

## Tetris

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# Tetris

by [chapstickaddict](#)

## Summary

Prompt (Edited into a Summary):

Cosette is Enjolras' half-sister. His father slept with Fantine and then bugged off to be with his wife. Then Enjolras found out. One day he sees her- and he knows its her- and doesn't know what to do.

Enjolras is Cosette's half-brother. Her mother slept with a married man and died of a broken heart and weary soul. Then Cosette found out. One day, she finds him-and she knows its him- and doesn't know what to do.

Then Marius happened...

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

# Enjolras

Lamarque found them just as the sun was kissing the edge of the water, casting the purple and red sunset colors across the beach. He parked his car beside the others at the far end of the gravel, wincing at the loud, high spirited music that was pouring from the speakers of the nearest sound system. Yards ahead, a bonfire cheerfully burned away as a group of young people danced like heathens around it. There were more than a few empty liquor bottles littered in the sand around their feet.

Approaching, Lamarque crossed his arms across his neatly pressed suit and waited. After a few moments, a figure broke away from the bonfire and the arms of one of his companions to come toward him.

"You weren't at the funeral," Lamarque said the minute Enjolras was within earshot. His godson smiled at him, but it didn't reach his eyes.

"I told you I wouldn't be."

"I was hoping you had changed your mind."

Enjolras shrugged, his face tired. "I didn't want to be surrounded by death and gloom today. She didn't want me to be either."

"Didn't you want to say goodbye to your mother?" Lamarque knew it was a low blow, but Enjolras had a habit of using personal pain to make a statement, and his absence had been noticed. Gabrielle had loved her son's uncompromising drive and conviction, but Lamarque thought there was a time and a place. And a funeral was not one of them.

For a moment, Enjolras looked exhausted, with dark circles under his eyes and slumped shoulders. In spite of that, he looked much better than he had a few weeks ago, sleep and food deprived beside a hospital bed with only the sounds of the machines filling the room around him. He waved Lamarque away from the blaring car and further down the beach to a large rocky cliff, wading carefully through the surf to reach the low seated boulders. Lamarque noticed more than one pair of eyes watching him from the fire with hostile intent.

"Your friends don't seem to trust me much."

"You're a reminder of everything my friends are trying to get me to forget about right now. Of course you're the enemy."

"This isn't something you can--or should--just forget about."

"No. But they're trying their best, which is all I could ask for," Enjolras replied as he took a seat on one of the boulders. Standing over him would have made Lamarque look ridiculous, so he resigned himself to ruining his suit and settled down next to him.

"We knew it was coming," Enjolras continued, staring out into the rolling waves. "We knew, and we planned. She didn't want me miserable today, and I'm trying to respect that. We already said our goodbyes."

There was an odd sort of logic there, he supposed. Gabrielle and Enjolras were so much alike that they both had probably thought it had been for the best that way.

Looking at his godson, Lamarque's mind couldn't help but fly back in time two decades. Enjolras had been so young when the divorce had been finalized, he had never known anything other than Gabrielle and her determined, fiery, and at times contrary, drive towards her goal. She had installed that same drive in Enjolras, and he wasn't above admitting that his own outspoken personality had not helped temper his godson in the slightest. And when he truly thought about it, he knew he wouldn't have it any other way, no matter the inconvenience it sometimes caused. Enjolras would thrive and shine in anything he ever attempted because of the skills Gabrielle had given him.

For all the golden hair and brilliant blue eyes, there wasn't a drop of Felix in him, thank God.

"Are you going to be okay tonight?" He asked after a moment. Enjolras' curls went flying in every direction as a gust of wind came in with the waves, and Lamarque brushed them out of his eyes with a tender touch.

"Yes. Grantiare will make sure of it. They all will."

"Are you ever going to admit to me you're dating him?"

"I don't think I'll ever admit that to anybody," Enjolras replied. But his eyes strayed back to the bonfire and sought out a lone figure watching them over the distance. Gabrielle had never been able to hide her emotions in her features, and Enjolras was no different. And the smile that came over his face made his eyes light up.

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Groaning, Enjolras rolled over and blearily eyed the alarm clock from his spot in bed. He had only slept for about two hours, according to the blinking red light. Beside him, Grantaire's spot was chillingly empty, which bothered him more than he thought it would. He had been passed out to the world by the time Enjolras had fallen asleep. Reaching out a hand, he brushed against the cool spot, as if his fingertips could magically summon the other back from wherever he vanished to.

He was still fully clothed and grimy from the beach, but getting cleaned up required more energy than he was up to giving. Instead, Enjolras tried to ease his mind back to sleep only to realize five minutes later it wasn't going to happen and gave up. Rolling out of bed, his feet barely beat his face to the floor and he shuffled himself downstairs to address the biting hunger in his stomach.

Over the course of many years, Enjolras' tiny family had grown to include the friends that he now knew he could never live without. They were an odd bunch all told, but Enjolras loved each of them in turn. One day, when Courfeyrac had made the entertaining but inevitably

disastrous suggestion of them all cohabiting together in the large brownstone he had tracked down, most of them had agreed out of some morbid fascination with the idea. Now, three years later, they could all agree that it had more or less worked out well enough.

So Enjolras was instantly concerned when he stepped out of his room and the house was empty around him. There was no muffled noise behind the various bedroom doors down the hallway, no television blaring from the living room downstairs. Walking through the silent hall, Enjolras found he didn't like the quiet one bit.

As he passed the main room on the first floor, he saw rows upon rows of greenery tabled on every available surface near a window. A late cold front had forced Jehan to evacuate most of his plant life indoors to survive the next few days, and while they made the living room smell amazing, Enjolras wasn't sure it was worth the soil and leaves that were currently scattered across the carpet. That thought didn't stop him from petting the brightly colored geraniums and fuzzy strawberry bushes as he passed though.

His mother had kept orchids. She always joked that they were the only plants she could ever keep alive because they were as high maintenance as he was. Once she had been admitted to the hospital, Jehan had offered to watch after them, but most of them hadn't survived. The only one that did, a deep purple one that was nearly as old as Enjolras, was sitting dead center on the coffee table. Its twiggy branches were stretched out over the growing sticks and many of the flowers were starting to bloom again. He stared at it for a long moment before moving on.

He found Grantaire in the kitchen, absentmindedly puttering away at the counter with half the spice rack spilled out before him. Enjolras made a pained sound at the mess.

"Morning, Apollo," Grantaire greeted, shaking up a spice jar in one hand.

Enjolras never understood the nickname, but complaining about it only brought on even more ridiculous ones. So he just grunted in return and started fumbling with the coffee machine, because no matter how much Joly and Combeferre tried to convince him otherwise, coffee was a main food group. Only, there was a thin layer of brownish mush at the bottom of the pot and not much else, which he thought was someone's idea of a cruel prank gone wrong. Setting it down, he slowly leaned forward until his forehead was pressed against the cool stainless steel of the machine. Life felt horrible right now.

Warm, herb smelling, and slightly gritty hands appeared in the corners of his vision to ease him upright. He groaned as Grantaire walked him backwards until the small of his back bumped up against the counter.

"Up," he cheerfully ordered, and Enjolras was boosted up until he was sitting on the counter, wedged comfortably between the corner cabinets. He was handed a simple glass of water that he downed in a few gulps as he watched Grantaire kneel to pull things out of the refrigerator.

"What's this?" he finally asked, waving his hand over the spices.

"I found a recipe for Old Bay," Grantaire explained. "Only I didn't have quite the right stuff, but then I thought 'fuck it' and tried anyway. It's got sage, all spice, the wrong kind of pepper,

the wrong kind of dill, too little salt--we're almost out, and crystalized ginger because dammit I strive to get rid of all that stuff before Jehan gets his hands on it again."

A few weeks ago, Jehan, in a fit of creativity, attempted to make some sort of Thai-based soup Enjolras had never heard of and the resulting hits of ginger throughout it had tried to kill most of them. Bahorel in particular had made it clear he'd never touch the stuff again, though Eponine seemed to adore it and had hoarded the leftovers for days. Setting aside the fish he had just pulled out, Grantaire stuck his finger in his new mix and tasted it cautiously.

"Well," he said after a moment. "It will definitely clear my sinuses out."

Enjolras hummed and leaned back against the cabinets as he watched Grantaire wrap the fish and throw it unceremoniously onto the sink to thaw. Rice was soon tossed onto the stove to simmer, and a few avocados appeared on the cutting board next to him. Slicing them in half, Enjolras looked on with tired fascination as Grantaire, with a quick flick of his wrist, imbedded the knife's blade into the pit and cleanly jerked it free.

"Ever since I saw Alton Brown do that trick my life has been better," he commented as he tossed the pit into the trash. "I see you managed to release your death grip on your phone."

Enjolras' hand promptly flew toward his pocket but he already knew he left it upstairs on his nightstand. He debated going to get it but he was surprisingly comfortable concentrating on Grantaire as he threw together a meal with more skill than he could ever hope to have in the kitchen.

"Where is everyone?" he asked instead.

"They cleared out for a bit," Grantaire told the countertop. "Wanted to give you some time alone. With me, if you wanted."

Enjolras was too tired for this. Leaning forward, he captured Grantaire as he walked by the stove and drew him in. Pressing their lips together, he shamelessly used the height advantage the counter gave him to bite and soothe his way around Grantaire's mouth as his fingers wove themselves into brunette waves. Hands settled on his thighs as Grantaire stood and allowed him to dictate their kiss, letting Enjolras pour all the overflow he was feeling into him instead.

When Enjolras pulled back, the taste of alcohol was on his tongue.

"Were you painting?"

"I'm building up to it," Grantaire replied, smiling up at him. Enjolras hummed and pressed their foreheads together as he let his eyes slide closed. His brain was still running in high gear, but now it at least felt like coming down was a real possibility rather than an unobtainable desire.

"Thank you," he breathed, the softest of whispers against skin. Grantaire responded with a kiss that was no more than a chaste press of their lips together.

Eventually though, the food needed to be cooked. Placing one last kiss on Enjolras' mouth, Grantaire held him tight before reluctantly letting go and returning to the stove. The next thirty minutes were spent in comfortable silence as Enjolras zoned in and out of awareness. He never got to watch Grantaire paint, mainly because it drove Grantaire insane to show unfinished pieces, but seeing him cook was almost as educational. He was making intuitive leaps in ingredients and flavor combinations that made absolutely no sense to him.

Enjolras had been so intent on watching the food that the hand that brushed up against the side of his face startled him into alertness. Grantaire, suddenly much closer and covered in flour and what Enjolras suspected was egg, inspected him with suspicious eyes.

"Did you get any sleep?"

"A couple of hours."

Grantaire looked distinctly unimpressed. "Go lay down, I'll wake you when the food's ready."

"I won't sleep."

"And of course trying is out of the question."

"It's more fun watching you do battle with the glassware," Enjolras replied, pointing to the sink. Grantaire turned and growled.

In what was either the best idea Bahorel ever had or the worst thing to happen to the brownstone, he and Bossuet had attempted to make their own moonshine. The only records any of them had of that night were the line of empty mason jars along the side of the sink since their memories couldn't be trusted. As time went on, the mason jars had been joined by a large bottle of moscato Joly and Eponine had split after a rough day, the vases Jehan used for his flowers, the pasta jars from when Courfeyrac had made spaghetti a week ago, and various other glasses and jars from around the house as well. Now, the entire right side of the sink was populated by glass, much to Grantaire's annoyance.

"I know what you're up to," Grantaire told the line of glassware stretching across the counter as he poked at the fish. "Keep trying to mobilize, but know that I have taken your brethren, the tall one."

Enjolras thought he meant the blender, but he couldn't be sure. Leaning back against the counter, he was satisfied that he had Grantaire suitably distracted--though something told him it wouldn't be that easy next time.

They ate at the counter with their fingers like savages, and there was a deep satisfaction in it. Afterward, with a wicked gleam in his eyes, Grantaire took his hands and slowly used his mouth to clean the remnants of dinner from them. The feeling of lips, tongue, and occasionally teeth across his palms was one of the most distracting things Enjolras had ever endured. He was hopelessly breathless and light-headed by the end as Grantaire christened each of his fingertips with a kiss.

Surging forward, he attacked Grantaire's lips with more aggression than before, wrapping his tongue around the other's. His hands were slick and shaking, but he managed to ruck Grantaire's shirt up under his arms in fumbling movements. The brunette tugged him off the counter and pushed him toward the living room while pulling his own shirt over his head. It was blind luck that had them avoiding Jehan's plants because he surely wasn't mindful of them at the moment.

Enjolras barely had time to shed his own shirt before Grantaire got him onto his back across the couch. His touches were more faulting than usual, but Enjolras was too distracted by getting as much skin-to-skin contact as possible to be concerned by it. His fingernails dug into bare shoulders as he tried to keep Grantaire as close as he could manage, even as the other chuckled and leaned back to sit comfortably on his heels.

"Hey, gorgeous," Grantaire breathed, eyes roaming. "What'cha doin' tonight?"

Enjolras couldn't help the laughter that ripped its way up his chest and throat. He tried to stifle it with his hands but only managed to make it worse. God, his cheeks hurt. It was really a horrible pick up line.

"That's better," Grantaire muttered as he began dropping kisses on Enjolras' smiling mouth, his neck, his torso all the way down until he was nosing at the button of his jeans. Enjolras groaned and buried his fingers in Grantaire's wild curls again, trying to keep himself quiet with his other hand pressed over his mouth.

Grantaire nipped gently at the hollow of his hips as he tugged his jeans and underwear down his thighs, sharp pangs that made him gasp every time. He was already hard and needy, but the brunette seems to enjoy taking his time with this part, which earned him a quick tug of his hair. In return, Enjolras had to bite down on his fingers as he was swallowed down to the root in one fluid motion to mask his startled scream. Grantaire had always classified his oral techniques as enthusiastic at best but Enjolras had honestly never known the difference, and always loved every minute of the attention. Reaching up, the brunette tangled his fingers around Enjolras' own, bringing them away from his mouth and letting his cries fill the room as he worked. He came with a sob, his grip on Grantaire's hair near painful.

Pulling back, Grantaire rested his chin against his hip bone and smirked up at him. Enjolras slid his hand down and gently batted away frazzled curls from his eyes.

"Feel better?" Grantaire asked quietly as Enjolras let his eyes slip closed.

"Sex doesn't fix everything."

"Yeah, but you can't tell me that didn't improve things."

Enjolras knew his dazed smile and lethargic movements were enough of an answer to that, so he settled for continuing to coil Grantaire's bangs around his fingers instead.

"Did you--,"

"Don't worry about it," Grantaire dismissed. Enjolras lightly kicked him in retaliation.

"Get up here,"

"I like this view."

"And I want you up here."

That got Grantaire up to eye level, and Enjolras pressed delicate kisses into his mouth in reward as his hand crept into the other's jeans. The taste of himself on Grantaire's tongue almost got him spun up enough for another round.

"Jesus," Grantaire panted into his mouth as he was taken in hand. He could barely move when they were pressed this close together, but he squeezed and stroked all the same, whispering softly in Grantaire's ear as he did so. Taking his time, Enjolras worked him towards completion and clung tightly to him when Grantaire cried out into the space between his neck and shoulder as he came.

It took a while from them both to recover, but they managed to shift into a more comfortable position on the sofa with Enjolras' head resting on Grantaire's chest. Smirking, the brunette cleaned them both off with Enjolras' shirt, who grumbled in annoyance and swatted feebly at him. His eyelids felt heavy. Grantaire's skillful hands were warm and steady as they stroked over his hair and shoulder and spine and back again. A soft blanket had somehow appeared over both of them...

Enjolras jerked back into consciousness faster than lightening as the front door slammed shut. Below him, he heard Grantaire growl.

"I had just gotten him back to sleep!" he yelled down the hall.

"Sorry! Bossuet's bleeding! Again."

"Ohjesusfucking-,"

"You goddamn idiot! Why didn't you say something!"

"Joly, breathe. He's fine--,"

"Don't you dare step on my plants or I swear to God, Bossuet won't be the only one bleeding--,"

"You had sex on the couch, didn't you?"

"Fey, I don't think you're one to talk."

Enjolras couldn't help but smile as Grantaire buried his face in his blond fringe with a sigh. Everything instantly felt much more normal. Getting to his feet, he snagged Grantaire's shirt from the coffee table and went to inspect the damage.

The next hour was dedicated to Combeferre patching up Bossuet's hand, which he had absentmindedly gotten stuck in a length of chicken wire while at the local nursery. He had managed to keep it hidden for the rest of the visit so Jehan had been able to find the new

hanging planters he wanted, as well as some last minute outdoor heaters before Joly had discovered what happened and had immediately flown into a fit.

At the table, Musichetta was keeping the slim brunette under control while Combeferre worked, and Enjolras was keeping an eye on the proceedings with a slightly disgruntled and shirtless Grantaire leaning against him. Outside, Jehan and Feuilly had pressed a much taller Bahorel into service as a ladder while Eponine and Courfeyrac kept a running commentary between the groups from the living room. Somewhere along the way someone decided what the situation needed most was some high proof alcohol and by the end they landed on the living room floor with every blanket in the house and what was left of the vodka from last night massed between them all.

"Movie night!" Eponine dubbed, flying for the remote just as Combeferre and Joly each dove for it. She easily won the three way wrestling match that ensued, cawing triumphantly as she flipped through their Netflix queue for the bloodiest horror flick she could find. Joly proceeded to spend the next hour and a half tucked between Bossuet and Musichetta, alternated who's chest he hid in and whining about the gore. Musichetta sent Eponine a discreet thumbs up and a smile for it. Enjolras, no great fan of horror himself, spent most of the movie annoying Grantaire and wishing for his phone. But every time he tried to work up the energy to retrieve it, Grantaire would run light fingers down his neck, or plant easy kissing on the inside of his wrist, or pull gently at his curls and he would lose all will to move.

Jehan managed to take control the remote next, mostly because he pulled some shamelessly dirty tricks on Courfeyrac once it went up for grabs. He subjected them all to two hours of wedding shows before Feuilly gained control by virtue of being terrifying. He found an extremely dry british comedy only he understood, however no one was willing to risk an attempt at stealing the remote from his grasp to change it. By the end of the evening, Enjolras was fairly sure Netflix had destroyed their bandwidth.

When he finally got back upstairs to his phone, there was an email waiting for him. Enjolras hesitated when he saw Felix's name on it, since his father and he hadn't spoken since his college graduation. He felt the unnecessary need to glance around him, even though he knew he was alone. While Grantaire spent most of his nights in Enjolras' room, the soft thuds above his head meant that he had ended up upstairs in his attic studio, following through with his earlier intent to paint. Enjolras considered deleting the email, but he knew he'd just dig it out of the trashcan in an hour and feel guilty about doing it, so instead he opened it with a tap of his thumb.

Reading through the text, he felt his blood run cold then red hot in his veins. In a childish act of defiance and denial, he contemplated throwing his phone into the wall but a rational voice pointed out that it would accomplish nothing past further frustrating him. He fought his instincts and set it down carefully on the bed, taking deep breaths to calm himself.

That bastard.

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No matter their woes, the world kept turning.

Monday morning couldn't have come quickly enough. Enjolras had been inching to get back to the office as soon as Grantaire and his friends had insisted he take the week off. He had been out of his mind within the first two days and most of his sleepless nights were spent in contemplation of how he could be better spending his time. Now, stepping into the ABC 1st North branch felt like finding the holy land.

Gavroche met him at the front desk, wearing an obnoxious purple vest and what looked to be one of Eponine's headbands holding his wild hair back.

"Morning, boss," he said cheerfully, holding out a fresh cup of coffee in offering. Enjolras had managed to finish his own on the way in, so accepted it without question as he walked by. However it apparently had not kicked in yet because it took a few steps for his brain to process the last minute. Slowly turning around, Enjolras brought narrowed, suspicious eyes down on Gavroche.

"What did you do?"

"Absolutely nothing," was his instant reply. "Only, who's M. Gillenormand?"

"He's an extremely ancient, ultra conservative Senator with old fashion opinions and stances," Enjolras summarized as he picked through the mass of paperwork splashed across the front desk. His messages had to be around there somewhere. "He has an iron grip on his district and deals with new ideas about as well as God does."

"Huh. So it's probably not a good thing that I snarked one of his aides off the phone earlier this week?"

That got him to pause. "Excuse me?"

"He was asking questions I didn't like about our policy and procedure," Gavroche replied as he swatted Enjolras' hands out of the way. Within seconds he made dozens of pink slips appear. "I told him he could pay dues if he was that curious about it. Then he started in on our stance on a whole bunch of different issues, and I asked him if he could read since it was all detailed on the website. Then he asked to speak to my manager, so I told him he could go fuck himself and hung up. Bad?"

Enjolras blinked. Gavroche was an amazing front desk manager, mainly because he talked everyone off the phone within minutes and could spot undercover cops or journalists at a glance. Combined with the menagerie of skills Eponine had taught him, and no one got past him unscathed. If Enjolras had wanted welcoming and personable as the face of their operation he would have employed Musichetta for the job.

"Not at all," he reassured as he started walking toward the back. "Tell me if he calls again, but don't pass it back."

"Got it."

"Good morning!" Enjolras shouted out to the floor in general, receiving various groans and grunts in return. Most of the others had gotten in before him this morning, since he had a

breakfast conference with many of the chiefs from other ABC branches that had run long. Tiberius in particular loved the sound of his own voice, and he had Enjolras biting his tongue more than once in annoyance.

Eponine, Bahorel, and Bossuet were all out on various errands, but the others seemed more or less awake and functioning. Jehan and Joly were pouring over the various city newspapers, circling and highlighting the relevant articles. Musichetta was next to them, doing the same thing with blogs and news sites. Feuilly was bent over his desk, spreadsheets sprawled out before him, while Combeferre, on the phone with the permits office, waved. Grantaire, feet on his desk and headphones in, was busy at his sketch book and Enjolras could only hope he was working on the flyer for their anti SuperPac rally next month.

Courfeyrac was leaning on his desk when Enjolras finally got there, looking smug.

"Meeting go well?"

Enjolras would never speak against the other chiefs, as many of them--Anton, Louisa, Breanne, Gregory--were amazing at what they accomplished. But he couldn't shake the disgruntled feeling of coming back to a cluttered house after his forced week off. All the projects he had left had progressed not one iota, and Tiberius' simpering bleating had grated on him. So instead he gave Courfeyrac a closed mouth smile and set his bag and coffee down.

Gavroche smacked Enjolras' messages down on his desk, then watched as the stack wobbled and toppled over across his calendar.

"That worked out better in my head," he commented.

"It usually does."

Courfeyrac whistled as he picked through them. "Do you really get this many messages a week?"

"A day," Gavroche corrected, fingers busy sorting. Courfeyrac stared at him in disbelief.

"He's popular," Gavroche explained.

"Most of these are nonsense," Enjolras told him. Shifting through, he automatically discarded anything with Tiberius' name on it, as well as the requests for interviews. The condolence messages confused him until he remembered why he had taken a week off and he chucked those into the trash bin as well.

"The Governor's City College wants you to come speak with their graduating class in three months," Gavroche commented, waving one like a banner. "Yay, nay?"

"Tell them I will if their residence dean finally decides to acknowledge the fuck ups his administration made on the frat house rapes." That fight had been a long and brutal one, spearheaded by Eponine who worked like a demon possessed. She hadn't been able to sleep for weeks afterward, and they had shared many dark evenings pouring over paper after paper in the depths of the ABC. Enjolras was long used to the driving need for retribution that

burned in him daily, but it had nearly broken Eponine and the memory of that still rang out from time to time.

"Carlyle over at the National Water Resource Drive wants to talk with you about forming a dual team to get support for their new environmental bill."

That one was more difficult. Carlyle was brutally efficient at cutting through political red tape and was a sledgehammer when it came to getting things done. But he also continuously propositioned Grantaire and Enjolras was a possessive soul at heart. He knew it was one of his more unattractive qualities but he couldn't bring himself to mind it much.

"I'll speak with him later," he finally decided. Grantaire's headphones must not have been up that loud because he glanced over the top of his sketch pad with a smirk on his lips. Enjolras met his gaze head on, but he could feel his face heating up.

"And the ABC fundraiser gala thing later this week," Gavroche finished off.

"No."

"Enjolras--," Combeferre sighed as he turned the phone into his shoulder, looking put upon.

"I see no earthy reason why I should go."

"Feuilly! Tell Enjolras we need money!" Courfeyrac demanded.

"We need money!" Feuilly yelled from across the office. "So much money!"

"We're the most profitable branch of the ABC," Enjolras pointed out.

"And all the other branches know it. They want you there Enjolras, if only so they can get enough money to keep the lights on."

The fact that he looked good in a tux and could speak in full sentences was left unsaid, but definitely hovering. Every branch of the ABC was commanded by a competent and dedicated chief, but some of them were more charming than others.

He rolled his eyes at the absurdity of it all, but nodded his consent all the same. Sitting down, he ran his fingers over his desk in delicate reverence. It was good to be back, and it help him build the wall against a very upsetting email sitting on his phone.

"Look on the bright side," Gavroche pointed out. "They gave us six tickets. I'd say you get to pick the five sad souls that get to join you."

"Courfeyrac!" Enjolras shouted immediately. "Don't make plans!"

"Damnit Gavroche, he was suppose to overlook that part."

"Combeferre?" He turned to towards his friend as Courfeyrac squawked.

"Why does he gets asked and I get ordered?"

"Because he actually does his work."

Combeferre nodded, still on the phone.

"Musich--,"

"Yes!"

"Any excuse to dress up, huh?" Joly teased.

"I was thinking the red one, maybe with those leather heels Bossuet got me?" she replied with a smirk as Joly's eyes went wide, his face pink.

Enjolras turned his eyes toward Grantaire as the others honed in on Joly. He wasn't sure if it was his place to ask, and he hated feeling this awkward. But Grantaire, who never judged his inexperience or hesitance, simply rolled his eyes affectionately and nodded, half his attention still on his sketch pad.

He shot Eponine a text as well, knowing she would at least enjoy free food and Courfeyrac's biting company. And if Combeferre finally worked up the courage to ask her for a dance than all the better.

A thought occurred to him, stilling his fingers across his phone screen.

"Gavroche."

"Yeah, boss?"

"The aide who called, did he tell you he was from Gillenormand's office?"

"No, but thanks to caller ID and the internet it took me all of three minutes to find him."

"But you couldn't be bothered to find out who Gillenormand was?"

"I bore easily. And Bahorel had spray paint."

Enjolras decided he wasn't going to touch that one. Instead, he nodded and let Gavroche get back to work as his tired mind spun. There was something there, even if he hadn't figured out what it was yet. With a sigh of frustration, he decided to let it simmer for a bit, marked a note in his phone and went on about his day.

\*

Their annual fundraiser had been put together by the ABC 2nd South division, which meant Breanne and her constant push to reintegrate the arts back into society had dictated the details. Because of that, their venue was the historical Redstone Art Museum, and the entire exhibit had been rented out for their use. Enjolras was fairly sure that was why Grantaire had been so easy to convince, but kept that to himself because, God, did he clean up well in a tux.

Grantaire, noticing his staring, made a show of running his own gaze up and down Enjolras in obvious appreciation. He felt himself reddened under Grantaire's exaggerated gaze, but he took a primitive pleasure in it. He had spent most of his life pointy ignoring anyone who ever looked at him like that, however trust and love had turned the normally discomfiting act into an intimate and delightfully dirty sensation between the two of them. It made Enjolras feel dizzy and coveted as he thought about it.

They had ridden the subway over, because their cars were only for emergencies and day trips outside the city to save on gas and greenhouse emissions.

"I still don't know why I'm here," Eponine grumbled, letting out a sigh that had her dark bangs fluttering around her face. She was wearing one of Musichetta's dresses, a teal colored strapless confection with rousing around her waist. She had vehemently vetoed any idea of a high heel, at which point Musichetta had smiled at her and produced a pair of silver flats instead. But despite her complaints, she had still smiled after Musichetta had finished her make up, reveling in Jehan's gushing and Bahorel's catcall. Even now, she seemed flushed with excitement, which Enjolras was glad to see. The Governor's College case still seemed to eat at her from time to time.

"Recruit more girls," Courfeyrac told her. Eponine jerked her thumb toward Musichetta.

"There's one."

Musichetta winked at her. Splendid in a bright red silk dress with no back, a plunging neckline, and a hem to her knees, she was going to be the instant center of attention once they arrived. She had styled her dark hair into gentle waves that tumbled down her bare shoulders and back, and had claimed Courfeyrac's arm before they were even out of the door. With Grantaire's arm already settled comfortably around Enjolras' waist, Combeferre had offered his to Eponine, who had taken it after a few moments of confused silence over the gesture. His oldest friend looked almost struck silly with her so close.

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Musichetta rolling her eyes dramatically.

Enjolras lost track of Grantaire within minutes of their arrival. He would have gone looking for him but Anton from the 2nd North branch had searched him out like a shark and he spent the next hour meeting the mayor, the mayor's aides, the aides to those aides, three primetime network news anchors, a popular photographer whose work Breanne was auctioning off later that evening, six congressmen, and five different CEOs from companies famous for their stance on environmental policy.

"Carlyle approached you about his environmental bill too?" he guessed, turning to Anton in a brief pause between introductions.

"Yeah, he being an impatient asshole," the other chief explained with a smile, nodding at their next introduction.

Good, there was that taken care of at least. If Anton and his division took care of the National Water Resource Drive, Enjolras (and Grantaire) wouldn't need to. He tapped out a quick note on his phone and went to shake hands with the museum curator next.

He was already exhausted by the time he escaped back to his friends. Musichetta bumped shoulders with him as she passed over his untouched drink, which he slammed back in seconds.

"That bad?" Combeferre asked, looking concerned. Enjolras waved him off and nursed the ice cubes in his glass as they chatted about nothing in particular. He had just started to relax and look around for Grantaire when he heard a voice shout out behind him.

"Enjolras!"

"Damnit." He couldn't help the curse as it slipped from his lips. Courfeyrac, the traitor, only laughed so Enjolras grabbed his drink and tossed it back as well as the branch chief of the ABC 3rd East slid in next to him.

"I was wondering when you would show that angelic face of yours for the cameras," Tiberius commented as his hand drifted over his shoulder and coming to rest on the small of his back. "You have no idea the chaos I've been having to deal with all on my own, what with the news coverage and the press releases and constant vender phone calls, you'd think Bre hadn't the time to get it all done what with that debacle with that blogger nut."

Enjolras hated it when people commented on his face like it was the only trait he had of value. Tiberius' schedule wasn't even half of what he took in a day. Breanne hated dealing with the press but her second in command, Rachele, was amazing at it by comparison and had probably been the one to handle the majority of it. Breanne loathed having her name shortened. Her branch produced the most revenue and good publicity after Enjolras'. The debacle in question had happened when a hacker had hijacked their servers a few months ago and had run with the first thing he had gotten his hands on, which had been Breanne's branch records. No matter how clean an organization, having every little correspondence picked apart and ridiculed never reflected well.

Tiberius was still talking, and his hand still hadn't moved.

Enjolras was about take steps when Eponine snapped, cutting Tiberius off. "The amount of hairspray I've been doused with is giving me a headache, the shoes I'm wearing aren't mine, and I was earlier told on no uncertain terms that all my underwear was inappropriate for this dress. As you can imagine, I'm itching for a fight. Are you volunteering?"

"No need to be aggressive, sweetheart,"

"Call me sweetheart again and this glass goes in your face. Leave now."

Not many people could stand against Eponine when she decided she had enough. Tiberius slink off within seconds.

"Thank you," Enjolras told her gratefully. His back itched from where the man's hand had been sitting. Eponine raised her glass in mock salute, but the reassuring light in her eyes meant she had taken his thanks to heart.

"Are you not wearing underwear?" Courfeyrac asked, completely shameless. He was never one to back down from Eponine's more viper-like tendencies. Combeferre's face was scarlet red.

"Wanna find out?"

"And that's where this conversation ends," Enjolras dictated on no uncertain terms. The last time those two had been allowed to banter unsupervised they had almost been arrested for indecent exposure at the local grocery store. Enjolras would rather not have a repeat of that phone call.

"I'm being oppressed by the man," Courfeyrac replied, but dutifully let it drop as Musichetta handed her drink over to Combeferre, who looked like he desperately needed it.

"Be an awesome date and get me another?" she asked Courfeyrac.

"If I'm getting you drinks aren't I entitled to sex later?" But he was already reaching for his wallet.

"I'm sure Joly and Bossuet wouldn't mind in the least if you wanted to join us one night."

Courfeyrac opened his mouth, thought better of it, and just laughed as he flounced over to the bar.

"Dance with me?" Musichetta asked, turning to Enjolras with bright, mischievous eyes. In retrospect, he should have seen that coming; the only other person in their house who stayed respectable on the dance floor was Feuilly. Shrugging, he led her onto the dance floor, only to find himself maneuvered around so Musichetta could keep her eye on their table, where they had conveniently left Eponine and Combeferre.

"What are you up to?" he couldn't help but tease as he picked the lead back up.

"Matchmaking," was her unabashed reply.

"I would have though you'd have tried with Eponine and Courfeyrac. Similar personalities and all."

"By that logic I should have shoved you and Combeferre in a closet together years ago. Besides, Jehan's had his eye on Courfeyrac for months now, and I think a calming personality would be great for 'Fey. I just need to keep him freed up until they work it out."

"Jehan and Courfeyrac?"

"Mmhmm."

"Wouldn't it just be easier to tell them?"

"That's what most of them said about you and Grantaire, but you both figured it out on your own."

"...Do you do this with all of us?"

"I make a three way relationship with a hypochondriac and the unluckiest man alive work. The rest of you are like really easy games of Tetris I can't help but solve."

If Enjolras ever needed a reminder of why Musichetta was so effective as their press liaison, this was it. Her people reading skills could put even perceptive Courfeyrac's to shame.

As they twirled, Enjolras caught glimpses of Eponine and Combeferre chatting back and forth, and couldn't help but smile as she reached out and straightened Combeferre's crooked tie. But eventually, the dance came to an end and Courfeyrac returned from the bar with drinks in hand.

"Did you see where Grantaire went?" he asked Musichetta as they finished.

"I think he's in the the art gallery."

"They don't open the doors for another hour and a half."

"He may have broken in."

Enjolras rolled his eyes and prayed he wouldn't find Grantaire stripping canvases out of their frames when he tracked him down. The headache behind his eyes was already brewing. Dropping a kiss on Musichetta's cheek in thanks, he went in search of his wayward artist.

The lock to the gallery door was hanging on by a thread, and all it took was a quick flick of his wrist to pop the door open and slip through. The lights were already on, but it was eerily silent in the large, brightly lit hallway. Artwork he didn't recognize lined each side, and painted eyes staring out at him as he passed. His footsteps echoed in his ears.

He found Grantaire in front of a long, horizontal canvas with shadows, curves, and a line of squares splashed across it. A rip was going down the middle, and a hand was pointing off frame near the center.

"You broke in," he accused, but the annoyance in his voice was vague at best. Grantaire's habit of doing exactly what he wanted, fuck anyone who told him differently, had always been both one of his most attractive and utterly infuriating qualities.

"Eponine actually broke in for me," Grantaire replied, tone completely unapologetic. His eyes stayed locked on the painting, but the smile on his face was all Enjolras' doing, which warmed his heart as he drew close. Their faces were probably on a dozen different security cameras right now, but he found he was too tired to care much.

"Tu m," the plaque read. "Marcel Duchamp."

Enjolras glanced at Grantaire, knowing full well he was out of his element.

"The rip's painted. The safety pins holding it together are real, though," Grantaire explained, reaching out to entwine their fingers as he spoke. "That's the Dada movement. During WWI, a group of artists thought the world was acting ridiculous, so they acted ridiculous in turn."

They attacked every cultural standard, and were happy when they could provoke violence from their audience. Bring on the chaos and the madness, because nothing else would satisfy them. And they kicked off the Surrealists."

Enjolras had no idea what half the things Grantaire was talking about were, but his thumb was stroking the back of Enjolras' hand and the gentle, almost absentminded caress was settling his frazzled nerves better than the drinks he had slammed earlier. So he kept still, hoping his lack of movement would encourage Grantaire to continue, and listened as art history through the 1920s and 30s was described to him.

Enjolras had no opinions on art, and he doubted he ever would. To him, they were colors and brush strokes on a canvas and he never felt a rush from staring at them for hours on end. Better to spend his time productively with his endless list of projects and causes. But it was one of the few things in the world that truly put emotion in Grantaire's voice, that lit his eyes up brighter than the sun, and that brought out the self-assurance Enjolras knew was within him. So he stayed silent and listened with half a brain to Grantaire's words, humming in agreement every now and then.

Eventually, Grantaire pressed a quick kiss to his temple and dragged their linked hands further down the hall, stopping at particular pieces as he went. He never spent less than five minutes with each one, detailing both the technique and the artist to Enjolras, who dutifully absorbed it all and filed the information in the equivalent of a dusty, unused corner of his mind. Though he was aware enough to notice that Grantaire was studiously avoiding the west wing of the exhibit.

"What's over there?" he asked, pointing.

"The Abstract Expressionists. I can't say I'm a fan of Rauschenberg." The distain in Grantaire's voice was evident. Enjolras knew he shouldn't ask, but curiosity and weariness opened his mouth before he thought better of it.

"Any reason?" He knew the minute he asked that he had doomed himself to a lecture he'd never comprehend, let alone remember, but he couldn't feel bad about it when Grantaire launched into an explanation, his eyes alive and his movements self-assured.

"When he had art shows, he's one of those artists who, when asked about what his paintings meant, would get into a conversation with the audience about what they thought it meant."

"That's a problem?"

"It bothers me. Somewhere in the 20th century it became acceptable for artists to become the center of their artwork. Suddenly you can't understand anything they create without understanding the artists themselves. It's part shock and awe, part performance art, and what's left is shoved on a canvas and called original. But if they're allowed to do that and call it art, then I'm allowed to have opinions about it."

This got Grantaire onto a tangent about popular art in the 1960s and Andy Warhol in particular. Enjolras couldn't tell if Grantaire admired or despised the man, which he was assured that was a normal reaction to Warhol. However, his stream of words came to an end

when they arrived at the next painting. The look on Grantaire's face was one of a devout pilgrim arriving at the holy land.

"This beauty was the reason you got me to come," he whispered reverently as they stood before one the plaque declared to be *The Elephant Celebes*. "Max Ernst bridged Dada and the Surrealists. Cynicism and depression gave birth to self-actualization and freedom. He brought some of the most ground breaking and emotional pieces into the world, because he dug into his darker side to find salvation."

He could see why that appealed to Grantaire. Enjolras slowly took in the round mechanical elephant, the smokey background, and the beheaded figure out front, arm tossed out in invitation. Even taking his time he was finished in about two minutes and couldn't claim to see any of what had been described, but Grantaire didn't seem ready to move anytime soon, so he settled down to wait. The brunette didn't take many moments for himself, so when he did Enjolras saw no reason to rush him. And if it kept him out of that viper's nest in the main room for a little while longer, he won't complain at all.

His mother had tried to instill an appreciation of the arts in him, he remembered unexpectedly. She had always thought it was important to enjoy all aspects of expression, not just the rhythm of the spoken word.

"You strive to make people understand your cause, your art, when you speak to them," she had told him. "It's only right to try to understand theirs in turn."

Enjolras had scoffed and rolled his eyes at the ridiculousness, but watching Grantaire truly become alive surrounded by all this made his emotions bubble in his chest. Quite suddenly, he needed the other's arms around him, needed to be closer to the heart that beat so close to his own. He pressed into Grantaire's personal space, wordlessly seeking support.

And Grantaire, even while caught up in his version of divine ecstasy, was so attuned to Enjolras that his arms were already out and waiting for him. He curled himself around Enjolras, tucking him safely into his chest with his chin resting on his shoulder.

"I have everything I want within feet of me. Fuck everything else, I want to keep you right here with me until judgement day," Grantaire whispered into his ear, and while his words should have been jovial, they instead carried a serious, deliberate weight to them.

He wanted to snort at the sentiment. But Grantaire's tone was soft and loving, reminding Enjolras that this man believed him to be the center of the world as well as everything good in it. He would always think that, even when Enjolras' temper got the better of him, or when his single-minded focus blinded him to recognizing anything else around him. When he got stubborn, self righteous, and antagonistic, Grantaire loved him all the same. While he climbed and fought and bled, Grantaire would be behind him with a word and a touch, reinforcing the near devout levels of adoration Enjolras had come to crave in return.

He was startled to realize he couldn't imagine the world without Grantaire anymore. But he also couldn't imagine it without his mother, who had been his guiding light since birth. He had lost her and he could lose all this, too.

He was sure his face wasn't reflecting the terror that suddenly overtook him, because he had trained it to reveal only what he commanded it. But he couldn't command the sickening roll of his stomach or the giant block of ice that enveloped his heart. He couldn't stop the cold sweat that broke out over his skin.

"What?" Grantaire asked, feeling him tense. Ignoring the question, Enjolras turned, twisted his hands up in the lapels of the brunette's jacket. He used surprise and a strength born of desperation to twist him around and slam him into the wall next to *The Elephants*. If Grantaire stretched out his hand only slightly (and he wasn't bowled over in shock, as his expression currently suggested) his fingers would be able to brush against the painting's frame.

"Enj--," he tried, but Enjolras lunged forward to seal their lips together, cutting off the inevitable stream of questions. He nipped at Grantaire's lips, gripped him with a bruising grip, trying to force away his bitterly unwanted emotions. There was a monstrous drive in him it was snowballing out of control at the thought of being left alone again. So he clung with all his might, as if his will alone could keep Grantaire's being tied to his own.

But in his frenzied state, his hold slipped and Grantaire was easing him back, solid and steady next to Enjolras' violent energy. Both of his hands were shanghaied and gathered in a paintbrushed-callous one to rest over Grantaire's heart, the unrestrained burning within him smothered by the weight of their bodies pressed close.

"Shhh," Grantaire whispered against his cheek. "I've got you. Everything's okay."

Enjolras thought he was insane. Of course it wasn't okay. There was too much inside him, overloading him to the point of pain, and he couldn't deal with it anymore so why was Grantaire telling him it was fine? His voice rumbled in his throat, a prelude to the scream that was fighting its way out. He didn't want to lose this. Being left behind once was bad enough, but if Grantaire ever left as well he may not survive it.

Only Grantaire wasn't backing down; was still holding him close, one hand over both his own on his chest and the other tangled in his hair, was still whispering in his ear and Enjolras realized the words were spilling over his lips as well as his mind.

"It's fine. I'm still here. You're not alone, I'd never leave you alone. God, Apollo, the world would need to end before I let you go, and even then I'd fight it every step of the way-,"

Enjolras slumped, the words, and deep conviction behind them, extinguished the near hysterical drive within him. Grantaire used the hand embedded in his curls to guide Enjolras forward and rest his head against his shoulder, still muttering nonsense. Enjolras was too tired to complain, what little energy he had left was completely drained from him.

Grantaire, bless him, didn't ask any questions and just continued to hold him and whisper. Listening to him, Enjolras distantly realized he had started to ramble about the Renaissance and the period's obsession with baby Jesus. He focused on that while he fought to control his erratic breathing--taking deep, measured breathes until he was confident in his ability to think straight again.

He wasn't sure how long they stayed like that: Grantaire against the wall as his words wandering from Fabriano to Botticelli to Da Vinci with Enjolras wrapped securely in his arms just breathing and slowly reconstructing himself.

"We're good," he finally broke in when Grantaire took a breath, pushing back slightly. Grantaire's grip didn't loosen an inch.

"Never a doubt in my mind, Apollo. Now, sometime in the beginning of the 14th century the Church decided to say that whenever the Virgin Mary was going to be depicted, her cloak had to be blue, which drove painters insane because blue paint is a bitch to get and temperamental as hell, but obviously they couldn't just leave her out--,"

"Enjolras!" someone hissed loudly from the other end of the hall and he felt Grantaire tense irritably around him at the interruption. But Musichetta stood at the broken door, looking terrified. "Enjolras, come quick!"

One of Enjolras' greatest skills was his ability to shut down parts of his brain he didn't have time to deal with. In the face of Musichetta's unadulterated fear, he immediately slammed a lid shut on his own and took off running, Grantaire close behind. Musichetta didn't wait for them, but turned and ran down a side corridor to their right. Stumbling twice, she kicked her shoes off and continued without a thought, leading them down a cinderblock staircase and a second, gloomier hallway that came out at the kitchen.

"We think we interrupted a kidnapping," Musichetta whispered in a shaking voice the minute they hit the last floor.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Breanne's a little short staffed so she asked us to grab more ice from the kitchen," she explained as they hurried down the hall. "When we got there, we saw a group of thugs hauling this poor kid out back, and well--you know how Courfeyrac and Eponine are when they see someone in trouble."

God, did he ever.

"Please tell me there isn't a dead body in the kitchen."

"No, no, no," Musichetta was quick to assure. "We got the kid, but the thugs took off. I think a few of them were bleeding though."

They had gotten to the kitchen by then, and Enjolras saw a young man tucked tightly into Courfeyrac's side, who had his arm wrapped protectively around his shoulders. In his other hand, he held what looked to be a dough roller in a white knuckled grip. Eponine was on the kid's other side, holding his hand and stroking his hair while Combeferre was checking his pulse. The kid had his face hidden in Courfeyrac's chest, and his whole frame was shaking. With a small internal sigh, Enjolras forced all thoughts of his own issues into a small, compact box and set his mind completely to the task at hand. He'd be damned if his capability was ever compromised by his emotions.

"Anyone hurt?" Enjolras asked the minute he got to them. Eponine shook her head mutely while Courfeyrac, lips pressed together and fury in his eyes, looked ready for murder.

"Just shock and stress, I think," Combeferre said, straightening. "Marius, can you look at me?"

The young man flinched but drew himself away from Courfeyrac enough to turn his face as requested. Enjolras felt his heart twist up at the nasty black eye he sported, as well as the various scarps and cuts across his face and hands. He had wide blue eyes, freckles dusting over his cheeks and nose, and Enjolras was fairly sure hurting this kid was akin to kicking a puppy.

"This is our friend, Enjolras. You remember we mentioned him earlier?"

Marius nodded, his eyes overly bright and glossy.

"He's gonna straighten this all out," Combeferre explained in his most soothing tone. Enjolras would have been offended at the presumption that he could fix this if his phone wasn't already in his hand and his brain wasn't flying. A familiar hand rested on his back as Grantarie breathed into his ear:

"Be nice."

Enjolras was too tired to resist the urge to roll his eyes, but nonetheless he tried to bank the fires already roaring inside him.

"Can you tell me what happened?" he asked, making an effort to keep his voice in the same comforting register Combeferre was using. It was more difficult than he thought it would be.

"My--my grandfather, he was driving me crazy," Marius whispered, his voice harsh. Enjolras took a closer look and saw a darkening ring of bruises around the poor kid's throat. "I went outside, just, just to get away from him for a bit, just a bit! And...someone grabbed me from behind. I--I tried to get away, I kicked, I yelled, but no one heard me...they wouldn't let go."

"Did you see their faces at all? Anything distinctive?"

Marius shook his head. "I'm sorry."

"Hey," Courfeyrac said, shaking him a bit. "None of that."

"Courfeyrac got one of them in the face with the roller," Eponine picked up. "And I'm pretty sure I winged another with one of those two pronged fork things."

Of course she had. Enjolras desperately hoped she hadn't killed the man.

"Did anyone see the van?"

"Black, no logos. Newer," Courfeyrac reported, anger still marring his features. Enjolras was fairly sure he hadn't seen his friend this upset since someone tried to jump Joly on his way to work a year ago.

"I got part of a license plate," Musichetta piped in. Enjolras wrote it down on a napkin, as well as the details of the van.

"Do the police have any reason to take your phones?"

"They shouldn't," Combeferre replied, puzzled.

"They shouldn't, but they might. Pull your SIM cards, all of you."

"Is that really necessary?"

"If I believed the entire police department would act with decorum and honor, it wouldn't. But we don't have a lot of friends there and I won't risk the ABC on that. We'll get new ones." He handed the SIM cards over to Musichetta, trusting her to make sure they got out of the building safely.

"Marius," he called the boy's attention back, making sure blue eyes were firmly on him before he continued. "Who's your grandfather?"

"Martin Gillenormand."

Shit.

\*

The police response time was actually rather impressive, and Enjolras had been right: their phones were taken immediately after their interviews. Luckily, after alerting those who needed it, he had put both his and Combeferre's phones into the nearest microwave and toasted them to uselessness. As a senior officer of the ABC, he should have destroyed Courfeyrac's as well but he knew there'd be a limit to what the police would tolerate from them. And there was a simmering satisfaction in thinking about that damn email going up in smoke.

He told them about the aide who Gavroche had chewed out over the phone, and watched as they got very excited about it. He expected they'd be seeing a pair of detectives at their door come Monday, and moved to make a note of it on his phone before realizing he couldn't anymore. Damnit.

The moment the police released him, Breanne, Anton, and Gregory from the ABC 1st West branch jumped him like pirañas.

"We're going to be in damage control for months after all this," Breanne said, biting her lip to the point of near bleeding to keep her temper in check. Enjolras hummed in agreement. A Senator's grandson almost being kidnapped at their fundraiser would generate nothing but bad press for their already radical reputation.

"I'll take care of it," Gregory offered at once. Enjolras traded looks with the other two. It was probably for the best; Gregory's branch had a reputation for wrathfulness and terror. If anyone could reign in a crazed media, it would be them.

"Do it," Anton confirmed. "Let us know if you need anything. Enjolras, can you keep us updated if the police tell you something?"

"Will do."

By the time he got away from the other chiefs and back to his own people, Marius had found his way back to Courfeyrac's side, which Enjolras thought was impressive given that he had last seen the boy being dressed down harshly by his raging grandfather not ten minutes ago.

"He's coming home with us," Courfeyrac informed him the second he walked over. Enjolras felt his headache unfold ten times worse behind his eyes.

"If that's okay," Marius added on nervously. On his other side, Eponine hugged him close as she rolled her eyes, her face set. Enjolras resisted the urge to press his fingers into his temples to dull the pain. He was so done with this night. This should not be his problem. Picking up strays was a horrible idea. While the police had some excellent leads the kidnappers were still out there. But Courfeyrac and Eponine both looked ready for a knock down, drag out fight in the middle of the kitchen and Enjolras wasn't sure he could fend them both off at once in the state he was in. The adrenaline had worn off, leaving his bones aching and his head splitting.

Behind them Grantaire, who was leaning out the window to share a cigarette with Musichetta, caught his eye and held it, just for a moment. But the look on his face was filled to the brim with adoration and love, and Enjolras felt his tired soul kick back to life.

"Marius, Enjolras said, his voice leaving no room for argument. "Someone tried to kidnap you less than an hour ago. Running off with us isn't going to look that good."

"Enjolras--," Courfeyrac snarled.

"Did you hear the word 'no' come out of my mouth?" Enjolras shot back. Courfeyrac, sensing his displeasure, instantly quieted.

"Is there someone you can tell about where you're going?"

Marius nodded, and Enjolras could tell he was holding his breath over his next words.

"Go tell them. If we leave in the next ten minutes we can catch the 9:30 train home."

\*

Musichetta had never gone back for her shoes and was about to brave the grimy subway floor anyway before Eponine had noticed and threw her flats at the other girl. She then spent the ride back piggybacking between the boys with Combeferre's jacket around her waist for the sake of modesty.

"I could have so many adorable pictures right now," Musichetta bemoaned as Eponine annoyed Grantaire by braiding his hair while he carried her along the last block with ribbon Enjolras could only assume had come from the depths of Musichetta's clutch. She had her arm linked with Marius who looked near petrified at the close proximity of a beautiful woman. Combeferre walked beside her, and between the two of them they managed to gently

draw their stray out of his shell one step at a time. Enjolras, bringing up the rear with Courfeyrac, watched them all with tired affection.

"Thank you," Courfeyrac muttered. "I know I didn't give you much choice in it, but thank you."

Enjolras tilted his head, eyeing his taller friend. Courfeyrac wore his heart on his sleeve, and in doing so had it handed back to him broken, bleeding, and deserted more than once. Yet he still cast it out freely for any lost soul who he happened to come across, springing up in arms for the downtrodden he encountered and had the ability to help.

"I couldn't say no." It was the truth, because as much as he wanted to protect Courfeyrac he knew he'd never be able to by isolating him. So instead he protected the strays 'Fey adopted.

Courfeyrac bumped into him, causing Enjolras to stumble a bit before slinging an arm around his shoulder. "And how are you doing?"

"Hmm?"

"Enjolras," Courfeyrac pressed their heads together. "Don't be stupid. Are you okay?"

His mother was still dead. His email was still sitting on his computer at home.

"I'm fine."

"And I think that's bullshit," Courfeyrac replied. "But I'm not going to call you on it too much because I know you're in safe hands."

Enjolras sought out Grantaire almost without realizing it. He was arguing over his shoulder with Eponine about the color of the ribbon in front of them. Watching him that relaxed calmed something inside Enjolras.

"Exactly," Courfeyrac said, hugging him tight for a moment as they arrived back at the brownstone.

The others were already asleep but Jehan had stayed up, sitting in the living room with hot chocolate and a few of his more delicate plants. He took one look at Musichetta's complete dishevelment, Eponine on Grantaire's back with her bare feet dangling, and a still bruised Marius and was on his feet in a heartbeat. Enjolras gave him the bullet points of the evening.

"I let you all out unsupervised for one night and this happens," Jehan protested. Marius had somehow ended up wrapped up in his arms during the story, and he was smothering their new stray with as much affection as he was capable of giving. Which, in Enjolras' experience, was quite a lot. Marius didn't seem to mind too much though; he wondered just how touch starved the kid was to be so grateful for even the most casual of embraces.

"We'll deal with it tomorrow," he commanded, making it clear that the night was over. "Come on, Marius. I'll show you where the guest bedroom is." The guest bedroom was actually suppose to be Bosseut's room but a month into living in the brownstone had proven that he'd never use it.

"He can't sleep in the guest room," Musichetta protested. "It's haunted."

"That was one time," Courfeyrac replied.

"Tell that to the footsteps I keep hearing up there," Eponine added in, and the conversation devolved from there.

"I always thought that was Grantaire."

"I'm not that loud."

"Yes, you are."

"It's not Grantaire, it's the water pipe running through that side of the house."

"Bahorel fixed that last month."

"Well, it's broken again."

"It's fine, I'll just sleep on the couch or something."

"No you won't, Marius. You'll take my room."

"Where's that gonna put you, 'Fey?"

"I'm going to be up half the night with all the hot chocolate I drank," Jehan piped up. "I was just going to watch Disney movies. Come crash with me?"

"Mmk," Courfeyrac agreed smiling obliviously in the face of Jehan's immediate blazing happiness. Enjolras wondered how he had always missed that--it was glaringly obvious when he actually looked for it.

As they began filing upstairs, he abruptly stopped and turned to stare at Musichetta in disbelief. She allowed a wicked smile to crest over her lips.

"Tetris," she told him with a wink as she past him on the staircase.

"What was that about?" Grantaire asked.

"I think Musichetta may secretly be the devil."

"Oh, I've known that for years." Grantaire caught him on the stairs and pressed him against the railing, peppering a few light kisses on his mouth. Enjolras shuddered in pleasure at the contact.

"Go sleep," Grantaire ordered quietly. "I'm gonna be painting for a bit."

There was a bottle of wine loosely grasped in his hand, and his eyes held that slightly crazed look he got when his fingers were itching for his brushes. Enjolras refused to call the twisting emotions in his chest disappointment, and instead planted a deep, lingering kiss to his lips.

"I'll be waiting."

Grantaire groaned, pressing their foreheads together. "You didn't use to tease like this, you evil bastard."

"Something about you just brings it out in me."

They parted at their bedroom after one more kiss that Enjolras made sure Grantaire would remember, and suddenly the dark room around him felt like a slap in the face. Sighing to himself, he stripped off his formal clothes and tried to convince his mind to turn off for a bit.

Four hours later, laying in bed with his eyes wide open, he admitted defeat and rose. He wasn't hungry, but he hadn't had a chance to eat at the fundraiser so maybe something in his stomach would help sleep seduce him.

He was surprised to find Marius in the kitchen, staring out into the night through the large bay windows. He seemed lost in thought, and still a little shaken.

"Can't sleep?"

Marius started, whipping around.

"I'm sorry, I didn't--,"

"Marius," Enjolras said firmly, drawing the other up short. "It's fine. No one here is going to yell at you for doing what you want. Do you not hear the two idiots upstairs giggling over *Lilo and Stitch*?"

Marius' eyes stayed glued on the counter, though the look on his face told Enjolras he had hit a nerve. Not that it had been hard to guess; if Gillenormand was anything like Felix he knew the type.

He got them both a glass of milk and the cookies Jehan had bullied Feuilly into making yesterday. It was a horrible substitute for a real meal, but some nights were like that. Setting them on the island in the middle of the kitchen, he hopped onto the counter and waved for Marius to do the same.

And he talked. He had never been good at mundane topics, so instead he talked about the ABC. He outlined their charter, their goals, their hopes and dreams. He talked about their latest projects, an educational outreach push to urban, underprivileged districts and a massive food drive to span over the course of three months, as well as the anti SuperPac campaign at the end of the month. He explained their structure, and how each branch of the ABC had been designed to function both cohesively and independently of each other. And he spoke about the people, those in the brownstone and beyond that helped rally others to their cause.

Marius listened with wide eyes and an awed expression. Every once in a while he would nod excitedly, and even offered a few suggestions as Enjolras detailed their projects. After the first few he was even meeting Enjolras' eyes when he did it. Once his shyness was broken through Marius was proving to be a smart, quick study with a mind full of new ideas.

The recruiter in Enjolras smelled blood in the water.

They spoke well into the night and until dawn had just begun to break over the horizon. But he had no desire to stop because for the first time in a long while he felt truly awake as he simultaneously debated and taught. It was only when Grantaire stumbled downstairs from his attic studio did they realize just how long they had been in the kitchen, glasses dry and cookies replaced by crumbles.

"Bed, now," Grantaire ordered them both firmly. Enjolras thought he had no room to talk with the dark circles under his eyes and the slight tremor lack of sleep had given his hands, but he went all the same, gently pushing Marius down the hall towards Courfeyrac's room as he did.

"You need a shower," he told Grantaire as the other herded him towards their own room. He smelled of paint brush cleaner, acrylic, and wine, and the sharp scents attacked Enjolras' nose mercilessly. Grantaire made sure to hug him close and place filthy, sloppy kisses over his face in retaliation but headed toward the bathroom nonetheless, stripping off his clothes along the way. Enjolras couldn't say he was disappointed in the view.

After he was sure he heard the water running, Enjolras popped open his laptop and forwarded Felix's email to Lamarque.

\*

"Lamarque, I have never met this man and my schedule is insane right now. I don't have time--,"

"Just talk with him," his godfather ordered. "He may be able to help with Felix being a nightmare."

"Felix may be a thieving bastard--,"

"Enjolras!"

"But the man doesn't have a leg to stand on. My mother left me everything, and alimony or no he has no right to it."

"But he can drag you through court for the next five years over it, at which point there won't be much of an inheritance left. Javert is an old friend of your mother's, and he wants to help."

"I've never met him," Enjolras reiterated, and he had known all of his mother's friends.

"Not everyone keeps their friends as close as you do," Lamarque defended. "But I wouldn't suggest it if I didn't trust him to take care of you."

Enjolras scowled into Bahorel's phone, but he knew Lamarque was right. "Alright. Where am I meeting him?"

And that was how he found himself at a local hole-in-the-wall nursing a stiff cup of coffee and waiting. It was his sixth cup of the day, so the caffeine had started to make the edges of his vision both fuzzy and extremely clear at the same time, and he felt a rush every time he

turned his head too quickly. Or maybe that was the sleep deprivation. His fingers itched for his phone, but their replacements wouldn't come in for another week.

A shadow fell over his table, and a slender, clear-eyed man sat down across from him.

"Javert," the man introduced himself.

Grantaire always joked that Enjolras was made from marble, but it was Javert's features that could have been carved from stone. There was graying around his temples and the very air around him seemed to command silence and obedience. With how formal and clean cut the man kept himself, Enjolras was suddenly reminded of how sloppy he currently felt by comparison. He hadn't been lying to Lamarque when he said his schedule had become insane in the days following Marius' attempted kidnapping. He was currently running off coffee, the hidden stash of M&M's in Jehan's desk drawer, and the clean change of clothes Combeferre had kept for him in the break room lockers. The last time he had slept had been for about an hour the night before, tucked into Grantaire's shoulder as they all sat in the garden and enjoyed the warm sunset.

He met the man's steely gaze straight on anyway, keeping his head up and his eyes as focused as possible. He may feel like he was being held together by spit and duct tape, but that didn't mean this man had to know. His mother never showed it when long nights with a young son and a pile of briefing threatened to swallow her whole, so he wouldn't show it when a few day's excitement robbed him of sleep.

"Enjolras. I'm told you knew my mother." No point beating around the bush.

"I did. And I had a great deal of respect for her," Javert explained. "She was a dragon among the mice that huddled together in the DA's office. I was saddened to hear of her passing."

Enjolras nodded in acknowledgement, tapping at the rim of his cup to distract his fingers. He really needed his phone back.

"I've also heard," Javert continued. "That your father has been attempting to...derail things."

Enjolras had been able to keep his face mostly neutral and disinterested, mostly out of distraction, but he couldn't help the snarl that twisted his lips at the understatement. He took control of it within moments, but he was sure Javert had seen it nonetheless. Enjolras snaked his hands into themselves to still them.

"He's suing me for my mother's estate. He believes he has more of a right to it than I do." There was no bitterness in his tone, but it was a near thing. And admitting it out loud seemed to bring the reality of it all crashing down on him. He and Felix had never been close, but the idea that his father wanted to sue him for a line of zeros in his bank account was near nauseating.

"So I'm given to understand." Javert's posture was painfully straight. Enjolras couldn't help but wonder if this was what Grantaire saw when he looked at him. "I asked Lamarque if I could speak with you, because I believe there are things you need to know. However, I want

to warn you first, because while it will give you the ammunition you need against him, it will mean learning things no child should know about their parent."

That was ominous. But Enjolras had burned his bridges with Felix years ago. There wasn't much that could make it worst. Puzzled, and slightly curious, he signaled for Javert to continue.

"I met your mother when she was working her way up in the DA's office. I had just passed the detective's test and we ended up on many of the same cases together. In all her time there, she never cut corners or refused to be compromised. She was a stalwart believer in the law and what it stood for, and could always be trusted to uphold it. And she had my external respect for it."

There was a level of devotion in Javert's voice that made Enjolras wonder if, in another life, this man replaced Felix. His mother had never taken another partner after her divorce, too preoccupied with him and her work, but he had always wondered if part of it was due to heartbreak. Not that he thought Felix was worth it, but maybe she had seen something he couldn't.

"You knew her well," Enjolras settled on.

"We were close, for a time. But I let some obsessions come between us, and by the time I realized my mistake we drifted apart..."

"When I knew him, Felix was an associate at one of the more prestigious law firms in the city. When your mother and he would go against each other in the courtroom, the wheels of justice themselves stopped to watch. No matter their flaws, they both were amazing at what they did.

"But, outside the courthouse, your father had a great many transgressions to his name. Transgressions that had reached me through various means and for various motives. I kept silent about them out of respect for your mother and a misguided assumption that his personal life had no bearing on his professional one.

"I see now that reasoning was flawed. There are many places to start, but I think the best one would be with a woman named Fantine..."

\*

Voices were yelling downstairs, clearly upset. Enjolras was out of bed and struggling into the first clothes he could grab before he was even fully conscious. Dawn was just barely breaking through his window, and a glance at his alarm clock made him wince. Behind him, Grantaire groaned and rolled over among the sheets, but when a loud banging echoed through the brownstone he shot up, scrambling for his own pants.

"The hell-,"

"Downstairs," Enjolras told him as he raced out the door.

The stairs were nothing more than a mild inconvenience, and he passed Musichetta and Joly stumbling out of their room, both wet from a shower and struggling into whatever clothes they could grab. When he got to the main floor he found Jehan and Eponine flanking a both terrified and extremely angry looking Marius in the threshold of the front door. Combeferre, barely awake, appeared behind him on the stairs, looking puzzled. Outside, Bahorel, Courfeyrac, and Bossuet were creating a shield at the front gate, keeping at bay a set of large and burly suits while a slick black sedan parked hazardously on the curb. Even in their sleep clothes, the three of them were doing a spectacular job of looking formidable in the face of uniformed thuggery. Thankfully it hadn't come to blows yet, though there was a nasty dent in the gate, much to Enjolras' ire.

But what really caught his attention was Feuilly, sitting alone on the front stoop with his shoulders relaxed and eyes fiercely intent. Always an earlier riser, he looked wide awake in dirt covered jeans and a battered, threadbare shirt while the rest of them were still half sleep and in various states of undress. He was casually passing one of the gardening picks back and forth between his gloved hands as he watched the argument play out before him. Concern instantly flared up in Enjolras, and he made sure to broadcast his presence as he eased down beside the redhead, touching his shoulder in both a reassurance and a warning.

After a moment, he felt Grantaire settle in next to him, legs stretched out and elbows braced on the steps behind him. A warm hand settled on the small of his back as he rubbed his thumb lightly into the slim patch of skin the edge of his shirt revealed, a subtle touch amid the yelling that Enjolras found himself thankful for. It felt amazing.

"Feuilly," he muttered, letting the question seep into his voice.

"They showed up about ten minutes ago. Marius' grandfather is in the car. They tried to kick the gate in." Though his tone was neutral, the twist of his lips showed his smugness. After a lobbyist group lackie had thrown bricks through their front windows two years ago, he and Bahorel had completely overhauled the security of the brownstone. The dented gate, for instance, was steel lined with deadbolt locks and reinforced hinges. They had wanted to electrify it as well, but Enjolras had put his foot down on that score.

"They were just going to barge in and drag him out," There was the fury Enjolras had been expecting, leaking its way into Feuilly's voice like oil across water.

"We're not going to let that happen," he cut in, voice firm. Feuilly tended to spiral out of control in violent ways if not brought up short, and quickly. Casting his eyes out, he kicked his tired brain into overdrive as half formed ideas were suddenly called upon to become game plans. His fingers absentmindedly tapped at the concrete step as if his phone's screen was between him and the cold ground.

Beside him, Grantaire snorted in amused ambivalence and pressed a kiss into his shoulder.

"Do we have enough room in our budget for another salary?" Enjolras asked, drawing Feuilly's attention away from current events. He knew they did, Feuilly had always been able to work wonders for their finances, but he wanted the redhead's mind on something else besides the scaming drama.

"Yeah," Feuilly replied after a moment, swallowing hard and jerking his eyes away to concentrate on Enjolras. "We'd have to suspend a few early stage projects to do it this quickly, but we're no where near the size of Anton and the 2nd North branch. We could afford expanding a bit."

"We've got nine projects in the early stages. I'd say we suspend the voter registration push, the NRA lobbyist scam, and the book drive."

"If we suspend the book drive-,"

"Marius!" The sedan's window had begun rolling slowly down as an older man yelled out. "Stop this foolishness and come home now!"

"Yes," Courfeyrac sneered. "Because obviously he's safe with you." Enjolras knew he was thinking about the vivid bruises that still stood in stark contrast against Marius' skin, just as he himself was.

"The aide responsible for the inconvenience at the gala has been taken care of," Gillenormand responded tonelessly. Unbidden, Enjolras' imagination conjured images of cement shoes and river sides. He allowed it to wonder because it was better than him focusing on this man classifying his grandson's kidnapping attempt as an inconvenience.

"I don't want to go back," Marius replied, quiet but steady. His eyes didn't rise above his feet but he stayed strong all the same. Enjolras was oddly proud of him. Beside him, Eponine bumped their shoulders together encouragingly, and smiled when he glanced at her.

"Now, Marius!"

"Marius," Enjolras said, half turning in his spot. He made sure to keep his voice kind, yet undeniable as opposed to Gillenormand's demanding shriek. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

Enjolras turned back as Courfeyrac and Bossuet jumped on that, arguing age of consent and kidnapping charges with the Senator's goons. Bahorel kept quiet, but the large shadow he cast kept the more hot tempered lackies in line as the other two proceeded to show just how much they had earned their law degrees. Gillenormand turned a face full of icy fury on Enjolras, who met it with calm eyes and a gracious smile. Watching the man's face twist up was the most satisfying thing he had seen all week.

Eventually, after many more threats and demands, the curious nosing from their neighbors forced Gillenormand's thugs back into the sedan empty-handed.

"Eponine," he called as he watched it pull away. "Call Gavroche and tell him to prep the office first thing--we may have to deal with a raid later on today."

Once they were all back inside and huddled in the living room, he had Combeferre draw up one of their employment contracts and within minutes Marius was the newest member of the ABC. With financial freedom and a roof over his head, he could start living life out from

under his grandfather's thumb. As the others began piling into the kitchen with thoughts of celebratory coffee and breakfast, Enjolras stayed curled up on the sofa and willed his mind to stop its insane whirling. A glance at the clock told him he had only managed about four hours of sleep, which wasn't near enough to make up for all he had lost over the past month, let alone the debt he incurred while his mother had been in the hospital. He had hoped after yesterday...

God, yesterday.

Javert had spoken to him for hours. Enjolras would have taken notes but he was fairly sure their entire conversation was burned deep into his brain. He had indeed given Enjolras more than enough ammunition to keep Felix at bay forever, if not completely destroy his life, but his mind kept cycling back to her.

Cosette Fauchelevent. He had a sister. He couldn't help but wonder about her: Did she know about him? Did they look alike? Did she begrudge him for having Felix in his life and not hers? Not that he much wanted the man anywhere near him, especially now. Did she even know about Felix, or did she dream of a fantasy father who would love her, and cherish her, and protect her from the world? He hoped it wasn't the last one, because all it would get her was bitter disappointment.

Should he reach out to her? He had asked himself that probably a hundred times now. Only every time he asked, his mind sputtered and coughed and could give him no answer. And for the first time in his life, Enjolras had no idea what to do.

\*

Grantaire wanted a drink. It wasn't even 8 am, his wake up call had included suited up goons and self-entitled old men instead of a warm, naked, and rested Enjolras, and now he had to sit and watch as his Apollo once again got a look on his face that said sleep wouldn't be coming anytime soon. He had been seeing a lot of that look lately and, as gorgeous as Enjolras was at any point of the day, he was thoroughly sick of it.

But he wouldn't get that drink. Not because anyone would stop him (they wouldn't) but because there was something he wanted even more than a drink right now. So instead he accepted the coffee Combeferre handed him and sat back to wait.

And if Enjolras worked up the nerve to tell him what was bothering him so much, all the better.

For all Enjolras' temper and relentless drive, Grantaire had always loved him from the first, even if it had taken a while for him to admit that's what it was. And in that love, he had found a near endless supply of patience because Enjolras was nothing if not stubborn. Even now, with his Apollo lost in thought miles away, Grantaire found he was content to drink the bitter coffee, grab his sketch book from the table, and begin an easy outline of the blonde's frame, trying to capture the graceful movement he managed to unconsciously emit. It probably wouldn't turn out to be much, but Grantaire had always liked live model drawing. His art teachers had hammered it into him relentlessly; how the body holds weight, how a human

naturally stands, how the the head, torso, and weight bearing leg all worked in tandem. He could recite those lessons in his sleep for all they were embedded in his brain.

Grantaire had never wanted much out of life. For the longest time, his sketches and drawings were the only thing that made getting out of bed worth the effort. The ABC, politics, changing the world and all that crap, he could take it or leave it. Hell, he had only joined up because Courfeyrac and Eponine wouldn't shut up about it and his elsie had been empty for over a year. Not amount of alcohol could bring ideas back to his fingers, and it was slowly driving him insane. He had burned many of his failures during that time out of sheer frustration with the world. So Courfeyrac had forced him into a suit, got him the interview, and made sure he was semi coherent through all of it. He was pretty sure the only reason he had been hired was because of his connections between the various curators and art hungry fat cats around town. Breanne had been near salivating at his resume.

But then he had been transferred to the 1st North branch (probably Courfeyrac pulling strings) headed by a blond with stormy blue eyes and a voice like fire who couldn't care less about his tortured soul.

Enjolras had made it clear from the onset that his standards were high and Grantaire's failure to met them were none of his concern. And Enjolras' complete dedication to his work had galled relentlessly him in turn. What was the point of trying so hard to fix a system that was hell bent on being broken? It would just crack again the minute he turned his back. But Enjolras refused to quit and seemed almost incapable of backing down. So Grantaire's day was filled with snarky comments and cynicism and during the nights his canvases became full of lightening storms and fields of fire, all barley contained in pale skin and blond curls. Every time he finished one (and there were dozens), he'd watch it dry as he drowned bottle after bottle in an attempt to get rid of the torrent of feelings he didn't understand in his chest.

Six months in, not even the alcohol could camouflage what he was finally willing to admit was affection, lust, and maybe even something more.

So he started working--not hard, or even notably well, but he started nonetheless. And amazingly enough, even the slightest bit of effort on his part brought a smile to Enjolras' face. That was the incredible part, he later marveled as he painted. Enjolras seemed happy with any little thing he managed, as long as he tried. And the more he tried, the warmer Enjolras became in turn, smiling and touching where Grantaire had come to expect insults and dismissal. To Enjolras, he was actually worth something. That was...well, the feelings he was working very hard not to acknowledge were only growing.

But Grantaire knew his drinking was a problem for Enjolras. No matter the certainly of something growing between them, he knew Enjolras' logical brain couldn't come up with a rational for it, so instead the blond had ignored it and never responded to his subtle overtures. Grantaire had been much more attached to the bottle back then, so he told himself that the brutal twisting in his chest was merely a call for more oil paint and vodka.

And that pattern would have continued on for years until one night, when Musichetta had been making his drinks especially weak despite his protests and Enjolras had been high off the adrenaline of an extremely sucessful campaign, one touch had lead to another. Soon, he had Enjolras up against the wall while he pulled every wicked trick he knew on the blond's

body and the bed had been right down the hall, all they had to do was stumble a few steps and fall through a door onto the mattress. Enjolras' touches had been hesitant and inexperienced, and he remembered realizing with a deep rush that he was probably the first person to ever see their great marble god like this. And divine he was because Grantaire would swear before all and sundry he saw heaven in Enjolras' wide blue eyes that night.

The next morning, Grantaire had woken up beside his still sleeping Apollo, and in that moment his whole world changed. After just one moment of staring into Enjolras' beautiful, relaxed features, he realized there was nothing more in life he wanted but to do this, every morning. And for that to happen things needed to change.

He hadn't realized how much he had come to rely on the bottle until he started trying to put it down. Quitting completely proved almost immediately to be impossible. He had decided instead to limit his drinking only to when he was painting, and in the process spent a lot of time painting in that first month; he couldn't say he created anything spectacular during that time but Enjolras had been working through his own feelings with a near constant flow of work so it had balanced out. And slowly, oftentimes painfully, he cut it out of his life like bad spots out of an onion. It took more self control than he ever thought he possessed, but he had someone to work towards. Someone who believed he was worth it.

He still lost his mind when an artist's high overtook him. He still had times when he was constantly running on paint fumes and whatever passed for liquor in the house, but he never saw Enjolras' face wrinkle in distaste after kissing him or shy away from his touches, and it had felt like the sun had finally dawned in his dark little world.

There were days, though. Days where his annoyance at Enjolras' oblivious disregard for anything beyond the cause grated on him like sandpaper. Days where his tongue could just taste the faint bite of a shot of whiskey. Days where he hid all day in his attic studio for an excuse to sling back just one more glass of wine. He was coming to hate those days with a passion.

Musichetta, his rock, his bartender, and the bane of his existence, had just barely held back laughter at his plight.

"Believe it or not, that's a good thing," she told him over lunch one day. "People don't like doing things they hate."

"I hate talking with you."

"My spirit animal is an octopus--you'll never escape me."

In retaliation, Grantaire had taken that as an excuse to hunt down every octopus themed trinket and article of clothing he could find. Feeling devious, he enlisted Eponine and Courfeyrac in his plots as well, and by the time they were done her room had been filled to the brim with the eight-legged creatures. He had even done a small watercolor of one entwined around a rock in inky purples and blues and hung it over her bed. Bossuet had not been amused by that one.

Grantaire didn't care about much: give him an endless supply of paint, a blank surface, and Enjolras and the rest of the world could burn for all he cared. But life seemed to require more from him, and if that was what his Apollo needed, then he would gladly give all he had and more. And what his golden god needed now was support. So Grantaire would give it, freely and with love, and count the breaths until Enjolras finally trusted him with what he was keeping so very deeply hidden.

# Cosette

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was dark, and Javert was freezing.

It may have been that insomnia had finally eaten away at his brain, but he couldn't help but wonder if he should call Gabrielle; a DA, even one from another state, tended to pull weight that he no longer possessed. But he dismissed the idea almost as quickly as it surfaced. Cheating the system was something Valjean would do, and no matter his circumstances Javert could always take comfort in lines not crossed.

Gabrielle would only laugh and chide him anyway. The woman had a contrary sense of humor, and she had been harassing him to give up his foolish chase for years now. He only wished he had the sense to listen to her. Now, locked away in a small, dank holding cell with no badge and no direction, did he see the sense in her words. Suddenly, everything he believed in seemed so fragile and meaningless.

His stomach rumbled, but he stubbornly shoved his hunger away. He wasn't sure when the last time he ate had been, but he would silently bare it as punishment for his insolence.

There were voices coming from the end of the holding cell hall, and one of them was soul-wrenchingly familiar. Could the man not resist rubbing just a little more salt into his gaping wounds? Javert didn't glance up as the cell door was opened, ignoring it in a juvenile attempt at denial.

For the longest time, there was only silence. Then, with a cautionary air, a warm presence settled into the mattress next to him.

"I told you not to try and follow me. I've told you that a lot, actually."

"Did you really think I'd let it go?"

"I had hoped. But you're stubborn." There was no admonishment in Valjean's tone, only a wiry affection. Javert refused to look at the man, keeping his eyes on the concrete floor while his tongue untwisted.

"I'm not the only one after you," he warned after a time.

"You are, actually."

Javert turned to stare at Valjean with startled eyes. That couldn't be right, not after everything he had made off with. "I know the men who were after you. They don't give up."

"I wouldn't know a thing about that," Valjean replied, not rising to the bait. "But I do know you're the only one chasing my shadow now. Don't you think it's time to give up the chase?"

Javert refused to believe it. "You stole more than a few fortunes from some very unpleasant people and just disappeared off the face of the earth. They'll never let you survive."

"You told me that ten years ago. And yet here we are, only you and I."

"And I still have a job to do. You should be in this cell, not me."

"You don't have a badge anymore. Did you really think arresting me without proof or credentials would have ended any other way?" Valjean's voice was gentle, but that simple fact stung like nothing else he had ever experienced. He buried his face in his hands in a desperate attempt to escape this hell for even a moment.

And the truly horrible part was that Valjean was right. Javert's obsession had brought him only darkness and tragedy, and now he was paying his penance. To be locked up while this man ran free and held unaccountable. He could think of nothing worse.

"Am I really worth this obsession?" Valjean asked. "Can you show me one person I ever hurt with my actions?"

"Fantine." It was an extremely low blow, but Javert was so badly hurting and it made him want to hurt the other in turn. However, the moment the words left his mouth, he instantly felt a wave of shame crash not him. Valjean had done more for Fantine than anyone else would have.

"I'm sorry-,"

"Fantine died of a broken heart and no will to live, which will probably haunt me until the day I die," Valjean whispered, and while there was pain in his voice, there was also a deep, unabated strength. "I may have been able to save her if..."

"Dwelling on it only makes it worse," Javert offered after a long breath.

"Perhaps."

A steady, loving hand brushed over his forehead where it peeked out above his hands, as if its blessing could banish his shame. A Heresy's bar and a bottle of water were set down next to him.

"Eat," Valjean gently ordered. "I'll see to your bail."

Protests bubbled up in Javert's throat. There was no way he'd allow charity from this man. But for whatever reason, the words couldn't fight past his suddenly heavy tongue and frozen lips. And by the time he had forced life back into them, Valjean had already clasped a comforting hand to his shoulder and was on his way, the cell door clanging shut behind him.

Javert barely held back the painful snarl that tried to twist up his lips. Embarrassment and humiliation warred in his mind, causing him near physical pain. He wasn't sure what he had done to deserve this, but God above this had to be punishment for some transgression or other. If there was any justice left in the world he would be left here to rot, forgotten.

But when warm and loving hands gripped him tight and raised him as if he were a child, he allowed it. And when he was tucked into a solid frame, all he could hear was the rhythmic beating of Valjean's heart. He let that lure him away from dark thoughts as he was led into the light.

\*

Her papa never told her, but Cosette was a smart girl and she was good at puzzles. She knew there was a reason they never stayed in one place for longer than a year. A reason money was never a concern for them despite the poor economy. A reason why her papa constantly drilled her on their escape protocols. She may not know everything, but she knew running when she lived it.

Then there was the shadow man, who seemed to appear out of no where when they stayed in one place for longer than a year. Over time, Cosette had come to associate that man with running again. Whenever he appeared, they would be off to a new city and a new life within days, if not hours.

"His name is Javert," her father confessed one night when she pressed him on it. "He's a shadow with an obsession."

"You?"

Her papa brushed her bangs away lovingly, smiling. "You don't need to be concerned about that, my darling. You'll always be safe."

Cosette knew that, but it didn't stop her from being concerned for him. Whenever the shadow man would appear, her papa would stress and shake. She didn't have to be an adult to see that he was scared of the man.

However, when she was thirteen, someone decided to rewrite the rules.

One night, her papa called her to say he would be home late. Cosette made dinner as usual anyway- simple spaghetti with a thick, meaty sauce- and set his portion aside in the oven to keep it warm. She then proceeded to spent the night obsessively monitoring the news, fully expecting to see her papa's face plastered all over it, even if she didn't know for what. But there was nothing on television past the latest town hall report, and around midnight the door finally cracked open. Her papa trudged in the front door, leading an exhausted, defeated looking shadow by the hand behind him.

"He'll be staying with us for a while," Papa had explained when she had questioned him later as the shadow man devoured the leftover spaghetti. "He needs some stability right now."

Cosette couldn't say she was completely surprised. Her father would rescue every animal in the local shelter if he could manage it and took home the distressed plants no one else wanted from the nursery. She adored him and his large, forgiving heart, but the shadow man- Javert, she told herself firmly--had been the maker of her worries for years now. Nonetheless, she trusted her papa, even if he was a bit of a bleeding heart.

Later, she realized her papa's definition of 'a while' seemed much longer than hers as, nearly five years later, Javert was still there. She didn't mind though, since it meant they finally, *finally* stopped moving.

\*

Cosette was in her room when Javert returned from wherever he had gone, but her door was open and sound moved through their house easily.

"You're back late," her father commented. He usually did most of his work in the living room where the light was better and he could occasionally gaze out into the immense garden in their front yard . Only Cosette knew he had spent the last few hours pretending not to monitor the driveway instead, waiting for Javert to return.

"I had an emergency in the city."

"Oh?" Her father sounded distracted. There was silence after that, but Cosette half turned in her seat to listen to the sound of their movement. Eavesdropping was a terrible practice, but what else was she to do when her papa refused to tell her anything? Now it was more of a habit than anything.

"My meeting was with Enjolras."

"I don't think I know who that is."

"Gabrielle's boy. She passed away recently and Felix is causing him problems."

There was more silence, longer this time. Cosette knew because she had bolted straight in her chair at the mention of her biological father's name and was counting the breaths until her papa spoke. She had never known much about Felix past the sad lamenting her mama would sometimes utter, and his name had been taboo in the house for years now. Ever since her mama had died, she had never allowed herself to dwell on him, too concerned with her papa and with the constant running. After they stopped, it had never really been worth a thought. But with his name hanging in the air, she was amazed at the instant hunger of her curiosity.

"I'm sorry to hear that," her papa finally muttered.

"I'd like to tell Cosette about it."

"No." Immediate, and stern. Never a good combination.

"Don't be-,"

"No."

"She deserves to know, Jean."

"What good will it bring? After what that man did to Fantine, he has no business in Cosette's life."

"Do you really think ignorance and denial is the best course of action here? She's old enough to decide that for herself, and you know it. I've already told Enjolras everything."

"Why would you do that?"

"Because he needed to know. Just as Cosette does. Hiding this from them was foolish, but I went along with it because I had no say in the decision. It was a choice Gabrielle, Fantine, you, and even Felix, got to make. But she is as much my daughter now as yours, and I say she has a right to know."

Cosette wasn't sure when she had gotten to the foot of the stairs, but when her toes touched cold linoleum she was startled to find herself outside the kitchen. Javert's words had stopped her cold. He thought her a daughter? For near the last five years, the last two in particular, she had hoped, but to hear him say it...Her heart beat a little faster at that, and a smile came unbidden to her face. It was good to hear.

She crept through the kitchen, spying her parents through the archway. Javert was standing deep in her papa's personal space, hands clenched at his side to keep them still. Her papa looked both furious and weary, which twisted her heart. He bared the burdens of the world on his shoulders, and she hated it when something about her added to that burden.

"Why did you even- Cosette." Damn, that came faster than expected. She had at least been hoping for a little more information before she was caught.

"Hi Papa. Hi Javert," she greeted, her voice sweet despite the anxiety and inquisitiveness warring within her.

Javert turned to regard her with sharp, penetrating eyes.

"Eavesdropping is unbecoming."

"But necessary, it seems. I hear you have something to tell me?" she phrased it like a question, giving them a loophole to slip through. Curiosity may be roaring deep in her soul but she never wanted to cause them pain.

Javert scrubbed roughly at his face, looking exhausted. But his eyes were clear as he studied her from between his fingers. Behind him, her papa looked ill.

"I have something to talk to you about," Javert started, and Cosette couldn't help but be amused at his formal tone. He was always so careful to lay out every little detail and confirm each statement before moving on. She nodded and sat down, tucking her skirt around her knees while he composed his thoughts.

"How much do you know about your father?" he asked.

"Papa?" She was stalling and they both knew it. Javert played along anyway.

"Felix."

Cosette let her nose wrinkle before she could stop herself. If she were to put all she knew about Felix in a box, it would contain his name, a lingering smell of disappointment, and a few wrinkled, faded Polaroids her mama had clung to for far too long. Her papa had been all she had ever needed on that front. She supposed her easy dismissal of the man who helped create her spoke to a flaw in her character, but she couldn't bring herself to care. The man wasn't even a shadow in her memories when her papa shown like the brightest sun.

Javert seemed to be aware of her feeling, if his expression was anything to go on.

"Something came up with him that you've become involved with, if indirectly. Would you like me to continue?"

"Am I going to like it?"

"Probably not."

"Tell me."

"Cosette-," her Papa took a step forward, and she felt her heart crack a bit. But she knew this conversation needed to happen. Javert was being oh so careful, treating her as if she were both glass and stone. Part of her, the young part that still clung to her dolls and dresses and sparkly toys, shied away from it. This didn't have to happen now, it whispered. She still had a few more years to live in blinded naiveté. But her older self, the one that worked and studied and bled for the things she wanted, was desperate for more.

"Tell me."

Her papa didn't look happy, but Javert proceeded take her back in time two decades, where a woman named Gabrielle, who had a voice like thunder and undeniable passion had married a beautiful bastard of a man named Felix. He didn't pull his punches; He described their marriage, their pains, their fights, and their eventual divorce with a kind of clinical detachment that suggested a volcano of emotions bubbling just below the surface, waiting to be tapped.

Then he told her about Enjolras, a boy with Felix's curls and eyes wrapped around Gabrielle's brains and conviction and a voice all his own.

When Javert came to an end, he waited with a straight back and an unreadable expression for Cosette to respond. But he had to wait a while because her mouth was as dry as the Sahara and her brain racing at high speed. A brother...

In a blink of an eye, she had made a decision.

"Where is he?"

"Cosette, this doesn't mean -,"

"Papa," Cosette interrupted with steel in her voice. "I love you. I always will." Her turned hard, terrible eyes back on Javert. "Where is he?"

\*

Cosette was fairly sure this was a very bad idea. The subway was dimly lit, odd smelling, and four stops ago someone had been raving about how the One True Savior would come with the Rapture to judge them all. How morbid. But she glanced at the flyer in her purse and her resolve was instantly strengthened. She had a goal and she was determined.

Not matter how sweetly she asked or how elegantly she manipulated, Javert had told her nothing about Enjolras past his name and general location. They needed to know of each others existence, he explained, but there would be no point in their meeting when all it would do is benefit a broken and vile man. He had even gone as far as to expressly forbid it. Her papa, always so strong and gentle, had seemed on the brink of becoming a nervous wreck at a word, so Cosette had smiled and demurred and agreed, all while her mind screamed at how much bullshit that was.

But she had a name and a location. It had taken her half a day with Google and the yellow pages for company to track him down.

Now, sitting on a grimy subway speeding toward the center of the city, Cosette had to stop and think for a moment. Javert was anything but stupid; he had to have known she wouldn't listen to him. And while his face had been set in stone, now that she thought back with a clearer head she could see his quick, dark eyes watching her and waiting.

Oh, her thought, both amused and irked. Oh you're a crafty bastard and I'm an idiot. But, with another glance at the flyer in her purse, she decided she could live with being an idiot.

A thump on her right, as well as a set of immature giggles got her attention. Two men--boys really--sat across from her, and the way their eyes constantly darted back to her told her they had more on their mind than just admiring the view. It probably wouldn't lead anywhere, but if there was one thing her papa had taught her, it was to be a practical soul at heart. She shifted in her seat, settling her purse more easily on her lap.

The next time the nearest one peeked at her, she caught his eye and smiled, wide, open, and a little too friendly for a fellow commuter. The can of pepper spray was in plain sight in her hand, but her purse hid the heavy duty MagLite in her lap. She had already turned all three of her sharp rings toward her palm; a slap from her could take an eye out. The small workmen's knife clipped to her pocket was for emergencies only, but she took comfort in its weight as she shifted her hips.

Papa believed in practicality, but Javert believed in being prepared. Cosette found she could value both lessons simultaneously. She took a deep satisfaction in the pale, sickly shade they both turned under her gaze.

Finally, her stop arrived and she disembarked with a quick scan at the nearest sign. Collard Square was only a few blocks away. Pulling out the flyer from her purse, she unfolded it with slightly trembling hands.

Most of what she had found on Enjolras had been in connection with an advocacy group called the ABC. She had tracked the group, particularly his division, obsessively after her

discovery. And when a rally to protest corporate funding in elections had appeared on their calendar, she found she couldn't resist the urge to see him in person. Javert had described him well enough, but she constantly found herself imagining him; did they share the same eyes, the same face? Did he bite his tongue when he thought, like she did? Did he have dimples when he smiled, like her? An endless barrage of questions burned themselves into her brain, demanding answers.

She had no plans to approach him. While Javert said he had told Enjolras about her, she was under no fairytale illusions. He had a life of his own, a family, a purpose. He may never even want to meet her. All she sought was a glance. Just one, she told herself, and she'd leave never to turn back.

She couldn't tell if she was lying to herself or not.

When she arrived at the square, she realized the rally was much, much bigger than she had expected. For a moment, all she could see were waves upon waves of people, signs, and shouting. She was at the edges of the crowd, and the dense pack of bodies meant she had little chance of making it further inward. This wouldn't do at all. She peered around, looking for Plan B.

Plan B turned out to be a pack of strapping young men to her right, leaning against a high, broad wall made of red brick and mortar. It was too high for anyone to conveniently climb, so the top of the wall was empty of spectators. But, as one of the men leaned over to tie his shoe, an idea occurred to her.

She took off running before she could second guess herself. She made the jump to the bench near them with no trouble at all, pacing the length of it in long, even strides. One of them saw her coming, but all he got out was a startled laugh before she jumped off the bench and planted her foot on the bent man's back. He jerked up in surprise, vaulting her much smaller frame upwards. It was a near thing, but she managed to get her hands wrapped around one of the iron lighting fixtures along the wall and scramble up until she was perched on the wide lip.

"Thank you!" she called down cheerfully, flashing her most charming smile down to them. The one she had used as a spring board looked enraged, but his companions seemed more amused than anything. One of them was laughing so hard he was on the ground, breathless. All good, then.

"Nicely done!" one of them called out, flashing her a wide grin. "Think you can do that again so I can record it?"

"It's not nearly as much fun the second time around," she hollered back. "He'd be expecting it!"

She allowed them to snap a few pictures of her anyway, even blowing a kiss or two down in reward. By the time they moved on, even her impromptu trampoline seemed in a good mood. She was rather proud of herself, all told. Glancing around her new seat, she found that the top of the wall was littered with building rubble, abandoned bricks, and even a beer can or two, all of which she collected in a small pile to clear space for herself.

With a much improved view, she cast her eye out over the massive crowd. From her vantage point, she could see that it mostly converged around a large elephant statue in the center of the square. Spiraling out from there was a riot of color that mixed and swirled about as tiny splinter groups curved around smaller landmarks. Riot police outlined the circle, the dark boarder to a beautiful picture. Pulling her phone out of her purse, Cosette snapped a few pictures and fiddled with the filters while she waited.

She had just started to debate breaking into her emergency candy stash when an almost unnatural hush fell over the crowd. Glancing up, her eyes darted around for a reason.

Then she saw him: wearing battered boots, jeans, and a bright red jacket with his blond hair (almost exactly her shade) flying around his face in disheveled curls, it was as if he were a beacon calling to her wayward ship. As she watched, Enjolras managed to climb his way up the large statue with the assistance of a worried-looking brunette who paced the base like a mother bear. Clinging to the elephant's trunk with one hand, he leaned out over the crowd, opened his mouth, his booming voice promptly filling every nook and cranny of the square.

Cosette sat frozen, absolutely enraptured. For the next hour, he spoke and she absorbed his words with every fiber of her being. She couldn't feel her body anymore, except for the goosebumps rippling over her skin. She couldn't even be sure she was breathing. He was...he was awe inspiring.

As he finished, the crowd went insane with cheers and cries. They loved him, she realized. And they weren't the only ones. She had just witnessed her brother bring to life thousands of people to one cause, one purpose with his ideas and his passion. Even this far away, she could tell he truly believed every word he spoke. And his belief sparked something in her that demanded she do her absolute best to match it with everything she had. Anything less would be a complete disrespect of everything she had just witnessed.

Her eyes were wet. She hadn't realized it over the roar of the crowd. Along the edges of the rally, the riot police stood on high alert.

She didn't see who threw it, but a bottle suddenly exploded on the statue near Enjolras' face. He jerked away from the spitting glass, grasping desperately to the trunk as gravity threatening to do its work on him. Cosette couldn't help but scream as he fought for his grip, throwing her voice out as if it could catch him, or soften the blow. In the next moment, the worried brunette who had been prowling around Enjolras' feet had managed to stretch far enough up, grabbed his wrist, and ripped him sideways into his arms before his balance was completely thrown. Despite her frantic searching, she lost track of him amid the bodies surging forward after that.

The crowd was screaming for a different reason now as the mood around her changed in an instant. Never attack an icon before a mob, she heard Javert's voice say in the back of her mind. He had always tested out his academy lessons on her, and some of it had been bound to stick. People don't react well when their icons are attacked.

Javert seemed to have a talent for understatement, she thought as the crowd exploded below her feet.

Her isolated perch was high enough away from the crowd for the violent wave of bodies to simply sweep away under her, but the objects being thrown proved a dangerous hazard. She hurriedly laid flat as a piece of debris barely missed her, pressing her face to the sun-hot stone below her.

She could hear things though. The sounds of the riot were made up of screams, pounding feet, and chaotic destruction. Something made of glass shattered near her head, and she felt metal graze her calf. Terror gripped her heart as she realized just how exposed she was, all alone on her towering roost. If anyone was so inclined, she could be picked off easily with a large enough rock or metal scrap. Curling up, she tried to make herself as small as possible.

She wasn't sure how she heard them above the din, or why she turned toward them, but the words seemed to float to her ears like driftwood in a river.

"There he is! Grab him before he gets back to the others!"

"It's insanity out there! If anyone sees us-,"

"You want to go back and tell Gillenormand we couldn't grab him after all this!"

"Wait for him to get closer, you idiots. We won't be able to chase him through all this."

That got her attention. Fear momentarily forgotten, Cosette slowly crawled forward until she was peeking over the far corner of the wall, searching out the source of the voices. In the alley below her, three thugs hovered in the shadows with their eyes locked on a target past her line of sight. Watching them, she was reminded of a pack of hyenas waiting to strike and devour their pray.

Everything in the next few moments happened so quickly that Cosette was able to remember little of it later. She couldn't be sure how she knew the young man who appeared along the edge of the crowd was their target, or where he had come from. All she could recall was the dreadful certainty of impending violence upon him. As the riot pushed him closer, the first thug struck like a spider on a fly.

Cosette's hands were around her heavy MagLite before she even realized she had pulled it from her purse. She had never had the best aim, but she could hit the broad side of a barn when needed, and the hefty flashlight clocked the first thug just as his hands wrapped around the young man's arm. The thug went down instantly.

As the second and third sprang out from the alley, she grabbed the first thing she could get her hands on, which turned out to be a broken bottle tossed her way earlier. She missed them both this time but the impact of glass on concrete made them flinch enough for the young man to realize he was under attack and pull away.

"Up here!" Cosette screamed out. "Come this way!"

The young man didn't even hesitate, just ran to her. The two thugs had recovered, but Cosette still had a collection of rocks and bricks and beer cans at her disposal, and she was even able to pelt one of them in the eye as they tried to advance.

The young man had gotten to the wall, but its height thwarted him just as it had her earlier. With no makeshift launchpad, he was left trying to get a foothold against the smooth brick. She threw one last stone, hoping to keep the thugs away long enough to relax her defense and swooped down to stretch out her hand. Cool fingers wrapped around her wrist and she pulled with everything she had.

It was always harder to pull someone up than to drag them down. She remembered an addiction and recovery seminar she had taken that detailed exactly why that was, but all she could recall now was that her odds of getting him up were slim. But the adrenaline, fear, and determination coursing through her veins negated the strain in her shoulder and the numbness in her fingers. She gripped his wrist with her free hand and dug her nails in, ignoring of the blood that she most likely drew.

She still didn't have the strength to get him all the way up, but she was at least able to haul him far enough to wrap his hands around the iron fixtures directly below her. With his grip secure, he was able to drag himself upward and out of harm's way while she hurled a few more stones at the thugs that were biting at his heels. Once he had gotten his elbow over the lip of the wall, she grabbed his shirt and drug him the rest of the way, heedless of the scraps and bruises she was probably giving him in the process.

"Thank you," he gasped as he knelt shaking next to her. She rubbed his back soothingly, muttering nonsense assurances as he clung to her hand. Then his head came up and Cosette abruptly found her heart somewhere in the vicinity of her throat as a face full of adorable freckles stared back at her through wide, clear blue eyes. He had full lips that begged a kiss and wild brown hair that she immediately wanted to bury her fingers into; Cosette knew she had never felt this way about someone. Not her papa, or Javert, or even Bernard DeLurant, who's body she had spent a very pleasant evening exploring on prom night.

"No problem," she said weakly as the thugs shouted below them. She eased him away from the edge as the they circled; they hadn't started throwing things in retaliation yet, so they must want to take him unhurt. It was a shame Cosette wasn't working under the same restrictions. She would badly want to kill them if she wasn't so enraptured with the equally stunned look on the young man's face. His gaze bore into her with an intensity that burned and made her soul sing.

"I'm Marius."

"Cosette."

One of the thugs down below screamed a very nasty word at her, but before she could respond in kind Marius had taken up one of the larger stones from her collection and thrown it down with much more accuracy than she had displayed. The loud mouthed thug reeled back, sporting a bloody gash over his eye and she could see the bruising even from their tall vantage point. Not to be shown up, she wrapped her hands around another stone but the riot police had begun moving in at that point, dispelling the chaos around them with shields and batons aplenty. The thugs melted into the remaining crowd, and Cosette drew Marius far enough away from the edge to escape notice, curling them together to hide beneath the lip of the wall.

They stayed entangled together for what felt like hours, each taking shelter in the other as below them the world seemed to fall apart.

"Are you alright?" he asked into her hair. She felt her heart beat faster at the care and unbidden concern in his voice. Surely he could feel it too, pressed as close as he was.

"Yes," she whispered back, hugging him tightly. But when he winced under her, she remembered her less than gentle handling as she had yanked him up the wall. "Sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You could never hurt me," he instantly replied, pulling her impossibly closer. Cosette had never felt so secure in all her life.

"Are you bleeding anywhere?" she persisted, because she was sure she could see traces of pain in the lines of his face.

"I don't think so."

She wasn't satisfied with that answer and drew back far enough to run her hands over his body. She was determined to keep her touch clinical, if only to fend off the growing panic at the thought of him in pain. Thankfully, while her search revealed a myriad of bruises, particularly along his torso and arms, the only blood she found was from a light graze on his biceps that was already starting to scab over and the gashes her nails had left on his wrist. She reached out to snag her purse from where it rested a few feet away, smiling as Marius refused to let her waist go. Making sure to stay low, she rummaged through its contents as she drew back and smiled when she came across the antibacterial gel her papa always threw in her purses. Bless him.

She smothered Marius' cuts liberally with the gel, because God only knew what they were laying in and she'd be damned if she let him get infected. Now that she had him, she was never letting him go. She was sure of that. Once she finished, he snatched the gel from her and gently applied it to the cuts and scraps she hadn't realized she had accumulated during her defense of him. He inspected the rest of her with the same deliberate, loving care, and she felt her heart wrap itself irreversibly around him.

She had no idea what was happening to her. From her experience, love like this took time and caution. It had with her papa and Javert, after all. Love at first sight only happened in movies. But...she didn't even know Marius' last name, or even who he was, but she knew she loved him, unconditionally and devoutly. Of that she had no doubt. She thought that revelation would scare her, but all it did was bring her a serene sort of comfort, because she could see her exact thoughts reflected back to her in his eyes.

The ground below them had long been silent when they finally decided to pop the bubble they had surrounded themselves in. The only evidence of the multitude of people that had been in attendance earlier was the overflowed trashcans and the footprints in the dirt. The square, which had been so teeming with life less than an hour ago, was now as silent as the placid sea.

Marius eased himself down the wall first, using Cosette's outstretched hand and the iron fixtures to lower himself safely to the ground. Once his feet met concrete, she was able to follow him by stepping down into his linked hands. He didn't release her until she was steady on, and even then it was only to instead tentatively take her hand. She smiled at him, entwining his fingers with her own.

"Are you hungry? We could go--or maybe a movie, that's what people do, right? Or we can just keep walking--,"

Cosette was willing to do anything in the world if it kept her next to Marius. Resting her head on his shoulder, she allowed him pick their direction--though she suspected that he was paying as much attention to it as she was. They ambled down street after street, caught up in each others presence to the point of complete isolation from the rest of the world.

Eventually though, her phone shouted for her attention. Nearly growling in frustration, she dug it out of her purse to see her papa's name flash across the screen. Then she noticed the time. Uh oh.

Her expression was enough to tell Marius what was going to happen next. She couldn't tell if she was more elated or worried when his face dropped almost to his feet, clearly broadcasting his disappointment. She never wanted to see that look on his face, but she was contradictory thrilled she could put it there.

"Here." She thrust her phone into his hands, maneuvering him into putting his information into her address book. She took it as an excuse to snap a few pictures of him to fill out the contact's photo. And if she took more than she needed, well, Marius definitely wasn't calling her on it.

"Let me get--oh no," Marius muttered suddenly, his hands flapping around his pockets. Cosette thought it was adorable. "I forgot I turned it on silent once he started speaking--,"

She took the phone the moment he produced it. "Twenty-four missed messages?" An odd possessiveness flared within her, startling her with its intensity.

"My co workers are a bit excessive. I'm pretty sure they think I'm a sheep in constant need of herding."

Cosette could certainly see that. But while relief was a soothing balm over her unruly emotions, it didn't completely dismiss them. He looked over her shoulder as she tapped in her own information, only smiling at her when she moved over into his messages. Most of them were from someone named Courfeyrac, demanding to know where he was and threatening to inject him with a pet tracker. A few from an Eponine worriedly wondering where he was. One from someone named Feuilly telling Marius that if he didn't hear from him within the hour, he'd come looking for him and by God, he'd find him--Cosette could feel the intimidation and cold competence in those words seeping through the small screen. Then she froze as a familiar name scrolled by.

"Where do you work?"

"At the 1st North branch of the ABC. I actually just started."

Cosette should have felt terror at that revelation. It was there somewhere in the depths of her subconscious, knocking cautiously at her brain. But she dared not let a single detail of it penetrate her mind. She suppressed the building turmoil, hoping beyond reason to just entomb this all away and spend the rest of her life walking with him. Having him this close to her meant the world could do no wrong.

However, time had other plans in mind. Marius' subway stop came up first, though he missed his train since they refused to leave each other when the time came, heads instead pressed together as they spoke. Practically won out in the end though, and they had to part ways or stay the night in the station. Cosette managed to wrangle a kiss and the promise of a second meeting out of him before finally releasing back him to the world. As she watched him descend the subway steps (stopping every few feet to glance back at her) she finally felt the panic set in.

The subway stop she needed was a few blocks away, but she had to hide in a side alley before she even managed to leave Marius' station. It was becoming too much, the build up of the day slamming into her brain and frying her emotions. She found herself laughing at the insanity of it all, and she was breathless and crying by the time she realized it. She slid down the side of the wall, trying desperately to catch her breath.

She had sworn to herself she would never approach Enjolras, but not a soul on earth was going to keep her from Marius.

\*

"My chief told me I was chained to my desk for the rest of the week for disappearing on them," Marius told her the next day over the phone. "But you want to do something this weekend?"

"I'd love to," Cosette's treacherous mouth replied.

\*

Cosette tugged at her hair, not nearly as pleased with it knotted in the back of her head as she thought she would be. She could add a pin or two so it distracted from the harsh lines, but she didn't like how anything looked with her favorite white summer dress. Maybe it was too much; did a pair of jeans and a nice top look better? The pink flats she had well broken-in felt oddly uncomfortable, making her debate if her converse sneakers weren't a smarter option. She supposed she could wear her hair down, but it was a frazzled mess right now with all the fussing she had put it through. She sighed as she tossed the pins back onto the counter, unaccustomed to finding her appearance this frustrating.

"Having difficulties?" came a voice from the hall. Javert was at the bathroom door, leaning against the jam and pinning her with inquiring eyes.

"Just being indecisive," she admitted. There was no other word for it.

"You look fine."

"You're not an impartial opinion. And I'm aiming for something a little over 'fine'."

"Why are you so concerned about it?"

"Are you asking as my father or as Papa's spy?" Javert averted his eyes, his face doing its level best not to turn a bright shade of red. Cosette couldn't tell if it was from the accusation or her use of the word 'father', which she had been deliberately throwing into as many conversations as possible over the past week. And she wouldn't stop anytime soon; he had finally accepted his place in their lives and she had no plans in letting him worm away from her. Repetition was key was Javert.

Now if only she could be as sure in her grip on Marius. Whenever she thought of her gentle angel, her stomach flip-flopped inside her.

"Probably both," Javert decided after a moment.

"It's a date." She had already told them both this, but was entirely unsurprised at having to repeat herself. "We're having lunch, we're getting to know each other, and my phone will be on at all times, so feel free to track the GSP signal at your leisure."

"Don't think we won't. And where did you meet him again?"

Atop a brick wall while escaping a riot that erupted because the long lost half-brother you faux forbid me to track down brought us all to tears and then nearly got himself killed. "At that adorable coffee shop down on 3rd. They have the cutest little scones there, I'm not sure if you've tried them. Their pumpkin one in particular--."

"Enough," Javert stopped her rambling with a quick word, just as she knew he would. He was never one to listen to unnecessary drivel. Cosette couldn't help but smile into the mirror as she dabbed on her pale lipstick, and Javert shot her an unamused look. "Fine, I'll stop prying. Be smart."

"I'll take the taser if you want me too." And she would. There was a difference between tweaking her overprotective parents' noses and disregarding their concerns for her safety.

"Only if you want to. Though Jean wants you to take an armed escort, and even then he still won't be happy about it."

Cosette had only ever thought it was adorable her papa thought he got to have an opinion on her romantic partners.

"You'll just have to piece his broken heart back together once I'm gone," she commanded as she hooked her gold and pearl earrings in. After a second inspection, she was actually much happier with her hair. She checked her fingernail polish for any last minute chips and, with a quick kiss to Javert's cheek in parting, bounced down the stairs.

"Papa! I'm leaving!"

Her papa, in his nook in the living room surrounded by paperwork, and smiled heartbreakingly at her, causing her to stumble on her way out the door. A nagging sense of guilt bit at her conscious; she knew he was having a hard time accepting her growing self reliance, but had managed to keep most of his reservations to himself. Though she knew she hadn't made it any easier on him in recent months.

Setting her bag down by the door, she stepped into her papa's living room office.

"Cosette?" her papa questioned right before she enfolded him in a deep hug, using the physical contact in substitute of everything they had trouble saying to each other. He was so important to her, so vital to her center. But, like many children, she sometimes forgot how important of a part he was to everything she became.

She supposed she could tell him all this, but her papa had always been so modest--he would sputter and blush and have no idea how to respond. But he had always been amazing at hugs, ever since she was young. So instead she spoke his language and attempted to smother her bear of a papa with her much smaller frame.

Her papa laughed, wrapped his large arms around her, and easily hefted her off her feet despite his seated position.

"Have fun, baby girl," he told her, his voice full of affection and light. "Let me know if you need anything."

"Of course." A peck to his cheek, and he looked years lighter then he had even just moments ago. Satisfied that all was right with him, Cosette grabbed her things and headed out the door.

As she slung her bag back over her shoulder, it took her mere steps to realize the weight was off in it. Peeking inside, she allowed a ruthless smile to cross her lips as she dug under the book, extra pair of shoes, wallet, and random other assortment of things that had ended up in the depths of her large purse. Seems Javert thought she should have the taser after all.

A subway ride later, she found Marius waiting for her at the gateway to the station. She couldn't help but smile as she ran to him, so deliriously excited at the sight of him even after only week of separation.

"I missed you so much," she told him as he ran his hands over her hair. He was probably destroying all her hard work but suddenly she couldn't care less how she looked. His expression told her just how much he already adored her anyway.

"Me too. This week..." Marius trailed off, the smile on his face dimming any words he could manage. Cosette couldn't agree more. The last five days had seen time crawl at an agonizing pace as she counted the hours until the weekend.

She noticed the basket at his feet only after spending about fifteen minutes memorizing his face.

"What's that?"

Marius turned a frankly adorable shade of red. "I thought, well we didn't have anything planned, not really. And there's a really pretty park just down the way. Jehan swears it's gorgeous this time of year."

Cosette's smile threatened to crack her face. "That sounds wonderful."

The park was gorgeous; the flowers had just started to bloom with spring and the breeze that ran through the trees kept them cool in the high sun. They found a quiet spot and settled in.

Their conversations had been wondering in and out of so many different subjects, but they finally managed to hit on the one Cosette had been concerned about: family.

"My father died in service," Marius told her, gently running his fingers up and down her arm. Her skin prickled pleasantly at the feeling. "He and my mother loved each other, but my mother's family weren't fans of the marriage. They seem to think they can erase him from my memory if they try hard enough. My mother may have stopped but she didn't live long after him. Maybe if she had my grandfather would have understood..."

Cosette had more than a few strong words for anyone who put that look on Marius' face. She did her best to kiss it away, enjoying the smooth feel of his lips against hers. She only let up when the lines around his face had finally eased into a smile.

"My mother died six months after meeting my stepfather," she told him, offering her vulnerability to cover his. "We moved around a lot when I was younger, but we settled down when my papa met my father."

Marius pressed their foreheads together, catching her eyes and holding them.

"My papa works in the mayor's office, a few towns over," That was accurate, she thought after a moment. Seeing as, being mayor, it was his office. "My father works at the local community college, teaching law." Her papa had once suggested Javert go back for his badge, but he had always seemed extremely reluctant about it. It seemed he preferred to educate instead, and her papa couldn't have been more happy about it. Cosette didn't pry because she knew her parents had a complicated history.

It was an extremely abbreviated version of the story, but Cosette was proud of herself for it. She didn't think their first real date was the place to get into the family drama that bubbled just below the surface.

She ignored the voice in the back of her mind asking when a good time would be.

Marius' phone beeped, drawing their attention back to reality. She nibbled on a piece of bread while he checked his messages, watching as he flushed.

"Something wrong?"

"No!" Marius said instantly. "It's only, there's something back at the office. I can do it later."

"No, let's go. I'd love to see where you work." Cosette wasn't sure who said that, but it sounded like her. That couldn't have been right though; Enjolras would be there.

But Marius looked thrilled at the idea, and Cosette couldn't bring herself to backpedal. So they bundled everything back into the basket and left the park hand in hand. Three subway stops and a bus ride later, she found herself staring at a pair large glass doors with 'ABC- 1st North' itched into them. Marius held the door for her, and she stepped into a spacious lobby with good lighting and sparse seating. The walls were covered in different flyers and newspaper articles, and while she didn't stop to read them the headlines all jumped out at her as she passed--bold words of triumph and liberty. After a moment, Cosette realized she was reading them all in Enjolras' rich, booming voice. The thought made her stomach twist with nerves.

"Took you long enough. Bahorel's been yelling for you for the last twenty minutes and I'm about to staple his mouth shut," a young boy behind the desk told Marius. Cosette couldn't imagine he was older than fourteen or so. He wore bright red jeans with a superhero shirt and his flyaway hair was being held back by a flowery headband.

"Use duct tape," Marius told him. "Combeferre gets mad when you misappropriate office supplies. Cosette, this is Gavroche, and don't let that adorable demeanor fool you, he's a downright terror."

"I'm sure no young man so dapper could be so cruel," she replied, smiling at the boy. He returned her blatant flattery with a sharp grin.

"Hi, beautiful," His eyes were bright and mischievous, his voice playful, as he leaned across the counter. "Run away with me and we'll leave this cruel world in the dust."

"You're spending too much time with Courfeyrac," Marius replied as Cosette laughed. She had to admit she was charmed in spite of herself and rewarded him with a peck on the cheek as she passed. He played the game well for someone so young. He'd be breaking hearts right and left in a few years.

"Marius!" If voices were animals, that one would have been a bull charging down the hallway. "I called you an hour ago! Those damn bastards over at Scott and Lowe are trying to bury us in paperwork again and their receptionist is a pit bull. You'll make a good chew toy for her while I sneak in back." A burly man was suddenly in front of them, papers fluttering around him like wayward birds.

"And I told you I'd be out today, Bahorel," Marius replied, sounding put out. "Remember?"

Marius gestured to her, and Bahorel paused in his muttering. He turned curious, slightly insane looking eyes on her, and for a few moments there was silence between them. Then he turned, yelling over his shoulder:

"She's real!"

"Grantiare, you owe me twenty bucks."

"Damnit, Marius! You did not just make me lose a bet to Jehan!"

"Your own fault for betting against the pool, dude."

"Is she cute?"

"Of course she's gonna be cute. His freckles are like a homing beacon to other furry woodland creatures."

"You never know, it could be a Beauty and the Beast type thing. Marius, I think you'd be an adorable Belle!"

"Tale as old as time~,"

"You were watching Disney movies again last night, weren't you?"

Laughing, Marius tugged her forward into the main office. There were people all over the room--some sorting through papers spread out on the floor, others rifling through boxes upon boxes stacked on desks. And, near the back, a head full of golden curls instantly drew her eye. Her heart caught in her throat.

"This is Cosette," Marius introduced to the room in general.

She held her breath as Enjolras' head slowly came up to stare at her, and even as the others all came up to say hello she felt his gaze on her. She tried her best to remember all the names being thrown out, but she was fairly sure she wouldn't be able to repeat them back if asked. But she could feel the weight of his eyes follow her around the room.

Finally, it was his turn. His grip was firm, his voice steady, but Cosette knew what to look for in herself, and she saw it in him: sheer, barely controlled panic.

"Enjolras."

"Cosette, it's so nice to meet you."

\*

It was like playing with a time bomb, Cosette decided as she regarded Enjolras across the room. It would explode any second, and most likely take her with it, but the almost euphoric high she got from it astounded her. It was as if she were seeing herself from behind a veil, shouting out suggestions and demands as she would during an especially obnoxious movie.

After a few missteps, she was pretty sure she had the names down too: bouncy, happy Joly constantly orbiting bemused Bossuet, both of whom seemed drawn to beautiful, steadying Musichetta. Quiet but authoritative Combeferre, who seemed to easily command the room. Gentle, adoring Jehan who fluttered around her like a butterfly but had the core of a lion. Flirtatious Courfeyrac, who wasn't giving Marius a moment's rest over her, and who seemed to take an enormous amount of pleasure in his shamelessness. Quiet Eponine, who stayed near the back and refused to speak to her past a few short words. Slim Feuilly, who smelled of danger like a fire smells of smoke, and bull-like Bahorel who circled him in absentminded constraint.

Grantaire, interestingly enough, seemed as intensely aware of Enjolras as she was. As she watched, he slung an arm over the back of Enjolras' chair and nudged him gently when the

blond became buried in his phone. His fingers were slowly, almost absentmindedly, stroking up and down blond's arm, even as Enjolras barely glanced up from the screen. She bit her lip in worry- she hadn't meant to send him spiraling into isolation. God, she hadn't mean to be here in the first place. Her instincts were screaming for her to do something, but she couldn't very well say anything without sending the room up in flames.

But, watching him, an idea came to her.

Lifting Marius' phone was much easier than it should have been. She would really need to teach him how to avoid that in the future. Her fingers flew over the keyboard and she tucked it into her lap as she waited.

*hi :)*

She saw the moment Enjolras froze, glancing up at Marius. But then, slowly, his eyes turned to her. The panic was still there but she met it with calm reassurance and friendliness. Please talk to me, she all but screamed through her eyes. I want you to talk to me. After a long moment, his lips quirked in tired amusement and his fingers worked.

*Hello.*

Tap tap tap.

*i hear we've got something in common*

*So you did walk in knowing I was here. I wondered.*

Cosette tried to keep her excitement subtle even as her fingers flew.

*it's complicated. but i'll leave if you want??*

Enjolras' gaze came up again, concerned. *No.*

*wanna talk?*

*If you'd like.*

*Passive-aggressiveness? doesn't sound like you*

*Do you know a lot about me?*

*i'm thorough :D*

*Then we share that in common as well.*

Cosette peeked at him again, taking him in with a fresh perspective. His eyes were still locked on his phone and he was ever so slightly leaning left, into Grantaire.

*You look sleepy.*

*And you look nosy.*

Cosette twitched her nose at Enjolras, feeling proud when he huffed back a smile. It made him look so much more human.

*you can smile! all the pictures of you are v stern* She pulled up the browser and sent him a picture of himself lifted off a news article to emphasis her point. In it, he looked thunderous and righteous, without a hint of joy in his features.

*You seem to smile enough for the both of us.*

Suddenly, Bahorel's voice, full of wickedness, broke through their silent conversation. "I have an idea."

"Oh, shit."

"God help us."

"This is gonna end in a jail cell, isn't it?"

"No! Well...maybe not for us," Bahorel attested, looking at Marius and her with unholy delight.

\*

"Miss," the security guard towered over them, but Cosette dutifully ignored him as she attempted to touch Marius' tonsils with her tongue. She was fairly sure all her carefully applied makeup from earlier this morning was smudged to high heaven, but Marius' lips were sinfully delicious. Straddling his lap, she kept one hand planted in his hair and the other locking his jacket in a death grip. One of his own hands was anchored firmly on her waist while the other fluttered from her thigh, arm, hair, and back again. She thought it was ridiculously endearing how hesitant he was to grope her in public.

"Miss!" the security guard barked again, firmer this time. Cosette pressed their lips together even harder to keep from answering. Feuilly had told them to hold out as long as they could, because even just one second could be the difference between success and failure.

Courfeyrac had offered to give them both some pointers, at which point Enjolras had shut him down with slightly wild eyes.

It was by no means a smart or even rationally acceptable plan. But Cosette could feel the urgent, demanding edge they all seemed to have. Whatever they were doing this for, they all seemed to think it was worth it.

"If we do this, we do it smart," Combeferre had told them. "Find a solid bench with no slots in it and no arm rests, so he can't handcuff you to anything. Don't show skin, because while the ABC can forgive a lot of things, registered sex offender isn't one of them. If he threatens you with violence, get the hell out. Understand?"

If she got arrested, Javert would kill her. Her papa would just be disappointed. Even days ago that thought would have bothered her beyond belief. Now though, her mouth (and the rest of

her) was far too involved with Marius to form a plan of attack on that front. She couldn't help but moan as he pulled something with his tongue that made her body shudder.

"Now listen hear, you two," a heavy weight settled on her shoulder, and Marius tensed up below her.

"Run like hell!" Footsteps pounded on the floor, and the security guard jumped back from them. Bahorel, Eponine, Feuilly, and Courfeyrac all came barreling down the hallway. Cosette rolled off Marius quick as lightening and they were on their feet in moments.

The security guard tried to stop them, but Grantaire, who had been lingering near them, put himself in the way. Enjolras tripped up the other guard across the lobby, Jehan managed to jumble up the receptionist, and through a miracle that Cosette wasn't sure would happen, they all ended up stumbling out into the street. Marius took her hand and together they ran until her lungs gave out.

They landed in a side alley blocks and blocks away from Scott and Lowe, gasping as they all caught their breath.

"Did you get it?" Enjolras demanded, leaning against Grantaire in a way that spoke more of intimacy than support. Something protective that she didn't quite understand sparked within her as she eyed the brunette.

Bahorel, sitting against the wall and gasping, reached into his shirt and slapped down a folded stack of papers at Feuilly's feet, who quickly snatched them up. "Got it all."

"Oh thank God," Jehan intoned from his spot on the ground, chest heaving. Eponine grunted in agreement as she slowly paced the alley, hands on her head. "Can we not do that again?"

"What are you talking about? That was awesome."

"Except for the running. Can we put a treadmill in the office?"

"And have the thing turn into a monument to dust and guilt? No."

"I don't know what you all are complaining about, at least you got to see the show. Tell me one of you took pictures."

"How much are you willing to pay for the video?"

"You recorded us!" Marius yelled. Grantaire smirked at them both, cheerfully ignoring Enjolras' disapproval at his side.

"My soul, of course," Courfeyrac instantly offered.

"I'm fairly sure you've already sold me a good portion of that. Try again."

"Why, 'Fey, if you're hard up for soft porn, I could lend you Bossuet's laptop."

They continued to banter as they slid through the alleys and back ways of the city, avoiding major roads and heavily trafficked stops. Cosette couldn't help but be amazed at how seamless they all moved together, constantly shifting and regrouping in different collectives as they went and even keeping each other in sight. They moved as a unit, she realized.

And they were including her in it as well. Not completely, she hadn't quite earned that yet, but Jehan, Musichetta, and Combeferre actively involved her in the conversation and Courfeyrac continued to flirt brazenly. Joly tutted over the small scrap she had acquired during their getaway and Bossuet couldn't seem to stop grinning at her. From where he prowled the edges of the group like a fiery guard dog, Feuilly minded them all as his herd of sheep.

She did notice outliers though: Eponine didn't seem to want to come near her with a ten foot pole and Enjolras had all but wrapped himself up in Grantaire to avoid interacting with any of them. But the group adapted to those outliers as they moved, and Marius had taken her hand again. His lips were swollen from her kisses and his eyes were alit with excitement and he had never looked more beautiful to her.

Dinner wasn't so much an organized meal as it was food suddenly flung around the hurricane of people they had created as they moved. Only Cosette hadn't realized how late it was until her phone bumped against her hand as she dug in her purse (past the taser) for her wallet to pay the vendor.

"Oh no," she muttered as she stared at the small screen. The last subway out of the city had left ten minutes ago.

"Oohhh," Jehan tried and failed to sound believably distressed. "Oh well, I guess you'll just have to stay with us tonight."

She had been wrong earlier. Her papa was going to be the one to kill her, and Javert was going to help him hide her body. But looking around, Cosette couldn't find it in her to care.

\*

It came to her phone this time.

*Do you still want to talk?*

Her fingers trembled slightly as they tapped out her response.

*Any time you want.*

*Tomorrow morning.*

\*

Cosette was already fully dressed and sitting at the desk when Musichetta crept in the next morning. The other girl had offered up her own room the evening before, saying she had a place to crash herself. Cosette had been puzzled by that until Marius had quietly told her

about Joly and Bossuet. Her cheeks had been red for nearly half an hour over that, which Musichetta had found adorable.

Cosette wouldn't have minded staying in Marius' room, but she felt that could be pushing her luck. Marius was so innocent and lovely, he deserved patience and support, not pressure.

So she had spent a sleepless night in Musichetta's room, counting the octopi. She had been playing with her phone to keep herself occupied, but she was sure she wouldn't have to wait long. In Enjolras' place she wouldn't.

"Leaving already?" Musichetta asked as she ruffled through her dressers. Cosette smiled as she pulled on a pair of octopus patterned sleep pants over her shorts and began brushing out her hair. Cosette tapped her flats against the floor to stem her impatience.

"No, just waiting."

Musichetta made a curious sound, but a knock on the door interrupted anything she had to say. Cosette shot forward, heedless of the other woman's surprised squeak.

On the other side of the door, Enjolras was wearing the same red jacket she first saw him in. And while he stood straight and proud, the dark circles under his eyes betrayed the sleepless night he undoubtedly had. Cosette couldn't claim she looked much better. She was still wearing yesterday's clothes, and even after the brief shower earlier she felt like a dried out husk.

She and Enjolras stared at each other for a long moment, neither of them sure where to start. It was hard enough to know what to say to a grown long lost sibling, but doing it in the threshold of another's room made it nigh impossible.

"Let's grab breakfast," Cosette threw out, floundering under the pressure of Musichetta's presence behind her. Suddenly the whole hallway felt suffocating, making her yearn to be anywhere else.

"That sounds wonderful," Enjolras responded immediately, stepping back to allow her into the hall.

"Saturday morning is pancakes," Musichetta said quietly, appearing behind Cosette. "All of us, Jehan's orders. Even Bahorel drags himself out of bed for it."

"Not now, 'Chetta," Enjolras whispered, his voice reflecting his exhaustion.

Musichetta took them both in with suddenly suspicious eyes, but Cosette met her gaze head on, because she was tired of hiding. The constant tension running through her body was taking its toll, which wore her patience thin. Around them, the brownstone was quiet with everyone else still abed, but the silence seemed to only amplify Musichetta's instincts as she weighted them both.

"What's going on?"

"Drop it, 'Chetta, please."

"I don't think I will. You two have been dancing around each other ever since Marius brought her home. Why-,"

Cosette turned and placed one hand on the door while her other landed on the jam, blocking the other girl into her room.

"He and I have business together," she said firmly. She never planned to have this moment alone with Enjolras, but now that it was being dangled so temptingly before her she wouldn't allow it to slip away. "It concerns no one else but us. We would both take it as a kindness if you please leave well enough alone."

She tried to pad the blow as much as possible, but hurt still flashed across Musichetta's eyes at her words.

"We'll be back soon," Enjolras told her, his expressive voice soothing where hers bit. "We just have some things to talk about. Everything's fine."

"I don't believe you," Musichetta replied, but she smiled sadly at them both anyway. "Go. I'll conveniently forget I saw you both."

Smiling, Cosette leaned in to press a quick kiss on her cheek before following Enjolras down the hall.

Breakfast turned out to be a small cafe a few blocks away from the brownstone. Cosette had only planned on ordering something light, but when Enjolras walked away from the counter with just a large cup of coffee, she ended up loading herself down with fruit, half a dozen pastries, yogurt, and toast as well. From watching him yesterday, she knew she couldn't bully him into doing anything directly, so instead she decided to try a tactic she frequently pulled on Javert.

She split her horde of food evenly down the middle, airily dropping Enjolras' half in front of him with no explanation or expectation. Digging into her own, she didn't prod him into eating or even acknowledge that he had the option to. He looked startled and bemused by her antics, but her complete dismissal made calling her on it seem foolish. So instead he sipped at his coffee and eyed her over the rim of the mug.

"How long have you known?" He finally asked as she ate.

"About a month. Javert told me because he told you."

"Right...I'm sorry I didn't reach out. I didn't know what to say."

"I didn't either," Cosette replied. "I only went to your rally last week so I could see you. I wasn't planning on anything else. But then, Marius happened..."

"Then Marius happened," he repeated with a slight smile on his face, as if the words were responsible for every major disaster in human history. "Have you told him?"

"No," she admitted. "I really wasn't sure how. Every time I try, it just sounds like I used him."

"Did you?"

"No." Cosette wasn't offended, she knew how it looked. But she also wouldn't stand for anyone questioning her more than once about it. Thankfully, Enjolras seemed to trust her word and merely nodded in return.

"Did you ever even want to met, or..." he had started to pick at the yogurt, and Cosette carefully did not draw attention to it. The key was to make sure he didn't realize what he was doing until it was too late.

"I didn't think I was going to approach you." she offered in turn. "I just wanted to know...you know, if we looked alike or-,"

"We do," he said, and the misery in his voice caught her off. "We both look like him."

Ah. The sickening look on his face now made much more sense. But she could work with that. Bonding over their disappointment in Felix was still bonding. She very determinedly did not watch as Enjolras dropped some of the strawberries she had given him into his yogurt. Good; she hated strawberries, so it worked out that she now had someone to shove them onto.

"What's he like? My mama only had a few faded pictures, and I never..."

"You're not missing much. He never expressed an interest in anything I did. He's passive-aggressive, condescending, distant, emotionally manipulative--," Enjolras cut himself off, rubbing at his chin.

"I may be a little bias," he admitted. "My mother told me he was also charming, charismatic, and extremely competent. I never saw much of that, but I never cared to. "

The dejection on his face had Cosette scrambling for another topic.

"Can you tell me about her? Your mother?"

And over the next hour, they spoke not about the man they shared but the women they didn't. Gabrielle, with her fiery, contrary, biting sensibility. Fantine and her kind, loving, gentle nature. Their differences (their polar personalities and varying skill sets) and their similarities (both brunettes with vivid light eyes who loved their children to death and beyond). He told her about life with a single mother and an intermittent father, his co-founding of the ABC, and his work. Though she noticed he spoke little Grantaire, guarding that part of himself with possessive determination. In return, she offered up stories of her papa, and of Javert. Of constantly moving and shifting, even if she left out why. Of learning about his existence, and tracking him down.

"It's a little disturbing that I was that easy to find," Enjolras commented after she finished. He had worked his way through his yogurt (and hers) as well as a good chunk of the fruit and a bit of toast.

"My Google-foo is amazing," she bragged. "And I really wanted to find you."

Her brother smiled over the table at her. "I'm glad you did."

Cosette was too.

\*

They didn't leave the cafe until well into the morning, and only because Grantaire and Marius had started texting them both incessantly. Seeing Enjolras' face fight between annoyance and affection while on his phone was an education in expression for her.

Only when they returned to the brownstone, her good mood came crashing down around her. There was a plain-looking white car parked in the street, and a man leaning against the passenger door who was eying the front gate wearily. She had inspected the gate earlier, and knew unwelcome guests were never getting past it.

And even without Enjolras' sharp intake of breath, the man's graying blond curls and penetrating blue eyes told her exactly who he was. Heart in her throat, she grasped her brother's hand in support as Felix turned on them both. Well, mostly on Enjolras. His gaze didn't linger for more than a moment on her.

He didn't recognize her, she realized. In the next moment, she berated herself on how stupid that sounded; of course he didn't recognize her. He had never really met her.

Felix raised an eyebrow at Enjolras. "Get rid of the other one so soon?"

"Mention Grantaire again, and you'll see just how much like mother I am."

"Screaming at me will get you nowhere."

"Punching you in the face will, though."

Felix sighed the deep sigh of an individual much put upon, rolling his eyes heavenward. In response, Enjolras' grip on her hand neared painful levels, but she dared not let it show.

"Did you want something?"

"You never responded to my email."

"I didn't realize a response was required. Suing me for my inheritance seemed pretty final."

"Damnit, Enjolras, I just wanted to talk to you. But you won't answer my calls and you refuse to meet with me. How else was I suppose to get your attention?"

He couldn't be serious, Cosette thought, aghast. That was the reason her brother looked exhausted on his feet and haunted every time he checked his phone? Rage boiled within her, but she bottled it in tightly. Felix seemed to have already forgotten she was there, but Enjolras' grip on her hand was iron-clad. She returned his grip with equal force, letting him know she had no plans to move.

"Well, you certainly have it now." Cosette was amazed at Enjolras' ability to reflect so many emotions with a simple sentence. "Though I can't say it's for the best. Anything else you have to say can be directed to Lamarque. I'm done with you."

"Lamarque?" Felix spat in disbelief. "As if that snake didn't get enough sniffing around Gabrielle. You have no place involving him in anything we discuss."

"The day you dictate who I speak to is the day they lay me to rest for good."

"Enjolras, I am your father--,"

"So biology tells me, but I have my doubts on that."

Growling, Felix took a menacing step forward, and Cosette reacted before she could stop herself. It may have been a completely harmless act, done out of frustration rather than malicious intent, but she was too on edge to consider the difference. She used their linked hands to jerk a surprised Enjolras behind her and dove her free one into her ever faithful purse. Her fingers found the handle almost instantly and Felix froze as the tip of her taser suddenly appeared within inches of his eye.

"Cosette, don't!"

Felix's brilliant blue eyes turned wide with shock, flickering from the tip of the metal prongs to her own slightly irrational face. There was a scuffling sound off to the side and she was vaguely aware of voices yelling from the brownstone porch, but her eyes never left her father's.

"Cosette," Felix breathed. "Oh God, is that really you?"

She nearly shoved the taser into his face for that alone, but Enjolras began slowly walking back, using their linked hands just as she had to take her with him. Her feet followed his lead, but her mouth seemed to have other plans.

"You bastard, you left her all alone--,"

"Cosette--,"

"Did it even bother you that you left her pregnant and alone! She told me you visited, but the only memories I have of you are her crying herself to sleep at night hoping you'd come back!" The taser was shaking in her hands. She dropped it to the ground when the weight became too much to hold.

"Please, Cosette--,"

"And I had forgiven you," she couldn't stop now, hard as she tried. "I was ready to forgive you and forget you were ever a part of my life, but then I find out I have a brother! You didn't think that was something we needed to know? That we may want to meet each other, regardless of being related by you!?"

She would have kept going, but Enjolras had ripped her around and hugged her close. She buried her face in his chest, holding back sobs as he shielded her.

"You need to leave now," It wasn't Enjolras' voice she heard, but Marius'.

\*

Felix put up a fight, obviously more determined than ever to talk with both of his children. But their friends, and especially Marius, all but shoved him into his car and on his way, making sure he was out of sight before retreating into the brownstone.

And, quite suddenly, she and Enjolras found themselves faced with eleven pairs of curious eyes.

"Uh," Cosette really had nothing else for this situation.

"This was going to be a 'where were you all morning' conversation," Jehan started. "Now I'm afraid it's going to be something a lot more serious."

Courfeyrac rolled his eyes. "Roughly translated: what the fuck is this?"

Joly looked between the two of them. "You know, I kind of see it."

"It's just the hair."

"It's not, they have the same eyes too--,"

"Same cheekbones, same build."

"But Enjolras is taller."

"Basic male to female ratio could of told you that, Bossuet."

"Awww, they both have those dimples."

"Ohmygod, matching outfits."

"Jesus, 'Chetta, their not twins."

"You don't know that! It's not like they told us." And there it was. Cosette felt her stomach constrict but Enjolras stepped up beside her, more than ready to play ball.

"Okay," he said firmly. "Everyone not sleeping with one of us, outside, now."

They grumbled and they complained, but they went all the same. Though Grantaire had to grab Marius as he turned to follow the others to the backyard.

"But we haven't--," Marius protested.

"That's not what he meant."

"You not sleeping with him yet?"

"We're taking it slow," Cosette defended. Their relationship was only a week and a half old after all.

Enjolras' lips quirked. "Talk to him. I'll deal with mine."

Cosette wasn't envious; Grantaire didn't look at all happy, what with his crossed arms and the stubborn set of his mouth etching lines into his face. But Enjolras laid a gentle hand on his arm and guided him away a few feet, giving her and Marius their own space.

She couldn't avoid it any longer--she turned to face Marius with an open face, fully expecting to have her heart broken. Only he caught her with gentle eyes and a loving expression.

"What do you want to tell me?" he asked her. Cosette was amazed that there was no judgement or accusation in his voice, only curiosity.

"Felix is my father, as well as his. I found out about it last month. I went to the rally, just to see him. But then I met you, and things got so complicated and I didn't know how to tell you but I couldn't just walk away from you and--,"

Marius cut her off, cupping her face in his hands and brushing his thumb over her lips to silence her.

"Do you love me?"

"With everything I have."

"Then it'll be alright, because I love you too." It was as easy as that. Cosette pressed her lips together to hold back a sudden impulse to cry as Marius hugged her close. He didn't need to know everything as long as he knew she loved him.

Raised voices from the other side of the room caught their attention.

"I don't care about that," Grantaire was saying. "What I want to smother you for is not telling me your father was suing you."

"You heard him, he only wanted--,"

"Did you know that a week ago?"

"...No."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want him to involve you."

"That's bullshit. When my dad threw me out of the house, did I keep that from you? When my ex beat me black and blue and left me on your doorstep because he thought I was cheating on him? When I knew I couldn't keep going, not without drowning, did I keep that from you for your own good? Did I think you were too weak to help me?"

"That's not what I meant and you know it," Enjolras' voice was like ice, his eyes blazing. A storm was well and truly brewing between the two of them now, and Cosette found her fear

of that towered over her fear of Felix. She would have stayed rooted in her spot had Marius not taken her hand and led her out the back, closing the door firmly behind them.

She thought she'd be under scrutiny the minute she stepped outside, however most of them were out in the garden, playing in the flowers under the close supervision of Feuilly and Jehan. Only Musichetta and Bahorel were left on the porch, both of them in quiet conversation as she rested her feet in his lap. Their shoes had been tossed into the lawn and a pair of bright red sunglasses were perched on Musichetta's nose.

"That was fast," Bahorel commented as they drew closer.

"There wasn't much to cover."

"There wasn't?"

"Marius doesn't seem to be that concerned about details," Cosette told the porch floor.

"I'll find out when you tell everyone else. I already know everything I need to."

Cosette smiled at him, ignoring Bahorel's eye roll, and the kick Musichetta gave him for it.

"That's wonderful," the other girl told them. "Sit, you can tell us everything."

And Cosette did. She had a feeling she'd be covering this story quite a few times, so she'd best get comfortable telling it now. She only told her side of it though. If Enjolras wanted to add on his own detailed that would be his choice, but she had no right to divulge what he had told her. Bahorel interrupted her when she described the thugs who tried to abduct Marius at the rally.

"They mentioned Gillenormand?"

"Yes."

"So it was your grandfather who put that together," Bahorel's eyes became distant and dangerous, even as Marius' face flushed. Musichetta motioned for her to continue, her easy smile comforting where Bahorel burned.

By the time she finished, the shouting behind the glass had gotten worse. Cosette eyed the door wearily, but the glare of the sun meant she couldn't see much passed their shadowily figures in the living room.

"Don't worry," Musichetta told her. "They'll work it out."

"They sound really angry."

"I'm sure they are. Grantaire has a lot of patience when it comes to Enjolras but even he has his limits. Hell, I kind of want to punch Enj' right now for not telling us Felix was causing problems."

"And if there's one thing Enjolras hates it's being backed into a corner. He's probably had this sitting on him for a while now and it's all just coming down," Bahorel added in.

Cosette hummed, still a little concerned. Marius dropped a kiss onto her forehead and stretched out on their bench, resting his head on her lap and letting his eyes slide closed. Cosette instantly wove her fingers into his hair, combing and petting it this way and that. He groaned and went as limp as an overcooked noodle under her touch.

"Can you cook?" Bahorel asked suddenly. Cosette blinked, thrown by the odd question, and took a minute before nodding.

"Really, Bahorel?" Feuilly chided from his spot in the garden some feet away. Out in the lawn, the others had split up into two teams and were playing what could loosely be described as a soccer game.

"What? With Marius here our chart was balanced. She's gonna throw it off again. At least this way we get can make it a week without repeating."

"I missed something."

"House rules: Grantaire, Courfeyrac, Jehan, 'Ferre, Feuilly and 'Chetta all cook while the rest of us clean. When we add you into the rotation that means we can make it a week before the chart starts over. Someone's gonna get stuck with dish duty twice though."

"Only until 'Fey finds another stray," Musichetta teased, earning her a glare from the man in question out in the lawn. Feuilly's exaggerated sigh let Cosette know this was an well-hashed conversation.

"I may not be staying," she decided to point out. It would only hurt to set unfair expectations.

Bahorel shot her a bemused look.

"You're Enjolras' long lost sister and Marius has already made it clear that he's never leaving your side. Seeing as most of us have a heart attack the minute he's out of our sight... Well, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but you're never leaving this house."

"Agreed," Musichetta chimed in. In her lap, Marius grumbled at their description, but didn't say anything against it. However, Cosette still hesitated, shooting a glance to the doors behind her again. She could still hear the occasional raised voice behind the glass.

"Don't worry," Musichetta told her again as she rose from her seat next to Bahorel and settling in on Cosette other side. "They'll be fine."

"They were both really angry," she finally admitted. "And they just...they seem so different."

"Do they?" Musichetta asked, turning to look at the door over her shoulder. "I never thought so."

"Really?"

Musichetta looking at Cosette over her sunglasses.

"You're really worried about them."

"I'm the reason they're fighting." Marius moved to protest, but her fingers in his hair instantly quieted him. She'd have to remember that trick.

"I promise you, darling, you're not. This has been brewing for a while, and today was just the catalyst. But they'll work through it."

"You sound so sure."

"I am. You wanna hear a secret?"

"What kind of secret?"

"The kind that's going to make me sound really creepy after I finish telling you."

Cosette could deal with someone else being awkward for a bit, so she nodded. Musichetta looked around, but Bahorel and Feuilly had fallen into a discussion involving garden renovations they had planned. Marius didn't seem much inclined to move, and Cosette definitely didn't want him to, but he also didn't seem to care much about what was going on around him. Musichetta leaned in close.

"They compliment each other perfectly. Enjolras needed someone who adored him from the first moment. It's never occurred to him that romantic relationships were something he wanted or even needed. So he doesn't date, he doesn't flirt, and he doesn't pursue--not because he doesn't want to but because he doesn't know how. He needed a partner who would love him instantly and unconditionally, not one who was exploring their own feelings while he was doing the same with his. Grantaire has loved him from their first meeting, flaws, faults, temper and all.

"And Grantaire, who has a self destructive streak a mile wide and who doesn't care about anything, needed someone he could climb to when the hole he digs becomes too deep. He doesn't believe he has it in himself to be good, but if someone who loves him believes it, he'll try. And once Grantaire actually cares about something he'll work until the end of time for it. Enjolras' expectations and love keep him sober enough and sane, and in turn his complete devotion to Enjolras keeps our fearless leader stable. They'll be fine--they've worked through worst than this."

"...who are you?"

"A very avid Tetris player."

\*

The glass door clicked open behind Cosette some time later, the latch snapping her out of the dazed state she had sunk herself into. In her lap, Marius shifted at the sound of footsteps, nuzzling lightly at her thigh as she slowly scrunched her fingers through his mussed hair. She could taste the slightly bitter bite of sleep in her mouth and there was a dull ache in her neck.

Enjolras settled in beside her as she eased the crick out as much as she could without dislodging Marius. She may be uncomfortable but she wasn't that uncomfortable.

"Okay?" she asked quietly. She didn't see Grantaire anywhere.

Enjolras let out a soft, single laugh leaned back to rest his head against the back of the bench, but nodded all the same.

"I haven't had a fight that intense for quite a while. I forgot how much fun they are."

Cosette didn't quite see the logic there, but for the first time since she'd known him, Enjolras looked relaxed and comfortable in his own skin. While the dark circles under his eyes hadn't diminished, the perpetual wrinkle between his brows had soothed out, and there was a slight smile on his lips as he watched the others play their semi-coherent soccer game.

She had been expecting thunderstorms and barely concealed malice from them both, but what she was getting instead was a mellow peacefulness.

"You enjoyed that?"

"I already know I'm odd."

"Well, I didn't say it." Cosette cast an eye out over the others. "Should we tell them now?"

"Let them finish their game first."

"Game implies organized rules."

"Rules are for institutional conformists."

His smile didn't widen, but the crinkles around his eyes became more pronounced, and Cosette arranged herself so that one of her hands was still imbedded in Marius' hair like a tether while the other entwined itself around Enjolras'.

"You were one of those kids who wrote your name on all your toys, weren't you?" She hadn't heard Grantaire come outside, but he was loaded down with a cup of coffee, which was passed over to Enjolras, and the sketch book that seemed permanently attached to his presence. Enjolras took the coffee in his free hand, set it reverently down at his feet, then snapped his fingers out to snag Grantaire's shirt and drag him down with much less grace. Bringing him close, Enjolras pressed a long kiss on the artist's mouth before reeling him in next to them on the bench. Grantaire stumbled and cursed as he went, but settled in all the same and Enjolras' smile became tinted with a layer of smugness.

Cosette would have taken a dozen pictures of them in that moment, but she had no intentions of releasing anything she was currently attached to. She wondered if she could reach Musichetta with her foot. The other woman was further down the porch, lounging with her elbows on the low steps and her head back to absorb the sun. Bahorel had been drawn into the game earlier but Feuilly had stayed firmly in the garden slightly away from the rest of them, watching them all with simmering contentment.

Out in the field, Jehan had somehow managed to get Courfeyrac pressed into the dirt, laughing as he kept the other pinned down long enough for Joly to get pasted Bahorel and kick the ball into something that resembled a goal. Or out of bounds. Cosette really couldn't tell at this point.

She wondered if she could get them all to her parent's house for dinner one night. She had a feeling her papa would adore them all as much as she did, and come to love Enjolras (and, in time, Marius and Grantaire) as a son as well. And the look on Javert's face at a house full of young people would surely be worth the effort.

Marius shifted in her lap again, and her attention focused in on soothing him back to sleep.

\*

Behind her sunglasses, Musichetta was leisurely surveying her kingdom.

Contrary to what she had told Cosette, she kept a firm eye on Enjolras and Grantaire for the first fifteen minutes or so after they had reappeared. She hadn't been lying when she told the other woman that they were perfect for each other, but when they argued, the heavens trembled at the terror of it. But Enjolras, who was always more physical when he was at ease, was keeping Grantaire firmly at his side. For his part, Grantaire's expressive eyes were calm and tender once again, the raging fire from earlier all but extinct.

Satisfied, she turned toward her other charges. Marius and Cosette... Musichetta knew from the onset they would be inseparable. Marius had been affectionate with all of them, but the levels of devotion he showed Cosette were only paralleled by what she in turn gave him. Musichetta wasn't a firm believer in love at first sight, since she had seen so many relationships flash and peter out under similar circumstances, but those two truly made her wonder if it was possible. Watching them create their own bubble around themselves showed a kind of intimacy that was rare to see in a couple so young.

And while Cosette was undoubtably sweet and kind, was cheerfully adorable and fun-loving, she was also possessive and demanding, just like Enjolras was with Grantaire. Just as he never allowed the artist's attention to wander away from him for more than a few hours, Cosette was as equally dominating of Marius. Really, between that and their startling physical similarities (she hadn't been joking about the matching outfits--she was thinking something red) Musichetta was positively ashamed that she hadn't registered their connection earlier.

However, one thing that wouldn't stop registering was the barely concealed malice on Eponine's face. Musichetta's heart twisted as she observed the brunette hide across the lawn, clearly miserable. Everyone else seemed tied up in Enjolras and Cosette, so she had been left to simmer in silence. That really wouldn't do.

She rose to her feet, shaking out the fluff that had settled in her bones. She had been wanting to have this conversation ever since their newest stray had wondered home, and now was as good of a time as any. She crossed the garden, making sure to stay well out of the game's way.

"Hey, chika," she greeted, bumping shoulders with Eponine. The other woman grunted in return but didn't tear her eyes away from the porch.

"It's a nice day out," Musichetta tried.

"Yeah."

"And the game looks fun. Wanna join?"

"No."

Musichetta sighed; Eponine wasn't making this easy. Time for a more direct approach.

"You can't blame him for finding love when he never knew you were interested."

Eponine's gaze snapped up to stare at her, her eyes fierce. Musichetta met fire with fire, smiling calmly into the face of Eponine's viciousness.

"I never-,"

"You didn't have to."

"I just...he's so sweet," Eponine whispered. "We could have been..."

Musichetta had her doubts about that. She would never tell someone not to experience a relationship with whomever they desired. People collided all over the place and outcomes couldn't never be fully predicted or controlled. Sometimes she lost the Tetris game. But she knew enough about people--her people--to understand when a relationship wouldn't work. Eponine desired Marius because he was innocent and pure, everything she believed she wasn't. She saw her own redemption in him, and wanted to protect him. But people have been trying to protect Marius for years and he was sick of it. He wanted adventures and challenges, wanted to explore the world. And Cosette wanted to be at his side every step of the way.

Eponine, though, she had wanted to burn the world down when they had first crossed paths, just like Feuilly had. But while Feuilly had been angry and voiceless, she had been hurt and bitter. Even now, after so much evidence to the contrary, Musichetta knew she still sometimes felt like an outsider. She needed someone who was stable and low maintenance, someone who wouldn't pressure her or make demands that she wasn't yet able to fulfill. Someone who was smart enough to understand her point-of-view but confident enough to challenge her at it.

Marius wouldn't be that for her. But Eponine didn't want to hear that, so Musichetta instead hugged her closed despite the heat and allowed her support to show through her actions.

Combeferre kept glancing at them between lulls in the game, concerned and obviously debating coming over. Musichetta shook her head at him in warning; Eponine was too raw to deal with more than one of them at the moment. Musichetta had always thought the two of them would do so well together, but she wanted them to last. If Eponine treated Combeferre like a rebound rather than a serious partner, all the work she had put into them both would be for not. They would both be miserable, and if there was one thing Musichetta couldn't stand it

was seeing someone she loved be miserable. Grantaire had been more than enough on that front, thank you very much.

So instead, she turned her concentration solely on Eponine, because they all deserved to be happy in the end, to win the game. And Musichetta had no problem cheating to make sure that happened.

## Chapter End Notes

Wow...This was never suppose to be this long. I hope you like it! Feedback is very much appreciated. Thanks.

## End Notes

So apparently my brain decided to spiral out of control with this....Feedback is appreciated!

Cosette is coming! her chapter is already half written, I should have it finished soon.

Side note- please don't think Grantaire's response to alcoholism is in any way appropriate in the real world. Non-fictional people do not do as I tell them and his solution should not be taken as gospel.

Link to prompt (as well as a very nice fill for the prompt completed a few months ago):  
<http://makinghugospin.livejournal.com/9761.html?thread=947489#t947489>

Works inspired by this one

[i've never seen my colors so alive](#) by [demistories](#)

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