

Only a memory away

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Only a memory away

by [LobbyLane](#)

Summary

What if you get the chance to meet someone a second time? Would it turn out differently? Leo is about to experience it... After a fight with Max something happens he never thought could happen... Leo/Max ... Producers (c) Mel Brooks

Chances missed

He had said it. He really had. Why? He didn't know. Only thing he knew for sure was that he'd done a terrible mistake. How could he have been so stupid? Now he roamed the streets desperately. If only there was a sign of him. Just one trace of him being okay. That'd be enough. He kept on saying this to himself. Again and again...and again. He prayed to someone up above that nothing bad had happened to him. He hoped. Hoped for what? For a miracle... Maybe he would walk around the next corner, being his normal self, attached to that stupid blanket of his and looking just lost.

He kept on running. He noticed neither his breath becoming heavier nor his heart beating faster and faster. All he wanted was to find him. And he was scared. For the first time in his life.

If only... Around the next corner maybe...

"Well, all I'm saying is that maybe we should try something new. You know, take a risk. Just this once," Leo said looking furious. Leo never looked furious. Max didn't even know he could get angry. He was this usual mousy shy little Nobody but he was proven wrong. Leo was standing in front of him, fighting for his rights. Max could hardly believe it.

"So, you wanna tell me abandoning the usual direction our shows follow is a good idea?" Max shouted back. There had never been a fight like this as far as he could remember. Smaller conflicts from time to time, yes. But this? Never.

"People are getting bored," Leo replied. "It's the same always. I guess a little change won't hurt."

"Oh you think so, hm?" Max couldn't believe his ears. "Let me tell you something then. If a concept works leave it that way. A change, no matter how tiny, can ruin everything. You can spoil a show that costs us more than two million Dollars just by changing a title. People know how we use to work. And love it. There's no guarantee for something different to work out. Believe me, I know!"

"Yeah, right," Leo snorted. "Just like you know everything; all the time."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You always must have it your way!" he gestured. Leo never gestured. That certainly was new. "It's not as if I really had anything to say. Every decision is yours. Every single thing must happen the way YOU want it. It's like you're only using my name, because people are captured by the big double B..."

"I MADE YOU WHO YOU ARE NOW!"

Leo plunked both his hands on the leather couch in the middle of the office.

"That's not the point! Why can't you get it into that big head of yours?" he shouted.
"Changing isn't always bad. I changed a lot since I've met you. And it wasn't the worst thing that could happen!"

"No you're god-damn right!" Who did this kid think he was? "You were a nothing until I showed you what you were capable of!"

"You what?" Leo looked at him rather shocked.

"And then this Swedish slut entered this office and it's the best evidence for what I just said. Change a tiny detail and you'll ruin everything!"

Leo stood there flabbergasted. "What?"

"You know I'm right," Max continued. "She's ruined everything. It went well, all of it, until she showed up. I tried to warn you but no. You had to fall for her and of course you had to run away with her."

"And I came back...for you!"

"Bringing her along! Great deal," Max was enraged. "And, of course you had to marry her..."

"Stop it," Leo had his eyes closed. He knew exactly what this was going to become.

But Max didn't waste one thought about stopping.

"...And you had to let her lead your life. It didn't matter what I was saying. How many times I tried to warn you..."

"Stop it!"

"And when she cheated on you and left you," Max didn't even look at Leo anymore. "Who was the first person you came crawling back to? ME!"

"I SAID STOP IT!"

The slap in his face came so unexpected, it took Max a moment to even realize it just had happened. Leo stood there in front of him with hatred in his eyes. Max looked back at him in shock. He touched his face. Slowly it began to burn and he felt it getting hotter. Leo slapped him? Obviously... What the hell... Was he out of his mind?

Max closed his eyes for a moment, trying to collect his thoughts.

Leo on the other hand now looked furious. Tears were dwelling in his eyes, yet he remained motionless for another couple of seconds. Until he seemed to realize what he had just done.

He stepped back a few inches, looking as though he couldn't believe his own actions. He looked down at his hands for a second then back to Max.

"Max... I'm sorry... I...", he started but Max interrupted him immediately without even looking up.

"Get out!"

"Hear me out, please. I didn't mean...I am sorry... I just...", Leo now merely whispered.

"OUT!" Max shouted as loud as he could.

Leo stood there ossified, then shook his head more to himself. He turned around and hurried outside, leaving Max alone in the office.

Max opened his eyes again. He felt numb. And all of a sudden very small. His own words were echoing in his ears. He felt like drowning in the ocean of his most recent memories, yet felt an unbelievable emptiness creeping up his body. He heard his own breath. He felt his own heartbeat.

And he was alone. This was it. He managed to hound off the only friend he ever had. He would never forgive him. He simply knew it.

"What kind of idiot am I," Max thought, sinking to his knees. He'd used the only thing he knew would really hurt Leo against him. And he'd wanted it oh so badly. He'd wanted to hurt his best friend. What kind of person did something like that? He'd given Leo the promise to comfort him a long time ago. When Ulla had left he had been there for him. He'd helped him up again. He'd promised him everything would be alright. When Leo had been begging him to never mention her again, he'd agreed. And he'd kept that promise... until now.

Max knew it would shatter the younger man. He was completely aware of what he had been saying to him. He'd wanted him to suffer. Why? Out of selfishness. Because he, Max Bialystock, could never let Leopold Bloom – former accountant- become as cocky as he'd gotten minutes ago.

And just because he still wanted to prevail over him.

Max sank to the ground. He felt tears running down his own cheeks.

"What have I done?"

~to be continued~

Straight to you

Chapter Notes

A/N: I know this seems a bit tangled somehow, but I have something planned for this and it will make sense in the end. ;) Sorry, for being mean in this one, but it's part of the plan...

lyrics used (c) "Straight to you" by Josh Groban

"All the towers of ivory are crumbling
And the swallows sharpen their beaks
This is the time of our great undoing
This is the time that I'll come running
Straight to you, for I am captured
Straight to you for I am captured one more time"

Leo still couldn't get used to all the shiny pink things inside DeBris' townhouse. He sat there, accompanied by Roger and Carmen, looking around from time to time. Sometimes it reminded him of a school-girl's room. But then again Carmen and Roger sort of acted like girls most of the time anyway.

Much to his surprise, they were exceedingly sensitive and caring right now. They hadn't wasted a second when Leo had showed up on their doorstep, asking them to stay there for a few hours.

And now he was there. He didn't say anything for a long while. Roger and Carmen were looking rather worried at each other.

"You hit him?" Carmen asked again. "And he threw you out?"

Leo didn't look up. Talking about it made him relive the fight again.

"I couldn't believe it myself. I was stunned. I couldn't control it and then... it was as though another person acted through me."

He lifted his head a little to find them listening to him wide-eyed.

"Believe me, I would never do anything like that...", he said. He was close to tears again; he could feel it.

"Hm..," Roger said, taking another sip of his tea. "Well, you could've expected some harsh reaction after something like this. But..."

"But what?" Carmen looked at his partner. "Throwing him out? I thought he was different."

"What do you mean?" Leo asked shyly.

"Well, it's not so unusual for Max to throw someone out," Roger continued, turning his head straight to Leo. "He's done that before. But those people were strangers in so many ways. Customers, Actors. People he didn't care about. Nothing special, so to say. But you!? I never thought he would."

"Reactions of heated minds are strange sometimes," Carmen said, putting his hand on Leo's shoulder to comfort him. "I wouldn't worry too much. He'll calm down and then he'll forget this quickly."

He smiled at Leo, who actually started to feel a little lighter.

"I tried to apologize, but...well...", he said.

Roger nodded and put his cup down. "Yes, yes. You see, he must've been in shock as well. People usually don't wanna hear anything like an apology once they've been hurt."

"By hurt, he means emotionally," Carmen added approvingly, seeing Leo's desperate face.

"He hurt me as well..."

Carmen leaned back. "We understand it, Leo. Everybody gets hurt in one or another way in a fight like this."

"I wonder...", Roger began. The other two men were turning their heads towards him immediately.

"You see, I got my problems with another thing somehow," he said. "It's unusual in some ways. First of all, throwing out Leo is something I thought I'd never live to see from Max."

"Why? You said it has happened before," Leo asked, a bit confused.

"Yes, but you see...", Roger stood up wandering around the room a few steps. He was trying to find the right words and gestured about now and then.

Carmen watched him for a moment, then turned back to Leo.

"You are special in many ways," he said. Roger nodded.

"Me...?"

"Oh yes," Roger added. "First of all, you are the first partner he had since...well, I think he's always worked alone, don't you Darling?"

Carmen nodded.

"And actually, we never thought he'd give much attention on having one," he said and took a sip from his cup as well.

"Plus, he's very careful not to talk about you apart from business," Roger said.

Leo didn't understand. "What makes me so special, then?"

"He keeps you to himself," Roger said. "I guess he is seeing you as the only person in his life worth protecting."

Leo shook his head silently. "He insulted me and threw me out!"

He looked down to the ground again. "I could be anybody."

"And gone are the days of rainbows
And gone are the nights of swinging from the stars
For the sea will swallow up the mountain
And the sky will throw thunderbolts and sparks
Straight at you, but I'll come running
Straight to you, but I'll come running one more time"

"It's getting colder," Max thought.

Luckily, the streetlamps held the world illuminated, so even though it was way past midnight he could see pretty good. He pulled the collar of his coat a little higher and looked around desperately. He had not the slightest clue about Leo's whereabouts and was getting worried.

"Please, let him be somewhere safe," he kept on thinking.

He walked the well known streets up and down again. If only he had an idea of where to start searching. He had been running after him only minutes later but had missed to catch him in time.

He had been at Leo's apartment but, of course, he hadn't been there. Leo used to live in the office most of the time anyway, so Max wasn't even sure if it still was his apartment. Ever since he and Ulla split up, Leo had abandoned most of his old life in many ways.

Max stopped and turned his head. Small clouds of breath were rising in front of his face. Something cold touched his face softly and ended Max's puzzling for a moment. He looked up. Snow.

"Great," he thought grumpily. It began to snow. Soon it would become freezing cold.

He had to find him. Somehow. He was sorry for what he said; for what had happened.

He wanted to tell him. And above all, he wanted him to be safe.

Leo was the one part of his life he cared for more than anything else. He was determined to make it up to him; to apologize in every way he was capable of.

Slowly, he kept on going. Once or twice he thought about just returning to the office to wait there but he was certain Leo wouldn't come back. Not after this.

Gazing at the ground while walking, he could see the white carpet, which began to cover the world, getting thicker.

The traffic sounded numb as if it was only there in a distance. The crunchy sound his steps made in the snow grew deeper. But Max scarcely noticed them. His mind was wandering. He tried to catch every face which crossed his path; tried to think of somewhere he could find his partner somehow. Some place. No matter where. And for the first time ever, he felt small and somehow lost in this big city.

He crossed a street still looking around. Maybe if he walked up to Roger and Carmen's he could get some help. After all, they knew Leo quite well by now. Maybe they knew some place he could have vanished to. But no. Max abandoned this thought again very quickly. Asking Roger and Carmen for help meant explaining to them what had happened. He could almost see their faces in front of him; their accusations. They would make him feel even worse, planting his bad conscience deep into him to never let go again. No, there was no way he could ask the both of them. What did they know anyway.

They didn't know Leo the way he did. He had always been careful not to let anything from their private conversations slip in front of them. They shouldn't know he cared.

Max sighed. Well, he didn't show Leo as well...ever. There were so many things unsaid and he wanted to change it so badly.

Crossing yet another street, he suddenly became aware of some blinding light in the corner of his eyes. It glared even more when he turned his head in its direction and soon he didn't seem to see the slightest bit anymore. Max held one hand up to cover his eyes but couldn't figure out where the source of this light came from.

There was something moving towards him. He heard some people nearby shouting something he couldn't figure out. The object was coming closer.

The next thing he remembered was a pain in his body as if something huge had hit him. And the light was gone. The screaming around him got louder. And the cold vanished.

Then everything went black.

"Heaven has denied us it's kingdom
The saints are drunk and howling at the moon
And the chariots of angels are colliding
Well I'll run babe, I'll come running
Straight to you for I am captured
Straight to you for I am captured one more time"

~to be continued~

Beyond goodbye

Chapter Notes

A/N: This was hard to write somehow... Especially, if friends keep planting stupid things into my head XD *lol* (Only saying "DeLorien" into Dolphy's direction...Thank you! XD) Well, been listening to "One last wish" by James Horner from the Casper OST while writing this, so maybe you can reconstruct how I've been feeling... Oh, and since I am listening to a lot (and I mean A LOT!) of Josh Groban songs lately, I've used yet another song for this one... Dunno, thought the lyrics kind of fit ;)

Feel free to review!

Lyrics (c) Josh Groban

"I close my eyes
And there in the shadows, I see your light
You come to me out of my dreams across the night

You take my hand though you may be so many stars away
I know that our spirits and souls are one
We've circled the moon and we've touched the sun"

It felt like running on forever. Every step took an eternity. Every moment lasted years. It seemed to him he did neither move nor come any closer to his destination. His own steps were echoing from the walls, sounding like thunder coming from up above in his ears. There was no one around. He heard Roger say something but didn't understand a word. Time stood still just that moment. All he could do was keep on running. Running along the gray corridors with only one thought rushing through his head: "Please, no!"

....

Leo woke up abruptly that morning. He'd been sleeping very little and had dreamed even worse. At first he couldn't remember where he was. He looked around and felt more tired than ever before. Only when he'd noticed the weird pink pillows all around him, he'd remembered the last day. He felt thankful for Roger and Carmen. For letting him stay in their house and somehow even more thankful for finding himself alone in the room. He had not the slightest idea of how late it was, nor did he care. He tried to get his head steady and waited for his eyes to get used to the light room. Leo blinked once and focused the windows. The daylight seemed to brighten the room even more.

Slowly, Leo climbed out of his alternative bed, rubbing his head. He shuffled to the window sleepily just to cover his eyes moments later. A white world was what hit his eyes.

"Snow?" he thought.

The city was covered in thick white snow. Leo stared at it for a while and suddenly felt extremely warm and cozy, just being inside.

He pressed his head to the window pane.

"It's still so strange waking up in this house," he thought. He used to spend his life in the office ever since Ulla had left. He had been very fortunate to have Max on his side for that matter. He'd never asked any stupid questions. When Leo had begged him about letting him stay, all he had done was emptying a room for him. He'd never questioned it. Leo used to live with him for over a year now. And Max had always been there. Leo believed he didn't even had somewhere else to go.

"I've never asked him about that," he thought. Thus did he realize he was thinking about his partner again.

"Maybe Roger was right," he closed his eyes and smiled. "It was an overreaction on both sides. Maybe, I should just go and talk to him again."

After all, every fight ended somehow; someday. And usually Max would never mention it again as he always did. And he still remained the only person to never let him down. Leo had to smile thinking about it.

Softly he rubbed his neck, while watching the people outside making their way through their icy environment.

"I should give it a try. Nothing lasts forever. And it'd be highly stupid to throw everything we've been through away, just because we lost our tempers in argument", he thought.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes again. Yes. He knew that was the right thing to do. He felt more determined than ever before. What good was this hiding anyway. Sooner or later he had to see him again. And he didn't want to stay away.

Leo moved over to catch his clothes and got dressed carefully. He ran through all the things he wanted to say in his mind. Everything that happened didn't count.

Then he stopped for a moment, looking at his right hand again. The pictures of him raising his hand against his partner came back to him.

"I shouldn't have done that," he ruefully said more to himself.

Max had been absolutely right about what he'd been saying. Ulla had been a mistake. She'd used him. At first to get to Rio, then to carry her career forward. And even though Leo was certain, if it had been Max in his place, he would have run off to Rio with her without even wasting another thought, he also knew his point of view had changed. Max did try to warn him a hundred times over. When Ulla had started flirting with this dancer, Max knew she was cheating on him sooner or later. He simply must have known.

Leo remembered that one day he'd tried to talk to him. At that time he hadn't been able to understand what Max had wanted to say. Usually, Max was very clear when it came to speaking about something so obvious. But somehow he'd chosen to hide it underneath a rag of suggestions and questions.

"I guess he wanted to protect me somehow", Leo thought again.

He went to the door and stopped again. With one hand at the doorknob he turned to look at the white splendor once more. "I will set this right."

"So here we'll stay
For always, forever
Beyond here
And on to eternity

For always, forever
For us there's no time and no space
No barrier love won't erase
Wherever you go, I still know
In my heart you will be with me"

Leo went down the huge stairs which combined several floors.

"Townhouse is the right word for this," he thought. Passing quite a few huge paintings of flowers, fuzzy dogs and close-ups on naked human backs, he noticed it was unusual quiet in here. Roger and Carmen lived with so many other crazy people – their 'production team' as they put it- , silence was something one rarely found underneath this ceiling.

Leo reached the end of the stairs quickly. Luckily, he had been in here a lot of times before with Max, so he couldn't get lost anymore. Too many doors were piled along the hallway like walls. But he knew which one to take.

Seconds later he entered the DeBris-kitchen just to find every single person living in this household standing in a circle and turning their heads on him. An awkward moment like this always gave him a chill running down his spine. Normally, they would speak all at once but no one said a word. Leo felt their eyes on him. Then, Carmen arose behind the others and came closer.

"Leo...", he began.

"Listen," Leo interrupted him, closing the door. "I've been thinking about what you said yesterday. And I think you were right."

He stepped closer, searching for Roger.

"I guess it was an overreaction, indeed. I think I should go now."

"Where do you wanna go?" Roger asked and now Leo noticed where he was. He was sitting behind all the others on a kitchen-chair; his arms folded, his head bowed and his eyes closed.

He spoke calmly, yet meaningful somehow.

"I'll go back to the office. I think I should make it clear I didn't want this to happen and apologize," Leo chose to ignore their funny behavior for he'd witnessed odd situations with them more than once. "You were right. I'm sure Max will have calmed himself by now. If I go over alone, I'm sure I'll be able to talk to him normally."

"Leo...", Roger began and finally their eyes met. "I think you should sit down..."

"From this day on I'm certain that I'll never be alone
I know what my heart must have always known
That love has a power that's all its own

And for always, forever
Now we can fly
And for always and always
We will go on beyond goodbye"

There was a seriousness in his voice Leo had never heard before. Why would he sit down? There was no need to do that. He didn't want to waste any more time. So, he shook his head.

"No, I think we can talk another time. I really need to do this now," he replied and turned to move outside the kitchen again.

"Leo, please. Sit down," Carmen jumped after him, carrying a compassionate look along.

Leo didn't understand. Why couldn't this wait. Roger and Carmen had never been the type to keep someone with them longer than necessary. And the sad faces of all the others around them including their continuous silence didn't help the situation much.

"Listen, I really appreciate what you did for me," Leo said a little uncertain. "But don't you see? I must go now, as long as I keep a stiff upper lip."

"SIT DOWN!" Roger's voice was much louder now. Leo flinched that second but although it sounded harsh, Roger still didn't look angry but desperate somehow. Now, Leo really started wondering what was going on here. Slowly he walked over to the kitchen-table, grabbed one of the chairs and sat down.

"What's going on here?" he asked carefully. Something was definitely in the air. At first he thought his eyes just played tricks on him but now he was convinced there was something going on that was absolutely wrong.

Roger turned his head towards the window, looking even more desperate. He didn't say a word. Everyone else turned their looks away from Leo, staring at the ground or into space. Leo looked from one to the other. No one seemed eager to tell him until Carmen put both his hands on Leo's shoulders. He looked him straight in the eyes, which made Leo feel even more uncomfortable.

"Something happened...", he said. "And we think you should know."

"No, we don't," Roger said silently, not daring to look in his direction. "But you would find out anyway..."

"What is it then?" Leo asked nervously. "You're scaring me a bit right now."

Carmen sighed.

"Leo...", he began. "When you're going now, you know...back to the office...you won't find Max there."

Leo looked at him questioning.

"There's been an accident..."

"No...", Leo caught the words only scattered. He felt his heart pounding against his chest "What... what kind of accident?" He was feeling cold all of a sudden.

From the corner of his eyes he saw Roger turning to him as well, sighing.

"He was hit by a car..."

Leo's heart sank. He didn't seem to breathe anymore. They must be kidding. Surely, he misunderstood them right now. This just couldn't be. No. It was too bizarre. The pure image of him sitting in this kitchen, with Roger and Carmen telling him something like that made him believe he was still sleeping. This must be a bad dream. Or a joke. A bad one for sure.

Leo tried to smile.

"Good one," he said and tried to laugh but he felt his eyes growing wider in shock. No, they wouldn't joke about something like that. But, this couldn't be...

His face grew pale and the smile was wiped away.

He lost the ground underneath his feet.

"For always, forever
Beyond here and on to eternity
For always and ever
You'll be a part of me

And for always, forever
A thousand tomorrows may cross the sky
And for always and always
We will go on beyond goodbye"

Nothing. They didn't tell them anything. Leo, Roger and Carmen were sitting in the waiting area of that damn hospital for what seemed like hours. No one dared to say anything. Leo sat bend forward, holding his head in his hands. He heard the annoying ticking of a nearby clock. He was angry. Angry with Roger for not telling him immediately what had happened; angry with those doctors, who refused to let him see Max and most of all he was angry with

himself. Why hadn't he been there when this had happened? Maybe it never would have happened at all, if he himself hadn't been leaving.

But Max had wanted him to leave... He didn't even know if this had anything to do with their fight. Yet, he blamed himself for this.

The more he thought about it, the more his body started to shake. He felt tears in his eyes and he still felt cold all the time. But what was that? The touch of a hand on his back.

Leo opened his eyes a bit only to look into Carmen's face.

"Don't blame yourself," he said in a nigh whisper. "It wasn't your fault. It's nobody's. No one could see that coming."

He knew Carmen was trying to help but it didn't blow away his bad conscience. Roger hadn't been saying anything ever since they sat in there. Whatever he was trying to tell him when he rushed out of the apartment and ran through this gray vault in desperation, Leo didn't know. He didn't ask either. It was unimportant.

"Mr. Bloom?" he heard an unknown voice coming from behind him.

Leo lifted his head. "Yes?"

A doctor stood now in front of him, carrying around something that looked like a patient file. He was looking serious. He seemed to notice the fright in Leo's face and the eyes of the two other men next to him, which seemed to freeze on him.

"He's alive," he said.

What a relief. At least some good news on this dark day.

"But he's got some wounds, of course," the doctor continued. "His right arm and two ribs are broken, he's got some cuttings and bruises on his face and head and all in all he looks like someone who has been hit by a car." He smirked but lost it again seconds later. This surely had meant to brighten the party a bit but it had no effect at all.

"Can I see him?" Leo asked shyly.

The doctor nodded.

"You can," he turned to Roger and Carmen. "But your companions. Well, it's okay as long as you say so. I cannot let people who don't belong in the family go inside."

"I'm not exactly part of his family either," Leo said as if out of his mind.

Again, the doctor nodded.

"Yes, but according to his living will" he pulled out a piece of paper from the file he was carrying. "You are his representative..."

Leo was stunned. "I am?"

"Yes. You didn't know?"

He'd actually never known Max had planned to put Leo in his living will, nor did he know he even had one. He felt enormously grateful and could tell his eyes were getting wet again. Then, he nodded.

"I want them to come along," Leo said, pointing at Roger and Carmen.

They were sent inside a small room with a lot of machines Leo had never seen before in his life.

Max lay in the middle of that room.

"He wasn't downplaying it," Leo thought. He looked horrible. But it didn't matter. He was alive and Leo couldn't recall a moment in all the years he knew him now, in which he felt more happy to see him. He stepped closer and sat down at the edge of the bed.

"Oh, Max..," he whispered.

To his surprise Max turned his head slightly and opened his eyes.

Leo sat there with wide eyes.

"You are awake?" he asked and moved a little closer. He stretched out his hand and touched his face the way Max had done so many times before with him. "Listen, I am so sorry for what had happened. I never should have said anything like that... I ..." He was fishing for words and swallowed hard. He felt tears running down his cheeks.

"I am so happy you're alive," Leo said. "I heard too late. And I thought...I thought I'll never get the chance to tell you how sorry I am..."

To his surprise Max didn't show the slightest change in his face in any way. He just kept on staring into Leo's face; completely expressionless and almost as though a stranger was sitting in front of him.

"You're still mad at me?" Leo dared to ask a little insecure.

Max opened his mouth and answered in a hoarse voice:

"...Who are you?"

~to be continued~

Calling me to stay

Chapter Notes

A/N: Do you know this feeling, when you know where you wanna go with a story but simply just don't get there?...Thanks a lot to Lena, who kept me writing with wonderful ideas... I used quite a few of them with her permission ;)

Again lyrics (c) Josh Groban

"There's a pale winter moon in the sky
Coming through my window
And the park is laid out like a bed below
It's a cold dark night and my heart melts like the snow
And the bells of New York City tell me not to go"

"They call it some kind of partial amnesia caused by a shock. They have no clue why it happened like that," Carmen said.

Leo was standing in the long hallway, leaning against the wall. His body felt so terribly heavy. He had to go outside, just to get the impression of what it was like to breathe again.

"Does he remember anything?" Roger asked, not taking his eyes away from Leo.

Carmen shook his head. "They don't know for sure what exactly got deleted in his memory. Fact is, he doesn't recognize any of us. They're not sure either how long it will take to regain his memory completely. It could take a day, a week...even years."

Roger looked at him in concern. "Or never?"

Carmen nodded once.

"Or never," he added.

Leo turned his gaze down again and folded his arms. He still felt cold. His thoughts were fighting each other. His mind was struggling with everything his inner logic was telling him. His head hurt. He felt like having been wounded in a fight and trying to move on without really knowing where to go. He hadn't been able to say anything back with Max. Still, he felt shocked. Carmen and Roger had urged him to leave the room as soon as they'd noticed what had happened. Carmen had been talking to the doctor while Roger had spent his time comforting Leo, whom he'd feared would have collapsed any moment. He'd been looking pale; a state that hadn't changed much until now. He hadn't been able to speak until they had him leaned against that wall and made him breathe slowly.

"Leo?" Roger spoke in a soft voice and very quietly, while putting one arm around his back.

Leo turned his head only to look at him with red swollen eyes.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Leo felt his eyes filling with tears again. And he knew both of them were staring at him; worrying about him, although he was only able to see them blurred.

"Although," he thought. "There's so much more important than me right now..."

"How can he forget everything just like that?" he asked.

....

"Leo, come on," Carmen was talking to a closed door. "You can't stay inside there forever!"

With his ear pressed against the door he waited. Any sign of reaction would be nice. Who was this kid trying to fool? He was in there and everyone knew it.

"Oh, don't act silly. You knew this day would come," Carmen said and pouted his mouth. He waited a few more seconds and then decided this had to be the end of his patience.

"I'm coming in now," he said. He took the doorknob and opened the gate into Leo's hideaway.

He stepped inside, carefully closing the door behind him again to find Leo basing himself on the bed with his arms. A little bewildered Carmen stepped closer. Leo didn't look up.

"Is..is everything alright?" Carmen asked a little surprised. "Honey, why didn't you open?"

Leo gave neither an answer nor did he really move from his position. He stood there petrified.

"Leo?"

Carmen really began to worry about him.

"I thought he had recovered the first shock," he thought.

Their living together for the past month had worked out better than he had expected. Sure, Leo had been quieter than usual but he had begun to talk again. He'd joined the crowd in this house and now and then he'd even dared to laugh about funny situations. The impression was given he'd won over the demons in his head and began to accept the situation. At some point Carmen even thought he picked up on his old life; pretending there never happened any change. But now...

"I can't," he heard a whisper from next to him. Carmen looked at him in astonishment.

"You can't what?" he asked though he could fore-feel the answer.

Leo turned away from him, not letting him see his face. His voice sounded shaky and, Carmen would have to call it weak to a certain point.

"I can't go there," Leo said.

Carmen had expected it. He got cold feet at the last moment. But actually, Leo couldn't be blamed for it. He was facing a long time with someone he knew once but who was pretty much a stranger to him now. He had been agreeing on living in the office again, just so someone would be there to watch over Max. The doctor had suggested him, because he was the closest to a family there was. And Roger's suggestion of letting both of them stay in their house had been rejected. Too many people might cause more trouble than they did any good.

"Listen," Carmen said, patting Leo's back. "I know it's hard for you. But it's the best for both of you, actually."

He could tell Leo was shaking his head slightly. "I can't endure to see him like this..."

He was merely whispering. Carmen grabbed his shoulders and softly made him turn around. He looked at him compassionately. Leo didn't open his eyes.

"Yes, you can. Just take a look on the sunny side. He's alive. And he'll be back for good. And you can help him remember," he said softly.

He thought Leo did take this in a good way for he opened his eyes for a second and his body seemed to relax in Carmen's grip, when all of a sudden he pushed him away with everything he had. Leo took two steps away and sank to his knees, leaving a startled Carmen in the middle of what now seemed like a huge room.

He stared at the picture of misery in front of him. Was that sobbing?

"I CANNOT DO THIS," Leo screamed desperately. "How on earth am I supposed to see him again after this? It's my fault it happened. I...I cannot make it up to him just like that. And he doesn't remember me. "

Tears were dripping on the wooden floor. Then, Leo lifted his head, looking at Carmen as if through other eyes.

"You cannot expect this from me," Leo cried.

Never had Carmen imagined someone could look both: desperately down and angry at the same time. But Leo did.

Carmen bit his lips. It would be highly unfair of him to scream back now. Instead, he knelt down as well, cupping Leo's head with both of his hands and looking straight into his eyes.

He spoke in a quiet voice: "I am not expecting anything. All I want is the both of you to be okay with a situation no one can be blamed for. You don't have to make it up to him. Or to us. Or to yourself, for it's not your responsibility. The only thing you have to do is to be there for a friend when he needs you."

"How can I look him into the eyes again? He doesn't remember a bit. It's not Max. It's someone else. I..." Leo started to cry again. "I... don't even know what I should say to him. It's not him... IT'S NOT HIM !"

Thus Carmen did something he'd never expected to do. He grabbed Leo abruptly and pulled him close to his chest in a bear hug. He could feel Leo stiffing at the sudden movement and he could hear his sobbing.

"I want him back," Leo said muffled.

Carmen simply sat there, stroking his back. Although he was well aware of Leo's doubts and the emotional pain he was going through right now, he couldn't help but grin slightly. Unless he was very much mistaken Leo cared a lot more for his friend than he realized now. Or maybe it was the shock still speaking out of him. He couldn't tell but he could sense being close to him helped Leo right now. None of them said a word.

"I'm being selfish," Leo thought leaning on the shoulder of a man he would never have described as very compassionate. "Or am I really?"

His head was fighting his heart right now. He didn't know what to do. He was scared. How should he handle a stranger who looked like someone he worshiped once? Worshiped? Yes, the longer he thought about it, the surer he was he could call it that. He had always admired Max for being who he was. For knowing what to do in every situation. For speaking up for what he wanted. Always. Even though he was uncomfortable to many people and had his flaws as everyone had them. Leo remembered a time when he was much younger. He had always dreamed of being like him. When he'd gotten to know him personally, he couldn't believe he was standing there. In front of him. And he had always been proud somehow to call him his friend and business-partner. Was it really such a bad thing to be scared of him now?

But he'd changed. Even though he didn't intend to. Maybe he wasn't like the Max Leo knew anymore. Leo had managed to stay away from him for a month now and he'd been thinking a lot about that. After all, chances were given his memory returned to him. Maybe even quickly. So, what was the big deal?

Leo knew he had to be strong just this once. He'd always been cowardly, weak even. He'd let himself carry through life by others. But just this once he knew he had to be someone else, instead of 'leo-ing' around, as Max had always called it. No, he knew this was sort of switching roles now. He wasn't sure if he could do it. All he knew was, he simply had to give it a try. Even if only for Max.

He slowly moved away from Carmen, who was looking at him with big eyes; nigh expecting. Leo wiped away his tears with his hand and nodded.

"Okay," he said. "I will try."

"It's always this time of year that my thoughts undo me
With the ghosts of many lifetimes all about

But from these mad heights I can always hear the sound
Of the bells of New York City singing all around"

The cold air made the white city seem even more icy. Leo sat on the backseat of the cab that carried him, Roger and Carmen back to the place he had been avoiding. As it turned the corner to the entrance of the hospital, it whirled up the snow that had been swept up to make the streets passable again. Like a waterfall of icy satin the snow splashed on the windows. Leo liked it somehow. It blocked out the outer world with its gray skies, which foreshadowed the inconvenient duty he was heading to on this gloomy day.

Leo felt safe somehow, being shut out. Just sitting inside the cab not able to see the ugly grimace of the world at least for another five minutes.

"We're there," he heard Roger's voice from before him.

He didn't look at him, nor did he say a word. An icy chill ran through his body when he opened the door and got out. Whether it was because of the snow or the situation he couldn't tell.

He followed Carmen and Roger into the hospital again.

.....

There he was. Leo stood behind the stained window that parted patients from visitors, just staring.

Carmen and Roger were inside with him, getting last advices from the doctor. Leo didn't dare to go inside. He didn't know what he felt exactly. He had signed some papers and now he was more or less useless. All he did was staring at his friend, who looked as always. Just his usual self. Leo tried to tell himself he was just the way he had memorized him. But every time, reason told him he was wrong.

"Be strong," he heard a voice inside of his head.

Roger shook hands with that devil in white. Leo saw it clearly. How he loathed those doctors for not being able to help. He hated them just as much as he still hated himself. He was so pointless, so not helpful. He couldn't stand the pure thought of it. He saw Carmen and Roger turning towards the door. Which meant they were coming. He took a deep breath, steadying himself. Then Carmen appeared in front of him. He only looked at Leo once, whispering: "Stay calm."

Roger followed with Max beside him.

"Mr. Bloom," Roger said and pointed at Leo in a very presenting way; just like introducing two strangers. Leo felt more than uncomfortable. It was just like his heartbeat stopped for a moment and he felt his hands getting sweaty.

"Leo, please," he added hastily. His gaze wandered from Roger to Max and back. Gosh, he sure was nervous. He felt the sudden urge to feel his blanket in his hands. Just for a second.

"Haven't you been here before?" Max asked.

Leo looked at him again. He still looked pale and rather damaged, his arm bandaged in plaster and the cuts in his face could still be seen. Leo held his breath and as in a trance he pulled out his blanket from his pocket and let it slip through his fingers several times. He must look pretty weird for he earned puzzled looks from Max and Roger, while Carmen giggled silently.

Max gently leaned over to Roger without letting Leo out of his sight.

"He's a bit crazy, isn't he?!" he asked, even though this should sound more like a statement.

Roger laughed out loud and patted Max lightly on the shoulder with one hand.

"Oh, you bet," he said. "You're going to get used to this, believe me. He's your partner in business."

Max looked at him in disbelief.

"Business-partner? Him?" he asked.

"You'll see." Roger nodded. He held out his arm in exit's direction, finally leading the way out.

"Great," Leo thought. "That went more than wrong."

He let his shoulders sink and followed them outside.

.....

They didn't talk much on the way back. Once or twice Carmen or Roger would ask something but Leo remained silent on the backseat, next to Max. He didn't dare to look at him, so he just stared straight ahead.

Max didn't seem to be interested in talking much either. He simply sat there, staring at the wintery city.

His thoughts drifted away. This huge city. So many people; so many buildings. He couldn't recall one place at all. They had told him what had happened of course. He just couldn't remember anything of it. Nor did he remember anything before this had happened. It was like waking from a long sleep, not knowing in where you had been or where you were now. Everything seemed strange. He didn't know what to think. Those three who picked him up were somehow connected to him. At least that's what people had been telling him. But he found them more strange than anything else.

A gay couple, obviously. He tried to figure out why on earth he would have any connections to people like that. He couldn't imagine. It simply drove him nuts. There was a black carpet which lay over his memory and as hard as he tried he just felt like a stranger among people he'd never seen before.

The weirdest one was this Mr. Bloom, for sure. Gee, what kind of issues did he have? Max didn't know why he would do business of any kind with someone like that. He didn't even know what he was doing exactly. And as for this Mr. Bloom...

He seemed way too cowardly; too mousy and too strange to Max to have something to do with.

Yet, he was sure he'd seen him before in that hospital. Had he been sitting there by his side, crying? He wasn't sure. And this whole city didn't look familiar in any ways. He felt lost somehow. If only he could remember one single detail. But there was nothing.

He watched the crowds of people pushing themselves through the snow; across the streets and inside these unfamiliar buildings. And all of a sudden he felt a wave of sadness coming over him. If they all had a plan in life, a way to go or a destination in front of them, they all must know what they wanted to change. Whatever went wrong in their pasts, they knew their ways.

He didn't even know his past. He could recall the last four weeks, being inside this damn clinic. But nothing else. They even had to tell him his own name...

"What the hell am I doing here?" he caught himself thinking. "With these strange people... Who am I to be in such company?" He sighed deeply. "Who am I?"

"Stay with me
Stay with me
Refuge from these broken dreams
Wait right here
Awake with me
On silent snow-filled streets

Sing to me one song for joy and one for redemption
And whatever's in between that I call mine
With the street lamp light to illuminate the gray
And the bells of New York City calling me to stay
The bells of New York City calling me to stay."

~To be continued~

Slipping through my fingers

Chapter Notes

A/N: This took me while...I'm sorry... I wanted this chapter to calm everything down a little...but well... XD I used lyrics by Josh Groban and Abba this time, although I must admit I changed the Abba-lyrics a bit to make them fit :D

Lyrics (c) Josh Groban, Abba

"You look at me with uncertainty
You look at me with urgency
You look at me with fear in your eyes
Like you're about to fall away"

When he opened his eyes, he stared through a window into this big unknown city again. He just remained where he was. Blended by the daylight he blinked a few times. This room felt strange as well. Its looks, its smell. Just everything. He looked around without moving much, then closed his eyes again. He had hoped that maybe he could remember something when he was back in here. But it felt like the first time he'd ever seen this office. There was nothing.

Max had been vanished into here shortly after they'd arrived last night. He didn't want to spend time with this lunatic stranger. Embarrassing silence made him feel uneasy somehow; at least when this guy was around. And he was determined he didn't need him to regain his memory. But now...

Opening his eyes again he stared at piles of books and there were posters displaying odd titles on the walls everywhere. Maybe they were plays. He couldn't tell.

After watching them for a while Max sat up. The rest of the room didn't look very different. His eyes wandered around. Slowly turning his head he discovered an old dark-brown closet standing there like a ghost; half opened.

Suits? There were a dozen of them hanging casually in there. Some of them were lying on the ground, others were sloppily flung over a chair. He had to smile seeing it.

"I'm obviously not very tidy," he thought.

He regretted not having asked what exactly he was doing for a living the last night. It must be something important if he wore suits all the time.

But how important could it be, when he did it with a partner? He couldn't help it. This Mr. Bloom was crossing his mind again. He didn't say much yesterday and Max had been thankful for that. He couldn't help it. This guy seemed just too weird to him; timid somehow

and almost as if he was scared of him. Yet, he was sure he'd never had any connections with people like that. Shy and introverted guys like him made him feel insecure himself. He could feel it. He felt it in the cab back to the office yesterday. He knew that Bloom had been watching him from the corner of his eyes but he didn't know why. It felt weird. That boy could've said something, if he wanted to.

Max had known that instance that the young man wasn't really capable of speaking up.

He turned his head a bit, looking at the huge piles of books. How theatrical. He must be reading a lot. And all those pictures.

"Seems a bit fanatic," he thought.

All of a sudden his gaze fell on an empty spot on the wall. He took a closer look. No, it wasn't just one. There were many of them. Looking around again, he noticed them now. Among all this stuff these empty spots weren't so obvious at first sight, yet they were there.

He stood up and walked over to the wall; studying them closely. It seemed there used to be pictures as well.

"Someone must have taken them away," Max said this aloud.

He stepped back a few inches just to get the full sight of it. This felt odd.

"It's just like my life," Max thought sadly. "Just like a jigsaw-puzzle. Only with pieces missing."

Maybe these pictures meant something. Why had he taken them away? Hadn't he liked the memories of his life anymore? Or had he wanted to make room for new experiences and therefore new memories? What was it that he'd wanted to eliminate here?

He turned in surprise, when all of a sudden he heard some noise coming from outside the room.

Max sighed.

"He must be awake," he thought.

He didn't feel the urge to talk to him again, but deep inside he knew, if he wanted to find out anything, there was no way around him.

"I'm living with this eccentric now, so he must know," Max thought. So, he decided to go outside.

He put on his pants and slipped over a pullover he found in the depths of this monster of wardrobe. It took him quite a while because with just one arm he couldn't move properly.

"He surely won't say much," he thought closing his eyes. "Or he'll pull out this blanket thing again. Talk about issues."

Max still couldn't cope with the image of a grown man and a blue baby-blanket. And he wasn't sure if he should ask him about that. But he knew he needed some answers. And if he was the only person he could talk to right now, so be it.

Max was practicing everything he wanted to say in his head over and over again.

"I need to know a few things and you must tell me. What happened? And don't tell me about this car-accident again. I want to know why I was in the streets and could've missed something as big as a car? What am I working as? And why the hell with someone like you?"

Yes. He'd say exactly that. Without any shortcuts. Straight forward. The quicker he got the answers, the sooner he could leave again.

He moved over to the door, turning the doorknob around. Stepping outside he was quite determined to know exactly what he would find. A gray cowardly strange boy looking at him as though he would eat him alive any time. Yet, he moved silently as a cat. He noticed in surprise. A quiet voice in the back of his head kept telling him not to scare this Bloom-boy away. It confused him deeply. Why would he care? It wasn't his choice to be bound to this man.

"So, why am I being so careful," he asked himself.

He walked through the office slowly, following the noises he kept hearing.

Finally arriving at what seemed to be a kitchen, Max stopped suddenly in astonishment. What he found there wasn't exactly what he had expected.

Before him a small table appeared, decorated with a bunch of flowers. Two place settings on a pearly white tablecloth had been carefully put there, together with a basket of fresh buns and a decanter of orange-juice.

Staring at it in surprise, Max flinched when he heard a voice coming from behind him.

"Good morning."

He turned around to find a smiling Leo standing next to him.

"You feeling better?" he asked without even losing his smile.

Max didn't expect that and must have looked pretty strange, for Leo started to chuckle when he saw it.

"I...I guess so," he stammered.

Leo just nodded without losing his happy face, passed him and pulled one chair forward; meaning for him to sit down. Max looked at him a bit taken aback.

"Only if you like," Leo said.

Max did as he was asked to, looking around a little absent-minded. Still, he felt the corners of his mouth lift into a smallish smile as well.

"Well, that was unexpected," he thought by himself. "He doesn't appear as reserved as he was yesterday. Who would have thought that."

Leo bustled about. Max couldn't make out what exactly he was doing, so he simply observed him from where he was sitting. He sure appeared much more nervous when he was in motion, yet he spoke in a very soft and calm way to him just seconds ago. Had he been wrong about him?

Leo half turned to him, addressing him directly.

"Would you like some coffee?" he asked friendly. Max only nodded.

Leo smiled again.

"Black, without sugar," he said, putting a cup of coffee in front of him. "Just the way you like it."

"If you say so," Max answered, but noticed his sarcastic tone right away.

He looked at the cup. One more clue. Black coffee. He liked it that way?

Leo's smile had left his face. He sat down, looking at him.

"You used to..."

Max lifted his head slightly and their eyes met.

"Well, I don't know anymore," he said, trying not to sound insulting. "I'll have to take your word for it."

He forced himself into a smile, even though he felt as though he could scream. He didn't even know such simple, meaningless things. How on earth could he expect to remember a whole life within just a few hours?

Leo was watching him. And Max knew it. He couldn't explain it, but he felt the eyes of his 'so called partner' on him every time without even looking at him.

Neither of them said a word.

He could hear him sip his own coffee. What kind of odd situation this was. Max felt so strange. There he was. This young man, smiling at him and caring about him as if nothing ever did happen. Yet, it felt all so familiar somehow. And as hard as he tried he couldn't make up his mind about that boy. He was crazy. He had seen it. He was confused and weird. Yet, none of these attributes were showing right now. And he knew. He knew how Max had been before. He could sense it. But somehow he didn't dare to ask him anymore. He wasn't sure why. A few minutes ago, he'd sooner beaten some answer out of him than waiting for anything to come back naturally, but now he didn't even know where to start.

Max looked at Leo again, who was sitting in front of him, supporting his head with his arm which he had braced on the table. He was smiling again.

"Feels strange, right?" he said softly. Max looked at him questioning.

"I mean this here," Leo was pointing at the both of them. "I can only imagine but it must be like trying to be nice to a stranger in the streets to you."

Unbelievable.

"How did he manage to reverse roles so quickly," Max thought without looking away. Then again, he nodded.

"I will get used to it for sure", he answered. He thought about how to ask the question he had in mind. "I mean we're living together, right?"

He tried to not make it sound like a question.

Unfortunately, Leo nodded. Damn! So, he was guessing right.

"For how long?" he asked a little uncertain.

"About a year now," Leo answered.

He took a deep breath. This couldn't be. Why on earth would he live with a man?

"Listen,...;" Max sighed, looking down. "We're not... I mean... Are we...?"

To his surprise Leo started to giggle and interrupted him.

"No, we're not," he answered.

His eyes were sad, even though he smiled again. Max noticed immediately. But he had to grin as well. He felt a little silly asking something like that but Leo didn't take it the wrong way.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"What for?"

"I thought I needed to ask that," Max was looking at him again. "After that queer couple back in the cab...well, you never know."

Leo gave a short laugh.

"Yeah, I hope they didn't shock you too much," he said. "They're nice guys, really...I mean, once you get to know them."

"And how do I know them?"

"They're friends of yours," Leo answered calmly. "Close friends, actually."

That didn't help so much. Friends. Where the hell did he know them from? He could feel an impatience rising inside of him, just to feel it vanish the moment he noticed it. Funny. That must be one of his weaker points then.

"Are they always ...," he didn't know how to explain it. He noticed Leo needed some more information for that answer. "You know... are they always that obvious?"

Leo nodded.

"Yes," he seemed amused. " Yes, they're always like that. A little loud and rushing but still nice people."

He waited for Max to ask the next question. Leo could feel there was a lot more he wanted to know but nothing came.

"I know how you feel," he finally said. Max didn't answer. "I found them very odd when I first met them, too. But, well... you'll grow to love them."

Max made an unbelieving face.

"Well, if you say so," he answered.

He started to relax a little. He'd never believed it but he was beginning to enjoy the company of this Mr. Bloom. He turned out to be not as nerdy as he thought and even though Max wished for him to tell a little more than only what was necessary, he felt like he's been sitting here with him before.

"Okay, can I ask something stupid?" he finally said.

"Of course," Leo smiled.

"Bloom, don't get me wrong but...What exactly is my connection to you?"

"We work together."

"I know that," Max interrupted. "But, don't you think it's a bit odd to share an apartment with a business-partner?"

Leo grinned and looked down. He was waiting for this question to come up. "We're friends as well. You let me stay here."

"So, this is mine, really?!"

Again, he nodded.

"I...I had to give up a few things and you were so kind as to allow me to stay here," Leo tried to explain.

He was avoiding his eyes, for he didn't quite know if he should tell him everything. But Max seemed eager to get to know more.

"And, well. How did we meet? Erm...It's quite a longer story," he rubbed his head, saying that.

"So? No rush. I've got all the time in the world."

There it was. That sarcastic smile Max used to wear so often before. Leo recognized it in an instance and all of a sudden felt like crying again. But he knew he had to stay strong. So, he took a deep breath and started to explain how they had met to the man in front of him. He was telling everything. From his starts as an accountant to their ridiculous plan of producing the biggest flop in history just to get enough money to lead a good life in Rio. He even told him how it all went wrong; how they were arrested and how they got free again. He told him how they started to get rich afterwards and how they've reached the top again after sinking so deep. Only thing he skipped was Ulla and how he came back for Max after leaving him with the police. Somehow he didn't think he needed to know. At least not yet.

Max on the other hand was looking at him wide-eyed, while he was talking.

"I'm a theatrical producer?" he asked once.

Leo explained he used to be the most famous. He didn't think it was possible but he somehow liked to talk about their actual first acquaintance. Max did laugh from time to time or ask something, but he hung on his every word.

"No," Max laughed out loud at some point. "We didn't actually do that?"

"Believe it or not," Leo laughed as well. "That's what happened."

It felt so much like talking to him before...well, before it happened. Leo almost forgot that his opposite didn't remember any of that. They laughed so hard at times, he also almost forgot not to tell him about the things that had happened. Max relaxed more and more and Leo's company suddenly didn't seem as strange as it was in the beginning. It was just the two of them again. Leo and Max.

Just like old times.

"Slipping through my fingers all the time
I try to capture every minute
The feeling in it
Slipping through my fingers all the time
Do I really see what's in his mind
Each time I think I'm close to knowing
He keeps on growing
Slipping through my fingers all the time"

They spent the morning talking about a lot of thing. Mostly about how they've met. Max seemed to be interested a lot in the story. Maybe because he heard it for what seemed the first time, but maybe -and Leo suspected this to be the more logical reason- because he just couldn't understand how the both of them ended up together. Leo knew they were so different and it must seem funny to others. He also thought of it as funny when he thought about it.

The morning and the afternoon went fast and he found himself casual leaning over a chair, watching Max who lay on the leather couch in their office.

"No, stop it," Max said, still laughing. "You're telling me I got the money for these productions by hooking up some grandmothers with too much dough to spare?"

"Yes, you did," Leo laughed. "Believe it or not. That's how it worked every time."

"Sounds like an easy-going thing to get some extra cash," he looked at Leo. "Why on earth did I give that up?"

Leo thought for a moment.

"I...I don't know," he said softly, looking down.

"Don't know?" Max never thought there was something he wouldn't get to know.

Leo's face turned from amused to sincere.

"You actually never told me," he said after a moment.

It was the truth. He never really thought about it until now but he never knew a reason why Max stopped it. He just had. From one day to another. Leo had been noticing of course, but he'd never asked him for a reason.

He stared at the ground with a distance in his eyes Max recalled from the cab-ride.

Leo couldn't help it. He had been so certain he was able to tell him everything he asked for. Except for the things he didn't wanna talk about, to be exact. But now? He'd never once believed there was something he didn't know. And all of a sudden he felt an oppressive sadness crawling into his mind again. This wasn't like old times. Not at all. Max didn't remember any of this. All he did was opening up to him a bit by listening to something that could be a made-up story as well.

"Bloom?"

Leo heard him addressing him and looked up. If only he'd stop that. Max had never called him by his last name.

"It's Leo," he answered quietly.

"Forgive me, I only remembered they introduced you as Bloom," Max answered a bit embarrassed. "Leo, then."

Even though he wasn't looking at him, Leo felt his insides flip when he heard Max's voice saying his name. He noticed it in astonishment and didn't dare to move at all. It sounded so much like the Max he knew. But how much of him was left?

He hid his face behind his braced arms to prevent Max from seeing his watery eyes.

Then, he just listened. But there was silence. Why didn't he say what he wanted to say?

Leo turned his head slightly again, just when he was sure he wouldn't start to cry again; just to find his partner looking at him in silence.

"You know, I thought you were a wreck," Max said.

That came unexpected. Leo was surprised.

"But of course, I don't really know... you know, your habits and stuff. It was just... Well, I feel like I need to apologize."

Leo lifted his head, wondering what would come next. Max apologized for something? Just like that?

And the older man seemed to notice his astonishment. "I guess I was wrong. You seem nice somehow. But...but I can't get why you are here."

"What do you mean?" Leo asked a bit uncertain.

"Well, you are young and good-looking. Why don't you live with your girlfriend or something?" he asked.

Again, Leo felt a chill running down his spine. He didn't know what to say. How on earth should he explain that? How could he talk about Ulla and the way they'd split up? How should he explain why he'd come to Max? And how he'd left him again due to a fight about her, leading to all of what had happened?

"You don't have one?" he heard him say.

Leo shook his head. "I used to... But it didn't work out."

Max took a breath as if to ask something more but decided not to do it. He leaned his head against the leather couch and stared outside the window.

The sunset was painting the buildings outside in bright orange. There was a light glow seemingly coming from below. Most likely due to the snow on the ground reflecting the last bit of daylight. It looked magical somehow.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?"

Max turned a bit. Leo had moved over to the couch and was kneeling next to him, looking in the same direction. Max nodded slightly.

"You used to love it," Leo explained.

"I did?"

"Oh yes. I remember, when you first told me about it. You showed me, you know... You were pulling me onto the balcony. You once called it 'your favorite time of the day'," he said.

Max listened to him with interest. He couldn't help but smile, listening to Leo.

He spoke so passionate about it. Maybe he wasn't so much different from now before?

He tried to remember it. But there was nothing. So, he shook his head.

"I'm so sorry Leo," he heard himself saying. "I don't remember."

He looked outside again. It made him feel sad. Something as nice as that. A favorite moment. Something like that simply must be a main thing to find in the depths of his memory somewhere. But it didn't ring any bells.

Max leaned against the couch again. His head felt heavy somehow.

"What kind of person have I been?" he asked.

It took a moment until he heard Leo answering.

"You were everything from sarcastic to were loud and ignorant at times," he said. Geez, that was exactly what he'd been dreading.

"But then," Leo started anew quietly. "There were those moments...You could be very calm and caring. You were compassionate and warm. You were, well...just you."

Max looked at him and was almost trembling. He didn't expect such an honest answer. And the way Leo said it...

He got the feeling a stronger bond was connecting them somehow. Or at least, it must have.

Leo was looking at him with the saddest eyes he had ever seen but still he smiled.

"We all have different sides," he said. "I used to be different, too. Still am sometimes. I guess that's why...why she left me..."

Max didn't dare to say something. He just kept on looking at the younger guy, who somehow managed to break his heart in so many ways; even though he couldn't explain a single one of them.

"I guess, I never loved her. So it must have been my fault entirely," Leo continued.

"You lived with a girl you didn't love?"

Leo nodded.

That sounded unbelievable to Max. He didn't know much about Leo but he wasn't exactly the person to something like that. From what he had learned until now, he was introverted, yes. But very strong when it came to emotional outbursts. So, why would he do something like that?

"It was you, right?" Max asked suddenly.

Leo turned to look him straight in the eyes.

"Who was there in the hospital. The day I woke up... That was you! Crying over me?"

He could tell Leo felt ashamed.

"Hm, if it really was you... there must be something true about your story," Max said, smiling at the boy.

Leo looked a bit confused.

"Maybe...maybe we were closer than just partners," Max thought.

Leo seemed sad. He took a look at him once more and it seemed he was fighting his own thoughts somehow. Max couldn't say why. All he knew was he needed to know more. And he felt this guy was the key. Why? He didn't know.

He smiled again and softly poked him. To his relief, Leo started to smile at him again. Max reached out and ruffled through his hair.

"Hey, don't let that get you down," he said. "I think you will find someone new soon. You're not that bad once you stay calm."

Leo looked a bit stunned and then laughed hard. Obviously, he didn't expect something like that.

But his laughter was catching somehow. Max couldn't help but giggle as well.

"After all," he continued, trying to catch some breath. "I don't expect you're the kind of nerdy guy letting himself get down by some swedish Blonde."

What?

Max opened his eyes wide, thinking about what he just said. Why did he say that? He didn't know. For a second, the picture of a blonde swedish girl was flashing in front of his eyes and somehow he must have connected it to Leo. Surely, his mind was playing tricks on him, for he couldn't find any reason to think about that. He tried to recover it. But no. He couldn't remember a girl. Why the hell did he say that then?

Not hearing a sound anymore, he turned to Leo, who was staring at him as well in shock. His eyes were wide open and his jaw dropped.

"What did you say?" he asked.

Max was rubbing his head.

"I...I don't know..."

"Don't be afraid to change your colors now
I've known you all summer and you rose above it all

I see you hesitate to fall now
But it's a pretty good view from down here too

When the wind takes you it takes me too
And when you change colors, I'll change mine too
Try not to think and I will try too
And when you let go, I will let go too

The cold air is pushing hard on you
I know what you're saying, I can feel it too
You'll go through changes and I'll go through them too
Don't be afraid now, no don't be afraid, don't be afraid"

~To be continued~

If you knew

Chapter Notes

A/N: Took me quite a while, but hey... I feel like calming down the whole story a little with information. :) And it's helping me getting closer to the end.

again Lyrics (c) Josh Groban

Something in your eyes makes me wanna lose myself
Makes me wanna lose myself in your arms
Something in your voice, makes my heart beat fast
Hope this feeling lasts the rest of my life

"He remembered...," Leo thought.

He wasn't sure what to say. And he wasn't sure how to explain the missing part in his story. Why did it have to be Ulla? Max despised her ever since Leo ran off with her to Rio. He hardly ever talked to her after that and he surely used to be the first in line when it came to pointing out her mistakes. Leo reflected it perfectly. He had been trying millions of times to just ignore Max's constant teasing about her. He had never been tired to bring it up. Jealousy. Leo had always been putting it this way. He must have been jealous all the time. But why the hell was she the first thing he seemed to remember?

Leo felt almost sorry for having answered and felt Max's eyes on him. Damn it!

He knew he ought to say something. But he only remained where he was, straining his eyes not to look at the man next to him.

He could hear the ticking of a clock nearby and the muffled noise coming from outside.

How long did he avoid him now? It felt like hours. And it made him feel bad. He wished Max would say something. Yet, he dreaded the moment the questions came.

"Please, don't ask," Leo thought.

If he did, Leo knew it would cause a relapse in the little trust they had managed to build up the last few hours. And admitting he kept Ulla a secret would surely lead to many more unpleasant questions.

"I should tell him. He has the right to know," he kept on thinking. "But what if it leads to another fight? I can't do this again."

A knock on the door shook him awake rather harshly. Leo turned his head, as did Max. They looked at each other for a second. Max shrugged questioning.

A second knock.

Leo got up from the ground and moved towards the door to take a look. He turned to doorknob and opened.

"Thank God," he thought, looking into the faces of Roger and Carmen who were smiling at him.

Leo was relieved to have found a distraction in their unexpected visit, yet he looked confused.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Checking, if you're doing good," Carmen answered joyfully and hugged Leo tightly.

Holding him so close, he whispered: "Have you been able to talk to him at all?"

Leo nodded slightly.

"Well, and Max of course. How do you do?" Roger passed Carmen and Leo and exuberantly entered the office.

Leo turned quickly. This was too much.

"Don't do that," he thought.

Being too rash could ruin everything. To his surprise Max remained quite calm; just standing up and shaking Rogers hand.

"Can't complain. Thank you," he answered.

Leo and Carmen looked at each other in surprise.

"Well, in that case...", Roger said and sat down next to Max, who kept acting as though it was his everyday routine.

"He's still very good facing unexpected situations, isn't he?" Leo heard Carmen whisper next to him.

Again, Leo only nodded. He didn't expect that for sure. It must be such a funny situation for Max; being there with a lot of strangers in a room he couldn't remember with only Leo's encouragement.

Yet, it wasn't as though he was facing them for the first time.

Carmen patted Leo softly on the shoulder; mouthing "Come on" and both of them joined Roger and Max.

"We thought we'd check up on both of you. You know...See if you get along or if you're still sitting around, being as silent as you were yesterday." Roger grinned widely and now addressed Leo directly.

Leo blushed a little and turned away. Carmen giggled and, much to Leo's surprise, Max lifted the corners of his mouth to a smile in his direction as well.

"Well,...er...," Leo started, but didn't quite know what to tell them.

"We get along," Max interrupted him, earning a confused look from Leo.

"I see," Roger grinned. "So, you've finally decided it was time to speak up? That's a good thing. After all, young Mr. Bloom here must not be obliged to spend his days in silence. Too much nonsense going around in his head, you know?"

He laughed out loud while Leo looked ashamed. He focused hard on the corner of the room, wishing Roger hadn't said anything as embarrassing as that right now.

Carmen gave his partner a look of incomprehension; just as though he wanted to correct him in a very maternal way.

"I think you underestimate him a lot," Max interrupted the odd situation.

Leo whirled around wide-eyed; as did Roger and Carmen. Max on the other hand sat there completely unimpressed, just staring back.

"How do you...," Carmen began, but Max cut him off quickly.

"I don't know why you think of him as such a withdrawn shy misfit but the way I see it, he is a very pleasant person to be around, who in fact talks just as much as he feels is necessary and it's highly unfair to present him in such a disparaged way."

He spoke distinctively severe, yet his voice was calm. Leo didn't believe what he had just heard. Max stepped into the breach for him? After only a day? Even before his accident he would never have done anything like that. At least not in front of Carmen and Roger. This certainly was new and Leo felt flattered in a way he never got to know before.

"Whereas...," Max continued. "I can't decide what part you two play in my memories, actually..."

"Well, we're...friends," Carmen stuttered.

"Yes, he mentioned it," Max nodded in Leo's direction. "But how do I know you? I mean, I simply can't figure it out."

Roger and Carmen looked at each other for a brief moment, then started to smile.

"The whole story?" Roger asked and Leo could see his face getting a soft, nearly sentimental expression as Max nodded.

Roger took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

"Well, we actually met many years ago. You had just started to work as a producer. Oh, I hope Mr. Bloom, did tell you about that? Yes? So, you've been pretty new to this business and just started your first work on your own, when we coincidentally visited the same... How would you call it, Darling?"

He looked at Carmen.

"Event?," Carmen answered amused.

"Yes, I guess you can call it that," again he started to laugh.

"What was it?," Leo asked, since he himself had never heard about how Roger and Max had met before and, so he must admit to himself, found it exceedingly fascinating.

Max never wanted to tell him, so there was something new on both sides.

"The choreographer's ball of '42," Roger blinked at Leo.

"No way," he looked a bit taken aback. "I mean, come on Roger...You can't be serious!"

"I am."

"Max in a costume?"

Carmen and Roger nodded simultaneously with the widest grin on their faces Leo had ever witnessed.

"What?" Max looked more than confused right now.

"Oh, don't you worry," Roger continued. "It was a nice white smoking, nothing too...fancy."

The shocked look on Max's face still didn't vanish and gave Leo a hard time to refrain from laughing out loud.

"Exactly the reaction I've expected of him," he thought.

"So, as a matter of fact I was there too, that evening," Roger kept explaining. "And dared to address you, if you don't mind me saying so."

"Why?" Max asked.

"Because, you were rather rude. I meant to ask you whether you are the protege my friend Boris told me about or not for I thought I had seen you before. But actually, you were somewhat scared of me. I don't know for sure. You were responding...what was it again...erm... You said, I should go and ask one of the other 'sissies' stupid questions and leave you alone for good."

"He did say THAT?" Leo asked appalled.

Roger nodded.

"And you became friends anyway?" Leo asked disbelievingly.

"Yes. That was a little time later, actually. I was angry of course, but well. Some days later I heard about him having problems, for he was quite unknown at that point and couldn't get a director to do the show he was producing. So, I visited him again," Roger smirked. "I don't know why I did it. Maybe, because Boris kept telling me he was a good guy or maybe because I thought... I don't know... I found there was something appealing about him."

Max lowered his head. Whether he was ashamed or just was trying to remember any of that, Leo couldn't tell. But he knew something was going on inside of his friend.

"Anyway, I walked up to his office. This office actually, and knocked."

"Did he take your offer?" Leo couldn't believe it. He could sense Max didn't either.

Roger snorted. "I thought he was about to throw me out again..."

Leo stared at him. Throw him out? Again? So, Roger hadn't been lying. Max had done this before. And the very reason he knew it for sure was he had experienced it twice, it seemed. Images of the day Leo left the office in anger and shame flashed before his eyes and brought back the horrible feelings which tied up his chest afterwards.

"Don't worry, he didn't do it," Roger said this as though having read Leo's thoughts. Both, Leo and Max looked up at him again.

"I just told him the truth. That I felt hurt when he so crassly insulted me back at the choreographer's ball, but actually he left quite an impression to me. After all, being new in the business and yet having no fear to express what he thought, even though it could ruin a lot of business partnerships for him... well, call me crazy, but I felt he deserved a fair chance in this business. So, I offered my help. And after all, I had done quite a few things until then. So, he agreed. We've been working together very often after that and, before you ask: No, he never apologized for that 'first meeting'."

Roger looked up at Max, who only stared back at him.

"But you showed it in the years to come... by simply involving me in everything we worked on. And letting me decide more than I was supposed to."

"Until 'Springtime for Hitler'," Carmen stepped in.

Leo nodded knowingly. Although both of them, himself and Max, had been apologizing for just 'using' Roger in order to make their scheme work, he still felt they had hurt Roger deeply. Max even told him he never thought about him being such a bad director and he'd just felt his style, colorful and flamboyant, hadn't exactly been the right way to produce a World War Two-play. But still, Leo often thought Roger had never quite forgiven them for this.

"ENOUGH!"

The three of them gave a jerk and whirled around in surprise. Max stood in the middle of the room, with a downcast look and closed eyes; his hands clenched to fists.

"Max?" Leo asked hesitantly. "Is...is everything alright?"

Max opened his eyes again and looked at the younger man in a desperate way.

"I'm... I'm sorry... I," he stuttered.

Then he turned around to face Roger and Carmen, who still sat on the leather couch, looking shocked. Max cleared his throat and spoke quietly:

"I ... I apologize... I'm...er..I'm not feeling too well. Could you please go now?" The look in his eyes didn't leave him, even though he did his very best to sound calm. "Both of you?"

Carmen got up and was about to say another word, when Roger soothed him by putting his hand on his shoulder. Carmen looked at him for a short moment and Leo saw Roger only nodded silently.

Both of them got up.

"I am very sorry," Roger said. "I didn't mean to upset you in any way. It's good to see you're doing better. Maybe...", he turned around to Leo. "Maybe you could keep us up to date, for we're kind of worried."

Then he nodded towards Max and pushed Carmen towards the door.

Leo got up as well.

"I'll just lead them out," he said quietly and followed them, leaving Max behind.

Arriving at the door, he accompanied them outside and closed the door carefully behind them.

"I am sorry," he said, looking at his two friends.

But both of them shook their heads.

"It was a bit much. Too many things at once. He can't cope with that," Roger said, smiling in an empathetical way.

He was about to turn around to leave with Carmen, but Leo held him back.

"Wait. I need to ask you one more thing," he said.

Roger looked at him for a moment. He was sure he noticed an urgency in Leo's eyes he had never seen before. So, he turned and whispered something into Carmen's ear. His partner nodded. Then he hugged Leo once more, whispering "Please, let us know if you need help."

He let go of him and left Roger and Leo to themselves.

"So?"

"I got one question," Leo began, taking a deep breath. "Remember that day, when... when it happened?"

Again, Roger nodded.

"You said... that... you didn't want me to know," Leo avoided the taller man's eyes.

"Hm," Roger answered. "And you want to know why!"

Leo lifted his head and met his eyes again.

"Yes," he said a little unsure.

Roger smiled. Why did he always have to smile so knowingly. How come, he seemed to know exactly what Leo was thinking every time?

"Well, I guess I just couldn't tell you," he finally said.

Leo was confused. "You couldn't?"

"Yes. I guess, because ...because I care about you and your well-being. I know you quite a long time now too, Leo."

"What?" Leo felt his body starting to shake and an unknown anger arising inside of him.

He tried to control it. He couldn't show weakness in this sort of situation; with Max waiting for him and all the thoughts that were still fighting inside of him. He closed his eyes.

"I had the right to know," he whispered.

"Come again?"

"I had the right to know!" he said, noticing his own voice growing louder. "It wasn't your responsibility... your decision. You should've informed me the moment you've heard... I mean..."

He felt tears running down his face. Again. He could have slapped himself that very moment for letting it show, but he simply couldn't help it.

"Leo..."

"No," he looked up again. "Don't you understand? It's Max! He's the only one I got. How could you even think about letting me out in the rain with this?"

"Did it change anything, now you know it?" Roger asked calmly.

Leo thought for a moment.

"No...", he admitted. "But... I don't know how to handle this. How can I even think of fixing this alone? I can't get used to the fact he isn't himself anymore."

He retreated appallingly a second later when Roger stepped forward, taking Leo's head in both of his hands and holding him close to his face.

"Don't you see?" he said distinctively. "This is exactly what I was trying to prevent you from a month ago. I didn't want to watch you break down on this situation!"

Leo's eyes widened. "Break down?"

"Yes," Roger's eyes looked sensitively at the younger man. He was wiping away his tears with his thumbs. "Oh Leo, look at all the things you are able to do. What you've already done. You managed to stay strong. You managed to swallow your own pain and forget about what happened just to be there for a friend. For someone you care about more than anybody else. You couldn't have done this in the deplorable state you were a month ago."

"What makes you think that?" Leo asked.

Roger let go of him. "Leo, let me ask you something in return. Imagine things went differently. What if Max had died that very day..."

Leo closed his eyes. He didn't want to imagine something like that. It was his worst nightmare. Just facing this situation inside his head made him shiver.

"Just imagine it had happened," Roger continued, noticing Leo's anxiety immediately. "Would you have been able to face it? To just live on?"

Leo didn't know what to say. He had been trying to avoid this thought. Every time it appeared somewhere deep inside of him, he diverted his thoughts to something else. But the truth was he just didn't know. It was the worst situation he could imagine. And he wasn't sure, if he could have lived with that.

No, Roger was right. He most likely would have never gotten over it. With Max gone, his life wasn't worth a thing. He realized it just now. But why was Roger asking him something as dreadful as that?

"I thought so," he heard him say.

"You thought what?" Leo managed to react.

"I think it's time for you to face it," Roger said, turning to leave. Leo stopped him again.

"Facing what?"

"Facing there is a lot more between you and him than just friendship," Roger smiled sadly.

Then he turned and followed the hallway outside; leaving Leo bewildered.

If you knew how lonely my life has been
And how low I've felt for so long
And if you knew how I wanted someone to come along
And change my world the way you've done

Leo returned to the office. His head felt heavy and his body was still shaking. As hard as he tried he couldn't get Roger's words out of his mind. Did he mean that?

Yes, Leo was sure he did. How could he imply something like that? They had always been just friends. Leo never dared to think about wanting more. But why made him this one notion feel more confused than anything else that had happened? Wouldn't anybody do what he did for a good friend?

'Even thinking you couldn't live without each other'? A quiet voice inside of him kept hammering this one question in his head. Wasn't it normal? But then, why did he hide the Ulla part from Max? After all, it was part of their past together.

Leo looked around.

The office looked the way he always remembered it. From the first day on.

He closed his eyes and searched in his memories. Just the scent of the wooden floor, the old furniture and the leather couch made him remember the first steps he took in here. Oh, and how he loved it. He had been so excited to come here. Not only to work in an office like this. Close to the theater; with famous people walking the streets all day long. He had known he was finally going to meet the one person he used to adore even when he was much younger and he had been so nervous.

"Everything in here... is Max," he thought. He opened his eyes again. "Max!"

He turned his head, just remembering he had nearly forgotten about Max's outburst just minutes ago.

Leo moved through the room. Max wasn't there anymore.

"Damn it," he thought. He was about to run through the entire apartment when he noticed the open french window close to him.

Taking a deep breath he slowly climbed out to the balcony.

There he was. Max stood on the ledge of the terrace just watching the nightly sky.

Leo approached carefully.

"Max?" he spoke softly, maybe out of fear to make him feel uneasy again.

"Hey, are you okay?"

Max didn't answer. He simply kept on staring into the dark skies.

Leo sat down. He still felt confused. But he was determined not to let it show. Watching his friend there reminded him, that bigger problems could occur in one's life than just a stupid notion of a friend.

They didn't say one single word in a long time. Leo simply remained where he was, watching Max looking around. And suddenly he felt very small. What must it be like to wake up and not remembering a whole life? Feeling all alone? Being surrounded by people you couldn't identify, who kept telling you all kind of weird stories about a life that once was yours?

"It must feel like trying to catch the wind," Leo thought. "It's impossible."

He felt sorry for Max. He couldn't even imagine the inner struggle he was dealing with right now but he knew, somehow, how terribly alone he must feel.

"I remember those."

Leo lifted his head. What was he talking about? He looked up to gaze at the stars. They were blurry and nigh invisible in the illuminated sky of this big city but still he could see them.

"The stars?" Leo asked.

Max nodded. "When I was younger I used to watch them every night. Making a wish..."

Leo was surprised. Max hardly ever spoke about his youth.

"What did you wish for?" he asked.

Max shook his head slightly.

"I don't know," he said. "But I remember them. Just as though old friends are watching over me."

Then he turned around and Leo heard him laughing.

"Sounds pretty silly, doesn't it?" he turned to look at the younger man again with a smile on his face.

Leo lifted his mouth to a small smile as well.

"No, it doesn't," he answered.

Max sighed. "I'm sorry."

"What for?"

"For screaming them away," Max answered.

Leo shook his head. "It's for the best they left. Just don't be mad at them. They only cared about you."

Max looked down. He felt bad for having done this. Leo had been right. They really were nice. A little loud and hectic, maybe. But nevertheless, they meant no harm.

"What was the matter?" He heard Leo's voice.

Max shrugged.

"You don't need to tell me," Leo said honestly. "I just thought..."

"I was an asshole."

Leo looked up at him. He didn't expect an answer like that and wasn't sure he understood right.

"I mean...just look at what they told us," Max said.

Leo noticed in an instance he must have recognized the weird situation of both of them hearing the story for the first time, too.

"The way I was... I mean, you said it yourself. I didn't care about the people around me. I was selfish and ungrateful and worst of all insulting," Max continued.

It hurt to talk about this. He couldn't make out why but considering the situation, he felt ashamed. Ashamed for supposedly having acted like a jerk all the time towards people who meant well.

"I cannot understand it. Why the hell have you all stayed by my side all those years? With me treating you like that. After all what Roger told me I was saying to him is...is horrible. And your story about that flop-scheme wasn't even better. What on earth makes you think I'm a person worth staying with? This is crazy," Max sounded more and more desperate. "You know, as hard as I try I simply cannot remember one detail of all this. It's like getting lost in a crowd. All of this here..." he pointed around: "is awfully unfamiliar. And I really try but the more you and your two friends are telling me, the more I think it's impossible."

Leo got up from where he was sitting. He moved over to Max. He understood perfectly. It was exactly the confusion he had been assuming and he knew it felt like being in hell. He gripped Max and flung his arms around him. Max stiffened by that unexpected touch but soon relaxed a little.

"You weren't as bad as you are portraying yourself," he said softly. "Believe me. I know it's hard to understand but you had another side as well."

Max didn't say anything for a while. He just hung there, breathing deeply.

"I don't wanna be like that," he only whispered and Leo was sure, he wasn't supposed to hear it.

He let go of him again, looking straight into his eyes. He never saw his partner being so honest with himself before.

"I understand how it feels. The whole situation confuses me too," Leo replied. "But you are not alone. I am here and I will help you. We'll go through this together, no matter how long it will take."

Another window breaks down a long, dark street
And a siren wails in the night
But that's alright, 'cause I have you here with me
And I can almost see, through the dark there is light

Well, if you knew how much this moment means to me
And how long I've waited for your touch
And if you knew how happy you are making me
I never thought that I'd love anyone so much

~To be continued~

Remember me this way

Chapter Notes

A/N: I know this took terribly long... I've had my troubles with that chapter somehow. I knew where I wanted to go, but it took me several "asking-for-directions", if you know what I mean XD *g*

Anyway, hope anyone is still reading this... According to the views there is life out there, but well ;)

Hope you like it :)

He wasn't sure what to say. He simply stood there, next to Max and watching him. The older man seemed to be thinking, but it was impossible for Leo to tell what exactly he was thinking of. Facing that place, a thousand pictures flashed before his eyes and he treasured them as if his life depended on it and he wondered whether he should mention it to Max or not. Max didn't move. What an odd situation. It meant so much to Leo. Everything he was and everything he left behind started here. As hard as he tried, he couldn't comprehend that he wasn't sharing this with anyone anymore. He felt bad, all of a sudden. How was he supposed to express how important it was. Important to the both of them. But somehow it remained his own. One of the few important things two people should have in their past.

"I have been here with you before," he heard Max saying and turned his head in surprise.

"I'm pretty sure of that..."

....

The weeks passed quickly. It became more and more normal to both of them just spending their days together. Leo took his time with Max and tried to act careful. Sometimes Max would ask something again and he took the time to explain everything to him as good as possible.

Max on the other hand, seemed to warm up with his forced partnership and everyday he was acting more casual when Leo was around. And although Leo felt like it was only yesterday when Max had shared his thoughts about his past self with him on the balcony; he never mentioned it again. Max did neither. Leo sometimes wondered whether he'd really meant it or not. Max was different now. But he only guessed it had to do with so much more than just the decision to be someone else and Leo never knew if he was intentionally trying to be like that. He simply decided to keep his cards close to his chest.

"It's so funny how things have changed," Max often thought. "A few weeks ago I'd have done anything to avoid being with him, but now I kind of enjoy having him around."

He started to notice these thoughts quite a while ago and started to wonder if it used to be like that before. Maybe it had been. At least, it would explain why he let Leo live here; a fact which made it easier to believe in Leo's story as well. But somehow, he grew to like these weird little habits of that boy a little more every day. Sometimes he would only sit quietly somewhere in the office, observing the younger man from the corner of his eyes. He enjoyed it, especially while Leo was working.

Leo had been trying to explain to him what exactly he did and what had to be done by the two of them, being the producers of a Broadway show but it wasn't at all as easy for Max to catch up as it was for Leo to simply do it. He had his problems imagining how he managed to do all of this paperwork before. And Leo was especially good with numbers, figures and calculations, so there was no need for Max to hurry to get an overview on all of that.

Maybe it was the accountant in him that kept Leo doing this stuff with a mad passion Max had hardly been seeing on him in any other situation in the last few weeks. He could sit over these books for hours, mumbling calculations and creating waterfalls of numerical values inside those books. From time to time he would stop, gnawing his pencil while simply eying his own writings. It was then Max knew he was lost somehow; searching for miscalculations and rubbing his own forehead. Max always suppressed a laugh whenever he saw it. He looked so desperate then, almost like a child. But Leo never gave up until he solved the problem; only to stroke through his hazel hair, forcing it to fall in thin strands softly over his face again whenever he would finally figure out the mistake hidden within his work.

There were numerous little gestures like that Max noticed now in surprise and he secretly developed a lot of pleasure in memorizing them; only to interpret them later.

He tried hard not to let it show but Leo was winning his affection more and more. He couldn't explain it. Maybe there existed a deeper bond somewhere in their being together. Max often thought about that as well. They lived together, worked together and, even though he never mentioned it again, he was absolutely sure it had been Leo in that hospital, sitting on his bed crying. No one cried just like that over a business-partner. Something about the things Leo had been telling him just didn't make sense. And after he got to know a little of the person he had been, he was convinced he couldn't have told him everything. Who would ever stay with such a person and still say there were other sides as well? Things only he seemed to know about, but he just wouldn't tell.

"How about visiting rehearsals today?" Leo said one morning.

"Is that part of the job as well?" Max asked in return. "I always thought it's the directors who manage those."

Leo nodded with a smile on his face. "Yes, but you have a voice in that as well. And I thought it'd be a nice change from just continuing that daily routine we're both enjoying for weeks now. You know. Just to get in touch with people again."

Max was sure he was trying to integrate him again. And he knew it meant meeting Roger and Carmen again. He'd been avoiding it since their little visit that first evening. He knew Leo met with them from time to time, as well as he noticed them calling almost every day.

Luckily, Leo never insisted on seeing them again together. He kept his thoughts about it to himself but Max could tell he didn't want to force him.

Only once Max had been thinking about telling him why he was avoiding them. They seemed to be nice after all. But ever since Roger kept telling him about the person he used to be, Max felt scared to confront him again. He felt ashamed. And he feared they might point out more of these things. But what if facing your demons was the only choice he had, if he really wanted to remember again?

So, he agreed.

"Maybe, it won't be that bad," he thought.

Leo seemed chuffed about it. He grinned delightedly. Max smirked. Maybe it was the right thing to do. If Leo was happy about it, it couldn't be all bad. He watched him turning to his writings again, still smiling and somehow that smile seemed to illuminate the whole office a little more. Could be he was imagining it but seeing it made him forget the feeling of alienation that stuck on him now.

He turned his head again to continue arranging the huge amount of plays in front of him.

"There you go again," Max thought. "Watching that boy and paying attention to the smallest movements which may reveal his current state of mind. How crazy is this?"

It made him feel weird. Why did he see these things now? What exactly made him so fascinating all at once? He couldn't get it. But he knew, he enjoyed it enormously to see him smile.

As he continued to rifle through the piles in front of him again he suddenly stopped, pulling out a softcover play in bright red. Those plays arrived there in every color one could imagine but somehow this one attract his attention. He stared at it for a moment. It seemed familiar somehow. Max stroke over the cover with one hand and suddenly was under the impression of knowing exactly what was written in it.

He opened it.

"Springtime for Hitler.."

"That's the play he told me about," he thought, staring at the front page.

The feeling was gone. Of course he knew what it was about. Leo had told him. His hands sank slowly. How disappointing. Just a moment ago, he believed he was close to remembering something but now it was almost like someone had barricaded that door. But he had the strange feeling of having held this play in his hands before.

"Of course you have, idiot," a voice in his head said. "If this is the flop you've been setting your hopes on, you simply must have!"

"I haven't seen that one in years."

Max whirled around to find Leo looking over his shoulders. Damn. He could be quiet as a cat, if he liked. Max took a deep breath to calm down again.

"Gee, you nearly gave me a heart-attack," he said half amused.

"Didn't mean to," Leo chuckled and sat down next to Max. "That's..."

"The play we used to put on a flop, I know," Max interrupted him. Judging the bewildered look on Leo's face, he added: "You told me."

Leo nodded without saying a word. Then he took the script from Max and opened it. He turned some pages and read a few lines now and then.

"See that?," he pointed at some red writings written sloppily between the lines.

"It's Roger. He always writes his own little notes inside the scripts. Unfortunately he thinks it's of 'paramount importance' to have his thoughts in the Producer's copy as well. So the whole thing looks like that."

Max had to laugh hearing Leo imitate Roger's voice as he cited him.

"And were they helpful?" he asked, even though he could imagine the answer from the start.

"Not for once. But it's fun to read them. We used to spend hours making fun of them once we were alone," Leo grinned. "Just look at this: 'Glittering Swastika's that rotate with the music on stage' How awful can something get, really?"

"Sounds horrible."

"Yeah, but it was supposed to stink, don't forget," Leo winked at him. "Actually, you kept motivating him to assert himself."

"I did?"

"Yes. You were quite obsessed with it becoming more and more despicable. So, you let him do whatever was possible," Leo smiled.

Max couldn't imagine. Why on earth would someone support a stupid idea like that. He moved a little closer to look at the pages as well. Roger's handwriting was literally everywhere. And his ideas kept getting more bizarre.

'Dancers in tank-costumes', 'Tap-dancing Nazis', 'Ulla wearing a German-Eagle costume'

"Who's Ulla?" Max asked, looking at Leo but immediately wished he had not asked.

Leo's face turned white and looked rather shocked. Max pointed at the notes of Roger without taking his eyes off of his partner. That name obviously aroused something inside of him.

Leo stared at the name. Damn it. He didn't even remember Roger writing something about her in that script. And he never dreamed of Max asking him about her of all the things he

could have asked.

"She's...", he began, but stopped. How was he supposed to explain that? He sighed.

"You don't have to speak about her, if you don't want to," Max answered.

Leo turned to look at him.

"I figure it is kind of hard for you somehow," Max continued without taking his eyes off him. "She's the one you've been living with, right?"

Leo stood up and turned away. He couldn't do it. And there it was again. Max reading his mind. He had always been able to do this somehow.

Leo took a deep breath, instinctively pulling his blue blanket out of his pocket.

"She's left me." he said quietly with his back turned on Max. "I guess it was my fault though. She couldn't forgive me. I've done something bad to her..."

"I see," Max answered.

It must be hard for Leo to talk about it. Max observed him pulling out that blanket every time he felt uncomfortable about something. "Well, as I said, you don't have to talk about her. After all, you've been skipping her until now."

Leo turned wide-eyed. He noticed?

Max shrugged. "I am guessing, since I can't recall you ever mentioning her in that 'Springtime'-story."

He gave it his best try to smile casually, but somehow it made him gloomy to say that.

"I am sorry," Leo answered.

Max shook his head. "No need to feel sorry. It's okay. She must have hurt you a lot. And I am sure, you've had your reasons to act like that. I won't judge."

Leo didn't believe it. That was so far from the Max he knew than he could imagine.

"One question though," Max started once more. "This girl...was she a blonde?"

Leo nodded. "And Swedish..."

So, that's why he somehow connected Leo with a blonde girl. And why Leo's look had been that appalling when he mentioned her weeks ago. Max nodded and by the looks of Leo, he knew boy thought the same.

"Did I get along with her?"

Leo shook his head. "You loathed her. Well, not at first. But you weren't exactly best friends, if you can call it that."

Just what he had expected. Being completely honest to himself, he despised her now, too. Even without really knowing her. But why? She surely didn't do anything to him.

"I'm really sorry, Max."

He turned his head again. "What for?"

"I should have told you about her in the first place... But,..."

"Hey, stop that," Max said and got up, moving towards the younger man.

Leo looked surprised but didn't back away.

"I don't know what you did to her or whatever she did to you, nor do I care. She's being an idiot leaving you," he said and stroke through Leo's brown strands, which fell into his face.

Leo looked at him with his puppy eyes as if trying to get what he just said. God, those eyes. Max felt the urge to kick that girl, just so he must never see those eyes looking so desperate back at him. But he remained where he was; hoping he wouldn't give away his own thoughts.

"You don't deserve being treated like that," Max continued. "If she can't see the person you are... I mean behind these scared habits of yours and that blanket. She just wasn't right for you."

Geez, why did he say that? Because his affection led him to this? No. Because it was true. Leo was so much more than a nerdy shy guy. He had managed to prove it during the last weeks. And he definitely did prove Max wrong. There was absolutely no way, someone else wouldn't notice that as well.

Leo's eyes began to fill with tears. Max noticed in surprise. It gave him goosebumps.

"Oh no, Leo. I am sorry. I didn't mean to make you cry," Max said quickly.

But Leo only shook his head and smiled. "It's just... Damn, I'm sorry..."

He tried to wipe away the tears with his hands. Why did he have to be so weak all the time? But hearing Max's words somehow left him thunderstruck. He never expected to hear anything like that from Max. Why did he have to be such a coward all the time. He should tell him. Tell him exactly what had happened between him and Ulla, so he would understand. But he couldn't. And then, there was this man... Being completely on his side and believing him, even though he had good reasons not to. It was insane.

He heard Max coming closer and before he could look at him once more, Leo found himself in his arms, entwined into a warm embrace. He didn't dare to move. He nearly didn't even dare to breathe.

"Never mind!" he heard his voice. "We won't mention it again. But please, don't cry."

Leo wasn't able to say anything. He just hung there in Max's arms, feeling like his soul was leaving his body. His heart started to pound fiercely. He closed his eyes and just listened to

Max's breathing, feeling his hands on his back and smelling his scent. And for once, he wished that embrace would never stop.

....

"So, how are you doing? Both of you," Roger asked, looking from Leo to Max.

They stood outside the theater that late afternoon and the sun began to color the snowy streets in bright orange.

Leo was rubbing his neck. Sitting in there for some hours sure had been exhausting. He noticed how much he got used to not doing this in the last two months.

"Fine, I guess," he answered smiling.

"Just that? Fine?" Roger laughed. "You look much more comfortable with each other now."

"Well, you get used to everything," Max answered. "It was a good idea to come here though."

Leo had to laugh. Max was doing good. He knew perfectly well he somehow wanted to avoid meeting Roger and Carmen again but Max didn't let it show during the day. He talked a lot and listened to everything Roger had to say. Sitting in his corner, Leo observed them. It was so funny. Usually, Max and Roger would start to argue about tiny things but this time time just went harmoniously. He saw Max smile every now and then or simply nod to Roger's stupid ideas. It was strange somehow, yet so familiar that Leo was more than glad he had brought him here.

He looked over to the both of them talking excitedly about the past days.

"It's as though he was never gone," Leo thought.

Thus, he noticed, he was watching Max again. His progress in integrating himself was astounding. He acted as though he'd never done anything else, even though he could not give much advice as a producer. He was very kind to the crew and tried to be courteous to everyone. In a way he was much more gentle now than he used to be. Sometimes, Leo must admit he was almost jealous of everyone who got in touch with him. Max used to show that side of himself before but only to Leo.

The smile on his face fell. Why was he thinking about this so often lately? He hoped things would return to normal once Max started to remember again but the more time they spent together the less Leo could ignore the affection towards his partner that grew stronger inside of him. He couldn't shake them.

"Is everything alright?"

Leo looked up to see Carmen standing in front of him.

"Everything's perfect," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

Carmen shrugged. "I thought I've seen a slight sadness in that charming face of yours."

He smiled openly at Leo and he knew in an instance Carmen had noticed it.

The slender man flung down besides Leo and sighed.

"Listen, what is it you're worrying about?" he started. "Max is doing great. He's much more open now and, boy! Talk about friendly. I mean everyone loves him. It's so different from what he used to be. That moody, grumbling and sometimes very vain guy. He's really making progress. And then, there's you."

He was pointing at Leo, who just kept staring at him.

"I mean, you of all people. You wanted him back. You wanted him to recover quickly and to sort of come back to life. But now you seem to be the only one not happy about it. To be quite frank Leo, I don't really get it."

Leo felt like Carmen's gaze was stabbing him.

"I am," he answered slowly. "I really am. More than happy."

"So, what's the problem then," Carmen asked. "You are much quieter lately. And you seem so withdrawn anytime you're among people. What is it, that keeps you puzzling about in your head?"

He still smiled. Leo looked down. He didn't really know what to answer. And Carmen still wouldn't look away. He could feel it.

"If I didn't know better," he heard him saying. "I'd say you seem sad...almost desperate."

Leo looked at him again. Carmen always had a way with speaking out loud whatever he was thinking and Leo had secretly admired it all the time but now it was like being an open book.

Carmen on the other hand, patted him on the shoulder while still not losing his smile and simply said: "Cheer up, little buddy. There really is nothing to brood about."

Then he stood up and started to move towards Roger again. Leo followed him with his eyes for a moment. He suddenly felt the urge to grin and lifted the corners of his mouth to a smile without really wanting it.

"He's right," he thought. "I don't really know how he's doing this every time but still he is right. There is nothing to worry about."

Leo got up and followed Carmen over to Roger and Max. He couldn't feel bad about it. It was just the way it was supposed to be. With Max standing here too; talking to the others, integrating himself in this job. A job he after all taught to Leo. It shouldn't be the other way around. And every little step forward should be something to be happy about. It still was Max. No matter, if he seemed different. And he didn't block himself about anything. On the contrary, it seemed as if Max wanted to learn. Maybe, he thought he could help his memory that way. Who knew?

"LEO? Are you even listening?"

He flinched for a second and turned his head to Roger, who looked at him uncomprehending. Darn! He did say something. Leo had been captured in his thoughts so much, he hadn't even noticed.

"I'm sorry...what?" he stammered.

Carmen started to giggle, while Roger looked a bit confused.

"I wanted to know if you and Max would like to join us tomorrow again? I think it'd be a nice way to get used to your job again," Roger repeated. "But looking at you, I bored you stiff."

Leo shook his head defending. "No no no, you weren't. I was...I mean...I just..."

He felt Max's hands on his shoulders. He came rushing by his side, smiling happily at Roger.

"We'd be delighted. Just let us take this evening off, if you don't mind. It's a bit much for just one day and I guess Leo is a little tired, too."

"And here we go again," Leo thought.

Max defending him in front of other was something that surprised him every time. He wasn't sure, if he ever was able to get used to it and he knew perfectly well, he couldn't really hide his amazement. So, he just nodded in agreement.

"I...I didn't sleep too well the last nights," he added. "I guess it really was a bit much... for both of us." He looked at Max and smiled.

"Very well, then," Roger said. "I guess it was good for a start. I'll be seeing you tomorrow then again?"

Leo and Max nodded simultaneously, whereas Carmen and Roger just cast knowing looks to each other.

"Okay, then tomorrow it is," Max answered happily and pushed Leo away from them.

As they vanished behind another building, Carmen turned to Roger.

"See what I mean?" he asked.

Roger nodded. "Yeah, it's quite obvious. Did he say anything to you?"

"No, he didn't really answer."

"Just what I expected," Roger grinned. He flung his arm around his partner and they moved inside again.

....

"Thank you," Leo said after a short while. "For rescuing me from them."

"Well, you should learn to listen to them even if your thoughts fly," Max said, grinning at him.

Leo smirked. He sounded just like...well, Max.

"You've really been quiet that whole day though," Max continued. "I...I hope it wasn't because of what I said this morning. It wasn't my intention to upset you."

Leo shook his head. "You didn't, believe me. It's just... well, there is quite a lot running through my head lately. A lot of things have changed somehow and I'm trying to cope with them."

Max didn't answer. They walked along the city. Leo couldn't remember the last time they had done that. Usually, both of them would take a cab to get to their destination. He sprawled out and took a deep breath of the icy winter air. It was fairly refreshing. He really enjoyed being outside and it felt like the first time in weeks, even though he had left the office almost daily for a few hours. But it was raising him up today.

He looked over to Max, who was walking silently beside him. Maybe, it was because he was here. It was somehow soothing to know he wasn't supposed to walk through the city alone. He still felt a little insecure every time he had to go alone somewhere.

They walked along the streets, past the busy people and the noisy traffic, and none of them even thought about the walk home could take quite a while. They passed more and more streets, just marching their way through the snow.

When they came to the edge of Central Park, Leo suddenly stopped.

"What is it?" Max asked, stopping too.

"I always thought about coming here again," Leo answered without looking at him.

"Again?"

"Yes. I used to come here very often but... Well, I always got distracted, if you can call it that," he smiled again. "I liked it, you know. Being inside there always felt like entering another world."

"Well, in that case," Max grabbed his arm and pulled Leo with him. "We should go inside."

"Going inside?" Leo thought for a moment.

He wasn't so sure this was a good idea. Just a few more hours and it'd be dark. He used to hear a lot about not wanting to be in there after nightfall and hesitated.

"Leo," Max said gently. "It's not dark yet. And you've done so much for me lately. Let's do something you like for once. Don't be afraid. We've got plenty of time."

Leo thought about it for a moment. Then he started smile and nodded approvingly.

"Come one," Max started to walk and Leo simply followed him. He ran a few steps to catch up and soon they found themselves in a white park, which indeed seemed like another world. The thick layers of snow on the trees and at the sides of the walkways made it almost magical. Leo listened to the crunchy sound their footsteps made in the fresh powder snow. He hadn't been here for ages. He used to walk along the ways of Central Park a lot when he was still working as an accountant. Here he kept on dreaming about another life. It was his own little hideaway he didn't have to share with anyone else. When he got to know Max he was here with him once or twice and also connected only nice memories with it. There was nothing he could do about it. This place was his recreation from everything; his job, the people around him and most of all his own feelings of unhappiness about his life.

"You're enjoying this, don't you," Max said next to him.

Leo turned his head and smiled.

"Yes, I really love being here."

"Then it's a good place to be," Max answered.

"Yes," Leo looked around, passing more and more sideways and trails. "I came here when Ulla left me as well."

"You did?"

Leo nodded. "I felt like nothing of the bad feeling I felt would get me here. I know this sounds stupid. It's sort of a hideaway. I mean, like a little paradise in the middle of a noisy big city. It's almost like becoming invisible to the world. Not that people cared a lot about me but I had the feeling no one was able to find me here. Does that make sense?"

He turned to find Max had stopped a few steps behind him. He looked confused. Leo turned and moved towards him again. Max didn't look at him but kept staring into another direction.

"What is it?" Leo asked, following his gaze.

Suddenly he felt his heart sink. They stood in front of the Bethesda Fountain. It was covered in thick snow and looked frozen. Leo started to get a little closer to it, not turning his eyes away.

He'd almost forgotten about it. It was here he agreed to work with Max and the start of his new life really. He almost felt sentimental thinking about it. All the memories this place held were coming back to him in an instance. How much Max had been begging him to stay and how cowardly he ran away, just to return hours later to find the older man still waiting there for him. It seemed like only yesterday to him.

"I've been here with you before," he heard Max saying next to him.

Leo turned in surprise. Max stood next to him, also looking up at the huge fountain.

"I'm pretty sure of that...", he continued.

"Yes, you have," Leo answered and knew without taking a look that Max was staring at him. He closed his eyes.

"It's kind of the place we've met for the first time. I mean we've met in your office before but it was here you wanted me to become your partner and I agreed."

Max looked up again. The evening light twinkled in the snow-covered statue. He closed his eyes. That's why this place seemed so familiar to him. So, it had been kind of a milestone in the relationship with Leo. It had been here he'd agreed to work with him. No, to be with him. How could he ever have forgotten something as important as that? It meant a lot to Leo. He could tell by the way he was talking about it. A memory he'd never dreamed about forgetting.

He had to laugh. In a way, Leo was so much like this place...

"Like a fountain. Waiting to explode..." Max mumbled and opened his eyes in shock.

What was that? He looked at Leo, who stood there wide-eyed as well.

"And shoot into the sky..." the younger man finished his sentence.

"Yes," Max said slowly. Did he really just say that? "You... you were running away... You were scared of that scheme and afraid of going to jail. You feared you didn't have the guts to put up something like that."

Leo nodded unbelieving.

"And me...I..I was staying here, praying to God above you'd come back. Until you showed up again," he continued.

"You stayed here the whole day. It had been dark already when I came back," Leo replied, sounding as though he was close to tears again.

This time, Max nodded and looked into the eyes of his partner with a feeling of just melting away. He remembered. He couldn't get why but the images of that day flashed before his eyes as if they never were gone. He knew how much he had tried to convince Leo to stay; to help him with that plan the accountant had mentioned. And how silly that comparison with that fountain had been but somehow it had given Leo the kick he needed. He remembered how grateful he had felt when the boy had returned and how emotional Leo had gotten by telling him he'd been changing his mind.

Max looked at the fountain again.

"We did jump inside, right?" he asked although he knew the answer.

Leo nodded.

"Yes," he smiled with watery eyes. "Yes, we did."

"I remember," Max just whispered but he could tell in an instance Leo understood perfectly.

Leo suddenly moved from the place he was standing and flung his arms around Max, who backed away by surprise for a split second. He relaxed in Leo's hug quickly though. He felt happy in a way he never knew before. Secretly, he had given up hope on anything might coming back to him. At least not within the next years. He had tried so hard to change the person everyone was telling him he used to be. After all no one every mentioned he couldn't be someone else, if he didn't know what they were talking about. But now... All of a sudden, it was back. That one memory. The most important for sure: The one about this boy agreeing to be with him. The start of their friendship.

"I..I was only thinking about my advantage back then," Max said and felt Leo loosen his grip.

He was looking up at him with the biggest puppy eyes he could accomplish. Max stepped away a few inches.

"So, it's true then. What you or Roger or even Carmen were telling me was true," he said, turning away. "I was despicable and only thinking about me."

Leo didn't know what to say. He stood there silently for what seemed an eternity.

Max sighed. He had so much hoped for them being wrong. He hoped they had just misinterpreted his behavior. But now, he knew what he was thinking of the moment he met the person that probably meant more than anything else to him... Whoa wait, what? Did he really just think that?

"I left her for you..."

Max turned around in surprise.

"What?"

Leo stood there, his head bowed and his eyes closed.

"I...I left Ulla...for you," he repeated.

Max didn't think he got that right.

Leo sighed.

"When... when the police noticed we've been cheating with those figures and sold more than we were ever able to pay back on 'Springtime'. Well,they arrested you. Not me. I ran away to Rio with Ulla."

Max's eyes grew wider. "You did what?"

Leo shook his head quickly. "It wasn't like I wanted to leave you. She convinced me."

"Didn't you say we were in jail together?"

"We were. I came back...for you," still Leo didn't dare to look at Max. "I felt so guilty in Rio and couldn't think of anything else than being with you. I forced her to come back with me

and I turned myself in. I couldn't stand the feeling of letting you down. You just didn't deserve it."

"Why not?"

"Because...", Leo stammered. "Because you meant so much to me. You'd changed my life and changed me. You have always been very caring and supportive with me. You've protected me in any way someone was able to protect another person. In jail as well as every time before and after that. When we'd gotten free again you've even tried to warn me about Ulla. She was cheating on me already back then and you knew it. I just never wanted to hear it. Not from you. But the truth is I knew what you've been trying to tell me. And I've talked to her shortly afterwards. She'd admitted everything. But she told me the very reason she was 'escaping' from me was that she couldn't stand my attachment on you. It was then I noticed I only talked about you; I only thought about you..."

Max didn't say anything. He simply stood there, listening to Leo's confession and tried to get the emotions rising inside of him straight.

"So, no!" Leo said. Max raised his head again. Leo was looking at him in a determined way he had never seen on him before. "You never once were a bad person. At least not while I was around. You were gentle, caring and almost loving. I can't tell you anything else really."

Leo came closer to Max again, until their faces almost touched.

"So, think again before judging yourself that easily," Leo said. "There's not a single time I can think of you've ever let me down. Not once."

Max felt his eyes filling with tears. He tried hard to force them back. This just couldn't be. Why would he be touched by anything as sentimental as that? How did this man manage it to turn him around just like that? Why was a story of mere betrayal the most beautiful thing he had ever heard? Or maybe, was it just Leo? He couldn't tell. All he knew was he was gone. He could feel it.

Without thinking about it, he bend forward; taking Leo's face in his hands gently and pressing his lips onto Leo's. He only realized it moments later and expected Leo to pull back, but it didn't happen. Leo stood there and without hesitation replying to his kiss...

~To be continued~

One Thing I know

Chapter Notes

A/N: Wow, thanks a thousand times for the kind reviews. I didn't expect so many, really and felt really happy reading all of them more than once :) Anyway, I had my troubles continuing after Chapter 7, but well... as you can see, I did it anyway. I planned to write a romantic scene, compared to the big emotional ones in the movies, but well... It's up to you to decide, whether I managed it or not ^^

But don't worry... It will change in the next chapter.

Inspired by "I don't know much" sung by Linda Ronstadt and Aaron Neville

Leo closed the office door behind them, but remained leaned against it for a moment. They hadn't been talking on the way back to the office. Not that any of them had known what to say anyway. But what both of them knew perfectly well was this changed a lot...

"Has this been real?"

The question kept sneaking into Leo's head from the moment they'd left Central Park. He knew it had happened. He could still feel it. The warmth inside of his body followed by a feeling of losing his foothold.

Yet, the huge mess in his head stayed to only grow from second to second.

He looked at Max, who only kept staring back at him.

Leo closed his eyes for a moment, then suddenly stormed into his own room. Max only followed him with his eyes but didn't move. As soon as Leo vanished inside, he bowed his head. He'd expected that. Leo never laid off that tension. It was swinging inside his whole being even if he acted relaxed and was accustomed to the things around him. That's what Max noticed the first day in that cab on the way home. And this situation. Well, it was something to freak out about. A stupid mistake. A single little moment of not paying attention and letting some currently budding sparks of affection take over. He should go after him and apologize. Or at least he should have said something back in that park after they had let go of each other. But what the hell should he have said? This was nothing he could explain easily. And apologize? Well, maybe it would calm down the younger man a little but the strange thing was: There was nothing to feel sorry about and yet Max regretted to might have destroyed whatever there was or even had developed between them in the past weeks.

He sighed and sat down on the leather couch, supporting his head with his arm and closing his eyes.

If only he knew what has gotten into him. If only he could remember more. Maybe he'd be able to find any clue of why he felt so much connected to that man. But was it really just that 'black hole' in his memories that seemed to hold some answers? He'd mistrusted Leo the first time he met him. He seemed so crazy.

"But it wasn't the first time," he thought. "I've spent a lot of time with him before. Obviously we went through a lot."

And after getting to know him better in only a few weeks, he was revising this thought again. It must be true then. Why else should he have asked a person like an accountant to be his partner?

Because of the money he'd wanted? It obviously went wrong. So, why had he stuck to him then? Why had he let him live here? Why wasn't this all about just getting some information out of him anymore? It was so confusing.

He noticed cautious footsteps on the wooden floor and lifted his head again. Leo stood there in front of him with his big hazel eyes looking as though they could see right through him. He was holding a pile of frames in his hands. Without a word he sat down next to Max, handing them over carefully. Max was flabbergasted at first but gently took them out of Leo's hands. At first, he wanted to ask but instead he just took a closer look at whatever Leo was handling with kid gloves.

It was quite surprising to realize what he was holding there. Pictures. Mostly Photographs mixed with some clippings. All of them showed both of them.

There was one of Max and Leo simply smiling into the camera; one of them bowing in front of what seemed a bunch of fans; one of them just sitting backstage, talking it seemed and many more.

Max looked through them carefully, until he reached a larger frame holding a photograph of him and Leo just hugging while smiling at each other.

"It's all us," Max said slowly.

He couldn't believe it. This was like the proof he'd been asking for in his head. The one evidence for everything Leo had been telling him to be true.

Max couldn't take his eyes off the last picture. They seemed so close on this one.

"Carmen took this one during the rehearsals of 'Maim'," Leo said. "We didn't notice..."

Max didn't understand.

"Why are you showing them to me now?" he asked without looking up.

"They're yours," he heard Leo answer.

Max looked up to Leo surprised. The younger man however simply stared straight ahead. No further explanations.

Max nodded. He closed his eyes and had to laugh. This was so obvious now. Why didn't he think of it before?

"These are the missing pictures from my walls, right?" he asked, even though he knew the answer.

He knew Leo nodded too.

"I...I took them off...", he heard him say. "The day it happened... I...I couldn't stand them... It reminded me too much..."

Max looked up again.

"Of what?" he swallowed hard before starting anew. "Of me? Of the fact we obviously got along just fine?"

He spoke very quietly and hesitated. Was he afraid of the answer? Going into himself he must admit he was.

"No," Leo answered softly.

Max turned his head again. He didn't know what to expect. Leo looked straight into his eyes with an overwhelming determination. He almost looked like someone else; if only for one breath of a second.

"Look... I am scared of everything," he started. "I'm scared of people. I'm scared of situations. My life scares me a lot, really and most of all I am scared of myself..."

"What?"

"But that day... To find out what happened...and to find you not recognizing me... It was as though you died that very moment," Leo stopped at that part as if his own word made him shake. "I thought I'd lost you. I just couldn't comprehend it. I still can't up to a certain amount. And then I came here that evening...alone. And saw them and I never felt more scared in my whole life. Scared of having lost the person that means more to me than anything else. It hurt. And even though I am quite used to that angst inside of me, it was way stronger than ever before and more than I could bear. So, I took them off and hid them. You were gone, so they had to go too."

Max sat there only listening to him. He didn't say anything, nor did he really move.

Leo kept staring at him. This sure was hard. He never dreamed of sharing his thoughts about that day with Max like this. These thoughts.

He'd kept them a secret for a long time and never wanted to admit them to himself, yet he felt it was time to let go.

"Why now," Max managed to ask. "Why not some weeks ago or even at that first day?"

"Because, I needed to be sure it's still you."

Max slowly began to shake his head.

"I'm not the person you knew. I don't even know if I ever really was..."

He got up and started to move through the office. This was idiotic. He didn't remember anything of the things Leo told him. And just because one little scene from his past had managed to find its way back to him again, didn't mean he was back.

"Don't you see? There's that big nothing. The things I certainly must know to understand myself properly but they ain't there. My life contains a few weeks. I can't take all this. I can't understand. How can you say I am still me when there's absolutely no memory of you left in me. I mean, obviously we must have known each other for a long time. And more certainly, we have been very close but to what extent? You could tell me a million things I said to you in the past; point out a million situations; even show me a million pictures like those..." he pointed at the frames, now carelessly lying on the floor. "I still wouldn't recognize any of them."

"You did remember some things," Leo started shyly.

"So, that's one in a million. What does it matter?" Max sounded rather desperate and his voice grew louder.

Leo followed him with his eyes but didn't dare to interrupt him.

Max sat down again, putting his face into his hands. He sighed.

"This is so confusing," he said, now much quieter than before. "I mean I have the feeling something connects me to you. Something other than just being your business-partner. But I can't get that straight, as hard as I try."

This was insane. He couldn't force anything to come back to him. At least not by crying out loud all his frustration and doubts about it. And he surely should not blame Leo. He had nothing to do with it. It wasn't his fault he couldn't recall anything from his past.

"We were close," he heard Leo's voice and looked up again. "Very close, really."

"How close?" Max didn't believe he just asked that.

Leo didn't reply. He just turned his gaze away again. It seemed he didn't really know an answer as well. Max was certain if there still was anything he didn't tell him from their past, he surely would have done it now.

"Why...?" Max started, but his voice broke as he thought about it.

"Why what?"

There they were again. Those big eyes staring at him again, waiting for an answer, a reaction or even any kind of movement. Max felt his insides flip again and almost felt like starting to cry, observing this. Why the hell did Leo have such an impact on him when it wasn't there before?

"Why do I feel the urge to kiss you every time I see you all of a sudden?" Max whispered in despair.

He didn't intend for Leo to hear it but he was being so close. There was no chance whatsoever he could have missed that question.

Leo still didn't respond.

So, this was it. It all came down to one point.

"Have we been in love with each other?"

Leo felt his heart sink. That one moment when all sounds around him seemed to fall silent. It was there. What should he say? What was he supposed to say?

He looked into that face. Those desperate eyes. Max longed for an answer. He had been so determined to find out about his past but this was about finding out who he was. Leo could read it in his look, his voice and even his way to sit there completely motionless, just waiting.

"I... I don't know," he responded hesitantly. "We..we actually never spoke about it...about...it might even be possible..."

Max closed his eyes. "Is it...?"

He needed to know. He needed to hear if this really was all just in his head; needed to know if he was crazy; needed to know if he was only imagining to feel attached to a man.

"Leo?"

He didn't look up. How could he face the answer he feared would be coming up next?

"Is it possible we were?" he held his breath, waiting for an answer.

He only needed to say it and Max could finally be sure about how insane this all was.

"I think... I am," he heard Leo's voice saying but he couldn't comprehend the words at first.

He felt his heart starting to pound and it seemed the echo of Leo's voice resounded from everywhere around him. He looked at him again and, much to his surprise, Leo didn't seem to be scared of that at all. If at all, he looked sadder than ever before.

"Max?"

Max took a deep breath and wanted to reply but absolutely nothing came out of his mouth.

"I am asking this now because you would never have answered it truthfully before this all happened," Leo started, but paused after finishing that one sentence.

He was thinking about how to put it. But then he decided it wasn't necessary to choose his words so carefully, considering how far they had come.

"Do you love me?"

He could hear Max's breath becoming faster and by the looks of him, Leo dared to say he was panicking.

"I..I...well... How can you expect me to answer that?" Max asked in despair. "I cannot recall. All I can do is supposing. There's no other way I could explain to myself why you're still sticking with me..."

Leo shook his head and got up. He moved closer to Max, who backed away but Leo followed him, taking his head into his hands and touching his forehead with his own. He was now able to look deeply into the older man's eyes. It was like looking right into his soul. There was confusion and despair but Leo knew so well he had never let him take a look so deeply inside his self ever before.

"It doesn't matter," Leo said and was surprised how calm and secure his own voice sounded. "It doesn't matter at all who you were or what you thought. It's all about who you are now. What do you feel?"

Max didn't take his eyes off of him. Leo could tell he was searching for something. Something inside of him he might have found there before and what still slumbered somewhere within.

"Do you love me?"

Max closed his eyes. He couldn't endure that stare. It felt like something invaded him and made it impossible to find an answer in his disorientation.

"Yes," he whispered after a while, opening his eyes again.

Tears were running down his cheeks and Leo was shocked. Not only, because of that confession but because he had never ever experienced Max giving away his emotions so openly. Could this be? The man he had always been looking up to sat there, in front of him...crying.

It was that moment, which told Leo he was telling the truth. It might have been there before but more importantly it was here now. He could read it in his eyes. Every single tear that fell was evidence enough. He, Leopold Bloom, was being loved by his partner. And he must admit to himself he was in love with that man as well. For many years now.

He had to smile and felt his own eyes filling with tears as well. Not, because of sadness but because of redemption.

So, he slowly bent over and closed his eyes until he could feel Max's lips on his own. There they were, entwined into a kiss that released so much. Leo felt happy. He had never been sure what it felt like to find that 'once in a lifetime' thing that made everything worthwhile but he knew for sure, if there really was something like that...

This was it.

He pulled away after what seemed an eternity, looking at him through watery eyes.

"I love you," his voice could barely be heard. He needed to tell him.

"Oh my God, I love you," Leo said again a little louder, kissing him once more. "I should have told you a thousand times before."

Of all the things he didn't tell Max in the first place, he regretted not having noticed this earlier.

Max, on the other hand, smiled and stroked the strands of his brown hair out of his face.

"And I love you," he said softly. "At least one thing I'm positive about..."

Leo neared once more, until their heads touched again.

"Then maybe, this is all you need to know," he whispered.

....

"They look different somehow," Carmen whispered to Roger, who was trying to bring some order into the arrangements on stage.

He turned to look at his partner.

"They act quite normal to me," he answered.

"No, just look at them," Carmen insisted, turning Roger's head into the direction of Leo and Max.

They sat in one corner a little apart from everybody else. Leo was stacking some papers on his knees talking to Max who sat very close to him, smiling at him.

"He's explaining something I guess," Roger said.

"No no no," Carmen just wouldn't let go so easily. "Just look at the way they look at each other..."

Roger looked a little closer. They were only talking, weren't they. Sitting next to each other, smiling from time to time. There was nothing wrong with that. Max had a lot to catch up with and Leo was helping him. And they all had agreed Max differed a lot from who he had been some months before. He wasn't as grumpy and moody as he used to, so all this laughing wasn't so unusual for that matter as well. He couldn't make out what they were talking about but it seemed to lighten them up. So, he couldn't really see what Carmen meant. A little fun was always allowed in rehearsals. And they were just enjoying the time of work obviously. Leo turned his head again into Max's direction and held his hand while roaming through these contracts and papers and... Whoa, wait!

Roger's eyes grew wider. What was that about? He held his hand?! That was definitely new.

He could see Carmen's face spreading into a wide grin from the corner of his eyes.

"I knew it," he heard him say. "I just knew it!"

Carmen was about to walk over to them, when Roger held him back.

"Wait!" he said.

"Whaaaat?" Carmen seemed taken aback. "You did see this too, didn't you?"

"And now, you wanna get over there and do what?" Roger smiled at him. "Remember, Max only knows about the last few weeks. It might ruin a lot if you rush over there, screaming all kinds of well wishes at them. They need to come out by themselves."

"But," Carmen looked over to them again and then back to his partner. "Isn't this obvious enough?"

Roger smiled at him, lifted his head with one hand and said: "It's not so easy admitting something like that."

Carmen stared into his eyes and started to smile.

"Maybe, you're right. But weren't you the one suggesting it to Leo anyway?" he blinked at Roger, who blushed a little.

"I...er...", he started, searching for words.

Carmen giggled and Roger felt caught somehow.

"Well, alright then," he finally agreed. "We'll ask him, if you stop mocking me then. But let's keep it quiet. Not the whole theater has to know."

Carmen seemed quite satisfied with this reaction and turned to call them over.

"Leo," he shouted and saw him lifting his head searching his eyes.

He was still smiling.

"He looks so happy somehow. I never thought I'd see that on him again," Carmen thought and almost felt glad for him, even though he only suspected what was going on.

"Would you come over here for a minute?" he called.

He saw Leo nodding but immediately dropped his jaw, when he recognized what happened next. Leo stood up, ready to get over, but was still holding Max's hand, who immediately pulled him back. It came so sudden that Leo almost fell over and he started to laugh again. He got up again very quickly, just bending forward and kissing Max before turning to move towards them.

Carmen stood there petrified. Only when he turned to search for Roger's eyes again, he noticed he reacted the same way, as well as most of the people in the theater. The big room turned so quiet one could hear a pin drop. It was just like one big inhalation of everyone at the exact same time.

Leo didn't seem to notice. He actually pulled Max up from his seat, forcing him to follow his way towards Roger and Carmen while still holding his hand.

When they arrived with them Leo grinned widely, waiting for them telling him whatever they wanted to say.

"What is it," he asked cheerfully smiling at them.

Neither Roger nor Carmen were able to say anything. They only kept staring at the both of them in disbelief.

"Well, then," Leo continued his way past them. "If there's nothing in particular you wanted of me, you'll have to excuse us now."

He passed them and linked arms with Max, very well aware of their stares which followed the both of them.

"Jaws up, guys," he smiled on his way out, winking at them.

Only when the big theater door flung close, Carmen and Roger were able to look at each other again.

"Well,...er... That about sums it up then," Roger was rubbing his head.

"Are you crazy?" Carmen was looking at him incredulously. "That was like...absolutely unbelievable. Did they..?"

Roger nodded. "I think they finally came to their senses."

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"They didn't believe," Leo laughed walking along the streets with Max close to him.

"Well, it might have been quite a shock to them," Max agreed and smiled too.

Leo shook his head.

"No, believe me," he giggled. "They smell stuff like that. They knew before any of us even considered the possibility."

"Do you think it was wise then to tell them this way?"

Leo stopped and Max turned around as well. Did he really think that? There was nothing wrong about showing his own personal luck for once, or was there?

"I...I just don't wanna hide," Leo answered silently. "I've been running away all my life. And I don't want that anymore."

Max immediately walked over to him, taking him in his arms.

"Oh Gosh, I didn't mean," Max started to apologize but was interrupted by Leo rather quickly.

"I know...," he said, kissing him again. "But don't you see? If you can manage to change for the better, even if it wasn't intentional, I can do it too. And I want them to know."

Max lifted his mouth to a smile again. It was astounding how much that boy could surprise him every day anew. He was so much stronger than himself. In so many ways. He had to deal with so much, just judged by the things he had been telling him. And he just took things the way they were. He could have stopped living after what had happened. He could have hidden somewhere to be that colorless Nobody for the rest of his life but he had chosen to fight for what was important to him. He had been determined not to give in. And now he was standing here, accepting a new really crass change in his life again and was willing to take it without hesitation.

In a way Leo was the most inspirational creature he had ever met. It was addictive somehow to just see the changes in him happen day after day.

Maybe that was the very reason he never could get rid of him after that scheme he'd been telling Max about flopped. And who knew? Maybe, someday he would be able to remember everything from their past again. Until then, he knew he only needed this, well, he had to call it 'light' coming from his partner that kept him going.

"What is it," Leo was looking at him. He must have noticed Max was lost in his thoughts.

Max shook his head in amazement and smiled.

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

He flung his arms around Leo, pulling him closer again. Leo instantly embraced him once more. It just felt perfect. Maybe, this was just the way it should be. Maybe he was supposed to lose everything, just to gain something new. Yes, he was certain. If there was a plan in life, this was the way that had been planned for him. For the both of them.

"Then, let them know," Max whispered, clinging closer to Leo. "Let the whole world know. Memory or not, I promise I won't go away."

~To be continued~

Learn to live

Chapter Notes

A/N: This took...incredibly long... I am so sorry... I find it particularly hard to write highly emotional scenes somehow... xD

Anyway, I think only one chapter will follow this one... We're heading straight towards the end...

This one though is highly inspired by the song "I hate you" from the musical If/Then.

"All I need is the assignment agreement from the author and the signed contracts you both had gotten some weeks ago to make it work," Leo got through the list he'd been making in the morning to check whether he'd forgotten anything or not. All this paperwork was kind of annoying but someone had to do it and somehow this job had passed over to Leo completely, so he was always very set on these things to be done immediately.

"Leo. Will you just forget about this stuff for a moment?" Carmen tried his very best to get his chance to speak but apparently Leo just kept talking business. If he didn't know better, he'd think his young friend wanted to start a hare.

"Actually, I need this done until tonight. I won't bother you again after that," the producer smiled.

Carmen shook his head. "Will you please stop it?"

He looked over to Roger, who sat silently and seemed rather amused to observe his partner's hopeless attempt to get a straight answer out of Leo.

"I'm afraid I have to insist," Leo continued, acting clueless. "We will never move on until these papers are done and..."

"For God's sake! LEO!" Carmen slowly lost his temper. "This really is the last thing we wanna hear about right now!"

Leo stopped and for once looked up from his papers. Seeing Carmen and Roger staring at him like that made him feel a little uneasy. He knew what they wanted to hear. He knew from the moment he'd been stepping over their threshold. Yet, he had been determined not to let them force him into explaining anything. Why should he anyway? He'd been making it quite clear. At least so he thought.

"I know," he sighed. "But actually, I have nothing to tell you, really."

"What?" Carmen rushed up to him. "How can you say that? Leo, don't you realize, this..."

But he wasn't able to finish his sentence, since Roger interrupted him quickly by getting up, putting his hand on his partner's shoulder and shaking his head while looking into his eyes.

"Leo," he began, turning his head to the former accountant. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

Leo nodded without hesitation.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, I am. It's exactly how it should be. And if I hadn't been too blind to notice sooner, it would have happened a lot earlier, I think. And you knew it."

Roger smiled.

"So, he remembered?" he asked, but didn't expect Leo to shake his head.

"No, no," he answered calmly. "But I think it's something subconscious. He's always very close to remember but somehow it never happens."

Roger and Carmen cast a look of mere confusion at each other.

"Well," Roger began but seemed to be stuck somewhere in between his own thoughts.

This was so funny. He'd always known there had been this 'thing' between the two of them; a bond or even some kind of attraction. Everyone around them could see and feel it. It had been only a matter of time until either one of them admitted it but actually Roger always expected them to keep it a secret. This was different. Max was different. And if he really didn't remember any of the things before, it was even more astounding this bond was back just like that. He'd noticed the way Max had been acting towards Leo the first days. Careful and almost mistrusting...

On the other hand, he also noticed big changes in Leo as well. He had gone through a lot and had grown with it. He had been there; had stayed even though Roger and Carmen knew perfectly well how much the young man had tried to run from the whole situation. He deserved this. He just deserved to be happy.

Leo looked from Carmen to Roger expecting some kind of reaction, until Carmen finally dared to move again. He stepped a little closer to Leo and gave him a short hug, just to look straight into his eyes shortly after he let go again.

"I always knew," he spoke very softly and smiled. It was the first time since Leo knew him that he didn't use his high-pitched screaming queen voice but a warm tenor. "I just never imagined you really would find a way to live with it. I am really happy for you."

"What if..."

Carmen and Leo whirled around. Roger seemed to have his doubts about it.

"What if he remembers?" Roger asked, looking sincere.

Leo broke into a smile again.

"Then nothing changes," he answered truthfully. "He means it. And there's absolutely no chance he will forget this here."

Roger cast him a concerned look.

"And what about you?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Can you deal with him being someone else again?" he asked but to his surprise Leo continued shaking his head and didn't look doubting at all.

"He can't change," he said. "For he never really has. If you knew him the way I do, you'd see it too. It's him. It's Max all the way. Just like he always used to be. Only without the mask he used to wear. He just forgot the way he acted in front of the world. But nothing changed really. I...I wasn't able to see it at first but it's the truth."

This time Roger had to smile. Shy little Leo. It was almost like watching a child grow. All of a sudden he seemed to appear in a new light. He had never heard him speak so passionate about anything; never seen him with such an inner strength. If this was true, Max managed to bring out the very best in him even though he didn't have the slightest clue about it.

"I know this is hard to understand," Leo continued, having watched Roger for a while. "But I can't and I don't want to change it. I love him. There I said it. I love him and it's just the way it's supposed to be."

Roger nodded approvingly and extended his hand towards the young man.

"In that case. Here's to you and Max," he said, shaking Leo's hand, who smiled at him gratefully.

....

"So?" Max still mulled over the huge amount of backer's lists Leo had left for him.

"How did it go?"

Leo entered the office and joined him, just rolling his eyes.

"Screaming queens?" Max asked with an extremely amused expression.

"Not at all but as expected they just wouldn't stop bombarding me with questions," Leo sighed and plumped down on a chair in front of the dark brown desk.

He sneaked a peek of some notes Max seemed to have scribbled next to the hundreds of names written down the white sheets, but he covered them quickly.

"What about you? Did you get along?" Leo asked and raised his eyebrows.

"A little," Max answered. "I've managed to memorize quite a few names but..."

"But what?" Leo smiled.

"But calling them seems more disturbing than anything else," Max grinned at Leo too. "I'm pretty sure you let me do that on purpose, you tease."

Leo burst out laughing. "Disturbing? What happened?"

"Well, some of those ladies...uhm... I don't really think I wanna know that part of my past," Max answered and Leo swore he saw a slight blush on his face, if only for a second.

"Well, you've always done it, so it's time you re-connect to your duties again," Leo laughed. He just managed to duck away from a sharp pen flying in his direction. "Ha ha, you just can't stand the truth."

"Better watch your mouth, Bloom," Max called after Leo as he left into his room. "Or next time I'll pretend you're one o' them backers."

He couldn't hide an amused amazement in his voice towards Leo for being so cocky all of a sudden. And he could still hear him laughing. Max smiled. The nerve of that boy...

But then again, this was exactly what made him so special.

Looking down at the lists lying in front of him, he could hear Leo's footsteps approaching him again. Not looking up he felt Leo's weight upon his shoulders seconds later as he hugged him from behind, looking at the papers on the desk as well.

"What is it you're writing down there," he studied the little notes. This time Max didn't bother to hide them.

"Just some mnemonics to help me," he snickered.

Leo looked surprised studying them. He didn't really react for a couple of seconds but then his face turned into a smile and leaned his head on Max's.

"I'm sure you'll get along," he responded.

"You are?" Max enjoyed having Leo so close, it didn't really matter why he thought so.

Leo just nodded and pointed at the notes on the paper.

"Call it subconscious or whatever but this is definitely a 'step backwards', which is good in our case," Leo answered.

Max stared down at them as well. All he did was writing down short catchwords or nicknames that somehow helped him to recall whom he had been talking with. It said 'sounded very old', 'definitely on some kind of medication!?', 'Hold-me Touch-me' and so on.

"I don't understand," Max said, looking at Leo a little confused.

Leo grinned and shook his head, snuggling closer to Max again.

"Doesn't matter," he said. "It's great you've done it."

Still wondering about it Max decided not to ask anymore. Leo must have his reason for not explaining it any further. Maybe he should stop weighing every word the younger man said and carry on. Maybe it just wasn't that important. And maybe he really didn't need to know a lot more than the things he already knew. He'd come this far after an accident that could've destroyed a lot more. So, there was no point in worrying so much, was there? No, definitely not. Just having Leo next to him was close enough to perfect.

"Why don't you let it be for today?" Leo asked without taking his head up.

"And leave it undone forever?" Max asked, still smiling.

But before he could return to work, Leo took the papers in front of him and threw them off the desk. Max simply followed them with his eyes; then turned his head to look at the younger man questioning.

"I think it can wait til tomorrow," Leo grinned. "Just let me have you for myself only for a few hours."

Max didn't know what to say, yet as he wanted to answer Leo put his finger onto his lips to shut him up.

"How about taking the evening off? Just for a little quiet time," he smiled. "I just get the feeling I have to share you way too often in the last few days and it's gonna be more once you start working again. And I really enjoyed the time with you alone."

Max gave a short laugh. "You're sounding like it's over."

Leo let go of him, stepping away a few inches. "It could be. Maybe it'll turn out to be like it always had been."

Max looked at Leo a little shocked.

"Are you afraid of that?"

Leo didn't answer. He turned and moved over to the couch, flopping onto it. Staring another direction he slowly began to shake his head.

"I don't know," he began. "I... I just thought...well... maybe daily routine will keep us busy. And maybe..."

"Hey," Max got up and moved over to Leo.

He sat down next to him but Leo didn't really turn.

"I don't know what makes you think anything's gonna change and I only assume it's got something to do with the way I behaved before but let me assure you it's not gonna happen!"

Leo leaned back, sighing deeply.

"I'm sorry," he said after a moment. "I don't know where that came from. It's just..."

"I know," Max replied calmly. "No need to explain. I guess fears like that are normal."

"You don't seem to have them though."

Max could feel Leo's eyes on him now. He shrugged.

"I just don't think anything could be different," he replied. "Actually, I'm better off. I have only a brief idea of that idiot I obviously had been. So, even if anything comes back to me it won't possibly change the way I see you."

Leo smiled and moved closer to him, putting his head onto his chest.

"That's exactly what I've been telling Roger and Carmen," he whispered and closed his eyes as Max softly stroked through his hair.

"You did?" Max thought but didn't dare to ask it aloud.

Obviously he must know him better than Max did himself. Which, of course, wasn't that hard at the moment. But why was Leo so afraid of him changing? How much different could he possibly have been?

"What have I done to you?" Max thought while looking at Leo.

He couldn't get past the feeling something terrible must have happened before. Or was this only a feeling? Something he interpreted into a meaningless statement again?

"You know, you're thinking a lot more now," he heard Leo's voice.

"I am?"

He nodded. "Usually you would speak about everything that crosses your mind but you're much quieter now..."

"What makes you think I was thinking?" Max asked softly and smiled.

Leo lifted his head to look into his partner's eyes again. "You've never taken a term like 'quiet time' so literally before and I can see it. It's there in your eyes."

The smile in Max's face didn't vanish but he looked away from that loving pair of eyes staring right through him. "There's a lot to think about actually. It's like talking about someone who died a long time ago. It's somewhat familiar, yet it could be anybody."

"Does it matter that much?"

Max shook his head. "Not in the slightest. It just crosses my mind a lot lately."

He looked down at Leo again, who followed his every movement.

"But I want you to know, this will never change."

He moved closer as well until their heads touched. "I love you. Please, don't give up on me that easily."

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"This is a disaster. What are we supposed to do?"

Carmen was running up and down the aisles in the theater. Usually they wouldn't be there that late, but this was an emergency and they had to react as quick as possible.

Roger was looking through all the set-cards he could find in a rush.

"Would you stay calm? We'll figure this out," he told Carmen for the millionth time now, turning yet another page.

"How could I possibly? We're in production. It's only a few weeks until opening night. Who could've guessed she would fall? You could definitely expect the lead to be a bit more careful during this time," his voice grew louder. "I've always told you not to work without an understudy."

"What's the big deal?" Roger asked. "All we have to do is find someone to replace her with. We've worked without understudies before and it always worked out."

Carmen guffawed the moment he heard that. "Yeah, but usually you would jump in. There is no way you could do it this time. And it has been particularly hard to cast her, so how do we find another one just now?"

He stopped and turned to Roger. "I mean who would do it on such a short notice?"

Roger looked up at him. "Someone who's willing to do anything to be in the spotlight..."

He threw one of the actor's files over to his assistant without saying a word. Catching it, Carmen still looked at him confused. Slowly he opened the file and read through the papers just to lift his head seconds later again, looking utterly bewildered. He shook his head.

"No," he said. "We couldn't possibly... There's no way... I mean..."

"Well, we would have to ask them," Roger replied. "But she'd be fitting to say the least."

"But," Carmen still shook his head frantically and moved his head from the papers to Roger and back again. "Now? Do you really think we should do something like that now? He will never..."

"I know that," Roger interrupted him. "But it's not up to only us to decide. That's business. We just can't take personal problems into consideration."

Carmen wasn't convinced at all. They stared at each other for a while.

"How are we supposed to ask ...that?"

"I don't know yet," Roger replied.

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The morning sun painted the city orange, yet the deep canyon-like streets still lay in shadows. It took some time for the light to touch the ground, especially during this time of the year. But the soft light let the snowy rooftops seem to glitter and gave a magical glow to Manhattan.

Max lay awake, watching it through the window. Usually, he wouldn't be up that early but he just couldn't sleep anymore. The night sure had been too short, however he didn't feel drowsy at all. And now, with this perfect sunrise he couldn't possibly turn his eyes away from that city. A city that appeared gray and unkind the first day he remembered it but changed into something incredibly wonderful.

He turned his head to look at Leo who, while still fast asleep, lay snuggled up to him. His hair fell tangled on the pillow and for the first time ever he seemed to be absolutely carefree. He held on to Max's hand and took long deep breathes. Max couldn't help but smile.

Who needed that sunrise? As much grace and beauty as it might brought to that huge city, it still remained anonymous, nameless. Unapproachable.

This here was real.

Max closed his eyes for a moment, just listening to the sounds around him. The noise from outside that seemed so very far away, the breathing of Leo as well as his own, some footsteps coming from an apartment above.

He'd been feeling restless and tired for weeks now; too much worrying about what his life used to contain, who he might have been and what had happened before. But now...

He was completely calm. A state he never thought he'd missed that much, if at all he could miss something.

"Are you thinking again?"

Max opened his eyes again. Leo hadn't moved a bit but smiled at him with sleepy eyes.

"No," Max replied. "I was enjoying this here."

Leo moved closer, rested his head on his partner's chest and put his arms around him. Max leaned his head on Leo's and didn't dare to move a bit for it might destroyed the moment.

"Leo?" he asked after what seemed like hours.

"Hm?"

He hesitated. Even Leo seemed to notice it for he turned to look at him; expecting him to finish whatever he wanted to say.

"I'm sorry," Max said, trying not to look at him.

Leo lifted himself up. He wanted to ask but somehow just kept looking puzzled.

"I think... I've hurt you somehow," Max continued. Why was this so hard?

"You didn't..."

"No, I mean... before... in the past... whatever caused all this. I can't shake the feeling I've done something to you and whatever it was... I am sorry."

Leo was stunned. He surely didn't expect that. Max had never been the kind of person to let emotions lead him. And there was no way he could know. He didn't know what to respond or if he should respond at all. So, he leaned forward, kissing him softly.

"I think there's blame to share," he said. "You ..."

But he couldn't finish. A loud ring grabbed their attention. They looked at each other in surprise, when Leo jumped up and disappeared in the hallway, heading for the phone. Max could hear him talking to someone but couldn't make out what it was about.

Just seconds later Leo appeared in the door frame again.

"We've gotta go."

.....

Roger just watched them. No reaction at all. He'd expected Leo to refuse it immediately but he just stood there without looking up from the file in his hands. Carmen sat a little behind Roger and gazed at Leo as well whereas Max stood next to him, his arms crossed and his eyes closed.

"Listen, we know this is a bit awkward but this replacement could literally save us," Roger explained calmly. "And it'd only be for a few weeks until our lead has recovered again."

"We've really been thinking about it and it's the only quick solution we could find," Carmen jumped in.

Leo still didn't react. He just kept staring at the picture in front of him.

Ulla!

He took a deep breath and began to shake his head slowly.

"No!" he said scarcely audible.

"Pardon?" Roger watched him closely.

"No... No! This," Leo exhaled again. "This is not an option!"

He handed over the file to Max, who opened it as well.

Carmen and Roger looked at each other. Leo being so calm was scary somehow.

"Leo, are you sure?" Carmen asked carefully. "Do you understand what depends on it?"

"Of course I am," Leo looked up again with a furious look in his eyes. "I am very well aware of what this could mean, but no! We'll have to think of something else!"

"There is no one else," Roger started anew. "If you..."

"If what?" Leo's voice was much louder now.

Carmen flinched in surprise hearing it. A sudden increase of volume was nothing he'd experienced from Leo in a long time. Basically, something like this hardly ever happened.

"If I decide to deny her, I'll ruin the show? Is that what you wanna tell me?" Leo stared back at him.

He felt his body starting to shake. How could they even think of anything like that? Having Ulla back in the show, back in his life, was nothing he could allow them to consider. He didn't want to see her again. He didn't want to read about her and most of all he didn't even want to think about her. Not for another second in his life.

"No," Roger answered harshly. God, that kid just didn't understand. "But you could ruin weeks of work for all of us and have us wasted a good deal of money just sitting this out."

"How can you say that?" Leo didn't believe what he was hearing. "How can you even consider that? You know what happened. And you knew perfectly well that there was not the slightest chance I agreed to that. How can you even think I was fine with it?"

"Well, it's the best we can do now," Roger replied. He tried his very best to stay calm. "Can't you just try to see this through the eyes of the producer you're supposed to be?"

"What?"

"We've actually....," Carmen started.

"You what?" Leo ventured without another thought. What could it be now? It couldn't get worse now, could it? "You have what?"

"We've... actually thought you would at least give her a chance and...well... invited her here," Carmen almost didn't dare to look at Leo directly, whereas Roger didn't turn his gaze away.

"No!" This couldn't be true.

"It's your god-damn job. It's what you're supposed to do," Roger answered.

Leo didn't dare to move. He looked at them with a lack of understanding he had never felt coming upon himself before. They knew. They simply must know. How could they do this to him? This just couldn't be true.

He heard a door behind them opening and felt his heart sink.

He would have recognized that woman among thousands. The way she almost danced through the aisles towards them, her blond wavy hair swinging with her steps and that sweet smile. How he hated it.

"Leo," she cooed, opening her arms widely. "Ulla happy to see you again."

She walked straight to him, hugging him. Leo felt his body stiffen the very moment she touched him. He wanted to scream. He couldn't breathe. He felt that old panic rising inside of him.

It took only a few second until he fought himself out of her deadly grip, stumbling a few steps backwards and looking at her wide-eyed.

"What are you doing to me?" he whispered in Roger's and Carmen's direction.

"And Maaaax," she turned to him the moment he recognized him. "Ulla didn't see you in a long time. How is Max?"

Leo turned as well, waiting for his reaction. At least it wasn't just him. Max simply must share his opinion.

She also hugged him shortly.

Max didn't let any reaction of amazement show and dryly answered: "Can't complain, thank you."

"Well," Roger said. "Since she is here, don't you think you could bury your pride and give her a chance?"

"Ulla happy you thought of her," she smiled widely. "Ulla helping you with pleasure."

Leo was disgusted. He didn't dare to look at her, nor did he really want to see anybody else right now. He felt betrayed.

Roger watched him for a moment, looking seriously angry.

Then he turned to address Max.

"Well, since you're a team...what do you think?"

"Oh no, leave him out of this," Leo interrupted. "It's highly unfair to expect him to..."

"I think you should give her a try," Max answered from behind.

Leo's eyes grew even wider in shock and his jaw dropped. Slowly he turned around. Not believing what he'd just heard, he felt himself breathing faster.

"What?" he whispered.

Max opened his eyes to look at the young man sincerely. He hesitated for a moment, then took one step ahead to face him.

"I think you should try it," he repeated. "You have nothing to lose, really."

This must be a bad dream.

"You too?"

"Leo, stay calm." This was about to become a freakout. He could see it. "All I'm saying," He looked at the papers in his hands. "Is she could indeed save this here."

He was pointing around.

"You're," Leo swallowed hard. "You're stabbing me in the back?"

"I'm only suggesting to try and see the professional aspect of it," Max tried his very best to calm his partner down. "She could indeed save a lot. Just think of all the things you and all of them worked for. It shouldn't be in vain."

Leo shook his head. Slowly he stumbled backwards, not turning his eyes away from Max. He was doing it again. He was using that one weakness against him. Even though he should know better.

"I hate you...," he whispered.

"Leo..."

"I HATE YOU!"

Then he turned and rushed out of the theater as fast as he could. Max looked up at Roger and Carmen, who stood silently and appalled in the middle of the theater and didn't dare to say something anymore. Even Ulla, who was acting carefree and happy just minutes ago looked a little scared. Max cast them an apologizing look, then nodded shortly.

"Do it," he said.

Then he turned as well and ran after Leo.

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"This cannot be true," Leo thought, pushing his head to the french window in the office.

He must be dreaming. They couldn't possibly put this on him. They've known him for years. They knew what had happened. And Max...

He hardly dared to think about what he'd been saying.

The door behind him opened and closed again and he heard footsteps.

"Leo, would you please relax?" Max tried his very best to keep his voice calm, for he knew upsetting Leo would only make the whole situation even worse.

Leo, on the other hand whirled around. "How could you do that?"

Gosh, he seemed so desperate and that incredulous look on his face was hardly bearable.

"I am just trying to think of what's best for the show. It's nothing that special, if you really think about it. Actor's get cast and replaced. It's really nothing personal," he tried to convince him to see it logically.

But Leo wasn't really listening. "I can't believe you're doing this. This is crazy. Please, don't. Don't let me go through this."

But looking at Max he knew he wasn't gonna change his point of view just to please a personal query.

"Forget it," Leo started to walk up and down the office and was getting more and more hectic. "I know you better. You're not going to move away from that," he gave a short snort. "This never changed..."

"Leo, please," Max was kind of lost. "What is this about? You said you've left her behind you. You said you decided to leave her. She simply can't affect you that deeply anymore..."

"I needed your encouragement this time," he answered.

"What? What the hell are you talking about?" Max raised his voice now too. "I always stood behind you. Don't you tell me I didn't. And you know pretty well it's not fair to say otherwise."

"Oh, here we go. Yes, you've been the compassionate part... As always," he was waving his hands about. "Next thing you're gonna tell me is you did this for me... A true act of love... Great deal."

"I am only telling you to stop behaving like a jerk," Max didn't intend to say that, but he wasn't prepared to be attacked like that.

"It's the truth. Well, spare me!"

"Will you stop it, for God's sake? Don't you dare questioning my motivations. I tried to explain it to you," Max lost his temper as well. "It's a god-damn job! Your job! It's got nothing to do with your relationship breaking apart a long time ago."

Leo looked away. How could he be that stubborn?

Max started anew: "Alright. You know what? If this is so important... If she still affects you that much, than keep running away. I really thought you were over that:"

"You don't know what I am feeling..."

"NO YOU'RE RIGHT! I obviously don't. I thought I did, but hey... Maybe you should go and cry over her and keep on wishing she'll return to you. That's what you want anyway, isn't it?"

Leo turned at him shocked. "You're breaking up with me?"

"No Leo," Max shook his head. "You should make up your mind. What is it that you want?"

Leo hit the desk in front of him with both his fists all of a sudden. This was too much.

"I WANT YOU TO BE ON MY SIDE. AT LEAST FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE," he screamed.

"I AM. And I fucking can't recall it had ever been differently," Max shouted back.

"Oh yeah? How long is 'ever' then? Two months? You don't know what had been before that. You have no idea of that selfish inaccessible asshole I had to deal with for years. And I really believed you were different now. What a mistake! It's always about you! You're the good one! You're the professional! YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS ME..."

"Yeah, maybe because you've always been that cowardly wimp and would never have done anything on his own, if it hadn't been for me then..."

"I don't fucking care what you think. I can go on by myself. I've done it before and can do it again! I don't need guidance from you!" Leo was beside himself with rage. "It doesn't matter anyway. You're going to leave me. You said it yourself just minutes ago. Well, go on then. Leave! I don't give a damn!"

"Fine! If that's what you want, at least you've made up your mind for once," Max shouted back and turned around to leave.

It was just then, Leo seemed to notice what he just said. His expression changed from angry to desperate as he jumped after him.

"No," he begged. "Please don't..."

Max turned again. Leo just stared at him in pure desperation.

"Don't leave me! Please," he whispered now as tears started to run down his cheeks. "I need you... I love you... I...Please, stay."

Max sighed and stopped, turning to Leo again. He couldn't bear seeing him like this. He didn't want to see him cry. He didn't mean to cause him any harm, even if he possibly did in the past.

"Please, I...", Leo sobbed. "I'm sorry... Let's talk about this calmly... You...It's just... You've really hurt me..."

"I didn't," Max answered softly. "I did nothing to attack you personally. I haven't hurt you, Leo. I never would..."

"No, right! You didn't," Leo answered quickly. "But you were about to... You cannot leave. I am begging you. Don't do that to me," his voice somersaulted and he spoke faster and faster again.

"I cannot deal with that, okay? I cannot...DON'T TOUCH ME... I DON'T NEED THAT... I cannot stand seeing her,do you understand? I can't be near her!"

"Remind me again why you left her? What was it you told me?" Max asked again.

"I..."

"You can't expect me to go over this, as much as I want to," he said. "You want me to leave. Fine. But then you're begging me to stay, yet telling me you still don't get over your personal problems concerning that woman. So, what is it? It's that business, Leo"

"It's always about business, isn't it?" Leo cried. "It's not about me. It's about business..."

"God damn it, it's all about YOU," Max felt the anger from minutes ago rising inside of him again. "It's not me who is the selfish one here. It's about you and you alone!"

"I TOLD YOU I WAS SORRY ABOUT WHAT I SAID," Leo shouted back.

"And what?," Max just couldn't get it. "To watch you start anew just the very next moment? You hate me, you love me. I got that. I am the asshole, fine. But what exactly do you expect of me? You're freaking the fuck out about something I obviously cannot understand. And I am supposed to stay calm, agree and never mention it again?"

"Yes, my bad," he got angry again as well, yet those tears just wouldn't stop coming. "I'm overreacting. I know... I said I'm do you have to start this over?"

"Is this here...," Max pointed at the two of them. "Really such a bad decision? Do you really want to throw it away, because of some slut you abandoned?"

"No...I told you... I..."

"Don't say it!" Max looked at him angrily. "Don't say you love me. It means nothing! Apparently not anymore... if ever!"

Leo shook his head, still crying frantically. He reached out and hugged Max as tight as he could.

"I am really sorry," he cried. "Don't...don't take me seriously, please... I don't...I never wanted you to leave... or hurt you... I need you! I thought I didn't but that's just not true!"

Max didn't reply at first. He stood there; his thoughts were fighting his emotions. But hearing the heart-melting sobs of that man wasn't something he could ignore. He felt his anger ebb away and softened every second. Finally, he put his arms around Leo as well, stroking slowly over his back.

"Hey. Calm down," he said caring. "This will pass as well. It's nothing we can't figure out. Just... Oh Leo, please stop crying. I didn't mean it..."

Leo had his head clinging on his shoulder, with his eyes closed. He was still sobbing.

"I know," he answered, but his voice sounded muffled. Max held him even closer to himself.

"Let's...let's just forget about that," he continued. "This was bullshit and shouldn't have happened...And about that girl..."

"Hm?"

"I'm sure you will get over that. You're able to work very professionally. I've seen it a lot of times in the past few weeks. You'll be able to work with her on a vocational level, blocking this shit out."

Leo let go of Max, looking up.

"What?"

He stepped a few steps away, slowly starting to shake his head again.

"You... you agreed on her doing it?"

Max nodded, not knowing what was going on. "It was the only choice."

Leo shook his head even harder now. Tears were still glittering in his eyes and his face got even paler, if that was even possible.

"Oh my God," he managed to say, turning quickly, putting his hands to his head and starting his mad walk up and down the office again. Max noticed immediately and tried to make him stand still.

"Please, relax," he said.

"You did it," Leo whispered, but his voice got louder again from second to second. He was breathing heavily. "You did it!...I KNEW YOU WOULD DO IT!... This can't be true! DAMN! I trusted you...I thought you would at least talk to me about that! But you had to go on decide it on your own...AGAIN!"

"Again?"

"IT'S THE SAME... ALWAYS! YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE!... DEEP DOWN YOU'RE STILL THAT...THAT...", he was searching for words to describe his rage.

"LEO!"

"NO! I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT! IT WASN'T UP TO YOU TO DECIDE! YOU DON'T EVEN REMEMBER A TINY BIT OF WHAT HAS TO BE DONE... YOU JUST HAD TO SHOW OFF, AS USUAL!"

"YES, I DID DECIDE IT," Max screamed. "AND YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE SOMEONE MUST HAVE THE GUTS TO DO IT! AND YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY TOO COWARDLY AND TOO FUCKING SCARED OF ANYTHING! YOU CAN'T EVEN GET YOUR OWN FUCKING LIFE STRAIGHT!"

Leo stood there, just staring at him with wide eyes. He couldn't believe it. How could he have been so wrong? He stepped backwards again, looking at him with pure disgust.

"Screw you!" he said. "I hate you... Go on with it, if you want... I'm done with you!"

"Leo... Wait! This is crazy... Don't do this rashly!"

But Leo just continued to shake his head. "Leave me be!... I don't wanna see you again..."

Thus he rushed towards the door, opening it. "I hate you!"

As the door fell close it took a moment for Max to get what just happened. He was stunned. Leo's left him. Just like that... Just moments ago...

Leo was gone!

Max felt his breath becoming faster. He felt like losing his grip. A stabbing pain shot through his head and all of a sudden he felt dizzy. He wanted to go after Leo. No, he simply had to go after Leo. But that pain grew stronger. He began to walk towards the door, but could hardly reach it. When he managed to grab the doorknob it got so intense, he felt like breaking down. Sinking to his knees he barely recognized the hard ground. He closed his eyes to stop the room from spinning around him.

"Stop that," he thought.

Where did this come from all of a sudden? It got worse every second. Max didn't think he could endure this any longer. It was so excruciating...

"Please stop," he screamed but opened his eyes wide in surprise only a moment later.

What was that about? There were pictures. Pictures flashing before his eyes. There was Leo... Always Leo... Max scared him... Leo pulling out his blue blanket, and screaming, while Max was splashing water in his face... Leo running away from him through the city... He looked so differently from what he looked now... Leo holding two accounting books, telling him to leave and turn himself in... Leo appearing in what seemed to be a court-room, rushing by Max's side... Leo and himself in Jail, trying to convince those convicts to be part in what seemed to be a musical-idea...

Max lifted his head a bit and just stared wide-eyed... He felt his eyes getting watery... And there was more... It was Leo screaming at him... And Leo... slapping him in the face... There was he himself shouting at Leo to get out... And the gray dark streets of New York City at night... Snow started to fall... And... There was... A car... coming closer... He remembered the pain... and then it was gone... And waking up in that gray room... With Leo beside him...

Max writhed on the ground. He had his eyes closed and his head was touching the ground... There was only silence. The pain had stopped. The Room stood still again. His own heart-beat was thumping in his ears... He could hear the silent dripping of his own tears on the wooden floor and an intensifying sobbing somewhere... No, not somewhere... It was himself... Sobbing on the floor... Feeling more miserable than ever before and this time he knew exactly why...

He remembered!

~To be continued~

You'll never walk alone

Chapter Notes

A/N: Here we are... Finale... TT_TT I'm feeling a bit sentimental about it.

White clouds of breath appeared before him as his steps finally stopped. He just stood in the dark streets, staring down at his feet. He was freezing and his legs were soaking by the muddy brown snow that had been fair and white just a few hours ago. At least so it seemed. But Leo didn't notice the freezing cold or the gloomy darkness around him or even the fact he'd run through half of the city without one break and his heart was beating faster than ever before. He tried to catch a breath. He couldn't think. He couldn't walk. He didn't know where to go. He didn't grasp what had happened. And even now he didn't feel the icy chills the wind spread over his face. He could see tears falling down, sinking into the snow. But he only assumed it were his own. He didn't feel them falling and more importantly he didn't know why he was still crying. There was nothing left...

Lifting himself up again, the streets and people around him seemed nothing but blurry and smudged. He swallowed down that lump in his throat and went on. His steps were slow and his body was heavy. With no destination in mind he just wandered through the black city with its neon-lights. People were passing him, some of them even jostled him, but he didn't mind. What was the point in freaking out about physical contact anyway? This meant nothing. All those people meant nothing.

"Watch it!"

"Get out of the way!"

"Excuse me? Do you mind?"

He didn't bother to answer. All he did was trying to dodge them, which turned out to be rather difficult. Leo had his problems moving on. He never realized how many people were in the streets at all times of the day. But then, he never really had had a reason to be out here alone after sunset.

Another person ran into him and he lost his grip. He rudely landed in the snow, just laying there for a few minutes; his eyes closed. He hardly recognized it. A fall like that should cause at least a little pain somehow. But Leo wasn't able to feel anything. Not the fall, not the cold ground, not even the snow his face landed in.

How could he have sunk that low? He'd had everything he ever dreamed of... And now, it was gone. It was as though history repeated itself again. He lost. As usual. How was he

supposed to set this right? How could he return to normal, if there ever had been something like that?

Slowly he opened his eyes again.

"I've lost him..." he thought and his eyes began to fill with tears again. An overpowering pain shot through his entire body all of a sudden. Something coming from deeper within than he'd ever experienced before... And even now he couldn't stop thinking about him...

"I don't want this anymore," he thought desperately. This man would never change. Things like that were sure to happen again all over. He just knew. It didn't matter that he had been so very different lately. It was inside of him. Always... And it always would be...

"How stupid of me to fall for it," Leo thought. "And for him..."

It was almost like being shaken awake, when someone touched him.

"Oh my God, dear...Are you alright?" he heard an unfamiliar warm voice. A woman? Leo turned slightly, but still everything appeared only blurred.

"Let me help you up," she said, lifting him up. "Gosh, you're freezing. You shouldn't be out here."

Just a few minutes later, Leo found himself sitting leaned on a window in a diner not far from where he had been found by that woman.

"What the hell where you doing out there?" she asked, handing him a cup of steaming tea. Leo took a short look at it, then at her. Her blonde wavy Hair was tied to a ponytail. She now wore a white apron over a yellow dress and was still smiling at him with her bright blue eyes.

"You work here?" Leo asked silently, taking the cup out of her hands. "Thank you."

She nodded, while sitting down in front of him.

"It's one of three jobs actually," she answered, still smiling. "Yeah, I know. It's not the big life, but it's, well...mine. And what about you? What were you doing out there? It's freezing cold..."

Leo just turned his head away again, not answering at all.

"I could be wrong," he heard her say. "But lying around in the snow in the middle of the city might not be the best idea ever."

He had to grin. Sure, one of many stupid ideas...

"What makes you think I'm not a homeless and this was just a trick to get someone near me and rob that person?" he asked in return.

"You don't exactly look like one," she answered. Judging the bewildered look on Leo's face, she added: "I have them here very often and no... No, you're certainly not one of them. And..."

well, I think I could have robbed you much easier out there...in your condition."

Leo rested his head in his hand and had to laugh. She certainly was right. Not, that he had cared much out there but he had to admit, it was much nicer sitting in the warmth of that Diner than strolling the streets alone. He looked outside again. People were still passing the window and he started to wonder where they were heading at this time. Surely, they've had a place to go...

"Oh, I know that look."

He turned to look at her again.

"What look?" he asked.

"Yours," it seemed nothing could wipe away that smile on her face, even though there was a hint of compassion in her eyes as well. "Only someone who's got his heart broken looks like that."

Leo was surprised. How did she do that?

"Well, then," she said. "Who was she?"

Leo, while still a bit taken aback, stroke through his hair to loosen some of the wet strands which kept sticking to his skin uncomfortably. "She!... Oh sure...", he said more to himself, jeering.

"Did she kick you out?" she asked again.

Leo looked at her once more. Talking to a complete stranger was something he'd never dared to consider before, but there wasn't much he could lose now.

"No. I left."

He could feel her staring right through him.

"Oh, a marital fight. Now that's bad," she replied.

Leo looked at her baffled, not moving a muscle for a moment. Then he burst into a laugh. He just couldn't help it.

"What's so funny?" she asked surprised at his reaction.

"We weren't married... even so...", he answered.

"Not?" she asked. "Well, maybe that's your problem then." She laughed as well, tousling though his hair.

Leo shook his head. "I guess people just never change. And that's the problem. They remain dishonest and captured in their own bad selves."

"Oh my," she looked away, thinking for a moment. "You've been hurt. I understand."

"You are?"

She nodded. "Oh yes. Look, the thing you gotta figure out now," she leaned forward to be closer to him. "...is why did you fall in love with her, if she was such a bad person..."

She winked at him once more and stood up. "Lemme know, if you need anything. You can stay as long as my shift lasts, which is the whole night," she smiled at him again and then moved into what seemed to be the kitchen-entrance, letting the old brown door swing bidirectionally.

Leo remained where he was and looked after her for a while. Then he stared down at his cup again, just watching the tea-leaves color the hot water brown.

That question echoed through his head... Why did you fall for him in the first place? He couldn't find the answer to that. Hell, he hadn't even noticed himself until recently. There must have been a reason...Or a day... Or anything. Why do people fall in love without having a choice? Or do they? He couldn't tell. But he felt that great sadness arising inside of him again. That emptiness... And the pain, thinking about never being together with him again.

'I hate you'

The last words he said to him. Leo closed his eyes thinking about them. He didn't want to hate him, but he did... No. That was a lie and deep within he knew it. He loved him... He couldn't change it as well. It was as though wishing not to breathe anymore. He hated to hate him, yet in the glimpse of that thought he knew he hated to love him either.

Leo turned his head again and looked outside into the dark streets.

"What am I supposed to do?" he thought.

....

Roger knocked on the door of that office once more. Nothing. He looked at Carmen who stood next to him, shrugging. This just couldn't be. It was way past midnight. They simply must be here. He was so certain Max followed Leo into the office when they had run out of the theater. At least that was what he suspected.

He knocked again. Still no response.

"Should we just go in?" Carmen asked.

Roger looked at him, then nodded. All he wanted to do is to apologize for having been so harsh on Leo, but now this seemed weird.

He opened the door carefully and the both of them took a step inside. The office was dark and it didn't seem as though anyone was there.

"What are we doing here?" Carmen's voice sounded doubting. "We shouldn't be in here. They're not here."

Roger stopped, looking around. This was odd. He had never seen Leo getting that angry before and he knew for sure Max had been the only person to calm him down, but where could they have gone? Leo was scared of the dark. He knew.

"I was so sure to find them here," he said. Carmen wanted to answer something, but only opened his mouth without any sound coming out. Then he shrugged.

"Maybe," he started, touching Roger's shoulder with one hand. "Maybe, we should wait and see how they are tomorrow. I mean they will have worked this out by then, I'm sure."

Roger thought for a moment, then nodded.

"Maybe, you're right," he agreed. He linked arms with his partner and turned to leave again, when Carmen stopped him. Roger turned to look at him questioning, but Carmen kept staring into another direction until he suddenly jumped into the room once more.

"Oh my God," his voice sounded worried.

Roger turned to switch on the lights. He saw Carmen move towards the french window which stood entirely open. The slender man looked at him shortly and entered the balcony. Roger didn't waste another thought of what he might have seen there and followed him in wide steps.

It took some time to get used to the darkness outside and see properly. Luckily the lights from inside illuminated the black surrounding a little. He blinked once or twice before he was able to see the shape of Carmen in front of him. A cold wintery breeze crawled up his body, forcing him to pull his coat a little tighter.

He reached for Carmen, who stopped just a few inches in front of him.

"Darling?" he asked quietly. "What are we doing out here?"

Carmen suddenly jumped forward without paying attention to him.

"Jesus... Max!" Roger jumped after Carmen as soon as he saw where he went.

Max sat on a chair in a corner of the balcony, not looking up. He didn't move and had his face buried in his hands.

"Hey, what are you doing out here? It's freezing," Carmen tried his best to sound soothing, yet Roger immediately noticed the anxiety in his voice. He couldn't even blame him. Seeing Max there was kind of worrying him as well; especially since none of them could tell how long he'd been out there in the cold.

Max didn't reply. He didn't even seem to notice them. He just sat there, his head leaned against his hands, his eyes closed.

"My God, Max," Roger knelt down next to him and Carmen. "What... Max! Can you hear me?"

"Should I call someone?" Carmen asked and sounded as though he was panicking now, with his voice rising to a new level of high-pitched.

"No need to scream. I can hear you alright!"

Roger and Carmen whirled around. Max still didn't move, but he did answer.

"Are you alright?" Roger asked, grabbing his shoulders trying to force him to look at him.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Max lifted his head, yet just stared into space. He looked tired and worn out.

"How long have you been out here?" Carmen asked.

Max shrugged. "I don't know. An hour...maybe two. Doesn't matter..."

Roger and Carmen looked at each other enquiringly.

"What are you talking about? You... What happened?" Carmen asked.

"You've gotta come in... It's way too cold to sit out here," Roger interrupted. He put his hand on Max's back trying to make him move, but pulled it away just seconds later as Max whirled around pushing his arm away and got up as though something had bitten him.

"What do you want?" he asked harshly, looking from one to the other.

Roger stepped back but didn't turn his gaze down. Something was different. It was there. In Max's eyes and oh-so-clear in the way he stemmed himself against them; struggling not to let them into that hell of his own thoughts he did build around himself all the same.

Roger took a deep breath, not turning away. He swallowed his first surprise and started to speak again, trying to sound unimpressed.

"Max?...Where's Leo?"

Max's expression changed. He almost looked like a child for not even a second and the image of someone completely lost in the dark came upon Roger that instance.

Max turned his head away, staring to the ground.

"He's gone."

Roger was pretty sure he'd never heard this man talk so quietly before.

"What do you mean... gone?" Carmen was the first to find his voice again.

"Just what I said," Max answered and stormed past them into the office. "He left and he's most likely not coming back."

Roger and Carmen followed him inside, observing him running up and down without really knowing what to do exactly.

"He...he left?" Carmen looked up to Roger, nearly whispering the question.

"Yeah, whatever," Max must have heard it. He stopped and supported himself on the desk-chair nearby, lowering his head and closing his eyes.

"What?" Carmen didn't believe what he just heard. He finally managed to step away from his partner, daringly approaching Max. "Are you crazy? Max! Leo's gone...and you? You don't care?"

Max only shook his head. "Why would I care?"

"What?"

"I said why would I care?" He looked up to them again and Carmen was sure he'd never seen him this confused before. It seemed his mood was changing just about every minute and he seemed desperate. He'd never seen him like that... at least not as far as he could remember. Hell, he even stayed completely cool coming out of that hospital after that accident, but now... This was kind of scary. But before he was able to answer only one word, Max continued.

"I cannot put my whole effort into some kid who tries to have it his will all the time... There are more important things to focus on. And if he wants to leave...Fine! I won't stop him. At least there's no one in my way anymore... No silly childish habits I'll have to pay attention to and most certainly no one who'll blame me for anything anymore..." his voice grew louder with every word and he gestured a lot. Something neither Carmen nor Roger had seen him doing in a long time. He did his very best getting his face out of sight, either not wanting them to see it or not daring to look at them.

Roger now dared to step closer to Carmen.

"Max? What happened?" he stepped closer until he would have been able to reach him in a heartbeat, yet he didn't touch him. "Max, you've been in the cold for quite a while. Are you sure, you are alright?"

"OF COURSE I'M NOT," Max shouted and lifted his head to look at him, startling Roger who almost jumped backwards. In surprise he noticed tears in Max's eyes.

"What do you expect?," Max continued and didn't take away his desperate gaze. "He's left... He...just went... After all we've been through. He won't come back like he did on that fountain...Or in that courtroom...Or even after what I've done the last time and ended up not recognizing him...He won't be there anymore. He's given me too many chances anyway."

Roger was speechless. He heard the deep gasp of Carmen next to him and watched Max, who just now seemed to really understand what had happened himself.

"You...", Roger was the first to find his voice again. "You..remember?"

Max had lowered his head again, still leaning over the chair and sobbing quietly. He nodded almost indistinguishably.

"Everything?"

Again Max nodded. "Everything!" he answered more calmly now. "But what good is it? It doesn't matter. Not in the slightest."

He lifted himself up and started to move through the office again.

"I cannot waste any more time. If this repeats over and over again, what am I supposed to do? I just can't roam the streets every other week and run into another car or whatever, just because he can't calm down. It's absolutely no point in talking some sense into that baby."

"You remember Leo had left before?" Carmen asked. This all sounded so unbelievable.

Max moved towards the door and nodded without taking any further recognition of the couple standing in the middle of his office, not knowing what to do or say.

"Yeah, I know," he said. "I know why I've been out there in the middle of the night. I know why I was roaming the streets and I know exactly where that car hit me... and more importantly..." he hesitated for a split second. "I know why. And that's nothing I want twice in my life, believe me."

If he wants to act like the poor misunderstood victim...well, go ahead Leo Bloom! See, if I care!"

He grabbed his coat and quickly put it on, moving yet closer to the door.

"You really wanna turn and just keep on going the way you always have?" Carmen didn't believe it. "Hiding behind that show? Not thinking about him anymore?"

Max shook his head. "Forget what I said about that show. I'm out of this. It's not up to me to decide anymore."

Roger and Carmen looked at each other questioning, before turning back on him.

"You mean the casting of Ulla?" Roger asked.

"Yeah, her and everything. I won't be part of this one. I didn't do anything and yet managed to ruin everything," he answered.

"Wh...Where are you going?" Carmen asked a little nervous, having watched him getting dressed and now reaching for the doorknob.

Max opened it and only turned to look at him once, while moving outside.

"I'm going after that kid. What do you think?" he answered desperately. "He's...afraid of the dark and can't be out there alone..."

Thus, he closed the door behind him. Roger and Carmen, being left behind, needed some time to get all of this straight. Then they looked at each other once more. Whatever happened here...it was crazy.

"My God...," Carmen whispered.

They both didn't waste another time and followed Max as fast as they could.

....

Leo had his head pressed against the window pane, watching the window getting steamy with his condensed breath. He was lost in his thoughts. He didn't know for how long he was sitting there already, but it didn't matter to him. He'd been watching the people outside for quite some time, for even at night the streets were never empty.

"The city indeed never sleeps," he thought by himself. He tried to look up to the sky but too many buildings were in his way. It was then he realized he was never able to see a little further than his own eye level... And maybe this was the whole problem.

"Maybe it was my fault then," Leo thought. "Maybe he was right...and I was selfish all the time..."

Mentally, he found himself back a lot of years ago. He was searching for a clue to prove his memory wrong, but actually there was nothing he could find. Why did he come back to Max after he explained that five-step-scheme to him? Because he saw his chance to follow his dreams just for once... Why didn't he leave after meeting all those obscure people who were unknowingly up to help them cheating their way through all of Broadway?... Because he knew that guy could lead him out of his own misery and open some new doors. All he had to do is go through them. Why didn't he waste another second when he heard what had happened with Max and ran back without hesitation?

Because he didn't know what to do without him.

Leo sighed. He couldn't find anything against this theory. It was really him being the selfish part. But why did he return to turn himself in then? He'd had everything. Money, a beautiful woman and Rio...

As hard as he tried he couldn't find an answer. It had never been for his personal advantage.

Or had it? He just didn't know. Maybe it was more a proof; more like some sure-fire evidence he was a good person. But to whom? To Himself? Why did he give that up? Maybe, because Ulla blamed him for feeling guilty? Maybe...

But why did he feel that way? Could it be it wasn't just for himself?

"You're still here?"

Leo was shaken awake by that woman again. She stood in front of him with that smile she wore from the moment he first saw her. She carried a tray of dirty dishes and just collected the cup in front of Leo as well.

"I got a bit carried away, actually," he smiled back at her.

"Well then, it's very nice to see a smile on that sad face of yours for a change," she answered.

Leo looked at her a bit perplex. "Sad face, huh?"

He looked down again, but had to smile considering that notion. Most of his life people were referring to him as shy or anxious. But thinking about it, she was right. 'Sad' was a much better way to put it. It mirrored himself much better. Or at least he felt more associated with it.

"Yeah, but it's no wonder really," she said, sitting down for a moment.

"No?"

She shook her head and her blonde pony-tail flew across her shoulders.

"I can only imagine what you have been through. And a heartache is never something one can put away that easily."

Leo sighed. "No. You're certainly right. But I was kind of thinking... About what you said earlier."

"About why you fell in love with her?" she asked, looking at him with her big eyes.

Leo nodded. "Yeah."

"And did you figure it out?"

"Not really," He only glanced at her from the corner of his eyes. "But it just won't let me be."

"Don't you know or don't you wanna see?"

Leo had not the slightest clue how she did that. Asking the right questions was a talent not many people possessed, but she certainly mastered a new level of asking.

He turned his head and looked at her again.

"I guess I don't want to see right now," he smiled. "It's been a bad argument. So, I am still trying to understand a few things myself."

"I see," she answered. "Well, did she change you?"

"Change me?"

"Yes. Like...Your behavior, your way of thinking and of acting. Just the whole way you see the world now compared to before you knew her," she asked, leaning on the table in front of her.

Leo had to think about it for a moment.

Did he? In a way, yes. No, who was he trying to kid here? Max changed everything. Leo never stood up for anyone including himself before. The city had been a huge scary place, before he showed him how great it could be to live in New York. Leo never had dared to scream at Max before. Even when he got to know him better it took quite some time before he even fantasized about admitting he thought differently in some situations. So, yes. He did change him in every way he could imagine. Why would he fall back in this old behavior pattern then?

Leo looked up with wide eyes. She was smiling at him.

"I thought so," she said softly. "You know, I always dreamed about not having to do this here."

"Working as a waitress?"

"Yes. I wanted to try my luck as an actress coming here...But well, it never worked out," she said. "And then I met my husband... and he changed everything. I don't mind working here and in two other restaurants actually. As long as he is with me! So, I guess if someone changes your point of view it's kind of worth fighting for."

Leo still smiled at her. Maybe she was right. And he felt an amazing wave of admiration for her all of a sudden. If she could do it, even though she didn't manage to keep her dream alive, why did he drew in his horn? This was crazy. He'd after all achieved everything he's ever dreamed of. And maybe even a little more.

"Do you think I've been wrong all the time?" he asked her after some hesitation.

She shrugged. "I don't know. I know too little of you actually, but I guess mostly it's just about not understanding each other the way you should. You have to decide whether it's worth fighting for."

Leo looked down. She was right. They had come so far... He never thought anything like it would happen anyway and Max reacted to him in a way he never dreamed of being possible. So, was it worth fighting for? ... Yes! Yes!

"Yes," he said.

"Yes what?" She looked at him a little confused. Leo didn't even notice she couldn't follow his thoughts.

"Yes, you are right," he said and smiled. "It is worth fighting for..."

He jumped up and nodded towards her. She agreed by nodding back.

"Thank you," he said, handing her some money, but she just stared at him questioningly.

"What?" he laughed. "I told you I wasn't a homeless. I can pay for that here."

She took it and started to grin again. "Well, in that case," she put it away carefully. "Thanks a lot, Mr. Sad-Eyes!"

"I have to say thank you," he answered, shaking her hand. Then he turned and ran out of the cafe as quick his feet carried him.

She was left back flabbergasted and looked after him some time. Then she closed her eyes and smiled again.

"I don't even know your name," she thought and thus returned to clean the tables around her.

....

Roger and Carmen followed Max as soon as they got what was going on, yet still managed to let him go astray. When they left the backstreet and ran into the first bigger crossroad, they had no idea where he went, to say the least. They spent hours of walking through New York trying to trace him down, but slowly ran out of ideas.

"So, what do we do now?" Carmen asked, looking up to Roger who kept on looking around from time to time. "I've really no idea where else to search?"

Roger shook his head reluctantly.

"I don't know either," he answered. "And I'm honestly starting to doubt he knows where to search for him..."

"You think he's just wandering the streets?" Carmen asked.

"Probably. I'm pretty sure he knows some more places he could have vanished to but I doubt Leo is anywhere there."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because," Roger tried to explain his line of thoughts carefully. "Young Mr. Bloom is way too emotional. I highly doubt he thought of somewhere to go. Just looking at it I think he really sort of left without any further thinking."

"He showed up on our door before," Carmen replied.

Roger nodded. "Yes, but this time... Well, I don't know what exactly happened. He probably doesn't wanna show himself this time."

Carmen looked straight ahead while he kept on walking. He thought about what Roger meant. Was this really such a serious thing? He tried to imagine what he would do. But he would never leave... at least not really. But then, he didn't know what happened either. And if it was true Max remembered everything again... well, then maybe it was something concerning a little more than just a fight. Then, maybe this was about finding out what he really wanted...

"He seemed so frightened," Carmen murmured more to himself, thinking.

"I agree."

He looked up to Roger again, who kept looking ahead. Sometimes it felt like he could read his mind.

"Did I say that aloud?" Carmen blushed slightly and earned another nod from his partner.

"To reassure you, I also think I've never seen him that frightened," Roger explained. "I guess he noticed."

"Noticed what?"

Roger stopped and smiled at the smaller man, who looked at him with big eyes.

"Noticed that as much as he tried to hide or pretend in the past and even as much as he manipulated his way through life always... there's one thing he cannot abandon just like that."

Carmen thought about it for a moment, then a smile started to spread across his face as well.

"Leo?"

Again the older man nodded. "I guess Max has made one major mistake. And that is letting Leo in his life. I guess he can't be without him anymore, even though his 'defensive measures' are still working."

"But he appeared to be fine with it while not remembering."

"So what?" Roger asked. "Just imagine you don't recognize anyone. You are a stranger anywhere and you feel kind of lost..."

Carmen listened closely.

"And then..." Roger continued. "You fall in love... and all of a sudden everything comes back to you. Wouldn't you be scared too? It must feel like giving up a great deal of who you are."

"So, he really is in love then?" Carmen asked, but half expecting the answer already.

"I believe he was before too. But he just never admitted it to himself. Same thing with Leo," Roger answered. "I guess it's that one dilemma everyone has to go through sooner or later."

Carmen nodded knowingly.

"Whether to allow yourself to love and take the risk of getting hurt..." he said looking straight into Roger's eyes.

"Or deny it and live with the subliminal question of 'What if?' for the rest of your life," he continued Carmen's thought.

"It can be painful," Carmen nodded in agreement.

"Yes, it sure is. And I think he does realize Leo's important to him, but what he doesn't realize," Roger agreed. "Is that he will have to decide what he wants. It can't work the way it

was."

Carmen started to grin and kind of enjoyed the confused look on Roger's face, seeing it.

"Now I think I understand why Leo's left," he said. "He's decided for himself."

Roger couldn't help, but smile as well. He flung his arm around Carmen and they continued walking through Manhattan as the first sunlight started to let the peaks of the huge buildings glow in a silvery light.

.....

He kept on running. Again. And just as before he had no clue at all where he should start to search.

"I cannot believe this happens twice in a lifetime," Max thought.

And yet, he felt he needed to do this. There was no understandable reason for it, he knew. And even though he didn't even know where Leo went, his feet were carrying him themselves. Just like an invisible hand grasping him and pulling him through the city. He looked at every face that passed him and felt even more worried recognizing none of those people were the person he was looking for.

And then a new feeling arose inside of him...As he suddenly stopped. Why the hell was he so worried? Leo was a grown man. And even though he acted like a child most of the time, he was perfectly able to stand on his own feet. He'd proven it. In so many ways over the last few months. And even before that... So why worry? There was absolutely no need to. And hadn't it been Leo who made his decision? He left. He hated him. He said so himself.

"Let me be. I hate you!"

Max started to shake thinking about it and closed his eyes.

It was true then. He knew. Even though he hadn't noticed in those past years, he noticed now. And this realization made it even harder to bear.

"I... I love him...", Max whispered to himself. And he meant it. It wasn't just a twist of fate occurring while he hadn't remembered anything. It was true. That's why he was so worried. He was about to lose the one thing that meant something in his life.

And as pathetic as it sounded in his head, he knew this was exactly how it was meant to be. He had to lose everything to realize what was important to him. Just to lose it again.

"Is this fair?" he thought. But then again life had never been fair. That was the very reason he had become the person he was.

"No, that's not true," he kept on thinking. "I was different. When I had no idea of how idiotic I always had been. I was a better person when...when he was with me. He's made life fair..."

The sound of squeaking wheels ripped him out of his inner monologue. It was so loud and appeared to come closer. This was so familiar. Looking around his heart started to pound all of a sudden. Max turned and his eyes grew wider in shock. He saw the black car. It was so close. He heard people screaming on the streets; saw their panicked looks. And without really thinking he jumped forward...

....

Leo opened the office door too quickly. He heard the crashing sound it caused when it bumped against the wall with a slam. But he didn't bother to take a look. He would fix this later.

"Max?"

He hasted through every room, just taking a brief look., but Max was nowhere to be found. Damn it. Leo stopped in the middle of the office. His thoughts circled in his head. He wasn't there?! How could this be?

He shook his head slowly. "I know," he whispered. "It's my fault. I said despicable things."

He never intended this. He had been selfish. And the worst thing was, he didn't even know why the pure mention of Ulla's name caused such a reaction in him. This was over. It had been long before... He felt so sorry for how he had reacted. But it seemed he didn't get the chance to set things right.

"I'm such a fool," he thought.

He had to find him. He had to tell him. If there was one thing he was sure of, it was this. He'd been unsure all his life. Even though there had been no reason to. And even after he'd gotten everything he'd ever dreamed of, he was full of doubts and wicked thoughts of 'what if'.

This had got to stop! It just couldn't be. And if history really repeated again and again, he was convinced not to let this chance go to waste.

Leo started to move towards the door, barely noticing how his steps got quicker until he almost flew down the stairs of the corridor and ran out of the building. He was driven by one thought only:

"Max"!

There weren't too many places he could be. After all, the city was strange to him still. He knew no one, except the few theater people he got to know while being with him. He hurried down the streets, trying not to run into anyone approaching him. He rushed down one road and another.

This was insane. How should he know where to find him? Maybe he could ask for help. Roger and Carmen would be a good start. But then... He would have to explain a lot.

"Maybe I should have stayed in the office, just waiting," he thought as he finally stopped to catch a breath.

"LEO!"

He whirled around. Someone called his name. He heard it clearly. This couldn't be...

Roger was running towards him, closely followed by Carmen. Leo felt his heart skip a beat. He had never been more grateful to see them and flung his arms around Roger, who appeared to be a little surprised, but let it happen.

"It's so good to see you here," he said, without thinking. "I need your help..."

Roger and Carmen nodded simultaneously. "We know..."

Judging the confused look on Leo's face, Carmen stepped to him as well.

"After your fight," he started.

"They know?" Leo thought a little taken aback.

"We went to check if you're okay and, well... only found Max," Carmen continued.

"Yes, it went so wrong," Leo admitted a little ashamed. "But that's the problem. I wanted to go back and...and can't find him anywhere..."

Carmen shared an omniscient look with Roger, knowing very well Leo must have seen it.

"He's...", Carmen started, but just hadn't the heart to tell him. So he just hesitated and tried to ignore Leo's frantic gaze.

"He's gone to search for you," Roger stepped in.

"He is?" Leo felt his heart beating faster. How could he do something as stupid as this? Why would he even do that? Just that moment Leo seemed to realize how wrong he had been. He shook his head as if to erase the thoughts which came into his mind.

"No... NO!," he suddenly said, looking up to his two friends again. "He can't wander here alone. Where does he wanna search anyway. He...He still doesn't remember anything."

"Leo...", Carmen tried to calm him down, reaching out for him.

"I have to find him... Oh God, this is all my fault," a slight panic started to arise inside of him again. He recognized it, yet he felt unable to inhibit it.

"Leo!"

"I have to find him. Please, I need your help. I guess together it'll be a whole lot easier. Please!" He looked at the both of them desperately.

Carmen took a breath again to say something, but was interrupted by Roger, who put his hand on his shoulder to stop him from saying anything. Then he turned to Leo and nodded.

"Alright!" he said. "You think of any places he could search for you... and we'll split."

Leo nodded and the three of them parted to search in different directions. Roger and Carmen looked after him for just a moment, then turned to walk the other way, when they heard Leo's voice again.

"Thank you!" he yelled in their direction from afar. Roger smiled, as did Carmen. They looked at each other, knowing perfectly well what the opposite was thinking.

"You didn't tell him?" Carmen asked.

"No, I think it's not up to us..."

They smiled at each other, but were distracted from the horrible sound of squeaking wheels and the inconceivable loudness of a group of people gasping at the same time. They looked up, but didn't believe their eyes. Some people around started to scream. Others were just standing paralyzed.

Carmen started to run first, closely followed by Roger. None of them said a word anymore. It was as though everything around stopped breathing for a second.

....

Leo waved at Roger and Carmen and turned to keep on searching. He had never been more thankful for having friends like them in his life. After all he'd spent most of it alone and always thought he'd been just too weird to be among people. Only after he got to know Max and his world he felt accepted.

"I think I've never told them," he thought by himself, while crossing a street, finding himself at exact the same point again. No way led around it. That waitress had been right. And everyone before had been right. It was Max. Max, who changed this misery he had called his life. He had to find him. He simply had to...

But what was that?

He heard a squeaking noise somewhere close. And it was getting louder. He lifted his head walking across that street and saw that huge thing coming closer. And closer. Like a huge black shadow. It seemed like moving in slow-motion though. And there was this silence. All around him...

Then there was someone screaming. Leo couldn't make out where it came from. And that shadowy thing was getting larger with every second. And its shapes were looming more and more.

"A car?"

Leo noticed this thought shooting through his head, but also noticed that know in his stomach that seemed to tighten with every inch that car came close. His heart sunk and felt like almost stopping to beat.

"Oh my...", he heard a little voice inside of his head and felt his eyes widening in shock.

He couldn't think properly and he couldn't move his feet. He heard the noise of someone jamming on the breaks, but it was like someone put his feet into solid stone. Unable to move he could only wait for the inevitable crash...

He felt a sudden tension on his whole body and lost the ground underneath his feet. He could feel his hair waving in the wind of what seemed to be a fall and something pulling on him. He had his eyes closed. Yet, he felt no pain at all. Nothing. This was so different from how he imagined it. It was a feeling of mere falling... nothing more. Soft somehow and comforting up to a certain amount.

But then he felt the brute impact of him landing on the hard stone street and felt his whole weight shaking through his body...

And there were screams again. He heard them clearly...

As he dared to open his eyes again, he saw that black danger drive past him, sounding its horn for everybody to hear. The driver was gesturing at him and people who stood nearby kept staring at him.

How could this be? He was sure it must have hit him... Yet, he lay a good distance away from all that on the curbstone of the walkway, not grasping it.

"Oh my God, are you alright?"

Leo whirled around. Next to him lay Max who, as well as himself, was covered in snow. He was looking at him worried, almost frightened, taking his face in his hands as if to stare into his soul.

Leo looked into those eyes and couldn't believe it.

"Leo? Are you okay?" he heard him ask again.

He must have jumped.

"You... just... saved my life...", Leo's voice wasn't more than a mere whisper; his eyes still wide in shock.

"Never mind!" Max answered quickly. "What about you?"

He seemed so worried; so fearful. Leo couldn't remember having ever seen him like that. He looked into Max's face... This was so unreal, so bizarre somehow.

"You're bleeding," Leo said at once, pointing at Max's head. A thin red line was running down his temples, arriving at his cheeks. Max only shook his head, not taking his eyes away from him.

"I'm fine...Max," Leo slowly came back to his senses. "You shouldn't have done that..."

"And what?" Max answered. "Let you die? Is that what you think I would do?"

He still seemed desperate. "Leo...I...I've made that big mistake to lose you twice... It won't happen again..."

Leo didn't understand. "What...?"

"I've been an idiot... I know that now," Max was still looking straight into his eyes. "You were right. It had to be about me...always."

"Max...I..."

"No, I know it;" the desperation in his eyes was now in Max's voice as well. "I've been like that my whole life... I never thought anyone could change it. I've given up. A long time ago. And grew older without believing in such things anymore... I thought it wouldn't matter anymore. Until you stepped over my threshold. Shy little you...with that stupid ticket stub in your wallet..." He had to smile. A sad smile.

Leo's eyes grew even bigger. This couldn't be...

"And I noticed...this was it. This was the second chance I was hoping for since I was much younger," Max said. "And I hated it... For years..."

"You did?"

Max nodded. "I hated to be proven wrong. I've learned life wasn't fair. It never had been. And then came you... and made it exactly that. How could I not hate it? You know me better than anyone. Can't you imagine?"

Leo nodded and felt tears welling in his eyes. "You thought you'd have to give up...yourself?!"

"Yes...", Max touched Leo's face once more. ""But then...after all we've been through...after you gave yourself up...for me and went to jail with me, I started to re-think all of this..."

Leo didn't believe what he was hearing, looking at Max without daring to say anything.

"And...and accepted this... And I wanted to tell you... so many times before... and then I did ruin it ...again and you left..."

"And you followed me?" Leo was starting to understand.

Max nodded. "And this happened... And I ruined it again... So, how can I let you share the same fate?"

"Fate?" Leo had his problems collecting his thoughts.

"It seems," Max said, holding Leo's face even closer to his own. "Everything I ever did wrong is coming back to me anyhow. And if...if this all repeats...over and over again...If it is foretold or whatever... I can't let you be the one to suffer from it."

"Max...", Leo tried to fight his tears back, but lost it and felt them running down his face. "You remember?"

Max nodded slowly and his expression turned from desperate to sad.

"I know this sounds ridiculous... and I know it's hard to believe but I know I would walk the same path all over again. Just to know you are at the end somewhere..."

He looked at Leo, who wasn't able to answer.

"And I am totally aware that it was the most rotten thing of me not to remember you," Max continued, sounding like he was about to sob as well. "But I am thankful for everything. Everything you did... and everything that happened. For I know know. And I had my eyes closed to it for so long," he took a deep breath. "But... I would fall for you all over again. No matter how often this repeats."

This was too much. Leo flung his arms around Max, not caring about how the both of them must look, lying there in the snow on the ground while he was crying frantically.

"I am so sorry," he whispered into Max's ear, while Roger and Carmen approached from behind.

"I promised you not to go away. And I won't," Max answered silently.

....

The weeks passed quickly and everything almost returned to normal for the both of them again. Max was his usual self; sometimes grumpy, sometimes moody and always loud. But Leo saw beyond that now and he knew Max would never let this side show when he was with him. He noticed so many times how he tried to pull himself together, no matter how hard a day went. He was kind and caring whenever Leo was in the same room with him.

As for Leo...

He had a lot more to do lately and enjoyed those quiet moments with Max alone.

For Max had kept his word. He had pulled himself out of production. At least for that one show. It was up to Leo to do it and only him. He felt very grateful for that opportunity, even though he was a little scared of it as well. But he knew Max was there, even if he wasn't in the theater. He would always help him out, whenever he had questions or got stuck somewhere. And Max giving something like this away to someone else was the greatest evidence of his words being true; Leo knew for sure.

And even though it was weird to know he'd have to work with Ulla again, he managed to get on with it in a very professional way. Just like Max had predicted.

She would come to him once or twice, trying to flirt around him, just like she did before. But Leo simply ignored it.

"Why Bloom don't talk nicely to Ulla again?" she once asked.

Leo grinned at her and simply answered: "You are very nice. But I'm afraid I'm not interested anymore."

"Because Bloom is with Mr. Bialystock now?" she asked.

Leo was a bit surprised at this notion, yet nodded without the slightest hesitation.

"Yes," he answered. "Yes, I am."

"Ulla knew," she answered.

But after that things went quite well. Leo had never really been sure, if Ulla understood everything properly, yet this time she seemed to have gotten it perfectly. And Leo noticed. Maybe for the first time in his life he wasn't scared to admit it. Not at all. All doubts that had been there before were gone.

Roger and Carmen asked him as well while he was working in the theater during rehearsals.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, we're fine," he smiled.

"And are you sure this is what you imagined?" Roger asked, while Carmen simply smiled back at him.

And again he nodded. "Yes, it is..."

The show became a huge success. Not only did the audience and critics love it just the same. It was new, fresh and so much different from the usual works they had produced in the past but also Leo felt something he had never dared to feel before. He was proud. Proud of having accomplished something in his life, he never had thought he was capable of.

After the opening night, people went crazy with talking to him about it. He was the center of attention. But actually, there was only one opinion he was eager to hear...

Max stood in a corner, having watched the whole show from the mezzanine for a change and hadn't said much the whole evening. When Leo approached him, smiling slightly, he started to grin.

"It's really good," he said and ruffled through his hair. "I guess we've reached that point now..."

Leo looked a bit confused.

"What point?"

Max sighed and hesitated a moment, turning his gaze away from the younger man.

"The moment you don't need me anymore," he said and seconds later stretched out his hand towards Leo. "Congrats," he smiled. "That's what you wanted to achieve, isn't it?"

It wasn't meant in a sarcastic way. Leo knew his words were true. Yet, Max turned and left the theater shortly after that.

...

Max arrived in the office -their office to be exact- and slowly climbed up the stairs of the hallway until the door saying "Bialystock & Bloom – Theatrical Producers" appeared in front of him.

He looked at it for a moment and started to smile.

"Look, how far you've come," he thought. "Little shy Leo. You've really managed to make your dreams come true."

He opened the door and stepped inside. It was dark when he carefully closed it behind himself again, searching in the darkness for the switch.

But when the light illuminated the room he couldn't believe his eyes. He stood there as if turned to stone, his gaze wandering through the whole room.

There were thousands of bunches of red roses spread everywhere. On the desk, on the floor, even on the leather couch. He looked around slowly.

"What the...?" escaped from his mouth. He couldn't grasp it. And in the very same moment he could hear the office door closing again quietly, as footsteps came closer.

Max didn't move.

He felt someone leaning against him and knew in an instance it had to be Leo. He closed his eyes and smiled.

"What's this about?" he asked without opening his eyes again.

Leo leaned forward, hugging Max from behind; snuggling close to him.

"I just wanted to let you know," he said.

"Let me know?" Max opened his eyes again and turned his head slightly to look into the brown loving eyes of the man that meant so much to him.

Leo moved closer, kissing him softly; leaning his head to Max's.

"That I will always need you..."

The end

A/N: ... Be safe around cars! A public service announcement from LobbyLane :D

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