A Revolutionary's Christmas Carol

by bramblesforbreakfast

Summary

Enjolras had never liked Christmas since he had been a boy. One year, when he's particularly annoyed by the merriment around him while he needs to finish the most important article of his career so far, he is visited by four ghosts. The things Enjolras sees during the night change the way he thinks about his past, the way he thinks his friends see him and the way he wants to act towards one particular person amongst his friends...

Notes

So, this is my first fiction that I actually regard good enough to be shared... It's also my first try on anything Les Mis-related. I'd love to get some feedback and I hope you enjoy it!
“Merry Christmas!”

“Not until tomorrow.”

“Spoilsport.”

Courfeyrac came into the kitchen, shrugging his jacket off while he whistled Jingle Bells, bringing a blast of cold air into the flat. Enjolras did not look up from the book he was skimming, running his finger along the side of the page to find the part he needed, shivering as the blast hit him. Winter, why on earth would someone indulge in a cold, wet and dark season?

“You're still working?”, asked Courfeyrac and slumped into the chair opposite from him, shoving away some papers and files while he put his mittens onto the table.

“Why shouldn't I?”, asked Enjolras grumpy, still not looking at Courfeyrac. It had been a bad idea to give a spare key to Combeferre because now it had found its way into Courfeyrac’s hands and Enjolras had lost nearly every privacy in his own flat. He should have left his key in the lock so he wouldn't have to bother with Courfeyrac now.

“Because it's Christmas Eve, that's why!”, laughed Courfeyrac and tossed his cap at Enjolras which collided with his shoulder and slumped down heavily on the keyboard of his laptop. Enjolras groaned and wiped the cap to the ground, not minding Courfeyrac's raised eyebrow.

“I need to finish that article until the day after tomorrow…”, grumbled Enjolras and started flipping through a file to his right, “With the cuts to the budget of the educational system and the draft law for a raise of politician's salaries the government has made a laps that could finally make the people realize how fucked up the system really is and I need this article to be included in…”

“That's Boxing Day, Enj, I don't think anyone will be in the office then.”

“I will be…”, snarled Enjolras and drew out a statistic about the increase of salary over the last five years.

“You should have taken the day off as well. You will get nothing done because everyone is staying home that day! I mean, even Javert will be home.”, acknowledged Courfeyrac while he skimmed an article about the closure of several primary schools all over the country. Because he will be in tomorrow, thought Enjolras impatient.

“I can't afford to stay home. This needs to be done!”, he snapped instead and yanked the paper from his friend's fingers, dreading that he would mess up the careful order he had put files, articles, papers and books in on his vast kitchen table.

“But it's Christmas!”, interjected Courfeyrac and leaned back somehow disappointed.

“Bah…”, made Enjolras under his breath, “It's a day like every other! Just because the system tells me that I need to stay home, be merry and buy stuff no one needs while it's overpriced by far, I won't laze around like the rest of the whole country.”

“Even Joly and Combeferre are closing down their joint practice for two days.”, tried Courfeyrac to change Enjolras' mind.

“If they want to, fine by me. But they should really consider that sickness doesn't stop to spread
just because it's Christmas.”, acknowledged Enjolras and poured himself a little more coffee from the Thermos in the centre of the table.

Courfeyrac watched him intently for a few minutes which bothered Enjolras more than his talking. He needed to finish this article, needed to go through so much paperwork before he returned to the office and that it was closed down tomorrow did not help his mood. He put down the Thermos and snapped: “What do you want anyway?”

“Wishing you a merry Christmas, for one…”, started Courfeyrac and smiled warmly at him. Enjolras just rolled his eyes. “And I wanted to ask if you want to come over to JBG’s house for a Christmas warm-up party?”

Enjolras rolled his eyes again while he took a sip of the – unfortunately cold – coffee. How long ago had he made the coffee again? Putting the cup down, he scowled at Courfeyrac who tried his most encouraging smile on him. It didn’t work. He didn’t want to go to a party, especially a Christmas party at the house of Joly, Bousset and Grantaire. It would definitely end with him and Grantaire arguing to the point where Combeferre would have to separate them for the sake of the neighbours. And Enjolras was not up for that although he had to admit that he missed the discussions with Grantaire, missed the way his green eyes sparkled when… No, he didn’t miss him. At all! Focus, Enjolras! He thought and directed his eyes to Courfeyrac again.

“A warm-up party?”, he asked lame, “Seriously?”

“Yes, why not? Tomorrow evening we will all be with our families… well, except for you, of course… and we thought it would be nice to have our own little celebration!”, explained Courfeyrac, “It would be great to have you there, too.”

“I don’t have time!”, insisted Enjolras.

“Oh, please!”, groaned Courfeyrac and rubbed his face for a moment, “You will be sitting all evening in your flat, working on that article, lonely and grumpy… That's not really how you want to spend Christmas Eve, is it?”

“It's exactly how I want to spend the evening.”

“Enjorlas, come on, Musichetta is making panettone and we're having mullet wine and cookies and...”

“No!”

“Geez, you're such a Grinch.”, sighed Courfeyrac and kept staring at Enjolras who had gone back to hacking furiously into his keyboard.

“Is there anything else you want to bother me with?”, he clipped a moment later when Courfeyrac did not move or say anything else. Looking up, he saw that Courfeyrac was twitching a little on his chair, not really looking at Enjolras now.

“Jesus, just spit it out, Courfeyrac!”

Courfeyrac looked up now. He knew his time was up when Enjolras started to use his full name and gulped nervous. He knew that Enjolras was not fond of Christmas, never had been, but this year it was particularly bad although no one knew what had triggered that. So the words he was about to speak could possibly be the last ones in his life: “We wanted to ask if you wanted to chip in for Grantaire's present?!”

“What?!”, asked Enjolras and seized working for the first time since Courfeyrac had entered the
That could actually be a good sign, thought Courfeyrac and mustered a smile.

“We are all chipping in. Joly and Feuilly went to that art supply shop R loves so much and got him an easel, a palette and those squirrel real-hair brushes he was dreaming about for the last few months. There wasn't enough money left for those ridiculously expensive oil colour-things he wanted too, but well... We thought it was a nice gesture after he had to sell everything but his charcoal for the repair costs after Bousset set the kitchen ablaze...”

Enjolras' hands on the table tightened to fists. He still felt the pang of shock in his guts when he remembered the day he had received a text from Combeferre, stating that there had been a fire at the house Joly, Bousset and Grantaire shared. Enjolras had lost no time, had left the office and nearly ran the whole way to the house. Fifteen minutes later he had rounded the corner. Thick smoke rose from the kitchen window downstairs while firemen were going in and out of the house, doing their job while the fire obviously had been extinguished. Enjolras' heart had raced like mad while he darted over to where Joly sat on the curb, shaking but generally all right. He had only then seen Bousset on the little strip of lawn in front of the house, sobbing and apologizing over and over again while Grantaire had wound an arm around his shoulders, rubbing Bousset's arm with the other hand.

They hadn't been injured but the soot on Grantaire's white shirt and his fingers, arms and face had sent a flash of fear through Enjolras' body. He had been the first of their friends to be there and he would never forget how relieved he felt when Joly and Bousset told him that it was only a material damage, nothing more serious. Grantaire had tried to extinguish the fire in the oven all alone and Enjolras and Grantaire had gotten into a fight over that reckless action which ended with Enjolras clinging to Grantaire for dear life, telling him furiously to be more careful. They had never talked about it afterwards, no one but Joly and Bousset knew and they kept his furious outburst of affection a secret as well.

His eyes focused on Courfeyrac again and the irritation about the holidays, the fury about the latest development in the policy, the memory-fear and panic about the fire mixed in Enjolras' chest and sent his temper up the walls. Before he could stop himself, Enjolras snapped: “Do you think I am made of money? Am I a bloody charity organization or what?”

“No... Enj, we just thought R would be happy to see your name on the card as well.”, said Courfeyrac a little disappointed about Enjolras' outburst, “It wouldn't be much anyway. Just ten quid, no big deal!”

“Bah, humbug!”, snapped Enjolras and started digging through his files furiously, “If he needs new art supplies, he should get a job and not make his friends pay for his stuff!”

“He has a job, Enj, he's a freelance artist.”

“Yes, right, as if that counts as a job. I mean something that actually contributes something useful to society!”

“That's cruel, really cruel.”

“It's the truth! Instead of lazing around and making his friends pay for his stuff, he could stop drinking for once and start being useful. He's got an amazing talent that he wastes at his doodles and paintings that he never even sells! If he just showed a little effort he would definitely get a job. Maybe even as an illustrator of sorts, if he wants to stick with the drawing. He's wasting away his life and knows it. He believes in nothing and no one and...”
“You do realize he is not here to hear any of that, don’t you?”, asked Courfeyrac and finally got up, picking up his cap that still lay on the tiled kitchen floor, “But I get it, Enj, you don't want to come and that's fine. But I suggest you change your mind about Grantaire a little. If you would know him better, you would understand.”

“Bah!”, made Enjolras again and waived his hand about dismissively while already googling some statistics, “I know him. Heavy drinker, good-for-nothing artist, cares for nothing and no one... Period.”

“Great... I'm off.”, huffed Courfeyrac and pulled on his mittens after zipping his coat, “If you change your mind, you can still come and join us, all right?”

“Goodbye, Courfeyrac...”, murmured Enjolras while he squinted on the screen of his laptop, reading an article about how far behind the pupil of this country were in subjects like Maths or Science regarding a European comparison.

He heard the door close behind Courfeyrac and leaned back in his chair. The point where his skull was joined with his spine had started thudding with a dull pain when he had left the office in the early afternoon. Everything had been buzzing there with that Christmas spirit he loathed so much and Javert had allowed him to work at home where he could concentrate a little better.

After Courfeyrac had joined him for – he checked his watch – only ten minutes, his headache was back. He liked his friend and still praised the day they had met at university, but sometimes he managed to make him even more furious than Grantaire.

Enjolras groaned and closed his eyes, massaging his neck with hard rubbing while he pushed back the thoughts about Grantaire again. How long had he not seen him now? Three weeks? Enjolras had lost count. He had not seen many of his friends recently and he acknowledged with a little shock that he had not really missed them. Not really. Thinking about Grantaire now and then was not like he was missing him, was it? And was it his fault that nearly everything managed to remind him of R or made him think that R would like that?

Enjolras got up and stalked over to the coffee machine to brew himself a new Thermos full. Leaning against the counter top, he watched the steam rise from the machine and huffed. Looking at the clock, he calculated quickly that he had approximately five hours left until he needed sleep and hoped it would be sufficient for finishing the article. He still needed a case to include into the text that would actually show how selfish the politicians had grown.

A flash of inspiration flared in his mind and he darted to the table, digging through the files the intern had packed for him before he had left. His digging grew more and more frantic when he recognized that the very file he was searching for was not amongst the pile.

“For fuck's sake!”, snapped Enjolras and swiped the last two folders off the table, furious about the carelessness of the intern who had forgotten to include the most crucial part of his research in the package. While the coffee machine in the corner started gurgling furiously from lack of water, Enjolras dug out his mobile and opened up the contacts. He listened to the dialling, pacing the floor of his kitchen in anger. It took only four rings until the phone got picked up.

“Hello, Enjolras...”, piped the intern on the other end.

“Alexandre, where is the file about the case of bribery in the committee for educational decisions?!”, barked Enjolras enraged without a word of greeting.

“Is it... is it not in the pile?”, piped Alexandre afraid and Enjolras heard his voice vibrate with panic.
“If it was, do you think I would call you?”, snapped Enjolras, “For fuck’s sake, Alexandre, I need that file, I told you! Where is it?”

“I... sorry, Enjolras... I... let me check...”, stuttered Alexandre and Enjolras heard papers rustling and the frantic breathing of the intern. He was still pacing, rubbing his forehead with his free hand while he tried to calm down. He would never get this article ready for publishing if everyone was loosing their minds over stupid Christmas!

“Here... I've got it, Enjolras. It slipped off the table.”, said Alexandre all of a sudden, eagerness and apologies in his voice.

“Lovely!”, barked Enjolras, “Listen, I need that file. You can either fax it or scan it and sent it via email or you can drop the file off at my flat.”

“But...”, stuttered Alexandre sheepish, “But Enjolras... I was about to leave for... for the holidays... I... I will miss...”

“I don't care!”, shouted Enjolras, completely furious by now, “It is quarter to five, you are not off work until five! I don't care what you’re about to miss, I need that file! And I guarantee you, if I don't receive it within the next half an hour, I will personally take care that Javert includes an unreliable and sloppy in your report! So get that file to me or you will regret getting up this morning!”

Silence on the other side. Enjolras felt his heart pounding in his throat and the headache roared now merciless in his temples as well. Alexandre was breathing flat and fast on the other side and Enjolras would bet that he was about to burst into tears. He hung up, not up for a teenager crying into his phone while he was about to lose his head over the most important file that was missing.

Enjolras tossed his mobile onto the table and cursed like a washerwoman while he poured himself a hot cup of coffee. He leaned against the counter top once more and closed his eyes, trying to get a grip on himself. He hated winter, hated the holiday it brought and hated how mindless and careless it made people. If he could have it his way, he would abolish Christmas.

With the soothing thought of a world without Christmas, he sat back down and got back to working. After about twenty minutes, his email account binged and announced a new email. He opened it up quickly. It was from Alexandre and contained a scan of the whole file. He opened the PDF and nodded impressed that the intern had actually scanned every snipped of paper that had been in the green folder. Everything he needed, right there. He skimmed the brief message Alexandre had typed: apologies, over and over, and a “Merry Christmas!” at the bottom.

Enjolras snorted bothered and clicked on printing, sending the PDF over to the printer in his bedroom that rattled to life immediately. After taking another large swig of his coffee, he went to the bedroom to get the print-outs.

*~*

At quarter past ten, Enjolras decided it was enough for the day when he had typed politicality instead of policy. He stretched groaning and recognized that his stomach was rumbling loudly.

The light was not even switched on although it was pitch black outside now. Enjolras knew that the headache would not get better after staring on a brightly illuminated screen for hours while everything about him was dark. Patting to the fridge, he opened the door and groaned when a dull pain cut through his forehead and eyes from the light within the kitchen utensil.

Hopefully his article would be published before New Year's so that all the effort was worth it. He
leaned into the open fridge and looked for something to eat. There was a bit of cheese at the back and a few dry slices of bread. He had not bothered going shopping lately for he always ate the discount meal at the canteen. Now that he was starving, he regretted it. And with most of the shops and the canteen closed tomorrow, he would have to rely on cereal and can-soup for the day which not really managed to brighten his feelings about Christmas.

Grabbing the cheese and the bread, he kicked the fridge shut with his heel and made his way through the dark hallway to his bedroom. When he passed the door to his bathroom, the door that had originally been an entrance door and still held the knocker from its old days, he stopped dead in his tracks and whirled around. Had the knocker just...? Enjolras shook his head and made his way to his bedroom while he heard a whine from the hallway. Quickly he shut the door behind him with a bang and switched on the dim lamp on his night-stand, slumping onto his bed, his heart beating frantically.

The whining from the hallway wore off and he rubbed his face a little. The knocker had definitely not looked like Javert's face and it had not been his boss' whine he had heard from the hallway. He was just too worn out from today and started hallucinating. Or he had heard the wind outside and had thought it sounded like Javert.

Enjolras opened his eyes again and started to nibble at the cheese while he opened his book – a biography of Jean Maximilien Lamarque, the great general and later fighter for the suppressed of French society. Combeferre had given it to him last time they had met – twelve days ago, why did time fly so fast? Shit! – and Enjolras knew well enough that it was a Christmas present given to him before the holiday for he would never have accepted it otherwise. Combeferre had probably been proud of himself for “tricking” Enjolras and Enjolras had not contradicted him because he wasn't that bad of a person... was he?

After half a paragraph and a little more cheese and bread, his eyelids started flapping and his head sunk onto his chest.

Enjolras jerked up when the whine was back and steps echoed through the hallway. His eyes flew to the clock on his night-stand. He must have dozed off for it was now a minute past midnight. The light on his night-stand flickered hard and extinguished completely. He scrambled into a sitting position, eyes wide and heart thudding hard.

There was someone in his flat! He grabbed for his mobile but it lay still on the kitchen table. Enjolras' heart missed a few beats while he crawled back against the headboard. Maybe his neighbours would hear him if he shouted just loud enough. Maybe they would call the police before Enjolras bled to death or got his head smashed in.

A chill settled over his bedroom and made his teeth clatter violently. Horrified he saw how the doorknob turned slowly. He grabbed the biography to have at least something to defend himself with when the door started to swing open creaking. His breath came fast and in blasts while it fogged out in the cold air. This was so far from normal that Enjolras forgot the threat for a moment and stared transfixed at the small swirl of fog.

“Eeeeeeeenjolraaaaaas!”, came a creaking, cold voice from the hallway.

“I am not at home, go away!”, he chirped frightened, regretting the words that sounded so childish as soon as he had spoken them. He must be still sleeping, this had to be a nightmare!

The door opened further and a tall man stepped in. Enjolras' eyes widened. It was his boss, but not really. Javert seemed thinner than this morning, cadaverous and miserable, half translucent. His eyes sat deep in his skull, his hair was completely white and the jacket he wore had a dark, gaping hole were the heart sat. Slowly he extended a hand towards Enjolras, a skeletal finger pointing at
the shaking young man.

“Enjolras!”, sneered the cold voice again, Javert not moving his lips.

“This can’t be!”, Enjolras whimpered, gripping a fist full of his golden curls, tousled around his head in an untamed mess after he had drawn the scrunchy out earlier that evening. “I must be dreaming, this can’t be real. God, I bet the cheese has gone off and is giving me hallucinations now. Gosh, wake up, Enjolras, wake up!”

The apparition by his door made another step towards him, sneering low and threatening so that Enjolras crawled back even further, nearly falling off the bed in the effort of getting away far enough from the threatening glare of Javert.

“Is this about the article?!”, asked Enjolras afraid, because apparently he was wide awake and not in the least dreaming, “I swear it will be ready for tomorrow, I will get back to it first thing in the morning! Sir, I will do my best, I swear! It will be a wake up call to everyone and we will change the...”

Another furious howl from Javert cut off Enjolras who now really fell off his bed. He peeked over the mattress afterwards to see Javert glaring down at him.

“What do you want?!”, he piped afraid and tried to remember what those two guys in that show Jehan loved so much always did when they encountered a ghost. He had no salt nor any iron, so he was without protection, facing a furious ghost-spirit-something-form of his boss.

“Redemption, Enjolras!”, crowed Javert without moving his lips, “Compassion! Forgiveness!”

“What?”, gasped Enjolras, crawling back up onto the bed, still trying to convince himself that he was dreaming. “Sir, what happened to you?”

The apparition screamed in a desperate way which made Enjolras' blood freeze. Javert's face was a mask of pain and agony and Enjolras felt how his heart shuddered from the torment on his boss’ face. Javert looked at Enjolras again and he saw that Javert was crying now. Enjolras wasn't able to breath.

“This is what will become of me... of us!”, gave Javert back, his voice sending shivers down Enjolras' spine, “This is what becomes of those who do not show compassion, who can not forgive and who do not care!”

“I care about a lot of things!”, tried Enjolras to defend himself, “I care for justice and for freedom and equality and I care for...”

Javert screamed again and Enjolras' books started flying out of his bookcase, hitting the wall over his bed and thumping down around Enjolras who covered his head with his arms. He whelped and prayed that he wouldn't be hit by any of the books. And – miracles over miracles – the books missed him and he was able to peek up at Javert again.

“Friendship! Kindness!”, boomed Javert again, “Love!”

“You are not really as eloquent as you were this morning.”, tried Enjolras his luck at sarcasm but when the Lamarque biography hit the wall only inches from his head, he stuttered, “But I have friends! I really do! Go ask Combeferre and Courfeyrac and Feuilly! I am not as lonely as you! And I will not end like this!”

“You will be visited by three ghosts tonight!”, boomed Javert and retreated backwards towards the door, “Listen and learn, Enjolras... Listen and learn!”
And then he vanished in a puff of smoke. Enjolras stared at the open door and shook his head after a while frantic. He must have been dreaming. There was no other possible explanation. The cheese must have gone off and he must have had a nightmare from that. There were no such things as ghosts or hauntings or supernatural beings. Well, if he asked Combeferre, he would have probably gotten a different answer but Combeferre was not here.

Enjolras swung his legs out of bed and tapped into the kitchen. The air in the hallway and the kitchen was warmer than in his bedroom. Maybe he had just gotten too cold in bed and had had a nightmare because of that. Enjolras filled a glass with water and gULPED it down in one go, his hands shaking lightly. He refilled it and went back into his bedroom, paying a short visit to his living room where he gathered an additional blanket from his sofa.

Back in bed, he wrapped himself up and set the alarm clock for six the other morning. He had to get back to that article, feeling uneasy and watched all of a sudden. And although he thought he could never find sleep that night, he soon drifted off into a deep slumber.

*~*~*

He was not sure what had woken him up put after about an hour – the bells outside were telling him that it was one o'clock in the morning – but all of a sudden Enjolras was wide awake. He rolled onto his back and glanced to the door. There was no skeletal Javert standing, no blind eyes staring accusing at him. Enjolras huffed and rolled onto his other side, grabbing the glass and taking a sip.

“Holy...!”, cursed Enjolras, dropping the glass that spilled water all over himself, soaking his shirt and the sheets of his bed. He was out of the bed in no time, retreating towards the door while not taking his eyes off the person perching on the windowsill, smiling wide.

“Combe... Combeferre?”, breathed Enjolras and relaxed slightly, “What...? It's one in the morning, what do you want? Seriously, you could have called and warned me that you stop by!”

He went over to his bed again, dabbing on the water slowly soaking the mattress. When Combeferre remained silent, Enjolras looked up startled and cocked his head. With a closer look, it wasn't really Combeferre. He looked exactly like his friend, only more... perfect? His skin was smoother, the freckles completely symmetrical, his skin like white marble, his auburn curls all so orderly that it couldn't be Combeferre. He wasn't even wearing his glasses.

“Are... who are you?”, asked Enjolras, stepping back from the bed once again, eyeing the person wearily. The not-Combeferre on the windowsill started smiling wide and unfolded from his crouching seat. He was as tall as Combeferre but stood completely upright, no trace of Combeferre's slightly hunched shoulders because he felt always too tall around his friends.

“I am the ghost of Christmas past.”, he said and his voice was even softer, even more gentle than Enjolras' best friend's voice. The apparition smiled fondly at Enjolras who paled with his words.

“Are you kiddin' me?”, groaned Enjolras and sat onto the bed, turning his back on the ghost. “I... could you... Just... please, just go away. I need my sleep, I need to finish this article... I...”, stuttered Enjolras, rubbing his face with both hands, hoping that the spirit would be gone when he opened his eyes again.

But quite the contrary. When Enjolras took his hands away and opened his eyes, the spirit was
floating in the air in front of him, only a few centimetres away from the ground, still smiling so fondly at him like Combeferre had always smiled all those years ago. A sad twitch shot through his heart and he narrowed his eyebrows.

“Come.”, said the spirit and extended a hand towards him, “We do not have much time and there is a lot to see!”

“What if I refuse?”, asked Enjolras. Not-Combeferre's face grew sad and he straightened. He watched Enjolras for a long time silently, so long that his stare grew awkward. Enjolras turned away and rubbed the back of his head. He already thought that the spirit wouldn't answer, but then his low words flowed over Enjolras like ice: “Then there's no rescue!”

“Rescue?!”, spluttered Enjolras and felt how he paled even more, “Rescue from what?”

“Your future... our future... his future.”, answered the spirit quietly and smiled even sadder. Slowly and carefully he reached out for Enjolras once again, his pale hand shining in the light of the moon that shone through the window. Enjolras watched that hand as if it was a venomous snake.

“If I come with you”, started Enjolras and raised a hand, hesitating halfway through the motion, his hand floating somewhere between his lap and the apparition's hand, “will I be back to finish my article on time?”

“There will be time for that, if you want.”, smiled the spirit and cocked his head a little, “Come, we do not have much time and there is a lot to see!”

“Do all spirits repeat themselves or is it just you and Javert?”, clipped Enjolras, annoyed that he had to miss a proper night sleep when he had to finish a very important article in the morning.

The spirit smiled fondly and extended his hand even a little further, not saying anything. Enjolras sighed and closed his eyes for a moment. I must be completely insane... or some kind of chemicals have seeped into the water supply of the city and I am seriously drugged right now. But never the less Enjolras opened his eyes and grabbed the spirit's hand before he could change his mind. Nothing happened.

“And now?”, asked Enjolras and stared at the apparition. The spirit smiled, a mischievous mixture between Combeferre's most sincere smile and the fond grin that he had bestowed on Enjolras so often when they had been boys. The spirit didn't move and Enjolras grew a little antsy. He seemed to need a little more time to react to questions than ordinary people.

Enjolras remembered a conversation he had overheard between Jehan and Combeferre, talking about how much time it would need for sound to filter through the veil of death and penetrate the ears of the dead. But... that thing was Combeferre, was it not? And Combeferre wasn't dead, was he?!?

“Now...”, breathed the spirit finally, getting Enjolras attention back, “Now we fly...”

“Fly? What do you mean by aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh?!”, yelled Enjolras when suddenly they darted vertically upwards, through the ceiling, through the flats over his and through the roof, up into the night sky over a sleeping city. The apparition laughed gleefully when he reached a certain height and started flying towards the horizon.

“What is that?”, yelled Enjolras over the howling of the wind in his ears, looking up to the spirit whose face was beaming with joy and glee. There was a glint on the horizon, bright white, standing up sharp against the dark of the night. Enjolras' stomach clenched when he actually
recognized that he was racing over the sky with the speed of a bullet, nothing holding him in the air but the spirit. In that moment, Enjolras hoped and prayed that that spirit was – in fact – real, otherwise he would really freak out about the danger he was in.

“That, Enjolras, is the past.”, smiled the spirit and increased his speed until around them was only light and cold air and suddenly...

… the air left his lungs in one single blast when he fell into the snow. Spluttering and coughing Enjolras pushed himself up, straightening and brushing snow from his clothes – the same button-down and the same pair of dress-pants he had worn to work that morning. The snow wasn't cold and it wasn't wet and Enjolras saw the snow he was standing in but his bare feet did not get cold.

“What the bloody...?”, huffed Enjolras and looked up. He was standing in a garden, surrounded by a white picket fence. The house was painfully familiar and Enjolras felt heat rising in his cheeks. The small house, higher than wide, surrounded by huge hedges, black bricks crowned by white windows, the grey roof, the white entrance door, the flowerpots on the front stairs, covered in a thick blanket of snow.

“Do you know where we are?” asked the spirit, perching on the garden gate in nearly the same way he had perched on Enjolras' windowsill. Apparently the rules of gravitation did not apply to spirits. Then again, they were spirits.

“This is the house I grew up in.”, answered Enjolras wearily. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other and eyed not-Combeferre. The spirit smiled fondly at him and waited, cocking his head.

“I think you wanted to show me something. This is more like a guessing game than you actually showing me something!” snapped Enjolras, annoyed by the assessing look the spirit gave him.

“Then watch!”, said the spirit fondly and pointed behind him. Enjolras turned on his heels and saw how the door opened. Two boys ran out, one with blond, longer curls, the other with short cropped, auburn fluff on his head, both laughing hysterically, packed into winter coats and scarves and mittens and earmuffs.

Enjolras' face heated up even more, his eyes growing wide and his heart aching with nostalgia. He gulped high in his throat while the boys tumbled down the stairs, laughing and shrieking and screaming the other's names in joy. He had nearly forgotten this day, the one year when they had spent Christmas together.

“That is us...”, he breathed while he watched his younger self rubbing snow into Combeferre's face, laughing hysterically while his friend shrieked in a mixture of delight and horror, “When we were children... we were seven or eight! You... you stayed with us because your parents were abroad on a diplomatic visit... we... it was...”

“The best Christmas you ever had.”, finished the spirit his sentence and watched the boys as well while they still played in the snow. A woman appeared in the door and called Enjolras' name. The voice cut through his heart and made him ache. He clenched his teeth and watched his younger self whirl around, beaming at the gorgeous woman in the door. She was even more beautiful than he remembered.

“That's my mum...”, he breathed and took a step towards the house. The apparition was next to him all of a sudden and nodded. He watched his younger self run over to the woman. She hunkered down and brushed hair out of his face, cupping his cheek fondly after doing so.

“She was always so concerned.”, whispered Enjolras and walked up to the house slowly where
his mother pulled a woollen cap over his unruly blond curls... no, the younger Enjolras' blond curls. The young Combeferre had formed a snowball meanwhile and fired away at Enjolras by the door, shouting in delight when it hit the back of the other boy. Enjolras' mother kissed his forehead and sent him off again, watching him fondly while the older Enjolras walked up to the door.

He could not take his eyes off his mother. He had not seen her in such a long time. The few photos he had had of her had faded and he had thrown them away after a few years. Because she had left, because he had gone and left him behind.

“...”, he stuttered, standing on the lowest stair, staring up to his mother while the spirit was at his heels, “I don't want to see her... I... please, let's leave!”

“Then let us look at another Christmas in this house... a few years later.”, said the spirit and touched Enjolras' shoulder gently. Everything around him went blazing white for a moment and then everything was dark. Enjolras exhaled sharply and blinked furiously. This whole time travelling made him dizzy. The spirit let go off his shoulder and motioned to the door.

Enjolras looked up. It was night, the door was closed and the window of the living room brightly illuminated. Enjolras gulped. He was not sure which year this was, not entirely, and after what he had just seen, he dreaded to see what was inside. The spirit floated up the stairs and opened the door, waiving him in with the same gleeful expression as on their flight.

Enjolras stepped inside the house. There were no pictures on the walls, a few old umbrellas in the corner and just two pair of snow boots on the floor. His heart tightened while he walked through the hallway into the living room, leading the spirit who followed closely, still smiling. Enjolras rounded the corner and stepped into the living room.

His father sat in the armchair, his paper unfolded, hiding his face. Enjolras gulped and let his eyes roam to the sofa. There he sat, maybe eleven, his eyes red and glassy, his nose runny, while he pressed a letter to his chest. He sniffled, again and again, dabbing tears off his face with his sleeve from time to time. Enjolras clenched his teeth and stepped towards his younger self, remembering the pain all too well.

That pain, that tore at his heart, that made it impossible to think one straight thought, to comprehend what was happening. That pain that had made breathing impossible, that had veiled his vision and had pounded in his ears until he could hear nothing else than the resound of his father's words.

“Do you remember that Christmas Day, Enjolras?” asked the spirit behind him. Enjolras raised a hand and brushed away a single tear, furiously and embarrassed. He squared his shoulders and shoved his hands into his pockets.

“Of course. How the fuck could I forget that?”, cursed Enjolras and turned to the window, staring out into the darkness. How could he forget that Christmas when his mother had left them? He would never forget that day, that day that had changed everything.

“Good grief, Enjolras, stop your whining, it won't bring her back!”, snapped his father in that moment and crumpled his papers up. Enjolras turned around and watched his father whose expression resembled his own so very much. The same expression he bestowed on Grantaire so often: disappointment, disgust, irritation. He saw how awful that looked from the other side and turned his head to his younger self who hunched down into himself.

“But... but, Daddy... when Mommy is gone...”, sobbed his younger self and the broken creak in his own young voice cut deep into his heart and made him turn away again. He didn't want to see...
what followed, didn't want to hear the words again.

“Shut up, Enjolras. You are not a baby any more!”, snarled his father and got up, towering over his younger self, “She is gone. She left. That's it. You need to man up and face reality. Grow up!”

The room went dark slowly and Enjolras turned around, watching his younger self fade into the darkness while his father still shouted at him. The spirit was with him again, looking fondly at him. Enjolras gulped against the tears in his throat and looked finally up at him.

“Why do you show me all this? It is... I don't want to remember...”, Enjolras stuttered in pain and closed his eyes, rubbing his forehead with thumb and forefinger. The spirit did not reply and so Enjolras turned to him, staring pleading at him. “Please, take me home.”

“Not yet, Enjolras. There is more you need to see...”, said the spirit gently and pointed behind Enjolras. He turned around and found the living room illuminated again. There were no flowers in the vases, no Christmas tree, no candles and no decoration. A lonely boy of sixteen years sat on the sofa, reading a book about the German-French competition about the Alsace. He was all alone, the house was empty, he knew, he remembered. Enjolras looked back at not-Combeferre.

“Let us leave... please, I beg you, I don't want to see what's coming!”, he begged, desperate to get away from this particular Christmas. It was one of his worst memories and he dreaded seeing everything once more. But the spirit just smiled at him and motioned at the doorway. Enjolras turned around.

“Merry Christmas, Enjolras!”, cried a well known voice, a voice that was to this day part of his life. Combeferre's younger self entered the room, gleefully smiling, carrying a basket with tupperware containers. His cheeks were rosy and he had that look of youth about him that showed that he had yet to grow into his long limbs and his growing strength. Enjolras had nearly forgotten how adorable Combeferre had looked.

“Bah!”, groaned Enjolras' younger self and turned a page in his book, “Humbug. Christmas... You should know that this is just a construct of religion and society to raise the sales quotes at the end of the year and play into the hands of the capitalism of Western cultures!”

Enjolras winced from the tone in his younger self's voice and looked over at Combeferre's younger self who just smiled.

“You should hear yourself.”, he laughed and threw himself onto the sofa next to Enjolras after putting his basket down, “You sound like you are fifty. Lighten up, it's Christmas, the festival of love and peace!”

“Do you really believe that?”, asked Enjolras and put his book away, “I mean, you are intelligent, you surely see through that capitalistic construct pressed upon us by religion!”

“So what?”, asked Combeferre and snuggled up against Enjolras. The older Enjolras flinched again. He had forgotten that Combeferre used to do that. He had forgotten how very close they had been before... Enjolras wanted to turn away but the spirit grabbed his shoulder, forcing him to watch.

“I know that it's capitalistic and stuff... but tonight... it's about love and be with those you love, don't you think?”, asked Combeferre and looked up at Enjolras. His younger self rolled his eyes and shook his head, not able to hide the smile.

“Why did you come over then? Shouldn't you be with your family?”, asked Enjolras and looked down at Combeferre. The older Enjolras knew what was to come. He wished he could shout at
his younger self to be civil, to show some compassion, to treat Combeferre according to what he
deserved in that moment. But the story took its turn again.

“Because you are alone... and because no one should be alone on Christmas Eve.”, said
Combeferre softly and reached up to brush a curl out of Enjolras' eyes. The two young men
locked eyes, staring at each other while Combeferre shimmied up to sit face to face with Enjolras,
his hand still in the blond boy's curls. Enjolras bit his lower lip and watched the expressionless
features of his young face. He wished it would not happen.

But it did. Combeferre closed his eyes and carefully pressed a chaste, soft kiss to Enjolras' lips. He
saw how his younger self's eyes widened in horror and how he stiffened. Then he raised his
hands, pushing Combeferre back, springing to his feet as swift and fast as a young cat. Enjolras
wished the past would vanish, wished he would not need to listen to the following.

“What the hell do you think you're doing?”, gasped Enjolras and stared at Combeferre.

“Enjolras, please...”, breathed Combeferre, “I thought maybe you... I love you... I thought you
were...”

“What, that I am a fag as well?”, snarled Enjolras and his older self covered his ears with his
hands because he didn't want to listen to the following words, “Do you think I will sacrifice my
good reputation at boarding school for you? I finally got somewhere in my life, hell I am offered a
scholarship at one of the best universities! I won't ruin that by turning into a bloody faggot for
you!”

Enjolras opened his eyes. Combeferre sat on the sofa, pale as death, tears glinting in his eyes, his
mouth a little opened while he stared at Enjolras in pain. His younger self was blazing with anger.
He had always thought that it had just been anger, but now Enjolras knew that it had not only
been that. It had been fear, confusion, love and shame as well. He had not understood then, but
now he did. And he couldn't stand the sight of Combeferre any longer.

He turned to the spirit and felt tears rise in his eyes. He brushed them away furiously and looked at
the spirit with a pleading expression. The apparition approached him and touched his shoulder
gently. Enjolras shuddered. He couldn't breath properly. He remembered the struggle following
this evening, the struggle of including Combeferre back in his life, of not loosing his best friend
forever. To this day, they had never talked about what had happened, simply trying their best to
act as if it had never happened. But then again, nothing had been the same after this evening. And
Enjolras still couldn't understand how Combeferre could have possibly forgiven him those words.

“Please...”, Enjolras breathed, turning his back at the scene unfolding, “Take me back... I can't
stand this.”

The spirit nodded slowly and everything was drowned out by white again. His flat's bedroom
materialized around them after a moment, the familiar smells and sounds seeping into his
perception again. The spirit was still there, still watching him so fondly that his heart seemed to
break once again.

“Why did you show me all this? Why... why live through all the pain again?”, he asked slowly,
still fighting tears rising in his eyes, a lump in his throat. The spirit smiled and stepped in, pressing
cold and hard lips to his forehead. Enjolras felt the sob erupt from him before he could stop
himself. The spirit smiled again after drawing back.

“Because it's part of you, Enjolras. Because it will shape your future although you tried to forget
everything about it.”, breathed the spirit and touched his cheek again, the way his mother had
done. Enjolras closed his eyes once more and took a shaky breath. When he opened his eyes
again, the spirit had grown translucent, disappearing into the air around them. He smiled one last
time at Enjolras, then he was gone, leaving only the faint smell of pine needles and cinnamon in
his room.

“Expect the next ghost when the clock strikes twice!”, echoed the voice of the spirit of Christmas
past through his bedroom again. Enjolras stood frozen in place in the middle of his bedroom,
shaking and feeling like he was about to burst into tears. He had pushed away all those memories
for so long, especially those about his mother and about the moment when he had nearly lost
Combeferre.

He knew he had never apologized to him for those words, had never made up for them.
Combeferre never mentioned Christmas around him any more. He had only started doing it again
after they had met Courfeyrac at university. And Courfeyrac had also been the first in a very long
time who had made Combeferre open up like Enjolras had done in their childhood. He had
blossomed from the friendship with Courfeyrac and Enjolras wondered when they had grown so
close.

Tired and exhausted Enjolras fell back into his bed. *Expect the next ghost...* He groaned. He had
had enough of ghosts for one night and wished badly that nothing would disturb his sleep any
more. Then again, he wished that those ghosts were just a product of a piece of undigested cheese
and that he would wake up laughing about his foolish dreams in the morning. But he failed in
shaking off the pain that still lingered in his heart before he dozed off again.
Laughter was the next thing that tore him from his sleep. Laughter that sounded very much of...

Enjolras sat up and turned to the door. Light was flooding into his bedroom, laughter echoing through the hallway, making Enjolras narrow his eyes. He knew that laughter...

He swung his legs out of bed and patted through his bedroom slowly. He pushed the door open and carefully moved through the hallway, peeking into the vacant kitchen. The laughter seemed to come from his living room. There was also the sound of bells tolling and of fabric ruffling and the whispering of twigs on snow. Enjolras narrowed his eyebrows and looked around the door frame.

“Come in and know me better, man!”, called a booming voice when Enjolras gazed into the room.

He saw a young man standing in front of his coffee-table, wearing blue jeans, a festive green sweater with white, sparkling snowflakes stitched onto it. His outfit was topped off with a long, crimson cloak, sparkling from tinsel, tiny Christmas baubles and candy canes. He laughed again, with a booming “Ho ho ho!” while he held his belly from laughing.

His dark, tousled hair shone from snowflakes and his dark eyes sparkles just as bright as the light of any Christmas decoration. His cheeks were rosy and his smile bright and sincere. Just as bright as it had been in the afternoon.

“Are you Courfeyrac past?”, asked Enjolras carefully and stepped into the room just when the bells outside announce that it had turned two o’clock. The man looked like his friend, only more sparkling, brighter and even more joyous – if that was even possible. The man laughed once more.

“Ho ho ho! No! Come in and know me better, man!”, he repeated and Enjolras’ really had had enough of the scarce rhetoric of the spirit world. He probably wouldn’t have a decent conversation with this spirit either. The man cocked his head, bells tolling with the motion and winked at Enjolras. “I am the ghost of Christmas present. Come in and know me better, man!”

“You seem to be really happy, aren’t you?”, asked Enjolras and stepped another step closer, crossing his arms over his chest. The spirit laughed again and nodded.

“You have family?”, asked Enjolras and slumped down on the armrest of his sofa, eyeing the spirit with interest. He seemed so much more lively than Javert and Combeferre. He was so different and he really made Enjolras feel a little better after what he had seen only an hour ago.

“Oh yes, ho ho!”, laughed the spirit, “I have over two thousand brothers that came before me. Imagine the family celebrations, they are huge.”

Enjolras laughed and nodded. “I can imagine...”, he said and cocked his head, “Tell me, spirit, are you here to show me something as well?”

“Oh yes, ho ho!”, asked the spirit and winked at him. Then he grabbed a fistful of his cloak and flung the fabric towards Enjolras. “There, hold onto that, my lad! Then come and join me and know me better!”
Enjolras shook his head amused about the childish happiness of the spirit but took a hold of the fabric, carefully burying his fingers in the soft fabric. A moment later, he found himself in the driveway of...

“This is Joly's and Bousset's house!”, he exclaimed in wonder, turning to the spirit, “Why did you bring me here?”

“Because you refused to come.”, reprimanded the spirit with a smile, “And I will show you what you missed out on.”

Within the blink of an eye, they were inside the house, inside the living room, standing in the corner between the book case and the brightly illuminated Christmas tree.

Everyone was there: Musichetta sat on Joly's lap in the armchair, both holding onto their cups filled with mullet wine, smiling fondly at Bousset who perched on the armrest of the chair.

Combeferre and Courfeyrac sat on the rug in front of the fireplace, strangely close together, Courfeyrac's long legs sprawled in a right angle over Combeferre's thighs, their faces bright and smiling.

Feuilly and his boyfriend Bahorel had taken a seat on the sofa where they talked to Marius. He had a girl in his lap, a girl that Enjolras had never seen before. He remembered remotely that Combeferre mentioned that Marius had met someone, but Enjorlas had forgotten her name. He had even forgotten how and when they had met.

Jehan sat to Feuilly's feet, allowing their friend to braid their long hair into a soft braid, looping around their throat like a scarf while they laughed gleefully.

Enjolras' eyes found the only person in the room who had been missing entering in that moment. Grantaire carried a tray filled with cups and plates full of cookies and balanced it over to the coffee-table. He wore a green hoodie, a baggy and worn jeans, rugged Converse chucks and a smile that Enjolras had never seen on him. His crooked teeth shone in the light of the fire and the candles and the shadow of a dark beard made him look older than the rest of the people in the room. His skin was pale and a little bloated, he had probably been drinking the night before.

Enjolras frowned and took a step into the room to catch the conversations going on between his friends. He tried to understand what Combeferre was telling Courfeyrac while he played with latter's fingers, smirking at the boisterous boy fondly.

“I am bored, let's play a game!”, sighed Musichetta and thanked Grantaire with a nod when he handed the young Latina another cup of mullet wine.

“I love games!”, laughed Courfeyrac and struggled up, grabbing an empty wine bottle from the coffee-table, “Let's play spin the bottle!”

A cacophony of yes's echoed through the room and they assembled on the floor in the middle of the living room, sitting in a loose circle.

Enjolras turned to the spirit who waived him forward, his eyes glinting happily. Enjolras slid closer and perched on the armrest behind Feuilly whose fingers were entwined with Bahorel's. Enjolras recognized that he didn't know anything of the tall, muscular man with the dense beard Feuilly had fallen for last year and felt heat rising in his cheeks.

“OK, let's do this!”, said Courfeyrac and gave the bottle a spin. It twirled and twirled and twirled and twirled until it stopped, pointing at Combeferre. Cheering and hooting followed the action and
Enjolras smiled about the cheerfulness of his friends.

“Truth or dare!”, squeaked Joly, completely beaming with happiness and eager to get the game started.

“Truth!”, answered Combeferre quickly and got a disappointed “Spoilsport!” from Bousset.

“What do you regret most this past year?”, asked Feuilly instantly.

Combeferre thought about the question for a moment, then he started to smile, took Courfeyrac's hand and pressed a kiss to his knuckles. Enjolras' eyes widened in surprise.

“That I didn’t tell this one earlier that I love him!”, answered Combeferre carefree and received cheering from his friends and a long and fond kiss – with a lot of tongue – from Courfeyrac.

Enjolras was dumbstruck and turned to the spirit. He pointed to his best friend and asked the spirit: “Combeferre and Courfeyrac are together?”

“For three and a half months now.”, answered the spirit and slumped onto the sofa next to Enjolras, bells tolling and baubles clinkering.

“I had no idea…”, sighed Enjolras and looked at Combeferre, jealousy and something like fear blooming in his chest while he watched the fond smile on his best friend's face, the smile that had normally been bestowed on him only.

“You never asked and you would never listen…”, acknowledged the spirit drily and motioned to the circle again, “Watch…”

Combeferre had given the bottle a spin and it twirled until it stopped on Marius. He blushed heavily while his friends shouted “Truth” or “Dare” at him. Marius brushed his hand through his hair and sighed deeply, before he smiled at the girl and said: “Dare!”

“Kiss her!”, shrieked Joly and Bousset applauded his suggestion. Marius obeyed with a deep red face, leaning to the girl with the blond hair with turquoise tips and kissed her fondly. She smiled into the kiss, wrapping both arms around Marius' neck while latter seemed ashamed of her being so direct.

“Awwwww… stop that, you two!”, laughed Musichetta after a moment and kissed Joly's temple, “That's so sweet that I might throw up!”

“All right, Marius, give it a go!”, ordered Bahorel and kissed Feuilly's cheek.

Enjolras felt a sharp tug of longing in his guts while his friends were so happy without him and sighed, watching the bottle spin until it pointed at Feuilly.

Before his friends could break out in shouts again, Feuilly declared: “Dare…”

“You are so brilliant at that guessing game!”, acknowledged Marius, “Cosette never played with you. Do it! Make us guess!

“Marius, you child!”, reprimanded Grantaire but his eyes sparkled with joy when he raised his cup of mullet wine.

“Go one, Feuilly, don't be a spoilsport!”, said Bousset and looked pleading at his friend.

“All right, OK, I'll do it.”, sighed Feuilly theatrically and got up, winking at Bahorel, “Although I
had hoped to get to kiss someone as well.”

Their friends laughed and even Enjolras, still undetected perching on the armrest, huffed a breathy laughter. The spirit looked at him content and nodded a little. Enjolras looked away from him, feeling like a dog who had carried out a difficult trick, deserving a treat, when the spirit had given him that look.

Meanwhile, Feuilly had rubbed his chin and thought hard, then he straightened up, a broad smile on his features and ordered: “Guess away!”

“Is it a plant?”, blurted Joly, eager for this game, as always.

“No!”

“Is it a mineral?”, asked Combeferre. Feuilly stared surprised and confused at him and laughed: “Hell, no!”

“An animal?”, asked Cosette, the clear voice ringing through the half-dark of the room.

“Of sorts!”, chuckled Feuilly.

“Does it live in the woods?”, asked Bahorel.

“No.”

“In the fields then?”, asked Grantaire, leaning back on his hands, his stout legs folded over each other in front of him.

“No!”

“In the ocean!”, exclaimed Joly.

“No, absolutely not.”

“Then it's not a fish!”, concluded Courfeyrac. The others laughed and Bahorel said: “That's not how you win the game!”

“Oh come on, I never win!”, laughed Courfeyrac and snuggled up against Combeferre. Enjolras recognized that they never did it when he was around. Maybe Combeferre didn't want him to know, maybe he wanted to keep it secret. But why? They had always shared everything... well, at least Enjolras had unloaded his burdens, problems and worries on Combeferre, never listening to him properly. Enjolras felt a cold fist tighten around his chest and he had to look away.

“Does it live in the city?”, asked Musichetta.

“Yes.”, said Feuilly and smiled wide at her.

“A raccoon!”, crowed Courfeyrac.

“Oh shut up, you!”, laughed Feuilly, “But no, it's not a raccoon!”

“Has it fur?”, asked Marius.

“Yes.”

“Is it black?”, pushed Marius.
“No.”

“Is it white?”, asked Grantaire.

“No... not really... it's...”, stuttered Feuilly, trying hard to lead them to the right conclusion, but not giving the answer right away.

“Blond!”, called Enjolras, making the spirit chuckle.

“Blond, then!”, assumed Bousset.

“Hey, I said that first!”, snapped Enjolras, forgetting that he was not really there. The spirit chuckled and nudged him a little. Enjolras nearly swatted at his hand but stopped before he actually did, not sure how good the idea was to hit a ghost.

“Golden Retriever!”, called Joly.

“No... not in the slightest!”

“Is it nice?”, asked Musichetta.

“Not very often... but it can be... I heard some people say...”, laughed Feuilly.

“Is it unwanted?”, asked Bousset.

“Most of the time...”, declared Feuilly.

“Is it unfriendly and rude?”, asked Bahorel, his eyes not leaving Feuilly who smiled warmly and nodded.

“So a blond animal in the city, unwanted, unfriendly and rude... It's Enjolras!”, laughed Combeferre and all the others broke into laughter too.

Enjolras felt how all his muscles tightened and felt a chill creep over his back. Not nice, unwanted, unfriendly, rude? Was that how they saw him? He watched his friends laughing like madmen, Joly crying from laughing so hard, Grantaire holding his belly, lying flat on the floor, and Combeferre being red faced while Courfeyrac roared laughter into his chest.

“Please...”, begged Enjolras who felt like crying again. He had never thought that Feuilly could be that cruel, he had never supposed that his friends did think so bad of him. Enjolras looked to the spirit and finished his plea: “... let us leave, I don't want to see any more.”

“But there is yet so much fun to come, Enjolras, don't you want to see that?”, the spirit asked and winked.

“No... that's... that's not fun... that's just cruel!”, snapped Enjolras, intending to get up while the bottle got spun once more. The spirit just dragged him down by his shirt again and Enjolras sighed, fed up with the happiness and laughter of his friends that had come at his expense.

“Grantaire!”, cried Joly when the bottle stopped and the doorbell rung as well. Bousset got up to get it while Grantaire rubbed his face for a moment, thinking what to choose. He sighed a little defeated and stated: “Truth!”

“A shame, I thought I would get a kiss!”, said a voice from the entrance. Enjolras looked up to find Éponine enter, holding Gavroche’s hand. She smiled into the round while everyone greeted her and her brother. Gavroche raced through the room and flung himself into Courfeyrac’s lap,
laughing happily when the young man wrestled him into a tight hug.

“It's great you could make it!” said Musichetta happily and made room for Éponine who sat down sighing.

“Yeah, there wasn't much to do at the Musain today. Everyone is spending the evening at home, of course.” she explained and dropped her voice so that only Musichetta could hear her. Enjolras though, always having had good ears, picked up her words as well: “And Gav' felt so good today that I hardly could hinder him from coming here on his own.”

Enjolras furrowed his eyebrows and looked at Gavroche. The boy was ten, seemed paler than usually and with dark circles under his young eyes. The way he pawed at Courfeyrac's scarf to make him listen to his hushed words seemed a little uncoordinated, his fingers twitching like he couldn't really control their motions.

“What...?”, asked Enjolras in a creaking voice, clearing his throat nervous when the spirit looked at him, “What's wrong with Gavroche? Is he ill?”

“Yes.”, stated the spirit quietly, for the first time not smiling, “He is ill. Half a year ago, they diagnosed an illness with Gavroche that affects the own immune system. It will get so powerful that it kills off even the transmitters of his own body. That will result in muscular failure. He will not be able to grab, to walk, to move. He will loose the ability to talk, to swallow... and eventually, he will stop breathing.”

“But that's horrible!”, exclaimed Enjolras, feeling fear and pain curl up in his chest because he had, yet again, not recognized that one of his friends had a problem, “Can't we do anything against that? Is there no treatment?”

“There is...”, said the spirit and sighed, “But it is very dear and Éponine can not afford it.”

“Tell me...”, pleaded Enjolras, watching Gavroche laugh with Courfeyrac who had such a tight bond with the child that it tore at Enjolras heart. Courfeyrac would break when Gavroche suffered, he knew that, “Will Gavroche... will he live?”

The spirit's eyes grew dim while he seemed to stare off into the blue. He gulped once and answered: “I see an empty chair at an empty table in the corner of the café. I see an empty room in a tiny flat. I see a tombstone... and I see tears.”

“No...”, breathed Enjolras defeated, feeling tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat again. The ghost reached up and patted his knee. Enjolras looked down, hoping that they would leave now. Now that he had so much to think about, seen so much he had not recognized, or not cared to see. He wanted to ask to be taken home, but the ghost just said: “Watch...”

Enjolras turned back to his friends where Joly piped up: “Hey, R still owes us a little truth!”

“Oh yes, right!”, laughed Grantaire and straightened up, “Go on, ask me!”

“Are you in love with someone in the room?”, asked Cosette cheeky and made Grantaire laugh heartily. Enjolras straightened up expectantly. Grantaire was a person who never talked about his feelings, who never showed when he liked someone... at least that was what Enjolras thought.

Now Grantaire winked at Cosette and answered: “No.”

“Oh, well...”, sighed Cosette and leaned forward, “Let me rephrase, then... Are you in love with one of your friends?”
“Cosette!”, exclaimed Marius reprimanding and horrified. The girl just laughed because Grantaire had huffed a laugh too.

“Two questions are against the rules!”, reprimanded Grantaire but winked at Cosette, “But because you're new and sweet, I will answer. And my answer is... yes!”

“I knew it!”, shrieked Courfeyrac and threw a punch into the air while Feuilly groaned defeated, fumbling out his purse and tossing a bank note at Courfeyrac who laughed delighted.

“I don't understand...”, said Enjolras and kept watching Grantaire who had blushed an endearing shade of red, rubbing the back of his head. “He said he's not in love with someone in the room, but in love with one of his friends... we're all here, I don't understand!”

“Well...”, said the spirit and glared at Enjolras who had obviously forgotten once more that his friends could not see him. The recognition hit him like a wall of brick. His stomach felt like it dropped out of his body, rushing into the deep without ever stopping. He felt heat in his cheeks while his hands turned cold as ice. His heart pounded, blood rushed in his ears and he felt dizzy. All he could do was breath a surprised: “Oh...”

The spirit of Christmas present laughed booming and patted his shoulder hard so that Enjolras nearly slipped of the sofa's armrest while the bottle spun again. He looked over to the spirit and was about to snap back when the spirit lifted his cloak and waived it about a little. “Hold on, there is still much to see!”, he declared.

“I don't want to leave.”, said Enjolras, looking back to where Grantaire sat between Musichetta and Combeferre, still blushing, but smiling at Feuilly who had chosen truth this time. “You have no choice, there is so much to see!”, repeated the spirit and waived his cloak again, the bells tolling quietly. Enjolras sighed defeated and grabbed the cloth, finding himself a moment later on top of a narrow bed, in a tiny, shabby room, facing a small table with one chair, an overloaded clothes rail and several stacks of books. It was dark and cold and Enjolras felt more miserable than he had felt entering his childhood home again.

“Where are we?”, he asked the spirit whose hair had gone a little grey at the temples after they had left the house of his friends.

“Watch...”, said the spirit and pointed to the door that seemingly led into some sort of kitchen-entrance-area. A small figure got visible, a slender boy, pale, with dark, short hair and tired grey eyes.

“That's Alexandre!”, exclaimed Enjolras, moving to sit at the edge of the bed, watching as the intern flicked on the light and sighed sadly as he came into the room, “He's an intern from my office.”

The spirit nodded and motioned at Alexandre, making Enjolras watch him again. The boy rubbed his face thoroughly, then he sat down at the table and drew his mobile out. He slumped over, put his elbow on the table and rested his forehead in his palm while the mobile dialled, on speaker. His whole posture seemed hopeless, defeated and so sad that Enjolras had to gulp against the lump in his throat.

“Alexandre?”, the voice of an elderly woman rung out of the speaker, “How did it go?!”

“Not too good.”, sighed Alexandre and rubbed his eyes once more, “They... well, they said that it was my own responsibility to reach the train on time and that it was not their fault I've missed it.”
“But it wasn't your fault either. That Enjolras was the reason!”, squawked the old woman.

“No, grandma, he wasn't! It was my mistake that I didn't include the file. If I had worked properly, I could have left early, like I had arranged with Javert!”, explained Alexandre patient, his voice hollow and his shoulders still hung.

Enjolras' hands on his knees tightened into fists. Alexandre had missed his train, because he had made him stay until the file was scanned over to him. And Alexandre had had arranged with Javert that he was allowed to leave early, and he – Enjolras – had prohibited it, which had not been his right. Once again, Enjolras felt awkward and bad about his actions.

“Don't you dare taking that upon yourself!”, snapped a younger woman's voice, “You work hard and you do your best and even that is not good enough for that bastard!”

“Mom, please.”, groaned Alexandre and rubbed his face so long that Enjolras thought it must be hurting by now.

“Monique, let him speak. Go on, my boy.”, said another voice, one of a man, possibly Alexandre's father.

“Anyway...”, sighed Alexandre and seemed stuck for words. After a few times opening and closing his mouth, he closed his eyes and simply said: “They won't refund my ticket.”

Silence. On both sides of the phone. While Enjolras could not really understand what about a missed train was so spectacular to cause such a silence, Alexandre rubbed the back of his head and explained: “And I can't just take the next possible train. They are all completely packed and they won't let me take one because I have that special sale ticket.”

“So you won't be home for Christmas?”, asked Alexandre's mother quietly, tears making her voice vibrate. Alexandre made a pained sound and shook his head. He only then recognized that his parents couldn't see him doing that and spoke up: “No, I'm afraid I can't! I'm sorry.”

“You haven't been home since the start of your internship!”, huffed his grandmother.

“Yes, thanks to that prick Enjolras.”, snapped Alexandre's mother.

“Mom, please stop calling him that!”, groaned Alexandre as if he feared Enjolras could hear his mother.

“Why should I? He's a horrible person to make you work all that overtime and then not even pay you for it!”, snapped his mother again.

“He's not the one to pay me, he can't decide that.”, argued Alexandre, too weak to actually be defending Enjolras.

“But he's the one who keeps you at work, although he knows your regular time is over! He's fighting so hard for the oppressed but oppresses you every day since the start of your internship!”, argued his mother, furious now.

“No he doesn't, he just prepares me for work life!”, tried Alexandre one last time to defend Enjolras.

“Oh come on, Alexandre! You finished your education with the best grades and what do you do now? Filing, cooking coffee, collecting his suits from the dry cleaner and sending e-mails to his friends when he can't make it to their meetings! That's not how you prepare someone for their work life!”, snapped Alexandre's grandmother.
“Please...”, groaned Alexandre defeated, “We've been through this! I need this internship and there's no better place in the world than to work for Enjolras. It... it doesn't matter what I get to do. And now... please”, Alexandre sighed deep again, his whole posture testifying to how tired he was, “Let us change the subject...”

Enjolras was still sitting on the bed, not really believing his ears. Those people did not know him and yet were so eager to judge. That was something he could not tolerate, it simply did not fit in his view of the world.

But then again, while he heard them talking about it, he recognized that he had truly treated Alexandre not really well. He had given him tasks way below the boy's qualification and had him turned more or less into his secretary, not really preparing Alexandre or showing him anything. A cold hand seemed to grip his heart and Enjorlas feared that he would throw up.

“So we won't see you this Christmas?”, asked Alexandre's mother in that moment.

“I don't know... I...”, Alexandre turned on his chair and seemed to dread to answer, “The bloke at the ticket box said there are no low price or special offer seats available during the holidays. I only got the 26th off of work because Enjolras needs me for a presentation on the 27th and not even Javert could talk him out of that... So, unless there is a train leaving early on the 26th so that I could take the night train back the same day... given there are also low price seats available... I can't make it home.”

A dry sob escaped the speaker of the phone and Enjolras flinched from that sound. He looked to the spirit whose hair had gone even a little more grey than when they had left the house of his friends. The spirit sighed and seemed to feel the urge to explain some things to Enjolras.

“Alexandre's family is really poor, you know. They can hardly afford the flat he is living in, hence the quality of this flat. He also can't go home very often for the train tickets are too dear... and you keep him too busy on other occasions. He's not seen his family since he started his internship.”

“But...”, gasped Enjolras and quickly calculated again, “But that's been nearly four and a half months!”

“Yes.”, said the spirit and seemed tired and sad. While Alexandre was busy to reassure his parents and grandmother that he was all right spending Christmas in the city, the spirit lifted his cloak once more and shook it gently.

“Please bring me home.”, pleaded Enjolras before he could tear his eyes from Alexandre's pained expression, “I can't stand any more of this.”

“No.”, said the spirit and shook his cloak a little more persistent again, “There is one more thing you need to see.”

“I don't want to see anything else. I have seen and heard enough for tonight... please, just take me home!”, tried Enjolras to resist but the expression of the spirit just hardened. Recognizing that it would not be of any use to resist the spirit any longer, Enjolras groaned and grabbed the coat, closing his eyes.

When he opened them the next time, he found himself in yet another unfamiliar room. It was large, could even be described as huge, and simply full of stuff. There was a vast queen-sized bed under the two windows on the one side of the room, sheets ruffled, cushions lying everywhere on the bed, additional blankets curled into lumps. A huge antique looking desk was piled with papers, magazines and books, all stacked in a chaos that seemed to collapse every second. The shelves
and book cases around the walls were filled with books and junk that Enjolras couldn't make out in the scarce light in the room.

It was cold and dimly lit, clothes and papers scattered over the floor in untidy piles. There were bottles on various shelves and in the book cases, empty, as it seemed. On the sofa facing a few other shelves with DVDs, CDs and other books, a few canvases stood to dry, the colour already dry and seemingly forgotten to be put away.

Enjolras narrowed his eyes. Everywhere – he now recognized – were paintings, sketches or drawings scattered on the floor, the desk, the narrow coffee-table or the side-tables on either side of the sofa.

The only source of light, Enjolras recognized now, came from the open window next to the sofa. It had a broad windowsill and a person sat on one end, one foot propped up in front of him, the wrist resting on the knee, a cigarette gleaming between the fingers of said hand. Enjolras stepped closer when the person took a deep drag from the cigarette.

His eyes widened. He had seen that green hoodie already today, had seen the grey beanie he wore on several other occasions, always hating how it flattened down those unruly black curls that looked so lush and lively whenever let free. He knew the person although he had never been in his room. Enjolras turned to the spirit.

“This is Grantaire's room, isn't it?”, he asked, and turned to the young man again, “Why did you bring me here? I have been here already! What else is there to show me?!?”

“Oh Enjolras…”, sighed Grantaire and squished out the glowing cigarette before hopping off the windowsill. Enjolras froze in the middle of the room, expecting Grantaire to start to go on about how not everything was about him and how he should quit telling him that he cared for no one and nothing because Enjolras himself lacked all interest in his friends, but he remained silent and strode to the corner next to the bed, to Enjolras left.

The spirit chuckled amused while Enjolras relaxed. Again he had forgotten that he was invisible in this world and – he acknowledged bothered – it really irritated him to be the spectator at the outer line, not able to give his input, because he always had input to offer. Timidly Enjolras thought that that was probably one of his biggest problems: that he always thought his opinion was the most important.

“Go on.”, coughed the spirit and nudged him towards where Grantaire crouched on a bar stool in front of a canvas on an easel, “Watch!”

Enjolras sighed bothered but slowly made his way over to the easel. Grantaire had switched on a few extra lights so that the corner was brightly lit, the easel with the canvas seeming to be the centre of all the light.

The young man sat on the stool, staring at the canvas while he absent-mindedly swirled a brush through a blob of red on the palette at his side. His trousers were stained with colours – as almost each and every pair in which Enjolras had ever seen him – and his hands were splattered in blues, reds and an apricot pastel tone.

While Grantaire lifted the brush to the canvas, Enjolras watched his face. He seemed so concentrated, so fixated that he could probably have pulled an air horn out of his pocket and honked at him and Grantaire would not have flinched. His gorgeous green eyes sparkled while a few unruly curls seemed not to obstruct his view, although they hung into his eyes. Enjolras had never seen Grantaire paint – in fact, he had never even seen one of his paintings – but so far he loved the sight.
No! Enjolras stepped a tiny pace back, shaking his head. No, he did not love anything about Grantaire, he had not missed him and it had not made his heart leap in his chest when he found out that the young artist fancied him. There was nothing between them, Enjolras could not allow himself to be carried away by something as trivial as love. And Grantaire would be such a distraction... that lovely, cynic, interesting fool!

“God!”, groaned Grantaire and pushed the brush behind his ear, the tip nearly staining his curls. He then dipped to the side but only so far as to grab a bottle from the floor. It was dark green and had a lightly yellowish etiquette. When he straightened again and lifted the bottle to his lips, Enjolras barked out of habit: “Grantaire, put that bottle down!”

He even dared to step forward and grab the bottle to yank it away, but all that happened was Enjolras' hand sliding through the bottle as if it was made of air. Helpless, Enjolras had to watch as Grantaire put his head into his neck and drank huge swigs, his Adam's apple hopping up and down in a hurry to deliver the liquid into his stomach.

With a delighted sigh, Grantaire put the bottle down on the table to his left, squeezing some colour out of a dark tube with the bottle – not recognizing it – and directed his gaze to the canvas again. He cocked his head and frowned.

“Why are you so hard to paint, you bastard?”, asked Grantaire and pulled his brush out of his curls again, going back to work. Muttering under his breath, Grantaire applied more colour to the canvas: “You stupid, blockheaded, gorgeous, perfect, beautiful prat?”

Enjolras got too curious and stepped around the easel, catching a glimpse at a stunning painting of... well, himself. His eyes went wide and his chin dropped while he gaped at a painting that showed him. Or more precisely: a painting that showed what he could look like if he would be laughing that hard in real life.

Grantaire's interpretation of Enjolras laughing out loud was breathtaking: the halo of blond curls, the white arch of his neck, his pink lips pulled back slightly over twinkling teeth, a slight blush on his cheeks, his blue eyes sparkling with joy, his features more precise and perfect than he remembered seeing them this morning in the mirror. It was just breathtaking.

“You know...”, sighed Grantaire and got back to working on the red coat he had draped over the painted Enjolras' shoulders. He rolled his head from side to side, taking closer looks, then applied some more colour. “If I could ask you to sit for me, things would be so much easier...”

Enjolras held his breath. Grantaire was talking to the painting as if it was him. He turned to the spirit who slumped on the sofa, seeming exhausted. The spirit just smiled encouraging and waived his hand towards Grantaire, ordering: “Watch... and listen!”

Enjolras turned to Grantaire who had taken yet another deep drag from the bottle, chuckling to himself.

“But then again, who am I to hope you would grant me the privilege of your time? You've got probably more important things to do with your time than to be here with me... the drunken good-for-nothing painter that I am...”, mumbled Grantaire.

Enjolras winced and felt his heart tighten. These were nearly the exact words he had uttered towards Courfeyrac the past afternoon. He wondered if Courfeyrac had told Grantaire but then again, he had insulted the young artist so many times that he had probably already forgotten when he had used which words to insult him. His heart tightened in a very unpleasant way and he wished he could speak up and tell Grantaire he was indeed someone worth his time, that he would love to spend time with him, sit for him, laugh with him, touch him, kiss him...
“And god knows I would give my right hand to spend time with you... hell, I would give my heart and soul for you to smile at me just once!”, groaned Grantaire, growing more frustrated while still working on the painting, “And even that wouldn't be enough for me to deserve you, would it? Why would the blind man be granted to finally see the sun? Why should you, of all people, care about me?”

Enjolras' heart felt so tight that he could hardly breath. His blood rushed in his ears and his hands flexed by his side while he ached to touch Grantaire, to reassure him that he was entirely wrong, that if Enjolras was just honest to himself, he would love to be with Grantaire as well. But Enjolras couldn't allow those feelings, couldn't succumb to his desires that were in the way of his goals. Why should he be allowed happiness if so many people in this world suffered?

“Bloody hell!”, cursed Grantaire after a moment and threw the brush frustrated at the canvas, jumping off the stool, knocking it over in the process and grabbing the bottle. He knocked back the rest of the wine – which was about quarter of the bottle at least – and went to the window again.

Enjolras watched him, his heart falling and falling, tumbling into a dark place that Enjolras hated and that he normally only entered when he was drunk or desperate.

He stared furious at the spirit for a moment, blaming the whole situation on him, before he stepped around the easel and looked at what had infuriated Grantaire about the painting. He felt physically sick when he saw the outcome. He looked gorgeous in the painting and the thing that had obviously upset Grantaire was a speech bubble that didn't fit into the painting but stood out sharp anyway.

I love you so much, R. It said. Enjolras ran his fingers over the canvas, running them through the canvas because of his current ghostlike form and felt a sharp blast of guilt in his heart. He turned to look at Grantaire who sat on the windowsill again, a cigarette dangling from his lips while he rolled the bottle between the palms of his hands.

“Have you seen enough?”, asked the spirit and tore Enjolras from his thoughts.

“Have I seen enough?”, snapped Enjolras and whirled around. Although the spirit seemed older and more tired than ever, Enjolras was furious and didn't feel like being merciful to the spirit.

“You and your brother dragged me through several time periods and memories I have not thought about in years and all they did was make me feel bad and horrible and lonely. And you ask me if I have seen enough? I haven't asked for any of this!”

“I know...”, sighed the spirit and limped towards Enjolras who backed away slightly, “But you will understand soon why we came. Just... grab the coat.”

He raised the cloth again and Enjolras was so sick and tired of everything, so sad and hurt about the things he had seen, that he snatched the cloth and found himself in his bedroom moments after, still the smell of paint in his nose.

The spirit stood behind Enjolras, bend forward, breathing harshly. Enjolras turned around to snap at him again, but he finally saw that something was wrong with the spirit. He stepped towards him and intended to offer an arm to him to prop onto, but the spirit shook his head and waived the gesture off.

“My time is running short, Enjolras.”, said the spirit and he looked so painfully like a very exhausted Courfeyrac now that Enjolras stepped towards him again, reaching out to offer support. The spirit just waved him off once more, sighing deeply to utter his next words: “You have seen Christmas present, you know things you never knew before. And now... you will wait. When the
clock strikes thrice, expect the next ghost.”

“Oh hell no!”, growled Enjolras, “I am not up for another trip like this. Just tell him to... stay at home or something. I swear, I know what you wanted to show me, I do. Just don't send me another one of your kind!”

“Fool!”, boomed the spirit and straightened up to full size again, making Enjolras stumble a step back, “You know nothing! You still understand nothing...”

A movement by the feet of the spirit made Enjolras look down. A figure crawled out from under the crimson cloak the spirit wore. It was skinny, dirty and moving in a way that was not human, limbs too long, movements too edgy. It wore rags and its fingernails were cracked and filthy. Its mouth was drawn into a hateful sneer, its dark eyes glinting with an oblivious light.

Icy shivers ran down Enjolras' back while he stumbled back against the bed, slumping down on the mattress, horrified by the appearance of the figure. It assembled – in a very inhuman and crippled way – Éponine's father who Enjolras had seen just once in his life – and would never forget that devious face.

“This is Ignorance...”, said the spirit and lifted his robe a little higher so that the figure could progress a little further towards Enjolras whose breath got caught in his throat, horror making his eyes nearly bulging from his head, “He's one of the two children of modern society you need to watch out from. His sister is Want, even more dangerous to behold.”

On his other side, a woman crawled out from under the cloak. She was emaciated as well, filthy, her hollow cheeks making her face seem like a skull, her long, dirty hair obscuring her blind eyes. Although she was ugly and distorted, she resembled Éponine and Enjolras whimpered when he recognized his friend's mother. She grabbed for Enjolras' ankle and he nearly squealed with horror, watching in a stupor of fear how the woman slavered.

“She's closer to you than you think, Enjolras!”’, warned the spirit while he seemed to decay in front of Enjolras' eyes, “You may not want material things, but excessive ambition and idealism is closer to Want than you might think. Take care, Enjolras... before it's too late!”

The two figures leaped at him and Enjolras screamed, shielding his face with his arms, slumping back onto the mattress. Nothing happened. When he opened his eyes again, his room was empty. The spirit was gone, so were the horrible figures to his feet.

Enjolras struggled out of bed and switched on the light, frantic and afraid, his heart pounding faster than humanly possible. Pressing his back against the closed bedroom door, he slid down slowly, the horror fading away with every heartbeat.

He wasn't ignorant! He may not be very preceptive about what was going on around him that had nothing to do with his fight for equality and justice, but he was not ignorant. And he clearly didn't want too much, did he?

He still shook frantically when he finally had calmed his heartbeat to a rate that seemed more healthy. He was not sure what tonight was about and he was not sure where this would lead and he was not sure how much more he could take. Seeing all the painful memories from his past had unsettled him and after what the last spirit had shown him, he felt like the most lonely and unloved person in the world. A voice in the back of his head told him that he was not entirely innocent about his situation, but he couldn't really acknowledge that right now.

But he was not unloved, was he? There was this one person – the only person Enjolras had always thought loathed him nearly with the same intensity as he sometimes loathed himself – who
loved him. Loved him against all reason, because Enjolras had always been horrible to him. His heart tightened and Enjolras closed his eyes, burying his face in his arms.

He needed to calm down and get a grip on himself again rather than freak out in the middle of the night in his bedroom. Things would sort themselves out, wouldn't they?
The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Chapter Notes

Third chapter, folkes... this is the shortest of the whole fic.

It's got a fair amount of angst in it that's not been resolved right away but in the next chapter. But I promise it will be fine once the story's finished...

And now, enjoy...

The next thing he heard was the bell toll for three o'clock. He had not slept this time, still trying to wrap his head around what was happening to him, still trying to make sense of the feelings swirling through his head and heart whenever he thought about his friends, about his best friend’s relationship with Courfeyrac and – most importantly – about Grantaire.

The room went colder than it had been when Javert had showed up and Enjolras closed his eyes before he raised his head from his arms. He still sat in front of the door, knees drawn up to his chest, his arms resting on them. The room was dark and silent and there was truly someone else there.

A small, stout figure sat on his bed, legs crossed, arms resting relaxed on his knees. He wore black: black jeans, black Converse chucks, black gloves and a black hoodie. The hood was drawn over his head, shading the face from any glimpse. He didn't move but stared at Enjolras out of unseen eyes, his fingers dancing slowly over his knee, a nervous habit, undoubtedly.

Enjolras couldn't bring himself to talk to the spirit. He hoped that if he kept just staring at him, he would go away and leave Enjolras to think. He needed to think and sort out his thoughts and feelings. He didn't need another load of fears piled onto his heart by this ghost while he was already a mess, although he didn't admit it to himself.

Man up! His father had said to him all those years ago and that was what Enjolras had done. Or at least he had done what he thought a man would do: bury his feelings, shut away the world and never let anyone see what and how he felt. He had dived head-first into his fight for the oppressed, finding a new goal in his life in this fight after he had felt empty and alone for so long.

What he had not seen all the while was that his life could be so much more filled... with love. Combeferre had been with him all the time, sensing that he needed someone although he would never admit it, and it had also been Combeferre who introduced him to Courfeyrac, who took him to a party at Bousset's flat – the first week of their first semester at uni – where he met the rest of his friends. And if he hadn't been that blind all the time, that self-destructive, he would have allowed their affection and their love to fill his life and nothing of the things that had happened tonight would have been necessary.

Enjolras' heart tightened. He knew that he had to follow again and knew that he would see things he did not want to see but yet again – as Jehan would say – fate was inevitable and he had to face whatever would wait for him.

Enjolras sighed and got up. He shoved his hands in his pockets and looked at the spirit through expectant eyes. When the figure on his bed said nothing, Enjolras asked: “Am I in the presence of
the spirit of Christmas yet to come?

The figure did not move or answer but kept staring at Enjolras. He shifted his weight from one leg onto the other and squared his shoulders. The spirit kept glaring at him without moving. Then, he slowly raised a hand and peeled off one of the gloves. He dropped it and pointed with one white hand behind Enjolras, right to a point over his right shoulder.

“Just tell me...”, murmured Enjolras, “I don't want to see the future unless it ends good. I have seen so much pain tonight... I don't want to believe that the future will be just like this. Please...”

The spirit got up slowly and straightened. He was so much smaller than the two previous spirits and Enjolras felt something oddly familiar about the stout figure, the way he hung his shoulders, the way he held himself while walking towards him. Enjolras backed away just one step before the spirit raised his white hand again, pointing behind Enjolras.

Sighing, Enjolras turned around and found himself in what looked like a hotel room. He groaned irritated because he was once again taken to places he didn't know, forced to face things he did not want to see. The spirit was with him, leaning against the wall to his right, his arms crossed and one leg folded in front of the other. He still stared at Enjolras without flinching, without Enjolras seeing his face.

“Hold still!”, commanded a well known voice behind him irritated. Enjolras turned around. Jehan stood in front of a small chest of drawers, looking approximately five years or more older than a few hours ago. They wore a suit and their hair was braided into a tight French braid. Currently they were struggling with the bow tie around Joly's neck. The young doctor had grown a dense beard – Joly in a beard, an unusual look – while his receding hairline showed more of his forehead than Enjolras remembered. He – as well – wore a suit.

“I hate Courfeyrac for forcing me to wear this!”, scolded Joly and swatted at Jehan's hands.

“Bow ties are totally gorgeous. He's right about them!”, insisted Jehan.

“Why are they dressed like this?”, asked Enjolras and turned to the spirit. He didn't answer, just kept watching.

Enjolras heard a flush in the other room and the door opened. Combeferre strode into the room, looking paler and more nervous than Enjolras had ever seen him. His hair had been cut shorter than in his teens while some more wrinkles around his eyes had appeared. He sported a thin moustache which looked completely odd on his face. Enjolras saw that he wore a three-piece-suit – still lacking the jacket –, a fancy cravat tugged into the vest and a silk pocket handkerchief poking out from the pocket on his chest.

“You look horrible!”, commented Jehan and went over to Combeferre to wrap their arms around his neck, hugging him for comfort, “Calm down, this isn't the end of the world.”

“I don't want to disappoint Courfeyrac. He's put so much effort into his dream-Christmas-wedding and I don't want him to be disappointed by a lapse of mine!”, slurred Combeferre and freed himself from Jehan's arms, rubbing his forehead with the knuckle of his thumb, like he always did when he was close to freaking out.

“Combeferre is getting married?!”, Enjolras blurted out and whirled around to the spirit. The spirit still just stared, not intending to give anything away. Enjolras shivered and turned around, eyeing Joly sitting on the bed, Jehan accompanying him a moment later.

Combeferre had turned to the set of drawers and opened a small box with cuff links resting there.
While he fumbled with his sleeves, Jehan sighed and got up again. They seemed to be more familiar to dressing this fancy than any of their friends. Combeferre let himself be helped and watched Jehan's skilled fingers.

“Did... ehm...”, stuttered Joly after a moment and blushed when Combeferre looked at him.

“What?”, asked the groom.

“Did you hear anything from Enjolras?”, finished Joly his question.

Enjolras did not miss how Combeferre's shoulders tightened, nor did he miss the icy look that Jehan sent Joly's direction. This was obviously a sore spot to touch and Enjolras was wondering why. If this was Combeferre's wedding – and Courfeyrac's if Enjolras was concluding correctly – why wasn't he here? Wouldn't he be Combeferre's best man? Wouldn't he be at least with him in this life-changing situation even if he wasn't the best man?

“No, nothing since the e-mail from Alexandre.”, answered Combeferre cryptically and thanked Jehan with a nod for helping him with the cuff links.

“He made Alexandre tell you via e-mail?”, gasped Jehan and whirled around to Combeferre again.

“Tell him what?”, asked Enjolras, half to the spirit, half to his three friends.

Combeferre brazed himself against the set of drawers, taking a deep breath and grumbled: “Please, don't bring this up again, Jehan. I promised Courfeyrac I wouldn't cry today and making me talk about it might as well set off the fountain again.”

“You are twenty-eight years old, Ferre, you shouldn't let this arse still make you cry.”, reprimanded Jehan more forceful than Enjolras had ever seen them. Their eyes were glowing fierce and their cheeks got redder with every second passing.

“Why...”, stuttered Enjolras, his heart racing in his chest, his mind not able to make the connection why an e-mail from Alexandre would make Combeferre cry. He turned to the spirit and looked at him begging, but the spirit just leaned there, without moving. Enjolras' jaw tightened while he turned back to his friends, dreading where this conversation would go.

“That's easy to say for you, Jehan.”, sighed Combeferre and rubbed his face, “Your best friend hasn't cancelled on you when you asked him to be your best man by telling his employee to send an e-mail saying that he would have a very important presentation the Monday after your wedding.”

Enjolras' heart broke and he felt so cold inside the he thought nothing could ever warm him. He had done what?

“Well, screw Enjolras!”, tried Jehan to cheer Combeferre, “This day is about you and Courfeyrac and about how much you love each other. This is all that matters, everything that counts. Nothing else. And we're here with you. And Joly is probably the best best man you could wish for! Besides, we haven't seen Enjolras in a year since he took over Javert's job, so we won't even miss him today!”

“You won't!”, sighed Combeferre and let Jehan drape their arm around his shoulders, “But I will.”

“Forget him.”, tried Joly now, “He doesn't even deserve someone as great as you missing him. He deserves to be missed by exactly no one for everything he has said and done in the last two years!”
“What did I do?”, asked Enjolras desperate, half hushed and turned to the spirit again, “What did I say?”

Enjolras turned to his friends. The pained expression on Combeferre's face, the fury in Jehan's eyes – those eyes that had always been so soft and kind – and the helpless frown on Joly's features made Enjolras feel sick again. He took a step towards Combeferre, intending to tell him that he was sorry, to apologize for things he did not know he had done – or would do –, hoping that he could still mend what was left of Combeferre's shattered affection for him.

“What did I do?”, whispered Enjolras again, his heart breaking while Jehan hugged the shaking Combeferre to comfort him. Enjolras turned around to the spirit and shouted desperate, tears burning in his eyes: “Tell me, what did I do?!”

A knock on the door distracted Enjolras and he turned back around. Courfeyrac came in the room. He had not changed much in the past few years, but there were slight silver streaks in the hair at his temples. He was clad in a three-piece-suit as well, his vest made of pale white satin.

“No!”, howled Jehan and flew to Courfeyrac, “You are not supposed to see each other! Get out, Courf!"

“Oh, get off, Prouvaire!”, laughed Courfeyrac and closed the door behind him, “This is a gay wedding, I think we can stop pretending we're doing this the traditional way!”

He made his way over to Combeferre and took the hands of his husbad-to-be.

“Are you all right?”, he asked and smiled a little nervous while Joly herded Jehan out of the door.

“I guess…”, said Combeferre and blinked down at his boyfriend. No, fiancé. Enjolras thought.

“Come on…”, sighed Courfeyrac and slung his arms around Combeferre's neck, pulling him in a tight hug, “It's gonna be fine. I promise, this day will be the best of our lives, even without him.”

“I'm sorry…”, whispered Combeferre and buried his face into Courfeyrac's curls, snaking his arms around Courfeyrac's hips.

“No need to be, love.”, soothed Courfeyrac, “I'm here. And I will never leave you, OK? Don't be afraid, I won't leave you.”

He didn't say it, but Enjolras heard the like he did hang in the air after Courfeyrac had finished. His throat went tight with the thought that he had abandoned Combeferre on the most important day of his life. And not only Combeferre, but also Courfeyrac.

Combeferre straightened and smiled at Courfeyrac wearily while latter brushed a tear away that had surfaced from under Combeferre's glasses. Courfeyrac smiled warmly while Combeferre whispered: “I love you so much.”

“I love you too.”, grinned Courfeyrac and took Combeferre's face between his hands, kissing him so softly and caring that Enjolras felt the room spinning around him.

“Are you ready? Or do you need a moment?”, asked Courfeyrac after Combeferre broke the kiss. Combeferre picked up his jacket and pulled it over, straightening and sighing deeply. Then he shook his head and smiled at Courfeyrac who beamed.

“All right then, let's get married!”, Courfeyrac laughed and grabbed Combeferre's hand to drag him out of the hotel room.
The spirit just glared at Enjolras when they were alone in the room. Enjolras did not know what to do. Combeferre suffered because of him. And Enjolras was eternally grateful that Courfeyrac was there for him. With a stab of pain Enjolras acknowledge that he had neither told Combeferre how much he meant to him, nor had he told Courfeyrac how happy it made him that he made Combeferre so happy.

“I want to go home... please...”, begged Enjolras, unsettled again. The spirit pushed himself off from the wall and approached Enjolras slowly. He stepped back when the spirit lifted his hand again and pointed over Enjolras' shoulder once more.

“No!”, protested Enjolras, “I won't follow you any further. I don't want so see anything else. I can not... you can not force me!”

The spirit took another step towards him, his demeanour so threatening that Enjolras backed a step away, frightened by this spirit more than he had been frightened by Javert. He was insistently pointing behind Enjolras, the dark void of his hood making Enjolras freeze.

He gulped a few times to calm down, still staring at the spirit. Enjolras closed his eyes and let all air escape from his lungs. Slowly, shaking slightly, he turned around and found himself in the kitchen of the editorial office he was working in. He and the spirit stood crammed into the space between the fridge and the small table, watching the scene unfolding in front of them.

Alexandre was standing in the middle of the kitchen, holding a Christmas-themed cup with steaming coffee, wearing an expensive suit and laughing heartily about something a young woman with a blond bob had said a few moments ago. He seemed older as well, maybe ten years from when Enjolras had last seen him in the morning.

“God, I thought the day would never come when I'm finally allowed to laugh about Enjolras!” he gasped after a moment and wiped off a tear from laughing.

“Well, everyone gets what they deserve in the end, don't they?”, said the third person, an elderly man with thick glasses, a slice of Christmas stollen in his hand.

“He would definitely say that at last there's been some justice in the world.”, giggled the woman and refilled her cup while the men laughed affirmative.

“I wonder what he's doing now. I mean, what's he got left after losing his job?”, asked Alexandre and leaned back against the counter top, cocking his head in thought.

A pang of shock shot through Enjolras' guts. Lost his job? What were they talking about?!

“Doesn't he have a husband?”, asked the blond one, “That good looking doctor who used to stop by once a week?”

“Combeferre?”, asked Alexandre and roared a laughter, “No, oh hell no! I think they were friends when they were younger. And Combeferre hasn't given up on him although Enjolras doesn't really care for him. Did you know that he made me cancel on Combeferre when he asked him to be his best man three years ago?”

“No way!”, blurted the man.

“I tell you, he made me call it off via e-mail. He didn't even bother going or sending a card or something. And Combeferre still came to see him although Enjolras made me send him away more than once without an excuse!”, explained Alexandre and took the piece of stollen the man offered him.
“But he has had that affair last year, hasn't he?”, asked the blond again, “The whole office was gossiping about it.”

Enjolras didn't like her. She was that sort of woman who dawdled in the kitchen, gossiping her day away while others worked hard.

“Oh yeah, that was entertaining!”, huffed Alexandre and took a sip from his cup, “I never thought it possible that he actually had any cravings...”

“Maybe it was just a way to blow off some steam.”, chuckled the man.

“No, no!”, laughed Alexandre, “He really craved for that artist... I quite forgot his name.”

“Poor him, I bet Enjolras is terrible to be with.”, sighed the man and pushed his glasses up.

“Pf”, made Alexandre, “If he's been stupid enough to let himself be treated bad, suits him.”

“So Enjolras is all alone?”, asked the blond again, making Enjolras shake his head in irritation. He had to find out who she was and hinder Javert from hiring her in the future.

A finger drilled itself into Enjolras shoulder blade, making a quiet whelp escape his lips. He whirled around and saw that the ghost – most likely – glared at him, his head cocked, his position testifying to the reprimanding glint of his eyes that Enjolras could not see.

“All right, I get it. That's not why you brought me here...”, sighed Enjolras and turned back to the conversation.

“As far as I know, yes.”, confirmed Alexandre, “He's not living with someone let alone has a boyfriend. He's not talked to his father in years and his mother ran away when he was a boy.”

“Doesn't surprise me.”, laughed the man, “He's probably been a pest as a child!”

All three of them laughed heartily. Enjolras' heart cringed when he thought about the notion. He had always wondered as a boy if it had been his fault that his mother had left. Hearing those thoughts uttered by strangers was more painful than thinking them in the lonely hours of his childhood. He took a deep breath to steady himself, focusing on the conversation again.

“And his friends do not talk to him ever since the whole story with the wedding and the fling with the artist.”, explained Alexandre and patted off some icing sugar from his hands.

“Understandable.”, affirmed the woman, “That's a new level of horrible, even for Enjolras.”

“Well, he got what he deserved in the end.”, huffed Alexandre and shrugged his shoulders, “Who would have thought that perfect, intelligent and idealistic Enjolras would not shrink from blackmailing and harassment when it comes to his goals?”

These words were like a punch to Enjolras' guts. He had to brace himself against the side of the table. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath. His head was swimming from everything he had just heard.

Blackmailing? Harassment? What had he done?

And Combeferre...

Enjolras' throat got tight and he felt like suffocating. Combeferre had forgiven him for letting him down on the most important day of his life and had still stuck with him, although Enjolras had
treated him worse than a dog. The thought about it wrung a dry sob from Enjolras before he could stop it by pressing a hand over his mouth. He felt his knees buckle and wished his mind would stop spitting the truths he had heard just now at him.

An affair? With an artist?

Enjolras felt bile rise in his throat at the thought. He only knew one artist and the last thing on his mind was to have an affair with him. He wanted so much more with him, he realized with a shock. He didn't only crave to get into bed with him, he wanted to spend time with him, wanted to talk to him, have him around when he came home, wanted to wake up next to him and watch him sleep, wanted to share everything with him and wanted to make sure that he was happy.

But an affair? He knew that Grantaire would not be strong enough to withdraw himself from Enjolras if he intended to sleep with him. And Enjolras knew as well that it would destroy him. He was not the person who could handle his emotions and the sole physical purpose of an affair as two separate things. If this was true, if Enjolras really had had an affair with Grantaire, he had probably hurt him even more than he had hurt Combeferre through all the years of their friendship.

A cold hand grabbed his shoulder, sending a chill feeling through his skin and made him look up. The spirit stood next to him, the blackness from his hood echoing the feeling in Enjolras' heart while he helped Enjolras to straighten up.

“Lead on.”, whispered Enjolras defeated, “I know there is still something to see, you would have taken me home if there wasn't. Lead on, I will follow you.”

The spirit nodded slowly and let go off his shoulder. He raised his hand and pointed behind Enjolras. He closed his eyes and took another deep breath, knowing that there was yet more horror to come. Because there could be no happy future if he was really turning into that monster of a man who put everything behind the struggle for a better world – even the hearts and feelings of his friends, of the ones he loved.

When Enjolras turned, they stood on a graveyard outside the city. The wind was cold, melting snow was covering the tombstones and the graves, dark clouds hung low over the weeping willows on the hill. He shivered in the cold wind – the first time this night that the nature actually affected him – and crossed his arms over his chest.

The spirit stepped next to him, silent as death, and pointed up the hill were Enjolras saw two people working on a fresh grave, putting wreaths, bouquets and bowls with flowers to the side to erect the tombstone. The flowers were frozen and the black ribbons on the wreaths were stiff from the cold.

Enjolras' chest ached with fear when he started his climb up the hill. The wooden cross that had been erected for the funeral lay face down in the muddy snow next to the grave, the two men struggled to put up the final tombstone, a plain stone of black marble, resting on the cargo space of a pick-up vehicle behind the men.

“... couldn't decide to die on a more decent day!”, Enjolras heard one of the men curse.

“Shut up, Guillaume. Show some compassion.”, ordered the younger man, carefully shovelling away some more earth.

“No one shows compassion for me!”, huffed Guillaume while Enjolras stopped at the foot of the grave, the spirit hesitating a few steps behind him, “I have to be out in this shite weather and put up that tombstone and no one pities me. Who would want to take their life on New Year's?”
Enjolras' heart pounded loud in his chest, he felt his heartbeat even in the veins on his throat and in his ears. The fear tightened his stomach and he started shaking.

“I don't know.”, sighed the younger man, “Poor bugger. Rumour has it that he got dumped by the man he loved. He couldn't take it, they say.”

Enjolras stumbled a step back while the men put aside their shovels and started to prepare the tombstone for putting it up. He whirled around to the spirit and reached out for him.

“No!”, he heard himself gasp in a heartbreaking way, “Don't tell me... Please... don't say he...”

The spirit stared down mercilessly on Enjolras and motioned with his head behind Enjolras. He was crying now, tears spilling over his cheeks and into the neckline of his shirt. With every thud, his heart ached like it would break any second. His breaths came terrified and harsh while he couldn't make himself turn around. If he saw the name on the tombstone, it would be true. And he couldn't face that truth, he couldn't see what he had done.

He heard the stone sink into the earth, the thud when it reached its designated place echoing in his bones like it was a death sentence for himself. His body acted as if controlled by an outer force and turned around. His eyes caught a glimpse of the stone. The men were hunkering to both sides of it, adjusting its position further while the wind whirled snow up and over their orange coats.

The writing on the stone was carved into the blank surface and enriched with white paint. Enjolras broke to his knees.

Henri Grantaire

* 12\textsuperscript{th} November 1988

† 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2020

The sobs now rolled from Enjolras' lips like a waterfall. He wrung his hands. Grantaire! No, this could not be how his future would go! He could not die, he could not take his life!

Enjolras had broken him. He knew it without thinking about it. His future self had not cared for him, like his past self had not cared. His past and his future would lead Grantaire to an early grave, they would toy with his feelings, make him see heaven before abandoning him and casting him into hell. They would break him. They would kill him.

The ground started spinning and Enjolras couldn't breath properly. The blood rushed in his ears and he felt so dizzy that he couldn't open his eyes. Panic washed over him, pain wrenched his heart and he wished – wished from the bottom of his heart, with his whole soul and his entire being – that he could change everything he had seen tonight. That he could make up for everything that has happened... for every bad deed he had done or would do.

The spirit stepped next to Enjolras and he looked up, the cold wind freezing his tears on his cheeks. This cold was not natural, it was the grasp of death. Enjolras suddenly knew why this spirit was so familiar, why he knew him, knew who he resembled. He extended his hands to him and stared up, his own face the same tormented mask now that the spirit of Javert had worn.

“Forgive me!”, sobbed Enjolras against the wind, “Forgive me, please!”
The spirit lifted his hand and pushed the hood from his head. Long curls, longer than Enjolras had ever seen them, hung in a pale, skull like face. Black eyes, completely dark and dead stared down at Enjolras. His lips were cracked and hung open just a little like from a silent sob. There were black strangulation marks on the white skin of his throat.

“Grantaire!”, cried Enjolras and shook from sobs, “Please, forgive me! I love you!”

The wind picked up and whipped over Enjolras so hard that he fell face first onto the ground. The cold was gone, heat flooded over his body and his hands and knees felt sore from hitting a ground harder than tamped earth. The smell of wood polish tickled his nose.
Enjolras blinked confused, tears still burning in his eyes, while they focused on his wardrobe. He carefully drew his arms towards his shoulders and pushed himself up from the hardwood floor of his bedroom – which seemed to explain the smell of wood polish in his nose.

It was snowing outside his bedroom window, the clock on his night-stand showed in flickering digits that it was half past six in the morning. Enjolras knelt in the middle of his bedroom, his heart beating frantic from the memory of his nightmare, his face still tear wet.

A nightmare?

Enjolras struggled up. The fabric over his knees was damp and his hands were stained with the black soil of a graveyard.

The graveyard!

Enjolras stumbled a step forward and slumped down on his bed. The lamp on his night-stand was on once again, the door to his bedroom closed, a glass of water on his night-stand.

Shaking he brushed the soil off of his hands and took deep breaths to calm down. He grabbed his head and ran his hand through his long hair.

There was no doubt that tonight something magical had happened. Enjolras still shook with the memories as he grabbed the alarm clock on his night-stand. Blinking afraid at the date, he saw that he could calm down: 25th December 2014... Christmas Day.

While the horrors of last night had not faded completely, a smile spread over Enjolras' features. They had shown him all this in just one night. And they had offered him a chance. A chance to change the future, just like Combeferre... no, just like the ghost of Christmas past had promised.

Enjolras jumped to his feet, already half out of his button-down. He threw it behind him, undoing his belt and shrugging off his dress-pants. A moment later, he was clad in bluejeans – the ones Grantaire had complimented him on in a drunken mood – , a warm jumper in red – a gift from Combeferre – , and a pair of snow boots. He shrug into his black winter jacket and wound his red scarf around his neck, humming to himself under his breath, suddenly so happy and feeling as light as a feather that he actually laughed out loud soon after.

He snatched his mobile and his purse from the kitchen, picked up the plain black hair tie from the floor and wound his blond hair up in a messy bun. On the way out he grabbed a pair of mittens and a cap and jogged down the flight of stairs, whistling.

It snowed outside and was yet to brighten completely, but the streets were so peaceful and inviting that Enjolras laughed under his breath.

He felt better than he had felt in years, his heart was singing with a new feeling that he had not allowed for himself in the past. Now he was on a mission, a mission to make things better. He knew he couldn't make up for the past in just one day, but knowing what would happen in the future if he carried on like he had all those years, he intended to try.
His usual bakery was – luckily – open although it was Christmas Day. Enjolras greeted the young shop assistant behind the counter and wished her a merry Christmas. He placed his order and waited patiently, not tapping his fingers like he used to do it while waiting, not glancing on his watch every second.

The girl blushed a little when he thanked her joyfully - his tip more than generous - and grabbed the paper bags she was holding out for him. Enjolras rushed out the bakery and made his way to the office building their newspaper had rented a floor in with a new kind of skip in his steps.

The elevator binged a moment later and the doors slid open. Enjolras hurried to Javert's office, knowing that his boss was in.

“Good morning, Sir! And a very Merry Christmas to you!”, he laughed when he entered the dark office. Javert looked up completely and utterly startled and blinked confused at Enjolras.

“Enjol... Enjolras, what are you doing here? I told you I would fire you if you don't take the day off!”, snapped Javert after recovering from his shock, glaring daggers at Enjolras.

“I know, Sir, I just came in to deliver this to you...”, he said and put down the smaller bag, containing a double espresso and a baguette covered with tomato relish, mozzarella and rocket, “And I wanted you to know that I intend to extend Alexandre's days off until the third of January.”

“But...”, stuttered Javert and pinched the bridge of his nose, annoyed with the unwanted interruption this early in the morning, “But I thought you needed him for that presentation?”

“No, I can handle that myself. I should be able to set up a beamer, shouldn't I?”, laughed Enjolras and nodded affirmative, “Did you know that he hasn't been home in all of four months?!”

“No...?”, breathed Javert and stared at Enjolras like he had gone completely mad.

“Horrible, isn't it....”, sighed Enjolras and shifted his weight a little, still beaming, “Oh, and just to warn you: I intend to hand the article about the nepotism in the allocation for those construction contracts to the cousin of the cabinet member to Alexandre as well. I think he has the potential to make that a really good story.”

“If... if you think so.”, stuttered Javert, staring wide eyed at Enjolras.

“I really do... Well, all right, Sir, I wish you a merry Christmas again and if you feel lonely tomorrow, just call me. I'm having some friends over for dinner and I would be delighted if you join us!”, smiled Enjolras and left the office.

Javert sat at his desk, gaping into the direction of the hallway where he could hear Enjolras whistle Jingle Bells. What had happened to that lad who had yesterday threatened to guillotine everyone who dared to utter the word Christmas? It was unlike him to give any of his big stories out of his hands. And why would he suddenly want to have his intern get a proper vacation?

Shaking his head, Javert reached out for the bag and opened it. A small smile played around his features when he saw Enjorlas' selection. Maybe that lad wasn't so bad after all.

Enjolras was at the station ten minutes later and left it with a ticket in his pocket only ten minutes after that. He had some trouble to find Alexandre's flat but when he had given a twenty euro note to a beggar with a “Merry Christmas!” on his lips, the man had escorted him personally to the door.

Now Enjolras stood in front of the flat and chuckled. He heard rustling from inside and put on his
most stern expression. He heard the key chain rattle and a key turning in the lock, then the door slid open and revealed a ruffled Alexandre, still wearing pyjamas and looking like he had just fallen out of bed. His eyes went wide when he saw Enjolras.

“Alexandre!”, barked Enjolras and wondered if his voice had always sounded so cold when he talked like that, “Good that I find you!”

“Please!”, whimpered Alexandre and stepped back, horror on his features, “Please, Enjolras... it's...”

“Christmas Day, I bloody know!”, snapped Enjolras, “And I demand an answer!”

Alexandre crumbled in front of his eyes and Enjolras nearly broke off with the charade to comfort him but he was enjoying himself too much. He wanted to build everything up until the perfect time had come for him to drop the bomb.

“What...?”, Alexandre nearly sobbed, “To what question?!?”

“Why you never told me that you haven't been home since you started!?”, snapped Enjolras, turning his voice softer and smiling at the young man while he continued: “Seriously, Alexandre, you should have told me that I overwork you. I am very sorry you missed your train because of me. And I have a present for you.”

Enjolras drew the envelope from his pocket and handed it to Alexandre who was gaping at him with a slightly open mouth. He smiled assuring and extended the envelope even further to Alexandre who took it finally with shaking fingers.

While Enjolras watched him open the small present, he added: “It's the least I could do to make up for how I treated you. I've extended your days off until the third of January, if that's fine by you? And when you get back, I'll have you work on that nepotism-case I researched.”

Alexandre looked up from the first-class return ticket to his home station. His eyes were glassy from tears and he opened his mouth a few times without making a sound. Enjolras took this as an affirmation. He stepped forward, patted Alexandre's shoulder and said: “Merry Christmas, Alexandre, enjoy your time at home and greet your parents and your grandmother from me!”

Alexandre still stood in the door while Enjolras danced down the stairs of the apartment house and hurried outside. Carefully, he pinched his arm through the pyjama shirt and flinched. No, definitely not a dream. The thought crossed his mind that Enjolras might have a good twin he didn't know about but when he returned his eyes to the ticket and saw that it had been paid by his boss, he broke into a hysteric laughter, darted into his bedroom and threw a small suitcase onto the bed to get packed for his vacation at home.

*~*

Half an hour later, Enjolras climbed up the stairs to the entrance of the apartment building Combeferre's flat was in. He still remembered the code for the entrance, at least he had lived two years with Combeferre in this flat while they had attended university.

Enjolras did not wait for the elevator but climbed up to the second floor without hesitating. He knocked melodic on the door saying 2D and waited patiently. He didn't hear something for a long time, then the door was opened and he found himself facing a shirtless Courfeyrac, his hair tousled, his eyes bleary and sweatpants with too long legs hanging low on his hips. Courfeyrac's eyes went wide when he saw who was standing in front of the door.

Enjolras could not be bothered and stepped forward, hugging Courfeyrac like a vice while he said
happily: “A very Merry Christmas to you, my friend!”

He let go off Courfeyrac whose hand still rested on the doorknob, his eyes wide, his mouth standing open. Enjolras raised both eyebrows and tried a careful smile at him.

“Don't you want to ask me in?”, he asked carefully, still smiling warmly at Courfeyrac.

“Ehm...”, made Courfeyrac and life returned to his body while he stepped to the side, “Of course, sorry. Come... please come in, Enj... I... ehm...”

Enjolras stepped inside and let Courfeyrac close the door while his friend still seemed overtaxed with the situation. The hallway was narrow and Enjolras let his gaze roam until it was attracted by a crumpled button-down still stuck in a jumper – the same one Combeferre had worn to the party at Joly, Bousset and Grantaire's house – pooling on the floor. A jeans lay a few meters away, accompanied by a Christmas-themed shirt, a few sizes smaller than Combeferre's, forming a trail to what Enjolras knew to be Combeferre's bedroom.

Enjolras turned to Courfeyrac and smiled cheeky, giving the pile next to his boots a slight nudge.

“I see you've been eager to get undressed last night, Courf...”, he mentioned teasingly.

Courfeyrac started spluttering, pointing to the clothing, waiving his hands fast, his face blushed so deep red that Enjolras was afraid he might explode any second while his eyes were wide and frantic.

“Enj... it's not what... it isn't like... we were just... I couldn't drive after... Combeferre said... we didn't do anything!”, stuttered Courfeyrac, his face as red as a traffic light by now.

Enjolras laughed.

“It's all right, Courf, I don't mind that you two are a couple.”, he chuckled and winked at his friend while he took off his cap, the mittens, scarf and coat after pushing the paper bags into Courfeyrac's arms.

“You know?!”, shrieked Courfeyrac, a few octaves higher than usually and was so close to fainting as he shouldn't get on a Christmas Day morning.

Enjolras straightened up after untying his boots and toeing them off and offered a sheepish smile to Courfeyrac. He brushed his hand over the back of his head and nodded carefully, not able to look at Courfeyrac.

“I... I somehow knew, yes.”, he said softly, more to the boots on the floor than to Courfeyrac, “I just didn't want to see it, I guess. Combeferre is... he's... he's the most important person in my life since we've been boys and... he means so much to me.”

Enjolras looked up at Courfeyrac eventually. His friend's face had a more healthy colour while confusion and panic swirled through his dark eyes. He did not say anything, just gaped at Enjolras as if he had never seen him before in his whole life. Enjolras took this as an encouragement to go on.

“And then we met you and we just clicked. All three of us.”, Enjolras explained timidly, “I just... I was always afraid that if you two got together eventually, because let's be honest, what the hell did take you two so long to actually get together?!... I ... I was just afraid I would loose Combeferre... and you. That I would be left out somehow...”

Courfeyrac dumped the parcels and the paper bags on the shoe cupboard to his right and stepped
forward, drawing Enjolras into a tight hug. Enjolras hugged back, hiding his face at the shoulder of his friend while his heart beat frantically.

He had never known that those feelings were in his heart, had never acknowledged them until he had uttered them aloud. And he felt how Courfeyrac was shaking and knew that this was all new to him as well and maybe even as hard to face as for Enjolras.

A moment later Courfeyrac let go off him and pressed a warm kiss to his forehead, his lips lingering there a little longer than necessary. When he looked at Enjolras, there were tears in his eyes.

“What the hell has happened, Enj?” he asked, his voice thick with emotions, “You are not telling me all this because you are dying, aren’t you?”

Enjolras mustered a pained laugh and shook his head. Even in moments like that, Courfeyrac managed to make him laugh... and for the first time Enjolras allowed himself to laugh. While his friend still looked concerned at him, Enjolras plucked Courfeyrac’s hand from his shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

“No, I swear... I just...”, he sighed deeply, “I just felt like I needed to tell you these things. I know you were afraid of telling me about the two of you because... because I am a horrible person and ... no, Courf, please let me finish.”

Courfeyrac stepped back again, closing his mouth while Enjolras tried to sort through his thoughts, not used to being not as eloquent as he wished to be.

“I am so happy for the both of you. I am happy that Combeferre finally found someone whose worthy of his love. And I am so happy that this person is you, Courf, I couldn't wish for any better person to be the one Combeferre wants to be with. And I hate the thought that I might have been the reason why you two didn't find each other sooner, because I know Combeferre didn't want to hurt me in any way... but... I hate myself for making him think it's necessary to put my feelings in front of yours and his own and.... I ask your forgiveness... There are no two people in the world who deserve to be happy together more than you two and I should have told you that earlier... and... You know that I love you just as much as Combeferre, Courf, although I have never told you, don't you?!?”

Courfeyrac burst into tears and wrapped his arms around Enjolras' neck, sniffling into the hollow of his neck, sobbing “I love you too!”’s into his skin. Enjolras bit back tears as well and hugged back comforting. Courfeyrac soon recovered a grip on himself and let go off Enjolras.

“You are a horrible, horrible person, Enjolras!”, he sniffled, mustering that beaming smile of his that Enjolras loved so much, “You can’t just come here on Christmas Morning, pour your heart out on the bloody doorstep and make me cry even before I had a coffee, that’s just unfair!”

Enjolras laughed and grabbed the bag on the shoe cupboard, opening it up and drawing a cup-to-go out. He presented it to Courfeyrac and recited: “Toffee Nut Latte with extra syrup and two pieces of rock candy, am I right?!?”

“Seriously, you are really starting to creep me out.”, laughed Courfeyrac but took the red cup never the less, sipping at the – hopefully – still warm coffee.

“I just thought that... well, I got up at half past six and I know that Combeferre most likely forgot to go shopping before the holidays and loathes to leave the house when the first snow falls and so I thought I could get us bagels and some coffee and we could have breakfast, just like in the old days...”, explained Enjolras and was suddenly not so sure about his idea.
The smile that Courfeyrac gave him was enough though to warm his heart and make him smile back.

“That's probably the best idea you've ever had... including the one to grow your hair out...”, sighed Courfeyrac, gathered the bags with one hand and slung the other arm around Enjolras' shoulder, “Combeferre will drop dead when he gets out of the shower.”

The two young men made their way into the kitchen – Courfeyrac grabbing his shirt from the floor and pulling it over – and set the table. Enjolras was aware that Courfeyrac was watching him all the time, a mixture of worries, surprise and confusion on his feature while Enjolras asked about the party the evening prior, about their plans for the holidays and about reviving their tradition of having pizza and a film-night on Friday evenings. Courfeyrac did not ask again what had changed, shrugged his shoulders after a while and shook off all the confusion, simply embracing the change in Enjolras with the same enthusiasm that had brought him into Enjolras' life in the beginning. And Enjolras loved him for it.

They settled down around the oval table and talked about the coming year, about Courfeyrac's promotion to junior partner in the law firm he worked, about Combeferre's plans to establish a free medical check-up for everyone who needed it and about Enjolras intentions to look for a new, bigger flat. They were halfway through discussing the benefits of a flat closer to the city centre when they heard the bathroom door open.

“Did I hear the doorbell, Darling?”, called Combeferre while they heard him patting towards the kitchen.

“Indeed you did, Muffin!”, called Courfeyrac back, beaming at Enjolras who hid a chuckle in the back of his hand.

“For the last time, Muffin is not even appropriate for an afterglow cuddle, so leave it.”, called Combeferre – the smile audible in his words – while he trudged towards the kitchen, “Who was...?”

Combeferre stepped into the kitchen, freezing on the spot when he saw Enjolras sitting at his kitchen table. His hair was wet and tousled, he wore only a towel, wrapped loosely around his hips, his glasses still a little fogged up from lying in the bathroom while their owner took a hot shower.

“Hi, Ferre!”, said Enjolras and smiled sheepishly while he got up and stepped to him, wrapping both arms around his neck and hugging his much taller best friend tightly, “Merry Christmas!”

“Enjolras!”, piped Combeferre, unable to return the hug when his friend let go off him, “What... why... how... did something happen? Are you all right? Are you hurt!?”

“God! Please breath, Muffin!”, said Courfeyrac and got up in a hurry, rubbing Combeferre's back while the tall men turned pale and grabbed Enjolras' shoulder.

“Everything is all right, I am fine, Ferre. Calm down please.”, begged Enjolras while Combeferre's hand on his shoulder tightened painfully, “I suggest you get something to wear and then we have breakfast.”

“Breakfast?”, asked Combeferre shaky and stared at the table.

“Enjolras brought bagels and coffee.”, explained Courfeyrac and now Combeferre seemed to be completely confused.
“Just... just go and get something to wear. We'll wait for you. OK, Honey?”, suggested Courfeyrac and pushed Combeferre carefully and fondly towards the door again.

Combeferre patted away, rubbing the back of his head and Courfeyrac grabbed his own head, shaking it lightly while he said to Enjolras: “I think you broke him...”

“Hmh...”, made Enjolras and sat back down with Courfeyrac, knowing that what he was about to say to Combeferre would possibly be too overwhelming for his friend. He glanced at Courfeyrac for a moment, not knowing if Combeferre had ever told him about that one Christmas when Enjolras had nearly destroyed everything. Enjolras sighed deeply. No matter what would come of this discussion, Combeferre had Courfeyrac and Courfeyrac would pick up the pieces if Enjolras was not allowed to piece Combeferre back together.

It did not take more than a few minutes, then Combeferre came back, clad in casual, baggy jeans and a jumper. He was still pale and wide eyed while he stepped into the kitchen again, his eyes fixed on Enjolras.

He drew a chair out for Combeferre and picked up the mug that Courfeyrac had filled with the content of the last take-away-cup. Offering a careful smile, Enjolras held it out and said: “Grande lungo with soy-milk and no sugar, right?”

“Yes, thank you.”, said Combeferre, his eyebrows raised so far up that they nearly disappeared under his hairline. He took the cup but didn't drink from it, still eyeing Enjolras.

Latter took a deep breath and decided that it was better to get it over and be done with it than postpone it any more.

“Listen, Ferre, I'm sorry I've intruded on you two like this...”

“You didn't intrude, you brought breakfast!”, tried Courfeyrac to ease the tension in Enjolras' voice.

“Anyway... I... I thought a lot about... different things last night and came to the conclusion that I've been an insufferable arse the last ten years or so.”, tried Enjolras to start again.

“You're not an arse, Enj, you...”, cut in Courfeyrac again. Enjolras turned to him and nearly lost his temper again, but he took a deep breath and mustered a smile at his friend. He pleaded then: “Courf, I'm trying to apologize to Combeferre for something and you are not really helping here.”

“Shall I go?”, asked Courfeyrac, already half off his chair, “I can wait in the bedroom if you want, I don't want to be in the way of...”

“No, please. Stay.”, said Combeferre and wrapped a hand around Courfeyrac's. He looked long at his boyfriend and finally the young lawyer smiled and bent forward, kissing Combeferre's temple before sitting down once more.

“Fine. But I'm quiet now, promise.”, he said, smiled carefully at Enjolras and kept holding Combeferre's hand.

Enjolras sighed and turned to Combeferre again. While his best friend watched him intently, all the memories from last night came crashing down on Enjolras again. The boy he had played with in the snow, the lad he had pushed away so rude and whose heart he had broken, the man who had been so desperate when his best friend wasn't at his wedding. And all those persons lay in the dark eyes that were now fixed on him.

Enjolras felt tears in his eyes and saw how the corners of Combeferre's mouth twitched slightly.
He bit his lower lip and took a deep breath while Combeferre asked: “Enjolras, what's wrong? You really scare me!”

“I'm sorry, Ferre, I didn't mean to.”, sighed Enjolras and rubbed his eyes for a moment, “The thing is... we've never talked about that one Christmas Eve when we were sixteen.”

Combeferre's eyes widened in shock and he paled even more. He opened his mouth a few times but closed it without speaking a word. Enjolras gulped hard and said slowly: “I know how brave it was of you to act on your feelings that night. And I know... today I know that I offered you enough clues to think I felt the same... and I did, Combeferre, I did.”

Combeferre's hand shot over the table and grabbed Enjolras'. His fingers were cold and wrapped themselves around his hand like a vice, his eyes never leaving his, unspoken words bubbling behind those dark orbs that Enjolras hoped to drown out before they could burst: “I was a fool and I was blind. I didn't want to face what I felt, didn't want to be true to myself because I feared what my father would say. And I was so cruel to you because I was so afraid. I know that I broke your heart...”

“Enjolras!”, choked Combeferre out and got up, his chair sliding back on the tiles.

“No, please, Ferre, let me finish.”, begged Enjolras and watched how Combeferre made a step back. Fear was in his heart now, fear that Combeferre would leave, did not want to hear his excuses and would refuse his attempt to seek forgiveness. He got up slowly as well and stepped towards him carefully, kneading his hands desperate.

“I... I know that I broke your heart. I have seen it in your eyes that evening. And I know that... I know that I'm much too late now to seek forgiveness, but... Combeferre, I want you to know that you are the most important person in my life. You are my family, you're a brother to me... and I can't believe that you just forgave me after the horrible things I said that evening. I... I didn't deserve that, I still don't deserve it. I just wanted you to know that... that... I love you and always will love you... And I am so sorry for what I did that evening.”

His voice broke. He couldn't go on because Combeferre was still staring, wide eyed, his face the same shocked mask than on that evening. This was too much of a deja-vu that Enjolras felt his throat go tight. He had said what he wanted to say and now it was Combeferre who had to decide how their relationship would go on.

Enjolras dropped his gaze after a moment when Combeferre still stared. He took a deep breath and raised his head to Courfeyrac, smiling appologetic when he saw how confused Courfeyrac actually was. He bit his lip for a moment and said quietly: “I think I should go now.”

“Don't you fucking dare!”, sobbed Combeferre and stepped to him.

Enjolras thought his ribs would break when he was drawn into a warm hug. Combeferre bent down – practically curled up against Enjolras' chest – and pressed his face into Enjolras' neck, his glasses poking painfully into his skin. Enjolras slowly raised his arms and wrapped them around his shaking best friend. Combeferre still couldn't speak and his shaky breathing showed Enjolras that he was close to – or was already – crying.

After what seemed like an eternity in which Enjolras had just held Combeferre, the taller man let go off him and stepped back, wiping his eyes discretely. He shook his head to himself while Courfeyrac got up to see if he was doing all right. Combeferre nodded at him and looked at Enjolras again, still unsettled and concerned.

“What's happened, Enjolras?”, he asked in a shaky voice, “What... why...?”
“I couldn't sleep last night.”, explained Enjolras and shrugged his shoulders, “I got into thinking and some... things... came up and I finally saw what an awful person I've been these past few years. And I... I suppose I just don't want to be that kind of person anymore.”

Combeferre laughed shaky and hugged Enjolras once more, his arm around Enjolras' neck like a vice, the other patting his back happily. Enjolras laughed as well and hugged back. When they separated, Enjolras leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Combeferre's cheek.

“Merry Christmas, Ferre.”, he smiled when the young doctor shook his head and shoved him a little.

“You too... idiot.”, chuckled Combeferre and finally they sat all down around the table, having breakfast and chatting quite as carefree as they had when they had been at university together. But Enjolras didn't miss the joyous sparkle in Combeferre's eyes and the fond gestures towards himself and Courfeyrac. Enjolras smiled into his bagel.

Of course this was only a start. A small start considering what Enjolras had done to him all those years ago. But Enjolras was determined to be a better friend, a more alert and caring friend, a friend who was there for others, not just expected them to be there for him. He would repay Combeferre for all the things he had done for him, for all the things he stuck with him although Enjolras was being insufferable. And he would never allow himself to hurt his friend so bad – never again.

He turned his attention back to Courfeyrac who talked – both hands waiving through the air – about a pantomime he had seen with Combeferre, Jehan and Cosette and Marius the other day. Enjolras smiled and inquired how they had liked it while he thought: One done, two more to go.

*~*

The streets were empty and quiet while Enjolras strode down his designated route, two small parcels tugged under his arm.

He had spent the morning and the biggest part of the afternoon with Combeferre and Courfeyrac who seemed both so relieved that they could show their relationship around him finally. They had sat in the living room, had looked at vacation photos from the summer – Enjolras hadn't even known that his two best friends had gone to spent two weeks in the warm sun of Spain, clearly kindling the flames in their hearts even more –, had watched a Christmas film around noon and had had deep frozen pizza for lunch.

Combeferre had been willing to cancel on his parents for their Christmas dinner – to which Courfeyrac had been invited, as he told Enjolras proudly – just for the sake of spending more time with Enjolras. He had been sucking up every word, every question, every fond gesture of Enjolras' like a dried out sponge and Enjolras had felt so eager to please this desire that he nearly forgot about his other plans.

Courfeyrac – surprisingly – had been the most reasonable and had made plans with Enjolras for the following weekend while he had beckoned Combeferre into his bedroom to get changed for dinner. Enjolras had left them soon after, telling Combeferre to wish his parents merry Christmas from him, a thing that would startle them even more than it had startled Combeferre.

Now Enjolras was in one of the poorer areas of the city, a suburb where he had never been before. He knew the address and was determined to find it without asking any of the few passer-bys. And after a few moments, he really found the small flat-complex in a narrow and dim street.

He approached the door and found it unlocked. He gathered all his courage – knowing that she
could be pretty fierce and with all his emotions boiling so close under the surface today, Enjolras was not sure if he could handle one of her outbreaks very well – and climbed up to the third floor, finding the door labelled with a tiny copper plate stating E.T. & G.T. without problems. After another deep breath, he knocked loudly and stepped back.

The key chain rattled and the door opened. Éponine's eyes were wide and surprised when she greeted him: “Enjolras, hi... I didn't expect you... well, to be honest, you are the last person I've expected tonight!”

“I know.”, said Enjolras and smiled a little sheepish, “Merry Christmas, Ponine. May I come in?!”

Éponine froze and kept staring at him, her knuckles white on the edge of the door. Enjolras wrinkled his forehead and waited for a moment, knowing that this greeting must have came as a shock to her.

“Yes...”, murmured Éponine after a moment and let him in.

“How's Gavroche today?”, he asked and drew his cap from his head, hesitating behind Éponine who barred the door. She turned to him, wide eyed and confused.

“You... how do you... I didn't think you knew.”, she said, suddenly timidly. She crossed her arms and looked onto the knitted socks she wore for a moment, gathering herself.

“I knew. But I choose not to see.”, he answered, more the truth than he himself knew.

“What do you want, Enjolras?”, asked Éponine, her defence mechanisms up again, her eyes glinting fierce.

“Stop by and wish you a merry Christmas. And offer you help. You and Gavroche.”, told her Enjolras and drew one of the parcels out from under his arm. Éponine eyed it suspiciously and looked at him while he held the parcel towards her.

“What's that?”, she snapped, “I think you're not a charity organization!?!”

Enjolras knew that Courfeyrac had told her about his words and they cut deep. Especially considering to which person he had referred with that utterance. Enjolras gulped and lowered the parcel.

“I may not be a charity organization, but I earn possibly thrice what you make in a week and... and I'm all alone and don't need so much money. But Gav'... he needs the medicine and I would, if you let me...”

“What?”, barked Éponine, “Pay for it?!"

Enjolras narrowed his eyebrows and gulped. That had been what he was about to offer, but as Éponine clearly... The next thing he knew was that Éponine hung at his neck and hid her face in the lapel of Enjolras' coat. She was crying, her sobs shaking her shoulders hard while she clung to him for dear life. He let go off the parcels which dropped with a clonk to the floor and wrapped her up in an embrace. And as fast as she had clasped him, she freed herself from his embrace, wiping away the tears furiously.

“Sorry...”, she murmured, avoiding his eyes, “I'm normally not that touchy... It's just...”

Enjolras reached out and brushed his hand over her upper arm, frowning reassuring. She looked at
him then, sighed deeply and confessed: “He's just so weak today and I can't pretend anymore... I can't...”

She broke off again. Enjolras understood in that moment that although Éponine was one of the toughest women he knew – and he worked with ambitious reporters and journalists, he knew what tough could mean – she was carrying too much on her shoulders. And in moments like that, even her hard façade could break and show how much she put herself through emotionally.

“It's all right.”, said Enjolras gently and patted her shoulder fondly, “No need to apologize.”

She looked up at him and he saw how embarrassed she was about crying in front of him. Her eyes were wide and fear and hope battled for the upper hand in the warm brown pools. She licked her lips and whispered: “I couldn't take that offer anyway...”

“Why not?”, asked Enjolras gently and took her hands in his and squeezed them slightly, “I offered. I want to help, Ponine. I want to help Gavroche and you. You let the others help you as well and given that I missed out on helping you for the last five years, this is only fair to offer.”

“But...”, started Éponine.

“No but-s, Ponine.”, said Enjolras softly and brushed a strand of her hair behind her ear, “I am here to help and I will help, no discussion.”

She smiled thankful at him and hugged him once more when a thin voice called: “Ponine, who's there?”

She looked up at Enjolras and said apologetic: “He's very weak today...”

“OK.”

“It's Enjolras!”, called Éponine back and led Enjolras into a tiny living room, just wide enough for a sofa, a side-table and a small television. Gavroche was wrapped up in two blankets, propped up against a few cushions and watched Love Actually on telly. He looked up when the two young adults entered. His smile went wide and beaming, his eyes were tired though.

“Merry Christmas, Gav!”, said Enjolras and dropped carefully onto the sofa next to him.

“Hello, Enj. You too.”, murmured Gavroche, seemingly tired and exhausted. Enjolras leaned forward and brushed over the blond head of the boy and tugged one of the parcels out from under his arm. Carefully he placed it in Gavroche's lap and smiled.

“I figured you might like another present.”, Enjolras smiled. Gavroche's eyes went wide.

“For me?”, he hushed and his hands flew to the string that held the brown paper. Before he plucked at the bow, he looked up at Éponine first – who nodded – and then back at Enjolras.

He smiled and leaned back, putting his arm over the backrest behind Gavroche, nudging him very gently while he said: “Of course, go on. Open it!”

Now Gavroche started ripping the paper to shreds, not patient enough to open the strings. His pale cheeks were now glowing red and his eyes sparkling with new life while he brushed the paper to the side.

“I remembered you told Courfeyrac that you liked old guns and pistols. So I figured you definitely would need this book if you want to be a real expert.”, explained Enjolras while Gavroche just stared wide eyed at the coffee-table book in his small lap, a glossy glinting cover stating that the
book was the biggest encyclopaedia on ancient weaponry to be purchased on the market, an old
wheel-lock pistol with a carved handle with ivory inlays displayed on a black velvet cushion
under the writing.

“Oh Enjolras”, breathed Éponine, “You shouldn't have, that's much too expensive!”

“Bah...”, made Enjolras and waived his hand through the air to dismiss that statement, “That's
fine. It's Christmas, let me spoil him!”

Gavroche had opened the book meanwhile and flipped through the pages. In no time Enjolras was
leaning closer to him, his legs crossed on the divan next to Gavroche's while he listened to the boy
explaining to him the different types of pistols used in the Thirty Years' War and why he thought
the Swedish had had the better weapons.

Éponine supplied them with punch and cookies and Enjolras enjoyed their presence. Gavroche
was so lively while he talked about the weapons and laughed as carefree as always when Enjolras
asked questions the boy regarded as stupid. Enjolras didn't mind his laughter and smiled along
while Éponine had curled up on the other side of the sofa and eyed him curious, a cup held in both
hands, her eyes showing confusion and wonder in equal parts.

“All right, squirt. I think you need a nap!”, said Enjolras fondly about forty minutes later, taking
the book gently from Gavroche who could simply not keep his eyes open.

“Not... tired...”, he mumbled and snuggled up against Enjolras who stiffened. He wasn't really
familiar with signs of fondness of anyone else than Combeferre or Courfeyrac, so he did not know
what to do at first. He then carefully handed the book to Éponine – who had rushed to her feet –
and tugged Gavroche tighter into his blanket cocoon.

“Yes you are. No discussion. But if you want, you can bring your book along tomorrow.”,
murmured Enjolras and slid to the side so that he could ease Gavroche into a lying position.

“Tomorrow?”, yawned Gavroche, taking away the question his sister had been about to ask.

“I’m inviting you to dinner. Combeferre and Courfeyrac are coming too and I still need to phone
Marius and Cosette. Feuilly texted he and Bahorel will come too. Then we can all have a look at
your book, OK?”, explained Enjolras and brushed his fingers through Gavroche's hair.

The boy smiled, already half sleeping, while he mumbled: “Cool...”

“Great, then I see you tomorrow.”, said Enjolras smiling and looked up at Éponine. He gestured
for the hall and together they made their way out of earshot.

“And what about Joly, Bousset and Musichetta?”, asked Éponine, crossing her arms intimidating,
“And Grantaire?"

“I’m going over to their place now, I will ask them personally.”, declared Enjolras while he took
his coat from Éponine who had brought it with her from the living room.

“Are you dying, Enj?”, asked Éponine all of a sudden and cocked her head.

Enjolras laughed out loud now, shaking his head amused.

“Why is everyone thinking I'm dying? Courfeyrac asked me as well.”, he smiled and picked up
the last parcel from the small shoe rack to his left, “No, I'm fine. Can't I just invite my friends over
for dinner?”
“No, you are Enjolras.”, sighed Éponine and rubbed her forehead, “You hate Christmas, you never invite anyone to your flat and you particularly don't buy ridiculously expensive books for my brother! Shit, I'm confused.”

“Sorry.”, sighed Enjolras and offered a sheepish smile.

“You're forgiven...”, she murmured and looked assessing at him for a moment. Then she sighed defeated and asked: “When shall we be there?”

“Seven should be fine.”, he answered, stepped forward and drew her in an one armed hug for a moment.

“See you then.”, said Éponine and held the door open for him while he hobbled down the stairs.

Éponine pinched herself and frowned from the pain in her arm. Either the punch she had been consuming the whole day was not at all alcohol-free or she had just had the most peculiar dream in years. They did not live in the world of films and fairytales where a person took a 180 turn each night. So what the hell had gotten into Enjolras that he finally cared?

Shaking her head she closed the door and made her way back to her sleeping brother who still had a small smile on his face.

*~*~*

“Enjolras!”

Joly stiffened while Enjolras drew him into a breathtaking hug and greeted him with a loud “Merry Christmas!”

Enjolras let go off Joly and beamed at his friend while the young doctor just stared at him, opening his mouth a few times, smoothing his slightly ruffled up light brown hair down with jittery movements.

“Are you off to your parent's house for dinner?”’, asked Enjolras and shifted his weight onto the other leg, giving Joly the possibility to recover from shock, hoping that that was what Joly was still doing for Christmas. At least he had done so when Enjolras had met him in their fist year at uni, Combeferre bringing the shy and pale boy with him to canteen one day to introduce him.

Now they were standing in the driveway at the trunk of Joly's VW beetle, the dusk descending over the city as they talked. By now, Enjolras should have been accustomed to the strange looks and the sheer shock on his friend's faces, but he still felt a little awkward while Joly struggled to regain the power of speech.

“Ehm... no, no I'm not... I mean, we aren't... we... ehm”, stuttered Joly and his eyes darted all over Enjolras' body and he thought that Joly also thought that he was either hurt or dying. He smiled a little reassuring and waited until Joly would have gotten a grip on himself again.

“We actually got an invitation from Musichetta's grandmother.”, explained Joly. When Enjolras was still looking at him – because what was so special about an invitation from a grandmother? – Joly took a deep breath and added: “Which is a big deal because the whole family will be there and they will finally somehow acknowledge that it's not just Chetta and me but also Bousset with us, so...”

“You're nervous?”, asked Enjolras and put his hand onto Joly's shoulder and made his friend actually jump with surprise.
“A bit...”, Joly hurried to say to overplay the little jump he had made. Enjolras decided that it was the best to ignore the shock his touch had afflicted in Joly and smiled warmly.

“Don't worry, you will be fine!”, he smiled, “You are an intelligent, kind and caring young man. What else could an Italian grandmother wish for her granddaughter? And Bousset is just so perfect for both you and Musichetta that everyone doubting it is either blind or dumb.”

Joly gaped at Enjolras, not able to answer to that. He was saved by Bousset who came rushing out of the front door, calling towards him: “Joly, I just can't find my mobile now! We need to get going. Otherwise we... Enjolras!”

“Hey, Bousset! Merry Christmas!”, laughed Enjolras who found that he was enjoying the surprise he caused that day and strode over to hug the smaller man, pressing his cheek to the bald head of his friend.

“You... you too, I guess.”, stammered Bousset and Enjolras was sure that he mouthed something like “What the hell?” at Joly whose shrug he only saw from the corners of his eyes.

“Sorry, but we're just on our way to Musichetta's grandparents.”, said Bousset after Enjolras let go off him and eyed him confused.

“Doesn't matter, really. I'm just here to wish you a merry Christmas and invite you over to mine tomorrow.”, announced Enjolras, leaning against the car's rear.

“You mean your flat?”, asked Joly with raised eyebrows while Bousset's mouth fell open.

“Yes.”, laughed Enjolras, “We'll have dinner and catch up. I know that I've made myself very rare the last month so I thought it would be nice to have everyone over for Christmas.”

“Are you OK, Enj?”, asked Joly, full-on doctor-mode now and took a step towards Enjolras, taking a hold of his elbow, “Do you want me to go in with you and run a short check-up?”

“No, let go!”, laughed Enjolras and nudged Joly friendly, “I'm fine and before you can ask: no, I'm not about to die any time soon.”

“So it's not just us who think you are acting very strange?”, asked Bousset and Enjolras once again held his straightforwardness in high esteem.

“No. And I don't blame you... It's just that I had a long night last night and got into thinking and... well... I think I have to make up for my really crappy behaviour of late...”, explained Enjolras and smiled at Bousset.

Joly and Bousset exchanged a short glance, then Joly gave again a small shrug and turned to Enjolras.

“All right.”, he said – still a little cautious because he feared that Enjolras would go back to his usual hard, grumpy self in the blink of an eye – and went around the car to open the driver door, “We forgive you, of course. Shall we give you a lift home?”

“No thanks.”, said Enjolras fast and shook his head smiling, “I was wondering if Grantaire was home.”

“R?”, asked Bousset and shot another one of those silent-conversation-looks to Joly, “Yes... yes he's home. Kitchen, last time I checked.”

“Thank you. Do you mind if I let myself in?”, asked Enjolras and made a step back towards the
Two sets of eyes stared at him in utter confusion now. Enjolras felt how he blushed and how his
ears reddened under the stare of his friends. He squared his shoulders for a moment but then
Bousset shook his head fast.

“No, not at all. I've not locked and... it's open... of course you can... visit Grantaire?!”, he hurried
to say and shot Joly another look.

“But if you two need a chaperone I could stay for a bit...”, offered Joly and was about to close the
doors of the car again.

“Bah, shut up.”, laughed Enjolras and made a step towards the door again, “We're reasonable
adults and can be around each other without you keeping an eye on us. I won't kill him,
promise...”

“Are you sure?”, asked Bousset and propped himself with his lower arms onto the roof of the
beetle.

“Yes.”, laughed Enjolras and shook his head.

“Good, then... we'll be off.”, announced Joly, still a bit hesitant.

“Great. Tell Chetta and her family merry Christmas from me and have a nice evening. See you
tomorrow!”, smiled Enjolras and turned on his heels, striding towards the front door, snow
 crunching under his boots.

Bousset and Joly got into the car and pulled out onto the vacant street.

“That was somehow creepy, wasn't it?”, asked Joly and Bousset saw how his knuckles tightened
over the steering wheel.

“If I wouldn't know any better, I'd say we just encountered a modern day Christmas miracle.”,
mused Bousset and scratched his head.

“Or maybe he's not as superficial as we all thought he was.”, mused Joly, always eager to see the
best in each person.

“Maybe... But I'll stick with the miracle thing.”, smiled Bousset and leaned over to kiss Joly at a
red traffic light.

Enjolras had meanwhile reached the front door and stood a little indescribable on the doorstep, his
hand resting on the doorknob.

Everything had gone fairly smooth so far and he felt content and happy about how his friends
were so forgiving. He was sure that his old self would have slammed the door in their faces if they
had treated him like he had treated them all those years as soon as they had shown up at his flat
out of the blue to apologize. But those days were over, he reminded himself and took a deep
breath, then he turned the knob.

A moment later, he toed off his boots quietly and hung his coat, scarf and mittens onto a hook. He
heard a radio ramble in the distance – Wham's Last Christmas without a doubt – and someone
hum along quite nicely.

Enjolras' heart was racing. This was not just a simple act of asking for forgiveness, like it had been
with all the others, this was far more. He knew that he had lied to himself all those years whenever
he had just thought Grantaire to be an acquaintance of his that did not mean anything to him. Because as the ghosts had successfully shown him, Grantaire meant the world to Enjolras, of that he was sure now. The only problem was now to make Grantaire understand that at well.

With shaking fingers he took a hold of the last, slim parcel and made his way through the hallway and the living room into the kitchen, where he soon found the source of the humming.

Grantaire stood with his back to the door, a tight grey shirt – splattered with paint – covering his muscular shoulders while he leaned into the fridge, searching for something to eat. Enjolras gulped and shifted his weight.

The sound of rustling fabric caught Grantaire's attention and he turned around with an indignant groan: “For the last time, Bousset, I don't know where your bloody mobile is so just get the fuck...”

He froze, his green eyes wide, his mouth standing slightly ajar. He simply stared at Enjolras who could not look away from him. The memory of the ghost of Christmas yet to come was still fresh in Enjolras' mind and just like with Combeferre this morning, the memories came crashing down on him and he felt all the emotions bubble in his throat again.

The affair – he had broken him. The cold graveyard – the lonely grave on the hilltop. The inscription on the stone, the words of the young graveyard worker – Enjolras couldn't catch a breath.

Before he knew it, he had flung the parcel onto the table and strode to Grantaire, grabbing his face between his hands and crushing their lips together. Sparks flew through his body from his lips and curled in his lower stomach into a hot ball while Grantaire's breath escaped in a shocked huff through his nose. He tasted of mild brandy and cigarette smoke, his lips warm under Enjolras' while he tilted his head to open his mouth slightly over Grantaire's lips.

What he hadn't expected was to be pushed away quite rude. He stumbled back a step while his eyes found Grantaire's again – utter fear and panic clouding those green orbs – while Grantaire panted slightly.

“What in God's name are you doing?”, snapped Grantaire after a second, still staring at Enjolras.

“Merry Christmas.”, squeaked Enjolras clumsily while his mind was blank from anything else to say. Of course, he was able to write the most convincing articles and he could clearly rouse the masses with his columns, but facing a flustered and equally shocked Grantaire made him loose all ability to speak. He looked so beautiful with the blush high on his cheeks, his hair wild, his lips red and his eyes wide. Enjolras wished to tell him just that but found his tongue not listening to his brain.

“You got to be joking.”, huffed Grantaire and rubbed his face thoroughly, groaning into his hollow hands.

“No... I... Grantaire, I...”, stuttered Enjolras while everything in his body seemed to contract into one painful ball of fear.

“Shut up for a moment...”, groaned Grantaire and reached for a bottle next to the fridge – a fresh bottle of a very expensive cognac which had been a Christmas present, judging by the wintry gift ribbon at the neck of the bottle. Enjolras watched how Grantaire unscrewed the bottle and poured himself a drink in an empty glass by the sink that had still a little ice in it. Knocking back the drink, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.
Opening his eyes again, he looked at Enjolras and groaned again: “Shit, you're still there.”

“Of course...”, said Enjolras and made a step towards Grantaire. “And I'm not going anywhere because I need to talk to you.”

“And you thought a good conversation opener would be to kiss me senseless in front of the bloody fridge?”, asked Grantaire sarcastically and strolled around the table, making sure that the whole diameter of the round table was separating them from one another.

“No...”, murmured Enjolras and blushed. He had to look away from Grantaire while his green eyes never left his, doubts and fears ever present in them. Then he nudged the small parcel over the table towards the young artist and confessed: “I meant to give you this as a conversation opener. Merry Christmas, Grantaire.”

“You hate Christmas.”, stated Grantaire and brazed himself onto the backrest of a kitchen chair.

“I used to.”, admitted Enjolras and nudged the parcel again, “Please open it.”

“You don't need to get me gifts, Enjolras, I know I'm not worth that much.”, Grantaire retorted without touching – or even looking – at the parcel.

The well-known flash of annoyance flared through Enjolras guts and his eyes sparkled while he snapped: “You're worth much more! And stop telling me what I should do and what not!”

“Ah!”, laughed Grantaire and cocked his head, “There's the Enjolras I can handle, yelling at me like the damn fool I am.”

His anger puffed away in an instant and Enjolras closed his eyes. Grantaire was the only person who always managed to get under his skin, even if he had sworn himself not to yell at Grantaire today. He had failed – miserably. Not a good start to what he was going to tell Grantaire. Enjolras took a deep breath and looked at Grantaire again.

“You are not a fool.”, said Enjolras gently, “And you are worth so much more than you think.”

Grantaire's sarcastic mask broke a little and he blinked rapidly, his jaws setting a little.

“Why did you come here?”, he asked dryly.

Enjolras nudged the parcel one last time and tried a very careful smile at Grantaire.

“To give you your present.”, he answered and stared expectantly at Grantaire.

The young artist groaned exhausted and slumped down into the chair he had been wrapping his fingers around and drew the parcel to himself. Enjolras sat down opposite from him and folded his shaking hands on the table. He watched Grantaire's finger move over the string, remembering how they had pressed themselves into his skin when Grantaire had pushed him away, his lips quivering under his own while his breath had shook in his throat.

He snapped his attention up to Grantaire's eyes, his cheeks flaming from the memory of their first kiss. Grantaire tugged the paper aside and his eyes widened. Enjolras hurried to explain: “Courfeyrac told me that they were getting you an easel and brushes and stuff but that the money was not enough to get you the oil paints you always wanted. So I figured as I hadn't chipped in I could get you...”

“Why are you doing this?”, asked Grantaire, looking up from the expensive wooden casket with the most expensive oil colours on the market in it. His eyes were wide and confused and it twisted
a cold knife in Enjolras' guts to see confusion, hope and fear battle in Grantaire's eyes. He wished
could get up and simply offer a comforting hug, but he was sure Grantaire would not allow him
to touch him again. Not before he had the explanation he wanted.

“But because I...”, started Enjolras and felt how his throat went tight under Grantaire's assessing gaze.
He could only tell him half of what was on his mind, couldn't tell him how he had heard that
Grantaire had a crush on him and how that had set a spark to his heart that burned so bright within
him now that he felt like glowing whenever Grantaire's eyes moved over his features. He couldn't
tell him that – if he didn't change – he would use Grantaire as an outlet for his stress in the future
and would ultimately kill him.

But he could start by telling Grantaire the things he needed to know, the things that tried to
suffocate Enjolras now, the things that tore at his heart in a way he had never felt before and his
hands started twitching on the table, a thing Grantaire did not miss but left uncommented.

“I have been a fool, Grantaire, not you. I have been a fool all along.”, rambled Enjolras then and
his knuckles turned white while he clasped his own hands so tight it nearly hurt, “I always... I
made you think I loath you and that I think you are worthless and that you do not care for
anything. And I am sorry about that because you are... you are a wonderful and inspiring and
beautiful person and I can't believe I needed seven bloody years to admit to myself that I'm head
over heels in love with you...”

He breathed again, feeling dizzy from the word-flood that had just exploded from his lips.
Grantaire was as stiff as a statue, staring at him through wide, unbelieving eyes. Enjolras searched
his features, hoping that he could read in them, hoping that he could see what Grantaire thought.
But as always, his ability to judge a character failed him when it came to Grantaire.

“Could you... could you say something? Please?”, pleaded Enjolras after a moment, his heart
beating so painfully that he thought it would burst any second. The fear to be pushed away was
enough that Enjolras felt tears pulse behind his eyes and make him blink more than usual.

“I... I... don't know what to say to that.”, admitted Grantaire, still pale, while he put down the
casket and got up to get his glass and the bottle. Enjolras frowned sad when he poured himself
another drink and jugged it back.

“Why not?”, asked Enjolras timidly and couldn't wipe the frown off his features although he
wished he could offer an expression to Grantaire that would make him see how much he loved
him.

“Because I'm confused and too bloody sober to deal with this right now!”, sighed Grantaire and
poured himself another glass full. Enjolras reached over the table and drew away the glass, getting
an annoyed look from Grantaire who settled for drinking right out of the bottle then.

“But Grantaire...”, started Enjolras, wishing to make Grantaire see how much he needed him to
believe him but Grantaire just cut him short: “No, now you listen, Apollo!”

Enjolras knew enough of Grantaire to know that he normally only called him Apollo when he was
close to loosing his nerves. So he kept quiet for the first time since he knew Grantaire, not
intending to infuriate him any further.

“You treat me for seven years like I am a bit of gum stuck to your shoe... a bit of very disgusting
gum, may I add... and now you come in here, kiss me like I was the last person on earth and then
you tell me that I am the most wonderful person you know and that you love me? I mean... what
the hell? What am I supposed to think in your opinion?”
“I understand that... it is hard to understand. And I know that I've been horrible to everyone over the last few years, especially to you. But Grantaire”, Enjolras had to massage his temples with his forefingers for a moment, sorting through the whirlwind of thoughts that threatened to make him babble again, “I have been dumb and blind to mistake love for fury, longing for annoyance. I... I can't tell you more than I already said. I love you, everything about you and I wish that we could... start over, or something. Go on dates, if you want... because I really want to be with you. And I want to make you happy!”

“And you think that goes by buying me paints?”, asked Grantaire sceptical and gave the casket a little nudge. Enjolras felt how he blushed again, shaking his head slowly.

A moment later, Grantaire buried his face into his hands and gave a hysterical laughter. Enjorlas watched him confused and felt how the tension returned to his shoulders while Grantaire continued chuckling.

“Sorry...”, he breathed after a moment and wiped some tears from his eyes and Enjolras was not sure if they were from laughing or desperation or shock. He remained quiet, not knowing what to say or do, sitting helplessly in his chair, hoping against all reason that Grantaire would quit thinking that Enjolras was out of his league.

“It's all right.”, whispered Enjolras while he debated with himself if it was a good idea to just leave and die in a hole somewhere far away.

“This is insane... You... wanting me... it's like... it's like a blind man...”, stuttered Grantaire and lifted the bottle to take another swig.

“It's like a blind man finally being allowed to see the sun...”, finished Enjolras Grantaire's sentence before the artist could.

Grantaire choked on his drink and spat the rest of it over the table, missing Enjolras just by a few inches. He coughed shocked and spluttered: “What... what... what did you just say?”

Enjolras remembered too late when he had first heard those words. Grantaire had spoken them in the solitude of his room, without anyone listening, and now that Enjolras had repeated them, Grantaire watched him shocked and a little terrified.

Enjolras squared his shoulders and took a deep breath, intending to make up for shocking him that badly: “But you aren't the blind man, Grantaire. You're the sun. I have been so blind and so... so stupid and finally... I finally saw the sun, Grantaire, the moment I saw you today... the moment I acknowledged that I love you...”

“This is absurd.”, laughed Grantaire desperate and shook his head fast, “Do you know how long I wished for you to say those words? For you to kiss me?! This has to be a bloody dream!”

“If this was a dream you would be sitting on my lap and kissing me right now.”, admitted Enjolras exhausted and blushed when Grantaire raised an eyebrow at him in surprise.

“You dreamt about that?”, he asked gently, his green eyes now so much softer than Enjolras had ever seen them. A scarlet blush high on his cheeks, Enjolras nodded sheepishly and fixed his eyes to his entwined fingers, only then recognizing that he had actually dreamt of that, although he had never admitted it to himself.

A chair scraped over tiles and Enjorlas looked up again. Grantaire came around the table with careful steps, his eyes never leaving Enjolras'. He carefully wrapped one hand around the backrest of Enjolras' chair and drew the chair – completely with Enjolras sitting on top of it – out a little
more. Sometimes Enjolras forgot how strong the boxing with Bahorel had made this stocky artist.

Grantaire hesitated a moment, then he carefully stepped towards Enjolras and sat down on his lap. Enjolras' heart started racing in a pace that was exhilarating and new and made his head swim a little, a careful smile stealing its way onto Enjolras' face.

“Like that?” asked Grantaire and looked down at him, his features suddenly so soft and his eyes so fond that Enjolras' mouth went dry.

“No...”, whispered Enjolras and drew Grantaire's arms around his own neck, wrapping his arms around Grantaire's waist afterwards and snuggling his temple against Grantaire's neck. The tension left his shoulders and arms while Grantaire's warmth washed over him completely. Enjolras closed his eyes and took a deep breath, the tip of his nose brushing over Grantaire's skin – making the artist shiver.

“Like this...”, Enjolras breathed and tightened his hug a little more, relishing in the warmth and the closeness of Grantaire, a thing that was so new yet so familiar that Enjolras hoped he would never have to let go of Grantaire ever again.

A thumb and a forefinger – splattered with paint – wrapped gently around Enjolras' chin and lifted his head from Grantaire's neck. They were mere inches away from one another, Enjolras felt Grantaire's breath on his skin and welcomed the tight curl in his stomach with a small smile. He had never thought he could feel such a thing for another person.

And yet here he was, sitting in Joly's overly-sanitary kitchen, on Christmas Day, Grantaire in his lap, his lips only a few millimetre from his own, smiling like a fool at the smaller man.

Their next kiss was different. Grantaire pressed their lips together fondly, softly, more a whisper than an actual touch. He drew back before Enjolras could properly reply the kiss, impatience sparking up in his eyes when Grantaire smiled teasingly.

“Like that?”, he asked again, his voice a low rumble deep in his chest.

Enjolras smiled. He wasn't sure if Grantaire believed him entirely, wasn't sure if he understood how important he really was to him, wasn't sure if he was doing everything right or if Grantaire would have deserved much better, but right now he couldn't care less.

“No...”

Enjolras' hand snaked up in Grantaire's curls, grabbing a fistful to tilt his head gently to the side, locking their lips more thoroughly, sucking at Grantaire's lower lip while they exchanged open mouthed, hungry kisses. Grantaire's hands cupped both his cheeks, his rough thumbs caressing Enjolras' cheeks with soft strokes. When Enjolras ran his tongue over Grantaire's lower lip, a soft moan escaped the other man. Enjolras smiled into the kiss and drew back a moment later, a teasing smile of his own on his lips now.

“Like this.”, he murmured and got a breathy laughter from Grantaire who leaned down and pressed a short peck onto Enjolras' lips.

“Merry Christmas, Apollo.”, whispered Grantaire and leaned his forehead against Enjolras', his thumbs still caressing the blond man's cheeks.

“Merry Christmas, Grantaire.”, replied Enjolras, smiling like a fool while he drowned in the green eyes of the man he loved with all his heart.
That's it, my first fiction. I hope you enjoyed reading as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Whether you did like it or not, I'd like to wish you all merry Christmas and happy holidays!

If you want, come say hallo on tumblr, I'd love to hear from you! It's bramblesforbreakfast there as well :) 

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!