heads, staring at the photograph. “...it’ll be a lot easier than going through surgery… and as long as it’s being monitored, he should mend rather easily…. I don’t think it would take that big of a dose to fix it....” Probably not...

“No, but we haven’t seen if it can happen yet…. so I’d rather start with surgery and insert the serum directly…. and then allow the serum to close up his skin after we’ve made sure that it’s corrected, and if not, I’ll have everything ready right then and there to fix it...” It's his spine, if not correctly fixed he’ll never be able to ride without pain... possibly walking could be an issue as well.

Levi nodded, looking over as Eren was carefully lifted from the machine. ...I want him to be okay. “That sounds like a good idea...” He gave Eren a faint smile, going to gently ruffle his hair. You're gonna be okay... I'll let Scotty tell you what it is...

“Eren you herniated a disc in your lower back, which means your disc structure is compromised and it is more compressed in the area and most likely pinching a nerve… we’re gonna need to do surgery, but we’re gonna see what the serum does before I try and correct it myself.” We’re still gonna open you up though...

Levi gently petted Eren as he was told, giving him a reassuring smile. “You’ll be okay… even if the serum doesn’t work, Scotty knows what he’s doing. You’ll be okay.” He gently kissed his forehead, his eyes soft. I didn't think that one night with the new bed would make this shit happen... damn.
Eren looked at him, closing his eyes as he sighed quietly. “Okay…. when are we gonna do this? Today?” I mean, I would imagine so….

Scotty nodded, scrolling through the OR schedule. “Yeah but you’re gonna have to wait until 3 in the afternoon for an opening.” That’s the best I can get you…

Levi nodded, walking with them back to Eren’s room. “We’ll wait…” He can't be in pain like this… He went to sit next to his bed when he was set down, kissing his cheeks. You'll be okay.

Eren could only close his eyes and wait, not even bothered when nurses came in to check his vitals and take blood for testing before his surgery. Fuck…. I don’t wanna go into surgery… I’m gonna be on my stomach too… Why haven’t they just flipped me over yet?

Levi held onto him as the day wore on, grateful when Lathe retrieved breakfast for him. Eren isn't suppose to eat before this surgery… He looked up to the man when he rested a hand on his shoulder. Hm?

“...I trust that you'll take care of my son. I'm going to go back to the center. He's in good hands.” I'll let you two be alone. He kissed Levi’s his cheek before going to peck Eren’s forehead. “You'll be okay, Eren. I'm sure of it.” You'll be better in no time.

Scotty was waiting in his office, getting together a group of nurses from that shift to be able to help with Eren’s surgery around 2:30pm he went down to meet Eren at pre-op. “Okay Eren, we’re gonna flip you over and lay you on your stomach, and then we’re gonna knock you out okay?” Scotty smiled as Eren agreed and his team flipped him over. Alright, let’s mark your back where I’m going to cut. He used a marker to dash lines near his spine as another doctor knocked Eren out and they closed off the OR, starting the surgery once a spare pack of blood came in for Eren’s blood type. Alright let’s get this over with….
Chapter 130: Anesthesia

Levi was waiting for Eren a bit nervously, feeling the hours tick by. What the fuck…. Scotty said two hours… it's been four... shit... Levi was anxious when Lathe returned with lunch, giving him a look. ....I don't know what to make of this. He let Lathe sit next to him, a quiet between the two of them as they ate. ....I hope it's nothing too horrible... maybe the serum didn't work and it's just being really tricky... that's probably it... hopefully...

Scotty finally came out of the double doors, a weary look on his eyes. Looking at the clock on the wall it was already past 8pm… Over 5 hours of surgery…. shit, that was…. and now I have to tell the both of them. He cleared his throat as he stood in front of Lathe and Levi. Fuck...

Levi looked up as he finally spotted Scotty, standing. “What the fuck took so long? Is he okay?” Levi looked over Scotty’s tired face, feeling nerves tugging at him. Is he okay? He is, right?

“Calm down, let me take you two to a back room, okay?” We need to make sure you two are because seated when I tell you this… He led them to a secluded area and told them to sit down, feeling his own face drain of color once more as he tried to think of what to tell them.

Levi and Lathe sat down, Lathe watching Scotty’s expression change. ....I know how this goes. You look so worried... maybe I should just ask. “It's cancer, isn't it.” Lathe was blunt about it, watching Scotty stiffen. His voice had been oddly calm, looking down when Scotty didn't respond. ....of course it is.... why would I ever get to have a son that's allowed to live a long life...

“We’re going to say it’s just a tumor for right now.... it appears it compromised the structure of the disc, and he aggravated it and caused it to collapse which forced the tumor out towards the spine…. It took awhile to find the mass and get it all out, that probably took up the majority of the five hours, then I used the serum and it corrected everything… and closed him up nicely, so he’s trying to get out of anesthesia… but he hasn’t woken up yet…” Scotty sighed quietly and looked down at his shaking hands. He normally doesn't have a problem coming out of it… but this time he is.... He soon got up and led the two of them to Eren’s usual hospital room, the brunet still asleep, and not showing any changes on vitals. Fuck… come on kid, wake up.

Levi looked over Eren’s still body, coming up to his side and climbing up next to him. He laid down next to him, curling into his side. I hope it's not cancer… Levi clutched at the thin gown covering him, feeling Lathe’s gentle hand in his hair. ....I want him to be okay.

It took another hour for Eren’s eyes to finally crack open and he looked over to Levi with a dopey smile on his face. I have a hottie in my bed… is this heaven? Or did he fall from heaven?
Levi felt Eren’s breathing change, looking up to see his smile. *oooh, he's still loopy. This'll be fun.* “Hey honey, how do you feel?” He softly kissed his cheek, giving him a playful look. *I'm so glad you're awake…*

“Did it hurt when you fell from heaven?” Eren asked in complete seriousness as he looked at Levi. *Did it?* His eyes quickly turned into puppy eyes without letting up from them. *Tell me…*

Levi looked stunned, his eyes lighting up after a moment as he gently kissed his cheek again. “No… you were there just in time to catch me.” *fuck, you're being cute…*

“Holy shit, you’re hot… When I get better, will you go out with me? Wait are you single? Please tell me you’re single… Is that a wedding ring?” Eren continued to ramble off questions as he looked over Levi’s entire being. His eyes turning a bit glassy as he saw the ring. *But then why did he kiss me?*

Levi watched him ramble with a soft smile, his cheeks a bit pink as he lifted up his own left hand. “It's an engagement ring, yes…” He then picked up Eren’s hand, showing him the ring on his own hand. “And this is the ring I proposed to you with last month…” *We’re engaged.* “So no, I'm not single.” Levi kissed the corner of his lips. “I happen to be happy with my fiancé.”

Eren blushed across his face and his eyes widened. “I’m pretty sure I’m dead, because I’m in heaven right now… Holy shit… Dad’s gonna freak out when he finds out I’m dead…” Eren’s head rolled to the side a bit to see Lathe sitting there and looking at him. “Oh shit… looks like Dad’s dead too… we’re all in heaven now, but I won the jackpot.” Eren wouldn’t stop talking, his eyes flying across the room and looking everything over. He then got distracted with his ring, and ended up shutting his mouth to stare at it with wide eyes. *Pretty.*

Levi and Lathe were struggling not to burst out laughing, Levi keeping Eren close and letting him ramble. *This is adorable.* “It's pretty, huh? Sapphires and Emeralds… you like it?” He chuckled as Eren stared at it with sparkling eyes. *He loves it…*

Lathe caught Levi’s gaze, trying desperately not to laugh. *I'm not dead, but his reaction to me being dead is pretty damn funny…*

Eren looked up at Levi again, his eyes widening once more and looking all over him. “Are you lost?... I don’t think this is the modeling agency…. Did someone call SWAT? Because you’re the bomb…. ” His eyes were staring right into Levi’s looking through the greyish blue orbs and trying
Levi hid his mouth behind his wrist, smiling as Eren continued rambling on, feeling warm. He leaned over in a short break to kiss him, gently cupping his cheek. *You're so damn sweet…* Levi broke their kiss after a moment, shifting to nearly lay on top of the brunet. *You're wonderful… even when you're loopy and on drugs…*

“Do you have a name?” Eren asked completely innocently, his puppy eyes on overload as he looked at Levi crawling to lay on top of him.


“Do you have a last name? ‘Cause I wanna borrow it…” *Please?*

Levi smiled, softly kissing him. “You're more than welcome to it… Eren Ackerman… I kinda like the sound of it…” *We haven't talked yet about last names… I guess we're technically doing it now, though.*

“I must be dead… because you’re an angel…” Eren’s smile was wide across his face, gasping in shock as Lathe finally lost it and began laughing loudly in the room. *Huh? We’re all dead…*

Levi couldn't help but start laughing into Eren’s neck when Lathe finally lost it, his eyes bright. “Eren, love, you're perfectly fine.” Levi leaned up, pressing kisses all over his cheeks. *This is great…* He looked over to Lathe, watching the man beaming as he held up his phone. *Oh my god, he's recording this. This is great!* Levi looked back to him, nestling into his neck. *All mine.*

“Wow, fuck, if I’m not in heaven I’ve sure seen it now… Don’t stop smiling because damn that’s beautiful.” *It is… oh my god it’s beautiful…*

Levi couldn't stop smiling if he wanted to, kissing all over Eren’s cheeks. *Fuck, I love you.* “You're being too good to me…” He kissed him again, happy when Eren looked dazed and more in love than ever. *Holy shit…*

“Are you a magician? Because whenever I look at you everyone else disappears…” His eyes were blown as he looked at Levi, and only Levi, ignoring Lathe for the moment.
Levi gently held his cheek, looking at him with shining eyes. *Fuck, they're all so cheesy... I love it...* Levi gently played with Eren’s hair, the touch tender. *I love you.*

“Your ass is so nice, it’s a shame that you have to sit on it.” Eren immediately waggled his eyebrows, a grin on his face. *It’s very round.*

Levi’s eyebrows shot up, looking over as Lathe sputtered and turned red. *Yeah, that one wasn’t meant for you to hear.* He understood when the man went to leave them be, looking back to Eren. “I’d take a seat elsewhere, but you're still recovering, honey. It'll get put to good use soon, though.” Levi gave him a wink. *We’ll be back to doing things soon enough....*

“Fuck me if I’m wrong, but dinosaurs still exist, right?”

Levi pretended to ponder the question. “Well, the closest descendant of the dinosaurs, the chicken, is still very much alive and well, so I guess I don't need to fuck you on that one....” He chuckled quietly as Eren gave him puppy eyes, kissing his nose. “But I guess since pterodactyls aren't around anymore... I should... sometime soon.” *I'll take care of you when you're not high on drugs.*

“Are you a trampoline? Because I wanna bounce on you.” Eren couldn’t help the cheeky grin that made it across his cheeks. *I really do...*

Levi smirked, his cheeks turning red. “Is that so?” He watched Eren nod. “You'll have plenty of chances to do that as much as you want...” He kissed his temple. *I like loopy Eren...*

Eren giggled like a child, his mind reeling. “If you were a squirrel, would you help me bust a nut?”

*Where are you getting all of these from?* “May~be.” He watched Eren pout, kissing him deeply for a moment. “If you asked nicely...”

“Hmm I’ll ask nicely, but I’m gonna call you leaves, ‘cause I should be blowing you.” He giggled once again, his eyes happy and light. *I like you...*

Levi chuckled. “Then I might as well call you a raspberry, because you're my favorite thing to eat...” *I haven't eaten you out lately.... we need to fix that.*
Eren’s face completely flushed, his eyes bulging a little bit. “I know my ABCs…. but I always forget the fourth letter… could you give it to me?” Eren tilted his head to the side and bit his lip, trying to be playful. *You’ll eat me whole…*

Levi looked over him with shaded eyes. “In a little bit…” *Depends when the drugs wear off… and when you stop aching enough to let me tie you up again…*

Lathe left them the second things got sexual, hunting down Scotty. “Scotty? Eren’s being loopy as hell and flirting with Levi like you wouldn't believe.” *The number of cheesy pickup lines he knows is surprising… and vaguely impressive.*

Scotty looked over paperwork, looking exhausted. “Yeah, well, we actually had him under anesthesia, so I would imagine he’d be loopy.” *It doesn’t surprise me…* He put the papers down, and went to go grab a few things from a nurses stand. *Let’s go see him then.*

Lathe walked with him back to Eren’s room, giving Scotty a gentle look when he saw how tired he looked. “…thank you, Scotty.” *You’re always here to take care of my family… and I really appreciate that.*

Scotty nodded, pausing as he looked into the room, Eren and Levi blushing like idiots. “Levi called and woke me up this morning… I owe Casper, fuck…” *I swear, Eren needs to stop getting hurt on my day off… I promised Casper it would be all about him, fuck I need to get shit together…*

Lathe looked at him, his thoughts clicking. “…today was going to be a date day, wasn't it.” He watched Scotty nod. “Oh shit, uh…” *You two never have days off together… ever…* “I'll try to convince him not to kill you. It's really bad timing…” *Shit, he probably wants to flay you alive… he's probably eating ice cream again… dammit.*

“Yeah, actually, Eren’s gonna be spending the night for observation… can you go and make sure Casper’s not eating ice cream?” *Please? He’s probably really pissed off at me…*

Lathe nodded, patting his shoulder. “I'll go make sure he's okay… somewhat…” Lathe gave him a small smile, turning to leave. *I need to make sure he's okay… if he gives in and eats a shit ton and then takes a ton of lactaid he'll grow resistant to it and then goodbye cheese pizza…*
Scotty nodded and thanked him before stepping in on Eren’s room and checking his vitals as Eren continued to giggle and try and talk to him, though he just ignored him, not up to speaking with him. *I’ll just snap at him...*
Lathe went to his car, pulling out and driving the short way to Casper and Scotty’s house. He parked in the driveway, the window flickering blue and grey as the TV was on. Uh oh. Lathe went up to the door and knocked, watching Casper open it, going from angry to defeated. “Casper?” ...you look like hell... 

Casper sighed and simply left the door open for him, motioning him forward. “You can come in.” His voice was rough as he moved back to the couch and picked up his tub of ice cream and spoon again. Scotty probably fucking sent you for damage control… god dammit why can’t he just take a fucking day off!

Lathe shut the door behind him and immediately snatched the tub out of his hands before he could eat more than a third of it. “Casper, you know you can’t eat so much. You’ll never be able to eat cheese pizza again.” Lathe went to put it away, hearing Casper make a sound of protest. “Future you will be happy I did this...” He turned when he had put it away, seeing Casper’s death glare. ...fuck, he’s really upset. “...I’m really sorry your date day was screwed over. It was just really bad timing… it turned out Eren had a big tumor in his back, on his spine… and I wouldn’t’ve trusted anyone more than Scotty to operate on him… I know it doesn't fix the fact that you were alone all day… and I'm really sorry about that.” You two don’t have much of an overlap in free time...

Casper gave a defeated sigh as he curled up to himself, running a hand through his light blue hair. Fuck, I can’t even really be mad at it at this point. “It happens every time…. and I even had to cancel reservations that we had…” Scotty had planned the whole day and he looked broken when he woke me up this morning. “It’s not even worth it, being mad, is it? I mean, I get it, he’s a doctor and his schedule will never allow him to come home, but you would think that he would tell the hospital he’s not on call for once?” Is an actual date alone with him too much to ask? Casper sniffled, tears once more beginning to erupt from his eyes. Fuck I’ve been crying all day... and now this?

Lathe moved to sit next to him, hugging him and letting him cry, rubbing his back. “I'm really sorry… Levi told me he had personally called Scotty because he was really worried- something was really wrong, especially with his spine, and Scotty knows his file forward backward and sideways. And he's one of the few doctors who actually use the serum… he couldn't have known that you two were going to have a day together… it was horrible timing...” I'm sorry...

Casper nodded and sighed quietly moving to grab the remote to turn the TV off. “I’m gonna go shower and then go to bed, I need to wake up early, I have a meeting tomorrow morning.” He looked absolutely horrible, his eyes puffy from crying all day, and face ashen. I just wanna be able
to cry in peace… and Scotty’s probably not gonna come home anytime soon… He stood up walking towards the stairs. “Can you lock the door behind you?” Please?

Lathe stood, catching his shoulder. “Casper-” He paused when he heard Casper’s stomach growl, thinking. “...have you eaten anything besides ice cream?” He watched him look away in embarrassment, sighing quietly. “I'll let you shower, but only if you come downstairs right after. I'm making you dinner.” You need to eat.

Casper sighed quietly. “Lathe, it’s already past nine…” It's basically the time I go to sleep... He sighed once more as his stomach growled again, and he could feel the bile rising in his throat. Definitely ate too much ice cream...

Lathe could see Casper raise a wrist to his mouth, ushering him to the bathroom. You look sick... He stayed outside the closed bathroom door, going into the kitchen and giving Casper privacy. Damn... He rifled through their pantry, lifting out ingredients. He had everything he needed for pasta when Casper came into the kitchen, looking pale. Shit... “I'm making you dinner. Go upstairs, take a shower, and then you can come back downstairs and have pasta the way you like it.” You always liked the pasta I made. “You'll feel better after a hot shower and a warm dinner. Please.” Let me.

Casper could only nod before he walked away in silence. He’s gonna give me a lecture when he sees the amount of ice cream I had. He sighed as he made it upstairs, going through the motions and grabbing himself some pajamas as he walked into the bathroom. I'm gonna be sick again… fuck...

It didn't take long for Lathe to be working in full swing, sighing as he went to throw out tomato skins and saw the numerous ice cream cartons in the trash. Holy shit... he's probably been eating ice cream and throwing up all day... He went on cooking, rolling out the pasta with a rolling pin and cutting it up as the tomatoes simmered. ...the two of them need to fix this shit... it shouldn't get so bad that when they have a date day and it gets cancelled Casper’s this depressed... it's horrible... He made plenty, waiting for Casper to come downstairs before putting in the noodles. ...I hope he feels a bit better after this... and I hope to god he didn't take so much lactaid that his system is flooded with it... that’d be bad.

Casper sat at the kitchen table, a miserable look on his face. Go on, lecture me and tell me how much I’m acting like a child, go on.... I know you’re gonna do it, get it over with. His eyes downcast as he stared at the table in front of him, unable to pick his head up to look at Lathe. I can’t… I can’t look at you… I’m horrible...

Lathe was patient as the noodles boiled, going to clean up the kitchen. He soon set a bowl full of pasta and sauce in front of him, gently resting a hand on his shoulder and smiling softly before he
turned away, going to clean the kitchen, even working on the dishes already in the sink. *I can do stuff... and I'm not about to lecture you about why not to eat a shit ton of ice cream. You've heard it before and it's not what you need now. You're trying to cope and I'm just going to help.*

Casper was surprised as he looked up, watching Lathe go back to cleaning. “You’re not gonna lecture me?” *This is a first... You always lecture me whenever I vaguely even touch ice cream.*

“What good is it gonna do, first of all? You're a grown ass man as a doctor who knows damn well what happens when someone lactose intolerant eats a shit ton of dairy and then takes too much lactaid. You've heard it before.” Lathe looked over to him. “...and I can understand being pissed off and really upset when you barely see him, look forward to a day just about you two, then find out that very morning it's been cancelled. I'm sorry about that... but I just want you to feel a little bit better, and lecturing you isn't the answer.” *It's just not.* Lathe turned back to the sink, starting to fill their dishwasher.

Casper could only nod. “I didn’t take any Lactaid….” He quieted down as he picked up his fork and began to eat. *Thank god... actual food...*

Lathe looked to him in shock. “...are you telling me that you would eat a shit ton of ice cream, throw it all up, and then start over again? All fucking day?” He watched Casper stare at his plate in silence, his fork twirling slowly around and around a few noodles. *...holy shit... “Casper, honey…”* Lathe moved to him, pulling up a chair and going to hug him. “You can't do that to yourself…” *You're really making me worry...*

“But I wanted a fucking day to myself with Scotty! Is that too much to fucking ask for?” He cried, a sad whimper escaping him. *I hate this! I hate that this always happens to us! Why can’t I just have the day to myself with him?* He closed his eyes, trying not to sob more. “I’m a fucking child, because I thought if it got bad enough I would just go to the hospital, and then he’d have to come see me one way or another…” *It was stupid and childish...*

Lathe’s eyes widened, looking up to him. “You were trying to put yourself in the hospital just to see him?” He watched the tears start streaming down his face, pulling him close. “I'm so, so sorry that today went to shit... it was horrible timing... and I'm so sorry that you were stuck home alone... but when Scotty comes home, please don't kick his ass... Levi called because Eren was in pain and he had to go through surgery with him... I'm so sorry that we took all his attention away from you but he looked so tired afterward... and he looked so hurt and dreading of what was going to happen when he came home... he wanted to spend today with you... and it just didn't work... I'm so sorry, but he loves you and he didn't want to have to come in on a day he'd rather be spending with you... it's a day off wasted... but you two can have another day together soon... have Scotty take off one day and demand to not be on call. You're a CEO, for god's sake- you can have things rearranged. Make another day this week to spend together. Even if someone in our family is unlucky enough to need him, we’ll go bug someone else. You deserve to have him to
yourself more than you do now.” You're both so busy... “You two need a vacation together...”
...that wouldn't be a bad idea... you two definitely need it.

Casper just broke down, clinging onto Lathe as he pulled him close. “These things always happen,
we always plan the whole day and then he can’t go... it’s so... it’s just...” I’m so sick and tired of
it... “I.... I don’t want our marriage to be like this too...” I know it hurts to think about losing him,
but at this rate he’s practically married to his job....

Lathe sighed quietly, holding onto him. “Things definitely need to change... you two need some
kind of structure... like one day out of the week or every two weeks you don't work... cut down
on hours... but you need more than just once a month or less and for half of them to be
cancelled...” This isn't healthy...

Casper could only nod as he shifted around. He sniffled, calming down after a few minutes and
moving to eat. “Thanks for making food...” At least one of us got dinner... Scotty's probably
scared I’m gonna beat his ass...I mean, I’m mad, yeah, but he always takes it out harder on
himself. “Did he.... did he look scared?” That I was gonna kill him?

“...he did... he's going to come home exhausted and probably camp out on the couch... he was
really sure that when he went home he'd have to face your wrath.. he was so upset that today didn't
go the way it was planned...” There's no way he'd rather work than just be with you all day...

Casper nodded, quietly twirling the noodles onto his fork. “Yeah... he probably will, and they’ll
probably give him tomorrow off...” They usually do when he gets called in...

Lathe looked over him, his voice soft. “...do you have anything important tomorrow? Or just
paperwork?” I know you said you had to shuffle things around, but that doesn't necessarily mean
that it's all tomorrow.

“I have a meeting in the morning I gotta go to... so I should probably go to bed once you leave...”
And sleep alone because Scotty thinks I’m gonna kill him. He felt his body deflate at the thought.
Shit... I really fucked up... he shouldn’t be afraid to come home.

Lathe watched him slump in his chair, gently rubbing his back. “I'm so sorry... you and Scotty
need to talk soon about having another day set aside for the two of you. Pull strings at your work,
ask him about taking another day off... and about making sure he's not on call. But one of us has to
text him and tell him that you're not going to kill him... and that you don't want to sleep alone.
Being alone to sleep is going to really hurt in the state you are now...
Casper sighed quietly shaking his head. “He’ll still sleep on the couch… he’s been tiptoeing around me lately… I feel like such an ass…” *He’s always afraid he’s gonna upset me… and that’s not healthy…*

Lathe sighed, about to speak when the front door clicked, their heads shooting up. *...he’s home? I thought he’d be there until at least eleven… huh. Lathe looked to the clock, his eyebrows shooting up. ...it is eleven… well then. “…Casper, Hun.” He looked to the man next to him, watching him look back at him, almost scared. “It's okay. Just go talk to him. Hug him, welcome him home. It's okay.”* *You two can't be so afraid of the other like this… it's really unhealthy.*

Casper slowly nodded, standing from the table and shuffling to the front where Scotty was hanging up his jacket. He saw Scotty stiffen the second he heard him, slowly coming up to him and wrapping his arms around his middle, burying his face in his chest. “Welcome home, Scotty…” *I missed you so much…*

Scotty stood there awkwardly for a moment before his hands slowly wrapped around him. “I’m really sorry about today Casper, I know we had everything planned out, but…. There’s no excuse… I really need to learn to put you first. “I’m sorry… Did you eat something? Lathe’s car’s still here, do you want me to go?” *I can go get myself something to eat if you’re still in the middle of talking with him…*

“Lathe made me eat dinner… I ate a lot of ice cream again…” *It didn't hurt as badly as being alone… and I hurt even more when I stopped… so I kept eating and it distracted me… “I missed you… and it's okay… you were on call but Levi called you so early and it was really serious and you had to go and make sure he was okay… I had to cancel our plans and my stomach and throat hurt from all the ice cream but it hurts less than you being gone so I didn't stop…” I need you. Casper clutched Scotty close, craving touch. Hold me… please…*

Scotty felt guilt take over his system. “I know, I’m so sorry Casper…” He timidly leaned his head down to kiss the top of his head, his own arms unwrapping from Casper. “Why don’t you go and eat a bit more, and try and settle your stomach before bed? I need to take a shower.” *You won’t be able to sleep that great and you have a meeting tomorrow morning, so you should probably make sure you can sleep…* Scotty tried not to let the guilt and pain show on his face, or in his voice. *I feel horrible…*

Casper shook his head, burying his face in his shirt. *You smell like you… you just smell like clean after you take a shower… “I'm not hungry anymore… I ate enough… I just wanna go upstairs and sleep with you… you're forbidden from sleeping anywhere but the bed…” I need someone to hold onto me.*
Scotty sighed quietly, shifting to pick Casper up and hold him to his chest. He turned away from the stairs heading towards the kitchen and setting Casper at the table and getting him to let go of him for the moment. “Eat, Casper… I know you just ate ice cream all day, so your stomach is going to be hurting all night… just eat this, okay?” He kissed the top of his head, ignoring Lathe’s presence for the moment as he searched the fridge for some food to eat. I’m starving… I didn’t get to eat yet…

Casper nodded, looking up as Lathe touched Scotty’s arm, silently asking if he wanted the rest of the pasta. He always makes a lot… there’s some left… He ate steadily, hooking ankles with Scotty the second he sat down. Mine…

Scotty thanked him quietly, grabbing a bowl and filling it before he poured himself a glass of bourbon. I need to be actually able to sleep tonight… Fuck I’m not going to be able to anyways. He sat, letting Casper hook their ankles, and quite surprised that he was being so touchy feely at the moment. Isn’t he pissed at me? Because he could actually schedule around today…. But not again… Scotty couldn’t help but let his shoulders slump as he ducked his heating face with shame. I’m a horrible fiance…

Casper looked up as Scotty set down a glass of liquor, watching as Lathe quietly washed the dishes before walking to the doorway. Lathe?+ He watched Lathe pause, his words slow enough for him to understand. It's been awhile since we've used Russian. +...thank you… for making me eat and stopping me from killing myself with ice cream…+ It was bad…

Lathe took a while to process it, his words unsure as he gave him a small smile. +...it's what friends are supposed to do. If something’s got to kill you, ice cream isn't the thing you want to do it.+ He watched Casper chuckle, giving them both a small smile before leaving quietly. They can have their peace.

Scotty’s voice was weak as he thanked Lathe and wished him good night. He kept his head down and his eyes downcast as he sipped at his drink, eating quietly. I don’t want to upset him… He’ll just eat more ice cream, and I won’t be able to stop him without taking him to the hospital… and then he’ll be even more mad because I’d probably get roped back into work again… He let out a sigh louder than he’d planned, his face still ashen and weary. He’s still hella pissed at me…

Casper didn't miss the broken look in his eyes, finishing up his warm noodles, picking at the small pieces of tomato left. He waited for Scotty to finish his bowl before standing, slowly shifting to sit in Scotty’s lap, curling up into his neck. Mine.

Scotty let him without protest. “I’m sorry….” His voice weak as he carefully wrapped an arm
around Casper, his other lifting the glass to his lips to finish the glass off. I know you said I can’t sleep anywhere but the bed… But I don’t think I’ll be able to sleep, and I don’t want to disturb you… You have to get up early…

“I-I want a vacation…” Casper’s voice was small, burying his face in his neck. “I want to take off two weeks with you and go somewhere where we don’t have to worry about you being called into work and I don’t have to go to boring as hell meetings… we can just be with each other and have fun and relax and just do whatever… I really fucking miss you…” It’s a pleasant surprise when I wake up and I’m not alone, and an even better surprise when I don’t fall asleep alone… but even then you’re always so exhausted… I’m very lucky if I get even some sleepy morning sex or just a sliver of attention… we haven’t done anything much for a while..

Scotty nodded as he listened to Casper. “I know I’m not the best fiance… but we can do that, I’d need to schedule it way in advance… where do you wanna go?” You pick, it’s better if you’re happy about what’s going on… and it would be nice to take a break sometime… He shifted to get up, scooping Casper up once more and heading up towards their room. I can deal with the dishes tomorrow…

Casper clung to him, his legs immediately wrapping around his middle. “Somewhere warm… by the water… I dunno.. we can figure that out soon… I just… anything to get to have you to myself a little…” I need you.

Scotty nodded, quiet as he held Casper and carefully walked up the stairs, setting him on the bed before he pulled away so that he could grab pajamas. I’m not gonna be able to sleep, but maybe I’ll be able to hold onto you until you fall asleep… and then I’ll sit in the bathroom and read… maybe contemplate how shitty I am…

Casper lay limply on the bed, watching Scotty dress. He reached for him when he was done, making him slip into the bed and turn out the light. Casper immediately tugged on the taller man, Casper clinging to him. “Stay…. please try to sleep and stay with me…” I need you here right now…. Casper nestled his nose into his neck, breathing him in. Mine… He slept soundly, feeling warm when he felt something bringing him from sleep. He blinked awake, groaning as he felt himself stretched full. What… He felt Scotty kissing all over his cheeks, feeling a gentle hand on his length. You…. “Scotty…” Casper felt want settle in his abdomen, reaching up and winding his arms around him, his legs spreading for him. You managed to get like this while I was asleep… fuck, it’s a damn good way to wake up...

Scotty continued to kiss at his cheeks. I know you need to actually get up soon, but I figured you might want some attention first… He hummed as he slowly pulled out and snapped his hips back inside, grinding down into Casper for a moment before he repeated the process. I know you don’t like me wearing a condom… but I needed to for today…
Casper gasped at the sudden burst of pleasure, clinging to Scotty as he moved. “Oh… o-oh…” Casper panted as Scotty began a deep pace, quietly moaning. *Fuck... I needed this*...

Scotty chuckled, his hands at his hips as he continued with his pace is slowly pulling out, snapping into him and grinding down on him. His mouth barely left his neck or his shoulder, marking him, but making sure it could be hidden. *Fuck, I want you on cloud nine... and you certainly sound like you're getting there...*

Casper held onto him, softly moaning as Scotty marked him. *I needed this so much... “Scotty... oh my god...”* Casper buried a hand in his hair, his chest heaving with every breath. *Fuck you're so deep...*

Scotty smirked, kissing at his neck more, his voice rough as he spoke. “You like this? You like getting fucked in the morning?” *Hmm, if you say yes I'll be inclined to do it more often...*

“I love it like this... you're here with me, at least one of us wakes up hard... fuck, I could get so used to this...” *I would appreciate a good fuck in the mornings...* Casper slowly rocked with him, whimpering as he was roughly handled. “It feels really good...” *I want this more...*

Scotty chuckled darkly, nipping at Casper’s ear and tugging on it. His grip around Caspers soft flesh tightened on his hips. *I wanna fuck you.... I wanna give you everything.* He pulled his hips back, snapping them back deep inside of Casper before he repeated the process and set a brutal pace. “Hmm, I wanna hear you Casper...” *I want to hear you beg for it.*

Casper gasped as Scotty sped up, crying out as he was pounded. “O-Oh Scotty... fuck... hah, f-feels really good...” His legs wrapped around his waist, feeling pleasure burning in his abdomen. *I wanna cum...*

Scotty continued to pound into Casper, soft grunts leaving him as he kissed at his shoulders and his collarbone. *Fuck, I need to make yesterday up to you, and I don’t know how to do that... You’re always so pissed at me...* He shifted his hold, letting go of Casper’s hips and moving his arms to curl them around Casper’s body, holding him to his chest. *I still feel horrible about it.*

Casper latched onto him, feeling his hard length rubbing against their bare stomachs. He enjoyed the feeling of Scotty flush to him, his voice breathy. “S-Scotty... h-hah....” He tried not to tug too hard on his hair, crying out and arching his back when he finally came between the two of them, Scotty pounding him all through it. *Oh fuck...*
Scotty continued to pound him, feeling his own coil tighten and promptly snap just after Casper cried out. He settled inside of Casper, resting his forehead against his shoulder, just taking in his scent. He’s still probably hella pissed at me for yesterday… “‘m sorry…” His voice was muffled in his shoulder, and his arms still wrapped tightly around Casper’s middle. I don’t wanna let go, but your alarm is gonna go off soon.

Casper held onto him tightly, enjoying the closeness as he slowly came down from his high. “…you owe me for yesterday… but I’m not mad. And I mean that.” He nuzzled into his shoulder. “I miss you… and I could certainly get used to waking up to this…” Fuck, this was a really nice surprise…

“I know I do, and I’ll keep that in mind.” He murmured, kissing his neck before slowly letting go and peeling himself off of Casper. “Do you wanna shower?” You probably do, we’re both a mess… He slowly pulled out shifting to take the condom off, tied it off and got up to take it and throw it in the trash. Even if you said you’re not mad…. I’m still guilty… and I saw how much ice cream you ate yesterday… I feel like shit…

Casper slowly nodded, turning over and shutting off his alarm. I don't want it to blare, no thank you… He sat up, seeing where Scotty had dropped their clothes into a pile and smirking. Of course. He stood, stretching and going over to his fiancé, hugging him from behind. “…I love you.” …there are things we have to work on… and we’re certainly nowhere near perfect yet… but I really do love you.

Scotty let out a sigh of relief as he heard Casper speak a soft smile forming on his lips as he turned around to peck Casper’s cheek. “I love you too…. Let’s get in the shower, shall we?” He asked quietly, a soft look on his face, and the guilt in his eyes and features well hidden. Casper doesn’t need to know… I’ll probably always feel guilty about it…

Casper smiled, holding onto him as they walked to the bathroom, grabbing their fluffy towels on the way. “I don't want you to feel guilty about yesterday… and I don't want you to feel guilty that it's happened before. I just want us to talk later about fixing this kind of thing.” We both lead very busy lives… but we need time for each other.

Scotty followed him quietly. But I can’t help but feel guilty… I know you kept telling me not to… but I can’t fucking help it… He turned the water on hot, watching as the steam slowly rose up. Yeah, well, Casper’s gonna need to shower and then leave right away because he has a meeting… Scotty let his shoulders slump a bit. I’m not on call today, but the nurses can discharge Eren, and he’ll be fine, he was doing fine after surgery…
Casper stepped into the shower with him, immediately pressing flush to Scotty’s front, kissing across his collarbone. *Mine.* He held onto him, relaxing when Scotty moved to wash him. *This is nice…*

Scotty was gentle and thorough as he washed Casper. *Just make Casper happy…. that’s all you need to do…* He was silent as he washed Casper off, moving to wash himself. “Have a good day at work…” *You gotta get dressed and go…*

Casper pouted, not wanting to let go of his fiancé. He relented after a moment of thought, sighing. *I have that fucking meeting…. “Thanks, Scotty.”* Casper leaned up on tiptoe, softly kissing him. “I really love you.” *Maybe I’ll see about coming home a bit early… you’ll be alone all day…*

Scotty smiled and pecked his forehead. He smacked his ass with a playful glint in his eyes. “Go on, get to work.” *You kinda have a meeting, and from what I remember it’s important.*

Casper gave him a scandalized look, smirking when he stepped from the shower. “Alright, alright. If you say so, Master.” Casper winked before he pushed the shower curtain back, grabbing a towel and going to dry off and dress. *I do need to get going…*

Scotty watched him leave, his eyes going downcast as he heard him leave the bathroom and head towards the bedroom. *Fuck… I’m gonna end up drinking today…. shit, maybe I should go in and release Eren anyways? Yeah…. Casper’s got a pretty full schedule today if I remember correctly…*

Casper rifled through his closet, dressing in an ivory dress shirt and charcoal grey pants. *I look fine.* He grabbed his wallet and keys, looking over Scotty when he walked from the bathroom not long after with a faint smirk. “I’ll be seeing if I can maybe get out early…” He winked, descending the stairs. *I'll be home soon enough.*

Scotty looked surprised, watching him walk down the steps. “Don’t skip work just to come home, you have a business to run!” *You’ve been avoiding running it for years…*

“Yeah yeah, I guess. I should hire someone to do that for me.” He grinned widely, obviously joking. “But I think the boss can get to come home early every once in awhile.” *I don’t really take days off…*

“Don’t slack off Casper!” Scotty called to him from the bedroom as he rummaged for clothes. *I could just sleep… I mean I probably should but I can’t…. I won’t be able too… just like I couldn’t
Casper cackled, the door locking behind him as he went to his car. *I can't be late.* He was glad that time seemed to have mercy, the day going by at a decent clip, looking to the clock. *It's one…. I already ate, I got plenty of paperwork done... yep, I'm done.* He packed up, handing his secretary a small stack of finished papers. “I'm heading out. These are all done- have one of the interns run them down to the mail room when you spot one, okay?” *They need to get distributed. And I told you I'd be gone after one, so we're good. I just had paperwork anyway, and most of if got done.*

The secretary nodded taking the small stack from him and going through them quickly to make sure they were in fact completed. “Oh, a delivery came for you while you were in the meeting, and I completely forgot about it, my apologies.” She quickly scurried to one side of her office to give him a large and long white box with a red bow wrapped around it. *I believe it's from a lover...*

Casper looked surprised, taking the box. “Oh, that's fine- hm.” He took a step towards the door, looking up to her with a smile. “I'll see you tomorrow.” *What is this?* He went back to his office in the meantime, setting down his bag and going to unwrap it. *What is this?* He untied the bow, opening the lid and smiling widely as he saw two dozen roses nestled with baby's breath in the box. *They're beautiful.* He looked for a card, finding a small note and smiling as he read the name in neat golden script printed onto it. *Do your goddamn job, Casper. I love you. -Scotty.* He rolled up the ribbon and put it in the box, closing it and going down to the lot with it, feeling warm. *That's really sweet of him.* He smiled softly the whole drive home, setting down his bag and going to unwrap it. *What is this?* He untied the bow, opening the lid and smiling widely as he saw two dozen roses nestled with baby’s breath in the box. *They're beautiful.* He looked for a card, finding a small note and smiling as he read the name in neat golden script printed onto it. *Do your goddamn job, Casper. I love you. -Scotty.* He rolled up the ribbon and put it in the box, closing it and going down to the lot with it, feeling warm. *That's really sweet of him.* He smiled softly the whole drive home, walking up the drive and unlocking the door quickly, dropping off his bag. “A little package came for me at the office today…” Casper’s voice drifted from the front door, hunting for his lover. *Where are you...*

Scotty was sitting on the couch, the coffee table supporting his feet and an empty bottle of bourbon. His eyes were bloodshot as he stared at the black television, barely looking up when Casper came in. *Shit... This is pathetic... He's gonna be pissed at me, but I couldn't stop myself... Fuck, I need to limit myself on drink next time... If there even is a next time, he's probably gonna kill me now.* His shoulders slumped almost instantly, tears starting to form. *Fuck... I don't want him to be pissed...*

Casper stopped when he saw Scotty, setting his things down and immediately coming to his side. “Scotty?” He pulled him close when he started crying, his hand running through his hair. *Fuck, you drank a lot... “It's okay, love... it's okay....” I'm right here. It's okay.*

Scotty couldn’t help but begin to cry, letting Casper pull him close. *Fuck... he's gotta be pissed at me, even though he says it's okay... It's not okay.* He sniffled and tried not full out sob. *He's pissed...*
Casper shifted to bring Scotty into his lap, gently holding him as he cried. “It's okay, love… I know yesterday didn't work out as planned but it's really okay… I love you and even though I wasn't happy yesterday I know we can fix this… we can fix this and be a lot happier… but you can't beat yourself up over this so much…. it really is okay. I'm not mad at you.” *It really is okay.*

“Casper…. You ate twenty seven pints of ice cream… You were throwing up all day because of it… Like hell you’re not mad at me… You wouldn’t have eaten that much! You looked like you were trying to put yourself in the hospital…” Scotty pulled away from him as his emotions bubbled to the surface. *Fuck! I can’t snap at him, it’ll make everything worse…*

“I didn't eat that many… but… I was just so upset… I looked forward to our day together for two weeks and the morning of, I wake up so happy that I get you to myself… and then I'm told that our day is cancelled… I was so upset and lonely and sick of never seeing you and I wanted nothing more than to just have you to hold onto… but right now I'm not drowning in sadness and I know that we can work to fix this. We can change how we do things and have more time to ourselves and with each other. We can do that.” *We can.*

“I took out the trash Casper… I counted every fucking one of them…” He cursed himself for snapping once more at him, putting his elbows on his knees and running his hands through his hair. “I’m sorry, can I just… can I have five minutes?” So that I can calm myself down and not snap and yell at you, because I don’t wanna do that to you…

“........love, let me clean you up and get you upstairs, okay?” *You look so tired.* Casper gently rubbed his back, softly kissing his cheek. …*maybe I did eat that much… shit…. I really wasn't thinking when I went and bought all of it…*

“I don’t think I can sleep Casper…” *I tried last night and even with the alcohol I had last night I couldn’t fall asleep… Fuck.*… He let Casper rub his back, his head down. “I’m so sorry… I’m a horrible fiancé…”

“You drank a lot… let's get you upstairs, I'm sure you'll sleep.” Casper helped Scotty to his feet, guiding him to the stairs. “You're not a horrible fiancé, Scotty… it's just that being engaged and being married means that we can't keep living the way we do. We need to change our schedules a bit. It's okay.” Casper got him into the bathroom, trying to coax him into washing his face. *You need to get a bit cleaned up.*

Scotty let Casper drag him along and gave into washing his face up, though in reality he simply doused his whole face and rubbed his hands all over his face. He let Casper dry his face off, shifting a bit as he was dragged and deposited on the bed. “Casper I can’t sleep….. I tried last night… It didn’t work then…” *It’s not gonna work… and if I do fall asleep, I’m gonna knock out*
completely and probably not wake up for awhile…

“You need rest…” Casper moved to strip him, fetching soft pajamas and leaving them on the side table, shifting to lay over Scotty’s legs. *I can help you relax.* He softly kissed at his clothed length, teasingly nipping him. *Just let me do this*…

Scotty’s head spun as he was laid back on the bed, feeling Casper’s weight on his legs, confusion settling in. “Casper?” His voice full of confusion as he felt Casper’s mouth on his clothed length, the sensation instantly making him hard. *Oh fuck… what’s he doing?*

“I want you to feel good… and maybe this will tire you out…” Casper gently nipped at his quickly hardening length, dragging down his boxers and nuzzling his base, his tongue dragging over the flushed flesh. *I hope this feels good*…

Scotty’s eyes widened, his hands gripping the sheets underneath him. *Oh fuck… he’s… he’s gonna give me a blow.* “Fuck… Casper…” He watched Casper engulf his hard length, a gasp leaving him as he felt Casper’s nose in the course hair surrounding his base. *Oh shit…*

Casper easily took him down to the root, gently sucking and rubbing his bare thighs. *You sound wonderful when I do this*… He slowly pulled up on him, his lips gracing his tip. *Mine.*

Scotty watched him with shaded eyes. “Oh fuck… Casper… you don’t have to…” *Fuck but it feels so good… But I’ve been so shitty to you, why are you so willing to do this?*

“But I want to…. I want you to be able to sleep…. ” Casper gently lapped at him. “And you deserve it…. ” *I don’t tell you how much I love you enough… we have a lot to work on, but we’re getting there.* Casper kissed his tip before his lips parted, taking him in again, all the way down, feeling his coarse hair on his nose, swallowing around him. *I want you to feel good… I want you to be able to relax after this and sleep….*

Scotty shut up after that, letting out shudders gasp after shudder gasp as he tried not to buck his hips. *Oh fuck it feels so good…* His hand came down to run through his blue hair before he threaded his fingers through it and grabbed it. *Fuck it feels really really good…*

Casper let him grip his hair, one hand gently cupping his sac, massaging him. “Does it feel good?” He rubbed the tip of his tongue through Scotty’s slit, looking up to him. *Does it?*
“Fuck… yes it does Casper….” *Fuck... your tongue*, it feels amazing. He groaned, bucking his hips up and feeling his tongue run up his length, a soft moan leaving him. *So good*…

Casper let his tongue run all over him, listening as he panted. He took him into his mouth again, bobbing faster. *Just let go... you deserve to feel good*...

Scotty swore loudly, his climax hitting him after a few more moments. “Casper.... fucking shit…” He let his head fall back on the bed, knowing better than to try and push Casper away from his over sensitive length. *Fuck, he knows I'm still sensitive*... It sent a shudder down his spine, his length still hard in Casper’s hands.

Casper swallowed down his load, still lapping at him as he remained hard. “Hm, you don't seem to be done, love…. you seem to still be very interested…” He chuckled deeply as he softly nipped at him, wrapping a hand around his shaft. *I'll sate you*.

Scotty groaned as he felt Casper’s hands on his shaft. “Fuck… *Casper …”Fuck you know I’m sensitive after I cum, and you're still rubbing me*... He let out a small whimper, letting his body relax into the sheets below him, closing his eyes.

Casper looked up at him as he pumped him, his lips toying with his tip. “Just relax, love….” He stroked him faster, watching his face. *I know how sensitive you are... but you're still so hard, and until you can relax enough to sleep, we can play.... “Would you like it better if I used something else?”* Casper gave him an innocent look, shifting onto his knees with his back arched, tempting him.

Scotty opened his eyes, looking over Casper’s figure and seeing his ass in the air. “Damn, Casper… Fuck, I want you to ride me…” His whole face heated instantly as he realized what he said. *Fuck, alcohol really is liquid courage*....

Casper smirked, kissing his tip. “You know, I **like** that idea.” He shifted to slowly kiss him, shedding his clothes in his lap and going for the lube and a condom. *I don't want to have to clean myself out after... I just want to focus on you*.

Scotty watched him move around, his eyes not leaving from Casper’s skin, watching with fascination and utter want. *He’s beautiful... and I still can’t believe he agreed to marry me... If we ever get there.*
Casper was soon enough nude in Scotty’s lap, going for the lube and kissing at his neck as he reached back to stretch himself, not wanting to get hurt. *I want this…*

Scotty hummed, turning his head and letting Casper kiss his neck, his hardon leaking profusely. *Fuck, this is amazing…* “You're gonna get fucked twice in one day…” He murmured, his hands coming up to grab Casper’s asscheeks and pull them apart. *Mine…*

Casper sighed deeply as Scotty parted the flesh, reaching deeply to stretch himself, quietly sighing as he slid his fingers in and out. *Fuck.* He nipped at his neck, groaning as he made it to three fingers. *I want it…*

Scotty let him, letting out soft moans as he soon let go of Casper’s ass cheeks, letting the jiggle back into place before smirking and smacking one and then the other, leaving large red hand prints on his ass. “Fuck that’s hot…”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for the abrupt end to this chapter but I need inspiration to smack me in the face to write anymore... any suggestions?
Damien was quiet as he read his paper, glancing up occasionally to Iroh next to him, still going through a book of crosswords. ....I still don’t understand why we have to be wearing tuxes... then again, I’m glad I didn’t fight it, since everyone else on this plane is too. He tugged at his collar for a moment, glancing out the window. ...this is going to be interesting....

Iroh looked around at the members on the plane with them. Aniki didn’t send who I thought he would, which either means he’s dead or moved up in the world... ^Mori, when will we be landing? ^

^Soon, Iroh-sama.^

^And I assume Brother expects us at the estate when we land?^

^You are correct, Iroh-sama.^

He sighed and nodded, looking to Damien over his crossword book. “I’m going to be speaking a lot of Japanese today, you best learn quickly, I know you only know a handful, but they’ll take advantage of you because of the language barrier, and know that I can’t always protect you from them…” You’ll have to prove yourself to Aniki and his followers.

^I’ll do what I can.^ He showed him his paper, every article in kanji, a card in his hand with notes to help him. ^I’m getting there.^

^I’m impressed the fucker knows that much.^

Iroh pinched the bridge of his nose as a majority of the men started to laugh. Fuck it. ^Oi, knock it off, don’t think that just because I’ve been in the states that I’ve forgotten everything I’ve been taught.^ He watched them quiet and straighten themselves out. Bunch of dogs that have a far worse bark than bite. “Felix, down.” The dog snorted, laying down but keeping his teeth bared still. At least none of them have decided to shoot anyone yet, that’s a plus.

Damien gave the man who had spoken a raised brow, looking back to his paper. They all look a lot more uncomfortable now that they know we both can understand them. Of course. Damien was unfazed, taking a sip of his water. I feel like this trip is going to be hell with some sprinklings of
amazing. Or vice versa.

Iroh sighed, shaking his head and looking at Felix, petting him and grabbing his vest as they went in for a landing at the airport, being taxied to the hangar the plane usually stayed in. ^Is transportation ready? Or are we waiting like sitting ducks?^ I like everything on time and on the move, the less time I have to be here the better...

...sitting ducks? He’s talking like we’re being hunted. Damien straightened out the few bands on his right hand, the metal rings inconspicuous. ...then again, these guys all look shady as fuck, so. Damien stood straight next to Iroh, the tallest of the group by far, looking around with apparent disinterest.

^They’ll be here in a few moments, we’re going to unloaded the plane Iroh-sama.^

^Go, make it quick, I want to be gone in less than 10 minutes.^ He waved them off, moving to readjust the holsters where his guns were hiding under his jacket. ^Let me guess, you packed all of yours away?^ Knowing you you probably did... Iroh’s eyes had hardened as he looked to Damien, reaching into his back pocket and pulling out a black handgun for him.

^Yes…^ Damien was stunned as Iron handed him a gun, taking it and instinctively slipping it into his breast pocket. ^I have other…^ Fuck, what was the word? Uh… ^ah… weapons, on me…^ I think that’s the right one…. His voice was quieter, glancing over to the others. .....wow. This could apparently go very badly. I have rings on both hands and a few knives, but I didn’t know I’d need a fucking gun.....

Iroh sighed, shaking his head for the moment and grabbing Felix’s leash and holding it. “Felix, follow…” He’ll follow me… He stepped outside of the plane just as three black SUVs pulled up beside them, their luggage and some boxes being added to the back of all three cars. ^He comes with me, if any of you object you’ll find a bullet in your eye before you finish your sentence. He was met with silence, relieved and walking towards the SUV in the middle, motioning for Damien to follow him.

Damien didn’t even bat an eye at his words, following him silently, not even looking at the other men. …this is life now. Damien got in beside Iroh, studying the face of their driver for a moment. ...okay. Once I memorize faces, I’ll feel the tiniest bit better about this shit.

^Tomaki, take us to the estate, Brother wants to see me.^
Of course, Iroh-sama…. and where shall your guest be staying?

He’ll be staying with me, at all times, and is not to leave my sight, is that clear?

Yes.

Iroh nodded, settling back in the seat and petting Felix as his head laid in his lap. “You’ll get used to this eventually. I hope you’ve seen people get shot before…” That’s the first thing he’s gonna have me do when I get back, and have you do...

“I have.” It’s not pretty…...holy fuck, what’s going to happen when we get to the estate? Damien was quiet, looking out the window and going over defensive and offensive techniques in his head, remembering every way he’d ever learned to disarm an attacker. ...I’m a head taller than anyone else here, and much heavier so far… as long as I can disarm an opponent and keep them from drawing more weapons, I could easily win in a fight....

Iroh waited in silence as the drove away from the airport and drove 10 minutes away to the estate, guards at the gate, opening them up for their SUVs and closing them once more. The rest of the winding driveway was very wooded, a very tall building standing in a clearing at the end of it, long outdoor walkways leading to other smaller buildings of the same like and build. “We’re here…” I wonder who I’ll be shooting today.

“Alright.” Damien got out when Tomaki opened the door for him, immediately skimming the edge of the woods around them, taking in their surroundings. Very wooded, well protected, completely walled in... yep, we’re gonna die.

Iroh-sama, where would you like your belongings? And the belongings of your guest?

Put then in my house, make sure all of it gets there. Will we be eating with the family today?

Big Brother will tell you, we’ll get everything moved, sir.

Iroh swore under his breath, whistling for Felix to follow him and stay at his side, making sure Damien followed him as well into the house. The maids bowed in his presence, and pointed towards the sound of someone groaning in pain and a fist meeting flesh. Does he ever learn?
Damien contained a grimace as he heard the sound, his face completely blank when they were led into a room with three men tied and kneeling in a line, a man currently holding one by the collar and repeatedly punching their face. Oh my god. He didn’t move, standing next to Iroh, breathing slowly. .....Whatever the fuck happens, I’m keeping Iroh safe.

^Well, if it isn’t my little brother, come to join us have you?^

^I have, Want do you want me to do?^ Iroh’s face was blank as he crossed his arms over his chest. 
Fuck I’m really gonna have to shoot someone.

^Well, I was originally going to have everyone take a turn with you until you’ve learned… but it seems like you haven’t forgotten…^ Hiro set the man he was beating up down, waving to the line of them. ^Go ahead, they tried to skim money off the top… your guest too, or he doesn’t stay with you.^

Iroh sighed, reaching into his jacket and pulling out a gun, turning the safety off and barely hesitating as he shot two of the three in the head, looking over to Damien. You better fucking do it, I gave you a gun...

Damien was completely still as Iroh shot the two men, waiting for Iroh to look at him before taking out his gun, looking to the third man. ^Look at me.^ His voice was commanding, lifting the gun when the man obeyed and shooting him right between the eyes without hesitation. Good, I still have decent fucking aim…. but holy shit… He watched them hit the ground, turning the safety back on and slipping it back in his jacket like nothing happened.

^Will we be joining the family for dinner?^ Iroh looked unenthused as Hiro looked over every aspect of Damien. Fuck this is already going badly.

^Yes, and I’d like you to sit to my right, I’d like to get to know your…. guest.^

Iroh nodded, bowing before turning and whistling for Felix letting him follow and waiting for Damien to follow him as well. You’ll get lost if I leave you all alone.

Damien immediately fell into step next to Iroh, thinking, ...I’m going to have to talk to that bastard tonight… great.
Iroh led him in silence out of the larger home and down the pathways to his own home. Their boxes and luggage already having been carried into the main hallway. “Grab your things, we’ll unpack, because we’re gonna be here awhile.” I can tell already... it’s going to be a bitch trying to go back home... even if he lets us.

“All right.” Damien grabbed their suitcases and brought those into the bedroom first, immediately unpacking his guns, hiding two more on his body. ….I have a feeling I’m going to need these. He switched out his plain bands for more squared-off rings, the tops neatly decorated and textured. Just in case... He began to put their clothes away, quickly finishing and going to help unpack kitchenware, producing a knife out of nowhere to open the boxes. ….fucking hell, I’m so paranoid... I feel like they’re going to try and jump us any second...

Iroh sighed quietly, pulling out two bed spreads for them, and setting them up appropriately before going to his closet and smiling as he saw his kimono. I should change... He got dressed in the dark blue fabric that hugged his frame perfectly. Well, it fits better than the last time I wore it... that’s a plus. “Damien?” Where have you run off to?

“Yes?” Damien walked in from the kitchen, stopping when he saw him. “...that looks really good on you.” It really does. Damien looked him over, stepping over to him and gently pecking his cheek, his hands on his waist. Fuck, I’ve been right next to you this whole time and I still missed you. “Do I have to worry about being affectionate while we’re in... I’m assuming our own house? Er, yours, excuse me…”

“Not necessarily, but Tomaki may come in and out just to check we’re alive every now and then, and to drop off my assignments...” I fucking hate doing what he makes home do... balancing his fucking checkbooks, and making sure all our bills are paid and everyone is paid as well. “I’ll be taking you with me when we go to work tonight, we should get some rest, I usually sleep during the day anyways...” I normally was only awake at night anyways...

“That makes sense...” Yeah, they probably do most of their ‘work’ at night... Damien turned and began to undress, neatly hanging up his tuxedo, the guns still in the pockets except for one, taking it out and stashing it closer to the bed. He went to put on simple black sweatpants and a tank top, sighing, thinking when he looked at his rings. .....I don’t want to take them off. “Forgive me for being paranoid, but I’d rather keep my rings on…”

Iroh chuckled, leaning down to kiss his lips softly. “I’m going to wait for Tomaki to come, he’ll be here soon, we don’t wear our tuxes to dinner, he’ll find you something proper to wear.” It needs to be like that... otherwise Aniki will kick you out.
“Alright. ...what could he possibly bring?” What counts as dinner-wear for your family...?

“Alright.” That doesn’t sound too bad. ....might be a bit difficult to hide guns or knives in there, though. He sighed, stretching. “....I’ll stay up until your brother comes...” I don’t want to leave you alone.

“Tomaki isn’t my brother, Hiro won’t dare step foot in my house, unless he become gay as well.” He fucking knows but he doesn’t understand it...

“...ah. Alright....sorry.” They know... which is going to be fun. Then again, it’s a bit obvious they know, but still.

“Get some sleep, I managed to get a few hours on the plane...” Not much, but enough... He kissed Damien softly once more before going through the door and sliding it shut. Tomaki should be here soon.

Damien nodded, sighing and going to settle on their mattress. I’m tired already... ....Guh.

It wasn’t long before there was steady rapping on the door, Tomaki waiting patiently outside, smiling softly when Iroh opened the door. ^Hello, Iroh. May I come in?^

Iroh nodded, letting him in and sliding the door closed again. ^Will you be taking us out tonight as well?^ He led Tomaki to the kitchen to sit at the low table, smiling softly as Tomaki went to make tea immediately. I forgot about that habit of his...

^I will, yes.^ Tomaki went about the kitchen, thinking. ^I’ll be the one driving you two around, mostly. ...It’s good to see you again. How’s America?^

^It’s nice, I’ve met with Damien’s friends, and they’re all good people, we may need to return for another wedding soon... I’m not sure when it will be but I know we’ll probably be here for at least that much longer....^ We’ll be here for awhile... ^It’s not illegal there.... to be gay...^
^...are you two married?^ Tomaki looked over to him, immediately looking at his hand. *No ring*....

^No, I would’ve had to invite Brother to the states… we’re not married, dating… we’ve been dating since I started college almost.^

^...I’m sorry how difficult it’s going to be for the both of you here… but I’m happy if he makes you happy.^ Tomaki have him a cheeky grin. ^And you’d better invite me too.^

^Quite honestly I would expect for the entire organization to come except for the Little’s… Damien needs a yukata for dinner…. but you saw how tall he was….^ I want to sleep a bit more, tonight will be a long night.

^It’s hard not to notice, he was a head taller than everyone else there. I already have our tailor working double-time to get his ready. They’ll be able to get something for his form ready before dinner, no worries. ...oh, and, ah…^ Tomaki went to get teacups, setting one down for each of them. ^There’s no doubt in my mind that your brother will test your boyfriend soon… I know he’s not going to appreciate the paranoia he’ll be living with for a while, but it might pay off soon…^ He’s going to be tested, no doubt about it. And failure is probably going to mean death, so.

^I know…. I hope that he’ll do well, I can only imagine…. how far behind are the books?^ You would know how much of a headache it’s going to be… Iroh reaches to sip at his drink, smiling as he drank the whole thing.

^You have your work cut out for you, sadly… I’m sure he made sure that you’d have plenty to do. Nothing too extreme, though. It’s been worse.^ Tomaki refilled his cup, smiling. *You can handle it.*

^That’s a relief to hear…. How many people?^ How many more hotels do we have? Or host bars? Or women? How many do I have to make sure get paid? Iroh drank from the glass, relieved with how much it relaxed him. ^Can you get me the cherry blossom Assam tea? For tonight?^ I want some of that tonight with dinner...

^We have 784 people right now- we’ve taken on quite a few since you were last here. And of course- blooming tea, tea bags, or loose?^

^Blooming and loose, please, the loose can come to my residence, the blooming for my crystal pot at the dinner table… now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to catch up on sleep as well…^ He stood up, moving to their bedroom and crawling under the covers with Damien, curling up to his side. *I’m*
tired…

Tomaki nodded, cleaning up and seeing himself out. Alright.

Damien woke up when Iroh came in, curling around him protectively. I’ll keep you safe. He fell back asleep, waking up three hours later, his hair standing on end. Something is fucking wrong. He immediately sat up, reaching in fear for his gun, bolting out of bed when the door crashed open, a barrel pointed at his head. Fuck.

Got him! The man smirked, only to groan in pain as he got a fist in the gut, lowering the gun. Fuck!

Damien immediately went for the gun, disarming the man and hitting him solidly in the face with the butt of his own gun, feeling his nose break under it, taking him and throwing him into the hall. Fucking hell… He looked up as he heard more sounds, raising his gun and looking another man dead in the eyes as they started to aim, pulling the trigger and watching them fall. Protect Iroh. Damien ran down the hall at the ready, listening and turning when he heard footsteps, jumping at the man when they rounded the corner, grabbing the gun and wrenching it from their grasp, taking hold of them and flipping them, smashing them onto the floor hard. He took the clip out of the gun and threw it across the room, seeing movement out of the corner of his eye and throwing the gun itself, hitting a man in the cheek. Where the fuck are they coming from?! He rushed them while they were blind, taking their gun and knocking them out with a blow to the temple. Fuck… Damien rounded the house three more times, a total of twelve opponents scattered for him, seven running with their tails tucked, two knocked unconscious on the floor and three more lying dead in puddles of blood. is it over? Damien scouted the house, soon coming downstairs and grabbing a pitcher of water, dumping it on the first of the unconscious men, waking them up just in time to be thrown onto the sidewalk, making sure to throw the second on top of them before they could get up. Fucking hell…. but, what about the bodies…? Damien turned to see one of the three in the living room, thinking. I don’t know… Damien went to find spare cloth, dragging the corpses out onto the front lawn, closing their eyes and covering their faces. all between the eyes… at least they didn’t suffer, I guess…. Damien came back inside to mop up the blood, needing the better part of an hour before he came back to the bedroom, finding Iroh awake. “….Iroh….” Fuck… He got into bed, pulling them close. you’re safe…

Iroh sighed in relief as Damien came into the room, hugging him tightly. Is… is everything okay? Are you okay?” I heard gunshots, and bodies drop… I was so afraid it was yours. “How… How many were there?”

“Twelve… there are three dead… I’m fine, I’m completely fine…. I was scared, I just wanted to keep you safe….” Damien kissed Iroh neck gently, trying to get the smaller man to relax, lying them down. Mine….
Iroh sighed in relief, curling up to him and kissing his jaw. “Oh thank god you’re alright… they’re… they’re probably getting the bodies now…” I was so worried… So worried you’d be gone...

“I put them on the lawn… I cleaned the blood… …I just…. Fucking hell…” Damien reached to undo the kimono, relieved when warm skin pressed close. “I’m sorry, I just…. I needed to know you’re okay…” He kissed his cheek, aware of every tiny sound. I’ll keep you safe....

Iroh nodded, holding onto him and letting him hold him close. Fuck he’s holding me, I’m gonna get horny…

“D-Damien…” He almost purred as he was kissed on the neck, his body feeling warm as he became aroused. I love this....

Damien could very soon feel Iroh hardening against him, smiling softly. …I’m not in the mood for all the way…. but… Damien slowly slid down to kiss at Iroh’s middle, tugging down his underwear. I haven’t done this in awhile… I hope I’m still decent at it....

Iroh gasped softly as he felt Damien kiss down his body. “D-Damien?” What? What are you doing? Fuck, just because I’m horny? Is that why? I should be able to hold it.

Damien looked up to him, his cheek resting on his hip, his lips close to his base, Iroh’s length lying bare. “…is this okay?” You don’t look completely sure....?

Iroh’s entire face was completely red, nodding as he squirmed around. He hasn’t done this to me in… should I even be letting him do it? He’s…. His breath hitched as he felt Damien’s tongue on his length. We haven’t had sex in a long time either....

Damien lapped at his length, very careful as he took his tip into his mouth, the mewls coming from Iroh instantly making him hard. Fuck it. Damien came up, a hand going to slowly stroke him while he reached for lube. Fuck it, I want him....

Iroh watched as he shifted, reaching for Damien’s clothes to try and get them off of him. I want them off… all off… “Damien… you’ll be… please?” I won’t ask you to be gentle, but I want it....

“You can ask… I’ll be gentle, don’t worry…” Damien shed his clothes, smiling as he looked over Iroh, splayed in the bed with an open kimono under him. The silk feels really nice… Damien poured lube onto his fingers, going to kiss all over his front as his first finger went to his opening. I’ll take good care of you....
Iroh was a moaning mess for the next hour as Damien pushed and pulled at his pleasure, making him bend and writhe in bliss. They slept together for a long while before he woke up to get himself ready for the dinner. *Tomaki should be here soon with the yukata for Damien*… “Damien… honey, you need to wake up for dinner…”

Damien stretched like a cat, managing to drag himself out of bed, rubbing the sand from his eyes. *I could use a lot more rest…* He meandered to the bathroom, smiling and wrapping his strong arms around Iroh for a moment, kissing the back of his neck lightly. “I love you….”

Iroh flushed completely as he looked over his shoulder and up to Damien. “Tomaki should be here with your Yukata soon… he’ll probably be wearing his own and help you get into it….” *I need to get into my own.* He stood on his tiptoes to kiss at Damien’s chin going to the closet to pull out his black kimono. *Damien might really like this on me…*

Damien nodded, washing his face and shaving, quiet as he looked himself over in the mirror. *….not even a nick from shaving…. and yet I dumped three corpses on the lawn…* He looked up when he heard a faint knocking, going to the door, opening it and seeing Tomaki. The man smiled faintly up at Damien. *…he really is tall.* “I have your yukata ready. I assume you’ll need help getting it on?”

“Please.” Damien let Tomaki in, closing the door. *Iroh likes this one… I wonder why.*

Tomaki quickly helped him put it on as well as help him hide and show him where to hide everything inside before bowing respectfully to him. *^Brother was very pleased with your work today, you may be wanted more and more from him.^* I only know so much English…

Damien smiled, returning the gesture. *^I can imagine…. thank you.^ I don’t know what to make of that just yet.*

Tomaki smiled and opened the door, looking out to see Iroh in the black kimono. *Oh wow… he must really be trying to impress everyone… ^Shall I escort you to dinner?^

^Please. And thank you.^ Damien paused when he saw Iroh, wanting to pull him closer. *….fuck, he looks good.* Damien was a bit unsure, offering his elbow. “…I don’t know if it’s proper if I lead you or not….”
Iroh smiled softly, holding onto the fabric. “It’s generally not, but I’ll allow it for now.” He smiled, holding onto Damien and making sure that Tomaki was leading them to the correct place, looking around the table to see multiple men beat to a bruised pulp as well as some looking away once Damien entered the room. *He kicked their asses…*

Damien felt a strange pride as he led Iroh into the room, seeing nine very thoroughly beaten men at the table. *They took away three place settings…* Damien led Iroh to the spot on Hiro’s right, sitting in the next seat over, quickly skimming the room with his eyes. *Okay, simple layout… escape would be easy.*

Hiro’s eyes were on them the entire time as they walked in and sat down. ^Now that everyone is here, we’ll be starting dinner…^ He set his glass of sake down, the sound a cue for the maids to bring in plates and plates of food for everyone to share. *I want to know how he walked away unscathed… there were 12 of them, and I only came out with 9 in the end…*

Damien looked over the food as it was set on the table, copying everyone else at the table, very grateful that he could use his chopsticks. *It smells good… strange, but good…* He paused for a moment, paranoid, making sure that at least two other people at the table had taken what he had on his plate. One plate in particular was set in front of them, but he didn’t touch it, passing it along. *Not yet… I don’t trust it.*

Iroh looked over his slowly growing plate, eating what he could as he knew Hiro was watching the both of them. *This’ll be interesting.*

^So, Iroh, Who is your guest? I’d like for you to introduce us.^ Hiro looked at Damien with the same intense brown eyes that Iroh had, only with a darker aura in them. *I want to know.*

^This is my husband and bodyguard, his name is Damien, and I’m sure you’d be happy with him if he started training your men? Even your best 12 couldn’t beat him.^ Iroh said it with a smirk, looking down the ring he’d placed on his finger before they came. *Damien will have to deal, if we’re married you’re already part of the family, not easy to get rid of….*

Damien looked up, playing the part easily, nodding to the man. ^It’s a pleasure to meet you. And your men fight well…^ Damien looked over them, many of them with very bruised faces. ^…but not well enough.^

Hiro looked over the remaining 9, shaking his head. ^They should be shot for their failure… but I
suppose a second chance and new training is in order…^ I want his strength… when the fuck did he get married?

^I think after watching three others fall, they’ll be a bit more eager to succeed…^ Damien took a slow sip from his cup. ^I’d want to know who trained them in the first place.^

^He’s already been shot, he wasn’t worth meeting… train them well, I’ll get you access to the dojo and the first few I would like you to teach.^ The nine that survived, they’ll be trained first.

Iroh seemed to sigh in relief as Hiro approved of Damien. He’s…. Everything is going to be okay for awhile…

Damien nodded. ^Of course. We’ll begin when you see fit.^ Damien continued to eat, relaxed. He approves of me…. good.

^Tomorrow, to make sure you’re at your best.^ Hiro grew quiet during the meal as everyone else did. I need to keep an eye on them…

^Of course.^ Damien continued to eat, watching the nine men shift uncomfortably and wince with every bite. ….if I try to train them while they’re hurt, they’ll be useless. ^Brother?^ Damien could tell Iroh was holding his breath as he spoke. ^If I try to train nine men who can’t even sit still and wince with every bite, they’ll be useless in training. If you have men other than these nine to train, they should go first. Once these nine can move without pain, they can properly be trained. I can’t work with them if their movement is hesitant or restricted.^

Hiro looked between Damien and his men. Where has he been this entire time? ^That works as well, I’ll get you a list, and give you an even ten… you’ll start after you escort Iroh where he needs to go.^ You’re still a bodyguard… I’m not sure I’ll accept your marriage yet.

^Of course.^ Damien nodded, thinking. First and foremost, I keep my husband safe. ...husband. Huh. I can get used to that.

Hiro seemed pleased, finishing his plate before leaving. After a few moments everyone seemed to sigh in relief. Iroh sighed quietly, leaning into Damien’s shoulder. I’m going to eat a bit more, then get dressed to go to work.

Damien immediately wound his arm around Iroh’s middle, continuing to eat. …. The food is really good… at least I can look forward to meals, more or less.
Iroh smiled, eating a bit more before standing. “Let’s get going, I need to get changed for work…” 
*I can still nap a bit more as well...*

“Of course.” Damien stood as well, gently guiding Iroh from the room again, his head held high. 
Mine. He walked them back to their house, closing the door behind them, turning Iroh to softly kiss him before speaking. “Do you think your brother approves of me?”

Iroh blushed as he was kissed, holding onto his sleeve as he spoke. Well…. “He approves enough to keep you alive for the moment… just know you’re okay for a few weeks…” *I hope he’ll like you more and more...*

“Alright… I’ll make sure he realizes I’m much more valuable alive than dead. If he tries killing me again, he might find himself my next target…” Damien paused, thinking. “....I really hope I don’t sound like a murderer to you… I know I’ve killed four people- technically five- in the last twelve hours but it hasn’t sunken in yet and I just… I want to keep you safe…” Damien let go of Iroh, looking down. ....*fucking hell... .....why do I feel like this is going to ruin everything?*

“Don’t kill him, we’d have to permanently move to Japan if we did that, and I’d rather not have to deal with the legalities of becoming the Head.” *Absolutely not....* “I don’t mind, really, I grew up around this stuff… I know you haven’t really talked much about your work but, it’s never bothered me… other than the fact that you’re huge and could quite possibly crush me without realizing it...” *That’s.... that’s really what I’ve been most afraid of...*

“I…. I’ve never done much killing in my work… there were dozens of instances where things went so violent that the suspects I was tracking were shot, but I was the one doing the shooting exactly six times… and every single time there was no chance for me to disarm, to talk the situation down, or do anything else, and a part of my mind had shut down and accepted that I was probably going to die the second before I killed them.... ....I’m not used to it, and I have no fucking clue how your organization is getting away with it, but.... I don’t want you to think I’m changing. ...and I know I’m big, it’s obvious there’s a big difference between us… but I’m always so, so careful with you.” Damien pulled Iroh closer by his waist, a hand running over his back. “I don’t want to hurt you… after all-” Damien winked, smirking. “-you’re my husband now.”

Iroh rolled his eyes and smiled softly. “Well, I’m not afraid of you, I know you won’t change and you won’t hurt me. Just know that if it ever comes down to you or me…. choose yourself, because you’d just be killing both of us if you chose me....” *I need you to know this now, I don’t know how many people know I’m back in Japan....*

“....okay.” Damien moved to softly lap at his neck. “...I’ll keep you safe however I can… I’ll do
everything to protect you… but I know that people will want to hurt you… and I’d rather you not suffer if it’s inevitable….” I’ll do what I can…. and have mercy if I need to….

Iroh sighed in relief that he understood, tilting his head to the side to give him access to his neck. He’s being gentle. “Tomaki’s going to take over work for tonight, and bring back the books for me to complete… I’m tired, and I don’t really want to go out tonight.” Knowing me, I’d be going to the red light district...

“Alright. Will I be staying here with you, then?” He watched Iroh nod, smiling and pecking his neck one more time. “Okay. Maybe you can teach me how to do the books… they’ve probably saddled you with work enough for three.” I’ll help you.

Iroh nodded, leading him to the bedroom to get changed into sweatpants and a sweatshirt that was five sizes too big on him. Damien’s hoodies are my favorite… He walked back down to the kitchen to start making tea, waiting for Tomaki to arrive. “You’ve balanced a checkbook before, right?”

“Of course….” Damien smiled when he saw him, leaning against the counter. “…you look good in everything… but you look even cuter in my stuff…” Damien couldn’t help it, his arms winding around Iroh from behind, holding onto him affectionately. I love you.

Iroh continued to blush, holding onto Damien’s arms as they wrapped around his torso, staying like that until the kettle started to whistle. Time for tea… fuck I’m really tired… “Damien, can you feed Felix?” He needs to eat...

“Yeah, of course.” Damien got out the dog food, smiling when Felix immediately trotted over to him at the sound of the plastic, setting down his bowl of food and water, petting them. Good woof. Damien looked up as Iroh picked a tea jar from the cabinet, curious. “Whatever kind of tea that is, it better have enough caffeine.” It’s gonna be a long night.

Iroh nodded, smiling as he steeped the tea for a long time before drinking it, waking up a bit more. He was wide awake when Tomaki brought the first book and 2 boxes worth of papers that were supposed to be filed with it. Time to start. He tried to teach Damien as much as he could as he slowly got more and more exhausted throughout the night, so used to going to sleep hours ago. I’m tired… When his eyes started closing Damien would make yet another pot of tea and try to wake him up. I’m really tired… It was around 5 am when Iroh started to really fall asleep, Tomaki having brought in 7 books and 18 boxes worth of papers to sort. I wanna sleep, I can’t concentrate...
Damien finally gave in when Iroh started to really sway, catching him. “We can finish these later, okay?” He watched Iroh nod, putting down his pen and scooping up his husband, carrying him to the bedroom and lying him down, curling around him. Sleep…. we could both use it… ...I’m so fucking tired….

Iroh whined when he was laid down, weakly trying to pull off the clothes he was wearing. … want off… too hot…. He gave up with the hoodie over his head and the pants around his knees. Fuck it….

Damien chuckled, taking off his clothes and tossing them off the bed, undoing the belt of his yukata and lying it on the floor, going right back to pull Iroh against him. Mine….

Iroh rubbed his face against Damien’s chest, happy with the closeness. “Hmm…. I love you….” I really do….

Damien smiled, pulling Iroh closer, rubbing his back. “....I love you too…. So much.” He kissed the top of his head, letting himself relax and exhaustion wash over him. Sleeeeeeep….

Iroh slept the entire night, only waking up when Tomaki came in with yet another book and three more boxes. I’m so fucking tired… I need more sleep. He got up to use the bathroom, looking at the large bath that was there and already full. A bath…. in hot springs water… that sounds wonderful...

Damien woke up when Iroh moved, settling in. Want Iroh back… He got worried when he was gone for more than just two minutes to pee, getting up and shuffling to the bathroom, stunned to find Iroh tiredly sinking into a hot bath. “Iroh, honey?” You’re gonna fall asleep in there…. Damien moved into the room, smiling when Iroh tiredly reached for him. “I’m coming, I’m coming…” He shed his boxers, stepping into the tub after him. Mine.

Iroh smiled as he came into the hot springs, happy that he was being held, his body heating up as he felt Damien’s hands on his hips. His hands are really big…. Hmm, I wonder if we’ll shower together… probably…. right?

Damien moved Iroh to his lap, sinking into the water with him up to their necks, sighing deeply. This feels really nice…. Damien let his hands slowly wander Iroh’s front, over his stomach and chest and down over his hips, lightly ghosting over his inner thighs. I love you.

Iroh hummed in contentment as he was handled gently, nuzzling against his neck and kissing the skin there. I like this, this is really nice. “When we get a house together… can we get a really big bath like this?” I really really like this one...
“Mhm, that would be great….” I like it.. a lot… Damien tilted his head to the side, letting Iroh nip at the skin, groaning. Mine.

“And…. can we actually make it like this house? I…. I miss having a Japanese style house.” You don’t ever see these in America….

“I think I’d like that… it’s really nice…” ...I could see myself living in a house like this permanently… Damien moved to softly kiss the smaller man, turning him over to straddle him, keeping him close. I love you. ….I want you to be happy.

Iroh smiled softly as they switched places, kissing Damien back just as softly and languidly as he did. I wonder what I’m gonna end up doing except for sleeping… He gently moved to kiss up his jaw, feeling the stubble against his lips. Hmm, it kinda tickles….

Damien smiled as Iroh started to kiss all over his face, chuckling softly. “You’re wonderful, you know that?” Damien let his eyes slip shut as Iroh kissed him again, letting their tongues meet. Damien pulled them flush, his strong arms keeping Iroh firmly in place, being careful not to hurt him.

Iroh let Damien pull him close, giggling a little as they pulled apart. This is amazing… it’s… it’s almost less stressful than back in the states… but our schedules are all out of whack. “Hmm, I wanna sleep more when we get out…”

“We’ll check what time it is when we get out, we might have time for more sleep…” Damien smirked, chuckling at how happy Iroh looked. “….it’s so nice to see you this happy… who are you and what have you done with my Iroh?” Damien poked his belly, happy. I love you.

“I’m not stressed… and I’m home, this is probably the safest place I’ll ever be… well, maybe except for your house… but we don’t have a house yet, do we… Husband?” You only had the lease…. didn’t you?

Damien smiled, shaking his head. “We don’t have a house just yet, husband, but I’d be very happy to have one with you… when we’re back in the states, if you want, we’ll buy a plot of land, and have one built just the way you want it… it’ll have plenty of room for nice hot baths like this and it’ll look just like home… I’d love that, wouldn’t you?”
“I would love that, we should definitely do something like that…” He kissed at Damien’s stubble some more, his hands gently running through his hair. “Hmm, when do you think we’ll be invited back to the states? Wait, we never told anyone we were coming here, did we?” I don’t think we ever did….

“No, we didn’t…. oops.” Damien and Iroh laughed for a moment, the larger man letting his hands wander Iroh’s sides. “Do we need to be invited back to leave this place…?”

“Probably, I don’t see Aniki letting us leave anytime soon…” Fuck, how are we supposed to tell them…. “You might have to call one of them eventually….”

“I’m worried about the line being tapped, honestly… that sounds like something they would do. Maybe we can send a letter? Sneak it out of this compound to mail it?” That would work. “Easier than trying to sneak away to have a phone call… unless we get a good opportunity…”

“That’s true…. Hmm, I’ll think about it, I hope you know the address…” Someone’s address at least...

“I don’t have addresses in my phone, and I only know Lathe’s address off the top of my head…. but it’s been so long, the other ones I have are probably wrong by now…. People move and stuff… “Lathe can send gossip around quick, he’ll let everyone know we’re at least alive.”

Iroh nodded and kissed at his neck. “I can get the letter out, don’t worry about it…” I know someone who will mail it, and won’t think twice about it...

“Good….” Damien tipped his head back, sighing deeply. “….you’re wonderful… even if I’m vaguely terrified, I think we’re gonna be okay….”

Iroh nodded and smiled happily as he hummed. “We’ll need to get out soon and shower…” I need to do work after I sleep… that means I need to go to the host club...

“Alright….” Damien moved to gently nudge Iroh’s head back, kissing up the column of his neck and lapping at the soft skin affectionately, soon standing, Iroh’s legs around his waist. “Let’s get you cleaned up….”

Iroh squealed as he was lifted up into the air, holding onto Damien for dear life. I don’t want him
Damien smiled and carried the man into the shower, turning on the hot water and waiting for it to heat up. *Come on.* He soon stepped in, sighing deeply. *Feels nice.*

Iroh sighed as well when the warmth was returned to his skin, looking at the small stools on the floor. *They should be sturdy enough for Damien.* “Hmm, sit with me?”

“Of course….,” Damien slowly moved to sit, smiling at Iroh as they held onto each other, looking him over. “….you’re really handsome….” *I love you.*

Iroh flushed to his ears, grabbing for the soap and a brush as they were covered with warm steam from the water. *We’ll stay warm while we’re showering. I wonder if… if I should help him with his slight morning wood? I’ve been practicing…. “If-If I’m h-handsome, what does that m-make you?”*

“Hm….. what would you say?” Damien gently rubbed his hips with his thumbs, smiling softly. “You look really nice like this…. Spread out in my lap….” *I like it…. a lot….*

Iroh was about to speak before he sputtered with Damien’s words. *He likes this? With me in his lap like this?* His whole face was red as he moved to bury his face in Damien’s neck from embarrassment. *Oh fuck….*

Damien chuckled, his hands rubbing his back. “No, don’t hide… I can’t help it….” Damien gently lifted Iroh’s head back up. “Were you going to say something?” *I wanna know what you were gonna say….*

Iroh shook his head, moving to hide his red face once more. “You don’t get to know anymore.” *Nope, I’m done …* He took the brush, lathering it with the soap before starting to scrub Damien’s back with it. *Time to get clean….*

“Awww….” Damien moved Iroh further up in his lap, pressing their foreheads together as he murmured. “Please? I wanna know….”

Iroh looked at him with doe eyes for a moment before looking away in embarrassment and starting to shrink in on himself. *But that’s…. that’s embarrassing… “I….I-I…”* He was struggling to force
himself to speak. *I can’t tell him...*

Damien sighed and smiled softly, pulling Iroh flush to himself, rubbing his back. “It’s alright, don’t be embarrassed… but I’m gonna wanna know what you’re thinking of later, okay? But don’t worry about that now.” Damien turned to kiss his cheek, gently nipping his neck. *It’s okay...*

Iroh shuddered as his neck was nipped, whimpering a bit. *I’m gonna get hard and it’s gonna be awkward... “D-Damien...” d-don’t...* He whimpered as he was held, curling up a bit more. *I need to do so much today... I can’t sleep...*

Damien paused, pulling back a bit. “...I’m sorry...” He loosened his hold, leaning his cheek on his head. “It’s okay, really… we can just focus on getting clean if that’s okay… and you can have your own stool if you want. I just want you to be comfortable...” *I’m sorry... I ruined the mood...*

Iroh nodded, shaking a bit as he crawled off of Damien’s lap and to the next stool. *I need to get clean.* His hands were shaking and his head down as he started to wash himself, hiding his front and his face from Damien. *Need to get clean, he’s probably really mad at me...*

Damien watched as Iroh began to shake, moving to gently tip his head up to look at him. “It’s okay, honey... I love you.” Damien kissed his cheek and then pecked his lips, smiling faintly as he pulled away. “No worries, no shakes, no nothing. It’s all okay. Let’s get clean so we can get you into something comfy, okay?”

Iroh still shook as he was kissed gently, turning his head away and ducking it down as he washed the rest of his body, covering himself in suds. *Fuck... He’s gonna get pissed that I’m still shaking...*

Damien sighed softly, beginning to wash himself. “…it’s okay, love.” *It’s okay. Damien was quiet for a little, soon reaching for the shampoo. “Is it alright if I wash your hair?” You need to relax a bit.... let me....*

“I-I-I can g-get it....” *Fuck I’m stuttering...* Iroh closed his legs tightly, not letting Damien see anything as he curled up to himself on the stool. *This is... this is really embarrassing.*

Damien watched Iroh curl up, noticing something. *Oh. “Honey.... do you want me to take care of you?”* Damien smiled softly. “I want you to be happy and comfortable, honey...”
Iroh shook a bit more. *Fuck... “N-No... I’m... I’m fine...”* He reached for the shampoo, taking the bottle and putting it in his lap for extra measure. *He doesn’t need to, fuck why am I so horny all the damn time?*

“Iroh... are you sure? ... I don’t want you to think you’re an inconvenience....” *I’m sorry....*

Iroh’s hands continued to shake ever so slightly as he scrubbed at his hair, his body hunched over his lap, trying to will himself limp. *I need to stop getting horny whenever he touches me gently... otherwise this is gonna get really awkward. “I’m sorry... I-I’m f-fine...”*

“....Iroh, I’m worried...” Damien very carefully took hold of his wrists, his voice soft. “Look at me, okay?” He waited for Iroh to look up, smiling softly. “You don’t have to hide it, honey.... I’m flattered... when we’re done getting clean, I’ll take you back to the bedroom... I’d love to take care of you... you’re my husband now, after all... I love you.”

Iroh face grew even redder, only nodding a bit and quieting down. *He.... Okay... His body relaxed a bit, slumping but still hiding his lap. This is gonna be embarrassing, I.... I just freaked myself out enough to lose it. Shit. He was quiet as he reached back up to scrub his hair which was slowly getting white with the added shampoo. 

Damien sighed, reaching for the bottle and washing his own hair, grabbing the conditioner as Iroh was rinsing out his own hair. *“May I?” I want you to relax....* 

“Iroh looked over his shoulder to see that Damien was holding the bottle of conditioner. *He wants to do my hair? “O-Okay...” He scooted the stool closer to Damien and kept his back to him, which his hands covering himself. This is gonna be really embarrassing.... fuck I’m a mess...*

Damien nodded, giving himself a generous amount before setting the bottle down, going to massage it into Iroh’s hair. His fingers moved slowly, massaging his scalp. He smiled as he heard a small sound, leaning down to gently peck the nape of his neck. “Feel okay?”

Iroh shuddered as Damien pecked his neck, his face heating up again. *He knows I like when he does this. He made a small sound of assent and let him work his fingers through his hair. It won’t be enough to get me hard again... Iroh let his shoulders slump as he realized his situation.*

Damien’s brow furrowed when he felt Iroh slump, glancing down. *What’s wrong? Is he...... oh.* Damien let one hand continue working while the other slid down his back, starting to softly kiss up
and down his neck while he traced all over his side. We can fix that.

Fuck, he’s gonna get me hard again… should I make him stop? Or is he gonna keep doing it? Iroh let out a shaky gasp as he shuddered with Damien’s movements, not sure if he should let him continue or not. He… well, I can’t really tell him no…

Damien moved his hand to Iroh’s front, gently holding his wrists, slowly coaxing them to move from over his hard length. “It’s okay to be aroused… it’s okay to want it… don’t be embarrassed, don’t be ashamed… it’s okay, love…”

Iroh felt his face flush in shame at his words, tears pricking to the surface. He’s… he’s constantly reminding me like this but… I can’t help but think I’ve just gotten more needy… It didn’t take long for him to sniffle, his body starting to shake as he cried silently, or as silently as he could manage. This is embarrassing, he’s trying to get me back into the mood and I’m fucking it up.

Damien immediately stopped, turning Iroh around and holding onto him, trying to calm him down. “I’m sorry, love, I’m sorry… I don’t wanna push you too hard….” He rested his cheek on his head. “I… I want you to be okay with the fact that you have a body and that it does what it does…. but it’s okay to need time to get there…” It’ll take time…. it’s okay…

Iroh shook as he was pulled into Damien’s arms. “I’m… I’m sorry, I didn’t mean…” He shut himself up as he cried more, embarrassed about how this entire exchange was happening. It… it felt nice what he was doing but… I just… He whimpered as he looked down to his already flaccid dick, reaching to scratch at his head and remembering there was conditioner in his hair. I need to rinse it out…

“It’s okay, you don’t need to apologize… everything is stressful right now… but you really don’t have to be afraid of what I think or how I’m going to react to what you need or want, okay?” You’ll be okay… Damien looked up, gently leaning Iroh back to rinse out his hair, bringing the man into his lap and shutting off the water. “Let’s get you dried off… I can make you some tea and get you clothes too…” I want my husband to be comfortable…

“Y-You should get s-some more sleep, s-so you’re wide awake when you….,” When you go and teach them in the dojo… I probably won’t be seeing him a lot… Tomaki will probably drive me around… He gasped as he was lifted when Damien got up and set down as a towel was wrapped around him, only to get picked up once more.

“Soon.” Damien lifted Iroh up, carrying him to the bedroom in the buff, setting him on the bed and thoroughly drying him off, gently handling his arms and legs. You’re handsome… Damien went to
the closet and pulled out another silk kimono, showing Iroh. “This one okay?” I want you to be comfy….

“I’m… I’m not going o-out for awhile… s-shorts and a t-t-t-shirt are f-fine…” Iroh twiddled his thumbs, looking at Felix as he came to lay his head in his lap, starting to pet him. He knows I’m not okay… fuck, Damien’ll know… but he probably already knows…

“Okay…..” Damien got out one of Iroh’s pairs of shorts and a pair of boxers, though he went through his own things to find an old t-shirt, handing the pile to Iroh. “Is this better?” You like wearing my stuff… and you know that one’s my favorite shirt… I know you like wearing it…

Iroh looked at the pile and nodded, carefully moving Felix’s head off of his lap and going back towards the bathroom to change. If I change with Damien in the room..... but it feels like I’m running from him… I don’t think I’ve changed in a different room than him since we started dating...

Damien was surprised when Iroh left the room to change, quickly dressing in comfortable clothes before meandering to the kitchen to start making tea. Tea might help…

Iroh got dressed, sighing as he stepped out of the bathroom and walked towards his office. I need to get a lot done today. He shuffled inside, closing the door behind him, glancing over the stacks of papers he needed to go through for one book. Well shit… this is going to take all day…. well, Damien is gonna be busy training people today too...

Damien soon gently knocked on the door, his voice soft. “What kind of tea do you want, Iroh?” There are a lot to pick from.…

Iroh looked up and then back down to the ledger. “I’ll be fine, Damien….” You don’t need to make me tea… “You should get back to sleep a little…”

“Honey, the water’s already hot… the tray is all ready and everything…” Damien came in, gently kissing the top of his head. “I want you to have something nice to snack on while you work…” Please?

Iroh stilled and shrunk as he felt Damien’s hands on him. “I’m… I’m sorry…” I don’t know what to tell you.
Damien immediately took his hands off his shoulders when he froze up, his voice softer. “Don’t apologize, honey… I’m sorry if I’m still being pushy… I wanted to do something nice… I know you enjoy tea… please, pick a kind… there are at least twenty in the cupboard, I want it to be something you like…”

Iroh looked up to Damien his eyes still slightly fearful as he looked up to him. “The… the… the rose blossom is… is okay…” I can drink that.

“.....honey?” Damien moved to kneel next to the desk, his head below Iroh’s, trying to seem as non threatening as possible. “....Iroh, honey, you don’t have to be scared of me… what’s wrong, really?” Damien let a hand rest on the edge of the desk, their fingers lightly touching. It’s okay…

Iroh shook his head, his hands shaking ever so slightly even as their fingers touched. What if…what if he gets hurt? “I’m s-sorry…. f-for bringing y-you here…” You probably want to go home… He felt his face heat up, tears easily prickling in front of his eyes. He’s gonna wanna leave, he doesn’t want to stay...

Damien immediately shook his head, his look gentle. “....Iroh…. I want to go wherever you go…. I want to keep you safe and wake up to see you every day… I didn’t want you to come here alone, knowing what I knew and especially now that I’ve seen it… it’s going to be hell, but with you here, I’d do it again… of course I would…. please, don’t cry…. I want to keep you safe…” Damien went to lace their fingers, his thumb rubbing against Iroh’s. “I love you… and we’re going to make the best of our time here, no matter what.”

Iroh sniffled as he looked to their laced hands. “Can you let Felix in here?” I don’t wanna be alone while I’m doing this because I’ll fall asleep… He gently reached with his free hand to trace gentle lines on his hand. I want you to be okay with all my baggage… you always say it’s okay, but I can’t help but think it’s not...

Damien nodded, smiling and standing up, opening the door and letting Felix trot right in. He knew you were upset.... Damien left for the kitchen, soon coming back with a tray of tea, the pot, cup, cream and sugar all balanced easily next to a plate of cookies, setting it on a corner of the desk, pouring a cup as Iroh pet Felix. Damien set the cup down within easy reach, going to kiss Iroh’s cheek, just at the corner of his lips. “...I love you… I’m gonna go sleep, but if you need anything, and I mean anything, don’t hesitate to wake me up, okay?” I wanna be there for you.

Iroh nodded, sniffling still and picking up the mug of tea with a soft smile. He’s.... he’s actually okay with being here... He watched Damien leave them, setting the tea down and grabbing a cookie. I wanna sleep too.... but I already got out all this stuff... and he found the cookies... and made me tea...
Damien meandered off to bed, settling in and knocking out after a few short minutes. .....I’m so tired... He woke up when he felt shifting, seeing the clock on the wall showing an hour had passed before he realized Iroh was settling under his arm, drawing the smaller man close. “Finished with your snack, hm?” He smiled as Iroh nodded, chuckling and petting his hair. I love you.

Iroh nuzzled into his arm pit, holding onto his shirt. Wanna sleep again… He hummed as he felt Felix get on their bed as well. I can stay here... Iroh went lax as Damien ran his fingers through his short hair.

Damien was relieved that Iroh finally relaxed, kissing his head before falling asleep with his arms around him. Mine… He yawned as a quiet alarm on his phone woke him, stretching like a cat and reaching blindly for the noise, hitting snooze and immediately turning over to pull Iroh closer, his nose buried in his hair. Warm...

Iroh whined as he was jostled from where he was nestled, waking as he heard Damien’s alarm. Fuck… my head hurts… I don’t wanna get up…

Damien whined as he heard Iroh start to, making them both sleepily giggle. “We can rest for a little while longer…” He settled Iroh back in place, petting him gently. “....mm, you’re comfy…”

Iroh shook his head. “Don’t wanna get up…” My head hurts… and I feel really warm. I just wanna sleep...

Damien chuckled, cradling him against his chest. “It’s okay…. we don’t have to get up for a little…. ” We can stay put for a while.... They relaxed in the quiet before Damien’s alarm went off again, hitting snooze a second time. Ten more minutes....

“Damien, you need to get up…” I wanna sleep, but you have to go and start training people at the dojo. “Tomaki will be waiting for you…”

Damien groaned, stretching. He’s right… He stood, going to he properly dressed in comfortable and form-fitting clothes, wearing all of his rings. I’ll need these in case anyone tries something funny. Damien looked back to the bed, seeing Iroh lying in misery. Aw… Damien meandered over, kissing his head. “...are you okay, honey? Besides feeling exhausted.” Are you alright?

Iroh shook his head, burying himself into Damien’s pillow. My head hurts, and I feel really warm...
Damien looked upset, thinking. *I wanna take care of my husband… I have no idea what Aniki would think if I tried to tell him I have to take care of you instead of train anyone… “Do you want me to stay and take care of you?”*

Iroh shook his head as he snuggled further under the covers. *You need to go train people. “I’ll be fine…” He’ll train people and be gone for a bit… I’m tired…*

“Are you sure? I can stay if you don’t want to be alone.” Damien gently ran a hand through his hair, his brow soon furrowing. “You’re warm….” *I don’t like it.*

“I’m just gonna sleep…. don’t kill them, okay?” *I don’t know how long you’ll make them train for…*

“…no promises.” *I’ll drive them to pass out, but I won’t kill them…* Damien kissed his head all over before he left, his jaw set as he walked to the dojo. *They’re gonna have fun.*

Iroh sniffled as he left, his head pounding. *Everything hurts… I should get some pills…*

Ten minutes passed before there was a quiet knock at the door, a soft voice filtering through. “Iroh? Can I come in?”

*Oh, Tomaki is here…. “Mmhmm…” I’m tired…. His eyes were red as he turned, his body covered in sweat as he looked up to Tomaki. My head hurts… I don’t wan na get out of bed…*

Tomaki’s eyes widened as he saw Iroh, setting down the tray he was holding and running to the bathroom to get a cold cloth. “Iroh, you look awful… no wonder Damien sent me over…” *Nooooo…*

Iroh coughed as he laid back in bed, whimpering as Tomaki put a cold cloth on him. “Can… can you get me some pills?” *I feel like shit, fuck, I should’ve known this would happen…*

“Yeah, I have some here….” Tomaki reached for a small silver container on the tray, soon handing Iroh a few pills and a glass of water. “Drink the whole thing, you’ll need it….”
Iroh nodded, letting Tomaki help him sit up a bit to take them and feeling his head spin. *Holy shit, I’m gonna be in bed for days at this rate…*

Tomaki held Iroh steady as he drank, gently lying him back down. “You’re gonna need a lot of rest, Iroh… here, we need to do something to help with your temperature…” Tomaki went to the closet and found the thinnest robe he could, coming back and coaxing Iroh to strip to his boxers to redress him in the thin cotton cloth. *You need to cool down.* Tomaki went to get fans set up in the room, wet cloths draped over their fronts to chill the air. *Circulating air will help.*

Iroh whined as he had to redress, sighing as he was allowed to lay down once more. *Tomaki knows what to do… he’s taken care of me while I was sick before…. Damien was gone at work the last time I was really sick…*

Tomaki want satisfied until the air in the room was at least five degrees cooler than before, keeping the blinds drawn and the room dim, going to brush out Iroh’s hair and try to clean it somewhat with the brush and a cold, wet cloth. *Keeping your head from getting too hot is really important.* Tomaki was right at Iroh’s side when he woke up after his nap two hours later. “Are you hungry at all…?”

Iroh whimpered and shook his head, nuzzling into Tomaki’s gentle touch. *My head is still pounding but I’m exhausted, I don’t wanna be exhausted…*

Tomaki chuckled, gently petting Iroh’s hair, sighing. “I’ll get a cloth again, you’re really sweating…. how does your head feel?”

“Like it’s splitting open…. can you give me pain meds too?” *I need to know… I really need to know because my head fucking hurts like a bitch.* He whimpered as his hair was tugged even the slightest bit.

Tomaki immediately nodded, opening the silver container and fishing out a small magenta pill, cutting it in half, then half again, before handing it over with water. “That should help a bit.” He helped him sit up enough to drink the entire glass, setting down a thick towel over his pillow and under his head before getting to work, carefully beginning to wash his hair. “You’ll feel a lot better if your head doesn’t feel disgusting.”

Iroh groaned, feeling his stomach turn and flutter. *Fuck, I’m nauseous…* He huffed as Tomaki’s hands went through his hair, washing his head, closing his eyes as he tried to go to sleep.
Tomaki was very careful not to move his head too much, a damp cloth gently rinsing out his hair, drying it carefully. “That should feel better… and the pill should be kicking in any minute now…. You really didn’t need the whole thing, but you needed a bit at least.

Iroh whimpered for a moment before closing his eyes and quickly passing out. I’m tired… Damien’ll be home soon...

Tomaki was relieved, cleaning up a bit and going to work on the books while he had the chance, his head shooting up when he heard someone at the door three hours later, putting down his pen and walking quickly into the hall, seeing Damien. “Hello Damien. Training going well?”

“We’re in the middle of lunch right now… They gave me twelve men and I’ve already had three pass out from exhaustion.” That’s fun.

“…Wow. Aniki isn’t going to be happy with them…. Nope, that’s bad…

Damien shrugged, taking off his shoes. “I need to see who out of them is actually in good physical form and can actually withstand some intense stuff. I have some that we’re doing as well as you really can and some who really needed a break. They’ll all get better soon, though. ...is Iroh okay?”

“Iroh’s very sick, sadly…. his head has been hurting him the most, he has a fever, and he’s been sweating constantly, but I’ve tried to keep him comfortable…” Tomaki led him into the bedroom, holding the door for him. “I gave him a low dose of morphine and it really helped, he’s been knocked out for a while…”

“Thank you…” Damien knelt next to the bed, gently petting Iroh’s hair, surprisingly sweat-free. “Iroh, honey? Can you wake up?”

Iroh groaned, barely cracking his eyes open. Fuck… “....ired…. I’m tired, my head feels like it’s still splitting.

“Sorry for waking you up, I wanted to see how you were doing…. are you hungry at all? Need more medicine?” Tell me…
Iroh nodded weakly, trying to open his eyes up more. *More meds…. my head hurts…*

He looked over to the tray, thinking as he picked up the smaller piece of morphine. “This is morphine, right?”

“Indeed.”

Damien helped Iroh sit up enough to take the small pill, petting him gently as he drank the water. “Any food, honey?”

Iroh shook his head, nuzzling into his warm hand as he started to sweat all over again. *I’m nauseous, I don’t wanna eat anything…*

Damien nodded, gently holding him and petting him, soon moving to lie on the bed next to him. *My baby…. Damien looked up as Tomaki came in after a few minutes with a plate of food, accepting it with a surprised look. “Oh, thank you…” Damien sat up, a hand still in Iroh’s hair. Sleep… you’ll feel so much better…*

Tomaki smiled softly, looking over him. “He’s…. this…. this has happened before, I’ll try and get him back to health…. but he could very well be sick for a long time…”

“Damn…. I hope he’ll be okay…” Damien kissed Iroh’s head, worried. “Do you think he’ll be in any shape to attend dinner…?” *That’s important… and I don’t want him to be left here alone during dinner…*

Tomaki shook his head. “No, he’ll stay here, I’ll watch him, but you’ll have to go. Aniki will be okay if you tell him he’s ill.” *You’ll be okay…*

Alright…. and thank you for taking care of him…..” *I can’t leave him alone…* Damien quietly ate, soon standing. “I should go get the nine goons back into the dojo for training.” *I need to go…*

“I’ll keep working on the books and make sure that he’s okay… you should probably get back to work…” *It would be best if Aniki sees tired men. “You should go…”*
“Alright… thank you.” Damien kissed Iroh’s forehead, smiling to Tomaki before leaving, heading for the lawn behind the dojo. *I left them here… they should be back by now.*

Hiro sat hours later at the head of the long table, waiting for everyone to arrive as he looked over contracts. *I need to make sure that Iroh gets on the books as soon as possible, I need to know what we’re looking at...* He gritted his teeth a bit as he looked up to see Damien coming in wearing his Yukata, followed by the twelve that were to train with him. *Wait… why are there only nine? And one looks to be limping quite badly....*

Damien jerked his head when they were all inside, watching them all obediently sit, giving the man just behind him with a heavily bruised face a dark look before he fell right into line. *Good.* Damien moved to take his place next to Hiro, settling in. ^Your men did well enough today... three are missing, as is obvious. They passed out from exhaustion before lunch, so they won’t be joining us. And before we could begin again after our break, one of your men attempted a mutiny of sorts... he’s been thoroughly dealt with. But with what hell they’ve been through, they all did very well. I know much better where to start when we begin again tomorrow. ...also.^ Damien took a small sip from his glass of water, looking over to Hiro. ^Iroh’s fallen ill, so he’s unable to join us. Most likely he’ll be out of commission for a few days.^ It’s bad.

*That explains his absence....* Hiro nodded, looking over the rest of the table with a heavy glare. ^You’ll return to work the day after next, rest yourselves and if I hear you misbehave once more... which would be going against my orders, you’ll be dealt with.^ He watched as the man with the beaten face swallowed thickly and rubbed his neck. *It looks like he’ll behave now.* ^You’ll take care of Iroh tomorrow and think of a training regimen for the rest of my men to start following.^ I want everyone in good condition...

^Of course. I have a few ideas, so I’ll put them all in writing for you. And thank you.^ *I wanna take care of my husband...* Damien sipped from his water, looking up as the maids began to bring in the food. *I’m hungry....* He chuckled softly as the nine men tried to eat with restraint, still scarfing down their food. *They’re like wolves.... but they’ve earned it.*

Hiro watched them eat, hissing and groaning when they reached too far, and managing to catch a few glimpses of bruises. *Well if my men are better at hand to hand combat, that’s one thing....* ^Can you teach in weapons as well?^

^Some, yes. I can do normal and throwing knives, some work with baton-like weapons like baseball bats or staffs, and some more physical work with pistols and rifles. I know very little when it comes to swords, but I’m still in training for that myself, actually...^ *I need to find a new trainer for that, I want to keep learning that...*

^We’ll find you a proper teacher, how fluent are you in Japanese? Do you know any other
languages besides English?^ I need to know…. I might need translators.

^I can handle a normal conversation, and I’m almost fluent, but I’m not at a native level. I’m fluent in French as well, and I know enough Spanish to manage a conversation. I know very basic Russian, but that’s mostly because I haven’t studied it in quite a while.^

Hiro nodded, lifting his bowl to drink his Miso soup, thinking. ^You’ll have to come with us when we go to France then… we have a deal coming up soon.^ Iroh won’t let him leave…. but I need someone to stay in charge.

^Of course. As long as Iroh will be with me.^ That’s my one requirement.

^Iroh needs to stay to run the syndicate…^ This is going to be interesting…we may need to knock him out and then bring him. ^We’re only staying for two days to secure the deal…^

^...I understand.^ Damien sipped at his soup. ^In that case, Tomaki will need to remain at Iroh’s side at all times. We don’t want anything happening to him.^ Damien thought quietly, his brow furrowed. I don’t like the thought of leaving him alone… ^As long as the trip isn’t extended past three days, I have no issues with that.^ Three days. Two for the deal, and one extra in case. That’s it.

^Tomaki will stay with him while we’re gone, don’t worry about it.^ Hiro seemed to relax a bit. I’m surprised he gave in that easy…. maybe he knows better than to oppose me?

Damien nodded, looking over the table, eating slowly. I’ll have to tell Iroh…. ….I really don’t want to get us in trouble. Iroh’s not as respected as he probably should be, and I’m a complete outsider. I don’t have anywhere near a good enough rapport with anyone to oppose Hiro.

The rest of the dinner was quiet, Hiro leaving after one of his guards spoke to him. Iroh was drenched in sweat again as he woke up, coughing and huffing, his entire body feeling cold and clammy except for his forehead and back. It hurts…. it hurts all over...

Damien ran for the bedroom once he was inside their home, kneeling on the bed and reaching to gently pet Iroh. “Honey? Are you okay? How do you feel?”

“…..disgusting….”
“Do you want a bath?” Bath….. get you warm and clean….

“…yeah…” I feel gross… and I’m still nauseous. Iroh whimpered as he was shifted around, weakly clinging to Damien as he was settled against his chest, barely having the strength to hold onto his yukata.

Damien easily lifted Iroh up, walking with him in his arms to the bathroom, having him stand for just a moment to undress him before setting him in the hot spring. You’ll feel better soon.

Iroh whimpered as he was set in the hot water, tears welling in his eyes instantly. My head… my head hurts… He started to cry as he was leaned back against the wall of the bath. It hurts… I want Damien… “....Da-a….” I feel dizzy too...

“I’m coming, I’m coming….“ Damien quickly undressed and stepped into the bath, seeing his crying husband, gliding over in the water and soon pulling Iroh flush to his body. “I’m here, I’m here…. it’s okay… what hurts, honey? Are you okay?” I’ll fix it....

“M-my heeeaa….” My head hurts so fucking much... Iroh started to cry more, clinging to him and whimpering horribly, my chest hurts too... It was only a minute more before he started to cough horribly, his whole body trembling.

Damien kept Iroh close, turning his head. “Tomaki! Can you bring that morphine in here?”

The man was in the room in a second with the pill, looking away from the two of them as he handed it over, going to get Iroh cool water. “He’ll feel better if you’re the one playing nurse.” He’ll appreciate it.

Iroh whimpered but took the pill as he was given it. He whimpered as cool water was pressed to his forehead to try and cool him down. I feel so stiff and sore..... He whimpered, shuffling closer and yelping as their lengths touched, a heavy blush forming across his face as he quieted down. Fuck.... that felt nice...

Damien relaxed when Tomaki left again, jumping a bit as Iroh yelped, looking over his face. ....oh. Damien gently pulled him closer, sighing softly as their lengths rubbed. “....is this okay?”
Iroh nodded, holding onto Damien’s shoulders as he was held by the hips. He’ll be gentle… but… but I miss him being rough… He let out a strangled moan as their lengths rubbed together, beginning to harden.

Damien was surprised at his sudden moans, cradling Iroh closer, rocking against him as one hand went to stroke the two of them. I want you to feel good… this’ll help take the pain away…

Iroh whimpered for only a moment before they turned into pleasured moans. His face buried in Damien’s neck and his legs splayed out on either side of Damien’s thighs. Fuck…. it feels a lot better. “....m-m....”

Damien stroked them faster, moaning softly and rubbing Iroh’s back, feeling very aroused as Iroh moaned and panted in his ear. Fuck, I miss hearing you… you’re…. “M-Mine....” I love you...

Iroh shuddered as Damien’s hand ran up his sensitive back, making him moan a bit louder. He tried to quiet himself down, yet failed miserably when Damien started to tease his slit. Fuck… I want him to go rough… “....r-rough.....” Want bruises and marks… I want your hands all over me....

Damien was shocked, looking down to him, nudging his head up to meet his eyes. “Are you okay with rough?”

Iroh nodded slowly, shifting to lay his head on Damien’s shoulder as he tilted his head to the side. His offered skin was a pale white and unblemished. I want marks… I want handprints. He gasped as Damien’s hands gripped onto his hips, breathing in deeply. Fuck yes....

Damien held onto him tighter, looking down to the skin being offered to him. …. mine. Damien immediately went in, nipping and lapping at the skin, his rough kisses soon turning into harsh sucking, his teeth grazing the skin. You’re all mine....

Iroh let out a very loud moan as he felt mark after mark being added to his skin. His hands wandered down Damien’s front, feeling his abs and down to his length. He took the massive length into his hands and started to fondle him. Want marks all over...

Damien moaned as he was handled, his lips starting to meander from Iroh’s neck, going to his front and his collarbones, latching onto him, his arms firmly wound around him. Mine. All mine.
Iroh was a shuddering and moaning mess very quickly, his hands ending up letting go of Damien’s length as he was pulled close. *Fuck, he’s rocking me against his length… is…. is he gonna put it in? When was the last time again? We…. We were here, right?*

Damien held onto him tighter, his voice soft. “I’ll give it to you the whole way later, okay? Not while we’re in the spring… I can already see how I want you on the bed… on your knees, spread out… shaking… you look so excited…” Damien smirked, kissing up Iroh’s neck. “Your toes are curling, and you’re more than ready to be stretched out… fuck, I’d love that….”

Iroh whined as he was teased, sighing in relief as Damien kissed up his neck. “….N-now?” *I want it, I want him…. He let his knees bend as he spread his legs out more, giving Damien a full few of his length and his entrance. Fuck, I want him to like everything…*

Damien’s eyes raked over him, his look dark. “… now.” Damien stood with him in his arms, carrying him back to the bedroom and putting him on the bed, leaving to quickly bring a towel and dry him off, throwing it aside and letting his lips seal over his tip the second he was done. *I want you… so bad….*

Iroh was relieved that Tomaki had left and wasn’t in the hallway when Damien picked him up. He squirmed a bit as he was dried off, letting out a loud cry as Damien started to suck him off. *Oh fuck… oh fuck…. I’m gonna cum if he keeps it up…. His back arched beautifully as he whined, the intense pleasures taking over.*

Damien popped off of him, moving to get the lube from the nightstand and coating his fingers with it, moving to Iroh’s entrance again, watching as a finger went to trace the pucker. “Ready?”

Iroh instantly nodded and spread his legs as far as he could with his back arched like it was. He gasped as he felt Damien’s thick finger enter him almost immediately. *Oh fuck, it feels really nice… I really really like it.* Iroh gripped at the sheets under him as he started to moan, Damien’s finger moving every which way.

Damien began to stretch him out, soon going up to two fingers, worried as Iroh whimpered. “Doing okay?” *I don't wanna hurt you…*

Iroh nodded, closing his eyes as he let out a loud gasp. *Fuck he found it… it feels really good, I’m not gonna last… I’m really not gonna last… His length was leaking profusely with each movement of his fingers.*
Damien smirked, going to tightly grasp Iroh’s base, his fingers retreating to focus just on the ring of muscle, hearing him huff in frustration. “Not yet, love…” Almost.

Iroh whined as he was denied release, grabbing for purchase on the sheets and trying to lift his head to look at Damien as his back sunk against the sheets. I want it… “D-Damien…”

“So soon, love… so soon…” Damien continued to stretch him out, watching as Iroh slowly relaxed around him. “I don’t want to hurt you….” I want you to love every second of this…

Iroh was moaning as he loosened around his large fingers. “D-Damien, I want it… please, we haven’t in… in so long…” Iroh had tears quickly welling. I hate that he can’t do what he wants with me so often…

“I’m so sorry, I know it’s been a long time…. we’ll fix that… I’ll have you as much as you want… we should enjoy each other….” Damien leaned down to kiss his hip, his look gentle up to him. “Don’t cry…. you’ll feel so wonderful soon….” He slipped in a third finger, carefully feeling the soft flesh. It’s okay.

Iroh moaned softly as he was handled gently, gasping as Damien added more lube to his fingers. Feels cold…But it’s okay now. He whined a bit, struggling to move from him, wanting to curl up to a pillow, rolling onto his stomach with his ass in the air. “Damien….” I want it rough… like you like it...

Damien looked him over with dark eyes, moving to slick himself up. “Fuck, you’re beautiful like that….” He lined himself up behind Iroh, gripping his hips tightly as he began to slowly sink into him.

Iroh’s grip tightened on the pillow under him as he quieted down, slowly becoming accommodated to the stretch. Oh fuck, he’s big…. he’s really big… really really big… I can already feel the bruises coming in, fuck, it feels so nice to be covered in them again...

Damien let his tip slip in and out of him for a little, trying to stretch out his hole more before slipping in further, careful as he slowly sheathed himself fully into him. “….fuck, you’re tight…. are you okay?” Damien rubbed his hips, his grip loosening for a moment. I don’t want you to be in pain….

Iroh nodded, gripping onto the pillow below him as he held in his breath with Damien fully
sheathed in him. It feels so fucking good... but I’m gonna be sore tomorrow.... worth it... He felt Damien’s grip loosen ever so slightly, feeling his heart sink as his grip almost loosened completely. He’s..... I thought we could maybe....

Damien sighed, nodding. “Good...” His grip tightened again, slowly drawing out before snapping his hips deeply into him, making Iroh gasp. “Are you going to behave for me?”

Iroh felt his heart skip a beat as Damien’s grip tightened and he snapped into him, feeling a shock wave of pleasure run up his spine. Oh fuck.... His mind was a frazzled mess as he tried to comprehend everything that was happening. We’re.... we’re doing it rough... he gets what he wants....

“Iroh, love... are you going to behave?” Damien asked again, his hands running over his sides. “I’ll be good to you if you behave...”

Iroh shuddered as he felt Damien’s hands all over him, coming back to reality after a bit of coaxing. “Y-Yes Master.” I love that he’s gonna do this again, I wonder if he found the room... he probably didn't.

“Good, good...” Damien snapped his hips deeply into him again, his grip tight as he started a slow, hard pace. I need you to loosen up some more first....

Iroh tried to think back on what he was supposed to do with Damien taking charge, his mind still hazy from his head cold. I’m not supposed to utter anything until he talks to me... His eyes widened as Damien snapped his hips back into him, trying not to moan, but letting a soft yelp leave him with every hard thrust that pushed him forward and made his ass jiggle. Fuck, he’s still.... it’s like he’s stuck, but fuck it feels wonderful....

Damien looked him over, smirking. “I wanna hear all those sounds, love... let it all out...” He snapped his hips forward again, starting to go faster. It’s okay... and fuck, it feels good....

Iroh let out a loud yelp with a particularly hard thrust. It kinda hurts.... it feels like he’s getting stuck in me.... and trying to rip his dick out.... He whimpered in between pleasured moans, struggling to stay in play with each hard thrust. Need more lube.... and more pillows.

“C-Can I h-have more l-lube and-and pillows, M-Master?” Please? You’re getting stuck... you need a lot more lube... and I need more pillows... my knees are starting to hurt. He whimpered when Damien slowly pulled out, feeling his insides grip onto him and try and keep him inside.

Damien slowly slid out of him, going to rearrange the pillows, getting Iroh more comfortable. “I’ll be good to my slave... if you need anything, ask nicely for it...” Damien kissed Iroh’s cheek, moving to slather on more lube. This will be much better... Damien slid into him again without warning, smirking as Iroh shook a bit. “Better?”

Iroh nodded, gasping and crying out in bliss as Damien slammed into him. Oh fuck, it feels so good. He moaned loudly as he felt Damien’s rough hands all over him. I want it... I really want it.

Damien smirked, gripping his hips and keeping him firmly in position, his hips beginning to move, thrusting deeply into him. I want you to scream...

Iroh was quiet at first, gripping onto the pillows below him. It feels wonderful... I’m gonna be covered in bruises. He slowly got more comfortable with letting out loud moans, his volume increasing as his mind grew fuzzy. I’m warm...

Damien held onto him, soon leaning down and beginning to suck marks all over his back. He’s all mine... “Let me hear you... it’ll make your master so happy....”

Iroh flushed as he heard Damien’s words, trying not to hold back like he’d been doing earlier. He’s marking up my back too.... “Hnhg.... M-Master.... f- fuck ...” Oh fuck he found it... that spot... He could already feel his length leaking precum down onto the pillows and sheets below him. It’s so good...

Damien smiled as he heard Iroh’s louder gasps, his hips snapping sharply into him. “Good.... you’re being very good for me....”

Iroh closed his eyes as he took in the sensations that were flooding his body. I feel warm... I think I have a fever... I probably do, and I’m covered in sweat too... He let out a loud cry as Damien snapped his hips roughly onto his prostate, making him see stars. Oh fuck fuck fuck.... Iroh’s eyes opened just a crack, tears bubbling to the surface from the pure pleasure he faced. Fuck, so good...
Damien kept up his pace, feeling a pleasuring burn as he heard Iroh’s cries. “You feel so good….. so, so good….” Oh my god…. fuck…. Damien nipped roughly at his shoulders, his hands moving all over his hips and sides. **Mine.**

Iroh didn’t even realize that he was getting as close to climax as he was as his whole body shook. He cried out in bliss loudly as he came, crying softly as his grip loosened. **Oh fuck it feels so good…** Iroh was still hard as Damien continued to pound him, his climax prolonged.

Damien felt Iroh clench around him, gasping as he came inside him, pounding into him deeper, soon grinding into him, moaning loudly. “Oh god, Iroh… o-oh god…” He panted, his grip loosening a bit, looking down to his husband, shocked to see tears. “Love, are you okay? You’re crying.” Damien moved to kiss away his tears, still hard inside of him. **Fuck, I love you… I really hope you’re okay…..**

“Y-Yeah, I’m…. I’m o-okay…” His voice was unconvincing as he sniffled, but he didn’t sound like he was in pain. Iroh’s hands were shaking as he slowly grabbed at the pillows under him. **Damien’s still hard…. are we gonna go for another round?**

Damien nodded, still kissing at Iroh’s cheeks, slipping out of him and gently turning him over to better hold him, jumping a bit as their lengths brushed. **He’s still hard… are we gonna keep going?** Damien held him close, his voice soft in his ear. “Do you want more, love?”

Iroh was still letting the tears roll down his cheeks as he was held close. **So he wants more? We can do more…** “Y-Yes M-Master…” **We can do more… it’ll probably feel really good… I wonder if he’ll put me in his lap again.** “Can… can you use more lube?”

“Of course, I’ll be good to my slave….” Damien sat up with Iroh in his lap, gently rubbing his back as Iroh cried. “….are you sure you’re okay?” **You’re really crying…. I don’t want to keep going until you’re ready….**

“It…. It was a lot… I’m… I’m sorry M-Master…” **It was… that was probably the best orgasm I’ve had…** Iroh leaned against his chest as he was held, shuddering as his back was rubbed.

Damien chuckled, softly kissing his neck. “I’m so happy my slave is happy…. it’s such a compliment, that you felt so good you cried…” Damien looked at him, his eyes soft for a moment as he wiped away his tears. “You let me know when you’re ready for more…”

Iroh whimpered and nodded as he curled into his chest. **I need to calm down.** His hot face was nestled against Damien’s neck as he took everything in. **It’ll take a long time...**
Damien soon moved to lie down, keeping Iroh on his chest and rubbing his back, sighing softly, relaxing. *Take your time, love…*

Iroh calmed down after half an hour, kissing at Damien’s neck. “M-Master?” *Is he still hard?*

Damien had nearly fallen asleep, humming softly. “Hm? Is my slave feeling better?” He chuckled as Iroh nodded, rolling them over to loom over Iroh, nosing his way into his neck, kissing at the pale flesh. …I’ve gone completely soft…. I don’t know if he’d be okay with just cuddles or not…...I don’t want to disappoint….

*Fuck, I ruined the moment…. “I’m… I’m sorry…” I took too long to calm down… Iroh felt his gut sink as tears started once more.*

Damien looked up to him, immediately moving to cradle the man to his chest. “Iroh, love, it’s okay…. you’re allowed all the time in the world to calm down and feel better… It was long enough for me to go soft, but we can still have fun if you want…” Damien looked over his pale flesh, now looking bruised and battered. “….aren’t you sore? Look at you…” He held him more gently, his hand rubbing his hip lightly. “You're so bruised…”

Iroh shook his head, whimpering as he curled up to himself. “I’m sorry… I… I’m sorry Master…” *I took too long… “I-I took too long… You…. you don’t want it..” He shook as he started to cry all over again. I fucked up so much…*

“Iroh, love, I’m not master right now, don’t cry…” Damien curled around Iroh, rubbing his back soothingly as he cried. “Honey, please, it’s okay…. I’d still love to have you if you want to.” *I just wanna make sure you want it…*

“I don’t want you to stop…. please don’t stop… that… that was the best orgasm I think I’ve ever had…” *I don’t want you to stop, because you’ll be gentle from now on.*

Damien’s eyes went dark, feeling his blood beginning to flow south. “That good, hm? I’ll have to have you like that more often…” Damien moved to press Iroh into the bed, starting to nip roughly at his neck and suck marks into his skin. *You like the rough and possessive sex, hm?*

Iroh gasped as he was pressed to the mattress, turning his head to the side. *I’ll give him more skin… “You… you won’t stop?” I don’t want him to…*
“If you want it this rough and possessive every time, I’ll give it to you like that…” Damien looked up to him with black eyes, his voice velvet. “...would you like that?”

Iroh looked at him and eagerly nodded, reaching up to kiss his cheeks. “Pl-Please? I like having my Master back.” He giggled a bit as he felt rough hands on him, moaning out as they gripped his hips. *I’m gonna have bruises for days...*

Damien chuckled at Iroh’s eagerness, tugging him closer and going to deeply kiss him, his hands roaming freely all over his body. *I’ve missed you....*

Iroh relaxed, kissing him just as deeply before he started to wrap his thin limbs around him to try and get leverage. *I wanna be in his lap, he... he'll play with my chest... we left all the toys in the storage unit... I don’t know what’s here anymore...*

Damien panted softly when they broke apart, holding Iroh securely to his chest. “Iroh, love... where are all of our toys hiding?” *I have some in mind...*

Iroh flushed completely as he looked down a bit. “I-I left them at home in the... in the storage unit... I um... I think there might be some st-still downstairs...” *I don’t think he took them when he left...*

“Downstairs?” Damien smirked, kissing his cheek, standing with Iroh in his arms. “Show me?”

“The... the door next to the bathroom door...” Iroh clung to his front, holding onto him as Damien held onto his ass. *Oh fuck it feels really nice...*

Damien walked with him through the house, not minding his nudity. “Mm, you’ve been hiding your toys from me?” Damien reached the door, sliding it open, pausing when he looked into the room. “...Iroh...” .... *Wow* .

“Y-You were sleeping.... and and I thought I-I should clean up... I just cleaned the straps and and the bed... but I didn’t open the drawers to s-see what was here...” *I don’t really know what’s here...* Iroh was still clinging to Damien with every bit of strength he had in him, his body already starting to shake from the exhaustion.
Damien felt Iroh shaking from the exertion, moving into the room and slowly setting Iroh on the black leather bed, laying him down. “Relax for a minute, love…” Damien looked over to a dresser, opening the first drawer and moving a protective sheet of velvet aside that had been catching dust and keeping out bugs, seeing a large collection of dildos, cock rings, and anal beads. Wow. He set the cover back over the toys and slowly shut the drawer, opening the one under it, full of gags, handcuffs, different straps for the bed, and blindfolds, all in different colors and fabrics. “….this is all quite… extensive…” Wow. He opened the third, his eyes hungry as he looked over the many implements. Wow…. canes, whips, paddles… collars with spikes, collars with bells…. plugs…. some even have tails….

“I uhm….. I used to date someone who was really into Bds, and he got it for me… I guess he left everything here too…” I wonder if he’d be able to tell what I like? He squirmed a bit on the bed, rolling onto his side a bit awkwardly due to the curve of the bed which was natural for a human body laying back.

Damien slowly nodded, looking over the assortment, reaching in and picking up a small leather whip, the wide leather strips looking well-worn but still in perfect condition. “This looks well-used…” Damien showed him, chuckling as Iroh turned scarlet.

Iroh’s entire face flushed red as he nodded. “M-Master, I-I like that o-one…” He shifted on the leather bed so that his ass rested in the low dip, his upper body splayed out on the higher section, his legs at either side of the bed as well. I remember when he would tied me down and whip me until all he saw was red on my back…. That thought instantly got Iroh hard. Rubbing his leaking length against the soft leather under him.

Damien smirked, meandering over to him and gently rubbing his back, his hand going down the curve of his spine to his ass and up again. “Where do you like it, slave?”

“M-My back and m-my butt, M-Master.” I’m still stuttering, this is embarrassing...

“Alright, slave…” Damien moved to gently kiss his shoulder blade, the leather soon coming down on his ass, watching as Iroh whimpered. “This is going to be fun…”

Iroh shuddered as he heard his tone, closing his eyes and quieting down. Does… does he like the room? Is he gonna keep me here like…. like my past master did? He swallowed thickly, whimpering as he felt the soft sting on his lower back.

Damien looked him over, bringing the leather down onto his ass again, worried as Iroh’s whimpers got louder, stopping when Iroh didn’t stop and began to shake. “Iroh, honey, what’s wrong?”
Damien set down the toy, going to hold onto him, rubbing his back gently. “Is it too much, or is it something else? …bad memories?”

Iroh whimpered looking down and away from Damien as he stopped. “I-I’m sorry M-Master…” 
I need to calm down…. “I-I’m okay….” He didn’t sound convincing as he sniffled, reaching to rub at his face.

Damien shook his head, moving Iroh gently to climb onto the bed as well, pulling Iroh into his lap, kissing all over his face as he shook. “It’s okay, love… take your time… ...do you wanna talk about it?”

Iroh looked at him with wide eyes, fear filling them as he looked down to Damien’s lap. But I can’t take my time… if I take my time we won’t end up doing anything… “I’m… I’m fine… p-promise, Master….”

Damien saw where he looked, shaking his head. “Honey, don’t worry about me… I want to keep going, but I only want to if you’re okay… I promise. Take your time, think and calm down, talk to me if you want or need to, and I’ll hold you the whole time….. okay?”

“Y-You won’t k-keep me here w-will you?” Not like him? You won’t force me to stay here?

“No, of course not… even if we get really into it, this place isn’t a prison…” Damien gently rubbed his back. “You’re free to stop whatever we do whenever it gets to be too much. Say the word and I’ll stop, untie you, bring you back up for a bath or a nap… when we’re in play, you’re my slave… and when you decide, I’ll be yours.” I’ll keep you safe and happy.

Iroh nodded, moving into Damien’s lap. “Can… can we do this? In here?” I want new memories… Iroh whined a bit as he pawed at his large chest, trying to entice him. I want another round… I don’t feel sick right now… I don’t wanna feel sick.

Damien chuckled as Iroh pawed at him, catching his wrist and going to kiss him deeply, moving Iroh onto the bed, soon breaking their lip lock. “Sit like you were before…..”

Iroh giggled a little, sitting back as he was and spreading his legs a bit further apart, so his ass cheeks were tight against each other. I want… I want him to do that to me… will he fuck me too?
Damien smirked, looking him over, the whip soon cracking on his ass, watching his cheeks jiggle as they began to turn red. “My beautiful slave…” He changed direction and lashed across his back, watching Iroh whimper, the sight making him slowly harden again. "I kinda like this…"

Iroh let out a loud sigh as his entire back was covered in red marks. “M-Master…” *Fuck it feels nice… my body's really warm… really really warm…*

“Yes, slave?” Damien lashed across his ass, soon reaching to massage one bruised cheek. *What?*

Iroh groaned in bliss as he was massaged. “Can… c-can you massage everyth-thing…” *Fuck I want it, his hands feel so fucking good. “P-Please?”*

“Of course…. will a nice hot soak help?” He smiled as Iroh nodded, scooping his husband into his arms. *I love you.*

“Can… can you massage… inside too?” *I can feel your seed inside, and it's starting to come out…* He gasped in bliss as Damien grabbed his asscheeks and held him like that on their walk to the bathroom.

“Of course…” Damien brought him upstairs to the bathroom, stepping into the hot spring and sinking into the water with him, settling the man in his lap with his legs spread over his lap. His hands went first to his entrance, letting two fingers slip inside. *I'll clean you out first…*

*Oh fuck the hell yes.* Iroh picked his knees up to curl them to the side as his toes curled up as well. *I need it, oh it feels so good… “Hmm, can you reach farther?”*

“Mhm…” Damien moved a bit to press further into him, smirking as Iroh began to cling tighter, feeling up his soft walls, coaxing out his release. “Mm, you’re so warm…."

“Hmm, you made me like this… can you fix it?” Iroh looked at him with devilishly innocent eyes, spreading his legs as wide as he could to show off his hole. *I want him, I really really want him inside again…*

Damien smirked, slowly moving him over his length, reaching for a bottle of lube they had tucked away on the shelf. He slicked himself up quickly, looking up at Iroh. “I think I know what’ll help….“
Iroh nodded eagerly, biting his lip a bit to look interested. *I want it... I really really want it.* “I’ll trust you...”

“Good...” Damien let Iroh sink into him, gently rocking his hips as their hips met. “Good... taking me so well...”

Iroh moaned loudly, his toes curling and flexing as he was rocked on Damien’s length. *I want him to fuck me...* “Am... Am I being a good boy, M-Master?” *I need to be a good boy for him, I’ll be his good boy...*

“Mm, yes, you are... you’re being very good for your Master...” Damien turned them, letting Iroh slip off of him, flipping him over so he knelt on the bench, his ass above the water as he bent over the edge of the pool. Damien stood, sliding right back into him, starting a fast pace even in the water. *Mine... all mine...* 

Iroh gasped as he was entered suddenly, feeling warmth pool in his gut and in the back of his head. *I need to lay down after this...* He moaned loudly as he was slammed into, shaking a bit as he held onto the edge, trying to keep his knees from spreading too far.

Damien moaned as the pleasure built, soon grinding into Iroh as he came, moaning deeply. *Oh fuck...* Iroh’s own cries echoed in the room before he slumped, Damien pulling him into his arms, petting him. “How was that, honey? Feeling good?”

Iroh nodded, his head spinning, his chest and the edge below him covered in his own cum. He was breathing hard as he looked back to Damien. *Fuck, I feel really warm...* Iroh started to cough again, his whole body shaking as his illness came back to bite him.

Damien realized what was happening, gently lifting him out of the bath. “Let’s get you in a proper bath, love...” Damien went to turn on the large tub, filling it with cool water, setting Iroh on a stool and beginning to massage his legs and feet while they waited. *I’ll keep you as comfortable and happy as I can...*

Iroh groaned as he was massaged, letting out quiet groans of pain as he felt the sting settle into his muscles. *It hurts...* “Fuck, it really hurts... but in a good way...”
“Good…” Damien smirked, careful to dig out the knots in his thighs and calves, careful as he massaged his feet, soon kissing the sole of his left foot, then his right. “I love you…” Damien soon reached to pick him up, climbing into the cool bath with him in his arms, sinking in. *Fuck, cold… *at least Iroh will be more comfortable here.

Iroh sighed in relief at the cool water, leaning back into his chest. “Hmm… how bruised am I going to be?” *Probably a lot… hmm, well I don’t need to go anywhere at all really right now, which is good...*

“Probably very…” Damien continued to massage him, soon enough carrying a well massaged, washed, and very tired Iroh to bed, lying down with him, sighing deeply. ….France soon...

The next three days were a blur, Damien reviewing French on his phone every moment he could, doing his best to remain calm and diplomatic. ….I can do this. And Iroh is okay…. ….he’s gonna be okay.....

...*My head is still killing me which is just making my temper come alive. I think I’ve snapped at five people now...* Iroh sighed as he and Tomaki walked into a host club, beautiful men and women alike sitting with their customers, bowing their heads in respect to him, and the newer employees respectfully doing the same. *Time to get this book sorted out… the numbers I have aren’t right…  I want Damien to come back home… his bruises are starting to fade...*

Damien was relieved when everything went smoothly, more than content to read the paper on the plane ride back to Japan, pleased with himself as he needed his flash cards less and less to read the Kanji. I’m getting better… He made it through all the headlines and more than three-quarters of it before they had to disembark, glad to have been undisturbed, anxious to be home. *I want to go home and see Iroh… I want my welcome-home kiss.*

Iroh was still out and interrogating the host club’s manager and owner, showing them the numbers they were given and then the ledger and showing them how it didn’t add up. *^Explain yourselves, or I’ll put someone new and less incompetent in charge.^* Iroh gave them a proper tongue lashing as he smacked each of them before turning to leave. *^You have 48 hours to come up with the missing 1,125,000 ¥.^

Damien walked towards his home when he was dismissed, entering the house and finding it silent. He did a complete walkthrough of the home and found it completely empty, trying to relax and going to change. *This collar is too tight.* He was soon in the kitchen in a yukata, making tea. *They have really good tea here, I have to admit....*
Iroh came in not even an hour later to the scent of cookies and tea. He pulled off his shoes at the front door and then started to loosen his tie as he walked towards the kitchen. “Damien?” Is he home? Or is it someone else?

“Iroh?” Damien stopped what he was doing, immediately coming to the front hall and embracing his husband, kissing him deeply. “…I missed you. Are you okay?” He looked worried, looking him over. I don’t see any bruises…. are they hidden?

Iroh smiled, breathing in deeply as they kissed. “Hmm, I’m in need of a nap, a massage and some hickeys…” He leaned forward, nuzzling into his chest. Fuck, I wanna be covered in his marks again. Iroh unbuttoned the first couple buttons on his shirt, slowly showing the fading marks bellow his neck. Hmm… I smell Assam tea...

Damien looked down, smirking and going to gently kiss Iroh’s neck, his hands catching the smaller man’s. “Hm, let’s get you full of snacks first, okay? I don’t want my cookies and tea to go to waste….” They’re really good."

Iroh’s face was flushed as he let out a small gasp from the attention his neck received. “Hmm, is it Assam?” That’s what it smells like… He pulled off his suit coat, letting it hang on the arm of the couch, setting his tie there as well. I want this shirt off…

“It is… good guess.” Damien watched as Iroh shed his shirt, pulling him close and running a hand up his back. Mine. “Let’s go….” He walked with him to the kitchen, lifting Iroh up and setting him on a seat at the counter, comforted for a moment by his familiar weight. I’ll get you food."

Iroh sighed softly, leaning his head against the table and watching him make food. “How was France? Aniki wasn’t hard on you, was he?” I hope not… we need him to like you...

“He was rather impressed, actually…. the man he was making the deal with, Mr. Reveille, was curious about his new bodyguard and ended up chatting with me most of the time… apparently I’m entertaining to talk to. He seemed pretty happy the entire time… which made negotiations a lot less tense, and made him want to bring out the good liquor.” Damien smirked, kissing the top of Iroh’s head as he set down a small plate in front of him, as well as a small platter with tea and other things. “Do we have any silver polish?” I want to do something productive...

Iroh shook his head, picking up a cookie and eating it. “Almost everything in this house is porcelain… don’t bother with the few things that are silver…” I’m surprised you even found the silver tray.
“I like the silver…. but okay.” Damien sat next to him, nudging his feet under the table. He took a sip of his tea, smiling when Iroh went for another cookie. “Are they any good?”

Iroh smiled as he bit into them. “No, they’re terrible… make me a new batch…” He pulled the plate of cookies towards him. *I want a lot of cookies… these are awesome, you haven’t made these ones in forever…*

Damien chuckled, standing and heading back to the kitchen. “Then it’s a good thing I have another bowl of batter mixed… you interrupted my placing on the tray. How dare you.”

Iroh gasped, taking a cup of tea and sipping from it quietly. “I sent Tomaki on an errand run, and he’s coming back with food…” *I’m hungry… even though ‘dinner’ was hours ago…*

Damien chuckled, spooning more dough onto the tray in little balls. “I see you’re prepared for second dinner, then. I hope you told him to bring enough for me too…” *Food would be nice…*

“I did, don’t worry, I hope you like fresh sushi…” *I made him get a fuck ton of it from the place I like…*

“That’s more than okay with me.” Damien smirked, soon setting the tray in the oven, starting to wash the dishes he’s used for cooking. *I’m hungry…* He looked up as he heard knocking on the door. “I’ll let him in.” Damien dried off his hands as he walked, smiling when he saw Tomaki. “Hello- come in, come in.” Damien moved out of his way, his voice soft. “Thank you for keeping Iroh safe.” *I was worried….*

Tomaki smiled as he came in, carrying two bags on each arm with take out boxes as well as carrying three large trays of sushi. “No problem at all, are you eating in the kitchen or the dining area?”

“Dining area!” Iroh’s shout came from the dining area and where he was munching on cookies and drinking tea, having already gotten out two sets of chopsticks. *He’s gonna learn how to use them…*

Damien let Tomaki go ahead, following, sighing softly as he saw Iroh with chopsticks. “You’re about to make a big deal out of this, aren’t you?”
“Yes.”

“Even though I already know how to use chopsticks?”

“But do you really know? Your abilities will now be tested…” I want to make sure, because you’re not touching a fork for anything here...

Damien sighed and nodded, giving Tomaki a look as the man chuckled. “I can use chopsticks just fine.” Damien sat next to Iroh, thanking Tomaki as he set down plates in front of them. He picked up his chopsticks and easily picked up a piece of sashimi, looking over to Iroh as he chewed, giving him a look. Don’t question me and my abilities.

Iroh raised an eyebrow as he picked up the next piece, watching him almost fumble it. “Hmm…. sure…” He was quick to grab the pieces he wanted as well as open up a box of tempura shrimp and start to grab those as well to eat. “Thank you Tomaki!” He called as he heard the door open and then slide shut. He heard me...

“Mhm. Totally a pro.” Damien popped the piece into his mouth, trying to get a piece of shrimp, making a face when he couldn’t manage after two tries. “Oh come on…” Damien gave Iroh a look as the man snatched the piece out from under his chopsticks, reaching to pull the man close and leaning forward to snatch the piece from his lips with his teeth, chewing triumphantly. Mine.

Iroh looked at him and shook his head. “I said you needed to use chopsticks, damnit!” That’s what you need to use! Not stealing food from me!

“But I wanted that piece…” Damien smiled cheekily, turning back and surprisingly managing to pick up a piece, eating with an arm still around Iroh. I love you.

Iroh smiled, leaning into him and finishing off his plate rather quickly. I need more food… a lot more food… He made another plate for himself, the first container of sushi almost gone as he did so. I’m starving, probably because I couldn’t eat much when he was gone...

Damien was happy to eat with him, managing the chopsticks well enough to tug playfully on a piece of food Iroh had already picked up. “Aw, but I wanted that one…”

“Fuck no, it’s my food… off.” Down boy…. my food, I will shank you if you steal my food. Iroh
took proper control of the piece of shrimp and started to eat it, glaring at Damien. *My food.*

Damien was stunned, backing off, nervously taking his arm back from around his middle. “Sorry…” Damien went quiet, silently eating. …*fucking hell, I thought he was okay with that…*

Iroh watched his reaction, his eyes widening and looking down at his plate feeling guilt roll in his stomach instantly. *Fuck…. I snapped at him.* He sighed quietly setting his chopsticks down and rubbing at his temple as he stared at the food. *I should get meds… I’m even snapping at him now, shit.*

Damien saw how Iroh’s mood shifted, setting his chopsticks down, turning and hugging him gently, kissing his cheek. “….I love you….” *Please don’t be mad at me…*

Iroh smiled softly, leaning into his arms and chest. “I’m sorry… I-I didn’t mean to snap… my head hurts…” He whimpered a bit as he curled up more to him. *I want my head to not hurt…*

Damien nodded, gently petting him. “Let me go get you some aspirin, honey…” Damien stepped down from his stool, soon running back from the bathroom with a bottle of pills, dumping two into Iroh’s hand. “I’ll get you water, too…”

Iroh nodded, accepting the pills and starting to take them, taking the glass when it was offered to him. “Thank you.” *I like this… this is nice… he’s getting me what I need.*

“Mhm.” Damien sat next to him again, letting Iroh curl into his side, still eating. *I’m still hungry…*  “I eat a lot slower than you with these chopsticks involved…” *Dammit. ….I’ll get better soon.*

“Tis’ why I said your skills would be challenged…” Iroh smiled softly, grabbing a shrimp with his fingers. *I get to use my fingers…*

Damien poked at his fingers with the chopsticks. “Hey, you’re cheating….” Damien picked up another piece, offering it to Iroh. *I can feed you too….*

“I said you had to use chopsticks… I never said I had to use them.” Iroh ate the piece he was given, enjoying it. “Hmm, are you gonna feed me?... oh, you need to write what you want for whoever we’re sending something to.” *I can do that…*
“I’ll write it when we’re both done eating… and of course I’ll feed my husband…” Damien chuckled as Iroh turned scarlet, eating another piece of shrimp, picking his way through every plate and feeding Iroh whenever he opened his mouth for food. *I love you.*

Iroh was happy to put a few leftovers away. “Write what you need to and I’ll send it to get mailed…” *I can get it tomorrow when I go to get money from the businesses...*

*Damien nodded, heading to the office and getting out a few sheets of good paper, thinking for a while before beginning to write. ....Lathe will know enough to tell everyone. But this’ll take a little while to explain...*

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