SUPPOSEDLY YOUR BED – You lie on your side in bed, in what you've been informed is your apartment, pillows between your knees to keep your leg elevated, trying to concentrate on your book despite the persistent, nagging ache in your leg. It hurts more when you move around the apartment, but lying still as the pain rasps against your skin, muscle, and bone is its own special kind of agony. Gottlieb cleared you to use twice the normal dose of Drouamine, but refused to give you anything stronger.

NIX GOTTLIEB – "You've been sober five days," he said flatly, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. "You'll probably relapse if you take opiates. Is that what you want?"

YOU – You said no at the time, but after three days you're reconsidering. You probably could get better drugs from a hospital, but that would require someone to drive you, or at least help you to the bus stop, and you can't imagine anyone at any of the half-dozen phone numbers Judit had written down for you would agree to help you get drugs, even if you could afford them. You have no idea how you managed to run around on this leg for an entire day. At this point you can barely stagger to the bathroom without your crutches.

UNKNOWN BEDROOM – You roll onto your back, wincing as you adjust your leg on the pillows. The walls and ceiling of your small bedroom are stained with nicotine. Based on the age of the place, some of it is probably from before you rented it, but you're sure you've contributed to the brownish-yellow coating over the beige paint. Or maybe it was white originally. You don't have proper curtains for the window - you just draped a blanket over the curtain rod. It's too annoying and painful to get up to push it aside during the day, so you just leave it where it is, judging the passing of the day by the light seeping through the cracks around the blanket and the alarm clock on your bedside table.

CENTRAL JAMROCK APARTMENT BUILDING – At least the apartment is cleaner than when you first arrived, Vicquemare and Minot under each of you arms as you sweated and groaned your way up three flights of stairs, the lieutenant following behind, one arm looped through your crutches, gripping the handrail for balance, shading his eyes from the hallway's fluorescent light that throbbed inside his aching skull. Until you reached the hallway where you live, all you were thinking about was collapsing onto the nearest soft surface and sleeping for the next twelve to sixteen hours, but as you approached the door to your apartment, you felt a sickening dread overtake you.

HALF-LIGHT – You don't want to go in there. It's *bad* in there.

YOU – "Wait. Wait," you say, trying to halt Vicquemare and Minot's forward progress. In doing so, you put weight on your injured leg, and your vision goes white for a second.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Fuck," grunts Jean, hauling on your belt as he tries to stop your full weight from collapsing on Judit - she's strong, but you're twice her size. "What the fuck are you doing, Harry?"

YOU – "I just–" you say, panting with pain, "I feel like– Maybe I should stay in a hostel tonight?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He growls in frustration. "You couldn't have brought this up before we hauled your ass up three flights of stairs? Do you even have money for a hostel?"

YOU – "I…"

DISCO TROUSERS – You have fifteen reál in your pocket. That probably isn't enough to pay for a room at a hostel. Not to mention you'll need to buy food as well.

YOU – "No. Probably not."

ENCYCLOPEDIA – The average hostel in this area costs twenty-five reál per night. An average weekly grocery bill (not counting alcohol) is somewhere around ten reál. Overall monthly expenses (again, not including alcohol) will be roughly three hundred seventy-five reál.

RHETORIC – Three hundred and seventy-five reál??? Just to live for a month???

SAVOIR FAIRE – But think about how much money we can save by not buying alcohol!

JUDIT MINOT – "Jean, maybe he's right. He's only been sober a few days. His apartment might not be the best place for him."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Yeah, I thought of that. I picked up some trash bags when we stopped at Frittte. We’ll clean up the leftover booze and drugs and he should be good to go. It won’t be *clean,* but that place is never clean.”

HALF-LIGHT – It’s worse than he thinks.

COMPOSURE – Don’t let them see inside.

LOGIC – You don’t have an apartment key. You can’t go inside if you don’t have your key.

SUGGESTION – If you can’t get in, they’ll have to let you stay somewhere else.

YOU – “I think I lost my key. I don’t think we can get in.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He sighs. “Of course you did.”

EMPATHY – He’s disappointed, but not surprised.

HALF-LIGHT – Of course *you* would lose your key.

JUDIT MINOT – “Jean. He can’t help it. It’ll be okay, Harry.” She pats your arm encouragingly.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “In this instance, it will. Fortunately,” Vicquemare digs his own keys out of his pocket, “I have a spare.”

SUGGESTION – Shit.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “You doing okay back there, lieutenant?” Jean turns his head to look back at the lieutenant.

YOU – You also look over your shoulder. The lieutenant has steadied himself against the wall with a hand, looking pale. When you turn to look at him, he straightens up with an effort.

KIM KITSURAGI – “I’m all right. Just a bit tired.”

PAIN THRESHOLD – He's dizzy and nauseous, and each beat of his heart sends a little spike of pain into his head, accompanied by assorted dull aches throughout the rest of his body. If no one was watching, he would lie down right here in the hallway.

EMPATHY – We should've taken him home first.

LOGIC – Why didn't we take him home first? They drove all the way here first, then they're going back to the harbor to drop off Kim, then back to Jamrock? That doesn't make sense.

SUGGESTION – Let's do it now. Get us out of opening that door for a while.

YOU – "We should take Kim home first, don't you think?" You try an expression of beatific concern. It looks more like a grimace. "He's injured, too. He doesn't need to wait around while we clean up my apartment. We probably should have brought him home first in the first place."

KIM KITSURAGI – "Detective, I have a concussion and a few bruises. You have a *gunshot wound* that nearly killed you, in a leg you've been running around on all day. And you're bleeding through your stitches. Again. This takes priority. I can wait."

BLOODY DISCO TROUSERS – You look down at your leg. Fresh blood is indeed seeping into the ochre fabric of your pants.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Yes, both of you can rest while *we–"* he indicates himself and Judit "--clean up the place."

YOU – "Yeah, but–"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Enough. We're all tired. Let's get this over with." He ducks out from under your arm.

JUDIT MINOT – Minot adjusts her stance to keep you balanced on your good leg.

HALF-LIGHT – Don't let him do it.

YOU – You grab Vicquemare's wrist. Dimly, you notice your breathing quicken. "Jean. I can't– I don't want to go in there."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare gives you a look of frustrated confusion. "Harry, you don't even fucking remember this apartment."

EMPATHY – His eyes flicker down to the wound in your leg. He wants to get you inside, let you rest.

HALF-LIGHT – He wants you to be literally anyone else's problem. He wants you to deal with your own shit for once in your life.

YOU – "Not really, but…it can't be good, right?" Your heart is really thumping now.

ENDURANCE – This isn't going to help the "bleeding wound" situation.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – What are you so worked up about? It's just an apartment. Don't piss yourself.

JUDIT MINOT – "Jean's been inside your apartment before, Harry. I have too, once or twice."

ESPRIT DE CORPS – It's been a while, though, Vicquemare thinks. The last few times I brought him here, I just dropped him at the door and left. Fuck…it could be worse than I thought.

KIM KITSURAGI – You feel a hand on his shoulder. Kim is standing next to you, meeting your eyes, steady and dependable as always. "It's best to face it," he says. "You'll only make it worse by building it up in your mind."

VOLITION – Don't look away. You have a place to live. It's a start.

YOU: You hesitate – Look from the lieutenant to Vicquemare. Something in you wants to keep holding on, but you can't stand in this hallway forever. "Okay," you say, releasing him.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He swallows, looking at you with his brow furrowed, then fits the key into the lock.

VOLITION – Take a breath, Harry.

PERCEPTION (SMELL) – Yes, take a breath and hold it. This won't be pleasant.

REACTION SPEED – Too late…

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare pushes the door open, then reels back as a wave of stench rolls out into the hallway. "Fuck!" he shouts, pulling his jacket over his face.

PERCEPTION (SMELL) – It's…bad. It's hard to pick apart the exact notes of the smell making your eyes water. Stale vomit is definitely a big component. Slight undertones of piss, too. Decay, as well - hard to tell if it's just rotting food or if there's something dead in there. And it's all underlined by sweaty, possibly moldy, unwashed laundry.

PAIN THRESHOLD – Next to you, Minot covers her mouth and nose with her hand, and the lieutenant stands, muscles in his jaw working as he wills himself not to throw up. His hand leaves your shoulder as he slowly retreats back down the hallway

HALF-LIGHT – You wanted to look so badly? Look, then!

PERCEPTION (SIGHT) – The inside of the apartment is dark, though it's still light outside. The light from the hallway dully illuminates glass shards of several different colors gathering dust on the floor, a couch nearly devoured by a pile of dirty clothes, and a phone that looked like it's been ripped out of the wall, the rotary base lying on its side on the floor, still tethered to its broken handset by a looping cord in the shape of a noose. Something skitters across the baseboard. You try to look away, but can't stop your eyes from continuing to search the room for further disasters. A dried, reddish stain in one corner. Could be wine, or blood. A small kitchenette, dishes piled high in the sink, fruit flies thick on every surface. The trash, overflowing with takeout boxes and wrappers.

ENDURANCE – Everything seems loud, suddenly. A roaring sound fills your ears.

HALF-LIGHT – It's worse than you imagined. You're going to be evicted. You're going to be homeless.

EMPATHY – You were living like this? That's really sad.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – Silver lining - there's tons of booze in there. And who knows what other little surprises?

YOU – Perhaps…the mess inspires my art?

CONCEPTUALIZATION – No, the only thing the mess inspires is depression.

VOLITION – You've faced it. None of what you see in there is unfixable. But you don't need to torture yourself, either.

COMPOSURE – Hey, you've been staring in there for a *while* now. Might be time to get it together.

ENDURANCE – Maybe try to slow your heart down, too? This doesn't feel great.

SAVOIR FAIRE – I'm trying to get him to move, but he's not doing anything. Is he stuck again?

PERCEPTION – I think Vic is on it.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Through the gray gathering at the edges of your vision as you stare entranced at the mess, you see Jean stride over to the door and slam it closed.

ENDURANCE – The roaring in your ears eases.

JUDIT MINOT – "...rry? Harry? Please say something." She's rubbing your back with one hand, still holding your wrist with the other to make sure your arm doesn't slip off her shoulders. "It's okay. We don't have to deal with this right now."

YOU – You shake your head, trying to clear your thoughts. “Uh…”

YOU – You’re struggling to put any words together in the face of the disaster you’ve just witnessed.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Fuck it.” Vicquemare shoves the key roughly into the lock and turns it. He turns to you, pointing a finger aggressively. “You’re staying at my place tonight. In the bed. I’ll take the couch. We’ll come back to deal with this shit tomorrow with actual fucking cleaning shit.” He shoves his keys into his pocket and hauls your arm over his shoulders, glowering. The three of you begin the slow progress back through the hallway and down the stairs.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant is waiting for you at the top of the stairs. He looks at you with concern.

YOU – You avoid his eyes.

KIM KITSURAGI – He opens his mouth to say something, hesitates, then closes it, frustrated.

HALF-LIGHT – Great. Everybody saw. Everybody smelled it, too. None of these people are ever coming to that place again.

EMPATHY – You can feel the tension in Vicquemare’s muscular shoulders through his jacket. His face is more-or-less impassive, though there are a few tells you somehow know to look for: flared nostrils, a tightened jawline. He’s upset.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – What the fuck do I care if he was living like that? he thinks. If he wanted me to check up on him, he should’ve…I don’t know, asked me to! I’m not his fucking mother! It probably wasn’t even that long. It can’t have been that long. I mean, the last time I was in there was…almost two months ago, and it didn’t look great then, but… Maybe if he tried not being an asshole about everything! I’m so fucking tired of this shit! I can’t do all his work *and* all my work *and* keep both of our apartments clean *and* drag his wasted ass home from the bar at 3:00 every other night! Fuck! Maybe if I just go over once a week to make sure it’s not a complete disaster…no, he doesn’t even *remember* me, I can’t do this anymore, I can’t, I can’t–

HALF-LIGHT – He hates you.

EMPATHY – No, he doesn't. It's complicated.

AUTHORITY – This is unacceptable. Order him to show you some respect.

SUGGESTION – Respect you within his own mind? Go ahead, tell him to do that. See how it goes.

VOLITION – You should say something to him, though. Take responsibility.

YOU – "Jean." Your voice is nearly swallowed by the peeling wallpaper and worn carpet on the stairs.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Yeah, what is it?" He's tracing the circumference of the semicircle the three of you are making around the landing as you turn to face the next set of stairs.

YOU – "..."

VOLITION – Go on. Tell him you're taking this seriously.

HALF-LIGHT – And why would he believe that? You had a few good days. You've had a few good days before. It can't last.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "What do you want, Harry?" His tone is clipped, partly from supporting your weight as you start down the stairs, partly out of annoyance at your silence.

COMPOSURE – Okay, you need to say *something*. It's getting awkward.

SUGGESTION – Don't say you're sorry. Somehow you know that only frustrates him.

INLAND EMPIRE – He's heard it before. Hundreds of times. Apologies. Promises. It washed over him like a tide: regular, repetitive, meaningless. The only change it made was to erode his trust in you.

HALF-LIGHT – So there's nothing you can say. He's one of the twenty people you know and you've already ruined your relationship with him.

VOLITION – No. He's here, isn't he? He's supporting you right now. Start small. Something like–

YOU – "Thanks. Thank you." You're too close to feel comfortable looking at him directly, but you're watching his reaction out of the corner of your eye. Your breath hisses through your teeth as you pull your injured leg down another step. "For…you know." You chuckle weakly. "You do know. Better than I do."

VOLITION – There you go. Well done.

EMPATHY – Several emotions play across Jean's face in quick succession. Surprise is one of them.

YOU – Surprise? Have I not thanked him before?

EMPATHY – Hard to say. He's still guarded, but you may have knocked a brick out of the wall between you.

JUDIT MINOT – "Do I get a thank you as well?"

YOU – Your head snaps around to look at Judit. "Sorry, I didn't mean to–"

EMPATHY – There's a slight smile around her lips. She's teasing you.

YOU – "Thank you very much, Patrol Officer Minot." You incline your head toward her in a kind of bow.

JUDIT MINOT – She nods at you in return. “You’re welcome, Lieutenant Double-Yefreitor Du Bois.”

PERCEPTION (SOUND) – Behind you, you hear a shuffling stagger of footsteps, then the sound of the lieutenant’s boot slipping off a step. He’s lost his balance. He’s about to fall.

YOU – “Shit– Kim!”

REACTION SPEED – He’s halfway up the flight of stairs. If he hits his head again while he’s recovering from a concussion, he could die. Someone needs to–

YOU – “Catch him, Judit!” You pull your arm off her shoulders, clutching Vicquemare to stay upright.

JUDIT MINOT – Moving with the speed and grace of a dancer, Judit spins on the stair she’s standing on, catches the lieutenant in her arms as he falls, sideways, his mouth open in surprise. He’s dropped your crutches, which clatter down the stairs. The force knocks her backward, past you and Vicquemare, but she’s already reaching a hand out for the railing. A confused tangle of limbs later, she’s half leaning back, half crouching, clutching Kim with one arm, his legs trailing up the stairs, her grip on the railing the only thing preventing them from falling any further. “A little help?” she grunts.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare deposits you on the stairs, then rushes down to help them both.

YOU – “Holy shit, are you guys okay? That was some serious Sam Bo shit!”

JUDIT MINOT – Judit grips Jean’s hand as she rights herself into a sitting position, then winces and rubs her shoulder. “I’m okay, more or less. Are you all right, lieutenant?”

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant sits on the step above Judit, ears blazing red. He’s taken off his glasses and is cleaning them with his handkerchief. “Khm. I’m all right. My apologies. Thank you for–” He stops abruptly, puts a hand to his head, covering his eyes. You hear him breathing steadily through his nose.

PAIN THRESHOLD – There's the nausea again, accompanied by a blinding spike of pain in his head.

COMPOSURE – He's breathing through it. He's absolutely determined not to throw up in front of anyone.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He pinches the bridge of his nose. "Fuck, you're as bad as he is! He's right, we should have taken you home first. Most people know to rest after they get a concussion, not run around catching murderers. You're making your symptoms worse."

KIM KITSURAGI – "I didn't see anyone else coming to help," the lieutenant snaps. Even from behind him, you can almost see the piercing look he gives Vicquemare.

CARPETED STAIRWELL – Silence billows out over the four of you. A dull flush spreads over Jean's pockmarked cheeks. He swallows and looks away from the lieutenant. Minot looks nervously between the two, and you tap your fingers together, unable to think of something to say to break the tension. Kim covers his eyes again. His ears are, if possible, brighter red than before.

KIM KITSURAGI – "Apologies, Officer." The lieutenant still has his hand over his eyes. "I believe irritability is often a symptom of concussion. I meant no offense. I'm sure you were acting in the best interests of your precinct."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "No, I was out of line. I'm sorry." Vicquemare's eyes are fixed on the wall opposite him. A muscle flexes in his jaw. "What I meant was, uh…Do you have someone to make sure you don't…fucking…aspirate vomit in your sleep?"

KIM KITSURAGI – "No, I live alone."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare pulls a box of cigarettes from his pocket, puts one in his mouth, but doesn't light it. "Listen, Lieutenant, I don't want to hear you fell down the fucking stairs in your building and fucking died after we dropped you off."

KIM KITSURAGI – “Okay? I’ll be careful, Officer.” The lieutenant sounds confused.

YOU – Somehow you’re pretty sure you know what Vicquemare is driving at, but it’s more fun to watch him struggle. Call it extremely mild revenge for leaving you behind.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He takes the cigarette out of his mouth and fiddles with it. “What I’m saying is I feel like you shouldn’t be alone. At least until the fucking…vertigo or whatever tapers off.”

KIM KITSURAGI – “But again, I live alone. What are you suggesting?”

YOU – “Sleepover, Kim! Party at Jean’s place!”

EMPATHY – Part of you is relieved at this idea. Spending the night at Vicquemare’s place (this acquaintance that feels like a friend, a brother) sounds very awkward. Kim being there will be a shield against conflict.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicqumare pinches the bridge of his nose. “It’s not a fucking sleepover because we’re not eight years old. But yes. Lieutenant Kitsuragi, please come sleep on my couch so I can make sure you don’t fucking die.”

EMPATHY – Part of you is just amused by this dynamic. Jean clearly wants to impress the lieutenant (everyone wants to impress him - he’s so cool), so he’s trying to maintain professionalism. But you can already tell (or you already knew) he cloaks any discomfort he feels in grouchiness and sarcasm, leading to a lot of gruff bluster he doesn’t really mean. Kim, on the other hand, seems confused and wrong-footed by the contrast between Vicquemare’s words and actions. He’s accustomed to people pretending to be nice, but Vicquemare offering to do something kind in a harsh way is baffling to him.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant says nothing for a moment.

EMPATHY – He’s totally taken aback by Jean’s offer. He’d never have expected anyone at his precinct to suggest such a thing, not since his partner. Certainly not someone he’s only met today, officially, at least.

KIM KITSURAGI – “I don’t know if I…” he trails off, swallowing nausea down again.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Think of it as a thank you. You kept this chucklefuck alive,” he waves his still-unlit cigarette at you, “so we owe you.”

YOU – “It’s a bonding experience, Kim! We’ll forge a broderbund!”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “No, it’s not a bonding experience, Shitkid! It’s a sleeping-for-sixteen-hours injury-recovery experience! Come on, we’re getting in the fucking car. Judit, make sure the lieutenant makes it downstairs. That is, uh…if you’re okay with that, Lieutenant?”

KIM KITSURAGI – Kim looks from Vicquemare to you, considering. And maybe it’s because he’s dead tired and doesn’t want to face the drive back to his apartment, maybe because he *is* worried that he’ll fall down the stairs and die, and maybe because you’re doing your best to mentally beam the thought *please please please please* into his head, but he says, “...all right. Thank you.”

EMPATHY – The part of you that doesn’t want to be alone is *very happy* with this turn of events.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Round two.” Vicquemare gets out of the car, interrupting Heidelstam in the middle of a tangent on butterflies. Minot and the lieutenant follow, Minot catching him as he staggers.

YOU – You wait until Jean comes around to help you out of the car.

PAIN THRESHOLD – Your leg is *really* starting to hurt. Is it time for more Drouamine yet?

PERCEPTION – No, it’s only been an hour since you took the last dose.

ENDURANCE – Going up and back down three flights of stairs might have something to do with it.

YOU – Really? It's not because I ran around on it for hours today?

ENDURANCE – I mean, there's that, too.

PERCEPTION – The bloody spot on your pants is getting bigger. Did you pop a stitch?

CONCEPTUALIZATION – It looks like a map of Revachol.

YOU – You lean your head back against the headrest, breath hissing between your teeth.

TRANT HEIDELSTAM – "You doing all right, there, Harry?" He's watching you from the driver's seat. He'll stay with the car again while you go inside. You've gathered there was some incident involving the fuel tank being drained when they were on their way back to Martinaise, and now he's paranoid it'll happen again.

YOU – You give him a feeble thumbs-up. "Totally disco, baby."

PAIN THRESHOLD – The pain is unfolding up and down your leg, spreading like invasive roots into your groin and down to your big toe.

CONCEPTUALIZATION – Your nerves vibrate with it, a violin bow drawn across them.

YOU – Your face is covered in cold sweat. You wipe your forehead on your sleeve.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare opens the door, considers you, the unlit cigarette still dangling from his fingers. His mouth twitches when he sees the amount of blood on your pants. "Almost there," he says, his voice gentler than before. "Come on."

YOU – Wincing, you slide your legs out of the car, settling your weight on your good leg. You crane your neck up at Jean's apartment building. "Which floor do you live on again?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Fourth.”

YOU – “Fuck.” Three more flights of stairs. You almost throw up at the thought.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “*My* building has a working elevator, though.” He smirks.

YOU – “Fuck you and your…bourgeois…apartment.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Yeah, comrade, after the revolution we’ll make sure all the elevators are destroyed.”

YOU – You exhale sharply (the closest you can get to a laugh right now). Vicquemare pulls your arm over his shoulders again. Ahead of you, Minot helps the lieutenant through the door into the building.

PAIN THRESHOLD – The main problem is that, in order to move, your leg needs to move with you. Even if you’re not putting weight on it, holding your foot in the air flexes damaged muscles, but you can *feel* your stitches pulling if you let it drag on the ground.

YOU – “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” You push the words out through gritted teeth. Swearing helps, a little.

COMPOSURE – Hey, just checking in, there are tears in your eyes now. Push it down. Please don’t cry in front of this guy. Don’t–you’re already crying.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – What a pussy. Do you have fucking booboo on your leg? It’s making you sad? Fuck off.

VISUAL CALCULUS – Shit. The building still is so far away. Who knows how many steps you’ll have to take when you’re inside?

YOU – “Motherfucker.” Your voice cracks. You wipe the tears off your face with your free hand. “Just leave me out here, Jean. I’ll sleep here.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – A muscle jumps in his jaw. He turns his head away from you.

EMPATHY – You've said those exact words before. It's an unpleasant memory. You, sad and sorry and sick, throwing up on the mostly-dead grass. Him, watching, trying to dredge up even a gram of sympathy, a bruise around his eye slowly turning purple, his reward for wrestling you out of the bar he'd found you in at ten in the morning.

YOU – I really hit him? When he was trying to help me?

RHETORIC – It's possible you didn't mean to. Could have been an accident, an elbow you didn't think would connect.

EMPATHY – Doesn't really matter, though. It hurt either way.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – I wonder how many times this makes, he thinks. I've dragged his ass up to my apartment so many times I've lost count.

HALF-LIGHT – You're fucking this up so bad.

SUGGESTION – Fix it. Now. It's different this time - you're sober.

YOU – "At least I'm sober this time." The words come out all wrong. You meant it as a lighthearted joke, but it sounds petulant and childish.

HALF-LIGHT – You stupid fuck, everything you do makes it *worse*.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare's head snaps back around, his gray eyes boring into you, a hard line between his brows.

EMPATHY – This stranger that's taken the place of the monster that took the place of his friend can *still* read his mind. It's unnerving. Almost like you've switched places. The two-way mirror is reversed: you can see into his heart while remaining a mystery yourself. He hates it, the intimacy with this stranger he used to know so well.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Are you?”

YOU – “Am I *what*?” You snap, harsher than you mean to. You’re losing track of the conversation. You’ve stopped, a few feet from the door, standing on the strip of dead grass outside the building.

PAIN THRESHOLD – Fuck, your leg hurts *so bad*.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Sober. Are you sober?” His words are quiet. He doesn’t even sound angry, just resigned. Like he knows any good news he hears can’t actually be true.

PAIN THRESHOLD – That hurts, too. Almost worse than your leg.

YOU – It’s your turn to look away. “Yes,” you hiss. You sound like a sulky child again. “Kim told you. I haven’t had a drink since Monday.”

AUTHORITY – You’re his superior. You need to teach him a lesson in respect.

HALF-LIGHT – I was wrong before. You hadn’t ruined this relationship yet. You’re ruining it right now.

YOU – What’s the point of getting sober if no one believes me?

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – There’s no point. You’re just choosing to suffer for no reason.

ENDURANCE – Please don’t start drinking again. You’re going to die if you do. Your heart doesn’t beat quite right already.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – Kitsuragi seems pretty observant, Vicquemare thinks, but Harry can be a sneaky fucker when he falls off the wagon. Can’t be sure.

YOU – “I’M NOT FUCKING SNEAKING ANYTHING! I’M SOBER!” Suddenly you have Jean’s lapels clenched in your fists. You’re shouting into his face.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Jean's eyes flash and he grabs your collar. "Oh, I can't even fucking think it? I'm not even allowed to fucking wonder in my OWN FUCKING MIND? DO YOU REALIZE HOW FUCKED UP THAT IS?"

YOU – "I CAN'T JUST FUCKING TURN IT OFF! SORRY I'M SUCH AN INCONVENIENCE TO YOU!"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Blotchy red patches appear on his face and neck. "Oh, an INCONVENIENCE? You want to talk to me about INCONVENIENCE? HOW MANY TIMES DO I NEED TO GO THROUGH THIS FUCKING SONG AND DANCE? 'Oh, I'm sorry, Vic, I'll get better, Vic, this time for sure," and the next day you call me at 2:30, and I have to go to all the phone booths in the area to find you, assuming you haven't wandered off again! Then you puke on my shoes and I drag you back to my apartment and clean you up and we do the same stupid shit OVER AND OVER AGAIN? Is that fucking INCONVENIENT for you? WAS IT INCONVENIENT FOR ME TO GIVE YOU EVERYTHING I HAD, WHEN YOU DIDN'T EVEN WANT TO TRY? WHEN YOU WANTED TO GET WORSE? GET OFF ME, ASSHOLE!" He shoves you, hard.

YOU – You stagger backward onto your injured leg and promptly collapse. Your vision goes gray. You clutch your leg, a scream forcing its way out through your gritted teeth.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Through the haze of pain you can see the anger drop out of him all at once. His face falls, he reaches a hand out toward you. "Shit! Harry, I–"

JUDIT MINOT – The sound of footsteps running inside the building. Judit shoves the door open, hard enough that it bounces off the wall. "What are you *doing*?" She takes in the scene. "Are you seriously fighting *now*?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He's kneeling on the ground next to you. "Are you okay, Harry?" He sounds scared. His hair is out of place, falling across his forehead, making him look younger. He puts a hand on your shoulder, and you roughly push it away.

YOU – You try to sit up. He tries to help you. You shove him away and fall over again.

JUDIT MINOT – “Hey! Someone tell me what’s going on!” She strides over to you and pulls you into a sitting position.

YOU – Something breaks in you. Without warning, you’re sitting in the grass, sobbing like a little kid.

COMPOSURE – You’re never recovering from this.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – What is this nancy shit? Stop it.

SUGGESTION – No…this might actually work. You can get through to him like this.

ENDURANCE – Whatever makes you feel better. It’s all coming out now - you couldn’t stop if you tried.

YOU – “He doesn’t believe me! No one believes me! What’s the fucking point of getting sober if everyone still thinks you’re drunk? If your partner still thinks you’re drunk? How can I get better if you don’t even think I can try?” You’re sobbing into your hands, totally devoid of dignity. At least you don’t have to look at Vicquemare and Minot.

JUDIT MINOT – “Jean…” Her hand still rests lightly on your shoulder. She sounds tired and sad.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – You hear the rustle of his clothes and you flinch a little, but he wraps an arm around you, resting his forehead on your shoulder. “Okay. Okay. You’re sober. I believe you.” His voice is heavy, guarded, tired, but you feel a little tension drain out of him.

YOU – Maybe this should be weird. You barely remember this guy. But relief washes over you as you hear him say it.

SUGGESTION – You know what he wants to hear.

VOLITION – Say it. It’s the truth.

YOU – “I want to get better. I do.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He says nothing, but there's a tiny hitch in his breath.

EMPATHY – He's been steeling himself for your death for a while now. He wasn't sure how it would happen. Maybe overdose, maybe suicide, maybe heart failure, maybe just getting high and wandering into traffic, but he's assumed he'd eventually find your body.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – Of course he would. He's your partner.

HALF-LIGHT – Of course he would. No one else would be looking for you. Just him.

JUDIT MINOT – Peering through your fingers, you see she's also knelt down next to you. She smiles a little at you as you make eye contact and pats your knee encouragingly.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – Not just him. She would, too.

YOU – How's the wall? The one between Jean and me? Did I knock a big hole in it?

EMPATHY – A few more bricks down.

YOU – A few?! All that for a few bricks?!

EMPATHY – You didn't build that wall in one day. It's going to take time, years maybe, for him to really trust you again. Saying you want to get better is one thing, but–

VOLITION – You're going to need to show him you mean it.

YOU – "Can we go upstairs now? I'm tired and my leg hurts."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Yeah. Yeah." He lets go of you and turns away to wipe his face, suddenly embarrassed. He and Judit haul you to your feet.

YOU – "Wait, where's Kim?"

JUDIT MINOT – “We were waiting by the elevator when we heard you yelling. I told him to stay put.” She pulls the door to the building open.

LINOLEUM-COVERED LOBBY – Small square metal mailboxes line either side of the entrance. Black and white checkered linoleum covers the floor and two thirds of the walls. It’s a little hard to look at. The popcorn ceiling is low and yellowed, but the building looks to be in pretty good repair. You glance around, looking for structural issues. Somehow you know to do this - you’ve done it automatically in almost every building you’ve entered, without even noticing what you were doing. Beyond the entrance, rust-colored carpet takes over. A hallway extends to the left and right, housing the first floor apartments. Opposite you, in an enclave, there’s an elevator on one side and the door to the stairwell on the other.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant sits with his back against the wall, next to the elevator. His face is pale. He looks over at the three of you as you struggle to maneuver through the doorway. “Everything all right?” He makes no effort to get up.

YOU – “Super chill, Kim.” Your breath hisses between your teeth as you take another step. “Ow.”

KIM KITSURAGI – He looks from you to Vicquemare.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Yeah, we’re good. Great, even.” It would be really difficult to tell he was crying on your shoulder a minute ago if you didn’t already know. You’ve made it to the elevator at last. He slaps the button.

YOU – “Hey, Judit, you sure you don’t want to join us? Don’t worry, we’re forming a gender-inclusive broderbund.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Don’t invite other people to my apartment, Shitkid. Not that, uh…” He glances at Judit. “You can hang around if you want, Jude. Obviously.”

JUDIT MINOT – “As fun as that sounds…” A small smile plays around her mouth as she takes in your bloody pant leg and Kim’s pale, sweaty face, “I do need to go home. I told my kids I’d be back tonight.”

RICKETY ELEVATOR – The elevator door opens, and after thirty seconds where you narrowly avoid being repeatedly crushed by the automatically-closing door, all four of you manage to make it inside.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He wrestles the keys out of his pocket once more and opens the door to his apartment one-handed, his other arm still around your ribcage, holding you upright. “It’s not like I had time to clean or anything, so lower your expectations appropriately,” he says before towing you inside.

VICQUEMARE’S APARTMENT – It’s not bad. Maybe the fact that the horror show that was your apartment, along with a handful of Martinaise apartments (including Cuno’s, which was almost as bad as yours) make up your entire knowledge about what an apartment looks like, but it's…nice? A little sparse, maybe. The front room is a combined living room/dining room/kitchen, and there’s a hallway that leads back, probably to the bathroom and bedroom. The furniture is all black - black couch, painted black side tables, small black kitchen table, two black kitchen chairs. A rug marks out the living room, covering the dark brown imitation wood with blue and gray squares. A pile of clean laundry sits on one side of the couch, and there are a handful of dirty dishes next to the sink, but otherwise it’s pretty clean. Hanging above the couch is the single piece of art in the room - a watercolor of the city in the rain, blue and gray clouds covering most of the sky, with a hint of yellow sun peeking out through a gap in the clouds.

YOU – Jean brought me here before. So many times he lost count. Is *anything* familiar?

ENCYCLOPEDIA – …Nothing registers in your semantic memory.

INLAND EMPIRE – It feels familiar. Like an old shirt you find in the back of your drawer. You have no memory of it, but it somehow conforms perfectly to your shape.

CONCEPTUALIZATION – Also, that’s a nice painting.

YOU – “It *is* a nice painting.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “What? What about the painting?”

YOU – “Oh. Uh. It’s good. Composition. Color choices. Lighting. It’s really nice.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Hear that, Jude? Art Cop likes your work.”

YOU – “It’s yours?” You look behind you, where Judit is guiding Kim through the door.

JUDIT MINOT – “Oh!” Patches of pink appear on her cheeks, but she looks pleased. “Yes. I do them on my days off. There are too many to put up in my apartment, so I give them away.”

CONCEPTUALIZATION – She picked this one to match the colors in Vicquemare’s rug, but it also made her think of him. The sun, mostly hidden by clouds, but still peeking through - she thought it captured his personality, and his depression. She seems very intentional about which pieces go to which person.

YOU – Did she give me a painting?

SUGGESTION – Don’t ask. If she did, you don’t remember it, and you don’t know what happened to it. If she didn’t…

HALF-LIGHT – There was probably a reason you didn’t get one.

YOU – “It’s really good. I like it. Captures Revachol.”

JUDIT MINOT – “Thanks, Harry. That’s really nice to hear.” She and Vicquemare settle you and the lieutenant on the couch, next to the pile of laundry. “I’m glad we could meet you, Lieutenant. I’m looking forward to working with you.”

KIM KITSURAGI – He gives her a faint smile. “Likewise.”

JUDIT MINOT – “Harry, I… You look good. Better. Other than the gunshot wound, I mean. I hope you can…” She stops, trying to collect her thoughts. “Good luck. We’re here for you. Aren’t we?” She looks pointedly at Vicquemare.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Did I not just haul his ass halfway across Jamrock?” He’s rubbing his shoulder, wincing. He glances at you. “But sure. What she said.”

JUDIT MINOT – She pats your arm and smiles.

COMPOSURE – Don’t start crying again.

YOU – “Khm…thanks, Judit.”

JUDIT MINOT – “I’m going home. Call me if you need anything. I’ll see if I can stop by tomorrow to check in.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Thanks, Jude.”

VICQUEMARE’S MOSTLY MONOCHROME APARTMENT – The door closes behind Judit, leaving the three of you to stare at each other. You fidget a bit, looking around the apartment again. Jean sighs, looking between you and Kim, then goes to the kitchen and fetches a couple glasses from a cupboard. Kim pulls off his glasses and covers his eyes with his gloved hand.

PAIN THRESHOLD – He looks awful. Pale and sweaty. Exhausted.

PAIN THRESHOLD – You’re not looking any better. You’re sweaty, too, but you feel chilled.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant abruptly lurches to his feet, staggering in the direction of the hallway.

YOU – “Kim, what are you–”

KIM KITSURAGI – His shoulder hits the wall of the hallway with a soft thump.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare turns his head at the sound, and hurriedly sets down the glasses he’s just filled with water. “Kim– Sorry– Lieutenant, you should probably sit down–”

KIM KITSURAGI – “Bathroom,” he says tersely, leaning against the wall for support as he tries to make his way down the hall.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Without a word, he takes Kim’s arm, guiding him down the hallway and into the bathroom. “Do you need–” he starts to say, but the door is slammed in his face.

YOU – You wince as you hear the sound of retching.

EMPATHY – The lieutenant hates showing weakness. Letting himself be taken care of is almost intolerable.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare runs a hand through his hair, unsure what to do. He glances over at you, and apparently, decides that you take priority. Striding back over to you, he says, “Take off your pants.”

YOU – Some joke along the lines of “Aren’t you going to buy me flowers first?” dies on your lips.

SUGGESTION – Maybe someday you’ll be able to banter with him, joke about the closeness of your relationship. Not today, though.

YOU – Wordlessly you kick off your shoes, then unbuckle your belt and undo your fly. You hold your arms out like a toddler. “Help me up for a second.” He hoists you to your feet, steadying you as you stand on your good leg. You slide your pants down over your hips, wincing as the tight fabric catches on the gauze wrapped around your thigh.

COMPOSURE – You haven’t changed your underwear for at least a week. This only occurs to you once your pants are around your knees.

PERCEPTION (SMELL) – It’s not great.

INTERFACING – The fabric over your right butt cheek is crusty.

COMPOSURE – No, please say you didn’t shit yourself. *Please*.

INLAND EMPIRE – It's blood. When you were lying, helpless, sinking into the abyss, your heart pumping your blood out through the new hole passing through your leg, quite a lot of it soaked into your clothes.

LOGIC – That explains where those jeans you were wearing went. The lieutenant likely threw them away.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – The jeans! The God-Ass jeans! How dare he!

EMPATHY – It was probably too upsetting to keep them around, given the bullet holes and the blood.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – With a grunt, he helps you sit down on the couch again, then, surprisingly carefully, strips your bloodstained pants off your calves, doing his best not to jostle your bad leg.

YOU – You're sitting on his couch in your dirty underwear and socks. It's cold. You're trying not to shiver. "Do you have any…spare underwear? Or pants?"

PERCEPTION (SIGHT) – Are you even paying attention? Look at this guy! He's got about three percent body fat! There's no way his clothes will fit you.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – You've really let yourself go, son.

YOU – You wrap a forearm around your belly, trying to hide it from view.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – Yeah, like *that's* doing anything.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He's been inspecting the bloody bandage around your thigh, not really paying attention to you. "Huh? Oh, yeah, just a second." He heads down the hallway. You hear him rummaging for something in his bedroom.

YOU – You're alone for the first time since you woke up this morning. Blood is oozing out from under your bandage, soaking into Jean's couch. You feel woozy, your head full of clouds.

HALF-LIGHT – They're not going to come back. They'll leave you here to bleed out slowly on the couch, like you deserve.

LOGIC – Relax. You're not bleeding that much, and you're sitting in the room with the only door. They can't leave without you knowing.

HALF-LIGHT – Unless they're just waiting for you to fall asleep so they can sneak out.

LOGIC – This is Jean's apartment. He lives here. He can't just leave you here.

HALF-LIGHT – You're ruining his couch. He's so mad about his couch he's going to climb out the window and leave you here to die.

COMPOSURE – You're crying again. Just in case you wanted to, you know, try to be dignified. At all.

HALF-LIGHT – Who cares? We're alone and we're going to die.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare reappears at the entrance to the hallway holding some clothes, a towel, and some first aid supplies, and stares at you, baffled. "Harry, what–"

YOU – "I'm sorry about your couch, Jean. Please don't leave." You wipe your face, sniffling pathetically.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "My couch? What the fuck are you talking about?"

YOU – "I'm getting blood everywhere. I'm gonna bleed out on your couch. Please don't leave." You're breathing faster than you should be.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "I'm not leaving, and you're not bleeding out. And I don't give a fuck about my couch." He sets the stack of things beside you, then fetches one of the water glasses from the counter and hands it to you.

YOU – The sight of it makes you realize how thirsty you are. You drain it, the cool water passing down your throat, making you feel more alive, breaking the spiral of your thoughts. You hand the glass back to Viquemare, he refills it, brings it back to you, and you drain half of it again.

EMPATHY – He's falling into the rhythm of taking care of you. This is familiar to him. Even comforting in a way, since it means you're calm, not screaming at him or throwing things or trying to fight anyone. This was the easy part.

HALF-LIGHT – Nothing about you was easy.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He's watching you, his arms crossed, brows drawn together. When you put the half-full glass of water down on the side table, he leans over you, pressing the inside of his wrist to your forehead. It feels cool. He pulls his arm back and crouches down, considering you. "I think you have a fever, and you're probably still coming down from your apocalyptic bender."

ESPRIT DE CORPS – "Fuck, and we were going to leave him alone in his apartment," Jean thinks. "You're a fucking asshole, Vicquemare."

YOU – "Ughhh, a five-day hangover. That might be a new record." You rub your face with your hand.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Could be worse. Going sober cold-turkey was dangerous. That shit can kill you." You shiver again and he catches it. He pulls out a blanket (also black), wrapping it around your shoulders. "Better?" You nod. He tosses the pile of laundry onto the floor next to the couch, then helps you balance as you change into the fresh underwear and shorts he brought.

YOU – "Where did you get these?" The shorts are canary yellow jogging shorts. They fit you pretty well, and they look wildly unlike anything you'd expect Jean would ever wear.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "They're yours. Obviously. I've never worn anything yellow in my life."

YOU – "Except the wig."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Fine, except the fucking wig.”

YOU – “Why do you have my clothes?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare lets out a small sigh. “So you’d have something to change into when I dragged you up here in the middle of the night covered in vomit or piss. Or both.”

YOU – “...” You swallow.

INLAND EMPIRE – There were nights when you woke up sitting in his shower, fully clothed in the lukewarm spray, his gray eyes watching you dully to make sure you didn’t drown.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He picks up your underwear with some disgust, holding them away from his body. “Can I throw these in the trash?”

YOU – “No, I wanted to keep the underwear I got shot in as a souvenir.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He looks away, the muscle jumping in his jaw again.

SUGGESTION – Maybe go easy on the “getting shot” thing.

EMPATHY – Quite a bit of guilt, there.

YOU – “I mean, yes. Please.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He wordlessly tosses the undies in the trash, then waves a hand at you. “Okay, lie down so I can see if you popped any stitches running around like an idiot.”

VICQUEMARE’S COUCH (WITH BLOODSTAINS) – You do so, and he rearranges the blanket so it’s covering your torso and good leg. Your bad leg is bent at the knee, so he can see both ends of the tunnel the bullet carved through it. He cuts the side of the bandage, and you grit your teeth as he pulls it away from the wounds, dried blood sticking to your skin. “You good?” he says, looking over at you as he puts the bandages down. You nod. He peers at the entry wound, the exit wound. “I need to clean it off so I can see what I’m looking at,” he says, going to the sink

to wash his hands. He rips open a gauze package, wets it in the sink, and kneels down next to you again. “Ready?” You nod again.

INTERFACING – He’s surprisingly gentle. Careful, but confident. Seems like he’s used to doing this.

PAIN THRESHOLD – Fuck, it still hurts, though.

INLAND EMPIRE – There’s a familiarity to it. He may have done it for you before.

YOU – “This feels…familiar. Did you…” You wave a hand vaguely.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He glances up at you as he works. “Clean and bandage your wounds? Yes. Gunshot wound in your arm. Knife wound in your leg.”

YOU – “Fuck, is our entire relationship just…you taking care of me?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He lets out a long, slow breath. “Not at first. And then not all the time. And then…yes.”

YOU – “Why did you keep doing it?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He frowns as he inspects your wounds. “I don’t know. If I kept at it long enough, I thought maybe you’d…snap out of it. Go back to how you were before. Stitches look good, by the way.” He picks up a roll of gauze and starts to wind it around your leg. “It worked before, you’d come back for a while. But the bad times were happening more and more. At a certain point it was just…like there was nothing left of you. You were just this…fucking thing I had to deal with. But I couldn’t just *stop* because you’d–”

ESPRIT DE CORPS – Kill yourself. Or someone else. Or just…vanish, and he’d never hear from you again.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “And I hated you for it. And I hated myself for hating you. And I hated you for making me feel this way.” He cuts the gauze, securing the end with a piece of tape. A

tear falls down his cheek. “Fuck,” he says, wiping it with the back of his wrist - his hands are still covered with your blood. “I don’t even know why I’m telling you this. You don’t even remember this shit. You’re not even really that person anymore–”

YOU – Without really thinking about it, you rest your hand on Vicquemare’s head. His hair is soft.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He meets your gaze, almost fearful, his breath hitching.

SUGGESTION – Not much you can say here.

EMPATHY – Sometimes it means more if you don’t say anything.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Slowly, he lets his forehead sink down until it rests on your stomach. His shoulders shake.

YOU – You still say nothing, just cradle the back of his head with your hand.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “I just wanted my fucking friend back,” he says, his voice cracking. “I wanted you to go back to the way you were, and you did. You did. It’s been a year since I’ve seen you like this. You’re doing so well. But you don’t remember me. So maybe it was me. Maybe I was just dragging you down all this time. All you needed was to get rid of my dead weight.” His bloody hands lie upturned on his knees, and you see a couple tears land on them.

INLAND EMPIRE – It wasn’t like that.

EMPATHY – It wasn’t like that.

YOU – “It wasn’t like that.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “You can’t know that. How the fuck can you know that?” He clenches his fists.

EMPATHY – He wants to believe you. He's afraid to trust you. He knows it can't be true. There's…a lot going on.

YOU – You feel your forehead wrinkling as you try to think of the words to describe it. Your brain feels sluggish.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – You know, you still have that speed you confiscated from Cuno. Really get those thoughts moving.

EMPATHY – Hey, not the time!

YOU – "I look at you, and I feel like I know you. Like there's this spot for you in my brain, but whatever should be in there was scooped out. But there's still some stuff left around the edges…" You rub your forehead, frustrated. "I'm not explaining it very well." You pause to think again, listening to the sounds of both of you breathing.

CONCEPTUALIZATION – Gravity.

RHETORIC – Yes, use gravity.

YOU – "Okay, you know how they teach you about gravity in school? How you imagine there's a web, and the objects with higher gravity distort the web more?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He turns his head a little to look at you. He nods.

EMPATHY – He's not sure where you're going with this, but he's listening.

YOU – "I can't see what we did together, or how we were. But I feel the gravity of it. I see the shape of it. So I know, on some level, what you were to me. What you are to me. And I can tell you you're *not* dead weight. Not to me." You grab his head with both hands, staring him down. "Got it?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – His face crumples. "Fuck, Harry," he says. He brings up a hand to cover his face.

REACTION SPEED – Blood! He still has your blood on his hands!

YOU – You catch his wrist. “Don’t rub that shit on your face. Who knows how many diseases I have? Not me, that’s for sure!”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Jean chuckles wetly as you release him. He turns away, his shoulders shaking again, and you put a hand on his back, feeling his breath hitch as he cries.

YOU – After a few minutes his breathing evens out. Something occurs to you with a pang. “Hey,” you say, “Kim’s been in the bathroom a while, right?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Fuck, you’re right.” He goes to wipe his face, sees the blood still on his hands. “Fuck. Ugh.” He goes to the kitchen sink to wash them.

PERCEPTION (HEARING) – You don’t hear any sounds coming from the bathroom. In fact, it’s been a while since you heard any.

HALF-LIGHT – Oh fuck. Oh shit. He’s fucking dead. He passed out, hit his head, and died.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – Shows you what all that pansy shit was worth. What were you petting Vicquemare’s hair for? He’s not a dog.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He’s heading down the hallway to the bathroom now.

AUTHORITY – Tell him to move his ass! This is an emergency!

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Lieutenant?” he says, knocking on the bathroom door. There’s no response.

HALF-LIGHT – Shit shit shit shit–

YOU – You sit up on the couch, groaning, and watch fearfully as Vicquemare knocks again.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Kitsuragi? I’m coming in now.” He cracks the door, then steps inside. “Hey, wake up.”

YOU – “Is he okay? What’s going on?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “He’s fine, he just fell asleep. Come on, Lieutenant, you’re going to fuck up your back.” He reappears, towing the lieutenant, who looks dazed, and is trying to straighten his glasses. Vicquemare settles the lieutenant on the couch next to you and fetches him the other glass of water.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant sips at it cautiously.

PAIN THRESHOLD – He’s thirsty, but his stomach is still unsettled.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “So– food? Sleep? What comes first?”

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – You could absolutely murder a bacon and egg sandwich right now.

YOU – “Food.”

KIM KITSURAGI – “Uh…maybe some toast? If that’s not too much trouble.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – His mouth quirks up at the corner. “No, I don’t think toast will be too much trouble. What about you, Harry? Bacon and egg sandwich?”

YOU – “Uhh…yeah. How did you know?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He shakes his head. “You forgot your favorite food?”

YOU – “Apparently?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “How about you, Lieutenant? I have enough for all of us.”

KIM KITSURAGI – “I…think I’ll stick to toast, thanks. Do you need any help?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “From who? The guy with the bum leg or the one who falls over when he stands up?”

YOU – “I didn’t volunteer.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Good. Don’t.” He glances at the lieutenant’s expression.

EMPATHY – Vicquemare can’t tell whether the lieutenant is annoyed or not. He’s not – just a little confused by Vicquemare’s attempts at banter.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Uh…sorry. Thanks, but I got it.”

KIM KITSURAGI – “No apologies necessary. You are making me food, after all.”

ESPRIT DE CORPS – Three kilometers away, Patrol Officer Judit Minot waves goodbye to Special Consultant Trant Heidelstam and climbs the stairs to her apartment. At the door she takes a deep breath, rolling her neck and shoulders, before putting her key in the lock.

“Mama!” a young boy yells as soon as the door opens. He runs out to give her a hug.

“Hello, Louis.” She strokes his hair affectionately, then picks him up, blowing a raspberry on his neck. The boy laughs uproariously.

“Olive? Bastien?” Judit enters the apartment, still carrying the boy, pushing the door closed with her foot.

“Hello, *ma cherie*,” calls a man’s voice from the kitchen. She kicks her shoes off at the entrance, sets Louis on his feet in the living room, and enters the kitchen. A man, blond, late twenties or early thirties, is chopping vegetables. The aromatic smell of cooking chicken fills the kitchen. Minot watches the man’s rough, scarred hands deftly slice a cucumber, then notes the glass of whiskey sitting on the table next to the cutting board. She slides a hand over his shoulder and he turns to face her, limping slightly – a result of the accident that put him out of work two years

ago. He has a cane, but he doesn't like using it, so it mostly sits in the bedroom. They're the same height, exactly - she likes how their chins rest on each other's shoulders when they hug. She lays a hand on his cheek, looking at his eyes, gauging how much he's drunk tonight. Not too much, yet. He doesn't have the glassy expression he gets later on most evenings. She kisses his cheek, he kisses hers.

"Where's Olive?" she asks.

"In the kids' room."

Judit knocks on the kids' door. "Olive? I'm back."

"...come in," a voice responds softly after a moment.

Judit opens the door. It's dark in the room. She sees the shape of her daughter on the bottom bunk, covered by a blanket. She crouches down next to the bed.

"Another bad day?" she asks, softly.

A girl pulls back the blanket enough to show her face, dark eyes looking out at Judit. She nods.

Judit's heart sinks. The bad days are a recent development with Olive. She's eight years old – she should be too young for this. Judit's tried as many ways as she knows how to get Olive to talk about what's wrong, but Olive clams up whenever she tries. Judit doesn't have the energy to try right now.

"Do you want me to join you?" she asks. Olive nods, so Judit lies down next to her daughter, holding her close. She murmurs a soft lullaby into her ear, listening to her daughter's breaths and the sounds of the city beyond the window.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – This bacon and egg sandwich is the best thing you've ever eaten. Holy fuck. You could make a religion out of this.

YOU – You hadn't realized how ravenous you were until Jean handed you the plate, the sandwich piled high with bacon and dripping with egg yolk and grease.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – You didn't eat all day, right? Should we do this again? Fuck, this is better than amphetamine.

VOLITION – No, we're not swapping out addiction for an eating disorder.

KIM KITSURAGI – On the couch next you, the lieutenant takes measured, careful bites of his toast.

EMPATHY – Maybe we should slow down? Watching you devour this sandwich can't be a great experience if he's still nauseous.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – *NO*!!!

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare sits at the table across the room, eating his own sandwich. Seeing that you're too engrossed in your sandwich to make conversation, Vicquemare turns to the lieutenant, leaning forward in his chair. "How long have you worked at the RCM?" he asks.

KIM KITSURAGI – Kim swallows the bite of toast he's just taken. "Twenty years. Started in juvie, worked my way up."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "Have you been with the 57th the whole time?"

KIM KITSURAGI – "Mostly. I spent a year in Processing."

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "What did you do before?"

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant raises an eyebrow. "Is this a job interview?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare's cheeks turn a bit pink. "Sorry." He rubs a hand down his face. "I don't think I know how to have a normal fucking conversation anymore. It's just interviewing suspects or witnesses and talking about cases."

KIM KITSURAGI – He nods, carefully, trying to move his head as little as possible. “I don’t think I’ve ever known how to have a normal conversation.”

EMPATHY – He’s surprised at himself for admitting that.

KIM KITSURAGI – “Khm. To answer your question, not much. Odd jobs. Retail. Whatever they’ll hire you for when you have no qualifications and no connections. What about you? What did you do before?”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “I joined when I was twenty, so pretty much the same. Whatever they hire teenagers to do in Jamrock. Worked at a cannery for a while. Honestly, I’m fucking lucky I still have all my fingers.” He pulls out a packet of cigarettes. “Want one?” He holds the box out in Kim’s direction.

KIM KITSURAGI – “No, thank you. I already smoked my one for the day.” His eyes follow Vicquemare’s movements as he pulls a soldier from the pack.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – Viquemare pauses, his thumb on his lighter. “He fucking what?!” he thinks. “One a day?! Is that even possible??” He looks at the lieutenant, but decides not to question him on this.

PERCEPTION – Honestly, I’m surprised EC isn’t chiming in.

VOLITION – Why would you say that? We’re trying to discourage that kind of behavior.

ELECTROCHEMISTRY – Fuck off, I’m busy. Holy fuck, this sandwich.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He lights the cigarette and takes a deep drag, blowing smoke at the ceiling. “Do you ever think about doing something else?”

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant thinks for a moment, pushing his glasses up his nose. “I don’t think I could. It’s been so long. I don’t know how to do anything else. But it’s also what I want to be doing. I believe in the RCM.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare snorts, swallowing a bite of sandwich. “Why? We’re basically stooges for the MoralIntern. The people we arrest aren’t even tried in Revachol - they’re shipped off to be looked down on by those rich bastards in Sur-la-Clef who have never even seen this city. They’ve never bothered to wonder why someone might turn to drugs, or to crime. We’re enforcing laws for their benefit, to protect their fucking…investments, not to keep people safe.”

KIM KITSURAGI – “Maybe it’s more accurate to say I believe in what the RCM could be. Yes, we enforce the MoralIntern’s laws, but they don’t pay our salary, so we don’t answer to them directly. There’s a lot of potential for power to shift to the people of this city, for Revachol to join the MoralIntern as a partner, not a subject. I want the citizens to take part in making the laws we enforce.”

REACTION SPEED – You barely catch it, but there’s the smallest glace toward you as he says it.

RHETORIC – Some of the conversations you’ve had appear to be shifting ideas in his mind.

JEAN VIQUEMARE – “There’s so much fucking corruption, though. Loyalty among officers is great, until it’s used as an excuse to sweep extortion, bribery, violent behavior under the rug.” He slumps back, letting his head fall against the back of the chair with a soft *thunk*.

YOU – You’re almost finished with your sandwich, but you set the last few bites down. Your notes from THE UNSOLVABLE CASE echo through your mind. A knot of guilt throbs in your chest.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant frowns.

RHETORIC – He’s convinced there’s a solution to this, but he’s unable to articulate what it is.

PAIN THRESHOLD – He’s having trouble thinking clearly through his headache.

EMPATHY – On the other hand, if his defenses weren't down, he likely wouldn't be answering so honestly.

KIM KITSURAGI – "What about you? Do you ever think about doing something else?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Vicquemare closes his eyes. "I don't know. I think about quitting. I think about how…fucking intolerable it all is. But it's like you said. I've been a cop longer than I haven't. There's nothing else for me to do." His hand holding the smoldering cigarette dangles loosely, a few inches from the floor. With what seems like an enormous effort, he brings it to his lips to take another drag. "So I lift weights for two hours a day because it makes my brain shut up for a while, and I knuckle down and do the work that's in front of me, try to wreck as few lives as possible." He grins mirthlessly. "Not too late to back out of joining us, if this isn't what you expected from the *legendary 41st*."

HALF-LIGHT – NO! Don't let him go, he's the one person you haven't drowned in your sewage-filled sinkhole of a personality!

AUTHORITY – Vicquemare needs to answer for this.

COMPOSURE – Calm the fuck down. If you act like a desperate loser, he'll never join.

PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT – Boo hoo hoo, my friend doesn't want to play with me.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He sees the expression on your face. His grin drops.

EMPATHY – I'm getting guilt, anger, sadness…maybe a little jealousy? Again, there's a lot going on.

COMPOSURE – What expression are you even making? It feels like you're wearing a mask.

REACTION SPEED – Shh! Kim's talking.

KIM KITSURAGI – The lieutenant has steepled his fingers in his lap, tapping them together as he thinks. "The candor is refreshing," he says. "The 57th is less…forthcoming. There's a lot of

competition for a few promotions. We have a tendency to withhold information that may be used against us."

ESPRIT DE CORPS – It's often been used against me in particular**,** he thinks.

EMPATHY – His coworkers were not the first to use personal information against him.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – Jean gives a brief bark of laughter. "That's one thing you can say for us. We're too fucking exhausted for office politics." His cigarette has mostly burned out, so he takes a final drag and stubs it in the ashtray on the table. "Pryce would never stand for it, either. 'Information is power, and holding all the power makes you a dictator,' he says. Plus we're all in each other's business. No one can keep a secret from the Human Can Opener here, anyway." He gestures at you.

YOU – Now that your hunger is sated, you're having a hard time staying awake. Your head jerks up as you realize he's talking about you, and you fumble the plate resting on your knee, nearly dropping it.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – "All right, enough rambling. Time for bed."

VICQUEMARE'S APARTMENT – Vicquemare settles you and the lieutenant on the kitchen chairs, spreads a spare set of sheets on the couch, digs a sleeping bag and pillow for himself out of the closet, badgers you into taking the bed and the lieutenant into taking the couch, and helps you into bed for the night, taking your blazer and shirt, tossing you a clean T-Shirt with some band you don't recognize on the front, propping your leg up on pillows to keep it elevated. He goes to shut the door of the bedroom.

HALF-LIGHT – They're leaving us again!

YOU – "Can you leave it open?"

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He gives you an odd look. "Sure, but…usually you can't sleep with the door open."

YOU – “I don’t think that’ll be a problem.” Your eyes are already half-closed.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – “Don’t fucking pass out yet. Take some Drouamine first.” He points at the water glass and tablets he’s left on the bedside table. He watches until you swallow the pill and lie down again.

YOU – “You’d make a good dad,” you mumble.

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He snorts. “Yeah, that’s definitely going to happen.” He rubs the back of his head, yawning. “Good night.”

YOU – “Good night.”

JEAN VICQUEMARE – He clicks the light off and leaves the room.

YOU – Your eyes droop closed. The sound of Jean’s receding footsteps stops. You feel a prickle of anxiety just below your sternum.

ANCIENT REPTILIAN BRAIN – Alone again. Everybody leaves you in the end, Harry.

YOU – Not this again. I just want to go to sleep. Please.

LIMBIC SYSTEM – Yes, take comfort in your dreams. She’ll leave you there, too.

YOU – Your eyes snap open.

HALF-LIGHT – They’re gone, aren’t they? They left you here.

LOGIC – Don’t be ridiculous. Kim’s as exhausted as you are. Maybe more, since he was taking care of you instead of resting, like he should have been. They wouldn’t leave.

ENDURANCE – Take a deep breath. You’re getting worked up again.

YOU – This is bad, isn't it?

LOGIC – Panicking whenever you're left alone in a room for thirty seconds? I wouldn't say it's a great sign, no.

YOU – You sit up, your hand on your chest, feeling your heart pounding inside your ribs.

EMPATHY – Harry, you've had a *very* traumatic week. People died. *You* almost died. Your memory of your life was almost completely obliterated. You're in pain. You have a fever. It's most likely been a while since you were sober this long. I think it's understandable that your feelings are all over the place.

YOU – But I can't function if I have to be with someone all the time! What, am I supposed to have someone with me in the bathroom while I shower? Hire someone to watch me while I sleep?

VOLITION – Just because it's uncomfortable doesn't mean you can't do it. If you can't do it now, it doesn't mean you won't be able to later. This is a good time to try. Give it ten minutes–

YOU – Ten minutes??? I fell apart after thirty seconds!!!

VOLITION – And another thirty seconds have passed since then. You can do it. Jean and Kim are just down the hallway.

YOU – Okay, what happens after ten minutes?

VOLITION – If it's not getting better, call Jean in to sit with you.

YOU – Will he do that?

INLAND EMPIRE – He has before. Sitting in the chair by the window, reading a book in the light from the streetlamps spilling into the room, his presence calming, allowing you to drift off. If it was a bad night. Like the night he found you standing on the wrong side of the bridge railing. You've done the same for him on his bad nights.

HALF-LIGHT – Call him in now!

COMPOSURE – Don't call him in.

VOLITION – Ten minutes. Nine left. Breathe as slowly as you can, like Kim said.

PERCEPTION (HEARING) – You can hear them talking. They're still here.

VOLITION – That's right. Lie down. Listen.

ESPRIT DE CORPS –

Jean lies on the rug in his sleeping bag, trying to get comfortable. He's slept in worse places. But his hip bone is still poking into the floor as he lies on his side. He turns over and sees Kitsuragi watching him, his dark eyes larger in his face without his glasses.

"Are you sure you're all right down there?" Kitsuragi asks quietly. Jean lent him a T-Shirt and a pair of shorts. They're too big, making him look almost like a teenager, if it wasn't for the receding hairline. Not that Jean's about to say that.

"I'm not about to make someone with a concussion sleep on the floor," grumbles Jean. He sighs. "I could use another smoke, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead."

Jean crawls out of his sleeping bag and gets up, fetching a cigarette from the pocket of his blazer. He rubs the back of his head, yawning. He needs a haircut - it's getting long back there. "Do you want any mint tea?" he asks, shuffling over to the cupboards. "I'm going to make some for myself. Supposed to be good for nausea."

"I'd like some, thanks," Kitsuragi says.

Jean puts the kettle on to boil, lights his cigarette. He glances over at Kitsuragi. “So…how was he? This week?”

“Didn’t we already go over this?” Kitsuragi sounds annoyed. Or maybe just tired. It’s hard to tell.

“You’re right, we did. Don’t mind me, just doing my detective shit again.” Jean leans against the counter, taking a drag of his cigarette. It’s quiet for a moment.

“At first,” Kitsuragi says quietly, almost to himself, “I thought he was a part of some sort of joke at my expense. I thought he might be acting strange to distract me, so that he could solve the case on his own. Take the credit for himself and the 41st.”

Jean nods.

“Until he collapsed while reading from his ledger. Or…from a card inside it. He might have just been dehydrated, but…”

Jean pinches the bridge of his nose. “That fucking card…I’d burn it if I didn’t think he’d kill me.”

“After that, I started to take the memory loss more seriously. The fact that he could solve the case when he didn’t even remember what *money* was…it was incredible to watch.”

“You know, that’s the one thing that doesn’t surprise me,” says Jean. “Harry could be blitzed out of his mind on twenty-five different drugs and still solve cases. I’ve seen him get people to talk when he was so fucking drunk he could barely string words together. He found a murder weapon hidden in a fucking tree after doing speed instead of sleeping for three days straight. That was never the part that I doubted.” He takes three angry drags from his cigarette, smoke spilling out of his nose as he exhales. “What I doubted was that he could do it *without* tearing the whole precinct apart. Without making everyone’s lives a fucking misery, being a monster to the people we should be protecting.”

The kettle starts to groan and grumble, and Jean takes it off the burner before it can fully whistle. He pours the water into two waiting mugs with mint tea bags, then carries the mugs to

the couch, his cigarette dangling from his mouth. Kim sits up to take the mug, and Jean takes the other end of the couch.

“If that’s your concern,” says Kitsuragi, “I didn’t see any of that. He was odd, yes. Inappropriate and impulsive, sometimes. But kind.”

Jean looks over at Kitsuragi, a sad half-smile pulling at one corner of his mouth. “That’s exactly how I would’ve described him. Before things got bad. I was excited to be partnered with him. Last time I was excited about anything, really. He was a legend. I knew him, kind of. Looked up to him. He was still a genius, but he cared so much about people.” He sighs, rubbing his forehead. “And I see it again, now. But I can’t trust it. I’m just…waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

“Once I transfer, I’ll be around, too,” Kim says. “I…haven’t discussed this with him, but I thought we worked well together.”

Jean snorts. “Understatement of the fucking century. You kept him in line better than I ever could.” He tries to hide it, but there’s a certain amount of bitterness to his words.

“Please understand, I’m not discounting your efforts.” Kim blows on his tea. “We worked together for under a week, and he required a lot of care and attention, even as he was actively trying to be sober. Watching out for him for years, in the worst of his addiction…that sounds very difficult.”

Jean frowns into his tea. For some reason his eyes are prickling with tears. He blinks them away.

“But,” Kim continues, “Since he and I work well together, and your relationship with him is somewhat…strained, I thought I might offer to partner with him. I can bring up the idea, but would you prefer if the three of us discussed it together?”

A confused tangle of emotions rises up within Jean. Relief, grief, anger, confusion. He sighs, short and forceful, not meeting Kim’s eyes. “Can I think about it?”

“Of course. There’s no rush.”

VOLITION – That’s ten minutes. Do you want to call Jean in?

YOU – I…think I’m ok?

VOLITION – See? Well done, Harry.

YOU – Some of that was…hard to hear.

VOLITION – But you still listened.

ESPRIT DE CORPS – They care about you. They’ll do their best to help you.

VOLITION – They’ll throw you a rope. It’s on you to pull yourself up. You can do it.

YOU – Within thirty seconds, you drop into sleep, dreamless and restful.